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THÈSE DE DOCTORAT D'AVIGNON UNIVERSITÉ

**École doctorale 537
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Doctorat Langues et Littératures Étrangères

Laboratoire ICTT (Identité Culturelle, Textes et Théâtralité)

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**SALMAN RUSHDIE AND
POSTCOLONIAL AUTHORSHIP:
*A Dialogical Aesthetics***

Soutenue publiquement le 09/12/2022 devant le jury composé de:

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Authorship: A Dialogical Aesthetics**

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I dedicate my manuscript to my daughter, Sofia, who was my main inspiration and whose presence and love drove me forward.

List of Abbreviations:

The following abbreviations respectively refer to:

MC: Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*

S: Salman Rushdie, *Shame*

SV: Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*

MLS: Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*

F: Salman Rushdie, *Fury*

Q: Salman Rushdie, *Quichotte*

GBHF: Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

NW: Venko Andonovski, *The Navel of the World*

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INTRODUCTION

... do not, under any circumstances, belittle a work of fiction by trying to turn it into a carbon copy of real life; what we search for in fiction is not so much reality but the epiphany of truth.

Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*

Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.

Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead.

James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

The epigraphs to this introduction give expression to two conceptions of literature that are crucial for an engagement with the *oeuvre* of Salman Rushdie, one of the most prominent (and certainly the most “notorious”) contemporary writers. On the one hand, the literary work is seen as carrying its own “epiphany of truth,” which bears little or no relation to the world outside it: seen in this light, a work of fiction acquires value according to its own intrinsic qualities, which are independent of how it positions itself *vis-à-vis* reality. On the other hand, literature is invested with the ideological mission to shape and refashion cultural and epistemological paradigms, to abandon its solipsism for a profound engagement with the social and historical realities from which it springs in order to effect a change in society and in individuals. Rushdie embraces both of these broad conceptions of literature, staging and developing them in his novels in various ways. He uses historical, political and cultural references to create fictional worlds that, he insists, are only tangentially related to the real entities or events that inspired them and should be conceived of as existing in this separate and autonomous aesthetic realm. Yet, this is informed by the politically and culturally subversive postcolonial literary ethos of bringing to the fore the

marginalised and silenced (hi)stories and reappraising the biased values and dichotomies established by dominant power structures (colonialism, nationalism, racism, ethnocentrism, communalism, religious extremism).

Rushdie's literary career is marked by temporal, geographical, ideological and thematic nomadism: spanning more than four decades (although *Grimus*, his first published novel, appeared in 1975, the novel that established him on the literary scene and that initiated his trajectory as a postcolonial writer was *Midnight's Children* (1981); his latest novel, *Quichotte*, appeared in 2019), with the author's location, reflected in the settings of his novels, migrating from the Indian subcontinent through England to the USA, his *oeuvre* charts a literary and intellectual evolution that at times risks being engulfed by the furor occasioned by his most explosive novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), which gave rise to "the Rushdie affair." Setting aside the political and ideological provocativeness that has dominated the reception and interpretation of his works, this research takes as its focus their author's insistent preoccupation with writing: the genesis and the effects of writing, the responsibility that authorship imposes on the author, and, crucially, the afterlife of the written text and its subsequent existence as, to use Plato's analogy, an orphan wandering about without the protective presence of its father. Giving expression to their multiple and conflicting selves, Rushdie's authorial figures locate their true being and legacy in the texts they produce, which carry their author's meaningful essence. All these aspects of writing that Rushdie explores in his works reveal his central preoccupation with what I will term "the ethics of authorship," which situates him not only in literary history, but, more importantly, in a broader intellectual history of philosophical engagement with writing that comprises, among others, Plato, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Benda, Nizan and Said.

The main focus of interest in this thesis are the figures of writers and writing subjects who contemplate and reflect on the nature and purpose of their craft, their authorial identity and their positioning in society and intellectual history in, through, and by means of, (their) writing; the aesthetics of the texts they produce and their subsequent agency in the world through the various ways they are interpreted and appropriated. Thus, the object of this study is not to follow every thread of instances of narration and storytelling with which Rushdie's *oeuvre* abounds, but to emphasise authorship as a special category of storytelling, a specific craft and vocation giving expression to a conscious and purposeful project. While storytelling is a common practice in which every individual engages on a regular basis, the authorial signature invites a greater

responsibility and a more serious engagement on the part of both author and reader. As Seán Burke points out, “the signature puts in place channels of accountability, responsibility and inquiry”, that situate the authored text in a “deep structure of ethical relationships.”¹ Onymity, therefore, as opposed to pseudonymity and anonymity, enables and conditions the disintegration of the solipsism of art, whereby a work of art is accountable only to itself and the artist only to the dictates of his artistic imagination; rather, it reminds authors and readers alike that the authored text is not beyond ethical considerations. Authoring a text is not a simple and frivolous act of writing something and releasing it as a finished aesthetic product to be judged solely on its artistic merit; indeed, Foucault distinguishes between a writer and an author by defining the latter as a function of discourse, whose role is “to characterise the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society.”² While even the simplest note or a pamphlet has a writer, an author implies a more profound intellectual engagement with the authored text – ontologically separate from the biological individual, the author-function “simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions; [...] all discourse that supports this author-function is characterised by a plurality of egos.”³

Authorship, the central concept in this research, will be explored in its three different aspects: the subjectivity of the authorial figures, the dominant conceptions of authorship these figures develop in their texts and, lastly, the instances of self-reading and diversification of their reception/interpretation staged by and within the texts themselves. My main argument is that Rushdie’s postcolonial authorship is configured as a “dialogical aesthetics,” which postulates juxtaposition and relationality as his basic narrative strategies. Rushdie’s dialogical aesthetics subverts the autonomy of authorial subjectivity, the stability of the text’s representation and the dichotomy author-reader in such a way that each of the novels incorporates either a representative reader as a character or explores its reception and interpretation. It is through the transgression of the boundaries between and within the author, the text and the reader as central categories of textual production and meaning-activation that Rushdie establishes his ethics of authorship, which culminates in the destabilisation of the authorial figures’ authority, either by the presence of an interlocutor which serves as a means of dialogising the author’s discourse, or

¹ Seán Burke, “The Ethics of Signature,” in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern. A Reader*, ed. Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 290.

² Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” in *Authorship*, ed. Seán Burke, 235.

³ Foucault, “Author,” 239.

by creating dual and ambivalent frames of his text's interpretations. This is the crucial way in which Rushdie examines the relationship between the work of art and the world, or art's situatedness in the world – defined by what Edward Said aptly terms the text's "worldliness," which is its

circumstantiality, the text's status as an event having sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency, [which] are considered as being incorporated in the text, an infrangible part of its capacity for conveying and producing meaning. This means that a text has a specific situation, placing restraints upon the interpreter and his interpretation not because the situation is hidden within the text as a mystery, but rather because the situation exists at the same level of surface particularity as the textual object itself.⁴

It is precisely this *situated* aspect of Salman Rushdie's literary engagement, reflected in that of his author-protagonists, that foregrounds what Jane Poyner, in reference to J. M. Coetzee, calls "the ethics of intellectual practice"⁵ as the major theme pervading his entire corpus of writing (fictional, essayistical and autobiographical) and that marks his entry into "the long-running and expansive debate about the ethics of intellectualism and the authority of the writer."⁶ In the end, I hope to arrive at an overall conclusion about the place, image and authority of the writer, through an approach that will combine the aesthetic with the ethical, in order to find out what it means – for Rushdie and for us as his readers – to be an intellectual in contemporary society.

My corpus consists of five novels that explore and confirm my central thesis, namely the essential ethical element illustrated by the dialogical aesthetics of Rushdie's *oeuvre* – a selective approach imposed by the problematic itself (the corpus features only the novels in which the figures of writers are also their protagonists) and by considerations of quality, as a reduced corpus allows for a more in-depth analysis of novels that are, by a critical consensus, already described as behemoths and sprawling family sagas and comic epics informed by multiple cultural, religious, literary, political, historical and mythological sources and that, as such, carry the risk of diffusing the critical interest in different directions. The approach followed is not strictly chronological – *The Satanic Verses* imposes itself as the central work because it engages with authorship by staging it in its originary aspect, albeit in the specific context of the birth of Islam's Holy Book, the Qur'an. Its conception of discourse (both oral and written) and literature

⁴ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), 39.

⁵ Jane Poyner, ed., *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006), 3.

⁶ Poyner, 2.

in particular as differential, ambivalent and pluralised at their very source, along with the equally ambivalent and plural authorial subjectivity that gives birth to it, forms the aesthetic and ethical kernel of Rushdie's view of authorship and writing, throwing a revealing (and revelatory) light on the internal dynamic of the rest of the corpus, which in its totality gives rise to the central premise of this research: that Rushdie's dialogical aesthetics conceives of an inherent ethical value in authorship. Clustered around this central Rushdiean text (published in 1988) are, first, *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), which trace the genesis of authorship, i.e. the birth of the author and his text, followed by *Fury* (2001) and *Quichotte* (2019), wherein the agon shifts from the author to the text itself and its afterlife.

In the first group, the dominant conception of authorship sees the author primarily as a son (of the Indian nation, of Bombay as an urban ideal, of a whole network of filiative and affiliative progenitors that situates him in the national and ideological narrative he embodies or defends) and allows him only textual fatherhood. Saleem and Moraes, the authors/narrators of these novels, are incapable of biological procreation and, as a consequence, see their texts as their true offspring, releasing them into the world to carry their legacy. Since these novels are fictional autobiographies, the dominant presence is that of the writing subject, who is revealed in his split and multiple subjectivity, as his text dramatises the unstable dynamic of his conflicting and contradictory fictive selves. In the second group of novels, the subjectivity and formative make-up of the authorial figure fade into the background and it is the text itself that "writes" its author, assuming the proportions of an independent creation in which, like in Frankenstein's monster, is distilled the ideological eloquence previously reserved to the author/creator. In these novels, the author is primarily seen as a father, both biological and textual, and the agonistics of the novels resides in the unstable rivalry between the author's creative and procreative legacies. *The Satanic Verses*, as stated above, features as the central text in that it marks the crucial transition from the first to the second group of novels, as its central premise is the bidirectional flow of the creative impulse between creator and creation: in other words, the author is created by the text as much as the text is created by him.

The "Rushdie affair" has undeniably left a deep trace on Rushdie's *oeuvre* and the novels following *The Satanic Verses* are often interpreted as allegories of his predicament, which is that of the creative imagination imperilled or incarcerated (literally or symbolically) by the centres of power. Also, after the unparalleled artistic, cultural and political daring of this novel, its

successors have been seen to mark Rushdie's decline as a writer, his aesthetics falling into exhaustion and his postcolonial ideology becoming besmirched by the neocolonial leanings of his status as a literary celebrity and of his American location.⁷ Aamir Mufti sees *The Satanic Verses* as the culmination of a process in Rushdie's writing marked by a shift from the "politics of constituency" of his two previous novels to "a politics of offence," with the intensification of the author's political engagement in each subsequent novel running parallel with his empathetic detachment from the people and topics about which he wrote, a stance that saw its apogee in the "transgressive politics" of *The Satanic Verses* regarding Islam.⁸ According to Roger Y. Clark, up to *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie's fictional universe was steeped in multiple cosmological, mythological and mystical traditions that broke through the surface of the real and explored conflicting views of the universe, reworking other worlds in startling and unexpected ways; in subsequent novels, references to the "tangled web of mythic figures, narrative ambiguity, demonic possession, oneiric shifts, diabolic innuendo, and outright satanic invasion"⁹ are gone or remain on the level of metaphor and analogy, never challenging ontologically the realism of our universe. "They do not offer the same kinds of labyrinthine puzzles and paradoxes that are built into the struggles of his characters – or that explode into a world at once magical and real."¹⁰ Madelena Gonzalez identifies an "exhaustion of the Rushdiean aesthetic of transgression," with "the post-fatwa fiction risk[ing] disappearing into Baudrillardian [sic] simulacrum. Increasingly high-tech writing effects a pastiche of a colourful original and the magic realist aesthetic, now

⁷ Rushdie's postcolonial and anti-establishmentarian credentials have been also eroded by his being awarded an Order of the British Empire (OBE) on June 16th 2007, on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth's 80th birthday honours. His acceptance of the award was construed as a political statement – that he endorses the establishment, which particularly stood out when compared to awardees who have returned it, such as Rabindranath Tagore and the Rastafarian poet Benjamin Zephaniah. Priyamvada Gopal was particularly denunciatory in an article lamenting that "the mutation of this relevant and stentorian writer into a pallid chorister is a tragic allegory of our benighted times, of the kind he once narrated so vividly." Ana Cristina Mendes sees Rushdie's acceptance of the Knighthood "within the framework of a renewed nostalgia for an imagined British community, and hence construed as a symptom of postcolonial melancholia" and "as an example of the numerous symbolic ways Rushdie has written himself into the metropolitan centre, or, alternatively, as a critical intervention from the margin". (Ana Cristina Mendes, "Cultural Warfare Redux: Salman Rushdie's Knighthood," in *Salman Rushdie: An Anthology of 21st Century Criticism*, ed. Ajay K. Chaubey, Janmejy K. Tiwari and Bishun Kumar [New Delhi: Atlantic, 2016], 3-19)

⁸ Aamir Mufti, "Reading the Rushdie Affair: An Essay on Islam and Politics," *Social Text* No. 29 (1991): 95-116.

⁹ Roger Y. Clark, *Stranger Gods: Salman Rushdie's Other Worlds* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 189.

¹⁰ Clark, 8.

used up, survives as a mere parodical echo,”¹¹ while “the celebratory aesthetics of magic realism have given way to the rampant technophilia of postrealism.”¹² No longer “engaged in boundary disturbance,” Rushdie is instead reduced to a mere “contemplation of [his] ailing aesthetic.”¹³

The dominant critical stance, as can be deduced from the quoted passages, sees Rushdie’s novelistic trajectory as a downward spiral of stylistically, linguistically and ideologically impoverished treatment of rehashed themes. Yet, what captures our attention is Rushdie’s insistent preoccupation with authorship, which is the connecting thread permeating his entire *oeuvre*. It is the evolution of his conception of writing as an aesthetic and ethical enterprise that this research undertakes to trace, focusing not on its ascent or descent on the evaluative chart but on its relentless transformations from one novel to another. Such an integrative approach, aimed at providing a picture of Rushdie’s conception of the craft of writing, will consider the exploration of our topic in his individual novels as fragments forming part of a whole: as “ingredients whose flavours leak into one another during the complex ‘chutnification’ of Rushdie’s particular brand of fiction.”¹⁴

¹¹ Madelena Gonzalez, *Fiction after the Fatwa: Salman Rushdie and the Charm of Catastrophe* (Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi, 2005), 4.

¹² Gonzalez, 189.

¹³ Gonzalez, 52.

¹⁴ James Harrison, *Salman Rushdie* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 129.

PART I

I. Opening Plato's, Derrida's and Rushdie's Pharmacies

Writing as Drug and/or Poison

Socrates: Yes, because there's something odd about writing, Phaedrus, which makes it exactly like painting. The offspring of painting stand there as if alive, but if you ask them a question they maintain an aloof silence. It's the same with written words: you might think they were speaking as if they had some intelligence, but if you want an explanation of any of the things they're saying and you ask them about it, they just go on and on for ever giving the same single piece of information. Once any account has been written down, you will find it all over the place, hobnobbing with completely inappropriate people no less than with those who understand it, and completely failing to know who it should and shouldn't talk to. And faced with rudeness and unfair abuse it always needs its father to come to its assistance, since it is incapable of defending or helping itself.

Plato, *Phaedrus*

Standing at a juncture in human civilisation which saw the clash between orality and literacy, Plato condemns writing for its inability to impart true knowledge. In his philosophy, such knowledge was seen to have been imprinted in the soul during its existence in the realm of the ideal Forms; fallen among the illusions of the present world, the only way for the soul to recollect that knowledge was through a dialectic. Plato's communicational ideal is that of the private conversation between a philosopher-teacher and a chosen student – an intimate dialogue whereby the “living, ensouled speech of a man of knowledge” is written, along with knowledge, in the soul of the student.¹⁵ Writing merely imitates this type of speech and is therefore inferior to it on several counts: it is incapable of engaging in a dialogue with an interlocutor and of saying anything more than it has already said; it cannot defend itself when challenged, and it can be used and abused by all and sundry, as a written text cannot choose who reads it. The trouble

¹⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 276a, p. 70.

with writing is that it inevitably detaches itself from its original context and, devoid of the presence of the father-author, is left, orphan-like, to roam across time and space. The incapacity of writing to enter into a dialogue with its reader is seen as a weakening of the critical capacity on the latter's part and thus as an encouragement to blind acceptance of its ideas – a danger that Plato implicitly/obliquely hints at by having Socrates, intoxicated by the charm of the written text, willing to roam outside of Athens at the beginning of the dialogue, exiled from his natural urban context like the orphaned text itself. As he tells Phaedrus, "I'm an intellectual, you see, and country places with their trees tend to have nothing to teach me, whereas people in town do. But I think you've found a way to charm me outside [...] it looks as though all you have to do is dangle a speech on a scroll in front of me and you can take me all over Attica, and anywhere else you fancy."¹⁶

The word Socrates uses to describe the seductive power of the written text is *pharmakon*, which etymologically means both "drug" and "poison," thus encoding both a curative and a destructive effect. It is repeated in the Egyptian myth of the origin of writing that Socrates narrates to Phaedrus. Namely, the God Theuth (Thoth) presented himself to king Thamus of Thebes to recommend his invention – writing – with the argument that it brings wisdom and improves memory and that therefore it is "a potion [*pharmakon*] for memory and intelligence" (274e). As Derrida points out, the king dismisses this potent potion as "he has no need to write. He speaks, he says, he dictates, and his word suffices. Whether a scribe from his secretarial staff then adds the supplement of a transcription or not, that consignment is always in essence secondary"¹⁷. Thus Thamus echoes Socrates' own dismissal of writing as derivative of and inferior to speech, much like art is deemed in *The Republic* a mere imitation of the physical reality we apprehend through our senses and which itself is a secondary reality in relation to the realm of the Forms. The god-king presents himself in the Platonic schema as the originator and therefore father of speech/logos; indeed, Derrida says, "one could say anachronously that the 'speaking subject' is the *father* of his speech", and "*Logos* is a son,¹⁸ then, a son that would be

¹⁶ Plato, 230d-e.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 432.

¹⁸ The father-son relationship between utterer/writer and speech/text has profound, not only philosophical, implications, giving rise to Derrida's repudiation of the Western "metaphysics of presence," but also religious ones. In Christianity, the oneness and unity of the Trinity has been the subject of fierce debates, most notably in what has become known as the "Arian heresy" of the 4th century. Arius, the presbyter of

destroyed in his very *presence* without the present *attendance* of his father. [...] The specificity of writing would thus be intimately bound to the absence of the father.”¹⁹ The fatherless text, operating in the absence of its originator, will produce forgetfulness as people will rely on something external to themselves for remembering. Thus, the god has discovered not a remedy for memory, but merely for reminding; his invention imparts not truth (*aletheia*) but a semblance of it (*doxa*); therefore, the reader will remain ignorant but will cherish the illusion of being wise – that is why “men of writing appear before the eyes of God not as wise men (*sophoi*) but in truth as fake or self-proclaimed wise men (*doxosophoi*).”²⁰ This is how Plato defines the sophists, the real target of his diatribe against writing. While the philosophers use dialectics – logical reasoning conducive to knowledge – by developing memory (*mnesis*), which is the soul’s internal way of recalling the eternal ideas acquired in the realm of the ideal Forms, the sophists appeal merely to memorisation (*hypomnesis*), by means of external techniques such as writing that are not conducive to truth. Hence the ambivalent word used as a metaphor for writing – *pharmakon*; both cure and poison, “writing endangers true ideas by offering a simulacrum of truth that need not contain true ideas, yet it is an addition or supplement to true ideas that allow them to be communicated.”²¹

The ambivalent (dis)advantages of writing, whose positive capacity for persuasion and argumentation is enveloped by the negative implication that it offers simulacra as a substitution for the real thing, is echoed in the equally ambivalent nature of its originator, the god Thoth. The inventor of games (dice and draughts), numbers, calculation, arithmetic, rational science, the occult sciences (magic formulas), astrology and alchemy, hidden texts, etc., he also functions as a substitute for and supplement to Ra, the sun-god, just like the moon supplements the sun and

Alexandria, claimed that Jesus (the Word/Logos) was not divine in the same way as God the Father, since he was created by him and therefore had his divinity conferred upon him. God created the world by means of the Word, which was, therefore, “entirely different from all other beings and of exceptionally high status but because it had been created by God, the Logos was essentially different and distinct from God himself[...] The very fact that Jesus had called God his ‘Father’ implied a distinction; paternity by its very nature involves prior existence and a certain superiority over the son.” The synod of Nicaea in 325 rejected Arius’s and espoused the theology propounded by Athanasius, his opponent, who imposed his Creed, according to which Christ was consubstantial with and “begotten not made” by the Father. (Karen Armstrong, *A History of God. From Abraham to the Present: the 4000-year Quest for God* [London: Heinemann, 1993], 128-30)

¹⁹ Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 432, emphasis original.

²⁰ Derrida, 438.

²¹ Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, “Notes” to Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 448.

writing supplements speech.²² Thus, Thoth simultaneously opposes his other (Ra = father, life, speech, origin or orient[,from which the] sun [rises]) by the opposite principle he represents and complements/supplements it:

Thoth extends or opposes by repeating or replacing,[...] takes shape and takes its shape from the very thing it resists and substitutes for. But it thereby opposes *itself*, passes into its other, and this messenger-god is truly a god of the absolute passage between opposites. If he had any identity – but he is precisely the god of nonidentity – he would be that *coincidentia oppositorum*... He cannot be assigned a fixed spot in the play of differences. Sly, slippery, and masked, an intriguer and a card, like Hermes, he is neither king nor jack, but rather a sort of *joker*, a floating signifier, a wild card, one who puts play into play.²³

As opposed to Plato's binary, in which Thoth/writing is secondary and inferior to Theuth/speech, Derrida posits a Thoth who is a substitute for and thus an embodiment of his other. In a further destabilisation of the hierarchy, Thoth becomes not only the god of writing but also of creative speech – Derrida quotes Festugière's placing of Thoth at the centre of an alternative cosmogony:

Since Thoth was a magician, and since he knew of the power of sounds which, when emitted properly, unfailingly produce their effect, it was by means of voice, of speech, or rather, incantation, that Thoth was said to have created the world. Thoth's voice is thus creative: it shapes and creates; and, condensing and solidifying into matter, it becomes a being. Thoth becomes identified with his breath; his exhalation alone causes all things to be born.²⁴

Dialogising Discourse: Who Speaks/Writes?

Paradoxically, the non-containment of Thoth within the constrictive framework to which Plato assigns him and his opening to the ambivalent nature of language (oral and written) and being (he is both himself and his Other) has served as the basis for effecting a similar deconstructive interpretation of Plato's authority. Since he condemns writing *in* writing, the reader is faced with two possibilities: either Plato's own text is included in his condemnation and therefore it

²² Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 434.

²³ Derrida, 435.

²⁴ Derrida, 449.

undermines his authorial position or it is excluded on the grounds of being recorded conversations/dialogues between his beloved mentor Socrates and various other people and, as such, comes closest to his ideal of truth-conducive speech. If Plato, by indicting writing via writing, intends his stance to be understood ironically, then what he in fact attacks is not writing *per se*, but the complacent and uncritical acceptance of what the text and its author say; since he defends speech on the grounds that it develops our critical ability, then what he implicitly encourages by attacking writing is precisely our ability to read with an open and questioning mind. However, according to Jasper Neel, Plato is engaged in a much more insidious project: to define what counts as thinking and then to undermine any authoritative position from which one could mount an attack on what Plato has defined as valid thought. Thus, if we accept what Plato presents as truth, then we become like Phaedrus and all the rest of Socrates' interlocutors in the dialogues that end up coming round to his position; if we dare to read Plato against the grain,

we are outside Platonism and run the risk of appearing incapable of thought because Platonism has already defined itself *as* thought. Thus our attack, rather than threatening Platonism, threatens thought. Plato has built himself a formidable position indeed. He has used writing, the one possible means to invent his specialised kind of "thinking," and then denied that means to all who follow him.²⁵

Moreover, as Plato's texts are written versions of the Socratic dialogues, they raise the question of authorship: who speaks through Socrates – himself or his pupil? Who, in fact, is the *father* of *Phaedrus*, whose parental presence we should evoke when we engage with the text? In *La Carte Postale*, Derrida suggestively hints at the ambivalent answer to these questions by focusing on a medieval depiction of the two philosophers, whose traditional roles are reversed, for it is Socrates who takes dictation from Plato:

Socrates, the one who is writing – seated, bent over, docile scribe or copyist, the secretary of Plato, what? He is in front of Plato, no, Plato is behind him, smaller (why smaller?), but standing. With an extended finger, he seems to indicate, to point out, to show the way, or to give an order – or to dictate, authoritarian, magisterial, imperial. Almost naughty [wicked], don't you think, and intentionally.²⁶

²⁵ Jasper Neel, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 12.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, quoted in Neel, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing*, 17.

In other words, Plato appropriates the voice of Socrates and uses the venerated figure of his beloved mentor and teacher as the authoritative foundation on which to build his own intellectual position:

What speaks is a replacement of the actual speaker, yet the replacement has always already been appropriated by the voice it supposedly replaces. In other words, Plato replaces Plato. He does this by giving up his voice to Socrates, but when we read from the situation of 367, we realise that there isn't a Socratic voice for Plato to take over except for the fictional one Plato himself made up. Plato's maneuver in 367 is really an attempt to hide his own voice. Perhaps Plato's most brilliant insight was to realise how difficult disputing his texts would be if he removed himself from them by taking on the role of recording secretary for the martyred, authoritatively dead Socrates.²⁷

Thus, Plato's strategy not to speak in his own name is revealed as a deeply calculated move to build his own authorial authority by appropriating Socrates' voice to silence the other dissenting voices in his dialogues, which, seen in this light, appear as monologues in which there is only one authoritative voice – Plato's. From this position, he “mounts projects no less ambitious than defining the truth and appropriating the means whereby truth is communicated while seeming to do neither – in fact, while seeming not to be there at all... Socrates' voice lives in the death of Plato's voice, which lives in the death of Socrates' voice. Whichever voice one hears, the other man is speaking. Or at least so it seems.”²⁸

Plato's texts thus lay open the capacity of writing to externalise the self: while the presential nature of speech allows for an overlap between the speaking and the spoken-about selves, writing operates by means of the distance opened up between them. In writing, the writing self is different from the real self and the narrative voice is inevitably caught up in the differential and split nature of the authorial subjectivity. The presence of self-identity in speech, which by its immediate and unmediated nature also operates in close proximity to thought and understanding themselves, is replaced in writing by an ambivalent and ambiguous narrative voice, which itself stems from the divided “I” of the author – no longer any single, unified authorial self, but split across the text and across texts, a multiple and heterogeneous textual self always already detached from the writing self. Thus, “[t]he writer who attempts self-discovery and self-presentation in writing discovers, perhaps with horror, that what appears in the space

²⁷ Neel, 8-9.

²⁸ Neel, 12 and 17.

called ‘self’ is continuous play. The concept ‘self’ is a signifier, a free-floating possibility of meaning; it is not a signified, a fixed, secure point of reference.”²⁹

The ambiguous and divided (Socratic/Platonic) self in Plato’s texts not only represents a paradigmatic example of the nature of the textual self/selves, but the dialogic form in which they are expressed has been seen by Bakhtin as the precursor of the novel as a genre. Bakhtin saw the Socratic dialogues as “characterised by opposition to any official monologism claiming to possess a ready-made truth. Socratic truth (‘meaning’) is the product of a dialogical relationship among speakers; it is correlational and its relativism appears by virtue of the observers’ autonomous points of view.”³⁰ The subjects of discourse here are “nonpersons, anonyms, hidden by the discourse constituting them.”³¹ They do not exist as individualised subjectivities outside of the points of view they express on the subjects discussed in the dialogue; therefore, the overall discourse of the text is engaged in a dialogue with itself, it dissents with and questions itself and in the process deconstructs or, rather, deconstructs the authorial subjectivity and worldview.

The novel as a genre is characterised by a radical transformation of the authoritative authorial self. As Julia Kristeva points out, by the very act of narrating, the writer is drawn into the text and becomes a textual self, “reduced to a code, to a nonperson, to an *anonymity*, [...] transformed by his having included himself within the narrative system.”³² It is precisely this new positioning of the author in the field of representation that distinguished the novel from the epic, according to Bakhtin:

the novelist may turn up on the field of representation in any authorial pose...This is not merely a matter of the author’s image appearing within his own field of representation – important here is the fact that the underlying, original formal author (the author of the authorial image) appears in a new relationship with the represented world. Both find themselves now subject to the same temporally valorised measurements, for the ‘depicting’ authorial language now lies on the same plane as the “depicted” language of the hero, and may enter into dialogic relations and hybrid combinations with it (indeed, it cannot help but enter into such relations).³³

²⁹ Neel, 122.

³⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine & Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1992), 81.

³¹ Kristeva, 81.

³² Kristeva, 74, emphasis original.

³³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (New Delhi: Pinnacle Learning, 2014), 27-8.

By situating the author within the field of representation of the text, the novel inscribes both as contemporaneous, incomplete and evolving in historical time. In lieu of the epic distance, in which the audience was separated from the portrayed personages and events both temporally (the national tradition enfolding in time between them) and ideologically (on a different value plane), the novel posits the contemporary moment as the framework for observing and valuating the represented world. In lieu of the externalised epic hero, “absolutely equal to himself,” in whom “authentic essence and its external manifestation”³⁴ coincide and who may be said to be individualised only in terms of the unique destiny that awaits and motivates him, the novelistic character is represented as inconsistent, not coinciding with himself, non-containable in a single plot, functioning at a disparity between his surface and centre, contradictory and even not fully representable. Never completed and always in a process of becoming, the novelistic character resembles in his processuality the novel itself, which, according to Bakhtin, is defined by its “novelness,” which is “whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system.”³⁵ The entire prehistory of the novel that Bakhtin traces (from the Socratic dialogues and the Menippean satire, through the medieval parodic literature, until it finally emerges in its proper form in the Renaissance novels of Rabelais and Cervantes) encodes the novel not structurally but ideologically, so that a novel becomes any literary work that, irrespective of the formal characteristics of the text, acts against the established model and order, against the canon and the established truths and dogmas.

The purpose of this Platonic and Bakhtinian *excursus* is to serve as a philosophical and literary overview of what a culturological and ideological, rather than merely formal, conception of the novel pinpoints as the defining characteristics of the novel in general and of the Rushdiean novel in particular: its profound anti-canonical and transgressive attitude towards the orthodoxies of its time; the fragmented and de-centred subjectivity it portrays, which reflects not only a stylistic or aesthetic practice, but, more importantly, is also an expression of a cultural and ethical outlook; the intra- and inter-textual juxtaposition of conflicting voices, worldviews and texts it establishes; the linguistic, cultural, literary and ontological dialogisation it rests on as a

³⁴ Bakhtin, 34.

³⁵ Michael Holquist, “Introduction” to Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, xxxi.

guiding principle; and, finally, the insistent but problematic and problematised image of the author it portrays.

Home, Roots, Rootlessness, Migration: The Double Perspective of Intellectual Migrancy

Rushdie's stance towards the ending of the film *The Wizard of Oz*, which greatly influenced his views on the idea of home and belonging, reveals his predilection for the fictive over the actual, for the expansive "imaginary homelands" of the mind rather than the frontiers geographical spaces of political reality. After her adventures in the magical land of Oz, in the end, Dorothy's magical slippers take her home in the black-and-white Kansas, because, as the saying goes, "there is no place like home." This unsatisfactory ending, as Rushdie points out, led L. Frank Baum to return Dorothy to Oz in his subsequent Oz books, in one of which Dorothy settles there, along with her Auntie Em and Uncle Henry, and becomes a princess. Thus, "Oz finally *became* home; the imagined world became the actual world [...] the real secret of the ruby slippers is not that 'there's no place like home' but rather that there is no longer any such place *as* home: except, of course, for the home we make, or the homes that are made for us, in Oz, which is anywhere, and everywhere, except the place from which we began."³⁶

Rushdie's repudiation of the traditional ideas of roots and belonging is informed by his migrant and minoritarian perspective – having been a member of a minority all his life (a Muslim in a predominantly Hindu India, an immigrant in Pakistan, Britain and America), he finds his position enabling rather than disabling:

I don't think that migration, the process of being uprooted, necessarily leads to rootlessness. What it can lead to is a kind of multiple rooting. It's not the traditional identity crisis of not knowing where you come from. The problem is that you come from too many places. The problems are of excess rather than of absence. That's certainly the feeling I have.³⁷

³⁶ Salman Rushdie, *Step across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002* (London: Vintage, 2003), 32-33.

³⁷ Michael R. Reder, ed., *Conversations with Salman Rushdie* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), ix.

In compliance with his perception of his position as one of excess rather than lack, Rushdie sees his minoritarian perspective and physical migrancy as informing his artistic credo, since he experiences his partial belonging to several cultures not as a phenomenon of incompleteness but of pluralisation.³⁸ The physical distance of migrant writers from both their native and host cultures becomes also an intellectual, critical distance that renders them more capable of perceiving reality and of articulating their counter-hegemonic voice. The dissenting, unorthodox voices of Rushdie's authorial protagonists are enabled by their physical nomadism, which in turn provides the material for their intellectual dissent: Saleem and Moraes are picaresque characters who seek validation for their existence by "migrating" parts of themselves into the body of the nation or into the historical past; Saladin and Gibreel, the protagonists of *The Satanic Verses*, are migrants but also, like most of the other characters, migrate through space and time in different oneiric and symbolic scenarios; Malik and the Author, both immigrants in America, consider themselves not as uprooted but as multiply rooted.

It is in this critical distance, notably from power structures, that Edward Said locates the sign of true intellectualism. In his view, the true intellectual is duty-bound to articulate the underside to the dominant ideas and values and the habitually forgotten and traditionally silenced voices. The most fruitful terrain for stimulating intellectual work of the kind described and lauded by Said is the state of metaphysical or intellectual exile, which is related to, but not identifiable with, literal, political exile. The exile Said has in mind is an actual but, above all, a metaphorical condition – feeling like an outsider even if one physically belongs. Metaphysical exile is the state of "restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. You cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and,

³⁸ In the ironic description of Revathi Krishnaswami, "a new type of 'Third World' intellectual, cross-pollinated by postmodernism and postcolonialism, has arrived: a migrant who, having dispensed with territorial affiliations, travels unencumbered through the cultures of the world bearing only the burden of a unique yet representative sensibility that refracts the fragmented and contingent condition of both postmodernity and postcoloniality. Journeying from the 'peripheries' to the metropolitan 'centre,' this itinerant intellectual becomes an international figure who at once feels at home nowhere and everywhere. No longer disempowered by cultural schizophrenia or confined within collectivities such as race, class, or nation, the nomadic postcolonial intellectual is said to 'write back' to the empire in the name of all displaced and dispossessed peoples, denouncing both colonialism and nationalism as equally coercive constructs". (Revathi Krishnaswamy, "Mythologies of Migrancy: Postcolonialism, Postmodernism and the Politics of (Dis)location," *Ariel* 26.1 (1995): 125)

alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation.”³⁹ Ultimately, this exilic anguish leads to an exuberant intellectual productiveness that finds constant inspiration in the physical and spiritual uprootedness of the intellectual from the constraints of a determined space and of conventional norms – in other words, physical not-at-home-ness translates into spiritual autonomy that is the very essence of intellectual production. Perhaps the greatest advantage bestowed by this metaphorical exile is certain ideological eclecticism and even amateurism, which Said considers to be the antithesis of the constraints of narrow professionalism, specialisation, the inevitable association with structures of power, and the very socio-political system under advanced capitalism, which, in spite of being liberal and democratic, rewards intellectual conformity. These are what Said terms the four pressures on the intellectual today, which individually and collectively enforce mainstream thinking, bookish and unimpassioned intellectual activity, limiting the intellectual’s scope of thinking by making him an expert in a particular, narrow field of knowledge, blindness to the bigger picture resulting thereof, pandering to the dictates of power and thereby distancing oneself from real knowledge – all of this, according so Said, constitutes the treason of modern intellectuals. Said’s equating of exile and intellectualism, however, is problematic (and probably due to his personal experience), especially because, as Bill Ashcroft warns, it is impossible to draw a fine line between geographical displacement and intellectual distancing⁴⁰ or to determine how one follows from the other.

Similarly to Said, Rushdie metaphorises his migrant, exilic position, which, following the etymology of the word “metaphor,” becomes the defining condition of contemporary man: “The very word *metaphor*, with its roots in the Greek words for *bearing across*, describes a sort of migration, the migration of ideas into images. Migrants – borne-across humans – are metaphorical beings in their very essence; and migration, seen as a metaphor, is everywhere around us. We all cross frontiers; in that sense, we are all migrant peoples.”⁴¹ The vocabulary of this passage, which condenses various migrations – of ideas, meanings and people – to conclude with an image of frontier-crossing, is indicative of Rushdie’s artistic credo: the transgression of

³⁹ Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual. The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 53.

⁴⁰ Bill Ashcroft, “Worldliness,” in *Edward Said and the Post-Colonial*, ed. Bill Ashcroft and Hussein Khadim (Huntington, New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2002), 88.

⁴¹ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-91* (London: Granta Books, 1992), 278-9.

taboos, dogmas and orthodoxies and the migration of ideas and knowledge in general across cultures, historical eras and epistemic boundaries. His *oeuvre* is wholly dominated by this dialogical, comparative aspect of perceiving the world and the image of migration captures the entire Babelian multitude of subjectivities, ideas, phenomena and cultures that inhabit his novels, as a result of which no character and culture is seen in isolation, but always in dialogue with (an)other(s). Even his own novels communicate with and complement each other as ideas, people and events migrate from one to another, thus modifying and diversifying their meanings.

Rushdie is almost ubiquitously perceived as a polarised and polarising writer who, on the one hand, dares to explore the extremes of aesthetic, religious and historico-political discourse, and, on the other, to channel the reception of his *oeuvre* under the umbrella of a critical “dominant”⁴² such as the postcolonial trope of migrancy, hybridity or subversion of established orthodoxies, which sideline other aspects of his novels. Moreover, perhaps more than any other living writer, he has managed to polarise his readership into two intransigent camps that interpret his artistic enterprise as either fully justified in its faithfulness to his artistic imagination, or fully unjustified in its transgressive and irreverent treatment of sacred subjects. Thus, Robert Fraser, in reference to *The Satanic Verses*, points out,

[t]he fact is that, while Rushdie’s methods understandably raised hackles in places where the Qur’an is handled literally with gloves, there is in his difficult and brilliant book a slight nostalgia for a wholeness, or at least for an integration of personality and culture well in line with the requirements of tradition.

⁴² As defined by Roman Jakobson, the dominant is “the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure... a poetic work [is] a structured system, a regularly ordered hierarchical set of artistic devices. Poetic evolution is a shift in this hierarchy”. However, Brian McHale clarifies that “despite his claim about the monolithic character of a literary history organised in terms of a series of dominants, Jakobson’s concept of the dominant is in fact plural. In this brief but typically multifaceted lecture, Jakobson applies his concept of the dominant not only to the structure of the individual literary text and the synchronic and diachronic organisation of the literary system, but also to the analysis of the verse medium in general (where rhyme, meter, and intonation are dominant at different historical periods), of verbal art in general (where the aesthetic function is a transhistorical dominant), and of cultural history (painting is the dominant art-form of the Renaissance, music the dominant of the romantic period, and so on). Clearly, then, there are *many* dominants, and different dominants may be distinguished depending upon the level, scope, and focus of the analysis.” (Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* [London and New York: Routledge, 2004], 6)

That the mullahs, unfamiliar with the codes of western literary irony, did not perceive this paradox was hardly surprising. That postcolonial critics have proved resistant to it is more interesting. It is also a state of affairs which needs to be explained.⁴³

Rushdie himself often seems to encourage such monologic readings of his novels in his essays and interviews, which programmatically lay out a poetics reliant on the “dominants” mentioned above (literal or metaphorical migrancy; cultural and individual hybridity; present-day Bombay [i.e. before it became Hinduised in name and ethos as Mumbai], Mughal India and Moorish al-Andalus as idealised historical eras; an authorial intention to write for and on behalf of the South Asian locations, people and diaspora that are the imagological foundations of his work; and an artistic credo to dare to destabilise religious, national or historical orthodoxies). However, his aesthetic practice⁴⁴ shows a more diversified and dialogical imaginational landscape in which these dominant images coexist with their conceptual opposites and propose an irresolvable dialectic that refuses to produce a viable synthesis.

Rather than embrace these totalising discourses that see Rushdie’s *oeuvre* as subscribing to a particular aesthetic or ideological principle – be it postcolonial/postmodernist or secular/religious – our approach relies on the ambivalence that we see as the guiding principle structuring his work, which does not offer a fixed and final meaning or ideology, but rather postulates an incessant semiosis of constant becoming in terms of subjectivity, culture, epistemology and ethics in which the inconstant and dynamic is counterposed to the constant and

⁴³ Robert Fraser, *Lifting the Sentence: A Poetics of Postcolonial Fiction* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 212.

⁴⁴ The words “poetics” and “aesthetics” have a complex use in critical theory: aesthetics is a “philosophical investigation into the nature of beauty and the perception of beauty, especially in the arts”, while poetics refers to “the general principles of poetry or of literature, or the theoretical study of these principles”. (Chris Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 5 and 262.) They are used here to distinguish between Rushdie’s poetics, i.e. the general principles of literature/writing that Rushdie espouses as his theoretical manifesto, “the general principles which make [his] literature possible”, its “‘literariness’ rather than [his] existing works of ‘literature’”, the “‘essence’ to [his] literature”, and his aesthetics, i.e. the formal and thematic characteristics of his works, the nature of his art as it is represented in his novels. (Peter Childs and Roger Fowler, *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* [London and New York: Routledge, 2006], 179.) Søren Frank is of the opinion that “there is a general agreement between Rushdie’s poetics and his aesthetics” while allowing that “[t]here is the exception, however, that his essays at times assume monological and unambiguous views which are differentiated and dialogised in his novels, among other things, through their aestheticised form”. (Søren Frank, *Salman Rushdie: A Deleuzian Reading* [University of Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2011], 15)

the stable.⁴⁵ Thus, the much-lauded hybridity under which Homi Bhabha situates Rushdie, although a privileged site of resistance, does not exclude its opposite, purity, which is also, in spite of the author's or his narrator's ideology, endowed with positive and rehabilitating capacities.⁴⁶ Similarly, Rushdie's "migrant" (i.e. dialogised, diversified, hybridised) conception of his fictional world(s) is counterbalanced by an underlying longing for a return to his beginnings, to his roots, which, in spite of his protestations otherwise, contain his spiritual home. It is not just that, as Shashi Tharoor has put it, Rushdie "recalled and reinvented his roots while thriving in his own uprootedness,"⁴⁷ but that, as his fiction reveals, he is incapable of detaching himself from, to use an analogy from *The Satanic Verses*, the umbilical cord that binds him to India, which contains his origin – "origin" being used here in Edward Said's definition of it as "divine, mythical and privileged," as opposed to the "secular, humanly produced, and ceaselessly re-examined" beginning.⁴⁸ It is the call of this archetypal significance that India exerts over his imagination and being that Rushdie ultimately cannot resist and that pulls him, through his fictional alter egos,⁴⁹ to grant himself multiple fictional homecomings. As he puts it in *Shame*, he hasn't relinquished his roots completely and sometimes sees himself as the ash tree Yggdrasil of Norse mythology and its three roots, whose fall would engulf the world in darkness (*S*, 88). Thus, all of his novels can be said to end with a scene of homecoming, literal or metaphorical: *Midnight's Children* ends with Saleem at the Braganza pickle factory managed by his ayah, Mary Pereira, whom at this point he describes as "the only mother I had left in the world" (*MC*,

⁴⁵ This contrast refers to numerous dichotomies whose unstable dynamism is explored throughout Rushdie's *oeuvre*: hybrid/pure, male/female, East/West, fragment/whole, continuity/discontinuity, essence/becoming, shame/shamelessness, faith/doubt, etc.

⁴⁶ For example, in spite of the celebration of his, Ormus's and Vina's floating free of the roots connecting them to family, nation, place, race, etc., Rai, the narrator of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, is aware that "Disorientation is loss of the East. Ask any navigator: the east is what you sail by. Lose the east and you lose your bearings, your certainties, your knowledge of what is and what may be, perhaps even your life. Where was that star you followed to that manger? That's right. The east orients. That's the official version. The language says so, and you should never argue with the language" (*GBF*, 176).

⁴⁷ Daniel Herwitz and Ashutosh Varshney, eds., *Midnight's Diaspora: Critical Encounters with Salman Rushdie* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008) 122.

⁴⁸ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), xii-xiii.

⁴⁹ All of Rushdie's protagonists are male, Indian and lapsed Muslims (and Bombayites to boot), like himself; while most are writers, all are, with the exception of *Grimus's* Flapping Eagle, intellectual figures. The only exception breaking this mould is René, the narrator of *The Golden House*, who is an anomalous figure in that he is, of all things, Belgian. However, his Belgianness is largely elided because it doesn't exert a significant influence on his ontological, cultural and ideological make-up and because the focus of the novel is the Indian family he voyeuristically observes and writes about.

639); at the end of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Moraes is symbolically reunited with his mother when he finds the painting that contained her prophetic representation of her death; Saladin, the inveterate Anglophile, returns to India, reconciles with his father and involves himself in the intellectual movements of the country; Haroun and Luka, the protagonists of Rushdie's children's books, both return home after their adventures; Malik re-establishes his connection to India through his love for Neela and his involvement in the political struggles of the Indian diaspora in Lilliput-Blefuscu, and even Quichotte, the eponymous hero of Rushdie's latest novel, can be said to metaphorically "come home" when he reunites with his creator, the Author, in a homecoming that is not geographical but (meta)textual. The endings of his novels thus reinscribe Rushdie's migrant philosophy by gesturing towards a different attitude to home and belonging, one which recognises that in order to inhabit Oz and all the other imaginary wonderlands, it is not necessary to leave our mundane lives. As Azar Nafisi points out,

Dorothy's lesson – and it is the lesson of every great story – is that the land of make-believe, that wonderland, the magical Oz, is not far away; it is, in fact, in our backyard, accessible if only we have the eyes to see it and the will to seek it. Dorothy, Alice, Hansel and Gretel all return home, but they will never be the same, because they have learned to look at the world through the alternative eyes of the imagination. That essential transformation is a change of heart.⁵⁰

In other words, home is not divested of but reinvested with meaning and importance.

Still, Rushdie is so ubiquitously inscribed into the postmodernist and postcolonial idealisation of ontological and epistemological inconstancy and ambivalence and cultural hybridity that this nostalgia for roots pervading his *oeuvre* is altogether ignored. Ultimately, however, his programmatic rejection of rootedness, home and belonging in their traditional meanings can perhaps best be understood as a variation of T. S. Eliot's remark on his definition of poetry as "not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; It is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality," to which he adds this significant clarification: "But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things."⁵¹ In other words, we do not negate what we distance ourselves from,

⁵⁰ Azar Nafisi, *The Republic of Imagination: A Case for Fiction* (London: Windmill Books, 2014), 20-1.

⁵¹ T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1948), 21.

but merely use it as the symbolical springboard to transcend it and reach a more universalist conception of who we are; even though we seemingly transcend it, it keeps defining our essence like nothing else can. Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to note that Rushdie is perhaps most defined by what he seemingly represses and satirises. Thus, migration, as we mentioned above, is almost always counterbalanced by homecoming. Similarly, his secularist outlook is belied by the extent to which religion occupies his thought, in particular in *The Satanic Verses*, which, at least in Sara Suleri's reading, represents not so much a parody or blasphemy of Islam, but is rather a "deeply Islamic book," "a work of meticulous religious attentiveness," "unfolding as an act of archaic devotion to the cultural system that it must both desecrate and renew" and "perform[ing] an act of curious faith: his text chooses disloyalty in order to dramatise its continuing obsession with the metaphors Islam makes available to a postcolonial sensibility."⁵² The awareness of this ambivalence in Rushdie's writing – the conflicting pulls of rejection and acceptance, desecration and reverence – is important in that it softens the rhetoric of discontinuity and fragmentation by revealing one of continuity and wholeness, thus paving the way for a more integrated approach to his *oeuvre*. Instead, his work has been received by two global audiences – the predominantly Western and secular on the one hand and the predominantly Islamic and religious on the other – which interpreted it, respectively, in a postmodernist vein (which lauded his aesthetic and ideological daring, defended the primacy of the individual imagination and rejected the possibility of collective identities) and traditionally (by insisting on the traditional forms of identity, i.e. on the primacy of ethnic/national, cultural and religious belonging). Our approach will try to integrate and emphasise the co-existence of these two worldviews, since they both constitute Rushdie's philosophy of being-in-the-world and, in particular, his conception of authorship.

⁵² Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 191.

Situating Rushdie

1. Critical Approaches

The contemporary cultural and political climate is articulated around the postmodernist incredulity towards the metanarratives of God, the sovereign subject, history, the nation, etc. on the one hand and the insistent reclamation of such metanarratives by a decolonising postcolonialism on the other. In Rushdie's case, the *fatwa* that the Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed against him on account of the blasphemy of *The Satanic Verses* brought to the surface not so much the incompatibility between East and West or between secularism and religion as it revealed the rash postmodernist dismissal of the essential anchors of identity, which have been revealed to be still operative in both the East and the West. The current cultural moment can primarily be defined as open, multilingual and multicultural, a time in which, according to Julia Kristeva, the anti-Aristotelian worldview flourishes, which implies a rejection of the structures of official thought, based on the Aristotelian, formal logic and of the tyranny of the One (be it God, the Law, the Subject). The literature that gives expression to such a cultural milieu, in Bakhtin's terms, is dialogic and is represented by the Menippean and carnivalesque discourse, which dismantles the stability of realistic representation and its postulates – “[r]ealist description, definition of ‘personality,’ ‘character’ creation, and ‘subject’ development.”⁵³ Bakhtin calls the novel that orients itself against the monologism of realistic representation “polyphonic,” which incorporates the carnivalesque transgressive attitude to the established social and epistemic norms – it can be found in Rabelais, Swift, Dostoevsky and the modernists Joyce, Proust, Kafka, and others, in whose novels the text becomes the site of “defiant productivity.”⁵⁴

Rushdie is one of the contemporary writers who best embody the desacralising and counter-descursive attitude of the polyphonic novel. His oeuvre partakes of the postmodernist rhizomatic worldview theorised by Deleuze and Guattari, which conceives of reality as “dynamic, heterogeneous, and non-dichotomous” and attempts “to subvert dichotomous conceptual schemes and the essentialising, totalising, and foundational modes of thought that

⁵³ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 70.

⁵⁴ Kristeva, 71.

binary thinking allows.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, their rhizomatics relies on nomadism on the level of thought, culture, and subject, which is defined by movement, inconstancy, and subversion of the repressive epistemic and state apparatuses. In postmodernist aesthetics, the real is pluralised by incorporating the fantastic and its prolific imaginarium consisting of dreams, superstitions, prophetic and mystical states of consciousness, the archetypal and mythical, the technological, etc.; the text is hypertextual, i.e. not linear, but synchronous, multiple, functioning on several levels, a combination of plot-lines and images connected in multiple ways, open-ended and resistant to a final closure; the subject is deconstructed, i.e. antithetical to the unitary and stable Cartesian subject.

The postcolonial “writing back” to the colonial practice of “othering” is also crucial to Rushdie’s fiction, alongside its problematisation of the centre-margin dichotomy, the foregrounding of the suppressed and silenced by colonial discourse, a renewed engagement with the historical, political and cultural reality of postcolonial society, maintaining a sustained polemic with colonial texts (Forster, Kipling, etc.), a dialogical confrontation of the worldviews of the coloniser and the colonised, etc. The matanarratives of History, the Nation and the Subject are not outright rejected but problematised and rendered open for a dialogue with the world. In spite of the insistence on exile, nomadism and hybridity, there is a centripetal movement towards the nation, the filiative family or its closest equivalent and the writer’s original religious-cultural context.

Rushdie’s in-between position between the East and the West, between the colonial centre and the postcolonial margin, is evident in the uncertain discursive position he occupies in his novels. Thus, the narratorial voice often finds himself obliged to justify himself and his manner of representing the postcolonial reality, giving rise to a contested and agonistic authorial authority. On account of his interstitial location, he is criticised either for his Orientalism (i.e. his exotic or stereotypical representation of the East, which is thus offered for cultural consumption to the West) or Occidentalism (i.e. his denigrating depiction of Western society and culture, while hypocritically enjoying its various benefits and freedoms).⁵⁶ In his view, however, this

⁵⁵ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1991), 99.

⁵⁶ A classic text dealing with the Western misrepresentations of the East is Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003). Occidentalism, its counterpart, is analysed in Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit’s *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004),

location is not a problem, but a solution in that it enables the contestatory, decanonising perspective of the modern hybrid, nomadic and migrant authorial subject.

2. Rushdie and the Literary Canon: Postcolonial Relocations

Working in the transnational, global literary space of the “world republic of letters,”⁵⁷ which is within the broader cultural sphere, traditionally considered to be separate from the economic and the political one, the artist/intellectual has been seen to be able to rise above the constraints of his time and place and to attain that universalist outlook that has often been regarded as the blueprint of true intellectualism. The very word “culture” has both literal/descriptive and symbolical/ennobling connotations. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said gives two definitions of culture; first, it refers to “all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in esthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure;” and second, it is “a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought, as Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s.”⁵⁸ In this second sense, culture in general and literature in particular enable us to reach the most profound thought and emotion, to come into intimate contact with the best and noblest that humanity has produced, safely ignoring (or being made to ignore) the hierarchical and often biased literary tradition that is being presented as the epitome of “high” or “great” culture. J. M. Coetzee perceptively formulated the simultaneously internal and external values that reside and are made to reside in the classic when reminiscing about the revelation he experienced when as a child he heard, for the first time, a piece of classical music by Bach:

where it is defined as a feeling of hostility to the secularism and individualism of the West: “to the City, with its image of rootless, arrogant, greedy, decadent, frivolous cosmopolitanism; to the mind of the West, manifested in science and reason; to the settled bourgeois, whose existence is the antithesis of the self-sacrificing hero; and to the infidel, who must be crushed to make way for a world of pure faith” (11).

⁵⁷ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁵⁸ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), xxii and xxiii.

The question I put to myself, somewhat crudely, is this: is there some non-vacuous sense in which I can say that the spirit of Bach was speaking to me across the ages, across the seas, putting before me certain ideals; or was what was really going on at that moment that I was symbolically electing high European culture, and command of the codes of that culture, as a route that would take me out of my class position in white South African society and ultimately out of what I must have felt, in terms however obscure or mystified, as an historical dead end...? In other words, was the experience what I understood it to be – a disinterested and in a sense impersonal aesthetic experience – or was it really the masked expression of a material interest?⁵⁹

The answer to this has to be both affirmative and negative: the classic is defined both by its inherent traits (the value that is recognised therein by numerous generations and intelligences) and by the ideological packaging through which it is presented to the world (in the case of Bach, as Coetzee mentions, as part of the propaganda for German nationalism in reaction to Napoleon's wars in Europe). In fact, the classic becomes a classic precisely because it is subjected to multitudinous questionings and endures through and in spite of them all; yet, it is also constructed as such by an ideology that has invested it with a symbolic meaning and significance that under different circumstances may have bypassed it. With this in mind, both Said and Coetzee posit criticism as “duty-bound to interrogate the classic”⁶⁰ and, by extension, the cultural formations within which they function as such.

If the role of criticism is to interrogate the classic, then literature (especially of the kind that aspires to a classical status), by analogy, is the battleground on which the conditions for such an interrogation are to be staged. Rushdie creates literature that, seen as a text in the postmodernist sense, represents a dynamic structure into which are fused, on the one hand, traces of the various texts of the greatest names of the world literary tradition and, on the other, the cultural, historical and socio-political (con)texts of the specific geographies and intellectual climates that have shaped his intellectual sensibility. His literary output pulsates with the aesthetic and ideological charge of all these various textualities and, as such, is profoundly intellectually, politically and socially engaged. Moreover, he has had to “negotiate” with the political structures regarding the “eligibility” of his works to pass government censorship. Rushdie's early novels were either suppressed by state leaders or altogether banned in several countries, not to mention the worldwide outcry that *The Satanic Verses* caused among Muslim

⁵⁹ Said, 10-11.

⁶⁰ Said, 19.

communities and intellectuals of any denomination. There is a strong insistence, especially in the early phase of his career, for his works to pass the “judgment” of the people and environments represented therein – in other words, to elicit the greatest resonance from the immediate context from which they sprang. Thus, Rushdie has stated that although he does not write “for” a particular reader in mind, in the case of *Midnight’s Children* he “felt that if its subcontinental readers had rejected the work, I should have thought it a failure, no matter what the reaction in the West. So I would say that I write ‘for’ those who feel part of the things I write ‘about,’ but also for everyone else whom I can reach.”⁶¹ Later, when *The Satanic Verses* was unequivocally and outrageously rejected by large sections of the worldwide Muslim community, by those “who have provided much of the inspiration for [his] work,” he felt that he was “rejected and reviled by, so to speak, one’s own characters.”⁶² In his more recent fiction, in which the authorial protagonist is located outside of the South Asian locale and even diaspora, this hermeneutical intention is abandoned and the intended/implied reader becomes anybody who can trace the dense web of literary, artistic, cultural, historical and political references that structure his novels in significant ways.

Rushdie started his career as a, indeed as *the*, paradigmatic postcolonial author who put the Indian novel in English on the international map and articulated a subversive and at times deeply critical voice in opposition to the grand narratives of the nation (the Indian, Pakistani and British in particular), religion (Islam), colonialism and its neocolonialist and neo-imperialist manifestations in culture, politics and literature. His writing, as he puts it in “In Good Faith,” sprang from his “determination to create a literary language and literary forms in which the experience of formerly colonised, still-disadvantaged peoples might find full expression.”⁶³ The “narratives of internal dissent”⁶⁴ on which he built his literary reputation (*Midnight’s Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*) and in which he expressed the mood of disillusionment with the national project and with the intolerant forms of nationalism and xenophobia, morphed into the “transcultural narratives” of his later output (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Fury*, *Quichotte*), “in which the idea of the nation as a reference point for the artistic

⁶¹ Salman Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands,” in *Imaginary Homelands*, 20.

⁶² Salman Rushdie, “In Good Faith,” in *Imaginary Homelands*, 395.

⁶³ Rushdie, 394.

⁶⁴ Fraser, *Lifting the Sentence*, 8.

sensibility dissolves, to be replaced by something more fluid, and often more solipsistic;”⁶⁵ in this last phase, references to popular culture abound, but there is also descent into kitsch, celebrity culture and even the latest phenomena of “wokeness” and “lurviedom.”

Rushdie has been seen largely as a postcolonial author engaged in “writing back to the centre” from the doubly marginalised position of an Indian writer of the diaspora and a British writer of immigrant origin. His in-between location between the two cultures and two literary legacies has both informed the uncertain authorial voice recurring in his fiction and the reserved reception of the worldview expressed therein by those about whom he writes. Therefore, in one respect, Rushdie can be located as operating within what Deleuze and Guattari call “minor literature,” which “does not appeal to established models,” “disrupts and dislocates the tradition,” in which “language seems foreign, open to mutation, and the vehicle for the *creation* of identity rather than the *expression* of identity.” Like Kafka, on whom Deleuze and Guattari base their model, Rushdie does “not occupy a language or culture that he could consider his own or identical with his being.”⁶⁶ Being a minor writer in the sense of the two authors means producing texts that pose questions rather than offer answers, depart from standard ideas of a people, nation, belonging or wholeness to explore the fragmentary, the incomplete, the nomadic and deterritorialised thought and subject.

However, Rushdie is at the same time part of a cultural formation that witnessed a significant shift and reevaluation of the canon. As David Damrosch points out, the old division of “major” and “minor” authors has been re-evaluated into a three-tiered model composed of a *hypercanon* “populated by the older ‘major’ writers who have held their own or even gained ground” over the past decades, a *countercanon* “composed of the subaltern and ‘contestatory’ voices of writers in languages less commonly taught and in minor literatures within great-power languages,” and, lastly, a *shadow canon* into which the old “minor” authors are relegated.⁶⁷ It was the emergence of the countercanon that effected the significant shift in the field for many authors, with some previously less read writers gaining new prominence and providing the springboard for catapulting many contemporary writers into the new hypercanon. Damrosch cites

⁶⁵ Fraser, 8-9.

⁶⁶ Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze. Routledge Critical Thinkers* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 103-4, emphasis original.

⁶⁷ David Damrosch, “World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age,” in *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalisation*, ed. Huan Saussy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 43-53.

Rushdie as one of the favourite contemporary writers comprising the new, postcolonial counter canon.

His, by now, central position in the new literary canon has paradoxically undermined the subversive power of his recuperative postcolonial discourse in such a way that it has compromised not only his stylistic, aesthetic originality and exuberance,⁶⁸ but his politics as well.⁶⁹ Sarah Brouillette argues that “[a]s Rushdie’s career has developed – in tandem with the increasing control of literary publishing by multinational corporations – there has been a parallel movement within his fiction from a general attention to the politics of contemporary nation-formation, particularly within a South Asian context, to a more solipsistic interest in the status of authorship and origins within the field of cultural production for a global market”.⁷⁰ The shift in his sympathies is made evident by a comparison between *The Jaguar’s Smile* (1987), in which

⁶⁸ Most critics variously locate this downward aesthetic and/or ideological spiral, as beginning with, or following *The Satanic Verses*, as a consequence of the “Rushdie affair” or of Rushdie’s becoming a literary celebrity (Gonzalez, Mufti, Clark, Grant, Brouillette, etc.). Of all of Rushdie’s publications, his novel *Fury* has received the harshest criticism to date. In James Wood’s review, tellingly titled “Escape to New York. Is Salman Rushdie’s new novel no more than playful self-indulgence, or is it the mark of a writer in terminal decline?”, we read that “*Fury* exhausts all negative superlatives. It is a novel that is indeed likely to make even its most charitable readers furious and that could hardly be worse if a secret committee bent on discrediting Salman Rushdie had concocted it. It is also, among other things, a flailing apologia” (*New Statesman*, 10 September 2001, available on <https://www.newstatesman.com/node/154106>, accessed 12 March, 2021). In reference to the same novel, Treasa de Loughry answers Wood’s question in the affirmative: “*Fury*’s mapping of Solanka’s cultural products, dolls and masks, from New York to the peripheral nation of Lilliput-Blefescu further actualizes the flow of American cultural and economic power to peripheral regions. This, alongside the text’s problematic characterisation of gender and race, is read as evidence of Rushdie as a writer in terminal decline”. (Treasa de Loughry, “America’s Signal Crisis in Salman Rushdie’s *Fury*,” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2017/02: 1)

⁶⁹ According to critics such as Timothy Brennan, M. Keith Booker and Aijaz Ahmad, Rushdie’s postcolonial credentials have been suspect all along. Brennan criticizes Rushdie and the rest of the “Third-World cosmopolitans” such as García Márquez for their dismissive approach to the nation, nationalism and decolonisation and the easiness with which they aestheticise the real political struggles and social problems in the postcolonies and their insistence on the greater validity and power of their fictional worlds than the painful realities they allude to. (Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* [New York: St. Martin Press, 1989]) Booker claims that from the beginning his work has been erroneously hailed as “somehow shak[ing] the mightily ideological foundations upon which the global power of Western capitalism has been built over the past three centuries” and that Rushdie’s ideology is not anticolonial at all. (M. Keith Booker, “Midnight’s Children, History, and Complexity: Reading Rushdie after the Cold War,” in *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*, ed. M. Keith Booker [New York: G. K. Hall & Co, 1999], 284)

⁷⁰ Sarah Brouillette, “Authorship as Crisis in Salman Rushdie’s *Fury*,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 2005 40(1): 140.

Rushdie sympathises with the struggle of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua against the American neo-imperialistic attempts to topple their government, and *Fury* (2001), which

makes no attempt to justify or explain the revolutionary program of the FRM [the resistance movement of the fictional Indo-Lillies], but rather focuses on the culture industries in order to emphasise the way revolutionary politics are incorporated by global popular culture like the Puppet Kings web phenomenon, as well as how revolutionary movements in turn appropriate that global culture in ways cultural producers may never have imagined.⁷¹

Andrew Teverson similarly sees Rushdie's contestatory, counter-hegemonic ideology as suspect. Thus, "Rushdie's location *within and against* dominant aesthetic and ideological formations has meant that he has been able, consistently, to disrupt those formations by adopting denunciatory political rhetorics, but that, because he is unwilling – or perhaps unable – to step outside those discursive formations, he is not a writer who has thought it his role to propose constructive alternatives."⁷²

As the question of what it means to be an author is a constant preoccupation of Rushdie's *oeuvre* and the subject of this research, the chosen corpus will give us a clear picture of how these changes in the author's location, aesthetics and ideology affect his conception of authorship and the evolutions and transformations it undergoes.

3. Rushdie in the History of the Novel

Rushdie belongs to two literary traditions: that of the British novel and that of the Indian Anglophone novel. In Indian literature, he is a fourth-generation writer of literature in English that began with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), had its inception with Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, followed by its flowering in the 1930s in the works of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan; in its third generation, it was represented by writers such as Bhabani Bhattacharya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, R. P. Jhabvala, Arun Joshi, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamala Markandaya, and Khushwant Singh; contemporary writers,

⁷¹ Brouillette, 150.

⁷² Teverson, *Salman Rushdie*, 215, emphasis original.

either India-based or in the diaspora, include Vikram Chandra, Kiran Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Suketu Mehta, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, and others. In this literary landscape, Rushdie occupies a central position in the literary formation described as a Renaissance of Indian writing in English, inaugurated with the publication of *Midnight's Children*. Josna Rege locates this novel's pivotal importance in its "enact[ment of] a discursive reconfiguration of the relationship between Self and Nation"; furthermore,

it was hailed both in and out of India as a literary masterpiece, and almost immediately became a kind of benchmark against which both writers and readers began to assess new novels; [...] the enthusiasm with which its publication was greeted in – India – [was] not because of its politics (there were always quarrels with that), or because of the accuracy of its representation of Indian history (it did not even pretend to that), but because of its exuberance of language and style, its combination of hilarious comedy and scathing political satire, its triumphant over-confidence, and, not least, its very success[...] [*Midnight Children's*] commercial success certainly helped to pave the way for future Indian English writers as publishers in India became more attentive to the domestic market for fiction in English, and publishers in Britain and the United States became more receptive to new writers from India.⁷³

This novel, in short, inaugurated a new style and thematic in writing about India and opened up the international market to this type of literature. So much has this latter aspect come to influence the marketability and popularity of Anglophone fiction from formerly colonised and peripheral countries that it has become an inevitable aspect of the reception and interpretation of Rushdie's later fiction.

Furthermore, he belongs in a group of contemporary writers, among whom Vikram Chandra, Upamanju Chatterjee, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy and others, who constitute a distinctive South Asian discursive formation which Bishnupriya Ghosh terms "cosmopolitical," "challenging both the forms of nationalism reinforced by global flows and the pernicious globalism surfacing in dispersed local contexts."⁷⁴ They are described as "cosmopolitan activists," "concerned with the impact of these nationalising and globalising agendas for local

⁷³ Josna E. Rege, "Victim into Protagonist? *Midnight's Children* and the Post-Rushdie National Narratives of the Eighties," in *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), 146.

⁷⁴ Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 5.

and subaltern communities threatened by economic violence and cultural erasure.”⁷⁵ These cosmopolitical writers

variously dismantle any stable emplacing national-global dialectic in favor of local heterogeneity. Highlighting the struggles of “minority” communities, disenfranchised urban migrant labor, *adivasis* (tribal and indigenous peoples) and *dalits* (low-caste subjects), the rural poor, and other politically and culturally “displaced” subjects of nationalising and globalising “development,” they invoke a social imaginary where the cosmopolitical writer acts in solidarity with these subaltern populations.⁷⁶

In the history of the British novel, his fiction is placed within “the new internationalism”, which Rushdie, according to Bruce King, occupies along with other bi-cultural and pluri-cultural novelists such as Buchi Emecheta, Kazuo Ishiguro, Timothy Mo, and Shiva Naipaul; unlike Commonwealth, Third World and ethnic writing, these novelists “write about their native lands or the immigrant experience from within the mainstream of British literature.”⁷⁷ In their opening up of British fiction to other forms of fiction “to create an international, late-modern fictional voice that is, like Henry James’, larger than any individual culture,” they also form a part of “the international novel.”⁷⁸ Yet, even as they diversified British fiction, these writers came to prominence along with other domestic writers who changed the tradition of the British novel from within (Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, Angela Carter, David Lodge, Ian McEwan, Graham Swift, Jeanette Winterson). The dominant thematic of his fiction is most often related to the cultural encounter and migrant sensibility he portrays:

Rushdie does not participate in the attempt to reclaim a particular geographical place, whether urban or rural, and to rethink national identity in relation to it. Rushdie, rather, is the chronicler of the unfettered migrant sensibility, that version of postcolonialism that unhooks historical tradition from place, and that creates new, self-conscious kinds of identity from a fragmentary vision. Rushdie’s suggestion is that the displaced,

⁷⁵ Ghosh, 18.

⁷⁶ Ghosh, 22.

⁷⁷ Bruce King, “The New Internationalism: Shiva Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Buchi Emecheta, Timothy Mo and Kazuo Ishiguro,” in *The British and Irish Novel since 1960*, ed. James Acheson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 193.

⁷⁸ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 425.

fragmented vision, “the broken mirror,” is “as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed.”⁷⁹

Graham Huggan places this type of fiction into the rubric of “postcolonial exotic,” or “the global commodification of cultural difference.”⁸⁰ Along with writers such as Naipaul and Hanif Kureishi, Huggan argues, Rushdie stages his marginality in his fiction; “the term ‘staged marginality,’ adapted from the work of Dean MacCannell, denotes the process by which marginalised individuals or minority groups dramatise their ‘subordinate’ status for the imagined benefit of a majority audience.”⁸¹ Writers like Rushdie accumulate “cultural capital”⁸² (Bourdieu) within the sphere of the postcolonial exotic, which Huggan defines as

the intersection between contending regimes of value: one regime – postcolonialism – that posits itself as anti-colonial, and that works toward the dissolution of imperial epistemologies and institutional structures; and another – postcoloniality – that is more closely tied to the global market, and that capitalises both on the widespread circulation of ideas about cultural otherness and on the worldwide trafficking of culturally “othered” artifacts and goods.⁸³

As a result, “India itself has been transformed through this general process into a consumable. Whatever its status – consumer or consumed – India is currently very much in fashion; and several of its best-known writers, most of them living in the diaspora, have become minor metropolitan celebrities, late twentieth-century household names, exponents of the latest literary craze – the new ‘Indochic’ (Mongia 1997).”⁸⁴ Huggan even asks whether Rushdie’s early works

⁷⁹ Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 179.

⁸⁰ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), vii.

⁸¹ Huggan, xii.

⁸² Graham Huggan explains the apparent hierarchy of postcolonial writers and thinkers, whereby a few well-known names are given a far greater critical and publishing prominence than others by means of Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “cultural capital,” which “is always unevenly distributed; it circulates within a symbolic economy of cultural value that is configured in a series of interlocking hierarchical structures. Cultural capital – to elaborate – is transmitted, acquired and accumulated through a complex process of legitimation negotiated through the interactions between the producers and consumers of symbolic goods.” (Huggan, 4)

⁸³ Huggan, 28.

⁸⁴ Huggan, 59.

are “cashing in on the durable exchange-value of a deliberately exoticised Orient.”⁸⁵ It is evident that, according to Huggan, Brouillette, and others, the international market for certain types of literature, the phenomenon of literary prizes such as the Booker that are attuned to the market, and the staged marginality of authors like Rushdie, who impose on the public their narratives of ostensible marginalisation in an era when, paradoxically, the marginal occupies the centre-stage, largely create the literary value of this type of literature, making it difficult to separate the inherently aesthetic from the external market value. Moreover, Rushdie’s novels exploit and capitalise on the current fixation on particular “cases” that consequently become the exclusive subject of postcolonial writing, theorisation and publication, to the exclusion of others, equally relevant. Such, to use Laura Chrisman’s phrase, “privileged site[s] of representativeness”⁸⁶ are India/the Indian subaltern woman/the *sati* in Spivak’s texts, the Arabs/the Palestinians in Said’s and the Indian male intellectual in Rushdie’s. Thus, Spivak is able to understand (and reveal to her readers) the self-immolation of Bertha Mason, a West Indian Creole woman, through the Indian *sati*, in spite of the widely different strategies of “worlding” attached to the two female subjects. Moreover, she is able to present Jean Rhys’s Antoinette, a member of the white, Eurocentric, slave-owning elite, as a paradigmatic subaltern woman whose sacrifice is necessary for the constitution of the European individualised heroine that is Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre. Similarly, for Said, the Arabs, and from among them, the Palestinians, have the most potent “conceptual supremacy for imperial ‘worlding.’”⁸⁷ This testifies to a concerning inability on the part of postcolonial intellectuals to transcend their own worldliness and exposes the problem inherent to this and similar anti-totalising concepts: by avoiding the systemic and totalising, they remain too local and too personal, to the extent of thwarting any universalist framework within which to situate all cases of colonisation, discursive or political.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Huggan, 93-4.

⁸⁶ Laura Chrisman, “The imperial unconscious? Representations of imperial discourse,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 499.

⁸⁷ Chrisman, 499.

⁸⁸ The roots of this ideological blindness reside, according to Aijaz Ahmad, first, in the “institutional site and individual location” of postcolonial intellectuals, who come from the prosperous upper-middle classes in the former colonies and are almost without exception based in metropolitan, elite universities in the West; and second, in the very nature of metropolitan literary theory. Poststructuralist in orientation, it advanced “a theoretical position that dismisses the history of materialities as a ‘progressivist modes-of-production narrative,’ historical agency itself as a ‘myth of origins,’ nations and states (all nations and all states) as irretrievably coercive, classes as simply discursive constructs, and political parties themselves

Nevertheless, there is an obvious irony in the fact that, when observed within the history of the English novel, the exotic and intercultural fictions of Rushdie and other postcolonial and/or multicultural writers vindicate the insular bias of earlier histories of the English novel, which privileged the domestic realistic novels at the expense of others, labelled “oriental tales” or “the gothic.” In this model, even as adventure tales such as *Robinson Crusoe* became paradigmatic texts for English imperialism, they were also,

in terms of literary prestige, somewhat sidelined, as a different kind of novel, more insular, more concerned with the nuances of class and gender relations within England, more precise in its delineation of psychological interiority and “character,” is elevated to the status of the novel proper. Major mid-century novels like Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748) and Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749) turn away from the direct exploration of racial difference in overseas contexts and towards a more minute dissection of cultural, regional, and familial patterns of behavior at home.⁸⁹

By tracing what he terms “Enlightenment Orientalism,” which “designates the itinerary of European knowledge regarding the East influenced by the utopian aspirations of Enlightenment more than materialist and political interest,”⁹⁰ Srinivas Aravamudan similarly contests the received theory of “the rise of the novel” propagated by Ian Watt and Erich Auerbach, which gives a selective overview of literary genres culminating in the realist tradition, by clearing

as fundamentally contaminated with collectivist illusions of a stable subject position.” This “dismissal of class and nation as so many ‘essentialisms’ logically [led] towards an ethic of non-attachment as the necessary condition of true understanding, and because breaking away from collective socialities of that kind inevitably leaves only the ‘individual’ – in the most abstract sense epistemologically, but in the shape of the critic/theorist concretely – as the locus of experience and meaning.” Furthermore, rather than place and interpret the text within the material and ideological conditions that produced it, as Marxist theory had done, it reduced everything to a text, with the inevitable consequence of foregrounding the figure of the reader/critic/theorist, i.e. the intellectual, as the most authentic interpreter of literary, historical and cultural texts. According to Ahmad, this doctrine of non-attachment and the ironic stance of the intellectual towards the world (caused by his poststructuralist distrust of rationality, representation, and of the possibility of objective knowledge) has led to and resulted “in the actual practice of the individual critics, in the ideological positions they advocate, and in the heavily charged ways in which conditions of postmodern ‘migrancy’ and the image of the theorist as ‘traveler’ are foregrounded.” (Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* [London, New York: Verso, 1994], 7, 35-36)

⁸⁹ Suvir Kaul, *Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 78-9.

⁹⁰ Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Contesting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3.

some intellectual space from naturalised accounts of the European novel, which tend to ignore forms of paraliterature that do not support the same old story of the nation and modernity triumphing over the rest of the world and over older forms of storytelling. While the novel came to be acknowledged as the preeminent fictional form in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and was taken up and imitated in a number of other regions of the world, we have to understand that domestic realism was very much a fledgling genre relative to the romance, which for many centuries in Europe dealt in both the long ago and the faraway. The early phases of the novel successfully invert this relationship, embracing history and the local and then drawing boundaries around the national to expel the foreign and the transcultural. While the novel did battle with various kinds of romance, the oriental tale was an alternative genre to the domestic novel – as were others before it, such as the lunar voyage, the travel narrative, and the criminal biography.⁹¹

Contrary to the insular and realism-based approaches of Ian Watt and others, contemporary criticism locates the beginnings of the novel precisely in the imaginative territory opened up by encounters with other cultures and by the transformation of parochial and close-minded societies into polyglot and international ones. Regrettably, these encounters in the last centuries took place in the context of European imperialism, which additionally exacerbated the mechanisms of power allowing the articulation of certain types of narratives. As Edward Said points out, “the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from emerging is very important to culture and imperialism and constitutes one of the main connections between them”⁹². Yet, as we shall see, the author emerged as a modern category out of the shadow of the medieval *auctores* and constituted his own authority as an integral part of the cultural landscape precisely at the point when a new era was inaugurated with the discovery of the New World and the radical alterity it represented for the Old. Authorship thus became a necessary aspect of the entry of newness into the world, a central preoccupation of Rushdie’s.

4. Rushdie’s Self-Situating: A Postcolonial Anxiety of Influence

Rushdie stated his anti-establishmentarian credentials at the very start of his career, repudiating excluding versions of nationhood (the Indian nation as exclusively Hindu) and literary

⁹¹ Aravamudan, 5-6.

⁹² Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xiii.

belonging, which labelled him, for example, as a Commonwealth author. In both cases, he saw himself marginalised by mainstream, majoritarian groupings *vis-à-vis* which he was relegated to limiting and artificial positions. In his essay “‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does Not Exist,” he describes the name as designating a ghetto-like formation which lumps together widely divergent writers from various Commonwealth and other postcolonial countries solely for the purpose of differentiating them from the white, native Anglo-Saxon literary tradition. Nevertheless, he triumphantly concludes that “perhaps ‘Commonwealth literature’ was invented to delay the day when we rough beasts actually slouch into Bethlehem. In which case, it’s time to admit that the centre cannot hold.”⁹³

As his reputation became more firmly entrenched in the particular type of postcolonial writing described above, however, his contestatory polemic gave way to a more self-serving and self-aggrandising attitude that was evident in his astonishing statement that

this is it: The prose writing – both fiction and non-fiction – created in this period by Indian writers working in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the sixteen “official” languages of India, the so-called Indian vernacular languages, during the same time; and, indeed, this new, and still-burgeoning “Indo-Anglian” literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books.⁹⁴

This literary and cultural elitism was further evident when

in an interview with Christopher Hitchens in October 1997, Rushdie insisted in proto-colonial fashion that the Indian vernacular literatures have lost steam because they have failed to keep up with the twentieth century. Unabashed (and apparently unaware of urban modern vernacular literatures), Rushdie decries the “parochialism” of these Indian literatures whose worlds seem unchanged: “Village life is hard,” “women are badly treated,” “landlords are corrupt,” and “peasants are heroic” (1997c, 40).” Carried away by the hubris of his lionisation in critical circles, not to mention his political celebrity, Rushdie falls victim to generating more cultural purchase for an elite practice with economic advantage over vernacular Indian literatures.⁹⁵

His privileging of Indian fiction in English and contemptuous dismissal of vernacular literatures as inferior repeats the Orientalist clichés best expressed by Macaulay in his “Minute on Indian Education”:

⁹³ Rushdie, “Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist,” in *Imaginary Homelands*, 70.

⁹⁴ Salman Rushdie, quoted in Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across*, 29-31.

⁹⁵ Ghosh, 31.

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed, both here and at home, with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalist themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education.⁹⁶

Predictably, Rushdie's stance caused a backlash from Indian intellectuals – thus, the Kannada novelist U. R. Ananthamurthy stated his surprise that “a sensitive and creative writer like Rushdie should speak with such arrogance... No Indian writer in any of the languages can presume to know what is happening in the other Indian languages. Rushdie does not even live in India. How can he make such an enormous assumption?” The Bengali writer and critic Nabaneeta Deb Sen explicitly compared Rushdie's comments to Lord Macaulay's, “conceding with dripping irony that ‘[w]e always bow to the supreme wisdom of one who reads no Indian language.’”⁹⁷

In light of these comments, we can conclude that Rushdie distances himself from the literature of India as such and aligns himself, firstly, with the elite group of internationally known, prize-winning Indian Anglophone writers that command the global market for exoticist literature, and situates himself in the great tradition of world literature (he chooses as his literary parents Gogol, Cervantes, Kafka, Melville, Machado de Assis). Asked by Jean-Pierre Durix in 1982, just after the publication of *Midnight's Children*, how he situated himself in relation to English-speaking Indian writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Narayan or Raja Rao, Rushdie replied that

Not at all really. This idea that there is a school of Indian-British fiction is a sort of mistake. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand and Narayan have many more affinities to Indian writers in the Indian languages than they do to a writer like me who just happens to be writing in English. Apart from the accident that we all use English, I don't think there's a great deal in common. *Midnight's Children* was partly conceived as an opportunity to

⁹⁶ Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education,” available on http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.htm, accessed December 12, 2020.

⁹⁷ Nabaneeta Deb Sen, quoted in Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 63-4.

break away from the manner in which India had been written about in English, not just by Indian writers but by Western writers as well.⁹⁸

Similarly, in an interview with Gauri Viswanathan, he distances himself from the realistic tradition of R. K. Narayan, because – “the India [his novels] describe, which is largely rural or consists of very small towns in India, was not mine. And also the manner of the novels was very calm, mild, classicist, linguistically orthodox, and I just thought India is not like that... India is turbulent and noisy and vulgar and crowded and unorthodox, and you know it’s a racket, and it’s a sensual assault, and it’s all these things.”⁹⁹ By denying any affinity with the previous Indian Anglophone literature apart from the, according to him, purely coincidental use of English, Rushdie rejects the continuity of such writing and represents himself as a rootless intellectual willing to admit only affiliative relationships with other writers.¹⁰⁰

In his first collection of essays, Rushdie rarely alludes to Indian Anglophone writers (only Anita Desai and V. S. Naipaul have essays dedicated to them), except when a writer’s attitude coincides with his. His polemic is oriented towards the colonial novel and the Raj revival he identifies in films such as *Gandhi* and *The Raj Quartet*; the lack of references to Indian literature proper is noticeable, in particular when contrasted with the insistent preoccupation with the political climate of the Indian subcontinent, which forms the basis of the contestatory politics of his novels. Furthermore, his status as the “father” of the new Renaissance in Indian Anglophone writing, which makes the writers of the 1980s “Rushdie’s children,” has led certain critics such as James Wood to hyperbolically claim that “He was central to the new power of Indian fiction in English, so dominating that he gobbled up his predecessors, who seem like clouds to his sun.”¹⁰¹

Interestingly, Rushdie’s self-distancing from the Indian Anglophone literary tradition and the attribution of literary fatherhood to him on the part of certain critics reconfigures the “anxiety

⁹⁸ Reder, *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, 9.

⁹⁹ Daniel Herwitz and Ashutosh Varshney, *Midnight’s Diaspora*, 24.

¹⁰⁰ However, Rushdie equally spurns the idea of an “international literature” and his belonging to it for the reason that “you can lose any real sense of a relationship with a language or a relationship with a place or a relationship with a particular community if you find yourself appealing to this international body.” (Rushdie, quoted in Michael Reder, *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, 94)

¹⁰¹ James Wood, quoted in Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across*, 42-43. Robert Eaglestone also considers *Midnight’s Children* an inaugurative novel – it “inaugurated the ‘contemporary’ period of literature in English” and is “the first novel of the age of globalisation”. (Robert Eaglestone and Martin McQuillan, eds., *Salman Rushdie* [London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013], 1 and 3)

of influence” as Harold Bloom conceives it. Far from exhibiting the “creative interpretation” or “strong misreading” of precursors that Bloom terms “poetic misprision” and that underlies all literary creation,¹⁰² Rushdie does not experience a literary belatedness that triggers the influence-anxiety along the filiative axis; rather, he chooses his literary fathers affiliatively (Kafka, Conrad, Grass). Similarly, his authorial protagonists exhibit the same restructuring of filiative parenthood in favour of the affiliative, privileging their own textual rather than biological fatherhood and troping authorship as the truly procreative principle, which in turn assigns to them a special status as forefathers and begetters. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar elaborate on this point in *The Madwoman in the Attic* by using Edward Said’s etymological identification of “author” with “father,” which in turn has invested the series of genealogical connections on which texts rest (author-text, beginning-middle-end, text-meaning, reader-interpretation) with “the imagery of succession, of paternity, or hierarchy.”¹⁰³ Thus, the “metaphor of literary paternity” has come to dominate the conception of author as “a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen’s power, like his penis’s power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim”; the literary text, then, becomes “not only speech quite literally embodied, but also power mysteriously made manifest, made flesh.”¹⁰⁴

Rushdie’s lack of filiative anxiety of influence and his status as a begetter/progenitor of a particular type of writing builds on this metaphor by reinforcing its analogous extension to further identify the author-father of the text with God, who, in like manner, is procreator and lord of his creation. Thus, the lack of secular, literary precursor is compensated for by the constant

¹⁰² Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). In Bloom’s view, the newcomer poet or ephebe is in the beginning in awe of his predecessor. “Caught within an essentially Oedipal, psychopoetic pattern of enthrallment and denegation, affirmation and denial, the ephebe will at some stage attempt the symbolic, ritual splaying of the Father in an attempt to carve out a space of authentic self-expression. But as with all gestures of this kind, the rejection of the precursor serves only to reconfirm the influence of the precursor. The only outroute for the ephebe is to reach a stage of poetic maturity in which the influence of the poetic father can be harnessed and mastered through the rewriting of the primal work in such a powerfully revisionist fashion that it comes to seem the ephebe’s own. Thereafter, and only thereafter, the *agon* abates, and the newcomer becomes a poet in his own right, a strong poet”. (Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008], 169-70)

¹⁰³ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 5.

¹⁰⁴ Gilbert and Gubar, 6.

allusion to and incorporation into his texts of the authors and protagonists of the ancient Indian myths and epics – *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*, Bhatta Somadeva’s ninth-century Sanskrit story *Kathasaritsagara*, the Oriental tradition exemplified by *The Arabian Nights*, various folklore and oral narratives and styles, Islamic sources which, in addition to the obvious reliance on the Qur’an, also include Farid-ud-Din Attar’s *Conference of the Birds* and other Sufi influences. The incorporation of these mythical texts, which activates their archetypal semantics, has led to the myth-inflected Hindu characters that populate Rushdie’s fiction (the timeless Tai, the Kali-like Indira Gandhi, Parvati, Shiva, Durga, Padma, to name a few from *Midnight’s Children* only) – not being able to imagine them as real people, he repeats the colonialist practice of silencing and elision. The absence of Gandhi from the alternative historiography that is this novel also corroborates the evasion of the Hindu element from his fictional world, as a possible manifestation of, in Feroza Jussawalla’s phrase, his “post-Mughal identity,” which, in spite of his atheist and secular outlook, nevertheless privileges the Indian Muslim male perspective. The unstable and in-between location he aptly describes as “straddl[ing] two cultures [and] at other times, [...] fall[ing] between two stools”¹⁰⁵ is reflected in the constant re-examination of authorship and his authorial responsibility. His recognition only of the ancient, classical Hindu texts is an orientalist strategy of lauding the Oriental culture’s past glory only to bring into sharp focus its present-day cultural impoverishment, as Rushdie insists in all his novels that the present era lacks the gigantic heroes of the past and even the historical greats such as Gandhi and Nehru are either denigrated or erased altogether.

¹⁰⁵ Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands,” in *Imaginary Homelands*, 15.

Rushdie's "Languaging"¹⁰⁶

In Indian Anglophone literature, it was Raja Rao who, in the foreword to his novel *Kanthapura*, first articulated the predicament of having

to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien,' yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up – like Sanskrit or Persian was before – but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.¹⁰⁷

Rao, like Rushdie, situates himself at the confluence of the two linguistic traditions – the English and the Indian – and recognises that his linguistic practice can never be purely one or the other, but rather an amalgam of the two. Unlike Rushdie, however, he regards English as an alien language – not fully alien, but not fully belonging to him either, at least not emotionally. The plural pronoun which he uses testifies to the collective Indian identity he embraces, in contradistinction to which he has to use a language he masters only intellectually in order to forge a new Indo-English variant. As Andrew Teverson points out, "Rao's commitment to the transformation of English, as well as his desire to revolutionise the novel in English by importing

¹⁰⁶ A term coined by Walter D. Mignolo to characterize the decolonising effect of linguistic "impurities" in texts by José María Arguedas, Michelle Cliff, and Gloria Anzaldúa, "who create unstable language hierarchies and multiple linguistic addresses in their texts" and thus "challenge the geohistorical epicenters of power. [...] They not only present mobile linguistic landscapes but subsequently, via discussion or narration, quite self-consciously challenge the radical asymmetries of the languages in the text. Moving between Quechua and Castilian (Argueda [sic]), English and the Creole Englishes (Cliff), and Spanish, English, and Nahuatl (Anzaldúa), the writers therefore present a theory of languages in their linguistic innovations." It is in the context of Mignolo's "geographic metaphors for linguistic worlds destabilised by cultural transgression" that Ghosh situates Rushdie's and the other "cosmopolitical" South Asian writers' linguistic practice, which is characterised by the "infus[ion of] standard English with the lexicon, grammar, and syntax of the Indian vernaculars of choice, or record[ing of] the local variant (Bombay, Malayalam, or Bengali English) of spoken speech in their novelistic heteroglossia. Their linguistic "maps" have unstable, layered, collusive contours that throw into confusion the established geopolitical borders of modern languages." (Ghosh, *When Borne Across*, 78-9)

¹⁰⁷ Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (Bombay: New Directions, 1967), vii.

into it the rhythms of the Indian storyteller, clearly anticipate Rushdie's later experiments with the form."¹⁰⁸

Rushdie shares Rao's view

that we can't simply use the language in the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or better because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free.¹⁰⁹

His inspiration was G. V. Desani's novel *All About H. Hatterr* (1949), which Rushdie finds

an extraordinary book... The way in which the English language is used in that book is very striking; it showed me that it was possible to break up the language and put it back together in a different way. To talk about minor details, one thing it showed me was the importance of punctuating badly. In order to allow different kinds of speech rhythms or different kinds of linguistic rhythms to occur in the book [*Midnight's Children*], I found I had to punctuate it in a very peculiar way, to destroy the natural rhythms of the English language; I had to use dashes too much, keep exclaiming, putting in three dots, sometimes three dots followed by semi-colons followed by three dashes... That sort of thing just seemed to help to dislocate the English and let other things into it.¹¹⁰

Robert Fraser argues that Desani's book "is an extreme example of the way in which the self-reflexiveness of the first person singular may confound itself, leading outwards towards the determining, representative facts of history. Hatterr's 'I' is seldom purely confessional, and his private narrative, idiosyncratic as it appears, constantly veers towards the public."¹¹¹ The inseparable connection between the personal and the communal/historical in Desani's book obviously found an echo in *Midnight's Children*, a novel that is credited to have inaugurated just such a type of writing about India in contemporary literature. Furthermore, Desani's book

offers a rather self-conscious linguistic project, a transcription of the Babu English¹¹² idiom in a somewhat modernist Joycean vein. In this bildungsroman, Desani features a grotesque but memorable autodidact who migrates between languages, but with a clear perception of the purity of each. But the protagonist's confusion of linguistic boundaries

¹⁰⁸ Teverson, *Salman Rushdie*, 42.

¹⁰⁹ Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands", in *Imaginary Homelands*, 17.

¹¹⁰ Reder, *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, 10.

¹¹¹ Fraser, *Lifting the Sentence*, 75.

¹¹² A derogatory term used by the British to refer to the English used by Indians.

is the subject of parody, not of valorisation. Hatterr slowly builds up a vocabulary with the aid of an English dictionary and French and Latin primers, combining curiosities like “colloquialisms of Calcutta and London, Shakespearian archaisms, bazaar whinings, quack spiels, references to the Hindu pantheon, [and] the jargon of Hindu litigation” (Desani 1986, 10). Every vernacular reference is subsequently translated into standardised English, either directly or through the unfolding of narrative situations.¹¹³

Still, in both Desani’s and Rao’s works, English remains the standard into which Hatterr’s rhetorical bombastic speech and the vernacular words, phrases and references which Rao appended to his novel are merely incorporated. In *Midnight’s Children*, however, the spheres of the two languages are no longer apart; the novel effects an internal transformation of the English language, which is rendered in a vernacular, localised form. Bishnupriya Ghosh identifies four strategies that define Rushdie’s linguistic localism in the later novel, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*:

direct recorded speech patterns in recognisable colloquialisms and street slang drawn from several oral registers; popular cultural resonances that harness context-specific vernacular knowledge, becoming learned idiom through iteration; (globally) circulating mass cultural signs that are recoded for the Bombay milieu; and citations that require historical knowledge of local milieu.¹¹⁴

The local referencing and use of multiple vernaculars (colonial and “babu English,” colloquial corporate and other professional global English, national, regional and English vernaculars, Bombayspeak, Hindised usage of English, etc.) point to a localised, situated language practice that is not “explained” or “translated” for the non-Indian reader, but rather permeates the text and is left to unfold inseparable from the linguistic texture. According to Andrew Teverson, “Rushdie adds a distinctly Indian strain to the novel’s already multi-vocal register” by imbibing it with the mythical and/or oriental(ised) milieu of the epic and folklore sources he draws upon, which in turn reshapes the structure of the novel: it is

“not linear”, it “does not go from the beginning to the middle to the end” like the classical Aristotelian narrative, but is “pyrotechnical”: “it goes in great swoops, it goes in spirals or in loops, it every so often reiterates something that has happened earlier to remind you, and then takes you off again, sometimes summarises itself, it frequently digresses off into something that the story-teller appears just to have thought of, then it comes back to the main thrust of the narrative” (Rushdie, 1985: 17-18).¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Ghosh, *When Borne Across*, 73.

¹¹⁴ Ghosh, 86.

¹¹⁵ Rushdie, quoted in Teverson, *Salman Rushdie*, 44-5.

The use of an oral register, and the concomitant techniques of digressions, circularity, repetitions, etc.,

coincides with a distinctly modernist and postmodernist agenda for the novel since it serves to undermine the assumptions concerning storytelling and authority implicit in the conventional realist text ... [by incorporating] pre-enlightenment, pre-literate mode of narrative structuring, ... [which ultimately translates into] a resistance to the kinds of narrative form favoured in European Enlightenment aesthetics, and to the kinds of philosophic world view implied in such aesthetics.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Teverson, 49-50.

II. Rushdie's Postcolonial Authorship

The Rushdiean Chronotope

Rushdie's protagonists are a part of the novelistic landscape of degraded heroes that Lukács posits as the *sine qua non* of the novelistic form. Rushdie repeatedly emphasises the de-heroicised and un-heroic nature of modern man. Thus, the materialistic rivalry between Abraham and Fielding in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is contrasted to the idealistic and idealised rivalries in *The Mahabharata*; when Saleem compares himself to the prophets, he is slapped by his father for his blasphemy. The disintegration of the organic connection between the individual and the collective that defined the epic cosmos and the concept of totality as the dominant historical-philosophical reality of an epoch has resulted in the "transcendental homelessness" inherent in the novel: "the homelessness of an action in the human order of social relations, the homelessness of a soul in the ideal order of a supra-personal system of values."¹¹⁷ Rushdie's protagonists, in a similar vein, insistently explore various ways of commonality and community against which and within which they posit their own carefully nurtured subjectivity.

Engulfed by the interiority to which the silence of the gods in the novelistic world and the unbridgeable gap that divides him from others relegate him, the novelistic hero plunges into "the adventure of interiority; the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself," but his seeking is wholly contingent and it is not guaranteed that "the world-dominating gods [will] triumph over the demons ('the divinities of impediment,' as Indian mythology calls them)."¹¹⁸ As Lukács further elaborates,

The inner form of the novel has been understood as the process of the problematic individual's journeying toward himself, the road from dull captivity within a merely present reality – a reality that is heterogeneous in itself and meaningless to the individual – toward clear self-recognition. After such self-recognition has been attained, the ideal thus formed irradiates the individual's life as its immanent meaning; but the conflict

¹¹⁷ Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 189.

¹¹⁸ Lukács, 204.

between what is and what should be has not been abolished and cannot be abolished in the sphere wherein these events take place – the life sphere of the novel; only a maximum conciliation – the profound and intensive irradiation of a man by his life’s meaning – is attainable. The immanence of meaning which the form of the novel requires lies in the hero’s finding out through experience that a mere glimpse of meaning is the highest that life has to offer, and that this glimpse is the only thing worth the commitment of an entire life, the only thing by which the struggle will have been justified.¹¹⁹

Unfolding in a world abandoned by God and lacking transcendental orientation, “the novel hero’s psychology is the field of action of the demonic,” locked within his own enclosed immanence, aware that meaning cannot fully penetrate reality, able only to find a seeming serenity in irony, that aesthetic dimension of representing the surface coincidence of man and the world. Hence the demonic predicament Cervantes lays bare in the first great novel: the only mysticism available in a world abandoned by Gods, with demons let loose, when the new arises out of the old and when the old ethical matrix is being eroded, is that of paradoxes and contradictions:

the purest heroism is bound to become grotesque, the strongest faith is bound to become madness, when the ways leading to the transcendental home have become impassable; reality does not have to correspond to subjective evidence, however genuine and heroic. The profound melancholy of the historical process, of the passing of time, speaks through this work, telling us that even a content and an attitude which are eternal must lose their meaning when their time is past: that time brushes aside even the eternal. *Don Quixote* is the first great battle of interiority against the prosaic vulgarity of outward life, and the only battle in which interiority succeeded, not only to emerge unblemished from the fray, but even to transmit some of the radiance of its triumphant, though admittedly self-ironising, poetry to its victorious opponent.¹²⁰

Rushdie exemplifies the Lukácsian godless and demon-infested novelscape, while at the same time infusing it with what Roger Y. Clark has aptly termed “other worlds,” “the overlapping realms of cosmology, mythology, and mysticism,”¹²¹ which, according to him, mitigate his iconoclastic stance on tradition and taboo by a kind of “secular idealism and by his subtle homage to mystical ideas of the past. Rushdie posits a fragmented self in a chaotic universe, yet he also hints at a mystical ideal of unity, a secular salvation that strives to exist beyond dogma or

¹¹⁹ Lukács, 199-200.

¹²⁰ Lukács, 211.

¹²¹ Roger Y. Clark, *Stranger Gods*, 3.

ideology.”¹²² His multi-focal and polylogic novelistic worlds are thus constantly invaded by a metaphysical, textual, ideological and cultural alterity that transforms his texts into dynamic, open-ended and ambivalent structures that represent a daunting interpretive challenge. They activate a host of “*imaginal images* that lack the precision and unambiguous quality of perceptual images”¹²³ and that Bakhtin defines by means of the “chronotope,” a concept that unites the coordinates of time (chronos) and place (topos) to form “an imaginal construct or entity representing a temporal process that occurs in a spatial situation.”¹²⁴

The Rushdiean chronotope pivots around *arche*-beginnings and apocalyptic endings, two absolute poles between which the author’s narration unfolds. In the early novels, the beginnings are structured around the birth of nations (India in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Pakistan in *Shame*), but imbue the historical and political dimension of these events with a mythical and biblical subtext, for these historical processes are simultaneously represented in cosmological terms – the gestation and birth of the nation is also the beginning of the world, indeed, of *a* world. The apocalyptic endings connote the violent and tragic end of a national ideal, which develops in a similarly biblically inflected imagery to connote the end of the world as the narrator knew it. The authorial protagonist or another character, who functions as an embodiment of the nation, is similarly engulfed in an imagery connoting disintegration, dissolution or an imminent death. *The Satanic Verses* presents a variation of the national allegorical paradigm by plunging even deeper into the exploration of absolute beginnings: on a historical level, it is the birth of Islam, while on a metaphysical, otherworldly level, the disruption of the God-ordained homogeneous world and word with the differential and subversive agency of Satan and the satanic principle of ambiguity, dissent and contradiction. In *Fury* and *Quichotte* there is a further transformation of the temporal dimension of the chronotope by tying the beginning to the effects of writing rather than to its genesis, as in the previous novels: these novels dramatise the beginning of the text’s afterlife, tracing its trajectory from its initial imaginative coming to life, the activation of its wordliness in a particular cultural and/or political context, and culminating in its political (mis)appropriation (*Fury*) or textual apotheosis (*Quichotte*).

¹²² Clark, 4.

¹²³ Bart Keunen, *Time and Imagination: Chronotopes in Western Narrative Culture* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 4, emphasis original.

¹²⁴ Keunen, 13.

In light of their multi-worldly configuration, the plots of the novels operate with different conceptions of time and history. The linearity of plot/character/time is complemented by a cyclicity derived from mythical and pre-modern paradigms, while the dualisms of the Manichean, theological and Enlightenment traditions are subverted and destabilised in various ways. In addition, conflict is generated by multiple paradigms: interreligious (primarily Christian, Muslim and Hindu, but also Jewish and Zoroastrian), secular vs. religious, mythical vs. historical, ancient vs. modern, realistic vs. magical, etc.

The linear projection of time into past, present and future, derived from Judeo-Christian thought,¹²⁵ conceives of time and space as unique, unrepeatable and irreversible; “nothing that has happened will again; the importance that we give our time and space comes out of their irreversibility.” However, primitive and pre-modern societies

do not conceive of the passing of life and epochs as separate, yoked to a continuous profane time like our own, rather as regulated – following a transhistorical model – by a series of archetypes that give all of their metaphysical value to human existence. From this pre-Socratic perspective, every *ad quem* is only apparent, as is any value given to the objects of the exterior world: all of these objects fundamentally depend on their participation in a transcendental reality. A vulgar stone may, by virtue of its symbolic value, or its origin (celestial or marine), acquire a sacred character (a meteorite, a pearl). The same applies to human acts. Nourishment or marriage are not mere physical operations, rather they reproduce a primordial act, repeat a mythical example: the communion with nature or another human being; properly speaking, archaic peoples knew not any act that had not been lived previously by another with whom they established a transhistorical and, in a certain sense, sacred communion.¹²⁶

This archetypal, cyclical conception of time does not admit beginnings and ends proper, but a ceaselessly turning and returning circle in which everything is repeated and repeatable – the myth of the eternal return. In Rushdie’s *oeuvre*, cyclicity is evoked by the Hindu concept of the *yugas*, by the repetition and reincarnation of characters of the same name in different generations of the same family (Aadam in *Midnight’s Children*, the Moor in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*) or in different spatial and temporal configurations (the Ayeshas, Mishals, Gibreels and prophets in *The*

¹²⁵ However, as Lady Spenta argues in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the Parsis, or Zoroastrians, also have a teleological, i.e. “forward-moving view of the cosmos. Our words and deeds are part, in their small way, of the battle in which Ahura Mazda will vanquish Ahriman” (*GBF*, 133).

¹²⁶ José Manuel Losada, “Preface: The Myth of the Eternal Return,” *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, Volume 40.2, 2017: 7.

Satanic Verses). Cyclical time can be also conceived of as timeless, mythic time, which is evoked to emphasise the transcendental role that Rushdie's authors ascribe to their texts, such as Saleem's attribution of mythical names to his Hindu characters, Moraes's likening himself to mythic sleepers who hope to be awakened, etc. Eschatological thinking is present throughout, as the authorial body is from birth or childhood plunged into a discourse of death: Rushdie's authors are doggedly pursued by disintegration, death, and annihilation, which is simultaneously a collective death (of a national, urban or cultural ideal). Bakhtin sees the extremities of life and death as a manifestation of the archaic grotesque which, as part of the carnivalesque conception of the world, gives rise not to death as non-entitising finality but to the "theme of birth-giving death,"¹²⁷ which sees death as a means of regeneration and renewal. Since the body is not merely individualised but acquires a collective and even cosmic identity, it is defined by its blendedness with the world and as such cannot completely disappear – in Rushdie, the authorial body regenerates itself not so much biologically, but textually.

Space in the Rushdiean chronotope is open, fluid and oscillates between different levels of abstraction.¹²⁸ Thus, on the most concrete level, we have a visual representation of space, effected by geographical indicators that refer to real referents (India, Delhi, Agra, Bombay, London, New York, etc.) or spatial indicators (the Methwold Estate, the pickle factory, the Zogoibys' bungalow Elephanta, the Shaandaar Café, etc.), which are complemented by a myriad references and detailed descriptions of streets, parks, rivers, billboards, filmic and other cultural references that all together bring to life the India of the second half of the twentieth century, the England of the 1980s and the America of the new millennium. At a further level of abstraction, there is the defamiliarised representation of real space, namely the fictional, estranged variants of geographical and spatial referents that exist at an angle to the latter, such as the alternative reality in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* or the Pakistan of *Shame* (at the level of characters, such are the Widow as a fictional version of Indira Gandhi, Fielding in relation to Bal Thackeray, Iskandar and Raza in relation to Zulfiqar Ali-Bhutto and Muhammad Zia ul-Haq).

Then, there are the symbolic spaces which, as Bart Keunen states, are "remarkable in the sense that they are able to shed entirely the visual link... [and] activate abstract processes of

¹²⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 405.

¹²⁸ Here I adapt Bart Keunen's triple scheme of visual, abstract/symbolical and metaphorical conception of space to Rushdie's representation of space in his novels.

thought.”¹²⁹ Partially or completely divorced from any concrete referents, they evoke emotional or ideological connotations that transform them into richly evocative and associative topoi such as, to use Keunen’s example, “una selva oscura” in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. This abstract representation of space transforms the setting into a symbolical content (such as Kafka’s castle) and space functions not visually but associatively, evoking a particular symbolical content which can be a state of mind or a cultural metaphor. In Rushdie, such symbolical spaces are the Sundarbans in *Midnight’s Children*, the Bombay Central jail and Benengeli in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, the oneiric topoi of Jahilia, London/Jerusalem and Titlipur of Gibreel’s dreams in *The Satanic Verses*, Lilliput-Blefuscu in *Fury*, etc.

Finally, at the highest level of abstraction, there are the metaphorical spaces, which “adopt the form of worldviews, both ethically and metaphysically.”¹³⁰ The dominant spaces and the interactions between them thus acquire an abstract ethical and metaphysical dimension. For instance, the horizontal movement in *Midnight’s Children* across the map of the subcontinent represents Saleem’s identification with the nation; by contrast, the vertical movement that dominates *The Moor’s Last Sigh* across the axis of medieval al-Andalus and modern-day Bombay explores the hybrid ideal embodied in these historical spaces (as well as their antithesis in the simulacral worlds of Benengeli and those of New York and America in *Fury* and *Quichotte* respectively). The ascent-descent movement that dominates *The Satanic Verses*, on the other hand, captures the fall of Satan and man from the plenitude of being in the divine presence in the garden of Eden and man’s subsequent desire to attain a form of transcendence in a secular world (the topoi of Everest and Mount Cone in particular exemplify these spiritual aspirations of the characters). Positioning themselves within or in relation to these metaphorical spaces (Saleem as India, Moraes as Boabdil, the author as God and Satan, etc.), Rushdie’s authors conceive of literature as indissolubly linked to lofty ethical and cultural ideals, which, in turn, endow authorship with grandeur and sublimity.

Rushdie reconfigures the premises of the standard *Bildungsroman* by replacing the traditional social contracts (finding love, marriage, personal growth, etc.) with the preeminence of the textual *agon*, which destabilises and problematises everything, even its own lauded ideals, such as those of hybridity and rootlessness. Similarly to Gibreel’s umbilical cord tying him to his

¹²⁹ Keunen, *Time and Imagination*, 20.

¹³⁰ Keunen, 21.

creations, Rushdie's authorial figures find their way back into the maternal womb metaphorically: through the textual bringing to life of the meaningful potential contained in the identity of the author-protagonist, which is comprised of the biological identity of the family, the affiliative one of the wider social *milieu*, and, finally, the worldview one of the ontological, cultural and ethical ideal they embrace. Their multilayered subjectivity, in which the personal is interwoven with history and myth, makes them not fully individualised and free characters, because their meaning is overdetermined by these wider categories in relation to which they position themselves. From this perspective, writing becomes not so much a Scheherazadean project of neutralising the political with the artistic, as an attempt to textually embody the personal and suprapersonal meanings that they attribute to themselves. Hence the ubiquitous presence of the mythical and archetypal hypotexts, which evoke the authorial archetype as crucial: by likening themselves to mythic and legendary storytellers and scribes such as Ganesh, Vyasa, Valmiki, Scheherazade, etc., Rushdie's authors imbue their authorial identity and authorship with an archetypal, transcendental component without which they cannot be imagined.

Rushdie's *Künstlerromane*

The German concept of *Bildung* encapsulates the notion of individual development – self-cultivation, or “the tradition of personal culture”¹³¹ – combining philosophical and pedagogical concerns about how to effect personal and cultural growth and maturation. It has been the object of literary-philosophical debate in Germany by such authors and philosophers as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Goethe and Thomas Mann, in the process of which it has been expanded and developed to include and refer to: individual maturation through negotiation between individual transformation and integration of accepted cultural norms and beliefs, harmonisation of the individual self with the collective self of society/the nation, coming to terms with one's own humanity and belonging to mankind, reorientation of the notion of education to mean not so much the necessary training for a vocation (i.e. the acquisition of facts and skills) as a life-long dynamic process of learning,

¹³¹ W. H. Bruford, *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: Bildung from Humboldt to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ix.

spiritual and emotional self-improvement and, ultimately, producing cultured national subjects with a heightened civic and political awareness.

The genre of the *Bildungsroman* appeared in the second half of the eighteenth century as a novel of growth or of self-cultivation. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, this type of novel represents a culmination of the development of the novel (after the novel of ordeal, the biographical, and the family novel), since it portrays a consciousness that undergoes a radical change. The heroes of the other types of novel also pass through life facing a series of tests and strive for some final fulfillment and happiness, but even after various ordeals, they “don’t undergo any important changes: even after conversions – Augustine’s being the inescapable model – they remain themselves, only more so.”¹³² The central theme of the *Bildungsroman*, on the other hand,

is precisely change – physical, psychological, moral. The hero is no longer “ready-made” and, through all his shifts in fortune or social position, stable. He is what Bakhtin calls “the image of man in the process of becoming,” whether through an idealised “idyllic time” – a sort of hypostatized Seven Ages of Man from the “Mewling and puking” infant to the youth “Seeking the bubble reputation” and so on – or through actual historical time. In the event-racked revolutionary years of the late eighteenth century, the emergence of the hero’s character increasingly mirrored the emergence – socially, economically, politically, ideationally – of the world around him.¹³³

The genre originated in Germany and Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* is traditionally regarded as the prototype. Goethe places the emphasis on the growth and maturation of the individual consciousness vis-à-vis itself and the world, which “depends on a harmonious negotiation of interior and exterior selfhoods, a reconciliation that involves the balancing of social role with individual fulfillment. Crucial to that holistic rapprochement is the educative journey that the hero undergoes: completion through enlightenment has been, from its earliest days, a cornerstone”¹³⁴ of the genre of the *Bildungsroman*.

G. B. Tennyson, in reference to nineteenth-century English literature, lists the following characteristics of the genre: the idea of Bildung, of formation, cultivation, education, shaping of

¹³² Thomas L. Jeffers, *Apprenticeships: The Bildungsroman from Goethe to Santayana* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 37.

¹³³ Jeffers, 2.

¹³⁴ Peter Childs and Roger Fowler, *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 18.

a single main character, normally a young man; individualism, especially the emphasis on the uniqueness of the protagonist and the primacy of his private life and thoughts, although these are at the same time representative of an age and a culture; the biographical element, usually supplied from the author's own life in what Dilthey calls the "conscious and artistic presentation of what is typically human through the depiction of a particular individual life;" the connection with psychology, especially the then-new psychology of development; and the ideal of humanity, of the full realisation of all human potential as the goal of life.¹³⁵

In Britain, the *Bildungsroman* became "synonymous with a certain sense of social dislocation as is discernible in some classic accounts of problematic identity and stifled individuation," such as Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, or Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*; elsewhere in Europe, appeared *Bildungsromane* "more overtly transgressive in the arenas of sexuality and sexual politics," as in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*; modernist literature tended to "focus attention away from the social interaction of the individual and towards the ineffability of the fractured self," as in the novels of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf and with the notable exception of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*; the rise of postmodernism shifted the focus towards the expression of the unstable and fragmented nature of subjectivity and identity and towards narratives of previously marginalised groups, as in feminist, gay, and lesbian writings.¹³⁶ The portrayal of the development of an artistic consciousness has given rise to the sub-genre of the *Künstlerroman*, referring to a novel tracing the "development of the self as a creative and artistic force[...] which addresses the struggle to fulfill an artistic potential."¹³⁷ This is the so-called "novel of the artist", which portrays the intellectual development of a writer or an artist, with James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* as the most representative examples.

Rushdie's *Künstlerromane* subvert the models of the traditional exponents of the genre by portraying a more complex relationship between self and society and by problematising the artist's *Bildung* as inevitably leading to maturity by socialisation, marriage and entry into the

¹³⁵ G. B. Tennyson, quoted in Robert Michael Kirschen, "James Joyce and Post-Imperial Bildung: Influences on Salman Rushdie, Tayeb Salih, and Tsitsi Dangarembga" (PhD diss., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2013), 7-8, <http://dx.doi.org/10.34917/4478268>.

¹³⁶ Childs and Fowler, *Dictionary*, 19-20.

¹³⁷ Childs and Fowler, 19.

desired class and social structure. Their belonging to a society or the nation is never fully realised and this unbelongingness is a constant source of authorial anxiety that finds expression in the texts they produce as a means of cementing their identity and legacy. The linear, temporal and causal progression of the self and the nation is undermined by a carnivalesque logic in which circularity, coincidences and, at times, forced correspondences lead the artist's *Bildung* to death or disintegration (Saleem, Moraes), infantile regression (Malik), or metatextual dissolution (Quichotte/the Author). Writing about *The Satanic Verses*, Shaul Bassi states that "thanks to the postcolonial time-lag of modernity[...], Chamcha starts as a belated follower of the Western promises of the Bildungsroman and ultimately fails because his world is no longer that of Dickens or Thackeray."¹³⁸ Bassi enumerates the following deconstructive aspects of Rushdie's novel regarding the classical novel of formation: youth (Saladin endorses false values that will fall apart later on), history (the great historical events are not marginal *vis-à-vis* the hero's growth but exert a crucial influence on him), mobility (the adventurous movements of the classical hero are here transposed as a different form of mobility, based on exile, migration, escape from political violence), the Law (the hero receives the deserved justice and the happy ending is ensured, but in Rushdie's novel the Law manifests itself as a brutal and oppressive force), metamorphosis (as opposed to the principle of conservation of the classical Bildungsroman), the villain (is not externalised as an antagonist embodying society's negative values, but internalised – Saladin becomes the devil), the narrator (no longer omniscient, heterodiegetic and stable, but elusive, unsure of his own identity), the conception of identity (no longer essentialist and in full possession of the expressive and descriptive power of language, but interpellated by ideology and cultural context and operating with an awareness of the inability of language to faithfully represent reality, which is also perceived as fractured and unrepresentable), and home (the traditional hero would leave his home in order to initiate his self-exploration and would eventually return to it, seeing it as the repository of his internal "truth;" in Rushdie's novel, Saladin's home-coming is not definitive and does not fully endorse the reintegration of the hero in his place of origin).¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Shaul Bassi, "The (Un)making of Saladin Chamcha: Rushdie's Subversion of the Bildungsroman," in *Salman Rushdie: New Critical Insights*, vol. I, ed. Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Joel Kuortti (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2014), 73.

¹³⁹ Bassi, 76-85.

Dubravka Juraga even questions *Midnight's Children's* postcolonial credentials. In her view, rather than create a hybrid space in which East and West merge to form the “third space” of cultural newness, this novel remains a Eurocentric narrative which uses its exotic locale to dramatise the existential and cultural angst of its Eurocentric protagonist:

By my reading, Rushdie's text is not an elaborate melting pot in which Eastern and Western cultures can mix and mingle as equals, producing something richer than either could alone. Far from suggesting the rich cultural hybridity that results from the colonial encounter, *Midnight's Children* reenacts the colonial encounter in ways that ultimately, if inadvertently, provide reminders that this “hybridity” was underwritten by a relationship of brute force, of domination and submission. Rushdie's text is a fundamentally Western one that has been elaborately tricked out with ornamentation derived from Indian culture[...] Within the exotic and alien world of the reified India of his text, Rushdie presents us with the struggles of a protagonist who is thoroughly Western, whose fragmented psychic experience is that of a subject of late capitalism[...] In *Midnight's Children*, India is not linked to the West as part of a hybrid, cosmopolitan global culture; it is merely a colourful stage setting on which Saleem Sinai can act out his thoroughly Western postmodern angst.¹⁴⁰

Rushdie's *Künstlerromane* trace the development of authorial figures who, through their writing, enact an intervention in public discourse in order to voice an alternative interpretation of politics or history and to propound a new perspective on pressing issues in their cultures/societies, notably colonialism, its postcolonial legacy, the apogee and downfall of the idea of the nation, the divisions and divisiveness in their society, etc. In addition, the focus is not so much on “fulfilling an artistic potential” *per se*, as the definition of the *Künstlerroman* suggests. Rather, this potential is used in order to come to terms with and articulate the historical-political issues named above, with which the artists' personal identity is intimately intertwined. Instead of the purely artistic, they undergo a more encompassing and inclusive cultural and historical *Bildung*, which, taking place in the conflict-ridden postcolonial nation-state, reflects the arduous path of the postcolonial artist towards a usually contested and never-fully-achieved intellectual fulfillment as he grapples with various structures of power. Rushdie's postcolonial *Künstlerromane* strive carefully to preserve the precarious balance of the interior and the exterior self, of locating value in both the subjective and the objective domain, and thus avoid the

¹⁴⁰ Dubravka Juraga, “‘The Mirror of Us All’: *Midnight's Children* and the Twentieth-Century Bildungsroman,” in *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*, ed. M. Keith Booker, 184.

narcissism and solipsism characteristic of some other exemplars of the genre. In this way, the socio-cultural coordinates within which the growth of the individual artistic consciousness is dramatised become just as important as the processes of change and destabilisation of the artist's subjective world.

“Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject!”: Who Has a Right to Speak?

Postcolonial criticism places a particular emphasis on the positionality of the writing subject as an authority-determining characteristic. Critics and writers alike have repeatedly called into question or insisted on the justifiability of their views, grounding them in their cultural and intellectual belonging both in the East and the West. Perhaps the insistence on exile as a metaphorical condition (albeit always tenuously tied to physical exile) on the part of contemporary writers and critics (Rushdie, Said, Bhabha) indicates a specifically postcolonial framework of thinking about the world and man's place in it that is inspired and nourished by the intellectual's dual position as an insider and outsider in the cultural, political and epistemological climate in which he creates his intellectual output. In other words, he has to be both inside in order for his voice to be heard and relevant, and outside in order to have a broader perspective and avoid narrow-mindedness. Andreea Deciu Ritivoi has aptly termed this dual personality of the modern intellectual an “intimate stranger,” which designates an outsider not in terms of citizenship but in terms of the community's attitude towards him/her as if s/he were a foreigner and who transforms his/her rejection as a non-citizen and foreigner into a source of special, defamiliarised insight:

The stranger persona of Arendt, Marcuse, Solzhenitsyn, and Said has its origin in estrangement conceived as “*depaysement*” in a broad sense, not merely being uprooted from one's homeland, but also not sharing the same discursive resources available to one's new community. In this sense, estrangement creates new perspectives by virtue of employing a different language. This language is poetic not in the aesthetic sense, but in its opposition to the everyday linguistic habits of a community. This language was, as Shklovsky's friend, Jakobson, would have put it, “not a supplementation of discourse

with rhetorical adornment but a total reevaluation of the discourse and of its components whatsoever.¹⁴¹

The stranger persona of the modern intellectual accorded him the status of

the ultimate impartial observer with objectivity the very consequence of disinterestedness. From westerns to religious narratives like the Book of Ruth, there are abundant representations of a wise and virtuous outsider who can help the community when its own members fail to do so. Yet at the end of the story, the foreigner either goes native or departs “in a timely fashion.” The figure of the foreigner is absorbed into the group or eliminated if it becomes resistant.¹⁴²

Assimilation and elimination both imply an absolute position: in the case of assimilation, the intellectual’s foreignness is domesticated, neutralised and turned into conformism, whereas in the case of elimination, it is cast aside and ignored because its radical subversion is not acceptable. The concept of the intellectual as an “intimate stranger,” on the other hand, maintains a precarious balance between these two extremes by carving out for him a critical position that is perceived both as domestic (and therefore acceptable) and foreign (and therefore open to criticism and rebuttal) (Rob Burton designates contemporary writers caught between cultures as “artists of the floating world”).¹⁴³ For postcolonial critics and writers, the majority of whom hailed from the Third World but forged their careers largely in the First, the quality of strangeness or foreignness was a crucial aspect both of their own self-perception and of the perception that their respective communities had of them. In their books and lectures, they capitalised on this by bringing into sharp focus the predicament of the postcolonial condition, thus paving the way for the ensuing predominance of the voices of the marginalised and subaltern groups in academic discourse. This, however, attracted a significant amount of criticism, as their insistence on and almost exclusive preoccupation with the postcolonial and the concerns of the Third World was often seen as self-serving. Namely, postcolonial intellectuals, most notably Said and Rushdie, were accused of using the sufferings and problems of the various dispossessed and subaltern groups they claimed to represent to forge their own intellectual

¹⁴¹ Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, *Intimate Strangers: Arendt, Marcuse, Solzhenitsyn, and Said in American Political Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 54-55.

¹⁴² Deciu Ritivoi, 43.

¹⁴³ Rob Burton, *Artists of the Floating World: Contemporary Writers between Cultures* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007).

standing and reputation, i.e. of pressing them “into the service of [their] own credentials as... intellectual hero[es].”¹⁴⁴ After all, there is an unbridgeable gap between the vulnerability and sufferings of the impoverished Third World masses which are the object of the intellectuals’ academic/literary engagement and the privileged life of the intellectuals themselves, who represent themselves to their First World audiences as the heroes of tragedies not their own which they nevertheless appropriate to bolster their own heroic status.

Edward Said’s entire *oeuvre* is predicated on the idea that both the intellectual and the ideas/texts that he disseminates are produced within a certain discourse which marks and delimits their intellectual territory. The idea of worldliness, i.e. the awareness of being situated in a spatio-temporal, political, cultural, and historical context, opens up the intellectual and the text to the ambivalences, paradoxes, and contradictions generated by a way of thinking marked by the vicissitudes of its own production, disrupting its assumed unitarity, continuity and consistency and exposing its fragmentary and porous nature. Above all, worldliness intersects with the politics of identity and this tension reveals the two contradictory allegiances of the contemporary (and the postcolonial in particular) intellectual: on the one hand, the glorification of inclusiveness, heterogeneity, hybridity, multiplicity (both at a discursive and a socio-cultural level), and, on the other, the pull of the notions of grounding, rootedness, essences, exigencies placed upon him by his identity. In Said’s case, this is evident in the paradoxical coexistence in his works of the cherished state of metaphorical/intellectual exile, which for him is the very condition for having a critical thought, and the fate of being a Palestinian – a contested identity which Said has to constantly assert – which, unlike exile, hangs upon a specific geography, history, and culture.

However, the awareness of the critic’s or the writer’s non-straightforward location should not lead to what Spivak terms “ghettoisation”¹⁴⁵ (instances of pigeonholing such as tokenisation, which refers to perceiving the intellectual as a token/representative of a region/ethnicity/ideology, or chromatism and genitalism, which refers to perceiving an individual as having or not having the right to speak based on their skin colour and gender respectively). All of these, as Spivak states, have to do with silencing: either by means of evoking a person’s privilege as a factor precluding the understanding of the Other, as is the case with chromatism

¹⁴⁴ Ian Buruma, quoted in Deciu Ritivoi, *Intimate Strangers*, 243.

¹⁴⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Postcolonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 61.

and genitalism, or, in the case of tokenisation, by taking an intellectual's national, ethnic or ideological identity/position as representative of his/her nation, ethnicity or ideology in exclusive terms.

As a result of this ghettoisation of intellectual discourse, Brenda Cooper finds herself obliged to justify her daring, as a white woman, to write a book about African magical realism, as if her race somehow precluded her from gaining an authentic or viable insight into her subject matter. Referring to other white intellectuals who have experienced a feeling of “discomfiture” when faced with texts by “more authentic” voices such as Fanon’s and Spivak’s, she ends up by rejecting this disabling feeling and advancing her authorial credentials:

Young describes how Sartre, in his introduction to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, experiences “the discomfiture felt by a European reading [it].” In a slightly different context Young refers again to the “discomfiture” experienced in reading Spivak’s dense, complex and shifting texts. Although Young is not in the case of Spivak referring directly to the response of the European reader, the repetition of the term “discomfiture” raises Sartre’s observation as European reader and links, even if unconsciously, to Young’s own responses as European critic of a radical, Third World text. It is precisely this “discomfiture” of which Spivak is gleefully aware and mercilessly exploits when assuming the role of speaking as an insider, a black, colonised, subaltern, Third World woman. [...] What I am writing here is my own, personal refusal of discomfiture, of having a caricatured pious face and in so doing, to sketch out a Third Eye framework within which to work. The fact of the matter is that neither Said, Spivak, nor Young himself satisfactorily answers the question of where they themselves speak from and derive authoritativeness.¹⁴⁶

The tentative authorial “I” in Rushdie’s *Shame* argues his position by highlighting the difference between himself and his poet-friend who spent some time in jail for no apparent reason and suggests that by rights, it is this friend who “maybe” “should be telling this story, or another one, his own; but he doesn’t write poetry any more. So here I am instead, inventing what never happened to me” (S, 28). The voice of the poet-friend, a citizen of Pakistan, is silenced by censorship and the oppressive regime and although he is a legitimate defender of his vocation because of the oppression to which he was subjected, the readers have to make do with the

¹⁴⁶ Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 11 and 12.

author-narrator, a migrant who lacks the credibility of a political victim raising his voice against injustice and who is loosely bound to the country, being able to represent it only at an imaginative and empathetic distance. From this precarious position, the author-narrator anticipates the protests of his native audience:

Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject! ... I know: nobody ever arrested me. Nor are they ever likely to. Poacher! Pirate! We reject your authority. 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? I reply with more questions: is history to be considered the property of the participants solely? In what courts are such claims staked, what boundary commissions map out the territories?

Can only the dead speak? (*S*, 28, emphasis original)

Coming from an “intimate stranger” such as himself, who even openly proclaims his distance from the represented world, his discourse is repudiated as being forked-tongued, serpentine, seductive in its falsity and equivocations. His in-between position – Rushdie’s famous “fall[ing] between two stools” – is evident in the cultural untranslatability of the word *sharam*, “for which this paltry ‘shame’ is a wholly inadequate translation” (*S*, 38-9) (and yet entitles the book), and in the acquired language, “this Angrezi” in which he is “forced to write” (*S*, 38). Hence, he formulates his position *vis-à-vis* his subject-matter in terms of the specific hero he has chosen for his novel: the “peripheral hero” Omar Khayyam Shakil, in relation to whom the author is as Fitzgerald was to the Persian poet Omar Khayyam (like his hero, the narrator becomes, as Kuortti highlights, “another voyeur, an Other voyeur”).¹⁴⁷ Just as the Western translator appropriated the Eastern poet’s voice by producing a text that was different from and at times even alien to the spirit of its original, so the author capitalises on his own “translation” from the Pakistan that he represents and propounds his translation from East to West as equally productive as that of Fitzgerald:¹⁴⁸ “I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*. It is generally

¹⁴⁷ Joel Kuortti, *Fictions to Live In: Narration as an Argument for Fiction in Salman Rushdie’s Novels* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris, Wien: Peter Lang, 1998), 96.

¹⁴⁸ Anuradha Dingwaney Needham sees both Omar and the narrator as “situated on borders; both are similar to the extent that they *figure* some of the competing pressures a post-colonial expatriate must negotiate... However, whereas for Shakil his position on the border ... yields only variations on loss... for the narrator it is a fertile zone of inquiry... I see Omar Khayyam’s case as a cautionary example; though he is situated on borders, both psychic and spatial, the absence of critical insight and love radically circumscribes the more valuable potential of his location”. (Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, “The Politics of Post-Colonial Identity in Salman Rushdie,” in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. D. M. Fletcher [Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994], 150-1)

believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion – and use, in evidence, the success of Fitzgerald-Khayyam – that something can also be gained” (S, 29, emphasis original). The narrator here lets loose his imagination around an originary void, for his Omar Khayyam never produced verses (“no *rubaiyat* ever issued from his pen” (S, 30)) and therefore does not leave him an “original” story with which to work.¹⁴⁹ Since his hero is a failed Omar Khayyam, who was himself mis-represented and mis-translated from his native eastern context to the western, the authorial “I” draws attention to the delegitimising effects of his own translated position while simultaneously asserting it as a gain. The loss and the gain obtained by his cultural and intellectual translation and translatability define his authorial credo.

The key phrases that encapsulate his subject-matter and his own relation to it are summed up in this passage:

The country in this story is *not Pakistan, or not quite*.¹⁵⁰ 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*. I have found this *off-centring* to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan. I have not given the country a name. And Q. is not really Quetta at all. But I don't want to be precious about this: when I arrive at the big city, I shall call it Karachi. And it will contain a “Defence.” (S, 29, emphasis mine)

The wording here evokes Homi Bhabha’s conception of colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*.”

¹⁴⁹ In contrast, “[a]s shown by the corruption of his texts, the doubts about his being an author at all, the incomparable number of translations of his work and the tendency of Rubaiyat collections to include the poems of other Persian poets, [Omar Khayyam] is not for Rushdie an individual poet but a figurehead for Orientalist poetry in the West”. (Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, 120) As such, he resembles a composite figure of Eastern artistic creativity similar to the Indian Overartist that Rushdie celebrates in *The Satanic Verses*.

¹⁵⁰ The defamiliarised Pakistan that Rushdie creates as a fictional counterpart of the real one is inscribed in the unstable geographical ontology of migrancy – its acronymic name was coined in England by a group of Muslim intellectuals (P for the Punjabis, A for the Afghans, K for the Kashmiris, S for Sind and the ‘tan’ for Baluchistan), “a word born in exile which then went East, was borne-across or trans-lated, and imposed itself on history”, like “a returning migrant” (S, 87). Forcefully imposing itself as a pure entity, oblivious of the palimpsest history to which it is an heir, it is conceived as not only the perpetrator but also the victim of epistemic violence, as it amounted to nothing more than “*insufficiently imagined*, a picture full of irreconcilable elements... a miracle that went wrong” (S, 87). Its name is further destabilised by the pun born out of the anecdote about Napier who, after capturing Sind, sent back a message containing the Latin word “Peccavi” (Latin for “I have sinned”) – “I have Sind” – therefore, Pakistan becomes “Peccavistan” (S, 88), its name embodying sinfulness and therefore the feelings of shame and shamelessness that function as the thematic centre of the novel.

Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.”¹⁵¹ Thus, Pakistan for the author is an ambivalent geographical and metaphorical space that oscillates between alterity and identity, difference and sameness, lack and excess. As such, it can only be apprehended and represented “at a slight angle” to its real referent. As a result, the author produces a narrator who is both omniscient and ignorant, an ambivalent text that is simultaneously a political satire and a fairytale,¹⁵² a fictionalised account of real people, places and events that constantly subverts its fictional reality by resorting to metafictional devices,¹⁵³ a

¹⁵¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 122, emphasis original.

¹⁵² Contemporary Pakistani politics forms the core of the plot and provides the material for the political satire (Rushdie depicts the regimes of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Zia ul-Haq and anticipates the premiership of Benazzir Ali Bhutto through the characters of Iskander Harappa, Raza Hyder and Arjumand Harappa, the Virgin Ironpants). Fairytale-like elements include the fabulistic Nishapur, the home where Omar Khayyam Shakil is born to three mothers who by the end resemble three vengeful witches; the reworking of the fairytale Beauty and the Beast in a way that allows Sufiya Zinobia, the heroine, to subsume both; the forty wives in the matriarch Bariamma’s household who are nightly visited by their husbands, etc. The novel begins and ends in the fabulous, labyrinthine space of Omar’s home, “Nishapur,” with its timeless, infinite aura, in the border town of Q. Since “the border is the edge of the world, the rim of things” (S, 268), Nishapur’s location on a literal state border assumes a symbolical importance, as that is where Sufiya’s violence consumes the last remnants of the novel’s world. Nishapur symbolises both the confined, shame- and censorship-contained space of Pakistan and the experience of the limit of most of the characters, which has a negative and a positive aspect. In its negative aspect, it refers to the extremes between supreme power and utter powerlessness of the political elite of Pakistan, as evidenced in the fates of Iskander and Raza; in its positive aspect, the crossing of a threshold of ethics or of consciousness is troped as a sign of liberation – when she is engulfed by the cycle of violence, Sufiya is seen by Omar as truly free in her savage and unrestrained strength; Bilquis reduced to a whisper and a ghost under her burqa and Rani embroidering her shawls in the solitude of Mohenjo, although kept in isolation by their respective husbands, are ultimately free in that they transcend the crude power struggle that defines the men’s life in the novel. Bilquis delivers the final judgement on the predicament of modern Pakistan by stating, at the very end of the novel, that once giants and titans walked the earth, while now “the pygmies have taken over... Pygmies pygmies everywhere, also insects and ants – shame on the giants, isn’t it? Shame on them for shrinking. That’s my opinion” (S, 271).

¹⁵³ “Ends must not be permitted to precede beginnings and middles” (S, 22), “a plague on this disobedient Time! I command this death scene back into the wings at once: shazam!” (S, 23), “what manner of hero is this?” (S, 25), “things have been happening while I’ve been talking too much” (S, 71), “I have turned a blind eye and snored loudly while Raza Hyder visited the dormitory of the forty women and made this miracle possible” (S, 77), “Enough. Ten years have slipped by in my story while I’ve been seeing ghosts” (S, 118), “I did it to her, I think, to make her pure” (S, 120), “Omar Khayyam claims his obsession with Sufiya Zinobia has cured his vertigo. Poppycock! Flim-flam! I accuse the villain of attempting a shameless piece of social climbing” (S, 144), “Very well; let’s get on. I’ve lost another seven years of my story while the headache banged and thumped” (S, 145), “I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale... But the women seem to have taken over” (S, 173), “I am no less disappointed in my hero than I was... But I must admit that his love for the damaged

peripheral hero, a beast-like heroine who, like Pakistan, is a miracle gone wrong, an entire country that is also a claustrophobic labyrinthine space, a double chronology whereby the events take place both in modern-day Pakistan (post-1947) and in the 14th and 15th centuries of the Hegiran calendar, which for the non-Islamic world evokes the notorious cultural darkness of medieval times, etc.

According to Catherine Pessa-Miquel, there is a dual narratorial persona in the novel: one is the autobiographical narrative “I,” whom we can recognise as Rushdie and who alludes to events from his own life, to the real Pakistan and its politics, while the other is “a mask, the narrative voice that narrates the story and assumes an ironic distance *vis-à-vis* the hero, Omar, quickly transformed into an antihero.”¹⁵⁴ This authorial instability accounts for the migrant vision of the narrator, which is fragmentary (“I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors... I must reconcile myself to the inevitability of the missing bits” (S, 69)) and mediated through his Western location. Thus, most of the autobiographical elements that the narrator/Rushdie provides in the text demonstrate that the imaginative core of the novel, like the name Pakistan itself, originated in the West and was then borne across to the East, performing the author’s itinerary in reverse and by giving rise to the novel we are reading, validates the author’s perception of the migrancy of people and ideas as productive. The inspiration for Sufiya were three incidents of violence that had taken place in London: one was the murder of his daughter by a Pakistani father for having been in a relationship with a white boy, another was the attack by a group of teenage boys on an Asian girl who afterwards feels not angry but ashamed, as she is a prey to the same shame-conscious culture as the father who was willing to sacrifice his daughter for a principle, and the third was a boy who spontaneously combusted in a parking

girl is beginning to seem as if it might be genuine... which does not invalidate my criticisms of the fellow” (S, 198).

¹⁵⁴ Catherine Pessa-Miquel, *Salman Rushdie: L’écriture transportée* (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2007), 38, translation mine: “l’autre est un masque, c’est la voix narrative qui raconte l’histoire et prend une distance ironique vis-à-vis du héros, Omar, vite transformé en antiéros.” Rushdie himself clarifies his technique as follows: ““In *Shame* the author sometimes knows less than a character, and he’s obliged to say that there are things he doesn’t know. Normally an author is omniscient or not, and to try to make an authorial voice which would shift between the two positions was technically one of the things I enjoyed in the book – sometimes the author is the writer of the story, sometimes he’s the reader of the story, and I thought that was quite valuable in providing shading” (Rushdie, quoted in Reder, *Conversations*, 44). For James Harrison, author and narrator are identical: “there is no pretense in this novel that author and narrator are other than one and the same. [...] Rushdie has no wish to hide behind any assumption that the voice speaking is that of a persona. This is his view of his subject expressed in his voice”. (James Harrison, *Salman Rushdie*, 80 and 81)

lot (S, 115-8). While the third incident evidently prefigures Sufiya's turning into a fireball that consumes Nishapur and its inhabitants, the first two reveal the in-between empathetic location of the author, who, first, finds himself understanding of the father's extreme act and thus partially inscribes himself in the Eastern culture of shame he critiques in his novel, and then imaginatively turns the violence suffered by the girl in the underground train against the perpetrators by portraying Sufiya as an embodiment of the just rage of the repressed and the victimised who even becomes a human guillotine, a being of legendary proportions, "a chimaera, the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage" (S, 263). As the three incidents out of which the image of Sufiya grew took place in England, the author sees them as an irruption of the irrational East amid the rational West, but also, as mentioned above, partly identifies with his Eastern cultural legacy by sympathising with the father and by undertaking their "translation" into their Eastern context. Ultimately, like the father who oscillates between the dictates of his personal fatherly love for his daughter and the culturally imposed feeling of shame that demands her murder, the author, in order to construct his text, metaphorically has to murder an aspect of his object of representation. Hence, his angled creation of "Peccavistan," the imaginary country in which he always speaks with a forked tongue.

These West-located images of violence are not the only ones that the author translates eastwards to give shape to his East-located text (thus performing an inverse Fitzgeraldian itinerary). Such is also the interpretive framework, as in the comment that the conflict between Iskander and Raza is the perennial one between the epicure and the puritan, for which the prototypes are Danton and Robespierre, as represented in Georg Büchner's play *Danton's Death* that the author saw on a London stage with some friends, visitors from Pakistan. While the author sees in their conflict "the true dialectic of history (S, 240) – the suppression of the subversive Epicureanism by a puritan regime – one of his Pakistani friends concludes that this opposition is an internal dialectic, thus we are all "Robeston and Danpierre" (S, 241). Envyng the freedoms of the West, where subversive plays and ideas can be staged and debated, the visitors from Pakistan tell of an almost failed attempt to stage *Julius Caesar* at a Pakistani university – the Eastern censorship that mangles works of literature in order to make them conform to a specific state ideology is in stark contrast to the free debate they all have in London about Büchner's play and, ultimately, it is from an awareness gained in this Western debate that the author is able to pass judgement on the dual nature of his protagonists and of us all. In other

words, pursuing the analogy between author-hero, they both function as voyeurs, estranged and alienated consciousnesses who trespass on people's intimacy. As the author muses about Omar's profession,

“What's a doctor, after all? A legitimised voyeur, a stranger whom we permit to poke fingers and even hands into places where we would not permit most people to insert so much as a finger-tip, who gazes on what we take most trouble to hide; a sitter-at-bedsides, an outsider admitted to our most intimate moments (birthdeathetc.), anonymous, a minor character, yet also, paradoxically, central, especially at the crisis.”
(S, 49)

The autobiographical guise of the narrator also enables him, under the pretense of discussing genre, to include elements that he would have to write about if this were a realistic novel about Pakistan, namely his family (who, unlike him, are citizens), criminal activities and other ignominious acts that are part of Pakistani political and public life, etc. He anticipates censorship and suppression if his novel were realistic, but being a modern fairytale, a fantasy, he is sure that it will not upset anybody and only the author's self-censorship would be operative, as “every story one chooses to tell is a kind of censorship, it prevents the telling of other tales” (S, 71).¹⁵⁵ Yet, by using the conditional to enumerate what he has excluded as generically unsuitable, the author in fact incorporates the realism of life in Pakistan as a parallel plot to his fairytale.

The author's ostensibly suppressed realism has the same function as Rani's eighteen shawls, collectively entitled “The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great,” documenting the excesses of his personality and rule, which he keeps under lock and key until she sends them as a gift to her daughter, Arjumand, recently installed in the seat of power vacated by Raza Hyder. The shawls, her epitaph, are a form of memory and truth that aim at dismantling the daughter's myth about her father as a martyr, hero and demigod. Her embroidered text is censored, like the author's realistic one would have been, as her daughter keeps her at Mohenjo, where they were both exiled by Raza, on the fringes of the reality Arjumand chooses to inhabit, which is one in which her father remains the idolised hero and which perpetuates the cycle of political intrigue exemplified by Iskander and Raza. However, Rani, in spite of or, bearing in mind the author's philosophy, because of, her exilic position, triumphs by transforming her political and familial powerlessness (she is not loved or appreciated either as a wife by Iskander or as a mother by

¹⁵⁵ The narrator was wrong, as *Shame* was censored in Pakistan.

Arjumand) into artistic self-assertion: not only does she sign her *oeuvre* in her maiden name, Rani Humayun, but she immortalises herself in her art. Her fourteenth shawl is autobiographic, “the portrait of the artist as an old crone, that self-portrait in which Rani had depicted herself as being composed of the same materials as the house, wood, brick, tin, her body merging into the fabric of Mohenjo, she was earth and cracks and spiders, and a fine mist of oblivion clouded the scene” (S, 194). Although a decrepit figure (“an old crone”), rendered an object similar to the house itself and with a disintegrating body prefiguring her death, she nevertheless asserts her symbolical presence by means of the image of the spider, evoking Arachne, another weaver who dared to depict the transgressions of the gods in her art and, although punished, morally triumphed over her rival, the goddess Athena. Moreover, her merging into the fabric of the family estate which has been her prison for most of her life also establishes her connection with the palimpsest history that Pakistan wants to suppress, for Mohenjo-Daro is the name of one of the centres of the first civilisation in the Indian subcontinent, ironically named Harappan after its other major centre, Harappa.¹⁵⁶ While Iskander repudiates the historical continuity contained in his surname, Rani, merged with Mohenjo, serves as a counterpoise to the historical silences enforced by Pakistani state policy and by offering an alternative, “realistic” memory in contrast to her daughter’s romanticised, “fairytale” one, she can eventually dispel the mist of oblivion that clouds, but never covers the depicted scene.

¹⁵⁶ Timothy Brennan further elucidates the historical semantics of names in the novel: “[The Harappan civilisation’s] most important archeological site at Mohenjo-Daro is thereby a subtle reference to Bhutto’s reign of terror, since it recalls Mohenjo-Daro’s other name – the ‘mound of the dead’ and the site is located just outside Larkana, the Bhutto family home. Similarly, ‘Iskander’ is a variant of ‘Alexander’, the famous Macedonian conqueror who invaded the part of India that is now Pakistan in 326 BC... Because the chapter sets out to puncture the inflated image of Bhutto as a democratic reformer, Rushdie also uses the name ‘Iskander’ to tie Bhutto to real-life ex-major-general Iskander Mirza... one of the commanders in the fratricidal war was against East Pakistan... ‘Raza’, an alternate form of ‘raja’, of course suggest [sic] the ‘Raj’ – the British governmental authority that ruled India from 1858 to 1947”. (Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie*, 119-20)

The Cultural Function of Authorship

In his essay “Author,” Donald E. Pease clarifies that the term “author,” derived from the medieval *auctor*, at the time of its inception was used interchangeably with it, which meant that it did not entail inventiveness and originality; rather, it denoted “adherence to the authority of cultural antecedent.”¹⁵⁷ *Auctores* were writers sanctified by tradition, authoritative figures in a certain area of knowledge (such as Aristotle in dialectic, Cicero in rhetoric, the Bible in theology, etc.); they

established the founding rules and principles for these different disciplines and sanctioned the moral and political authority of medieval culture more generally. Over the centuries the continued authority of these founding figures derived from medieval scribes’ ability to interpret, explain, and in most cases resolve historical problems by restating these problems in terms sanctioned by *auctores*.¹⁵⁸

Their authority derived in large part from the allegorical relationship between the authoritative books they had authored or inspired and the world of medieval man, which was rendered meaningful and comprehensible as a result of this allegorical transposition. As Donald E. Pease further states,

to experience an event in allegorical terms was to transpose the event out of the realm of one’s personal life into the realm of the applicable authority. Following such a transposition, the event became impersonal – everyone’s spiritual quest rather than one individual’s personal biography. The benefit of this transposition for the individual was indeed a spiritual one – the ability to experience an event in one’s life as a reenactment of a sacred custom¹⁵⁹.

With the discovery of the New World, the allegorical worldview enabled by the *auctores* disintegrated, as the new people, customs, and topography were not explainable by the concepts of *auctores*, who thereby gradually lost their authority. There appeared the Renaissance “new men,”

individuals within Renaissance culture who turned the “news” sent home from freshly discovered lands into forms of cultural empowerment for unprecedented political actions and their personification by new agents within the culture. Among these new cultural

¹⁵⁷ Donald E. Pease, “Author,” in Seán Burke, ed., *Authorship*, 264.

¹⁵⁸ Pease, 264.

¹⁵⁹ Pease, 265.

agents were “authors,” writers whose claim to cultural authority did not depend on their adherence to cultural precedents but on a faculty of verbal inventiveness. Unlike the medieval *auctor* who based his authority on divine revelation, an author *himself* claimed authority for his words and based his individuality on the stories he composed.¹⁶⁰

By exploding the medieval typologies under which all knowledge and experience, however varied, was subsumed, the newness of the discovery of the New World, as relayed and interpreted by the authors, imparted an “unprecedented cultural power to their words;” along with explorers, merchants, colonists, adventurers and other categories of “new men,” they rose to cultural prominence and the entire cultural formation of which they were a part enabled the birth of the autonomous human subject. Their rise to cultural prominence was, from the start, related to their self-determination – the alternative world-pictures they presented to their cultural milieu were an expression of their own verbal inventiveness, whereby they “declared their right to be represented on their own terms rather than in the worlds of ancient books. And their writings produced readers who also learned how to define themselves in their own terms.”¹⁶¹ The discovery of the New World, the encounter with its otherness and the exposure to “truly alien phenomena produced an ‘other nature’ *within* the Renaissance men who discovered them”¹⁶² and this otherness within gave rise to the autonomous subject. While these cultural developments went hand in hand with the political and social transformation of European society from agriculture-based feudalism into democracy and industrialisation, the author was inseparable from these processes; once the cultural transformation was complete, however,

the author was no longer part of an emergent cultural process. Following the realisation of an alternative culture he had earlier only envisioned, the author’s work underwent a related change – from a reciprocal workaday relationship with other cultural activities into the realm of “genius”, which transcended ordinary cultural work.¹⁶³

Now he was in a position similar to that of *auctores* – like them, the author was seen to transcend the cultural milieu; he operated in an autonomous sphere – a “Republic of Letters” – obeying the dictates of his own imagination. While the author was initially a product of the culture he himself helped bring into being, the genius was seen to be different from the rest of culture – there was no longer a reciprocal relationship between them. His work was fashioned out of his own

¹⁶⁰ Pease, 265.

¹⁶¹ Pease, 266.

¹⁶² Pease, 268.

¹⁶³ Pease, 267.

imaginative materials; thereby the specific kind of “cultural” work he performed was radically different from “industrial” labour, over which industrial workers had no control. Thus, the conception of “genius” led to the separation of the cultural from the political and economic sphere; the author’s function underwent a radical change – “from that of producing an alternative political world to that of producing a cultural alternative to the world of politics.”¹⁶⁴ The radical break occurred in the 20th century, when “the author’s genius was invoked to explain the irrelevance of economic and political issues to questions of strictly cultural interest.”¹⁶⁵ As the genius was an isolated category, operating independently from his milieu, it was only a matter of time before another factor appeared on the cultural scene. In a further division, *within* the cultural sphere itself, there appeared the critic, who now stood between the author and his work, claiming privileged insight into the latter that not even the author could have. The critical approaches to literature and authorship in the 20th century oscillated between the autotelic and autonomous literary text of the New Criticism and Russian Formalism, separate from the control of the author, and its opposite – the contextual literary text of Marxism, feminism, historicism, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, etc., “turning the transcendental genius into a culturally situated human subject.”¹⁶⁶ Poststructuralism effected a further dethronement of the author, denying him the status of an autonomous subject who generates the meanings and structure of the text, reducing him to an effect of textuality, even pronouncing him dead (Barthes) or a discursive function (Foucault). The split and problematised authorial subjectivity, which reflects the crisis of modern subjectivity in general, calls for a new, enabling conception of the author. As Pease concludes,

in order to be enabling, the term “author” can no longer remain divided into partial subjects (the *auctor*, the author, the reader, the critic, the determining-determined subject). The controversy surrounding the term “author,” however, may actually produce a material practice able to overcome the division in cultural realms that depends on such a partitioning of human subjectivity.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Pease, 269.

¹⁶⁵ Pease, 269.

¹⁶⁶ Pease, 271.

¹⁶⁷ Pease, 276.

Salman Rushdie and Postcolonial Authorship

Postcolonialism, the cultural framework within which Rushdie appeared as a writer, appeared on the cultural scene with an important task in mind – to decolonise the epistemic, cultural and political discourse coloured by imperialist ideology. Contrary to the romantic sacralisation of art and culture as ennobling categories standing above the political sphere, which itself was seen as besmirched by imperialism, racism and crass materialism, postcolonialism relied on the premise that the cultural sphere itself, far from transcending the political, was not only a part of its prejudicial ideology but also an active agent preparing the ideological ground on which empire was created. Edward Said's most notable works, *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, rely on the premise that culture was from the start implicated in the imperialist project and prepared the ideological ground which enabled it. Thus, *Orientalism* can be defined as merely “an exercise of cultural strength” and “intellectual power.”¹⁶⁸ In his view, *Orientalism* was not (indeed, as it developed within the imperialist context, could never have been) neutral and pure knowledge about the Orient. Rather, the gradual growth of this type of knowledge actively created the reality it purportedly merely reflected or described. In other words, the *Orientalist* text contained not “truth” or “‘natural’ depictions of the Orient”, but representations,¹⁶⁹ and Said insists on this point because seeing such depictions as representations would provide the ground for unmasking the ideological bias informing much of the *Orientalist* archive. Under the influence of imperialist and racist ideology, the Orient became what the *Orientalist* wanted it to be, a repository of reductive stereotypes and clichés (either romanticised through the stereotypes of the Oriental sensuality, irrationality and mysticism or demonised through the stereotypes of political disorder, Oriental despotism and barbarism). His indictment of orientalist discourse rendered all knowledge about colonial otherness and all cultural production in general suspect.

Literature, and the novel in particular, played a decisive role in the dissemination of imperialist ideology because, as an encyclopedic genre, it was capable of mobilising the entire social, historical, linguistic and cultural apparatus of the era in order to propagate a Eurocentric vision of the world in which the colonial other was relegated to radical alterity or even non-humanity, inferiority, marginality and, ultimately, silence. In turn, postcolonial literature,

¹⁶⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 40 and 41.

¹⁶⁹ Said, 21.

especially the novel, emerged for the purpose of contesting this worldview and of foregrounding the marginal, the othered and the non-canonic. As Ashcroft *et al.* point out, “directly and indirectly, in Rushdie’s phrase, the ‘Empire writes back’ to the imperial ‘centre,’ not only through nationalist assertion, proclaiming itself central and self-determining, but even more radically by questioning the bases of European and British metaphysics, challenging the worldview that can polarise centre and periphery in the first place.”¹⁷⁰

In spite of the proliferation of postcolonial theory and literature, some critics considered it not a wider cultural movement but a product of an elite group of Third World intellectuals, who, in Arif Dirlik’s view, “have arrived in the First World academy not only because they have broken new intellectual ground (although they have rephrased older themes) but also because intellectual orientations that earlier were regarded as marginal or subversive have acquired a new respectability.”¹⁷¹ The popularity of the term itself “has less to do with its rigorousness as a concept or with the new vistas it has opened up for critical inquiry than it does with the increased visibility of academic intellectuals of Third World origin as pacesetters in cultural criticism.”¹⁷²

Kwame Anthony Appiah similarly describes postcoloniality as

the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa.¹⁷³

Salman Rushdie has had an undisputedly prominent place in this contemporary literary and cultural landscape. Timothy Brennan places him in a group of celebrity authors he designates as “Third-World cosmopolitans”: “those writers Western reviewers seemed to be choosing as the interpreters and authentic public voices of the [postcolonial world].”¹⁷⁴ It is largely due to their global literary success that their respective countries have become popularised and reinserted

¹⁷⁰ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 32.

¹⁷¹ Arif Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol.20, No. 2 (Winter, 1994): 344.

¹⁷² Dirlik, 329.

¹⁷³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonialism?” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Winter, 1991): 348.

¹⁷⁴ Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, viii.

into the cultural imagination of the West, which, through their works, is allowed an intimate encounter with the historical and cultural maps of the societies and issues portrayed in them: intimate because the portraits have been painted by insiders who are citizens and/or members of their communities and because the novels exude a particular insistence on a contemporary, sober engagement with their historical mores, which serves the purpose of placing the reader along the same interpretive line as the author, because the former approaches the latter's novels from the same temporal, i.e. contemporary, perspective, in spite of the geographical and cultural distance/distancing. Brennan's definition also underlines another significant aspect relating to these authors' popularity: they (here, in addition to Rushdie, he includes Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, Derek Walcott, Bharati Mukherjee, etc.) have been consciously chosen as authentic representatives and interpreters of their countries in and to the West, which should alert the more discerning reader/critic to the criteria that have served as markers of inclusion/exclusion and to the genuineness of their supposed authenticity. Each of these writers has been accepted and represented by the western publishing establishment as a figure which manifests a collective identity whose complexity and versatility do not allow such reductionism¹⁷⁵. After the initial enthusiastic and one-sided reception of their works and themselves as representative authors, the phenomenon of their representativeness, exclusivity, and authenticity has only recently begun to be the subject of a sustained and profound analysis and questioning.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Brennan cites the following common characteristics that unite these authors: "a harsh questioning of radical decolonisation theory; a dismissive or parodic attitude towards the project of national culture; a manipulation of imperial imagery and local legend as a means of politicising 'current events'; and a declaration of cultural 'hybridity' – a hybridity claimed to offer certain advantages in negotiating the collisions of language, race and art in a world of disparate peoples comprising a single, if not exactly unified, world." He excludes authors such as Wilson Harris and Wole Soyinka as "not 'in-between' in the same way" due to their "books [being] simply too difficult for the parochial tastes of the Western public – too rooted in alien histories and mythological systems of their own making", as well as authors from white Commonwealth countries like Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee, who "are probably better placed in some category of the European novel of Empire because of their compromised positions of segregated privilege within colonial settler states. They are too much like the fictional 'us' of the so-called mainstream, on the inside looking out." (Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie*, 35-6)

¹⁷⁶ Numerous critics have been drawing attention to the discrepancy between prominent authors from postcolonial countries (whose location is most often the developed world) who achieve a celebrity status in the West precisely because they capitalise on their exoticism and not-so-prominent authors who write in and about the same countries, but whose location and language are usually non-western. Here I have particularly in mind Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, Graham Huggan's *The*

As a member of this cosmopolitan club, Rushdie emerged on the literary scene in the mid-1970s, but established his literary reputation in the 1980s and 1990s, when he wrote his best and most written-about works. In the novels and essays of these decades, he brought into focus his native geographical location – the Indian subcontinent, which logically imposed specific historical-political preoccupations: the colonial conquest by European powers, the multiethnicity of his postcolonial society and the problems and challenges it generates. The dominant thematics that these geographical, historical and cultural locations give rise to are: historical and political violence; the problematised identity of the epistemically still colonised society; the multiple identifications of the postcolonial subject; the inarticulateness of the Other; communal, sectarian and interracial animosity and violence; the liminal position of the intellectual torn between his emotional identification with the colony and its provincialism and his intellectual leanings towards the colonial centre, perceived as cosmopolitan, sophisticated and universal. Initially, writing seems to be for him not merely an aesthetic enterprise, but primarily an ethical mission to expose and condemn the historical and political evils to which his own background has exposed him and of which it has made him aware. However, his works written during the last decades are not reduced to modern chronicles or political pamphlets due to this pronounced social engagement: the programmatic is interwoven with a developed aesthetics revealing a profound erudition and artistic sophistication – he is, after all, a highly educated intellectual who continues and develops the novelistic tradition of the “greats” of world literature such as Borges, Conrad, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, etc.

However, this ideological and aesthetic self-positioning of postcolonial authors would render the interpretive scope of their work incomplete without taking into consideration their position within international literary markets, which, in Sarah Brouillette’s view, gives rise to an authorial anxiety which is reflected in their texts. Her premise is that the entire process of literary production and consumption, as well as the material (format, cover, packaging, typography) and paratextual aspects of a text (prefaces, titles, interviews, reviews, blurbs), are not merely the context within which the textuality of the literary work is situated – rather, they are “*textual* in their own right.”¹⁷⁷ She claims that with Rushdie’s increasing literary prominence, his fiction has

Postcolonial Exotic, and Madhu Krishnan’s *Contemporary African Literatures in English: Global Locations, Postcolonial Identifications* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁷⁷ Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2, emphasis original.

undergone a shift in focus – “from a general attention to the politics of contemporary nation-formation, particularly within a South Asian context, to a more solipsistic interest in the status of authorship and origins within the field of cultural production for a global market.”¹⁷⁸ The trajectory of Rushdie’s writing and his status as an eminent writer thus mark a movement from the exemplary postcolonial preoccupations with the epistemic, cultural and political legacy of empire towards a radical questioning of authorship in the era of globalised and mass markets and, in particular, his own authorial identity, ambivalently positioned between the centre, where a celebrated author such as himself belongs, and the periphery, as his authorial intentions have been persistently sidelined in the post-*fatwa* period by the dominant discourses of Western secularism and Islam that hijacked the interpretive possibilities of his novels. This curious trajectory oscillating between the centre and the periphery no longer reflects only the postcolonial meaning of the terms, whereby the centre is Europe/the West and the periphery the former colonies, but is internalised within the field of authorship itself: the contested centre now becomes the author himself, while the periphery is constituted by the centrifugal forces of the market, the dominant discourses and the fate of the literary work in the era of globalisation, against which the author has to constantly assert his authorial intentions and the value of literature.

a. Literature as Mongrelisation

Rushdie begins his essayistic reflections on the subject of literature and the writer in his first collection of essays, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-91*, in two essays that trace the genesis, purpose and several narrative problems in *Midnight’s Children*. First, in “Imaginary Homelands” he states that the novel was born out of his overwhelming desire “to restore the past to myself”, “gripped by the conviction that I, too, had a city and a history to reclaim.”¹⁷⁹ Since, in order to achieve this, he relied on memory, which is by nature fallible, what he actually reconstructed was not the India of actual reality, but “his” India, one version among many. In this way, the gaps and errors of Saleem’s and, by extension, Rushdie’s memory

¹⁷⁸ Sarah Brouillette, “Authorship as Crisis in Salman Rushdie’s *Fury*,” 140.

¹⁷⁹ Salman Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands,” 10.

became not a failure in artistic achievement, but the opening up of new imaginative possibilities. In “Errata: or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight’s Children*,” Rushdie admits to several factual mistakes in the novel, such as the ethnicity of the troops deployed in the Amritsar massacre, the date of Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination, and the epic written down by the god Ganesha, but refuses to correct them because he reorients his subject matter – it is no longer a Proustian search for lost time, an attempt to recreate his past through memory, but a desire to remake that past, to use memory in order to create an imaginative world that is propped up by the author’s/narrator’s personal experience and perceptions of a specific lived Indian reality, but is nevertheless set apart from it. Alienated from his past, the expatriate writer, like the archaeologist, is doomed to create an illusion of wholeness out of fragments, continuity out of discontinuity. Literature creates “imaginary homelands,” alternative worlds and realities, tied to real-life historical, geographical and cultural references, but by extremely elastic bonds, which the author can stretch according to the dictates of his creative imagination:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.¹⁸⁰

Physical alienation from his country of origin does not entail emotional alienation, oblivion or loss of authenticity; on the contrary, Rushdie indefatigably defends the view that emigration is not a handicap, but an advantage, for the writer is free to chart new imaginative territories, the “imaginary homelands” of the title, and thus reclaim (some of) the physical and symbolic territory that in actual reality is occupied by the politician, whose natural enemy he is. Literature has the arduous task of reclaiming the politician’s territory and discourse and rewriting them through an alternative imaginative reality in which the officially accepted versions of history and truth are denied:

Literature is self-validating. That is to say, a book is not justified by its author's worthiness to write it, but by the quality of what has been written. There are terrible books that arise directly out of experience, and extraordinary imaginative feats dealing

¹⁸⁰ Rushdie, 10.

with themes which the author has been obliged to approach from the outside... And as for risk: the real risks of any artist are taken in the work, in pushing the work to the limits of what is possible, in the attempt to increase the sum of what it is possible to think. Books become good when they go to this edge and risk falling over it—when they endanger the artist by reason of what he has, or has not, *artistically* dared.¹⁸¹

This passage reveals the task of the writer as a risky business: the vocabulary of danger (“go to this edge,” “risk falling,” “endanger”) sets high expectations of literature, which has the lofty goal of expanding the conceptual horizons of its readers and thereby charting the new cognitive maps of its time. Moreover, it is significant that Rushdie places the responsibility for achieving these goals not on the writer as the source of the ideas expounded in the literary work, but on the work itself, which testifies to its own worth independently of the intentions and the person of the author. Literature, in fact, is not simply a product of a particular writer; rather, it “is made at the frontier between the self and the world, and in the act of creation that frontier softens, becomes permeable, allows the world to flow into the artist and the artist to flow into the world.”¹⁸²

After this initial subtle effacement of the author, however, Rushdie somewhat paradoxically hastens to locate the origin of the artistically daring type of literature he lauds in the above passage in a particular type of author – an immigrant like himself, possessor of more than one cultural heritage, oscillating between cultures and therefore particularly attuned to finding new ways of engaging with postcolonial reality. As he puts it in *Shame*, migrants engender resentments because of their “conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds; that is to say, we have flown[...] We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time” (S, 85, 87). Unchained from all the props of identity that bind people to a particular place and culture, migrants are natural storytellers: “I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal

¹⁸¹ Rushdie, 14-15.

¹⁸² Rushdie, “Is Nothing Sacred?” in *Imaginary Homelands*, 427. In the same essay, Rushdie metaphorically represents literature as an unimportant-looking little room in a vast house that is the world, where you hear many voices who choose you as their privileged audience and who speak to you in various tones, expressing various ideas and outlooks, giving the house an atmosphere of openness, physical and cognitive freedom, suffusing you with existential joy. When this insignificant-looking room suddenly disappears, the house becomes a prison and its inhabitants desperately want to get out of it. “Whenever in the world the little room of literature has been closed, sooner or later the walls have come tumbling down,” (429).

with change” (S, 87-8). This leads Rushdie to define the ambivalent identity of the migrant writer/intellectual, which is

at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles.¹⁸³

The protagonists of his novels all fit in with this description of the writer and the presence of this strong autobiographical element in his novels is impossible to miss, in spite of the fact that the authorial persona in a work of literature is a rhetorical construct independent of the empirical author. That the intellectual make-up of Rushdie’s protagonists is made in the image of himself as their author further testifies to the fact that, according to him, there should be a close affinity between the intellectual engagement of the author with his actual reality and that of the narrator/protagonist with his imagined reality – the fluidity between the personal and the fictional permeates Rushdie’s entire oeuvre.

The Satanic Verses is the novel that best synthesises Rushdie’s views on literature and when he describes it as “rejoic[ing] in mongrelisation and fear[ing] the absolutism of the Pure,”¹⁸⁴ he builds on the above ambivalent image of the simultaneously partial and plural subjectivity of the bicultural author, who is thus perhaps uniquely capable of “finding new angles at which to enter [and represent] reality.” Mongrelisation is used as a synonym for hybridity¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands,” 15.

¹⁸⁴ Rushdie, “In Good Faith,” 394.

¹⁸⁵ Postcolonial discourse abounds in terms that capture the processes of genetic, social and cultural intermingling and the mutually transformative effects of colonialism for both the coloniser and the colonised. Creolisation, “the process of intermixing and cultural change that produces a creole society,” is redefined by Edward Brathwaite as “not a product but a process incorporating aspects of both acculturation and interculturalisation, the ‘former referring ... to the process of absorption of one culture by another; the latter to a more reciprocal activity, a process of intermixture and enrichment, each to each.’” Robert Young distinguishes “creolisation,” which refers to the amalgamation and merging of two or more cultures into a new one, from “hybridity,” “which he regards as more ‘contestatory’” (58-9). Similarly, Mary Louise Pratt writes about “transculturation,” a concept first developed by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, “to replace the paired concepts of acculturation and deculturation that described the transference of culture in reductive fashion, one imagined from within the interests of the metropolises.” The term captures the bidirectional flow of cultural influence, although Pratt emphasises that the “contact zones” in which it takes place are “social spaces where ‘disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today’” (233). (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth

and as such enables the extension of the literal meaning of its root word¹⁸⁶ to encompass the wide-ranging process of the intermixture of linguistic, cultural, historical, ontological and epistemological meanings that circulate through Rushdie's fiction and that represent his aesthetic and cultural philosophy. Ultimately, literature as mongrelisation is a form of de-eliticisation and dialogisation, or better, pluralisation of monologic conceptions of subjectivity and the world – the subversion of “the absolutism of the Pure” – that rejuvenates stagnant, predictable or eroded modes of perceiving culture and identity. It is precisely out of the “mongrel” world of *The Satanic Verses* and its conjoinings of subjectivities, worlds, ideas and events that, to use the phrase permeating the novel, “newness enters the world.”

b. Literature as Transgression: Subverting “the Absolutism of the Pure”

As an author who, being faithful to his own definition of the writer as someone who dares to go to the edge of what is possible to think and imagine, Rushdie has often come into conflict with the representatives of power, from the political establishments of India, Pakistan, and, to a less repressive extent, Britain, to a surprisingly large section of the Muslim communities all over the world and their religious leaders. Following his artistic credo, he does not balk at the daunting task of the postcolonial intellectual, who strives to challenge the structures of power, all orthodoxies and all forms of entrenched and outdated understanding of the world and of our place in it. Taking on the biblical analogy that George Orwell uses in his essay of 1940, “Inside the Whale,” which advocates quietism in literature, in the essay “Outside the Whale,” Rushdie compares the postcolonial intellectual to being, not inside the whale, like Jonah, but outside it: if the whale is taken to mean “a safe haven, a refuge” from the vicissitudes of the world (for which another metaphor would be Pangloss's garden, both representing the sense of ontological security provided by the womb) and being inside it to mean not being involved in the world, then being outside it means that

Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003)

¹⁸⁶ Mongrel is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as “a dog of mixed breed” and more generally as “something of mixed origin”, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mongrel>, accessed on 7 May 2021.

we see that we are all irradiated by history, we are radioactive with history and politics; we see that it can be as false to create a politics-free fictional universe as to create one in which nobody needs to work or eat or hate or love or sleep. Outside the whale it becomes necessary, and even exhilarating, to grapple with the special problems created by the incorporation of political material, because politics is by turns farce and tragedy, and sometimes (e.g., Zia's Pakistan) both at once. Outside the whale the writer is obliged to accept that he (or she) is part of the crowd, part of the ocean, part of the storm, so that objectivity becomes a great dream, like perfection, an unattainable goal for which one must struggle in spite of the impossibility of success. Outside the whale is the world of Samuel Beckett's famous formula: *I can't go on, I'll go on.*¹⁸⁷

Further on, when faced with the lethal and dark reality of the hostile reception of *The Satanic Verses* and the fatwa against him, Rushdie is obliged to seek an even more serious and profound *raison d'être* for literature, which in the essay "In Good Faith" is formulated as follows: first of all, to assume one's right to freedom, more specifically, to freedom of expression as the *sine qua non* of any artistic activity; to dissent "from the end of debate, of dispute, of dissent," "to dramatise certain ideas about morality,"¹⁸⁸ to explore spiritual and social/cultural division of the self and dramatise the self's quest for wholeness, intercultural and interreligious conflict, the loss of faith, and, finally, the facile reductionism that is blind to nuances and sees only pure categories where it should see variety, hybridity and difference.

Rushdie subscribes to Milan Kundera's dictum in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* that "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting," which asserts art's right and duty to challenge the monologic and oppressive vision of reality created by the structures of power. The dichotomies Kundera operates with – memory vs. forgetting, the individual man vs. the faceless machinery of power/the State apparatus – delineate two separate realms: one for art, which is individualistic and democratic, and another for politics, which is impersonal and autocratic. Rushdie quotes Kundera in the essay "Imaginary Homelands," adding that "[w]riters and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of the truth"¹⁸⁹. In other words, art and politics struggle for the power of representation, with politics creating official versions of the Truth and suppressing other truths in

¹⁸⁷ Rushdie, "Outside the Whale," in *Imaginary Homelands*, 100-101.

¹⁸⁸ Rushdie, "In Good Faith," 396 and 401.

¹⁸⁹ Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands," 14.

the process, whereas art “can, and perhaps must, give the lie to official facts,”¹⁹⁰ relying on memory to preserve what politics tries to consign to oblivion.

These goals of literature approximate to what Anthony Julius defines as “transgressive work,” which combines four essential meanings of the word “transgression”: “the denying of doctrinal truths; rule-breaking, including the violating of principles, conventions, pieties or taboos; the giving of serious offence; and the exceeding, erasing or disordering of physical or conceptual boundaries.”¹⁹¹ Although the accent is on the “criminal” nuances of the word (law- and rule-breaking, violation, etc.), antinomianism is not celebrated per se; rather, transgression fulfils an important psychological and social imperative. In Georges Bataille’s view, it

represents a desire both for the sovereignty of subjectivity and the extinction of subjectivity – a desire to return to the world from which, through the discovery of subjectivity, man has become separated. It is an assertion of dominion combined with a kind of chthonic nostalgia. It is a moment of both elevation and debasement, and so it is accompanied by the experience of a certain anguish. One is furthest from one’s origins precisely in that brief, voluntary reversion to them. Transgression is never, of course, an actual return. On the contrary: transgressions, together with taboos, make communal life what it is.¹⁹²

Furthermore, transgression is “a protest against the servility implicit in the project of labour, the subordination to things,” springing from an impulse, inherent in us, “that always exceeds bounds, and can never wholly be reduced to order. This is the violence of desire, which always threatens to disrupt collective work.”¹⁹³

Julius further identifies three distinct types of modern transgressive art: “an art that breaks art’s own rules; an art of taboo-breaking; a politically resistant art. That is to say, there is an art that repudiates established art practices, an art that violates certain beliefs and sentiments

¹⁹⁰ Rushdie, 14.

¹⁹¹ Anthony Julius, *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 19.

¹⁹² Georges Bataille, quoted in Julius, 22. Bataille argues that by means of work, we detach ourselves from our animal existence; anything that interferes with productive labour becomes taboo because it risks returning us to our animal state. However, work, even though it makes us who we are and elevates us, also represents a form of subjection and we experience the desire to liberate ourselves from it; hence the need for transgressing the taboo. “this transgression is both a return to an animal existence, where labour is unknown, and an assertion of sovereignty over communal life, where labour is mandatory. We become conscious of ourselves as subjects through work; our consciousness of ourselves as subjects impels us to resist our subordination to work subjectivity is discovered in work, but expresses itself against work.”

¹⁹³ Bataille, quoted in Julius, 23.

of its audience, and an art that challenges the rule of the state.”¹⁹⁴ The first type violates the art canon, the second its audience, the third confronts the law-giver. Regarding art rule-breaking, it can be innovative, “undertaken because the rules are experienced as constraints on an artistic project,” and interrogative, “one that is reflexive and prompted by an interest in art itself.”¹⁹⁵ Finally, “politically resistant artworks have divided audiences: those against whom they are directed, and those whose morale they are intended to lift. The stance of the artist is thus both oppositional and representative. His artworks are pitched against one audience, but made on behalf of another one. They are transgressive and affirmative – in a sense, transgressive *because* affirmative.”¹⁹⁶

Rushdie’s art practices all three kinds of transgression, with the taboo-breaking and politically subversive elements of his fiction imposing themselves as the dominant terms under which his transgressiveness has been read. Thus, the former category covers the violation of the pieties and sensibilities of his Muslim readership (and not only readership) by *The Satanic Verses*, while the latter refers to his contestation of Islamic orthodoxy in the same novel and of South Asian political orthodoxies, notably the Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi and the rise of the Hindu nationalist movement Shiv Sena in India (in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*) and the regimes of Zulfikar Ali-Butto and Zia ul-Haq in Pakistan (in *Shame*). The taboo- and politically transgressive period of Rushdie’s writing is completed with this cycle of four novels, but the artistic transgressiveness is a constant that also spills over into later novels such as *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Fury*, *The Enchantress of Florence* and *Quichotte*. As such, it constitutes a crucial aspect of Rushdie’s engagement with authorship and with the role of literature he envisions and represents.

Although art rule-breaking covers any violation of established artistic practices, our analysis will focus on the intratextual aesthetics of transgression that Rushdie develops in his *oeuvre* and that comprises a subversive destabilisation and problematisation of categories – artistic, historical, political, epistemological and ontological. Transgression, in this context, can be defined as any instance of aesthetic expression that “inverts, contradicts, abrogates or in

¹⁹⁴ Julius, 102.

¹⁹⁵ Julius, 104-5. “Innovators redraw boundaries, interrogators disturb them. Innovators are explorers, interrogators are ironists. Innovators enlarge, interrogators subvert” (106).

¹⁹⁶ Julius, 113.

some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, social and political”¹⁹⁷. According to J. Jervis, however,

The transgressive is reflexive, questioning both its own role and that of the culture that has defined it in its otherness. It is not simply a reversal, a mechanical inversion of an existing order it opposes. Transgression, unlike opposition or reversal, involves hybridisation, the mixing of categories and the questioning of the boundaries that separate categories. It is not, in itself, subversion; it is not an overt and deliberate challenge to the status quo. What it does do, though, is implicitly interrogate the law, pointing not just to the specific, and frequently arbitrary, mechanisms of power on which it rests – despite its universalising pretensions – but also to its complicity, its involvement in what it prohibits.¹⁹⁸

Rushdie’s intratextually transgressive aesthetics refers to the various violations of diegetic levels in his novels, which cover the numerous ways in which the different fictional and “real” levels overlap and irrupt into each other, to the interweaving of the categories of author-character, character-imaginary persona, character-author, author-narrator, author-text-reader, etc. All the novels of the corpus can be said to transgress both the role of the author and the distinction author-reader when they incorporate readers as not only the necessary audience guiding the author by its reaction, but as constitutive of the production of the text. The self-reading that appears as the *sine qua non* of a Rushdiean novel in this research is interpreted as an ethical moment that delivers the ultimate verdict on Rushdie’s relational and polylogic conception of writing and the role of the artist.

c. Literature as Secular Transcendence: The Rushdiean Artistic Sublime

As Rushdie states in a later essay, “many attitudes, many views of the world jostle and conflict within the artist, and from these frictions the spark, the work of art, is born. This inner multiplicity is frequently very difficult for the artist to bear, let alone explain”; consequently,

¹⁹⁷ Barbara Babcock, quoted in Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 17.

¹⁹⁸ J. Jervis, quoted in Chris Jenks, *Transgression*, 9.

“[w]ithin every artist – within, perhaps, every human imagination – there exists, to paraphrase Blake, a marriage between Heaven and Hell.”¹⁹⁹

The mystical imagery of Blake, which Rushdie admits to being, along with Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita*, the dominant influence on his most contested novel, when joined with the conception of literature, and the novel in particular, as a privileged arena where the multiple, disparate and conflicting voices of society can hold a never-ending debate, leads Rushdie to posit art as “the third principle that mediates between the material and spiritual worlds; ... [and] by ‘swallowing’ both worlds, offer us something new – something that might even be called a secular definition of transcendence.”²⁰⁰ Rushdie’s conception of art as a mediatory and median category between “the material world of secular, rationalist politics and the spiritual world of art and aesthetic endeavour”²⁰¹ leads him to a representation of literature in particular as both elevated above the materialism and calculating rationalism of politics and analogous to the experience of the divine. The aesthetic category that captures this elevating and divine-like characteristic of art is the sublime and I would like to posit the idea of the “Rushdiean sublime” as comprising the various and complex ways in which he explores the idea of authorship in his novels. As an aesthetic category, the sublime was first defined by Pseudo Longinus in the context of rhetorics and literature as the use of a grand and serious style and as an expression of noble and lofty passions engulfing the author and the recipient of the work of art, whereby the sublime is an echo of the greatness of spirit manifesting itself in the moral and imaginative power of the author, embodied in his work. The sublime is a powerful, inspiring feeling that approximates the creating human soul to the divine and as such the spiritually sublime artist exists in and transports us into a superior, transcendent sphere of existence. Later, the sublime is related to greatness, to what is beyond any comparison (i.e. absolute) and beyond human reach (the eternal, infinity, the spectre of death and coming to terms with our mortality, the supernatural and irrational forces in man and nature), distance, uncertainty, phenomena that both attract and terrify (silence, darkness, foreboding landscapes and the wild, untamed, exotic nature, the unknown, the Other) and an entire negative semantics evoking the inexpressible, the

¹⁹⁹ Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002* (London: Vintage, 2003), 233-4.

²⁰⁰ Rushdie, “Is Nothing Sacred?” 420.

²⁰¹ Minoli Salgado, “The Politics of the Palimpsest in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*, ed. Abdulrazak Gurnah (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 157.

unrepresentable, etc.²⁰² Kant distinguishes the sublime from the beautiful as two distinct aesthetic experiences – whereas beauty evokes pleasure and a feeling of harmony in the perceiving subject, the sublime provokes an ambivalent response, a feeling of attraction and repelling, pleasure and pain.²⁰³

Rudolph Otto compared the sublime with the experience of the divine, or more specifically to the numinous, a term he coined, which he defines as *mysterium tremendum fascinans et augustum*.²⁰⁴ The *mysterium* refers to the “awareness of the nothingness of the self over against that by which it is confronted in the numinous experience,” the perception that “the individual’s own being is as nothing in the face of the overwhelming might of the other.”²⁰⁵ Faced with the unknown, the unintelligible and the wholly other that is God/the Holy, the individual experiences wonder, awe and astonishment. *Tremendum* captures the feelings of “awefulness” (“the biblical concept of the wrath of Yahweh... [is an] ideogram of this moment of awefulness,” which fills the believer with a sense of terror) and “majesty or absolute overpoweringness.”²⁰⁶ *Fascinans* is the entrancing, intoxicating, captivating feeling of the numinous, and, as such, “it is the source of the quest for salvation and atonement, of self-surrender to the *numen*, of identification with it, of self-fulfilment in exaltation and ecstasy;”²⁰⁷ and, lastly, *augustum* is the recognition that it does not only offer a subjective experience, but that it “possess[es] in itself *objective* value that claims our homage.”²⁰⁸

Edmund Burke saw the source of the sublime as that in nature which can terrify and cause pain and fear, but which can still prove enjoyable and attractive if we contemplate this

²⁰² Иван Џепароски, *Естетика на возвишеното*, Скопје: Магор, 2008 (Ivan Dzevaroski, *Estetika na vozvishenoto*, [Skopje: Magor], 2008).

²⁰³ Spivak, however, draws attention to the Eurocentric aspect of Kant’s thinking when he describes the sublime as apprehensible only to the Western mind, predisposed to it by culture and the presence of moral ideas, as opposed to “man in the raw”, i.e. the savage and the primitive, who can experience it only as terrible. The sublime thus becomes not only an aesthetic category that the non-Western man is incapable of experiencing, but a figurative trope that comprises reason, morality, even the concept of justice, which, by excluding him from the sublime, also excludes him from the concepts of rationality, ethics and the law. Thus, Kant admits only the Western man as a subject of philosophy and as a moral being. (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* [Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1999], 12-13)

²⁰⁴ Rudolph Otto, quoted in Philip C. Almond, *Rudolf Otto. An Introduction to his Philosophical Theology* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 65.

²⁰⁵ Almond, 67-8.

²⁰⁶ Almond, 70-1.

²⁰⁷ Otto, quoted in Almond, 75.

²⁰⁸ Otto, quoted in Almond, 75.

from a safe distance, out of danger. Nevertheless, Sara Suleri considers the Burkean sublime as not so much an aesthetic as a colonising category and his *Enquiry* as “a study of the psychic proximity of aesthetic discourse with the concomitant intimacy of cultural terror... sublimity becomes the first terrain in which Burke can bury his intuitive understanding of the irrationality that lies at the heart of rationalism, that which insistently shapes the narrative of the latter’s will to control.”²⁰⁹ Since the basic conceptual parameters of the sublime have to do with the experience of the Other (Otto’s “wholly other”) and with the limits of the knowable and the representable, its activation in the colonial context place it as part of the epistemic violence of colonialism; thus, Suleri mentions “the pigmentation of the sublime,”²¹⁰ i.e. its conception in racial terms, with the dark races endowed with evoking the sublime feelings of fear and terror, but also an irresistible fascination such as Marlowe’s with the dark heart of Africa. Additionally, the sublime can be related to all categories subsumable under radical “otherness,” such as the unrepresentable, the unknowable, the unsayable, etc.

Rushdie’s artistic sublime is closest in spirit to Lyotard’s postmodern sublime. According to Lyotard, the sublime

describe[s] the way in which art or literature can disrupt established language games and ways of representing the world. Modern art, he argues, has the capacity to present the fact that the unrepresentable exists: that there are things that are impossible to present in available language games, voices that are silenced in culture, ideas that cannot be formulated in rational communication.²¹¹

Furthermore, “the existence of the unrepresentable can be signalled by the sublime in two distinct ways, one of which Lyotard calls modern and the other postmodern[, ...] describ[ing] the difference in terms of modernist nostalgia and postmodern jubilation”²¹²:

The accent can fall on the inadequacy of the faculty of presentation, on the nostalgia for presence experienced by the human subject and the obscure and futile will that animates it in spite of everything. Or else the accent can fall on the power of the faculty to conceive, on what one might call its ‘inhumanity’... and on the extension of being and

²⁰⁹ Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, 36.

²¹⁰ Suleri, 43.

²¹¹ Simon Malpas, *Jean-François Lyotard* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 47.

²¹² Malpas, 47.

jubilant that come from inventing new rules of the game, whether pictorial, artistic, or something else (1992: 13).²¹³

Thus, the un(re)presentable can evoke in the artist a modernist feeling of loss and nostalgia for a return to the previous state of signifiatory plenitude or a postmodernist feeling of “jubilation” at the collapse of the capacity to represent the world because it is seen as a way of liberating the creative imagination to create, unconstrained by aesthetic or ethical limits. Rushdie’s aesthetic of the sublime is nourished by both the modernist moment of nostalgia for the ontological and epistemological wholeness that has been lost and the postmodernist one of using the collapse of the previously stable categories to refashion the world anew in his fiction. Inhabiting the domain of artistic creation, Rushdie’s authorial protagonists attempt to exert the totalising gaze of authorial omniscience, incorporating entire national and cultural formations into their texts and molding themselves as embodiments thereof. Saleem and Moraes are unthinkable as individuals and authors without their identification with India and Bombay respectively; neither are their texts imaginable without that “Indian disease” that Saleem calls “elephantiasis” – the desire to encapsulate in one’s art the entire world. In both novels, sublime moments and events radically influence the experience of writing. Thus, the inexpressible horror of the “sperectomy” of the midnight’s children gives birth to Saleem’s text, while the grandiosity of the Alhambra, that monument to a historical glory now lost and irrecoverable, inspires the dying Moraes to return to a new life like the mythic sleepers of folklore and legend. However, in both novels this attempt at wholeness falls apart under the sway of alternative forms of representation that rely on the fragmentary, the incomplete, the multi-layered, the unrepresentable, such as the metaphors of the perforated sheet in *Midnight’s Children* or the palimpsest and mosaic in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. This scheme is completely collapsed in *Fury*, where the author is torn apart from his work by an unbridgeable gap that leaves him no space from which to exert his authorial influence or proclaim his authorial intention – Malik is repudiated by avatars of his own literary creations, who do not recognise him as their creator/author. *Quichotte* recuperates this radical disjunction between creator and creation by conjoining them into an image of ontological wholeness that the reader is encouraged to read in the mystical terms of Attar, whose allegory of the soul’s spiritual quest for submersion into the divine is used as a model for Quichotte’s quest for his Beloved, who is revealed to be not the beloved woman, but his creator, the Author (Rushdie even conflates

²¹³ Lyotard, quoted in Malpas, 47-8.

these two images of the beloved by naming Quichotte's love interest Salma R – after himself (!), thus making sure that whichever way Quichotte decides to go, he is sure to meet his creator, his Author/Salman Rushdie). Moreover, while authorial creation is represented as the purest expression of sublimity, as man's approximation to God/the divine in all the novels of our corpus (Saleem and Moraes compare themselves to prophets and divine figures, Malik makes figurines out of clay in a creative act mimicking God's, the Author is obviously conceived as a godlike being capable of infusing his creations with life), it is in *The Satanic Verses* that this analogy between Author and God is explored in its most elevating and grounding manifestation in the vision of the "myopic scrivener," who refers both to the God of creation and to the novel's writer, Salman Rushdie. This novel addresses the sublimity of artistic creation by likening the scene that gives birth to the text – the fall of Gibreel and Saladin from the exploding plane above the English Channel – to the biblical scene of man's and Satan's fall from the garden of Eden. Furthermore, the entire text is saturated with metaphors of creation both artistic and divine. Ultimately, the conflation of the divine and the satanic into the image of the author returns us back to Blake and his "The Tyger", which relies on an identical conflation. As Blake Hobby points out, the poem

addresses many of Blake's obsessions, including the relationship between good and evil and our image of God... The poem conflates the *imago Dei* with the process of fiction-making. The speaker questions how a loving God could create evil. The speaker ironises the image of God by asking the Tyger what kind of creator might bring evil into being. But there is more at play in the poem. For "The Tyger" addresses explicitly the process of fiction-making and the desire of the artist to harness mystery in a work of art."²¹⁴

*

These three conceptions of writing – writing as mongrelisation/hybridisation, writing as transgression and writing as secular transcendence – are interwoven in Rushdie's oeuvre and inform his conception of authorship. Organised around the central thematic of authorship and Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, my analysis will focus on the complex ways in which they are played out in terms of authorial subjectivity (Chapter I), the dominant metaphors and systems of

²¹⁴ Blake Hobby, "Urizen and the Fragmentary Experience of the Sublime in *The Four Zoas*," in *The Sublime*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2010), 56-7.

representation within which authorship is articulated (Chapter II), and the instances of self-reading present in Rushdie's novels (Chapter III). Thus, a triangular configuration between the author, the text and the reader imposes itself as constituting the relational, dialogic aesthetics defining Rushdie's oeuvre.

The primary critical approach that will inform my research will be postcolonial theory and criticism, as elaborated by such postcolonial luminaries as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, since in my view it is the theoretical matrix that best defines Rushdie's literary output and artistic ideology. In addition, I will be using insights and concepts from other branches of literary criticism and theory, notably psychoanalysis (Freud, Lacan), postmodernism (Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Brian McHale, Jean Baudrillard), deconstruction (Jacques Derrida), intertextuality (Ulrich Broich).

Having established, in the introductory part, the literary and cultural context within which Rushdie creates his fiction, I now proceed to the main body of the dissertation, namely the analysis of his dialogical aesthetics. It is organised into three main chapters, which together represent the foundational postulates that give expression to Rushdie's philosophy of writing, i.e. his dialogical aesthetics.

The first chapter analyses the authorial subjectivity as revealed in my chosen corpus. Taking Lacan's psychoanalysis and Bhabha's hybridity as a theoretical basis, I will explore the decentred and destabilised subjectivity of Rushdie's authorial figures, each of whom is configured as a subject in different ways: through the author's complex network of identifications, the autobiographical subject's radical non-coincidence between author (the subject writing) and subject (the subject written about), the satanically diversified and differential ontology of the complex authorial figure in *The Satanic Verses*, and the metafictionally-inflected subjectivity of the authors in *Fury* and *Quichotte*, who rethink themselves in relation to their artistic creations.

The second chapter will focus on the nature of the authors' texts themselves, with a particular emphasis on the models of representation dominant therein, which in turn give expression to the authors' ideological positioning as creators of cultural value. I begin this chapter with the nature of representation exhibited in the texts of the authorial figures in the novels, with a particular emphasis on the "realness" or fabulated fictional reality they write into being or inhabit. Then I mention instances of silences, gaps and distortions that reveal Rushdie's

author-narrators as unreliable or biased and go on to analyse the particular form of dialogical aesthetics characteristic of each novel.

Finally, the third and last chapter focuses on the presence of the reader or on the awareness of readership/audience as a co-creationary factor in the production of the text. Following Lukács and Hillis Miller, I see this as a profoundly ethical narrative and ideological strategy that further dialogises and democratises the already dialogical and hybrid nature of the text.

PART II

RUSHDIE'S DIALOGISM

Rushdie's novels thematically belong to the genre of the postcolonial novel because they deal with the legacy of colonialism on the Indian subcontinent or in the Indian diaspora. Within this framework, his protagonists, caught between cultures, grapple with issues of belonging, roots and rootlessness, and cultural and historical legacy. This ambivalent, or, as Rushdie describes it, simultaneously plural and partial identity (both on the level of subjectivity and culture), inscribes itself as dialogic because it nourishes itself from and wavers between at least two cultural paradigms and systems of thinking about and conceiving reality.

Bakhtin defines dialogism as “the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia,”²¹⁵ or hybridisation on the level of language: “Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole – there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others.”²¹⁶ Languages, cultures or ideologies may exist as abstract unitary systems, but their conceptual monolocality is undermined by the heteroglossia and dialogism of their concrete manifestations in the utterance and in lived reality. Significantly, as Michael Holquist clarifies,

dialogue is not, as is sometimes thought, a dyadic, much less a binary, phenomenon. Dialogue is a manifold phenomenon, but for schematic purposes it can be reduced to a minimum of three elements having a structure very much like the triadic construction of the linguistic sign: a dialogue is composed of an utterance, a reply, and a relation between the two. It is the relation that is most important of the three, for without it the other two would have no meaning. They would be isolated, and the most primary of Bakhtinian a prioris is that nothing is anything in itself.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Heteroglossia is “a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor.” (Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist [Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981], 358)

²¹⁶ Michael Holquist, glossary to Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 426.

²¹⁷ Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 36.

The monologic reading of language and culture, which in postcolonial theory is attributed to colonial discourse, tends towards the canonisation of its own postulates and resists any alternative voice and any challenge to its absolute power. Postcolonial discourse, on the other hand, is identified as anticanonical, decentring, dialogical, and hybrid, opposed to the unity, wholeness and absolutism of history, tradition and language, on the one hand, and of consciousness, the subject and individualism on the other.

In dialogism, the very capacity to have consciousness is based on otherness. This otherness is not merely a dialectical alienation on its way to a sublation that will endow it with a unifying identity in higher consciousness. On the contrary: in dialogism consciousness is otherness. More accurately, it is the differential relation between a center and all that is not that center[...] “[C]enter” in Bakhtin’s thought [should] be understood for what it is: a relative rather than an absolute term, and, as such, one with no claim to absolute privilege, least of all one with transcendent ambitions. [...] [D]ialogism is a version of [Einstein’s theory of] relativity[...] [O]ne body’s motion has meaning only in relation to another body; or – since it is a relation that is mutual – has meaning only in dialogue with another body, [...] where bodies may be thought of as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to political bodies and to bodies of ideas in general (ideologies).²¹⁸

Just as Einstein postulated the interdependence of physical bodies, Bakhtin’s dialogism establishes the hybridity of the subject, consciousness, culture and ideology – they attain their true meaning only in their mutual juxtaposition and cannot even be perceived in their individual isolation because they already contain within themselves their alterity. Dialogism represents a slippery and changeable category because it sees the world as an inexhaustible semiosis, which constantly regenerates itself and generates new meanings through the utterance, which does not exist in a vacuum, but is determined by social factors. In dialogism

there is neither a first word nor a last word. The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue’s later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Michael Holquist, *Dialogism*, 17 and 19.

²¹⁹ Bakhtin, quoted in Michael Holquist, *Dialogism*, 37.

The postcolonial novel relies on this capacity of discourse to constantly generate meaning. It dialogises the monologically confident colonial discourse and its ideology, which places the coloniser and his culture in a permanently superior position. The subject of this discourse is not only exclusively the European, but the colonial Other, who was previously represented only as the object of a system of representations written according to the premises of Eurocentric ideology. It arises out of postcolonial hybridity and identitary pluralism, at a time that enables the articulation of the previously silenced colonised subject and the dialogisation of colonial monologism, whose centrally positioned, Eurocentric discourse becomes de-centred, ex-centric, provincialised²²⁰ and pluralised in the endless heterogeneity of the postcolonial cultural palimpsest.

Although the hybrid character of postcolonial discourse, whose principal theoretician is Homi Bhabha, is read in the spirit of the psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan (the most common names to which Bhabha refers), it can also be interpreted as a form of postcolonial dialogism in the sense of Bakhtin, thereby emphasising the importance of material and social factors in the formation of postcolonial subjectivity.²²¹ In fact, the very encounter between the coloniser and the colonised in and with colonialism, which in different circumstances still continues today, causes the unstable structure of postcolonial discourse (at the level of psychology, culture, language, ideology, politics and identity), within which the unceasing dialogue between the two subjects-participants in the encounter takes place. Just as Bakhtin's hybridisation means destabilising and undermining the established centres of power and authority, Bhabha's postcolonial hybridity marks the problematisation of colonial power in culture, language, literature, history, ideology. Rushdie's *oeuvre* is unimaginable without the tension produced by

²²⁰ For this concept, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincilising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press), 2000.

²²¹ Here a mention must be made of the harsh criticism of Bhabha's (and Spivak's) theories by Patrick Colm Hogan. In essence, he resents the deconstructivist and psychoanalytical drift of their theories (which he describes as "terminologically opaque, conceptually imprecise, and empirically lax" (p. 25) and is of the opinion that there is no room for such "high" theory in postcolonial criticism. According to him, Bhabha places too much emphasis on the psychoanalytic approach to the postcolonial situation, as if colonialism was an encounter of minds or characters rather than a cruel struggle for resources and profit. Therefore, Colm Hogan's postcolonialism is above all political and sociological, along the lines of Ashis Nandy, Edward Said, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Samir Amin, etc. (Patrick Colm Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crises of Tradition in the Anglophone Literatures of India, Africa, and the Caribbean* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000])

the encounter between and the clash of ontological, epistemological and cultural difference both in the context of (post)colonialism and migration as historical, political and cultural phenomena.

In postulating Rushdie's aesthetics as dialogical, I am adapting Bakhtin's theory to the postcolonial context and themes permeating Rushdie's oeuvre. I am building on what Elleke Boehmer determines to be the crucial element of postcolonial writing, namely juxtaposition, which is a

device that often sparks a stepping back, [...] yet that also demands the reader or critic's creative input and involvement, intensifying the continual, often dilatory, and wayward transactions that take place between the reader and the text. The device also intensifies and enhances the exchanges and translations across linguistic and cultural borderlines that the postcolonial text invites. Throughout, therefore, juxtaposition will be considered a key postcolonial poetic, one that lays down structural procedures for postcolonial writing and in turn also provides a score for reading for resistance or against the grain, or, as I will put it here, for *reading otherwise*. It is by reading otherwise, directed by nonsynchronous and juxtaposed effects, that meanings which cannot yet be articulated in so many words might be subtly and also subversively inferred.²²²

Rushdie's aesthetics is dialogical because it generates meaning by means of a juxtaposition or dialogue between categories (East/West, self/other, world/text, author/reader, etc.) and by means of dramatising the liminal or ambivalent in-between spaces produced by the encounter or clash between cultures, histories, stories, ideas, etc. How this dialogical aesthetics plays out and the particular forms it takes in the trajectory of Rushdie's *oeuvre* is the focus of the following three chapters.

²²² Elleke Boehmer, *Postcolonial Poetics: 21-st Century Critical Readings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 43, emphasis original.

CHAPTER I: AUTHORIAL SUBJECTIVITY

Writing is born from and deals with the acknowledged doubt of an explicit division, in sum, of the impossibility of one's own place. It articulates an act that is constantly a beginning: the subject is never authorised by a place, it could never install itself in an inalterable cogito, it remains a stranger to itself and forever deprived of an ontological ground, and therefore it always comes up short or is in excess, always the debtor of a death, indebted with respect to the disappearance of a genealogical and territorial "substance," linked to a name that cannot be owned.

Michel de Certeau, *L'Écriture de l'histoire*

AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHENTICITY: DELINEATING THE AUTHORIAL SELF

The alliterative pattern of the title of this chapter is not random – both “author” and “authenticity” share the same etymological roots and, conveniently for our present research, fuse together the two central concepts of the chapter: authorship and selfhood/identity.

The entry for the noun “author” in the *Online Etymological Dictionary* states that it is derived from the Latin *auctor*, meaning “promoter, producer, father, progenitor; builder, founder; trustworthy writer, authority; historian; performer, doer; responsible person, teacher”, literally ‘one who causes to grow.’²²³ In Old French, *auctor*, *acteur* meant “author, originator, creator, instigator,” whereas in the mid-14th century, *auctor*, *autour*, *autor* meant “father, creator, one who brings about, one who makes or creates” someone or something. From the late 14th century, it acquired the meaning of “a writer, one who sets forth written statements, original composer of a writing” (as distinguished from a *compiler*, *translator*, *copyist*, etc.), and, significantly, a “source of authoritative information or opinion.” This sense of “author” is now obsolete, but is

²²³ *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/author>.

retained in the etymologically close “authority.” Interestingly, in the 16th century the -t- changed to -th-, “on model of change in Medieval Latin, on mistaken assumption of Greek origin and confusion with *authentic*,” which was originally the Greek word *authentikos*,²²⁴ meaning “original, genuine, principal,” derived from *authentes*, “one acting on one’s own authority.”

Edward Said makes an interesting connection between “author” and “authority” to “describe the way in which narrative fiction asserts itself psychologically and aesthetically through the technical efforts of the novelist:”²²⁵

Authority suggests to me a constellation of linked meanings: not only, as the OED tells us, “a power to enforce obedience,” or “a derived or delegated power,” or “a power to influence action,” or “a power to inspire belief,” or “a person whose opinion is accepted”; not only those, but a connection as well with *author* – that is, a person who originates or gives existence to something, a begetter, beginner, father, or ancestor, a person also who sets forth written statements. There is still another cluster of meanings: *author* is tied to the past participle *auctus* of the verb *augere*; therefore *auctor*, according to Eric Partridge, is literally an increaser and thus a founder. *Auctoritas* is production, invention, cause, in addition to meaning a right of possession. Finally, it means continuance, or a causing to continue. Taken together these meanings are all grounded in the following notions: (1) that of the power of an individual to initiate, institute, establish – in short, to begin; (2) that this power and its product are an increase over what had been there previously; (3) that the individual wielding this power controls its issue and what is derived therefrom; (4) that authority maintains the continuity of its course.²²⁶

The word most commonly used to describe “authority” in the preceding paragraph is “power”; therefore, when joined together with the crucial word “author,” it connotes not only an ability to establish, to beget something, but, more importantly, to do so by commanding respect, obedience, and to control what has been created. However, bearing in mind that the present orthography and meaning of the originally Latin word “author” were shaped by a mistaken identification with the originally Greek “authentic,” what does this tell us about the authority of writing and of the writing subject? Are its pretensions to truth and validity always already undermined by the fact of a mistaken fusion of two elements that were meant to belong to separate semantic fields: was the begetter/creator originally meant only to “grow” or “increase” what was already there, but not lay a claim to the originality or the genuineness bestowed upon

²²⁴ *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/authentic>.

²²⁵ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1975), 83.

²²⁶ Said, 83.

his creation by that tiny but significant prefix “self-” (“autos”) embedded in its etymology? In this way, the concepts author/authenticity/authority by their very etymology have a direct bearing on the question of selfhood/identity and subjectivity, in particular the identity of the authorial subject, the one wielding authorial authority and authenticity.

a. What is Identity?

The distinction between the self and the other is the starting point in the construction of identity. As Stuart Hall points out,

identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render “outside,” abjected. Every identity has at its “margin,” an excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it “lacks”.²²⁷

In other words, the line that separates one subjectivity from another is not naturally given, but constructed – in fact, identity assumes its recognizable form only by its relation to its Otherness, to what it is not and which can be termed its “constitutive outside.”²²⁸

The relationship between the subject and the discursive practices in relation to which it is conceptualised is marked by the process of identification. In general, identification implies

a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the “naturalism” of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always “in process.” [...] [I]dentification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference. The total merging it suggests is, in fact, a fantasy of incorporation[...] There is always “too much” or “too little” – an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality. Like all signifying practices, it is subject to the “play” of *différance*. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking

²²⁷ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (New York, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996), 5 emphasis original.

²²⁸ Hall, 4, emphasis original.

of symbolic boundaries, the production of “frontier-effects.” It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process.²²⁹

Traditionally understood, *identity* has been seen as a stable category, a known and knowable essence of an individual or a collective self, which develops and is revealed during the lifetime of the individual or the life of the nation (i.e. history), while remaining consistent and faithful (*identical*) to itself over time. Contemporary psychoanalytic and culturological theories, on the contrary, do not speak about a single, stable identity and instead shift the focus onto plural, fragmentary, at times even contradictory, identities, which undergo profound changes and transformations. As the above passage indicates, identification and therefore identity are defined by processuality, contingency, and difference, and never achieve totality or finality. To quote Stuart Hall again, “identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicisation, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.”²³⁰

Both formulations represent extreme epistemological and ontological positions: while the former, which can be defined as essentialist, tends to excessive normativity and relies on an idealised and often elitist image of identity, the latter relativises identity, reducing it to an irrelevant, regressive and invented ideological construct. In the present research, I find neither of these positions acceptable, because neither offers a satisfactory solution to the identity dilemma facing any individual or collective subject. In other words, subjectivity, as conceived in the present research, is neither a pure unchangeable essence nor a relative and essence-less construct depleted of any meaning. Rather, it is a complex structure of identifications available to the subject, allowing for self-invention without rendering its identity a mere superficial playfulness.

The multiple positioning of the subject in a specific national, historical, cultural, linguistic and religious context prevents the absolute relativisation of its identifications and determines its complex and multisided relations to its Otherness, which is in turn implicated in a similarly complex network of identifications and relations to its own Othernesses.²³¹ As Anthony

²²⁹ Hall, 2-3.

²³⁰ Hall, 4.

²³¹ Its synonym, the term “alterity,” derived from the Latin “alteritas,” means “the state of being other or different; diversity, otherness.” According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, in contemporary critical

Elliott points out, “selfhood is personally created, interpretively elaborated, and interpersonally constructed.”²³² In this complex constellation, the subject assumes various degrees of agency in the creative but not arbitrary forging of a self that constantly doubles back between “the individual construction of identity as a symbolic project on the one hand, and processes of subjection to dominant symbolic systems and ideologies on the other.”²³³ Thus, the self is both a *subject* engaged in its own self-creation and *subjected* to factors external to itself that determine its ethical and epistemological make-up.²³⁴

b. The Authorial Self and Its Others

discourse, and in postcolonial theory in particular, these two terms, although often used interchangeably, can reflect two distinct ways of perceiving the relationship between consciousness and the world. Since Descartes, “individual consciousness had been taken as the privileged starting point for consciousness,” wherein the other functioned as “a reduced ‘other,’ as an epistemological question.” In other words, “in a concept of the human in which everything stems from the notion that ‘I think, therefore I am,’ the chief concern with the other is to be able to answer questions such as ‘How can I know the other?’, ‘How can other minds be known?’” As opposed to this use of “otherness” as a philosophical problem, “alterity” can be used to designate the “moral other,” “who is actually located in a political, linguistic or religious context”, i.e. “otherness as a feature of a material and discursive location.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 11-12)

²³² Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of the Self* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 5.

²³³ Elliott, 12.

²³⁴ Paul Smith draws a distinction between the “individual,” which, according to its semantics, connotes “that which is undivided and whole, and understood to be the source and agent of conscious action or meaning which is consistent with it,” and the “subject,” which is “not self-contained, as it were, but is immediately cast into a conflict with forces that dominate it in some way or another – social formations language, political apparatuses, and so on.” Human beings are caught within this “tension between the supposedly determining ‘individual’ and the determined ‘subject’ in such a way that a person is not simply the *actor* who follows ideological scripts, but is also an *agent* who reads them in order to insert him/herself into them – or not.” The complex positioning of the person within various social and cultural contexts, however, reveals the concept of the “individual” as an ideological construct “designed to give the false impression that human beings are free and self-determining, or that they are constituted by undivided and controlling consciousnesses,” whereas the “subject” is defined by “the series or the conglomeration of positions, subject-positions, provisional and not necessarily indefeasible, into which a person is called momentarily by the discourses and the world that he/she inhabits.” (Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* [Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1988], xxxiii-xxxv)

The inseparability of the subject and language is central to Lacan's psychoanalysis, according to which the subject is produced through language. Initially, as a purely biological being, the child lacks an awareness of itself as a separate entity and experiences itself as merged with the world:

the child has no sense of itself as a separate entity. There is no understanding of the limits of the individual body, nor that there is necessarily anything external to it. The many surfaces that the child touches – the mother's skin, clothing, carpet – are all felt to be part of a continuous, uninterrupted, limitless being, so amorphous and open-ended that it cannot be compared to anything as located, specific and defined as selfhood.²³⁵

In the "mirror-stage," the subject perceives itself as a totality, a perception obtained from the external vantage point from which it looks at itself. This unified, whole and integral selfhood is the first that the child experiences, who is now aware of its separateness from its surroundings, from objects and other bodies; thus, the perception of the external world as distinct from the self, i.e. as an otherness, corresponds to the initial phase of subjectivity, that of the whole and unified individual. As this selfhood is developed as the child's response to (i.e. his identification with) its image in a mirror/eye, Lacan terms this phase the Imaginary Register. However, this comforting sense of ontological security is riven with contradictions which will soon disturb the subject's totality: as this feeling of wholeness and unity is not inherent to the self, i.e. is not an expression of some innate truth of our being, but from an external source, from the otherness, the subject becomes, in Lacan's words, "the discourse of the Other." Thus, contradiction underlies the birth of the subject, whose self-definition does not proceed from itself, but from outside, through the mediation of the Other.

This alienating identity, which entails seeing oneself as one's mirror image, as an-other, born out of an awareness that the feeling of wholeness is illusory and derived from the otherness external to the subject, marks the entry into the Symbolic Register, which is in essence a linguistic dimension because it is structured like a language.²³⁶ The new sense of self, gained

²³⁵ Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 41.

²³⁶ Language, understood in its Saussurean sense of a system of signs, has a dyadic structure – signs are composed of a signifier (the form of the sign, which can be a word, image, sound, object, etc.) and a signified (the concept it refers to). The subject's entry into language thus means an entry into a field of signification dominated by the arbitrary (the relation between signifier and signified is dictated by convention rather than intrinsic), differential (the signifier functions as such because it is different from any other, e.g. "cat" is not "bat," etc.) and relational (the relationship of each signifier is not with the outside world it refers to, but with other signifiers) nature of the sign. In Lacan's psychoanalysis, the semiotic structure of language differs from Saussure's in that 1) the sign is not the indivisible unity of

from the point of view of language, which the subject now possesses, is determined by Lacan's definition of the unconscious as the discourse of the Other, towards whom the subject orients itself. The symbolic Other is different from the imaginary other, who was a reflection of the self and who provided the feeling of imaginary unity; rather, the Other is a radical otherness that cannot be assimilated to the subject and that connotes alienation, division, lack and absence; it can variously refer to death, language, the unconscious, the symbolic father. The entry on the scene of the father, as the third member of the Oedipal structure of the family, who intervenes in and disrupts the harmonious union of the child with the mother, marks the culmination of the subject's subjection to the laws of the symbolic order and its formation as a social being: the child now identifies with "the name of the father," not literally but symbolically, for the Symbolic Father represents the functioning of the law, of the rules of language and society. As the father is the carrier of a symbolic castration, he also represents the repression of desire and a split in subjectivity between the conscious and the unconscious, and one of the aspects of the elusive Other.

For the Cartesian subject of the Enlightenment, the other was everything that was outside of the individual consciousness, which was understood in a predominantly epistemological sense – the epistemological other is that which is not me and that has a meaning to the extent that I can get to know it. Descartes' thinking "I," the *cogito*, was central and shaped primarily by its consciousness of itself ("I think, therefore I am"). This stable and autonomous Cartesian subject has given way to the decentred and destabilised subject of the contemporary cultural and epistemological climate, which in Rushdie's case is informed primarily by the postmodernist image of the non-unitary subject and the postcolonial one, which sees the subject as determined by its position along the imperial centre/colonial margin axis, established by the imperial political, cultural and epistemological structures of power. In this context, the Other ceases to be simply an epistemological category that the subject can get to know, but a "moral other," i.e. the other who is situated in a specific cultural, ethnic, political, linguistic or religious context and who interacts with the subject in different and altogether more challenging ways. This contextual *situatedness* of both the subject and its othernesses is of crucial importance for the formation of

signifier and signified; rather, the signifier refers to other signifiers in an endless chain of signification which does not stabilise but proliferates meaning; 2) the signifier becomes the privileged site of the chain of signification, which does not arrive at the fixed point of the signified but is caught up in an incessant process of becoming.

the authorial subjectivity in Rushdie's oeuvre, because it reveals the complex interplay of ideological, discursive and linguistic factors shaping and being shaped by the subject.

Lacan's positing of language as the central structure which constitutes the subject and gives a sense of identity is all the more significant for the present study, which centres on the authorial subject and authorial subjectivity. The moment of entry into language of Rushdie's authorial subjects, which is here taken to be the moment of narrating and/or writing, is of crucial importance in that it significantly destabilises and re-evaluates the axes of identification that had dominated the subject before the act of narrating/writing. Irrespective of the othernesses *vis-à-vis* which the subject has imagined his being, by undertaking writing/narrating, which imposes the need of mastery over language, decentres the subject and the, to a greater or lesser extent, stable and affirmational anchors of his identity and he, by entering the unstable realms of language, simultaneously steps onto a slippery ontological territory that, to follow Lacan's terminology, replaces the comfort and wholeness supplied by the other with the incessant search for meaning(s) generated by the Other.²³⁷ The unknowable and unassimilable essence of the Other also generates the co-existence and inscription of various fictive selves through the oscillations of the grammatical categories of language, splitting, fragmentariness, and the non-coincidence of the different images of the self that are being revealed to him in the process of writing. In other words, the act of writing propels the writing subject to different ways of constructing his identity, resembling those governing the shift from the ontology of the imaginary to the ontologies of the symbolic register.

The disintegration of the stable authorial ego into the uncertain ontologies of the symbolic is most evident in *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, in which the genesis of the text and the construction of the authorial self are of central importance. Saleem's identification with the midnight's children and, by extension, India, and Moraes's with Bombay,

²³⁷ It is useful here to draw a distinction between the different orthographies of the o/Other in postcolonial theory. Adapting Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical terms, Bill Ashcroft et al. distinguish between the "other" (with a small "o"), which refers to "the colonised others who are marginalised by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the centre," and the "Other" (with a capital "O"), which refers to "the imperial centre, imperial discourse, or the empire itself, in two ways: firstly, it provides the terms in which the colonised subject gains a sense of his or her identity as somehow 'other', dependent; secondly, it becomes the 'absolute power of address', the ideological framework in which the colonised subject may come to understand the world. In colonial discourse, the subjectivity of the colonised is continually located in the gaze of the imperial Other, the 'grand-autre.'" (Bill Ashcroft et al., *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 170-1)

fortified by their function as allegories or embodiments of the nation/the city, which has served as the crucial aspect of their identities, is rendered problematic once they begin the act of writing. Saleem's predicament is the need to abandon the centrality he has heretofore assumed as undisputedly his on account of his being the midnight child, born on the very stroke of the historical midnight, which for him also means the relinquishing of the self-centredness of the narrative "I" to merge it in the hybrid multiplicity of the plural "we." This merging of his individual self with the plurality of India is enabled only after he has narrated/written the story of the children, of the violence done to them and of his complicity therein; by admitting and coming to terms with his guilt, he assumes responsibility for his actions and produces his text as a substitute for his misplaced historical agency – hence, his text as his true legacy as a historical document inserting the midnight children into the alternative national historiography he writes. In his trajectory from the Edenic realm of the family home of Elephanta, presided over by the ideals of mongrelism and hybridity celebrated in his mother's paintings, to the dark Infernal underside of Bombay, where crime and corruption flourish, Moraes finds his role as an embodiment of the city problematised. Searching for a validation of his sense of self in his identification with Boabdil, the last sultan of al-Andalus, he departs for Spain, to a simulacrum of the idealised Moorish kingdom in the village of Benengeli, where he begins writing his text, in the process of which he is forced to reenact the cowardly act of his predecessor and to effectively reinscribe himself not as the lauded ideal of hybridity he has always deemed himself to be, but as a historical failure. In both cases, the author's entry into the Symbolic/language destroys the stable ontology of wholeness and belonging of the Imaginary and reveals the sense of lack, fragmentariness and ontological instability governing his subjectivity. India/the midnight children and Bombay function as Saleem's and Moraes's "other" – they provide a sense of stable identification and buttress the writing subject's self-perception as a meaningful individual, disrupting the solipsism within which his craft imprisons him and endowing him with the comforting feeling that he belongs within a certain community. This type of otherness often engages with the concept of hybridity on an ontological level, as it diversifies the purity of the individual self by placing him in a historically or culturally conceived collective identity, such as the community of midnight's children with whom Saleem identifies or the hybrid Bombay which Moraes in many ways resembles and embodies. However, this stable sense of self, once inscribed, i.e. refracted through language, gives way to an awareness of the impossibility of a

final and stable anchoring of identity. Here, the subject is oriented towards the capitalised Other, a more complex frame of reference which precipitates the splitting of the subject's psyche or his doubling by means of a fictive or projected alter ego (Shiva for Saleem, Boabdil for Moraes, the fury for Malik, Quichotte for the Author). As this otherness is within the authorial subject, it often plays the role of the alien, "other" element in authorship that has been variously defined as the irrational in Plato or the Muse in Greek aesthetics and mythology, God in the medieval auctores, the voice of genius speaking through the poet, etc. As stated above, the stability of the imaginary ontology collapses, in and through the act of writing, into the unstable and decentred subjectivity defined by the symbolic otherness and the symbolic, capitalised Other is the exclusive prism through which authorial identity is continually reconstructed.

The focus of this section is the authorial subjectivity in the novels of Salman Rushdie, which is the axis around which are layered the different Others in relation to which the authorial figures conceive and construct their identity. Since the authorial subjectivity is (de- and re-)constructed in and through the act of writing, i.e. in and through language, the authorial subjects are intermeshed in a complex network of Othernesses that refract, split, decentre and destabilise the subject. The phrase "discourse of the Other" will be used as a conceptual tool to capture this dynamic of ceaseless becoming and reinvention of the subject in order to arrive at a representative image of the ways in which the authorial "I" experiences himself and the Others, whose validation he seeks in order to buttress his authority as a writer. It refers to the agonistic identifications of the subject that remain at the level of an unsatisfied desire, revealing his internal instability and fluidity. The discourse of the Other refers to the internal instability of the subject, to the multitude and non-coincidence of his fragmentary selves, to the fluidity of the narrative "I" and to the impossibility of his full inscription as a subjectivity.

This conception of the subject, in turn, corresponds to the disintegration of the meaningfully ordered reality and, as a result, the authorial subject is faced with his inability to represent reality realistically and unproblematically. The crises of representation and the manners in which they affect the authorial subject's conception of his authorship will be analysed in the second section of this study. Finally, this conception of the authorial subject has an ethical dimension, as it disrupts the binary logic of dominating discourses, such as those of colonialism, religion, nationalism, etc., which rely on the rigid division between "us" and "them" and categories in general. Crucially, it also destabilises the authority of the authorial subject as

having the central and unique role in the creation of his text. As a result, he relinquishes his role as the sole creator of meaning in his text and in this way the process of creation is dialogised by incorporating a listener or a reader, whose input radically modifies the narrative; the ethical implications of this metaphorical enactment of “the death of the Author” will be the subject of the third chapter of the dissertation.

c. Hybrid and Pure Selves

An important factor in the constitution of the authorial subjectivity in Rushdie’s fiction is the concept of hybridity, whose inclusionary and liberating potential is championed over the exclusionary and constricting effects of its opposite, purity, which for Rushdie means the tyranny of the One (God, race/ethnicity, nation, language, idea, etc.). Hybridity is celebrated in Rushdie’s oeuvre in every possible aspect: as ontology (individuals are always conceived relationally, there is therefore intersubjectivity), as culture (no culture is represented in isolation, independent of others; rather, there is a constant intercultural oscillation – India/Pakistan/Bangladesh, India/England, Mughal India/Renaissance Venice, Bombay/al-Andalus, New York-Lilliput Blefuscu, etc.), as epistemology (ideas and various forms of knowledge are traced across different temporal and geographical contexts, such as the idea of Islam in pre- and early Islamic Jahilia, in modern-day Titlipur and London, the evolution of India through history, etc.), and, finally, as ethics (the recognition of man’s dual angelic-devilish nature brings spiritual regeneration for one of the protagonists of *The Satanic Verses*, its refusal the death of the other, who futilely aspires towards an ethically pure self). Rushdie’s protagonists usually have a mixed biological parentage, which is further diversified and destabilised by the different affiliative models of identification they embrace, such as Saleem’s affinity with, among others, Tai, Mary Pereira, Nadir, Hanif, and Picture Singh, who are all accepted as “parental” figures, or Moraes’s with the historical Boabdil, who is, curiously, his distant biological ancestor, but whom he venerates as, primarily, the epitome of the Islamic culture in Spain over whose demise he “sighs” – the hybrid and tolerant culture of al-Andalus. These hybrid subjects are in turn positioned against antagonists who are either pure and unproblematised identities, such as Shiva and Raman

Fielding, or adhere to the ideal of the One, the uniform and exclusionary, such as the Widow, Mahound, the Mumbai Axis, the God of Islam, etc.

In the rest of this section, I will focus on the concept of hybridity as elaborated primarily in the postcolonial theory of Homi Bhabha, reworking it so as to suit not solely the postcolonial paradigm within which Rushdie's fiction primarily belongs, but also to establish the foundations of "the ethico-politics of writing"²³⁸ he develops in his novels.

As defined in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, hybridity "commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation."²³⁹ Originally a "term from botany – referring to cross-breeding – hybridity in postcolonial studies refers to the mixing of races (miscegenation) and cultures so that new forms of culture are produced."²⁴⁰ According to Bhabha,²⁴¹ hybridity is the expression of the breaking up of colonial authority and of the disintegration of its power under the sway of the erasure of the difference between the coloniser and the colonised, of the stable and final distinction between them:

colonial authority secretly – rather, *unconsciously* – knows that this supposed difference is undermined by the real sameness of the colonised population. This unconscious knowledge is disavowed: sameness is simultaneously recognised and repudiated. Importantly, the tension between the illusion of difference and the reality of sameness leads to anxiety. Indeed, for Bhabha colonial power is anxious, and never gets what it wants – a stable, final distinction between the colonisers and the colonised. This anxiety opens a gap in colonial discourse – a gap that can be exploited by the colonised, the oppressed.²⁴²

As soon as the certainty of the coloniser's authority and power is weakened and undermined, the colonised gains an opportunity to dismantle the colonial structures of violence and domination. It is precisely at this point in his argument that Bhabha postulates the agency of the colonised or the postcolonial subject, who finds a possibility of resistance and the rejection of the political and ideological yoke of colonialism in this gap of colonial authority.

²³⁸ Jane Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship* (Farnham, England, & Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2009), 1.

²³⁹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 108.

²⁴⁰ Pramod K. Nayar, *The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Blackwell, 2015), 91.

²⁴¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); David Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

²⁴² David Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 3-4.

The emphasis on agency is Bhabha's original contribution to postcolonial theory²⁴³ and on this point he diverges from both Gayatri Spivak, who insists that the subaltern has no voice and cannot articulate his story/history, and Edward Said, who minimises the forms of resistance on the part of the colonised in his image of the East as a perennial victim of the West. In Bhabha's conception of the postcolonial situation, the accent is no longer on antagonism but on agonism – the ambivalent process of “the producti[on] of meanings that construct counter-knowledge *in medias res*, [takes place] in the very act of agonism, within the terms of a negotiation (rather than a negation) of oppositional and antagonistic elements.”²⁴⁴

Hybridity is not a simple combination of anything and everything blended to the extent of unrecognisability. It represents a condition of consciousness manifested on an individual (psychological) and collective (social/historical) level and means the recognition of the role and importance of the Other in the formation of subjectivity and culture/history. As Bhabha emphasises, it relies not on *negation* (i.e. domination over the Other and hierarchisation of cultures/nations/races/histories as superior and inferior, authentic and fake), but on *negotiation*, which means that a necessary prerequisite is that all parties involved should recognise the Other as a subject and as a consciousness.

Conceiving of culture and subjectivity as hybrid means recognising that they are neither unitary, homogeneous and independent in and for themselves, nor dualistic in the relation self-Other. Hybridity is not a dialectic but an interstitial place where binary identitary models are problematised. It takes place in the “Third Space,” where the negotiation of previously disparate phenomena occurs. It is similar to what Gloria Anzaldúa calls a third element or a new, mestiza consciousness, which exists

where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness – a mestiza consciousness – and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Huddart, 4.

²⁴⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 33.

²⁴⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 79-80.

Due to its borderline positionality, this new consciousness has developed a tolerance for contradictoriness and ambivalence. In the context of identity, this complex condition does not refer to plural and multiple identities; rather, it emphasises the idea that identity is neither a pure monolithic essence nor a simple combination of several elements. This conception of identity foregrounds the ambivalence of the multiple identifications of the individual or collective subject who, although the product of different cultural, linguistic and historical heritages, nevertheless represents a recognizable whole which is irreducible to the “sum of their severed parts.” As Amin Maalouf succinctly puts it, “I don’t have several identities, I have only one, made of all the elements that have fashioned it, according to a particular “dosage” that is never the same from one person to another.”²⁴⁶

Salman Rushdie says almost the same when he emphasises the intellectual productivity of postcolonial authors and the postcolonial novel, which thematises the encounter between continents, nations, races and cultures. Tracing the etymology of the word “translation” to the Latin for “bearing across,” he identifies postcolonial authors, spread over different countries and cultures, as

translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained. [...] Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles.²⁴⁷

The narrators/authorial figures that are the subject of analysis of this research capitalise precisely on this capacity for “finding new angles at which to enter reality.” Like their creator (Rushdie is described as being Indo-Pakistani-British, and, lately, American, author), they exist in the liminal category between nations and cultures. They, in Rushdie’s famous phrase, testify to “the folly of trying to contain writers inside passports.”²⁴⁸ The following quote by Iain Chambers perfectly sums up these disparate threads: Bhabha’s third space, Anzaldúa’s new consciousness, Maalouf’s identity of a “pasticular dosage,” Rushdie’s translated men that sometimes straddle

²⁴⁶ Amin Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières* (Paris: Grasset, 2014), 8, translation mine.

²⁴⁷ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 17 and 15.

²⁴⁸ Rushdie, 67.

two cultures and sometimes fall between two stools. They all partake of a specific cultural and historical legacy

in which asymmetrical powers, dissonance and the unsaid are inscribed in a rendezvous in which the West and its others emerge modified. *Neither* term is guaranteed by presumptions of an autonomous history and identity; and neither term can simply be added to the other – Anglo-Indian, Asian-American – to create a facile composite. Both, despite the consistent manoeuvres of Euroamerican cultural hegemony to discursively intern the excess of that hyphen, become part of a doubled and compounded condition that “does not limit itself to a duality between these two cultural heritages.”

We are perhaps beginning to learn that in order to look towards this potential horizon it is no longer possible to seek refuge, what used to be called critical distance, in the supposedly neutral languages of science and knowledge: those discourses that previously nominated alterity and then reduced it to the tyranny of the logic of the same in the name of civilisation, culture and progress. We are learning to substitute the violence of that translation with the disturbing recognition that translation – mine of an other, an other’s of me – is never a transparent activity but always involves a process of re-citing, hence cultural and historical re-siting, and is therefore a travesty, a betrayal, of any “original” or “authentic” intention.²⁴⁹

However, not all the meanings and uses of hybridity can be subsumed under the rehabilitating semantics Bhabha accords it. Amar Acheraiou, for example, criticises its uncritical endorsement by postcolonial intellectuals as invariably contestatory, subversive and counter-hegemonic *vis-à-vis* the grand narratives or as the bringer of newness and renegotiation of identities/cultures/meanings. He claims that it can be appropriated by new structures of power and thus exert its own hegemonic influence: “not only is hybridity discourse accommodated by global neoliberal/neocolonial power structures, but also [...] the very ambivalence or indeterminacy of this discourse is what made this accommodation possible in the first place.”²⁵⁰ He also contests the claim that the third, in-between space of hybridity creates an international, cosmopolitan culture nourished by the translation of people and ideas, which, in Bhabha’s idealistic view, takes place as if in a political vacuum where all the “real” problems of such translation are neutralised and dissolved. Therefore, the emancipatory potential of Bhabha’s notion of hybridity is, according to Acheraiou, compromised.

²⁴⁹ Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 49, emphasis original.

²⁵⁰ Amar Acheraiou, *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalisation* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 7.

In *The Satanic Verses*, for example, the translation of Gibreel and Saladin, the two protagonists, from the former colonial periphery (India) to the imperial centre (England and London in particular) is equally debilitating and traumatic regarding their sense of self, triggering off their literal and symbolical transformation into an angel and a devil respectively. The “angelic” migrant is ostensibly troped as “good” because he wants to cling to his cultural and religious roots – he is “an untranslated man” and punished for that by the narrator/Rushdie with psychic disintegration and death. The “devilish” migrant is represented as “bad” because of his willingness to assimilate and be assimilated by England and its culture; however, his hybrid/translational outlook on life is rewarded with a new beginning not in the diaspora, but in the homeland, India, which re-routes the hybrid philosophy espoused by Rushdie by finding spiritual replenishment in the previously abandoned roots and tradition.

Still pursuing Amar Acheraiou’s argument, the unquestioning endorsement of the fragmented in-between self caught in the third space of cultural translation and enabling deracination by hybridity discourse puts an almost exclusive emphasis on disjunction and discontinuity, which are valorised as positively transformative. As a result, the ontology and ethics of wholeness and continuity are dismissively abandoned. Rushdie engages with this hierarchy of hybridity discourse in different ways. In *The Satanic Verses*, he follows its logic by representing Gibreel’s wish to remain tied to his roots as an unwillingness to be translated into the new culture, hence his tragic end; the novel does not create a discursive space in which Gibreel might productively engage with both his native and adoptive cultures and locates the continuity of his self (he is explicitly described as a “continuous”, “untranslated” self) solely within his native identity, not in the third space between native and migrant identity. In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, though, Moraes’s translation to Spain does not imply a break with his native identity as a Bombayite at all; rather, he seeks to confirm it by connecting it historically to the tolerant ideal of the culture of al-Andalus. This perception of hybridity stresses the connective and integrating, rather than disjunctive and fragmentary, aspects of cultural translation, rooting it in historical memory.

Finally, hybridity discourse is claimed to dismantle binary and essentialist modes of thinking, dissolving them in the ambivalent in-betweenness of the third space dominated by the logic of neither-nor, where the antagonism of the former binaries colony-empire, coloniser-colonised, centre-periphery, etc. gives way to an agonistic interplay between them which

privileges not the negation of one element by the other but the negotiation between them. As can be seen from Bhabha's terminology, he propounds a conciliatory, benign view of hybridity based on a rhetoric of ambiguity and ambivalence that prevents the formulation of a clear contestatory stance vis-à-vis the structures of power, which has been seen by his critics as a continuation of colonial discourse, which downplayed the coloniser's anti-colonial protest. Therefore, hybridity, by dint of its very epistemological and ethical malleability and elasticity, is considered to lack the oppositional and anti-hegemonic power it is credited to possess. The very fuzziness and inclusiveness on which it depends precludes a clear and unambiguous oppositional stance, which is indisputably evident in the openly anti-colonial rhetoric of early postcolonial theoreticians and ideologues such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi and Aimé Césaire, whose binary logic has been dismissed as retrograde and simplistic by the adherents to hybridity discourse. Rushdie's exploration of hybridity, however, although relying on its ambivalent and ambiguous aspect, ultimately manages to create a subversive space for the authorial subject from which he can, in Said's phrase, speak truth to power.

Moreover, hybridity can be said to produce its own binary logic by being adopted and imposed as the only viable outlook in postcolonial theory and literature, thereby positing the alternative concepts of unity, wholeness and homogeneity as a naïve and unviable essentialism that does not do justice to the realities of contemporary life. Rushdie's narrators, who embrace hybridity discourse as not only the postcolonial but also the universal contemporary personal and cultural norm, as a rule juxtapose binary categories such as shame-shamelessness, religion-doubt, continuous-discontinuous selves, etc., with one term being privileged over the other. The privileged element of the pair connotes hybridity, tolerance and multiplicity, while the repudiated one implies purity, intolerance, unicity, exclusion. This Manichean paradigm, however, within the overall logic of the novels is sublimated into an ontological, epistemic and ethical position that affirms the interdependence and complementarity of the two elements forming the binary pair, whose tension propels the processuality, incompleteness and incessant development and growth of the subject and his systems of representation. Thus, the ultimate dichotomy is not between the two elements of the binary, but between their interwovenness and separate existence – in the end, it is not hybridity per se that is affirmed by the logic of the text (although it is affirmed by its narrator) over the repudiated purity, but a complex individual and collective mode of existence and perception that accommodates this contrast, in which the hybrid and the

pure enable an unstable, but creative balance that is seen as giving rise to newness and growth in the world.

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Authorship, as its etymology shows, inevitably draws on a certain authority and power to produce meaning and control its afterlife. The subversive and decentring nature and effect of hybridity seems to cancel out the validity of authorship and writing, not least because while undermining discourses of power, it assumes just such a position of power by its capacity to exclude. While it redefines alterity as a category that is a constituent part of the self rather than its binary opposite, it does not abrogate the process of creating alterities, described by Spivak as *othering*, because to do so would mean to embrace the absolute relativisation of identity. Therefore, even a hybrid and inclusive identity would have to have its “constitutive outside” (Stuart Hall) and to establish a dividing line between itself and that which it will leave out or it will not be in order to avoid falling into amorphousness and, ultimately, erasure.

Having presented the theoretical basis for the analysis that is to follow, in the rest of this chapter I provide an in-depth analysis of the different ways authorial identity is conceived in Rushdie’s fiction and of the processes of inclusion/exclusion Rushdie’s author-protagonists enact in the construction of their subjectivities as revelatory of their self-perception and of their understanding of personal and artistic authenticity.

I. (Self-)Portraits of the Artist as a Young Man: *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*

Midnight's Children and *The Moor's Last Sigh* deal with the political and cultural development of India from the last decades of the Raj, through independence, the partition of the subcontinent, the subsequent divisions along religious, political, ethnic and linguistic lines and the Emergency, until the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1990s. Although complementary novels, tracing roughly the same national trajectory, they are diametrically opposed in terms of the treatment of theme and the vision of the country they project – the earlier novel represents a homage to Rushdie's country of birth, offering a gleam of hope for India, while the later paints a bleaker picture, seeing the demise of the Nehruvian secular state under the sway of Hindu nationalism and communalist division.

The imbrication of self and nation defines these novels as what Fredric Jameson calls “national allegories,” wherein the public/political is inextricably linked to the private and the individual. According to Jameson, “all third-world texts are necessarily allegorical;” there is a radical difference between the western realistic and modernist tradition, in which the private and the public, the poetical and the political – Freud and Marx – are separated, and the postcolonial literary tradition (Jameson uses the term “third-world texts”), which does not feature such a separation. In the latter, the public/political is inextricably linked to the private and the individual. Postcolonial texts, “even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.*”²⁵¹

Both novels are fictional autobiographies (autofictions, alternative historiographies, historiographic metafiction), representing the growth of an artistic consciousness that, like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, seeks to forge the essence and soul of a nation, with which they identify or embody, both metaphorically and literally. Thus, Saleem, born at the same moment as India, becomes its synecdoche, in the sense that his life mirrors that of the nation, and literal embodiment, as his body develops and disintegrates in parallel with that of the body politic.

²⁵¹ Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text*, No. 15 (Autumn, 1986): 69.

Moraes similarly undergoes an unnatural development like Bombay, the city he embodies. On account of this intimate conjoining of authorial self and nation/city, the fictional autobiographies they write become alternative historiographies, whereas their search for their artistic identity becomes a quest for the realisation of the ideal of Indian hybridity, which is unquestioningly embraced and promoted in both novels.

The national and historical grounding of the authorial subject in these novels is a determining factor, functioning as identity anchorage. Although the subject undergoes an ontological instability, it unfolds in the narratives only in so far as it allows a wide scope for an engagement of the self with various forms of commonality, which ground the subject and prevent the relativisation of his identity. Saleem and Moraes, as Adnan Mahmutović points out, “rework the sense of communal bonding, and reclaim community as the space for personal development... They posit no essential kernel or substance, but argue for an existential process of creation through action. There is a movement away from the sovereignty of selfhood (be it individual or communal), and an opening onto its alterity.”²⁵² Thus, in spite of the subject’s enmeshment in the unstable ontologies of the Symbolic and the reflective distance their autobiographical writing provides, the collective realities of the nation and history, without which his own subjectivity would be unimaginable, provide anchors and a certain sense of rootedness for the authorial subjectivity.

They are family sagas, wherein the appearance of the writing subject on the scene is preceded by detailed and extensive filiative and affiliative genealogical trees, whose aim is to position the subject within the national and historico-political discourses. In both novels, genealogy is important, albeit not in a strictly biological sense – while both narrators admit they are a changeling and a “bastard” respectively and toy with the implications of their hidden biological parentage, the genealogy they want to create is more ideological and artistic. Thus, although he is a son of the imperialist Methwold, Saleem begins his narrative with his artistic ancestors – his “grandfather” Aadam Aziz and the boatman Tai and throughout his text explores various parental figures, among whom his biological parents do not figure at all. Although he toys with the idea of being Nehru’s son, Moraes finds this possibility attractive only in so far as it would make him a more faithful embodiment of the ideals upon which Nehru envisioned the

²⁵² Adnan Mahmutović, *Ways of Being Free: Authenticity and Community in Selected Works of Rushdie, Ondaatje, and Okri* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2012), 104.

nation; ultimately, he finds his real ancestor in Boabdil, the last ruler of the hybrid and tolerant culture of al-Andalus. From this follows their self-conception as sons of the nation or history, inheritors of the ideals the latter embody and to which they strive to give expression in their texts.

In the first section of this part, comprising the sub-chapters “Embodying the Nation: Saleem as India” and “Images of Bombayness,” I analyse the collective aspect of identity that the author-narrators of these two novels aspire to, namely India for Saleem and Bombay for Moraes. In their (self-)perception as embodiments or synecdoches of these collective national entities, they strive to construct a heightened sense of self, one that exceeds the limits of a purely individual subjectivity. However, since India and Bombay remain the elusive Other to the authorial self, these identifications remain problematic and illustrative of the unstable authorial subjectivity presented in both *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. This is followed by the second section, which offers an analysis of the equally tense and ambivalent relation established between the authorial self and the Other projected as a double, a role performed by Shiva and Boabdil respectively. I conclude the section on the authorial subjectivity in these two novels by an examination of the internal split of the writing self that occurs in the act of writing.

The Author’s Collective Selves

a. Embodying the Nation: Saleem as India

Born on the stroke of midnight on August 15th 1947, when India gains its independence, Saleem Sinai is “mysteriously handcuffed to history” (*MC*, 3). By virtue of his birth, he becomes not only the locus on which the private and the political meet and collide, but an embodied map of his country and an “all-India radio” through which all the voices of the nation can speak and be heard. The central premise on which his personal identity and authorial authenticity rest is the mythology his text builds around the midnight children, i.e. those born during the first hour of Indian independence – as the first children of the new nation, they represent its soul and essence, the optimistic potential for growth and development that would propel the former colony into a

new historical era of national greatness. The central trope of the midnight's children has them representing "1001 imaginative possibilities that are gradually impossibilised in the actual history of independent India."²⁵³

His link to the country is emphasised, first and foremost, by the multitude of parental figures that will flit across his nomadic life. The biological son of a poor Hindu woman and a wealthy Englishman, he is swapped by his future Christian ayah, Mary Pereira, with the son of the Muslim Sinai family, Shiva, who is born, like Saleem, on the stroke of midnight at independence. This "private revolutionary act" of Mary Pereira – she swaps the babies so as to "giv[e] the poor baby a life of privilege and condemn[...] the rich-born child to accordions and poverty" (*MC*, 157) – reflects the crucial narrative strand of locating Indian identity precisely in the religious and linguistic hybridity of the subcontinent. The swapping-of-the-babies motif problematises the question of roots, belonging, tradition, and history and defies the political nation-building project by symbolically erasing the divisions on which the latter rests.

The proliferation and confusion of parental figures has the function of placing both Saleem and Shiva in the arms of history – Indian history – because as the truest midnight children, born at the very same moment as the birth of the state, they, along with the rest of the midnight children, are "fathered by history":

In fact, all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents – the children of midnight were also the *children of the time*: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen. Especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream. (*MC*, 159, emphasis original)

Hailed as the first generation of the independent state, the midnight children are born with extraordinary abilities, which symbolise the endless potential and optimism of the nation.

Understand what I'm saying: during the first hour of August 15th, 1947 – between midnight and one a.m. – no less than one thousand and one children were born within the frontiers of the infant sovereign state of India... What made the event noteworthy ... was the nature of these children, every one of whom was, through some freak of biology, or perhaps owing to some preternatural power of the moment, or just conceivably by sheer coincidence (although synchronicity on such a scale would stagger even C. G. Jung),

²⁵³ Patrick Colm Hogan, "Midnight's Children: Kashmir and the Politics of Identity," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 4, (Winter, 2001): 516.

endowed with features, talents or faculties which can only be described as miraculous. It was as though – if you will permit me one moment of fancy in what will otherwise be, I promise, the most, sober account I can manage – as though history, arriving at a point of the highest significance and promise, had chosen to sow, in that instant, the seeds of a future which would genuinely differ from anything the world had seen up to that time. (MC, 271)

Their number – one thousand and one – is significant because of its symbolical openness and magical reproductivity; it is “the number of night, of magic, of alternative realities – a number beloved of poets and detested by politicians, for whom all alternative versions of the world are threats” (MC, 300). Thus, the magical/poetical that is embodied in the children, which is prone to endless fluidity and exploring alternative options, is counterpoised with the political, which strives to maintain the status quo and resents the openness of the imagination. Since the midnight’s children possess magical qualities on account of the fateful time of their birth – the birth of the nation – they represent an alternative historical option, one that is inclusive and constructive, albeit also idealised and even utopian. As seen through Saleem’s eyes, they are the very essence of the nation, since their variety mirrors that of India, and as such they constitute themselves as the natural antagonists of the structures of power that govern the nation, i.e. the political elite, concretised in the person of the terrible Widow (Rushdie’s narrative persona for the historical Indira Gandhi), who also aspires to be the soul of the nation.

But what I learned from the Widow’s Hand is that those who would be gods fear no one so much as other potential deities; and that, that and that only, is why we, the magical children of midnight, were hated feared destroyed by the Widow, who was not only Prime Minister of India but also aspired to be Devi, the Mother-goddess in her most terrible aspect, possessor of the shakti of the gods, a multi-limbed divinity with a centre-parting and schizophrenic hair... And that was how I learned my meaning in the crumbling palace of the bruised-breasted women. Who am I? Who were we? We were are shall be the gods you never had. (MC, 612)

Her attempts to neutralise the power of the midnight children usher in the period of the Emergency in the national history, when the children become the guinea pigs of the government’s sterilisation programme. The operation performed on them is called “sperectomy” because it “not only ensures their irreversible sterilisation but also removes all hope.”²⁵⁴ The senseless violence of this act is emphasised by the graphic description of the fate of the -

²⁵⁴ Josna E. Rege, “Victim into Protagonist? *Midnight’s Children* and the Post-Rushdie National Narratives of the Eighties,” in *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Harold Bloom, 159.

ectomised organs: they were “curried with onions and green chillies, and fed to the pie-dogs of Benares” (*MC*, 614). As a result, the children are deprived of their magical gifts and capacities, bestowed on them by the historical moment of their birth, which severs their organic connection to the land and makes them disillusioned, passive individuals without any sense of national purpose or identity:

Might not a Widow, obsessed with the stars, have learned from astrologers the secret potential of any children born at that long-ago midnight hour?... Yes, you see, the scraps begin to fit together! Padma, does it not become clear? *Indira is India and India is Indira*... but might she not have read her own father's letter to a midnight child, in which her own, sloganised centrality was denied; in which the role of mirror-of-the-nation was bestowed upon me? You see? *You see?* (*MC*, 597, emphasis original)

The Widow, as the leader of the nation, desires to be its centre and essence, to which the slogan *Indira is India and India is Indira* deftly alludes. However, in this case the copula, in spite of the almost complete parallelism between its two parts, does not establish a sameness, which is emphasised both on the literal, semantic level and, even more importantly, in the symbolic splitting that Saleem's narrative achieves between *India* (whose formation and growth is represented through the life of the narrator Saleem and his identification with the other midnight children) and *Indira* (whose extreme and destructive policies thwart the unification of the various components of the nation and the healing of its deep historical wounds). The conflict between them, which is a conflict between the elite and the masses/ the One and the Many, is the central theme of the novel, which in this way explores the various aspects of the contemporary postcolonial nation. Thus, on the one hand there is the Widow, as a single representative of the governing apparatus and the political elites, who aspires only to absolute power and for this reason is represented monologically, without any nuances or subtleties to her motivation. On the other hand, there are the *numerous* or, as the one-thousand-and-one motif mentioned above indicates, even the *endless* Children of the Nation, who represent all its classes/castes/races and who find their voices expressed through Saleem's narration. In fact, Saleem draws his authority as a narrator precisely from the gift bestowed on him, as the child of the nation, by the special midnight ushering in Indian independence – telepathy, whereby he is able to enter people's minds and thus render his consciousness invariably pluralised and marked by the presence of the other.

The *raison d'être* of Saleem's narration is to bear witness to the existence and meaning of the midnight's children and to the historical violence of their erasure from the national archives; feeling guilty of betraying them and enabling their collective "sperectomy," he compensates through his narration. To this end, he has to insist on his own centrality as *the* midnight child (the reduced number of the children, who out of the magical and endlessly proliferating number 1001 soon are reduced to a mere 581, already enacts the elision and restriction of the initial multiplicity into a smaller unit), gifted with a unique power of discernment and a special insight into the real, as opposed to the apparent, nature of things, which, in turn, necessitates that he displace the children and position himself at the centre of attention. Thus, the element of self-aggrandisement is present throughout: he assumes responsibility for directly triggering or being the motive of massive political upheavals in the country, such as the partition of the state of Bombay along language lines, the hostilities between India and Pakistan, the sterilisation programme of Indira Gandhi, etc. Furthermore, although Saleem's true rival is Shiva, whose life he unwittingly usurped, he sees himself as, in fact, opposed to the Widow, the literal centre of power. The beginning of the novel places *him* at the very centre of national history – "Soothsayers had prophesied me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, politicians ratified my authenticity. I was left entirely without a say in the matter" (*MC*, 3). His role as a synecdoche of India²⁵⁵ is corroborated by the letter that he, as the first child born in independent India, receives from the prime minister of the newly fledged state, Jawaharlal Nehru

"Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that *ancient* face of India which is also *eternally young*. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the *mirror* of our own." (*MC*, 167, emphasis mine)

The mirror-like relationship that, as even a leader of Nehru's stature admits, is established between Saleem's private life and the political life of the nation enables him to impose his own

²⁵⁵ Saleem "imagines two bodies for himself, the first a projection onto the scale of the nation of a body like his own and the second a composite of the bodies of all his fellow citizens. The body of the nation as imagined by synecdochical identification and that figured by metonymic assembly are gendered differently. The sovereign whole, figured as the Kolynos Kid or Ganesh, is masculine; the assembly of metonymic parts is, like the statue of Mumbadevi above the pickle factory, feminine. [...] It would seem that the nation-state can be imagined either as an ideal version of the male self or as a beautiful female who will complement the male nationalist." (Neil ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children* [Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004], 135)

discourse of a private individual upon the official historical-political discourse. His self-perception as a representative and a spokesperson of all the midnight's children is central to his authorial authority to narrate his story, which, by virtue of their momentous birth, becomes also their story. His identification with the midnight's children, who synecdochically represent the entire country in all its heterogeneity, is of central importance to Saleem, who, in this way, carefully constructs his narrative not merely as a conventional autobiography, but, more importantly, as an alternative historiography, aimed at rectifying a historical injustice and telling a story that would otherwise remain silenced by the official, politically ratified version of the narrated events. To this end, even while he authors a text that is not a mere autobiography but a whole national historiography, he has to assert his artistic authority because only then would his text have a wider validity beyond the solipsistic world (and Word) of its author.

Saleem's gift initially propels him into a failed attempt to unite the midnight children within the Midnight's Children Conference he telepathically convenes in his mind and later, after their "sperectomy," to undertake the role of their chronicler to reinsert them into the life and memory of the nation. In order to achieve this, he has to assume a collective identity which would unite all the children, representing the entire nation, and, as has been mentioned above, his self-perception as their representative and "authorised" chronicler invests his narrative with the authenticity and gravitas that the official historiography concerning the narrated events lacks. His telepathic ability is valued as the greatest gift of midnight precisely because it enables the intersection and coexistence of a multitude of consciousnesses within his, which makes Saleem not an individual subject but a truly polylogic, multiple and invariably relational over-subject who reflects and synecdochically represents the nation. The line of development of this over-subject starts from the idealistic innocence of the Midnight's Children Conference (or "the optimism disease", as Saleem calls the utopian expectations before, and immediately after, the proclamation of independence); through the conflicts and divisions between the children, which mirror those within the nation; until the final dismantling of the national ideal, symbolised by the sterilisation and the "sperectomy" of the children and their eventual death without progeny and hope for the future. Saleem's complicity in the destruction of the miraculous legacy of the children (he is able to identify the children for the Widow's henchmen precisely on account of his telepathic ability) marks his nonentisation as a historical subject: he replaces his initial belief in his own historical centrality with the awareness that he is nothing but a plaything of history, a

victim of political violence, deprived of any meaningful agency. Moreover, it causes a split in his identity, as the writing self cannot bring himself to narrate the horrors of the Widow's act and his own complicity in it and enters into an internal dialogue as two voices within him debate the conflicting necessities of, on the one hand, narrating the event and therefore inserting it into the collective memory, and, on the other, of leaving it unsaid and consigning it to a soothing oblivion.²⁵⁶

No! – But I must. I don't want to tell it! – But I swore to tell it all. – No, I renounce, not that, surely some things are better left...? – That won't wash; what can't be cured, must be endured! – But surely not the whispering walls, and treason, and snip snip, and the women with the bruised chests? – Especially those things. – But how can I, look at me, I'm tearing myself apart, can't even agree with myself, talking arguing like a wild fellow, cracking up, memory going, yes, memory plunging into chasms and being swallowed by the dark, only fragments remain, none of it makes sense any more! – But I mustn't presume to judge; must simply continue (having once begun) until the end; sense-and-nonsense is no longer (perhaps never was) for me to evaluate. – But the horror of it, I can't won't mustn't won't can't no! – Stop this; begin. – No! – Yes. (*MC*, 589)

However, his act of betrayal, which coincides with the proclamation of the Emergency, gives birth to Saleem as an authorial subject even as it marginalises him as a historical one. As Neil ten Kortenaar states, “Saleem the memoirist (as opposed to Saleem the hero) is the child of that second Midnight, the hour when Indira Gandhi arrogated dictatorial powers to herself with the declaration of a State of Emergency.”²⁵⁷ Thus, the centrality of the authorial subjectivity is preserved throughout – as Saleem's centrality as a midnight child/historical subject falls apart with his betrayal of the children and his and their collective victimisation by the political violence of the Widow, he assumes a central narrative position by becoming a writer and the protagonist of his own story. Significantly, at the time of writing, he is no longer the magical,

²⁵⁶ This is one of the instances when Saleem holds back information from the reader and provides only a summary of his role of the sterilisation of the children, with whose betrayal on his part he cannot come to terms: “Here I record a merciful blank in my memory. Nothing can induce me to remember the conversational techniques of that humourless, uniformed pair; there is no chutney or pickle capable of unlocking the doors behind which I have locked those days! No, I have forgotten, I cannot will not say how they made me spill the beans – but I cannot escape the shameful heart of the matter, which is that despite absence-of-jokes and the generally unsympathetic manner of my two-headed inquisitor, I did most certainly talk. And more than talk: under the influence of their unnamable – forgotten – pressures, I became loquacious in the extreme. What poured, blubbing, from my lips (and will not do so now): names addresses physical descriptions. Yes, I told them everything” (*MC*, 605-6).

²⁵⁷ Neil ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text*, 142.

special child of the nation, but an ordinary citizen working through his own complex web of familial and national-historical identifications.

The contrast between Saleem's dual self-conception as both a historical and an authorial subject is most vividly expressed in the juxtaposition between the rage he felt at history's indomitable injustice and the individual's powerlessness against it (a rage exacerbated by his awareness of his own responsibility for the violence perpetrated against the children) and the moment of calm at the moment of writing, when he has learned history's lesson. The rage is felt by a self that believes himself to be obliged to carry the burden of history:

The object of my wrath was, in fact, everything which I had, until then, blindly accepted: my parents' desire that I should repay their investment in me by becoming great; genius-like-a-shawl; the modes of connection themselves inspired in me a blind, lunging fury. Why me? Why, owing to accidents of birth prophecy etcetera, must I be responsible for language riots and after-Nehru-who, for pepperpot-revolutions and bombs which annihilated my family? Why should I, Saleem Snotnose, Sniffer, Mapface, Piece-of-the-Moon, accept the blame for what-was-not-done by Pakistani troops in Dacca? ... *Why, alone of all the more-than-five-hundred-million, should I have to bear the burden of history?* (MC, 534, emphasis original)

Saleem the protagonist's belief in his historical centrality is countered by Saleem the author's awareness of its futility, who even condescendingly permits himself "a wry, understanding smile" at his naïve younger self. Taught by the Widow that there is no escape from the pressures of the historical/political, he knows that he, as an individual, is subjected to external forces that determine his life and that his centrality in the narrative of the nation is illusory. At the moment of writing, Saleem the narrator re-positions his subjectivity – he is no longer destined to conform to the grand narratives of the Nation or History, against which he is powerless, but only to be the controlling force of his own narrative, in which he and the rest of the midnight's children occupy a privileged place. Seen in this light, his self ceases to be special (in spite of opportune birth and letter-from-Nehru) and becomes like any other:

... now, seated hunched over paper in a pool of Anglepoised light, I no longer want to be anything except what who I am. Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come. Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each "I", 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)

Saleem's conception of the ordinariness of his own self leads to a new identification with the community of the midnight children – it does not weaken, but reinvigorates the analogy self/children and, by extension, children/nation. In an agonised internal address to the children, Saleem reclaims his authenticity by assuming responsibility for his complicity and by asking for the forgiveness of the children, whose story will be immortalised in his narration. The Widow's political violence does not ensure her desired centrality as the essence of the nation, but theirs. Even as they are marginalised and silenced by the centre of power that is the Widow, they become invested with an archetypal meaning, which transcends history (where the Widow reigns supreme, at least temporarily) because it is nourished by the mythical, primordial sources of India: she can never realise her aspiration to become a manifestation of the sacred sound OM or “Devi, the Mother-goddess in her most terrible-aspect, possessor of the shakti of the gods, a multi-limbed divinity with a centre-parting and schizophrenic hair”; her oneness is destined to be replaced with the pantheon of the countless children of the nation. This awareness completes Saleem's search for meaning as his individual “I” gives way to a plural “we:” “And that was how I learned my meaning... Who am I? Who were we? We were are shall be the gods you never had” (*MC*, 612).

b. Images of Bombayness

Moraes Zogoiby, the narrator-author of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, is, like Saleem, a biologically and culturally hybrid subject. Of Catholic and Jewish provenance, he was

raised neither as Catholic nor as Jew. I was both, and nothing: a jewholic-anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was – what's the word these days? – *atomised*. Yessir: a real Bombay mix. *Bastard*: I like the sound of the word. *Baas*, a smell, a stinky-poo. *Turd*, no translation required. Ergo, *Bastard*, a smelly shit; like, for example, me. (*MLS*, 104)

As Moraes mentions at the very beginning of his narrative, his is “the story of the fall from grace of a high-born cross-breed” (*MLS*, 5). He claims he has his mother's and his beloved's “story in

[his] hand” (*MLS*, 3), insisting that it is a reliable hand – however strange we may find the tales he narrates, “of the truth of these further stories there can be no doubt whatsoever” (*MLS*, 85). Narrativity becomes the most fundamental principle of consciousness, springing from a conception of the indissoluble link of the artistic subjectivity with the geography (Bombay “was an ocean of stories; we were all its narrators, and everybody talked at once” [*MLS*, 350]) and the history (the conflation of the two Moors – Boabdil and Moraes – so that Moraes cannot be interpreted in isolation from Boabdil) that have shaped him, creating an existential angst of silent wonder at and protest against the impotence of man to become anything other than what his destiny has made him. His, like Saleem’s, is a dialogised discourse, interpolating other voices and in this way multiplying the interpretive possibilities of his text. Thus, the repeated comparison of his ideas and the manuscript that is being nailed to the Andalusian landscape to Luther’s nailing of his theses on the church door in Wittenberg is undercut by his mother’s pun on the homophony of “theses” with “faeces,” thereby dismissing what he has to say as mere nonsense.

His is another fictional autobiography in which the authorial self, trying to impose meaning on his life, inevitably rethinks the meaning of India. As Stephen Baker points out, “[b]oth Saleem and Moor, in their ever more desperate attempts to make their narratives cohere, raise the question of the coherence or viability of the Indian state as a single political entity.”²⁵⁸ Lacking the symbolic nation-regenerating identity of a midnight child, he searches for his own meaning on a smaller scale – as an embodiment of the hybridity of Bombay, which for him encapsulates the purest essence of a vision of India that is to be defeated by the onslaught of Hindu fundamentalism,²⁵⁹ at which point his identification with the Bombayite, urban synchronic

²⁵⁸ Stephen Baker, “‘You Must Remember This’: Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*,” in *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Harold Bloom, 240.

²⁵⁹ Dohra Ahmad argues that Islam, while conspicuously absent in this novel, figures transmuted into the other forms of fundamentalism explored: “Even as migrant Islam surfaces as minority Judaism, the statist, authoritarian version of modern Islam appears in Rushdie’s satiric portrayal of monotheistic Judaism... Invisible Islam, then, is split into two components: migrant Islam, the minority religion of banished Boabdil, becomes a struggling Judaism, and fundamentalist Islam, majority religion and statist ideology, becomes a warped, dishonest monotheistic Hinduism. Just as minority Judaism both symbolises other minority religions, and also carries its own, genuine, history, majority Hinduism too functions as a figure for majority Islam elsewhere, and also carries its own context and meaning.” (Dohra Ahmad, “‘This fundo stuff is really something new’: Fundamentalism and Hybridity in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 18, number 1, 2005: 5)

national belonging in “empty, homogeneous time”²⁶⁰ collapses and he searches for his true identity in a backward-oriented diachronic displacement to Moorish Spain.²⁶¹ The anchoring of his troubled identity in this particular historical era is not coincidental – he claims wrong-side-of-the-blanket descent both from Vasco da Gama and Boabdil, but only the latter stimulates his identity search, while the former remains an unexplored possibility within his text.²⁶²

Moraes, like Saleem, is an embodied identity, an allegorical character that stands not for India as a whole, but for Bombay. Bombay is central to Moraes’s self-perception both as the site of nourishing hybridity inculcated in him by, and explored through, Aurora’s art, and in terms of the historical parallel that is established between Bombay and al-Andalus (which follows the parallel Moraes-Boabdil). As he writes,

Bombay was central: had always been. Just as the fanatical “Catholic Kings” had besieged Granada and awaited the Alhambra’s fall, so now barbarism was standing at our gates. O Bombay! *Prima in Indis! Gayeway to India! Star of the East with her face to the West!* Like Granada – al Gharnatah of the Arabs – you were the glory of your time. But a darker time came upon you, and just as Boabdil, the last Nasrid Sultan, was too weak to defend his great treasure, so we, too, were proved wanting. For the barbarians were not only at our gates but within our skins. (*MLS*, 372)

The urban space here functions as the protagonist’s other, nourishing his sense of self. Born with an inexplicable condition that makes him age at twice the average speed and grow into an above-average size, he identifies the consequences of his abnormality with those of Bombay’s post-Independence growth:

I have always been, if only in my uncontrollable increases, prodigious. Like the city itself, Bombay of my joys and sorrows, I mushroomed into a huge urbane sprawl of a fellow, I expanded without time for proper planning, without any pauses to learn from my

²⁶⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006).

²⁶¹ Madelena Gonzalez emphasises the exilic nature of identity in this novel – “... voluntary exile from identity is the only means to redefine that identity as an unfixed, constantly evolving notion, rather than a prison of pre-ordained meaning. Exile is identity in Rushdie’s world, but the most productive sort of identity, not just the physical, geographical exile around which the book is organised, but mental, intellectual exile from fixed and constraining truths.” (Gonzalez, *Fiction after the Fatwa*, 99)

²⁶² Moraes’s mother, Aurora, nevertheless takes pride in her famous ancestor, as she often sits and talks in front of the empty tomb of Vasco da Gama.

experiences of my mistakes or my contemporaries, without time for reflection. How then could I have turned out to be anything but a mess?" (*MLS*, 161-2)²⁶³

In spite of the negative tone of this passage, however, the identitary chaos and uncontrollable growth of both Moraes and Bombay is embraced as a personal and cultural ideal that should be defended at any cost against the encroaching danger of communalist division.

The family home on Malabar Hill, which Aurora names Elephanta, functions as a microcosm of the bustling city; it houses a salon where artistic and intellectual debates take place and that serves as a site of pilgrimage for the city's intelligentsia. Presided over by the dominating presence and artistic genius of Aurora Zogoiby, it is an edenic place that promotes prelapsarian unity and togetherness. Amid the state division along language lines, she decrees that neither Gujarati nor Marathi is to be spoken under her roof, only English which, in spite of being an alien, colonising language, unifies. It is at Elephanta that Aurora conceives and brings to life in her paintings the utopian Palimpstine/Mooristan, an imaginary realm of inclusiveness and tolerance modeled both on contemporary Bombay and Moorish al-Andalus. Her son Moraes has a central place in the cultural ideal she constructs as a confluence of these two historical spaces: he serves as an embodiment of Boabdil, the last Nasrid ruler who lived to see the tolerant culture of al-Andalus vanquished by the forces of the Spanish Reconquista. Moraes can thus be seen as the symbol of Aurora's vision of a hybrid culture where the family's minoritarian status – Portuguese Christian, Jewish and Moorish – would be embraced as nourishing rather than disabling.

Moraes's fate evokes Boabdil's loss: like Boabdil, he will lose all the crucial coordinates that buttress his identity and that will mirror the parallel loss not only of the idea of India, but that of History as such. Due to a misunderstanding, he will be banished from his family and disinherited; deprived of his place in society and of his status both as a son and as a lover, he becomes a part of the violent nationalist machinery of Raman Fielding's Mumbai's Axis. The ease with which he appropriates both Uma Sarasvati's incestuous fantasies about him and his

²⁶³ Moraes's uncontrollable growth also mirrors "Abraham's unbridled rapacity; fittingly, he is endowed with remarkable height. Like the tall buildings Abraham raises with his invisible workforce, Moraes is 'a skyscraper freed of all legal restraints, a one-man population explosion, a megalopolis, a shirt-ripping, button-popping hulk' (*MLS*, 188)." (Farhad B. Idris, "*The Moor's Last Sigh* and India's National Bourgeoisie: Reading Rushdie through Frantz Fanon," in *Critical Essays*, ed. Keith M. Booker, 162) Furthermore, the roots of the family's wealth in the spice trade, which brought about the European colonisation of India, reveal the family's colonial legacy, rendering it a representative example of Fanon's flawed national bourgeoisie in the newly independent colony.

mother²⁶⁴ and the pejorative rhetoric of the band of thugs of Fielding's organisation who revel in violence²⁶⁵ suggests an absence of identity, a loss of self that, like an empty vessel, is filled with the detritus of other people's prejudices and hatreds. Such is his alienation from his authentic self that he even persuades himself that this is his true nature, that after a failed "lifelong quest for an unattainable normality" he can finally reveal his "super-nature to the world" (*MLS*, 305-6). He is engulfed by the feeling that he is rendered a nonentity, deprived of any meaning and no longer an authentic being, but a fragmented and empty self:

I was nobody, nothing. Nothing I had ever known was of use, nor could I any longer say that I knew it. I had been emptied, invalidated; I was, to use a hoary but suddenly fitting epithet, mined. I had fallen from grace, and the horror of it shattered the universe, like a mirror. I felt as though I, too, had shattered; as if I were falling to earth, not as myself, but as a thousand and one fragmented images of myself, trapped in shards of glass. (*MLS*, 278-9)

The crime for which Moraes is exiled from his paradisaical home is his betrayal of the ideal cherished by his mother by succumbing to the insidious influence of Uma Sarasvati, an exponent of a different credo. Hers is a multiple self that proliferates itself to such an extent that any sense of the real, authentic self is lost. Moraes's new abode is an-other Bombay, not the bright, bustling city, but its criminal, dark other, fittingly described as Pandemonium, where the fundamentalist fanatic Raman Fielding and Moraes's own father, Abraham Zogoiby, rule (significantly, Abraham uses not the edenic Elephanta, but a separate sky-garden for his criminal operations).

As Moraes is de-centred as a familial and social entity, a surrogate son and an alternative emblem of Bombay is installed in his place: Saleem's son Adam Sinai, who has migrated from the world of *Midnight's Children* into the very different world of *The Moor's Last Sigh* as Adam Braganza. He is first described as "a precocious eighteen-year-old" (*MLS*, 341) who rises through the ranks of Abraham's organisation at a breathtaking speed. He is Saleem's Aadam and

²⁶⁴ During their lovemaking, she makes him say "Screw her. Screw her stupid the stupid bitch" and similar obscenities.

²⁶⁵ Moraes's vocabulary during this phase of his life reveals his appropriation of Raman Fielding's ethnic and class prejudices: he describes how they dealt with "union-wallah dross, activist scruff and Communist scum. I use these terms not pejoratively but, if I may so put it, technically. For all industrial processes produce waste matter that must be scraped away, discarded, purged, so that excellence may emerge" (*MLS*, 306-7). As a member of this criminal organisation, Moraes participates in targeting the most vulnerable segments of society, such as the Dalits or Harijans, and even persuades a young woman to become a *sati*.

his transformation from an embodiment of the promise and a guarantor of the future of a newborn country into a pompous, superficial and complaisant young man with a criminal predisposition is perhaps the saddest commentary on Rushdie's changed vision of India. His disproportionately large ears, which to the affectionate eyes of Saleem evoked the good-natured Hindu god Ganesha, look to Moraes's to be "the size of Baby Dumbo's or of Star TV satellite dishes" (*MLS*, 341).²⁶⁶ The historical and nation-regenerating mission Saleem aspired to instill in him is made irrelevant and rendered impossible by the vulgar reference to modern commercialised art and commodities. Here he is nothing more than a

youth with a spectacularly chequered past. It seems he was originally the illegitimate child of a Bombay hooligan and an itinerant magician from Shadipur, U.P., and had been unofficially adopted, for a time, by a Bombay man who was missing-believed-dead, having mysteriously disappeared fourteen years ago, not long after his allegedly brutal treatment by government agents during the 1974-1977 Emergency. Since then the boy had been raised in a pink skyscraper at Breach Candy by two elderly Goan Christian ladies who had grown wealthy on the success of their popular range of condiments, Braganza Pickles. He had taken the name of Braganza in the old ladies' honour, and, after they passed away, had taken over the factory itself. (*MLS*, 342)

Having sold the business to Abraham, he becomes the old man's right hand man and the "new Adam in Eden" (*MLS*, 343). Here, as in *Midnight's Children*, his generation is described as the one that will breathe new life into the stagnant culture of the old, but the viewpoint is radically different:

Abraham was right. The future had arrived. There was a generation waiting to inherit the earth, caring nothing for old-timers' concerns: dedicated to the pursuit of the new, speaking the future's strange, binary, affectless speech – quite a change from our melodramatic garam-masala exclamations. No wonder Abraham, inexhaustible Abraham, turned to Adam. It was the birth of a new age in India, when money, as well as religion, was breaking all the shackles on its desires; a time for the lusty, the hungry, the greedy-for-life, not the spent and empty lost. (*MLS*, 343-4)

As opposed to Adam, who finds his place among the materialist and future-oriented youth of the new India, Moraes feels like a "back number; born too fast, born wrong, damaged, and growing old too quickly, turning brutal along the route. Now my face was turned towards the past,

266 Later, Moraes adds the names "Gofo," "Mutto," "Crooko," and "Sabu" when referring to Adam and reluctantly allows for Ganesh, only because he finds out that Adam's parents were called Shiva and Parvati; lastly, he is "the detestable Elephant Boy" (*MLS*, 359).

towards the loss of love. When I looked forward, I saw Death waiting there” (*MLS*, 344). At this point, Moraes is to all intents and purposes an old man, unable to conceive a child and give his father an heir, who turns to Adam and adopts him, giving him his surname. Nevertheless, in spite of his professional sophistication, such is Adam’s hollowness that Moraes does not see him as a rival – he even begins to put his name in parentheses, as if he were not a complete person. Moraes likens him to Uma and to her shedding of the past not to direct her present towards a nobler purpose, but to achieve some transitory end by dissimulating and calculating. They both become chameleons, shaping themselves on the whim of the moment, rather than achieving authenticity and individuation. When, soon after Adam’s adoption, Abraham’s entire organisation is dismantled and his criminal activities become exposed by the authorities, paradoxically, it is the name of the adopted, rather than that of the biological, son that is mentioned alongside the father’s, in all its variations (first Aadam Sinai, then Adam Braganza and lastly Adam Zogoiby), arranged chronologically to illustrate his chameleon-like shifting and inconstant identity. As a version of Bombay and a symbol of the new, technologised India, he is the undesirable Other that the narrator Moraes excludes from his imagined national ideal.

During his exile in the “other” Bombay,²⁶⁷ Moraes also becomes an-other – in the criminal underworld he is known as “the Hammer,” a false self that blindly follows where the ideals Aurora has inculcated in her art, whose symbol she has made him be, would never lead. This inauthentic self of Moraes’s dies simultaneously with the apocalyptic explosions that all but destroy the city and that obliterate almost every person and place to which Moraes has any connection. Although marking the end of a way of life (that of the tolerant, hybrid Bombay) and specifically his way of life, this event is ultimately liberating for it suggests a potential for regeneration both for the city and for Moraes. Out of the all-engulfing destruction, the figure of Nadia Wadia, Moraes’s fiancée, emerges as the bringer of new hope. Appearing on television

²⁶⁷ Through the image of the underworld, Other Bombay, Rushdie laments the collapse of the classical image of Bombay as “the quintessential modern city structured by modern and rational forces of industry, law, and bureaucracy” with the rise of Hindu sectarianism in the 1990s. Thomas Blom Hansen also registers a profound change in Bombay in the last decades of the 20th century: “Decades of democracy – unruly and often unwieldy – have enabled a new breed of public figures to make their way into politics using powerful populist rhetoric. During the Nehruvian period the ideal of public speech and appearance was that of the cultured and reasonable gentleman, but since the 1970s a more coarse, plebeian, but also heroic type has appeared: the self-made man whose reputation in the slums and popular neighbourhoods often is based on his capacity for violence, his underworld connections, and his gang of young men ready to help his friends and terrorise his enemies.” (Thomas Blom Hansen, “Reflections on Salman Rushdie’s Bombay,” in *Midnight’s Diaspora*, ed. Herwitz and Varshney, 96 and 98)

after being disfigured, when asked about her personal ordeal she looks directly into the camera and her answer is focused not on her but on the city: “The city will survive. New towers will rise. Better days will come. Now I am saying it every day. Nadia Wadia, the future beckons. Harken to its call” (*MLS*, 377). As for Moraes, the explosions that destroy his beloved city also explode his identification with and embodiment of Bombay, thus rendering impossible his belonging in its imagined political community. With his synchronous, “horizontal comradeship” with the imagined community of the nation destroyed, the way remains open for his diachronic identity quest, which leads him to a more profound engagement with the historical and symbolical figure of Boabdil. This leads us to the following section, which focuses on Boabdil and Shiva as Moraes’s and Saleem’s respective doubles, which is another layer of the author’s complex identity in these novels.

The Author and his Double

a. “Nose-and-Knees”

The character of Shiva is similarly defined by both a concrete historical and a symbolical/mythical identity in the same way as the children are. As a concrete individual, he is the dispossessed child of the family Saleem claims as his own, a changeling that is never restored to his rightful place in society. Symbolically, he is an agent of destruction and, as such, aligned with the violence of the political, represented by the Widow.²⁶⁸ In both identities, he is Saleem’s antagonist and can even be considered a projection of certain aspects of Saleem’s self that he cannot accept in himself. Hence, Shiva functions as Saleem’s double, an externalised embodiment of his internal Otherness. The double denotes a rupture of the principle of identity,

²⁶⁸ It is undeniable that their gifts are innate and symbolically derive from the historically charged time of their birth, but it is erroneous to affirm that Saleem’s familial and social usurpation of Shiva’s position, although caused by factors beyond and independent of him, does not affect his historical meaning and social identity. Shiva’s “gift for war” can come to fruition in the impoverished and crime-ridden milieu to which Mary’s act condemns him, while Saleem’s very access to an intellectual discourse and to ideological ruminations about the state of the nation are premised on having a life of privilege and education.

one that confirms the complementarity of self and other and explodes the myth of the indivisibility, unicity, totality and wholeness of the self.

As they are both born simultaneously with the nation, they both carry the midnight legacy in its purest form, as opposed to the rest of the children, whose gifts are diluted in significance the further into the first hour of independence they are born. The meaning and significance of this legacy is explored in the novel through the duality between these two characters who are the children of the momentous midnight in the most literal sense of the word.

The duality between Saleem and Shiva, established at the moment of their simultaneous birth, is a duality and coexistence of two opposed principles. They represent the antagonism and incompatibility between the magical/poetical and the political that on the national level is dramatised by that between the midnight's children, i.e. the children of the nation, and the Widow, its political leader.²⁶⁹ Born on the very stroke of the midnight of Independence, they have the most miraculous qualities of all – Saleem has the gift of telepathy and penetrating people's minds, whereas Shiva has the gift of war:

So among the midnight children were infants with powers of transmutation, flight, prophecy and wizardry... but two of us were born on the stroke of midnight. Saleem and Shiva, Shiva and Saleem, nose and knees and knees and nose... to Shiva, the hour had given the gifts of war (of Rama, who could draw the undrawable bow; of Arjuna and Bhima; the ancient prowess of Kurus and Pandavas united, unstoppably, in him!)... and to me, the greatest talent of all-the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men. (*MC*, 277)

As an author writing from a position of authority and with a sense of historical mission, Saleem embodies the principle of creativity; Shiva, his dark alter ego, conversely, embodies the principle of destruction. Faithfulness to the historical and narrative logic requires the demise of Saleem's Gandhian idealism under the force of Shiva's knees and the caste and ethnic animosities of Indian reality. If Saleem represents the imagined pure principle of the nation and its essence, then Shiva is the unwanted otherness sullyng that purity. He is the carrier of dialogicity within Saleem's thought, which he complements with his own grim existence on the streets of Bombay. If Saleem experiences India through the relative wealth of his family and his high social status,

²⁶⁹ Patrick Colm Hogan sees them as personifications of two types of imagination: authoritarian, which seeks to subjugate the opponent, centralised, homogeneous, does not tolerate dissent and difference, and pluralistic, which seeks common ground, inclusive, democratic. (Colm Hogan, "*Midnight's Children: Kashmir and the Politics of Identity*," 512)

Shiva experiences that same India through poverty and the misfortunes it gives rise to: physical violence, begging, cruelty, and the inevitable lapse into crime. Very early on, Shiva loses the third principle Saleem naively propagated as the authentic ideological orientation of the midnight's children – childhood, and, with it, innocence, idealism, and optimism – and becomes the leader of children's gangs and then a perpetrator of more serious violent acts that turn out to be self-destructive – aimed against the midnight's children and, consequently, against himself, because he is one of them. In the constellation of the novel, Shiva's outlook on life turns out to be more substantiated, because the hope and optimism caused by the fateful midnight will progressively degrade into further divisions (into new states and language barriers) and violence (ethnic and religious wars). Thus, the otherness incarnated by Shiva in its dark and destructive aspect becomes an inseparable part of the self Saleem tries to construct and that, although welcoming heterogeneity and hybridity, remains impermeable and blind to some hardly acceptable facts, such as the ugly face of India, embodied by Shiva.

Since Saleem undertakes such a serious task as to contest the legitimacy of the entire political establishment and its historiographical apparatus, his artistic consciousness has to undergo a process of a gradual displacement and reduction of the scope of his identifications and the identity hybridity he insists on. Thus, although he initially assumes a hybrid identity by identifying with all the midnight's children, as his narrative progresses he narrows down this all-embracing hybridity to the duality and rivalry between himself and Shiva, who becomes his nemesis. Significantly, he subjects his rival to a process of narrative elision. In spite of the fact that his manuscript comes into being after the narrated events, which means that Saleem the narrator takes the omniscient and all-knowing position that Saleem the character could not and does not have, it is significant that he does not accord Shiva, whose familial, social and symbolical meaning he (by now knows he) has usurped, his due attention. Shiva functions as Saleem's foil, but he is invoked only sporadically and always to emphasise Saleem's superiority. Since Saleem aligns himself with the magical and poetical/artistic principle, Shiva, although a midnight child like Saleem and, like him, born on the stroke of the midnight of independence, is given a very non-magical and prosaic gift – an excessive capacity for violence – and therefore more naturally belongs with the political principle and the destructive capacities embodied by the Widow. After their simultaneous birth and swapping, Shiva is dismissed to the life of “accordions and poverty” envisaged by Mary Pereira, appears briefly as the only dissenting voice

at the Midnight's Children Conference, mocking Saleem's aspirations to equality and justice, and resurfaces as a feared and mighty soldier wreaking destruction, for which the conflict-ridden post-independence India provides him with ample opportunity.

The strong mythological overtones of Shiva's name testify to the larger symbolical and cultural perspective inherent in Saleem's search for personal and national meaning. In Hindu mythology, Shiva is one of the most important gods, who is sometimes a supreme deity, the Absolute itself (Brahman), and sometimes one of the three cosmic functions which, in the post-Vedic tradition, are attributed to the Hindu Triad, in which Shiva is the destroyer of that which was created by Brahma and preserved by Vishnu²⁷⁰ (Saleem in his role as preserver of memories resembles Vishnu). In addition to an embodiment of the principle of war and the warlike mythological characters of Rama, Arjuna and Bhima, Shiva is also a creative force in the novel, in line with the status of the mythological Shiva as a god of procreation. At the zenith of his popularity as a distinguished soldier, he fathers the new generation of children that will continue the life of the nation. Significantly, his is the only progeny of the midnight's children, as their collective sterilisation ensures that they are unable to reproduce – this, in turn, nullifies their miraculous capacities, which makes the midnight legacy a question of procreation/continuation rather than simply of political power or god-like veneration, to which the Widow aspires. It is this legacy that Saleem appropriates for himself by restructuring the familial configurations affiliatively in order to constitute himself as a child of the nation/history rather than of his biological or “adoptive” parents. By the same token, he will affirm his fatherhood regarding Aadam, Shiva and Parvati's biological son, thereby disturbing the exact parallelism between the mythological family Shiva-Parvati-Ganesh and the quasi-familial unit of Shiva-Parvati-Aadam in the novel, in which the son, Aadam, is equated with the elephant-god Ganesh on account of his long ears. Negating Shiva's fatherhood, he imposes himself as the progenitor (in an echo of the patriarchal/dynastic capacities of Aadam Aziz's long nose, which Saleem “inherits”) of the only child of the Emergency who is individualised and whose identity is known.

As a progenitor of the new generation of the children of India, Shiva manifests yet another aspect of his mythological namesake – as the first teacher of humankind, who “presented

²⁷⁰ George M. Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology* (Santa Barbara – California, Denver – Colorado, Oxford – England: ABC Clio, 2003), 267.

the wisdom of immortality to mortals.”²⁷¹ Since through his offspring he will ensure the continuity of the nation, Shiva bestows immortality upon India, thus negating the destructive project of the Widow. Paradoxically, it is Shiva, the Widow’s collaborator, who thwarts the annihilation of the legacy of the midnight children, while Saleem, their chronicler, is complicit in it. The irony of this situation is apparent to Saleem, who, in the midst of his despair in his cell in the Widow’s Hostel in Benares where the sterilisation has just taken place, emits a laugh, in a parodic echo of the liberating carnivalesque laughter of Rabelais:

I laughed because Shiva, destroyer of the midnight children, had also fulfilled the other role lurking in his name, the function of Shiva-lingam, of Shiva-the-procreator, so that at this very moment, in the boudoirs and hovels of the nation, a new generation of children, begotten by midnight’s darkest child, was being raised towards the future. Every Widow manages to forget something important. (*MC*, 615-6)

Shiva’s procreation, which is even mythologically reinforced, is contrasted with Saleem’s sexual impotence. Although he at first claims that Shiva is dead, later he retracts and leaves him alive and the possibility of his eventual reappearance open. Since Saleem lays a claim on both sonhood *vis-à-vis* India and fatherhood *vis-à-vis* Aadam, maintaining Shiva as an always impending, albeit threatening, presence on the margins of his narrative, hints at his subconscious desire to integrate the previously intolerable Otherness represented by Shiva. Thus, Saleem’s text posits not the antagonism, but the complementarity of the two midnight children, who are thereby conjoined into a composite subjectivity. Although he is supposed to prophesy about the future of the baby in Amina’s womb, in Shri Ramram Seth’s prophecy the two children are conjoined as if forming a single entity – there are two heads instead of one, “knees and a nose, a nose and knees” (*MC*, 114) – which is simultaneously also a composite, hybrid conception of India.²⁷² There is a poignant irony, both personal and historical, in this image of the protagonist and the antagonist, who is his alter ego, in which the narrative is controlled by the usurper of the rightful heir/possessor (Saleem doubly usurps Shiva’s position, first as a son and then as a

²⁷¹ Williams, 269.

²⁷² For Brennan, there is an essentially cultural and religious difference in the dichotomy between Saleem and Shiva: “His fight with Saleem is not only poor against rich, village wisdom against cosmopolitan snobbery, but East against West. ‘Shiva’ bears the mark of Hinduism; ‘Sinai’ (Saleem’s last name) the name of the Judeo-Christian covenant... Their dispute involves class, not as profession or place in production, but as cultural vision and as national style”. (Timothy Brennan. *Salman Rushdie*, 102-3)

father), while the dispossessed is relegated to a secondary, predominantly negative role and is never rehabilitated into his rightful place.²⁷³ Transposed onto the level of history, this image serves as a reminder of the thick layers of history contained within each one of us and of the numerous cultural, ideological and other discursive factors that have made us who we are and that constitute us as both causers and sufferers of various forms of injustice and violence. Saleem's ambivalent stance towards Shiva, whom he both exiles from and keeps on the margins of his narrative (and self), points to his coming to terms with his biological/ethnic and cultural legacy. Fathered by the colonialist Methwold and raised by the Muslim Sinais, he navigates through these (post)colonial and post-Mughal legacies in order to construct his identity as an Indian in independent India. His narrative is his purest act of agency whereby, chronicling the meaning of the midnight children, he makes amends for his sin and assumes responsibility for his complicity in the violence perpetrated against the powerless of his country – an act that demonstrates that he has overcome his subjection through free, and yet, responsible and never arbitrary, choice of his side in history.

Yet, Shiva is not only the other whose inferiority buttresses Saleem's superiority in terms of social standing, family background and character. Rather, he embodies a more radical Otherness that destabilizes Saleem's sense of self in more profound ways than the changeling motif would suggest. Thus, at one point, when Saleem muses about whose umbilical cord is preserved in the empty pickle-jar, Shiva becomes Saleem's Other – the capitalised orthography here hints that the rivalry between them is not simply familial, but has a wider national-political, ideological, and symbolical significance. For Saleem, Shiva is the abjected Other – rejected as alien to the self, but simultaneously an eternally haunting presence on the borders of the self, threatening its very being-ness.²⁷⁴ The abject arises when the repression of the unconscious material is incomplete: "The 'unconscious' contents remain here *excluded* but in strange fashion:

²⁷³ As we saw, this "injustice" of *Midnight's Children* is rectified in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, where Aadam (re-spelt Adam) has chosen not the idealistic path of his spiritual father Saleem, but the pragmatic path of his biological father Shiva.

²⁷⁴ As Kristeva defines it, abjection is "a process of jettisoning what seems to be part of oneself. The abject is what one spits out, rejects, almost violently excludes from oneself: sour milk, excrement, even a mother's engulfing embrace. What is abjected is radically excluded but never banished altogether. It hovers at the periphery of one's existence, constantly challenging one's own tenuous borders of selfhood. What makes something abject and not simply repressed is that it does not entirely disappear from consciousness. It remains as both an unconscious and a conscious threat to one's own clean and proper self. The abject is what does not respect boundaries. It beseeches and pulverises the subject." (Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* [New York and London: Routledge, 2004], 46)

not radically enough to allow for a secure differentiation between subject and object, and yet clearly enough for a defensive *position* to be established.”²⁷⁵

Since, as the truest children of the midnight of independence, they both carry the essence of the country in its purest form, the antagonism between them dramatises the conflict and co-existence between the opposed principles they embody: intellectualism/violence, spirit/body, idealism/pragmatism, hybridity/purity, inclusion/exclusion, etc. In spite of Saleem’s desire to elide Shiva’s importance, his text emphasises their complementarity. Prefiguring the conjoining of Gibreel and Saladin in *The Satanic Verses*, Saleem and Shiva together form one composite personality and an integral, albeit conflicted, image of India. Thus, each partakes of the defining traits of the other – Saleem partakes of Shiva’s propensity for violence when he becomes complicit in the destruction of the children, while Shiva partakes of Saleem’s textual creativity by fathering the new generation of children of the nation. The rivalry between them can also be seen as Rushdie’s exploration of two kinds of creation/aesthetics: by activating the mythological paradigm of Hinduism, Saleem becomes Brahma, the god who created the universe in the absence of Shiva, whose prerogative it was; bent on destroying the world created by another, Shiva is in the end appeased and castrates himself. As Brennan states, Brahma “is the god who *dreams* the world. Shiva, we learn, is the god who allows it to exist by declining to use his immeasurable power for destroying it.”²⁷⁶

This powerful blend of the destructive and the (pro)creative is the pledge that Shiva bequeathes to the nation and it is “in this context that the narrator pits textual production against biological procreation as a superior method of national formation, even as he portrays his own writing as phallic.”²⁷⁷ A victim, like all the other midnight children, of the Widow’s sterilisation programme, which extinguishes both their biological and miraculous potentials, Saleem foregrounds his narrative and himself as a narrator as a more authentic reflection and embodiment of the essence of the nation, superseding and superior to Shiva’s biologically procreative model of national formation. To this end, “Saleem equates his phallus with his pen through an act of substitution, in which his writing instrument supplants his penis. This emphasis

²⁷⁵ Julia Kristeva, quoted in Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity*, 80-1, emphasis original.

²⁷⁶ Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, 113.

²⁷⁷ Jean M. Kane, “The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History: Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*,” *Contemporary Literature* 37.1 (Spring, 1996): 97.

on his penis as impotent and his pen as compensatory structures Saleem's linguistic production after biological procreation, even as sex and writing come to denote competing activities."²⁷⁸

Although Saleem is the children's chronicler and spokesperson, he allows the significance of the midnight's children to be differently interpreted – “as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation” or “as the true hope of freedom, which is now forever extinguished” – but what they must never become is a meaningless invention, “the bizarre creation of a rambling, diseased mind” (MC, 277-8). That is why Saleem, all the while undermining his own narrative, must hold on to some modicum of narrative authority: validated as a mirror of the nation by Nehru's letter, he ousts any competition for this central position. As has been mentioned, the procreative potential of Shiva is rendered redundant as Saleem advances a narrative and spiritual nation-building model. Similarly, he resents the “apotheosis” of his childhood friend, Cyrus, who later on reinvents himself as India's most famous guru, an apotheosis which Saleem trivialises in his description of it as both elevated and mundane, toppling it from its spiritual heights to the lucrative bid for donations, complete with a postal address (MC, 373). If Cyrus is trivialised as a competitor, then Shiva's propensity for violence is, conversely, hyperbolised and given truly demonic proportions; as Saleem admits, he becomes, for him,

first a stabbing twinge of guilt; then an obsession; and finally, as the memory of his actuality grew dull, he became a sort of principle; he came to represent, in my mind, all the vengefulness and violence and simultaneous-love-and-hate-of-Things in the world; so that even now, when I hear of drowned bodies floating like balloons on the Hooghly and exploding when nudged by passing boats; or trains set on fire, or politicians killed, or riots in Orissa or Punjab, it seems to me that the hand of Shiva lies heavily over all these things, dooming us to flounder endlessly amid murder rape greed war – that Shiva, in short, has made us who we are. (MC, 415)

There is a dual principle at work in Shiva's characterisation that serves different purposes in Saleem's narration: on the one hand, elision and dismissal (whenever his early life is mentioned, it is always described as a life of “poverty and accordions”, he is “the rat-faced fellow”, a description indicating his base and asocial nature; his presence at the MCC is reluctantly and only barely tolerable to Saleem, who dislikes “the roughness of his tongue, the crudity of his

²⁷⁸ Kane, 112.

ideas” [MC, 314]), and hyperbolisation on the other (later on he becomes the supreme embodiment of the principle of violence and destruction – Saleem suspects him of every notable crime perpetrated in the country).

Each principle is a structural and ideological necessity of Saleem’s narrative. If he is to represent himself as the spiritual (because biologically impotent) essence of India, he has to accord Shiva a similar representative status in the area of biological procreation (indeed, Shiva is the progenitor of the new generation of children who will carry on the burden of independence; Saleem is careful to emphasise that Shiva has fathered innumerable children equally to high and low born women, in this way splitting the historical momentousness between the two of them). If he is to advance his authorial/artistic legacy as equally important and even superior to Shiva’s political agency, he has to minimise the latter’s effects. That is the role of Aadam, the son of Parvati and Shiva, who becomes *the* child of the Emergency and “simultaneously not-[his]-son and also more [his] heir than any child of [his] flesh could have been” (MC, 625-6). Appropriating Aadam for his national and artistic project, Saleem constructs a progressive line of personifications of India, starting with the emptiness and incompatibility of the modern and the traditional in the person of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, through his own excessive, hyperbolic and all-embracing nature by means of his identification with the midnight’s children, to the stable, moderate and historically-wise nature of Aadam Sinai. Thus, after the Emergency and the birth of the new generation, the excesses and the defamiliarisation of the independence Midnight are channelled into a state of balance, which has better prospects to survive and last. If Saleem represents the uncurbed optimism of a new personal/familial/national era, Aadam is the harbinger of experience, who is not fooled by dreams and fantasies and carefully measures reality:

We, the children of Independence, rushed wildly and too fast into our future; he, Emergency-born, will be is already more cautious, biding his time; but when he acts, he will be impossible to resist. Already, he is stronger, harder, more resolute than I: when he sleeps, his eyeballs are immobile beneath their lids. Aadam Sinai, child of knees-and-nose, does not (as far as I can tell) surrender to dreams. (MC, 594)

Through the character of Aadam Sinai, the son of Parvati and Shiva, who is not the real son of his father Saleem, but is the real great-grandson of his great-grandfather Aadam Aziz, the two

legacies that Saleem has been exploring in his narrative – the biological and the spiritual – are joined together and that is the positive note on which the novel ends. Through him also the author Saleem/Rushdie delivers his final judgement on the pretensions of the Widow/Indira Gandhi to become the soul of the nation: just as Shiva is the Sinais' biological son and Saleem their spiritual descendant, so the Widow/Indira Gandhi, although Nehru's daughter, is not the "real" descendant of Mahatma Gandhi, "the Great Soul" of India, in spite of the fact that in her strenuous efforts to install herself as the Indian essence, she consciously exploited this fortuitous sameness of their surname (Gandhi was her husband's surname). Saleem assumes the role of educating Aadam and such is his reliance on the superior importance of his spiritual parentage that, moulding the child's historical awareness through his narration, Saleem likens it to a birth – a birth into knowledge and, after the excesses of the midnight generation, into a careful assessment of historical reality and of one's place in it.

Empowered by the power of the pen, Saleem effectively writes Shiva out of his nation-building project, admitting that his only "out-and-out lie" throughout his narrative is the lie about Shiva's death.

Still and all, whatever anyone may think, lying doesn't come easily to Saleem, and I'm hanging my head in shame as I confess... Why, then, this single barefaced lie?... Padma, try and understand: I'm still terrified of him. There is unfinished business between us, and I spend my days quivering at the thought that the war hero might somehow have discovered the secret of his birth... and that, roused to wrath by the irrecoverable loss of his past, he might come looking for me to exact a stifling revenge... is that how it will end, with the life being crushed out of me by a pair of superhuman, merciless knees? That's why I fibbed, anyway; for the first time, I fell victim to the temptation of every autobiographer, to the illusion that since the past exists only in one's memories and the words which strive vainly to encapsulate them, it is possible to create past events simply by saying they occurred. (MC, 619)

The existential angst Saleem experiences regarding the meaning and purpose of his life is intimately related to Shiva, whose presence he perceives as threatening – not so much for his position in the Sinai family as in the national narrative, within that wider family to whose genealogical tree Saleem has so carefully grafted himself. As the text unfolds, it increasingly reveals that Saleem's claiming sonship *vis-à-vis* India and fatherhood *vis-à-vis* Adam (and the

new generation of the nation that he represents) are acts of usurpation motivated by his desire to belong and to establish continuity within the narrative of the nation. His self-perception as a synecdoche of India (he often refers to himself as an “all-India radio” because he can telepathically connect to the minds of his compatriots) and as the “true” father of Shiva and Parvati’s biological son, whom he insistently calls “my son,” are central to the identity he creates for himself. In both roles – as son of the nation and father of its new generation – Saleem functions as the Other, an alterity that seeks to be integrated within the identity of the nation (his colonialist biological parentage reinforces this). Also, to both roles Shiva can claim an equal and even greater right. Crucially, if Saleem appropriates Shiva’s biological child, then Shiva can appropriate Saleem’s textual one, which poses the question – whose is the text Saleem writes? Thus, the antagonism between Saleem and Shiva pivots around their claim on the authorial signature.

As Seán Burke argues, “the signature puts in place channels of accountability, responsibility and enquiry which attend to the specific concerns which haunted Plato’s vision of a graphic culture... The true Platonic nightmare would indeed be an anonymous discourse, a discourse genuinely orphaned, irresponsible and without any ethical trackback whatsoever.”²⁷⁹ As we saw in the “Introduction,” Plato’s condemnation of writing was motivated by the fact of the text’s ability to circulate among both suitable and unsuitable readers, to shed the protective and vigilant presence of its author and allow itself to be put to discursive and performative uses beyond what he envisioned, i.e. *authorised* for it. This severing of the relationship between a text and its author lies at the core of Saleem’s authorial anxiety, as it opens up the referentiality of the name Saleem Sinai: whom does it designate, the real child of Ahmed and Amina or the child they thought was theirs? Or, whom does Nehru’s letter confirm as the true son of India, whose life would be a mirror of the nation’s? There is an indicative moment in Saleem’s narrative, where, thinking about what is real, Saleem locates it not in reality but in Mary’s stories,

Mary my ayah who was both more and less than a mother; Mary who knew everything about all of us. True was a thing concealed just over the horizon towards which the fisherman's finger pointed in the picture on my wall, while the young Raleigh listened to

²⁷⁹ Seán Burke, *Authorship*, 290.

his tales.²⁸⁰ *Now, writing this in my Anglepoised pool of light, I measure truth against those early things: Is this how Mary would have told it? I ask. Is this what that fisherman would have said?"* (MC, 103, emphasis mine)

Juxtaposing his perception of truth with Mary's and the fisherman's, Saleem is plunged into a questioning of his own status as a writer: since truth resides in the stories we tell, then the inevitable question is, what would the story we are reading be like if the real Saleem Sinai, i.e. Shiva, had told it? In other words, how much of Saleem's truth, as revealed in his text, has been shaped by Mary's, whose act has made Saleem who he is, and the fisherman's, with his finger pointing towards Raleigh's destiny as a future explorer in the painting hanging on Saleem's bedroom wall? These questions concern Saleem's major preoccupation, namely how much of his subjectivity is inherent to his own being, i.e. would have remained the same if he had been the child destined for poverty, and how much has been shaped by his familial and social *milieu*, populated as it has been by Mary his ayah, a fisherman's finger pointing towards destiny, a letter from Nehru, a loving extended family and, most importantly, an intellectual background enabling his writing in the first place?

It is significant that Saleem measures his version of events against Mary's hypothetical one, for the obvious reason that she has known the truth about the children all along, but at the time of writing he knows as much as Mary, so his query is beside the point and misleading. The real question remaining unasked but implicitly lurking in Saleem's text is how Shiva would have narrated *his* story. The possessive pronoun, like the entire grammatical structure referring to Saleem, is ambiguous throughout and here it refers not so much to Shiva's version of events or point of view (of which we gain some insight through Saleem's comments), but to the more profound implications this ambiguity has for Saleem's text, namely how would have Shiva

²⁸⁰ Neil ten Kortenaar provides a detailed analysis of the significance of Millais' painting of the young Raleigh and another young boy listening to a fisherman's story. The painting functions as part of a triptych – representing the first panel, it stands for Europe, high art, and empire. In the central panel are the newspaper clipping announcing Saleem's birth, the letter from Nehru and a photo of baby Saleem, representing the Indian nation-state; the third panel is the window, representing the level of the local and of immediate experience. Read in a linear fashion, the narrative they tell is the decline of empire and the birth of the postcolonial nation; if the focus is on the central panel, national history is primary and the fisherman's finger is just one path leading to this centre. Saleem's position in the central panel, between the painting and the window, "is the hybrid location of the postcolonial writer, who stands between European text and local context, neither one nor the other but partaking of both." (ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text*, 178-9)

narrated his story – this story – if Saleem Sinai, the authorial signature of this text, had referred to him? Or, which of them is the Other in the familial, national and autobiographical identity the text explores? The answers to these questions remain unanswered and unanswerable, serving as points of dislocation for Saleem as an individual and as a writer.

Early on in the narrative, Saleem describes the growth of the foetus his mother is carrying in linguistic terms:

By the time the rains came at the end of June, the foetus was fully formed inside her womb. Knees and nose were present; and as many heads as would grow were already in position. What had been (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming, one might say, a book – perhaps an encyclopaedia – even a whole language ... which is to say that the lump in the middle of my mother grew so large... (MC, 133)

Equating body and language/text, Saleem represents his growth into a fully formed human being in terms evoking the creation and dissemination of meanings, but, as he reveals further on, this particular full stop in Amina's womb is, in fact, Shiva. However, the accumulation of words, sentences, paragraphs, etc. that Saleem implicitly alludes to is not the one created in his mother's body, but the one he himself creates: what ultimately matters is not the book or encyclopedia this, as yet, anonymous being will grow to be, but the one that Saleem writes into being. As Ambreen Hai points out,

Rushdie thus presents a central premise that undergirds his writing: that language, instead of being subsequent to, or a way to make sense of, physical experience in fact gives birth to our sense of reality; language constitutes – as it literally provides the terms for – our understanding of something as basic and apparently prelinguistic as embryonic selfhood, or the physical experience of our bodies.²⁸¹

By giving expression to his own sense of self in writing, Saleem recreates himself through language and, with or without this particular authorial signature, he is the subject of writing. Ultimately, it can be said that Saleem's identity is the story he tells and, irrespective of the name

²⁸¹ Ambreen Hai, *Making Words Matter: The Agency of Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006), 206.

that is attached to its author, it still undisputedly is the expression of the identity of the person to whom all the things narrated have happened.

b. Boabdil and the Sigh for a Lost World

Moraes structures his text as a family saga tracing a family unit in order to present it as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm that is the state. As has been said, his aim thereby is to position himself in the national narrative or a segment of it. However, Rushdie here widens the synchronous model established in *Midnight's Children*, whereby the authorial subject identifies with the nation at the present time of its history, and posits the diachronous axis as determining of the authorial subjectivity. Thus, national history gives way to a fictional meditation on History. The identity drama in this novel is realised by a symbolical exploration and re-imagining of the historical threads that have converged in Moraes's family tree (Portuguese Christian, Jewish and Moorish) and that, by dint of their convergences and divergences, encapsulate the entire modern history of the world. In order to find himself, Moraes is obliged to undertake a symbolical journey to his beginnings (in an echo of the descent into hell of classical heroes) and thereby find his purpose and authenticity as a person and an artist. His enactment of the figure of Boabdil, his ancestor and namesake, first in the artistic imagination of his mother and then by becoming his modern incarnation, is of crucial importance in the construction of his subjectivity.

The historical Boabdil was the last sultan of Granada, which he lost in January 1492 to the armies of the Spanish Reconquista led by the Catholic Kings, Fernando and Isabella,

giving up his principality without so much as a battle. He departed into exile with his mother and retainers, bringing to a close the centuries of Moorish Spain; and reining in his horse upon the Hill of Tears he turned to look for one last time upon his loss, upon the palace and the fertile plains and all the concluded glory of al-Andalus... at which sight the Sultan sighed, and hotly wept – whereupon his mother, the terrifying Ayxa the Virtuous, sneered at his grief. Having been forced to genuflect before an omnipotent queen, Boabdil was now obliged to suffer a further humiliation at the hands of an impotent (but formidable) dowager. *Well may you weep like a woman for what you could not defend like a man*, she taunted him: meaning of course the opposite. Meaning that she despised this blubbing male, her son, for yielding up what she would have fought for to the death,

given the chance. She was Queen Isabella's equal and opposite; it was *reina* Isabel's good fortune to have come up against the mere cry-baby, Boabdil... (MLS, 80)

On a personal level, Boabdil's fate suggests the loss of the idea of home (as Moraes mentions later on, he was given an estate by the Catholic Kings and lost it to an unfaithful courtier and eventually died in battle, a mere soldier to another kingling), a humiliating defeat revealing an ordinary man's frailties rather than a hero who is either victorious or, if defeated, is immortalised in legends praising his greatness (a fate his mother imaginatively claims as her own), and a brutal deprivation of the most defining moorings of his identity: his masculinity, his exalted position of a ruler, his status as a son, his place in history. On a historical level, the fall of Granada meant the end of the tolerant and hybrid culture of al-Andalus, thrown into even sharper focus by the subsequent horrors of the expulsion of the Spanish Jewry and the discovery and genocidal colonisation, first of the New World and then of the Old.²⁸²

The Boabdil association as an option for imaginative identification is implanted in the circle of his family by an outsider²⁸³ – it is Vasco Miranda who paints the first painting entitled

²⁸² This novel is complementary to *Midnight's Children* because it explores India's oscillation between hybrid inclusivity (manifested in the country's ethnic, linguistic, cultural and caste make-up) and nationalist exclusivity (the rise of Hindu fundamentalism), but diverges from it in that it widens its historical scope by becoming a commentary on History in general. A crucial leitmotif is the Spain of 1492, a year which spelt the fall of al-Andalus (along with the end of the culture of tolerance in this Islamic society, often compared to that of the Mughals in India) and the discovery of America by Columbus on behalf of the Catholic Kings (in this novel, Rushdie even places him in the ranks of their retinue, witnessing Boabdil's handing over the keys of Granada to Ferdinand and Isabella). At this particular moment in history, Spain joins the Old and the New Worlds, initiating the modern aggressive imperialist era, which is, in fact, the reason for the character's location: Moraes's ancestors ended up in India as refugees of the Catholic Kings' policies or in search of spices, enabled by the geographic discoveries of the period, realised in large part by the Portuguese, among whom were Prince Henry "the Navigator", Vasco da Gama (both referred to in the novel), Bartholomeu Dias, Ferdinand Magellan, etc. There is also the Jewish thread, with Jewish communities settling in India both in ancient times and post-*Reconquista*. In this way, Rushdie foregrounds his preoccupation with minority and other groups that have faced expulsion and other historical injustices. However, this should not lead to the conclusion that *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a tragic novel that consistently and profoundly reflects the tragic fate of the, to use Frantz Fanon's phrase, "wretched of the earth": the narrator-protagonist belongs to the élite spice-merchant class and his tragic fall is brought on by a banal misunderstanding caused by his obsession with a woman with a suspicious past and intentions.

²⁸³ Upon the discovery of his famous ancestry and the onset of asthma to mirror his ancestor's famous sigh, Abraham Zogoiby literally identifies with Boabdil, feeling his pain as his own: "*These wheezing sighs not only mine, but his. These eyes hot with his ancient grief. Boabdil, I too am thy mother's son. Was weeping such a weakness? he wondered. Was defending-to-the-death such a strength?*" (MLS, 80).

The Moor's Last Sigh, “an equestrian portrait of the artist [himself] in Arab attire... weeping on a white horse” (*MLS*, 159).²⁸⁴ Initially, therefore, even this most defining characteristic of Moraes’s subjectivity is external and inauthentic – it will stop being that only when he has cast aside all superficial and false influences on his personality. Rushdie explores Moraes’s growth as an artist and search for authenticity through the repositioning of the most important identity-forming familial bond: that with his mother, the illustrious artist Aurora Zogoiby.

In a narrative strategy reminiscent of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie pits the possibilities of the artistic against the limitations of the biological. Not capable of giving her children the natural motherly love and care, Aurora nourishes what might be called “an artistic motherhood,” which is exclusively centred on her son Moraes (her three daughters are an irrelevant presence in the family life, as evidenced by their shortened and mangled names). Even after the disrupted mother-son relation occasioned by the forcefully induced shadow of incest, she will continue developing it through her paintings into a whole new dimension, transcending the dominant mother-son image of the novel.²⁸⁵

The “Moor sequence” is Aurora’s most famous series of paintings, its central piece being the unfinished *The Moor's Last Sigh*. It is divided into three periods: the “early” pictures,

However, this does not influence Moraes’s imagination directly and remains a private experience of his father’s, being recorded much later, at the end of Moraes’s life.

²⁸⁴ The full name of the painting is *The Artist as Boabdil, the Unlucky (el-Zogoiby), Last Sultan of Granada, Seen Departing from the Alhambra, or The Moor's Last Sigh*.” Vasco Miranda’s inspiration for the painting is probably the conquest of his native Goa by the Indian army after 451 years of Portuguese colonial rule, repeating the, by now, established associations of the Boabdil motif with sadness, loss and powerlessness to divert the flow of History. Significantly, the painting is a palimpsest – it is painted over an image of Aurora Zogoiby, not captured in the glory of her motherhood, as her husband had commissioned, but eroticised: “sitting cross-legged on a giant lizard under her chhatri, her full left breast, weighty with motherhood, exposed” (*MLS*, 158). The replacement of the erotic with the political, i.e. of the disengaged with the engaged, is a crucial trajectory in the novel’s conception of art and the artist. Through the similarities and contrasts of the artistic figures Aurora/Vasco, Aurora/Uma, Uma/Vasco (they are both “self-inventors,” shedding their past to create their present) and, in the end, Moraes himself, Rushdie explores the role of art and the purpose of the artist in the modern world.

²⁸⁵ The novel presents a series of weak sons and powerful mothers: Boabdil-Ayxa, Abraham-Flory, Camoens/Aires-Epifania, and finally Moraes-Aurora, depicting the female principle as exerting a certain power over the masculine (personified by the son), but only at the expense of the constraints placed upon them by a patriarchal society and/or history: Ayxa mocks and derides Boabdil because, had she been given the historical chance, she would have attained a heroic rather than a cowardly status; both Flory and Epifania curse Abraham and Aurora respectively but both revert to this most feminine and despised practice only after they have been disempowered by their husbands, both of whom leave, never to return; Aurora disinherits Moraes, but in spite of her bohemian and libertarian life, dies at her husband’s hand, disgraced as an artist and nullified as a mother.

covering Moraes's early years; the "great" or "high" years, which saw the creation of "glowing, profound works;" and the "dark Moors," "pictures of exile and terror" created after Moraes's exile, which include "her last, unfinished, unsigned masterpiece, *The Moor's Last Sigh*" (MLS, 218). While being the subject of the paintings, i.e. an object of contemplation, Moraes is conscious of there being a dialogue between himself and the painter/his mother, i.e. that the observation works both ways:

As I set down my memories of my part in those paintings, I am naturally conscious that those who submit themselves as the models upon whom a work of art is made can offer, at best, a subjective, often wounded, sometimes spiteful, wrong-side-of-the-canvas version of the finished work. What then can the humble clay usefully say about the hands that moulded it? Perhaps simply this: that *I was there*. And that during the years of sittings I made a kind of portrait of her, too. She was looking at me, and I was looking right back. (MLS, 219)

Sensing that his condition made him special to his mother (who never allowed it to be called an illness), Moraes announces himself as a presence in her art; moreover, the act of creation enables her to make him think of himself "as someone special, someone with a meaning, a supernatural Entity who did not truly belong to this place, this moment, but whose presence here defined the lives of those around him, and of the age in which they lived" (MLS, 220). Moraes surmises that "she was trying to will my half-life into wholeness, by the power of mother-love". The first phase of the series has a religious connotation – they resemble "a godless madonna and a child", with Moraes's stunted hand as "a glowing light, the only light-source in the picture" – this is an attempt on Aurora's part, as Moraes puts it, "to transcend and redeem [the world's] imperfections through art" (MLS, 220). This is the golden age, the prelapsarian existence of Moraes's life: "I would say that my joy in life was born in our collaboration, in the intimacy of those private hours, when she talked of everything under the sun, absently, as if I were her confessor, and I learned the secrets of her heart as well as her mind" (MLS, 221).

In the "early" Moors, his hand is "transformed into a series of miracles" (MLS, 224) and they are charged with eroticism, as in the one in which Aurora is the dead Desdemona and Moraes is Othello, "falling towards her in suicidal remorse as I breathed my last" (MLS, 225). The motif of lastness in this painting is an introduction to the "re-imagining of the old Boabdil story – "not Authorised Version but Aurorised Version," as she told me – in a local setting, with

me playing a sort of Bombay remix of the last of the Nasrids” (*MLS*, 225). This point marks the beginning of the artistic appropriation of the Moorish Andalusian context in Aurora’s vision of her relationship with her son and of modern India. Significantly, around this time she has a dream (which turns out not to be prophetic, quite the opposite in fact) in which she is offered the chance of sacrificing her son in return for her safety, but refuses the offer – the Abrahamic temptation at this point in their lives makes her an exemplary mother, “a godless madonna” (*MLS*, 220), elevating the maternal principle to the level of a religion without a divinity.

In her Hispanicised version of modern India, she blends the two cultures in what she calls “Mooristan” or “Palimpsestine,” interweaving the layers of history as she would superimpose the character of Boabdil over that of her son, for the incidental renaming of Moraes as Moor (his first cry as a baby was “moo”) becomes a foray into the transcendental in art, a symbolic exploration of Moraes’s identity in which his subjectivity partakes of the universal cultural legacy. Initially, his is a golden age of serenity and stability, in which people of all races and religions are honoured guests of the sultan’s banquets and the conquering armies of the carriers of repression and exclusion, the Catholic Kings, are barely visible. In such a vision, even the sultan himself, the centre of power, appears as a “masked, particoloured harlequin, a patchwork quilt of a man” (*MLS*, 227), an embodiment of the hybridity of his surroundings. Progressively, as “the Moor pictures moved further down this fabulist road, it became plain that I barely needed to pose for my mother any more; ... the story unfolding on her canvas seemed more like my autobiography that the real story of my life (*MLS*, 227). Moraes’s text, as a work of art itself, repeatedly stresses the interdependence and interpenetration of his real life with that of his mother’s art, inspired for the most part by the historical character of Boabdil and the inclusive cultural ethos of Moorish Spain, which resembles, at least in Aurora’s artistic vision, that of modern, hybrid India.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ Later, with the appearance of Uma in Moraes’s life, she appears as the Chimène character from the *El Cid* epic. In the painting *Mother-Naked Moor Watches Chimène’s Arrival*, Ayxa-Aurora holds a mirror to her naked son – not the Boabdil-inflected representation of Moraes this time, but he himself, who is captured by the beautiful beloved. Significantly, he does not look at himself, in his naked, pure being, even though his mother is trying to show him who he really is, but at the beloved, which in the symbolism of the painting, indicates the loss of himself in love. At this point, Moraes does not recognise the truth revealed in his mother’s painting and feels that art is not – cannot – equal life and that what “might feel truthful to the artist... did not necessarily bear the slightest connection to events and feelings and people in the real world” (*MLS*, 247). Later, becoming an artist in his own right, Moraes will assert the contrary,

If in the “early” Moors the idea of the identification of Moraes with Boabdil sits well with that of Mooristan (the hybrid and inclusive India Aurora envisions) as a veritable palimpsest – “Palimpstine,” the “mature” Moors mark a different tone and hint at an impending danger from an external power, perceived as menacing and intolerant. This new period is inaugurated with the entry of Uma in Moraes’s life and the paintings acquire a darker and contrast-inflected tone, foregoing the multicoloured exuberance of the earlier period for a predominantly black-and-white vision. The Moor in these paintings is an abstract figure, painted black and white, still demonstrating the possibility of the union of opposites. Both mother and beloved are a part of him, the former black and the latter white, but they pull him in opposite directions, hinting at the untenability of the hybrid self. Significantly, the armies of the *Reconquista* are amassing on the horizon, a sign that the culture of tolerance is under threat. A treacherous figure, wrapped in the hooded black cloak of the mistress of the palace (Ayxa/Aurora) gives the palace key to the besieging armies, but when she reaches them she reveals herself to be white (Uma), like them, and “her whiteness faded into theirs. The palace fell” (*MLS*, 259).

The entry of Uma in Moraes’s life and in the personal-national identitary vision of Aurora is equated with the appearance of the conquering armies of Ferdinand and Isabella before the gates of Granada. This also coincides with the rise of Fielding’s Mumbai Axis and the gradual diminishing of Aurora’s reputation, as she is no longer considered an Indian, but a member of a minority. Soon afterwards, Aurora becomes an irrelevance in India’s cultural circles, whereas Uma becomes the new star of Indian art. Her protean capacity of taking on different personalities according to the necessity of the moment indicates an absence of “a clear sense of an ‘authentic’ identity that was independent of these performances and this existential confusion had begun to spread beyond the borders of her own self and to infect, like a disease, all those with whom she came into contact” (*MLS*, 266), including Moraes himself. Her ascendancy in both Moraes’s and the nation’s affections represents the defeat of the personal and artistic authenticity embraced by Aurora by the inauthenticity of Uma’s nationalist art and loss of self, of the many by the one, of inclusive and pluralist hybridity by exclusive nationalism. Although she is described as “pluralist,” with “multiple selves,”²⁸⁷ hers is a forced and unnatural multiplicity

will claim veracity and authenticity through his writing, all the while insisting on the narrative aspect of life itself.

²⁸⁷ Her inauthentic selfhood will preclude her happy union with Moraes – she does not share his vision of love as “the blending of spirits, as *mélange*, as the triumph of the impure, mongrel, conjoining best of us

that violates the real in order to make it fit her conception of the imagined. In this way, she foreshadows the equally inauthentic recreation of medieval Granada by Vasco Miranda; her “inventive commitment to the infinite malleability of the real, her modernistically provisional sense of truth” (*MLS*, 272) suggests not the ability to include alterity in a heightened and more authentic sense of selfhood but a dangerous manipulation with people and ideas springing from a complete absence of an ethical core which does not amount to anything creative or progressive. In the end, she can offer only cheap theatrics (even the manner of her self-inflicted death is bizarrely melodramatic) and nothing of the sustained and profound philosophy of self and nation that stimulates Aurora’s series of paintings. The sculpture that marks her rise as the new artistic star of India, entitled *Alterations in/Reclamations of the Essence of Motherhood in the Post-Secularist Epoch*, is a “group of seven roughly spherical, metre-high stone pieces with a small hollow scooped out at the top and filled with richly coloured powders – scarlet, ultramarine, saffron, emerald, purple, orange, gold” (*MLS*, 261). As opposed to Aurora’s hybrid art, Uma’s seeks to reclaim an essence and fills the scooped out centre of the stone pieces with, granted, different colours, but which are nevertheless contained and recognizable as “essence.” “Uma’s sculpture also purports to convey ‘being,’ but in a purified, unitary, and essentialist form.”²⁸⁸ Uma is represented as clinging to the motherhood of India and therefore of Indianness, which, in her case, equals Hinduness, and as such is a foil to Aurora, who repudiates the ideal of Bharat Mata and models herself as its opposite – an urban, non-nurturing, negligent and cruel mother.

over what there is in us of the solitary, the isolated, the austere, the dogmatic, the pure; of love as democracy, as the victory of the no-man-is-an-island, two’s-company Many over the clean, mean, apartheidising Ones. I tried to see lovelessness as arrogance, for who but the loveless could believe themselves complete, all-seeing, all-wise? To love is to lose omnipotence and omniscience. Ignorantly is how we all fall in love; for it is a kind of fall. Closing our eyes, we leap from that cliff in hope of a soft landing. Nor is it always soft; but still, I told myself, still, without that leap nobody comes to life. The leap itself is a birth, even when it ends in death, in a scramble for white tablets, and the scent of bitter almonds on your beloved’s breathless mouth” (*MLS*, 289-90). There is also the underlying suggestion that she is demonised by both Aurora and Moraes because she remains an unfathomable mystery, impervious to the lover’s and the artist’s gaze.

²⁸⁸ Dohra Ahmad, “*This fundo stuff...*,” 7. Ahmad further elaborates on this difference between the two artists as proceeding from the opposition Moraes establishes in the very same paragraph: Uma’s likening of Moraes’s words to “theses” relates her to the category of “pure, transcendent truths,” which “reappears throughout the book in the guise of various constructs from founding myths of nations and religions, to the Word as brought by the Prophet, in the Judeo-Christian *milieu* of the book, to the figure of Ram in the overlaid Hindu *milieu*.” Aurora’s countering with “feces” relates her to the opposing category of “stories told and retold, filtered through the human body like a breath or a sigh,” which reappears as “paintings painted over, as evolving nations and subjects, and as a polytheistic universe.”

The last phase of Aurora's Moor series, the "dark Moors" or the "Moor in exile" sequence, still contains the "unifying narrator/narrated figure of the Moor," "but was increasingly characterised as jetsam, and located in an environment of broken and discarded objects, many of which were 'found' items, pieces of crates or vanaspati tins that were fixed to the surface of the work and painted over" (*MLS*, 301). In a transitional diptych, Uma/Chimène is a corpse, "blue and bloated, denied beauty and dignity, reduced to the status of junk" (*MLS*, 302). In this dark vision, everything is a collage made of pieces of the city's detritus, suggesting an unnatural combination of cheap materials; the people's lives become "composite, as patched-up as their homes, made of pieces of petty thievery, shards of prostitution and fragments of beggary" and even the people themselves are collages made of rubbish and of what the metropolis does not value. In this grotesque world of inauthentic, soulless, patched-up people, the Moor-figure is

alone now, motherless, he sank into immorality, and was shown as a creature of shadows, degraded in tableaux of debauchery and crime. He appeared to lose, in these last pictures, his previous metaphorical role as a unifier of opposites, a standard-bearer of pluralism, ceasing to stand as a symbol – however approximate – of the new nation, and being transformed, instead, into a semi-allegorical figure of decay. Aurora had apparently decided that the ideas of impurity, cultural admixture and melange which had been, for most of her creative life, the closest things she had found to a notion of the Good, were in fact capable of distortion, and contained a potential for darkness as well as for light. This "black Moor" was a new imagining of the idea of the hybrid – a Baudelairean flower, it would not be too farfetched to suggest, of evil... And of weakness: for he became a haunted figure, fluttered about by phantoms of his past which tormented him though he cowered and bid them begone. Then slowly he grew phantom-like himself, became a Ghost That Walked, and sank into abstraction, was robbed of his lozenges and jewels and the last vestiges of his glory; obliged to become a soldier in some petty warlord's army (here Aurora – interestingly enough – for once stayed close to the historically established facts about Sultan Boabdil), reduced to mercenary status where once he had been a king, he rapidly became a composite being as pitiful and anonymous as those amongst whom he moved. Garbage piled up, and buried him. (*MLS*, 303)

In these collage-paintings, Moor is a composite figure of different materials (no longer the positive union of opposites creating a healthy hybrid being), the origin and nature of which degrades this purposeless mélange to the status of junk, devoid of any spiritual and meaningful content. He is part-junk part-ghost, i.e. a combination of useless, discarded material and an eerie,

not-quite-living being, defined by lack, suggesting the loss of his self and meaning. Historically, this is the period of the decline and “ordinarisation” of Boabdil – post-*Reconquista*, he becomes an anonymous nobody and disappears from history, just as Moraes, in his new life of violence and being-one-of-many, for the first time finds normalcy and ordinariness, paradoxically while he is to all intents and purposes dead to his family, i.e. has disappeared from his own history. This period ends with the complete annihilation of all the moorings of Moraes’s identity in the apocalyptic explosions that “atomise” his entire world and the people who inhabited it. From this point onwards, with his “reality” destroyed, the imaginative gains ascendancy and, with it, the resumed dialogue with his mother’s art, which contains both a prophecy and the sublimation of his identification with Boabdil, which takes place in a fake Granada recreated by Vasco Miranda in the Andalusian village of Benengeli.

By following the thread of his mother’s art all the way to Andalucía, the historical roots of the Boabdil legend and of his own family, Moraes consummates his identity search by a return to a historical past which paradoxically contains his future life and destiny. This cyclical search poses and resolves the crucial question of the authenticity of being: both Vasco and Moraes identify with Boabdil, but Rushdie draws a sharp distinction between them. Vasco reclaims Boabdil as his own original artistic creation by stealing the two paintings entitled *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, one of which is his and the other Aurora’s, recreating the Alhambra by moulding his home in Benengeli after it and acquiring the appearance and behavior of its ruler. There is even an attempt on his part to make his small kingdom multicultural and inclusive like Boabdil’s by hiring as housekeepers two half-sisters of mixed origins (Spanish-Arab-Jewish). However, his identification is inauthentic: Boabdil’s tragic fate and the cultural ethos of his rule represent an unassimilated and unassimilable alterity for Miranda, remaining at the level of a façade/appearance. His is a failed hybridity, like that of Uma and Adam: the three of them are hollow chameleons who appropriate what is on offer but do not succeed in balancing or unifying the disparate elements of which their subjectivity partakes. The result is always negative and destructive: irrationality (Uma), criminality (Adam), madness/despotism (Vasco). In the case of Aurora and Moraes, Rushdie represents a model of an authentic artistic and subjective hybridity. Their artistic hybridity is evident in the rich artistic legacy they leave behind: Aurora’s art, which is distributed across museums and private collections, and Moraes’s manuscript, pinned up throughout the Andalusian landscape. Their subjective hybridity is attained with the repetition of

the “last sigh” episode of the Boabdil legend at the exact moment when Aurora’s palimpsest painting is finally revealed by the Japanese restorer Aoi Uë. Then, a demented Miranda dares Moraes to fight for Aoi’s life, but the latter, in spite of the affection he has for her, chooses not to: in an intricate interweaving of history, art and life, Aoi, running around to save her life, at one point assumes the same position as Aurora in the painting standing in front of her and becomes her, Vasco fires and kills her, her blood dripping through Aurora’s painted chest. Vasco says to the cowardly Moraes the same words Boabdil’s mother used at his moment of cowardliness, “*Well may you weep like a woman for what you could not defend like a man,*” and then the needle circling his body finally bursts his heart and he dies. There is no revelation from the paintings that would give a final meaning to Moraes’s life:

When he died he lay upon his portrait of my mother, and the last of his lifeblood darkened the canvas. She, too, had gone beyond recall, and she never spoke to me, never made confession, never gave me back what I needed, the certainty of her love. (*MLS*, 432)

On the one hand, it can be argued that even at the moment when he consummates his identification with Boabdil and his mother’s vision of him, he finds only lack and defeat: the Moor’s tragedy – “the tragedy of multiplicity destroyed by singularity, the defeat of Many by One,” that “had been the sequence’s uniting principle” (*MLS*, 408) – is also Moraes’s, because the philosophy of hybridity promoted by his mother as a guiding principle both in art and life is negated by the full-scale destruction engulfing Moraes’s life. The ending of the novel is under the sign of “lastness”: the destruction of his mother’s last paintings, his being the last of his family, and his (probably) last days of life complement Boabdil’s last sigh and the expiration of his world. However, the imagery of this painting, her last, is telling: in it,

she gave the Moor back his humanity. This was no abstract harlequin, no junkyard collage. It was a portrait of her son, lost in limbo like a wandering shade: a portrait of a soul in Hell. And behind him, his mother, no longer in a separate panel, but re-united with the tormented Sultan. Not berating him – *well may you weep like a woman* – but looking frightened and stretching out her hand. This, too, was an apology that came too late, an act of forgiveness from which I could no longer profit. I had lost her, and the picture only intensified the pain of the loss. (*MLS*, 315-6)

After the fragmented and historicised selfhood of her son during the early phases of her oeuvre, in the end Aurora paints simply a “portrait of her son,” a tormented soul over whom she watches

protectively, as a mother should. In this final vision, there is no room for the words of scornful derision, “*Well may you weep like a woman.*” Although Vasco uses them to mock Moraes’s cowardliness, within the context of the historical parallelism they must fall flat because they are not his to utter; they belong to the mother, Ayxa/Aurora, who on this occasion chooses not to say them. Interpreting this as an act of forgiveness from beyond the grave, through the language of art, Moraes undertakes to continue her work. The only purpose he has in life is to complete their joint artistic message – “As for me, I went back to my table, and wrote my story’s end” (*MLS*, 432).

Writing the Self

Having analysed two forms of a hybrid identity in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, namely Saleem’s and Moraes’s identifications with a collective (national/urban and historical) ideal and with a double, in this sub-chapter I shift the focus onto the internal split of the writing self that takes place in the act of writing.

Keith Wilson states that “t]he image of the writer as both master and victim of public and private material, which he has been formed by in the past and is himself attempting to form in the present, dominates *Midnight’s Children*.”²⁸⁹ Since Saleem’s and Moraes’s are autobiographical narratives, this duality in the narrator-protagonist’s identity corresponds to the paradox that dominates such writing, namely the split

between the “subject of the enunciation” and the “subject of the enounced”: “I” does not talk about or correspond to “I”: rather, “I” talks about “me.” Inscribed, thus, in the formal structures of utterance is the “enunciatory abyss” that Barthes is intent on opening up, where the “I” that speaks constitutes an enunciatory subjectivity and the “me” that is absent constitutes the “subject of the enounced.”²⁹⁰

Thus, there is a gap between the writing subject (the subject of the *discours*) and the subject written about (the subject of the *récit*): the former is absent, approaches the latter from a

²⁸⁹ Keith Wilson, “*Midnight’s Children* and Reader Responsibility,” in *Reading Rushdie*, ed. Fletcher, 56.

²⁹⁰ Smith, *Discerning the Subject*, 105.

temporal, geographical and epistemic distance, and, crucially, imposes structure and meaning upon the text retrospectively – from and at the moment of writing. Put differently, the biographical subject is unassimilable to the artistic one (i.e. the self is irreducible to language) – “indeed, in extreme cases, the act of authorship can present itself as self-deflection or indeed as the creation of an aesthetic identity which seeks to transcend or negate the biographical subject.”²⁹¹ Hence, the possibilities that the text opens up for the multiple expression of authorial identity, whose development and meaning are revealed in the unfolding of the narrative: the development of the “I” that is written about over time and of the writing “I” in the process of writing. In his autobiographical texts, Barthes posits a speaking subject that does not possess the traditional autobiographical unproblematic knowledge about the self and cohesion of the writing subject guaranteed by the writing signature; moreover, language is not merely a tool expressing or reflecting knowledge about self and world. On the contrary, he conceives of the writing subject as an effect of language, inscribed into “a mobile and continual process of knowledge and its inscription. This process is accretive or ever expanding and, thus, open to the inscription of a changing history of the subject/individual.”²⁹² As we saw in the preceding section of this chapter, the autobiographical subjects of *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* are not coherent and unified individuals; rather, in writing their texts they inscribe their varied fictive selves. Caught in various processes of identifications, they are locked in a ceaseless engagement with “the discourse of the Other,” which precludes a stable positioning of their identity.²⁹³

²⁹¹ Burke, *Authorship*, 303.

²⁹² Smith, *Discerning the Subject*, 104.

²⁹³ Ultimately, due to the non-coincidence of the two aspects of the authorial self – the subject writing and the subject written about – with the one always escaping the other, both Saleem and Moraes are incapable of ending their stories with a proper closure – Saleem waits for a disintegration that never comes and that is negated by his impending wedding to Padma and their return to Kashmir, connoting paradise, while Moraes awaits death but hopes for a resurrection. Thus, both authors neutralise the finality of death with a hoped-for spiritual, if not bodily, regeneration. Providing closure would mean closing the processuality of their constant becoming and the atrophying of the historical processes they navigate through; instead, they end their texts with the expectation of an almost Christ-like resurrection; such endings confirm and perpetuate the ongoing quest of the subject for the historical and ideological parentage whose sons they consider themselves to be. This, in turn, positions them, through their texts, to claim textual and ideological fatherhood in relation to the future they envision for the collective entities of India or Bombay and the hybrid ideals that are inextricably entwined in their subjectivities.

Since the very act of writing is encoded in the vocabulary of death and disintegration that defines the corporeal writing body, the text’s open-endedness is a refusal to give in to finality. In the context of the specific *Bildung* Saleem and Moraes create as national, historical and authorial entities, the moment in which the act of writing takes place gains a symbolical importance. Thus, Saleem finishes his text on the eve of his thirty-first birthday (which, we mustn’t forget, is also India’s birthday), after the annihilation of

However, any autobiographical writing connotes self-referentiality and a conscious engagement with the writing self's interiority. By seeking their personal and artistic meaning in identification with specific forms of collectivity – the Indian nation in Saleem's case and the hybrid ideal of Bombay and al-Andalus in Moraes's – both authors resist the centrifugal pull of these external alterities in relation to which they construct their sense of self by a centripetal inward turn, plunging themselves into an examination of their interiority. As Katerina Kolozova writes,

The autoreferential stance is always already translating itself into an autoreflexive one. We are speaking of an auto-affirmative process of self-preservation striving towards – and inevitably resulting into – precisely the continuity of that particular “auto-.” This ceaseless duration of self-preserving labour takes the figure of curving of the Self into itself, similar to the Nietzschean idea of the Self's will that turns upon and against itself as the origin and perpetual act of auto-reflexivity and, hence, subjectivity.

And this is a state of insurmountable, radical solitude. The question whether it is prior to the “entrance on the scene” of the Other, posterior or contemporaneous to it is, in fact, irrelevant. Relative or viewed as denuded of any relation, there is an instance of radical solitude in the Self, involved in the auto-generating and auto-reflexive processes of subject production. In other words, behind, beneath, next to ... the mobility of the multiple and transformable Subject, the hard labour of self-preserving continuity is taking place, creating a state which is irrevocably solitary one.

This is a self-enclosed reality of mere labour at a point where the organic and the sense of Selfhood merge into one another, a denuded effort of self-preservation which is ultimately elusive to the authority of Language – the instance of the unsurpassable “imprisonment” in one's own Self. This instance is the Real of the “I” that is unmediated through the Other and through Language. This irrevocably *solitary* instance is the Limit itself to mediation through and relatedness to the Other, the limit to the reach of Language.²⁹⁴

the midnight children and in the dark years of the Emergency, while Moraes writes at the age of thirty-six (although physically he is seventy-two), after the almost total destruction of his beloved Bombay and the failure of the project to revive the tolerant ethos of al-Andalus. By ending their texts at this symbolically charged age, which marks the individual's entry into maturity and into the “social contract” of marriage, with intimations of impending death or disintegration, they almost willingly preclude the possibility of creating biological offspring, foregrounding the textual one, in which they see their true legacy. Thus, it is their texts that, in the absence of their “fathers,” will carry on the latter's spiritual and ideological legacy, as a pledge for or a testament to the ideals they embrace.

²⁹⁴ Katerina Kolozova, *Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 50.

This long quote foregrounds crucial aspects of Saleem's and Moraes's narratives – the self-reflexivity of their autobiographies as an act of self-affirmation, their writing an instance of “self-preserving labour” unfolding in “a state of insurmountable, radical solitude,”²⁹⁵ irrespective of all the Others *vis-à-vis* each of them constructs his subjectivity. This interior self-preservation of the autobiographical subject does not impart cohesion or an unproblematic referentiality to the authorial signature, however, and in Rushdie's novels this supposed coherence of the writing subject is diffused by that self's (will to) dissolution into, on the one hand, collective identities (such as the midnight's children/India and the tolerant ethos of al-Andalus) or projected doubles (such as Shiva and Boabdil), and, on the other, of an acute awareness of an Otherness within. This Otherness within the authorial subject unfolds into a reformulation of the self in the act of writing, which is in line with Barthes' conception of writing

as not some expression of pre-signified or determined instances in a life, but rather the process of language's constructing a momentary subjectivity *for* the human agent who always, by contestatory and resistant use and reception of language, emerges as the place where contradictory discourses are marked... There is no referent to be *historised* (if I may refloat an archaic verb which means to relate as history, to narrate), but there is a continual process of *historicisation*, the ever renewable representation of instances of subjectivity and situation across time.²⁹⁶

Although he conceives of literature as an imitation, mimesis, Plato recognises an Otherness within the poet/writer that generates the text – whether it is the Muse/the irrational, language, God, the implied narrator or the reader, there is an “Other” element within authorship that activates the inexhaustible semiosis of the text, enabling the never-ending inscription of the narrative selves. This “Other” element is activated by Rushdie's autobiographical subjects in several ways: by the unstable anthroponymy (naming); by problematising the differentiation between author (writing subject) and subject (subject written about), which is evident in the pronominal shifts that both Saleem and Moraes use in order to signal an empathetic distance or

²⁹⁵ Although both have interlocutors in Padma and Aoi, by the very act of writing, or “scripting,” they impose their own worldview on the narrative. As Paul Smith argues, “The question of the ‘subject’ in this conjuncture is crucial since what is taken to *be* the ‘subject,’ the ‘I’ that speaks a given discourse, reflects, as it has always been taken to reflect, specific epistemologies. Wherever the ‘I’ speaks, a knowledge is spoken; wherever a knowledge speaks, an ‘I’ is spoken. This is the dialectical mechanism of a certain presumption of the ‘subject’: that is, a ‘subject’ is presumed to exist, indexed as an ‘I’ and loaded with the burden of epistemologies, wittingly or not.” (Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject*, 100)

²⁹⁶ Smith, *Discerning the Subject*, 110-1, emphasis original.

alienation between the categories of author and subject, and the corporeal as an anchor of identity.

a. “What’s in a Name?”: Anthroponymy as the Discourse of the Other

In writing their autobiographies, Saleem and Moraes proliferate their texts with their presence as both narrators/writers and protagonists. In spite of the intersubjective and dynamic nature of their individuation, whereby they construct their subjectivities in relation to various individual or collective entities, opening up their selves to the world and reinventing themselves with regard to it, the ubiquity of the narrator’s “I” that pervades their texts does not connote a stable, unified subject, whose cohesion is guaranteed by the writing signature. Thus, Saleem aspires towards just such a cohesion when he strengthens the identity of the narrative “I” by adding to it his full name – “I, Saleem Sinai.”

The fluid instability of the name of the authorial subject testifies to the heterogeneous nature of the writing signature in these two novels, which is distributed across various subject-positions – both Saleem and Moraes are textually present in their multiple names/nicknames. Saleem Sinai is also “Snotnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, Buddha and even Piece-of-the-Moon” (*MC*, 3). This is not to deny the ultimate significance of the name and surname, which impose a kind of non-negotiable essence; as Saleem states, “Our names contain our fates” (a sentiment shared by Moraes) and as such must not become meaningless or relative. Therefore, he goes on to dissect the multiple inflexions of meaning bestowed upon him by his (sur)name:

Sinai contains Ibn Sina, master magician, Sufi adept; and also Sin the moon, the ancient god of Hadhramaut, with his own mode of connection, his powers of action-at-a-distance upon the tides of the world. But Sin is also the letter S, as sinuous as a snake; serpents lie coiled within the name. And there is also the accident of transliteration-Sinai, when in Roman script, though not in Nastaliq, is also the name of the place-of-revelation, of put-off-thy-shoes, of commandments and golden calves; but when all that is said and done; when Ibn Sina is forgotten and the moon has set; when snakes lie hidden and revelations end, it is the name of the desert-of barrenness, infertility, dust; the name of the end. (*MC*, 423)

Throughout his text, Moraes rarely uses his given name²⁹⁷ – indeed, the first reference after the “I” that begins the text is his nickname, “Moor”: “Oh, you Moor, you strange black man,” exclaims his lover Uma in the very first paragraph. This reference conflates both his Moorish legacy (evident in his dark complexion) and his spiritual identification with Boabdil, the historical persona which he grafts onto his subjectivity. Although he got his nickname by the very first sound he made as a baby, “moo,” once attached to his personality, it confers upon him the particular inscription of historical failure and loss experienced by his historical forebear. Thus, as we saw, he enacts the same pattern of cowardice, loss and sinking into oblivion, as the historical Boabdil, whose nickname, “el-zogoiby,” or the unlucky one, has become Moraes’s surname.

The loss of the name creates an existential void; thus, when the amnesiac Saleem finally recovers his memory, the only thing that still eludes him is his name, which makes his individuation incomplete. Significantly, once his memory is restored to him, words begin pouring out of him and he ends up narrating his story to his fellow-trackers: even without the authorial name, i.e. the authorial signature, narration takes place. Saleem narrates an “authorless text” in this instance (which is the first version of the later text we are reading), one that contains almost the same information as the later written text, yet the lack of the authorial signature marks a significant lacuna in the chain of significations in that, without the signatory presence of the subject that produces it, it would be, in Plato’s terminology, fatherless and orphaned. In spite of Derrida’s protestations, however, the authorial signature is not an oppressive structure that constrains the freedom of the text, but a necessary aspect that gives it particularity and context. Without the signature, the text remains unanchored, attributable to anyone and therefore prone to misappropriations and misinterpretations. The nameless Saleem is at this point in his narrative deprived of his meaningful context (India) – the loss of his memory and name takes place in Pakistan and in the newly proclaimed Bangladesh – and his anonymity connotes loss of meaning

²⁹⁷ Madelena Gonzalez dissects in detail the polysemy of Moraes’s name: his name suggests “‘always more,’ the philosophy of excess indicated by the protosemanticism of his full name, ‘Moraes,’ that is to say, ‘more he is’... [Moreover,] in Urdu *mōr* means peacock (162). It is also interesting to note how, in the context of the novel, the ‘mooring’ of identity signifies precisely the opposite of what one might expect, that is to say the confusion rather than the stabilising of self. An ironic intertextual link with Othello as the symbol of otherness is obviously intended as well.” (Gonzalez, *Fiction after the Fatwa*, 102-3)

and self.²⁹⁸ Significantly, it takes another midnight child and synecdoche of India, Parvati, to re-attach his name to him, to return him to India and to metaphorically give birth to him before he can establish continuity with his previous self. The magical basket she puts him in in order to take him from Dacca to Delhi is a symbol of the womb, in which he embryonically gestates until he is catapulted into his subjectivity, which he reclaims once he is on Indian soil again.

Ultimately, it is of vital importance for Saleem to hold onto his name and thereby cling to that part of his self that has been determined by his familial and ethnic-cultural milieu because it would confirm his sense of belonging within these larger collective units – it is also important that he is the only character who feels an existential anxiety once Mary’s act becomes known, while nobody else ever wonders what has happened to the real child of the Sinais. Unlike all the other concerned parties, Saleem cannot afford to erase Shiva precisely on account of his fear of losing his name, which would displace him from all the axes of belonging and self-awareness.²⁹⁹ The name, along with Nehru’s letter, the umbilical cord carefully preserved in a jar and the story that bears his name, are a crucial part of his personal, familial and national legacy, to which the dispossessed Shiva (the real Saleem) can always lay a claim.

b. Pronominal Shifts

The tension between the different fictive selves in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, as stated above, is propelled by the split of the autobiographical “I,” which is both the subject writing and the subject written about. The difference between the two represents a duality in the authorial subjectivity which enables the writing subject to turn his externalised,

²⁹⁸ The integral text we are reading completes the anonymous one Saleem narrates to his fellow soldiers with his complicity in the violence against the children and his seeking forgiveness, the refraction of his personal identity by replacing the singular I with the plural we, his new beginning in the pickle factory with Mary (as a surrogate-mother, her function is to confirm Saleem in his family identity after the death of his entire family) and his adoption of Aadam, which represents his second usurpation of Shiva’s identity, which Saleem seems to need in order to confirm his own.

²⁹⁹ This ethical blindness is all the more astounding as the culprit, Mary Pereira herself, once her secret is revealed, begs Saleem for forgiveness and never harbours a feeling of guilt about the difficult life to which she has assigned Shiva. Many critics emphasise the fact that in Saleem’s world, as he represents it in his text, the possibility of the dispossessed son to be installed in his rightful place is neither desired nor desirable. Saleem even proudly states that nobody in the family ever stopped seeing him as anything other than the son of the Sinais; even his uncle Mustapha, the despised sycophantic bureaucrat, welcomes him in his home as a nephew. Still, despite Saleem’s efforts to elide him and the entire family’s to pretend he does not exist, Shiva, as we saw, is an insistent presence in Saleem’s scheme of identifications.

judgemental eye on himself and observe himself as an object, subjecting himself to a process of othering and self-estrangement. In line with the third space of hybridity, which is the site of the dialogical production of meanings and the articulation of a subversive, contestatory position, Paul Smith theorises a “third ‘I’”, which is

the intended moral effect of a closing down of the enunciatory gap. [...] It is, in fact, the ideological “subject.” In traditional autobiography the appearance of the third “I” is a crucial instance of the ideological force of the discourse, by which the intended moral “subject” guarantees its *own* knowledge by virtue of its provenance in a life lived (“what I have learned...,” and so on). Indeed, in the autobiographical mode the “I” that speaks typically becomes a kind of *de facto* third-person pronoun, supposedly having full objective possession of that which it views.³⁰⁰

In traditional autobiography, this third, ideological “I” functioned as a coherent and total subject guaranteeing the truthfulness of the knowledge revealed in the text and expressing the ideology of the discourse, but in the context of Rushdie’s novel, I will be using this concept to analyse how the instances in which his authors speak about themselves in the third person contest and destabilise their own narrative voice, mark their self-distanciation and their taking moral responsibility for their actions. Thus, the “third ‘I’” is a moral, ethical self functioning on a higher plane than the writing self.

Saleem writes about himself in the third person on several crucial occasions,³⁰¹ but the most important one is the evacuation of his self that occurs in his transformation into the character of “the Buddha.” The name is bestowed on him by his fellow-soldiers because of the air of antiquity hanging around him, but Saleem draws on an ambiguity provided by its dual transliteration:

[t]he Urdu word ‘buddha’, meaning old man, is pronounced with the Ds hard and plosive. But there is also Buddha, with soft-tongued Ds, meaning he-who-achieved-

³⁰⁰ Smith, *Discerning the Subject*, 105.

³⁰¹ Notable examples are: 1) when he is in the washing-chest spying on his mother and experiences an explosion in his head, starts hearing voices and this activates his telepathy; 2) when he dances with Masa Miovic, responds to the teasing of two of his classmates, loses the tip of the middle finger of his left hand, which reveals his biological identity; 3) when he consorts with prostitutes in Pakistan out of nostalgia for Bombay and the children, trying to arouse his sense of history with the prostitute Tai Bibi, who can reproduce any odour she likes. This is the period that cements Jamila’s wholeness and his incompleteness; 4) in the story of the principedom of Kif, which marks his marginalisation within the family, as the fame of Jamila Singer propels her into the centrality Saleem has always desired, but never possessed.

enlightenment-under-the-bodhi-tree,” one “capable of not-living-in-the-world as well as living in it; he was present, but also absent; his body was in one place, but his spirit was elsewhere. (MC, 487)

According to Roger Y. Clark, “Rushdie parodies the state of *nirvana*, in which the self is ‘snuffed out’ and merges with the Absolute, when Saleem’s identity is snuffed out by the bombs that fall on his family’s Rawalpindi bungalow.”³⁰² Like Buddha, Saleem functions as a human being in this world, but unlike Buddha’s willful detachment from the sorrows of earthly existence into a higher plane of spirituality, Saleem’s spirit is extinguished by the trauma of the loss of his family. Emptied of memory and of his ontological essence, he becomes a mere pawn in the nefarious machinations of a corrupt and violent political regime.

Allegorically, his “parodic buddhahood”³⁰³ refers to his self emptied of history and identity. Such an empty self can be filled with any content and Saleem’s is filled with unquestioning submission to the Pakistani regime: “emptied of history, the buddha learned the arts of submission, and did only what was required of him. To sum up: I became a citizen of Pakistan” (MC, 488). There is nothing spiritually elevating about his condition: he is simply a “man-dog,” a member of an intelligence unit placed in the service of power, a blindly obedient being that has renounced his ability to think and maintain a dialogue with his own interiority and therefore falls into his own personal hell – the loss of meaning and purpose. At this point in his narrative, Saleem as an “I” is completely disassociated from the “he” that is the buddha, explicitly identifying him as “not-Saleem” (MC, 502). The splitting of his self, which he attributes to his “seceding from history,” echoes or causes that of Pakistan, whose East Wing is about to secede as the new state of Bangladesh under the leadership of Sheikh Mujib (MC, 490).

It is as this estranged and othered self that Saleem, along with his fellow-trackers, enters the Sundarbans, a surreal place that proves crucial for Saleem’s personal and artistic *Bildung*. As the jungle swallows them and encloses them as within a tomb, they succumb to its otherworldly logic – invading their bodies and minds with its incessant rain, unnatural growth, insects and animals, the jungle induces in them a “turbid, miasmatic state of mind” (MC, 505). Here the memory-deprived authorial subject undergoes a complete dissolution of the self: feeling lost and having forgotten the purpose of their journey, they are all reduced to “trembling shadows of the

³⁰² Roger Clark, *Stranger Gods*, 82.

³⁰³ Clark, 82.

people they had once been” (MC, 507). Emptied of their inauthentic, submissive selves, they are awakened into consciousness and conscience when faced with apparitions of people they have killed or families they have destroyed, which the jungle sends forth in their dreams. The jungle leads them towards childish regression in order to propel them towards adulthood by inducing purpose in their lives and neutralising the blind obedience that brought them here. It brings Saleem into memory and selfhood by having a serpent bite him, upon which he becomes an “I” again. As he is reunited with his memory, past and self, words pour out of him and he narrates his story to the other soldiers.

After this, the boy soldiers waited for the *man-dog* to die; but *I* was stronger than the snake-poison. For two days *he* became as rigid as a tree, and *his* eyes crossed, so that *he* saw the world in mirror-image, with the right side on the left; at last *he* relaxed, and the look of milky abstraction was no longer in *his* eyes. *I* was rejoined to the past, jolted into unity by snake-poison, and it began to pour out through *the buddha’s* lips. As *his* eyes returned to normal, *his* words flowed so freely that *they* seemed to be an aspect of the monsoon. The child-soldiers listened, spellbound, to the stories issuing from *his* mouth, beginning with a birth at midnight, and continuing unstoppably, because *he* was reclaiming everything, all of it, all lost histories, all the myriad complex processes that go to make a man. (MC, 508-9, emphasis mine)

This passage reveals the agonistic process of Saleem’s individuation by dramatising the tension between his (self-)perception as an object (evident in the use of the third person pronouns) and a subject (the narrating “I”). It is impossible to determine who the focaliser who perceives Saleem in the third person is – it could be either his fellow-soldiers or Saleem himself. Whether in this passage Saleem interweaves an Other’s point of view with his own, or demonstrates his own estrangement from himself by writing about himself in both the third and the first persons, he approximates the “moral,” or “third ‘I’” Paul Smith writes about because he tacitly assumes responsibility for the actions he perpetrates on behalf of the oppressive Pakistani regime. As his experience in the Sundarbans marks the end of his connection to Pakistan, Saleem’s destabilised and divided self, as revealed in this passage, reflects the inauthentic subjectivity that this other, wayward product of the fateful midnight (namely, Pakistan), imposes upon him. After all, in Pakistan he becomes dangerously close to becoming a version of Shiva, a violent thug who serves, rather than challenges, power.

Saleem’s logorrhea, brought on by the reclamation of his past and memory, is still not a full individuation, as the jungle has another lesson for them. When they come across a Hindu

temple presided over by the goddess Kali, they are visited by four girls who satisfy their sexual appetites, but, in the process, make them transparent, since the complete satisfaction of their desires leaves no room for dreams. Once they become aware of the trick of the jungle to lull them into a false sense of completion, the illusion breaks and at this point the jungle sends them a tidal wave and expels them from its territory, jolting them back into history and reality. Thus, the ontological lesson the Sundarbans provide for the soldiers is to make them experience two types of inauthentic selves: a dissolution of the self of a subject already emptied of the past and of meaning on the one hand and a false sense of ontological wholeness on the other. Here, “Saleem’s identity assumes a schizophrenic nature in that he, among other things, goes through a becoming-dog, a becoming-transparent, and a becoming-jungle. The condition of transparency is the ultimate form of interaction between subject and object, and it is in this condition that the body is most open to the world’s inscription.”³⁰⁴ As a surreal, primordial place, “a deep realm below the state, below individual consciousness, and below meaning,”³⁰⁵ in which Saleem undergoes an infantile regression as if in a womb, the Sundarbans are similar to the other enclosed spaces which have a crucial formative role for Saleem’s *Bildung*, such as the washing-chest wherein his telepathy is activated, the tower from which he invades people’s thoughts, and Parvati’s wicker-basket, which, by bringing him back to India, completes his personal and historical continuity. In the basket, he becomes like a ghost, “present, but insubstantial; actual, but without being or weight” (*MC*, 532), and in this transitional space between being and non-being, he still refers to himself in the third person: “our hero is greatly affected by being shut up in confined spaces” (*MC*, 533). Holding the lapis-lazuli inlaid spittoon helps him not give in to the comfort of forgetfulness offered by the magic of the basket; once he is released into the country wherein his ontological meaning resides, Saleem becomes the narrative “I” again and, “[a]s a result of the mystic workings of the jungle, Saleem goes from *rejecting* to *accepting* his life, from being an empty-headed dog of war to becoming a socially aware citizen.”³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Søren Frank, *Migration and Literature: Günter Grass, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, and Jan Kjærstad* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 140.

³⁰⁵ Neil ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text*, 221.

³⁰⁶ Clark, *Stranger Gods*, 85.

c. The corporeal as an anchor of identity

We saw that the speaking/writing “I” inhabits a plurality of consciousnesses, but ultimately subjects them to the centripetal force of his own centrality as a writing subject – what Keith Wilson terms “the inevitable subjectivity of the writing process.”³⁰⁷ As mentioned above, autobiography implies self-reflexivity; in fact, the very prefix “auto-” rests on the inevitable solitude of the act of writing, which affirms the continuity of the writing subject before, and even irrespective of, the emergence of the others *vis-à-vis* which the subject constitutes itself as such. The identity of Saleem and Moraes as autobiographical and, crucially, historically aware subjects is caught up in the interplay between the centrality they assign to themselves as writing subjects on the one hand and the heterogeneous plurality from which they derive their meaning on the other. It is, in fact, fout of this very plurality – Saleem’s “sameness” with the midnight’s children and, by extension, with India itself and Moraes’s with Bombay and Boabdil/al-Andalus – that the writing act itself springs. In terms of narration, these two identificatory paradigms are reflected in two complementary textual strategies that, according to Søren Frank, provide the encyclopedic production of identity in the novel: “attempts at *fusion* – that is, the metaphorical attempts to bring together what at a first glance might seem to be disparate elements into a meaningful whole – are accompanied by the forces of *fission* that the novel also employs.”³⁰⁸ In this section, I will concentrate on the ambivalent troping of the corporeal as, on the one hand, a fusional, centripetal force that accumulates the dispersive, fissionary identifications onto the locus of the body, which is defined by unicity and does not yield itself to hybridity, and, on the other, as open towards the world.

In both novels, an object or an objectified entity functions as an externalised metaphor of the continuity and anchoring of the narrator’s identity – in *Midnight’s Children*, such is the silver spittoon, while in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, the stuffed dog Jawaharlal, which “represents the failure of Indian secular democracy which survives only as taxidermy.”³⁰⁹

Corporeally, both Saleem and Moraes are inscribed into the Rabelaisian grotesque body. Bakhtin emphasises the liberatory and affirmatory ethics of grotesque realism, subversive of the

³⁰⁷ Wilson, “*Midnight’s Children* and Reader Responsibility,” 57.

³⁰⁸ Frank, *Migration and Literature*, 134-5.

³⁰⁹ Gonzalez, *Fiction after the Fatwa*, 138.

classical canon revered in Renaissance aesthetics, according to which the body is complete, closed, isolated and demarcated from other bodies, represented in its self-contained individuality and showing no signs of openness, growth, degeneration or death. The grotesque image of the body, on the other hand, relies on exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness and disproportionality. It emphasises the open, protruding, secreting and deformed parts of the body, the excrescences and orifices such as the gaping mouth, the bulging eyes, the bowels, the phallus, the nose, the belly, etc. In short, those parts of the body engaged with

eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body – all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven.³¹⁰

The ethical element of the grotesque representation of the body is the emphasis it places on the body's connection with other bodies and the world, its constant growth and becoming, its collective (rather than individualised, private) and even cosmic and universal character, which foregrounds collective growth and regeneration (hence the dominant images of fertility, abundance and life-giving death). Saleem becomes aware of precisely this fluid, permeable openness of the grotesque body which, by opening itself to the world, cements its collective rather than individual identity when the loss of the tip of his finger exposes the truth of his birth and jolts him into an even greater awareness of who he is:

“O eternal opposition of inside and outside! Because a human being, inside himself, is anything but a whole, anything but homogeneous; all kinds of everywhichthing are jumbled up inside him, and he is one person one minute and another the next. The body, on the other hand, is homogeneous as anything. Indivisible, a one-piece suit, a sacred temple, if you will. It is important to preserve this wholeness. But the loss of my finger (which was conceivably foretold by the pointing digit of Raleigh's fisherman), not to mention the removal of certain hairs from my head, has undone all that... Uncork the body, and God knows what you permit to come tumbling out. Suddenly you are forever other than you were...” (MC, 328)

By disrupting the integrity and separateness of what Kristeva terms “*le corps propre*,” which, following the dual meanings of the French adjective, is designated as both “clean,” i.e.

³¹⁰ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 317.

uncontaminated by anything exterior to it, and “one’s own,” i.e. the body as something that the subject unproblematically owns,³¹¹ the grotesque bodies of Saleem and Moraes open themselves to the in-betweenness, ambivalence and instability of their identity. In short, bodily openness connotes simultaneously an ontological openness. If, on the one hand, this bodily and ontological openness destabilises the self’s integrity and wholeness, on the other, it grounds the self within the collective entity which the self aspires both to incorporate and to be incorporated in. Thus, it is precisely the grotesque, open body that confirms the subject’s identity – Saleem’s as a synecdoche of India and Moraes’s as that of Bombay and al-Andalus – by accentuating the permeability between self and Others. Their bodies become “discursive, textualised,” “site[s] of signification – the place for the inscription of stories,” “semiotic[ally] retriev[ed]... in order to make [them] signify, or represent, or mean.”³¹²

Saleem’s and Moraes’s grotesque bodies are conditioned by their allegorical function as embodiments of India and Bombay respectively. As his teacher Zagallo mockingly states, Saleem is a lesson in human geography:

“See, boys – you see what we have here? Regard, please, the heedeous face of thees primitive creature. It reminds you of?” [...] “You don’t see?” he guffaws. “In the face of these ugly ape you don’t see the whole map of *India*?” (MC, 320-1, emphasis original)

He goes on to enumerate the salient features of this “human geography”: Saleem’s protruding nose is the Deccan peninsula, the stains on his face are Pakistan and its then East Wing, the goo running from his nose is Ceylon, while the tonsure made by the absence of the piece of hair that the sadistic teacher pulls out is Kashmir. He is described in a vocabulary connoting excess, deformity and degradation. Initially, he grows abnormally until Schaapsteker cures him with cobra poison; he then turns a runny and congested nose; his telepathy is activated when in the washing-chest his snot goes upwards in his sinuses and an explosion occurs in his head; he becomes aware of the midnight’s children when in a bicycle incident his bulging temples fit into Sonny’s dented ones; his sinuses are drained, as a result of which his connection to the children is broken; he develops an unusually strong olfactory sense while he wallows in “the pungency of

³¹¹ Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity*, 82-3.

³¹² Peter Brooks, quoted in John Clement Bell, *Satire and the Postcolonial Novel: V. S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 127.

the gutter” (*MC*, 442) among prostitutes in Pakistan, etc. His body is cumulatively maimed and partitioned – the tonsure created by Zagallo, the cut off tip of his finger, the sperectomy – all are a sign of the burden of his birth which, confirming his role as a synecdoche of India, repeats the violence of the maimed and partitioned land on the body of the individual embodying it.³¹³ In other words, Saleem’s identification with India is confirmed by the acts of violence perpetrated on his body; the authorial signature may be a floating signifier that could be attached to various referents, but the facticity of the corporeal violence he has suffered anchors his identity as it provides undisputed proof that he has been marked by Indian history.

Moraes is also conceived as a character that, like his novelistic predecessor Saleem, possesses characteristics that are considered out of the ordinary – or extraordinary: he has a deformed right hand resembling a club and he ages twice as fast as a normal person. Thus, while his father’s surrogate-son Adam is typical of his time and location, Moraes is anything but: he is separated from the whole of humanity on account of his unusual divergence from normal time. In this novel, the human body is also “the main site where literal and metaphoric versions of the national health (or disease) are enacted. And again the body’s fluid dynamics (blood, food, poisons, breath) serve as markers of both an esteemed intermingling and the invasive, ‘purifying’ violence that denies it.”³¹⁴

Psycho-physical abnormalities in characters are an indication of either an incomplete or a disintegrated personal identity which, in the context of Rushdie’s fiction, is a reflection of an equally incomplete or disintegrated collective identity³¹⁵; or an interface with the Other³¹⁶ in

³¹³ Saleem’s freakish appearance is reminiscent of that of the gnome Oskar Mazerath in Gunter Grass’s *The Tin Drum*, an intertextual influence Rushdie has repeatedly acknowledged. “Both these fictional characters and narrators, because of their abnormal, outsider position, provide the author with the only possibility to create a fictional world which is highly symbolic of historical reality. The central theme with Grass and Rushdie is not social criticism but the presentation of certain phases of history in the course of which the world and human nature have undergone radical and irrevocable changes. In India and in Europe the phenomenon of all-pervading inhumanity and absurdity can imaginatively only be dealt with – unless you write historiography – from a grotesque and absurdist point of view.” (Klaus Börner, “The Reception of *Midnight’s Children* in West Germany,” in G. R. Taneja and R. K. Dhawan, ed., *The Novels of Salman Rushdie* [New Delhi: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies, 1992], 17)

³¹⁴ John Clement Bell, *Satire*, 156.

³¹⁵ See Lisa Freigang, *Formations of Identity in Salman Rushdie’s Fictions* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2009). This study focuses exclusively on the embodied identities in Rushdie’s fiction: embodiment in this context is the interconnectedness of allegory (in Fredric Jameson’s phrase, Rushdie’s novels are seen as (trans)national allegories) and literalised bodily metaphors or the literalisation of metaphor in a single character, such as Saleem and Naseem (as a “partitioned woman” she stands for the partitioned India) among others in *Midnight’s Children*, or Moraes in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. While this provides a fertile

terms of race, class, gender, social identity and, in general, any deviation from normality and normativity. Since this novel is a fictional autobiography, the narrator's self-perception plays a crucial role: functioning as everybody's Other, all the while insisting on his abnormality or, as he terms it, "super-nature", the character-author foregrounds his specialness and his authoritative voice because physical specialness is translated as a spiritual one. While his deformed hand can be interpreted as "the potential for violence in [India's] aggregation of cultural and religious difference,"³¹⁷ it also "symbolises and substitutes for the phallic power the narrator wants yet can never wholly achieve, particularly after he becomes sexually impotent."³¹⁸ His double aging also has a wider metaphorical meaning, largely in connection to his identity as a writer: he is the persecuted writer who must race against time (and danger) to complete his manuscript as a vindication of his mother's and his own history and art. But before he can embark on this literal and symbolic journey to the core of his mother's art and to the beginning of his own act of writing, Moraes has to navigate through the tangled web of his contemporary and historical hybrid family. The narrative structure reveals the progressive loss of his family (his disinheritance, his mother's death while he is banished from the family, his reconciliation with his father but subsequent divergence from him, the imposition and then disintegration of the inauthentic family unit with Adam), which culminates in the series of explosions throughout Bombay in which not only all the remaining members of his family and other persons variously connected with them die, but also all the locations that had any meaning for him are blown up. He is literally atomised and, deprived of all the coordinates of his personal and familial identity, the only purpose that remains in his life is to find his mother's stolen paintings and finish his

ground for exploring identity in Rushdie's oeuvre, I consider this approach reductive, simplistic and as not doing justice to Rushdie's overall artistic and historical identity vision.

³¹⁶ See Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). According to Quayson, when the dominant protocols of representation within the literary text are short-circuited in relation to disability there occurs in the text an "aesthetic nervousness". This is evident on many levels, from tensions arising out of the interaction between a disabled and nondisabled characters, through tensions across various levels of the text in terms of symbols, motifs, plot, perspective, etc., to the final dimension of aesthetic nervousness – that between the reader and the text (15). Because the aesthetic domain itself is short-circuited upon the encounter with disability, the dominant protocols of representation that may have governed the text are inevitably undermined. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, this aesthetic nervousness is made all the more prominent by the choice of a protagonist-narrator with a disability.

³¹⁷ Lisa Freigang, *Formations of Identity*, 62.

³¹⁸ Alexandra W. Schultheis, "Postcolonial Lack and Aesthetic Promise in *The Moor's Last Sigh*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 4, (Winter, 2001): 580.

artistic dialogue with her. This entails a return to his family's historical roots in a simulacrum of al-Andalus and a re-activation of the symbolical charge of Boabdil, the last sultan of Granada.

In *Midnight's Children*, the nose is given a particular prominence – it distinguishes both Methwold, who has “a nose from Bergerac” (*MC*, 146) and Aadam, “a cyranose” (*MC*, 9) as Ilse Lubin describes it, which in Tai's view establishes him as a patriarch. When Aadam Aziz's nose itches, making him fall forward as Brigadier Dyer issues the command for the massacre in Jallianwalla Bagh, it saves his life and this early agency of the nose prefigures its role as a life-affirming and regenerating organ (the nose is a common phallic symbol). The nose ensures a generational, historical and identitary continuity: it connects Saleem both to Aadam Aziz, the affiliative ancestor with whom he begins his narrative, and to Aadam Sinai, the son with whom he ends his narrative and to whom he bequeathes the legacy of his text. Mythologically, Saleem, with his long nose, and Aadam Sinai, with his flap ears, compositely form the elephant-headed god Ganesh, a mythical scribe. In this way, the corporeal functions as a crucial determinant not only of the historical inflection of Saleem's self, but also of his authorial identity.

II. “We are All Translated Men”: Authorial Identity in *The Satanic Verses*

With *The Satanic Verses*, we find ourselves in a slightly different terrain regarding authorial identity and identity in general. Here the national and historical grounding of the author-protagonists of *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* is replaced with the liminal, in-between space of migration. Authorial identity in this novel is inscribed into the element of ambivalent indeterminacy that precludes a final grounding of the self. The satanic principle is represented as crucial in this aspect, because it is equated with the acquisition of knowledge, with a special insight into the nature of things, and, ultimately, into self-awareness. The very beginning of the novel enacts a fall that functions on several levels: as the two protagonists fall from an exploded plane onto the shores of England, the scene echoes the biblical loss of paradise (the plane carries the name of one of the Islamic gardens of paradise – Bostan) and simultaneously represents a metaphorical loss of the defining props of their identity.

On the most literal level, the fall of the two Indian protagonists onto the territory of the former colonial centre activates the theme of postcolonial migrancy. However, the historical context is intimately permeated by the metaphysical and archetypal subtext furnished by the satanic thread that is interwoven throughout the diegesis. Thus, the epigraph itself establishes this diversification of the theme of postcolonial migrancy with Satan's nomadism: taken from Defoe's *The History of the Devil*, it refers to Satan as the perennial exile, “confined to a vagabond wandering, unsettled condition, is without any certain abode”, a “part of his punishment” being “that he is... without any fixed place, or space, allowed him to rest the sole of his foot upon.” In the novel, Satan's exile builds upon the physical one postulated by Defoe and comprises ethical and identitary instability and fluidity that are initially conceived of as liberating but are ultimately revealed to be a burden on the human psyche.³¹⁹ In the sections that

³¹⁹ As both Satan's voice (which is sometimes identified with the archangel's) and the narrator's equally intervene in the text, there is a clear analogy between the former's doubling and thereby subverting of God's word and the polylogic discourse of the latter, in a truly Bakhtinian sense. In the history of ideas, the poet/writer has been considered either a medium of divine inspiration or an original creator resembling God himself, but here he is a reincarnation of Satan, both in terms of their nomadic outlook

follow, I start my analysis of this novel by focusing, first, on the paradigms of identity established in the novel and, then, on how these identity paradigms apply to the construction of authorial identity.

Satanic Ontologies: Identity in *The Satanic Verses*

As Rushdie has stated, *The Satanic Verses* is “a migrant’s-eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity.”³²⁰

The Satanic Verses celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves.³²¹

The “migrant condition” is primarily examined through the divided and inauthentic selves of the two protagonists, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha – the former’s division is spiritual (he is torn between his need to believe and his inability to do so), the latter’s is secular and societal (he is torn between East and West); the novel “is ‘about’ their quest for wholeness.”³²² This theme is engulfed by the more encompassing aim of the novel to undermine “imposed orthodoxies *of all types*,” to protest against “the end of debate, of dispute, of dissent.”³²³

and their seductive playing with language/categories, which is a part of Satan’s character as a dialogic counterpart to God’s monologism. Therefore, he is an embodiment of Rushdie’s ideals regarding both authorship as a vocation and modern subjectivity. The satanic as inherent in authorship will be further analysed in the following sections.

³²⁰ Rushdie, “In Good Faith,” in *Imaginary Homelands*, 394.

³²¹ Rushdie, 394.

³²² Rushdie, 397.

³²³ Rushdie, 396.

Saladin and Gibreel are conceived of as conjoined opposites that together represent two variants of the migrant “condition” and two possible resolutions to a crisis of identity. As the narrator admits, they are “two fundamentally different *types* of self”: Gibreel wishing

to remain, to a large degree, *continuous* – that is, joined to and arising from his past[...] so that his is still a self which, for our present purposes, we may describe as “true” [...] whereas Saladin Chamcha is a creature of *selected* discontinuities, a *willing* re-invention; his *preferred* revolt against history being what makes him, in our chosen idiom, “false”? And might we then not go on to say that it is this falsity of self that makes possible in Chamcha a worse and deeper falsity – call this “evil” – and that this is the truth, the door, that was opened in him by his fall? – While Gibreel, to follow the logic of our established terminology, is to be considered “good” by virtue of *wishing to remain*, for all his vicissitudes, at bottom an untranslated man. (*SV*, 427, emphasis original)

The dichotomies that are juxtaposed in this passage pit Gibreel’s continuity against Saladin’s discontinuity; continuity is subsequently identified as a “true” self and as good, whereas discontinuity is a “false” self and evil.³²⁴ This narratorial intervention ascribes an openly ethical aspect to the conception of the continuous and the discontinuous selves of the protagonists, which is rendered literal in their metamorphoses during their fall from an exploded plane – Saladin is transformed into the devil, while Gibreel into an angel. Thus, the contrast between these two ethically nuanced identities/selves is explored through the myth of the fallen angels, which “provides the writer with powerful symbols of good and evil to match the feelings generated by the clash of cultures as one crosses thresholds and frontiers in wandering between worlds.”³²⁵ In Rushdie’s version of the myth, the migrant’s in-betweenness and belonging to multiple cultures is likened to the fallen angels’ transgression of the imposed boundaries between the divine world and the human and of the authority of divine injunction.³²⁶ The fall of the two

³²⁴ While the specific context of the two protagonists identifies their predicament as that of the migrant caught between two worlds, the general tone of the quoted passage gestures rather towards a universalised condition of liminality and in-betweenness that has to do more with universal ethical principles (after all, there is nothing intrinsically good or bad about continuity and discontinuity) that need not be reduced to simply a migrant’s options.

³²⁵ David W. Suter, “Of the Devil’s Party: The Marriage of Heaven and Hell in *Satanic Verses*,” *South Asian Review*, 1992: 64.

³²⁶ In 1 Enoch 15-16, the angels desire to be like human beings and take human wives and beget hybrid children, giants called Nephilim, “with incompatible natures who possess insatiable appetites for human flesh and blood.” Isaiah 14 tells a different story concerning the fallen angels: here, Lucifer “violates the threshold between the divinity and the created order by seeking to place his throne in heaven alongside that of God but is cast down into Sheol, the place of the dead.” In later Christian tradition, “Lucifer is

migrant protagonists, accompanied by a metamorphosis, in fact subsumes the two mythical paradigms of the fall – not only that of the angels but also of man. The loss of divine grace for the angels meant transforming into the radical otherness they will henceforth embody as devils, while for man it entailed a life of toil and uncertainty – existential and ontological, for in lieu of his existence in the plenitude of the divine presence, his soul will henceforth become the battleground of good and evil, the knowledge of which he gained when he disobeyed God’s injunction. By means of the religious foundations of the novel, provided by the biblical myth of origins (namely, that of the fall of the angels and of man, dominating the main plot) and the Islamic one (the birth and development of Islam, dominating the sub-plots), Rushdie explores a specific ontology – that of migrancy, which becomes an all-embracing state of ambivalence and ontological uncertainty taking place at several levels (intrasubjectively, intersubjectively, interculturally, etc.), that will ultimately engulf the narrator/author and the text itself.

Saladin and Gibreel’s act of transgression is their desire to create themselves anew, which the narrator ironically and daringly likens to a Godlike, Creator’s role. Their self-refashioning is principally staged around the migrant status they acquire by relocating from their native India to England, which allows the text to formulate an entire philosophy of migrancy. Thus, it states that in such a process of physical and cultural translation, the migrant becomes “unnatural, a blasphemer, an abomination of abominations” (SV, 49). Having become separated and/or alienated from the previously stable reference points of identity, the migrant struggles to adapt and either succeeds or fails in his heroic struggle. In Homi Bhabha’s reading of the novel, by opening themselves to the hybridity of the migrant condition (or by possessing it to the extent that it led to their migrancy), the migrants inhabit the interstitial “third space” of in-betweenness that leads them “towards an encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture’s difference.” Bhabha emphasises that “the liminality of

identified with Satan, the adversary or accuser, who comes to be thought of as the prince of evil.” Whereas Milton in *Paradise Lost* sympathetically portrays Satan as the tragic hero of his epic, Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* goes against Christian orthodoxy in that he posits the necessary union of the demonic, identified with desire, and the angelic, identified as reason, to make human regeneration possible. In the Qur’an, Iblis’s or Shaitan’s fate has less to do with the crossing of thresholds/boundaries than simply with disobedience to God: he refuses to bow to Adam and is therefore banished from heaven. In another passage, it states that Shaitan was among the jinn, a race of inferior demonic beings, and consequently is not the gigantic and tragic figure of the Jewish and Christian traditions. According to Suter, Rushdie’s reworking of the myth of the fallen angels, in what he terms a metamyth, or a myth about a myth, is more indebted to the Christian tradition present in Milton and Blake than to the Islamic one. (David W. Suter, “Of the Devil’s Party,” 65-6)

migrant experience is no less a transitional phenomenon than a translational one; there is no resolution to it.”³²⁷ He considers the migrant’s position in aesthetic terms, in light of Walter Benjamin’s thought, i.e. his theory on translation:

caught in-between a “nativist,” even nationalist, atavism and a postcolonial metropolitan assimilation, the subject of cultural difference becomes a problem that Walter Benjamin has described as the irresolution, or liminality, of “translation,” the *element of resistance* in the process of transformation, ‘that element in a translation which does not lend itself to translation’ (Benjamin).”³²⁸

Bhabha’s analogical relation between the physical migration of people and the translation of a text from one language into another is interesting, bearing in mind the subject of this dissertation. It is also in line with Rushdie’s description of migrants such as himself as translated men, i.e. “borne across,” and his belief that in translation – literary and physical – something is not only lost, but gained too.

As “subjects of cultural difference,” Saladin and Gibreel navigate between the various conflicting sides of their identity. Their identity instability is brought on not only by their translation from their native Indian environment to England, but their very professions suggest and demand a protean capacity for assuming other voices and personas, resulting in a detachment from the self in order to accommodate all those “Others” within it. They are both actors – Gibreel a celebrity in the Bombay film industry, especially famous for his roles of various gods in a series of Indian “theological,” while Saladin is a well-known voice-over performer in various British television programmes and advertisements, also known as “the Man of Thousand Voices and a Voice.” As Gaurav Majumdar states, the novel “recognises both acting and performance as staging the other within the self.”³²⁹ They both rename themselves and thus lose the individualistic authenticity inherent in the name: Ismail Najmuddin, bearing the name of the son Ibrahim was prepared to sacrifice and the surname meaning “star of the faith,” becomes Gibreel Farishta, meaning “Gabriel Angel,” whereas Salahuddin Chamchawalla becomes Saladin

³²⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 321.

³²⁸ Bhabha, 321.

³²⁹ Gaurav Majumdar, “Jolting the Grotesque: Aesthetics and Ethics in *The Satanic Verses*,” *SubStance*, Vol. 38, No. 3, Issue 120: Ethics and the Inventive Work (2009): 38.

Chamcha.³³⁰ While Rushdie stages their migrant status by means of their spectacular fall from the bombed plane *Bostan* on English soil, this literal meaning of migrancy in the novel is only the nodal point around which are clustered several threads. The abandonment of their native land, triggering the loss of the ideas of “*land, belonging, home*” (SV, 4), causes their wavering national and cultural identifications, which are interwoven with their immense desire for love – the need to believe in somebody and to be believed in is inseparable from their desire to make themselves anew. Ultimately, Gibreel loses his faith in God and Saladin in his father, which triggers his complete alienation from Indian culture. Through his two protagonists, whose connectedness and parallel trajectories are repeatedly emphasised in the novel, Rushdie explores a complete disintegration of identity.

In the specific contexts of the novel, all of the losses Gibreel and Saladin experience (of family members, home, homeland, belonging, culture, love, religious faith or quasi-religious faith in a figure of authority (for Saladin, loss of faith means to “boil away his childhood father-worship and make him a secular man” [SV, 43]) constitute the universalised term “migrancy” with which Rushdie operates in this novel. They can all be understood as violent and unwilling transitions from the sacred to the secular, as they all imply a fall from something grand and important – the wholeness they desire but cannot attain – which Gibreel and Saladin want to be a part of, to a void and nothingness that inspires feelings of dread, despair and existential meaninglessness.³³¹ Thus, Saladin is particularly hurt when his father tells Zeeny that by becoming a “pretender” and an “imitator,” his son steals his posterity from him, reduces his legacy to nothing, to “*less than nothing*” (SV, 71, emphasis original). Hence, the “punishment of

³³⁰ In Urdu, a “chamcha” is a spoon (hence Gibreel’s mocking nicknames for him – “Spoon” and “Spoon”) and figuratively, a “boot licker” or a “flatterer,” as Saleem describes his uncle Mustapha in *Midnight’s Children*. In “The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance,” Rushdie gives this definition of the meaning of the word in the colonial context: “A chamcha is a very humble, everyday object. It is in fact, a spoon. The word is Urdu; and it also has a second meaning. Colloquially, a *chamcha* is a person who sucks up to powerful people, a yes-man, a sycophant. The British Empire would not have lasted a week without such collaborators aomn its colonised peoples. You could say that the Raj grew fat by being spoon-fed.” “Chamchawala” literally means “seller of spoons,” but he contracts his surname to “spoon,” “in order to better serve English palates.” (Srinivas Aravamudan, “Being God’s Postman,” 199-200)

³³¹ Thus, the tragic heroism of Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* represents perhaps the most crucial and pertinent source of and an analogy with the predicament of Rushdie’s protagonists. Saleem’s fear of lack of meaning, which he “cures” by writing the story of himself and the midnight’s children, is a precursor of Gibreel’s and Saladin’s existential crises. Borges provides an interesting play between everything-nothingness, between endless multiplicity and final oneness in the short story “Everything and Nothing,” which stages a conversation between Shakespeare and God – again a repetition of the writer-god duality, crucial for Rushdie.

dreams” that they both experience, the estranged oneiric logic prompting them to face the otherness within themselves.

The first intimations of Saladin’s spiritual disintegration happen on his return to India, a journey which for him is a “regression,” “an unnatural journey; a denial of time; a revolt against history” (SV, 34), when in a dream he sees

a bizarre stranger, a man with a glass skin, who rapped his knuckles mournfully against the thin, brittle membrane covering his entire body and begged Saladin to help him, to release him from the prison of his skin. Chamcha picked up a stone and began to batter at the glass. At once a latticework of blood oozed up through the cracked surface of the stranger’s body, and when Chamcha tried to pick off the broken shards the other began to scream, because chunks of his flesh were coming away with the glass. (SV, 33-4)

The dream takes up the body-soul dualism in the traditional meaning of the skin as a prison of the soul, i.e. the essence of being. The glass skin of the stranger suggests a brittle surface projection of a self that both he and Saladin deem easily disposable, but when Saladin breaks the glass surface, the stranger screams in agony as his whole being disintegrates in the process, revealing the inseparable connection between them.³³² The dream not only “reveals his colonial alienation as a splitting of personality into self and other, I and ‘stranger,’ and hints at the self-destructive nature of their relations,”³³³ but also hints at the profound implications of Saladin’s heretofore serene assumption of an alien identity, which will soon grow to embody the essence of evil. Since Saladin’s identification with a dominant group implies his endorsement of its repressive and dehumanising attitude towards its “Others,” his “post-lapsarian metamorphosis... into the archetypal ‘other’ is thus one of the most blatant instances of dramatic irony in the novel”³³⁴. Even more significantly, however, his transformation into the devil literalises, on the level of image, the monstrous violence he has already perpetrated to his own innermost, authentic being by denying his roots and cultural heritage. After the dream, his constructed persona will start to disintegrate, as the Bombay accent he has diligently suppressed will break through his cultivated Oxford enunciation, an inexplicable and involuntary transformation,

³³² This also echoes the troping of the corporeal as a centripetal force that anchors rather than disperses identity in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*.

³³³ Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, *Origin and Originality in Rushdie’s Fiction* (Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt a.M., New York, Wien: Peter Lang, 1999), 113.

³³⁴ Hennard, 114.

accompanied by heart palpitations and a feeling of not being well, of not being himself, which is exacerbated by the clash between his dual cultural identifications.³³⁵ Being back in India and under his father's roof is Saladin's final reminder that there is an unbridgeable gap between himself and the land of his birth, rendering impossible Zeeny's mission of reclaiming his Indian identity for him. Saladin's and Zeeny's contrasted outlooks represent, respectively, the vision of the alienated migrant, experiencing the multi-faceted existential migrancy Rushdie constructs in the novel, and that of the decolonised native intellectual, confident in her national and cultural identity. Thus, while Zeeny shows an unqualified admiration for the Hamza-nama cloth collection and idealises it as a representation of the inclusive hybridity of Indian history and art, Saladin sees it as barbaric and distasteful.

The whole first chapter of the novel traces the roots of Gibreel's and Saladin's subsequent metamorphosis, the purpose of which is "to act as a metaphor for identity."³³⁶ The transformational ontology to which Saladin and Gibreel are subjected in their desire to re-invent themselves from the imposed constraints on their being-in-the-world revolves around the *satanic ontology* that defines identity in the novel. In the broadest sense, the satanic ontology inscribes each character as, on the one hand, *internally* differential, non-unitary, ambivalent and contradictory, and on the other, understandable only *relationally*, in terms of the Other, never in isolation. Thus, Saladin and Gibreel, seen in themselves, are inauthentic selves, internally

³³⁵ Having longed all his childhood to escape from his father's shadow to London, his "dream-city", imaginatively recreated and renamed as "ellowen deeowen", Saladin's decisive moment of embracing Englishness occurs not so much by his physical relocation there, after a journey "from Indianness to Englishness, an immeasurable distance" (SV, 41), but after an act of cultural ignorance – having been served a kipper at his English school, he eats it with a fork and a knife, with all the bones, to the mocking glee of his school-fellows, sadly complaining to himself why nobody offered to explain and show him the proper way of eating fish. His Anglophilia is then his conquest of England, like William the Conqueror's who "began by eating a mouthful of English sand" (SV, 44). His mother's death – choking to death on a fishbone during one of her soirées – is an ironic comment on her inability to conquer alterity, a feat her son believes he has achieved.

³³⁶ See Azeez Siddiqui, "'Gods into bulls, men into wolves, women into spiders': Classical Metamorphosis in *The Satanic Verses*", *Classical Receptions Journal* Vol 6. Iss. 3 (2014): 440-1. Siddiqui analyses the motif of the metamorphosis within the context of the classical mythological tradition, in which characters undergo metamorphoses to symbolise a fall, as in *The Satanic Verses*, such as Icarus and Phaeton, or as punishment for defying authority, such as Arachne and Lycaon. He finds a strong analogy between Rushdie's novel and Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, which similarly stages an "outsider" perspective on a ruling culture. Like Rushdie, Apuleius had a "hybridised" identity – Roman and colonial ("Moroccan", but his mother tongue was Greek and his novel is set in Roman Greece). Rushdie's reliance on classical European myths leads Siddiqui to conclude that "Western foundations become tools for Eastern transformations," but the East-West dichotomy is in my reading of the novel only one aspect of the complex identity of Rushdie's protagonists.

alienated from themselves, engaged in the difficult task of reconciling the conflicting aspect of their personalities; at the same time, the very oppositionality established between them reveals each of them more clearly when juxtaposed with the other. This relational scheme is rendered more complex by the overall architecture of the novel, in which identity is further destabilised in more challenging ways.

Conceived on the horizontal axis, i.e. within the same diegetic level, two more identity paradigms coexist: on the one hand, the characters are differentiated into binary opposites, such as Gibreel's continuous, as opposed to Saladin's, discontinuous self; on the other, they are each other's double and hence can be conceptualised as one amalgamated, hybrid subjectivity. Vassilena Parashkevova defines the two protagonists as "catoptric doubles, or as each other's negative twins,"³³⁷ together constituting an ambivalent and contradictory ontological unit. Conjoined during their fall, they become "*Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha*, condemned to this endless but also ending *angelicdevilish* fall" (SV, 5, emphasis mine). In the process, each of them appropriates a part of the other's personality as each of them becomes involved in the other's narrative, which marks the ultimate loss of self. Thus, in their postlapsarian lives each of them appropriates and enacts the tendencies and affinities the other nourished before their literal and symbolical fall: Gibreel's mission as an archangel – to tropicalise the imperial centre – is an intervention into the post-imperialist narrative of England that is more in line with Saladin's preoccupation with Englishness, whereas Saladin's return to his Indian cultural and familial roots at the end of the novel is his (satanic?) usurpation of Gibreel's desired cultural rootedness.

On the vertical axis, i.e. between the various narrative levels, each of the protagonists doubles himself in a dreamed persona – Gibreel becomes the archangel and Saladin the glass man. Such is the potency of their dreamed realities that each man's dreams start invading their "real" reality – his own and the other's. In other words, the imaginative material forming the dream, which the psyche draws from the individual and the universal human unconscious, crosses over from the dreamer not only into his lived reality, but also to that of his other, complementary self. Saladin's dream about the glass man, symbolising his split personality, becomes a reality as his skin turns almost to glass when he lands on British soil as a dehumanised creature, which signals his dual metamorphosis – his succumbing both to his

³³⁷ Vassilena Parashkevova, *Salman Rushdie's Cities: Reconfigurational Politics and the Contemporary Urban Imagination* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013), 80.

father's narrative and to that created by his own subconscious mind regarding his inauthenticity. Tavleen herself, the female terrorist, materialises in the reality of the hijacked plane straight from Saladin's dream, with the identical appearance and Canadian accent. Later on, at the sanatorium, he realises that there are whole collectives, consisting of various marginalised and repressed groups, which have turned into the narratives constructed about them by the discourses of power:

“But how to they do it?” Chamcha wanted to know.
“They describe us,” the other whispered solemnly. “That’s all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct.” (SV, 168)

One of the mutants re-inscribed as subhuman and monstrous by society's descriptive powers is Glass Bertha, which is another real-world manifestation of the images haunting Saladin in his dreams:

Just then a wail came from a far corner of the ward. “Lemme go,” a woman's voice howled. “O Jesus I want to go. Jesus Mary I gotta go, lemme go, O God, O Jesus God.” A very lecherous-looking wolf put its head through Saladin's screens and spoke urgently to the manticore. “The guards'll be here soon,” it hissed. “It's her again, Glass Bertha.”
“Glass...?” Saladin began. “Her skin turned to glass,” the manticore explained impatiently, not knowing that *he was bringing Chamcha's worst dream to life*. “And the bastards smashed it up for her. Now she can't even walk to the toilet.” (SV, 168-9, emphasis mine)

Gibreel's dreams exert an even more tyrannical influence on his waking life, as they become a parallel reality not only in his own psyche but also in the architecture of the novel, wherein the dream sequences function as narrative strands on an equal footing with the “real” plot featuring their dreamer. Sheltered at the Shaandaar Café, Saladin comes across the contemporary counterparts of the Jahilian Grandee and his wife Hind, who had already been brought to life in one of Gibreel's dreams. In this way, the content of one character's dream irrupts into the reality of another's (interestingly, Gibreel never meets Muhammad and Hind Sufyan). Furthermore, by means of the what-kind-of-an-idea-are-you leitmotif, each of them is related to continuous/discontinuous or intransigent/bending characters in the dream sequences, which also

contain polarised and complementary identities (Mahound/Baal, the Imam/Empress Ayesha, Ayesha/Mirza, etc.).

Finally, each character is internally dialogised by the satanic voice that is not simply the repressed internal Other disrupting the purity of the self, but functions as an externalised metaphysical entity representing the ontological principle of difference and dissent and, to a lesser extent, the ethical principle of evil. Interestingly, this satanic Other can be traced back to the narrator/author himself, and as such functions as a metafictional layer of the already multiply layered identity of the characters.

This complex scheme of identity formation in the novel plays itself out in the opposed but complementary trajectories of Gibreel and Saladin in their post-lapsarian identities as the archangel and the devil respectively. By metamorphosing (through a metaphorical explosion of their confused and conflicted selves), they are confronted with the consequences of their losses, i.e. of their previous falls towards identity nothingness: Gibreel becomes the angel he has always believed himself to be, Saladin the “demon up from hell,” “a two-legged-lie, and such beasts are Shaitan’s best work” that, according to his father, becomes the man who is untrue to himself (SV, 48).³³⁸ The metaphorical reading of the terrorist attack diverts what would be a tragedy had this been a “real” event into an opportunity for, in Gibreel’s words, “a second period of gestation,” “being regenerated, made anew,” culminating in the refrain “To be born again, first you have to die” (SV, 84).

Their landing on British soil emphasises the fall into “foreignness” both Gibreel and Saladin experience as inauthentic selves. With skin turned almost to glass on account of the falling snow, Saladin resembles the glass man from his dream and is “possessed by the nightmare-fear of cracking, of seeing his blood bubbling up from the ice-breaks, of his flesh coming away with the shards” (SV, 131). Gibreel, conversely, has metamorphosed into an angel with a halo, and although their physical identities impact how the others see and respond to them – Gibreel is respectfully left alone while Saladin is arrested and abused by the police – their transformed state is a punishment for both: Saladin’s “macabre demoniasis” (SV, 159) is the complete opposite of his normal, sophisticated persona, while Gibreel is tormented by the ghost of Rekha Merchant, his rejected lover.

³³⁸ The lamp in his father’s study, standing next to Richard Burton’s translation of *The Arabian Nights*, which his father does not allow him to have until he has become a man, symbolises his thwarted wish for wholeness and authenticity.

In the multilayered text that is the novel, the antagonistic relationship between the two protagonists operates on several levels. In historical terms, Gibreel is the non-assimilating native and Saladin the obsequious colonised subject mimicking his colonial originals. In ontological terms, Gibreel is the continuous self, admitting no heterogeneous elements in the pure essence of its being and Saladin its discontinuous counterpart. In metaphysical and ethical terms, Gibreel is an angel identified with goodness and Saladin the devil identified with evil.

The postcolonial thread is evident in the Fanonian terms in which Gibreel sees the antagonism between himself and the English – he cites Fanon’s dictum that “The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor” (SV, 353). As Fanon clarifies, the goal is not to become the settler but to possess the latter’s position of power,³³⁹ which motivates the native’s insurgence. In line with Fanon’s view of decolonisation as “always a violent phenomenon,” bent on “the veritable creation of new men,”³⁴⁰ Gibreel assumes a militarised stance towards England and identifies his “Biblical-Satanic confusions” as “England-induced ambiguities,” giving his moral confusion colonial overtones. This leads him to the conclusion that the trouble with the English is their weather and “that the moral fuzziness of the English was meteorologically induced” (SV, 354), prompting his mission to tropicalise London and institute radical social and cultural changes in the imperial centre. The quote from Fanon describes a native who does not accept the inferiority to which the colonial system has relegated him, but is increasingly insurgent and waits for an opportune time to manifest his resistance to colonial oppression. Such a native, with whom Gibreel identifies, is contrasted to another kind of native, which describes Saladin’s false, mimic self: “In this way the individual – the Fanonian *native* – accepts the disintegration ordained by God, bows down before the settler and his lot, and by a kind of interior restabilisation acquires a stony calm” (SV, 353). Following its dichotomous logic, the novel pits Gibreel’s anticolonial, decolonising credentials against Saladin’s colonial mimicry, adding another layer of difference between them, in addition to the polarity continuous/discontinuous self.

In his post-lapsarian life, Saladin is confronted with various instances of hybridity and people re-inventing their identities. At the Shaandaar café in the London borough of “Brickhall,” he is exposed to its owners’ own hybrid identities wavering between nativism and assimilation.

³³⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 41.

³⁴⁰ Fanon, 27 and 28.

Hind embraces a “gastronomic pluralism” (SV, 246) to match her husband Muhammad Sufyan’s “pluralistic openness of mind” (SV, 245), but ends up losing her self both physically (she loses her figure as she becomes as vast as the subcontinent by pursuing her gastronomic indiscriminateness) and psychologically (although she is the one that has gained in status by their migration from the East Wing to England, as the café prospers on account of her cooking prowess, she ends up feeling like the loser because “everything she valued had been upset by the change; had in this process of translation, been lost” [SV, 249]).

While Hind’s perception of herself, constructed as a variant of, and yet ending up as a contrast to, her husband’s identity, is of an existential nature, Sufyan’s understanding of the migrant condition is wholly intellectual and, significantly, derived from European, classical sources: Lucretius and Ovid. The Lucretian position, expounded in *De Rerum Natura*, is that “Whatever by its changing goes out of its frontiers,... by doing so brings immediate death to its old self” (SV, 276). Ovid, in the *Metamorphoses*, takes the opposite view that “As yielding wax... is stamped with new designs And changes shape and seems not still the same, Yet is indeed the same, even so our souls... Are still the same forever, but adopt In their migrations ever-varying forms” (SV, 276-7). The dilemma is, then, between irreversible transformation of self in the process of migration/crossing of thresholds (Lucretius) and preserving the essence of self even while undergoing transformations, which thereby manifest what is already there (Ovid).

Sufyan has chosen Ovid over Lucretius (i.e. preserving the essence of self over an identity inconstancy and mutability) and has comfortably settled into his migrant life, in spite of it involving a loss of his prestigious status as an intellectual, but Saladin at first finds such easy balancing of old and new lives problematic.³⁴¹ He is unable to recognise the Englishness

³⁴¹ According to Summer Pervez, who elaborates on Bhabha’s reading of the novel in terms of his theorisation of postcolonial hybridity, the Lucretian and Ovidian positions correspond to mutability and essentialism respectively. By choosing Lucretius, Saladin chooses hybridity and frees himself from an essential self; at this point, he regains his human form. This makes him a person of the selected discontinuities described by the narrator. Gibreel, on the other hand, longs for constancy and precisely that essential, immutable self that needs the ethical clarity he explores in his dreams. However, his multiply divided self and his fragmented identity (as human and angel) place him in the Lucretian hybridity, which he utterly rejects. “Unable to accept the hybridity Lucretius offers, yet unable to recognise his own Ovidian unchanging essence”, he ends tragically by suicide. Saladin’s going back to his essential Indian self in the end is seen as a rejection of Bhabha’s privileged space of the hyphenated, hybrid identity, a position which for Bhabha is enabling and revisionary in terms of both personal and collective identity. By giving Saladin such an ending, Rushdie diverges from the elsewhere lauded celebration of hybridity and, in a way, reinscribes his own migrant position. (Summer Pervez, “‘Hybridity is Heresy:’ Homi Bhabha and *The Satanic Verses*,” *South Asian Review*, 25:2, 2004: 153-164)

that Sufyan and his daughters, Mishal and Anahita, represent – where the emotional and cultural attachment to the old sits unproblematically with the new – as authentic as his own: “But they weren’t British, he wanted to tell them: not *really*, not in any way he could recognise. And yet his old certainties were slipping away by the moment, along with his old life...” (SV, 259, emphasis original). The gulf that their different forms of identifications with their native and host cultures and historical legacies has created between them leads Saladin to confess to himself “I’m not your kind... You’re not my people. I’ve spent half my life trying to get away from you” (SV, 253).

However, even though the novel strives to maintain its own dichotomous logic, polarising the characters into binary categories, namely continuous/discontinuous, anticolonial/procolonial, Lucretian/Ovidian or transformationalist/essentialist, in the end it dismantles it by means of the satanic ontology, which turns out to be triumphant. This is made evident in the passage describing Saladin’s transcending of these dichotomies by an increasing awareness of the angelic-demonic nature of man, which, in turn, will bring about the gradual accommodation of his Indian self within his Anglophile persona:

Angels and devils – who needed them? “Why demons, when man himself is a demon?” the Nobel Laureate Singer’s “last demon” asked from his attic in Tishevitz. To which Chamcha’s sense of balance, his much-to-be-said-for-and-against reflex, wished to add: “And why angels, when man is angelic too?” (SV, 408)

Saladin ultimately embraces his dual, hybrid human nature, whereas Gibreel remains a solipsistic entity, incapable of assimilating such a type of self. However, Saladin’s is not the hybrid self that is opposed to Gibreel’s pure one, but one that accepts the interdependence and complementarity of both. In this way, as already stated, it is not hybridity *per se* that is affirmed by the logic of the text (although it is affirmed by its narrator) over the repudiated purity, but a complex individual and collective mode of existence and perception that accommodates this contrast, in which the hybrid and the pure enable an unstable, but creative balance that is seen as giving rise to newness and growth in the world.

This is evident in the ambivalent, both continuous and discontinuous, state of being implied by Saladin’s return to his roots at the end of the novel. Embarking on a process of regeneration, he boards a plane, aptly named *Gulistan*, after the other Islamic garden of paradise,

to India, a journey that he finally feels is taking him home.³⁴² Here, he 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, but which had apparently continued to exist, perhaps in the parallel universes of quantum theory” (SV, 523). Reclaiming his birth name means accepting his authentic self – heterogeneous and multiform, but no longer imitative of colonial authority and based on extinguishing his Indianness. Learning not only to love but to look up to his father after a lifetime of alienation and distrust, he learns from him how to live and die stoically in a world without God. In a renewed relationship with Zeeny, which is not only romantic but also ideological (she induces him to get involved in India’s social problems and the causes for reform she and her circle of friends have embraced), he is on the brink of forging a different relationship with place as well, which is radically different from the repeatedly emphasised migrant desire to “tropicalise” London – Zeeny urges him to truly belong to Bombay, to empathise with the city and its inhabitants.

The sense of belonging in a hybrid national community that the ending suggests brings us back to Fanon and his project of decolonisation, which entails the “introduc[tion] into each man’s consciousness [of] the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history,”³⁴³ and which can therefore be said to inscribe itself into the satanic ontology that requires a multiplicity of hybrid subject-positions. In London, Saladin-as-Devil begins to appear serially in the dreams of people in the community:

And in every one of the thousand and one dreams he, Saladin Chamcha, gigantic of limb and horn-turbaned of head, was singing, in a voice so diabolically ghastly and guttural that it proved impossible to identify the verses, even though the dreams turned out to have the terrifying quality of being serial, each one following on from the one the night before, and so on, night after night. (SV, 285)

³⁴² The two flights, named *Bostan* and *Gulistan* respectively, thus frame the novel and the identity development of Saladin and Gibreel. The mirror-like quality of their journeys is emphasised yet again, when Saladin comes across an air hostess with a Canadian accent, echoing Tavleen; however, as this journey is his authentic going home, it is devoid of the ominous implications of the former and he arrives safely and on time to spend his father’s last days with him and reconnect to his roots. In this, he follows the example of Mishal, who reopens the Shaandaar Café and vindicates her mother’s plight by reconnecting to her heritage rather than losing herself in the Western modernity she had previously embraced.

³⁴³ Fanon, 73.

These collective dreams give rise to a devil-cult among the minority communities, becoming a symbol of solidarity and resistance. As the delighted Mishal comments, “It’s an image white society has rejected for so long that we can really take it, you know, occupy it, inhabit it, reclaim it and make it our own. It’s time you considered action” (SV, 287). However, in spite of his own reluctance to play any role in the migrant community of which he does not feel a part, the resistance symbolism Saladin has come to embody ends up by constructing an alternative “real” personality in the eyes of the community: “everyone, black brown white, had started thinking of the dream-figure as *real*, as a being who had crossed the frontier, evading the normal controls, and was now roaming loose about the city. Illegal migrant, outlaw king, foul criminal or race-hero, Saladin Chamcha was getting to be true” (SV, 288). In an act of subversive agency, performed in his satanic appearance, he melts the waxworks in the alternative Madame Tussauds that is the Club Hot Wax, housing black and forgotten heroes, “the migrants of the past” (Mary Seacole, Abdul Karim, Ukawsaw Gron-niosaw, Ignatius Sancho) facing the villains of British history (Mosley, Powell, Edward Long, Margaret Thatcher), into oblivion. Here, he is humanised “by the fearsome concentration of his hate” (SV, 294).

However, in spite of playing a significant part in forging the minority communities’ solidarity and resistance to the racist and exclusionary discourses and practices of the establishment, Saladin still retains a Prufrock-like alienation from this form of collective identity: “This isn’t what I wanted. This is not what I meant, at all” (SV, 287). Similarly, at the end, Saladin does not commit fully to the collective Indian identity Zeeny embraces and remains strangely silent in the intellectual debate about the condition of India held by Zeeny’s circle of friends. Therefore, his return to his “many alternative Saladins” is not a simple regrafting of his new self onto his potential old selves. In spite of the regenerational atmosphere of the ending, this is not an unproblematic establishing of continuity between the old and the new. Rather, it is punctuated by a sense of, to use the narrator’s term, “discontinuity” in that he retains his distance both from India and the minority communities of London, which can be read as a residual trace of his Anglophilia present in his new-found Indian identity.

When the narrator describes Gibreel’s self as “continuous,” he identifies it as erroneously good because this type of self, going through life unreflectingly (because oriented externally rather than inwardly) and therefore unscathed by the consequences of his actions, becomes a totalising idea, seeking not to transform itself but to bend the world into conforming to the idea’s

binary, exclusionary logic. Thus, wishing to “tropicalise” the morally fuzzy London, Gibreel ends up terrorising it. Gibreel’s predicament is not so much his crisis of faith as his inability to reconcile his secular and religious identity, not so much his continuity as his inability to make the contradictory and conflicting aspects of his personality coexist within one hybrid but still self-consistent identity. His is the theological hermeneutics of pure essences and unequivocal meanings, purged of ambiguities and paradoxes, much like the Imam’s. Such a fragile self, when faced with the differential logic of the satanic, succumbs and is ultimately both destructive and self-destructive – Gibreel, his jealousy exacerbated by Saladin’s satanic verses, ends up murdering Allie, prompted by satanic verses of his own, and committing suicide. Saladin’s “discontinuous” self, on the other hand, is morally bad only in so far as, wishing to possess the certainties of the pure identity it is unable to attain (hence his envy of Tavleen, Allie and Gibreel), wreaks havoc on those who are. These two types of self are not inherently ethically inflected; the ethical tags are used here to underline and ironise the traditional conceptions of identity, whereby the sedentary (settled in a particular location and ethos) is superior to the nomadic (the “satanic” condition of being without a fixed abode) – a dichotomy going back to the biblical enmity between Abel and Cain.

Exploring the theme of migrancy, Salman Rushdie activates this dichotomy as a marker not of physical movement, but of his protagonists’ capacity and willingness to become epistemically and imaginatively translated. Gibreel’s tragedy lies in his imaginative alienation from and resistance to the proliferation of meanings his dreams expose him to (as we shall see, he figures in them as his own Other and progressively loses himself as a self as his dreamed characters take over). He emerges out of his dreams conceptually and epistemically unenlightened, with a completely disintegrated sense of self. Saladin’s willingness to embrace the satanic aspect of his personality, while making him morally “bad” (he destroys two lives), simultaneously imparts a “goodness” of a different type, namely the ability to exist as a contradictory and morally tainted self, which ultimately enables his emancipation from the alien discourses troping him as the undesirable Other and allows him to re-attach himself to his roots. Gibreel, by contrast, enslaves his real self to the archangelic identity he constructs in his dreams, which prevents any possibility of psychic integration and wholeness. He fails to emancipate himself from the alien discourses that invade his subjectivity and in a final surrender to the external narrative that has been the greatest threat to his moral certainty, namely the satanic voice

whispering satanic verses, kills his beloved and thereby destroys any chance at redemption and regeneration.

The parallel postlapsarian trajectories of the two protagonists, yielding two very different endings and resolutions to their ontological and ethical dilemmas, risk engulfing the reader into the ostensibly dual logic of the novel, which offers pairings such as Gibreel/Saladin, angel/devil, continuous/discontinuous self, etc. However, the text establishes its anti-binary, hybrid credentials at the very beginning, by emphasising the conjoined, composite persona that the two protagonists and the essences/principles/types of self they embody. Throughout the main plot, the element of admixture and hybridity is emphasised as an ontological and cultural ideal; conversely, purity is seen as producing intolerant, unbending ideas that end in destruction. Saladin, abiding by the former and coming to terms with the dual angelic-satanic nature of man, survives and forges a new path for himself – a path, significantly, that leads to his integration in a community of intellectuals and of his own fellow-Indians. Gibreel, on the other hand, is from beginning to end imprisoned in a solipsistic world which remains unshaken by the powerful unmasking of the intransigent ideas that are his dreamed prophets; neglecting to hail the lesson of his dreams that everything is permeated by its Other, he fails to recognise the satanic otherness within himself. Repudiating the satanic principle of the mutable and hybrid, differential self – which implies his inability to tread the path from submission to subjectivity – he is in turn repudiated by it and, in a last triumph of the seduction of verses, goes not into a new beginning, like Saladin, but into the finality of death.

The satanic ontology posited in the novel confuses the binary oppositions that the narrator establishes in terms of ontology, epistemology, ethics, and, as we shall see, poetics. In discussing the novel's identity models, Vassilena Parashkevova states that

Andrew Teverson argues that the novel does not fully assert either the Lucretian or the Ovidian model but both: “some aspects of identity are translated, and some remain untranslatable” (2007, 151). I would argue, more precisely, that the novel's paradigm of identity *is* the Lucretian one, which is not to suggest that it excludes the Ovidian paradigm. Lucretius negotiates Ovid in the text in the manner in which the city of Jahilia is governed by the idea of the inclusive many (Lucretius) that accommodates the exclusivist one (Ovid).³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ Parashkevova, *Salman Rushdie's Cities*, 98.

Ultimately, however, the novel's satanic ontology is foregrounded as a recuperative decolonising strategy that dismantles the continuity/discontinuity or Lucretius/Ovid binary in a way that each element in the pair is inherently "contaminated" by the other, to the extent that, by the end, they become indistinguishable from each other. Contrary to both Teverson and Parashkevova, I argue that the satanic logic of the novel renders the question of which model is preferable over the other irrelevant, since each partially becomes the/its other/Other – hence, Saladin's homecoming, which is neither a continuity nor a discontinuity, but a paradoxical "discontinuous continuity." Although the hybrid, collectively inflected identity he somewhat reluctantly embraces is different from the desired, albeit never fully realised, national and urban/cultural belonging of Saleem and Moraes, I read this as a sign of the very nature of the satanic ontology, which demythologises and destabilises even itself by being inscribed within the inconstancy and ambivalence of the novel's nomadic, migrant outlook.

Satanic Authorial Subjectivities

As I argued above, the satanic ontology developed in *The Satanic Verses* conceives of identity as a complex structure in which the self is multiply decentred and fractured both internally and externally and along both the horizontal and the vertical axis. In this section, I will focus on the author's own self-inscription in the satanic ontology he has devised for his characters. Although enveloped in an aura of elusiveness and even unrepresentability, the authorial figure reveals its presence by means of the recurrent interventions of the narrative voice and by its materialisation as the "myopic scrivener" with a multilayered identity as God/Satan/Author.

a. Who Speaks/Writes the Satanic Verses?

The narrative voice that occasionally intervenes in the narration is itself inscribed into the fluid, ambivalent ontology that characterises the characters, the plot and the novel as a whole. The narrator's interventions in the text reveal the distinct functions that the author-narrator performs in the novel. First, he is the traditional omniscient narrator, an anonymous erudite voice posing

philosophical questions, who calls the reader's attention to aspects of the plot, summarises, expounds, clarifies and provides guidance and commentaries of various kinds (offering interpretations, definitions, judgments, etc.), as when he reflects on "newness" or the "idea" that individual characters represent:

"How does newness comes into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made? How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? What compromises, what deals, what betrayals of its secret nature must it make to stave off the wrecking crew, the exterminating angel, the guillotine? Is birth always a fall? Do angels have wings? Can men fly?" (SV, 8)

In this function, he is the author-God who is the supreme creator of his fictive world and who, more importantly, is perceived as a disembodied voice/consciousness speaking from a neutral position, i.e. from a position from which the reader can rely on the veracity of his words.³⁴⁵ The author-God is the sole creator of meaning in the chaos that is his fictional material and he reinscribes his own alternative versions of the biblical narratives of the Fall, Genesis, Exodus, Apocalypse and Revelation.

A second function is evident in the author-narrator's undermining of his own godlike omnipotence by leaving open the possibility for his satanic identity and consequently for the deconstruction of his own discourse –in pluralising the diegesis, the narrative "I" pluralises his own identity. Hence the rhetorical questions he poses to the readers which implicitly identify him as Satan:

Who am I? Who else is there?" (SV, 4);

I know the truth, obviously. I watched the whole thing. As to omnipresence and -potence, I'm making no claims at present, but I can manage this much, I hope. Chamcha willed it and Farishta did what was willed.

Which was the miracle worker?

³⁴⁵ Initially, the authorial voice is split within itself, dialogising its own discourse, albeit in a debate with the silent reader that resembles a soliloquy, an artist at work thinking about his own creative process: "What characteristics which? Slow down; you think Creation happens in a rush? So then, neither does revelation ... take a look at the pair of them. Notice anything unusual? Just two brown men, falling hard, nothing so new about that, you may think; climbed too high, got above themselves, flew too close to the sun, is that it? That's not it. Listen... (SV, 5) The authorial self revealing his presence in this passage presents himself as a narrator-critic, commenting on his own writing method and foregrounding two central themes, introduced in an ironic tone: writing-as-creation/revelation and alterity. Narrating his own creation about the two brown men falling from the sky, the author interweaves the creative process with the presence of the Other, which in the immediate context of the passage means the immigrant status of the two Indian protagonists once they land on British soil.

Of what type – angelic, satanic – was Farishta’s song?
Who am I?
Let’s put it this way: who has the best tunes? (SV, 10)

What did they expect? Falling like that out of the sky: did they imagine there would be no side-effects? Higher Powers had taken an interest, it should have been obvious to them both, and such Powers (I am, of course, speaking of myself) have a mischievous, almost wanton attitude to tumbling flies. And another thing, let’s be clear: great falls change people. You think they fell a long way? In the matter of tumbles, I yield pride of place to no personage, whether mortal or im-... (SV, 133)

Significantly, the satanic narrative voice here, faithful to the devil’s characteristic ontological elusiveness and equivocating rhetoric, alludes to his identity by questions that have no affirmative answer: although rhetorical and therefore not needing one, they nevertheless maintain the reader in a constant state of uncertainty. In other words, the satanic narrative voice always alludes to itself as Satan and never explicitly introduces itself as him. Whenever this voice intrudes into the narration, he either frames his words in parenthesis, thus delimiting his discourse from that of the consciousness he invades and otherwise emphasising his presence,³⁴⁶ or adopts a polemical tone when he answers questions in such a way that the reader is expected to accept them at face value, as when he posits doubt as the opposite of faith:

Question: what is the opposite of faith? Not disbelief. Too final, certain, closed. Itself a kind of belief. Doubt... Angels are easily pacified... Human beings are tougher nuts, can doubt anything, even the evidence of their own eyes. Of behind-their-won-eyes... angels, they don’t have much in the way of a will. To will is to disagree; not to submit; to dissent. I know; devil talk. Shaitan interrupting Gibreel. Me? (SV, 92-3)

Yet, bearing in mind the architecture of the novel in which everyone and everything is ambivalent and fluid, the text invites distrust whenever such polarised dichotomies are foregrounded as self-evident (similar binary opposites that the narrator presents as mutually exclusive but which the overall logic of the novel dismantles are the good and bad selves of the continuous Gibreel and the discontinuous Saladin and the Ovid/Lucretius dichotomy). Thus, in spite of what the satanic narrative voice says, there is nothing certain or final about Gibreel’s

³⁴⁶ This happens when he refuses to answer Saladin’s query why he suffers his devilish transformation and who punishes him (“For what was he – he couldn’t avoid the notion – being punished? And, come to that, *by whom?* (I held my tongue.)” [SV, 256]) and Gibreel’s dilemma as to whether he is an angel of god’s love or of his wrath (“I’m giving him no instructions. I, too, am interested in his choices – in the result of his wrestling match. Character *vs* destiny: a free-style bout. Two falls, two submissions or a knockout will decide [SV, 457]).

disbelief, for instead of eliminating any religious feeling in him, it triggers a “punishment of dreams” in which he witnesses in three separate scenarios the inextricable complementariness of such opposites as religion/secularism, timelessness/history, etc. Moreover, as the satanic narrator’s words opposing doubt to religion are an intrusion into Gibreel’s own consciousness, which is itself suspended in the ambiguous space between human and archangelic, his ontological uncertainty invites a dismantling of the satanic logic that religious faith is inimical to the free will that is capable of articulating dissent and doubt. If Satan sets up doubt as the ultimate spiritual ideal enshrining the human capacity for dissenting and enabling human subjectivity (following his own trajectory from submission to God’s will to subjectivity as the Prince of Evil and differing from the will-less angels), the very oppositional, antagonistic position from which he speaks invites an intellectual agility on the part of the reader who, if he were to follow the devil’s logic, would not be merely a passive receptor of his messages, a yes-man like Phaedrus, but would question Satan’s words and would doubt doubt itself. The very confusion of personal pronouns when he intervenes in the consciousness of Gibreel/Mahound – this tripartite identitary complex is impossible to disentangle – cements the speaker’s uncertain position and thus undermines the authority of his message.

The implicitly satanic character of the narrative voice in the quoted passages has led critics to argue for a “satanic point of view as the novel’s ideological centre” (Alex Knönagel)³⁴⁷ or that “there is no case to be made for Satan as the consistent narrator throughout the novel... For the greater part of the book, where the narrator is unidentifiable, the tone of the writing neither is nor readily could become either recognizably or appropriately satanic.”³⁴⁸ James Harrison concludes that the intrusions of the satanic voice in the narration “seem to be vestiges of an apparently promising but short-lived bright idea.”³⁴⁹ Taking the opposite stance, Roger Y. Clark argues that the novel has two narrative voices: “a conventional, omniscient narrator as well as an otherworldly satanic narrator.”³⁵⁰ These two narrative voices in turn inform the worldly and the otherworldly politics of the novel, functioning at a disjunction and not successfully reconciled, which, in Clark’s view, prevents the novel from being a complete success. The worldly politics of the novel, centred on the migrant experience in contemporary

³⁴⁷ Alex Knönagel, quoted in Clark, *Stranger Gods*, 136.

³⁴⁸ James Harrison, *Salman Rushdie*, 114.

³⁴⁹ Harrison, 114.

³⁵⁰ Clark, *Stranger Gods*, 134.

London/England, is diluted by the irruption of the otherworldly satanic narrator, who “is only concerned about those who are marginalised and demonised insofar as they can be used to further his own case against God and the cosmic status quo.”³⁵¹ Clark sees in the novel “an insidious otherworldly drama being played out on a worldly stage,”³⁵² in which the devil “rewrites his own disastrous fall from Heaven, possesses Chamcha, manipulates his Iago-puppet to torture and destroy his Othello-puppet, argues that it is better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven, and, finally, crushes and marginalises the mystical aspirations of Alleluia and Sufyan.”³⁵³ The ending of the novel, seen through this otherworldly lens, marks the triumph of the satanic narrator, who

contrives events so that his archangel meet a violent end, while his archdevil is rewarded for destroying the Edenic love between Gibreel and Alleluia[...] Gibreel’s dreams are not only mental scenarios shaped by his upbringing and by his inner fears or frustrations; nor are they merely aimed at political or postcolonial targets. They are also projections or dreamscapes which the novel’s Satan uses to take the upper hand in his ancient vendetta with God.³⁵⁴

In this role, the satanic narrator can be seen to be the originator of the profoundly ironic and judgemental tone of the novel, which is dismissive of the characters’ aspirations for transcendental experience and contemptuous of venerated individuals such as Abraham/Ibrahim, Mahound and his first followers, etc.

In Clark’s view, the satanic narrator that makes his presence known in the text is Satan, but I think a distinction must be drawn between the two because the text itself does not allow for the existence of metaphysical beings. If the narrator were Satan, who would also be a character in the novel, this would in turn confirm the existence of, if not the presence in the diegesis, of God. Although the novel stages a metaphorical antagonism played out between the divine and the satanic principle, by enthroning the latter as a champion of semantic and ontological openness and inexhaustibility, it nevertheless envelopes every appearance of angels, devils and ghosts in a distancing effect: the archangel is a projection of Gibreel’s schizophrenic self, the

³⁵¹ Clark, 147.

³⁵² Clark, 139.

³⁵³ Clark, 136.

³⁵⁴ Clark, 140-1.

ghost of Rekha is an effect of his guilty conscience about her death, the protagonists' metamorphoses – the most obvious element of magical realism in the “real” plot of the novel – are an embodied metaphor of their disintegrated identity, the satanic verses in their every articulation represent the irruption of the subconscious in the characters' consciousness, the phantasmagorical London Gibreel and Saladin encounter reflects the distorted lens of its nationalist and racist outlook, while everything that happens in the dreams is, of course, the product of fantasy. The text is permeated by an “overwhelming diabolism,”³⁵⁵ but its presence is attributable to the satanic aesthetics that informs the novel rather than to the literal shenanigans of the devil, which asserts values different from those defended by the satanic narrator and hence functions separately from him. In this view, the satanic narrator – who may be Satan himself or another entity embracing Satan's forked tongue – represents merely its antagonistic element that ultimately does not have the last word.

Another function the narratorial voice performs in the novel is as a metafictional strategy whereby the narrator ponders his own creative process, representing the very process of writing. This is evident in the soliloquising tone of the narrator, debating with(in) himself about his own narrative, as when he exhorts the reader or himself to slow down, that “that is not it”, etc. The multiple allusions to drama and film also exemplify this function: Gibreel's position in his dreams, very much like the narrator's, is that of a director, spectator or actor; the characters are repeatedly compared to marionettes to emphasise their powerlessness and the complete control their author exerts over them (at the same time, their dependence is seductively attributed to the insidious influence of Satan over them); the numerous references to the stage and the employment of the language of theatre provide a literary intertextual prism through which Saladin's destruction of the love between Gibreel and Allie is likened to Iago's “motiveless malignity,” with Gibreel playing the role of the gullible Othello and Allie the victimised Desdemona.³⁵⁶ By employing a metafictional strategy, the narrator, as Goonetilleke states,

³⁵⁵ Clark, 180.

³⁵⁶ This allusion also provides the narrator with the opportunity to bemoan the degraded heroes of the present unoriginal era that populate his novel as opposed to the greatness of those of the past: “What follows is tragedy. – Or, at the least the echo of tragedy, the full-blooded original being unavailable to modern men and women, so it's said. – A burlesque for our degraded, imitative times, in which clowns reenact what was first done by heroes and by kings. – Well, then, so be it. – The question that's asked here remains as large as ever it was: which is, the nature of evil, how it's born, why it grows, how it takes unilateral possession of a many-sided human soul. Or, let's say: the enigma of Iago. It's not unknown for literary-theatrical exegetes, defeated by the character, to ascribe his actions to ‘motiveless malignity.’ Evil

“prevents the reader from getting absorbed into the world of the novel and imparts a Brechtian alienation effect, as in *Shame*, but leaves a sharper sense of the postmodern status of this novel as an art(y)efact.”³⁵⁷ It is this metafictional preoccupation of the novel that undermines the outlook propagated by its satanic narrator, precluding his conception as a powerful and insidious metaphysical being that is let loose upon the world from which God, the only being superior to Satan, has inexplicably absented himself. Instead, it reduces the narratorial voice to an effect of language, a discursive construct which, if we were to follow its own logic, invites the subversion of its own narratorial position.

Moreover, as Rushdie reconceptualises the migrant theme into the specific context of colonial encounter/clash of cultures, Gibreel’s and Saladin’s metamorphoses turn them into the paradigmatic noble savage and demonised cannibal, those two forms of engagement with radical alterity – or, to pursue the Shakespearean analogy, into Ariel and Caliban figures, with the author as Prospero in this Rushdiean drama. In Prospero’s soliloquy in the play’s epilogue, in which he directly addresses the audience, he begs to be released from its magic spell: since his “charms are all o’erthrown, And what strength I have’s mine own” (5.1.356-7), he presents himself in the triple identity of the character Prospero begging to be allowed to return to Naples, the actor playing him reminding the audience that what they are witnessing is a mere performance, and, finally, as the author Shakespeare himself, that impenetrable “iron mask” of literature,³⁵⁸ allowing a rare, perhaps unique, glimpse into his own identity as he takes his leave of the stage:

Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;
And my ending is despair.
Unless I be reliev’d by prayer,
Which pierces so, that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardoned be,

is evil and will do evil, and that’s that; the serpent’s poison is his very definition. – Well, such shruggings-off will not pass muster here. My Chamcha may be no Ancient of Venice, my Allie no smothered Desdemona, Farishta no match for the Moor, but they will, at least, be costumed in such explanations as my understanding will allow. – And so, now, Gibreel waves in greeting; Chamcha approaches; the curtain rises on a darkening stage.” (SV, 424-5)

³⁵⁷ D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, *Salman Rushdie* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), 94.

³⁵⁸ Boris Tomaševskij, “Literature and Biography,” in *Authorship*, ed. Seán Burke, 82.

Let your indulgence set me free. (5.1.366-375)³⁵⁹

These final lines reveal an artistic manifesto – “my project... was to please”, “spirits to enforce, art to enchant”; the author/character/actor seeks to validate his life’s work by asking for the audience’s “indulgence” to “free [him of] all faults” and to receive his creation in the Christian spirit of prayer and mercy. The authorial intrusions into the text in *The Satanic Verses* similarly conflate three authorial avatars: God (who fashions his own universe out of the primordial chaos of the creative material at his disposal, refashioning the holy scriptures of the Bible and the Qur’an into his own secular orthodoxy), Satan (who is the voice of difference in the author-God-created world, fostering a spirit of doubt in his authority and thereby encouraging a deconstructionist stance vis-à-vis the text itself) and the human, empirical author who for a moment, like Shakespeare through Prospero, destroys the narrative illusion and inhabits his own text as a “myopic scrivener.”

b. The “Myopic Scrivener”

The question of authorial subjectivity in this novel of incessant ontological and thematic fluidness is crystallised in the scene in which the dream-tormented psyche of Gibreel sees a vision of God. As opposed to Blake’s vision,³⁶⁰ who through Isaiah posited God as “an immanence, an incorporeal indignation,” Gibreel’s reduces “the Supreme Being” to a pitiable corporeality:

³⁵⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in *The RSC William Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 2007), 50-1.

³⁶⁰ On finding her scribbled copy of Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Gibreel reads a fragment of Isaiah’s reply to the poet’s query to Isaiah and Ezekiel “how they dared so roundly to assert that God spoke to them” – “I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover’d the infinite in every thing; and as I was then perswaded, & remain confirm’d, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences, but wrote.” Isaiah locates the source of his divine inspiration not in a transcendental being, but in himself. Blake’s visionary mysticism asserts the transcendental as immanent in humanity and serves as a reminder, which Gibreel ignores, that transcendence is inherent in our earthly existence.

He saw, sitting on the bed, a man of about the same age as himself, of medium height, fairly heavily built, with salt-and-pepper beard cropped close to the line of the jaw. What struck him most was that the apparition was balding, seemed to suffer from dandruff and wore glasses. This was not the Almighty he had expected. (SV, 318)

In contrast to God's incorporeal apparition to Moses, in a terrifying vision which leaves the latter awe-struck, the all too corporeal God in Gibreel's vision is of an unenviable appearance, suffering the physical shortcomings of an ordinary human being. Moreover, he bears the appearance of the novel's author, Rushdie himself – God here looks like a “myopic scrivener.” Yet, when Gibreel asks who he is, this God does not announce unequivocally, as Moses's did to him, “I *am* the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6), but equivocates: the apparition identifies himself as “Ooparvala, the Fellow Upstairs”, but he may equally be “Neechayvala, the Guy from Underneath”, i.e. the devil himself. The unwillingness to proclaim his identity approximates this God to Satan and his minions, who are notorious shape-shifters, masters of disguise, never satisfying the inquiring humans' desire to identify themselves to them. Moreover, as he experiences the all too divine emotion of wrath, he starts speaking in the plural (again in contrast to the Biblical God who says “I am what I am”):

“We're losing patience with you, Gibreel Farishta. You've doubted Us just about long enough.” Gibreel hung his head, blasted by the wrath of God. “We are not obliged to explain Our nature to you,” the dressing-down continued. “Whether We be multiform, plural, representing the union-by-hybridisation of such opposites as *Oopar* and *Neechay*, or whether We be pure, stark, extreme, will not be resolved here.” (SV, 319)

The Author-God here posits for himself the same identitary binary that he establishes for the migrant selves of Gibreel and Saladin: the hybrid, plural identity comprising the divine and the satanic, as opposed to the pure, homogeneous, theological identity (the progenitor of everything “good”) that is traditionally attributed to God. Interestingly, the dichotomy he poses here is not between “oopar” or “neechay,” but between the hybrid (“oopar-neechay”) and the pure (that might be “oopar” or “neechay”). As the pure, unadulterated identity is revealed in the novel as unattainable and impossible, this manifestation of God implicitly exhibits the plural hybridity of the characters, each of whom exists as a fragment in all the others, each of whom is permeated by the satanic principle weaving its seductive magic through satanic verses, and each of whom is invaded by characters from a different ontological level. Like Gibreel's materialisation in his

dreams as a fluid self composed of dreamer and dreamed-of, human and archangel, this vision also has an unclear ontological status: is it God, Satan disguised as God or the author-as-God? The novel here consistently follows its own deconstructionist, satanic aesthetics by allowing all possibilities. Since the narrator (satanic and traditional) does not intervene in the first person as heretofore and is represented through Gibreel's confused psyche, we can conclude that it is indeed a vision of a supernatural being – either God in his pure presence, Satan disguised as God (recognisable by his fluid identity) or another metaphysical being embodying the duality God/Satan and thereby manifesting the hybrid identity on a supernatural level. In this sense, the vision represents an expected line of development in the plot featuring a character who, faced with a loss of faith and ethical uncertainty, longs for a sign of God's existence, which is here confirmed as a hybrid being. By seeing a vision of such a God, Gibreel is yet again led by his own subconscious to learn to embrace the multiple aspects of his personality and, more importantly, to reconcile his own religious doubts with a form of religious faith that he evidently still feels. In this way, the dream sequences and this vision of God belie the satanic narrator's philosophy of faith and doubt as opposite and mutually exclusive. They provide Gibreel with a way towards personal and cultural integration which he resolutely and disastrously fails to follow.

And yet, the language of this supposedly exalted figure is uncharacteristically low-key and conversational, lacking the solemnity of the Absolute itself; it also markedly differs from the seductively erudite rhetoric of the satanic narrator:

“The point is, there will be no more dilly-dallying. You wanted clear signs of Our existence? We sent Revelation to fill your dreams: in which not only Our nature, but yours also, was clarified. But you fought against it, struggling against the very sleep in which We were awakening you. Your fear of the truth has finally obliged Us to expose Ourselves, at some personal inconvenience, in this woman's residence at an advanced hour of the night. It is time, now, to shape up. Did We pluck you from the skies so that you could boff and spat with some (no doubt remarkable) flatfoot blonde? There's work to be done”. (SV, 319)

If Gibreel sees a vision not of God, but of the author, as a material manifestation of the narrative voice permeating the novel (and the grotesque physical description of the being allows this option: “The disarranged bed on which his Visitor had rested Its posterior (which, Gibreel now observed, was glowing faintly, like the rest of the Person) was granted a highly disapproving

glance“), then the text again provides a dual interpretation: this authorial figure is the narrative voice intervening on numerous occasions in the text, a voice that branches off into the dual narrative persona of the traditional omniscient author and Satan/the satanic narrator. If this is Satan/the satanic narrator, as he is also a character in the narrative he narrates, the vision represents a manifestation of an intradiegetic narrator, hitherto revealed only to the reader, who finally reveals himself to a character in his own narrative. If, on the other hand, this is the traditional narrator, extradiegetic as he has not functioned as a character so far, then his appearance adds another layer to the transgressive aesthetics of the novel, whereby the diegetic and ontological levels are constantly broken and interwoven. This postmodernist device of frame-breaking, as Brian McHale points out, simultaneously foregrounds the author’s superior reality and destabilises it by making it just another fictional layer:

Frame-breaking is a risky business. Intended to establish an absolute level of reality, it paradoxically *relativises* reality; intended to provide an ontologically stable foothold, it only destabilises ontology further. For the metafictional gesture of sacrificing an illusory reality to a higher, “realer” reality, that of the author, sets a precedent: why should this gesture not be *repeatable*? What prevents the author’s reality from being treated in its turn as an illusion to be shattered? Nothing whatsoever, and so the supposedly absolute reality of the author becomes just another level of fiction, and the *real* world retreats to a further remove. Or to put it differently, to reveal the author’s position within the ontological structure is only to introduce the author *into the fiction*; far from abolishing the frame, this gesture merely *widens* it to include the author as a fictional character.³⁶¹

The vision is, significantly, de-solemnified and its lack of ineffable sublimity is in marked contrast to Allie’s overpowering transcendent experience of God on Mount Everest and therefore cannot possibly be the same God; in fact, his colloquial, at times even crude, language identifies him not as any sort of metaphysical being, but as the writer himself, who, in his self-conceit, paints his auto-portrait by toying with the idea of being both God-like in his creative omnipotence and satanic in his playful mischievousness (at one point he even admits as much: “I, in my mischievousness...”). Thus, the entire otherworldly spiritual and material landscape of the novel does not, as Clark says, stage Satan’s perennial vendetta against God, but adds a transcendental, sublime dimension to the representation of the artist that Rushdie makes in this

³⁶¹ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 197-8, emphasis original.

novel. Yet, the artist is instantly undermined in his divine and satanic pretensions by the openly de-aestheticised and de-solemnified nature of his portrait. The focus on the banally corporeal recalls Joyce's own author-God analogy, emphasising their indifference: "The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails,"³⁶² which in turn evokes Flaubert's assertion that "[t]he artist must be in his work as God is in creation, invisible yet all-powerful; we must sense him everywhere but never see him."³⁶³ Rushdie obviously plays with various ideas about authorial presence in the written work, invoking metafictional and other postmodernist narrative strategies to exemplify this. Importantly, this manifestation of the author does not absolutise his superior position as an agent of the creation of the world he inhabits.

This plural authorial character intervenes once more in the text, alluding to his appearance before Gibreel in Allie's bedroom:

I'm saying nothing. Don't ask me to clear things up one way or the other; the time of revelations is long gone. The rules of Creation are pretty clear: you set things up, you make them thus and so, and then you let them roll. Where's the pleasure if you're always intervening to give hints, change the rules, fix the fights? Well, I've been pretty self-controlled up to this point and I don't plan to spoil things now. Don't think I haven't wanted to butt in; I have, plenty of times. And once, it's true, I did. I sat on Alleluia Cone's bed and spoke to the superstar, Gibreel. *Ooparvala or Neechayvala*, he wanted to know, and I didn't enlighten him; I certainly don't intend to blab to this confused Chamcha instead.

I'm leaving now. The man's going to sleep. (SV, 408-9)

Here again, he refuses to identify himself and to clarify anything, dismissing the character and leaving him to draw his own conclusions as to his identity and addressing himself to the reader instead. He is distanced from the character, does not assume responsibility for the latter's actions and does not exhibit the closeness that a God or an author would have towards his creations. As the plot reaches its culmination, this unidentifiable narrative persona gradually exits the text,

³⁶² James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 189. An equally bizarre image of the indifferent God can be found in Edward Albee's play *The Zoo Story*, which Rushdie tried to produce in Pakistan and from which he had to delete "the line about God being a coloured queen who wears a kimono and plucks his eyebrows". (Salman Rushdie, "Censorship", in *Imaginary Homelands*, 38)

³⁶³ Miriam Allott, *Novelists on the Novel* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 271.

having made his presence known both to the characters and, in asides such as the above-quoted passage, to the reader, facing both groups with the difficult hermeneutical task of extracting the novel's ethical core(s). In a novel replete with seers, prophets and mystics of various sorts, the myopic scrivener is unusually reticent in this passage, his language devoid of loftiness and instead drenched in colloquialisms that reduce him to a fight-fixer butting in, blabbing, having a glowing posterior (these words are capitalised for comic effect), etc.

The authority of literature, rather than in the personality of the author, resides in his creations and, above all, in the authorial alter egos he proliferates throughout the novel. He is like Prospero in whom, as many critics have claimed, Shakespeare has put the most of himself, setting the stage for his entry into the world of the imagination he has created only to announce his exit; having allowed this one glimpse into his personality, he, like Shakespeare, disappears from his creation, letting it speak for itself. As Brian McHale points out, "there is a catch" when the author appears in the world of his fiction – he becomes a fiction himself.

The *real* artist always occupies an ontological level superior to that of his projected, fictional self, and therefore *doubly* superior to the fictional world: [in Diderot's *Jacques the Fatalist*,] behind Jacques and the world he occupies stands "the author," and somewhere behind "the author" stands the real Diderot. There is a possibility here of infinite regress, puppet-master behind puppet-master *ad infinitum*. The romantic godlike poet is, to revert to theological discourse, both immanent and transcendent, both *inside* his heterocosm and *above* it, simultaneously present and absent.³⁶⁴

This image of a de-solemnified and devalued author, set against the figures of both divinely-sanctioned prophets and their secular poetic counterparts, both of whom obstinately cling to their respective sacred and profane texts, makes *The Satanic Verses* "a text[, which] is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."³⁶⁵ It is this authorial figure's willingness to remove himself from the text he, we presume, writes/creates that opens the text to the ambivalence and indeterminacy of interpretation that is its defining characteristic. As he openly refuses to clarify the ontological and ethical dilemmas of his creations, he leaves the scene open for their own flawed ethical choices and the more than

³⁶⁴ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 30, emphasis original.

³⁶⁵ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image Music Text*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 146.

willing intrusion of that other, satanic, narrator, who, conversely, butts in at every available opportunity.

The authorial-narrative figure thus presents himself as an alter ego of his protagonists Gibreel and Saladin, with the same schizophrenic identity, which he appropriates: Saladin's with the proliferation of voices that nobody can identify as belonging to one person and Gibreel's stage and film capacity to enact a theological and mythological multiplicity. Creator and creation thus represent the same schizo-identity capable of splitting into countless selves/chronotopes and functioning on several ontological levels, with varying degrees of real-ness and fictionality. By providing a momentary glimpse of the author (as a real person and as a fictional construct) who gives birth to all this complex world in the guise of the myopic scrivener, the text posits the author-God as the starting point, the kernel from which spring and around which revolve the concentric circles of the various diegetic and ontological levels of the narrative, and by the same gesture splits this seemingly unitary centre into a plural, heterogeneous, and self-contradictory identity of *coincidentio oppositorum*. Here the umbilical cord analogy, of which more will be said later, is apposite: just as the revelation of the Qur'an was effected by the fusion of the archangelic and the prophetic / the creating and the created selves, so the cord indissolubly binding author and character/text into an "aesthetic contract" must flow in both directions and make the author himself in the image of his characters as much as he makes them in his. This, in turn, to pursue the author-God analogy, mirrors the bidirectional creationary impulse whereby God has created man in his own image and has in turn been made in man's. Collapsing the differences between creator and creation, this author-Satan-God who is also his characters, resembles Borges's Shakespeare who

before or after dying... found himself in the presence of God and told Him: "I who have been so many men in vain want to be one and myself." The voice of the Lord answered from a whirlwind: "Neither I am anyone; I have dreamt the world as you dreamt your work, my Shakespeare, and among the forms in my dream are you, who like myself are many and no one."³⁶⁶

To sum up, this manifestation of the author as both a totalising structure embodying the divine/satanic/human condition and a fractured entity splitting itself into countless authorial

³⁶⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, "Everything and Nothing," in *Authorship*, ed. Seán Burke, 338-9.

avatars enacts the metaphor of the tower of Babel, which represents both a totality (it is a product of the universal language that humanity has lost) and a multiplicity (it marked the splitting of the universal language into many)³⁶⁷; in addition, it represents the frustrated attempt of humanity to reach God, making real transcendence impossible. The multiple inflections the novel attributes to the authorial figure and consequently to authorial identity cannot be equated with a desire, on Rushdie's part, to posit aesthetic/secular transcendence as preferable to the impossibilised divine/real one. After all, there is nothing flattering in the portrait of this aestheticised "authorised" God. Rather, the novel inscribes itself into the tradition of literary explorations of the intellectual void/chaos in which authorship gestates and from which the authorial self projects itself simultaneously in the transcendent heights of the divine (symbolised by the motif of the ascent) and in the degraded depths of the humanly fallible (symbolised by the motif of the fall), claiming for itself the nomadic and inconstant abode of epistemic and ontological homelessness.

The Satanic Verses thus posits an ambivalent authorial identity that branches off into multiple and contradictory authorial selves in order to construct a satanic ontology whereby the different aspects of the author's subjectivity interanimate and enrich one another. In this way, this novel charts a different territory from the previous novels of our corpus, *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, wherein the author's self is unimaginable without the national and/or historical layer it seeks to integrate within oneself. In contrast to these two novels, which are preoccupied with how an author becomes an author, *Fury* and *Quichotte*, to which I now turn, shift the focus onto how the author's identity is moulded in relation to his creations.

³⁶⁷ For an exhaustive analysis of the myth of Babel, see Paul Zumthor, *Babel ou l'inachèvement* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1997).

III. “Devour Me, Creation”: *Fury* and the Cosmopolitan Author

Along with *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Fury* inaugurates a locational and ideological shift in Rushdie’s *oeuvre* – the postcolonial paradigm is abandoned for a cosmopolitan one, while the artist’s rootedness in a collective entity is replaced with a tragic individualism. Malik Solanka, the author-protagonist of this novel, is a lonely, isolated figure lost in the consumerist and superficial maelstrom of contemporary New York, whose predicament can be seen as an expression of Rushdie’s decentred and divided self after the fatwa. As he puts it, the demonised image his detractors created after the notoriety of *The Satanic Verses* has made him feel “as if I have been concealed behind a *false self*, as if a shadow has become substance while I have been relegated to the shadows.”³⁶⁸ Malik Solanka epitomises this authorial split self, as he feels pursued by an Other self, which, similar to Borges’s, is an estranged self that bears his name and is an alterity nevertheless. Cut off from the moorings of nation, family and home, he is left with only art to validate his existence – art here is not an alternative (hi)story as in MC and MLS, but the only world in which the author seeks to belong. As Sarah Brouillette puts it,

... with Rushdie’s career in mind, what I want to suggest is that the novel’s more significant solipsism is its paranoia about the way mass media make cultural products available for highly politicised forms of appropriation or interpretation that betray the controlling intentions of their authors. As Rushdie’s career has developed – in tandem with the increasing control of literary publishing by multinational corporations – there has been a parallel movement within his fiction from a general attention to the politics of contemporary nation-formation, particularly within a South Asian context, to a more solipsistic interest in the status of authorship and origins within the field of cultural production for a global market.³⁶⁹

Marianne Corrigan states that in *Fury*, Rushdie describes “the inter-connective networks of contemporary culture” and the novel, along with his other 21st-century novels, represents a

³⁶⁸ Salman Rushdie, “In Good Faith,” in *Imaginary Homelands*, 405.

³⁶⁹ Sarah Brouillette, “Authorship as Crisis in Salman Rushdie’s *Fury*,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2005 40(1): 140.

“rhizomatic narrative of globalisation.”³⁷⁰ Anshuman Mondal argues that in this novel, the critique of globalisation is tempered with “an aestheticism that consistently undermines this critique.”³⁷¹ Thus, Rushdie seems to confirm Timothy Brennan’s early judgment of his work as outside the truly postcolonial paradigm of decolonisation that offers affirmative options for postcolonial nations and Third World nationalism, all of which Rushdie abandons in the interest of the “detached and insensitive [...] logic of cosmopolitan ‘universality.’”³⁷² However, Bishnupriya Ghosh claims that it is possible to “confront cosmopolitan privilege without dismissing cosmopolitanism as politically bankrupt.”³⁷³ Rishona Zimrung suggests that in *Fury*,

cosmopolitanism provides a way out – perhaps the notorious “third principle” of *Midnight’s Children* – of the binary opposition between colonial and postcolonial, allowing for a questioning of both... *Fury* bears disappointed, disillusioned witness to the fading of an American dream of cosmopolitan possibilities and to the desolation of a postcolonial writer whose rejection of nostalgia makes going home an impossible consolation.³⁷⁴

Ironically,

Rushdie’s later “writing self” seems to have merged with that simulacrum of him that had been deployed in polarised debates about the “Rushdie affair.” Writing from within the celebrity glasshouse, his work is now as much written from the American centre as about it, as much a reinforcement of his own celebrity as an indictment of the culture that sustains it, as much an articulation of globalisation as a critique of it. The result is a chronic ambivalence.³⁷⁵

Sarah Brouillette also reads *Fury* as a fictional exploration of Rushdie’s own status as a literary celebrity:

It is then all too appropriate – given the fate of Malik’s own narratives – that critical reception of *Fury* almost universally read the text as the product of Rushdie’s self-obsessed solipsism. What needs to be acknowledged is that the book is not about

³⁷⁰ Marianne Corrigan, “Rushdie as an International Writer: *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Fury*, *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence*,” in *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Eaglestone and McQuillan, 34-5.

³⁷¹ Anshuman A. Mondal, “*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury*: The Reinvention of Location,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*, ed. Abdulrazak Gurnah, 170.

³⁷² Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, 165.

³⁷³ Ghosh, *When Borne Across*, 20.

³⁷⁴ Rishona Zimrung, “The Passionate Cosmopolitan in Salman Rushdie’s *Fury*,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 2010, 46:1, 14.

³⁷⁵ Anshuman Mondal, “*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury*,” 173-4.

Rushdie's life, but about "Rushdie" as brand name, as paratext, and as icon. It concerns the very process through which "Rushdie" then turns his "backstory"—a story defined by the contentious politicisation of literary works – into yet another book, available again for scrutiny and critique. If *The Jaguar Smile* sees contemporary political movements necessarily drawing on the resources of media and participating in the conscious creation of a historically situated iconography, in *Fury* those movements instead pose a direct challenge to the creative rights of one individual, who is granted a special power to manipulate both his own history and contemporary politics within his fictional works. For Malik, the subsequent reintegration of those narratives into the world produces an anxiety about the way the meaning they take on erases not just his intentions but also, as the novel's frequent references to masks suggests, his very identity.³⁷⁶

How authorial identity is shaped and destabilised in relation to the author's creations is a crucial issue in *Fury* and this focus marks a turning point in Rushdie's *oeuvre*. The novel is a reflection of and on its author's status as a literary celebrity; hence, its preoccupation with the consequences and the aftermath of literary creation, the author's responsibility as an arbiter of ideas and public opinion, and the degree of independence his work can attain from its creator.

a. "Unselfing" the Self: The Fury of Creation

The dominant Rushdiean themes of the self-invention and reconstruction of identity encoded in migration and national, cultural and epistemological nomadism are subdued in *Fury*, which reveals the ontological void of hybridity. The ontological richness of Saleem's and Moraes's relational selves, productively re-constructed along multiple axes of identification, gives way to a significantly impoverished sense of self that glosses over a traumatic past in India and England and roots itself in a perpetual present where instead of the desired oblivion, the authorial self is haunted by the ghosts of the past subsumed under an all-engulfing "fury." Madelena Gonzalez sees the novel as "an embattled *Künstlerroman*" painting "[a] portrait of the artist in a permanent state of disquietude, the 'furia,' described in Rushdie's novel as the natural condition of the inspired creator, striving to reconnect with real emotion, to reinstate the language of the heart through recourse to the myth of the Romantic imagination, negative capability and the creative

³⁷⁶ Brouillette, "Authorship as Crisis," 151.

energy or special madness of poetry,”³⁷⁷ Malik’s personal and artistic *Bildung*, like that of Saleem and Moraes, is unsuccessful, albeit in different ways. Saleem and Moraes, encountering disintegration and death where the traditional *Bildungsheld* would find fulfillment and entry into maturity, nevertheless saw their authorship as carrying their spiritual legacy and therefore vindicating their quest for personal and historical meaning. For them, the texts they produced represented a counterforce to the constraints of their subjecthood and thus took over once the physical body gave in. In other words, *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* pivot around the conception of the text as a textual body where different strands of the author’s identity meet and form an indivisible texture in a richly layered palimpsest wherein the individual self is inseparable and unimaginable without the socially, historically and culturally inflected self. In *Fury*, this conception of the self is radically different in that the authorial subjectivity is (re-)constructed in its unstable interaction with its own artistic creations, which represent the *agon* that propels the dynamism of authorship. Through his most famous creations – the doll Little Brain and the cyborg Kronos – Malik explores different aspects of his self that ultimately lead nowhere as both creator and creation are engulfed in the world of (mis)appropriation and simulacra.

According to Damian Grant, the quest towards which Malik Solanka is propelled is “for the discovery of the self, or rather for the ‘unselfing of the self’ (*F*, 79), as Solanka seeks, through a painful process of confession and expiation, to recognise and admit to the kind of person he is, the forces that drive him, and the experiences which have made him so.”³⁷⁸ Here, Rushdie explores the crisis of authorial subjectivity, as Malik’s desire to lose himself in the world of the simulacrum and empty consumerism of New York is directly triggered by the consequences of his artistic creation – the commercialisation of his doll Little Brain and the disassociation of his creation from its creator, which is therefore the “orphaned” “text” circulating globally without the guidance of its author-father. Activating the Frankenstein effect and developing the theme from *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie reconfigures an archetypal subtext – that of artistic creation as divine creation – in a modern setting: Malik fashions a creature out of clay which subsequently “rebels” against him, threads on the principles he instilled in it and

³⁷⁷ Madelena Gonzalez, “*United States of Banana* (2011), *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) and *Fury* (2001): Portrait of the Writer as the ‘Bad Subject’ of Globalisation,” *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 46 | 2014, non. pag.

³⁷⁸ Damian Grant, *Salman Rushdie*, 152.

starts a new life independent of its creator, while ineluctably remaining tied to him with elastic bonds.

Malik becomes a creator as a decisive divergence from academic life. Finding the academic environment of Cambridge as despair-inducing on account of its “narrowness, infighting and ultimate provincialism” (*F*, 14), he embarks on creating his own intellectual world. In the intellectual climate from which he springs, literature and art in general have become arenas in which human being-ness in this world has turned into an aporetic point where the contradictions of human existence remain unresolvable and unexplainable. Thus, his wife’s doctoral thesis on Shakespeare’s tragedies sees Othello’s demise as caused not by Iago’s “motiveless malignity” but by the conflict of cultural values separating him from Desdemona – he kills her in an act of honour killing, for as a Muslim he thinks within the parameters of the culture of honour and shame, not the Christian ethics of sin and redemption. In this view, Othello is incapable of seeing Desdemona as a person and therefore of truly loving her, which renders their love story doomed from the beginning. Similarly, his intellectual alter ego, his friend Dubdub (Krzysztof Waterford-Wajda), ultimately cannot live up to Candide’s ideal of “cultiver son jardin” which he defends in his widely popular lectures and, finding Pangloss’s optimism that this is the best of all possible worlds untenable, dies quasi-suicidally of operable clogged arteries that he refuses to have treated. Another dominant intellectual character is Jack Rhinehart, whose fall from a politically committed journalist documenting the brutalities in such crisis-riven regions as Bosnia, Rwanda, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Timor, etc. to a lapdog and “house nigger” (*F*, 57) of the rich white class of New York marks the blind spot that is hybridity in this novel. Like the half-English half-Polish Dubdub, Rhinehart in the end gives in to the ontological tragism encoded in his unstable identity. Originally identifying as African-American, separated from white America by its racism, he sheds this hyphenated identity and becomes simply an American, taking on his “usefully non-black specific name” (*F*, 57), devoid of ghetto connotations. Although he is the cherished Rushdiean self-invented man, possessing the “human capacity for automorphosis” (*F*, 55), here the liberating power of hybridity is submerged by the American tendency to appropriate and Americanise not just concepts and cultural practices, but the innermost individual psyche.

The position from which Malik “speaks” in this novel is radically different from that of Rushdie’s other authorial figures. The hybrid framework of the previous novels, in which the

artist seeks his authenticity, is abandoned: Malik does not possess the identitary palimpsest that defined Saleem/India, Moraes/Boabdil, the conjoined selves of Gibreel and Saladin or the satanically diversified Author-God. All forms of commonality and collective forms of identification are exploded, for Malik's time is the aftermath of the dismantling of the hippy, Marxist and other utopias of the 1960s and the setting in of Thatcherism in Britain (whose conservatism was a "counterculture gone wrong"), whereby power was taken from the old power-blocs to be given not to the people but "to a web of fat-cat cronies" (*F*, 23). The political and intellectual currents of those times have given rise to the "two great industries of the future" that will later on shape Malik's life:

The industry of culture would in the coming decades replace that of ideology, becoming "primary" in the way that economics used to be, and spawn a whole new *nomenklatura* of cultural commissars, a new breed of apparatchiks engaged in great ministries of definition, exclusion, revision, and persecution, and a dialectic based on the new dualism of defense and offense. And if culture was the world's new secularism, then its new religion was fame, and the industry – or, better, the church – of celebrity would give meaningful work to a new *ecclesia*, a proselytising mission designed to conquer this new frontier, building its glitzy celluloid vehicles and its cathode-ray rockets, developing new fuels out of gossip, flying the Chosen Ones to the stars. And to fulfill the darker requirements of the new faith, there were occasional human sacrifices, and steep, wing-burning falls. (*F*, 24)

The cosmopolitan authorial sensibility that in the previous novels led to a relational conception of the self, culture and history, is here manifested in the rootless, rudderless and purposeless character of Malik becoming gradually "unselfed" in a society of simulacra and uncontrolled consumerism. His American "unselfing" is presented in terms alluding to consumption ("America is the great devourer, and so I have come to America to be devoured" [*F*, 69]), renaming ("Give me a name, America, make of me a Buzz or Chip or Spike"), loss of memory ("Bathe me in amnesia and clothe me in your powerful unknowing... No longer a historian but a man without histories let me be"), loss of language ("I'll rip my lying mother tongue out of my throat and speak your broken English instead"), and technologisation ("Scan me, digitise me, beam me up" [*F*, 51]).

The force that threatens to unmake him is an ontologically destabilising "fury" that dominates both him and his surroundings. It is conceived of as an expression of the inauthentic self, as in Jack's case, behind whose mask Malik detects "the self-loathing fire of his rage" (*F*,

58); the rage and impotence of “the wretched of the earth,” as for Mila, her father and the angry taxi-driver Ali, and a generalised state of mind of modernity:

Life is fury, he'd thought. Fury – sexual, Oedipal, political, magical, brutal – drives us to our finest heights and coarsest depths. Out of *furia* comes creation, inspiration, originality, passion, but also violence, pain, pure unafraid destruction, the giving and receiving of blows from which we never recover. The Furies pursue us; Shiva dances his furious dance to create and also to destroy. (*F*, 30-1)

As Vassilena Parashkevova puts it,

[a]s a metaphor, fury is strongly reminiscent of shame in Rushdie's early novel of the same title in that both “conditions” are at once the cause and effect of themselves, feeding off themselves and gaining in potency until they reach epidemic proportions... *Fury* engages in tracing the ways in which specific genealogies and trajectories of fury – American as well as postcolonial, post-communist, nationalist, ethnic or indigenous, crisscross, overlap and inform each other.³⁷⁹

Fury becomes Malik's own personal demon, a paranoid anxiety that manifests itself in outbursts of expletives, violent behavior, loss of consciousness induced by drink, blackouts, etc., the roots of which can be traced to the abuse by his stepfather he suffered as a child and exacerbated by the loss of Little Brain. In a twist of the Frankenstein theme, Rushdie explores the consequences of the break-up of the creationary bond between creator-creature for the creator himself, who becomes a monster to his own Frankenstein, unable to imagine a life without his creation and, deprived of it, sinks into a life of emptiness and, so he fears, murderous destruction. Estranged from himself, becoming his own Other, he seeks integration in love and temporarily finds it, first in Mila and then in Neela, who both provide a healthy focus for his artistic creativity (Mila gives him a new artistic project and Neela a political one). However, the invocation of the mythical avenging goddesses as the presiding spirit of the modern age cannot help but render femininity, as Malik conceives it, a dark, inscrutable force that threatens the male ego with destruction. At one point, the three women in his life – his wife Eleanor, Mila and Neela – become incarnations of the Furies of Greek mythology, confronting Malik with his marital and sexual transgressions:

³⁷⁹ Parashkevova, *Salman Rushdie's Cities*, 158.

Everywhere you looked, thought Professor Malik Solanka, the fury was in the air. Everywhere you listened you heard the beating of the dark goddesses' wings. Tisiphone, Alecto, Megaera: the ancient Greeks were so afraid of these, their most ferocious deities, that they didn't even dare to speak their real name. To use that name, *Erinnyes*, Furies, might very well be to call down upon yourself those ladies' lethal wrath. Therefore, and with deep irony, they called the enraged trinity "the good-tempered ones": *Eumenides*. The euphemistic name did not, alas, result in much of an improvement in the goddesses' permanent bad mood. (*F*, 123)

The mythic subtext of the Furies and their transformation from blood-thirsty avenging goddesses into the tamed Eumenides represents a paradigm shift of the civilisational ethos from a primitive culture of strict and inviolable moral norms in which transgression is severely punished into a time of lax morality in which the essence of things (around which the notions of right and wrong are erected) is replaced with an ethical, epistemic and rhetorical toying with the fundamental values of human existence.³⁸⁰ The modern era of divided and imploding societies and

³⁸⁰ Aeschylus's play *The Eumenides* dramatises this shift through the evolution of the familial ethos of Greek tradition as exemplified in the tragedy of the house of Atreus. After killing his mother Clytemnestra as a retribution for her killing his father, Orestes is pursued by the Furies who, spurred on by Clytemnestra's ghost, demand his punishment. Orestes is protected by Apollo, who had incited him to the murder in the first place and who successfully defends his case at the trial convened by Athena. Matricide is pardoned in the end and Orestes is excused from guilt; Clytemnestra, on the other hand, is abhorred by everyone in Hades. Having been cheated of dispensing their Fate-ordained just retribution, at the end of the play the Furies are left alone with Athena, bemoaning that "The old is trampled by the new!" (803). Athena describes the inauguration of a new era, with herself, the goddess of wisdom, as its emblem and patron: the time of violence and implacable immemorial law is past and the era of peace, prosperity and progress, guided by persuasion, wisdom and reconciliation has arrived. The Furies will henceforth be in charge of marriage and giving birth, two sacraments that ensure the continuation of a society and bind its people together. Such is Athena's eloquence that the Furies are enthralled by their new role and eagerly offer to do more. Thus, the drastic shift from a matriarchal to a patriarchal culture in Aeschylus's play marks a corresponding ethical shift from a violent, blood-thirsty, barbaric age to an enlightened era of reason and moderation. Aeschylus foregrounds two crucial aspects: the taming and domestication of the dark and inscrutable force of the Furies, which goes hand in hand with the overall devaluation of the feminine in the new patriarchal order, and the triumph of rationality by the elimination of violence, which marks the power of the word to persuade, assuage, excuse, and relativise what has so far been inexcusable and absolute (matricide according to the old ethos represented by the Furies was the ultimate taboo and an inexcusable and punishable crime; in the new order presided over by Athena, it is a pardonable offence, with Orestes' acquittal being achieved chiefly by her – the goddess of wisdom's – eloquence). Apart from the general sociological implications of the supplanting of the matriarchal order by a patriarchal one, both Aeschylus and Rushdie place a crucial importance on the discursive power of the new order, in which language is dislodged from its position as a symbol of "presence", wherein meaning – pure, unambiguous and absolute – positively resides, and is rather retroped as history's and religion's Other, aestheticising and thereby relativising their discourses. (Aeschylus, *The Oresteian Trilogy* [London: Penguin Books, 1959])

disintegrated families and collective forms of belonging seems to be the ideal milieu for quenching the Furies' avenging thirst – “from New York to Lilliput-Blefuscu there was no escape from the beating of their wings” (*F*, 251). However, Malik's obsessive preoccupation with the Furies turns out to be not so much the chaos of modern life as the split in his psyche caused by the loss of his creation, Little Brain: his dark, furious self emerges for the first time when, after his wife got rid of every trace of his doll from their home, he catches himself, in a clearly disassociated state of mind, standing above his sleeping wife and son with a knife in his hand. Moreover, the doll represents both a product and an aspect of Malik's self. As Madelena Gonzalez points out, as part of his stepfather's abuse involved dressing him as a doll, the doll is his “feminine double” which makes him a “prisoner of a hermaphroditic impulse”³⁸¹ that he strives to sublimate in art. Hence, Little Brain is an externalised manifestation of his own feminine double, the loss of which “unselfs” him and makes him a victim of his own ontological and artistic fury.

On one level, the motif of the fury functions as a variation of the classical concept of the Muse and both Mila and Neela as incarnations of the creative feminine principle orient Malik's creative potential, which he compares to having “the divine afflatus: the breath of life” (*F*, 138). When Mila reveals herself naked to him, she is “the self she had never fully shown, Mila as Fury, the world-swallower, the self as pure transformative energy. In this incarnation she was simultaneously terrifying and wonderful” (*F*, 178). An affirmation of the creative impulse in terms of subjectivity and art, Mila-as-Muse overpowers the artist: as he admits, to deny her would mean agreeing to become dead, to unleash her dark double, “the dark fury” (*F*, 179).

However, the dominant image of the Furies in the novel is that of avenging goddesses bent on punishing the transgressions of Malik's artistic imagination – a modern-day Orestes, he is their predestined victim for turning not against his mother but against his artistic progeny. Thus, in *Fury*, Rushdie further develops his exploration of the workings of the artistic imagination by re-orienting his focus not on the genesis of the work of art or the genealogical positioning of the artist as in *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, but on the work of art itself, which is here captured in its afterlife. This focus, however, is not without implications for the authorial subjectivity. As Malik's creations – first Little Brain, then the puppet kings –

³⁸¹ Gonzalez, *Fiction after the Fatwa*, 178 and 181.

become outlaws repudiating the Law of the Father-Creator, what he perceives as their transgressions, flaws and debasement represent a reflection of his own.

For if Malik is his own doll-like feminine double, in creating the doll Little Brain he inevitably pours something of himself into her. As he says, she is a “questing knowledge-seeker”, a “female time-travelling doll”, “not so much a disciple as an agent provocateur” (*F*, 16-7), interrogator of the “Great Minds” philosopher-dolls, who in her insouciance and arrogant fearlessness resembles her godlike creator (as he admits, at one point Malik starts making his dolls out of clay in an act of *imitatio Dei*). Thus, in accordance with her modern-day taboo-breaking sensibility, she reproaches the doll of Galileo Galilei for submitting to the power of the Church and retracting his theory, confidently claiming that she would have burned the Vatican down; however, she, like Galileo, is censored. Paradoxically, Malik bolsters his self-image as a godlike creator by asserting the ontological supremacy of his (and god’s) creation: “Clay, of which God, who didn’t exist, made man, who did. Such was the paradox of human life: its creator was fictional, but life itself was a fact” (*F*, 95). As a result, Little Brain’s gradual growth from a doll, a puppet, an animated cartoon into a full-fledged public personality who has her own talk show and memoirs that are classified as “non-fiction” on the Amazon bestseller list marks her ontological transformation from a creation into an individual in her own right, while her creator’s identity takes the downward trajectory from an authoritative Creator/God/Father to an anonymous puppet-master who no longer pulls the strings and who, in the end, evaporates from her life as an anachronistic fiction:

This creature of his own imagining, born of his best self and purest endeavor, was turning before his eyes into the kind of monster of tawdry celebrity he most profoundly abhorred. His original and now obliterated Little Brain had been genuinely smart, able to hold her own with Erasmus or Schopenhauer. She had been beautiful and sharp-tongued, but she had swum in the sea of ideas, living the life of the mind. This revised edition, over which he had long ago lost creative control, had the intellect of a slightly over-average chimpanzee. Day by day she became a creature of the entertainment microverse... She was a video game and a cover girl, and this, remember, in her personal appearance mode at least, was essentially a woman whose own head was completely concealed inside the iconic doll’s. (*F*, 98)

However, in deploring the mass media misappropriation of his own creation, Malik is blind to the fact that Little Brain’s renegade progress is encoded in the very nature of his own authorship. Although initially envisioned as a counter-voice calling to accountability the great philosophers

of human history by putting them in modern-day scenarios that lay bare the epistemic and cultural superiority of their interviewer *vis-à-vis* the constraints of their time within which they had to operate, she becomes subsumed by the cultural industry and rendered its epitome, just as Malik's anti-establishmentarian credentials become eroded by his continuing to reap the profits of Little Brain's commercial success. To continue the analogy made in *The Satanic Verses*, if creator and creation mutually create each other, then Malik is no less a creation of Little Brain as she is of his. If she becomes a degraded version of her authentic self, so does he and it is his failure to assume responsibility for his complicity in Little Brain's degradation that occasions his split subjectivity and the dominance of his dark Other, the "fury" that dogs his steps and that he cannot help but identify with Mila, the consummate Little Brain brought to life.

b. Paradigms of Creation: Kronos

If Malik's first larger-than-life creation, Little Brain, represents his split subjectivity, his second, the cyberneticist Akasz Kronos, doubles it. Created as his *doppelganger*, Kronos bears Malik's exact physical resemblance: "a man with a full head of long silver hair framing a soft, round, surprisingly boyish face dominated by a wine-dark Cupid's bow of a mouth" (*F*, 162). Through the story of Kronos and the usurpation of his identity by his creation, the Dollmaker, Malik reproduces the motif of a creation turned against its creator, which multiples the chain of the creative process. Thus, we have the writer Rushdie and his fictional alter ego Malik, whose creation Little Brain turns against him; then, Malik creates Kronos after himself, who in turn creates the Dollmaker (an occupation that refers to Malik) and other cyborgs modeled after people from Malik's reality (the triple entity of Malik/Kronos/Dollmaker is replicated in that of Neela/Zameen of Rijk/Goddess of Victory). The religious and mythical matrix encoded in the act of creation forms the framework within which the creator-creation dynamic is to be played out: the creator creates his creations after his own image, but leaves them a certain degree of ontological freedom, as a consequence of which their meaningful potential is not reducible to what the creator instilled in them. Rather, they are largely free to transcend his "authorial intention" and become their own makers; however, this freedom is inevitably revealed to be the flaw in the creator's plan/providence, for, in their desire to assert themselves and their free

agency, the creations turn against their creator, either in an open confrontation (as Satan's and the other fallen angels' rebellion against God, the Dollmaker's revolution against Kronos, the monster's murderous spree against Frankenstein's family, the Olympian gods' war against the Titans, etc.) or, more importantly, by reducing his ontological status and making him nothing more than a fiction (like Man's treatment of God and, to an extent, Little Brain's of Malik).

Malik's name for his creation, Kronos, evokes the divine ruler from the race of the Titans who, having rebelled against his father Uranus and usurped his place, is in turn displaced by his own progeny, the future Olympian gods, led by Zeus (when Kronos cut off his father's genitalia, the resulting blood gave birth to the Furies – the genealogy creation-transgression thus seems to be encoded in the very nature of artistic creation). The mythical story envelops Kronos's fatherhood and divinity in the negative framework of infanticide and cannibalism, which, in turn necessitates rebellion and parricide. As in his dual identity as God and Father he conflates the two aspects of the creative potential, Cronos/Cronus/Kronos was also read as Chronos, or “‘Father Time’ with his relentless sickle,”³⁸² who ends up consuming what he has created. Defeated, he is represented as either imprisoned in Tartarus with the other Titans, as a ruler of the immortal heroes on the Island of the Blessed or yet as presiding over a Golden Age of a Golden Race at the beginning of mythic time. His iconography swerves from the negative one of creationary and ethical primordial chaos of mythical origins and the positive one of the ruler of a mythical utopia where, in a truly carnivalesque fashion, existing hierarchies are dismantled. His emergence as a utopian ruler seems to be invoked as a response to a period of crisis:

“All societies are constructions in the face of chaos. The constant possibility of anomic terror is actualised whenever legitimations obscuring the precariousness are threatened or collapse,” Berger and Luckman write, and in such situations, or more regularly in ceremonially created periods of crisis — literally: separation between two eras, situations, periods — a “deep legitimacy” is required, referring to a mythical reality outside ours, “the other reality,” lying outside history and space, an eternal truth that existed before time but still exists behind it and behind our reality, and occasionally mingles with ours in “periods of exception.”³⁸³

³⁸² Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 38.

³⁸³ H. S. Versnel, “Greek Myth and Ritual: the Case of Kronos,” in *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, ed. Jan Bremmer (London: Routledge, 1990), 137-8.

In other words, Kronos as the benevolent ruler and fatherly figure appears to satisfy a spiritual and cultural crisis in moments of deep societal changes that necessitates the belief in another reality, eternal, ideal and immutable, which exists separately from ours but is still connected to it. Kronos is thus the ultimate artist, creator and ruler of a separate, fictional world that is different from and yet mingles with the real one; he undertakes creation in response to a crisis in himself or his surroundings (in the same way that Malik's Kronos does when faced with the extinction of the Rijk civilisation), and, as a consequence, suffers the rebellion of his creations and his dethronement from the position of authority over them. The relation creator-creation is, according to this mythical paradigm, that of mutual dis-membering and re-membering, or, as the creator is also a father to his creation/child, infanticide and parricide – images of extreme violence that metaphorically describe the intensity (or, as Malik would have it, the “fury”) of bringing a new world into being.

In Malik's case, biological and textual fatherhood sit uneasily with each other: for the first time in Rushdie's fiction (with the exception of his children's books), his author-protagonist is a father, but, like Kronos, he metaphorically “devours” his child in order to clear the space for his artistic child, Little Brain. The son is an absent and barely remembered figure, while Little Brain and later the new character Kronos dominate the novel. Interestingly, Malik compares himself to Kronos not when he sidelines his son, but when his wife removes Little Brain from their home. Unable to separate himself from her, he subconsciously contemplates his wife's and child's murder, finds his doll and, carries her, torn and ragged, with him to America. His son Asmaan is evoked primarily through the semantics of his name – Urdu for “sky,” but so is Akasz, from the Hindi word for sky, “aakaash.” Following the family pattern of *Midnight's Children* (Shiva/Parvati/Aadam, Saleem/Padma/Aadam), Malik forms an affiliative family unit composed of Asmaan/Akasz (an incarnation of the sky gods Ouranos-Varuna, Brahma, Yahweh, Manitou), himself as Kronos and Neela/Zameen as the earth goddess (*F*, 170). The animosity he feels towards his family, whom he promptly abandons as soon as he loses Little Brain, is rooted in his pathological desire to remain forever in the primal scene of creation wherein only creator and creation exist and when they first become aware of each other, each seeking validation from the Other. This is similar to the Edenic scenes within which Saleem and Moraes see their beginnings and which connote the feeling of plenitude that will soon be lost forever, but while Saleem's and Moraes's falls meant the awakening of creativity, Malik's plunges him into an

ontological crisis. His obsession with his doll is satisfied when New York offers him the possibility to isolate himself from the frenzy of the outside world with Mila, an avatar of his creation, and thus recreate the initial impulse of creation (*Frankenstein* enacts a similar pattern whereby the monstrous creature causes the death of the entire family of his creator until the two of them alone are left in a final confrontation). However, as he soon realises, this hermetic scenario is unnatural – indeed, it is against nature and therefore troped as incestuous, with Malik turning into Mila’s surrogate father, in an echo of his own traumatic quasi-incestuous relationship with his stepfather. This awareness is the culmination of the dark creative force evoked by the motif of the fury, which is further exacerbated when he fears that his Jekyll persona, which arose in London, has become a serial killer.

Overall, the artistic subjectivity in this novel is destabilised and contradictory, as it finds artistic creation incompatible with familial procreation, a development of the theme of the mutual exclusivity of fatherhood and art in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Malik’s ontological crises are related to his relationship with his creations – the renegade Little Brain causes his split into a dark and light self, Jekyll and Hyde, while Kronos and his subsequent avatar in Lilliput Blefuscu become his doubles and alter egos that ultimately escape his conceptual control in the same way as Little Brain. Thus, the authorial subjectivity in this novel is doubly decentred: first internally split and then doubled, both processes leading to a profound ontological crisis that reflects the crisis of authorship that is the dominant theme of *Fury*.

In both cases, Malik’s authorial self is progressively “unselfed” and left unmoored even from the last anchor of his identity – the world of his own invention. Bearing in mind the religious and mythical paradigms of creation on which the novel rests, this is a parodic echo of modern man’s dismissal of his Creator-God as an anachronous fiction and the various repetitions of this model in the dethronement, dismemberment and/or murder of father-gods/creators that are abundantly alluded to in the novel. As mentioned above, the Little Brain/Mila scenario is represented as incestuous and therefore transgressive; the Kronos scenario equally leaves Malik unable to conceive of a productive orientation and meaning both for his authorial identity and for his creations. The motifs of the mask and the double that represent his two creations hint at the negation of the authorial subject as the dominant paradigm of identity in this novel. Thus, the success of Little Brain leads to the ubiquitous presence of masks of the image of the, as Malik

calls her, 'Frankendoll' (*F*, 101), which occasions derision from highbrow critics of this type of popular culture, but also comparisons from "eminent theater folk" who "came forward to speak of the ancient tradition of mask theater, its origins in Greece and Japan. 'The actor in the mask is liberated from her normality, her everydayness. Her body acquires remarkable new freedoms. The mask dictates all this. The mask acts'" (*F*, 99-100).

Similarly, the popularity of the Kronos saga leads to the appropriation of their iconography by the revolutionaries of Lilliput-Blefuscus, who all wear masks with the faces of Malik's creations, in what Malik describes as "a strange piece of mask theatre" (*F*, 235). Their leader wears the mask of Kronos who, as mentioned, is modeled after Malik himself and therefore when he comes face to face with the Commander, he does not exist as his own self, but merely as the copy of his own copy: "Here in the Theater of Masks the original, the man with no mask, was perceived as the mask's imitator: the creation was real while the creator was the counterfeit! It was as though he were present at the death of God and the god who had died was himself" (*F*, 239). Moreover, the entire country of Lilliput-Blefuscus

had reinvented itself in his image. Its streets were his biography, patrolled by figments of his imagination and altered versions of people he had known... The masks of his life circled him sternly, judging him. He closed his eyes and the masks were still there, whirling. He bowed his head before their verdict. He had wished to be a good man, to lead a good man's life, but the truth was he hadn't been able to hack it... When he had attempted to retreat from his darker self, the self of his dangerous fury, hoping to overcome his faults by a process of renunciation, of giving up, he had merely fallen into new, more grievous error. Seeking his redemption in creation, offering up an imagined world, he had seen its denizens move out into the world and grow monstrous; and the greatest monster of them all wore his own guilty face. Yes, deranged Babur was a mirror of himself. Seeking to right a grave injustice, to be a servant of the Good, "Commander Akasz" had come off at the hinges and become grotesque. Malik Solanka told himself he deserved no better than this. Let the worst befall. In the midst of the collective fury of these unhappy isles, a fury far greater, running far deeper than his own pitiful rage, he had discovered a personal Hell. (*F*, 246)

This immense "Theater of Masks" in which an entire country has "reinvented itself in his image" is a repeated reenactment, on a larger scale, of the primal scene of creation that Malik sought in his relationship with Mila, the real-life avatar of Little Brain. Here too, he is locked up alone with real-life avatars of his other creations, in an identical atmosphere of furious menace and transgression. If, for Mila, he ceased being himself in order to fulfill the role of a surrogate-father

to suit her incestuous fantasies, in Lilliput-Blefuscus he is completely non-entitled as a subjectivity as he loses his ontological essence: he no longer functions as the “original” on which Kronos/Babur/the Commander was modelled, but a copy of the copy of the copy. Malik’s cyborgs become representative of a “posthumanist” view of subjectivity, which treats the body

less as a bounded entity than as a network or assemblage, evolving with technology and then environment, [and] identity emerges as a consequence of the layered flows of information across multiple routes and channels, and of course subject to social pressures and power relations. This view of the body as an assemblage with non-human and machine, and embodied but distributed subjectivity, is at the core of posthumanist thought.³⁸⁴

The cyborg (or cybernetic organism), as theorised by Donna Haraway, in fusing the organic and the technological, breaches the boundaries between organism and machine, natural and artificial, physical and non-physical, etc. and as such can be taken to represent our contemporary ontology: “The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; *they* do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they.”³⁸⁵ Furthermore, the cyborg is “resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence,” “wary of holism, but needy for connection,” “illegitimate offspring... unfaithful to [its] origins,” “does not play by its father’s rules,” “can challenge the places from whence it came.”³⁸⁶ In fact, it is another, technologised manifestation of a boundary-transgressing, oppositional, differential mode of consciousness similar to the satanic ontologically diversificatory role in *The Satanic Verses* and the postcolonial “Third Space” of hybridity. According to Haraway, “a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.”³⁸⁷

Malik’s failure to engage productively with the oppositionality encoded in the cyborgs he creates when they are politically appropriated by the revolutionaries on Lilliput-Blefuscus and harness it to a specific postcolonial paradigm testifies to the ontological void he experiences, a

³⁸⁴ Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 90.

³⁸⁵ Donna Haraway, quoted in David Bell, *Cyberculture Theorists: Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 107.

³⁸⁶ Bell, 99 and 100.

³⁸⁷ Bell, 101.

void which is sealed by his betrayal of his own authorial legacy when he suggests that the political crisis on the island be solved by an American intervention and, presumably, invasion, which is the ultimate betrayal of his postcolonial credentials. In this way, Malik comes to follow the downward trajectory of Little Brain and become reduced from a subversive, de-canonising voice questioning authority to a neo-coloniser who subjugates an entire history of resistance and revolution against an oppressor to the demands of his own aesthetic whims and personal drama. As a result, this part of the novel follows the pattern of the reductive representation of a history from which Malik/Rushdie is culturally and empathetically alienated that is first evident in his treatment of Milo, Mila's father. Thus, Neela is no longer a beauty dominating the scene but a slave who parrots the Commander's nonsensical dictums, while the latter is no longer fighting a just fight for freedom but has become a Machiavellian figure bent on proclaiming a new Filbistan, a later-day empire "upon which the sun never sets" (*F*, 245).

In the convoluted creationary paradigm of this novel, in which the creator's self progressively disappears as his creations, made in his image, gain conceptual life and currency as cultural symbols, it is not clear whether the degradation of the creator follows that of his creations or vice versa. Imprisoned, both literally and metaphorically, in the world of his own invention, Malik is unable to forge a productive position for himself and can therefore offer only a violent and self-defeating solution, one that seals his ultimate self-negation as a meaningful subject. Rather like God and Kronos, he is dethroned by the children he has himself fathered, who, no longer needing him, proclaim him either dead or relegate him to oblivion – in the end, Malik is metaphorically expelled from his own invented world, which is left to its own devices, unsupervised by its Creator-God.

Having returned to London, to the only world that still, however tenuously, upholds his status as a progenitor in the wider sense of the term "author," as Edward Said analyses it, he tries to reclaim his "authorship" by renewing the ties with the son he has neglected and all but forgotten. However, what he seeks is not the usual fatherly and filial love, but a vindication of his authorial status. Bouncing on a bouncy castle in order to catch his son's attention, he subconsciously reenacts another artistic archetype, the only one that requires the presence of a son for the father to mean something, that of Daedalus and Icarus. The imagery of this last scene is indicative, as it conveys Malik's anxiety of authorship, which is here equated with that of fatherhood:

The noise that emerged from him was awful and immense, a roar from the Inferno, the cry of the tormented and the lost. But grand and high was his bouncing; and he was damned if he was going to stop leaping or desist from yelling until that little boy looked around, until he made Asmaan Solanka hear him in spite of the enormous woman and the gathering crowd and the mouthing mother and the man holding the boy's hand and above all the lack of a golden hat, until Asmaan turned and saw his father up there, his only true father flying against the sky, asmaan, the sky, conjuring up all his lost love and hurling it high up into the sky like a white bird plucked from his sleeve. His only true father taking flight like a bird, to live in the great blue vault of the only heaven in which he had ever been able to believe. "Look at me!" shrieked Professor Malik Solanka, his leather coattails flapping like wings. "Look at me, Asmaan! I'm bouncing very well! I'm bouncing higher and higher!" (*F*, 259)

The ending of the novel has been differently interpreted. Madelena Gonzalez sees the last scene as "an image of infantile regression... in a parody of Gatsby, that 'gold-hatted' bouncer and self made man. Literally reaching for the sky, the ending falls (intentionally?) flat, an ironic judgment on the American dream, fuelled by the flows of fast capitalism"³⁸⁸; for Yael Maurer, the ending "signifies a qualified return to the 'real' and a rejection of the dream of an ultimate 'elsewhere' in cyberspace", in an "expression of emotion: not of 'fury' but of love," "signal[ling] a return to life and to real emotion, after a long hiatus in the web's simulated life, in the novel's very last lines."³⁸⁹ In my view, however, the novel's ending conveys Malik's last attempt to reconstitute himself as an author by plunging into the heights of artistic creation like Daedalus, the Ur-artist, the "old father" and "artificer" whom Joyce's Stephen Daedalus claimed as a spiritual inspiration through which to forge his authorial identity. The repetition of the phrase "his only true father" confirms Malik's desire to be seen, by both his son and the reader, as something more than a merely biological progenitor, perhaps as the spiritual ancestor that Saleem and Moraes, like Joyce's Stephen, so desperately sought. However, bearing in mind that Asmaan does not play the structural role of Aadam Aziz, we can conclude that neither can Malik be a Saleem or a Moraes investing his own being in his authorial legacy that he bequeathes to a surrogate son or to the nation or the readers that will pick up the scattered manuscripts of Moraes's manuscript. The dual incarnation of the archetypal artist – as the moderate father who survives and the impulsive son who flies too near the sun and dies – encodes the demise of the

³⁸⁸ Madelena Gonzalez, "Artistic 'Fury' in the Information Age: Nostalgia for the Real," *Information, Communication and Society*, 2008, 11(6): 778.

³⁸⁹ Yael Maurer, "Rage against the Machine: Cyberspace Narratives in Rushdie's *Fury*," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2012, 47(1): 121 and 132.

son (Icarus/Asmaan) and the survival of the father (Daedalus/Malik), but coming as it does after the expulsion of the artist from his last identitary anchorage, Malik's self-projection as the mythical artist cannot but be a delusion, the last cry of the Author-God before he is relegated to oblivion and nothingness.

IV. The Ontological Quests of *Quichotte*

Like *Fury*, *Quichotte* explores authorial subjectivity in relation to the work of art, namely in relation to the fictional character, who becomes the author's alter ego and a mirror self through whom he makes sense of his own life. As we saw, the earlier novel makes use of several mythical and archetypal paradigms to throw a revealing light on how the author's self is destabilised and rendered more complex once the author breathes life into his artistic creations. The latter novel continues and develops this theme by harnessing both literary and mystical hypotexts in order to shed a new light on how Rushdie perceives authorial subjectivity in his most recent fiction.

Rushdie's latest novel has been described as "a 21st-century post-novel," set in "a post-truth world,"³⁹⁰ and as "a satire on our contemporary fake-news, post-truth, Trumpian cultural moment, where the concept of reality itself is coming apart."³⁹¹ Through its eponymous hero, it combines a modern retelling of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, the ur-text of the powerful effect of literature on readers, and the mystic quest of Attar's *Conference of the Birds*, re-contextualised as the story of a demented consumer of reality and other junk TV programmes who sets out on a road trip across America on a quest for his Beloved, a talk show host named Salma R. Through the frame plot, featuring Quichotte's (and *Quichotte's*) Author, Rushdie's novel develops the exploration of the nature of authorship by re-staging it in an ordinary moment, by means of its conception of the Author as a generic, Everyman figure and its engagement with the very beginnings of the history of the novel through the paradigmatic Cervantean themes of the power

³⁹⁰ "The novelist's natural bent has always been towards the encyclopedic, but now he has graduated from encyclopedia to Google. *Quichotte* ends up suffering from a kind of internetitis, Rushdie swollen with the junk culture he intended to critique." (Johanna Thomas-Corr, "*Quichotte* by Salman Rushdie review – A literary hall of mirrors," *The Guardian*, 26 August 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/26/quichotte-salman-rushdie-review>)

³⁹¹ "It's a sci-fi novel, a spy novel, a road trip novel, a work of magical realism. It's a climate change parable, and an immigrant story in an era of anti-immigration feeling. It's a love story that turns into a family drama. It's a fast-spinning postmodern double Catherine wheel – impossible not to be dazzled by, but also making a lot of choking smoke", "bogged down by fatiguing accumulations of examples and explanations." (Holly Williams, "*Quichotte* by Salman Rushdie review: Bogged down by exhausting accumulations," *The Independent*, 13 September 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/salman-rushdie-quichotte-review-book-release-date-length-booker-prize-shortlist-a9074476.html>)

of literature, elusive authorship and the interwoven categories of the author, the character and the reader.

In terms of subjectivity, *Quichotte* deftly plays with both an essentialist and a constructionist conception of identity. The former is articulated in the generic appellation of the author as “the Author,” which reveals an engagement with authorial subjectivity as a general, essential category, while the latter is put into play by the gradual constitution of the generic Author through the character he writes into being, the eponymous Quichotte. In this novel, neither the author nor the other characters in the frame plot have proper names and are instead represented in generic terms denoting their familial relationship mainly to the Author, who is also referred to as Brother, in relation to whom we have Sister and Son. The lack of a proper name for the author hints at Rushdie’s engagement with the originary aspect of authorial subjectivity, a continuation of the metaphysical conception of the authorial subject in *The Satanic Verses*; at the same time, through the capitalised Author, Rushdie resuscitates *Fury*’s exiled creator and Barthes’ dead author by positing a sort of an authorial Everyman in the process of becoming as he writes his manuscript about Quichotte. Overall, the ontological landscape of *Quichotte* is represented by characters (and their author) who are ultimately unknown and unknowable, destabilised by multiple selves and names or quasi-names such as pseudonyms or nicknames. For instance, the government agent of Japanese origin who approaches the Author introduces himself with no fewer than four names: Lance Makioka, Trip Mizoguchi, Kyle Kagemusha, and Clint Oshima.

The parallel stories, one of which centres on the Author and the other on his character Quichotte, demonstrates the mutual imbrication of author and character and of narrative and ontological levels,

for the tale and the teller were yoked together by race, place, generation and circumstance. Perhaps this bizarre story was a metamorphosed version of his own. Quichotte himself might say, if he were aware of Brother (which was impossible, naturally), that in fact the writer’s tale was the altered version of his history, rather than the other way around, and might have argued that his “imaginary” life added up to the more authentic narrative of the two. (*Q*, 22)

The Author is a New York-based writer of Indian origin, author of moderately successful spy fiction novels written under the pseudonym of Sam DuChamp, who puts a break to his generic

orientation and almost against his will comes up with Quichotte, who “had been with him all his life, a shadow-self he had glimpsed from time to time in the corner of his eye, but had not had the courage to confront. Instead he had written his commonplace fictions of the secret world, disguised as someone else” (*Q*, 22). It is from his enmeshment in the fictional world of his spy novels, in which the truth, reality and morality are mirages, and individuals and identities are unreliable and treacherous, that his ontological anxiety springs, which, in turn, spurs him on to rediscover himself by writing the story about Quichotte as his veiled fictional autobiography.

The Author is the last in the long line of the Rushdiean diasporic protagonists, “not rootless, not uprooted but transplanted. Or, even better, multiply rooted, like an old banyan tree putting down “prop roots” as it spread, which thickened and in time became indistinguishable from the original trunk. Too many roots!” However, his multiple rootedness is here used not to assert the ontological productivity of postcolonial hybridity, as in the previous novels, but to explore it as a productive site for creating art: “It meant his stories had a broader canopy beneath which to shelter from the scorching, hostile sun. It meant they could be planted in many different locations, in different kinds of soil” (*Q*, 28). With this, the metafictional dimension becomes a central preoccupation of the novel and the other themes it touches upon, such as the search for love, the social evils of Trump’s America, racism, xenophobia, immigration and diasporic life, become of secondary importance. The questions of “who is the Author,” or “who is an Author” and how he comes into being are explored through the parallel stories about the Author and Quichotte, his fictional alter ego.

Quichotte is a travelling salesman of Indian origin, whose original name is Ismail Smile, his very surname an Americanised version of “Ismail,” hence his is a tautological name, which he hides under the Cervantean pseudonym he adopts when he decides to begin a correspondence with his beloved, the talk show host Salma R. The pseudonym is chosen to honour the memory of his father’s favourite record, Jules Massenet’s opera *Don Quichotte*, from which he has shed the honorific “don” because he does not consider himself worthy of it yet. Chosen at a moment when his consciousness is at the boundary between waking and dreaming, when “he seemed to see himself in a dream addressing himself awake” (*Q*, 6), the pseudonym captures the in-between space where one becomes estranged from oneself and self-invention and hence (self-)narrativity spring forth. Thus, defamiliarised from his banal ordinary self, the newly created Quichotte

becomes a great man with a mission, which he likens to a knight's quest for the Grail and to the thirty birds' quest for the Simurg in Attar's *Conference of the Birds*.

The mystic Sufi poem teaches the path to the surrender of the self to the Divine by means of a purification of the senses in order to prepare the soul for an enlightenment in which perception and judgement are unclouded by earthly bias, passions and limitations. It is an allegory that on its surface level narrates the story about the desire of the birds to have a king, since they alone are without a leader, whereupon the Hoopoe, the bird that in Muslim tradition is credited to have been the emissary of King Solomon to Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, proclaims itself a member of the Celestial Army knowing the Lord and the secrets of creation and tells the birds that they do indeed have a king – Simurg, who resides behind Mount Caucasus:

“He is close by, but we are far away from Him. The road to His throne is bestrewn with obstructions; more than a hundred thousand veils of light and darkness screen the throne. Hundreds of thousands of souls burn with an ardent passion to see Him, but no one is able to find his way to Him. Yet none can afford to do without Him.”³⁹²

The difficult journey will take the birds through seven valleys covered with forests: the valleys of the Quest, Love, Knowledge, Independence and Detachment, Unity, Bewilderment and Stupefaction, and Poverty and Annihilation. In the first valley, they will have to renounce their riches and everything they have and detach themselves from earthly life, which will, in turn, stimulate their spiritual desires. In the second, the searcher is consumed with love for the spiritual path, which dissipates reason and frees the soul from judgement. In the third, earthly knowledge is repudiated; in the fourth valley, the soul becomes detached from the world, the veil between reality and unreality is torn and everything becomes possible because no categories exist anymore. In the fifth valley, “everything is renounced and everything unified, where there is no distinction in number and quality,” death and eternity, for “[t]hese two extremities having vanished, cease to speak of them. In fact, as all that is visible is nothing and nothing everything, how can all that we behold be anything but worthless in its origin and unworthy of our attention?”³⁹³ Here, everything is “one” and thinking in terms of self and Other is meaningless. In the sixth, there is an annihilation of self; and in the seventh, the self disappears into a unity

³⁹² Farīd ud-Dīn Aṭṭār, *Conference of the Birds: A Mystic Allegory* (Walnut, California: Mt. San Antonio Colege, 2016), 8.

³⁹³ Aṭṭār, 64.

with the universe. By the time the birds pass the seventh valley, only thirty have remained of the many millions who set out on the quest, whose bodies

were reduced to dust. After they had been thus completely purged and purified from all earthly elements, their souls were resuscitated by the light of His Majesty. They stood up again, dazed and distracted. In this new life the recollection of their transgressions was completely effaced from their mind. This was *baqā* after *fanā*, immortality after perishability, life after life's loss, eternal existence after extinction.³⁹⁴

Illuminated by the sun,

[i]n the reflection of their faces these thirty birds of the earth beheld the face of the Celestial Simurg. When they cast furtive glances towards the Simurg, they perceived that the Simurg was no other than those self-same thirty birds. In utter bewilderment they lost their wits and wondered whether they were their own selves or whether they had been transformed into the Simurg. Then, to themselves they turned their eyes, and wonder of wonders, those self-same birds seemed to be one Simurg! Again, when they gazed at both in a single glance, they were convinced that they and the Simurg formed in reality only one Being.³⁹⁵

The birds' quest for the Simurg is an allegory of the mystic's union with the divine, which in the context of Attar's Sufi mysticism means "a complete integration of body, soul and spirit in a consciousness that transcends the individual level," that is achieved in the highest form of prayer, the *dhikr*, or invocation of God's names, which "is in the final analysis the act of God Himself within us."³⁹⁶ The following paragraph from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, beautifully capturing the experience of the soul's dissolution in the divine, joins together the dominant artistic images and metaphors of this and some of Rushdie's previous novels:

This quintessential mode of prayer, or the prayer of the heart, also brings about the wedding between action, love, and knowledge as it integrates body, soul, and spirit. Those who follow the path of action and good works seek to live a righteous life and to enter Paradise when they die. Those who follow the path of love and knowledge seek God here and now and aim at this very moment at the highest Paradise, which is the *Garden of Truth*, what the Quran calls *Riqwan*, where the *Gardener* is to be found, the

³⁹⁴ Attār, 79.

³⁹⁵ Attār, 79-80.

³⁹⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 100-101.

Paradise that is also here and now in the center of our being. In ordinary prayer men and women address God in an I-Thou relationship. In the prayer that is intertwined with love, the I and the Thou melt into each other. In contemplative prayer, the inner intellect or spirit, which is itself a Divine Spark to which Meister Eckhart refers when he says that there is in the soul something uncreated and uncreatable and that something is the Intellect[...], is able to transcend the I-Thou dichotomy altogether. This faculty is able to plunge into the *Supreme Reality* and, in drowning in the *Ocean of Divinity*, to know it.³⁹⁷

The I-Thou relationship in terms of the imbrication of the author's self and the fictional character, who is that self's Other, is, of course, central to *Quichotte*. The interwoven narrative and ontological levels, which are a dominant narrative device in *The Satanic Verses*, *Fury* and *Quichotte*, trigger the question of reality and fictionality in the fictional worlds of the novels and find an echo in the reference to the mystical Supreme Reality above. As the quote from Brian McHale above indicates, the author's reality is supposed to be superior and clearly separated from the fictional one, but in postmodernist fiction it is made to be just another layer of the fictional world. Similarly, the author's ontological level should occupy a superior level to that of his fictional creations, and yet in these novels it is reduced to an equal or even inferior status to the latter's. Finally, the references to the "Gardener" of a particular garden and to the "Ocean of Divinity" remind the reader of Rushdie of Geronimo, the protagonist of *Two Years, Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*, where the concept of the garden is represented as emblematic of the artistic imagination and the human creative potential, and of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, where the Sea of Stories or the Ocean of the Streams of Story similarly represents the source of the imagination. The confluence of these mystical-religious and fictional images in or in reference to *Quichotte*, the last novel of our corpus, functions as an apt summary of the Rushdiean conception of authorship, which in this novel and throughout his *oeuvre*, is endowed with transcendent and sublime overtones.

Quichotte's own quest is both a literal journey across America to find Salma R. and a metaphorical one that involves an exploration and testing of the self so that the searcher is worthy of unification with his ideal – the Grail in romance lore, God in Sufi mysticism (who is also referred to as "the Beloved") and the beloved woman in Quichotte's case. In the frame story, it is the Author who through his fictive alter ego tries to make sense of his own life and purpose and creates the latter's story to mirror his own. As he passes from one valley into another,

³⁹⁷ Hossein Nasr, 101, emphasis mine.

Quichotte becomes progressively alienated from his old self, as he tries to atone for his past sins of arrogance towards, and betrayal of, his sister, whom he has affectionately nicknamed the Human Trampoline, and to forge a parental relation with Sancho, the son whom he has invented into being. By the time his sister, the founder of a charitable organisation designed to help underprivileged women from the Third World, admonishes him for his lack of support for her during her illness and chemotherapy and in the aftermath of a violent backlash against her article in which she has accused South Asian men of keeping their women in submission, he replies “These accusations should be leveled at another person, who disappeared long ago” (*Q*, 258). Faced with his past transgressions, the awareness of which still keeps him in the thrall of earthly passions, he feels as if the realness of his being becomes dissipated – in his sister’s apartment, he feels insubstantial like a ghost,

as if there were two Quichottes in the room, a version from the past as well as the present one, and that as the past was superimposed on the present it caused a sort of blurring, because the two versions were so unlike each other that it became difficult to see the Quichotte in the room clearly, as he now was, and he himself was a victim of the same confusion, not able with any degree of ease to free himself from the trap of what he had once been. (*Q*, 252)

In a sense, his ontological weariness is the result of the incursion of the chaos of urban life into his privacy, of his not-feeling-at-home-ness in the big city, whose “multiplicity, the everything of everything, the roar of narratives, the endless transformation, the myth factory lost in the myth of itself” (*Q*, 274) unsettles him and makes him feel like “a cosmos with holes torn out of it, where nothing remains. I am fraying at the edges and may not survive” (*Q*, 275-6).

Like Salma’s and the Author’s, Quichotte’s decentred and unstable subjectivity derives from his diasporic identity, suspended between the East and the West, between the necessity to make their past (memories, traumas, sins, regrets) cohere with their present in a world that is increasingly represented as faulty and in the process of disintegration, about to be swallowed into an apocalyptic void. By portraying such a world, Rushdie seems to lay bare the existential fragility of modern man, who is here represented in his collective anonymity, brought to the fore by means of the common names of the characters and the pseudonyms or masks behind which they hide. Multiply decentred, Rushdie’s two protagonists, the Author and Quichotte, seek to re-integrate their split, doubled and contradictory selves – the former by means of writing, the latter

by his intersubjective self-grafting onto the Quixotic tradition of demented readers/art-consumers who find it hard to distinguish between reality and fantasy. In both cases, it is fiction that serves as a conduit to a heightened self-perception, which in turn allows the two protagonists to re-establish themselves as brothers, fathers, and, in Quichotte's case, a lover. Through writing the story of Quichotte, the Author, for his part, seeks to validate his authorship and constitute himself as an author.

The arduous path towards this self-awareness is articulated through the Sufi allegory of the mystic's journey across the seven valleys, as a result of which Quichotte begins to see himself in a new light: not as the gallant knight whose purity guarantees his worthiness, but as an "impure" "opportunist", ready to supply his beloved with the opioid drugs she is addicted to in order to be able to see her; but then, she is also unworthy because it is she who demands of him this immoral task (*Q*, 322-2). It is this break-up of the quixotic delusion that enables Quichotte to see that the quest has been for the self rather than for Salma – he, like the thirty birds in Attar's poem, finds not the Beloved (woman/God) at the end of the road, but himself – and that the object sought is merely a reflected image of the seeking subject.

For Quichotte, the end of the journey connotes an ending, which alludes not only to the annihilation of the self-Other dichotomy by the mystic's union with the divine that takes place in the seventh valley, but also "because after perfection was attained there was only oblivion to look forward to" (*Q*, 316). For this purpose, Rushdie fuses the mystical allegory with another genre – that of science fiction – by introducing the elusive character Evel Cent (a homophone of his real name, Awwal Sant, disguising his Indian identity, and also of "Evil Scent"), a scientist whose theory of intergalactic passage Quichotte initially mocks, but then grows to believe in. His theory that as the known space-time continuum is headed for collapse, the only solution for survival is migration into an alternative, parallel universe which would be the new home of humanity, finds an echo in Quichotte's prognosis about the end of being, only not in the union with the beloved but in a literal apocalypse. Pervaded by a tone of mocking playfulness, this narrative layer of the novel at first seems to be another aspect of Quichotte's quixotism and the apocalypse merely a metaphor for the Author's and Quichotte's awareness of their mortality. As Quichotte and Salma board one of Evel Cent's spacecraft that is supposed to take them to another galaxy, however, their world is indeed falling apart and they make the crossing-over into another dimension of being – into the world of the Author!

Quichotte thus develops the transgressive aesthetics of *The Satanic Verses* in presenting the migratory ontological content between author and character, who seem to inhabit realities of the same ontological reality rather than a “real” and a fictional one respectively, with one migrating from his reality into the other’s and vice versa. Like Gibreel in his dreams, the Author is a spectral presence in his manuscript (and even, again similarly to Gibreel’s vision of the myopic scrivener, sees Quichotte and Salma materialise in his room in a blurry state of consciousness between waking and dreaming), not so much as the puppeteer who pulls his characters’ strings (of which Sancho is aware, but Quichotte is not), but as the object of Quichotte’s quest: it is the Author and not God or Salma who stands at the end of Quichotte’s journey of self-discovery, who is the true self that he finds reflected in the mystical Other, his very own Simurg. To follow the terms of Attar’s allegory, the soul’s union with the divine connotes a dismantling of the I-Thou dichotomy, so that there is no concept of self and Other anymore, but a complete merging of the soul with the spirit of the world. In Rushdie’s novel, author and character become one, the latter’s ontological status levelled with that of the former’s, into whose reality he, his fictional status shed, is re-born.

Quichotte’s materialisation in the Author’s world is described in an imagery suggesting both a sacred ritual and the birth of a new life, both of which emphasise the sanctity of the authorial craft. Thus, before writing the last page of his manuscript, the Author has performed his writerly ritual, without which he wouldn’t be able to work, namely has arranged his thirteen venerated objects on his desk and on the mantelpiece and has handled fondly “a little silver ingot, an inch high, on which was engraved the map of unpartitioned India” (*Q*, 389). As the narrator further states, “[o]ften at the end of a working day the Author would fall asleep at his desk, his forehead resting on the wood, bowed down before the computer screen as if performing some ancient rite of worship” (*Q*, 389-90), and it is in this state of consciousness that he sees Quichotte irrupting into his room, leaving his “embryonic” existence in the Author’s fiction through a small aperture to “burst into” the real world “helpless, puny, gasping for air” (*Q*, 390), like a newborn baby. Hossein Nasr’s Sufy imagery, quoted above, is indicative in this context in that it hearkens back to the Rushdiean metaphors for artistic creation developed in the previous novels – the paradisiacal “Garden of Truth” tended by a Gardener and the Supreme Reality created by the artistic imagination which is nourished by the “Ocean of Stories.”

By situating the authorial scene of writing in the realms of the sacred and the biological and thus appropriating for fiction their life-giving and life-enriching potential, *Quichotte* foregrounds the apotheosis of the intra-textual Author, which, again in a metafictional gesture reminiscent of *The Satanic Verses*, also implicates the extra-textual one, Rushdie himself. By a further exchange of places, it is not only Quichotte's Author who installs himself in the seat vacated by the mystical God, but the Author's author, Salman Rushdie, who has been playfully alluding to himself all along. Bearing in mind Rushdie's predilection for activating the etymological and cultural meanings of his name,³⁹⁸ we can conclude that the name for Quichotte's beloved, an appellation that, when capitalised, could also refer to God – Salma R. – has been a red herring all along, a mask which, at the end of the reader's journey, reveals Salman R. This link is hinted at in the very last paragraphs, which are separated from the rest of the text by the italicised typeface and are written by a different Author, the implied narrator who has been insinuating himself occasionally throughout the novel by calling attention to himself and thus breaking the narrative illusion.

In a novel emphasising the writing of fiction as a tool for guaranteeing the Author's purpose in life and validating his existence, although initially merely imitating the reality of the Author, fiction gradually becomes so powerful as to engulf reality, which itself becomes an imitation of the imaginative one in which Quichotte resides. In the end, it is the Author who tries to make real for himself his character's experience, embarking on a trip across America with his son, with the result that scenes experienced by Quichotte and his son occur to the Author and *his* Son, albeit with different outcomes. It can even be said that, by retracing his character's route and reliving his experience, the Author undertakes the same journey in reverse. Just as Quichotte steps into the Author's world, so too the Author steps into Quichotte's and thus becomes a fiction himself. In the end, we find out that Quichotte's thirteen numinous objects, which he carries with himself wherever he goes and which he carefully and ritualistically arranges in

³⁹⁸ Rushdie's *oeuvre* reveals an almost personal mythology built around the author's name. For instance, it is telling that he named the blasphemous scribe in *The Satanic Verses* after himself rather than giving him his real, historical name. In addition, in both *Two Years* and his memoir *Joseph Anton*, he idealistically and contrary to the historical record, represents Ibn Rushd, from whom his family name derives, as an enlightened and progressive Islamic intellectual, whose legacy he, as his modern-day counterpart and namesake, proudly carries.

precise order, are also the Author's,³⁹⁹ but because they have been first introduced in relation to the former, it appears as if they have migrated into the frame plot from the fictional one rather than the other way round. At the end of the novel, the implicit narrator mentions the Author's most precious possession, "a little silver ingot, an inch high, on which was engraved the map of unpartitioned India. This was his greatest talisman, his open-sesame, his magic lamp" (*Q*, 389). These images conflate a self-reference on Rushdie's part, who in an interview confesses that he, like other authors, has his own sacred objects or "little totems" that he keeps around him while he works, one of which being "a little inch-high block of silver, Indian silver, engraved with the map of the unpartitioned continent of India and Pakistan, which was given to me as a present by a friend of my father's when I was one day old,"⁴⁰⁰ and intertextual references to some of the dominant metaphors in his other novels, namely Saleem's perforated sheet, which was his "talisman" and "open-sesame," as well as Saladin's magic lamp. By calling attention to his autobiography and to his *oeuvre*, Rushdie foregrounds his authorial presence in his text and inscribes himself, as the author of the novel, into the fluid authorial subjectivity with which he ends his novel.

The dissolution of self into the Absolute encoded in the mystical layer grafted onto the novel is reinscribed as a dissolution of the various authorial selves – author (Rushdie), character (the Author) and character-of-the-character (Quichotte) – and their collapsing into one another, creating a multi-layered Overauthor/Overartist/Authorial Everyman. This transgressive aesthetics, previously evoked in *The Satanic Verses*, is here reconfigured in such a way as to make the authorial subjectivity increasingly intertextual and evocative almost exclusively in relation to other texts, paramount of which is Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, whose protagonist is another layer enriching and rendering even more complex the figure of the Overauthor developed in this novel. This intertextual echo joins together several threads that are amply used in Rushdie's novel: the delusional nature of Don Quixote, i.e. his inability to distinguish reality from fiction, shared by both Quichotte and the Author; the voracious and deranged reader,

³⁹⁹ These objects are "a polished 'found art' Chinese stone whose patterning resembled a landscape of wooded hills in the mist, a Buddha-like Gandharan head, an upraised wooden Cambodian hand with a symbol of peace in the center of its palm, two starlike crystals, one large, the other small, a Victorian locket inside which he had placed photographs of his parents, three other photographs depicting a childhood in a distant tropical city, a brass Edwardian English cigar cutter made to look like a sharp-toothed dragon, an Indian 'Cheeta Brand' matchbox bearing the image of a prowling cheetah, a miniature marble hoopoe bird and a Chinese fan" (*Q*, 11 and 389).

⁴⁰⁰ Reder, *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, 129.

enamoured of fiction to such an extent as to reimagine his reality as a fiction whose protagonist he becomes; and, most importantly, Don Quixote's transcendence of his fictional status to become both a fully fledged person (in the second part of Cervantes' novel) and an archetypal image representing an essential aspect of the human psyche.

Rushdie's Quichotte who, in his quixotic delusion, thinks that he is about to pass through a portal leading to an alternative space-time continuum, in fact crosses over from fiction into reality and in the process undergoes an ontological growth. This climactic moment represents an apogee of the creating power of literature to widen the horizons of the cultural and conceptual maps of its readers and, in the novel, an apotheosis of the Author, who, at his most exalted, becomes clearly recognizable as a surrogate for Rushdie. This metafictional aspect of the authorial subjectivity, in rendering permeable the distinctions between fictional and real self, performs the crucial function of "explor[ing] the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text."⁴⁰¹ This "ironic flaunting of the Teller"⁴⁰² in the tale paradoxically demarcates the social irrelevance and almost complete cultural redundancy of Rushdie's author in the real world, who is left with fiction – his own and that of his revered predecessors – as his only existential reassurance. Ontologically overdetermined (intra- and inter-textually, metafictionally and autobiographically), the authorial subjectivity in *Quichotte* gestures at the constructed image of the author.

⁴⁰¹ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 2.

⁴⁰² Waugh, 131.

CONCLUSION

The portrayal of authorial subjectivity in Rushdie's fiction yields a complex and multi-layered image of the author, who oscillates between centrifugal and centripetal forces that alternately stabilise and destabilise the authorial self.

Midnight's Children and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, which are centrally concerned with the genesis of the author, trace the artistic *Bulding* of Saleem and Moraes through the fluid axis between the self and the world they establish in their texts. As historically situated and determined subjects, they construct their subjectivity as historical and authorial subjects by an insistent identification with a national (India), urban (Bombay) or a historical (al-Andalus) ideal, that serves as a projection of their individual self into a form of commonality or collective identity, without which they are unimaginable. Furthermore, each of them is further defined by his agonistic relationship with an individualised Other (Shiva and Boabdil), a double who also incarnates the collective ideal they aspire to be and who triggers the uneasy reference of the authorial signature. As autobiographical subjects, they are inevitably split between a subject writing and a subject written about, i.e. between author and subject, which is evident in the uncertain anthroponymy, the pronominal shifts that destabilise the narrative voice, the grotesque corporeality that grounds it and the narrative open-endedness of their texts, whereby they refuse to be contained in and by their texts.

The Satanic Verses posulates a satanic ontology, whereby the characters are constructed as subjects along multiple axes. Firstly, each character's identity, seen in isolation, is formed as internally differential and non-unitary, and relationally, in terms of its Others. Within the same narrative level, the characters are differentiated into binary opposites, with one excluding the other, while simultaneously forming one conjoined, amalgamated and hybrid subjectivity. Between the various narrative levels, every character has its double(s) in a different narrative level or a dream sequence, i.e. each of the protagonists of the main plot is doubled in a dreamed-of persona, which is further multiplied in a corresponding double in the other dream sequences. Finally, each character is internally dialogised by the satanic voice that is not simply the repressed internal Other disrupting the purity of the self, but functions as an externalised metaphysical entity representing the ontological principle of difference and dissent and, to a lesser extent, the ethical principle of evil. Interestingly, this satanic Other can be traced back to

the narrator/author himself, and, as such, functions as a metafictional layer of the already multiply layered identity of the characters. The narrator-author is himself inscribed into the satanic ontology of his characters, in all of its characteristics: the narrative voice speaks with a serpentine, forked tongue that is indicative of the satanic inflection of the author's identity, and is even identifiable as the extra-textual author of the novel, Salman Rushdie himself.

In *Fury* and *Quichotte*, the agonistics of authorial subjectivity is transferred to the text itself, as the authors in these novels construct their authorial self in relation to the characters they create and the anxiety of influence, i.e. of becoming, of the previous novels gives way to an anxiety of exerting influence, articulated through the afterlife of the authors' artistic creations. Transferring the attention from the genesis of the author/text to the exertion of authorial influence, the author re-invents himself in relation to his textual selves. Detaching themselves from their historical and political context (which defined Saleem and Moraes as individuals), the authors in the last two novels of our corpus are solipsistically contained within their own fictional worlds and incapable of exerting political or social agency. The metafictional construction of authorial identity, which emphasises the authors' fictional, artefactual status, in turn leads to a betrayal or a renunciation of their postcolonial credentials.

This multi-layered conception of authorial identity is emblematic of the dialogical aesthetics that defines Rushdie's oeuvre in that it encodes an ontological heterogeneity in which self and Other are possible only in relation to each other and are inherently intersubjective. Therefore, the subject is, in fact, an "inter-subject," defined by an ontology of coexistence, plurality, inconclusivity, inexhaustibility, irreducibility and complementarity.

CHAPTER II

CONFIGURING THE PROBLEMATIC OF POSTCOLONIAL AUTHORSHIP IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S FICTION

The focus of this chapter is on the concept of authorship dominant in the novels of the corpus. It looks more closely at the texts/narratives that the authorial figures, analysed in the previous chapter, produce in order to elucidate the specific nature of their dialogicity and the purposes it achieves or strives to achieve. The novels of the corpus are structured around particular conceptions of authorship that condense the dominant ways in which the writing process is conceptualised and are therefore classified into three groups in terms of the dominant form of dialogism they exhibit. An analysis of the incorporation of the discourses of fiction, religion, history and politics will shed a light on the manner in which the text engages with these other (con)texts and further reveal the ethical position of its author and the ideological standing of his authorship.

In his essayistic and fictional output, Rushdie develops polyvalent conceptions of authorship, which all share an exalted view of literature as a contesting and contested space where different discourses and worldviews meet and clash. As we saw, literature for Rushdie performs several crucial epistemological and ideological roles. Firstly, it is a hybrid space that enables the “mongrelisation” of categories and by rendering them impure and interpenetrated, resists the monologic and hegemonic modes of perceiving culture and identity. Secondly, it violates established aesthetic and cultural codes, values and norms, thereby constituting itself as a transgressive force that sees taboo- and rule-breaking as a means of bringing epistemological, ontological and cultural “newness” into the world. Thirdly, it functions as a form of “secular transcendence,” a median category between the material and the spiritual, simultaneously elevated above the materialism of the world of crude politics and approximating the experience of the divine, without falling into the trap of erecting its own alternative theology. Even in this exalted position, literature is always prone to de-mythologise itself and to call attention to its own unreliable and unstable authority as an arbiter of meaning.

In this part, I shift my attention from the ontological focus of the previous part to the epistemological and the narratological aspect of the present one: namely, from the subject producing the text to the arena of the text itself, with a view to determine how it configures the Rushdiean conception of authorship. The texts of Rushdie's authors conform to the Barthesian idea of the text as a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."⁴⁰³ Veritable polylogues, they incorporate and dialogise with the discourses of religion, politics and history and are thus impossible to regard as a pure category, in the same way that their authors are never simply fiction-writers but are (or aspire to be) at the same time chroniclers, historiographers, political commentators and religious exegetes/prophets.

Representation, the primary focus of this part, is a fundamental concept that refers to the portrayal(s) of realities (with varying degrees of "realness") in the text and comprises such questions as the representability or unrepresentability of events or phenomena and mimeticism or fabulation, i.e. whether it faithfully copies a known and knowable reality or consciously constructs it as an artifact. Furthermore, in postcolonial literature and theory representation is related to the author's positionality within a specific historical, political and ultimately ideological frame, which enables him to voice certain opinions and to promote certain values. The position from which the author speaks, in turn, raises the question of his complicity with or oppositionality to the discourses (of history, politics, religion, etc.) he engages with. Thus, postcolonial authors have been regularly accused of being complicitous in the Western practice of silencing the Other in their attempt to speak for, i.e. represent it to the Western public because their location is Western. Their intermediate, in-between position between cultures renders ambivalent their identification with the Otherness they represent, which leads them to biased, erroneous and even deliberately misleading judgements. This embattled intellectual tone, as we saw, applies to Rushdie's own authority as a Third World or postcolonial writer writing in and largely to the West about the East, which is the main wellspring of his imagination. As Timothy Brennan points out, the extreme reactions to *The Satanic Verses* were for the most part motivated by Rushdie's position as both insider and outsider in both the East and the West⁴⁰⁴ and charges of Orientalism and Occidentalism have been liberally hurled against him. His fictional authorial alter egos similarly write from an ambivalent insider/outsider position.

⁴⁰³ Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 146.

⁴⁰⁴ Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, 144.

A. Speaking in a Forked Tongue

The title of this section is taken from Homi Bhabha's essay, "Of Mimicry and Man," which he begins with the statement that "[t]he discourse of post-Enlightenment English colonialism often *speaks in a tongue that is forked, not false*."⁴⁰⁵ The topic of Bhabha's essay is the ambivalence of colonial discourse, which perceives and constructs the colonised Other as an inauthentic mimic man who adopts the language and culture of the coloniser. However, the result is never a mere repetition or copying, but an ambivalence that tropes the colonised as both "resemblance and menace," Anglicised but never English, "almost the same, but not quite." This renders colonial discourse "ruptured," ambivalent, uncertain, "partial" (in the dual sense of "incomplete" and "biased"), de-authorised, always producing "its slippage, its excess, its difference."⁴⁰⁶ Hence, the image of speaking in/with a serpentine forked tongue, i.e. producing a discourse relying on ambiguities, ambivalence, incompleteness and prejudice, one that reveals the subject's ideological position. Rushdie's authorial figures display such an ambivalent authorial discourse in different ways.

Thus, Saleem's distancing from his identity hybridity that was analysed in the previous chapter is an effect of his distancing from the object of his representation – an "othered" India that could only be constructed by a subject writing from a position of symbolical distance, a position that can be identified as Orientalist. The magical saturation of Saleem's text presents a unique and exotic India whose portrait we, as readers, are expected to believe because it is painted by an insider, by a child of the nation, endowed with a special insight into its soul because he and it were born at the same moment. However, as Alfred J. López points out, for a writer to produce such literature – he has in mind the magical realism of Márquez, Rushdie, Carpentier, etc. – an implicit consensus is needed to the effect that he and his, presumably, Western, readers are to a certain degree alienated from that magical world; far from being absorbed in it, we in fact approach it from a distance, aware that we do not fully belong.⁴⁰⁷ In other words, an author such as Rushdie and a character-author such as Saleem position

⁴⁰⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122, emphasis mine.

⁴⁰⁶ Bhabha, 122 and 123.

⁴⁰⁷ Alfred J. López, *Posts and Pasts: A Theory of Postcolonialism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 143-204.

themselves as outsiders, as alien observers who strive to represent the mysterious and the inexpressible, and that is the position of the Orientalist, i.e. of the West towards the non-West. When magical realist authors defamiliarise a world and envelop it in a shroud of mystery and wonder, we, as informed readers, know what lies behind their literary tricks and

this knowledge clearly creates an irreducible distance between reader and character that makes it impossible for us to share the latter's magical perception of the object; we simply know too much to believe such a thing, and it is precisely this knowledge, that is, this body of knowledges and of contexts that constitutes each of us as a Western (or at least Western-informed) reader, which renders us unable to share the character's magical worldview. Our relation with the character[/narrator], then, is one of *distance* and *alterity*.⁴⁰⁸

The characterisation of Saleem as an Orientalist entails: his “being a consciousness set apart from, and unequal with, its surroundings”⁴⁰⁹; his using of these surroundings for the purposes of his artistic aesthetics not from a position of political power, from which he carefully disentangles himself, but from the more subtle intellectual and cultural power he acquires by dint of his authorial status; the inevitable “othering” of these surroundings in order to make them knowable and understandable; and the resulting split in his consciousness as both belonging, however tenuously, and non-belonging with the object(s) of his representation. If belonging makes him a midnight child that is an integral part of the entire midnight children community of India, non-belonging gives him identity as an artist/author. In this latter aspect, the most crucial task Saleem faces as a narrator is how to control and normalise his story, for in order to make it representable for his Western readers, he has to impose a certain order in it and, even more importantly, to establish his own authority as a narrator.

If the authorial position in *Midnight's Children* can be described as, to a certain extent, Orientalist, *The Moor's Last Sigh* foregrounds the discourse of mimicry and inauthenticity. In spite of his artistic inferiority to Aurora, Vasco Miranda is endowed with strong political judgment, which is brought to light when Goa loses its autonomy as a Portuguese enclave and is subsumed into the huge Indian state. Therefore, he voices a truly minoritarian perspective, which is different from that of the Zogoibys. He foresees and recognises the downward spiral of Indian political life long before any of the other characters do. Mocked as a mediocre artist and man by

⁴⁰⁸ López, 156.

⁴⁰⁹ López, 157.

Aurora, his patron and object of his unrequited love, he gradually distances himself from the national-historical narrative defining Aurora's artistic output. Rather than develop his own vision of Indian national identity, he produces commercial art that is not bound by the nation and reaches a truly international status. The equilibrium of his selfhood is disturbed first on the night of India's independence, when the sectarian violence that erupts transforms the triumph of the occasion into a failure, and then when the Indian army conquers his native Goa, subsuming the Catholic Portuguese enclave into the monumental multiplicity of the Indian state. It is Vasco Miranda who characterises the minority elite to which Aurora and Moraes belong as "Macaulay's minutement," "English-medium misfits" that do not belong in India and are merely foreigners as despised and unwanted as the English, that "read the wrong books, get on the wrong side in every argument, think the wrong thoughts. Even your bleddy dreams grow from foreign roots" (*MLS*, 166). His political prescience leads him to conclude correctly that Pandit Nehru's vision of a secular India will never materialise in this country of countless deities and of religious intolerance inciting communal violence and that the only power capable of vanquishing religion is corruption. With the rise to power, first of Abraham and then of Raman Fielding, Vasco's prediction is vindicated, especially in the all-engulfing destruction of Bombay caused by their rivalry. As he leaves his beloved, now smoke-enveloped city that no longer contains anything of meaning to him, Moraes repeats Macaulay's ideas:

To form a class, Macaulay wrote in the 1835 Minute on Education,... of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. And why, pray? O, to be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern. How grateful such a class of persons should, and must, be! For in India the dialects were poor and rude, and a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature. History, science, medicine, astronomy, geography, religion were likewise derided. Would disgrace an English farrier... would move laughter in girls at an English boarding-school. Thus, a class of "Macaulay's Minutemen" would hate the best of India. Vasco was wrong. We were not, had never been, that class. The best, and worst, were in us, and fought in us, as they fought in the land at large. In some of us, the worst triumphed; but still we could say – and say truthfully – that we had loved the best. (*MLS*, 376)

Ultimately, the novel insists on the separation of the conceptual provinces of the artistic (which represents ideas, profound reflection, tolerance and non-violence) from the historical-political (which stands for mindless action, superficial reasoning and violent agency) (the same polarity separates Erasmo from Benengeli, al-Andalus from Catholic Spain, Nehru's from Indira's and

Fielding's/Thackeray's India). Following the consistent juxtaposition of the politicised versus the artistic, which stand for the power- and violence-driven versus the liberal and tolerant, worldview in the novel, Rushdie offers an alternative route to be taken by those who, like Zeenat Vakil, would rather fight "over great poets than over gods," i.e. would embrace ideas rather than ideologies. Moraes offers his own take on the situation, when, nostalgically remembering Uma's own nationalistic art (her sculpting the Nandi bull), focuses on the conceptual province occupied by Ram in the Hindu pantheon: since he, like the bull, is an avatar of Vishnu, "most metamorphic of the gods," the

true "rule of Ram" should therefore, surely, be premised on the mutating, inconstant, shape-shifting realities of human nature – and not only human nature, but divine as well. This thing being advocated in the great god's name flew in the face of his essence as well as ours. – But when the boulder of history begins to roll, nobody is interested in discussing such fragile points. The *juggernaut* is loose" (MLS, 351).

However, the novel does not represent a tragedy about the loss of a way of life; rather, it can be characterised as a parody and a farce. As David Myers points out, "Salman Rushdie would have liked to write a tragedy about the fall of civilisation and the failure of multicultural tolerance, but because he knows that we live in an era of anti-heroic farce, he could not create tragedy but only a parody of tragedy."⁴¹⁰ Therefore, Moraes's abundant evocation of the ancient epics to describe current events emphasises the contrast between the heroism prevalent in the former and the farcical pettiness of the latter. Thus, his murder of Fielding has the tragic stature neither of the murder of Ravan by Lord Ram for the abduction of Sita in the *Ramayana*, nor of that of Hector by Achilles; the confrontation between Abraham and Fielding is not a "Mahabharat-style conflict, then, a Trojan war, in which the gods took sides and played their part" because they were merely "johnny-come-latelies", Carmen's gambling with Prince Henry the Navigator has no "echoes of Yudhisthira's loss of his kingdom on a fatal throw of the dice", and "though men fought over Nadia Wadia, she was neither Helen nor Sita. Just a pretty girl in a hot spot, is all". His sad conclusion is that

Tragedy was not in our natures. A tragedy was taking place all right, a national tragedy on a grand scale, but those of us who played our parts were – let me put it bluntly –

⁴¹⁰ David Myers, "A Postmodernist Apocalypse or The Tragedy of Secular Art?: Approaching Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* as Lectura-Locura," *World Literature Written in English* Vol. 36. 2 (1997): 34.

clowns. Clowns! Burlesque buffoons, drafted into history's theatre on account of the lack of greater men. Once, indeed, there were giants on our stage; but at the fag-end of an age, Madam History must make do with what she can get. Jawaharlal, in these latter days, was just the name of a stuffed dog. (MLS, 352)

Since the artist plunges into the depths of the text, writing or deciphering its layered meanings, he remains confined in and by the province of thought/reflection, in which the penetration into the potentialities of the intellect yields the ethical values of understanding, tolerance, and inclusivity. Conversely, the lack of hermeneutical skills and engagement with the Text (here “text” is understood in the widest meaning of the entire systems of culture/worldview/history, etc.) produces the tragic agency of historical violence⁴¹¹ and the farce of the human lives caught in its juggernaut. In the era of anti-heroes, the protagonist Moraes lacks historical agency: he is “not responsible for history but subject to its processes.”⁴¹² If agency means the domination on the historical-political scene of characters like Abraham and Fielding, Ferdinand and Isabella, Indira and Sanjay, Rushdie seems to be saying, then the world really needs more passive cowards like Boabdil and Moraes. Instead of the creators of history, this novel brings into sharper focus the victims and thinkers of history. Hence the presence of the intellectual hub that is Erasmo as countervailing the fanatical Benengeli, evoking not the sterile rationalism of scholastic, monologic thought, but the epistemic openness and regenerative power of “folly,”⁴¹³ a wisdom of living reminiscent of the Rabelaisian carnivalesque spirit.

The narrator’s discursive position in *The Satanic Verses* is even more problematised, because his satanically-inflected voice invites doubt and interpretive skepticism, even as it

⁴¹¹ The contradictory tension between the two principles is central to the characterisation of Raman Fielding, called Mainduck. Initially he is a foil to Aurora – a political cartoonist and therefore a fellow-artist, he parodies her Chipkali strategy by signing his caricatures with a little frog. Then he assumes political power and becomes a foil to Abraham. As Moraes, as his employee, is allowed into the privacy of his home, he sees “the antique Ganeshas, the Shiva Natarajas, the Chandela bronzes, the Rajput and Kashmiri miniatures” adorning it. Moraes understands this as “a disproof of the alleged improving power of art” because Fielding’s moral centre is nationalistic and full of hatred. Yet, he finished this passage with the startling statement that “when they began, in their guffawing way, to belittle the culture of Indian Islam that lay palimpsest-fashion over the face of Mother India, Mainduck rose to his feet and thundered at them until they shrank back in their seats. Then he would sing ghazals and recite Urdu poetry – Faiz, Josh, Iqbal – from memory and speak of the glories of Fatehpur Sikri and the moonlit splendour of the Taj. An intricate fellow, indeed” (MLS, 298-9). Fielding’s tragedy lies in his inability to apply his intellectual profundity to his political agency. The opposite can be said about Vasco Miranda, who fails to fuse his political awareness into a correspondingly robust artistic vision.

⁴¹² Laura Moss, quoted in Minoli Salgado, “The Politics of the Palimpsest,” 160.

⁴¹³ See Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, trans. Betty Radice (London, Penguin Books, 1994).

seduces the reader, like Eve in the Garden of Eden, with the validity of its arguments. The biblical and Miltonian undercurrent running through the novel makes the satanic narrator, more than any other Rushdiean narrator/author, resemble most “[t]h’ infernal Serpent” whose “guile”⁴¹⁴ sets the entire biblical narrative into motion. In Rushdie’s novel, the satanic narrative voice “satanises,” i.e. diversifies and even falsifies not only the Divine Word, but insinuates an element of difference into every discourse, including its own.

The question of (lack of) authenticity also defines the authorial position in *Fury* and *Quichotte*, whose authorial figures find it problematic to distinguish between fiction and reality to such an extent, that they become incapable of seeing their objective reality on its own terms and merely see it as a repetition of a fictional reality, specifically one that they have created themselves. This is a strategy whereby their fiction, and, by extension, fiction in general, becomes an existential reassurance, i.e. a guarantor of the author’s very existence. However, this exaltation of the fictional at the expense of the real simultaneously encodes the author as socially and politically inconsequential, an authorial position that, as we shall see, is central to these two novels.

B. Authoring a World: (Anti-)Mimesis, (Mis-)Representation

Closely related to the author’s positionality as a factor shaping the fictional world that Rushdie’s authorial figures bring into being is also the concept of representation, one of the very first literary and philosophical concepts to be elaborated, referring to the way in which art mediated the world. As formulated by Plato, *mimēsis* (imitation, representation), captured the problematic nature of artistic representation of the world – “literature does not depict the *reality* of its objects, but rather portrays the way they *appear*.”⁴¹⁵ Indeed, bearing in mind Plato’s worldview, it could not be otherwise: since the true reality resides in the ideal world of the Forms, of which the world of physical phenomena is merely an inferior imitation, i.e. an illusion or appearance, then

⁴¹⁴ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gordon Teskey (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), Book I, verse 34.

⁴¹⁵ Andrea Nightingale, “Mimesis: Ancient Greek Literary Theory,” in *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 38.

literature, in representing this inferior world, itself becomes the inferior copy of an inferior copy. Twice removed from the true reality, literature does not imitate reality but an ontologically inferior world, apprehended with the senses (whereas the true reality of the Forms is accessible to the rational mind of the philosopher), defined by mutability, appearances, illusion. Since literature in Plato's view was incapable of apprehending the truth, it was dismissed as inferior to philosophy and as capable of dealing merely with illusion.

For Aristotle, literature belongs in a different, aesthetic sphere and therefore cannot be held to the ethical and political standards of truthfulness and correctness envisioned by Plato: it creates an alternative, fictional reality guided by its own rules and standards. In Aristotle's view, "mimēsis is a fictional representation [i.e. an imitation of a significant action] that, when composed correctly, improves its readers, both intellectually and emotionally (rather than offering a false image of the world that harms its audience). A fictional mimēsis, in short, cannot be judged as right or wrong: art and life occupy separate realms."⁴¹⁶ With Aristotle, mimesis/imitation becomes invested with a positive valence, as a basic human instinct to render human experience intelligible, pointing the way to truth and knowledge of universals.

Representation is a fundamental concept in postcolonial discourse, which delves into colonialist and any other dominant discourse and dismantles its presuppositions of self and Other and the entire Manichean structure on which it rests. One of Edward Said's central points regarding Orientalism was its propagation of representations of the Orient rather than the objective, faithful depictions thereof as "truth" and he insists on seeing these representations *as representations*.⁴¹⁷ Seeing them as images refracted through the prism of their author, who is located within a specific cultural and ideological context, reveals their constructed and subjective nature; no longer seen as objective "facts," they become fictional constructs, open to contestation and/or dismantling.

Frank Ankersmit defines the term "representation" as substitution... A representation (cf. a representation of the past) does not resemble or imitate something else, but *substitutes*, that is to say: comes in the place of something else... Thus, art historian Ernst Gombrich says, representations create presence-in-absence: the clay horse functions precisely in the absence of the living, the idol in the absence of the god. Representations are not subjective or opaque, they are not about seeing through but about seeing *as* – a stick *as* a

⁴¹⁶ Nightingale, 41.

⁴¹⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 21, emphasis original.

horse. One could even say, as the philosopher Arthur Danto does, that representations are all about seeing the world in a certain way: about *mediating* the world.⁴¹⁸

Not only do representations present a certain view of the world, but the very possibility of an objectively apprehensible reality has become problematic in the current post- climate. In Rushdie's novels, the authorial figures grapple with the problems of understanding and writing their worlds into existence. Reality as such is subjected to the demands of the writerly imagination. Thus, when Saleem perceives an error in historical fact, he does not see it necessary to correct it, but leaves it to stand as it is and to impart its own internal logic to the text.

The fragmented, plurivocal and irreconcilable authorial subjectivity dominating Rushdie's texts precludes realistic representation as a viable form of rendering its postcolonial, conflict-ridden and epistemologically "violated" reality. According to Paul Smith, realistic representation "set[s] into place[...] particular forms and relations of subjectivity. Specifically, the classic realist text is understood as an attempt to install the illusion of a plenary and controlling producer (the authorial 'subject'), and also to create in the reader the particular subjectivity or subject-position appropriate to the consumption of the text."⁴¹⁹ Thus, the very fractured, decentred and unstable authorial subjectivity imposes the impossibility of realistic representation and the texts are inevitably permeated by elements that defy rational, logical or teleological explanations. In *Midnight's Children*, this *unheimlich* element resides in the exuberant magical realism which yields a defamiliarised and even exoticised picture of India, where the illogical and excessive naturally belong. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Moraes writes his manuscript in the surreal locale of Benengeli, where both locals and newcomers enact their purposeless, soulless existence – the former on account of their Francoist affiliations and the latter on account of the empty consumerism they practice. In *The Satanic Verses*, the reality which the protagonists inhabit is made to resemble the fantasmagoric landscape of Gibreel's dreams and is a place where the repressive discourse of power produces the monstrosity it ascribes to the Other it repudiates, namely, its immigrant population. In *Fury*, the world Malik Solanka inhabits is one of simulacra and fake values, while in *Quichotte* reality is literarised, apprehensible mostly through the coming to life of fictional characters and phenomena.

⁴¹⁸ Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, "Remediation," in *Literature: An Introduction to Theory and Analysis*, ed. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Lasse Horne Kjøeldgaard, Lis Møller, Dan Ringgaard, Lilian Munk Røsing, and Peter Simonsen (London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2017), 327-8, emphasis original.

⁴¹⁹ Smith, *Discerning the Subject*, 92.

Pitfalls of the Artistic Consciousness: Unreliability, Silences, Gaps, Distortions

Rushdie's authors are invariably revealed to be unreliable narrators/authors and even openly flaunt their unreliability. Wayne Booth defines a narrator as "*reliable* when he or she speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not".⁴²⁰ What makes a narrator unreliable is not only the deliberate lies or deceptions he fabricates, but also the unconscious bias he reveals in his text, which is consequently riven with internal contradictions and discrepancies between the flawed logic of the narrator and the overall logic of the text, governed by the implied author.

In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem, as we saw, is constantly haunted by the spectral presence of Shiva, whose existence foregrounds his own status as the Other in the familial and national unit in which he has carved a place for himself and, more importantly, as the carrier of the authorial signature attached to the text he is writing. To emphasise the threatening aspect of Shiva, Saleem ascribes to him a mythical significance, both as the divine principle of destruction and of biological procreation; the Widow, Saleem's other antagonist, is similarly mythically magnified by being identified with Kali, the Mother Goddess in her most terrible aspect. Arraigned against such mythical forces, Saleem's narrative assumes equally epic proportions, transcending the solipsistic preoccupations of an ordinary autobiography and becoming an alternative historiography.

However, a careful analysis of his text reveals a more insidious bias on his part, one that in asserting the validity of his own minoritarian perspective (in spite of his British-Hindu parentage, he is brought up as a secular Muslim), denigrates the majoritarian Hindu element of India and downplays its cultural, national and symbolic significance. This is most evident in his orientalist tendency to neglect the contemporary, lived reality of Hindus, whom he sees instead through an almost exclusively mythical lens. A glance at the catalogue of names flitting through Saleem's text lays bare this strategy – apart from Shiva, nearly all the female Hindu characters are manifestations of the mythological incarnations of Shiva's wife: Parvati as the lover, Durga

⁴²⁰ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 158-9, emphasis original.

as the mother and Kali as disease and death. Furthermore, this female principle assumes an even wider multiple personality:

the feminine divinity which personifies the “power (Sakti) of Siva [Shiva] is Parvati, daughter of the Himalayas, also named Uma, the gracious, and Bhairavi, the terrible, Ambika the generatrix, Sati the good wife [Sati, according to one myth, is Parvati in a previous incarnation], Gauri the brilliant, Kali the black, Durga the inaccessible.”⁴²¹

Parvati is, after himself and Shiva, the most endowed of the midnight children, possessing the gift of real magic, but what all this potential ultimately amounts to is mere circus trickery. Apart from fulfilling the important structural role as Shiva’s consort and mother of their son Aadam (the mythological Ganesh), her only important act is to give Saleem his name back and to transport him from Bangladesh back to India. The only occasion her allegorical connection to India surfaces is in her thirteen-day labour, which is simultaneous with the political turmoil leading to the proclamation of the Emergency and after giving birth, she dies in the slum-clearances orchestrated by Sanjay Gandhi.

Durga takes over from Parvati as the woman who nourishes the orphaned Aadam – described as a “succubus” and a “bloodsucker lizard in human form”, she is an embodiment of the grotesque female body (her breasts are “colossal” and possess inexhaustible reserves of milk and she is rumoured to have two wombs!). However, she arouses Saleem’s intense antipathy by being equally “full of gossip and tittle-tattle as she was of milk: every day a dozen new stories gushed from her lips.” Prefiguring the tyrannical discursive dominance of Mahound, the Imam and the prophetess Ayesha in *The Satanic Verses*, who cannot admit other, alternative forms of discourse, Saleem detests the alternative worldview represented by Durga, which he sees as a negation of his own. For Durga’s addiction to incessant gossip springs from her rootedness exclusively in the present and her refusal to exceed her memory’s scope beyond a day:

She was a monster who forgot each day the moment it ended. It was with the greatest reluctance that I agreed to make her acquaintance; it is with the greatest reluctance that I admit her into these pages. Her name, even before I met her, had the smell of new things; she represented novelty, beginnings, the advent of new stories events complexities, and I was no longer interested in anything new”. (*MC*, 622-3)

⁴²¹ Larousse, quoted in James Harrison, *Salman Rushdie*, 133.

By eliding the novelty of Durga's gossip, Saleem confirms his narrative exhaustion and Durga remains superfluous to his narrative.

Perhaps the most glaring instance of bad faith Saleem exhibits is the shocking omission of Gandhi from the national narrative he constructs. As Timothy Brennan points out,

the very staple of a major branch of Indo-English historical fiction, Gandhi's National Movement, is impertinently excised from the narrative outright, which rushes from Amritsar in 1919 to Agra in 1942 without so much as a passing comment! Thus, the story of Indian nationalism is erased from the book that documents its sad outcome, and the most dramatic illustration of Rushdie's argument is an absence.⁴²²

In the novel, Gandhi is mentioned only as having decreed "Hartal," literally "a day of mourning, of stillness, of silence," that, at this time, "in the heyday of the Mahatma, when even language obeys the instructions of Gandhiji" (*MC*, 37), acquires a new meaning of protest against the continuing British presence in India and the passing of the Rowlatt Act. His death occurs while the family is watching a film by Hanif in the cinema, which is interrupted when the manager appears on the stage with the news that "This afternoon, at Birla House in Delhi, our beloved Mahatma was killed. Some madman shot him in the stomach, ladies and gentlemen – our Bapu is gone" (*MC*, 196). The event is mentioned only to register its effect on the family, who are relieved that the assassin is a Hindu and not a Muslim. Aadam Aziz's comment that "This Godse is nothing to be grateful for" and Amina's that "By being Godse he has saved our lives" (*MC*, 197), while understandable under the circumstances, reveal no emotional identification with the murdered ideologue. Similarly, Saleem's text does not intimate that a great tragedy has occurred or that the nation has sustained an irreparable loss. As Neil ten Kortenaar argues, the news of Gandhi's death, which interrupts Hanif's film, marks the eruption of the real into art. However, it is subordinated to the needs of Saleem's narrative and Gandhi's "assassination is not, as it would be for most people alive at the time, the linchpin around which the Sinais order their memories – where were you when you heard the news? – but can be fitted into a narrative that already has its own shape."⁴²³ In the end, the real that is Gandhi's death is summarily excised from the text,

⁴²² Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, 84.

⁴²³ Neil ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text*, 233.

where it figures under a wrong date: “The supposed error about Gandhi makes the point that the real can never actually erupt into art; reality is always mediated.”⁴²⁴

While Saleem’s elision of Gandhi has been interpreted as a conscious strategy on his part to evacuate the role of national hero in order to install himself as India’s essence (at the Midnight Children’s Conference, Saleem advocates the third principle of togetherness and inclusion, described as the ideal of “the great soul, otherwise known as *mahatma*, of mankind” [MC, 355]), I believe it lays bare what Feroza Jussawalla describes as Rushdie’s “post-Mughal identity,” “the effect of post-Islamic colonialism and its syncretic existence in contemporary Hindu India that shapes Rushdie’s consciousness.”⁴²⁵ The Islamic sensibility – his post-Mughalness – is crucial for Rushdie and indicative of the falseness of his minoritarian credentials, whereas he, in fact, speaks from a majoritarian perspective, that of high Mughal-Islamic culture and worldview. While he purportedly covers the minority communities of India in his *oeuvre*, there is nothing peripheral or subaltern in the experiences of the individuals and families he portrays. Saleem claims Indian centrality for himself as a child of the Muslim Sinais, not of the British Methwold and certainly not of the Hindu Vanita; in spite of amalgamating the Jewish and Catholic minorities, Moraes ultimately finds his meaning through the Moor Boabdil, who turns out to be his distant ancestor, glorified at the expense of his other even more famous ancestors, Vasco da Gama and, potentially, Nehru himself; the Zoroastrian Cama family of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* are certainly not the oppressed Others of Hindu India – the knighted Sir Darius Xerxes Cama is, after all, best friends with William Methwold himself, etc.

⁴²⁴ Kortenaar, 233. Ultimately, “[t]o misremember the event is to misunderstand the nature of Gandhi” (236).

⁴²⁵ Feroza Jussawalla, “Of *The Satanic Verses*’ Mohajirs and Migrants: Hybridity vs. Syncretism and Indigenous Aesthetics in Postcoloniality,” *Third Text*, 1995, 9:32, 91; also, “Rushdie’s *Dastan-e-Dilruba: The Satanic Verses* as Rushdie’s Love Letter to Islam,” in *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*, ed. M. Keith Booker. Jussawalla draws attention to the critics’ almost exclusive focus on Rushdie’s anti-hegemonic rhetoric *vis-à-vis* British colonialism, forgetting his inscription into the high Mughal culture of India, as a result of which he is oppositional also to the Hindu element which Islam considers inimical to it, in spite of the non-sectarian nature of Indian Islam, which accepts Nehru’s vision of a secular India and is particularly oriented against Khomeinism and the mullocracy. She claims that Rushdie affirms “the syncretic indigenesness of Indian Muslim culture which is also a product of colonialism”, because the long history of cultural and ethnic absorption in India has produced not hybridity but “new affirmations of the *locally indigenous*. Today, instead of moving towards the ‘post-cultural’, we in India are increasingly moving towards (re)affirmations of *endangered authenticities*” (88, emphasis original). However, Jussawalla does not register the hegemonic tendency in Rushdie, who not only affirms his suppressed Mughal authenticity but is able to either contextualise it in an ideological space evacuated of the Hindu element or, if it figures at all, to trope it primarily as fundamentalist and oppressive.

Gandhi's excision from *Midnight's Children* is made all the more prominent when compared to several references to him in *The Moor's Last Sigh*.⁴²⁶ Here, he is twice described mockingly by two different characters using the same vocabulary – it is not enough that the odious Epifania describes him as “Little Man Loincloth,” but Rushdie has Aurora, a character he endorses, repeat the sentiment when, insisting on finding a parrot for her one-legged doorman Lambajan to make him resemble a real pirate, she says “Might as well have had the little man without the loincloth” (*MLS*, 126). Moraes parenthetically clarifies that “it was not done to make lewd jokes about the Mahatma,” but the analogy little man/pirate and loincloth/parrot is there all the same. Both Camoens and Belle are “for Nehru, not Gandhi – for business and technology and progress and modernity, for the city, and against all that sentimental clap-trap of spinning your own cotton and travelling third-class on the train” (*MLS*, 54), as if the famed Indian hybridity could not have accommodated both Nehru's urban and Gandhi's rural vision. In spite of being “a Nehru man,” however, Camoens goes to the small town of Malgudi⁴²⁷ to hear Gandhi speak. The narrative voice here becomes blurred and the focalisation is uncertain: Moraes observes his grandfather imaginatively, but the scene is described in italics and in the first person that can be either Camoens or Moraes, which suggests that Moraes endorses Camoens's view. At first, he is overwhelmed by the beauty and sublimity of the gathered mass of people, but as soon as it starts a religious chant, he moves away in disgust:

In the city we are for secular India but the village is for Ram. And they say *Ishwar and Allah is your name* but they don't mean it, they mean only Ram himself, king of Raghu

⁴²⁶ The historical watersheds of *Midnight's Children* are only a background in *The Moor's Last Sigh* – Nehru's stature is diminished as he is merely Aurora's lover whose function is to help assert her devil-may-care attitude of a frivolous artist; Indira Gandhi is mentioned as being the runner-up in a role-model poll published in a female magazine, being beaten to the first place by Moraes's sister Ina; Minnah's resolution to contest the Emergency in court is mentioned only in passing. The colonial period, the resistance, the Amritsar massacre, Partition, Independence and the Emergency are only sporadically evoked in order to provide chronological guidelines for situating the family saga Moraes narrates.

⁴²⁷ R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma: A Novel of Gandhi* (1955) interrogates the impact of Gandhi on ordinary people by dramatising the revolutionary change his address to the people in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi provokes in the young Sriram, who henceforth becomes passionately involved in Gandhi's Quit India movement. Literary India's engagement with Gandhi, as Priyamvada Gopal points out, has been extensive – some of the novels featuring Gandhi and/or his ideas are Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* and *The Guide*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Bhabhani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger*, and Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*. (Priyamvada Gopal, *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009])

clan, purifier of sinners along with Sita. In the end I am afraid the villagers will march on the cities and people like us will have to lock our doors and there will come a Battering Ram. (*MLS*, 55-6, emphasis original)

What for Narayan's hero was a life-changing experience of sublimity and new-found purpose, for Rushdie's is a premonition of violence and the rise of Hindutva. The crowd sings the glory of all the gods, among whom the Hindu Ram and the Muslim Allah, and yet Camoens's secular sensibility registers the potential danger only from Hindu fundamentalism and not any other. Both here and in *Midnight's Children*, the mention of Gandhi is intimately woven in with that of Rama (when they hear of his death in the cinema, the audience in *Midnight's Children* cries "Hai Ram! Hai Ram!"), which, coupled with the image of the Battering Ram that will reshape the social and political life in India at the end of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, lends the disturbing impression that the ideological roots that culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque lie in Gandhi and the religious and pacifist undercurrent of his teaching!

In *Fury*, Gandhi is alluded to in the context of Malik Solanka's sexual arrangement with Mila, a young Serbian woman who has modelled herself on Malik's creation, the doll Little Brain. Together, they play out a sexual fantasy in which both of them take up the identity of his creations: she is the inquisitive doll and he is the philosopher she interrogates. It is here that the narrator compares Malik to Gandhi: "[l]ike Gandhi performing his *brahmacharya* 'experiments with truth,' when the wives of his friends lay with him at night to enable him to test the mastery of mind over limb, he preserved the outward form of high propriety; and so did she, so did she" (*F*, 125). Malik further profanises and de-sacralises Hindu spirituality when he sees himself as a *sanyasi*⁴²⁸ (albeit a modern, urban one, "with a duplex and credit card" [*F*, 82]), like his neighbour Mr. Venkat, a wealthy banker who on his sixtieth birthday abandoned his family and, adopting the famous Gandhian iconography (loincloth and begging bowl), embarked on his spiritual path.

Ever historically conscious, Saleem traces the beginnings of his beloved Bombay to

the dawn of time... in this primeval world before clocktowers, the fishermen – who were called Kolis – sailed in Arab dhows, spreading red sails against the setting sun... There

⁴²⁸ A "sanyasi" or "sanyasin" is a "renouncer," a religious ascetic who has renounced material desires and has detached himself from material life. It is the highest of the four Ashramas, or Hindu stages of life, which are those of student (*brahmacharaya*), householder (*grihastha*), forest dweller (*vanaprastha*), and renouncer (*sannyasa*)." (Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], 21)

were also coconuts and rice” and, “above it all, the benign presiding influence of the goddess Mumbadevi, whose name – Mumbadevi, Mumbabai, Mumbai – may well have become the city’s. (MC, 121-2)

However, under different waves of colonisation, the city has lost its original identity: it was named first Bom Bahia by the Portuguese on account of its harbor and then Bombay by the English, transforming itself into a modern city in which its original inhabitants and its presiding goddess have all but disappeared.⁴²⁹ Saleem’s nostalgic evocation of this original Bombay hints at a possible and, in this novel, desired reclamation of its indigenous identity, which has been suppressed by repeated colonisations; yet, when that identity begins to be asserted in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, its recuperative and decolonising implications are engulfed and negated by the negative aspects of the rise of Hindu sectarianism.

In Rushdie’s outlook, only the assertion of Muslim identity is celebrated as truly postcolonial. The Islamic cultural heritage is evident in the common references to the Mughal emperors and their achievements, such as the Taj Mahal and the fortress at Delhi, and is an object of proud identification for modern Indian Muslims such as Saleem’s father Ahmed, who invents an entire genealogical tree stretching back to these famed Islamic rulers. Although since the incursion of Islam into India, the most contestable aspect of Indian identity has been precisely the conflict between Islam and Hinduism, Mughal iconography has consistently represented them not as invaders and colonisers, but as some of the earliest propagators of a tolerant and multicultural society. Rushdie builds on to this positive representation of enlightened Muslim rule in *Midnight’s Children* and connects it to that of Moorish al-Andalus in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Yet, he never identifies the inclusive pluralism of India with Hinduism, which in his fiction figures only as oppressive and fanatical. As James Harrison points out, “pluralism in Indian culture, however, is to a large extent the product of pluralism in Hinduism, whose multiplicity of deities and avatars bears witness to the number of other religions it has

⁴²⁹ Saleem is wrong when he states that there is no day dedicated to Mumbadevi on the calendar of festivals, whose place, he says, has been usurped by Ganesh, commemorated on Ganesh Chaturthi, “when huge processions are ‘taken out’ and march to Chowpatty [Beach] bearing plaster effigies of the god, which they hurl into the sea” (MC, 123). What in *Midnight’s Children* is a nostalgic longing for the symbolical presence of the ancient Hindu goddess in the city whose patron deity she is, in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* becomes an unwelcome aspect of the rise of Hindu fundamentalism. Bombay was renamed Mumbai in 1995, when the Shiv Sena came into power (which was also the year of the publication of *The Moor’s Last Sigh*), but both in this and subsequent novels Rushdie repudiates the ideology underpinning the new Mumbai and clings to the hybrid ideal of the Bombay of his childhood.

been able to incorporate and reincorporate, in contrast to the exclusive nature of Islam and other monotheisms.”⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰ James Harrison, *Salman Rushdie*, 52.

I. The Historical Dialogism of *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*

Both *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* are historiographic metafiction, a genre of postmodernist writing which, according to Linda Hutcheon, is characterised by a “theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction)[, which] is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past.”⁴³¹ Informed by an awareness that the past is only accessible to us by means of its textual representations rather than as an objectively recorded fact, this type of fiction uses parody as a means of rethinking the aesthetic in relation to the discourses of politics and history, engaging it both with the present and the past (as she states, “parody” is in this context redefined as “repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity”⁴³²). This section engages with the nature of the novels’ relationship with these discourses and then proceeds to analyse the dialogical poetics of Saleem’s and Moraes’s texts.

Saleem’s and Moraes’s self-perception, as we saw, is inextricable from their perception of the historical or political collective conglomerations (India/Bombay) with which they identify and as whose synecdoche they function. At the same time, their texts make it clear that this almost organic link between the subjective and the historical/political is not instigated by their authors’ conscious choice, but is inherently incorporated into their very being by forces over which they exert no control. For Saleem, the burden of history is foisted upon him by dint of his and India’s simultaneous birth, for Moraes, both by his preternatural growth and by his imaginative troping as an incarnation of Boabdil in his mother’s art. As a result, theirs are autobiographies that are simultaneously alternative historiographies, wherein Saleem’s and

⁴³¹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 5.

⁴³² Hutcheon, 26. Historiographic metafiction differs from the historical novel proper by its openly self-conscious treatment of history. The historical novel is “modeled on historiography to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force (in the narrative and in human destiny)”. Lukács defined it as “enact[ing] historical process by presenting a microcosm which generalises and concentrates (1962, 39). The protagonist, therefore, should be a type, a synthesis of the general and particular, of “all the humanly and socially essential determinants”. From this definition, it is clear that the protagonists of historiographic metafiction are anything but proper types: they are the ex-centrics, the marginalised, the peripheral figures of fictional history.” (Hutcheon, 113-4)

Moraes's meaning as individuals and artists is intimately bound up with the meanings they instill into history. As carriers of the symbolism of their historical-political legacy, the dilemmas they face in their lives are closely connected to the question of the kind of histories they write.

The official history that Saleem disproves with his own, alternative one, may be determined as a

traditional or "total" history[, which] inserts events into grand explanatory systems and linear processes, celebrates great moments and individuals and seeks to document a point of origin, [whereas] genealogical analysis attempts to establish and preserve the singularity of events, turns away from the spectacular in favour of the discredited, the neglected and a whole range of phenomena which have been denied a history... Genealogies focus on local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge.⁴³³

Saleem's (hi)story interweaves both types of historiography. The teleological model of traditional history is maintained, along with its strict chronology (with the exception of the death of Gandhi), the momentous events and the historical figures directing them (the text is interspersed with references to Brigadier Dyer, Nehru, Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay Gandhi). What Saleem disrupts in this teleological narrative is the causal flow of events – the midnight children and he in particular, as an embodiment of their and of the national essence in its purest form, are the cause propelling contemporary national history.

... I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. (*MC*, 3)

... it is my firm conviction that the hidden purpose of the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 was nothing more nor less than the elimination of my benighted family from the face of the earth. (*MC*, 469)

... the truest, deepest motive behind the declaration of a State of Emergency was the smashing, the pulverising, the irreversible discombobulation of the children of midnight. (*MC*, 597)

Although by the end, Saleem has abandoned his insistence on his central historical position in a renewed perception of himself and the children as victims rather than agents of history, he never relinquishes the idea that they are the true protagonists of Indian history. In this way, his

⁴³³ Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 59.

autobiography is not the solipsistic narrative of the growth of an individual consciousness, but an alternative historiographic document narrating the discredited and silenced – indeed, subaltern – history of the children, not a mere fiction but a truly postcolonial, genealogical history tracing the historical routes not taken, hence Mian Abdullah and his Free Islam Convocation rather than the Muslim League or the Indian National Congress, the children rather than the Widow, etc.⁴³⁴

As a narrator, Saleem constructs the meanings of the text by filling in gaps in memory, omissions, mistakes, misinterpretations, digressions, retractions, revealing his narrative weaknesses and leaving them incorporated into the text instead of correcting them, etc., thus emphasising his unreliability. This, at times, nonchalant attitude towards his story, however, due to its parallel anchoring in the historical, precludes arbitrariness; although some critics claim that the beginning of Saleem’s story with his grandfather Aadam Aziz and the ending with his own impending disintegration are contingent and not motivated by the internal demands of the text, this is not so.⁴³⁵ Aadam’s loss of faith is an appropriate beginning for Saleem, as he locates his beginnings in the irrecoverable feeling of loss experienced by his grandfather and accepts his “god-shaped hole” as his ontological and, as we shall see, artistic legacy. His impending disintegration is, likewise, required by the logic of his identification with India – Saleem obviously perceives their joint thirty-first birthday in 1978 as a personal and national watershed and sees both himself and India as falling apart as a new generation, more balanced and mature, takes over. The alternative option – that he will get married to Padma and go to Kashmir – provides a contrast to the first ending, as it ensures continuity and his entry into maturity; this

⁴³⁴ However, Stephen Morton emphasises that Saleem’s deconstructionist stance towards official bourgeois nationalist history does not automatically mean that his is a truly subaltern alternative history. The open vision of the nation he lets loose when, in his disintegration, he enables the articulation of the voices of the heteroglot Indian multitudes that jostled in his head “is opposed to the Nehruvian model of ‘unity in diversity,’ which seeks to contain and subordinate the voices of the multitude to the political will of the secular state... Saleem’s inability to contain the voices of the multitude within his head can be read as a mirror of Rushdie’s failure to represent the nation as a totality in the novel... *Midnight’s Children* creates a rhetorical space for the multitude to contest the false universality of national independence... Saleem’s body, like Rushdie’s novel, is a site of dialogue and debate. It is in this sense that *Midnight’s Children* is an appropriate aesthetic form for India’s democracy.” (Stephen Morton, *Salman Rushdie: Fictions of Postcolonial Modernity* [Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008], 46-7 and 51)

⁴³⁵ According to Joel Kuortti, “[t]he opening of the novel is not only, or not essentially, about Saleem and his birth; it is about the difficulty to begin, the difficulty to narrate. In quick succession, in the first three paragraphs, Saleem tells about his birth, his present condition as a dying man 31 years later, and the need to go even further back in time than his birth. In this hedging it is underlined that neither Indian independence nor Saleem’s story can be so neatly folded up as to give them a clear-cut beginning.” (Kuortti, *Fictions to Live In*, 67)

lack of final closure is not the usual postmodernist toying with narrative conventions, but is consistent with the type of historiography Saleem writes, which is one that includes the unwritten pages of potentialities. Similarly, he allows different interpretations of his words and even openly invites doubts as to his veracity, but he does not allow that what he writes about be interpreted as the meaningless ramble of a delusional individual.

The metahistorical discourse Saleem and Moraes engage in, as Hayden White defines it, constitutes an inquiry into historical consciousness, the epistemological status of historical explanations, the forms of historical representation and the authority of historical accounts. In his view, historical narratives are “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found*.”⁴³⁶ The result is that the truth is in the story itself, as shaped by the creative imagination of the writer, and not in the empirical reality out there. White has coined the term “emplotment” to designate “the process through which the facts contained in ‘chronicles’ are encoded as components of plots,”⁴³⁷ i.e. historical facts do not have an intrinsic value. Rather, their specific function and value in the narrative is dictated by the demands of the story itself, by the plot that requires a certain configuration, which is nothing more than one point of view among many. Saleem and Moraes openly claim that the truth they present in their texts is a textual, “emplotted” truth and not an unadulterated objective fact. This is not to deny the authenticity of their texts – on the contrary, they thereby assert their autonomy by letting the worlds they have created and the characters and events contained in them stand on their own as full-blown fictive products. It is precisely this awareness of the constructed nature of the text that makes Saleem wonder what his story would have been like if Mary and, by implication, Shiva, had told it. Whenever a Rushdiean narrator tries to impose a single, omniscient perspective on his creations, he is thwarted by the logic of the text. Thus, the Author-God that manifests himself in *The Satanic Verses* does not try to impose an omniscient, totalising vision (indeed, it looks as if he does not want to be in his text at all!), but leaves his characters to navigate through their own ethical choices. Moreover, everything in the novel is permeated by multiple interpretations, not least by the differential plurifying perspective of the satanic narrator.

Aruna Srivastava distinguishes two historical models in Saleem’s story: a chronological (colonial, British) and a mythical (Gandhian) one, the latter Indian in spirit as opposed to the

⁴³⁶ Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artefact,” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 1712-3.

⁴³⁷ Hayden White, quoted in *The Norton Anthology*, 1710.

imported European one.⁴³⁸ The linearity, teleology, order and the cause-and-effect relationship dictated by the former are all repeatedly countered by the circularity, chaos and contingent nature of the latter.⁴³⁹ The monological History that the former wants to impose is countered by the other, alternative version of events that Saleem voices. Thus, he reveals Methwold's fake parting, reflecting the hollowness of the colonising mission; he reveals the peculiar pigmentation of Indian businessmen who, installing themselves into the seat of power vacated by the British, all of a sudden turn white:

... during my frequent psychic travels, I discovered something rather odd: during the first nine years after Independence, [...] all over India, I stumbled across good Indian businessmen, [...] businessmen who had become or were becoming very, very pale indeed! It seems that the gargantuan (even heroic) efforts involved in taking over from the British and becoming masters of their own destinies had drained the colour from their cheeks. [...] The businessmen of India were turning pale. (*MC*, 248)

Saleem even lays bare the mimicry of the inhabitants of Methwold Estate, who, bound by the peculiar condition upon which they have bought their homes from the departing colonial – that all the objects in the houses remain as they are until the Raj officially cedes power to the nation – find themselves mimicking Methwold's habits, in short becoming his mimic men.

But now there are twenty days to go, things are settling down, the sharp edges of things are getting blurred, so they have all failed to notice what is happening: the Estate, Methwold's Estate, is changing them. Every evening at six they are out in their gardens,

⁴³⁸ Aruna Srivastava, "The Empire Writes Back: Language and History in *Shame* and *Midnight's Children*," in *Salman Rushdie: Midnight's Children/The Satanic Verses*, ed. David Smale (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 76-82.

⁴³⁹ In both *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie hints at the "philosophies of history" of both the West and the East. The Hindu division of historical time is contained in the "doctrine of the Yugas", according to which history forms a repeated cycle of four Yugas: Satya yuga of divine bliss; Treta Yuga, when man begins to alienate himself from the gods, no longer feels selfless duty to them but expects reward for his devotion; Dvapara yuga, marked by an increasing fall from morality, justice, truth, and the good; and Kali yuga, the reign of misfortunes, poverty, hunger, fear and vices of all kinds. The Greek myths of history, as described in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, mention 5 periods populated by 5 corresponding races of man: Golden race (did not know of moral or physical evil and did not have to work), Silver (race created by the Olympian divinities, godless and reckless, destroyed by Zeus), Bronze (terrible and powerful, admired the god of war Ares, destroyed by its own hands), Heroic (demi-gods, a divine race of heroic men, these are the god-like heroes of Homer's epics), and the Iron race (the present one, division, evil, hatred, immorality). (Грејс Кернс, *Филозофији на историјата* [Скопје: Култура, 1993])

celebrating the cocktail hour, and when William Methwold comes to call they slip effortlessly into their imitation Oxford drawls; and they are learning, about ceiling fans and gas cookers and the correct diet for budgerigars, and Methwold, supervising their transformation, is mumbling under his breath. Listen carefully: what's he saying? Yes, that's it. "Sabkuch ticktock hai," mumbles William Methwold. All is well. (MC, 131)

Moreover, the geographical scope of Saleem's telepathic powers only within the borders of India, rather than within the entire territory of the erstwhile Raj, neutralises Methwold and the model of history he represents. By a similar strategy, he disassociates himself from the official historiography of the domestic regime presided over by the Widow: lacking documents about the "sperectomy" (the Widow and her son have burnt all the files relating to the children), he presents himself as a historian who does not possess factographic data and offers himself as proof instead. He seeks to convince not by the objective truthfulness of his story, but by its sustainability, i.e. by the numerous correspondences and the form that all that has happened to him has imposed on his narrative – as he states, there is no escape from form. His text, which is metaphorically his body and the body of the nation, by means of the metaphor of pickling/chutnification, is the document that inscribes the children into the national memory and vindicates their existence and, above all, suffering.

The historical models Rushdie explores in his novels resemble what Robert Young in *White Mythologies* defines as postmodernist historiography:

Postmodernism can best be defined as European culture's awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world... Postmodernism, therefore, becomes a certain self-consciousness about a culture's own historical relativity... postmodernism itself could be said to mark not just the cultural effects of a new stage of "late" capitalism, but the sense of the loss of European history and culture as History and Culture, the loss of their unquestioned place at the centre of the world. We could say that if, according to Foucault, the centrality of "Man" dissolved at the end of the eighteenth century as the "Classical Order" gave way to "History," today at the end of the twentieth century, as "History" gives way to the "Postmodern," we are witnessing the dissolution of "the West."⁴⁴⁰

⁴⁴⁰ Robert J. C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 51-2. Young also claims that poststructuralism may be considered a "child" of France's colonial crisis: "If so-called 'so-called poststructuralism' is the product of a single historical moment, then that moment is probably not May 1968 but rather the Algerian War of Independence – no doubt itself both a symptom and a product. In this respect it is significant that Sartre, Althusser, Derrida and Lyotard, among others, were all either born in Algeria or personally involved with the events of the war." (32)

Rushdie brings to the fore the marginal histories, the *petits récits* of ordinary people, which, although tied to the capitalised, absolutist History shaped by political power, nevertheless prove superior to it.

The rich historical tapestry of both *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* constitutes a powerful elegy of the violence, expulsions and extinctions that have plagued history.⁴⁴¹ The author's/narrator's satirical representation of his present historical moment inevitably entails a comparison with an idealised past, leading to a series of parallels and contrasts between historical epochs and societies. The conception of our current historical era as a fall from preceding eras of moral giants is, as has been mentioned above, crucial to Rushdie's characterisation of his protagonist Moraes Zogoiby as a non-heroic naïf, of his contemporaries as clowns and buffoons and of his times as the fag-end of history.

This section has focused on the historical models used in *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* in order to provide an insight into the ways in which the texts produced by the novel's author-narrators engage with the discourse of history. In the following section, I will engage with the representational models proceeding from the intimate dialogue between art and history that they establish in their texts.

⁴⁴¹ In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie covers the following historical events: the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar (1919); the rise and fall of Sheikh Abdullah (Mian Abdullah, the Hummingbird, in the novel), Sher-e-Kashmir (the Lion of Kashmir), whose Muslim National Conference (Rushdie's Free Islam Convocation) was opposed to the idea of partition advocated for by Jinnah's Muslim League; the Partition of 1947; the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi; the division of the state of Bombay along linguistic lines (1956) into Gujarati and Marathi; the Nanavati affair (Sabarmati in the novel); the war between India and China; the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965; the capture of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the looting and rape of Bengal by the Pakistani army, the secession of Pakistan's East Wing to form the new state of Bangladesh; the Emergency Rule of Indira Gandhi 1975-1977; the clearance of Delhi slums and the sterilisation programme to reduce population growth directed by her son, Sanjay Gandhi (1976); the election of 1977, when Indira Gandhi's Congress Party was defeated by the Janata Party. (Uma Parameswaran, "Autobiography as History: Saleem Sinai and India in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*," in *Salman Rushdie's Early Fiction* [Jaipur, New Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Guwahati: Rawat Publications, 2007], 6-16). *The Moor's Last Sigh* contains references to the Spanish *Reconquista*, the plight of Spanish Moors and Jews, the Holocaust, the genocidal colonisation of the New World, the Indians of India and America, the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, etc.

A. Crises of Representation: Between Wholeness and Fragments

Elephantiasis: A Poetics of the Whole

The ambivalent engagement with historiographic models on the part of Rushdie's authors has implications for the ways in which they are able to represent reality through language. On the one hand, they aspire to exert a totalising, all-encompassing vision that would include all reality, and on the other, they are faced with a fragmentary, contradictory world. Early on in *Midnight's Children*, Nadir Khan reminisces about his roommate, "a painter whose paintings had grown larger and larger as he tried to get the whole of life into his art. 'Look at me,' he said before he killed himself, 'I wanted to be a miniaturist and I've got elephantiasis instead!'" (MC, 59). Significantly, pretensions at comprehensiveness are doomed as unviable – the painter kills himself. Picture Singh meets the same tragic end when he gains the title "Most Charming Man in the World" – the attainment of a superlative quality, which connotes the extinguishing of desire (and is thus similar to one of the tricks the Sundarbans play on Saleem and his fellow trackers by sending them the houris that satisfy their appetites and reduce them to transparency), soon leads to his suicide.

Lifafa Das, one of the "Dugdugee-men", who shout "Dilli dekho" / Come see Delhi" all over India, in Delhi modifies the call into "See the whole world, come see everything!" (MC, 97). His name literally means "envelope" and idiomatically "empty show"⁴⁴² and the semantics would seem to gesture at the futility of his effort to represent the whole world. Although his method is to show a succession of scenes through a hole in his peepshow box, as Uma Parameswaran states, "the cumulative effect... is that one has seen all life."⁴⁴³ His obsession with "the hyperbolic formula," which "began, after a time, to prey upon his mind; more and more picture postcards went into his peepshow as he tried, desperately, to deliver what he promised, to put everything into his box," prompts Saleem to consider its implications for his own writing method, as he parenthetically remarks "I am suddenly reminded of Nadir Khan's friend the painter: is this an Indian disease, this urge to encapsulate the whole of reality? Worse: am I

⁴⁴² Parameswaran, "The Perforated Sheet," in *Salman Rushdie's Early Fiction*, 60.

⁴⁴³ Parameswaran, 54.

infected, too? (*MC*, 97). In his urge to be an “all-India radio” and a synecdoche of India containing her multitudes, Saleem certainly suffers from this very Indian disease.

Saleem’s connection to Lifafa Das is not superficial – indeed, his presence crystallises people’s characters at crucial moments, which in turn propels them to act in ways that radically change their lives. Just when he is about to be lynched by a Muslim mob, Amina gives him shelter in her home and announces her pregnancy for the first time to the gathered men, daring them to attack a pregnant woman and show the world their “bravery.” As a gesture of gratitude, he takes her to his cousin, the soothsayer Ram-Ram, a charlatan who, on this occasion, goes into a real prophetic trance and sees the intertwined destinies of Saleem and Shiva. Thus, Lifafa Das sets (his)story in motion, for prophecies heard by those to whom they refer inevitably bring about their fulfillment.

The opposite of artistic comprehensiveness is practiced by Hanif, Saleem’s uncle, a film director and script writer, “the only realistic writer working in the Bombay film industry,” who works on a film project about “the Ordinary Life of a Pickle Factory”, prefiguring Saleem’s ending. In his case, artistic failure is caused by his obsession with documentary realism and when Saleem starts writing his story in “a pickle-factory created, run and worked in entirely by women” (*MC*, 339), as was his uncle’s dream, he takes a different approach and saturates his text with the excess and magic that is India. Thus, as Keith Wilson argues,

for the artist who has overdeveloped ambitions, who pursues comprehensiveness, pure sequence, and manipulative control, the cost is high and the eventual outcome, even when it has the passing appearance of success, is failure... From the first principles of his narrative, Rushdie confronts directly the fallibility of the artist, the partialness of his vision, and the imperfection of the work of art.⁴⁴⁴

Elephantiasis thus connotes an omniscient, god-like perspective, which in Rushdie’s hybrid ideal is placed under the sign of the One, the monologic and exclusionary, which brooks no dissent and no other alternatives. For this reason, his “elephantisers” end tragically, an ending he also reserves for himself when he anticipates his disintegration.

However, there is another aspect to elephantiasis: as Saleem intuits, it is a specifically Indian “disease” and, this being the case, he cannot help being infected with it. It animates his

⁴⁴⁴ Keith Wilson, “*Midnight’s Children* and Reader Responsibility,” 58.

own attempt to encapsulate the entire Indian reality and to give expression to its excess of people, stories, gods and destinies through his writing. Hence, the pervasive presence of the elephant-god Ganesh who, according to Brennan, “provides the culmination of national style.”⁴⁴⁵ As a mythical figure which manifests itself in the writer of the story (Saleem), his audience (Padma, who fulfils the role of Ganesha as an audience and scribe of the bard Vyasa) and Aadam (the intended recipient of the text), Ganesh is “the medium through which the entire story is filtered.”⁴⁴⁶ Thus, he embodies an artistic principle of mythical proportions, which allows the individual artist to merge with universal, archetypal creationary forces which impart a transcending character to his art – an image that appears in the Overartist in *The Satanic Verses* and the primordial Ocean of the Stream of Stories in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Significantly, Padma gives Saleem the root of *feronia elephantum*, one of the herbs of virility with which she tries to cure his impotence, and renders him delirious instead. When he resumes his writing, he finds that some sort of magic has been worked on him by the potion, as he is connected “with that world of ancient learning and sorcerers’ lore so despised by most of us nowadays; but ... I’m glad of its irruption into my last days, because to contemplate it is to regain a little, lost sense of proportion” (MC, 269). Cast in the role of Ganesh, he finds himself “overwhelmed by an older learning” which provides the mythic subtext of his narrative. Thus, the teleological perspective (according to which “history entered a new phase on August 15th, 1947”) is complemented with the mythical/cyclical, according to which that date is only a fleeting moment in the Age of Darkness, Kali-Yuga. Elephantiasis, in this way, becomes not so much a totalising poetics as one that incorporates a multitude of layers (historical, fictional, mythical, fantastic, etc.) which multiply the interpretative possibilities of the text. In *The Satanic Verses*, elephantiasis is enacted in the multilayering of characters and phenomena, so that meanings are multiplied to such an extent that everything in the novel is interpretable through several perspectives which are ambivalently poised against one another.

In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, the motif of the elephant alludes to the pervading theme of demolished illusions and eroded ideals, perhaps best summed up in the degraded figure of Saleem’s Aadam. Belle, Aurora’s mother, hates the figurines of Ganesh in the house of the da Gamas on Cabral Island because they are a part of the oppressive atmosphere pervading the

⁴⁴⁵ Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, 116.

⁴⁴⁶ Brennan, 116.

house and the Anglophilia of Epifania and Aires. The child Aurora secretly steals the figurines as a vindication of her, by now, deceased mother, which prompts her father to think that Belle's ghost wanders the house. Moraes comments that "matters elephantine, as well as spectral, continued to play a part in our saga, after all" (*MLS*, 10).

Here, the symbolism of the elephant connotes spectrality, absence and failed illusions and is echoed by Lambajan and the ideal elephantine community he imagines to have lived on Elephanta Island. He evokes a mythical era in which elephants created a mighty civilisation where philosophy was debated. However, when men found this elephantine utopia, they were so frightened by the creative force emanating from the colossal mammoth statues the elephants had left behind, that they "smashed up the whole lot. Yes, men wiped away the memory of the great elephants but still not all of us have forgotten" (*MLS*, 127-8), a prefiguring of the tragedy of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya, where Indian secularism is finally defeated by sectarian violence. Lambajan's fantasy thus follows a pattern whereby an ideal is demolished at the precise moment when it is about to yield a transcendent experience. In this novel, the nourishing aspect of the elephantiasis, that Indian disease from which Saleem animated his poetics with the archetypal materials of the national consciousness, becomes a failed illusion.

The motif of the elephant also performs the function of a counter-discourse against various forms of power. Such is Aurora's dance on the day of Ganesh Chaturti, when crowds celebrate the god, while she dances against the god. However, her resistance to the religious fervor of the multitude is represented as futile, as her dance loses its subversive message and becomes incorporated into the festival. As such, it serves as a testament to the unbridgeable alienation of the artist from the masses and the powerlessness of the artist. Years later, in Benengeli, Vasco Miranda tries to paint from below an elephant named Isabella, who "had the delicacy of sensibility to refuse to co-operate in what some local commentators had dubbed a 'degraded act' of 'underbelly voyeurism,' in which the wastrel wantonness, self-indulgent amorality and ultimate futility of all art seemed to be encapsulated" (*MLS*, 325-6). The elephant is commemorated in a cubist fountain placed in the centre of the square outside Vasco's fortress-fully "Little Alhambra," which was consequently named "Place of the Elephants," superimposing it over the previous name of the square, after the Caudillo's wife (a reference to the fountain of the Court of the Lions in the real Alhambra). This episode marks Benengeli's transition from a Francoist stronghold and the leader's favourite southern retreat to "a nesting-

place for itinerant layabouts, expatriate vermin, and all the flotsam-jetsam scum of the earth” (*MLS*, 327) and reveals the artist’s futile attempt to graft a symbol or a principle on an alien structure. Vasco tries to incorporate the Indian symbolism of Ganesh onto his new Spanish habitat, but the result is a parodic mimicry – he is a despotic Boabdil and his Little Alhambra becomes an oppressive labyrinth negating the symbolical openness of the original.

Finally, the family home in Bombay that Aurora names Elephanta is the place where she develops her hybrid vision of India, conceived in a sustained dialogue with the culture of al-Andalus. The ethos she forges at Elephanta encourages overcoming the individual’s subjection to god/the ethnos/family in the name of an affiliative community that is reminiscent of that aspired to by Saleem. Moraes attributes his non-communal ethics to the values instilled in him by his mother – having “been raised in *Elephanta*, where all communal ties had been deliberately disrupted; in a country where all citizens owe an instinctive dual allegiance to a place and a faith, I had been made into a nowhere-and-no-community man – and proud of it, may I say” (*MLS*, 336). It is at this point that, faced with his father’s attempt to involve him in the nuclear trade, he establishes a natural continuity between his *Elephant*-ine values of tolerant inclusiveness and a new-found identification with his Jewishness (indeed, with Jewishness in its general connotations of persecution and exile), rejects the Law of the Father and says “no” to his godlike “*I am that I am.*” This anchoring of Moraes’s identity in a specific historical legacy – that of the victims rather than that of the victimisers – leads to the consummation of his identification with Bobadil that will take place in Andalusia.

Countering Elephantiasis: A Poetics of the Fragment

a. The Perforated Sheet

Two poetics are interwoven in *Midnight's Children*: one corresponding to the mythical, archetypal subtext provided by elephantiasis, which gives a universalist and timeless perspective on self and world and is represented by Ganesh as an authorial alter ego, and another corresponding to the historical, divisive subtext inherent in the motif of the perforated sheet/partitioned land, represented by Saleem as a chronicler of a particular history. There is an uneasy balance between the two and this is reflected in Saleem's and Moraes's narrative projects.

The artist's desire to encompass all reality, subsumed under the metaphor of the elephantiasis, is countered by the necessarily fragmentary experience they have of the world. The motif of the fragment performs many functions in the novel, one of which is to reveal the hollowness and fakery of power. Thus, it is by means of his centre-parting that Methwold seduces Vanita, which is revealed by Saleem to be fake, a hairpiece, an allusion to the disingenuousness of empire; later, the Widow is most recognizable by her centre-parting and her particoloured hair, which stands for her doubleness. On the one hand, she presents an image of a national mother-figure, while, on the other, she is revealed to be a brutal despot destroying the children of the nation, over whose wellbeing she is supposed to watch.

When, as a young doctor, Aadam Aziz is called by Naseem's father to cure the imaginary illnesses of his daughter, he is allowed to see only a fragment of her body each time in order to preserve the young girl's modesty. Thus, he examines his future wife's body through a hole in a perforated sheet and falls in love with her. Aadam is later unable to build a stable and harmonious marriage with the whole and theirs becomes an unhappy union. The whole that has enticed him to fall in love with the fragments evokes the God-shaped whole he metaphorically carries within him as a result of his loss of faith. This is the moment at which Saleem begins his text and into the emptiness his grandfather must have felt, Saleem starts pouring in his words, like pickles in a jar. Rushdie endows the impulse to write with almost primordial aspects – Aadam becomes condemned to holes/fragments in a world that seems to be only just becoming, when “the world was new again” (*MC*, 5). This also suggests the recently returned doctor's

“altered vision.” From the scene of genesis Aadam witnesses in the paradise that is his native Kashmir, in which the world is only just being created, springs forth his “God-shaped hole,” which Saleem embraces as the genesis of his own artistic imagination rather than his own birth. Thus, writing for Saleem begins from a moment of irreparable loss, of an existential void that is equated with the loss of an edenic garden of identity plenitude.⁴⁴⁷

Saleem embraces the perforated sheet as his “talisman” and his “open-sesame” (*MC*, 4). His grandfather’s legacy pursues him both in terms of a historical burden, which derives from Naseem as a partitioned woman and is echoed in the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan and subsequently of Pakistan, whose East Wing secedes as Bangladesh (when years later Aadam opens the chest, he sees that it has been “Moth-eaten! Look, Begum: moth-eaten! You forgot to put in any naphthalene balls!” (*MC*, 149), using the same adjective that describes the divided Pakistan), and in terms of an aesthetics that, desperately trying to imbue the entirety of India, is condemned to experience and represent it piecemeal. However, Saleem sees the fragmentary representation of reality as an advantage, for by gradually seducing his reader with the parts, he leaves the whole permanently deferred and therefore permanently desired. This is his artistic triumph, for while the perforated sheet made his grandfather its slave,⁴⁴⁸ Saleem has

⁴⁴⁷ In the essay “In God We Trust,” Rushdie describes the motive for his own writing as an attempt “to fill up that emptied God-chamber with other dreams. Because it is, after all, a room for dreaming in.” Emptied of religious dogmatic thinking and the doxa of received opinion, the secular artist is free to “dream versions of [himself], new selves for old. Waking as well as sleeping, our response to the world is essentially *imaginative*: that is, picture-making.” In requiring us to submit to the will and adoration of a supreme being, religion makes us “not masters, but servants; so perhaps we can see religion, in this contrast, as a dream of our inadequacy, as a vision of our lessness.” Politics diminishes us even further by making us aware of “the boundaries in space, time, resource, will and possibility” and even lacks the transcendent possibilities religion offers us, such as the promise of “eternity, immortality, everlasting bliss.” (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 376-392)

⁴⁴⁸ The perforated sheet becomes a family legacy as all four generations experience it in different ways, transforming it from a symbol of incompleteness, division and lack, to one signifying a mature and responsible attitude to life. Following Aadam, Amina imitates his falling in love by picking one part of her husband’s body at a time on which to lavish her love in the hope that she will grow to love him. In the process, she imaginatively transforms him into Nadir, whom Ahmed even begins to physically resemble. Ultimately, she succeeds, as towards the end of their lives, Amina and Ahmed genuinely fall in love with each other. Having become the most beloved singer of Pakistan, Jamila sees and is seen by the world through the hole in her *chador*. This empowers her, as it creates a mystical aura around “the Bulbul” of Pakistan, but ultimately isolates her from the world. In the end, she fades mysteriously out of the narrative. Hers is an uncertain fate, for although the text strongly suggests that she has been killed by the regime for condemning it, Saleem refuses to allot her such an end in his narrative and keeps her safe in a monastery, where she has sought and been given sanctuary.

turned himself into its master, “and Padma is the one who is now under its spell” (*MC*, 165). As Ambreen Hai states,

th[e] sheet is metonymic of Saleem’s storytelling, for it is associated with (and instrumental to) the beginning of his story, a representative of his family’s origins. It becomes Saleem’s mnemonic “talisman” and “opensesame” to that formative past. By alluding to the fabulous opening enabled by a magic word that led to a wealth of treasures, Rushdie suggests that just as Ali Baba climbed through a cave – an orifice that here suggests both mouth and womb – so too will the writer enter through a perforated sheet into the cave of the past, using his words as magic to open this hole of memory and retrieve a forbidden history.⁴⁴⁹

The enclosed spaces that ostensibly hide Saleem but in fact afford him glimpses of reality are also symbolical of the fragmentary vision – the washing-chest from where he observes his mother and which triggers his telepathy and the abandoned clocktower, from which he observes the world like “a tourist, a child peeping through the miraculous peepholes of a private ‘Dilli-dekho’ machine” (*MC*, 239), as he catches glimpses of moments/scenes of Indian life thanks to his telepathic ability.

The motif of the hole/fragment frames the novel, which ends with the ghost of Naseem appearing in Saleem’s dream, “staring down through the hole in a perforated cloud, waiting for my death so that she could weep a monsoon for forty days... and I, floating outside my body, looked down on the foreshortened image of myself, and saw a grey-haired dwarf who once, in a mirror, looked relieved” (*MC*, 645). Looking at himself from an outward perspective, he sees a distorted image of himself, suggesting the fallible artistic vision. If in his dream Naseem sees him through a hole in a cloud, he also suffers from such a fragmentary perspective which produces incomplete, faulty and distorted images, but which he nevertheless embraces as his artistic credo. As such, the perforated sheet, along with the doubts as to his reliability and authority that he encourages in Padma and the reader, are emblematic of the imperfect artistic vision that connotes a mature engagement with art and the world and a de-absolutised epistemic stance that should look upon everything with distrust and skepticism. Such is the aspect of the legacy of the perforated sheet that Aadam Sinai embraces: contrary to baby Saleem’s inability to close his eyes, suggesting his eagerness to imbibe all reality, Aadam keeps his eyes closed and opens them only to reveal their blue colour, like the sky above Kashmir, the paradisaical place

⁴⁴⁹ Hai, *Making Words Matter*, 228.

which is the novel's beginning and suggested end. Aadam's careful opening to the world indicates his generation's careful and circumspect engagement with the reality of India, which, in Saleem's words, has a greater potential to endure and continue the life of the nation.

b. The Palimpsest/Mosaic

The enthronement of Aurora as the most venerated and imitated artist in the country, which culminates in the literally demented obsession of both Vasco Miranda and Moraes with her art, and her subsequent decline bring into sharper focus the extent to which art in this novel is subjected to a process of vengeful destruction. This iconoclastic feeling towards art justifies and necessitates the palimpsestic mode of painting on the part of both Aurora and Vasco, who, for different reasons, find themselves obliged simultaneously to hide and intensify their art. The palimpsest is an all-engulfing image referring to subjectivity, history, geography, painting, and writing. According to Shobhana Bhattacharji, there are two dominant versions of the palimpsest in the novel:

The palimpsest is the opposite of extinction. One sort of palimpsest hides older pictures without destroying them. However different they may be, and even though the older ones cannot be seen, successive pictures coexist. Another sort of palimpsest is paintings on transparent glass stacked one on top of the other. Looked at from above, the stack of glass panels forms a composite picture that is simultaneously a *mélange* and a unity. Rushdie's novel is both kinds of palimpsest. He narrates 500 years of religious fanaticism from the end of Moorish rule by the Christian *Reconquista* in 1492 to Babri Masjid and Mumbai in 1992 and 1993 in four sections, each like a painted plate of transparent glass in a palimpsest.⁴⁵⁰

The palimpsest preserves (i.e. is "the opposite of extinction"), but does so in a covert, not immediately visible way. In the most general terms, it can refer to any process of layering sediments (of paint/texts/conceptions) which together form a complex structure understandable only by the opposite process of the removal of the layers in order to get to the hidden core of something. In terms of subjectivity, the palimpsest can be seen as an artistic variant of hybridity and its reliance on a fluid separation of self and Other; in terms of geography, it refers to the

⁴⁵⁰ Shobhana Bhattacharji, "Twenty Years After: Reading *The Moor's Last Sigh* in 2015," 172.

urban underworld of crime, vice and corruption that underlies the outward façade of progress and civility; in terms of history, it foregrounds the hidden forces that shape and cause its flow lurking beneath the monumentalised figures of statesmen and politicians. Originally, it was “a parchment or other writing-material which has been written on twice, the original writing having been erased or rubbed out to make space for the second.”⁴⁵¹

In the novel, there are two palimpsestic paintings, both entitled *The Moor's Last Sigh*: the first is by Vasco Miranda and the second by Aurora. Miranda's was originally a portrait of Aurora (overpainted with a portrait of Miranda as Boabdil), which to Moraes “somehow came to represent my lost mother, Abraham's lost wife. If we could but rediscover it! It would be like her younger self reborn; it would be a victory over death” (*MLS*, 324). It is significant that this painting ends up in the private collection of a billionaire called Bhabha – a reference to the famous critic Homi Bhabha, criticised for the dense, “palimpsestic” style of writing. The second palimpsest, Aurora's, hides her murderer, Abraham, beneath a scene depicting the reconciliation of mother and son. The multilayered nature of the paintings suggests the various ways in which the artists in the novel appropriate the historical legend of Boabdil and Moorish Spain for their own self-representation. According to Minoli Salgado,

Rushdie's presentation of the palimpsest is correspondingly plural and diverse. His palimpsest is at once a metaphor for the multilayered and multicultural social reality of India, a historical paradigm that makes active agents of his readers, a literary device that informs the intertextuality of the novel in which multiple texts are invoked, and a model of visual art that plays a central role in a narrative that focuses on painting and visual representation. Through presenting the palimpsest as an object, a theoretical paradigm, and a transformative process, Rushdie is able to embrace his own contradictory position as an exilic observer and one who is critically engaged in exposing injustice.⁴⁵²

As a “central trope in postcolonial literature,” the palimpsest is a model of engaging with history “that is inherently paradoxical, built on the contradiction of simultaneous erasure and retention, violation and restoration, and rests on a specific reading of the past as both manufactured and man-made, the product of contestatory power relations”; postcolonial texts are therefore palimpsestic, “multiply marked by this process of erasure, inscription and partial emergence of

⁴⁵¹ Minoli Salgado, “The Politics of the Palimpsest in *The Moor's Last Sigh*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*, 157.

⁴⁵² Salgado, 154.

suppressed discourse.”⁴⁵³ Salgado places emphasis on Rushdie’s revision and challenging of “the teleological model of history found in *Midnight’s Children*”, the “linear logic of layered time.”⁴⁵⁴ The teleological model views history as a linear progression, bound by causality, and resting on the capacity for agency. Moraes, unlike Saleem, has no agency, “his accelerated aging is symptomatic of his powerlessness in the face of historical determinism.”⁴⁵⁵ His life “is not only scripted for him by a predetermined past but subject to compression through the experience of accelerated time. Such temporal acceleration finds its visual counterpart in the palimpsest – a layered representation not only constitutive of linearity, but of temporal compression and simultaneity.”⁴⁵⁶ By juxtaposing Boabdil and Moraes, Moorish Spain and modern India, Rushdie forces us to see them simultaneously and to join them in a way that neither can be seen in isolation from the other – this is a gesture of historical revisionism, writing back to the centre, imbuing the present with the past and vice versa:

Rushdie exposes the potential of the palimpsest as a model not only for historical revisionism – the ability to write back to and over hegemonic history – but as a paradigm for temporal compression and synchronicity that subverts the very possibility for ordering history into a logic of cause and consequence.⁴⁵⁷

According to Salgado, in the context of the historical framework of Rushdie’s novel, the palimpsest implies a compression and simultaneity of the historical episodes. It is also a characteristic artistic strategy for postcolonial writers to re-assert a suppressed or falsified discourse. This has an obvious relevance for the iconoclastic treatment of art in this novel and the mission of Moraes’s text to counter the destruction of his mother’s art with the opposite act of creating art. In pursuing this last purpose of his life, he elevates his mother’s artistic appropriation of a particular historical episode and figure – Boabdil’s loss of Granada – to the level of his existential necessity, fusing his own subjectivity with that of his tragic ancestor. Repeating the motif of the endangered artist/art, the very beginning of his text, the one we are reading, presents him as a persecuted writer, a literary Luther, nailing his family’s “theses”

⁴⁵³ Salgado, 158.

⁴⁵⁴ Salgado, 159.

⁴⁵⁵ Salgado, 160-1.

⁴⁵⁶ Salgado, 161.

⁴⁵⁷ Salgado, 161.

throughout the landscape of Andalusia,⁴⁵⁸ hoping for redemption and even symbolic resurrection after a life likened to a crucifixion. His age at this juncture in his life likens him to both Jesus and Dante – the hyperbolic self-imaging shows an obvious parallel with Saleem in *Midnight's Children*. Again, like Saleem, the feeling of imminent physical death intensifies the need to write the story and vindicate an artistic idea (Aurora's): the end of filiation, by means of the son's death and the destruction of the mother's paintings, marks and even guarantees the beginning of affiliation, which in this context means the dissemination⁴⁵⁹ of a vision, an idea or a philosophy of being through writing.

The two explicitly palimpsestic paintings in the novel, both entitled *The Moor's Last Sigh*, are the work of Aurora and Vasco Miranda, both of Portuguese Catholic origin, who interpret their hybrid identity as Indians with Iberian roots by rendering it analogous to the hybrid culture of al-Andalus. Both wish to recreate this hybrid and inclusive culture through their art and way of life, but while in the hands of Aurora this artistic attempt acquires a truly transcendent dimension which her son will re-memorialise and bequeath to the world after the destruction of her paintings, in Vasco's case it becomes a perversion and a negation of the original. Vasco's inferiority as an artist bolsters Aurora's greatness, but his role in the novel cannot be reduced to that of a foil to Aurora. It is his prescience and a more profound historical sense that reveals the Indian artistic elite as minutemen after the desire of Macaulay and it is he who departs from the growing tensions in India in time in order to pursue another locale where

⁴⁵⁸ The breathless agonising with which Moraes begins his manuscript is conveyed through two intertextual images: the Christian crucifixion and the Lutheran nailing of theses. Having escaped Vasco Miranda's fake Alhambra, he wanders through the Andalusian landscape, nailing the sheets of his manuscript to whatever object he can find (gates, fences, trees, etc.), hoping that they, like Jesus, will be resurrected after their crucifixion and, like Luther, will successfully protest against dogma and repression. Resigning himself to the inevitability of his capture (he awaits his fate "uncomplaining"), his only care is for his text, for it contains a lot of last sighs, a whole multitude of "lastnesses": those of Boabdil and himself, of al-Andalus, of the Zogobys, of Aurora's and Vasco's art, of the idea of Bombay and India.

⁴⁵⁹ The title of a critical study of Aurora's paintings by Zeenat Vakil, "a brilliant young art theorist and devotee of Aurora's oeuvre" and the author of "an influential study of the Mughal *Hamza-nama* cloths" (*MLS*, 329) – *Imperso-Nation and Dis/Semi/Nation: Dialogics of Eclecticism and Interrogations of Authenticity in A. Z.* – sums up the main tenets of Aurora's philosophy: the dialogical principle propounded by Mikhail Bakhtin and the postcolonial theory of Homi Bhabha (there is a character in the novel named Bhabha who is a collector of art and who acquires Aurora's *Moor's Last Sigh*). This could be interpreted as "Rushdie's mocking mimicry of academic discourse, to use Bhabha's terminology, or Rushdie's incorporation of theoretical literary critical discourse in his novel with the typical parodying effect Bakhtin ascribes to novelistic style." (Nicole Weickgenent Thiara, *Salman Rushdie and Indian Historiography: Writing the Nation into Being* [Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009], 162)

he can recreate his idealised Moorish ethos. He fails, but so does Moraes when he refuses to save Aoi and to live up to his own and the reader's expectations, and both their failures are inscribed in the overall theme of lost ideals pervading the novel.

While the palimpsest, as practiced by Aurora and Vasco, implies the destruction or the erasure of a previous text by superimposing another over it, the other artistic style figuring in the novel – that of the mosaic – implies integration of elements/fragments into a whole. In the palimpsest, the layering means establishing connections between epochs and subjectivities, whereby each subsequent layer provides an additional perspective on the former and in turn has its meaning reshaped by it. In the mosaic, there is no such accumulating and diachronic dimension, rather the synchronous ordering of parts into a composite image, like the elephantiasis. The Cantonese tiles in the Cochin synagogue resemble a mosaic – while each of them is unique (no two of which are the same), collectively they tell simultaneously a personal and a collective story (that of each viewer and that of the Cochin Jews as it develops in time), have an undeniable historical and symbolic pedigree, offering endless interpretive possibilities (they also presumably contain prophecies, whose meaning has been lost over time), and are a conduit for a heightened awareness of self (after years of polishing and reading them, Flory Zogoiby is suddenly jolted into an awareness of her own racial hybridity and for the first time manages to understand them). Like Aurora's palimpsestic art, they too have a dark counterpart in the tiles in the home of Renegada and Felicitas, which function as cheap and empty adornments. Although Renegada claims, echoing the Cochin episode, that no two are identical and are all that remains of the ancient synagogue of Benengeli, her half-sister disproves her statements, saying that they are two-a-penny and easy to find. The inauthenticity of the latter tiles is another testament to the simulacral identity of Benengeli.

The mosaic is also linked to Uma, in particular when she appears in a dream to Moraes, telling him,

“You know how the Moors built,” she whispered to me. “Theirs was a mosaic architecture of interlinked insides and outsides – gardens framed by palaces framed by gardens and so on. But you – I condemn you to exteriors from now on. For you there are no safe palaces any more; and in these gardens I will wait for you. Across these infinite outsides I will hunt you down.” Then she came down to me, and opened her awful mouth. (*MLS*, 309-10)

The dream combines the *femme fatale* aspect of her personality with that of her as an artistic and ideological foil to Aurora, as is confirmed by her using of an artistic form – that of the mosaic – to threaten Moraes. In this way, the text inscribes her as the enemy of hybridity. Although she is condemned as an inauthentic self that models itself on the others for its own personal and selfish gain, within the wider political context that Rushdie develops in the novel, Uma’s inauthenticity and negative characterisation are equated with her ethnicity. As she says to Moraes, “you must see that just as you are from a tiny minority, so I am a child of the gigantic Hindu nation, and as an artist I must reckon with the same. I must make my own encounter with origins, my own accommodations with eternal verities” (*MLS*, 262). The artistic ideal of the mosaic she defends, therefore, is perceived as synonymous with the totalising artistic vision, similar to that of elephantiasis, and ultimately with the majoritarian and fundamentalist Hinduness that destroys the classical image of Bombay as a centre of progressive culture.

It is at this, seemingly unproblematic, convergence of the aesthetic and the historico-political that the novel reveals its flawed argument. By locating Uma’s chameleonic, manipulative and even criminal nature in her Hinduness and Aurora’s and Moraes’s hybridity and inclusiveness in their appropriation of an idealised Moorish rule in Europe (which was, after all, a colonising enterprise), Rushdie presents a distorted image of both contemporary India and Moorish Spain. J. M. Coetzee notices this problematic aspect of the novel:

With all respect due to the author, one must demur. The palimpsesting of Moraes over Boabdil supports a less trite, more provocative thesis: that the Arab penetration of Iberia, like the later Iberian penetration of India, led to a creative mingling of peoples and cultures; that the victory of Christian intolerance in Spain was a tragic turn in history; and that Hindu intolerance in India bodes as ill for the world as did the sixteenth-century Inquisition in Spain.⁴⁶⁰

Seeking to make sense of the new political and social reorganisation of India, Rushdie risks homogenising cultures and epochs that developed under different circumstances and reflected the mores of vastly different times and peoples. Thus, “the novel starts to seem less an attempt to

⁴⁶⁰ J. M. Coetzee, “Salman Rushdie, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*,” in *Stranger Shores: Essays 1986-1999*, (London: Vintage, 2002), 206.

address the complexity of Indian national identity and statehood than an exercise in self-reflexive literary [and historical] game-playing.”⁴⁶¹

To conclude, in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie represents the artistic principle as a responsible engagement with the artist's personal, cultural and historical reality, but only when it is grounded in a legitimate vision of self and others. Such are the tiles of the Cochin synagogue (but not those in Benengeli), which capture history in its ongoing flow; Aurora's paintings, which maintain a dialogue with their viewers even after her death (but not those of Vasco and Uma); and Moraes's manuscript, which, after his final sigh, will be read by its readers who will become metaphorical pursuers of the unproblematical, unambiguous meaning that Moraes/Rushdie refuses to give.

⁴⁶¹ Stephen Baker, “‘You Must Remember This’: Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*,” in *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Harold Bloom, 233-4. Paul A. Cantor clarifies that the tolerance of al- Andalus was an exception to the other Islamic regimes of its time: “The religious toleration and hence the multiculturalism in Moorish Spain resulted in part from precisely the weakness of the Islamic regime there – a consequence of the remoteness of Spain from the centers of Islamic culture in the Middle East, as well as of all the internecine strife among the Islamic rulers in Spain.” (Paul A. Cantor, “Tales of the Alhambra: Rushdie's Use of Spanish History in *The Moor's Last Sigh*,” in *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Harold Bloom, 142-3)

B. Conceptualising the Writing Process: Chutnification and Sighing

Since both *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* trace the *Bildung* of an author by means of the birth of a text, which are the novels that we are reading, they incorporate particular conceptions of writing, which serve as metaphors for the writing process. In line with the historical dialogism on which both Saleem and Moraes base their narratives, each of them represents writing as an aspect of the very historical grounding of their personal and authorial identities. Thus, for Saleem, writing his alternative historiography resembles the very Indian culinary practice of “chutnification,” the final product being a particular blend in which his own original spices mix harmoniously with the recipes he has learnt from Mary Pereira. For Moraes, writing his text while awaiting his death is best encapsulated in the metaphor of the sigh, which emphasises his link to his ancestor and alter ego, Boabdil of al-Andalus. In the subsections that follow, I will analyse the metaphors of chutnification and sighing to elucidate their function regarding the nature and purpose of the texts Saleem and Moraes strive to write into being.

Saleem's Chutnification of (Hi)Stories

Early on in his narrative, Saleem underlines his contestatory and oppositional aesthetics, likening his project to a “haram” rather than “halal” version of the family and national history:

Family history, of course, has its proper dietary laws. One is supposed to swallow and digest only the permitted parts of it, the halal portions of the past, drained of their redness, their blood. Unfortunately, this makes the stories less juicy; so I am about to become the first and only member of my family to flout the laws of halal. Letting no blood escape from the body of the tale, I arrive at the unspeakable part; and, undaunted, press on. (*MC*, 74)

The “halal” version of reality which, refracted through the prism of religious and any other discursive orthodoxy, is, in his view, “drained of [its] redness, [its] blood”, devoid of vitality and “less juicy,” pared down to its acceptable contours. Instead, his will be a “haram” story, transgressing the dietary laws of family and any other doxa (national, religious, cultural), including the forbidden, the erased, and excluded. Yet, as Ambreen Hai asks,

why should this verbal act be cast as a bodily one of eating and sharing slaughtered flesh, as if stories (histories) taken in and given out, passed from mouth to mouth, were as necessary as food? Why should family history be “swallowed” and “digested” by the storyteller, assimilated and incorporated into his body, and then re-produced for his audience to consume?⁴⁶²

Rushdie’s metaphor, by likening his narration/writing to the consumption of “haram” food, suggests, on the one hand, the transgressive nature of his story, which posits an alternative national historiography, and, on the other, “both the vitality and the violence inherent in narration and consumption: stories both nourish and can be subject to censorship or amputation.”⁴⁶³ In both cases, Saleem/Rushdie brings to the fore the agency of writing/storytelling to cast an uncensored, revelatory light on reality and, in reshaping it according to its artistic vision, let it stand as an imaginatively recreated world on its own terms. For his truth, as he later explains, is not dictated by what is objectively real, but nourished by stories, by what is imaginatively possible, a sentiment that is celebrated in Mary Pereira’s song, “Anything you want to be you kin be,” which is repeated as a refrain throughout the novel, and the fisherman’s stories revealing to the young Raleigh that there is a whole new world out there (*MC*, 103). His truth is “memory’s truth,” unreliable, prone to distortions, inventions, and gaps in memory, which “selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimises, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else’s version more than his own” (*MC*, 292). Art reveals reality to be “a question of perspective,” likened to watching a film on a screen:

the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems – but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the stars’ faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves – or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality. (*MC*, 229)

Artistic truth resembles the dream-like vision of the world described by the Hindu concept of “Maya,” which “may be defined as all that is illusory; as trickery, artifice and deceit. Apparitions, phantasms, mirages, sleight-of-hand, the seeming form of things: all these are parts of Maya” (*MC*, 293).

⁴⁶² Hai, *Making Words Matter*, 4.

⁴⁶³ Hai, 4.

Saleem uses the concept of “maya” to persuade an incredulous Padma of the “veracity” of his story; as if his erudition and “haughty, lecturing tone” weren’t enough, he offers her chutney: “‘Have some more chutney,’ I added graciously, taking a generous helping myself. ‘It tastes very good.’ Padma began to cry. ‘I never said I didn’t believe, she wept. ‘Of course, every man must tell his story in his own true way; but...’” (*MC*, 293). Chutney, like halal/haram food, is a specific cultural signifier and emphasises the national and cultural rootedness of Saleem’s artistic vision. Like the typically Indian urge to encompass all reality, which Saleem names “elephantiasis,” after the elephant-god Ganesh, and therefore represents as something entirely Indian (in fact, Hindu), the references to chutney, pickles and halal/haram food bring to the fore the Indian and Muslim imaginative geography within which Saleem operates. Therefore, when he uses these culture-specific food references as a metaphor for his writing, Saleem intensifies his carefully created image as an author whose artistic meaning is drawn from his Indian context – in other words, he *is* only in so far as he can be equated with the essence of India, encapsulated by the midnight children:

But now, “A cook?” you gasp in horror, “A khansama merely? How is it possible?” And, I grant, such mastery of the multiple gifts of cookery and language is rare indeed; yet I possess it. You are amazed; but then I am not, you see, one of your 200-rupees-a-month cookery johnnies, but my own master, working beneath the saffron and green winking of my personal neon goddess. And my chutneys and kasaundies are, after all, connected to my nocturnal scribblings – by day amongst the pickle-vats, by night within these sheets, I spend my time at the great work of preserving. Memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks. (*MC*, 44)

Saleem uses the mixture of “chutney and oratory” to impart authority to his narrative and offers both to Padma and the reader: “Here: everybody: take some chutney. I must tell you some important things” (*MC*, 292). Saleem’s seductive offer of food along with story is aimed not so much to convince with arguments (the goal of oratory, as Plato saw it, is merely to persuade and not argue the validity of its arguments), as to seduce with the magic of the word – similarly to the irresistible seduction of the satanic verses – and, more importantly and in another prefigurement of *The Satanic Verses*, to incorporate and even incite doubt as to the veracity of his own story. Thus, after plying her with words and chutney, Saleem admonishes Padma: “if you’re a little uncertain of my unreliability, well, a little uncertainty is no bad thing. Cocksure men do terrible

things. Women, too” (MC, 294). The moral Saleem is trying to inculcate in Padma and the reader is the healthy presence of doubt and skepticism as an attitude to life. Not content with merely disproving the truthfulness of official historiography, Saleem is careful to place his own text in a slippery epistemic territory where certainty is an evil leading to the Widow in this novel, to Raman Fielding in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* and to the intransigent “ideas” of Mahound, the Imam, Ayesha and their dreamer Gibreel in *The Satanic Verses*.

By consigning his story to writing, Saleem has preserved it from the ravages of distortions, time and oblivion. All the chapters of his novel resemble pickle-jars on which the lids have been tightly shut, apart from the last one, which must by necessity remain open and empty, because “the future cannot be preserved in a jar” (MC, 645). His pickle-chapters (each representing a unique, “Special Formula”) yield a distorted image, as “Sometimes, in the pickles’ version of history, Saleem appears to have known too little; at other times, too much... yes, I should revise and revise, improve and improve; but there is neither the time nor the energy.” However, the reader is left with no other version of the events Saleem narrates: “I am obliged to offer no more than this stubborn sentence: It happened that way because that’s how it happened” (MC, 644).

The circumstances in which the two processes of writing and pickling take place are indicative of Saleem’s authorship as it is represented in the novel. Firstly, his location – a pickle factory – places Saleem among the labouring classes of society, thus showing that he has followed the fisherman’s finger pointing towards the fishermen, Koli women and working people rather than the empire-building project of Raleigh. This is a suitable place for Saleem to ply both his crafts – to collect raw material for pickling and storytelling. Evoking nostalgically the patron goddess of the city, whose name might have been that of the city, he works under a neon sign of Mumbadevi, again a national and topical cultural signifier that intensifies his oneness with the multitudes of India. Secondly, he occupies a unique position as the only male in the all-female enclave of the factory, where he is responsible for the “creative aspects of our work” (MC, 642), continuing the motif of centrality sustained throughout the novel, albeit in a different light. It is this unique vantage point of the artist who has infiltrated the space he fictionally recreates as both participant and observer (a voyeur, to pursue the analogy of *Shame*, *The Golden House* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*) that ultimately imparts truth-value to his

narrative. Finally, the analogy between the two crafts⁴⁶⁴ accounts for the specific traits of Saleem's narrative: the imperfections and distortions inevitably arising out of the blending of disparate narrative materials ("in words and pickles, I have immortalised my memories, although distortions are inevitable in both methods" [MC, 642]). He follows Mary's

legendary recipes; but there are also my special blends, in which, thanks to the powers of my drained nasal passages, I am able to include memories, dreams, ideas, so that once they enter mass-production all who consume them will know what peppercorns achieved in Pakistan, or how it felt to be in the Sundarbans... believe don't believe but it's true. Thirty jars stand upon a shelf, waiting to be unleashed upon the amnesiac nation. (MC, 643)

Saleem's artistic credo is clear – he does not claim complete originality, as he uses the materials of others, but the final product is his own "special blend," a story that could have been written only by him, the person to whom all these things have happened and who offers his maimed body as proof of the burden of history he has been obliged to bear. Irrespective of whether the referent of the name "Saleem Sinai" is himself or Shiva, the narrative "I" speaking through the text is inextricable from the narrated events. It is from this position of authority, sealed by the fact of his being marked by Indian history, that Saleem is poised to unleash his text on the "amnesiac nation" that is India. In preserving the memory of the midnight children, Saleem admits to "a certain alteration, a slight intensification of taste," but does not allow his story to be construed as meaningless:

The art is to change the flavour in degree, but not in kind; and above all (in my thirty jars and a jar) to give it shape and form – that is to say, meaning. (I have mentioned my fear of absurdity.) 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)

⁴⁶⁴ Saleem's extraordinary skill at pickling is enabled by his extraordinary sense of smell, which he acquired after the operation of the sinuses, which drained his telepathic ability. Through writing, Saleem maintains his connection to the children, not telepathically, but imaginatively, by a retrospective reflection on what they meant to themselves and to their country. Thus, he symbolically appropriates the phallic, procreative potential of Aadam Aziz's protruding nose, which represented his future patriarchal destiny as the head of a large family (inherited by his real grandson Shiva); in Saleem's case, his nose, inherited from Methwold's French grandmother, marks his narrative procreative capacity.

In this sense, *Midnight's Children* is a homage to an entire country, who is its real protagonist. In spite of Rushdie's insistence on diasporic, multiple identities and on exile as the most typical and desirable condition of the contemporary world, an attitude inspired by his triple and lately even quadruple nationality (Indian-Pakistani-British-American), in no other work of his does he succeed in painting such a compassionate and loving portrait of a country. Only India remains magical to his eyes and when he tries to plumb the soul of his other homelands, he is only capable of seeing nightmarish dystopias in which the magical does not defamiliarise but violates reality. Through Saleem, Rushdie cannot stress enough that the extraordinary nature and narrative exuberance of his protagonist-narrator spring directly from his connection to India, which, unlike Pakistan, which went through the identical birth into independence, was the only one able to endow that process with magic and promise of a unique kind.⁴⁶⁵

“A Last Sigh for a Lost World”: The Moor's *Paroles Soufflées*

While *Midnight's Children* likens the act of writing to the process of pickling/chutnification, a culinary metaphor that serves to emphasise the cultural grounding of the author and to bring to light the element of distortion involved in the preservation of textual meaning, *The Moor's Last Sigh* advances the metaphor of the sigh as indicative of the intimate, almost corporeal connection between author and text and between word and world, which echoes the bidirectional creationary bond promulgated in *The Satanic Verses* with the motif of the umbilical cord.

Moraes's text is an elegy to the “lastness” of an ideal of Bombay and, by extension, India, narrated in a confessional mode that renders the narrative a

⁴⁶⁵ Saleem admits as much when he states that “If a similar miracle was worked across the border, in the newly-partitioned-off Pakistan, I have no knowledge of it; my perceptions were, while they lasted, bounded by the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, the Himalaya mountains, but also by the artificial frontiers which pierced Punjab and Bengal” (*MC*, 271). His identification with India rather than with the entire territory of the Raj, which included Pakistan and Bangladesh (but not Kashmir), is indicative of his repudiation of the imperial legacy inherited by his biological father, the colonialist Methwold, and his constitution as a postcolonial rather than a neo-colonial subject, i.e. as a son not of the Empire but of India.

testament or (what you) will; life's Last Gasp Saloon. Hence this here-I-stand-or-sit with my life's sentences nailed to the landscape and the keys to a red fort in my pocket, these moments of waiting before a final surrender.

Now, therefore, it is meet to sing of endings; of what was, and may be no longer; of what was right in it, and wrong. A last sigh for a lost world, a tear for its passing. Also, however, a last hurrah... A Moor's tale, complete with sound and fury. (*MLS*, 4)

The asthma and other diseases of the lungs running through the family are all inscribed into the aesthetics of the sigh as an expression of lastness and expiration (of individuals, of a world and of an ideal)⁴⁶⁶ and as the foundation for mobilising the legacy of Iberian Spain for interpreting the events in India in the 1990s. This legacy, while predominantly tied to Boabdil and al-Andalus, is not reduced to them only and encompasses the story of El Cid, Spain's national hero, a champion of Christianity against Islam in the *Reconquista*, and Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Thus, before her death of tuberculosis and lung cancer, Belle identifies with Ximena, the Cid's wife, prefiguring Moraes's troping as Boabdil, whereas the name of the village Benengeli has Cervantean undertones.

The "breathless tale" (*MLS*, 28) Moraes is narrating registers the laborious task of producing meaning through writing, which is equated with the difficult breathing out of an asthmatic:

it is easier to breathe in than out. As it is easier to absorb what life offers than to give out the results of such absorption... Nevertheless, wheezing and ratchety, I eventually exhale, I overcome. There is pride to be taken in this; I do not deny myself a pat on my aching back.

At such times I become my breathing. Such force of self as I retain focuses upon the faulty operations of my chest: the coughing, the fishy gulps. I am what breathes. I am what began long ago with an exhaled cry, what will conclude when a glass held to my lips remains clear. It is not thinking makes us so, but air. *Suspiro ergo sum*. I sigh, therefore I am. The Latin as usual tells the truth: *suspirare* = *sub*, below, + *spirare*, verb, to breathe.

Suspiro: I under-breathe.

In the beginning and unto the end was and is the lung: divine afflatus, baby's first yowl, shaped air of speech, staccato gusts of laughter, exalted airs of song, happy lover's

⁴⁶⁶ Abraham and Moraes suffer from asthma, Belle dies of tuberculosis and lung cancer, Ina of cancer, and Minnah of shortage of breath when she is poisoned by gas in an explosion. Upon the discovery of his famous ancestry and the onset of asthma to mirror his ancestor's famous sigh, Abraham Zogoiby literally identifies with Boabdil, feeling his pain as his own: "*These wheezing sighs not only mine, but his. These eyes hot with his ancient grief. Boabdil, I too am thy mother's son. Was weeping such a weakness? he wondered. Was defending-to-the-death such a strength?*" (*MLS*, 80). However, Moraes's connection to Boabdil and the motif of sighing joining them together proceeds not so much from Abraham, his Jewish-Moorish side, but from his mother's art, in which he cultivates his and his mother's palimpsest identity.

groan, unhappy lover's lament, miser's whine, crone's croak, illness's stench, dying whisper, and beyond and beyond the airless, silent void.

A sigh isn't just a sigh. We inhale the world and breathe out meaning. While we can. While we can. (MLS, 53-4)

As Ambreen Hai argues, this novel

proposes that the world is absorbed or taken *in* by the writer-protagonist (inhaled as oxygen), is incorporated into his flesh, transforming it, and then is breathed *out* in altered form (exhaled as carbon dioxide) so that what he sighs or (re)produces, as *word*, will in turn materially transform that world... These bodily representations of language attempt to break down binary oppositions between language and material reality, between word and world, between inside and outside: both insist on the mutual reinforcement and inextricability of language and body, as well as the porous continuities between the self and its environment.⁴⁶⁷

By equating body with speech, Rushdie tropes sighing as the corporeal equivalent of the difficulty of articulating and producing meaning in a meaningless world. In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida opens up the entire semantic range of the adjective *soufflé*, whose possible meanings include “spirited (away)” and “stolen.” As the translator Alan Bass clarifies, the preferred English translation is “sprited away” “because it maintains the connections with theft, breath (from the Latin *spirare*), and the multiple meanings of in-*spir*-ation. The French word for ‘prompter’ (*souffleur*) might best be rendered by the neologism ‘inspirator.’”⁴⁶⁸ Sarah Wood mentions another meaning of the word *souffler*, which is “to blow up like a bomb” and therefore a *parole soufflée* would be “an exploded word or utterance”; moreover, the Greek root of the French *souffler* is *psukhe*, which means “breath,” “spirit” and “psyche.” Thus, the production of speech/text is likened to an “explosion” of its status as a site of presence and stability – instead, “voice and language scatter from inside, their appearance transformed by a violent energy”⁴⁶⁹ – as is that of the author as a guarantor of the text's meaning. In their own ways, both Derrida and Rushdie build on Plato's fear of the interpretative consequences when a text is separated from its author and origin and ceases to belong solely to him. In speech,

⁴⁶⁷ Hai, *Making Words Matter*, 5.

⁴⁶⁸ Alan Bass, notes to Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 325.

⁴⁶⁹ Sarah Wood, *Derrida's Writing and Difference: A Reader's Guide* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), 95.

I must first hear myself. In soliloquy as in dialogue, to speak is to hear oneself. As soon as I am heard, as soon as I hear myself, the I who hears *itself*, who hears *me*, becomes the I who speaks and takes speech from the I who thinks that he speaks and is heard in his own name; and becomes the I who takes speech *without ever cutting off* the I who thinks that he speaks. Insinuating itself into the name of the person who speaks, this difference is nothing, is furtiveness itself; it is the structure of instantaneous and original elusion without which no speech could ever catch its breath [*souffle*]⁴⁷⁰.

Derrida here captures the permeable boundaries between the different I's of the speaking subject, who is split between a self that produces speech and a self that hears it; interestingly, he describes their dynamism as one of theft (one "takes" speech from the other), which destabilises the certainty of the speaking self, which now, as a result of the introduction of difference, merely "thinks that he speaks." Difference, as Derrida clarifies, "is the sign of theft or of the purloined breath [*souffle*], ... the total dispossession which constitutes me as the deprivation of myself, the elusion of my existence; and this makes difference the simultaneous theft of both my body and my mind: my flesh."⁴⁷¹ Hence, "[t]he *soufflé*-effect acknowledges the loss incurred in speech. And yet, in the gesture of acknowledging and accepting that necessary state of affairs, breath opens a realm in which life relights."⁴⁷² Moraes does not sigh only over the expiration of his world, but also over the disseminative fate of his spoken (and therefore "exploded") words which, in breathing out meaning, reveal its internal contradictions and instabilities. Like Saleem, the meanings out of which he fashions his text inevitably determine his own being and, again, like him, he delineates his and his text's *raison d'être* as something that is to be revealed in its afterlife, which both Saleem and Moraes take great care to chart. Saleem consigned his text to his "amnesiac nation" and Moraes seems to share his predecessor's project. Hence the doubling of their creative acts – lest the oral word prove itself insufficient to carry their meaning across, they resort to writing as another, additional strategy of "pickling" (hi)stories. By scattering the sheets of his manuscript across the Andalusian landscape, Moraes tries to affirm his spectral, fragmentary presence that is about to be "spirited away" like the unstable words he disseminates both orally and in written form. Paradoxically, the joining together of the sheets of paper would require the poetic of the mosaic, which, since it refers to the ontologically void *Uma*, produces another unstable signficatory reference in terms of speech/text and the speaking/writing subject.

⁴⁷⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 177-8.

⁴⁷¹ Derrida, 179.

⁴⁷² Wood, *Derrida's Writing and Difference*, 100.

Moraes recounts a dream which spells out the link between sighing and narrating – fleeing from unknown pursuers, he comes upon “a lightless subterranean flow, and was instructed by a shrouded woman to *swim beyond the limit of my breath*, for only then would I discover the one and only shore upon which I might be safe for ever, *the shore of Fancy itself*” (MLS, 290, emphasis original). Joel Kuortti underlines the significance of the dream as presenting a “confident or heroic dream-image [through which] the attempt to go beyond the limits of human finitude, this asthma, the Sigh grows into an overwhelming figure in the novel.”⁴⁷³ So, Moraes swims until his lungs collapse, the ocean engulfs him and he awakes to find his literal liberation from prison and metaphorical liberation from the prison-house of personal, familial and historical doxa. Hence, he embraces the “sigh” as an artistic credo that seeks to exhaust the limits of the physical by the transcendental power of art, sublimated in the vision of the Alhambra with which the novel ends:

the glory of the Moors, their triumphant masterpiece and their last redoubt. The Alhambra, Europe's red fort, sister to Delhi's and Agra's – the palace of interlocking forms and secret wisdom, of pleasure-courts and water-gardens, that monument to a lost possibility that nevertheless has gone on standing, long after its conquerors have fallen; like a testament to lost but sweetest love, to the love that endures beyond defeat, beyond annihilation, beyond despair; to the defeated love that is greater than what defeats it, to that most profound of our needs, to our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self. Yes, I have seen it across an oceanic plain, though it has not been given to me to walk in its noble courts. I watch it vanish in the twilight, and in its fading it brings tears to my eyes. (MLS, 433)

Moraes describes his final journey as a pilgrimage, not to a religious site, but to a monument embodying the entire philosophy of tolerance, intellect, morality and selfhood espoused by his mother and handed over as her legacy to him. For the Alhambra, Rushdie/Moraes has reserved the most sublime and intense moment in the entire novel, evoking feelings of awe and longing. However, Moraes cannot reach it just yet – it vanishes into the twilight before his eyes. As a symbol of the endurance of all that is best in humanity even after it has been seemingly defeated by the worst, it will await any seeker after the good and the beautiful, who will find it standing erect, its silhouette framing the horizon above Granada, whenever he chooses to seek for it. For his part, Moraes makes his farewell both to the magnificent monument and to life, finally ready to rest. However, although the graveyard imagery connotes death, the word is never explicitly

⁴⁷³ Kuortti, *Fictions to Live In*, 207.

mentioned in the concluding paragraphs: Moraes will “rest, and hope for peace,” “according to our family’s old practice of falling asleep in times of trouble, and hope to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time” (*MLS*, 433-4). Whereas death suggests a break in the cycle of life, with the possible belief in a resurrection or reincarnation, awakening suggests continuation: if and when Moraes awakens, it will not be to a different life but merely in a better time. The historical-religious imagery enveloping the uncertain destiny of his manuscript is here replaced with references to mythical and folkloric “sleepers waiting for their moment of return” (*MLS*, 433): Arthur in Avalon, Barbarossa in his cave, Finn MacCool in the Irish hillsides, the Worm Ouroboros on the bed of the Sundering Sea, Australia’s the Wandjina underground, Snow White in her glass coffin and Rip Van Winkle. Thus, the author’s possibility for immortality resides not in the religious or in the historical, but in the literary-mythical. Ultimately, the aesthetic realm is the only one in which the author will achieve transcendence.

II. The Transgressive Dialogism of *The Satanic Verses*

In the case of *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the text establishes its dialogical nature by means of the historical parallelisms and analogies between Saleem/Moraes and India/Bombay/al-Andalus/Boabdil, in which meanings between the narrator-protagonists and the historical entities they identify with enrich and interanimate one another. In *The Satanic Verses*, such plurality of meanings is achieved by the interflow between the various narrative levels, which, since they also constitute distinct ontological levels, give rise to what I shall term “transgressive dialogism.”

The Satanic Verses embodies, in Julia Kristeva's term, the “defiant productivity”⁴⁷⁴ of the carnivalesque novelistic principle that transgresses the tyranny of the One (God, the Law, dogma, Aristotelian logic, the monologic novel resting on realistic description and consistent character development) by means of a polylogical novelistic architecture of several interwoven diegetic and ontological levels, replicated scenes, characters and names in various temporal and geographic locations, and a multiple authorial subjectivity that contains both the divine-creatory and satanic-oppositional principles.

As Brian McHale points out, “among the oldest of the classic ontological themes in poetics is that of the *otherness* of the fictional world, its separation from the real world of experience.”⁴⁷⁵ In other words, the fictional world is a “heterocosm,” a world apart, separated by an ontological boundary from the real world and, at the same time, riven with ontological differences within. Thus, Hrushovski posits the “double-decker” scheme of reference of a literary text, i.e. between the heterocosm and the real, the text and the *hors-texte*.

To handle such phenomena, a modified heterocosm theory is required, one that admits of a certain kind of overlap or interpenetration between the heterocosm and the real. Thus, for example, according to Benjamin Hrushovski all literary texts involve a “double-decker” structure of reference. Literary texts project at least one internal field of reference, a universe or semantic continuum (loosely, a “world”) constructed *in* and *by* the text itself. In addition, they inevitably refer *outside* their internal field to an external field of reference: the objective world, the body of historical fact or scientific theory, an ideology or philosophy, other texts, and so on. The internal and external fields constitute

⁴⁷⁴ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 71.

⁴⁷⁵ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 27.

two parallel planes but, says Hrushovski, their geometry is non-Euclidean, for the planes overlap at many points without merging into one; that is, many referents are *shared* by the two planes, thus possessing a “dual referential allegiance.”⁴⁷⁶

Roman Ingarden further emphasises the heterogeneous nature of the literary work:

The complexity of the literary artwork, he tells us, lies first of all in its being *heteronomous*, existing both autonomously, in its own right, and at the same time depending upon the constitutive acts of consciousness of a reader. Secondly, the literary artwork is not ontologically uniform or monolithic, but *polyphonic*, stratified. Each of its layers has a somewhat different ontological status, and functions somewhat differently in the ontological make-up of the whole.⁴⁷⁷

Rushdie’s novel inscribes itself in this “double-decker,” heteronomous and polylogical narrative and ontological structure in several ways: by incorporating historical and religious discourses (Muhammad, Khomeini, Islam, Thatcher, etc.) and activating their external referential scheme within itself; by diversifying its own ontological structure with a frame plot of a fictional “reality” (featuring Gibrel and Saladin) and a triple subplot⁴⁷⁸ (consisting of the three dream sequences), each of which is internally subdivided into a worldly and an otherworldly dimension (the latter represented by the satanic and angelic/divine elements); and, finally, the extradiegetic narrator/author, who destabilises his status as an “outsider” by momentarily inhabiting the world of his fiction and who materialises as the novel’s real author, Salman Rushdie.

In this section, I will analyse the conception of sacred/religious *vis-à-vis* profane/literary discourse as a factor in determining the novel’s idea of authorship. I provide a comparative

⁴⁷⁶ McHale, 28-9.

⁴⁷⁷ McHale, p. 30.

⁴⁷⁸ Brian McHale cites Umberto Eco’s “subworld” and Pavel’s “narrative domain” terminology for this narrative phenomenon of creating possible-worlds-within-possible-worlds: “It is the tension and disparity among various characters’ subworlds, and between their subworlds and the fictional ‘real’ world, that formed the basis of modernist and, before that, realist epistemological poetics. Pavel gives as an example the two parallel sets of worlds in *Don Quixote*, the ‘actual-in-the-novel world’ in which one Alonso Quijana suffers certain delusions, and the worlds of Quixote’s delusions. Pavel’s concept of narrative domains is not quite identical with Eco’s subworlds, however, for he has extended it interestingly to include not only epistemological domains such as Quixote’s delusional worlds, but also *ontological* domains. A single work, in Pavel’s view, may be apportioned among several different ontologies. He cites the example of the confrontation in such Renaissance plays as Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus* and Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* between a bi-planar, other-worldly ontology and a single-plane, this-worldly ontology. Such ontologically complex, multiple-world texts undertake the ‘exploration of certain ontological propositions.’ The possible-worlds approach not only complicates fiction’s internal ontological structure, it also weakens its external boundary or frame.” (McHale, 34)

analysis between Rushdie's novel and *The Navel of the World* by Macedonian writer Venko Andonovski because both novels engage with the thematic of the birth of the secular author from within the fold of religion. By comparing and contrasting the strategies both authors employ in their treatment of this theme, I hope to demonstrate these two authors' similar conception of (their) literary authorship, in spite of the different linguistic, religious and cultural contexts from which they write.

Then, I will posit the internal "transgressive aesthetics" of the novel as an effect of the complex internal dynamic of the various narrative levels, which I will elaborate as follows: firstly, I will focus on the implications for authorship that this inter-level dynamism presents; next, I will analyse the migration of concepts, names and events across the different levels to see how their distribution affects the alleged aim of Rushdie/the implicit narrator to reclaim and appropriate colonised discourses; I will conclude with the dynamic, processual, as opposed to the static, model of authorship that is championed in this novel.

A. Sacred and Profane Authorship in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Venko Andonovski's *The Navel of the World*

The beginning of the Gospel according to St. John refers to Jesus as “the Word” of God made flesh in the person of the Christ: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John, 1, 1). As personification of the Logos, Jesus represents the creationary aspect of God, who brings the world into existence by the power of his word: “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (Genesis, 1, 3). Similarly, in Plato’s account in *Phaedrus*, in Egyptian mythology it was the god Thoth who created the world by means of speech.

Gods who possess the performative power of speech are, by analogy, credited as the bringers of the arts and civilisation in general. In Greek mythology, Prometheus, who stole fire from Zeus and brought it to the mortals, was further worshipped as the creator of man and the inventor of writing. Since the beginning of time, the word has been invested with a magical, transformative power and those who master it – shamans, priests, prophets, poets – have been elevated to a special status above ordinary humanity, in direct communion with and proximity to the divine. However, this proximity and daring on the part of man has also incurred the wrath of God, who jealously guards his creationary prerogatives. Hence, Yahweh’s destruction of the Tower of Babel and the confusion of languages, Thamus’s repudiation of Thoth’s invention, Prometheus’ terrible punishment by Zeus of having his liver endlessly consumed by an eagle, etc.

The opening verses of the Gospel according to John have been called a “threshold” poem in the sense that in it two temporalities intersect – the eternal “was” and the transient “become.” Namely, it “is concerned with what *was* (in Chrysostom’s sense, eternally) and how that which *was* crossed over into *becoming*.”⁴⁷⁹ The eternal becomes transient in the incarnation, in the person of the Christ, the Word that “was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1, 14). Although “God is thought of always as ‘speaking’ to human beings, not as writing to them,” this divine orality is, as mentioned above, performative, “always an event, a movement in time,

⁴⁷⁹ Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, ed., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 445.

completely lacking in the thing-like repose of the written or printed word.”⁴⁸⁰ However, as the embodied Word, Jesus can be regarded as a divine text, a function that in Islam is performed by the holy book: “the Qur’an is the Uncreated Word of God – an intrinsic part, as it were, of the Divine Essence, [...] a part of the Divine Logos.”⁴⁸¹

However, as the Divine Logos, which represents itself as immutable, final and universal, crosses the threshold from the eternal to the transient, it opens itself up to the contingencies of the mutable and the relative. In other words, the sacred Word becomes counterposed to the profane word, which, in the context of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* and Venko Andonovski’s *The Navel of the World*, denotes the birth of literature and of the profane author.⁴⁸²

1. Verses and Texts

The very title of Rushdie’s novel presents a provocative dilemma: is it only some verses that are satanic or are verses inherently so?; also, what kind of verses does the author have in mind – exclusively the Qur’anic or verses, i.e. words, in general?⁴⁸³ At the heart of the novel is the “satanic verses” episode,⁴⁸⁴ which is a novelistic reinscription of an incident in the early history

⁴⁸⁰ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologising of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 74.

⁴⁸¹ Malise Ruthven, *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Wrath of Islam* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1991), 8.

⁴⁸² Rushdie himself states the central theme of his novel as “to create metaphors of the conflict between different sorts of ‘author’ and different types of ‘text’ – to say that literature and religion, like literature and politics, fight for the same territory.” (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 408)

⁴⁸³ The English word “verse” is used both in a literary and scriptural context and therefore, as used in the title, maintains the ambiguity, whereas, as Daniel Pipes points out, in the major languages of Islam (Arabic, Persian and Turkish), the word “ayat” is used to designate specifically the verses of the Qur’an. Therefore, the translation of the novel’s title into these languages would emphasise either the scriptural or literary meaning of the word “verse.” (Daniel Pipes, *The Rushdie Affair: The Novel, the Ayatollah, and the West* [New York: Birch Lane Press, 1990], 114-118)

⁴⁸⁴ Martine Hennard reads the episode of the satanic verses “as an intricate allegory of writing” that represents “the classical stages in the communication of meaning according to Aristotle,” from mental experience through the spoken to the written word. Rushdie explores the phenomenon of origin and originality by “stress[ing] the discontinuities in the chain of transmission from God (or the Devil) to Gibreel, Mahound, and Salman. Or, in other words, from the divine ‘logos’ to thought, speech, and finally writing. Satan’s interpolation in the sacred text of the Recitation is only the most radical and provocative emblem of the generative principle governing the novel as a whole. Self-identity, which at first seemed to be disrupted from the outside, in fact contains the germs of difference from itself at the source and from the very beginning.” (Martine Hennard, *Origin and Originality*, 184-5)

of Islam when Muhammad was misled by the devil, masquerading as the angel Gibreel, to allow the worship of three pagan goddesses – Al-Lat, Uzza and Manat – alongside that of Allah. Suitable verses to this effect are indeed produced, but Muhammad subsequently abrogates them, ascribing their authorship not to Gibreel but to Satan/Shaitan. Rushdie renders the origin and status of these verses profoundly ambiguous and unclear in order to attack the notions of purity and homogeneity in religion and identity in general. Simultaneously, he tropes the adjective “satanic” as that necessary element of impurity and difference that undermines the dominant discourses of religion, nationalism, culture, language, and ultimately subjectivity.

The questions of origin and originality are also crucial to Andonovski’s novel, at the centre of which is the undeciphered inscription in the eastern chamber of the Hagia Sophia. Of uncertain provenance and authorship, the inscription seems to point to “the Navel of the World,” which refers not so much to a geographical centre of the world, but is rather a symbolical reference to God, the source of light and life which we have lost and, therefore, are now doomed to roam the realms of the post-Babelian plurality of languages and incomprehension.

In both novels, the Word, be it oral or inscribed, is endowed with a sacred aura, which imposes upon the would-be decipherer a hermeneutical authority and responsibility. Thus, the appearance of the satanic verses transforms Mahound from a messenger (the Messenger at that) into a hermeneuticist: by identifying the contested verses as such and subsequently abrogating them from the pure essence of the divine Word, he assumes a hermeneutical authority that, on the one hand, establishes an entirely new religion, but, on the other, leads to the religious fanaticism of his later incarnations, the Imam and Ayesha, the prophetic figures in Gibreel’s other dream sequences. The novel condemns this authoritarian certainty and advocates for the healthy presence of doubt instead. Therefore, as soon as Mahound proclaims the verses satanic, Gibreel immediately intervenes to counter his claim: “*it was me both times, baba, me first and second also me,*” (SV, 123), i.e. he was the source of both the divine and the satanic verses. Mahound’s authoritarianism is taken to the extreme by the Imam (a reference to Khomeini), with his hatred of History itself, which is

the blood-wine that must no longer be drunk. History the intoxicant, the creation and possession of the Devil, of the great Shaitan, the greatest of the lies – progress, science, rights – against which the Imam has set his face. History is a deviation from the Path,

knowledge is a delusion, because the sum of knowledge was complete on the day Al-Lah finished his revelation to Mahound. (SV, 210)

The revolution against the forces of history the Imam envisions is a reign of terror and death, with him transformed into a monster, his mouth a yawning gate which swallows the endless lives that pass through it. A similar scene of death ends the ill-fated *hajj* of the Titlipurian villagers led by Ayesha, a charismatic seeress whose religious intransigence, which, for instance, calmly allows the stoning of a baby for being ostensibly born in devilment, leads Osman, the boy heretofore desperately in love with her, to exclaim in disgust, “You’ve become a demon,” to which she simply replies “I am nothing,” “I am a messenger” (SV, 483).

The presence of the undeciphered inscription in *The Navel of the World* similarly allows the text to posit a particular hermeneutics, one that is informed by a profound respect for the written word and preparedness to plumb the depths of the textual meanings. Thus, the first unsuccessful interpreter of the mysterious inscription, the tautologically named Gramatik the Grammarian, meets with an imminent death, while the second, Father Mida, literally becomes an embodied text, as his body is transformed into letters. The third and final decipherer is Cyril the Philosopher, a saintly and Christ-like figure, whose belief in the oneness of God and His identification with the Word – “God is One, He is Great, the Word is in Him, and He in the Word” (NW, 39) – encapsulates the almost sacralised veneration of the Word and the Text upon which the novel rests.

In both the frame plot, featuring the peregrinations of Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, and the three subplots, featuring Gibrel’s dreams in which he is the archangel Gibreel, of *The Satanic Verses*, the oral word, manifested as sacred and profane verses, is rendered inherently heterogeneous and differential by being permeated by the satanic. This satanic diversification, as we shall see, is seen as the necessary prerequisite for the transition from the submission encoded in the very nature of religious discourse to the subjectivity required of the author if he is to author a text at all.

Although the satanic perspective plays an identical role in *The Navel of the World*, Andonovski’s novel starts from a radically different premise, one that is reverential with regard to the divine identity of the text and, therefore, as such, is opposed to Rushdie’s blasphemous intention with regard to Islam and its founder, Muhammad. Andonovski confirms the Bulgakovian belief that “manuscripts don’t burn,” only in his novel the indestructibility of the

word is guaranteed not by Satan, as in Bulgakov and Rushdie, but by the presence of God in the text, i.e. by the equivalence Word/God that informs the author's Christian orthodox perspective. The novel contains numerous references to embodied texts, i.e. to "the Word made flesh," and *vice versa*, from the unfortunate Mida's becoming a text, to the very text we are reading, which the narrator, Ilarion, figuratively regurgitates, in the form of a confession, from a letter that he has swallowed. These reinforce the idea that being *is* writing and both reside in and proceed from God. As Father Mida admonishes the members of the logothete's council, false spiritual fathers led by his own son, Father Stefan, "to burn a Word means to burn God, your Father, on the pyre" (NW, 72 my translation of the Macedonian original, passage omitted in the English translation), and, ultimately, "to burn the Word means to place yourselves on the pyre, for you are the fruit of the Father and of time, for no one lives outside Him, just as no one lives outside time, for then he would be nothing" (NW, 58). In a similar way, alphabets and languages do not become fully extinct: just as the written text is an embodiment of the Word/Jesus Christ, the letters of the alphabet and the sounds which they express have their own particular warmth and, bearing the imprint of the Holy Spirit, speak their own language. This language can be understood by anyone in whom God resides, like Cyril the Philosopher, to whom they reveal themselves of their own accord, but not by Stefan the Letter-Bearer and the council members, all of whom are represented as antithetical to the Word.

Since verses/texts assume conceptual centrality in both novels, both Rushdie and Andonovski tackle the question of authorship and embark on an exploration of the authorial "I" authoring the verses and the texts around which the novels are organised.

2. Who is the/an Author?

Rushdie describes the production of Mahound's Revelation in such an ambiguous way that it is impossible to determine whether it comes from the archangel or from Mahound. Thus, it remains unclear whether it is divine or human in origin, whether the archangel willingly says the verses or Mahound forces them out of him. The manner in which the "satanic verses" are produced is described by the (satanic) narrator as a "wrestling match" between Mahound and Gibreel:

After they had wrestled for hours or even weeks Mahound was pinned down beneath the angel, it's what he wanted, it was his will filling me up and giving me the strength to hold him down, because archangels can't lose such fights, it wouldn't be right, it's only devils who get beaten in such circes, so the moment I got on top he started weeping for joy and then he did his old trick, forcing my mouth open and making the voice, the Voice, pour out of me once again, made it pour all over him, like sick. (SV, 123)

The agency in this w/Word-producing struggle is clearly attributed to Mahound rather than to the archangel, who is merely the passive medium through whom the Prophet articulates Allah's Revelation which, in fact, comes from him. The quoted passage ironically plays with a certain sense of propriety in such matters that Mahound strives to adhere to. Thus, he wills Gibreel to display a greater physical prowess in their wrestling match and to pin him down to the ground because "it wouldn't be right" for an angel to lose such a fight, upon which he "weep[s] for joy" and *forces* the archangel's mouth to produce the required verses, which are therefore born out of an all-too-human voice that masquerades itself as being a divine Voice.

Since this is an "old trick" that Mahound plays upon the powerless archangel, the narrator leads us, the readers, to conclude that it is not only the satanic verses but the entire Recitation that is rendered suspect, which becomes simultaneously human, divine and satanic in its source and nature, with Mahound, Gibreel and Satan as its joint originators. The ambiguity is achieved by the fluid subjectivity created by Gibreel's and Mahound's selves: as the dual human/archangelic Gibreel persona is mixed up with that of the Prophet of Islam, the novel hints at the impossibility of pinpointing an originary source or pure essence for religious discourse. The birth of Allah's message is described in gestational imagery, with Gibreel in the process of *becoming* as he awaits the approaching Mahound and ultimately being overwhelmed by the sheer force of the prophet's personality. Continuing the gestational imagery, the text posits an analogy between the relationship of mother-child and of archangel-prophet – they are bound together as if with an umbilical cord:

But when he has rested he enters a different sort of sleep, a sort of not-sleep, the condition that he calls his *listening*, and he feels a dragging pain in the gut, like something trying to be born, and now Gibreel, who has been hovering-above-looking-down, feels a confusion, *who am I*, in these moments it begins to seem that the archangel is actually *inside the Prophet*, I am the dragging in the gut, I am the angel being extruded from the sleeper's navel, I emerge, Gibreel Farishta, while my other self, Mahound, lies *listening*, entranced, I am bound to him, navel to navel, by a shining cord of light, not

possible to say which of us is dreaming the other. We flow in both directions along the umbilical cord. (SV, 110)

The revelation is induced by a dragging of the cord, “the miracle start[ing] in my his our guts,” with Mahound generating the power that will force the words out of Gibreel’s mouth, upon which “the voice comes.” Reversing the traditional direction of revelation, it is not the archangel who transmits the divine message to the receiving prophet. Rather, they exist as one fluid subjectivity in which the divine and the human, the sender and the receiver of the message, are conjoined and blurred. Gibreel is not an entity external to Mahound, but the fetus inside the prophet’s metaphorical womb who the dragging of the umbilical cord will bring out into the world. This positionality of both archangel and prophet destroys the ostensible superiority of the former, as divine and human messenger become one. The “something trying to be born” is, of course, the divine revelation of Allah, but the pronominal and ontological confusion (“my, his, our”, “my other self”) suggests that it is born out of the total extinguishing of consciousness and subjectivity, in an agonistic birth within the realm of a defamiliarised unconscious which problematises even the dream itself as such, rendering it something ever more elusive.

In a further level of self-estrangement, the voice that speaks from and through Gibreel is not his: “*Not my voice* I’d never know such words I’m no classy speaker never was never will be but this isn’t my voice it’s a Voice.”⁴⁸⁵ As the Supreme Being is never seen by anybody, Gibreel wonders who speaks through him: “My lips moving, being moved by. What, whom? Don’t know, can’t say. Nevertheless, here they are, coming out of my mouth, up my throat, past my teeth: the Words. Being God’s postman is no fun, yaar. Butbutbut: God isn’t in this picture. God knows whose postman I’ve been” (SV, 112). Another layer of ontological complexity is added by means of the irresolvable uncertainty of who Gibreel really is, as he is represented as an ontological fusion consisting of the archangel, Satan, Mahound and the Indian actor undergoing a crisis of identity. Overwhelmed by the strength of Mahound’s personality, he describes himself as merely “*some idiot actor having a bhaenchud nightmare*” and helplessly appeals both to

⁴⁸⁵ The novel here renders Gibreel’s predicament identical to Muhammad’s. Namely, the historical accounts of Muhammad’s life find corroboration of the authenticity of his prophethood in the fact that there is an incomparable difference between, on the one hand, his sayings, as collected in the *Hadith*, which are genuinely his, and his pre-prophetic reputation as a mere businessman not very skilled in oratory, and, on the other, the language and spirit of the Qur’an, unrivalled in originality and beauty before or since, which therefore must have come from God.

Mahound and, ultimately, to the reader, “*what the fuck do I know, yaar, what to tell you, help. Help*” (SV, 109, emphasis original).

Thus, Gibreel is represented as a fluid, non-definable subjectivity that operates on several ontological and narrative levels: both human and archangelic, dreamer and participant in his dreams, source of the divine revelation and an unwilling agent from whom the revelation is forced out, separate from and identical with Mahound, etc. Just as he is one and many, so the revelation is both divine and satanic and Mahound is both its source and messenger. Ultimately, Gibreel’s de-centred, plural and unstable self is an emblem of the identity difference that is Satan, the traditional master of dissimulation and disguise.

In Rushdie’s rendering, therefore, the divine revelation (and, by implication, language itself), is inherently “corrupted” or containing its difference/alterity in its very essence. In other words, it is suspect because of its uncertain source (it is unclear whether it comes from God or the Devil), the unreliable medium of its transmission (the angel Gibreel is a protean, playful figure of an uncertain ontological status: he is simultaneously a divine and human consciousness, a modern-day Indian actor dreaming he is the archangel and in the process also becoming him), the human recipient of the divine word (Mahound, whom Rushdie represents not by his venerated authentic name but by the one attributed to him in medieval Christian tradition, which demonised him) and, as we shall see, the scribe who writes down the revelation revealed to the prophet (Salman deliberately distorts the words relayed to him in order to test Mahound’s authenticity).

If the search for the authorial “I” in *The Satanic Verses* reveals a plural and ontologically fluid source, *The Navel of the World*, while seemingly going in the opposite direction, i.e. positing God, who is One, as the original textual source, in the end also finds a confusion of authorial selves.⁴⁸⁶ The decipherment of the mysterious inscription in the Hagia Sophia requires

⁴⁸⁶ This authorial indeterminacy and fluidity is characteristic of the overall narrative strategy of both novels. The narrator of *The Satanic Verses*, as we saw, is himself satanically diversified and is simultaneously traditional and satanic, extra- and intra-diegetic, worldly and otherworldly, God and Satan. *The Navel of the World* is a collection of manuscripts, containing a preface from the editor; three parts (Jan Ludvik’s “novel” about Cyril the Philosopher’s decipherment of the inscription in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople; his diary, documenting his unrequited love for Lucia, which is related and complementary to his “novel,” with characters and events echoing and mirroring one another (a link emphasised by their titles, “Keyhole” and “Key” respectively); and Lucia’s court testimony about the last day of Jan’s life, before his suicide); a critical afterword by Venko Andonovski, in which he expresses doubts regarding the work’s authorship and originality and locates elements plagiarised from other works

that Ilarion and Cyril the Philosopher depart in search of its supposed original, located at the “Navel of the World,” a mountain next to the city of Kermanshah, which bears the Behistun inscription. In order to get at the true meaning of the inscription, written in an alphabet that no one can read, Cyril needs “to transfer it from rock to parchment,” for “I cannot read or decipher the alien symbols on the rock, so first I must copy them on parchment or vellum in order to restore the warmth that the stone has taken and sucked from them, and from their warmth I will determine their light and their colour, and eventually their meaning” (NW, 107). The Philosopher’s painstaking and reverential copying of the inscription is also a literal and a symbolical ladder-climbing: the higher he climbs on the ladder carrying him to the beginning of the text, the more dangerous the enterprise becomes, because the beginning contains the word “I”, the essence of the real author, which is inappropriable, irrespective of the signature. The anonymous authorial “I” thus contains within itself the real creator of the word and is divorced from the signature, which can be appropriated by anybody. Therefore, when the Philosopher reaches the “I” heading the entire inscription, which to the awed Ilarion seems to be in the very sky, thus reinforcing the divine characteristic of the word/Word, there is a huge abyss which can only be crossed by means of the metaphorical leap of faith that the Philosopher abundantly possesses. As he tries to make an imprint of the first word, which contains the essence of the text’s originator, a bolt of lightning hits the mountain, the earth quakes and the sky darkens, whereupon Cyril finally deciphers the inscription at the navel of the world.

The significance of Cyril’s insistence on the sanctity and inviolability of the “I” heading the inscription is fully revealed on their return to Constantinople, where they find out that Stefan has already deciphered the inscription with the help of his father’s notes. The comparison of the two nearly identical inscriptions reveals a telling difference; namely, in Stefan’s version, the signatory is Solomon, while in the Philosopher’s, it is Darius. This means that Darius’s signature

of literature, such as Kundera’s *The Joke* and even one of his own novels; and an appendix, containing Jan’s poetry collection *Enigma*, prefaced by an unflattering note regarding the poems’ suspect originality, written by Jan’s brother, who is the editor of the whole collection of manuscripts. The element of suspect authorship is emphasised throughout – the editor even lists the books left behind by his brother, including the Bible (and in particular the Song of Songs), *The Pannonian Legends* (which contain Cyril’s and Methodius’s hagiographies), Venko Andonovski’s *Alphabet of the Disobedient*, which Jan has copied from (or plagiarised) when writing his “novel,” and, finally, Kundera’s *The Joke*, from which the editor himself takes the names he gives to the characters of his brother’s diary in order to avoid recognition. Significantly, and bearing in mind the complex nature of the authorial “I” in the novel, he finds no name for himself in *The Joke* and is therefore signed as an anonymous “I.”

at the Navel of the World was fake, as he merely erased Solomon's and put in his own name, usurping Solomon's authorial "I." The navel of the world, therefore, is not in the middle of the mountain (because it contains not the original but a copy), but Solomon's cup, on which the original inscription was made by king Solomon, who drew his wisdom therein, becoming a just and beloved ruler. Once he fell into sin, dissipating his life on drink and women, however, the wisdom of the cup dried up. The cup got stolen and lost over the centuries, until somebody had the inscription written on the Behistun mountain, as a reminder of the ephemerality of wisdom on account of having had too many passions in the cup of life. This inscription was later appropriated by Darius and was copied by some wise ancestor of the Byzantines', who brought it to the Hagia Sophia, in order to preserve its wisdom, but also, as we shall see, to convey something else.

The authorial signatures of both inscriptions end with the number 909, which reveals the architectonics of the act of creation. The zero in the middle stands for

creation itself, a sphere, an infinite line, everything contained within nothing [...] a spider's web, a circle, a pure nullity that engulfs all, from which everything exits, and to which everything returns, the way a woman's womb, the womb of the letter *Ⲅ*, expels new life; a womb, an eternal zero, the source and delta of the world; and this is true whether one seeks pleasure from a woman or from a text. (NW, 127)

It is the source of creation, the primordial chaos out of which the Author fashions a new world, in an act of *imitatio Dei* that binds the divine and human creators with an indissoluble bond. God is, in fact, the original author, whose authorial, creationary self man appropriates in order to become a Creator like (or instead of) him. The number 9 carries the Christian symbolism of "a triple perfection, since the Holy Trinity is repeated three times in the number nine" (NW, 127). Standing on both sides of the zero in the middle, it represents two readers: one who reads the surface meanings and another who reads the hidden ones and can therefore be described as a *satanic reader*, for it contains the Devil's perspective: "one needs to stand in the place of the devil, to become a devil, in order to understand the inscription; that is the price one pays to discover hidden meanings. Only the devil sees what we do not see!" (NW, 128). Stefan is a representative of the first type of reader, which is one that seeks a final reading and a fixed understanding, one that is dogmatic and radically opposed to the second, satanically inflected

reading practiced by Cyril the Philosopher, which is nourished on intellectual restlessness (and in this sense evokes Satan's physical and intellectual nomadism that Rushdie sees reflected in the intellectual exile of the contemporary intellectual) and the ability to read between the lines/letters, thereby penetrating into the very soul and essence of the written word. The ideal reader posited by the text, therefore, would be one who is able to read simultaneously through both the traditional/orthodox and the satanic perspective.

However, since the act of interpretation contains both of these perspectives, by implication, they would necessarily be present in the act of creation as well. In other words, in order for them to be recognised by the reader as the different layers of meaning accumulated in the text, they must have been ingrained therein from the very beginning, which imposes the conclusion that a satanic authorial thread is interwoven in any text, as it is in Mahound's verses.

Thus, the satanic element is foregrounded in both novels as a necessary element in the acts of creation and interpretation, without which the (oral) word and the (written) text would be one-dimensional and depthless. Simultaneously, the satanic principle plays more complex roles in both novels and it is to these that I now turn.

3. Diversifying the Word: A Satanic Hermeneutics

Since the Qur'an in Islamic tradition represents a part of the divine Logos, Rushdie's destabilisation of its source by insinuating the satanic into its divine essence introduces an element of difference, an alterity, intellectual openness and relativising of the absolute. The effect of the satanic verses is to undermine the authority of divine revelation by doubling and therefore diversifying its source. Satan's very appearance in the biblical narrative introduces

difference into a universe that, according to the biblical narrative, was created to be unified. For example, while God created the universe and "everything he had made" to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31), Satan explicitly introduces a concept of difference, namely "good and evil" (Gen. 3:5), implying the possibility that not "everything" was "very good," and thus, questioning the truth of God's word. Satan's use of words therefore dismisses truth and divine authority as knowable categories of interpretation.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁷ Caroline Sauter, "The Diabolic Logic of *Logos*: Towards a Hermeneutics of Hell in Goethe's *Faust*," in *The Hermeneutics of Hell: Visions and Representations of the Devil in World Literature*, ed. Gregor Thuswaldner and Daniel Russ (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 116.

Etymologically, his name means “Adversary” in Hebrew and, as such, he can be conceived of not as embodying a metaphysical principle, but as playing an oppositional and dissenting role, which is Rushdie’s and Andonovski’s aesthetic philosophy. He does this by relying on his oratorical mastery in proffering alternative interpretations of scriptural messages and exposing the differential, ambiguous and inconstant nature of language. In Rushdie’s novel, the satanic verses appear in order to express an already existing uncertainty regarding the source of the revelation Mahound preaches, an uncertainty of which he is very much aware. In other words, the satanic verses are not the *cause* of the corruption of Allah’s revelation, but the *consequence* of an already experienced uncertainty on the part of Mahound regarding his status in the origin and transmission of the message: is he merely the messenger bearing Allah’s words or actually their source? The transgressive or satanic aesthetics of the novel, in which everyone and everything is infused with its alterity, refuses to provide an unequivocal solution to this dilemma: the narrative tone simultaneously discredits Mahound by emphasising his businessman-like character and hence his pragmatic motivations in giving shape to the revelation (divine *and* satanic) and ennobles him by infusing him with the consciousness of the archangel in such a way that the emergence of the (“his my our”) religious discourse flows both ways along the umbilical connection between them. Mahound’s internal dilemma is articulated by Gibreel and by the latter’s uncertainty as to who speaks through him. The agonistic struggle between them, which is brought into a sharp relief when contrasted with the never questioned prophetic authority of the Imam and Ayesha, alludes to Mahound’s sincere engagement with the nature of his prophethood and of the words that are articulated through him, much as Gibreel is preoccupied with his own archangelic nature and agency.

Both Rushdie and Andonovski repeat and confirm the traditional literary activation of the devil as the carrier of a satanic hermeneutics or, as Caroline Sauter states, “a modern, ‘deconstructive,’ differential hermeneutics,”⁴⁸⁸ opposed to the traditional, theological one, which stems from God. Similarly, Srinivas Aravamudan argues that

the slipperiness of the devil is that of the signifier itself; it is the very indeterminacy of the devil’s actions that make him truly diabolical. The *destinerrance* of his vagrancy, his

⁴⁸⁸ Sauter, 117.

lack of address which summarises his delinquency, the nomadic refusal to recognise the law of settlement, is an eternal escape from the transcendental signified – God.⁴⁸⁹

The appearance of Satan,⁴⁹⁰ in the guise of a snake and speaking with a snake’s forked tongue, in paradise introduces the difference of “evil” – in fact, difference *as* evil – into the homogeneous world created by God in which everything was “good” and faithful to its essence, presential, unequivocal and pure. Satan’s evilness is to function as a contrast to and an opposite of God’s original. His rhetoric problematises God’s unequivocal words by introducing double meanings, aporias, paradoxes and contradictions, as opposed to the divine and theological hermeneutics based on the truth, the pure essence, pure identity and pure ethical values.

The Navel of the World emphasises this point by placing the Devil in a crucial position in the eastern chamber, in an oval fresco in the midst of the spherical dome, from where his eyes equally see you wherever in the chamber you are, his divine-like omniscience, which can be seen only if one stands in his place and sees through his eyes, always reading a different, an-other inscription and therefore yielding different and differential meanings. Seen through the other, orthodox reader’s perspective, the inscription pays homage to the saintly, venerated Solomon, whose wisdom serves to glorify God and the prince (Solomon) whose glory shall be witnessed by all. Seen through the Devil’s perspective,

King Solomon is a liar
And as much a thief as any ruler.
For he knows not how to make letters,
For letters are soft, and power hard,
For wisdom is sweet and uplifting,
And power a degrading poison
And Solomon is no poet.
Another “I” abides in his mouth
He adorns himself with the wisdom of others.
For every power desires

⁴⁸⁹ Srinivas Aravamudan, “‘Being God’s Postman Is No Fun, Yaar’: Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*”, in *Reading Rushdie*, ed. M. D. Fletcher, 202.

⁴⁹⁰ Neil Forsyth draws attention to the various mythological and religious sources out of which the figure of Satan developed: the Canaanite tradition of the bright star Lucifer; the Greek myths about Zeus defeating Kronos and then the Typhon monster, Hephaestus, Prometheus, Phaeton, and Icarus; and the Gnostic manuscripts. Other mythological narratives of battles between opposing principles are the Babylonian Gilgamesh versus Humbaba, Ninurta (later Marduk) versus Tiamat, and the Zoroastrian Ahura Mazda (Light) versus Ahriman. (Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* [Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003], 28)

That the navel of the world be his! (NW, 139)

The Devil reveals that “even Solomon was not the creator of the inscription attributed to him, but an unknown poet, who sold his wisdom for a handful of gold, his cup, in order to survive” and ultimately “knows the real “I” of every text” (NW, 140).

The devil is an embodiment of paradoxes, inconstancy, but also the possibility for self-invention: from the fixed, God-given identity as the brightest angel Lucifer (the Angel of Light), to his fall and expulsion from heaven (a fate he shares with Adam and Eve), he acquires the slippery ontology of the unstable identity, one that is *di*-versified, *dia*-bolic and *antagonistic*.⁴⁹¹ Such is Satan’s fluid ontology that according to a Gnostic tradition, his role is usurped by Christ, who becomes the serpent of Genesis, bringer of Gnosis or spiritual knowledge,⁴⁹² and in this role he is comparable to numerous mythological gods or demi-gods who are bringers of knowledge (Thoth, Prometheus, etc.). As he rejects the identity conferred upon him by God, he is the prototype of the self-made man, the man reinventing himself, the man born anew, which is the ideal defended in Rushdie’s novel, while the immutable essence of divine selfhood is the heresy that needs to be sidelined. Because of this, he is also a creation turning against his creator and, like Frankenstein’s monster, obliged to use language/rhetoric to convince man of the justifiability of his position. Both Milton and Rushdie emphasise the satanic ideal of self-fashioned subjectivity, revealing itself in all its anguish, doubts and dilemmas, as opposed to the unquestioned obedience God demands of his creations. Mahound’s religion even identifies itself purely as “submission,” hence it inherently requires the *diversificatory* intervention of the satanic.

The Biblical narrative, even while expelling Satan from the God-created universe, cannot do without him: he is just as indispensable for man’s final salvation as Jesus.⁴⁹³ Similarly, Rushdie’s novel is permeated by the satanic nature of logos, operating through the differential function of satanic-fictional verses, which begin, drive forward and put an end to the plot,

⁴⁹¹ The prefixes di-, de- and dis- derive from the Indo-European words for “two,” implying division, discord, and other related meanings, results of the Fall (Forsyth, 219) and the movement from the God-ordained unity and homogeneity to division and heterogeneity. “Diabolos,” from which “devil” is derived, is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Satan,” meaning “adversary,” “opponent.”

⁴⁹² Forsyth, 311.

⁴⁹³ Neil Forsyth emphasises this point: “Satan’s temptation of mankind is a necessary prerequisite to the Son’s reciprocal intervention in the fate of mankind. Without Satan, no Son” (29).

interweaving it in all narrative threads.⁴⁹⁴ As Vassilena Parashkevova states, since the Latin word *versificare* derives from the oppositional semantics of *versus*,

the activity of *versifying* – the production of erosive verses, magic spells, commandments, prophecies and satirical poems... partakes of this quality of being against established discourses, of producing satanic interpretations of the dominant order of things or of reading *against* the grain. [Moreover,] [t]hose who pronounce these performative utterances engage, simultaneously, in di-versification, the process of bringing newness into the world, of rejecting, challenging or reclaiming dominant ideological verses and tropes.⁴⁹⁵

The very semantics of the words, containing the oppositional *versus*, subsuming the meanings of both “verses” and “against,” throws into sharp relief the contradictoriness and semantic openness of language/discourse around which the entire novel revolves. The very nature of language, as we saw, embodies the satanic principles of polysemy, ambiguity and epistemic uncertainty, hence the explicit identification on the part of all authorial figures with the satanic voice that insinuates itself through both Rushdie’s and Andonovski’s novels. The dilemma between the divine principles of submission and orthodoxy and the satanic principles of subjectivity and difference ultimately marks the point at which the profane author emerges as distinct and differentiated from the sacred author.

4. Sacred and Profane Authorship

Rushdie’s and Andonovski’s novels use the religious contexts of Islam and orthodox Christianity respectively in order to explore the birth of literature as a deviation from religious discourse and the birth of the author, i.e. the writer of fiction, as a partial or total repudiation of sacred

⁴⁹⁴ As Neil Forsyth states, Satan “was first, and really always remained, a character in a narrative – in fact in the myth of a combat between Christ and Satan that informs, or gives shape to, the Christian story of Fall and Redemption. The role of Satan in that narrative is to be the Opponent, the Adversary, the one who motivates the plot, who drives the story into motion” (26). The first occurrence of satanic verses, at the very beginning of the novel, saves Gibreel and Saladin from dying after the explosion of their plane above the English Channel and thus enables their rebirth as metamorphosed beings. In other words, instead of the finality of death, the satanic verses effectuate both a new beginning for the protagonists and the beginning of the novel itself. Similarly, they pave the way for the denouement of the main plot by providing a way out for both protagonists – a homecoming for one and a suicide for the other.

⁴⁹⁵ Parashkevova, *Salman Rushdie’s Cities*, 77.

authorship and authority. The dichotomy between sacred and profane authorship is evoked by means of authorial pairs – Salman the scribe/Mahound in *The Satanic Verses* and Ilarion/Cyril the Philosopher in *The Navel of the World*.

Salman is the unscrupulous scribe of the Recitation who distorts it in order to prove Mahound's inauthenticity as a Prophet of God and, as such, functions as an authorial alter ego through whom the other Salman, i.e. Rushdie,⁴⁹⁶ voices his protest against the monologic discourse of religion. Having been made Mahound's scribe on account of his advanced Persian education, Salman faithfully takes down the divine Revelation, until in a dream, remembering the "satanic verses" episode, he identifies with the devil, Shaitan himself, and starts producing *other*, satanic verses of his own, interpolating them with Gibreel's:

Little things at first. If Mahound recited a verse in which God was described as *all-hearing, all-knowing*, I would write, *all-knowing, all-wise*. Here's the point: Mahound did not notice the alterations. So there I was, actually writing the Book, or rewriting, anyway, polluting the word of God with my own profane language. But, good heavens, if my poor words could not be distinguished from the Revelation by God's own Messenger, then what did that mean? What did that say about the quality of the divine poetry? Look, I swear, I was shaken to my soul. It's one thing to be a smart bastard and have half-suspicions about funny business, but it's quite another thing to find out that you're right... Also: I was sadder than I have ever been. So I had to go on doing it. Maybe he'd just missed out once, I thought, anybody can make a mistake. So the next time I changed a bigger thing. He said *Christian*, I wrote down *Jew*. He'd notice that, surely; how could

⁴⁹⁶ In their respective novels, both Rushdie and Andonovski engage in so-called "performative biographism," namely they experiment artistically with their biography, infusing it into their artistic output in order to foster a particular image of their authorial persona. (For this concept, see Jon Helt Haarder, "Author," in *Literature: An Introduction to Theory and Analysis*, ed. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Lasse Horne Kjalldgaard, Lis Moller, Dan Ringgaard, Lilian Munk Rosing, and Peter Simonsen [London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2017], 152). Thus, in *The Satanic Verses*, in order to strengthen his own anti-dogmatic and intellectually rebellious stance, Rushdie seizes on the historical personage of Salman Farsi, of Persian origin, one of the earliest followers of Muhammad and a skilled engineer whose construction of a ditch around Medina led to the victory of the Muslims over the Meccans in 627, but gives his namesake an authorial identity by grafting the actions of another historical persona onto him – those of Abdullah Ibn Sa'ad, who was one of Muhammad's scribes and temporarily lost his faith when the Prophet failed to notice an error in his transcription (Martine Hennard, 182). The author of the first part of *The Navel of the World* and the author-narrator of the second part is Jan Ludvik, in whose alienation from the moral and intellectual conformism induced by the provincial environment that cannot accept his differential, *other* way of thinking, can be recognised, I believe, the author's own anti-establishmentarian stance (to emphasise the biographical element, the author himself has stated in interviews that in his teenage years he composed a collection of poems entitled *Enigma*, which is also the title of Jan's and is appended to the novel). In view of this, each of the two novels can be stated to function, to a greater or smaller extent, as its author's intellectual autobiography.

he not? But when I read him the chapter he nodded and thanked me politely, and I went out of his tent with tears in my eyes. (SV, 367-8)

This is a crucial moment in the novel which marks the transformation of the scribe/copyist into an original creator.

As he narrates the circumstances of his loss of faith, Salman traces his evolution from scrupulous scribe (who repeats) to imaginative writer (who makes up tall tales). In this sense, he is much more than the embittered unreliable narrator of Mahound's Medinan years. As he re-enacts the satanic interpolation by substituting fiction for fact and tampers with the prophet's original message, Salman becomes a follower of the archetypal fiction-maker.⁴⁹⁷

It is this satanic, *dis*-obedient perspective that enables Salman to break away from the submission encoded in Mahound's sacred discourse and to forge his own authorial subjectivity. As Mahound's oral Recitation, as we saw, is already corrupted, i.e. satanically diversified at its source, Salman functions as another satanic voice diversifying the supposed purity of Allah's Holy Book, the Qur'an, and thereby undermines its status as an incarnation of the Divine Logos. In fact, Salman becomes Shaitan's human equivalent and Mahound's secular counterpart, for, in the end, it is "his Word against mine" (SV, 368).⁴⁹⁸ Although Rushdie does not stage their "his-Word-against-mine" confrontation, in writing his novel, he lets the imaginative power of literature speak on behalf of the repudiated scribe, who loses his place in the community of believers (a fact sealing the separation between the secular and the religious) and in the end departs for his native Persia, there to ply his craft of a fiction writer proper, investing the real with fantasy and the objective with his own subjective intervention.

Another authorial figure assumes Salman's antagonistic mantle after the latter's departure – the Jahilian poet Baal, whose name in the Bible and Christian tradition evokes the devaluation and subsequent demonisation of once supreme and valued deities, which the suppressive drive of the monotheistic religions relegated to the status of demons or oblivion. Baal (or Ba'al, meaning "Lord") was a prominent god in the old Canaanite religion, worshipped under many guises in the

⁴⁹⁷ Martine Hennard, *Origin and Originality*, 172.

⁴⁹⁸ Calvino's brief treatment of this episode in the history of Islam develops the theme differently: the scribe's collaboration was necessary to Allah, who assigned him the responsibility to organise the message of the Qur'an in writing. Muhammad knew this and allowed the scribe full scope to exert his duty in the recording of the Revelation, "but Abdullah [the scribe] was unaware of the powers vested in him. He lost his faith in Allah because he lacked faith in writing, and in himself as an agent of writing." (Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* [London: Minerva, 1993], 182)

Levant. He has an interesting relationship with the Hebrew god Yahweh: originally, they both may have been sons of El, their worship indistinguishable. Over time, as monotheism took an ever greater hold in Palestine, Baal becomes the primary enemy of Yahweh and the chief villain of Israelite religion. The struggle for preeminence in their respective worship is represented during the reign of King Ahab, with the prophet Elijah engaged in a battle, on behalf of Yahweh, with Baal's prophets, supported by Ahab's Phoenician wife, Jezebel. In the Christian tradition, Baal has multiple identities: he is Satan's main lieutenant; the first and principal king in Hell, ruling over the East; or the demon Beelzebub (or more accurately Baal Zebûb, a Philistine deity whose name might have meant "Lord of Zebûb", a now unknown place), which on account of the pun on the name – "zebûb" being a Hebrew noun meaning "fly" – has become the "Lord of the Flies," or Satan himself.⁴⁹⁹

Bearing in mind these connotations of his name, Baal becomes another authorial figure who actively resists and undermines Mahound and his religion of submission. Therefore, he, too, can be defined as satanic in the sense in which the adjective is employed in the novel. Persecuted by Mahound, Baal creates an "anti-mosque" and a "labyrinth of profanity" (SV, 383) in the most famous brothel in Jahilia, the Curtain (*Hijab* in Arabic), whose Prophet the poet becomes. As "the secret, profane mirror of Mahound" (SV, 384) (while the twelve prostitutes of the brothel become the profane doubles of Mahound's wives, the Mothers of the Believers), Baal begins to write again, producing the sweetest poetry he has written, a profane Qur'an. The culmination of his newly found poetic power is his serenading his jailed "wives" with verses so powerful that they rival the literary and rhetorical brilliance of the Qur'an itself:

⁴⁹⁹ In Canaanite lore, he was the ruler of Heaven as well as god of the sun, rain, thunder, fertility, and agriculture. In a mythological story known as the "Baal Cycle," he rises to power after a dispute with his father El and a fight against his father's chosen successor, Yam, who rules despotically over the other deities. Baal thus becomes a benevolent ruler of the gods. However, the god of the underworld, Mot, soon lures Baal to his death, which brings desolation to the land. He is revived and restored to his position after his sister, Anat, assaults Mot, dismembers him and scatters his remains like fertiliser over the fields. In a titanic battle with the revived Mot, Baal becomes the undisputed ruler of the gods. Baal's myth thus follows the same pattern as other ancient fertility deities: his death signals the wintery desolation of the land and his resurrection the spring-revived nature; in a dual role as the god of rain in the arid and hot climate of the Middle East, the fertility god was unsurprisingly given a supreme place in the polytheistic pantheon. A version of Baal was worshipped among the Hittites, Syrians and Assyrians, even the Phoenicians and, from them, the Carthaginians. His worship included animal sacrifices, shaman-like ecstatic dances by his prophets, self-mutilation and even ritual sex and child sacrifice. Source: *New World Encyclopedia*, <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Baal>, accessed 13 June 2020.

On the third day, however, there appeared among these lovelorn fools a peculiarly woebegone fellow in turban and pantaloons, with dark skin that was beginning to look decidedly blotchy. Many passers-by sniggered at the look of him, but when he began to sing his verses the sniggering stopped at once. Jahilians had always been connoisseurs of the art of poetry, and the beauty of the odes being sung by the peculiar gent stopped them in their tracks. Baal sang his love poems, and the ache in them silenced the other versifiers, who allowed Baal to speak for them all. At the windows of the jail, it was possible to see for the first time the faces of the sequestered whores, who had been drawn there by the magic of the lines. When he finished his recital he went forward to nail his poetry to the wall. The guards at the gates, their eyes running with tears, made no move to stop him.

Every evening after that, the strange fellow would reappear and recite a new poem, and each set of verses sounded lovelier than the last. It was perhaps this surfeit of loveliness which prevented anybody from noticing, until the twelfth evening, when he completed his twelfth and final set of verses, each of which were dedicated to a different woman, that the names of his twelve “wives” were the same as those of another group of twelve. (SV, 390-1)

This scene foregrounds the magical, enticing power of the poetic word to captivate the audience and it enables Baal to assert himself as the divinely inspired poet of ancient tradition – a poet not of divine Revelation but of love. “I am Baal,” he announces, “I recognise no jurisdiction except that of my Muse; or, to be exact, my dozen Muses” (SV, 391). The parody of the prophet and his way of life by Baal and the troping of *The Curtain* as an “anti-mosque” is the irreverent culmination of this process, which ends up by asserting the poet’s muses as the ultimate source of inspiration. The intoxicating effect of Baal’s ode to his muses stages the irresistible power of the poetic word in lieu of that of the divinely inspired Qur’an.

The fact that the undermining of both religion and language is carried out by the authorial figures of Baal and Salman attaches a special importance to the awareness and the responsibility arising out of authorship. Salman and Baal jointly pluralise and thereby undermine the conceptual purity of both the oral and written divine revelation. The problematising of the origin of the divine word and the transition from sacred to profane writing constitutes the epistemological and aesthetic focus of the Jahilian episode. Setting the episode in the indicatively named city (“*jahilia*” designates the state of ignorance before the advent of Islam), Rushdie takes an initial state of “ignorance” as its conceptual centre around which to explore the trajectory of literary discourse and its subversive and resistant function in relation to power.

Andonovski's Ilarion follows an authorial trajectory similar to that of Rushdie's Salman. Ilarion represents his authorial vocation as deriving from, but nevertheless different from and, at times, even antithetical to the divine Logos manifested in the Gospels and in the person of Cyril the Philosopher. His manuscript reveals the author's growing awareness of his gradual emancipation from the authority of the medieval Byzantine *auctores* and the resulting autonomy of the field of the modern author.⁵⁰⁰ These two forms of authorship – sacred and profane – are represented as being at a disjunction, as if they were mutually exclusive: as soon as he becomes a Tale-Weaver, Ilarion stops being an Ascender of Ladders, a descriptor meaning “one who ascends towards God.” As he triumphantly announces, he received the former name when as a six-month-old child he started narrating stories that had no basis in reality but were purely fictional, unlike the real histories that really happened and that need to be told faithfully.

So, as I noted earlier: in some respects I was better than the Philosopher, who was wise and learned, but he could not see what only I could see, and he knew not how to weave tales in his mind but could only repeat those of others. But He chose him to abide in Him [it could even be said, “because of this He chose him to abide in Him”], because He detested the imaginary. For in Holy Scripture it is pointed out that into the heavenly realm, the City of God, dogs, fornicators, murderers, and idolaters will not be admitted, nor those who bear false witness, who lie. And the Tale-Weavers do lie, and they *want* to lie. (NW, 26-7, emphasis original)

Conscious of his imaginative abilities, Ilarion renames himself as a “Fragment-Fitter,” or, as the Macedonian original specifies, “Mosaic-Maker.” The act of self-naming can be conceived of as one of dethroning the religious authority that has shaped his spiritual and intellectual make-up and that allots names. By naming himself and by adhering to his inborn talent for tale-weaving, he goes against the God-ordained order of things that Cyril perpetuates. As he clarifies on the

⁵⁰⁰The trajectory from *auctor* to author was also traversed by Dante in the *Commedia*. In this context, Albert Russell Ascoli emphasises the crucial role played by Virgil and Dante's treatment of this ancient authority: “It is not just that he [Virgil] serves the abstract function of allegorically conflating the three major types of authority with which an earlier Dante wrestled so long and so hard – more important, he does so in the guise of a historical person, with a specific biography and an individual history. According to the *Vita nuova* and *Convivio*, only ‘modern’ poets like Dante are in the awkward position of having to ‘explain themselves,’ justifying their practices of signification, in the first person, while the illustrious authorities of antiquity are to be taken on faith and blindly obeyed. In *Inferno* 1, Virgil has been personalised, and thus brought down to Dante's level, even as Dante is being raised up to his.” (Aglae Pizzone, “The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: A View from Within, in Aglae Pizzone, ed., *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities* [Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014], 14-15)

very first page, his actions as Cyril's scribe in pursuit of the original text and the original author are identified as attempting to de-centre the throne of God, who, the novel suggests, is the original author and the source from which all textuality stems and aspires to, the eloquent zero which requires constant interpretation and adoration.

Ilarion's authorial *Bildung* develops in relation to two alternative epistemologies and hermeneutics, represented respectively by Stefan the Letter-Bearer and Cyril the Philosopher, onto whom his text attempts to be grafted and tied, as to its authorial Father. One of the twelve members of the Byzantine logothete's council, Ilarion seeks to distance himself from their false spirituality: they may be "asikrits, grammarians, ascetics, august ones and evangelists, learned men, holy fathers," but they are also "thieves" and "common bandits" (NW, 59-60), for they plot against the Philosopher and do not practice an authentic Christian spirituality. They are the false apostles who fail to defend the woman unjustly accused of sin by her husband and Stefan, their leader, is the Morning Star who, like Satan, will fall from great heights and, from a Letter-Bearer, will become a mere "Ascender of Ladders," i.e. one who needs to start finding his path towards God again.

Cyril the Philosopher's mission to decipher the mysterious inscription that has brought misfortunes upon the Byzantine kingdom, is, in fact, a search for a pristine and unequivocal authorial "I," which, as we saw, leads to the recognition that Satan's is invariably the *other* voice interwoven with that of the author/creator, either Divine or worldly. However, even while embracing this satanic, diversified authorship, the text does not thereby relativise authorship. Rather, it insistently emphasises the great responsibility it confers and is very careful to distinguish the real from the fake authorial "I." Thus, one of the very first actions Cyril performs upon his arrival in Constantinople is to unmask Stefan the Letter-Bearer's credentials as the inventor of a new alphabet, which the latter has falsely appropriated as his own "flesh and blood" (NW, 53),⁵⁰¹ for taking another's "I" as one's own (like Darius did with Solomon's and Solomon with the unknown poet's) incurs the wrath of God.

⁵⁰¹ This episode is an allusion to the unparalleled achievement of Cyril and his brother Methodius, known as the "Apostles to the Slavs," who were the founders of the first Slavic alphabet and the first Slavic literary language (the dialect of the Macedonian Slavic people in the vicinity of Thessaloniki), the first translators into Old Church Slavonic and the first Slavic enlighteners and educators. Cyril opposed the trilingual thesis for the interpretation of the Holy Scripture and his humanistic and reformist spirit is evident in the argument with which he countered the attacks of German priests, who had accused him of heresy: just as the sun shines equally for all, so too all the peoples have the right to express their faith in

In so far as the recognition of the satanic nature of the text entails a reading of both what is written and what is not but is nevertheless implied by the text, Cyril endorses this differential hermeneutics of which the Devil forms an inalienable part, in spite of his inscription in the saintly, Christ-like imagery that sets him apart from the false spirituality presiding at the logothete's court. Interpreting the symbolism of the spider that has woven its web in the centre of the eastern chamber, on whose back is placed the scroll containing the strange inscription, Cyril explains to Ilarion that

“If you want to be initiated into the knowledge of interpreting letters and mysterious texts, you must learn about the spider and its web. Over every book, over every letter, exists one such as this black spider (unseen by wretched and weak souls) that has spun its web; not everyone has access to what the letters say, for not every soul is prepared to receive each letter. The letters are poisonous for souls unprepared for their interpretation. He who does not know to remove the spider lurking above the letters, he who does not know how to unravel the web of words, only reads from afar, understanding nothing; only he who removes the spider web from before his eyes, only he will see the letters as a vision, a revelation, and will understand it, for he will read not only the words, but also [the sounds,] their colours, the whiteness between them and their lines. Only he will succeed in avoiding entanglement within the ball of letters, only he will grasp the essential thread of the yarn of meaning; only he [will be blessed in Christ, for he] will see.” (NW, 97)

Ilarion is dumbfounded when he hears the Philosopher's wisdom, for it resonates with his own thoughts on the matter:

For I have always said: writing is created by one hand but read by many eyes, and all of them read it differently, that hand-fashioned ball, that spider's web, that thick yarn, because readers follow different threads toward the centre, the source of the text, to the one who spun it and will swallow them [i.e. the readers] – the poisonous spider, the black, glowing sun, creator and master of a small universe. (NW, 97)

Cyril's hermeneutics does not regard the differential, satanically diversified kind of writing/reading as impure and, consequently, contrary to God and the Divine Logos. Indeed, as the quoted passages emphasise, the true knowledge produced by such writing/reading endows

their own language rather than only in Latin, Hebrew and Greek. After Cyril's successful defense, Pope Adrian II officially recognised Slavic literacy and allowed the liturgy to be held in Slavic. In Rome, Cyril became a monk, assumed the monastic name by which he became known throughout the Slavic world (his birth name was Constantine) and died there in 869. Andonovski does not allude to these events directly, but their monumentality looms in the background notwithstanding, being the standard against which Stefan the Letter-Bearer's false intellectual credentials and Ilarion's profane authorial *Bildung* are measured.

the author/reader with an insight of a special kind, such that brings him closer to Christ (who, as we know, is the Word incarnate). However, as Ilarion clarifies on the very first pages of his manuscript, his writing proceeds from a position of godlessness. He's been rejected by God, who no longer resides in him because he has tried to decentre God's throne: "And the Lord expelled me from before His face with these words: 'Be gone from My face; thou decided to reshape and complete that which I never wanted to alter, recreate, or finish'" (NW, 21). Ilarion's profane authorship thus echoes Salman's in that it arises out of an opposition to the divine one, which manifests itself through the Philosopher in *The Navel of the World* and Mahound in *The Satanic Verses*.

Although Ilarion's ideas of authorship and hermeneutics are largely aligned with the Philosopher's throughout the narrative, he ultimately forges a different authorial path, one that is made possible by a different intellectual kinship. Ilarion becomes aware of this kinship when, among Father Mida's papers, he finds his own genealogy, which tells him that he is, in a strange way, the child of the mysterious inscription which is the semantic centre of the novel. The inscription addresses a woman, who is identified with the legendary cup from which Solomon drew his wisdom. In Macedonian, the word for "woman" is "жена" and therefore the text begins with the letter "ж," an eroticised letter which in Ilarion's imagination resembles a woman with her legs and arms spread apart, as if enticing the reader into the erotics of interpretation.⁵⁰² When he entered the chamber to copy the inscription, Father Mida became entranced by the beauty of the letter "ж," which transformed into a beautiful girl and out of their union Ilarion was born. The narrator/author, therefore, is a product of the union of a body that became letters (Mida) and a letter that became flesh (the girl), his authorial self a doubly repeated equivalence between *being* and *writing*. As this equivalence evokes Christ, the Word incarnate, the symbolism of Ilarion's identity serves to divinise the secular author and to impart authority to his craft. This is

⁵⁰² Nikos Chausidis analyzes the complex representations of this letter in Slavic mythological imagery: resembling a woman with her legs and arms spread apart, as if about to give birth, it evokes the tree of life growing everywhere. Observed horizontally, it refers to the centre out of which everything springs. Observed vertically, its central vertical line resembles an axis that divides the letter into two, making it simultaneously dualistic and harmonic, divided and symmetrical. It celebrates the importance of the female principle in the act of creation, representing an active and dynamic image of the world and man. When the male principle prevailed in Slavic culture, the active and dynamic "ж" became replaced with the passive and static "о" (Chausidis, 1997). The letter "о" in Andonovski's novel is identified with the Devil, who is portrayed in the oval fresco of the chamber. (Весна Мојсова-Чепишевска, "Активното и динамично 'ж' наспрема пасивното и статично 'о,'" Annual Collection of the Faculty of Philology 'Blaže Koneski,' Skopje 2009, No 35:273-284, pp. 276-7)

also emphasised by Ilarion's age at the time of writing (33, which is also Jesus's age at the time of the crucifixion) and the place from which he writes (in the temple of wisdom that is the Hagia Sophia, which was also called "Church of the Holy (or Divine) Wisdom").

However, the woman-like letter is also the horrible spider spinning its web in the middle of the chamber, on whose back is the small cross, upon which the scroll with the inscription is placed. Thus, the chamber which contains the secret of Ilarion's origin brings forth the triple authorial symbols of the spider, the woman/letter and the cross, which combine together the elements of tale-weaving, erotic engagement and faith as the necessary prerequisites for a text to be born. The author is thus like a spider weaving his web and standing invisible, like God, in the centre of his finished work, his very invisibility in the universe he has created revealing his presence therein. Furthermore, the centrality of woman for keeping the text alive is emphasised: hence, the central position of the letter "ж," which advances the principle of love (both for a woman and for the text/knowledge) as necessary for true wisdom. Finally, faith in oneself and one's human identity, with all its limitations and fallibility, for "God is within us; the one without faith in himself has no faith in God, who resides within [him]" (NW, 32).

Although Cyril's hermeneutics acknowledges the satanic subtext hidden in every text (he reads the inscription from the Devil's perspective and is prepared to interpret it to the logothete), it can be defined as divine/sacred in the sense that it relies on truth as an absolute category (and the absolute is related to God). Cyril fearlessly follows wherever the text and its meanings lead because for him they are inevitably inscribed in the text of the world/nature created by God. Ilarion's authorship tentatively holds to this hermeneutics by a loose thread, by means of the element of faith symbolised by the cross, but his is ultimately a profane authorship, propped up by a different foundation, namely the erotics and the skill of the profane word that the author-spider weaves into his text, which emphasise the elements of playfulness, relativity, de-absolutisation, illusion, even manipulation and lies.⁵⁰³ For, wishing to protect his brother Stefan from the truth that Cyril is about to reveal the following day, Ilarion moves the inscription and the other, differential, satanic reading, which reveals Stefan's depraved sinfulness as the source of the curse tormenting the kingdom, is lost in the process. Cyril leaves for Rome, Stefan is

⁵⁰³ As we saw, an identical shift from an ethics based on absolute, immutable laws to one based on de-absolutised and relativised values is dramatised in Aeschylus's play *The Eumenides*, where Athena's eloquence and skilled oratory absolve Orestes from the heretofore unpardonable crime of matricide and appease the vengeful Furies pursuing him.

rehabilitated, the kingdom is healed and “all the letters contained only one meaning, only one soul inhabiting each creation and event” (NW, 142). Ilarion’s profane authorship, therefore, unlike Salman’s, leads him to eliminate the satanic thread interwoven in the word/text, which results in exactly the same dogmatic monologism propagated by religious discourse, in opposition to which Salman’s authorship arose. Notwithstanding this difference, in both cases the profane authors write from an anti-religious position: Salman is banished from Mahound’s religious community and Ilarion from God’s grace, for, as he states, God no longer resides in him and he can no longer commune with Him.

By way of conclusion, it can be stated that both Rushdie and Andonovski, writing from widely different cultural and religious contexts, explore the thematic of authoring texts and meanings by means of the complex dynamic between sacred and profane authorship. Rushdie envisions profane authorship as an inherently resistant and subversive corrective to all forms of power; as he has stated, the aim of his novel is, among other things, to undermine “imposed orthodoxies *of all types*,” to protest against “the end of debate, of dispute, of dissent.”⁵⁰⁴ For Rushdie, this role of literature springs from its very oppositionality to religious discourse, which is oppressive, dogmatic and monologic. Andonovski, on the other hand, does not dismiss the religious so easily. On the contrary, he ends the first part of his novel with Ilarion’s unsatisfied longing to see again the halo of divine light encircling Cyril the Philosopher’s body, a sign of his being in God’s grace and of his and Cyril’s God-given ability to see with inner eyes, to see the invisible. Andonovski dissects the agonistics within literature and profane authorship themselves and, by means of a convoluted game of various hermeneutics and hidden meanings, draws attention to the traps and pitfalls embedded in the text itself and to its satanically polysemous and aporetic nature. Ultimately, for both authors, authorship implies an anti-dogmatic outlook and intellectual nomadism and restlessness, characteristics that they both consider to be inherent to their craft.

⁵⁰⁴ Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 396, emphasis original.

B. Troping Transgression: A Satanically Transgressive Aesthetics

The Satanic Verses follows a dialogic logic (which proceeds from the satanic and the implicit narrators but is not reducible to them) inherent in its carnivalesque⁵⁰⁵ anti-theology and anti-teleology that can be best described as “transgressive” in that it decentres the dogmatic One of character-development, plot, national(ist) and religious pieties, etc. As the boundaries between categories disappear, everything is conceivable only relationally, never in isolation from the fluid semiosis of the text. To quote Julia Kristeva again,

A carnival participant is both actor and spectator; he loses his sense of individuality, passes through a zero point of carnivalesque activity and splits into a subject of the spectacle and an object of the game. Within the carnival, the subject is reduced to nothingness, while the structure of *the author* emerges as anonymity that creates and sees itself created as self and other, as man and mask. The cynicism of this carnivalesque scene, which destroys a god in order to impose its own dialogical laws, calls to mind Nietzsche’s Dionysianism. The carnival first exteriorises the structure of reflective literary productivity, then inevitably brings to light this structure’s underlying unconscious: sexuality and death. Out of the dialogue that is established between them, the structural dyads of carnival appear: high and low, birth and agony, food and excrement, praise and curses, laughter and tears⁵⁰⁶.

Both a writing subject and an object of his own text, both inside and outside it, the tripartite structure of the author is inscribed into the carnivalesque image of authorship as Kristeva describes it here: as simultaneously God/Satan/human, the “myopic scrivener” generates a myriad of meanings simultaneously. He is the theological One and its satanic, Othered subversion, the spiritually elevated and sublime and the degraded, the ideal embodied in the divine and its antithesis – human fallibility, etc. The *coincidentio oppositorum* that is this

⁵⁰⁵ Elements of the carnivalesque in the novel include: carnivalesque mésalliances and profanations, the derogatory language of curses is here transposed in the degraded prophetic messages; grotesque materialism that stands out from the classical ideal of the beautiful – Gibreel’s halytosis, Saladin’s supernatural phallus, Pamela’s white hair that she subsequently shaves off, Alli’s multiple abortions and a generalised desacralised outlook that permeates the novel. Death is not conceived of as a finality but is transmuted into an opportunity for staging a new birth through transformation of the old. Incompletion, becoming and processuality are the principles guiding the novel.

⁵⁰⁶ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 78-9.

representation of the author echoes and aligns itself with the undermining of the authority of the prophetic figures, the Holy Book and the divine principle as such on the part of secular, laic versificators who themselves have a degraded status as they are invariably permeated by the satanic. One of the central preoccupations of the novel – how newness enters the world – is explored through endless metamorphoses and permeations of characters, plots and situations in an echo of a primordial chaos out of which the Author-God fashions his own fictional cosmogony which is “satanised” from the start.

As we saw above, Rushdie’s conception of literature is primarily transgressive. Madelena Gonzalez argues for “a case for a transgressive aesthetics which seems increasingly viable as a description of his contribution to literature,”⁵⁰⁷ but which has exhausted itself with *The Satanic Verses*. When used to refer to Rushdie, the word “transgression” indicates his anti-dogmatic, desacralising and counter-hegemonic disturbance of the pieties of nationalism, racism, majoritarianism, religion, etc. In aesthetic terms, it refers to his innovative use of the English language, his stylistic experimentations and his overwhelming intertextuality in which literary, religious, political, cultural and historico-political references from various sources diversify and enrich the text in a myriad ways. In other words, Rushdie’s transgressiveness is understood in extratextual terms, in the text’s relation to an entire complex network of “texts” that, although incorporated within it, nevertheless inherently exist outside of it. I propose a different conception of Rushdie’s transgressive aesthetics, one that is located *within* rather than outside the text. I argue that the crucial aspect of his aesthetics is an intra-textual and intra-discursive transgression that is best exemplified in *The Satanic Verses*.

Anthony Julius distinguishes four essential meanings of transgression: “the denying of doctrinal truths; rule-breaking, including the violating of principles, conventions, pieties, or taboos; the giving of serious offence; and the exceeding, erasing or disordering of physical or conceptual boundaries.”⁵⁰⁸ It is within the fourth meaning that I want to situate my analysis of Rushdie’s transgressive aesthetics in order to show how the novel’s transgression of its own narrative levels destabilises the “conceptual boundaries” that are established in the individual plot lines. Two crucial aspects serve as my points of departure: first, the fact that the subplots represent dreams dreamt by a character of the main plot, which I argue is of central importance

⁵⁰⁷ Gonzalez, *Fiction after the Fatwa*, 5.

⁵⁰⁸ Julius, *Transgressions*, 19.

(leaving aside the psychoanalytical readings and implications that dream-analysis would yield, my argument is that the representation of the oneiric content of the subplots as stronger than the “real” world of their dreamer is essential for the overall system of representation guiding the novel); and second and related to this, the readings according to which Gibreel’s vision of the “myopic scrivener” as that of the author, Salman Rushdie himself, in spite of the reservations of critics such as James Harrison.⁵⁰⁹

The transgressive aesthetics of *The Satanic Verses* resides in the specific inter-relations established between the different narrative levels. Its main plot, concerning the protagonists Gibreel and Saladin, is punctuated by Gibreel’s dream sequences, which are unevenly distributed. The sequence featuring the Imam, for instance, is significantly shorter than the others and can be perceived either as separate or as part of the Ayesha sequence, as it is attached to the latter by way of introduction. Christopher Langlois rightly points out that

the value of focusing on dreaming in literature when it occupies so prominent a place in the text [...] is less to allow readers to psychoanalyze literary characters (or the author) than it is to decipher, contrapuntally, what stands outside the peculiar space of the text that demands representation seemingly only through dreaming.⁵¹⁰

The plot-subplot/reality-dream dichotomy accounts for the fragmentary, nonlinear structure of the novel, which corresponds to a poststructuralist poetics foregrounding its own status as an artifact. In this context, the dream sequences can be seen as, in Yael Halevi’s phrase, “interactive storytelling debates,” which, as fiction within fiction, serve as a means of “a playful exploration of fictionality.”⁵¹¹ Thus, Rushdie uses dream material to dramatise the dynamics of the

⁵⁰⁹ Regarding some critics’ interpretation of Gibreel’s attitudes in the novel as Rushdie’s own, Harrison states that “were he to have created such a walk-on speaking part for the author and allowed him to communicate with other characters as well as with the reader, as Mozart improvised cadenzas to his own concertos, Rushdie would surely have used such a radical innovation much more extensively and in more fruitful ways.” Equally, he dismisses the case for the narrator as being Satan. However, he perceptively notes the predominantly realistic narration of the dream sequences, as opposed to the magical realism pervading the frame, “undreamed” plot. (James Harrison, *Salman Rushdie*, 114 and 120-1)

⁵¹⁰ Christopher Langlois, “‘A Punishment of Dreams’: Reading Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* after *Orientalism*,” *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, Volume 51, Number 1, January 2020: 44. Langlois suggests that “Rushdie’s deployment of dream-texts in *The Satanic Verses* has two diametrically opposed functions, namely the consolidation of orientalist essentialisms of the other and the defamiliarisation of the epistemological ground on which such orientalist essentialisms rest” (45).

⁵¹¹ Yael Halevi-Wise, *Interactive Fictions: Scenes of Storytelling in the Novel* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 2003), 1, emphasis original.

production of narratives in the act of writing the narrative we are reading and activating “one of the important powers of fiction, [namely] the power to theorise the act of storytelling *in and through the act of storytelling*.”⁵¹²

As has been mentioned, Gibreel’s creation of his dreamscapes is likened to an author’s recreation of whole imaginative worlds out of various imaginative materials; thus, the dreams dramatise the birth of a particular discourse/text in the wider meaning of the word and its re-activation in different spatio-temporal contexts. According to John Erickson, this forms part of the novel’s overall oppositional strategy consisting of contradictions, ambiguities and dismantling of the barriers separating dream from reality, etc.⁵¹³ Thus, the materialisation of a dream into the lived reality of the protagonists “signals the complete breakdown of distinct narrative levels separating the dream-like from the life-like, fiction from reality, imagination from history.”⁵¹⁴ The creation of a world in which differentiation between the categories (real/fictional, good/evil, religion/doubt, unity/disunity, etc.) is rendered non-existent and impossible represents not only the traumatism of being “suddenly inscribed in the hostile imaginative geographies of cultural encounter and translation”⁵¹⁵ experienced by Gibreel and Saladin, but also the unrestrained power of the imaginative self-reinscription to which they voluntarily subject themselves or to which they are subjected against their will.

Being the oneiric product of a character’s imagination, Gibreel’s dream sequences function as subplots within the main plot, as narratives within a narrative, which, as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan emphasises, “create[s] a stratification of levels whereby each inner narrative is subordinate to the narrative within which it is embedded.”⁵¹⁶ Gibreel’s vision of the Author, in turn, creates an additional level, which is the highest narrative level, the one to which both the main plot featuring Gibreel and Saladin and the subplots featuring Mahound, the Imam and Ayesha are hierarchically subordinated. Thus, we have a triple structure of an “extradiegetic level,” which is “the one immediately superior to the first narrative and concerned with its narration” (the Author); then, “immediately subordinate to [it] is the diegetic level narrated by it, that is the events themselves,” namely the author’s story about Gibreel and Saladin; and, finally,

⁵¹² Ross Chambers, quoted in Halevi-Wise, 10, emphasis original.

⁵¹³ John Erickson, *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵¹⁴ Langlois, “A Punishment of Dreams,” 49.

⁵¹⁵ Langlois, 42.

⁵¹⁶ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 94.

a “hypodiegetic level” consisting of “the stories told by fictional characters,” which “constitute a second degree narrative,”⁵¹⁷ a function fulfilled by Gibreel’s dream sequences. The extradiegetic Author narrates the diegetic level (i.e. the story), within which Gibreel serves as a diegetic or intradiegetic “narrator” “narrating” his own dreamed stories. Yet, the ontological and thematic implications of the distinct narrative levels have not been explored in the copious criticism on the novel and it is this aspect that is the focus of my analysis. It is the internal dynamic of these three narrative levels that, I argue, constitutes Rushdie’s transgressive aesthetics, which will be analysed in the remainder of this chapter.

1. “Whoever you invented invented you too”⁵¹⁸: Authorship and the Forked Path of Artistic Creation

The Satanic Verses is a novel that follows its own satanic logic by reading itself against the grain, so to speak. The satanic ontology that we analysed in the previous part, which posited identity as multiply layered along several axes, is mirrored in the equally diversified and convoluted narrative and epistemological scheme of the novel as a whole, in which the careful juxtapositions and parallelisms emphasise the novel’s fabulation and bring to the fore the authorial voice that inserts itself into the different plotlines, which is a convenient narrative strategy for drawing attention to the process of the creation of narratives. As the novel situates the oral text of the Recitation and the written text of the Qur’an in the ambiguous space between inspired and satanic intervention on the one hand and faithful and fictional rendition on the other, the intervening narrative voice appropriates the satanic principle of doubling and reinterpretation of meanings by re-inscribing Gibreel’s archangelic hallucinations as a metaphor for textual production/writing.

The dream sequences, interrupting the main plot of the contemporary fictive reality of the protagonists, form three subplots that, on account of their oneiric status, represent a weaker,

⁵¹⁷ Rimmon-Kenan, 94.

⁵¹⁸ Christine Brooke-Rose’s *Thru* (1975), 53. The novel is quoted by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan as “an extreme example of the interchangeability of narrative levels. The novel repeatedly reverses the hierarchy, transforming a narrated object into a narrating agent and vice versa. The very distinction between outside and inside, container and contained, narrating subject and narrated object, higher and lower level collapses, resulting in a paradox which the text itself puts in a nutshell: ‘Whoever you invented invented you too.’” (Rimmon-Kenan, 97)

subordinate narrative level – as dreams, they are less “real” than the reality of their dreamer Gibreel.⁵¹⁹ Yet, it is the ontological and thematic superiority of this, the hypodiegetic, level, in relation to the diegetic one producing it that is insistently affirmed by the text. This is evident in the way in which Mahound, the Imam and Ayesha, the prophetic figures featuring in Gibreel’s dreams, subdue him to suit their own ends.

Far from being an otherworldly entity endowed with a divine authority and mission, the Gibreel who appears to Mahound is a weak creature operated by the sheer force of Mahound’s will:

... and the businessman is waking up, and once again his wanting, his need, goes to work, not on my jaws and voice this time, but on my whole body; he diminishes me to his own size and pulls me in towards him, his gravitational field is unbelievable, as powerful as a goddamn megastar ... and then Gibreel and the Prophet are wrestling, both naked, rolling over and over, in the cave of the fine white sand that rises around them like a veil. *As if he’s learning me, searching me, as if I’m the one undergoing the test.*

In a cave five hundred feet below the summit of Mount Cone, Mahound wrestles the archangel, hurling him from side to side, and let me tell you he’s getting in *everywhere*, his tongue in my ear his fist around my balls, there was never a person with such a rage in him, he has to know he has to KNOW and I have nothing to tell him, he’s twice as physically fit as I am and four times as knowledgeable, minimum, [...]; so we roll kick scratch, he’s getting cut up quite a bit but of course my skin stays smooth as a baby, you can’t snag an angel on a bloody thorn-bush, you can’t bruise him on a rock. And they have an audience, there are djinns and afreets and all sorts of spooks sitting on the boulders to watch the fight, and in the sky are the three winged creatures, looking like herons or swans or just women depending on the tricks of the light. (SV, 122-3, emphasis original)

The manner in which the Recitation is produced is likened to a wrestling match, a David-vs.-Goliath confrontation between unequal participants, with Mahound, the human prophet, stronger and craftier than Gibreel, the archangel. In a twist of the usual logic, it seems as if Gibreel is a vision imagined by Mahound rather than the other way round: “Mahound’s eyes open wide, he’s seeing some kind of vision, staring at it, oh, that’s right, Gibreel remembers, me. He’s seeing me” (SV, 112).

⁵¹⁹ Yet, it was the Jahilian episode that was at the centre of the controversy surrounding the novel and remains the most commented upon section of the novel, the critical attention it has received being far out of proportion to the small part it occupies within the novel as a whole.

The ambiguous element of their relationship resides in the uncertain identity of Gibreel himself, who is simultaneously the archangel (to which the references to supernatural beings such as djinns, afreets and the three “winged creatures,” who are, in fact, the goddesses Al-Lat, Uzza and Manat allude) and the Indian actor of modern times who dreams he is the archangel. His irruption into his own dream not as his real self but as a multiple identity consisting of his human and archangelic selves and Mahound, whereby he is simultaneously a part of the narrative level and an outsider, a trespasser from a higher diegetic level, represents an aspect of the transgressive aesthetics of the novel, for it cements the uncertainty and ambiguity around which the entire novel revolves. His multiple selves, operating on both diegetic levels – that of the main plot and the various subplots, which constitute his dream-sequences and are therefore (or should be) narratively and ontologically of a lower order – are part and parcel of a narrative logic whereby characters, plots, names, and functions are doubled in one narrative track and then repeated and thus multiplied in another.

In one of the other dream-sequences, Gibreel dreams up “the Imam,” a parallel to Mahound, to whom he also appears as the dual human-archangelic persona, but in this case there is no identification with the prophet-figure, as Gibreel remains ontologically and ideologically antithetical to the Imam. The text leaves open the possibility of the archangel’s existence being imagined rather than real (it is uncertain whether he is summoned or conjured up), which has the effect of reducing his ontological status at the expense of the dreamed-of Imam, who, although a vision like Mahound, attains a higher discursive and performative potency than his dreamer. Here, Gibreel’s impotence and helplessness are made more evident; more than with Mahound, who at least allowed (or enacted internally) a dialogic communication between the two of them, with the Imam he feels like a marionette, compelled to obey him:

He sees himself in the dream: no angel to look at, just a man in his ordinary street clothes [...]. This dream-Gibreel, so like the waking one, stands quaking in the sanctum of the Imam, whose eyes are white as clouds.

Gibreel speaks querulously, to hide his fear.

“Why insist on archangels? Those days, you should know, are gone.” [...] “You don’t need me,” Gibreel emphasises. “The revelation is complete. Let me go.” (SV, 211-2)

The manner in which Ayesha, the third prophetic figure dreamed by Gibreel, receives Gibreel’s revelatory message takes place radically differently from the two previous instances. As we saw,

with Mahound, there was a struggle which could be seen as an internalised dialogue within his consciousness, while Gibreel was a mere marionette to the implacable force of the Imam. With Ayesha, on the other hand, he is a disembodied and barely aware consciousness, asleep even in his dream while she receives her revelation in this dream-within-a-dream from a voice that no longer even comes through his own body:

With Mahound, there is always a struggle; with the Imam, slavery; but with this girl, there is nothing. Gibreel is inert, usually asleep in the dream as he is in life. She comes upon him under a tree, or in a ditch, hears what he isn't saying, takes what she needs, and leaves. What does he know about cancer, for example? Not a solitary thing.

All around him, he thinks as he half-dreams, half-wakes, are people hearing voices, being seduced by words. But not his; never his original material. – Then whose? Who is whispering in their ears, enabling them to move mountains, halt clocks, diagnose disease?

He can't work it out. (SV, 234)

Her claim that the archangel Gibreel has lain with her is immediately contested by the narrator, in whose version the archangel's agency is again nullified, as he is rendered passive by the power of her gaze, making him unsure "what she saw, wings maybe, haloes, the works" (SV, 226). He is disembodied and even his self-perception is by this point fractured. Furthermore, she acquires knowledge of something he has not communicated at all and even her transformation happens without his knowledge, while he is asleep. His very presence is made unreal as the narrator states that she dreamed him beside her. The dreamer-dreamed interplay is again put into play as the text ambiguously makes Gibreel just as much a vision dreamed by Ayesha as she is an oneiric product of his imagination.

It is significant that, in Gibreel's relationship with his dream visions, the agency resides in the dreamed characters, each of whom re-inscribes their creator according to their own needs. The prophet communing with the divine internalises the voice he purports to receive from Allah, the young girl casts him in the role of a suitor who even sings to her to the tunes of popular songs, the religious fanatic "reforms" him into a martyr for his cause.

It is a sign of Rushdie's "antilogical discourse"⁵²⁰ that characters dreamed by another character, who would logically be expected to be ontologically inferior to the "real" character

⁵²⁰ "Through the power of counterdescription asserted by Rushdie's narrator, the reader enters an antilogical world where eristic processes rule supreme and challenge received ideas of established narrative discourse and authority, East and West. The art or operation of 'antilogic' (from the Greek

dreaming them, are raised to the level of the same ontological status as their dreamer to the extent that the differences between them become non-existent. As the imaginative self/dreamer and the fictive/dreamed selves he brings to life in his imagination are intimately connected, the dual direction of the connection, which ensures that each self flows and dissolves into the other(s), drastically destabilises the ontological and narrative levels, as the real and the fictive selves become indistinguishable. Thus, the dreaming Gibreel functions in his dreams as a split dreamed-of persona: in the “reality” of the dream he is the archangel Gibreel transmitting messages to the prophetic figures of Mahound, Ayesha and the Imam, while the consciousness of the divine messenger, as unfolding within the dream itself, is still that of the human, dreaming Gibreel, who reacts to the archangelic expectations imposed upon him with surprise and dismay. Such is the power of the imaginatively created dreamscapes that at times it seems as if the dream sequences are not really dreams but real-life scenarios in which the prophetic figures of Mahound, the Imam and Ayesha really receive messages from the archangel, into whose identity Gibreel, drawing from the collective archetypal unconscious of humanity, unwittingly taps.

The bidirectional creationary connection between author and character, dreamer and vision, creator and creation is evoked by means of the metaphor of the umbilical cord, which, as we saw, is used by the ontologically fluid Gibreel to describe the birth of Mahound’s Recitation. In confirmation of the transgressive aesthetics of the novel, the motif of the umbilical cord, crucial for the novel’s representation of authorship, also transgresses its original Jahilian setting and migrates into Gibreel’s reality by connecting him to Rosa Diamond, in whose house the two protagonists end up after landing on a beach near Hastings. The irruption of Gibreel’s minoritarian, colonised alterity into Rosa’s national(ist) narrative disturbs her serene confidence in the glories of English history – her visions of the Norman conquest represent her as a guardian of English identity – and she finds herself unable to “look her history in the eye” (SV, 153). However, as an archangelic being who has internalised the omniscient position of the divine entity whose emissary he imagines himself to be, he can be said to integrate Rosa’s narrative,

antilogike), attributed primarily to the Sophists, describes very well Rushdie’s discursive tactics. Antilogic, as G. B. Kerferd defines it for us..., ‘consists in causing the same thing to be seen by the same people now as possessing one predicate and now as possessing the opposite or contradictory predicate’... Rushdie’s discourse introduces contrariety and contradiction, challenging the logical, scholastic contention that a thing cannot be and not not be at the same time.” (John Erickson, *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative*, 139)

which is also English national history, into his repertoire of fragments from which his dreams and dreamed/narrativised selves spring forth and Rosa's legacy may be the root of his subsequent obsession with the theme of Englishness. Moreover, the umbilical connection between them, prefiguring his with Mahound, bidirectionally re-fashions them both and in this way Gibreel's presence makes Rosa's memories of her life in Argentina and her passion for Martín de la Cruz spill over into her and his present reality in her home in Hastings. Through him, she narratively experiences her youth anew, "making the last version of the story of her life, unable to decide what she wanted to be true" (SV, 152). The oppositional postcolonial stance, which defines Gibreel as a disruptive, subversive presence in the English imperialist narrative, is thus intermeshed with the narratively transgressive one, whereby Gibreel and Rosa function simultaneously as mutual creators and creations, each re-inventing the other one.

Both as a disruption in the continuous flow of English history and as an imaginary bricoleur fashioning dream-narratives from the fragments of stories he comes across, Gibreel has an almost biological connection to Rosa: he feels a tugging at his abdomen that practically renders him a prisoner of Rosa's narrative magnetism. As we saw, the same almost physical connection as between a mother and a child, bound together with an umbilical cord, defines his relationship with Mahound. The parallel drawn between Gibreel's connection to a person perceived as real (Rosa) and to a fictional one, existing only in his dreams (Mahound), is indicative not only of the transgressive nature of the narrator's discourse, subversive of the differences between narrative levels, but also of the constructed status of the literary character, who is in the same dependent position towards its author as the "real" Gibreel is towards Rosa's "narrative sorcery" and the archangelic Gibreel towards the prophetic figures who use his voice for their own ends.⁵²¹

⁵²¹ Similar imagery of biological conjoining is used in the description of the birth of the religious discourse of the Imam, whose message is transmitted through the voice of his messenger, Bilal X. This, almost organic, transmutation is reminiscent of the umbilical cord dragging Gibreel whenever Mahound summons him: when Bilal's voice emerges from the radio transmitters in Desh, it is "transmuted into the thunderous speech of the Imam himself" (SV, 210), their vocal apparatuses thus becoming conjoined. In the sequence featuring Ayesha, the feminisation of the prophet-figure is troped as sexual impregnation, for Ayesha claims that Gibreel lies with her, an act of eroticised discursive gestation gives birth to a textual "baby" – a purportedly divine revelation – that enacts its own transformative role in the world into which it is left to grow. Taken together, then, the three dream sequences rework corporeal imagery in order to emphasise the gestational and creationary aspect of textual production, charting a dual path for the agonistically born "text." One, as in the Imam's example, entails discursive and ontological sterility: in seeking to suppress, silence and subjugate (the Imam reduces Gibreel to a mere marionette), it has

As Gibreel's real self constantly irrupts into the dreamed Jahilian world, his intervention is described in the language of film, an invasion from the modernity of the protagonist's world into the primal scene he witnesses. Thus, his position resembles that of a camera (at which times he is constantly on the move, floating up or swooping down among his "actors" to capture the best angle) and sometimes that of a spectator (at which times he sits up on Mount Cone and observes Jahilia as if on a screen). Most terrifyingly for him, however, in a further shift, he plays the central role, only not as himself, but by becoming Mahound (i.e. by inhabiting the self that seeks his archangelic guidance), in this way blurring the distinction between the real and the fictive self, i.e. between the one who dreams and the one who is dreamed-of. While awaiting the approaching Mahound, Gibreel experiences "fear of the self his dream creates" (SV, 109), while he is merely "*some idiot actor*" who is expected to play the role of the archangel for a fantasised person who frightens him, his dreamer, with the inexorability of his presence.

It is out of this ontological fusion of dreamer and vision that the satanic verses are born and left to exert their decisive influence on the text. Gibreel's is the point of view of an outsider caught unawares in a compromising situation, almost a case of mistaken identity in which the usurper and the usurped are, paradoxically, one and the same person. Although the voice speaking is that of Gibreel the man, the person Mahound communes with is obviously the archangel, for he reveals an already established relationship with the archangel, referring to miracles performed and even to being in the divine presence of Allah and Moses. In spite of the oneiric and therefore imaginary nature of the episode, the narrator insinuates a factual aspect to it by the sheer force of Mahound's personality, who overwhelms Gibreel, his dreamer, and by the irruption of names and events from the dream in Gibreel's reality. Such is the re-appearance of the Grandee of Jahilia and his wife Hind as the contemporaneous Muhammad Sufyan and his

outright destruction as its inevitable destination. The Imam's cannibalistic gobbling up of the children of his revolution stands for the sterile dead-end of monologic, suppressive and supposedly pure discourses that conform to the oppressive logic of the One. On the other hand, there is the path of discursive fertility, as in Mahound's and Ayesha's cases, which represent the birth of discourse in biological terms, either as a result of sexual impregnation or of an umbilical connection between author and word/text. Seen in this context, the word is to its utterer what the baby is to the mother, both tied together in the unbreakable bonds of parenthood.

wife, also named Hind, whom Gibreel never even meets – the fictive self starts a life independent of its originator/father, which is the ultimate triumph of the creative imagination.

Herein lies the meaningful core of the novel: in its triumphal affirmation of the imaginative world as ontologically stronger than the writer-creator; once it is created, the text does not remain a finished product, enclosed in the frames of the authorial intention, but acquires a life of its own – the newness that enters the world – and incessantly re-creates itself in its afterlife in an endless processuality that generates an endless semiosis of ideas that variously adapt to new circumstances and stay firm when called to account. Like the discontinuous, processual self embraced by Saladin, it inscribes itself into the satanic differential logic of mutability and inconstancy.

On yet another level of “ontological levelling,” the narrator extinguishes his own non-textual reality and equates himself with his fictional characters by materialising in his own text in the guise of “a myopic scrivener,” in front of Gibreel, who is expecting to see God, the source of his angelic mission. By identifying himself as the originator of Gibreel’s visions, he subsumes the religious context within which the dream-sequences operate within his own authorial craft and reveals his own status as the ultimate divinity who, like the God of the Scriptures, suspends his creations between the freedom they have been given to make their own choices and their pre-determined role to act out the scenarios the inscrutable divine Providence has pre-ordained for them.

The appearance of the author as a character in his novel has a dual effect: it reduces him to the level of character and reminds the characters that they do not function as completely free beings. For Gibreel, the awareness of being merely a marionette in other people’s hands (i.e. a character in a novel, which, as we shall see, connects him to *Quichotte’s* Sancho) is brought home in his dreams, where his archangelic avatar is bound by almost tangible strings to the prophetic figures who claim to draw inspiration from him, and ultimately by the narrator, who reveals himself as the God who has set everything in motion and who is the wielder of the “punishment of dreams.”

The distribution of various forms of authorial figures across the multiple narrators and characters culminates, in Gibreel’s vision of the myopic scrivener, in an image of an authorial supra-subject, creator of the text, in whom the human, the divine and the satanic are inextricably amalgamated and sublimated into a complex and composite authorial subjectivity that carries the

emblematic characteristics of all its components: the capacity to partake of all divine categories of the sublime, the ineffable and the transcendental; the disseminating, differential and antagonistic creative spark of Satan, along with his irresistibly seductive rhetoric and vanity; and, finally, the fallible, defective and doubting nature of man, which, in its authorial manifestation, is sufficiently self-flattering to pretend to a sameness with both God and Satan.

Just as Gibreel transgresses the ontological and narrative levels by appearing as an archangelic, ontologically different character in his dreams, so too his own dreamed-of visions reappear under the same or slightly different names but different guises in his own reality/that of the frame plot, strengthening the novel's transgressive aesthetics. For instance, Jahilia's Grandee, Abu Simbel, and his wife Hind reappear in the frame plot, i.e. the diegetic level, as Muhammad and Hind Sufyan, the modern-day proprietors of the Shaandaar Café in London. Significantly, Gibreel never meets them; rather, they provide shelter to the Satan-like Saladin.

By irrupting into his own text as his own, human self, the authorial persona commits another transgression of ontological and narrative levels, because the implied author (the real author's textual self) inhabits the world of his imagination. Ultimately, as the myopic scrivener actually resembles Rushdie's real appearance, this vision is the culmination of the novel's transgressive aesthetics, because in this case it is not an extradiegetic narrator, but the real author who enters into his fictive world, who, paradoxically, in asserting his presence in his own fictional world, destroys his ontological superiority and becomes a fictive self. This completes the chain of authorial alter egos inhabiting the novel: we have the real, extra-textual writer Salman Rushdie appearing as himself and as an amalgam of a human-godlike-satanic persona, who intra-textually divides himself into the dual narrative voice of the traditional omniscient and the satanic narrator, who are themselves doubled: the former can also be identified with the implied author, the consciousness governing the novel as a whole and creating its satanic aesthetics, while the latter can be either a voice adopting Satan's forked tongue or Satan himself. Since this amalgamated authorial figure is, in all its guises, the puppeteer pulling the characters' strings, then it would logically supposed to be the strongest in ontological terms. Yet, as it is merely a vision of Gibreel's and is therefore enveloped in the distanciation effect governing the novel as a whole, rather than a full-blown character/person, it renders its own creation, Gibreel, ontologically stronger, just as Gibreel's own creations – the dreamed-of personas of Mahound, the Imam and Ayesha – were ontologically stronger than him, since they neutralised or

controlled his agency and invaded his own reality with their dreamed presence. In terms of this reversed ontology, in the triple identity they possess (as human/divine/satanic) and the bidirectional creativity they establish with their own “creations,” Gibreel and the authorial persona are assimilable into each other.

The manner in which the myopic scrivener marks his entry into Gibreel’s consciousness and the text itself is reminiscent of Gibreel’s own irruption into his own dreamscapes, whereby he invades the prophets’ consciousness both as himself and as another. The scrivener inscribes the figure of the Author (in fact, of the writer Rushdie himself) within the ontologically and diegetically polylogic structure of the novel. Significantly, it is not an outright metafictional intervention on the part of the author, but a vision of Gibreel’s schizophrenic mind, which serves a dual purpose: on the one hand, to serve as a distancing and derealisation effect, undermining its “real”-ness and emphasising its psychological nature; on the other, the opposite effect of being ontologically more powerful than Gibreel’s real self, making the author – or better, this vision of him – ontologically stronger than the person having the vision, and therefore putting him on a par with Mahound, the Imam and Ayesha. In this latter aspect, the vision serves as a strategy for again putting into play the bidirectional process of creation between creator-creation, whereby each both produces and is a product of the other. Therefore, the author, who according to his logic manifests himself as a psychic projection of his character, makes of his characters his own alter egos, a multitude of fictive authorial selves who, in addition to their doubles and namesakes, already contain a fragment of the authorial identity, an additional layer of multiplication of identities. Thus, by means of the vision of the scrivener, which grafts the idea of authorship onto the already explored ideas of (un)bendingness, (dis)continuities, etc., the text pluralises and problematises its own dichotomies and thereby posits a satanic aesthetics that reads the text – in fact, itself – against the grain. That this is so is corroborated by the fact that this vision cannot be identified either as the satanic narrator or Satan himself: the language and attitude reveal a different entity altogether, who is not the rhetorically seductive satanic voice flouting its power, but rather a reticent, irritable figure who, like Gibreel, has become an unwilling interloper into his own imaginarium.

The confusion and loss of self that such an understanding of creativity entails is referred to as a Chinese box of layers of consciousness in which the distinction between reality levels is non-existent: “Sometimes when he sleeps Gibreel becomes aware, without the dream, of himself

sleeping, of himself dreaming his own awareness of his dream, and then a panic begins” (SV, 92). This agonistic view of creation inscribes the creating self into the open-endedness and unfinalizability that Bakhtin saw as the defining characteristics of the polyphonic novel. Bakhtin defined Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novels as containing a “*plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses... with equal rights and each with its own world, [that] combine but are not merged in the unity of the event,*” that displace the traditional novelistic world of “a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness.”⁵²² Rushdie’s own brand of polyphonic, internally transgressive, novel presents the authorial consciousness in order to liken and diffuse it into the multiply doubled and multiplied selves of its protagonist, who is himself split and splintered into the many selves he creates in his own fictional/dreamed world. It is not so much that this authorial consciousness renders its characters “*not only objects of authorial discourse [and] also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse,*”⁵²³ but that it reduces its own ontological superiority to the same level as that of its characters, with the result that author and characters function on essentially equal terms within the text.⁵²⁴ As a result, the novel functions as a heterarchy, a multilayered structure in which the logical ontological and epistemological hierarchy is destabilised and rendered meaningless, as everything permeates and is permeated by its difference/Others.

If, as Kundera says, Gibreel is inseparable from his dream-visions, which contain his identity potentialities and which represent different facets of his own subjectivity,⁵²⁵ then by

⁵²² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 6, emphasis original. On the same page, Bakhtin further emphasises the discursive strength of Dostoevsky’s characters by stating that he, “like Goethe’s Prometheus, creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus), but *free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him.”

⁵²³ Bakhtin, 7, emphasis original.

⁵²⁴ This is what Dostoevsky achieved, according to Bakhtin, but by taking a different route – that of elevating or constructing the character’s consciousness as fully autonomous, not subjected to the author’s, rather always containing within itself its own authentic content, which may elude the author. “Thus the new artistic position of the author with regard to the hero in Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel is a *fully realised and thoroughly consistent dialogic position*, one that affirms the independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminacy of the hero. For the author the hero is not ‘he’ and not ‘I’ but a fully valid ‘thou,’ that is, another and other autonomous ‘I (‘thou art’).” (Bakhtin, 63, emphasis original) While Dostoevsky elevates his characters as consciousnesses equal to that of the author, who is thereby only one voice among many and is never a transcendental, omniscient being, in Rushdie’s novel the author’s consciousness reduces itself ontologically and represents itself as that of a fictional character.

⁵²⁵ Milan Kundera, “The Day Panurge No Longer Makes People Laugh,” *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 2: 44.

extending Kundera's argument, we can claim that the author reveals himself through his own creations, who are all his alter egos and avatars. Seen as artistic manifestations, the two protagonists can be interpreted as embodiments of different authorial sensibilities. Gibreel resembles an omnipresent author, inhabiting his dreamed characters' selves, a godlike figure schizophrenically divided into fragments. He attempts to create *ex nihilo* through visions of beginnings,⁵²⁶ by embracing the archangelic subtext entailing a preternatural consciousness and by a re-siting of religion within the province of textuality, which he wrings away from the prophet's authority and gives over into the hands of the scribe Salman (the analogy between the Jahilian scribe and the myopic scrivener is inescapable, as they both have the same profession and go under the same name – Salman).

Gibreel is the demented author who is lost in the world of his own text, the exalted apotheosed writer who has lost control over his creations, as Rushdie will eventually do, unable to impose order on the creative chaos. Therefore, when he appeals to God, whom he imagines to be the source of his creativity, in his frustration he manages to see a writer like himself. Two principles are at work in his characterisation: the erasure of his agency, evident in his pronounced passivity and disassociation from the prophetic figures claiming to be inspired by him, and the singularity of discursive dissemination, evident in his appropriation of both the angelic and the satanic discourses. These two tendencies are seemingly opposed to each other, but they serve the common purpose of constructing his schizophrenic, multiple, hallucinatory self into a prototype for the narrator-author, who is also the source of "the statement and the repudiation, verses and converses, universes and reverses" (SV, 123). The endless proliferation of his selves – his duality with Saladin, the countless deities he represented on film, all the

⁵²⁶ Before being plunged into the first dream-sequence about the birth of Islam, Gibreel "sees beginnings," other originary scenes he stumbles upon that might potentially kindle his imagination: the driving of Shaitan from paradise and his singing "soft seductive verses" in Hell with "his daughters" Lat, Manat and Uzza, Gibreel's revealing of the spring of Zamzam to Hagar the Egyptian, and later also to "Muttalib of the scarlet tents", Mahound's grandfather (SV, 91). These, however, fail to grow into the vivid narratives that his three subsequent dreams become. The mention of the unexplored "beginnings" serves the purpose of dramatising the predicament of any creationary act, be it God's creation of the world or an artist's creation of a work of art: how to begin "despite the tyranny of starting a work *in medias res*, a convention that burdens the beginning with the pretense that it is not one." (Edward Said, *Beginnings*, 43) As the novel embraces both an otherworldly imaginative landscape peopled by angelic and satanic forces in their respective roles of representative of or antagonistic to the divine essence and a worldly one experiencing a similar ontological and ethical uncertainty, the search for stable meaning and buttresses for identity is revealed to be as equally futile as the search for God.

characters featuring in his dreams, his dual identity as a man and angel, etc. – create a postmodernist pantheistic subjectivity that Rushdie claims for the author and his creation, the literary work.

Saladin is an embodiment of the balanced, controlled creative imagination, or, as Jacqueline Bardolph describes him, “the rational, worldly aspect of the artist and exile.”⁵²⁷ As opposed to Gibreel’s enmeshment in the world of his imagination, wherein he functions as a failed Daedalus incapable of creating his way out of the imaginative labyrinth, Saladin gradually overcomes the symbolic and enters the register of the Real. Saladin’s personal regeneration starts with his emancipation from the seductiveness of the satanic verses, whereas Gibreel’s staying in thrall to them causes his tragedy and seals his inability to transcend the symbolic register and enter into the Real. This is evident in their contrasted attitudes to the magical lamp in Saladin’s father’s house – initially a symbol of the endless possibilities of the wondrous in life, on his return to India Saladin takes away its symbolic potential and relocates it in his relationship with his father. Having finally acquired the right to possess the magic lamp, he completes his process of regeneration by attributing magical qualities not to the object itself, but to the beauty of his and his father’s last days together and to the serene sublimity of his father’s death:

Yes, this looked like the start of a new phase, in which the world would be solid and real, and in which there was no longer the broad figure of a parent standing between himself and the inevitability of the grave. An orphaned life, like Muhammad’s; like everyone’s. A life illuminated by a strangely radiant death, which continued to glow, in his mind’s eye, like a sort of magic lamp. (SV, 534)

Gibreel, on the other hand, is unable to cling to the real and succumbs to the overwhelming power of his dreams and his dream-induced false identities when in a last thrall to “satanic verses,” he kills Allie “for the crime of being human / especially female” (SV, 544) and commits suicide in front of Saladin, after rubbing his magic lamp, out of which materialises not a wish-fulfilling genie, but a revolver. The narrativised self/selves invade(s) the real and, in so doing, bring(s) not the infinite, as in the stereotypical reach of the imagination, but finitude/finality/death. Gibreel kills his beloved because of the irruption of the dream, of the imaginary, into his consciousness – significantly, the verses inciting him to murder come from

⁵²⁷ Jacqueline Bardolph, “Language is Courage,” in *Reading Rushdie*, ed. Fletcher, 213.

his own internal Other, from his dreamed-of Satan, not Saladin. The lamp, which for Saladin is the promise of redemption, for Gibreel is a curse and a road to perdition, another negative manifestation of a magical symbol, like Rekha flying on a magical carpet.

Saladin's return to India sees his embracing of Zeeny as his spiritual "muse" presiding over his regeneration and in her intellectual circle of friends, who are passionately involved in the cultural and political processes in their country, he finally finds "his own people."⁵²⁸ Gathering his creative material into a coherent whole, he becomes Salahuddin – the reclaiming of his name being an indicator of his reclaimed identity, his attainment of subjectivity after being subjected to alien narratives – serving as the ethical core around which the layers of a self-in-becoming, continuous in its discontinuities, would revolve. Incapable of learning from his dreams, Gibreel becomes an unbending idea himself, an indiscriminate interpreter whose hermeneutical illiteracy stems from his insistence on clear ethical and epistemic essences, a worldview that, in the religious subtext of his dreams, is read as a slavish submission to established dominant discourses – the tyranny of the One: the one god, the one unambiguous meaning, the literality of the word and the world. The novel equates Gibreel's hermeneutical slavishness, which reduces him to the level of a mere marionette, to the angels' lack of will and submission to the rule of God, whereas Saladin's ability to muster his multiple selves into a coherent whole and thus master the narrative of his own life is likened to the active and epistemologically nourishing principle represented by Satan, who ultimately becomes a paragon for the creative artist.

To conclude, Rushdie's novel exhibits the Dostoevskyan literary landscape of multi-voiced consciousnesses, which are invaded by others both horizontally, within the same plot, and vertically, across plots and narrative levels, by those of the character's double(s), dreamed-of alter egos or visions, always being simultaneously Othered by the lurking of the satanic voice whispering satanic verses. The crossovers between the variously dialogised and split consciousnesses are thus inflected by echoes and traces from different spatio-temporal imaginative worlds, with London/Babylondon, Bombay, Argentina, Jahilia, Titlipur and the

⁵²⁸ Zeeny provides a way out for Saladin by forging in him a new attitude towards the city – to become one with it – and he finally embraces his native country and its inhabitants, symbolised by the human chain that is to be formed "from the Gateway of India to the outermost northern suburbs of the city, in support of 'national integration'" (SV, 537) and in which he is to participate as a sign of his cultural regeneration.

Imam's phantasmagoric Jerusalem/Desh staging their cultural interaction through the ontological one of the characters. Everybody and everything is locked in its internal contradictoriness, ambivalence, semantic polysemy and uncertainty. The co-existence and contemporaneity of distinct temporalities, geographies and consciousnesses imparts a conceptual and interpretive complexity to the novel, because its various doublings, echoes and splittings multiply its system of signification and preclude an overarching interpretation. The transgressive interpenetration of narrative levels radically refracts and re-signifies the system of representation created within the distinct levels, enforcing their comparative and relational interpretation.

In the following section, I will focus on the migration of discourses, metaphors, names and phenomena between the narrative levels to show to what uses Rushdie puts the postcolonial strategy of appropriation.

2. Decolonising Transgression: (Mis)Appropriations, Blasphemy

Ashcroft *et al.* postulate two processes whereby the coloniser's language can be deconstructed and decolonised: by abrogation of "the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning 'inscribed' in the words"; and appropriation, implying the reconstitution of the language of the centre, its dethronement as a dictator of experience and remoulding it to reflect one's own cultural experience.⁵²⁹ Roberto Fernández Retamar mentions an example of a linguistic deconstruction whereby ideologically inflected elements of language are reconstituted in order to give them new, purified usage, emptied of negative connotations:

The most venerated word in *Cuba – mambí* – was disparagingly imposed on us by our enemies at the time of the war for independence, and we still have not totally deciphered its meaning. It seems to have an African root, and in the mouth of the Spanish colonists implied the idea that all *independentistas* were so many black slaves – emancipated by the very war for independence – who of course constituted the bulk of the liberation army. The *independentistas*, white and black, adopted with honor something that colonialism meant as an insult. This is the dialectic of Caliban. To offend us they call us

⁵²⁹ Bill Ashcroft *et al.*, *The Empire Writes Back*, 37.

mambi, they call us *Black*; but we reclaim as a mark of glory the honor of considering ourselves descendants of the *mambí*, descendants of the rebel, runaway, *independentista* Black – *never* descendants of the slave holder.⁵³⁰

The “dialectic of Caliban,” i.e. the usage of the coloniser’s language by postcolonial authors to articulate their own experience, also entails finding their own way back to the discourse of the repressed mother, Sycorax. The dialectic of Caliban abrogates the pejorative semantics of the imperial discourse and re-inscribes it in a positive way, which testifies to the postcolonial author’s ideological distancing from the centre and his identification with his postcolonial legacy. Only in this sense can we speak of the creation of a new, Adamic language in postcolonial literature, which implies deconstructing the colonised elements in language and their rearticulation not in neutral, but in semantically ennobled, units of discourse.

The absence of God in both the worldly and the otherworldly plots of *The Satanic Verses* signifies the impossibility of a creation *ex nihilo*, in lieu of which is posited the translation of cultural meanings – a metaphoric translation, which is also an aspect of migrancy. Elleke Boehmer highlights the metaphoric aspect of the colonial enterprise, whereby the new was interpreted and represented by means of

the familiarity of the symbolic languages used: the dialogue with a known and translatable text. This in part is what is meant when colonialist discourse critics point out that, travelling to the outer regions of the world, Europeans were confronted with nothing so much as an image of themselves. As well as spoils, they brought back from their journeys writings, descriptions circumscribed by the way they understood the world.⁵³¹

In other words, cultural encounter engenders phenomena and subjectivities that are formed as a result of the dialectic between the meanings produced by the clash of the known and the unknown, the new is rendered knowable by its very insertion into the already existing cognitive apparatus of an individual or a culture. By announcing his presence and usurping the omniscient and omnipotent position of God, the narrator in this novel translates the symbolically and culturally charged meanings of dominating discourses (religion, nationalism, racism) into the

⁵³⁰ Roberto Fernández Retamar, “Caliban: Notes towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America,” trans. Lynn Garafola, David Arthur McMurray and Robert Márquez, *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1/2, Caliban (Winter - Spring, 1974): 27-8.

⁵³¹ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 46.

domain of literature and from this conjoining of the sanctioned and the fictionally re-inscribed meanings arises the textual newness of the novel.

The multiple repetitions and parallelisms, distributed over several plotlines of a different diegetic status, with which the novel abounds, testify to the narrator's exploration of the dissemination of ideas and concepts across spatio-temporal and epistemic coordinates. Here, my focus will be on names and the strategy of naming operative in the novel. I aim to show how it is only by means of the transgressive distribution of the names of Mahound and Ayesha across the narrative levels that the novel's supposed blasphemy is diluted and their revered names ennobled in Retamar's sense.

Naming is instrumental to "solidifying and objectifying experience" by "enabling us to create entities practically out of nothing."⁵³² The insistent repetition of names in the novel points to the numerous reactivations of the semantic and cultural charge they carry. The very setting of the first dream sequence in the indicatively named city – "*jahilia*" designates the state of ignorance before the advent of Islam – points to an epistemic neutral ground as a conceptual centre from which names and meanings migrate in proliferating contexts wherein they evolve as "ideas" (this episode is even chronologically marked as "pre-," namely pre-Islamic, in relation to which all the rest are structured as post- [the other two dream sequences are post-jahilian, i.e. Islamic, while the frame plot is postcolonial/postimperial]), which points to a consistent politics of abrogation and appropriation.

That names are ontologically determinating is corroborated by Mahound's words when he expunges the satanic verses: "Shall He have daughters and you sons?... That would be a fine division! These are but names you have dreamed of, you and your fathers. Allah vests no authority in them" (SV, 124). In other words, unnamed, the goddesses abandon the conceptual horizon in which they figured and become non-entities, relegated to oblivion. Thus, after wrestling with Gibreel and obtaining the desired confirmation, he rushes back to the city to "expunge the foul verses that reek of brimstone and sulphur, to strike them from the record for ever and ever, so that they will survive in just one or two unreliable collections of old traditions and orthodox interpreters will try and unwrite their story" (SV, 123). Abrogated from the sacred text, the goddesses are de-normalised and demonised; yet, they are revived and reappropriated

⁵³² Dwight Bolinger, quoted in Chidi Okonkwo, *Decolonisation Agonistics in Postcolonial Fiction* (London and New York: Macmillan Press and St. Martin's Press, 1999), 68.

in the text of the novel in much more significant ways than the mere apocryphal memory to which Mahound relegates them.

Thus, Al-Lat reappears throughout the text not as a descriptive décor, but as a crucial reincarnation of female assertion and an agent propelling the plot. The goddess materialising out of the body of empress Ayesha, although vanquished by the Imam (acting through Gibreel), exerts her power as History by invalidating the Imam's triumph, who is promptly dissolved from the plot. As soon as the "commencement of the Untime of the Imam" (SV, 215) is announced, the dream sequence ends. Appearing before the dying Mahound, who, contrary to his former dismissive attitude, acknowledges her presence, she inscribes herself into the origin of Islam as the text hints at her being the possible source of Mahound's revelation:

And the lamp blew out; and in the darkness Mahound asked: "Is this sickness then thy doing, O Al-Lat?"

And she said: "It is my revenge upon you, and I am satisfied. Let them cut a camel's hamstrings and set it on your grave."

Then she went, and the lamp that had been snuffed out burst once more into a great and gentle light, and the Messenger murmured, "Still, I thank Thee, Al-Lat, for this gift."
(SV, 394)

Finally, the articulation of her name during Gibreel's and Saladin's fall activates their transformation and self-reinvention: as he falls, Gibreel hears "verses in a language he did not understand, all harshnesses and sibilance, in which he thought he made out, but maybe not, the repeated name *Al-Lat*" (SV, 8).

The name "Ayesha" also figures prominently in the novel and stages numerous (mis)appropriations of its original aura of sacredness (as a wife of the Prophet, she is one of the "mothers of the believers"): first, in the desacralising parody of the prostitute assuming her name and identity; then, as a powerful emblem of History as opposed to the tyrannical timelessness of the Imam in her reappearance as the empress of Desh; and lastly, as an ambivalent embodiment of both the sacred and the demonic in the character of the Titlipurian prophetess. Interestingly, her name already contains its own difference in its "origin" as the name of Mahound's favourite wife: whenever she is mentioned in the Jahilian episode, her character is wholly focalised through the disillusioned prism of the apostasised Salman. Refracted through the gaze of Islam's Other, she comes across as a petulant and infantile woman vexed at the way the religion of

“submission” relegates her to a subordinate position *vis-à-vis* her husband. However, in the scene of the dying Mahound, this characterisation is radically overturned. The triumph at the end of the Jahilian episode is paradoxically carried both by Al-Lat and by Ayesha’s dignified affirmation of the “idea” of Mahound and Islam. Facing the crowd after Mahound’s death, she says, “If there be any here who worshipped the Messenger, let them grieve, for Mahound is dead; but if there be any here who worship God, then let them rejoice, for He is surely alive” (SV, 394) and thereby affirms herself as a religious and historical subject, outgrowing the identity of a jealous child-bride. Two processes are interwoven here, carrying the novel’s ambivalent aesthetics: on the one hand, Al-Lat’s triumph and Mahound’s attitude of resigned intimacy towards her marks the unearthing of the repressed memory of the satanic verses (and the suppression of the female principle they effected), which, thus resurrected, continue to exist as traces in the subsequent history of Islam and of ideas in general; on the other hand, Ayesha’s words, the first and only ones she utters directly in the novel, mark the triumph of the opposite principle, that of Mahound’s revelation/Islam, which paradoxically gains a confirmation of its own validity at a moment of failure, i.e. the death of its prophet.

By turning a defeat into a victory, the text here seems to follow an ideology of decolonisation, explicitly embraced by the narrator when he explains the choice of the name “Mahound” – “a dream-name, changed by [Gibreel’s] vision”, in which

he is neither Mahomet nor MoeHammered; has adopted, instead, the demon-tag the farangis hung around his neck. To turn insults into strengths, whigs, Tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn; likewise, our mountain-climbing, prophet-motivating solitary is to be the medieval baby-frightener, the Devil’s synonym: Mahound. (SV, 93)

Rushdie has received harsh criticism for his blasphemous choice of name, which is neither the revered “Muhammad,” nor Dante’s “Mahometo,” but the Othered name Mahound, used in medieval times to refer denigratingly to Muhammad as a satanic figure. The overall portrayal of Mahound in the Jahilian chapters largely fails to yield a positive picture of this revered religious figure. Both the narrator and Salman, from whose perspective the rise of Islam is largely represented in these chapters, portray Mahound primarily as a crafty businessman negotiating his place in society rather than as a truly inspired prophet reshaping the dissolute Jahilian society into a pious and righteous one. Initially, true belief is made to reside in his first followers, who

object to the Grandee's proposal to integrate the three goddesses into their worship of Allah, while Mahound weighs in the odds, calculates and in the end compromises his faith. When Mahound announces to the congregation of Jahilians that Gibreel has approved the three goddesses, which is followed by the city's embracing of Islam, the narrative voice describes this as "the desolating triumph of the businessman" (SV, 115). While it registers no emotion on Mahound's face, it describes Khalid's running into the desert, disillusioned, with tears in his eyes: "his teardrops, as he ran, burn holes in the earth, as if they contain some harsh corrosive acid. Mahound remains motionless. No trace of moisture can be detected on the lashes of his unopened eyes" (SV, 115). The negative portrayal of Mahound ties in with the negative portrayal of Islam, which, as Anshuman Mondal argues,

is here figured as an exception to the text's principle of historical development through hybridity. It is the one-in-a-hundred phenomenon where the ethic of purity establishes itself, survives and even thrives. However, this essentialises Islam as a system of belief that is "outside" history... For if newness does enter the world through "conjoining" and "hotch-potch," a "bit-of-this and a bit-of-that," then Islam's "purity" speaks to an inability to accommodate the plurality and multiplicity on which such a process depends.⁵³³

Steven Connor also emphasises that

the revelation of Islam is shown as a violent, transfiguring cleavage of the historical world of changing human interests by the absolute truth of divine knowledge, which confronts the shifting impermanence of the commercial city of Jahilia, built on sand and vulnerable to the dissolving effects of water, with the terrifying intransigence of a faith that tolerates no admixture of error or impurity.⁵³⁴

Furthermore, Rushdie adroitly defuses the angelic-satanic dilemma of the Islamic revelation, imposed by the "satanic verses," by providing the political prelude that led to the occurrence of the verses in the first place. As represented in the novel, they are not a satanic intervention into the purity of an otherwise pristinely divine revelation but a political machination to ensure a very

⁵³³ Anshuman Mondal, "Revisiting *The Satanic Verses*: The *Fatwa* and Its Legacies," in *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Robert Eaglestone and Martin McQuillan, 67.

⁵³⁴ Steven Connor, *The English Novel in History: 1950-1995* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 114.

earthly power and prestige, both for the Grandee and Mahound. It is only later that the pragmatic Mahound produces the verses allowing the worship of the goddesses as if they were from the archangel, only to attribute satanic authorship to them soon afterwards, in this way confirming his portrayal as more “*profit-motivated rather than prophet-motivated.*”⁵³⁵

However, I would like to argue that the recuperative decolonising strategy of (mis)appropriating discourses is articulated transgressively, i.e. across the narrative levels and the subplots themselves rather than within them. Mahound as a religious figure is “recuperated” by a comparison with his later incarnations, the Imam and Ayesha. Mahound’s ambiguous portrayal in the novel precludes a final judgement to be made regarding his prophetic mission: on the one hand, he is devoid of spirituality and has a suspiciously businesslike approach to the ethics of his religion; on the other hand, he is the only prophetic figure who is locked in an agonistic struggle with Gibreel as to the spirit of the revelation, suggesting a sincere concern about his prophethood. The fluid subjectivity of Mahound/Gibreel suggests an internalisation of the divine principle on Mahound’s part and a unique intimacy with God.

Unlike Mahound, the Imam does not experience the need to engage in ideological speculations. As far as he is concerned, the formative aspect of Islam has been sealed with and by Muhammad and his only mission is to bring about his Islamic revolution against the hedonistic empress, time and History. His credo, as voiced through his *muezzin* Bilal, is “Burn the books and trust the Book; shred the papers and hear the Word, as it was revealed by the Angel Gibreel to the Messenger Mahound and explicated by your interpreter and Imam” (SV, 211). Although it echoes Mahound’s inimical stance towards the literary interventions of Salman and Baal, it has nothing of Mahound’s internal struggle as to the authenticity and purity of his prophethood.

Ayesha is similarly untroubled by the ethical implications of her mission and never questions what it is exactly that the archangel requires of her and the villagers. Initially, the *hajj* to Mecca inspired by her takes place under the sign of the miraculous, which is represented by the butterflies that mark Ayesha as a spiritual figure (from the moment of her communion with Gibreel, she is wholly enveloped in them and they even constitute her entire diet) and protectively form a cloud above the villagers of Titlipur throughout their journey, enveloping them in an aura of mysticism and divine approval. Butterflies are usually identified with the soul

⁵³⁵ Clark, *Stranger Gods*, 169.

and Ayesha's special connection to them suggests a deep and sincere spirituality to her conviction and the pilgrimage she leads. Seen outside of its religious framework, the Ayesha episode dramatises the power of discourse to defamiliarise reality and estrange the ordinary by investing it with transcendental meaning. Thus, the *hajj* manages to neutralise the differences (manifested in the sharp class and caste divisions among the villagers) and ennoble their drab existences by transforming them all into divinely-protected pilgrims. Ultimately, it even achieves the improbable feat of transmuting their failure (in the end, the Arabian Sea does not part as they were promised by the Archangel/Ayesha and they drown in its waters, never reaching Mecca) into a figurative triumph: their literal demise is the object of envy on the part of the survivors – all the skeptics and non-believers who did not plunge into the sea – who claim that the waters did indeed part and they all walked across to Mecca!

Yet, it is significant that the motif of the parting of the sea, which maintains an analogy with Moses and the episode of the Book of Exodus in the Bible, while bolstering Ayesha's enterprise, is ultimately also used to discredit it. When in the later stage of the *hajj* she is consulted as to whether a newborn baby has been born in devilment or not, she and the local imam (an indicative pairing that implicitly joins two of the oneiric prophetic protagonists) approve the baby's stoning. At this point, the narrator states that "the crowd part[s] like the sea" (SV, 496) to make way for her and the imam to approach the baby, an act of cruelty that fosters doubt in her own followers. By now, the phrase she has been using like a refrain ever since her first encounter with the angel – "Everything will be required of us, and everything will be given to us also" – has become a presage of doom and has sealed her inscription in the negative, which replaces the positive, regenerative imagery with its destructive opposite.

While all three prophets exert religious authority by claiming to be the receivers of a divine revelation, Mahound is the only one who engages in an internal dialogue with the divine that he, like Blake's Isaiah, finds immanent in himself. Ultimately, it is in the contrast between him and the cold and almost inhumane religiosity of the other two prophetic figures in the novel that Mahound comes across as a character who can effect a recuperative reconfiguration of the meaning of Islam.

Similarly, the "blasphemous" choice of the name "Mahound," as the narrator claims, springs from the contemporary postcolonial context, that of Britain of the 1980s, which is in the novel represented as a racist, bigoted society oppressing its immigrant minorities. To counter the

belittling semantics of the insulting tags – “whigs, tories, Blacks” – their carriers appropriate them and turn them into “strengths,” giving them an ennobling connotation. The strategy of re-naming or re-signification has as its aim a radical restructuring of the (self-)perception of the concerned groups; once this is achieved, an overall change in society, one based on equality and emancipation, is inevitable. The politically volatile scene into which Saladin stumbles into London is precisely that of impending change in British society, with immigrants, mostly from the former colonies, repudiating white society’s colonialist worldview in favour of a truly decolonised one. We saw how the satanic Saladin was appropriated by these groups and turned into a potent symbol of resistance against the establishment. To quote again Mishal’s triumphant words to the reluctant Saladin: “[the satanic, i.e. immigrant, Other is] an image white society has rejected for so long that we can really take it, you know, occupy it, inhabit it, reclaim it and make it our own” (SV, 287).

The narrator places his choice of the name “Mahound” in this contemporary context and in such a comparative framework along the vertical axis, i.e. transgressively, across the narrative levels, it does function as a positive re-evaluation of its originally negative semantics. In this way, the novel’s supposed blasphemy is somewhat diffused and Muhammad/Islam can be incorporated within the novel’s postcolonial agenda of “turning insults into strengths.”

3. *The Satanic Verses* and Its Creationary Ideal

The ideal of hybridity championed in the novel’s ending brings into question the dichotomies unfolding through the novel, explicitly posited as such by the narrator, satanic or otherwise. As opposed to the satanic narrator, who espouses the satanic logic that has been amply analysed in the previous sections, there is the implied narrator, “the governing consciousness of the work as a whole, the source of the norms embodied in the work,” who advocates different values and who may be the source of the novel’s satanic aesthetics, for it poses itself as undermining the satanic logic of the satanic narrator. In the context of *The Satanic Verses*, the implied author can be either regarded as stemming from the omniscient narrator, that other narratorial voice serving

as a counterforce to the satanic narrator, or as, in Wayne Booth's terms, "the author's second self,"⁵³⁶ giving an expression to Rushdie's artistic and cultural philosophy.

Since the novel's aim is, according to Rushdie, to produce dissent and destabilise the stagnant and atrophying dominant structures of political and discursive power, the ideas of transformation, the fusion of the old and the new out of which newness renews the world, movement and dynamism permeate *The Satanic Verses* and are championed as ideals on the metaphysical, cultural, personal, ethical and aesthetic levels. The metaphors of the mirror and the refracted fragmentary vision are the dominant prisms through which these ideals are perceived; the motifs of the fall and its opposite, ascent, symbolise the bidirectional movement marking the trajectory of the "ideas" as they migrate across space and time.

With the satanic principle as an integral part of the Logos (both divine and profane) and therefore of the creative principle as such, the novel grafts the theological dilemma of the nature of the Creator and his relationship with his creation onto the aesthetic plane, drawing parallels between the logocentric theological and the fictional artistic ("versificatory") principles as both infused with the satanic logic, which functions as "diversificatory." Bearing in mind this analogy between divine and artistic creation and creators, I would like to suggest that the theological discourse is appropriated in the novel not only to historicise and bring into question religion and religious faith, but to explore authorship: to posit the Author as analogous to God and to shed light on the relation author/text through the theological prism of the relation Creator/creation.

Bakhtin found an explanation of Rabelais' carnevalesque aesthetics in the philosophy of his time: the Renaissance debunking of the theological truths and the established order by means of a folkloric-carnevalesque destabilisation and laughter.⁵³⁷ As a subversive poetics, Rabelais'

⁵³⁶ Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 89. Rimmon-Kenan emphasises the importance of distinguishing not only between the narrator and the implied author, but also between the implied and the real author: "An author may embody in a work ideas, beliefs, emotions other than or even quite opposed to those he has in real life; he may also embody different ideas, beliefs and emotions in different works. Thus while the flesh-and-blood author is subject to the vicissitudes of real life, the implied author of a particular work is conceived as a stable entity, ideally consistent with itself within the work. Distinct from the real author, the implied author also differs from the narrator[...] Thus, while the narrator can only be defined circularly as the narrative voice' or 'speaker' of a text, the implied author is – in opposition and by definition – voiceless and silent. In this sense the implied author must be seen as a construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text. Indeed, speaking of the implied author as a construct based on the text seems to me far safer than imagining it as a personified consciousness or 'second self'" (89-90).

⁵³⁷ As Bakhtin states, the medieval world picture followed the Aristotelian hierarchy whereby the earthly world was composed of four elements – earth, water, air, and fire – ordered from top to bottom according

carnevalesque becomes satanic differentiation and diversification in Rushdie, pivoting around inconstance, becoming, incompleteness and processuality. The ideas of creation, explored on a metaphysical level, express a cultural-philosophical formation that analogically can be applied to artistic creation. Thus, the ancient conception of the creator of the universe was that of an immutable being whose agency gave birth to a rational and orderly universe. Plato's Demiurge semantically approximates God to an "artisan/craftsman" in *Timaeus*, who, "imitating an unchanging and eternal model, imposes mathematical order on a preexistent chaos to generate the ordered universe (*kosmos*)"; this result is "not fortuitous, but the outcome of the deliberate intent of Intellect." The human soul, in its innermost nature, strives to understand and to emulate this model of the beautifully ordered universe; "such understanding and emulation restores those souls to their original state of excellence, a state that was lost in their embodiment."⁵³⁸ The Demiurge does not create the world *ex nihilo* but fashions it out of the available material of chaos; he is not a creator as in the monotheistic religions, but merely "a subordinate god who fashions and arranges the physical world to make it conform to a rational and eternal ideal." In the dualistic Gnostic tradition, the Demiurge was "one of the forces of evil, who was responsible for the creation of the despised material world and was wholly alien to the supreme God of goodness."⁵³⁹ Aristotle's concept of God is that of an Unmoved Mover, Being itself, eternal, unchangeable, immobile,

to their nature and movement. Nearest to the centre of the cosmos was the earth as the heaviest element, then water and air next to it, with fire at the end as the element tending upwards and therefore moving in the opposite direction from the earth, whose defining movement is the fall, as any part separated from it tends to fall back to it. The basic principle of all phenomena in the earthly world is transformation – the transformation of one element into the the one next to it. This transformation is the law of creation and destruction to which all earthly things are subject. Above the earthly world, however, there is the world of the celestial bodies, composed of a different matter, *quinata essentia* ("quintessence"), which is not subject to transformation. Celestial bodies, in Aristotle's view, embody perfection because they are not subject to change and are endowed with pure movement only – the circular movement around the centre of the earth. Since the hierarchy was conceived vertically, with regard to the element's position in space, from the lowest to the highest, with the latter valued above the former, the conceptions of the higher and the lower stratum dominated the medieval worldview. With the Renaissance, these become relative and the focus is transferred to the horizontal plane, with "forward" and "backward" (the temporal movement from the past to the future) as the dominant movements. The human body becomes the relative centre of the cosmos, while the new conception of perfection is no longer Aristotle's immutable circularity, but the process of free becoming, of man's development in history by triggering the many possibilities planted in him at birth, a radically new humanistic ideology that found its best expression in Pico della Mirandola's speech, *Oratio de hominis dignitate*. (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 362-4)

⁵³⁸ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/>.

⁵³⁹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Demiurge>.

pure thought, at one and the same time thinker and thought, engaged in an eternal moment of contemplation of himself, the highest object of knowledge. Since matter is flawed and mortal, there is no material element in God or the highest grades of being. The Unmoved Mover causes all the motion and activity in the universe, since each movement must have a cause that can be traced back to a single source. He activates the world by a process of attraction, since all beings are drawn towards Being itself.⁵⁴⁰

The static, changeless and rationalist divine conception of the ancient Greeks corresponded to a worldview that saw

movement and change as signs of inferior reality: something that had true identity remained always the same, characterised by permanence and immutability. The most perfect motion, therefore, was the circle because it was perpetually turning and returning to its original point.⁵⁴¹

Man is part of the mutable physical world, but, being a microcosm of the whole universe, also has the divine gifts of intellect and wisdom (*sophia*), and therefore, by engaging in contemplation (*theoria*) of philosophical truth, can partake of the divine nature. The ancient concept of God thus posited a perfect, immutable and contemplative being as the fashioner/craftsman of the universe. Significantly, he was not the creator of the universe, which either emanated spontaneously from the Prime Mover or was shaped by the Demiurge by drawing on a previous model, therefore merely imitating a previous act of true creation.

The antithetical conception of God, one on which the monotheistic religions are based, would be of God as engaged in creation *ex nihilo*, whereby his prerogative is to engage in creation/becoming, as opposed to simply being. Such a God also inevitably became anthropomorphic – he was created in man’s own image, experiencing the very human emotions of anger and jealousy, becoming involved in the earthly affairs of men through the various prophets claiming a privileged communion with Him.

⁵⁴⁰ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 48. Aristotle approximated religious feeling to the catharsis produced by tragedy – in effecting a purification through the emotions of terror and pity, tragedy induces an experience of spiritual rebirth. The origin of the Greek tragedies in religious ritual is thus significant: like religion, literature plunges the initiate into universal truths about the human condition. “Aristotle’s account of the katharsis of tragedy was a philosophic presentation of a truth that *Homo religiosus* had always understood intuitively: a symbolic, mythical or ritual presentation of events that would be unendurable in daily life can redeem and transform them into something pure and even pleasurable” (48).

⁵⁴¹ Armstrong, 46.

Yet another radically different conception of godhood can be found in Hinduism and Buddhism, which seek to transcend God – in Hinduism, Brahman is a sacred power inherent in all creation, “the inner meaning of all existence” that can be cultivated in all things. Although transcending all human activity and thought, Brahman sustains and pervades us and therefore we can gain an insight into this essence of all being by a special spiritual effort leading to an enlightenment wherein a new dimension of self and the world is revealed.⁵⁴² Similarly, the spiritual enlightenment of Siddharta Gautama, the Buddha, led to “the ultimate Reality of nirvana that was higher than the gods,”⁵⁴³ transcending the world of pain and flux and the cycle of rebirths.

Rushdie’s conception of authorship partakes of these philosophical-religious ideas of the divine in that it provides a glimpse of the ultimate Creator of the fictive universe that is the novel only to diminish his status in two ways: he denies his ineffableness by portraying him in clear contrast to the sublime vision of God and by insisting on his corporeality, suggesting his fallible human nature. Giibreel’s vision of the myopic scrivener serves as momentary stabilisation of the authorial self under the guise of the writer Rushdie himself, but is immediately inscribed into the pattern of the “forked paths” of the satanic proliferating and differential ontology: the vision evokes, by means of contrast (to his disadvantage), not only the sublime God of the Bible or the Qur’an, but also the earlier scribe, the Persian Salman, whose name also refers to Rushdie. Moreover, as Rushdie renders his godlike author inherently “satanised,” the satanic differential principle spills over into his creation and permeates the entire text.

William Blake’s poetic-visionary example serves as a prelude to the authorial vision, which also draws on the analogy between religious and artistic experience. Rushdie’s Author, who appears in the guise of an anthropomorphised god resembling him, is not an impersonal creative force transcending its created world; neither is he a pure essence that can unproblematically exclaim “I am what I am.” The strictly religious analogy through which Rushdie explores authorship, which is evident in the dual godlike-satanic image of the Creator, underlies the Manichean, dualistic world that the satanic narratorial voice portrays, wherein continuity is identified with ethical and epistemic purity and destructive intransigence, mockingly defined as “good” and angelic because they are likened as submissive to an

⁵⁴² Armstrong, 39.

⁵⁴³ Armstrong, 42.

established discourse. Discontinuity, conversely, signifies ethical and epistemic ambiguity and nomadism, lauded as “bad” and satanic because it is indicative of Satan’s rejection of submission to the divine will and his attainment of subjectivity as the carrier of an alternative principle and worldview.

The satanic narrator, therefore, reverses the usual logic by championing the “bad” self of the satanic Saladin (“Rushdie’s novel begins with the devil even as it ends with his innocuous survival in a rejuvenated Chamcha”⁵⁴⁴), who is given a happy ending, while Gibreel’s angelic, “good” self ends tragically. The ending of the novel has thus been seen as disappointing and negating the novel’s entire migrant philosophy.⁵⁴⁵ Furthermore, pursuing the Shakespearean duality for colonial subjectivity (the angelic servile Ariel and the demonic protesting Caliban), in the novel their places are reversed: “the twist of postcolonial reverse perspective makes the Ariel figure into the devil, while the schizophrenic, violent, and libidinal Caliban of this theatrical novel is Gibreel, occupying the spot of ‘angel.’”⁵⁴⁶ Seen in this light, the ending of the novel has a more ominous meaning: “Ariel-Chamcha can go “native,” after completely internalising colonial paternalism; Gibreel-Caliban would always remain monstrously inassimilable, whether in the periphery or the metropole.”⁵⁴⁷ In other words, Chamcha’s mimic, discontinuous, uprooted self, although seen as “satanic” in a postcolonial worldview, is in the end vindicated by a forced return to roots which is, in turn, undermined by the ironic detachment of a narrator who is intimately versed in “satan-speak”:

the novel *suggests* a disagreement with Chamcha, rather than imposing upon him a prescription for heroism or a condemnation of his act. The text veils its ethical responsibility and suggests its ethical preferences through its aesthetic inconsistency. This subtle ethical modesty or generosity requires attentive reading, and shocks, or

⁵⁴⁴ Srinivas Aravamudan, “Being God’s Postman,” 202.

⁵⁴⁵ Anshuman Mondal sees in Gibreel’s suicide “an act of sacrifice that absolves Saladin of his ‘sin’/guilt (and of having to ‘explain’ himself). It is only this return of the religious repressed that makes possible, and complete, Saladin’s redemption and moral rehabilitation, although this is quickly repressed once more by a secular formulation: ‘there was no accounting for one’s good fortune’ (547)”. The opposition between the secular and the religious is dismantled in the end and revealed as fictitious, for Saladin’s secular regeneration is enabled by Gibreel’s “redemptive sacrifice,” which is a mark of the religious sensibility that is contested throughout the novel. Mondal’s conclusion is that the novel, in spite of advocating hybridity, “cannot imagine a hybrid position between the religious and the secular and ultimately reinscribes and reinforces the categorical distinctions of secularist orthodoxy.” (Anshuman Mondal, in *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Robert Eaglestone and Martin McQuillan, 70-1)

⁵⁴⁶ Srinivas Aravamudan, “Being God’s Postman,” 200.

⁵⁴⁷ Aravamudan, 201.

pleasantly surprises, its interpreter. In other words, thwarting expectations of aesthetic consistency, the novel sustains its jolts in its turns to realism when describing Chamcha's return to India, and its inconsistency conceals an ethics.⁵⁴⁸

The “aesthetic inconsistency” Gaurav Majumdar locates in the novel's ending, and which has an ethical import, seen through the lens of the implied narrator guiding the novel, becomes in fact a consistent strategy whereby Saladin's regeneration is a negation, not of the migrant philosophy celebrating rootlessness and nomadism, but of the binary logic of the satanic narrator's Manichean worldview. As previously stated, Saladin's return to Indianness is neither an embracing of continuity with the old Salahuddin, nor a new form of discontinuity, but an amalgam of the two: the forging of many new identitary potentialities that represent both a continuation of the old and its necessary partial discontinuation so that the new can be born. By neutralising his inauthenticity with a return to his roots and acquiring an awareness of his alternative selves, Saladin attains the classical ideal of “Know thyself,” from which proceeds a wholesome engagement with his world by an act of politically subversive agency. In spite of his tragic downfall, Gibreel is not unwaveringly condemned – for all their destructive force, it is through his visions that Gibreel transcends the persona of a superficial, philandering film star and becomes the author's mouthpiece for probing philosophical and metaphysical questions that define and condition man's existence on earth.

The ambiguous coding of the protagonists, who are thus no longer clearly divided into the categories of continuity/diconstintuity or good/bad assigned to them by the satanic narrator, is the work of the satanic, i.e. differential aesthetics of the novel, which undermines the dichotomies of the Manichean worldview. The unification of the protagonists during their fall into a composite subjectivity, the di/tripartite dream content, the fluid interpenetration of the narrative and ontological levels, which culminates in the tripartite structure of the myopic scrivener, points to a worldview that is perhaps best perceived as cumulatively integral rather than fragmentary, in line with Zeeny's Over-artist. Here the satanic aesthetics of the novel destroys the logic of the satanic narrator, who “scores” by dichotomous differentiation: there is no clear separation between God and Satan, continuity and discontinuity, religion and faith, India and England, etc., but a constant oscillation between them, rooted in the recognition of their complementarity and inseparability. The satanic logic locks every character and event into the

⁵⁴⁸ Gaurav Majumdar, “Jolting the Grotesque,” 48.

hybrid permeability of its worldview and complements every interpretation with a counter-interpretation.

The image of the Over-artist is a triumph of the hybrid aesthetics championed by Zeeny, represented by the famous Hamza-nama cloths, “that sixteenth-century sequence depicting scenes from the life of a hero who may or may not have been the same Hamza as the famous one, Muhammad’s uncle whose liver was eaten by the Meccan woman Hind as he lay dead on the battlefield of Uhud” (SV, 69-70). The cloths confirm Zeeny’s thesis

about the eclectic, hybridised nature of the Indian artistic tradition. The Mughals had brought artists from every part of India to work on the paintings; individual identity was submerged to create a many-headed, many-brushed Over-artist who, literally, *was* Indian painting. One hand would draw the mosaic floors, a second the figures, a third would paint the Chinese-looking cloudy skies. On the backs of the cloths were the stories that accompanied the scenes. The pictures would be shown like a movie: held up while someone read out the hero’s tale. In the *Hamza-nama* you could see the Persian miniature fusing with Kannada and Keralan painting styles, you could see Hindu and Muslim philosophy forming their characteristically late-Mughal synthesis. (SV, 70)

Zeeny’s image of the “many-headed, many-brushed Over-artist” is materialised in the appearance/apparition of the “myopic scrivener,” who is himself a fusion of his many fictive alter egos inhabiting his text, while they are all infused with the differential satanic principle that marks their ontological and diegetic unfinalizability and never-ending processuality, as they constantly migrate across ontological and narrative levels, being constantly reinscribed in the open-ended epistemical and ethical “translation” of meanings and selves. Like the numerous anonymous artists who have formed the composite artistic figure of the Hamza-nama, the myopic scrivener submerges his individual artistic identity into an anonymous, multi-faceted and multi-voiced Over-artist. The role of Zeeny in the overall authorial preoccupation of the novel is crucial – she is described as

an art critic whose book on the confining myth of authenticity, that folkloristic straitjacket which she sought to replace by an ethic of historically validated eclecticism, for was not the entire national culture based on the principle of borrowing whatever clothes seemed to fit, Aryan, Mughal, British, take-the-best-and-leave-the-rest? – had created a predictable stink, especially because of its title. She had called it *The Only Good Indian.*” (SV, 52)

Her artistic and cultural ideal is thus not an uncritical and indiscriminate hybridity – rather than a simple mingling of separate and disparate materials, she advocates for “an ethic of historically validated eclecticism,” as in the Indian example, a centripetal type of hybridity around which an aesthetical and ethical core can be accumulated, and which is in contrast to the centrifugal, destabilising ontology of the metamorphosed Gibreel and Saladin.⁵⁴⁹

Ultimately, the ending of the novel encodes a dual resolution not only to the migrant dilemma, but also to the novel’s own authorial discourse, which effected the ultimate transgressive leap from the diegesis into the extra-textual, real world of its writer and his readers, itself becoming truly prophetic even while it undermined the authority of its own prophetic figures. Pursuing the conception of the two protagonists as authorial alter egos, it can be stated that in the divergent resolutions to their identity predicaments Rushdie inscribed the forked path of his own authorial imagination. Saladin’s regeneration points to the regenerative authorial self that fruitfully engages with the world and its epistemic and cultural structures, while Gibreel’s downfall suggests the authorial self that is consumed by the “rivers of blood”⁵⁵⁰ and

⁵⁴⁹ As we saw, this differentiation between an ethically sound hybridity and an ethically hollow one is also evoked in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, in the contrast between Aurora/Moraes and Uma/Vasco Miranda.

⁵⁵⁰ The “Rivers of Blood” speech was made by British Member of Parliament Enoch Powell on 20 April 1968, to a meeting of the Conservative Political Centre in Birmingham, United Kingdom. His speech strongly criticised mass immigration, especially Commonwealth immigration to the United Kingdom and the proposed race relations bill. The speech caused a political storm, making Powell one of the most talked about and divisive politicians in the country, and leading to his controversial dismissal from the Shadow Cabinet by Conservative Party leader Edward Heath. In his speech, Powell had in fact voiced the grievances of several of his constituents, who, under the sway of uncontrolled and massive immigration, had “found found themselves made strangers in their own country.” The proposed race relations bill would effectively discriminate against the native population; therefore, Powell proposed controlled immigration, especially as in his view the majority of immigrants refused to integrate and capitalised on their racial and religious differences in order to exert domination over the indigenous population. He then goes on to paraphrase the Sybil’s admonition to Aeneas: “As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood.’ (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rivers_of_Blood_speech, consulted 10 September 2020). In *The Satanic Verses*, the phrase occurs several times: as a description of the powerful impact of Baal’s satire, as the name of a poem by Jumpy Joshi and in a simile describing the Imam’s dream of his glorious return. The narrator says of Baal that “if rivers of blood flow from the cuts his verses inflict, then they will nourish him” (SV, 97). By ascribing this power to Baal’s verses, the narrator invests poetry with the society-changing capacity that is usually reserved for politics. Jumpy Joshi, his modern-day counterpart, who hears voices like Gibreel, wants to reclaim the metaphor from Enoch Powell and appropriate it, “Turn it; make it a thing we can use” (SV, 186). His is a humanistic project and in his poem humanity is envisioned like a river of blood that flows in every human being. Framed between the appearance of the images in two of Gibreel’s visions – as descriptions of Baal’s poetry and of the Imam’s desired revolution, when

overpowered by the “satanic verses” caused by his own creative imagination. As we shall see, this dual perspective of the artistic imagination transgressed its intratextual articulation and spilled over into the real world, causing the novel’s satanically diversified reception.

“blood will flow like wine” (*SV*, 209) – the occurrence of the metaphor in the frame narrative emphasises the modern author’s powerlessness and lack of historical agency.

III. Dialogising Reality and Fiction

As stated in the previous chapter of this dissertation, in *Fury* and *Quichotte*, Rushdie shifts the focus of his attention from the genesis of the author/text to the afterlife of the author's artistic creations. The anxiety of influence, i.e. of becoming (an author), of the previous novels gives way to the anxiety of exerting influence. The ending of Saleem's and Moraes's texts simultaneously inscribed or announced their authors' death, but the artistic production of the authorial figures in *Fury* and *Quichotte*, Malik and the Author, is merely the beginning of a dialogical engagement between author and text that raises new challenges about the power of fiction and the responsibility of authoring fiction.

Both Malik and the Author lack Saleem's, Moraes's, Saladin's and Gibreel's sense of belonging to any form of collective identity. Their Western, American location does not lead to establishing an intercultural hybrid position between the centre of global political and discursive power and the Indian periphery that constitutes their origin. Instead, they are alienated from their environment, be it predominantly cosmopolitan, as in *Fury*, or racist, as in *Quichotte*. Their distancing from their reality in turn leads to an excessive insistence on the fictional, as the authors see their fictional creations take over their lived reality (*Fury*) and even become a guarantor of the author's very existence (*Quichotte*).

The uncertain oscillation between these two types of representation – realistic and fictional – is dominant in these two novels. The dialogical interaction between reality and fiction takes place in the context of globalisation (*Fury*) and quixotism (*Quichotte*) as political and/or cultural ideologies within which Malik and the Author constitute their authorship. In both cases, the real recedes at the expense of the fictional and the author, unable to assume a viable narratorial position from which to speak, becomes socially and politically inconsequential as a result.

Fury: Authorship in the Era of Globalisation

We saw how the migration of people and ideas modifies and even radically restructures meanings by means of the transgressive aesthetics of *The Satanic Verses*. The birth of profane authorship, in particular, advances Rushdie's belief in the decanonising, subversive role of literature and authorship *vis-à-vis* discourses of power, particularly the discourse of religion. *Fury* also deals with the phenomenon of cultural transformation, but regarding authorship seems to take the opposite path to that trod in *The Satanic Verses*, for here literature and the production of cultural meanings end up eroding a just liberatory revolution and buttressing the global power of the West/America.

The troping of "fury" as a chthonic artistic force in this novel builds on the ancient model of cultural transformation (of a brutal and violent culture into a more enlightened one), which, in the contemporary era of mass media and globalisation, ushers in not the rule of language instead of brute force (a shift captured in the transformation of the Furies into the Eumenides in a new era presided over by Athena, the goddess of wisdom), but that of the commodification of cultural products and meanings. The tragedy of Malik's authorship in such a cultural landscape is the erosion of his subversive potential by his commodification and his becoming an empty symbol.

In the context of postcolonial literature, *Fury* can be seen as an exploration of authorship in the era of globalisation and its author's and protagonist's predominantly American and New York location as a new re-conceptualisation of the centre-periphery dichotomy. As the stereotypical melting-pot that is the centre of the present-day globalised world, America/New York serves as another locus of hybridity where, as in Rushdie's other urban settings, different people, stories and the histories from which they stem and have been cut off meet and jostle, creating a unique dynamic. Elsewhere in Rushdie's oeuvre, this dynamic is celebrated as the productive third space that generates newness in an exhausted and prejudice-filled world, but here it figures as a compromised ideal that does not offer fulfillment for the characters.

Anthony Giddens defines globalisation as

the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice

versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanced relations that shape them.⁵⁵¹

Rushdie's novel is built on the relational aspect of the globalised world as Giddens defines it in putting together characters from various parts of the world – the Serbian Mila and her father Milo, the Indo-Lilliputian Neela and the revolutionaries she becomes embroiled with, the Muslim, South Asian taxi driver Ali, the Polish plumber, etc. The axis local/global or centre/periphery, however, is predominantly erected in order to reveal the incessant circulation of ideas and cultural symbols and products between different points of the globe, which is perfectly captured in Malik's art: inspired by a political rally of Indo-Lilliputian subversives in New York to which Neela takes him, he creates the story of Kronos and his puppets, which is in turn appropriated by the revolutionaries on the distant island of Lilliput-Blefuscu, whereby the "original idea" returns to its source, albeit radically transformed. The central theme of the novel is precisely the inevitable uses and abuses of ideas and meanings that are part and parcel of globalisation, explored first in the context of the commodification of art and then in the context of the interplay between art/culture and politics within which Malik Solanka's crisis of authorship is being played out.

a. Creating Commodified Art: The Author's Compromised Postcolonialism

Arjun Appadurai emphasises the social agency of the artistic imagination in the globalised world:

The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms which direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice*. No longer mere fantasy..., no longer simple escape..., no longer elite pastime... and no longer mere contemplation..., the imagination has become an organised field of social practices, a form of work (both in the sense of labour and of culturally organised practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency ("individuals") and globally defined fields of possibility. It is this unleashing of the imagination which links the play of pastiche (in some settings) to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors.

⁵⁵¹ Anthony Giddens, "From The Consequences of Modernity," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, 181.

The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order.⁵⁵²

This new global cultural sphere replaces the dichotomous differentiation between categories such as centre-periphery with “a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order”⁵⁵³ that conforms to Baudrillard’s notion of the postmodern era of simulations, hyperreality and simulacra, where computerisation, information processing, mass media and digitalisation dominate social life, that has replaced the modern era of production. According to Baudrillard, simulation is the very antithesis of representation:

Representation starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent (even if this equivalence is Utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Conversely, simulation starts from the Utopia of this principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference.⁵⁵⁴ Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum.⁵⁵⁵

Representation is based on a correspondence of the sign to its referent and even if this relation is problematic or false, it still postulates the existence of a reality in terms of which the sign is somehow related, hence simulation would merely be “a false representation.” However, in the postmodern era dominated by simulation, the very notion of representation is problematised, as reality becomes submerged under a “procession of simulacra,” copies without originals, the consummate type of representation yielded by simulation. In a world dominated by simulation, authenticity, identity, truth and reality are rendered meaningless as it is impossible to distinguish the original from its copies, the real from the fictional, the true from the false, etc. In short, a complete disintegration of meanings and values reigns, as the real is replaced by its signs in a conceptual confusion. Unlike dissimulation, which means “to feign not to have what one has,” simulation is “to feign to have what one hasn’t. One implies a presence, the other an absence.”

⁵⁵² Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” in *Colonial Discourse*, ed. Williams and Chrisman, 327.

⁵⁵³ Appadurai, 328.

⁵⁵⁴ The negation of the sign as theorised by Saussure encoded in simulation rests on the disappearance of reality and therefore of referentiality in the Baudrillardian conception of the postmodern age: the triad of the signifier (the word), the signified (the concept the word stands for) and the referent (the real-world element the sign refers to) is no longer valid and, consequently, language is not only unable to represent reality, but there is no reality in relation to which language can function as a representational tool – language/the sign creates its own reality.

⁵⁵⁵ *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Marc Poster (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), 170, emphasis original

The difference between dissimulation and simulation, however, is more profound: to feign an illness means simply to pretend one is ill, while to simulate it means to produce some of the symptoms; the former “leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false,’ between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary.’”⁵⁵⁶ Simulation marks a radical break with previous forms of representation in which the sign/image has some relation to reality:

These would be the successive phases of the image: 1 It is the reflection of a basic reality. 2 It masks and perverts a basic reality. 3 It masks the *absence* of a basic reality. 4 It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum. In the first case, the image is a *good* appearance: the representation is of the order of sacrament. In the second, it is an *evil* appearance: of the order of malefice. In the third, it *plays at being* an appearance: it is of the order of sorcery. In the fourth, it is no longer in the order of appearance at all, but of simulation. The transition from signs which dissimulate something to signs which dissimulate that there is nothing, marks the decisive turning point. The first implies a theology of truth and secrecy (to which the notion of ideology still belongs). The second inaugurates an age of simulacra and simulation, in which there is no longer any God to recognise his own, nor any last judgement to separate truth from false, the real from its artificial resurrection, since everything is already dead and risen in advance⁵⁵⁷.

The defining process of a world dominated by simulation is implosion, “a process of social entropy leading to a collapse of boundaries, including the implosion of meaning in the media” and a saturation of “the social field [with] meaning and messages [that] flatten each other out in a neutralised flow of information, entertainment, advertising, and politics”⁵⁵⁸ to such an extent that nothing stands out as more authentic, true or real than the rest. Reality is replaced with hyperreality, created by the mass media and the entertainment industry, which marks “the transition from the bourgeois culture of drama and the spectacle to that of a mass culture mediated by televisions and computers. Hyper-reality is a precursor to virtual reality”⁵⁵⁹; it is a type of reality “more real than the real” and, paradoxically, it is the “real” reality that models itself on this higher form of reality rather than the other way round. The proliferation of dolls, masks and doubles/clones in *Fury* is indicative of the hyper-real nature of its world, in which the

⁵⁵⁶ Baudrillard, 167-8.

⁵⁵⁷ Baudrillard, 170-1, emphasis original.

⁵⁵⁸ Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, 121.

⁵⁵⁹ Richard G. Smith, *The Baudrillard Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 95.

concept of the authentic and original self is rendered meaningless and subordinated to the tyranny of the image/sign.

The age of simulation is that of post-industrial consumer capitalism, a culture of excess, of the fragment and the surface, of floating signifiers unattached to any referents, of a Disneyland-like submersion of the real by the image, a culture in which everything is subjugated to the demands of the market and to an excessive consumerism that does not bring satisfaction but an insatiable desire for more. The cultural logic of consumer or late capitalism is marked by what Fredric Jameson terms “the waning of affect,” the loss of genuine feeling or emotion,⁵⁶⁰ the commodification of the body and of identity, a celebrity culture in which the image is valued over the substance, and, in art, by an aesthetics of depthlessness or an emptying out of meaning and significance.

The urban landscape in *Fury*, as seen through the eyes of Malik Solanka, consists of a procession of visual images that do not have a representational but merely an accumulating effect, suggesting an imploding conceptual chaos – the numerous lists, references to popular culture and explicit historical and cultural allusions do not enrich but impoverish the novel’s representation, which relies on an endless recycling of the visual rather than the creation of new fictional worlds as in Rushdie’s previous novels. Furthermore, the representation of the brutal murders of three upper-class women by their boyfriends completely ignores the women’s suffering by reducing them either to “allegorical symbols of America’s decaying hegemony,”⁵⁶¹ so that an attack on them symbolically represents an attack on America as a superpower, or to objectified and commodified Barbie dolls devoid of individuality and voice. As Treasa de Loughry states,

Barbie is often cast as an exemplar of the late capitalist American consumer, while in turn commodifying a certain representation of femininity. The women’s reduction to objects or “totems” is gruesomely confirmed by their scalping, which is loaded with settler-colonial era connotations of trophy gathering. Taken to its extreme, the commodifying effect of women as dolls aids in the production of the female body as an object.⁵⁶²

⁵⁶⁰ Fredric Jameson, “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (Harlow, England: Longman, 1993), 69.

⁵⁶¹ Treasa de Loughry, “America’s Signal Crisis,” 9.

⁵⁶² De Loughry, 10.

Mila herself is flattened as a contextualised subjectivity by being made to conform to a sexual stereotype – improbably, she calls Malik “papi,” a word that a woman of her origin would never use, but Rushdie/Malik in his eroticised representation of her confuses her with a Latina. Neela is also reductively represented first as an objectified body that invitingly seeks the male gaze and whets Malik’s sexual appetite, then as a subservient puppet of the Commander Babur, and finally as an independent subject whose agency is nevertheless compromised because it is put not in the service of the revolution to which she has dedicated her life but to the liberation of Malik. Hers is therefore an act of female self-sacrifice made to nourish the male subjectivity.

As Jameson further argues, in late capitalism the temporal logic that rests on an engagement with history is replaced with a spatial logic that subjects everything to the voyeuristic gaze of the spectator:

The new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time. The past is thereby itself modified: what was once, in the historical novel as Lukacs defines it, the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project – what is still, ... for the resurrection of the dead of anonymous and silenced generations, the retrospective dimension indispensable to any vital reorientation of our collective future – has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum. Guy Debord’s powerful slogan is now even more apt for the “prehistory” of a society bereft of all historicity, whose own putative past is little more than a set of dusty spectacles. In faithful conformity to poststructuralist linguistic theory, the past as “referent” finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts.⁵⁶³

Fury’s Malik is an example of a history-less subject and, as such, is an anomalous figure in Rushdie’s oeuvre – revolted by his past and wishing to forget it, he enmeshes himself in a perpetual present and is only able to conceptualise his identity by means of his art and not of his past experiences. Furthermore, although Rushdie provides his characters with back-stories and thereby situates them within a specific cultural and historical context, they are ultimately subsumed by the aesthetics of depthlessness that Jameson condemns.

The case of Mila’s father illustrates the historical banalisation which is evident in this novel: a prominent intellectual, poet, professor at Columbia and a real bohemian, with the outbreak of the war in Yugoslavia he begins to re-think his Serbian identity. Wishing to separate his identity from that of his nationalist and chauvinist namesake, he changes his surname from

⁵⁶³ Jameson, “The Cultural Logic,” 74-5.

Milosevic to Milo. This is how Rushdie represents Milo's spiritual turmoil, as seen through the eyes of his own daughter:

To separate Milo the poet from Milosevic the fascist gangster pig. But after it all went crazy out there in getting-to-be-ex-Yugo, he got all worked up about the demonisation of the Serbs, even though he agreed with most of the analysis of what Milosevic was doing in Croatia and going to do in Bosnia, his heart was just inflamed by the anti-Serb stuff, and in some mad moment he decided it was his duty to go back and be the moral conscience of the place, you know, like Stephen Dedalus, to forge in the smithy of his soul et cetera et cetera or some Serb Solzhenitsyn. I told him to cut it out, who was Solzhenitsyn anyway but this crazy old coot in Vermont dreaming of being a prophet back in Mother Russia, but when he got home nobody was listening to his same old song, that's definitely not the route you want to go, Dad, for you it's women and cigarettes and booze and mountains and work work work, the idea was to let that stuff kill you, right, the plan was to stay away from Milosevic and his killers, not to mention bombs. (*F*, 113)

Milo's patriotic feeling is emptied of significance by being portrayed as a foolish, quixotic pursuit of an empty ideal and his Joycean and Solzhenitsynian preoccupation with the conscience of his nation is besmirched as merely the pretext that would provide him for an escape route out of his incestuous relationship with his daughter, a relationship that is perversely insinuated by Mila. The novel seems to be asking, why did this emancipated Serb have to go straight into the arms of Milosevic and become involved in the war plaguing his country when he could have let such superficial vices as womanising, drinking and smoking kill him? Mila's and Rushdie's dismissive tone regarding Milo is unjustly negative – Milo is, like Neela (and unlike the uprooted Mila and Malik), still tied to his roots, but while Neela's patriotism is endorsed, Milo's is humiliated.

Milo's return to his Eastern European periphery from the American centre is condemned both by his daughter, Mila, and Malik (and, ultimately, by the implied narrator), especially as it seems to have been motivated by his desire to purify the besmirched connotations of his surname. This, in turn, rests on the unquestioned demonisation of an entire nation for the crimes of one person, a demonisation that Milo takes upon himself. The concept of collective guilt is nowhere more clearly articulated in Rushdie's fiction and, although merely insinuated and relegated to the background, it is all the more significant because it reveals Malik's endorsement

of Western cultural and political hegemony and prefigures his view on the suppression of the revolution on Lilliput-Blefuscus.

Malik's authorship is enmeshed in the cultural logic of consumer capitalism as represented by Baudrillard and Jameson and is thus affected by the dominance of the image and simulation. Although he situates Little Brain in an interactive and dialogical platform in order to launch a counter-discursive attack on intellectual complacency and conformity, his doll progressively loses its subversive force by becoming a simulacrum of what the consumer demands of it. Little Brain becomes an emblem of the superficial culture of the global market, loses its conceptual depth and becomes a pure surface/simulacrum, an ersatz "self" that can be assumed by anyone, an empty vessel and an ontological void into which the consumer can pour his/her obsession with the celebrity culture of which Little Brain is the paragon. The proliferation of masks bearing the doll's image, which are worn by fans and celebrities all over the world who identify with and appropriate it, leads to the disappearance of the original doll as conceived by Malik and to its replacement with simulacra, copies that can circulate without their original, which is thereby rendered obsolete. In Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner's assessment,

[t]he Baudrillardian universe of simulacra without referents can therefore be read as an effect of the poststructuralist critique of meaning and reference taken to an extreme limit where the effluence of simulacra replaces the play of textuality or discourses in a universe with no stable structures in which to anchor theory or politics. [...] the universe seems to be without boundaries and in a vertiginous flux where all the old boundaries and distinctions[...] are imploded into an undifferentiated flux of simulacra.⁵⁶⁴

It is this defeat of meaning and commodification of his doll as a cultural capital that leads to the ultimate erosion of Malik's postcolonial authorship, which has already been compromised by his problematic representation of women and ethnicity. Himself a part of the celebrity culture of which Little Brain becomes an emblem, he is left with no viable position from which to mount his critique of the consumer society which enables his cosmopolitan flânerie. The depletion of postcolonial authorship from its productive and subversive potential is further made clear in the further besmirching of the cultural value of Malik's art when it becomes embroiled in the political turmoil on Lilliput-Blefuscus. It is to this aspect of the novel that I now turn.

⁵⁶⁴ Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, 121.

b. The Work of Art in the Era of Digital Reproduction

Madelena Gonzalez rightly states that “[b]y threatening to make it obsolete, the information age throws down a specific challenge to literature and thus forces it to engage with its order”⁵⁶⁵ and Rushdie’s novel is primarily concerned with the status of art and authorship in the new technological era. According to Walter Benjamin, the work of art in the era of mechanical reproduction nevertheless retains its authenticity, which in itself is not reproducible. Even in the most perfect reproduction, something is lost: the temporal and spatial coordinates of the original, whose very presence “is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity... The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical – and, of course, not only technical – reproducibility.”⁵⁶⁶

Benjamin emphasises the different degrees of the authenticity of the original in manual and technical reproduction. In the former, the original retains its full authority while it brands the copy as a forgery, whereas in the latter the copy itself offers possibilities not available to the original, for instance, it can bring out aspects of the work of art that are not as visible in the original and it can be put “into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself.”⁵⁶⁷ The very existence of the copy, by copying the original, cements its quality and value; however, something is lost in reproduction:

that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art... One might generalise by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.⁵⁶⁸

The aura of the work of art implies its status as a cult-like, ritual object invested with an inimitable uniqueness. Benjamin mentions the example of an ancient statue of Venus, which was differently seen by the ancient Greeks (as “an object of veneration”) and by medieval clerics (“an

⁵⁶⁵ Madelena Gonzalez, “Artistic ‘Fury’ in the Information Age: Nostalgia for the Real,” *Information, Communication & Society*, 11:6, 766.

⁵⁶⁶ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 220.

⁵⁶⁷ Benjamin, 220.

⁵⁶⁸ Benjamin, 221.

ominous idol”), but both groups of viewers were “equally confronted with its uniqueness, that is, aura.”⁵⁶⁹

If in mechanical reproduction the original, even though with a weakened aura, nevertheless retains its ontological status, digital reproduction radically changes both the relationship between and the ontological status of the original work of art and its copy: the perfect and endless reproduction without degradation renders the work of art aura-less in Benjamin’s sense.⁵⁷⁰ As Douglas Davies claims,

the work of art in the age of digital reproduction is physically and formally chameleon. There is no longer a clear conceptual distinction between original and reproduction in virtually any medium. These two states, one pure and original, the other imitative and impure, are now fictions. Images, sounds, and words are received, deconstructed, rearranged, and restored wherever they are seen, heard, and stored. What has happened to the aura surrounding the original work of art, so prized by generations of collectors and critics? Digitalisation transfers this aura to the individuated copy. Artist and viewer perform together. The dead replica and the living, authentic original are merging, like lovers entwined in mutual ecstasy.⁵⁷¹

The concept of the original loses its relevance and does not possess any advantage over its copies; the very point of this type of reproduction is not coming into contact with an original through its copy, but to render its reception interactive, which implies opening the process of the creation of the work of art for its recipients. Thus, a new concept of authorship emerges: instead of the singular, authorial conception of the work of art, which is related to linearity of the story, coherence and roundedness, the author of the digital work of art, located in the endless chaos of data in the database, aims at rendering it accessible to the interested audience. In the process of interaction, the recipient can choose which elements to follow and which to discard, thereby creating a unique work of art – his own – and becoming its co-author. The author is no longer mediator between his inspiration and the finished work, but between the unfinished work and the audience that endlessly completes it.⁵⁷² Singular authorship is replaced with a plural one, the

⁵⁶⁹ Benjamin, 223.

⁵⁷⁰ Vangel Nonevski, “The Work of Art in the Age of the Interactive Context”, in *Context 9, Review for Comparative Literature and Cultural Research* (Skopje: Institute of Macedonian Literature, 2011), 85.

⁵⁷¹ Douglas Davies, “The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction (An Evolving Thesis: 1991-1995),” *Leonardo*, Vol. 28, No. 5, The MIT Press, Third Annual New York Digital Salon, 1995, 381.

⁵⁷² Nonevski, “The Work of Art,” 87 and 89.

finished work with an endlessly open one which each individual user can complete at will. In short, virtualisation is an extreme deconstruction: not only is the work of art open for new interpretations, but is encoded with a semantic void that requires filling-in by the consumer, thereby undergoing “structural changes in real time.”⁵⁷³

Malik is exhilarated by precisely these possibilities of the new electronic media, where the superseding of causation and linear chronology allow him a Godlike simultaneous omniscience in the past, present and future:

He, who had been so dubious about the coming of the brave new electronic world, was swept off his feet by the possibilities offered by the new technology, with its formal preference for lateral leaps and its relative uninterest in linear progression, a bias that had already bred in its users a greater interest in variation than in chronology. This freedom from the clock, from the tyranny of what happened next, was exhilarating, allowing him to develop his ideas in parallel, without worrying about sequence or step-by-step causation. Links were electronic now, not narrative. Everything existed at once. This was, Solanka realised, an exact mirror of the divine experience of time. Until the advent of hyperlinks, only God had been able to see simultaneously into past, present, and future alike; human beings were imprisoned in the calendar of their days. Now, however, such omniscience was available to all, at the merest click of a mouse. (*F*, 186-7)

Malik Solanka creates his story of the puppet kings as a digital interactive platform where readers can click on different links and icons to pursue and complete the story according to their affinities. The digital technology available to Malik offers creative freedom “from the tyranny of what happens next” and is thus a modern counterpart of Saleem’s Padma, whose “what-happens-nextism” went against Saleem’s non-linear, fragmentary narrative. The various links these websites provide are not only an invitation to co-create, but are also a business enterprise advertising merchandise that can be delivered globally. Thus, the first chapter of Malik’s story ends with the following: “Click on the links for more PK info or on the icons below for answers to 101 FAQs, access to interactivities, and to see the wide range of *PK merchandise* available for INSTANT shipping NOW. All major credit cards accepted” (*F*, 168). While the passage quoted above extols the virtues of the “brave new electronic world,” what it eventually yields for Malik is not the author’s Godlike omniscience, banally available “at the merest click of a mouse,” but a loss of authorial authority.

⁵⁷³ Nonevski, 93.

The “antihero” of Malik’s story about the puppet kings is the “demented genius” Akasz Kronos, “the great, cynical cyberneticist of the Rijk” (*F*, 161), an artistic creator like himself, his double and alter ego. He creates the Puppet Kings as a response to the terminal crisis of his civilisation, “but on account of a flaw in his character that made him unable to consider the general good, he used them to guarantee nobody’s survival or fortune but his own” (*F*, 161). He creates his dolls as part of a colonising enterprise that takes him to the independent, mountain-island nation of Baburia, at the antipodes of Galileo-1, the Rijk’s home planet, where he negotiates his territory, rights and responsibilities with Mogol, the local ruler. Endowed with independence from the start – they are “no-strings” Puppet Kings, his cyborgs are programmed to regard themselves as superior to and masters of their human Baburian hosts; they are even able to clone themselves – each can “endlessly re-create itself in its own image” (*F*, 163).

However, they remain his slaves, having only the illusion of freedom; de-personalised, they have no names and are known by the seven-digit numbers branded on their wrists. Each has its own unique personality traits and a value system, regarding which Akasz Kronos permits them “a degree of ethical independence” (*F*, 164). Programmed with a limited number of ethical values, they are offered “multiple-choice options” (*F*, 164), whereby each value can be defined either as a virtue or as a vice and it is in their personal liberty to evolve as moral beings that the cyborgs become simulacra of real people. At first, they diligently obey their creator, but then adapt their circumstances to their needs and start modifying their systems without Kronos’s help; thus technologically advanced, they win the Battle of the Antipodes against the Rijks. Armed with a new sense of individual worth and rights, they empower themselves by naming themselves, thus breaking Kronos’s mastery over them. After a successful revolution led by the Dollmaker, whom Kronos created in his own image and imbued with his characteristics, Kronos disappears. The only surviving portrait of him, which shows him as “the very picture of the dignified genius,” also shows that his puppet dolls have broken free of their creator:

As we peer into the darkness around him, we make out fine white filaments floating from his fingertips. Only after much study do we notice the small bronze-colored figure of a puppet man at the bottom left of the picture, and even then it takes a while before we realise that the puppet has broken free of the puppeteer’s control. The homunculus turns its back on its maker and sets off to forge its own destiny, while Kronos, the abandoned creator, takes leave not only of his creation but of his senses, too. (*F*, 162)

From this point onwards, creator and creation become ontologically merged and indistinguishable from each other: the last word from Kronos, which is an electronic message sent to the Dollmaker, his double and usurper, is “a rambling, incoherent text, self-exculpatory and full of accusations of ingratitude, threats, and curses” (*F*, 166) and is likely a forgery made by the Dollmaker himself. Although polarised as a “mad Kronos” and his “sane mirror image,” which is the Dollmaker, they exist as one fluid identity, Kronos/Dollmaker, with Kronos as the unrecoverable original: just as his rambling message may have been forged by his double, the balanced, rational fragments of his journal in which he proclaims his love for his creatures may equally be fake. The dolls, renaming themselves Peekays, announce that henceforth they will live along with the Baburians on the two islands as equals, but this equality instantly becomes a Darwinian survival of the fittest.

However, a new confrontation of another pair of doubles – Zameen of Rijk, the lover Kronos abandoned, and her cyborgian avatar, the Goddess of Victory, the Dollmaker’s lover – stages anew the dichotomy original-copy in which it becomes increasingly difficult and well-nigh impossible to distinguish between the two. The narrative of Kronos’s Puppet Kings, embedded in the text of the novel but clearly separated from it by the different typeface, ends with a series of questions about the development of the plot and the rivalry between the original prototypes and their copies, which suggests the open-ended nature of the story and the interactive platform within which it is to be variously transformed by different users. As the story develops along various strands, Malik finds that it is not necessary to answer questions or pursue the story in-depth,

... indeed, it was vital to the project’s long-term prospects that the tale be capable of almost indefinite prolongation, with new adventures and themes being grafted onto it at regular intervals and new characters to sell in doll, toy, and robot form. The back-story was a skeleton that periodically grew new bones, the framework for a fictional beast capable of constant metamorphosis, which fed on every scrap it could find: its creator’s personal history, scraps of gossip, deep learning, current affairs, high and low culture, and the most nourishing diet of all—namely, the past. The ransacking of the world’s storehouse of old stories and ancient histories was entirely legitimate. Few Web users were familiar with the myths, or even the facts, of the past; all that was needed was to give the old material a fresh, contemporary twist. Transmutation was all. The Puppet Kings website went on-line and at once achieved and sustained a high level of “hits.” Comments flooded in, and the river of Solanka’s imagination was fed from a thousand streams. It began to swell and grow. (*F*, 190-1)

To pursue the thread of argument from the previous part, this freedom of the digital text to be re-fashioned according to the whim of its recipients who thereby become its co-creators is, in the context of the novel, revealed as the flaw in the creator's plan: activated in the political turmoil in Lilliput-Blefuscu, the clash of cultures envisioned by Malik/Kronos leads to a veritable perversion of his art and of his artistic image. The culturally disseminating nature of the globalisation and digitalisation of art can be examined by means of Edward Said's conception of culture as intimately enmeshed in politics – not reflecting it a posteriori but preparing in advance the terrain on which political power is to be played out. As Edward Said, following Foucault, argues, when culture is interwoven in a discourse of power, it cannot maintain the autonomy of its sphere and is an active participant in the struggle for political and epistemological domination.

As I argued above, Malik has already marked his epistemological position by devaluing certain signifiers and advancing others as privileged. Thus, Milo's patriotism is elided as he is represented by two signifiers: as the artistic antithesis of his tyrannical namesake and as an incestuous father. His national and patriotic inner turmoil serves merely as an object of derision for his own daughter and Malik, his less impressive counterpart, both of whom use the attractive poet-ideologue as the silent springboard for their perverse game that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, stages an intimate scene of creation between creator and creation that can be read as quasi-incestuous since it echoes an intimate relationship between a parent, i.e. a begetter, and a child/progeny. In this context, Milo functions as a catalyst onto which this incestuous, unnatural element can be projected by both Mila and Malik. Furthermore, Jack Rhinehart's fall from an ideologically committed journalist documenting war crimes and inter-ethnic brutalities to a mere puppet of the white elite of New York encodes a similar devaluation:

Jack's new line of work gave him an all-access pass to the Palaces, and he loved it. He wrote about this gilded milieu with waspish venom, he tore it apart for its crassness, its blindness, its mindlessness, its depthless surfaceness, but the invitations from the Warren Redstones and Ross Buffetts, from the Schuylers and Muybridges and Van Burens and Kleins, from Ivana Opalberg-Speedvogel and Marlalee Booken Caudell, just kept on coming, because the guy was hooked and they knew it. He was their house nigger and it suited them to keep him around, as, Solanka suspected, a sort of pet. (*F*, 57)

Unlike Saleem's empathetic openness, Gibreel's agonistic dreamscapes and the democratisation of Moraes's text, faced with the interactive symbolical and ideological proliferation of his story, Malik Solanka reduces the stories of the people around him to a mere reaction to his, denying them their authenticity. Thus, in spite of Mila's enormous effort to digitalise his art, she is represented as stubbornly frustrated by his abandonment of her as a lover, while Neela's returning to her island is, in spite of her fierce commitment to the cause of her people, simply a reaction to the revelation of Malik's affair with Mila and she even dies only to save him.

As the story of his imaginary dolls is appropriated by the revolutionaries on Lilliput-Blefuscu, Rushdie's novel explores the ways in which culture actively shapes politics and, more specifically, the ways in which the open-endedness and ethical depthlessness of digitalised art allows for its own various uses and abuses. The survival-of-the-fittest slogan of Malik's Kronos story becomes a literal clash of the two ethnic groups on the Pacific island – the indigenous Elbees and the Indo-Lillies, *girmityas* or descendants of migrants who had come to the island as indentured labourers after the abolition of slavery. The latter were known only as numbers, like the cyborg Puppet Kings, while the former had names, like autonomous human beings; the latter are vegetarian, while the former eat meat and are even embroiled in a history of cannibalism; the latter are “Big Endians, from Big Endia,” i.e. believe that the right way to break a soft-boiled egg is the big end, while the former go for the little one (*F*, 157). Although the Indo-Lillies till the land and drive the economy, it is the indigenous Elbees who are the exclusive landowners, each group fearing that the other will impinge on its rights and/or privileges. However, the antagonism between them is not only because of ethnicity and property, but their radically different cultures:

“They're collectivists. The land isn't held by individual landowners but by the Elbee chiefs in trust for the whole Elbee people. And then we Big Endia-wallahs come along with our good business practice, entrepreneurial acumen, free-market mercantilism, and profit mentality. And the world speaks our language now, not theirs. It is the age of numbers, isn't it? So we are numbers and the Elbees are words. We are mathematics and they are poetry. We are winning and they are losing: and so of course they're afraid of us, it's like the struggle inside human nature itself, between what's mechanical and utilitarian in us and the part that loves and dreams. We all fear that the cold, machinelike thing in human nature will destroy our magic and song. So the battle between the Indo-Lillies and the Elbees is also the battle of the human spirit and, damnit, with my heart I'm probably on the other side. But my people are my people and justice is justice and after you've worked your butts off for four generations and you're still treated like second-class

citizens, you've got a right to be angry. If it comes to it I'll go back. I'll fight alongside them if I have to, shoulder to shoulder." (*F*, 158)

A coup led by an indigenous Elbee merchant, Skyresh Bolgolam, topples the government of the liberal president Golbasto Gue and institutes a dictatorial rule with the president and the Indo-Lilly parliamentarians and political leadership held hostage. However, the coup is entirely unnecessary, as under pressure from the Bolgolamites, the president, "who had pushed through a program of constitutional reform designed to give Indian-Lilliputians equal electoral and property rights, had already been obliged to reverse course and throw out the new constitution only weeks after it had come into being" (*F*, 215). The Indo-Lillian Filbistani Resistance Movement, the FRM, or Fremmen, stage a countercoup after having stolen a supply of Kronosian cyborg masks and costumes (no Baburian costumes were taken), identifying "strongly with the Puppet Kings, whose inalienable right to being treated as equals – as fully moral and sentient beings – was denied by Mogol the Baburian, their deadly foe, of whom Skyresh Bolgolam was accused of being an avatar" (*F*, 226).

The enmity between Malik's Puppet Kings and the Baburians thus becomes transposed in reality into that between the Indo-Lillies and the Elbees, which follows the same trajectory as its fictional counterpart: what begins as a just struggle for emancipation from tyranny on the part of oppressed and dehumanised groups seeking to reclaim their autonomous identity is soon transformed into the wielding of a new form of oppression, with the previously colonised group becoming the colonizer of its erstwhile masters. The Darwinian postulate of "the survival of the fittest," encoded in Malik's text, becomes a political and social reality on the Pacific island, perverting the original revolutionary ethos of the Indo-Lillies' struggle and, to emphasize this point, the revolutionaries wear the masks and costumes of Malik's cyborgs in what amounts to a "third revolt of the living dolls" (*F*, 226-7), their leader Babur becoming a living embodiment of Kronos/Dollmaker (he even refers to himself as "Commander Akasz").

As he has created Kronos Akasz in his own image, Malik finds in the Fremmen Commander a clone of himself who is thus both author and protagonist, reshaping the "original" story and simultaneously acting it out, co-authoring Malik's story and putting its cultural value to political use. Gradually growing into a veritable strongman dictating the shape of political life in Lilliput-Blefuscus, Commander Akasz is radically different from the other creators in the novel.

Unlike Malik and his Kronos, who renounce their absolute control over their creations, leaving them space for self-invention, he assumes the omnipotent prerogative of the Author-God and stubbornly refuses to “die,” functioning both as an author and a hegemon.

When Malik arrives on the island in search of Neela, he is practically imprisoned in the world of his own invention and subjected to the will of his own characters. This situation is reminiscent of the ontological superiority of the character and the dreamed-of persona over the author/dreamer in *The Satanic Verses*, but here the author’s subjection is conditioned by the very nature of his art which, centred around questions and unexplored dilemmas, is left to seek its own answers and forge its own afterlife independent of its author and of the ethical values he may have instilled in it. As Malik’s story becomes materialised in the political landscape of Lilliput-Blefuscu, it is impossible to determine whether its afterlife represents a logical continuation or a perversion of an unrecoverable “original” idea (which again builds on the differential, satanised nature of logos in *The Satanic Verses*). It is merely one possible line of development of an already given imaginative material that has been and is being constantly recycled. In the end, both authors are removed from the world of their creation – Malik is exiled and the Commander killed by Neela – and the inhabitants on the island are left “orphaned” from both their authorial and political “fathers” to continue their struggle on their own and finish their story. Rushdie’s novel thus enacts and confirms the creationary and authorial paradigms on which it is built by asserting the creation/work of art as ontologically and epistemologically superior to the creator/author.

The movement of the novel concerning authorship is thus twofold. On one hand, Rushdie puts into play the ludic possibilities offered by contemporary digital technology of nonlinear, multiple and consumer-determined narration and ways of authoring a text. Rushdie’s conception of the Internet thus “operates as one more in a long line of metaphors, [...] that are designed to be paradigmatic of Rushdie’s own writing: heterotopian spaces in which multitudes of influences blend creatively and clash dynamically,”⁵⁷⁴ such as the anti-linear narration of *Midnight’s Children*, the palimpsest in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* and the Ocean of Stories in *Haroun*. In this sense, Teverson can further claim that

⁵⁷⁴ Teverson, *Salman Rushdie*, 191.

Rushdie is indicating that vehicles of globalisation, such as the Internet (and by implication, mass publishing), do not inevitably produce inane and commodified pap, but may produce complex and contestatory forms, which are expressive of divergent and non-homogenised viewpoints. The Internet may have been brought into being by dominant capitalistic processes that encourage the homogenisation of global culture, *Fury* suggests, but it also, paradoxically, enables the global dissemination of forms of expression that cannot be fully contained by dominant structures of authority.⁵⁷⁵

However, the argument of this chapter has been that the typically Rushdiean contestatory and dissenting textual politics is not upheld in this novel, which ends with a dystopian scenario in which the author is literally and symbolically exiled from the world of his imagination and deprived of his ontological status. Finding himself in a literal manifestation of the puppet theatre he has imaginatively constructed, he is not perceived as the “original” “Creator” who is the source of the story unfolding before his very eyes, but a simulacral figure who does not belong and who should be banished because it is the work of art that writes itself and its author.

While this foregrounding of the work of art at the expense of the author can be perceived as an exploration of the powerful effects of artistic creation in a new stage of Rushdie’s reconfiguration of authorship from the author-centred *Midnight’s Children*, *The Satanic Verses* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, *Fury* fails to deliver in this respect. This is because the agonistics of Malik’s story, when brought to life in the political strife in Lilliput-Blefuscu, does not operate as a nexus of empowering ideas and (hi)stories as in the previous novels, but confusedly wanders between a real politics (the history of Fiji or postcolonial society in general) and an intertextual transformation (Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*), and their fictional representation by Rushdie. Dominated by the depthless image of the simulacrum, the political appropriation of Malik’s text leads not to a teleological triumph of liberty over oppression, but to an implosion of cultural meaning and historical direction: in the end, the revolution is about to be suppressed by internal dissent within the ranks of the Indo-Lillies, which signals a return of the Elbees’ hegemony and American military intervention, both alternatives suggesting a continuation of the oppression of the Indo-Lillies. The novel’s historical nihilism goes hand in hand with its authorial nihilism, evident in its representation of the author as an ethically compromised figure who no longer has a viable position from which to speak and act.

⁵⁷⁵ Teverson, 192.

***Quichotte*: Postcolonial Authorship as Quixotism**

Quichotte continues and further develops the theme of the afterlife of the work of fiction begun in *Fury*, but replaces the cosmopolitan and globalised focus of the earlier novel with a more textualised, metafictional one. It explores the question of the relevance of literature and, more specifically, of authoring a text, in our contemporary, post-truth, post-real world and, as such, is an appropriate ending for this dissertation.

The “Age of Anything-Can-Happen” (*Q*, 18) it enthusiastically proclaims at the very beginning manifests itself, at the social level, in absurd, surreal images reflecting the degeneration of society in xenophobic America, and, on the artistic level, in the capacity of the creative imagination to beget a textual being that is here equated with begetting a biological progeny as nowhere else in Rushdie’s oeuvre. Thus, *Quichotte* imagines a son, Sancho, who promptly materializes next to him and becomes his companion on his journey. On the hypodiegetic level, Sancho’s role is to serve as a surrogate for the Author’s estranged Son, the central familial relation that defines the Author. The authorial and familial function are intertwined in this novel – the Author is simultaneously designated as “Brother” as his reconciliation with his Sister is a crucial aspect of his life and fiction, but his most important role is that of “Father,” a relation that does not figure explicitly in any of the common names used for him, but that is central and implicitly subsumed under his function as an Author. Introduced in the context of the family dynamics which give an impetus to the Author’s authoring of the text, the sisters fade out of the two stories and the sons take over: after a brief reconciliation, the sibling relationships remain divisive and cause a further disruption in the plots: after having received *Quichotte* and Sancho in her home, *Quichotte*’s sister is robbed by the latter and this drives another wedge between brother and sister, while the Author’s niece coldly distances herself from him after he has supplied his sister and her husband with the drug with which they commit double suicide.

As we saw, Edward Said’s disambiguation of the word *author* as “a person who originates or gives existence to something [i.e. a text], a begetter, beginner, father, or ancestor”⁵⁷⁶ equates textual with biological (pro)creation and, in *Quichotte*, authoring a text and begetting a

⁵⁷⁶ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings*, 83.

son are parallel processes. While *Fury* represented the text-son analogy as incongruous and disjunctive, Rushdie's latest novel explores the productive ways in which the convergence of fatherhood and authorship enables personal and artistic growth.

In the frame plot, the Author's primary goal in authoring his text is to reestablish a close connection with his estranged Son, which he puts into effect by means of the fictional father and son he invents. Fiction comes to mediate the father-son relationship to such an extent that the narrative levels cease to be distinguishable as reality and fiction respectively and become intertwined in a web of representation that places the entire diegetic structure under the sign of fabulation, with blurred boundaries between ontological and narrative levels. Thus, fiction becomes a thread signifying the unconscious affinity between father and son, as the son unwittingly identifies with the same cultural and literary iconography used by his father.

The Japanese-American agent who enlists the Author's help to win the son over to the government puts into play the coming true of the plot of one of the Author's spy novels, which emphasizes the positive mutual imbrications of the two meanings of "author," one mirroring and enabling the other. The agent's narrative of how he came to acquire his son as an asset on Indian territory, where he had gone to seek his authenticity and reestablish his Indian roots, is in fact a plot from one of the Author's spy novels.

"Oh my God," Brother said, "it's the plot of my seventh book."

"*Reverse Rendition*," Lance Makioka said, actually clapping his hands in delight. "I hoped you'd recognize the similarity. We're all big fans."

In his seventh novel Brother had imagined a scenario in which the American secret state needed to extract an asset from a safe haven in a neutral country and bring him onto American soil for questioning.

"If my information is correct, it was your most popular book," Lance Makioka said. "I took a look at the sales figures. They were pretty impressive. For you."

"This story you came to tell me," Brother said. "How much of it is a fairy tale?"

"It's a good story," Lance Makioka said. "You wrote it." (*Q*, 227)

Having "dematerialised and ceased to exist by an act of will, for his parents, at least" (*Q*, 215), the son retains his link to his father by going under the pseudonym Marcel DuChamp and, as the driving force behind the hacktivist organisation Legion, uses a Don Quixote mask to maintain his anonymity. As the multiply-named agent states, "The apple, sir, would not appear to have fallen very far from the tree" (*Q*, 222). The son's pseudonym not only grafts his subversive activity

onto his father, whose own authorial pseudonym is Sam DuChamp, but evokes the French artist Marcel Duchamp, “who broke down the boundaries between works of art and everyday objects” and whose “irreverence for conventional aesthetic standards led him to devise his famous ready-mades and heralded an artistic revolution.”⁵⁷⁷ Interestingly, he is one of the transgressive artists who feature prominently in Anthony Julius’s book:

...it is the job of art to shock us into grasping some truth about ourselves, or about the world, or about art itself, and that one way in which it does this is to alienate us from our preconceptions, by making the familiar strange and the unquestioned problematic. Art undermines pieties, challenges torpid institutions, and is always fresh and disturbing. The makers of artworks are themselves “armed against reality,” as Georges Hugnet said of Marcel Duchamp.⁵⁷⁸

Both as an artist who breaks down the boundaries between art and the real world and disturbs the pieties of individuals and institutions, Duchamp figures as an authorial alter ego both for the Author and the Son, who in different ways assume the artist’s transgressive mantle: the Author by rendering his fiction indistinguishable from his own reality and the Son by working against the establishment.

The Son’s holding on to his filial bonds to the Author even while he seeks to reinvent himself by an act of will enables the peeling away of the masks and false identities of both the father and the son and the finding of an affective core within themselves that, in binding them together in a new-found affection, brings about their personal and professional fulfillment. Paradoxically, the renegade son’s identity is traceable by the suggestive pseudonym that leads directly to his father.

Even as the mask/pseudonym/assumed identity comes to dominate the frame plot, it does not lead to the Baudrillardian simulacrum as in *Fury*, but is used as an emblem of the principle of (self)creation that is ultimately conducive to a reconciliation between the characters. Thus, the mask does not blur but reveals identity by pointing to an “original” (the son), which in turn leads to its “originator” (the Author).⁵⁷⁹ Ultimately, the affirmation of his fatherhood vis-à-vis his son

⁵⁷⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica, “Marcel Duchamp” by Robert Lebel, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marcel-Duchamp>, accessed June 2 2021.

⁵⁷⁸ Julius, *Transgressions*, 26.

⁵⁷⁹ Like the Author’s Son, Sister’s Daughter is obsessed with masks and, inspired by a theatre production of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* in which the whole cast wore masks throughout the performance, is planning to

is equated with an affirmation of the Author's authorship for it is only in authoring his text that he is able to reassert himself as a father.

In the "real" world of the Author, authorship is analogous to, but ultimately clearly distinguishable, from fatherhood, even though the latter builds on the metaphor of the creative process as a force enabling people to reinvent themselves and their reality. Although fictionalised through the character of the fictional son Sancho, the Author's son is not denied his authenticity as a human being and is not collapsed into a textual effect. Moreover, he is endowed with the subversive potential that in Rushdie's other novels is habitually reserved for the author, who is here constituted as a figure of conformity to the establishment who even helps the agent to recruit his son for the government. Moreover, the son's reestablishing of his Indian roots can be seen as being in an implicit relationship to his cyber-warfare activism/hacktivism against the American government, which tentatively puts into play the postcolonial discourse of resistance and anti-establishmentarianism that dominated Rushdie's previous novels.

However, *Quichotte* refuses to engage with this discourse and relegates the theme of American neo-colonial interventionism to the background. Paradoxically, it is precisely the Author, elsewhere in Rushdie's fiction the subversive figure *par excellence*, who thwarts the activation of postcolonial discourse generated by his son, a sign, perhaps, of Rushdie's exhaustion of this theme and of his preparedness to relinquish it to the next generation of postcolonial writers. This, in turn, can be interpreted as the reason for the elevated stature of Son at the expense of that of the Author, who becomes the paradigmatic quixotic character unable to conceive of reality in non-fictional terms and is therefore blind to the real world of injustice and inequality that motivates his son's dissidence.

In representing the Author's authorship as essentially quixotic in character, Rushdie imprisons him in a solipsistic world that sees and recognizes only art/fiction as a conduit to self- and world-perception, a theme dominant in his *oeuvre*, but which is here given a different twist. As Harold Bloom points out, Part II of Cervantes' novel effects a "grand" "disruption in the aesthetics of representation":

organise a runway show in which the models would not only wear different masks but would bring them to life. Empowered by such a metaphorical mask, she writes a message to the Author from her mother's computer and enables the reconciliation between brother and sister.

Hamlet again is the best analogue: from the entrance of the players in act II through the close of the performance of *The Mousetrap* in act III, all the rules of normative representation are tossed away, and everything is theatricality. Part II of *Don Quixote* is similarly and bewilderingly advanced, since the Knight, Sancho, and everyone they encounter are acutely conscious that fiction has disrupted the order of reality.⁵⁸⁰

This productive interanimation between reality and fiction in Cervantes's novel proceeds from the dual vision of reality enabled by Don Quixote's quixotism: in the world he encounters, everything is both real and fictionalised by means of his chivalric perspective. In other words, everything is both itself, i.e. as it is in its real existence, and something more, i.e. what it could potentially be if the real world were like the chivalric fiction that Don Quixote reads. This dual representation in the novel takes place across the entire social panorama of late Golden Age Spain, from the lowest strata of society in Part I (prostitutes, inn-keepers, servants, peasants, shepherds, prisoners, mule-drovers, outcasts) to members of the upper classes and the aristocracy in Part II. The initial disjunction between Don Quixote's fictional idealism and the crude reality he comes across is progressively diluted, as real situations and people assume characteristics reminiscent of the chivalrous romances Cervantes purportedly satirises. For instance, Sansón Carrasco, a student at Salamanca from Don Quixote's village, assumes the identity of a chivalric knight, the Knight of the Mirrors, and engages in a duel with him so that, having vanquished him, he can make him return home. In short, Don Quixote modifies and ennobles reality and even Sancho, his illiterate squire, at times adopts the high-flown, extravagant diction of his master.

In Rushdie's novel, Quichotte's and Sancho's peregrinations across America yield a one-dimensional picture of contemporary American society, where white supremacy seems to be the prevalent ideology and whiteness automatically connotes violence and oppression *vis-à-vis* the other races. In fact, the Author's pseudonymity seems to have been motivated by fears of prejudice and racism:

Yes, the name on the books veiled his ethnic identity, just as *Freddie Mercury* veiled the Parsi Indian singer Farrokh Bulsara. This was not because the Queen front man was

⁵⁸⁰ Harold Bloom, Introduction to Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman (London: Vintage Books, 2005), xxiii-xxiv.

ashamed of his race but because he did not want to be prejudged, did not want to be ghettoed inside an ethnic-music pigeonhole surrounded by the bars of white attitudes. Brother felt the same way. And after all it was the age of the invented name. Social media had made sure of that. Everyone was someone else now.

Pseudonyms have never been uncommon in the world of books. Women had often deemed them necessary. Brother believed (without daring to compare his poor talent to their genius) that Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, George Eliot, and even J. K. Rowling (who preferred the gender-neutrality of *J.K.* to *Jo*) would have understood. (*Q*, 25-6)

The Author then proceeds to trace the legal history of “brown people of South Asian ethnicity” in America, from their being denied American citizenship at the beginning of the twentieth century, to their being barred from immigrating to the United States, until 1965, when

a new Immigration and Nationality Act opened the doors. After which, an unexpectedness. It turned out that *hindoos* were not to be a major target of American racism after all. That honor continued to be reserved for the African-American community, and Indian immigrants – many of them familiar with white British racism in South Africa and East Africa, as well as India and Britain themselves – were almost embarrassed to find themselves excused, in many parts of the USA, from racial abuse and attacks, and embarked on the path of becoming model citizens. [...] Then came September 11, 2001, and young Indian men started wearing T-shirts reading DON’T BLAME ME, I’M HINDU, and Sikh men were attacked because their turbans made them look Islamic, and cab drivers put flag decals on their windshields and stickers on the glass partitions between themselves and their passengers reading GOD BLESS AMERICA, and suddenly it seemed to Brother that maybe the mask of a pen name was worth continuing to wear. There were too many hostile eyes looking at people like him now. (*Q*, 26)

Pitting themselves against such a hostile environment, neither the Author nor Quichotte can exert a mediating influence between reality and fiction in the way Don Quixote did. Like Malik, they cannot inhabit the Third Space, which potentially opens

the way to conceptualising an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the “inter” – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁸¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 56, emphasis original.

In spite of the several translational and relational, i.e. dialogical, moves performed by the characters – the Author as a “real-world” Don Quixote and Quichotte as a fictional, modern-day Don Quixote – both the Author and Quichotte remain unable to achieve the truly quixotic achievement of forging a stronger bond between reality and fiction, one in which each would complement, enrich and add another dimension to the other. Alienated from their American, non-native environment, they wrap themselves in their fictional delusions and therefore cannot envisage an inbetween space, neither in terms of culture (India/America, East/West) nor in terms of reality/fiction.

Whereas in the other novels writing enabled the author to engage with postcolonial history, politics and culture in different ways, here the author is enclosed in the world of his fiction to such an extent that it swallows his reality and in the end, he becomes an imitation of his character rather than the other way round:

As it unfurled, America – with its calm green signage, its garish billboards featuring men with large, excellent teeth who were trying to sell him their legal services, its Howard Johnsons and Days Inns – began to feel progressively less real to the Author than the versions he had invented and lived in and with for a year and more. The imagined took precedence over the actual. Quichotte and Sancho were travelling with them, in the car which was also their car, and his and his son’s journey felt more and more like theirs, run backwards, like a film, in the days when there was film. Ghost-Quichotte sat with him in his seat, ghost-Sancho helped Son to drive the car, and gradually their phantom forms merged with and were absorbed by his own and his child’s. He genuinely felt as if he had entered the world of his fiction and began to look nervously up at the sky as they drove through the cold night to arrive by daylight in the Kansas town he had renamed Beautiful, and he half expected – more than half expected – to see ruptures in reality up there, holes in space-time, and panic in the streets below. (*Q*, 363)

Even *Fury*’s Malik Solanka, in spite of interpreting a real political and revolutionary struggle for freedom as a puppet-theatre performing his own text, nevertheless became involved in it, but *Quichotte*’s Author is unable to recognise the real world without his fictional lens and functions as the principal exponent of a worldview that fictionalised/narrativises being, knowledge and reality. Thus, when the agent effectively tells him of an American undercover operation on foreign, Indian soil, the Author sees not an instance of a hegemonic interventionism in his own native country, but an interplay of textualities brought to life – for him, the agent is a James Bond figure acting out a plot of one of his spy novels.

The agent himself is constituted primarily as a reader and interpreter of the Author's manuscript and even suggests that "[a] third party, reading these accounts, might even, at a certain point, conclude that both were fictional, that Brother and Sister and Son were imaginative figments just as Quichotte and Salma and Sancho were. That the Author's life was a fake, just like his book" (*Q*, 229). Although clearly a metafictional statement that is in line with the common Rushdiean theme of the constructed nature of subjectivity, history, politics, etc., the agent's statement and the overall system of representation of the novel, in which the Author is troped as a modern-day Don Quixote, reveals the ideological and conceptual blindness of such a relativisation of reality, which, in turn, leads to the Author's ethical blindness.

Having grown up in the high cultural *milieu* of Bombay, in the Breach Candy neighborhood, like Saleem and Malik, in which figures like Aurora Zogoiby and Vasco Miranda moved, he easily falls prey to the quixotic disease,

in the grip of which the boundary between art and life became blurred and permeable, so that at times he was incapable of distinguishing where one ended and the other began, and, even worse, was possessed of the fool's conviction that the imaginings of creative people could spill over beyond the boundaries of the works themselves, that they possessed the power to enter and transform and even improve the real world. (*Q*, 32)

The repetition of addresses and the invariably Bombayite location and bourgeois upbringing of Rushdie's authorial protagonists suggest an exploration, on Rushdie's part, of the possible paths taken by the postcolonial intellectual and of the different destinations at which they can end up even while starting from the same geographical, historical and cultural point. The Author's quixotism in this novel is radically different from that of the other authors, who use reality for producing fiction that has an invariably ideologically motivated provenance and purpose. Saleem, Moraes, the diasporic narrator of *Shame*, the Divine-Satanic author in *The Satanic Verses* and even the Malik of his Little Brain days, author their texts/art as a result of their engagement with the historical and cultural realities from which they sprang, a decidedly non-textual context that found a fictionalised expression in their texts, but nevertheless retained its extra-textual facticity even though it destabilised the boundaries between reality and illusion.

The quixotism of Quichotte's Author consists of his symbolical authorial castration which prevents him from any engagement with the world in a non-textual framework. Hence, his narcissistic self-representation in his character Quichotte and his wish-fulfillment creation of his

fictional son Sancho as an allegory of the progressive growth of a text rather than of a human being. Such is the ubiquity of the authorial presence as the omniscient Author-God presiding over the realm of his invention, that the Author even situates himself as the goal of Quichotte's and Sancho's respective quests: in searching for his beloved, Quichotte, himself a projection of the Author, finds the Author, i.e. himself, while Sancho, seeking to emancipate himself from the father/author, becomes not a real boy of flesh and blood like Pinocchio but vanishes into thin air, like a pure fiction, incapable of existing out of the paternal presence of his Author.

The appropriation of religious imagery for the purpose of exploring authorship as a godlike creation of a world links *Quichotte* to *The Satanic Verses*. Both novels trope the author as a textual God who, in creating his characters in his image, is in turn created in theirs. The satanic narrator/Author and Gibreel both possess this godlike omniscient perspective: Gibreel is a supra-oneiric consciousness observing the world of his dreams from above and is, like the Author, also a participant in the fictional world he creates.

Paradoxically, the text demystifies this perspective even while asserting it, because both Gibreel and the Author are a part of the epistemic and ontological fallenness that engulfs the novels.

CONCLUSION

The internal dynamism of the text in the novels of our corpus reveals the evolution of Rushdie's conception of authorship. The historiographic aspect of *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* demonstrates a representation of history that is riven with contradictions, omissions, gaps and distortions, which the historically conscious subject nevertheless foregrounds in his aspiration to constitute his text as a multidimensional texture that resists the monologic discourse of official historiography. The cultural and historical grounding of Saleem and Moraes as authors of the texts we are reading affects the similar grounding of their texts, which are nourished by culturally specific forms (or, as I termed them, "crises") of representation, such as elephantiasis as a specifically Indian "disease" that aims at wholeness and comprehensiveness, and, as its opposite, the fragmentary form of representation expressed through the perforated sheet, the palimpsest and, to an extent, the mosaic. Since the accent in these novels is on the *Bildung* of their authors and protagonists, the novels are structured around specific metaphors for the writing process, which define how Saleem and Moraes become writers and inform their metahistorical discourse. Both Saleem's chutnification of (hi)stories and Moraes's sighing encapsulate their dominant mission to preserve and record suppressed or lost (hi)stories and thus express a truly postcolonial agenda of resistant authorship that rests on a conception of literature as a vehicle of imparting a transcendent dimension to life. In view of this, I have termed the dominant form of dialogism in these novels "historical," since the entire conception of the novels, their author-narrators and the poetics they exhibit in their texts is the product of an intimate engagement with the discourse of specific histories, namely those of India and al-Andalus.

In *The Satanic Verses*, the umbilical connection between author and text, developed within and across the different narrative levels (Gibreel-Rosa, Gibreel-Manound and, by analogy, Author-Gibreel), disrupts the traditional hierarchy in which meaning flows from the author to the text and indicates a conception of authorship as a bidirectional process in which each member of the pair creates and is created by the other. The novel as a whole establishes a "transgressive dialogism" in which the dichotomies within the same plot, ethically polarised as good/evil, i.e. angelic/satanic, monologic/dialogic, continuous/discontinuous, etc., are subverted transdiegetically, i.e. across the narrative levels. It is only in this sense that the novel allows for a

recuperative representation of Mahound/Muhammad and the early history of Islam. Overall, the novel propounds a processual, dynamic conception of authorship that actively resists the stabilisation of meanings and ideologies. However, in championing semantic and ideological indeterminacy and ambivalence, the novel risks provoking misreadings, which I discuss in the following chapter.

The dialogical interaction in *Fury* and *Quichotte* is primarily between reality and fiction, as the authors in these novels find it problematic to mediate between them. The dominant model of representation in *Fury* is the world of simulacra and depthless consumerism, which triggers a profound authorial anxiety in Malik regarding the afterlife of his creations. Producing aura-less art, devoid of authenticity, which is subsequently appropriated by different commercial and political interests, the author ends up being engulfed by such interests himself and ultimately the novel is unable to uphold the Rushdiean contestatory and dissenting textual politics. Deprived of its subversive political and discursive agency, the work of art cannot articulate a viable political solution and produces nothing more than hermeneutical and political impasses that lead nowhere, a sentiment further explored in *Quichotte*. Here, the author's solipsism leads to a downright renunciation of his postcolonial engagement in a gesture that seems to indicate a willingness on his part to bequeath his legacy of dissent and subversion to the next generation of writers.

CHAPTER III

TOWARDS AN AUTHORIAL ETHICS: THE READER IN THE TEXT

... interpretation is a function of identity, specifically, identity conceived as variations upon an identity theme[...] The overarching principle is: identity re-creates itself, or, to put it another way, style – in the sense of personal style – creates itself. That is, all of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolise and finally to replicate ourselves. We work out through the text our own characteristic patterns of desire and adaptation. We interact with the work, making it part of our own psychic economy and making ourselves part of the literary work – as we interpret it.

Norman N. Holland. *Unity Identity Text Self*

My voice comes and goes. For you, it comes from me. For me, it goes out from me. Between this coming from and going towards lie all the problems and astonishments of the dissociated voice.

Stephen Connor. *Dumbstruck – A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*

According to Lukács, ethics is built into the very structure of the novel. In the epic, ethics is determined by the communal nature of totality – since the individual does not conceive of itself as an entity separate from the community, the question of an individual system of values at a disjunction with that of the group does not arise. The novel, on the contrary, is unimaginable without ethics, as it rests on a profound dissonance between the individual and the world; hence, the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in the novel is different from that in other genres. The novel lacks the balance between elements that forms the epic totality of the world; hence, in the novel “ethic – the ethical intention – is visible in the creation of every detail and hence is, in its most concrete content, an effective structural element of the work itself. Thus, the novel, in

contrast to other genres whose existence resides within the finished form, appears as something in process of becoming.”⁵⁸²

J. Hillis Miller also considers ethics to be inseparable from narration and argues that “there is a necessary ethical moment in the act of reading as such, a moment neither cognitive, nor political, nor social, nor interpersonal, but properly and independently ethical.”⁵⁸³ In his view, a universal “moral law gives rise by an intrinsic necessity to storytelling, even if that storytelling in one way or another puts in question or subverts the moral law.”⁵⁸⁴ He locates the ethical moment in narrative in the “claim made on the author writing the work, on the narrator telling the story within the fiction of the novel, on the characters within the story at decisive moments of their lives, and on the reader, teacher, or critic responding to the work.”⁵⁸⁵ To elucidate the ethical dimension of narrative, Hillis Miller concentrates on texts in which the novelists read themselves and takes the act of self-reading as paradigmatic for reading in general. His take on ethics in the novel, therefore, does not lie so much in the thematic dramatisation of ethical situations, but in the act of reading staged by the novel itself. Hence, he views deconstruction as primarily good reading, as it is only in the act of reading that a text produces an effect.

In the previous parts, our analysis showed how the authorial subjectivity in Rushdie’s novel was destabilised and decentred and how this, in turn, affected the aesthetic practice of Rushdie’s authors, which was revealed to be marked by crises of representation, showing their inability to faithfully and unambiguously represent their world. In addition to the dual authorial self – the writing and written-about subject, Neil ten Kortenaar also posits a “third-order” narratorial self in *Midnight’s Children*, who is the metafictional commentator addressing a higher-level narratee both in the absence of, and above, Padma. He “appeals to readers who know about Scheherazade, the Quran, and Indian history and who understand the conventions of postmodern narration. He regularly flatters his narratees that they can see (and hear) more than Padma can.”⁵⁸⁶ Furthermore, there is a fourth-order authorial figure, the implied author, who can

⁵⁸² Georg Lukács, from *Theory of the Novel*, in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon, 195.

⁵⁸³ J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 1.

⁵⁸⁴ Hillis Miller, 2.

⁵⁸⁵ Hillis Miller, 8.

⁵⁸⁶ Neil ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text*, 246.

be called “Rushdie,” “explicitly related to the author of the same name who has written articles inviting readers of the novel to join him in regarding the narration from a vantage point superior to Saleem’s.”⁵⁸⁷ The implied author points out the unreliability of Saleem’s narration and exposes his weaknesses, encouraging his readers to assume an interpretative position superior to Saleem’s. As Madelena Gonzalez states, in Rushdie’s fiction

[m]eaning, it seems, should always be accommodated within this framework of multiplicity, it should never be imposed by the one upon the many (even if that “one” is the author), but must be the result of the interaction of different subjectivities. The freedom that Rushdie would like to give to his reader makes his fictional project apparently contradictory. He is a writer responsible for his fictional world who nevertheless dreams of an impossible interaction with a living audience. By giving them a share of the responsibility, he feels able to undermine the sacred truth-value of the written word.⁵⁸⁸

The presence or the awareness of audience/readers in Rushdie’s novels indicates an ethical concern with the motive for and the manner and purpose of telling/writing a story. In this way, Rushdie reads himself in Hillis Miller’s sense and articulates an ethics of authorship. The implied or empirical reader is necessarily a significant factor in activating the meanings of the text, but Rushdie’s novels also invariably include readerly figures as characters (in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*), anticipate their different reception (*The Satanic Verses*) or contain a dual frame of audience-reference (in *Fury* and *Quichotte*), which suggests a profound preoccupation with the responsibility of authoring a text.

In this part, the focus will be on the acts of self-reading staged within the texts, which further destabilise the authority of both author and text, as it dialogises internally the creationary process, imbricating both author and listener/reader. In *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, the presence of Padma and Aoi as listeners and/or readers of Saleem’s and Moraes’s manuscripts illustrates their co-creationary role as each of them provides something essential to the text that their authors could not provide. As Saleem’s and Moraes’s narratives progress from orality to writing, the presence of Padma and Aoi dramatises the difference between the immediacy of the former and the mediation of the latter. In both cases, a gap is created between author and audience, albeit for different reasons: Padma can listen to Saleem’s narration and influence it with her comments and expectations, but is unable to read it as text because of her

⁵⁸⁷ Ten Kortenaar, 248.

⁵⁸⁸ Madelena Gonzalez, *Fiction after the Fatwa*, 105.

illiteracy, whereas Aoi, having complemented Moraes's narrative with her "vowels," is prevented from reading its end because of her untimely death at the hands of Vasco Miranda. Padma provides Saleem with the archetypal and mythical authorial paradigm without which Saleem's authorship is unimaginable, whereas Aoi, by becoming one with the painted Aurora at the moment of her death, can be said to embody the ideology and artistic ethos Aurora sought to instill in Moraes through her paintings, which he incorporates within his text.

In addition to Padma and Aoi as intratextual narratees, there is an unidentified secondary narratee to whom the author addresses his words – an erudite, well-read recipient who can understand the intertextual allusions and who is evoked by forms of address such as "ladies and gentlemen," "reader," etc. The presence of this secondary narratee(s) emphasises the ultimately disseminating orientation of the texts, i.e. its aim to be incorporated into a plural, collective framework, such as the Indian "amnesiac nation" and the pursuers to whom Moraes leaves his manuscript scattered across Andalusia.

The Satanic Verses contains, within the body of the text, the two dominant modes of reception by which it was interpreted by its Muslim/religious and Western/secular readers; moreover, according to Aamir Mufti, its fragmentary, pastiche-like reception was anticipated and conditioned by the fragmentary and pastiche-like form of the novel itself.⁵⁸⁹ Pursuing the transgressive aesthetics as it was defined in the previous chapter, my analysis will focus on the ultimate aspect of transgression which the novel provoked – namely, the usurpation of the status of the author by one reader in particular, the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Fury and *Quichotte* dramatise their self-readings by operating according to a dual intertextual framework, namely by incorporating the extra-textual intertexts of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the dynamics between internal and external audience

⁵⁸⁹ Mufti argues that "parody and pastiche comprise in Rushdie's novels two aspects of the same formal intention, marking the texts' hesitation with regard to notions of originality and purity, on the one hand, and their self-critical sense of [metropolitan] affiliation, on the other. Parody thus provides ironic distance as a means of expressing a simultaneous sense of continuity and discontinuity with the (colonial) past." Moreover, "pastiche and its ambivalence of form," as employed in Rushdie's novel, are "the very conditions that enable the literary text to enter the political sphere." Critics in the West, following outmoded conceptions of reception "based on an almost Victorian image of the solitary bourgeois reader," interpreted the novel as written for and read by a primarily Western audience and failed to understand both its Islamic politics and Islamic mass reception. "A reconceptualisation of reception appropriate to the realities of the postcolonial 'global ecumene,'" Mufti argues, "must account for forms of mass 'consumption' other than 'reading' in the narrower sense of that word." (Aamir Mufti, "Reading the Rushdie Affair: An Essay on Islam and Politics," *Social Text*, No. 29 (1991), 95-116)

disintegrates; the intratextual audience disappears (there are no equivalents to Padma and Aoi here) and the accent shifts to how the work of art is received by a global audience.

Rushdie's consistent use of different modes of self-reading in his novels testifies to the different ways in which he modifies and refracts the "death of the Author" promulgated by Barthes and Foucault and tempers their anti-humanistic ideology. As opposed to humanist ideology, which acknowledges the writer or author as the creator of meaning, anti-humanism dislodges the authorial subject, and the subject in general, from this position and locates meaning in language, the text or an impersonal force (power, social practices, etc.). Barthes' "The Death of the Author" (1968) and Foucault's "What Is an Author?" (1969) wrested from the author the authority to be the ultimate arbiter of meaning and authorial intention, postulating that the creativity of the text derived from language and not from the person organising it into a text. In Barthes' anti-authorial view,

writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing. [...] As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.⁵⁹⁰

For Barthes, this means burying the Author as a begetter, antecedent to the text, in the interest of the modern scriptor, who

is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is essentially written *here* and *now*... For him, on the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – of which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁹⁰ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 142.

⁵⁹¹ Barthes, 145-6.

The culmination of this process of authorial self-effacement is the birth of the reader as the locus where a multitude of textual, cultural, historical, ideological and linguistic meanings released by the text are activated. However,

seeking to separate authorial signature from the named individual, the conflation of which dominated criticism since the advent of signed publication, they [i.e. Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and others] all claimed that the text could no longer be considered as an expression of an author's unique personality. Rather, it is the product of a signifying process of difference and differentiation that make absolute truth and authority impossible.⁵⁹²

The metaphorical death of the author/Author was an expression of modernity's loss of faith in the coherent and integral human individual transferred to the field of aesthetics; with the author displaced from his position of epistemic centrality, the focus was shifted onto the work and the reader, wherein the production and activation of literary meaning was seen to reside. Chidi Okonkwo criticises Barthes and Foucault, claiming that "what they have effectively done is lay the foundation for a tradition of misreading which substitutes the critics' resourcefulness and ideological agenda for the author's intelligence and intentions."⁵⁹³ Similarly, Seán Burke draws attention to the paradox that in order to destroy the Author-God, Barthes must necessarily "participate in its construction. He must create a king worthy of the killing. Not only is the author to be compared with a tyrannical deity, but also with bourgeois man himself[...] Hence, too[...] the capitalisations ('sway of the Author,' 'Author diminishing,' 'reign of the Author') prime for decapitation. Hence, again, the characterisation of the author as the Father to whom the book is the child."⁵⁹⁴

The "Rushdie affair" brought to the fore a welter of such misreadings, as the author Rushdie was largely sidelined as a source of meaning for his novel and was himself created by his readers as either the consummate secular intellectual daring to speak truth to power or a Satanic enemy of Islam. Rushdie organises his novels around the principle of narrative

⁵⁹² Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and Polina Mackay, eds., *Authorship in Context: From the Theoretical to the Material* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3.

⁵⁹³ Chidi Okonkwo, *Decolonisation Agonistics in Postcolonial Fiction*, 21.

⁵⁹⁴ Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*, 25. Further on in his text, Burke reinforces his position: "The death of the author emerges as a blind-spot in the work of Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, an absence they seek to create and explore, but one which is always already filled with the idea of the author" (165).

instability, manifested in multiple interpretations and meanings, open-endedness, circularity and repetition, decentering of narrators and characters, blurred distinctions between categories, the confluence of various discourses (history, politics, art, myth, religion, philosophy, etc.), a complex web of intertextuality, etc., all of which serve to modify and relativise the God-like, omniscient perspective of the authoritative and integral self of the narrator of realist fiction and the stable world of his representation. However, while the goal of all these strategies is to create a distancing effect between the logic of the text/implied author and that of its author/narrator, they do not signify the disappearance and even less the death of the author. Rather, his presence is insistently asserted by the proliferation of authorial fictive selves who mediate between the textual worlds they create and their audience in different ways.

The presence of a listener/reader within the text destabilises the authority and centrality of the writer by dialogising the production of meaning, which does not flow unidirectionally from the author and into the work as a finished product, but is actively constructed, deconstructed and then re-constructed as a dialogical process. Thus, Rushdie's novels exemplify Lukacs's definition of the novel as an incessant becoming.

As Philip J. M. Sturgess argues, "the role of the reader in detecting a narrative's logic of narrativity is crucial and this, when the reader is both pluralised and contextualised by his historical moment of reading, at once qualifies any idea of a 'pure and essential meaning' intrinsic to the work."⁵⁹⁵ I would like to argue that Rushdie's intratextual listeners/readers in *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the transgression of the categories of author/character/reader in the text and reception of *The Satanic Verses* and the dual interpretive framework of *Fury* and *Quichotte* serve precisely this function of diluting the idea of pure and unambiguous meaning in the text and as such confirm the authorial ideology of difference and structural, thematic and interpretative ambiguity visible throughout Rushdie's *oeuvre*. Dialogised with those of his narratees, the authorial voice in his novels is intersubjective, interdiscursive, dislocated and diffused – in fact, truly "ventriloquial", as Steven Connor defines it. The ventriloquial voice is "the voice speaking from some other place, reorganising the economy of the senses, and embodying illegitimate forms of power"⁵⁹⁶; unamenable to integration, internally divided and contradictory, it is precariously located in an imaginary space it shares with the

⁵⁹⁵ Philip J. M. Sturgess, quoted in Dominic Rainsford, *Authorship, Ethics and the Reader: Blake, Dickens, Joyce* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997), 4.

⁵⁹⁶ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck – A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, 43.

reader as his epistemic Other that is both affirmed and negated. Suspended between author and audience that is simultaneously listener and reader, the ventriloquial voice “asks in particular to be understood in terms of the relations between vision and hearing, relations which it itself helps to dislocate.”⁵⁹⁷ Investing neither the ear nor the eye with autonomy in isolation from the other, it enforces their cooperation, making both listening and reading complementary processes in the production of textual meaning.

Seán Burke presciently affirms that “the concept of the author is never more alive than when pronounced dead.”⁵⁹⁸ The reading/interpretive paradigms that Rushdie’s novels contain represent a profoundly ethical dimension that seeks meaning (that of the authorial self and of his text) relationally, in the dialogue of the authorial self with his Other, who is the ubiquitously present addressee,⁵⁹⁹ explicit and implicit, of the author’s narrative and as such is inseparable from its significatory structure. First, they comprise the instances of self-reading in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* through the characters of Padma and Aoi, whose reactions to Saleem’s and Moraes’s texts represent an intratextual interpretation incorporated into the text itself. Then, there are the various(ly) encoded readers, i.e. the varied explicit and implied audience to whom the text is addressed, such as the Widow, Aadam and India (*Midnight’s Children*), the collective Andalusian readers (*The Moor’s Last Sigh*), the implicit readers of all the novels who are able to identify the intertextual references therein, and, finally, the character-turned-reader-turned-author in *The Satanic Verses*, namely the Ayatollah Khomeini.

⁵⁹⁷ Connor, 14.

⁵⁹⁸ Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*, 7.

⁵⁹⁹ Sara Suleri contends that a “schizophrenic anticipation of audience [Western and Eastern] is already built into the [i.e. Rushdie’s] text” (176). In reference to *Shame*, she elaborates: “Its somewhat generic shifts suggest that Rushdie is attempting to accommodate two monolithic audiences at the same time, anxiously misreading their skills as readers. The genre of fantasy gestures toward a Western audience, long since sophisticated at reading the language of the surreal. At the same time, however, Rushdie cannot help but be seduced by the facticity of the sorry tale he chooses to tell, by its gossip value to a more informed [Eastern] audience. As a result, his narrative is forced to gather power from a commitment to the incredulous, or to a language that knows how to retrieve immediately what it has to give.” (Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, 179)

(De)Composing the Text: The Roles of Padma and Aoi

Named after the lotus goddess, whose name means “The One Who Possesses Dung” (*MC*, 24),⁶⁰⁰ Padma is the first person who listens to Saleem’s story in its entirety, and as such, she has a paradigmatic role: on one level at least, she can function as an exemplary audience. As Alfred J. López points out,

if we are to read her as a gauge, however accurate, of how an audience might read the text (or at least a characterisation of what an author might anticipate in such an audience), then what Saleem faces here [i.e. by her absence] is much more than the loss of a single reader. Read in this context, the loss of Padma would signify nothing less than a full-scale mutiny, a crisis of credibility not just for a particular text but for an entire body of literature – or more precisely, for the very possibility of what I call a “magical agency” and of a literature that would allow us to think of such a possibility.⁶⁰¹

In this perspective, Padma’s permanence in her role as the first recipient of Saleem’s narration is essential in order to validate his credibility and to counter the success of the political agency of the Widow and Shiva by the regenerative and memorialising potential of its own magical narrative agency. On another level, however, she functions as Saleem’s opposite, his down-to-earth, uneducated counterpart. Hers is an

alternative, popular aesthetics. Padma is not only a passive receptor, or a disembodied voice of the national conscience, but a literary *critic*, whose authority rests on her being a member of the lower classes. Significantly, her advice is hardly ever followed, but it ostensibly tempers the shameful cosmopolitanism that would make the writing inauthentic. Her presence is Rushdie’s playful acknowledgement of a tradition of national literature which his peripheral status allows him to criticise even as he participates in it.⁶⁰²

Her folksy wisdom, as gauged by her reactions to Saleem’s words, remains at the superficial level of practical expediency (for example, she interprets Nadir Khan’s asking for Mumtaz’s hand in marriage as an act meant to ensure his safety under the Aziz’s roof; when Saleem

⁶⁰⁰ Uma Parameswaran brands this definition of the goddess Lakshmi as a “distortion”; Padma is “the Lotus calyx,” the lotus is “a flower that grows in the shallow, muddy shores of ponds and rivers. Mud, slush, slime, muck, mire, bog, swamp; any of these would be acceptable, for they have more than one meaning, and one of the meanings is the kind of swampy mud in which the lotus grows. But ‘dung’ has only one meaning and that very definitely has nothing to do with the lotus or goddess Lakshmi, one of whose names is Padma.” (Parameswaran, “The Perforated Sheet,” 64)

⁶⁰¹ López, *Posts and Pasts*, 187.

⁶⁰² Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, 101.

dismisses the cheque he received on his birth from a newspaper as insulting, she replies “Don’t be vain... One hundred rupees is not so little; after all, everybody gets born, it’s not such a big big thing” [MC, 160-1]; when Saleem muses whether the many women in his life are the multiple faces of Bharat-Mata, she simply replies “They are just women, that’s all”) and willful interpretive arbitrariness (she rejects the negative semantics of her name and asks that Saleem provide another). Saleem sees in her

ignorance and superstition, necessary counterweights to my miracle-laden omniscience? How to do without her paradoxical earthiness of spirit, which keeps – kept? – my feet on the ground? I have become, it seems to me, the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities, the wild god of memory and the lotus-goddess of the present... but must I now become reconciled to the narrow one-dimensionality of a straight line? (MC, 206)

Yet, bearing in mind the mythological rootedness of her name and the fact that she is the one who engenders the idea that Saleem read the manuscript to her (his initial intention has been for it to be accessed through reading rather than listening), I can concur with Brennan’s statement that “she is the heart and soul of the nation’s original sense of self as described in the primal literature of mythology, the true national novelist’s only reliable source material.”⁶⁰³ Although “a preserver of traditions... she is not, surprisingly, a symbol of memory, which is a *historical* quality directly at odds with the repetitive logic of folklore. Rushdie makes this distinction at one point when Saleem counterposes his own ‘wild god of memory’ to Padma’s ‘lotus goddess of the present.’”⁶⁰⁴

Overall, critics are divided as to whether Padma has a crucial and complementary (Brennan, López, Wilson, Batty) or a minor and marginalised (Verma, Ramsey-Kurtz) role in the novel. As opposed to Brennan’s interpretation of her as a representative of the masses, López’s as an exemplary audience, Wilson’s as an aesthetic foil to Saleem and Batty’s as a parodical echo of Shahryar, the listener who marries the storyteller, Charu Verma sees her as merely “a victim of th[e] male hegemonic view...a footnote to Saleem the narrator... Her story is discardable like dung.”⁶⁰⁵ Uma Parameswaran takes the middle ground in describing her like “the chorus in a Greek drama always on the stage, but never initiating action; essentially a non-participant but

⁶⁰³ Brennan, 104.

⁶⁰⁴ Brennan, 106.

⁶⁰⁵ Charu Verma, “Padma’s Tragedy: A Feminist Deconstruction of *Midnight’s Children*,” in David Smale, *Salman Rushdie*, 123 and 125.

occasionally giving a thrust to the play's progression."⁶⁰⁶ On the other side of the spectrum, Helga Ramsey-Kurz emphasises that Padma "occupies the most subaltern position a figure can possibly occupy within *Midnight's Children*, as she remains relegated to the very margins of the text from where she cannot even access her own characterisation in writing, as any literate subject could by reading."⁶⁰⁷ In her view, Padma's illiteracy is permanently disabling for her and it is this choice of audience that ensures the fragmentation of Saleem's narrative, "as it can never really contain the illiterate consciousness it introduces."⁶⁰⁸ She is on a par with other characters who embody the mythical and primordial aspect of India, such as Durga, Tai, Tai Bibi, Picture Singh, and others, who are all carriers of a wisdom that is inaccessible to a literate culture.

Immortalisation by autobiographical record is not for everyone in India and in *Midnight's Children* denotes a privilege which only Saleem can employ to assert his superiority over his unlettered vis-à-vis and have the last word. Disposed of and eclipsed, Padma, in turn, comes to signify, together with Tai Bibi, Picture Singh and Durga, that vast part of Indian history which is not preserved, chutnified, pickled in writing, but left to waste in oblivion because its agents are not literate... Padma's failed attempts to challenge his prominence and break out of the role of the silent listener highlight how the writing of one history can mean the suppression of another, how the transcription of collective experiences into letters must turn into a highly competitive act in a culture in which an inexhaustible plurality of discourses determines the making of truth.⁶⁰⁹

Although she is subordinated to Saleem in many ways – as a poor, illiterate Hindu woman and, above all, as a listener, therefore a mere recipient of his story – Padma's role overcomes the subalternity that Ramsey-Kurz ascribes to her. Her ubiquitous presence from the very beginning of the narrative positions her as Saleem's constant interlocutor and although he marginalises her input, her presence nevertheless exposes the faults and limitations of Saleem as narrator.

She is another voice that dialogises Saleem's narration (along with Shiva), but whereas Shiva represents the destructiveness of the political and a foil to Saleem's intellectualism, Padma is necessary to keep Saleem's narration from straying into the metafictional and thus to mitigate his self-aggrandising assertions. As he confesses, "Padma has started getting irritated whenever my narration becomes self-conscious, whenever, like an incompetent puppeteer, I reveal the

⁶⁰⁶ Parameswaran, "Handcuffed to History: Salman Rushdie's Art," 27.

⁶⁰⁷ Helga Ramsey-Kurz, "Does Saleem Really Miss the Spittoon?: Script and Scriptlessness in *Midnight's Children*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2001, Vol 3, Issue 1: 133.

⁶⁰⁸ Ramsey-Kurz, 142.

⁶⁰⁹ Ramsey-Kurz, 138-9.

hands holding the strings” (*MC*, 83). She is his “necessary ear,” the advocate of realism as opposed to Saleem’s predominantly magical realist narrative, in whose absence his certainties are falling apart. She insists on a simple cause-and-effect narration, on “what-happened-next,” impatient to know the facts: “At this rate,” Padma complains, “you’ll be two hundred years old before you manage to tell about your birth”; “You better get a move on or you’ll die before you get yourself born.” She may not be “a symbol of memory, which is a *historical* quality directly at odds with the repetitive logic of folklore,”⁶¹⁰ but is indispensable nevertheless, for without her Saleem must “become reconciled to the narrow one-dimensionality of a straight line” (*MC*, 207).

Their inability to achieve sexual union, as Brennan points out, signifies the incompatibility of literature and folklore, of elite and mass culture, of upper and lower classes, and ultimately of Eastern and Western influences,⁶¹¹ but Rushdie is careful to include the two in order to emphasise the hermeneutic ramifications of Saleem’s narration. She is his first and, it might even be said, as stated above, an exemplary audience, namely an audience that espouses different cultural values from those of the narrator, an audience that is occasionally disbelieving and complaining (i.e. becoming engaged in the narrative and as such confirming Saleem’s narrative skills), but that, in the final analysis, is docile, credulous and faithful. Since she offers no interpretive or analytical challenge to Saleem’s assertions beyond the superficial and the expected, his insistent dependence on her presence and insight might come as surprising and insincere. After all, although he regularly registers her protests and advice, he never acts upon them. In fact, her very subjection, as a recipient of Saleem’s narrative, necessitates her neutralisation in epistemological terms. Like Shiva’s, her presence is admitted and recognised, but in the end she, like him, becomes a hermeneutic irrelevance. One wonders what the identity of the other listener (“an off-stage woman journalist” to whom Saleem sends his manuscript⁶¹²), the one that on Rushdie’s editor’s suggestion was left out of the novel, would have been. As it stands, s/he remains another interpretive option that is hinted at but not explored.

Her illiteracy differentiates her from Saleem and from the implicit, literary-minded reader to whom Saleem also addresses his text, but her function is ultimately asserted by the fact that she, Saleem and Aadam, together form a family nucleus in which Saleem in the end finds his meaning, for after his expected demise, it is to Padma that he will hand over the destiny of

⁶¹⁰ Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, 106.

⁶¹¹ Brennan, 108.

⁶¹² Salman Rushdie, Introduction to *Midnight’s Children*, xvi.

Aadam and, by implication, of his text. As Saleem is expecting to fulfil his historical destiny and become symbolically “trampled” by the multitudes of India on his and India’s thirty-first birthday, Padma is hoping for a different future, when

no doubt a marriage will take place, and Padma will have henna-tracery on her palms and soles, and also a new name, perhaps Naseem in honour of Reverend Mother’s watching ghost, and outside the window there will be fireworks and crowds, because it will be Independence Day and the many headed-multitudes will be in the streets, and Kashmir will be waiting. I have the train-tickets in my pocket, [...] we will drive south south south into the heart of the tumultuous crowds, [...] and along Honrby Vellard, where a dog was left to die, the crowd, the dense crowd, the crowd without boundaries, growing until it fills the world, will make progress impossible, [...] and yes, I will be separated from Padma, my dung-lotus extending an arm towards me across the turbulent sea, until she drowns in the crowd and I am alone in the vastness of the numbers... (MC, 645-6)

The separation from Padma that Saleem predicts on the very last pages of his manuscript signifies her survival and emancipation as a guardian both of his text and of Aadam, the two legacies Saleem bequeathes to the nation and to posterity. Thus, Aadam’s future as the only individualised child of the Emergency, in whom Saleem invests his authorial and historical meaning, is not so much determined by the alternative legacies of his fathers, Saleem and Shiva, but by the maternal nourishment he has gained from Durga, who acted as his wet-nurse, and that he will gain from Padma, in whom he can seek his pre-Oedipal wholeness as another child of the nation. As she can never consummate her marriage with Saleem, she will remain the privileged recipient, like Aadam, of Saleem’s textual fertility and, bearing in mind the pre-literate culture she represents and which is intimately linked to the mythical and to the ontological and epistemic groundedness it connotes, she will provide an identitary and cultural certainty for Aadam as a counterforce to the divisive, differential impetus of the writing of the Father.

On another level, Padma can be conceived of as a representative of the paradigmatic reader, the implied reader to whom Rushdie addresses his novel. This is confirmed by the fact that she is inserted in the narration surreptitiously, as if by stealth. Saleem’s narration is from the start presented as a dialogue with an overtly addressed narratee, whom the actual reader might mistake for himself, only to find out later that Saleem’s addressee has all along been Padma. In other words, Padma is likened to the reader and this leads to another dimension of her character – in addition to the (intra)textual and intertextual, she also has an extratextual significance. She is

the *hors-texte*, i.e. the world outside the text, the reality that is the object of the narration, but that also has a non-textual existence, countering Saleem's textual hermeticism by her own corporeality. Padma has so far been seen as an auditor/audience, as the folkloric foil and complement to Saleem's intellectual discourse, and as intertextually charged character, but Saleem in fact insists that she is first of all a person of flesh and blood, her interest in him being aroused not so much by his writing as by her very real love for him. As he admits, she is, "unaccountably, more interested in me than in my tales" (*MC*, 375).

Seen in this light, all her interventions in the narrative can be interpreted not solely as reactions to the story she is being told, but as expressions of her impatience at not being able to consummate her love and even to provoke an emotional response from Saleem: when at one point she leaves Saleem, she states that her unrequited love is the motive for her absence, not his story: "So then I thought, how to go back to this man who will not love me and only does some foolish writery? (Forgive, Saleem baba, but I must tell it truly. And love, to us women, is the greatest thing of all.)" (*MC*, 267). So when Saleem reduces her alternative narrative input as next to negligible, it is to counter her power to dismiss the relevance of his narrative by such a mundane thing as a marriage proposal, an act that provokes Saleem's irritation: "Padma, by proposing a marriage, revealed her willingness to dismiss everything I've told her about my past as just so much 'fancy talk'" (*MC*, 622). In this way, Padma represents a reminder of the worldly, the extratextual, which Rushdie constructs as a challenge to the predominantly textual and narratorial approach to the reality his narrator purports to represent.

Through the character of Padma, Rushdie seems to allude to the eternal irreconcilability between discourse and praxis and to the fact that, upon completion, each act of writing is released into a world of readers and other recipients (who may not be readers but who may act as if they were, as the "Rushdie affair" demonstrates), who can act upon it in different and often unpredictable ways. Thus, Padma's corporeality and practical concerns reinforce the worldliness of the text and serve as a reminder to the author to engage responsibly with the reality he purports to represent, exhorting him to resist the thrall of solipsism and the seductive playfulness of fantasy. Keith Wilson evokes "the uneasy reconciliation of the often conflicting imperatives of author and reader"⁶¹³ in the alluded to union between Saleem and Padma. In my view, it is rather

⁶¹³ Wilson, "Midnight's Children and Reader Responsibility," 60.

a union between discourse and praxis, between the Word and the World, whose complementarity is ensured by the ventriloquial narrative voice composed of Saleem and Padma.

Rushdie mentions the different ways in which his novel was received: while in the West it was seen as a fantasy, in India it was deemed “pretty realistic, almost a history book. (‘I could have written your book,’ one reader told me when I was lecturing in India in 1982. ‘I know all that stuff’).”⁶¹⁴ This dual reception is prefigured in the novel by the presence of Padma and the implied reader, who is presumably Western and erudite and who, consequently, sees the represented world as an exotic and magical one, responding to it with glee and wonder. As opposed to him, Padma is the local, Indian reader who does not see the magic but the grim Indian reality of violence, dispossession, division and poverty which is interwoven in the text. In view of the birth of the reader that Barthes advocates as a consequence of the disappearance of the author, this contradictory, dual audience of Rushdie’s novel marks the schizophrenic splitting of the texture of the work of art into different paradigms of reception and interpretation.

When Moraes enters Miranda’s folly, both in the spatial and psychological meaning of the word, he finds a Japanese restorer of paintings who is forced by Vasco to exhume the layer buried under her portrait of Moraes. To allay any suspicions of her imprisonment, Vasco forces her to write fake letters and postcards to her friends, in which she deliberately plants clues in the hope somebody will recognise them. However, as she admits to the hopeful Moraes, “People are inattentive, by and large. They do not read closely, but skim. They are not expecting to be sent messages in code, and so they may not see any” (*MLS*, 422). As she is the first reader of Moraes’s manuscript, she has the same structural function as Padma in *Midnight’s Children*. However, she does not possess Padma’s rootedness in the folkloric, inherently national selfhood that Brennan identified as the national novelist’s most authentic source material. If she were to be attributed, due to her status as a first reader, the status of an exemplary audience, then the lessons she teaches Moraes have a crucial bearing on his aesthetics. He describes Aoi as a “formidably contained woman,” “the most orderly of spirits,” with a prodigious capacity for self-possession that “might, in the outside world, have been a little alarming, but in the confines of our fatal circle it became my mainstay, my nourishment by day and my pillow at night.”

⁶¹⁴ Rushdie, Introduction to *Midnight’s Children*, xvii.

Her formality, her precision, awakened an old self in me, reminding me of my own adherence to ideas of neatness and tidiness in the childhood days before I surrendered to the imperatives awakening in my brutal, twisted fist. In the hideous circumstances of our chained existence she provided our necessary disciplines, and I unquestioningly followed her lead. (*MLS*, 423)

In short, she provides comfort and support in the difficult conditions of their mutual incarceration, teaches him the values of order, self-control, precision, neatness, and dignity, values which Moraes senses he had always had, but which had been buried during the course of his unusual life. Although not present in the text as much as Padma was in *Midnight's Children*, she is nevertheless more integrated in it: Padma's input is easily identifiable and separable from Saleem's as it is made explicit, while Aoi's is suffused in Moraes's and inseparable from it.

Furthermore, as Jenni Ramone points out, her job as a restorer is to perform a process that is the opposite of the palimpsest, namely to remove the upper layer in order to remove the lower, which was an unacceptable, censored version and therefore had to be covered with another, acceptable one.⁶¹⁵ Therefore, hers is a typically hermeneutical role, exhorting the peeling off of the accumulated meanings of the text in order to get at the hidden core. As she is revealed to the reader towards the end of the text, she is a necessary metafictional conduit through which Moraes represents the creation of his text. Intertextually, she performs the role of Dinarzade, the person destined to take over from the narrator Moraes/Scheherazade should s/he perish in the telling of his/her tale. Most importantly, she enables his articulateness, permeating his story of betrayal and violence with the ensuing calm of the moment of writing. As she is present throughout the writing of Moraes's manuscript, it can be assumed that the values she represents have been dutifully incorporated into the text we are reading by her grateful disciple. On one level, she functions as a paradigmatic audience, like Padma, and as such makes her own contribution to the shaping of the text. For instance, her resigned belief in the validity of one's own experience even in the face of betrayal and lies: when Moraes complains about Uma's falseness and her playing a part in their love story, she replies,

“Still, you did love her... You were not playing a part.”

“Yes, but –”

“So, even then,” she said with finality. “Even then.” (*MLS*, 426)

⁶¹⁵ Jenni Ramone, *Salman Rushdie and Translation* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013), 159.

Furthermore, her response to the text she (and we) is/are reading is telling, as she delineates the contours of the subsequent audiences' reaction to it. She is frightened, but not by what the demented Vasco can do to her:

She was frightened by my words, by what I set down on paper, by that daily, silent singing for my life. Reading what I wrote before Vasco spirited it away, learning the full truth about the story in which she was so unfairly trapped, she trembled. Her horror at what we had done to one another down the ages was the greater because it showed her what we were capable of doing still; to ourselves, and to her. At the worst moments of the tale she would bury her face in her hands and shake her head. I, who needed her composure, who held on to her self-control as if it were my lifebuoy, was dismayed to find myself responsible for these jitters. (*MLS*, 427)

On the other hand, she can be seen as representing language itself, her name testifying to her symbolical meaning in the novel: Aoi Uë, “a miracle of vowels,” “the five enabling sounds of language” (*MLS*, 423) constructing her discursive identity.⁶¹⁶ If the violence of Moraes's story phonetically corresponds to a consonant-filled shapeless “tale told by an idiot/full of sound and fury,” Aoi's mellifluous and soothing vowel-like calmness is its necessary antidote opening the horizon to better and brighter possibilities:

There was our story in a nutshell, our tragedy enacted by clowns. Write it on our tombstones, whisper it to the wind: those da Gamas! Those Zogoibys! *They just didn't know how to be calm.*

We were consonants without vowels: jagged, lacking shape. Perhaps if we'd had her to orchestrate us, our lady of the vowels. Maybe then. Maybe, in another life, down a fork in the road, she would come to us, and we would all be saved. There is in us, in all of us, some measure of brightness, of possibility. We start with that, but also with its dark counter-force, and the two of them spend our lives slugging it out, and if we're lucky the fight comes out even.

Me? I never got the right help. Nor, until now, did I ever find my Chimène. Towards the end, she retreated from me, she said she did not want to read any more; but read it, nevertheless, and filled up, each day, with a little more horror, a little more disgust. I begged her for forgiveness, I told her (my nutty cathjew confusions persisting right to the end!) that I needed her absolution. She said, “I'm not in that line of work. Get yourself a priest.” There was a distance between us after that. (*MLS*, 428)

⁶¹⁶ As Goonetilleke points out, that is the name of the bride of Genji in the eleventh-century Japanese novel *The Tale of Genji* by Lady Murasaki Shikibu (146-7). Dohra Ahmad considers her “as a manifestation of Rushdie's guilt over the death of his Japanese translator for *The Satanic Verses*. (Ahmad, “This fundo stuff is really something new,” 17)

She, like Padma, is the necessary complement to the act of writing, just like the vowels constituting her name complete the alphabet and thus equip the writer with the necessary apparatus for his craft. Indeed, in the Judeo-Islamic context of the novel, she is indispensable for the creation of language and meaning – the sacred name of Yahweh, the Tetragrammaton, rendered in written form as “YHWH,” is nevertheless “unpronounceable without the vowels to insert between the consonants.”⁶¹⁷ Employed by Vasco to do a job that is inimical to her profession – she is supposed to destroy a layer of a painting instead of preserving it – she nevertheless performs her constructive role in the creation of Moraes’s text:

Her transgression causes the successful creation of the text, however; during the destruction of one painting (or text) to reveal another, she creates a new text, written by Moor under her enabling influence. [...] The text created by Moor fills the gap left by the missing child in the painting which Aoi uncovers. The text replaces the Madonna’s missing child, standing in for the figure Christ; the text which is born is a rewriting of Christ’s nativity.⁶¹⁸

The novel reaches its climax at the moment of the simultaneous arrival of Moraes’s story at the time he reaches Vasco Miranda in Benengeli and Aoi’s final restoration of the hidden Aurora from beneath Vasco’s mediocre self-presentation as the sultan Boabdil. The narrative logic tracing the development of Moraes’s identification with Boabdil requires an act of supreme cowardliness to rival that of his Moorish ancestor, whereby Vasco Miranda is finally displaced from his forced and shallow self-imagining as the tragic sultan. As Vasco’s fake al-Andalus crumbles under the weight of his power-induced madness, so does his desired embodiment of the romanticised Boabdil. In a surprising re-distribution of the roles in this historicised drama, Vasco becomes the structural counterpart of the destructive and fanatical Catholic Kings, daring Moraes to fight for the life of Aoi, who thus becomes the equivalent of the ethos of al-Andalus, an impossible ideal that will be destroyed by the onslaught of the modern incarnation of fanaticism. As Moraes, in reclaiming his mother’s legacy, newly rediscovered from beneath Vasco’s mediocre art, by appropriating her vision of him as Boabdil, refuses to save Aoi, he brings to a resolution and fulfillment his own identitary quest. His cowardliness makes of him a veritable modern Boabdil. Aoi’s death and his unwillingness to save her are a last instance of the triumph

⁶¹⁷ Ramone, *Salman Rushdie and Translation*, 166.

⁶¹⁸ Ramone, 167.

of the consonant-filled violence in the multiple histories evoked in this novel.⁶¹⁹ In a surprising, *deus-ex-machina* dénouement, Vasco dies (as, by extension, does the ideology of repression and exclusion he represents), in what amounts to an act of wishful thinking on the part of the author, who in this way gets rid of the political/historical violence so that a new culture of enlightenment can be rebuilt.⁶²⁰ In such a world, the power of the Word which, as Aoi intuited, is stronger than political power, reigns supreme. Hence the hopeful, albeit naïve ending of the novel in which Moraes hopes, after his imminent death, “to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time” (*MLS*, 434).⁶²¹

Moraes produces two texts: one for his father and the other for Vasco Miranda (which is the text we are reading). His doubling of the moment of his text’s inception and the possibilities for its interpretation can be seen as a palimpsestic structure exhibiting its author’s *Bildung*. The first birth of his text is at the behest of his father, who enjoins him to write down his own explanation of the events that led to his banishment before taking him back into the family fold. Here, Moraes parodies his father’s injunction by likening him to the skirt-wearing actor playing the pharaoh in *The Ten Commandments*: “As Yul Brynner, in Pharaonic mode (that is, a rather fetching short skirt), was so fond of saying in *The Ten Commandments*: ‘So let it be written. So let it be done’” (*MLS*, 322). The filmic reference trivialises “the iconic ‘Law of the Father’ [...] into a parody of the typical objectification of the feminine as seen through the male perspective, which thus acts against itself to undermine its own discourse.”⁶²² At this point, Moraes distances

⁶¹⁹ Dohra Ahmad interprets Aoi’s insertion of coded messages in her postcards in the hope that someone will decode them and rescue her and Moraes as “vocaliz[ing] the idea that the text contains a single encoded meaning on the part of the author” and as “locating meaning in the author’s intention, not in the reader’s reception. Messages that have failed to be intercepted still exist” (17). Its opposite are the synagogue tiles that resemble the authorless Barthesian book, embodying the jouissance of reading by yielding different meanings to different ‘readers’, who thus re-write the book. The result is a contradiction: “Author’s book and reader’s text coincide. Seen in this light, the narrative trope of retelling serves to strengthen rather than to diminish authorial responsibility. By articulating all versions of the story, Rushdie reassert his authority. Throughout the novel, he himself both writes and re-writes, until finally he owns both the original hidden truths and the interpretations. The reader, then, cannot even misinterpret, since Rushdie already developed and claimed all misinterpretations. All the reader can do is to miss interpretations, by not reading carefully enough”. (Ahmad, “‘This fundo stuff is really something new,’” 18)

⁶²⁰ It is as if Rushdie, abandoning the careful representation of history in the novel, all of a sudden decided to cancel and erase the Catholic Kings and Hindu sectarianism, deciding to clear out a purer space for the artistic in the world.

⁶²¹ Such an ending represents a parallel to the similar optimistic ending of *Midnight’s Children*.

⁶²² Gonzalez, *Fiction after the Fatwa*, 121.

himself from his father (who now ventures into the manufacture of nuclear weapons), and declares himself a Jew: “excuse me, but I find that I’m a Jew” (*MLS*, 336-7). In rejecting the Name of the Father, Moraes rejects the symbolical order symbolised by Abraham and, with it, the text he has created for him. Hence, he immerses himself in another symbolical realm, through his mother’s art, transferring the psychological paradigm onto the textual one. As a result, he produces the second text, which is a product of the intersection of his poetics with that of Aurora’s art and thus a dialogical texture of meanings that is brought into being by Aoi.

Archetypal Storytellers and Scribes and Their Tyrannical Audiences

In the previous section, I analysed the crucial roles played by Padma and Aoi in the creation and interpretation of Saleem's and Moraes's respective texts. In this section, my focus is on other types of audience in *Midnight's Children*, namely those alluded to or evoked by intertextual references in the novel.

As mentioned above, one of Padma's roles as a listener of Saleem's narrative is to avoid his waxing too self-conscious as a narrator. She is expected to curb his sweeping imaginative flights and to remind him of the actual Indian reality he has undertaken to represent. In spite of its careful and comprehensive historical and therefore real(istic) scope, Saleem's narration is conspicuously metafictional and self-aware. He admits that

the feeling had come upon me that I was somehow creating a world; that the thoughts I jumped inside were mine, that the bodies I occupied acted at my command; that, as current affairs, arts, sports, the whole rich variety of a first-class radio station poured into me, I was somehow making them happen... which is to say, I had entered into the illusion of the artist, and thought of the multitudinous realities of the land as the raw unshaped material of my gift. "I can find out any damn thing!" I triumphed, "There isn't a thing I cannot know!" (*MC*, 241-2)

Although his historical project requires veracity and reliability, his artistic consciousness exults at the unrestrained imaginative possibilities in which he can indulge. Hence, his outrageous assertion that "it is possible, even probable, that I am only the first historian to write the story of my undeniably exceptional life-and-times. Those who follow in my footsteps will, however, inevitably come to this present work, this source-book, this Hadith or Purana or Grundrisse, for guidance and inspiration" (*MC*, 410). In retrospect, he identifies this urge of self-aggrandisement as "born of an instinct for self-preservation. If I had not believed myself in control of the flooding multitudes, their massed identities would have annihilated mine" (*MC*, 241-2)⁶²³. The very act of creating art requires individualism and is therefore a necessary bulwark against the

⁶²³ This self-centredness and self-control is countered by the end of the novel – the final paragraph portrays Saleem and the midnight children as destroyed by the multitudes of India, although they remain central to its historical and symbolic significance.

collective anonymity imposed by the multitudes, perceived as threatening in the quote above. The very purpose of Saleem's narration – to capture the soul and variety of India by depicting the life and times of the midnight's children – presupposes a belief in the miraculous not as miraculous, but as realistic when it comes to this unusual land. In this way, he diminishes the unreliability of his narration and attributes its exaggerated and excessive elements to the miraculous nature of India itself. Thus, when he states that Naseem started to haunt the dreams of her daughters, he explains that “stranger things have been known to happen in this country of ours, just pick up any newspaper and see the daily titbits recounting miracles in this village or that” (*MC*, 69). What his narration contains, in other words, is the same defamiliarised content of any daily newspaper in “this country of ours” and in such a country, legends can easily “make reality, and become more useful than the facts” (*MC*, 57).

Such an uninhibited artistic licence comes in handy for Saleem's literary project, since throughout his writing he has to rely on his memory. His memory, like anybody's, is defective and he freely creates and recreates the factual and imaginative material that is available to him, with the result that he produces an encyclopedic image of India both synchronically and diachronically, but composed of fragments. As he freely admits, he works with “shreds and scraps”, “the trick [being] to fill in the gaps, guided by the few clues one is given” (*MC*, 596). Bits and pieces are, anyway, the only things one can gather together from a disintegrated world, but this, in the context of the novel, is not a fact to be deplored – it is rather a welcome opportunity for the artist/narrator to get creative. As Saleem states, “in autobiography, as in all literature, what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe” (*MC*, 375-6). Saleem is constantly conscious of his audience, implied (the reader) and real (Padma and, implicitly, the Widow), and a consideration of this question brings us to the intertextual influences that he overtly inserts into his text.

At several points in his narrative, Saleem likens himself to a modern-day Scheherazade and uses the motif of a 1001 both symbolically (to denote the endless possibilities represented by the midnight's children) and narratively (to emphasise the inexhaustible nature and power of narration). The *Thousand and One Nights* is the paradigmatic piece of literature that accentuates and relies on a fluid notion of both authorship and narrative coherence.⁶²⁴ Initially, the

⁶²⁴ The *Thousand and One Nights* or *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* is a collection of stories originating from Baghdad in the mid-8th century, Persia in the 9th, Cairo in the 12th to 14th centuries. From

schematics of the *Nights* revolved around the notion of the inexhaustibility of narration, implicitly understood as collective and anonymous, hence folkloric. The very temporal and spatial multi-layering of the stories defined them as popular literature; in addition, they covered a wide range of social classes and life situations. With Galland's intervention, the stories were interpolated into the frame story of king Schahriar and the vizier's daughter Scheherazade, thereby eliciting the popular impulse of the stories and contextualising them. In this way, the stories obtained an author/narrator (Scheherazade), a motivation (to save Scheherazade and cure the king's misogyny) and a concrete reader/listener (Schahriar) (the reductive/diminishing aspect is also evident in the literalisation of the original Arabic meaning of "thousand" as "endless" into the finite number 1001, into which the stories would subsequently be arbitrarily divided by compilers and translators).⁶²⁵ Positioning Scheherazade as the narrator and/or inventor of all the stories foregrounded the idea that the consciousness and discourse of an author/narrator can conjoin otherwise disparate elements and consciousnesses, an idea Saleem takes ample advantage of. Moreover, the concretisation of the cycle by attaching it to a specific narrator and narratee partially reduced the endlessly multiplying potential of storytelling generated by the initial loose structure of the stories – the extolling of the narrative potential inherent to the story cycle would hence be enmeshed in politics, i.e. in a political act of violence.

Saleem draws on these two aspects of the *Nights*: the unexhaustibility of the creative potential (through the midnight's 1001 children and, after them, the children of the Emergency, who symbolise the regenerative cycle of the nation) and the political motivation (maintaining the national memory by telling the story of the children and revealing the destructive policies of the Widow and of nationalism itself). The motif of the disintegrating body, which Saleem consistently attributes to himself, emphasises the notion that he, like Scheherazade, offers

the 14th century Syrian manuscript, two major versions evolved, Syrian and Egyptian, with additions, modifications, and indiscriminate borrowings from Indian, Persian, Greek, and Turkish sources. The stories had been circulating for centuries in both oral and written form in the Arab world, Persia and India, before being compiled, translated into French and given the frame story by Antoine Galland in the early 18th century. He added perhaps the most famous stories, *Aladdin* and *Ali Baba*, which were in part creations of his own mind or loose interpretations of oral tales conveyed to him. His is also the addition of the concluding frame story in which the misogynist and violent Shahriar is reformed by the power of Scheherazade's tales, repents and marries her. For an analysis of the *Nights* as an intercultural code, see Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, eds., *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶²⁵ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 86.

himself as a scapegoat and undertakes to narrate as a form of a saving mission – his is to keep the memory of the children alive and hers to save the other women in the kingdom from certain death. After the death of his entire family, Saleem becomes a character without memory and consciousness – Buddha – who, in order to protect himself, has withdrawn from the world of pain and suffering. However, indifference and resignation lead him to betray himself as a child of the nation, because, as a member of a Pakistani intelligence unit, he discovers his childhood friends in the enemy he is trained to hunt and kill. Getting back to his essence/meaning means not only getting back to India, which is the source of his magical nature, but also undertaking responsibility for his treason and determination to save his country. Here, he experiences anger,

a righteous anger on behalf of India's oppressed people that brings with it an exalted sense of mission: a mission no less than that of saving the country. However, like the self-appointed leaders of the Indian nationalist movement, he is to betray the people he claims to represent, and he fails to overcome the isolation that followed his rejection of Shiva, his nemesis and polar opposite, and his loss-of-connection with the midnight's children. Far from saving the country, he is sucked down into the vortex of its crisis.⁶²⁶

After the failure of his political agency, memorialising through writing becomes his only attempt at redemption. Even though the writing process is to be brought to an end simultaneously with the complete disintegration of his body, both processes confirm the fulfillment of his historical significance. He will disintegrate in as many particles as there are Indian citizens, thus confirming that he and India are one, and with the conclusion of the last paragraph, his writing attains a transcendent value, as it becomes prophetic and affirms the continuance of the idea of India:

Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust, just as, all in good time, they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his, and his who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died, because it is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace. (*MC*, 647)

⁶²⁶ Josna E. Rege, "Victim into Protagonist?," 159.

The final reverting to the prophetic discourse, with its mystical and sublime overtones, silences the heretofore ubiquitous narratorial voice by the sheer force of the historical relevance of the midnight's children, who, like Saleem, will be annihilated by the multitudes that form the nation, but will nevertheless nourish it, because to strengthen it by their own destruction is their historical privilege and curse. The ultimate historical meaning, perceived as both a privilege and a curse, is allotted to the midnight's children, whose multitudes will annihilate their (and every other) narrator and meaning-giver into "specks of *voiceless* dust" (emphasis mine), and who, after an endless cycle of deaths and rebirths (the motif of the thousand and one), will still have an eternal revenant-like existence, because they will have the historical and symbolical charge imparted to them by the significance of their midnight birth. In spite of the power of the political, Saleem's narration, memorialising the legacy of the Midnight's Children, is given a transcendental potential by being turned at the very end into a prophecy which places the utmost emphasis on regeneration and survival and in which the individuality of the narrator, carefully sustained throughout the novel, is subsumed into a collective identity that is indestructible and eternal. This is an eloquent testament to the aspirations and the role of literature/art in this novel, which is allotted the privilege of being the ultimate arbiter of meaning.

Such a lofty artistic mission naturally presupposes reaching the appropriate audience, one that would share the moral and cultural values generated by Saleem's text. Padma, who, as has been mentioned, symbolises the Indian masses, is the explicit listener/reader of his narration, and although she represents an alternative aesthetic and ethical set of values that Saleem consistently incorporates in his narration, she is not the principal audience to whom he addresses his text. Following the schematics of the frame story of the *Nights*, in which the narrator Scheherazade narrates to the representative of power, we can assume that the structural counterpart of Schahriar in *Midnight's Children* is not Padma, but the Widow.⁶²⁷ She is the implicit recipient to whom Saleem addresses his story in the hope of effecting a political change. Padma is the counterpart of Dinarzade, the listener capable of empathy and discernment, the repository of national memory, who, should the narrator fail in his/her risky project, would carry on

⁶²⁷ In the relationship between Padma and Saleem, Nancy Batty sees a parody of that between Shahryar and Scheherazade: "Like King Shahryar, Padma is compelled to take pity on and wed her narrative suitor. Not only is Saleem's marriage to Padma, built on its foundation of impotence rather than fertility, a parody of Scheherazade's marriage to Shahryar, Padma herself is a parody of the knife-wielding despot." (Nancy Batty, "The Art of Suspense: Rushdie's 1001 (Mid-)Nights," in *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Smale, 122)

remembering and/or narrating. However, it is even more important for the Widow/Schahriar to understand the message of the narrative, because only after the elimination of the political violence can the regenerative potential of both Schahriar's kingdom and the state led by Indira be liberated. Paradoxically, Scheherazade can be saved not by arousing Schahriar's insight as to the relevance/moral of her stories to his own position, but by his continuing blindness. In the end, it is doubtful whether he has been morally educated by Scheherazade; what is certain is that he "learns rather the role of compulsive and undiscerning consumer, addicted to the generation of story without an ability to distinguish and judge. Schahriar puts one form of compulsion (story) in place of another (despotic government)."⁶²⁸ In other words, Schahriar overcomes his being a despotic ruler by becoming a despotic listener/consumer of stories.

Being Schahriar's modern counterpart, the Widow,⁶²⁹ like him, remains blind to the profound relevance of the story to her own position. Saleem implicitly addresses his message to the structures of power, embodied in the Widow, whose intervention would ultimately effect the political changes he craves to achieve. Unlike Schahriar, however, she directs her agency at destroying the midnight's children by draining their procreative potential and their hope, without intervening in the story. Her lack of interest in the story is paralleled by her even more pronounced exercising of political power. By leaving Saleem's text intact, she ignores the implications of the ideas contained therein, which are far more detrimental to her status as a politician than the physical existence of the children could ever be. Similarly, the real Indira Gandhi sued the novel for defamation, surprisingly, taking offence not at Rushdie's portrayal of the Emergency years, but at the sentence in which he (or rather Saleem) states that "It has often been said that Mrs Gandhi's younger son Sanjay accused his mother of being reposnsible, through her neglect, for his father's death; and that this gave him an unbreakable hold over her, so that she became incapable of denying him anything."⁶³⁰ Since this sentence was her only objection to the book, it meant that she implicitly confirmed the truthfulness of her portrayal as a politician. As in Scheherazade's case, the survival of Saleem's manuscript depended on her

⁶²⁸ Ros Ballaster, "Playing the Second String: The Role of Dinarzade in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction", in Makdisi and Nussbaum, eds., *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context*, 91.

⁶²⁹ Uma Parameswaran argues that "the Widow's hand, despite Saleem's claim, is not the cause of the failure of *Midnight's Children* within the novel but only the catalyst of another phase in their betrayal of themselves". (Parameswaran, "Lest He Returning Chide": Saleem Sinai's Inaction in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*," 32)

⁶³⁰ The author's preface to the novel, xvii.

partial blindness: she focused on the unimportant family detail (her relationship with her son) and neglected the severity of the description of her destructive policies, as if history would judge her for her motherhood rather than for her political legacy. Both Saleem and Scheherazade face a despotic ruler, trying to reinstate the historical balance by opposing an absolutist government, but the success of their act of daring is in both cases doubtful: both despots are temporarily restrained in their tyranny, without being ethically reeducated and reformed. Paradoxically, this failure at discernment is necessary in order to ensure the survival of the manuscript, which will eventually find other ways to challenge the monologic, one-dimensional and repressive interpretation of and engagement with literature.

As a postcolonial intellectual, Saleem takes it upon himself to provide an alternative national historiography that, as we have seen, does not wholly evade the lure of eliticisation and individualisation characteristic of official historiography. He thwarts Indira's pretensions at centrality (in his story, Indira can never equal India) with his alternative historiography, but by intensifying the symbolic significance of the promise of the eventful midnight in the powers of three of the 1001 midnight's children – himself, Shiva and Parvati – he unifies where there should have been multiplicity and therefore does he not perpetrate a narratorial violence as a parallel to the Widow's political violence? In this way, it would appear as though Saleem partially abdicated his more ethical and egalitarian position. What his narrative foregrounds instead is the admissibility of mistakes, uncertainties and failures in both morality and narration, leading to a capacity for growth and transformation, which in this novel is seen to reside in the artistic principle with which Saleem identifies. The political principle, on the other hand, which is represented by Shiva and the Widow, is seen as fixed, obsessive, given and accepted without questioning (their sole purpose is attaining power), destructive and although as such less vulnerable, it is in the end defeatable and defeated by the transcendental potential of literature. After all, Saleem's insistence that he contains within himself a multitude of people and stories and that he will not allow his story to be mistaken for an invention and an absurdity reveals his careful delineation of the posthumous meaning of his work.

When Saleem describes Padma as his disciple and is angered by her leaving her role, he asks "Other men have recited stories before me; other men were not so impetuously abandoned. When Valmiki, the author of the *Ramayana*, dictated his masterpiece to elephant-headed Ganesh, did the god walk out on him halfway? He certainly did not" (MC, 206). As Rushdie subsequently

admits, he made a mistake, because it was Vyasa, the author of the *Mahabharata*, who dictated the epic to Ganesh.⁶³¹ This mistake on Saleem's (and Rushdie's) part is opportune, for it brings together two paradigmatic literary figures: Valmiki, who had only sung the *Ramayana*, "was the *adikavi*, the first poet, in the oral tradition," while "Vyasa had the *Mahabharata* written down, thus, making him the first proper 'writer' or 'author.' [...] Even *Mahabharata* is, perhaps, a text on the borders of the oral and the written, as it was first sung and then written and went on growing like the oral texts, thus representing a collapsing of orature and literature (or *écriture*)."⁶³²

Vyasa was a great seer, even "recognised as an incarnation of Vishnu – the God-like quality of creation,"⁶³³ but as there were several authors named Vyasa and the *Mahabharata* had been composed over a very long time, he is now considered to be a generic name for the author as an institution. As Satchidanandan makes clear, Vyasa, like Valmiki (and Saleem), can be described as one of the earliest autobiographers, because they are also characters in their respective epics. Interestingly, he roots his act of writing in failed agency: "May be, it is when actual intervention fails or becomes impossible that one turns to writing, that is essentially an act of witnessing: each writer has perhaps in him a failed activist!"⁶³⁴ Identifying himself with the ancient poet, Saleem also adopts his example to write only after he has failed in the political sphere, where Shiva reigns supreme. Literature thus becomes not an alternative but a complement to politics, an epistemic agency that is enmeshed in the political sphere, but that nevertheless stands apart. Simultaneously, it extends his artistic genealogy. In spite of the filiative and affiliative parents they choose, both Saleem and Moraes "begin" as parts of a deeper ontological layer provided by the mythical archetype of Ganesh and the historical one of Boabdil.

⁶³¹ Rushdie cites several other factual mistakes in his novel and admits that they are due to the occasional sloppy research of its author and to the Proustian nature of his artistic project, because through this novel he tried to recreate his childhood in India, but two filters intervened – time and migration. At first, he wanted to work *through* them and, in spite of the time which had passed and his emigration to Britain, to penetrate into the object of his memory, but soon his subject matter changed – it was no longer a search for lost time, but "the way in which we remake the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as our tool". (Salman Rushdie. "Errata: or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight's Children*," in *Imaginary Homelands*, 22-25)

⁶³² For this and subsequent ideas regarding these two epics and their authors, I am using the essay by K. Satchidanandan. "Reflections: Vyasa and Ganesa," *Indian Literature*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (250) (March/April 2009): 6-8.

⁶³³ Satchidanandan, 6-8.

⁶³⁴ Satchidanandan, 6-8.

Ganesh is the elephant-headed god, the scribe of the *Mahabharata*, and another character with whom Saleem identifies both himself (because of the length of his nose) and his adopted son, Aadam (because of his unnaturally big ears). When he was chosen to put the epic into writing, he accepted on one condition – that Vyasa should not make any breaks in his dictation until the epic was finished. Satchidanandan interprets this as an expression of Ganesh’s anxiety of his own interference in the text: “Did he fear that in those pauses and short silences he himself would, albeit unconsciously, insert his own verses? Does it thus come from a profound concern for the authenticity and the ‘authority’ of the text? It could also be because of a deep belief in the purity of inspiration, ‘the spontaneous overflow’ of the Wordsworthian kind.”⁶³⁵

The evocation of Ganesh by Saleem, therefore, can be understood not only as a conscious intertextual duplicating of the narrator-listener/reader/scribe dyads (Scheherazade-Schahriar, Vyasa/Ganesh), but also as broaching the question of authorial authenticity, which will be more seriously explored in *The Satanic Verses*. After all, Vyasa himself had a counter-condition concerning their writing project – that Ganesh should start writing only after he has fully grasped the meaning of the narration. As previously mentioned, Saleem is careful to delineate the contours of the reception paradigm of his manuscript: it is not by any means to be the product of a delusional mind or a pretentious invention. Rather, the story of the midnight’s children is to be read in the context of the historical and cultural development of India, for they embody the essence of India and are therefore an image of the country itself, in all its terrible beauty.

⁶³⁵ The questions that Satchidanandan poses in his essay regarding the Indian epic are intertextually evoked and hinted at in Rushdie’s novel merely as layers of Saleem’s characterisation as a writer who, in order to emphasise his Indian identity and to acknowledge both his Hindu and Muslim legacy, consciously identifies with archetypal authorial figures from both cultures. They will be examined with a poignant and even tragic profundity in *The Satanic Verses*, where the purity of Qur’anic revelation will become one of the central, and certainly the most contested, issues, not only of the novel but also of the identity of the modern world.

De-Authoring the Text: The Author as Reader

Cide Hamete Benengeli is a fictional historian to whom the narrator Cervantes attributes the authorship of his novel. The convention of an author's distancing himself from the authorship of his work, claiming it is a copy or a translation of a previous text or a record of an oral tale by another, was common in medieval texts and the chivalric romances Cervantes parodies and served the purpose of strengthening the text's credibility and grounding it in reality, as the author effectively denied that his text was an invention.

In the Prologue to the first part of *Don Quixote*, Cervantes claims he is not Don Quixote's father, but just his "stepfather," while also claiming that he is a "child of [his] intellect" – "dry, withered, capricious" and resembles a child who is "ugly and lacking in all the graces," but is nevertheless loved by his father. Cervantes presents himself as falsely modest here, denigrating his creation and at the same time ironically emphasising its originality: "fearful of the opinion of that ancient judge they call the public,"⁶³⁶ he bemoans the fact that, unlike the books of his time, his is "as dry as esparto grass, devoid of invention, deficient in style, poor in ideas, and lacking all erudition and doctrine, without notes in the margins or annotations at the end of the book" that amaze the readers and make their authors appear "well-read, erudite, and eloquent men." His book "will also lack sonnets at the beginning, especially sonnets whose authors are dukes, marquises, counts, bishops, ladies, or celebrated poets."⁶³⁷

Reluctant to publish the book and unleash it to the judgment of the readers, he is nevertheless encouraged by a friend, who, like a true Sancho Panza, offers a practical and ingenious solution to every fault mentioned by the author: he can write the sonnets and epigrams himself and then attribute them to a famous poet, to make his text more erudite he can intersperse it with Latin phrases that fit the context and refer to well-know stock characters from literature, for a bibliography he can simply append one from any random book – no one will bother to check. He does not need all these things anyway, because his purpose is to parody the chivalric romances and there is no theoretical precept for such a matter in the ancient sources: "Aristotle

⁶³⁶ Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman (London: Vintage Books, 2005), 3.

⁶³⁷ Cervantes, 4-5.

never thought of, and St. Basil never mentioned, and Cicero never saw” books of chivalry. The only thing he needs to be careful about is his style, which should be “in plain speech, with words that are straightforward, honest, and well-placed, to make your sentences and phrases sonorous and entertaining, and have them portray... your intention, making your ideas clear without complicating and obscuring them”⁶³⁸.

Had it not been for the advice of his friend, the story of Don Quixote would have remained “in the archives of La Mancha.”⁶³⁹ Later on in the novel, Cervantes mentions finding the original manuscript of the famous hidalgo, an Arabic text written by an Arab historian called Cide Hamete Benengeli (his identity is not explicitly clarified, but the Arab/Moorish connection is consistently insisted on). The Moorish identity of the authorial persona, the ironic and subversive play with literary convention, the erosion of authorial authority, the concern with the reception of the text, the intertextual grounding, the prominent dialogisation (between the author and his friend in the Prologue, between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in the novel), the goal to document the end of an era and its outmoded or destroyed ethos, the desire to roam in a world free of any boundaries, the individualised and defamiliarised nature of the protagonist (he has what Ian Watt terms “the posture of *ego contra mundum*”⁶⁴⁰), the protagonist’s struggle for noble ideals against all forms of oppression, and, above all, the optimistic humanism of the textual outlook are the most evident narrative threads connecting *Don Quixote* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*.

The self-effacement of the author-character (who is not Cervantes the real person) and the proliferation of his narrative alter egos serves several purposes. Firstly, it effects distancing, as the author, having written his text, releases it to the public and lets it unleash its meanings, which are multiple and complex on account of the multilayered authorship. Secondly, it claims credibility for the text, not only to emphasise the real existence of the events and characters (as opposed to their being an imaginative creation), but also or even more to exhort the reader to see their relevance to reality in general: be they real or invented, the author nevertheless clears a space for them in the imaginative territory of the universal cultural heritage. Then, it is a metafictional strategy whereby the text playfully problematises the relationship

⁶³⁸ Cervantes, 8.

⁶³⁹ Cervantes, 5.

⁶⁴⁰ Ian Watt, *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 122.

between fiction and reality, which allows it not only to question how reality is perceived as such (Aurora concerns herself with this issue in one phase of her art, as we have seen), i.e. to emphasise its constructed, narrative status, but also to raise the status of fiction into a whole new alternative reality.⁶⁴¹ Rushdie's *oeuvre* constantly subjects to shifts and erasure this blurry line between reality and fiction, not only at the levels of meta- and intertextuality,⁶⁴² but also by an insistent ambition to change the world, to invest his written word with a historical agency. Thus, even though, as has been mentioned above, his protagonist Moraes lacks agency – he does not influence history, unlike his predecessor Saleem, but is subject to historical processes – the novel that narrates him does not: the overall distribution of various levels and degrees of authority among the text, the author and the reader that was discussed above gestures towards a careful but forceful tendency on Rushdie's part to place this and his other texts in the world and transform it by the power of its ideas. The outrageous provocativeness of *The Satanic Verses*, his disrespectful and openly hostile treatment of Indian (Indira Gandhi, Bal Thackeray), Pakistani (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq), British (Margaret Thatcher) and lately American (Donald Trump) political figures and politics all speak to this effect.

The Cervantean intertext, therefore, informs and destabilises Rushdie's text both in terms of narratology and of literary reception.⁶⁴³ Of the narratological aspects, some of which have

⁶⁴¹ This goes against the grain of the usual separation between reality and fiction, as fiction by definition transforms the real into the fictional. In Cervantes's novel, this life-creating power of fiction is exemplified in the Second Part, in which the reception of the first is "lived out" by his protagonists, who have become real flesh-and-blood celebrities.

⁶⁴² For *The Moor's Last Sigh* only, a list of the intertextual allusions would include Cervantes, Shakespeare's plays (*Othello*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*), Dante, Virgil, Bram Stoker, Kipling, Homer, the Indian epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the Spanish epic of the *Cid*, Kipling, Luis de Camoëns, Murasaki Shikibu, Scheherazade, Carlos Fuentes, Juan Rulfo, Henry Fielding, etc, among a welter of historical, mythological, religious, popular culture and folklore references. There is also the appearance of characters or motifs from his previous novels, such as Adam Sinai, Lord Khusro, the Braganza Brand pickles, the Sabarmati affair from *Midnight's Children* and the Chamchawalla house and Zeenat Vakil from *The Satanic Verses* – this is an aspect of what Ann Jefferson terms "sister-textuality". For an analysis of the term, see Ann Jefferson, "Autobiography as intertext: Barthes, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet," in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. Michael Worton and Judith Still (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 108-129.

⁶⁴³ An in-depth analysis of Cervantes's prologue would cite its most prominent features as follows: it lays bare the author's "critical position on transmitting literary and, by extension, cultural authority in the early modern age," "the privileged status to commentary on the creative process, the blurring of old and new writing strategies," "the erosion of the belief in the authority of the written word" (there is no privilege accorded to sources, writers, texts, or readers), and a challenge to the reader to take the leap in self-assertion in the act of reading. (Carolyn A. Nadeau, "Reading the Prologue: Cervantes's Narrative

already been alluded to, the open-endedness and processuality of the text deserve a special attention. The cyclical structure of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, which brings the end to the beginning while also encoding the beginning with the end, is an obvious parallel to Cervantes's Prologue, since both reveal the disingenuousness of the author: all the author's worries in the Prologue are false because he merely translates an already written manuscript, so whatever reservations he may have regarding it are thereby rendered useless. Similarly, Moraes's chronology of the writing of his text is misleading because, if he is right, then the beginning should not contain the end of his story. The dynamism of these narrative strategies transforms the text-as-product into a text-as-process, refusing to come to an end by not offering closure and refusing to be neutral, as it already encodes its own criticism (in the case of Cervantes the character) and reception (in the case of Moraes). Significantly, in both Cervantes and Rushdie there is a strong interweaving of history and fiction: just as Rushdie's Moor is unimaginable without the historical Boabdil, so Cervantes's Cide Hamete Benengeli is a historian rather than a writer of fiction. Therefore, both authors represent fiction/the novel as a revision or a corrective of history.

Don Quixote is considered the first modern novel, marking a break with the medieval tradition of legendary, epic heroes engaged in adventurous pursuits and introducing a new conception of man in its individualised protagonist, revealing his complex interiority and relation with his world. The polarised and complementary values embodied by its two protagonists have been defined as "Quixotism", an idealist and impracticable behavior towards reality, and "Sanchopanzism", a pragmatic attitude towards reality, guided by the desire to turn every occasion into one's own advantage. The difference in their approaches has been also manifested in the imagology of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: the former's leanness suggesting his almost ascetic detachment from this world in the pursuit of his ideals and the latter's portliness indicating his materialism and desire to fill up his own stomach (*panza*). During the centuries since its publication, *Don Quixote* has exerted an enormous influence, not only literary but also

Appropriation and Originality," in *Miguel de Cervantes's Don Quixote*, ed. Harold Bloom [New York: Info Base Publishing, 2010], 3-24.

philosophical, cultural and historical. The mythical and even archetypal figure of Don Quixote has been revitalised and appropriated in numerous political and ideological contexts.⁶⁴⁴

For Miguel de Unamuno, he incarnated the noblest qualities of the Spanish national character, which was in a desperate need of regeneration after the country's loss of her colonies and its ensuing profound identity crisis. In Latin America, Don Quixote's resolute pursuit of justice in a world dominated by brute force and injustice has come to symbolise the struggle for emancipation and decolonisation. Revolutionaries such as José Martí, Simon Bolívar, Che Guevara and even Fidel Castro have frequently been compared to the famous hidalgo for their idealism, altruism and readiness to take on the giants of this world even if they had the misleading appearance of windmills, in an unequal fight evoking that of David and Goliath. Although during Franco's dictatorship Don Quixote was venerated as one of the greatest national figures by the fascist establishment, buttressing the nationalist Castilian sentiment, in the Republican camp he was a symbol of antifascism and democracy which served as a denunciation of the cruelties and the repression of the *Dictadura*.

Finally, the noble hidalgo was compared and contrasted with another prominent Spanish personage, both historical and literary – that of Cid Campeador, Spain's champion against the Muslim invaders. Set in the twelfth century, during the Spanish *Reconquista*, the epic called variously *Cantar o Poema del (Mío) Cid* narrates the exploits of this great hero, which are interwoven with the vicissitudes befalling his family, resulting in the portrait of a noble man embodying a host of Christian and universal human values, such as bravery, justice, patience, moderation, spousal and fatherly love, patriotism, etc. The spectacular success of the Reconquista consecrated the historical and cultural heroic standing of the Cid, one of its greatest champions, against whom the sad and pitiable figure of Don Quixote was taken to stand for failure. *The Moor's Last Sigh* is interspersed with allusions to the legend of the Cid: Ximena, the Cid's wife, is evoked by Aurora's mother, Isabella Ximena da Gama, who at the time of her death identifies with her namesake, is later represented in Aurora's paintings in the character of Uma and likened by Vasco Miranda to Aoi Uë, whereas the surname of the taxi-driver who takes Moraes to Benengeli is Vivar, the same as El Cid's. This distribution of the references to the

⁶⁴⁴ For an exhaustive list of the historical, cultural and artistic reactivation of the myth of Don Quixote, see Danielle Perrot, ed., *Don Quichotte au XXI^e Siècle: Réception d'une figure mythique dans la littérature et les arts* (Clermont-Ferrand (France), Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2003).

Spanish national epic hero among secondary characters brings into sharper focus the absence of a Cid-like figure in the non-heroic universe of Rushdie's novel, which corroborates its narrator's belief that his is a non-heroic age, populated by buffoons and clowns, pitiable figures like Don Quixote. If we take the contrast between El Cid and Don Quixote to mean a contrast between success and failure, purposeful heroism and senseless fight-picking, then Rushdie's novel, in its focus on the romanticised but ultimately cowardly and non-heroic protagonist Moor (in his dual characterisation as Moraes and Boabdil), reveals the empty place of the Hero.

The relentless intertextual playfulness of the novel can be extended to include the inevitable pun on the homophony and near sameness of El Cid's name with that of Cervantes's supposed author, Cide Hamete Benengeli, which takes us back to the nightmarish Andalusian village of the novel's dénouement. With its evocation of the immense significance of Miguel de Cervantes for the history of the novel and the universal cultural heritage, why has Rushdie enveloped Benengeli, i.e. the fictional historian that gave birth to Don Quixote, in such a phantasmagorical atmosphere?

Benengeli is the surreal locale where Moraes writes his manuscript. It is a place where both locals and newcomers enact their purposeless, soulless existence: the former on account of their Francoist affiliations and the latter on account of the empty consumerism they practice. Benengelis is "a nesting-place for itinerant layabouts, expatriate vermin, and all the flotsam-jetsam scum of the earth" (*MLS*, 327). Moraes likens his journey there to a "transglobal pilgrimage," undertaken to return to the home of his ancestors, to find a spiritual revelation in the last messages of his mother's art, which becomes here a preserve of memory. However, he arrives in a veritable Inferno, populated by the living dead, lost souls in their personal hell of destroyed ideals and blighted lives; "human automata" who "could simulate human life, but were no longer able to live it" (*MLS*, 403). Their existential emptiness is made evident by the fact that there are no mirrors in the village as they would have nothing to reflect. It is a place where "people came to forget themselves – or, more accurately, to lose themselves in themselves, to live in a kind of dream of what they might have been, or preferred to be – or, having mislaid what once they were, to absent themselves quietly from what they had become" (*MLS*, 402). Rushdie combines the most paradigmatic infernal intertexts in his description of Benengeli to convey the atmosphere of lostness and existential despair, which is the reversed, dark mirror of the previous parts of the novel, set in India.

Not only is Benengeli a Falangist stronghold, retaining its fascist leanings long after the fall of the *Dictadura*, but it is also the centre of the simulacrum, where all meaning and identity collapse into uncertainty, fakery and inauthenticity. The spirit of republicanism/liberalism/democracy and humanist values are housed instead in the neighbouring village of Erasmo, separated from Benengeli both spatially (there is no road connecting them) and ideologically. There is a profound significance in this ideological contrast between the two spaces, which are conceived of as concrete symbols of opposing values.

In his rejection of religious and historical transcendence, as discussed in the previous chapter, Rushdie elevates the status of literature and the literary as a conduit for a sort of “secular transcendence.” Simultaneously, he undermines this consecrated status of literature by investing not the literary-inspired but the philosophy-minded village with the progressive and humanistic values that elsewhere he attributes to literature. This irresolvable paradox is the hallmark of Rushdie’s *oeuvre* and, considering the time of writing of this novel, a sad commentary on the “Rushdie affair” and the nightmarish events inspired by the *fatwa* against Rushdie. For if we take the name “Benengeli” to mean the innovative and revolutionary power of literature to reveal and inspire, as it does in the Cervantean context, then Rushdie’s phantasmagorical village comes to symbolise the exact opposite, namely the hellish turmoil that literature can unleash and the descent into the darkest core of the human psyche and its driving forces accompanying such a crisis of identity. The soulless and meaningless essence of Benengeli represents the unpleasant realisation of the possibility of a “hellish” reception of literature, raised to the level of an epistemological and existential negation of humanism and humanist values. Written after the *fatwa* proclaimed against Rushdie in the aftermath of the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, *The Moor’s Last Sigh* cannot but reflect its author’s personal experience of just such a reception of literature.

The Satanic Verses and the Various Deaths of the Author

a. The Uses and Abuses of the Artistic and the Hermeneutical Imagination

With the explosive reactions to his novel, Rushdie transferred the polemic about the value of literature and the responsibility of the author from the literary-academic to the political sphere, bringing to the fore the worldliness of the work of art and the fallacy of the autonomy of the artistic sphere. Having appropriated and re-inscribed the discourses of nationalism, colonialism, religion and history, he saw his own hybrid novelistic discourse appropriated and re-inscribed in turn, most infamously by the *fatwa* the Ayatollah Khomeini issued against him on 14th February (St Valentine's Day) 1989 (in an uncanny coming-true of his fictional reality, Rushdie was transformed into a satanic symbol and was burnt in effigy). As David Bennett states, "this arch-framer seems to have framed himself with the prophetic authority of his own fiction."⁶⁴⁵

Bennett poses the question of the incompatibility/contradiction of Rushdie's deconstructive and anti-representational postmodernist practice and his claims to represent and be represented by governments, nations, and cultures in the furore over the fatwa. In an intellectual climate wherein the postmodernist deconstruction of identity and grand narratives stands alongside the postcolonial assertion of marginalised peoples and histories, the postcolonial migrant or diasporic intellectual like Rushdie (and Bhabha, Spivak, Gilroy, and others) can too easily fall into the trap of "cultural and ethical relativism"⁶⁴⁶ by insisting on the hybridity and openness of everything. Once the layers of the postmodernist nihilistic rhetoric are stripped down, however, what remains is the individual's belonging to and reliance on precisely those grand narratives and collective identities that it sought so negate. This, in Bennett's view, has been amply demonstrated by the Rushdie affair and Rushdie's reaction to it, which "attempted containment of precisely the decentred, 'unauthorised' dissemination of meanings that the palimpsestic texts of postmodern writing foreground and celebrate."⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁵ David Bennett, "Salman Rushdie as Post-postmodernist: The Politics of Genres and Self-Representation in the *Satanic Verses* 'Affair,'" *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 19:1, 1997, 1-37: 3.

⁶⁴⁶ Bennett, 13.

⁶⁴⁷ Bennett, 21.

Contrary to his rejection of totalising identities, Rushdie has, since the *fatwa*, aligned himself with three such identities. Firstly, going against his own insistence on the malleability and non-essentialism of national identity and nationalism as such, he demanded representation by the British government “both as a citizen whose liberal-democratic right to freedom of expression (not least in his own legal defense) is enshrined in English law, and as a member of a secular-humanist culture that defines religious belief and dissent as matters of private conscience, not public accountability.”⁶⁴⁸ In this case, apparently, Rushdie was “contained” and saved by his British passport, which granted him the government protection that other dissidents, bearers of inferior passports, are denied. Contrary to his protagonists’ ability to cheat death and reinvent themselves anew in the process, the affair demonstrated that such self-refashioning is determined by the political realities of the individual’s national, ethnic, racial or gendered location. Secondly, he sought representation by the

international community of artists and writers whose common interests were at stake in the lethal form of literary criticism being practiced by Tehran. Like many of his supporters among the literary intelligentsia, Rushdie argued that the concerns of art are universal; that aesthetic values are categorically different from political and religious values; and that his novel should be judged on its artistic motives and merit alone.⁶⁴⁹

This, however, goes against the historical, political and religious themes in his fiction, which by incorporating these different discourses, demands being interpreted and understood in relation to them. Lastly, and most disturbingly, he sought representation by the community of Islam, to which he re-converted in 1990 in an attempt to allay the rage of his Islamic readership, thus denying his own secular credentials as an intellectual who speaks truth to power. Bennett concludes his essay with two rhetorical questions to which the implicit answer would be in the affirmative:

does Rushdie’s present predicament illustrate the impossibility of performing *politically* the “deconstruction” of every unitary identity which postmodernist writing – in its critique of representation as such – undertakes on the page? Or does Rushdie’s

⁶⁴⁸ Bennett, 15.

⁶⁴⁹ Bennett, 24.

performance of identity since the fatwa illustrate precisely the multiple and incommensurable identifications that individuals often make in the struggle to survive?⁶⁵⁰

Talal Asad also points out the fallacy of regeneration and self-invention that is the central motif of the book, which is “the classic morality of consumer capitalism.”⁶⁵¹ He criticises Rushdie’s elision of the real historical and political struggles of the masses, who rely on their identity and are neither ready nor willing to relativise and narrativise everything, pointing out that a crucial factor in the religious entrenchment of British Muslims is not Islam *per se*, but their class situation, which is rooted in English imperialism. Like Bennett, he denounces Rushdie’s moral relativism by having Chamcha return to his homeland, be reconciled with his father, get his inheritance and start a new life, unscathed by his role in the deaths of Allie and Gibreel: “In such a morality there is no reason to suppose there can ever be an end to the cycle of destruction, self-forgiveness, and reconstitution of the subject. Where there are no obligations to the past every destruction is only a new beginning, and new beginnings are all one can ever have.”⁶⁵² Finally, Asad mentions the Western interpretation of the Bradford book-burnings as comparable to the Nazi ones of the 1930s, pointing out the irony in the West’s condoning of violence in books (and in Rushdie’s in particular) on the grounds that it is not real, but aesthetic, merely a story, and its reacting with horror to the acts of the symbolic book-burnings in Bradford, which were denied such literalist understanding. In this case, the books burned were not just paper and ink, but a manifestation of the barbarism of Islam; after all, “it was ‘Literature’ that was being burned, not just any printed communication. And it was burned by people who did not understand the sacred role performed by literature in modern bourgeois culture.”⁶⁵³

Other critics dubbed Rushdie a “*literary terrorist*”⁶⁵⁴ or “a secular fundamentalist,”⁶⁵⁵ who admits no legitimacy in the opposition to his book and asserts the right of the artist to free speech, regardless of the consequences. Sardar and Davies regard *The Satanic Verses* as a culmination of the Orientalist tradition of vilifying Islam, a product of what they call “the

⁶⁵⁰ Bennett, 23.

⁶⁵¹ Talal Asad, “Ethnography, Literature, and Politics: Some Readings and Uses of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*,” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Aug., 1990): 256.

⁶⁵² Asad, 256.

⁶⁵³ Asad, 258.

⁶⁵⁴ Shabbir Akhtar, quoted in Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland, eds., *The Rushdie File* (London: Fourth Estate, 1989), 239, emphasis original.

⁶⁵⁵ Malise Ruthven, quoted in Appignanesi and Maitland, 159.

distorted imagination,” a conceptual tool that the Western secular literati use to represent the alterity that is Islam in derogatory terms and to capitalise on the unbridgeable gap between cultural and civilisational difference, hidden under the veil of the absolute freedom of art.⁶⁵⁶ In their view, Rushdie is the consummate “brown sahib,” the colonised native who is permanently enamoured of colonial culture and who is permanently divided within himself between his native culture and the colonial culture to which he desperately wants to belong, but does not succeed – he never becomes a *pukkah* sahib.⁶⁵⁷

Malise Ruthven emphasises the rootedness of the violent Islamic reaction to Rushdie’s book in the fragility of the identity of the British Muslim immigrants from the Indian subcontinent, who have had to assert their faith, first in the midst of Hindu polytheism, and then in a secular Britain unsympathetic to their religiosity. Ali Mazrui similarly draws attention to the real pain that Rushdie caused among the believers, which he exposed “to the titillation of his western readers.”⁶⁵⁸ According to him, if Rushdie’s aim was really to achieve a reform in Islam, he has failed, as “the best approach toward reform is not abuse but a reordering of values within the existing paradigm.”⁶⁵⁹

As we can see, the emphasis, in this adverse reaction to *The Satanic Verses* is on a failure of the artistic imagination to reach its ostensibly primary readership, those about whom it writes and who are intimately imbricated in the reality out of which Rushdie fashions his fiction. Even an intellectual of the stature of Edward Said detects an Orientalist note in Rushdie’s novel because he represents the East to the West using Orientalist clichés and, as he is a lapsed Muslim, represents himself through the prism of the Other, which is the West.⁶⁶⁰

Conversely, the novel was hailed as a literary masterpiece by its defenders, mostly writers and intellectuals from the West, who in defending Rushdie asserted their own craft as propagating liberal and universal values, in contrast to the opposition, which spoke from a position of the here-and-now. Thus, Marina Warner saw Rushdie as an inheritor to the moral satire of Rabelais, Voltaire, Erasmus and Swift, while Nadine Gordimer branded the *fatwa*

⁶⁵⁶ Ziauddin Sardar and Meryll Wyn Davies, *Distorted Imagination: Lessons from the Rushdie Affair* (London: Grey Seal and Kuala Lumpur: Berita, 1990), 4-6.

⁶⁵⁷ Sardar and Davies, 77-9.

⁶⁵⁸ Ali A. Mazrui, “*The Satanic Verses* or a Satanic Novel? Moral Dilemmas of the Rushdie Affair,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Winter 1990): 118.

⁶⁵⁹ Mazrui, 118.

⁶⁶⁰ Edward Said, quoted in Appignanesi and Maitland, 176-7.

“censorship’s Final Solution for that great enemy of darkness, the word.”⁶⁶¹ A notable difference between Rushdie and the other dissident writers Warner mentions is that they were insiders writing for a domestic public, while Rushdie occupies the more precarious in-between position between East and West, which means that he does not fully belong in either. Carlos Fuentes and Milan Kundera similarly extol the primacy of the creative imagination and its ability to engage with the most profound aspects of human existence.

A third group of intellectuals took a more balanced approach and saw the novel and the affair in the context from which they arose, namely a particular group of people holding a particular set of beliefs. Rustom Bharucha is especially relevant here – he writes that by invading the private sacralised space of believers, Rushdie has caused trauma:

His “crime” to my mind, is directly linked to the very faculty of the imagination that he upholds as a writer... It is precisely the nature of this fiction that is the cause of the problem, because in asserting his own, rather manic imagination, Rushdie has desecrated the imagination of others, more specifically the “private space” in which faith resides. In naming the unnamable and reducing the sacred to a playful, often vicious, parody, Rushdie has no right to claim his innocence as a writer.⁶⁶²

Roald Dahl also calls for a more responsible exercise of the artistic freedom of speech: “In a civilised world we all have a moral obligation to apply a modicum of censorship to our own work in order to reinforce this principle of free speech.”⁶⁶³

What these responses to Rushdie’s novel bring to light is the gap between the intellectual and the masses, specifically that segment for which the novel was ostensibly intended. This renders manifest the separation of the cosmopolitan author from those whom he represents in his work and who, as was shown by the furore over *The Satanic Verses*, openly reject Rushdie’s representation of them and of what they hold dear. At the same time, the polarisation of the novel’s reception by the world literati/liberal West and the world Islamic community and intellectuals demonstrated that collective identities based on religion and cultural belonging are still very much operative as grand narratives, as Rushdie’s reliance on them has also made amply evident. It can be therefore concluded from the Rushdie affair that in modern democratic

⁶⁶¹ Appignanesi and Maitland, 208 and 214.

⁶⁶² Rustom Bharucha, quoted in Malise Ruthven, *A Satanic Affair*, 176.

⁶⁶³ Roald Dahl, quoted in Appignanesi and Maitland, 218.

societies, intellectuals, while expected to subvert the discourses of power, are also required to maintain a civilised and respectful attitude, or, as Jeffrey Goldfarb puts it, to strive for a “proper balance between civility and subversion.”⁶⁶⁴ By not preserving this balance, Rushdie has not achieved what he says he set out to do – to encourage a reform in Islam and Islamic societies and communities; quite the reverse, he thwarted the possibility of a genuine intercultural debate.

b. A Tale of Three Texts: The Birth of the Reader as Author

The charges of blasphemy and of the irreverential treatment of Islam and its founder levelled against *The Satanic Verses* and its author, some of which were based on fragmentary and incomplete readings or even ignored the novel completely, brought to the fore the distance between the novel’s author’s horizon of expectations and that of his Muslim readers.⁶⁶⁵

According to Jauss,

The distance between the horizon of expectations and the work, between the familiarity of previous aesthetic experiences and the “horizon change” demanded by the response to new works, *determines the artistic nature of a literary work . . . the smaller this distance, which means that no demands are made upon the receiving consciousness to make a change on the horizon of unknown experience, the closer the work comes to the realm of “culinary” or light reading.*⁶⁶⁶ [...] Misunderstood or ignored masterpieces, by the same token, are works whose distance from the horizon of expectations of a given time is so great that it may take generations before they are incorporated into the literary canon. The

⁶⁶⁴ Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, *Civility and Subversion: The Intellectual in Democratic Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

⁶⁶⁵ Hans-Robert Jauss defines the “horizon of expectations” (*Erwartungshorizont*) as “the set of cultural, ethical, and literary (generic, stylistic, thematic) expectations of a work’s readers ‘in the historical moment of its appearance.’ These expectations are the basis on which the work was both produced and received, for a writer necessarily writes in function of what he knows to be the previous experience – and hence the current expectations – of the reading public, even if in his work he criticises or acts against those expectations. The modern understanding of a literary work of the past necessarily differs from its first understanding, because today’s horizon of expectations is itself different. One task of the history of reception, according to Jauss, is to reconstruct, using both extrinsic and intrinsic data, the horizon of expectations that existed when a given work first appeared (this involves finding ‘the questions to which the text originally answered’), and thereby to ‘bring out the hermeneutic difference between past and present ways of understanding a work.’ (Susan Rubin Suleiman, “Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism,” in Susan Rubin Suleiman and Inge Grosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980], 35-6)

⁶⁶⁶ Jauss, quoted in Suleiman, “Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism,” in Suleiman and Grosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text*, 36-7, emphasis original.

idea that a work's artistic value is directly proportional to its "negativity" with respect to the expectations of its first readers is especially appealing to modern theorists.⁶⁶⁷

Rushdie's novel certainly cannot be characterised as a "culinary" or light reading that poses no interpretive challenges to the reader and rather belongs in the group of misunderstood literary works that radically transgress both the intellectual and cultural/identitary sensibilities of its readership. A significant aspect of its transgressiveness was the way it transgressed its status as a literary artifact and crossed over into the real world of international, intercultural and inter-religious politics: as his offended readers attributed meanings and intentions to the book and its author that were clearly rejected and inadmissible by the latter, they assumed the role of more authoritative "authors" of the novel than Rushdie himself. An extreme example of one such reader-turned-author was the Ayatollah Khomeini, with the *fatwa* he issued against Rushdie.

The *fatwa* itself does not even mention Rushdie. Instead, he is descriptively referred to as "the author of the book entitled *The Satanic Verses*, which has been compiled, printed and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet and the Koran."⁶⁶⁸ The anonymity to which Khomeini consigns Rushdie serves to render the magnitude of the offence caused by his book all the more obvious. The passive construction further disassociates the author from the book, which thereby acquires its own agency on a par with the author's, the two imbricated in a joint transgression against a religion, its prophet and holy book. Significantly, Khomeini does not refer to his own fictionalised persona, the Imam, and instead unconsciously takes on the latter's mantle in his fight against the secular forces he sees aligned against himself and what he stands for. Thus, three texts are palimpsestically interwoven: the Qur'an, *The Satanic Verses* as its alternative, profane version and the text of the *fatwa*, which denounces the latter and seeks the execution of its author. The *fatwa* thus becomes another text that further enriches the intertextual texture of Rushdie's novel, the two forming an uneasy *mésalliance*.

The three interlocked texts are locked in an intertextual game in which the positions of author, character and reader are interchangeable and volatile. In denying Muhammad's authority as a genuine prophet, Rushdie asserts his own authorial authority which comes close to the prophetic, because in his novel he correctly predicts his novel's polarised reception. Thus, while negotiating to make Gibreel's dreams into another "theological," Billy Battuta, the financier of

⁶⁶⁷ Suleiman, 36-7.

⁶⁶⁸ Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, quoted in Appignanesi and Maitland, *The Rushdie File*, 84.

the project, when asked whether the film about the Prophet would not be seen as blasphemous, replies,

“Certainly not,” Billy Battuta insisted. “Fiction is fiction; facts are facts. Our purpose is not to make some farrago like that movie *The Message* in which, whenever Prophet Muhammad (on whose name be peace!) was heard to speak, you saw only the head of his camel, moving its mouth. That – excuse me for pointing out – had no class. We are making a high-taste, quality picture. A moral tale: like – what do you call them? – fables.” (SV, 272)

In Jahilia, when Baal suggests to the Madam of the brothel that the prostitutes take the names of the Prophet’s wives, she reluctantly agrees, saying “It is very dangerous...but it could be damn good for business. We will go carefully; but we will go” (SV, 380). The novel is permeated by an awareness of being blasphemous, but dilutes its transgression by voicing the sentiment that “Where there is no belief, there is no blasphemy” (SV, 380). Paradoxically, the prophetic discourse, denigrated and undermined in the novel, was affirmed and vindicated in the world, while the novel’s guiding metaphor of the “rivers of blood” made its final migration and became not a trope, but a disturbingly literal shedding of blood.

Khomeini, in turn, destabilises Rushdie’s authority by assuming the authoritative position of a religious leader who can command the believers to execute the novelist and all those implicated in the book’s publication and calls on God’s blessing in the process. The fictionalised character of the fanatical Imam has migrated from the world of the novel and has made its author Rushdie the protagonist of the text he himself has authored, thus usurping his authorial position. As Spivak points out, “it is the late Ayatollah who can be seen as filling the author-function, and Salman Rushdie, himself, caught in a different cultural logic, is no more than the writer-as-performer.”⁶⁶⁹ Thus, the novel extratextually performs its own intratextual transgressive aesthetics, by projecting and externalising it outside, into the real world: just as the author inhabited his fictional world in the guise of a “myopic scrivener,” his text inhabited his own world, transferring the ontological fluidity of the fictional world into objective reality. To continue the chain of ontological permeations between the different narrative levels of the novel, which we analysed in the previous part, by issuing the *fatwa*, the novel’s Imam, in the guise of

⁶⁶⁹ Gayatri Spivak, “Reading *The Satanic Verses*,” in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York & London: Routledge, 2009), 246.

Khomeini, became ontologically and ideologically stronger than his author, usurping his role, literally inciting his death.

This multiplication of the chain of re-inscriptions in the two texts requires a re-conceptualisation of the role of the author and the status of the literary work in the modern era. Going against the widespread acceptance in literary circles of the “intentional fallacy,” Rushdie has been obliged to assert and reassert his intentions in writing his book. And, contrary to the postmodernist sidelining of the author and reliance on the text only as a generator of meaning, Rushdie has been asked to account for what he has written, which confirmed Foucault’s assertion that the name of the author became necessary when he became amenable to punishment.⁶⁷⁰ In fact, “[b]y an ironic reversal of the intentional fallacy, the author becomes the creation of the text,” with his readers engaged in “the construction of an author to fit a particular reading of the book.”⁶⁷¹ Rushdie thus effectively becomes a powerless fictionalised character trapped in his own text. As Máire ní Fhlathúin further states, the affair is “a perfect example of ‘the return of the subject,’ as the process of rewriting, interpreting and interrogating the author and his work is carried out by those who felt themselves subjects of his satiric invention.”⁶⁷² In fact, by killing the author, the book gave birth to many readers and even Overreaders, Khomeini being one of them.

Seán Burke insists on the ethical recall to which authors are inevitably amenable, and rightly so, for whenever specific political or historical developments are traceable to a text, then “the rarefied notion of artistic impersonality implodes, and society finds itself in search of an author.” Karl Marx might well have protested against the horrors of the gulags, Goethe against the spate of suicides inspired by his *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Rousseau against the Terror, Nietzsche against the concentration camps, etc., but they remain tied to these events nevertheless. In Rushdie’s case, he need not have

traded off one set of cultural values against another by bringing irony, metafictionality, and self-consciousness into contest with a religion and textual tradition which has not acknowledged mediation as a form of authorial absolution or abnegation of responsibility. To this extent, Rushdie declined to put his name to what had been written

⁶⁷⁰ Seán Burke, *Authorship*, 287.

⁶⁷¹ Máire ní Fhlathúin, “Postcolonialism and the Author: The Case of Salman Rushdie,” in *Authorship*, ed. Burke, 277.

⁶⁷² Máire ní Fhlathúin, 282.

in his name, wished to be the authoritative reader as well as the writer of a text he freely surrendered from the privacy of an intuition to public dissemination. Not for nothing did society call him back along the ethical path that tracks a text to a proper name, to a person, a biography, and set of intentions.⁶⁷³

In short, the furore over *The Satanic Verses*, in collapsing the distinction between the categories art-politics, author-text and author-reader, produced a hermeneutical aporia whereby each category was vacated of its meaning and usurped by that of its Other. If we were to follow the Barthesian belief in the primacy of the reader, then the proliferation of readers, Overreaders and misreaders that *The Satanic Verses* has generated should be a welcome exercise in decoding a text drenched in ambiguities and ambivalence. However, this has not been so and Rushdie, displaced from his authorial position by his readers (and one Reader in particular), wanted to impose himself as an authoritative reader or critic, endlessly justifying, explaining and defending his book and thereby reducing its signficatory plurality to the clichéd themes of hybridity, migration, historicising Muhammad, etc. In preferring his authorial interpretation, Rushdie comes dangerously close to giving interpretative closure, which goes against his philosophy of *mélange*, translation (of people, knowledge, ideas) and the unrestrained polysemy of the novel. Refusing to disappear and let his text do the talking, the author aspires to become the Author-God, wielding pure and unadulterated meaning that his readers are to accept at face value. Although capable of predicting his reader's polarised reception in his text (through Billy Battuta and *The Curtain's* Madam), he dismisses them with the argument that blasphemy can come only from a believer, which he is not and thereby, having built-in the interpretative codes in his text, subordinates them to his authority, unable to accept a different reasoning from his own.

It can be stated that the separation of the author from the text, which is enacted in the novel itself, is the source of the book's and its author's predicament. In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie breaks the logic of artistic creation espoused in *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, in which, as we saw, the author conceives of his text as his child, the progeny that is to carry on his true legacy, which is textual rather than biological. In *The Satanic Verses*, this model is that of the umbilical cord between author and text, each equally creating the other. Thus, the

⁶⁷³ Seán Burke, "The responsibilities of the writer," in *Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Patricia Waugh, 488-9. Burke is careful to distinguish between intention and responsibility, with the "former as a subset of the latter" and uses the example of a woman who drives under the influence of alcohol, who does not normally intend to kill, only to drive, but "that lack of specific intention does not prevent us from holding that person responsible for the death of another."

novel advocates a seemingly more democratic model of creation whereby the author loses his hierarchical precedence over the work (and thereby his “fatherhood”) and is reinscribed as a being-in-process, like the text itself, a semantic void into which the text can pour new meanings. This semantic indeterminacy is the guiding principle of *The Satanic Verses* and although stimulating an incessant semiosis, in the long run it proves disabling for the author because it deprives him of the historical and cultural grounding that was so essential for Saleem and Moraes. The latter are unimaginable without their context, which in turn makes their counter-discursive postcolonial position all the more evident. At the same time, the concrete historical, political and cultural grounding of the author in these novels enables him to articulate clearly his authorial intention and to envision the afterlife of his text, whose function is to educate the next generation of the nation and/or to serve as a testament to a suppressed history and to a way of life that is gone. Although both Saleem and Moraes, as authors, speak from a hybrid and inclusive position, undermine their veracity and reliability and allow for different interpretations, their texts are never relativised and reduced to mere textual plays precisely on account of the cultural and ideological rootedness of the author.

Unlike Moraes and Saleem, the author in *The Satanic Verses* is an indeterminate, schizophrenic figure who, in spite of assuming the guise of both God and Satan, is nothing more than a grumpy middle-aged man who refuses to assume responsibility for the moral choices of his characters, who appeal to him for guidance as to a God. He is inscribed in the satanic logic of his novel, in which every judgement or statement is countered by its opposite and therefore is a *coincidentio oppositorum*, an aporetic space from which both his characters and his readers are at pains to extract a clear meaning. The diasporic, nomadic position from which the author here speaks itself generates the unstable meanings that his characters and events migrate from one narrative level to another: the very temporal and geographic locations of the novel (the oneiric landscapes of Gibreel’s dreams, the airspace above the English Channel in which their metamorphosis takes place, the fantasmagorical London through which he and Saladin move, etc.) suggest the indeterminate space which produces the differential logic that is interwoven into the text.

In *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, the reader is represented as necessary for the creation of the text and in the guise of Padma and Aoi is in various ways integrated in it, creating meaning in collaboration with the author. However, in spite of being crucial and

complementary, they are nevertheless subordinated to the authority of the author. *The Satanic Verses* charts a different territory: by postulating the mutual creation of himself and his text, the author foregrounds his own fictional nature, a challenge which his readers took up and implemented in real life, creating various portraits of Rushdie (as Satan or as “Simon Rushton,” the Anglicised version of his name he allegedly preferred as a sign of his deracinated identity, etc.). In the postcolonial context of appropriation and reclamation of the negative stereotyped representation of colonial Otherness by the imperial centre, a strategy that, as we saw, he copiously uses in his book, Rushdie’s intermediate position as an intellectual suspended in the cultural space between East and West proved one of the decisive factors in the interpretation of *The Satanic Verses*. As a result, each side judged him as a writer in terms of his connection to the “other” side, namely the West hailed him as the true voice of the subcontinent and its immigrant communities, while the East saw him as a traitor flaunting its political and cultural realities to the West as exotic fare. Although the *fatwa* obliged Rushdie to declare his authorial intentions and to explain his book to his readers, in the novel itself his author refuses to clarify; therefore, the readers called him to accountability.

Absent from the work and yet the object of fictional representation (*The Satanic Verses* presents a scathing portrait of both East and West), the readers asserted their presence and importance by “killing” the author and making him the object of their fictions about him, thereby continuing the satanic logic of destabilising the authorial voice in the novel and even coming dangerously close to taking it away and denying the author’s right to represent himself.

c. Reading and Interpretation after the *Fatwa*

The “Rushdie affair” drew sharp lines between the East and the West, secularism and religion, the intellectual and the masses, activated the rhetoric of Huntington’s clash of civilisations, the post-Orientalist discourse dissected by Said and even Lyotard’s *différend*, i.e. the irreconcilability and even incomparability of differences. As quoted by Goonetilleke,

as distinguished from litigation, a *différend* would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments. One side’s legitimacy does not imply the other’s lack of legitimacy. However, applying a single rule of judgment to both in order to settle their *différend* as

though it were merely a litigation would wrong (at least) one of them (and both of them if neither side admits this rule).⁶⁷⁴

In the context of the Rushdie affair, one of the greatest *causes célèbres* of our time, the Islamic community and the West, remaining faithful to the roles of the Same and the radically Other that each side ascribes to the other, found themselves in a situation in which they could not enter into a debate about the novel because they lacked a common language. The arguments of each were incomprehensible and unacceptable to the other. Vijay Mishra invokes the *différend* as a typical postcolonial strategy whereby the repressed, marginalised, alternative histories disrupt the great teleological, Enlightenment-informed outlook of Eurocentric history. In his view, Rushdie's novels are postcolonial narratives articulating

demands [that] lead to a re-theorisation of the category of history; they lead to a postmodern claim for alternative, minor histories; they lead to the displacement of grand narratives by narratives that are contingent, narratives that are established within frames that require other forms of knowledge construction. For practical purposes these narratives now challenge the very foundation of a consensual democratic ethos in the sense that these narratives may in fact speak of world views that are incommensurable, that require different kinds of cultural know-how and that, in some cases, lead not to difference but to Lyotard's *differend*, the presencing of such radically contingent moments and histories that require us to rethink the foundational rules of liberal dialogue to begin with⁶⁷⁵.

The binary categories ubiquitous in Rushdie's oeuvre as a whole and in *The Satanic Verses* in particular inevitably determined the dual framework – secular/Western and religious/Islamic – within which his novel would be received, and emphasised both the necessity of, and difficulty in, trying to procure an epistemic and cultural space that would accommodate both in an uneasy equilibrium.

This forked path of the processes of both authoring and interpreting a text has necessitated various theories of correct readings. Thus, K. M. Newton refers to the dispute between M. H. Abrams and J. Hillis Miller regarding the correct way of reading a work of literature: one is grammatical, seeking meaning at the most literal level of what the words

⁶⁷⁴ Goonetilleke, *Salman Rushdie*, 124.

⁶⁷⁵ Vijay Mishra, *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorising the Diasporic Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 215.

actually say, and the other is rhetorical, focused on the figurative level of tropes. A good reading fuses them both, a reading that remains at the grammatical level runs the risk of also being an under-reading, while a reading that is overly deconstructive and rhetorical may be deemed an over-reading.⁶⁷⁶ In Rushdie's case, his Muslim readers under-read his novel in that they focused on the literal portrayal of their prophet and faith, while his secular readers took the other extreme and over-read the text, engulfing its specific context (that of Islam and Muslim immigrants in Britain) into abstractly generalised themes such as migration, the postmodern split subject, etc.⁶⁷⁷

Overall, the "Rushdie affair" demonstrated the necessity of reconfiguring the theories of authorial intention, authorship and, most importantly, reception. The pertinent question to ask here is "where is the limit at which an open reading that is nevertheless immanent to the text becomes so open as to become alien to it and violate its spirit?" Considering the opposite and even irreconcilable readings of *The Satanic Verses*, some of which clearly poured meanings into the novel that were not there, we can conclude that the conceptions of the death of the author, the primacy of the reader, the intentional fallacy⁶⁷⁸ and the endless semantic play of the text can no

⁶⁷⁶ K. M. Newton, "Literary Theory and the Rushdie Affair," in *Salman Rushdie*, Smale, 153.

⁶⁷⁷ A similar dichotomy is theorised by Denis Donoghue, who distinguishes between "epi-reading" and "graphi-reading." The former, humanistic in orientation, sees language as transparent and adequately representing the world, relies on intention and referentiality in interpretation, seek ethics beyond the text (epi-readers include Gerard Manley Hopkins, Georges Poulet, Paul Ricoeur); the latter prioritises language in itself, literariness, the text and reading, is not caught in a nostalgia for the human voice speaking through language and ignores referentiality, i.e. everything that is beyond the text (graphi-readers include Derrida, Paul de Man, Roland Barthes, etc.). (Robert Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997]) Eaglestone further classifies Martha Nussbaum as an epi-reader and Hillis Miller as a graphi-reader. If Nussbaum can be reproached for reducing the text to simply words on the page offering a transparent meaning that is too moralistically inclined (she is a neo-Aristotelian), Hillis Miller's deconstruction is, in Eaglestone's view, too unethical in that it ignores the world outside the text. Eaglestone proposes Levinas's ethics as an alternative to the two previous approaches because he denies the transcendent capacity of art and asserts the primacy of the ethical over the aesthetic, which he sees in the dialogic activation of language – language produces meaning only in the presence of an audience/interlocutor.

⁶⁷⁸ Wimsatt and Beardsley's article with that title claimed that the author's intention in writing a work of literature, which is a self-sufficient linguistic entity, is "neither available nor desirable" and that it is not a standard for evaluation and for literary interpretation. It is this moving away from the author as a source of meaning and authority regarding his work that subsequently led to the anti-authorialism and anti-subjectivism of Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan and poststructuralist thought in general. The intentionalist response takes the opposite view, namely intentions are not private and inaccessible and literary works are clear indicators of the author's intention, that meaning and intention are inseparable and therefore the text means what its author meant, that even though there are various hypothetical interpretations, actual authorial ones are nevertheless present in the text, and that the work cannot be separated from its author. (Peter Lamarque, "The Intentional Fallacy," in *Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Patricia Waugh, 177-188)

longer be accepted as theoretical absolutes, because each of them implies the neglect of others and the result is misreading and misinterpretation. Instead, all the factors that activate literary meaning – author, text and reader – should be given their due attention.

Here Umberto Eco's notion of the *opera aperta* is pertinent. He defines the "open work" as being "*in movement*,[...] characterised by the invitation to *make the work* together with the author," as being "'open' to a continuous generation of internal relations which the addressee must uncover and select in his act of perceiving the totality of incoming stimuli," and, as an inherent characteristic of art in general: "*Every work of art, even though it is produced by following an explicit or implicit poetics of necessity, is effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings, each of which causes the work to acquire new vitality in terms of one particular taste, or perspective, or personal performance.*"⁶⁷⁹ Eco makes it clear that although semantic openness is characteristic of all art, contemporary art is open in a radically different way, namely because it encodes ambiguity, plurivocity and indeterminacy. The difference between the two types of openness is illustrated by a comparison between a terzet from *The Divine Comedy*, which, in spite of yielding deeper and richer suggestions with every new reading, nevertheless remains univocal in meaning, and an excerpt from *Finnegans Wake*, where no such single meaning is possible and which is practically undecipherable.⁶⁸⁰ In terms of interpretation, Eco provides a triangular model of "interpretation as research of the *intentio auctoris*, interpretation as the research of the *intentio operis*, and interpretation as imposition of the *intentio lectoris*."⁶⁸¹ Taken in isolation, each would remain a pure category contrasted with and compared to the others; taken together, they would constitute a complex semantic and interpretive structure in which each element would remain the elusive but necessary Other, introducing difference into a conceptual apparatus that would otherwise remain homogeneous.

⁶⁷⁹ Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21.

⁶⁸⁰ Eco, 40-1.

⁶⁸¹ Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 50.

The Intra- and Extra-Textual Readers of *Fury* and *Quichotte*

To explore the strategy of self-reading in the last two novels of my corpus, I will use Ulrich Broich's conception of intertextuality. According to him, postmodern intertextuality performs new functions that correspond to the new, postmodernist conception of literature. The function of intertextuality in previous literary epochs was largely constructive: in imitating the classics, which were venerated for their proximity to nature, poets sought to remain closer to nature. Thus, intertextuality in a text played a constructive role and signified not so much a desire to imitate literature *per se* (although this had a legitimising effect – “[w]hen Fielding imitated the epic in *Joseph Andrews* he wanted to convince his readers that his novel belonged to a legitimate genre”⁶⁸²), but it “stabilised its imitation of nature”: “the more intertextual a poem is (given that it imitates the right pre-texts) the more strongly mimetic it will be.”⁶⁸³ In postmodernism, intertextuality has a deconstructive role: not to stabilise, but to destabilise meaning and the textual world, a strategy used to foreground the ludic, pla(y)giarist aspect of the text.

Fury and *Quichotte* put into play an intertextual relation by means of what Broich terms “markers in the external communicative system” – a type of intertextuality of which the readers are aware, but not the characters themselves.⁶⁸⁴ He cites as examples Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which the characters are not aware that they are modelled on *The Odyssey*, and Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, in which, in addition to intertextual relations that are immanent to the text, such as Aristotle's *Poetics*, there is a link to the detective stories of Conan Doyle, indicated by the names of the protagonists, Baskerville and Adso (phonetically similar to Watson), and Jorge Luis Borges, alluded to in the figure of the blind librarian Jorge of Burgos. As opposed to the type of intertextuality signaled by “markers in the internal communicative system,” whereby allusions to other texts and characters are included in the text and the characters are aware of and respond to them in different ways (as Don Quixote does to the novels of chivalry, which largely

⁶⁸² Ulrich Broich, “Intertextuality,” in Hans Bertens and Douwe Fokkema, eds., *International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997), 253.

⁶⁸³ Broich, 253 and 249.

⁶⁸⁴ Ulrich Broich, “Konzepte der Intertextualität,” Macedonian translation by Ranka Grcheva, in Katica Kulavkova, ed., *Teorija na intertekstualnosta* (Skopje: Kultura, 2003), 141-163.

shape his worldview), this type of intertextuality posits textuality as an interactive process between author, text and reader. Indeed, intertextuality

is present whenever an author, in creating his text, is not only conscious of his use of other texts, but expects the reader to recognise the relationship between his and the other texts, as an authorial intention that is important for understanding the text. Thus, in this more narrow sense, textuality is the result of a very specific communicative process in which there is in each of the two partners involved therein – the author and the reader – an awareness of intertextuality.⁶⁸⁵

In her discussion of the imaginative geography that Rushdie builds in *Fury*, Parashkevova notes the asymmetry in his fiction between real cities and imaginative ones, asking “why can cities such as Bombay, London and New York afford the luxury of referring to a positive (in the sense of undeniably existing, if critiqued) political geography outside the novels and to the material lives of its inhabitants while others can only allude to or ‘borrow’ locations from such a geography?”⁶⁸⁶ Comparing Rushdie’s history of Lilliput-Blefuscu with that of Fiji, on which the former is modelled, she notes that the revolutionary counter-coup depicted in the novel has not taken place in Fiji, which makes Rushdie, like Solanka, “a global author who produces signposts of things to come.”⁶⁸⁷

However, an aspect neglected in criticism of the novel is the literarised location Rushdie has chosen for the South Pacific island that he has named “Lilliput-Blefuscu” and that is modeled on Fiji. The question I would like to explore in this part is why Rushdie’s fiction increasingly comes to rely on literarised locations and characters instead of real or imagined ones and to explore the effects that this strategy produces. The Swiftian and Cervantean intertexts in *Fury* and *Quichotte*, activated by means of Broich’s “markers in the external communicative system,” effect a split in the interpretive framework of the novels, one for the characters and another for the readers.

Andrew Gibson terms this duality in interpretation “the split-space of reception,” by analogy with Bhabha’s “split-space of enunciation”:

⁶⁸⁵ Broich, 141, my translation.

⁶⁸⁶ Parashkevova, *Salman Rushdie’s Cities*, 171-2.

⁶⁸⁷ Parashkevova, 172.

If the “enunciative split” has a “temporal dimension” in the disjunction between the subject of a proposition and the subject of its enunciation (*LoC*, p. 36), then, by implication, a similar disjunction is present in reception, too. In the split-space of reception, “the ‘I’ in the position of mastery is, *at the same time*, the place of its absence” (*LoC*, p. 47). [...] A “split-space” is produced for reception not least by much of the kind of postcolonial and postmodern writing that most interests Bhabha.⁶⁸⁸

The “split-space of reception” is particularly evoked in postcolonial novels, Rushdie’s included, where the existence of an intercultural space, usually between East and West, creates an unstable interpretive site for the reader, which is neither simply the East nor the West. As an example, Gibson mentions Timothy Mo’s *Sour Sweet*, which

rather insistently raises the question of cultural identity and the latter’s boundaries not only “within the text” but as a question of reception. As a novel in English about Chinese characters, its appeal would appear to be to the Western reader, not least in Mo’s explanations of how a Chinese community functions. At the same time, however, *Sour Sweet* consistently and strategically estranges a non-Chinese from the non-Chinese who figure in the novel, like the outlandish English creatures whom the Chinese waiters laugh at because they drink wine or beer with their Chinese meals. [...] The point is precisely the oddity and the incompatibility, from one cultural perspective, of value-systems that are apparently congruent enough from another. On one level, then, the reader appealed to in *Sour Sweet* is not Western. As the English social world is very largely closed off from the Chinese characters in the novel, that world is negated and closed off for the reader, too. But the reader appealed to cannot be Cantonese, either, not least because of language. Not only is the novel written in English. We are repeatedly reminded that much of it is in effect a translation from what, in their original language, are more expressive utterances. *Sour Sweet* is apparently written in English precisely for the sake of a Western reader, [...] but also] repeatedly refers away to a cultural tradition with which the Western reader will hardly be familiar.⁶⁸⁹

In the context of Rushdie’s *Fury* and *Quichotte*, I locate the “split-space of reception” in their intertextual structure itself, which, by means of the presence of intertextual markers of which the characters are not aware, while the reader is, creates a split interpretive perspective. As opposed to the previous novels in my corpus, the author and his world in these two novels are increasingly textualised, constructed in accordance not with an extra-textual history and politics

⁶⁸⁸ Andrew Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel: From Leavis to Levinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 197.

⁶⁸⁹ Gibson, 197-8.

that are interwoven in various ways in the text, but with the laws of other texts. In this way, fiction is posited as a privileged space in which the authorial protagonist and the reader come to rethink the question of authorship in the contemporary epoch. However, the metafictional aspect of these novels, by aestheticising the political, can be said to undermine the authors' responsibility and their ethics of writing.

The Author's "Galilean Moment"

Malik creates his story of the cyborgs in order to explore the perennial dilemma between nature and nurture, endowing his dolls with human characteristics and letting them forge their own identities either within the ethical parameters instilled in them by their creator or to radically reinvent themselves. The Rushdiean theme of the interplay between the created and self-created subject explored throughout his fiction is here re-configured in the context of the afterlife of a work of art. In a globalised and technologised world, the categories global/local, original/copy, beginning/end, culture/politics become blurred and enmeshed in a complex network of mutual dependence and conceptual clashes. As Vassilena Parashkevova states,

Fury can be read as a casebook of globalisation's contradictory currents, specifically as a complication, or even interrogation, of the thesis that the local is a product or a victim of the global. New York "shapes," or assists in, the emergence of a global-narrative creator, in the figure of Solanka, who "produces" and benefits from the local, Mildendo/Lilliput-Blefuscu history through the creation of the Puppet Kings. Yet this creator is himself worldly, the outcome of diaspora. The revolutionary Indo-Lillies are also the product of elsewhere, involving another location – India – and the globalising forces of British colonialism. In appropriating the Puppet Kings narrative, the Fremen are re-claiming their own by fixing or localising it. Localisms and globalisms appear to feed off each other in a cycle of identificatory/liberatory-essentialist/hegemonic appropriations, without a start or an end point.⁶⁹⁰

As we have seen, authorship in *Fury* is envisioned according to mythical and biblical paradigms that would seem to impart social and symbolical relevance to it. However, I would like to argue that, by means of the Swiftian intertext, this monumental conception of authorship, constructed and sustained in the previous novels even as it was critiqued, is undermined and deconstructed,

⁶⁹⁰ Parashkevova, *Salman Rushdie's Cities*, 171.

with the author becoming a political irrelevance and his text a travesty of postcolonial writing. In this way, Rushdie drastically reconfigures his textual politics and critiques his own authorial practice.

Rushdie names the island on which the denouement of the plot takes place after Swift's imaginary islands of Lilliput and Blefuscu (the capital city of Mildendo and the names Skyresh Bolgolam and Golbasto Gue are also Swiftian in origin) and thus invites an interpretation in relation to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The country is initially conceived of as a typical postcolony of the Third World, caught in two extremes of representation – as an exotic utopia on the one hand and a place of violent political unrest on the other.

In a way, both these aspects of the island nation are mirrored in Neela, who is herself both an exotic beauty who literally stops traffic and an ideologue who becomes involved in the revolution of her immigrant ethnic group against the tyranny of the indigenous population. Becoming aware of the goings-on in her country through his love for her, Malik conflates woman and country both erotically and artistically, transmuting them into fictional entities. Thus, Neela becomes Zameen of Rijk and the Goddess of Victory, while Lilliput-Blefuscu becomes the country of Baburia on the planet Galileo-1 in his story of the puppet-kings. Consequently, the “reality” of Neela and Lilliput-Blefuscu remains circumscribed by their reduction to figments of the authorial imagination, Rushdie's and Malik's. Thus, the initial politico-historical impulse behind them is gradually diluted and they both cease to *be* in themselves and become *reactions* to Malik's words and actions, engulfed in the ontology of the simulacrum. The political and historical referents around which Rushdie's previous novels revolved, while still present in *Fury*, are mediated through literary ones and acquire meaning through this intertextual relation. The transgressed and transgressive boundaries between reality and fiction, explored throughout Rushdie's oeuvre as a stimulating hybrid space producing epistemic newness, are revealed here as a dystopian vision in which literature has betrayed the cultural power invested in it by relinquishing its subversive potential and has started to exert a hegemonic influence over reality, on a par with the spread of American neo-imperial interventionism.

In this section, I will argue that Malik's textualisation of the Lilliputian reality by confining it within the parameters of his own fiction regarding Kronos and his cyborgs seeks to bolster the monumental image of authorship he wishes to construct. After all, the elevation of the ontological status of his creations both within his text and outside it (among the Fremmen) as fully

independent, “no-strings” beings renders him an almost Godlike figure and this idea is reinforced by the mythical creationary paradigms interwoven in his text and the novel as a whole. Paradoxically, his expulsion from the island by simulacral clones of his creations confirms his status as a quasi-divine Creator even as it effectively marginalises him, for it demonstrates their superiority and political dominance. The Swiftian hypotext is used in this context as a specific narrative strategy whereby Rushdie extra-textually signals to the reader the destabilisation of Malik’s and his own authorial position, an act of self-parody and self-subversion that destroys Malik’s Olympian pretensions. As an element of self-interpretation incorporated within the text, this type of intertextuality in *Fury* harnesses the meanings of Swift’s fable to its own conceptual structure and, by reaching out to the reader to activate these meanings, re-affirms the extra-textual reality that has been undermined in the novel.

Gulliver’s Travels is a text centrally preoccupied with language and power, the fluid boundaries between reality and fiction, authoring and interpreting a text, and the unstable differentiation between author and character. Peter Conrad describes this novel as “a text-book of linguistic error, an encyclopedia of misunderstanding.”⁶⁹¹ The problematic nature of authorship is alluded to on the very first page: it begins with “a letter from Captain Gulliver to his cousin Sympson” in which he rebukes the latter for persuading him “to publish a very loose and uncorrect account of my travels” (*GT*, 1)⁶⁹² and complains of the latter’s unethical editing of his text. While asserting a particular authorial intention by exposing some of the falsehoods of his editor, he distances himself from his text, the appearance of which is owed not to his conscious authoring of it, but to his “being prevailed upon by the entreaties and false reasonings of you and some others, very much against my own opinion, to suffer my travels to be published” (*GT*, 2). In the absence of an original manuscript, which has been destroyed since the publication of his book, we have almost an authorless text full of errors and omissions and Gulliver exhorts the reader to form a just opinion of his travels. Yet, even the author’s own disclaimer is disputed by Richard Sympson in his address to the reader, in which he offers the original text, twice as long, for perusal to any traveler curious “to see the whole work at large, as it came from the hand of the author” (*GT*, 7).

⁶⁹¹ Peter Conrad, *Cassell’s History of English Literature* (London: Cassell, 2003), 315.

⁶⁹² Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).

Given these distanciations of the present text from the lost original, how is the reader to respond to Gulliver's affirmation that "by the instructions and examples of my illustrious master" he has been able "to remove that infernal habit of lying, shuffling, deceiving, and equivocating, so deeply rooted in the very souls of all my species, especially the Europeans" (*GT*, 5)? The text multiply undermines itself by an insistent emphasis on the difficulties of conveying meaning through language (thus, Gulliver's remark that his interlocutors, although initially incredulous, end up believing his narratives "because the truth immediately strikes every reader with conviction" (*GT*, 4) is profoundly ironic), even as its representation is constantly mediated by means of texts: proclamations, petitions, lists, letters, translations, etc. As Richard H. Rodino states,

Gulliver's story... conflates the power of language with the language of power. Acts of interpretation within *Gulliver's Travels* – acts of authoring, and of reading, of inventing characters and becoming characters in the fictions of others – signal not only this text's problematical relations to truth, but also its readers' unceasing stratagems for gaining power over its meaning. The story within reflects the story without: a struggle in which readers willfully characterise Swift and rewrite his character, Gulliver, while also authoring their own texts against other readers... Interpretation, by humans at least, is never merely a quest for truth and value in *Gulliver's Travels*, but always also contains a desire to control the flux of meaning... Language conceals even as it reveals. The text opens up a central problematic of eighteenth-century culture, in that the will to author the self's experiences can never free itself from a struggle for authority over others as well as over the self. The eighteenth-century's heavy investment in dialogue, which Habermas has invoked toward the possibility of an "ideal speech situation" – a place where the self can use language freely, where speech is action, and where truth claims are possible – is revealed to be in active conflict with the usurpative role of language in constituting self and other.⁶⁹³

In the heading prefacing each chapter, Gulliver is referred to as "the Author," an appellation that provides a clue as to the text's preoccupation with authorship. In his first two travels, he is first a giant in the miniature world of Lilliput and Blefuscu (which finds its echo in Malik's puppet world) and a dwarf in Brobdingnag, an ontological difference between him and his hosts that refers not only to size but to a particular authorial vision. Thus, in the former world he has a godlike, omniscient vision, in the latter a microscopic one, seeing the minutest detail. Both are

⁶⁹³ Richard H. Rodino, "'Splendide Mendax': Authors, Characters, and Readers in *Gulliver's Travels*," in Albert J. Rivero, ed., *Gulliver's Travels, Norton Critical Edition* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), 431-2.

limited because the all-encompassing gaze from above makes him blind to particulars, whereas the view from below obscures the whole picture, a reference to the problematic authorship exposed in the text.

Both Swift's and Rushdie's novels operate from an identical authorial position vis-à-vis the world each encounters or creates: Gulliver and Malik are at first welcomed in their respective Lilliput-Blefuscu and then forced to leave it under threat of (authorial) castration. When on his arrival on the island his property is confiscated by the Lilliputians, Gulliver is eager to keep his spectacles in order to be able to apprehend the strange reality he has encountered so that he may then author his text and later, when in order to save the Empress he urinates on her flame-engulfed apartment he unwittingly performs a taboo, he is convicted of high treason, for which the punishment is to have his eyes put out. Malik is also symbolically castrated when he is imprisoned and denied a voice and agency when he is reduced to just another simulacrum rather than an "original" from which the revolutionaries' puppet images are derived. In both novels, the author's liberty is under constant threat and this atmosphere of danger implicitly refers to the impossibility of using language to produce unadulterated meanings and to author a text, an impossibility that Gulliver and Malik encounter at every turn. In Swift, examples of the inadequacy of language to represent reality include the slanted manner of writing of the Lilliputians; the incapacity of the Brobdingnagians to use "ideas, entities, abstractions, and transcendentals" (*GT*, 144) and their simple and brief laws that yield only one meaning so that to write a commentary on a law is a capital crime; the Laputans' compulsive dedication to reflection to such an extent that they are oblivious to the outside world and need to be woken up from their reveries by being flapped on the mouth and ears with a flail; one of the absurd projects of the Academy of Projectors in Lagado, the capital of Balnibarbi, which is to abolish language altogether by having people carry with them the objects they might refer to and thus avoid the need of naming them; and the self-evident, not-subject-to-opinion truth among the Houyhnhnms: "Neither is reason among them a point problematical as with us, where men can argue with plausibility on both sides of the question; but strikes you with immediate conviction; as it must needs do where it is not mingled, obscured, or discoloured by passion and interest" (*GT*, 295-6). In Glubbudubdrib, the island of magicians or sorcerers, whose governor is served by the ghosts of dead people, Gulliver has the opportunity to summon any historical personage from the dead and ask them any question, provided it is confined to the period they lived in. Alexander

the Great, Hannibal, Caesar, Pompey, Brutus, and many others are all summoned, but apart from spectacle and trivia, the reader is not offered anything of importance. Next, Aristotle and Homer appear, along with their numerous commentators, who ashamedly huddle in corners “because they had so horribly misrepresented the meaning of those authors to posterity” (*GT*, 216). In a prefiguring of Little Brain’s impertinent calling the great philosophers to account by interrogating them about their conduct and ideas, Gulliver’s communion with ghosts of the dead furnishes him with a deconstructed knowledge of ancient and modern history, laying bare the silences and misconceptions on which historiography is based. The world, he finds out, has been misled by “prostitute writers” who have attributed great exploits to cowards, piety to atheists, wisdom to fools, villains have been exalted and heroes tortured. In the end, an exasperated Gulliver exclaims, “How low an opinion I had of human wisdom and integrity, when I was truly informed of the springs and motives of great enterprises and revolutions in the world, and of the contemptible accidents to which they owed their success” (*GT*, 218-9), a sentiment incorporated in *Fury* with the perversion of the Fremmen’s revolution.

Gulliver’s travels all lay bare the absolute necessity of having mastery over language if understanding and cultural rapprochement is to take place and he takes pains to learn every language he comes in contact with. Paradoxically, however, there is progressive alienation both from the Other and himself, which culminates in the ontological dread he experiences when he refuses to recognise the beastly Yahoos as being of the same species as himself and instead identifies with the rational horses, the Houynhnms. On his last voyage, Gulliver encounters a society ruled by rational and virtue-prone horses in which a degenerate group of people, the Yahoos (who may have been of English origin), are reduced to enslaved brutes. Gulliver feels an unqualified admiration for these rational animals that have no concepts of lying, crime, punishment, disease and vice, but it is quickly revealed that their lauded ethics is based on a Manichean worldview governed by hierarchy, injustice and inequality. Swift presents here an upside-down world in which the animals rule and the humans are ruled, its ostensible superiority neutralised by the exchange of the places of the rulers and the ruled, leaving the structure of inequality unchanged. Like the ethnic conflict in Rushdie’s *Lilliput-Blefuscu*, the root of the enmity between the Houynhnms and the Yahoos turns out to be the latter’s “immigrant” status (they had not been always there but had appeared one day out of the blue), as opposed to the former’s indigenoussness, which is used as an argument for the latter’s extermination! As Rushdie

makes one of the differences between the Indo-Lillies and the Elbees which side of the egg's shell is to be broken first, in an echo of the silly disputes between the High-Heels and Low-Heels and the Big- and Small-Endians in Lilliput and Blefuscu, he denounces the unjustifiability of difference as such. The very reason for Gulliver's banishment is that, in being kept and treated like a Houynhnhm rather than the Yahoo that he is, he violates the difference between the two species. Similarly, in being his own true self, Malik is made to leave the society of masks and clones who have lost their unique authenticity and their revolution's purpose.

At the very end of Swift's novel, he has his author-protagonist appear before the Secretary of State to give in "a memorial" because, as a British subject, the lands he has discovered belong to the Crown. What follows is a panegyric to the selflessness and benefits of British colonisation, but Gulliver does not recommend that the lands he has visited be colonised because it would not be "easy," "worth the charge of a fleet and army," "prudent or safe," and as to his beloved Houynhnhms, he "could never give [his] advice for invading them" (*GT*, 325) and instead undertakes to spread their values among his fellow-countrymen. This is a misanthropic Gulliver, revolted by his own and his family's humanity, and yet he delivers this humane response that satirises and thereby condemns the colonial enterprise. As a kind of a coda to the narrative of his travels, this scene divorces language and Gulliver's and Swift's authorship from complicity in the perpetration of colonial and epistemic violence and thus delivers a final message as to the anti-colonial/postcolonial credentials of both Swift and Gulliver as his authorial alter ego.

Rushdie also confronts his author-protagonist with a similar dilemma about his authorial and intellectual practice by means of a "Galileo moment" which hinges on the nexus between knowledge and power:

"Galileo moments," those dramatic occasions when life asked the living whether they would dangerously stand by the truth or prudently recant it, increasingly seemed to him to lie close to the heart of what it was to be human. *Man, I wouldn't have taken that stuffing down. I'd have started a fucking revolution, me.* When the possessor of truth was weak and the defender of the lie was strong, was it better to bend before the greater force? Or, by standing firm against it, might one discover a deeper strength in oneself and lay the despot low? When the soldiers of truth launched a thousand ships and burned the topless towers of the lie, should they be seen as liberators or had they, by using their enemy's weapons against him, themselves become the scorned barbarians (or even Baburians) whose houses they had set on fire? What were the limits of tolerance? How

far, in the pursuit of the right, could we go before we crossed a line, arrived at the antipodes of ourselves, and became wrong? (*F*, 188)

When a sassy Little Brain rebukes the doll of Galileo for recanting, Rushdie, through Malik, poses anew the dominant question of *The Satanic Verses*: what kind of an idea are you? The dilemma here is between defending the truth at any cost and bending before the mightier propagator of the lie. Malik embeds a “Galileo moment” at a climactic moment in his Kronosian story: captured by the Baburians, Akasz Kronos is blamed for the ongoing war between them and his cyborgs. His self-justification on the basis of the cyborgs’ autonomy is met with contempt by the court, prompting a debate between nature and nurture, between predetermination and self-invention. Ever a Creator, Kronos defends his creatures, taking pride in their autonomy from himself as their creator, thus paying the ultimate compliment to himself. The Mogol, conversely, sees them as nothing more than machines that can be incapacitated, expecting Kronos to recant his theories and provide the technological know-how to destroy his creations, which he does (the Dollmaker cyborg has not created replicas of himself and was still one of a kind, perhaps alluding to the end of the proliferating chain of creation, “thus his character was erased with his termination” [*F*, 189]). Kronos himself remains of an uncertain fate and may have been “blinded like Tiresias and permitted, by way of further humiliation, to wander the world, begging bowl in hand, “speaking the truth that no man would believe” (*F*, 189), accepting that his lack of moral fibre has brought about this destruction.⁶⁹⁴

Kronos’s “authorial” castration, reminiscent of that almost done to Gulliver, signals Rushdie’s ironic treatment of the author and authorship, which by means of his creators’ failure to live up to the “Galileo moment” by repeating Galileo’s recantation rather than stand up for the truth, lose their authority and subversiveness vis-à-vis power. Thus, the “Galileo moment” represents a test for the moral standing of the creator, who, in all his incarnations in the novel,

⁶⁹⁴ In an earlier draft of the “Galilean moment” the captured creator is not Akasz but the Dollmaker himself, and his “denial of his right to be called a ‘life-form,’ his confession of his own inferiority, became a crime against himself and his own race. Later the Dollmaker escaped from his Baburian jailers, and when news of his ‘recantation’ was spread by the Mogol’s propaganda machine with the aim of undermining his leadership, the cyborg hotly denied the accusations, announcing that he had not been the prisoner in question, that in fact his human avatar, Kronos, was the real traitor to the truth” (*F*, 192). Rushdie here follows the logic of the Baudrillardian simulacra by the lack of differentiation between creator and creature, “original” and copy, human and cyborg, but their recantation is a constant that joins all of Rushdie’s creators in this novel.

recants his creationary truth and prerogative: Kronos by rejecting his cyborgs' autonomy, the Dollmaker by confirming his and the cyborgs' ontological inferiority, Malik by trivialising the revolution in Lilliput-Blefuscu, and, finally, Rushdie himself who, in an attempt to appease his Muslim detractors in the heat of the *fatwa*, briefly re-converted to Islam only to become an apostate again.

In *Fury*, it is not the author Malik, but Neela who is faced with a “Galileo moment” outside of the fictional world created by Malik. Subservient to Babur, who goes by the name of Commander Akasz, she submits to his power by agreeing with whatever he claims to be the truth, such as “the earth is flat” and “the sun revolves around it,” her Galilean recantation running parallel with Babur’s imperialist leanings and the perversion of the new Filbistan (Free Indian Lilliput-Blefuscu) into a despotic regime. However, she gains ethical stature by emancipating herself from the perverted course the revolution she has believed in has taken and, wishing to free her crew and Malik, kills Babur and then herself. Soo Yeon Kim terms her recantation of her ethnic allegiance “an ethical treason,” a repudiation of nationalism in the name not of American cosmopolitanism, but of “radical cosmopolitanism,” “a type of non-allegiance that deconstructs a utopian rendition of cosmopolitanism and refuses to commit to either cosmopolitanism or nationalism,” revealing both as “as false ideologies concocted by an American empire.”⁶⁹⁵

However, her disaffection with Babur and betrayal of their revolutionary cause cannot be wholly seen as the act of a heroine breaking away from her ethnic fold in order to right a wrong of which she has been a part, for all that Malik is assured that her last words were “the earth moves. The earth goes round the sun” (*F*, 255). Indeed, her betrayal can be interpreted as a wish-fulfillment fantasy on the part of Malik, who reduces her actions to a reaction to himself, as he does with everything happening on the island. Also, in so far as Neela has been the inspiration/Muse for Zameen of Rijk and the Goddess of Victory, the female counterparts of Kronos and the Dollmaker in his story, behind whose mask she has been hiding, her self-sacrifice in order to save him can be seen as asserting her ultimate loyalty to her creator, breaking the mold of the renegade creation pervading the novel.

⁶⁹⁵ Soo Yeon Kim, “Ethical Treason: Radical Cosmopolitanism in Salman Rushdie’s *Fury* (2001),” *Ariel*, Vol. 42 No. 1, 2011: 65.

As for Malik, he refuses to accept any responsibility for his own complicity in the new ideology fanning the fires of the revolution and, having lost any controlling influence over the real-life development of his fictional story, even presumes to act as an intermediary between Babur and the West to recuperate the former's international image. Both he and Neela wholeheartedly endorse Western involvement in the conflict and an impending American and British intervention is strongly hinted at.

Malik's attitude towards the solution of the political problems in Lilliput-Blefuscu (shared by Neela) is an echo of his dismissive stance towards the poet and intellectual Milosevic/Milo (shared by Mila⁶⁹⁶), which is in line with the Western justification of NATO's aggression in the then Yugoslavia as the just removal of a genocidal tyrant, repeated in the image of the Pacific island as positively begging for Western invasion as a solution to its problems. This signals the downfall of Malik's postcolonial and counter-hegemonic influence as a global author who, rather than recuperate suppressed and marginalised narratives and histories like his predecessors Saleem and Moraes, is lost in the maelstrom of historical and cultural meanings and stands under the banner of the wrong side of history without even being aware of it.

His metaphorical blindness testifies to the authorial castration hinted at in Swift's novel (and contrasts with Gulliver's enlightenment, even though this is profoundly ironised), which, as employed in Rushdie's, brings to the fore the differences between Gulliver's rejection of colonisation and Malik's endorsement of it. Bearing this in mind, Treasa de Laughry interprets Rushdie's novel as "evidence of a writer in terminal decline, specifically how the text produces revolutionary Lilliput-Blefuscu as a mirror for the cultural reproduction of Solanka's work, and a

⁶⁹⁶ Mita Benerjee emphasises the convergence of two cultural paradigms in *Fury*, namely the "quasi-whiteness" of Malik as the new postethnic postcolonial and the "off-whiteness" of Mila as an Eastern European, both conceived of as a sign of a racial and cultural difference that separates Malik and Mila from the normative whiteness of the Western subjects. She points out that the postcolonial fails to engage historically with the postcommunist and, in Rushdie's novel, reduces it to an erotic object: "Rather than arguing that postcommunist characters are postcolonial at a time when the postcolonial protagonist himself has vacated the place of postcoloniality, what may be intriguing may be less the allure of Eastern European cheekbones than the intersections, and differences, between colonialism and communism as systems of social, cultural and economic domination." (Mita Banerjee, "Postethnicity and Postcommunism in Hanif Kureishi's *Gabriel's Gift* and Salman Rushdie's *Fury*," in Joel Kuortti and Jopi Nyman, eds., *Reconstructing Hybridity: Post-Colonial Studies in Transition* [Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007], 313-4 and 323)

despotic, rather than revolutionary, postcolonial nation requiring the intervention of the American military.”⁶⁹⁷

However, in my reading, Rushdie’s employment of Swift’s novel marks his ironisation of and distancing from Malik as an authorial figure – deconstructed and undermined through a contrast with Gulliver, that other visitor to a different Lilliput-Blefuscus, Malik himself becomes neither an original creator nor creation, but a parodic mimic of a more exalted original. In this way, Rushdie drives home to the reader the point that in conditions when the artist is uprooted from the healthy props of identity and grounded only in the commodified culture of a superficial cosmopolitanism, there can be no Joycean forging of a national or an international conscience and that “the Third World writer’s political commitment in the era of US imperialism”⁶⁹⁸ can be nothing but severely compromised and indicative of the loss of that writer’s authoritative position from which to speak and act.

The Quixotism of Quichotte’s and *Quichotte’s* Authors

When he materialises in Quichotte’s reality, Sancho is an imperfect, barely sketched character in black-and-white, invisible to everyone except his father and functioning as a rudimentary consciousness only when he is close to him. Conscious of having only Quichotte as a begetter and a source of being (he possesses his father’s knowledge and memory), Sancho decides to become an authentic, “Technicolor” instead of black-and-white being, a process that requires a development of conscience and an ethics and, like Pinocchio, a shedding of the strings that bind him to his Gepetto. In a further instance of materialised fictions, the cricket Jiminy materialises as a projection of Sancho’s psyche and henceforth serves as his moral guide, showing him the path towards attaining an “insula,” the part of the brain that contains the basic elements of consciousness.

As a contrast to Quichotte’s idealistic view of the world as a testing-ground for the worthy knight or mystic, Sancho sees the instability and danger-ridden reality of America as stemming from racism and xenophobia, as wherever they go, the invariable response to them is

⁶⁹⁷ Treasa de Loughry, “America’s Signal Crisis,” 3.

⁶⁹⁸ Morton, *Salman Rushdie*, 127.

“get out of my country,” “terrorists,” “where did you hide your turbans and fucking beards”, “we’re gonna nuke you all,” etc. In order to assert their Otherness and simultaneously their belonging in America, at one point they resort to the Bombay vernacular Bambahiyya, for “to redescribe the country in their private language was also to take ownership of it[...] Their linguistic act of possession made the country begin to make sense again. The random spatial and temporal dislocations stopped. The world settled down and gave Sancho the illusion, at least, of comprehensibility” (*Q*, 152-3). Mastery of language is thus presented as an epistemological mastery” the ability to describe the world means to know it and, in knowing it, control it and bend it to one’s creative will. The multiple instances of materialised creations in the novel – Quichotte as the Author’s fiction made real, Sancho as Quichotte’s, Jiminy as Sancho’s etc. – testify to this power of language to reshape reality. The very existence of a “Don Quixote” figure as a literary creation is premised on an erotic *jouissance* in language and Quichotte is abundantly aware of his linguistic prowess being a crucial part of his worthiness as Salma’s suitor:

“It is because in my messages – which are not so frequent as to be irritating – I am wooing her with style – with the right mixture of flamboyance and self-deprecation and with, if I may be so bold as to say so, a certain literary panache. I am approaching her as a woman of that caliber deserves to be approached, and she, as a woman of caliber, will at once have recognised that that is so. I do not come at her head-on, like a brute, like a bull. I am indirect, modest, lyrical, philosophical, tender, patient, and noble. I see that I must make myself worthy of her, and she, seeing that I see that, sees that by virtue of my seeing it, I reveal myself as being, in fact, the worthy suitor I aspire to be. Nobody who did not see the need for worthiness could ever acquire that quality whose importance he had failed to perceive.” (*Q*, 154-5)

However, Sancho correctly sees that it is not only their race but also Quichotte’s quixotic declamations that attract antagonism towards them and distances himself from his father, determined to forge his own path towards ontological fullness.

Sancho’s rebellion against his father mirrors Son’s subversive hacktivism: both turn against dominating discourses of power that exert literal and symbolical hegemony, but while Son is ultimately brought into the fold of paternal (i.e. his father’s and government’s) supervision, Sancho is more severely castigated because he becomes a foil to the quixotism of his father and author. Son, Sister and the Human Trampoline are all arraigned against the fiction-obsessed Quichotte/Author persona by being involved in real struggles for freedom and

emancipation (the Human Trampoline runs a foundation for helping Third-World women, while Sister is a successful civil and human rights lawyer) and are not reducible to a textual play. Sancho, however, sublimates a different form of anti-quixotism, which is not the rational common sense embodied by his Cervantean namesake, but an awareness that he is a character in a fiction:

just sometimes, not every time...I get the weirdest sense that there's someone else in here. Crazy, right? I'm as crazy as he is, the old guy. But who or what is this third person? I'm just going to say this the way it comes to me to say it, even though it makes no sense and makes me sound...unreliable. It feels to me, at those moments when I have this sense of a stranger, as if there's somebody under slash behind slash above the old man. Somebody – yes – making him the way he made me. Somebody putting his life, his thoughts, his feelings, his memories into the old man the way the old man put that stuff inside me. In which case whose life am I remembering here? The old man's or the phantom's? This is driving me nuts. Who is that under there slash over there slash in there? Who are you? If you're his Creator, are you mine as well? There's a name for this. For the person behind the story. The old guy, Dad, he has a lot of material on this. He doesn't seem to believe in such an entity, doesn't seem to sense his presence the way I'm doing, but his head is full of thoughts about the entity all the same. His head and therefore my head too. I have to think about this now. I'll just come right out and say it: God. Maybe he and I, God and I, could understand each other, maybe we could have a good discussion, because, you know, both imaginary. If you get imagined into being, does that mean that after that you can just be? If I knew how to reach him, God, I'd ask him that. (*Q*, 84-5)

Sancho's maddening queries regarding who he is echo Gibreel's and, in both cases, the quest for one's own identity entails a simultaneous quest for one's creator. In both novels, Rushdie plays with the notion of a biological, divine and textual fatherhood and it is the interweaving of these three types of creation that nourishes their dynamic architecture regarding authorship.

Sancho's is a consciousness antithetical to Quichotte's and ultimately the Author's literature-intoxicated quixotism that is represented as more capable of seeing the reality of things. Experiencing himself as the Other not in ethnic or racial but fictional terms, he is paradoxically endowed with a heightened perception, which makes it seem as if he were the real person and Quichotte the imaginary one, because the latter sees the world with naïve eyes, unaware of the othering to which he is constantly subjected. Thus, when they are attacked by white supremacists at Lake Capote, it is Sancho who sees the otherwise invisible collars and even dangling pieces of a broken lash of their attackers. Later on, he sees visions of violence and hatred such as hooded

figures of Ku Klux Klan members walking on Madison Avenue, a drunk woman stamping on a rainbow, three middle-aged white men in suits with the same collars around their necks who, spouting the usual dross – “these people, they don’t know manners”, “we pay for their health care”, “the safety of our womenfolk”, “worship alien gods”, “potential terrorists” (*Q*, 210) – beat him up, etc. He slowly begins to realise that his ability to see what is invisible to everybody else is related to his ontological drama, i.e. to the questionable reality of his being:

As he walked around the city wearing his father’s cashmere coat, Sancho remembered the white lady at Lake Capote and the unusual leather choker she was wearing around her neck, with a brass buckle at the side, and what looked like a few dangling inches of broken leash. He had thought then it looked like a dog collar, and it wasn’t at all the kind of fashion item a lady like that would wear. At the time, he had dismissed it from his thoughts. [...] Now, however, he began to see that there had been no mistake. Or, to put it another way: *he began to realise that he was seeing things that other people couldn’t see.* One day on Tenth Avenue, a dozen blocks down from the Blue Yorker motel, he saw a drunk woman stamping on a rainbow. [...] Another day, on Madison Avenue among all the clothing stores, he saw three figures dressed all in white including white pointed hoods. That was impossible. This was New York. The Klan wasn’t here at all, let alone wearing couture hoods on Madison. He crossed the avenue to get a closer look but the well-dressed crowd merged briefly ahead of him and then parted again and they were gone. This was insane, Sancho thought. It created in him *a kind of ontological dread.* There were days – it was just about every day, in point of fact – when *the issue of his own reality came back at him and haunted him. His coming into being had been so exceptional, his transition from being a dependent sub-clause of the long sentence that was Quichotte into an independent existence continued to feel so improbable, that he had nightmares about having it all come apart, about his very being flickering like a faulty image on TV, then disintegrating and vanishing; about, in short, death.* (*Q*, 207-8, emphasis mine)

On one level, the described scenes refer to the racist aspect of contemporary America, in which Quichotte and Sancho, as foreigners, function as Others and therefore cannot fully belong. On another level, however, they form part of a different reality, for they are visible only to Sancho’s special vision. These disturbing visions of violence and hatred, he realises, create in him an “ontological dread,” i.e. fear of the disintegration of his fragile being and, eventually, vanishing and death. As we shall see, Sancho’s fear, inspired by these visions, alludes to and prefigures a different kind of violence, one perpetrated by the Author himself.

The scene in Berenger crystallises the various threads interwoven into the narrative – literary, mystical and metafictional – and, by strengthening his determination to gain his authenticity, instills an incipient ethics in him. In the town, where there is a Jonésco Motor Inn managed by a Romanian immigrant called Mr. Jonésco, people are transformed into mastodons under the influence of the disease mastodonitis, their dehumanisation a literalised metaphor for their xenophobia. The mastodon, *M. americanum*, an extinct species native to America, alludes to the presumed indigenoussness of the local population, which, of course, conveniently forgets the extermination and expropriation of the real aboriginals, the Native Americans, that enabled the constitution of the USA as a state of immigrants from the Old World. While Quichotte interprets the events in Berenger as one of the temptations of the fourth valley, in which reality has ceased to exist and other forms of being become possible, Sancho has the feeling that the people’s reactions are not psychologically convincing, that “it was all too stylised, somehow, to be real” (Q, 190). This it certainly is, in part because it performs a miniature “theatre of the absurd,” as it re-stages Eugène Ionesco’s play *Rhinoceros*, which similarly deplored the death of humanism by France’s giving in to fascism and Nazism (in the play, the inhabitants of a small provincial French town, apart from the central character, Bérenger, turn into rhinoceroses), and in part because it is a fiction itself and the Author emphasises that fact. The scene culminates in the people’s confrontation with the mastodons, in which the former can either cure or kill the latter with dart guns: Quichotte is ready to shoot the first dart, but Sancho feels as if they are faced with a moral test and stops Quichotte from acting, whereupon the scene dissolves.

The double vision of the novel embodied by the two characters, which diversifies its system of representation by portraying two contradictory images of reality, is part of the overall structure of the novel, which builds on parallelisms and correspondences: two parallel plots, two quixotic protagonists, two sons, two sisters, etc. Sancho’s ethical solution – not to shoot and therefore not potentially kill the dehumanised people (a dilemma that evokes the contradictoriness of writing, which Theuth presented as *pharmakos*, i.e. both cure and poison) – functions like the satanic verses in the novel of that title in that it neutralises a potentially destructive outcome by transmuting it into a plot-driving device: instead of the violent death they would have normally suffered, Saladin and Gibreel are magically transformed into a new form of being, while the scene in Berenger dissolves, revealing its constructed, artificial nature. This scene thus affirms an outlook resting on the impossibility of human beings to attain full

authenticity and control over their lives, represented in the novel by a character that is aware that he is a character and desperately tries to transcend his dependent status and become a real human being. In Sancho's case, the imperfect authenticity he has as a result of his fictional status serves as an alibi to act without morals and to not assume responsibility for his transgressions. Thus, when he robs his aunt, he alibis himself out by claiming "it's not my fault, is it? See, if I'm bad... it's because I'm drawn that way" (*Q*, 339).

Sancho's instance of "bad faith" alludes to the existential anguish of human beings, who are condemned in their freedom to choose what to make of themselves and are burdened by the weight of the responsibility of their own choices, left alone in an empty, godless universe. Sartre's claim that "existence precedes essence" expresses the view that man has no given essence that he acts out during his life; rather, he "first exists without purpose or definition, finds himself in the world and only then, as a reaction to experience, defines the meaning of his life."⁶⁹⁹ As Pelagia Goulimari points out,

[f]or Sartre and for Nietzsche, perhaps once we had an essence, derived from belief in a creator god, but God has gone, and also all gods, all sense of some one final metaphysical truth of ourselves and the world. In the Sartrean universe we are condemned to be free, never to be excused from the responsibility of choice, yet never to be able to feel justified as we desire to be, in our choices or in our sense of our being.⁷⁰⁰

As opposed to Sartre's belief in personal agency, Adorno offers the more pessimistic view that "the world 'permanently puts a pistol to men's heads' (Adorno 1977b, 180). Adorno's reading of contemporary reality is that it is a 'predetermined reality' of 'unfreedom' – the whole administered universe – where 'freedom becomes an empty claim' (180). Sartre is wrong to believe that 'human beings are in control and decide' (182)."⁷⁰¹ Sancho realises that he can embrace his existential freedom, which he does not yet possess for he is controlled by somebody else, by separating himself from all the dominating forces that seek to impose a predetermined essence on him. These forces form a chain of command that consists of his father, who sees him merely as the necessary sidekick in his quest, his author, who decides how to "draw" him, and God, as the ultimate metaphysical source of the ethics that Jiminy, his "*grillo Parlante*," insists

⁶⁹⁹ Philip Stokes, *Philosophy: The Great Thinkers* (London: Capella, 2007), 235.

⁷⁰⁰ Pelagia Goulimari, *Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 271.

⁷⁰¹ Goulimari, 272.

he obtain. Independence from them would mean the development of a consciousness not constrained by Quichotte's, which he instills into Sancho by the very fact that he imagines him into being as his son; the author's, which defines his as a black-and-white one, and God's, which similarly imposes a theological and teleological purpose on his creations.

The Author subsumes all of these three paternalistic, hegemonic figures/principles and from such an authoritative position thwarts Sancho's quest for freedom, which is initially conceived of like Quichotte's, i.e. as another quest for the beloved woman, whom he names simply Beautiful. For Sancho, the fundamental question of his existence is not "what is it to be a man?", but "who is he without Quichotte?" or even "can he be without Quichotte?" In Sartrean terms, Sancho's foremost struggle is to become, i.e. to exist, and only then construct his own essence, i.e. the ethics proposed by Jiminy and the blue fairy, who see his emancipation in his development of conscience, apologising to his aunt and living as an honourable man. Doomed in his transgressive aspirations, Sancho remains an ontologically incomplete being, falling in and out of consciousness, "[l]ike there's bad reception, a bad signal, and you aren't always coming through clearly" (*Q*, 349, emphasis original).

Yet, even though he is constituted as the ontologically weakest being, Sancho is the only character who, irrespective of the limited consciousness within which he is developed, is engaged in a sustained reflection of the sources and nature of his being, wondering about the "celestial storyteller whom he occasionally contemplated and toward whom he felt the kinship of one fictional character for another" (*Q*, 340), undermining his ontological reality by the very fact of his own compromised ontological status. Swerving away from Quichotte's quixotic quest, which leads to the Author-God, he knocks on the door of Beautiful's home, offering his love as a pledge that he believes will serve as his existential guarantor:

"I love you, and I know that's insane, but I also know that love takes courage, and I take my courage in my hands and say, I love you, and God, I hope you remember who I am."

"Hello," she said, looking left and right. "Is anybody there?"

"Take my hand," he pleaded, hardly able to hear his own voice now, "say you love me and I'll be able to live. I throw myself at your feet and beg."

"No," she said, answering someone behind her in the depths of the house, "there's nobody. Someone definitely knocked but there's nobody here now."

And then there was nobody there. (*Q*, 354)

Sancho's plea to be recognised and acknowledged as an entity is met with a negation and his final non-entitisation. Thus, the answer to the question "who is Sancho without Quichotte?" is "nobody. A fiction that could not endure" (*Q*, 353).

As we saw above, Sancho's "ontological dread" is particularly exacerbated by the visions of hatred and violence he sees everywhere around him. The ultimate punishment he fears is disintegration, vanishing and death, which he receives not at the hands of the racist xenophobes of contemporary America, but at the hands of the Author, who writes him out of his story and thus, paradoxically, aligns himself with the violence he unreservedly condemns in his narrative.

In punishing with non-existence the character who seeks to escape his control, the Author constitutes himself as an omniscient and omnipotent godlike figure who doubles himself in his character and installs himself as the object of a lover's and a mystic's quest for the Beloved (woman and God). Quichotte is granted spiritual enlightenment because, although unaware that he is a fiction, maintains his fictional identity (which in this novel means keeping within the limits of his fictionality imposed by the Author) until the very end, when he is raised to the more "real" reality of the Author and thus made his equal (their ontological equality further strengthens their overlapping subjectivities). Sancho, as the antithesis of both the Cervantean and the Author's Quixote/Quichotte, is written out of the Author's fictional universe because he persists in transcending his fictional, dependent status and becoming an autonomous individual. By representing him as opposed to Quichotte's and his own quixotism, the Author, still working within the terms of the Cervantean hypotext, is aware that he cannot simply dismiss the common sense inherent in Sancho's outlook, which proves to be correct. Hence, the paradoxical realisation, encoded in the novel's ending, of the Author's own constructed position, the reduction of his ontological and epistemological superiority to that of his fictions. It is at this point that Broich's intertextuality, effecting a split in the interpretative framework of the novel, becomes operative: at the end, the Author, who is not aware that he is a character in Rushdie's fiction, becomes one with Rushdie himself.

This equivalence between the Author and Rushdie is insisted on in the last pages of the novel and adds on another authorial layer to the carefully sustained equivalence between the Author and his creation, Quichotte. This doubling of the author-creation pairs is achieved by means of specific objects that stage a creationary scene and that enable the act of creation itself. Quichotte feels an inner compulsion to arrange his thirteen "numinous," "sacred" objects in the

right position and in the right relationship to one another, because if he does not, “his life would lack equilibrium and he might surrender to panic, inertia and *finally death*. *These objects were life itself*. As long as they were with him, *the road held no terrors*. It was his special place” (Q,12, emphasis mine). Similarly, “without these [identical thirteen] objects around him, he [the Author] couldn’t work. He picked up at least one of them once a day” (Q, 389). And then, the implied author adds that “there was one more, too precious to display, which he kept in a drawer: a little silver ingot, an inch high, on which was engraved the map of unpartitioned India. This was his greatest talisman, his open-sesame, his magic lamp. *He had caressed it this very day, before writing his final page*” (Q, 389). As we saw, this object is an autobiographical element that binds together Rushdie and his Author, just as the thirteen sacred objects bind together the Author and his Quichotte. For all three, these objects represent much more than their physical reality would suggest, notwithstanding the sentimental value they hold for their owner: they either are life itself (for Quichotte), who, without them, would experience the same “ontological dread” as Sancho, facing disintegration and death, or enable the creation of life (for the Author and Rushdie), both of whom caress their silver ingot before writing their final page.

As Salma R. and Quichotte burst into the world of the Author, joining the two worlds, “cross[ing] over from the world of Fancy into the Author’s real world” (Q, 390), the Author knows that this presages his own death, the Barthesian “death of the Author”:

Stop! cried the Author, knowing what would happen next, the thing he could not stop, for he had already written it; it had already happened, so it could not be prevented from happening. His heart pounded, feeling as if it might burst from his chest. Everything was coming to an end.

The end cannot be changed after it has ended; not the end of the universe, not the death of an Author, nor the end of two precious, even if very small, human lives.

There they stood in the gateway, on the threshold of an impossible dream: Miss Salma R and her Quichotte. (Q, 390, typeface original)

As he bestows full ontological reality to his own creations, the Author necessarily disappears from this ultimate scene of creation, enveloping himself in the imagery of disintegration, vanishing and death as Sancho and thus allotting to himself the same cruel fate as to his literary creation. In the same way, the implied author Rushdie, writing the final page of his novel, establishes between himself and his Author the same ontological relationship as that between the

Author and Quichotte, affirming the ontological reality of his creation, the Author, and simultaneously reminding the reader that this fictional Author is nothing but a character in his, i.e. Rushdie's, novel.

In my reading of the novel, therefore, by means of this symmetrical parallelism between Quichotte's and *Quichotte's* Authors, the latter – Rushdie – inscribes himself within the paradigm of his Author's quixotic authorship. What, then, of the quixotism of *Quichotte's* author? How is it relatable to that of Quichotte's Author? In troping his Author's quixotism as a naïve, delusional and reading-induced outlook on reality, Rushdie seems to indicate his desire to remain open to the possibility of his own blindness, like that of his and every other Author, which is an ethical position whereby he subverts his own authority as a writer. In other words, by aligning himself with the archetypal deluded reader, the author launches an interpretative challenge to other readers, who may take the Sanchoist approach and interpret the fictional and the real worlds differently, in a more balanced and sustained way. Then, the very troping of his Author, whose capitalised generic name likens him to the transcendental signifier that is inherently inimical to the mongrelised, hybrid and dialogical ideals he embraces, testifies to the ontological lostness experienced by Rushdie's characters, whose uprooted and masked existence, along with the absurdist reality they seem to inhabit, seems to point at the pitfalls of the de-contextualised and history-evacuated authorial consciousness that Rushdie exhibits in his latest novels.

CONCLUSION

This section explored Rushdie's ethics of authorship by means of an analysis of various aspects of self-reading contained within or suggested by the novels themselves.

The presence of the readers in their various guises as characters, intertextual echoes, or collectively constituted audiences built-in or foreseen by the text destabilises the traditional hierarchy in which the author generates meaning and foregrounds their role as textual co-creators. This is designated as an ethical dimension in Rushdie's *oeuvre* on account of the relational and dialogical nature it imparts to authorship. The different narrative strategies employed in each of the novels hint at the productive function to which an audience-aware author and text can harness its overt and covert, intra- and extra-textual readers.

The incorporation of the reader into the text also represents a culmination of Rushdie's dialogical and transgressive aesthetics, as it mobilises the entire multilayered narrative structure in order to produce its desired dialogical effect. By blurring the distinctions between author-text-reader and author-character-reader, in a textually transgressive texture wherein each element irrupts and becomes dissolved in the others, it produces a rethinking of the ontological, epistemological, ethical and aesthetical postulates generating meanings about ourselves and the world.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The main issue that this dissertation proposed to explore was the evolution and transformations of authorship as represented in the novels of Salman Rushdie. For this purpose, I postulated a “dialogical aesthetics” which, in my view, informs Rushdie’s novels, which are unimaginable without the juxtaposition and clashing of different cultures, histories, ideologies, writing and reading practices, etc., and which, therefore, become crucial in exploring how postcolonial authorship is constructed in Rushdie’s novels.

Rushdie’s dialogical aesthetics was analysed through a triple focus, namely the subjectivity of the figure of the author, the texts Rushdie’s authorial figures produce as part of their authorial output, and the presence and construction of particular types of reader that are inbuilt in the structure of each of the five novels analysed. In each of these three aspects – authorial subjectivity, text and reader – the principle of dialogism informs a typically Rushdiean aesthetic practice that juxtaposes and puts into an irresolvable tension at least two conceptions of the self, two worldviews, and two types of reader, the boundaries between them dissolving and overlapping.

The subjectivity of the author in the novels is conceived of variously as indelibly marked by its national and historical context (in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*), by an ambivalent indeterminacy that precludes a final grounding of the self in *The Satanic Verses*, and by a view of the self as formed almost exclusively in relation to the author’s fictional characters (in *Fury* and *Quichotte*). In each case, the self functions as a non-homogeneous, non-unitary, i.e. a dialogical self that constantly reimagines itself in relation to something else. As Rushdie traces the development of the authorial subjectivity, beginning with how an author is born or becomes and ending with how an author situates himself in relation to his work’s afterlife, a picture of postcolonial authorship emerges in which the postcolonial author gradually abandons being overdetermined by his particular national and historical context and either opts for the inbetween, third space of intellectual exile/nomadism or advances fiction itself as a necessary component of his self.

The texts Rushdie’s authors create also chart a trajectory of a dialogical interaction of at least two different worldviews and aesthetic practices. To analyse this aspect of the novels of the corpus, I have organised them into three dialogical types, which do not represent pure categories,

as each is present alongside the others in all the novels, but are nevertheless used as analytical tools to demonstrate the dominant type of dialogical interaction that serves as a narrative foundation upon which the novels are constructed. The first category is the historical dialogism of *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, so termed because of the protagonist-authors' awareness of the historical element interwoven in their texts. Each novel vacillates between two different types of representation, which are seen as typically Indian, i.e. nationally and historically encoded, namely the poetics of wholeness, represented by "elephantiasis" as a typically "Indian disease," and its opposite, the poetics of fragmentariness, represented variously by the perforated sheet, the palimpsest and the mosaic. It is within this nationally and historically inflected framework that both Saleem and Moraes locate their postcolonial authorship.

Authorship in *The Satanic Verses* revolves around the sacred-profane axis, as opposed to the historical and national focus of the two previous novels. This novel postulates a worldview/creationary ideal in which everything is rendered impure and permeated by its opposite/Other, which is reflected in the "transgressive dialogism" of the novel. By this I refer to the "transgressive" way in which meaning is articulated in the novel, namely, by the constant crossing over of motifs, characters and events between the main plot and the three subplots and between the subplots themselves rather than within the same narrative level.

The commodified art in a globalised world that *Fury's* Malik Solanka and the quixotic world that *Quichotte's* Author create present new challenges for the dialogical postcolonial aesthetics, as literature is now more intimately involved in the world of the author and he finds it increasingly difficult to distinguish between his real and fictional realities. This, in turn, precludes his ability to find his place in each and to exert an oppositional, subversive stance *vis-à-vis* the structures of power.

Finally, Rushdie's novels each include an intratextual and an extratextual reader, thereby extending the dialogical aesthetics to this aspect of the text. This makes the novels centrally preoccupied with the validity and authority of interpretation. By splitting the figure of the reader by situating him/her both inside and outside the text, Rushdie advances the postcolonial and postmodernist skepticism towards a dominant discourse or interpretation, encouraging doubt and intellectual resistance.

The insistent textual articulation of authorial figures in the novels of the corpus sheds a revealing light on Rushdie's self-articulation as an intellectual. In the process, he charts an

imaginative (auto)biography of the postcolonial writer. The loss of the props of his authorial identity by the elision of history and the nation give rise to the ambivalent, differential ontology, epistemology and ethics of *The Satanic Verses*. Afterwards, the author turns towards fiction in general and his own fiction in particular as a last resort, but he is eventually banished from his own imaginative terrain. *Quichotte* stages an attempt on the author's part to install himself in God's place and to attain a transcendent position, but the characterisation of this attempt as quixotic renders problematic his optimistic faith in his own centrality.

As the overall conception of literature and authorship shifts from that of constituting a cultural alternative to the world of politics, with which it remains dialogically connected, to a solipsistic world detached from the real one, the dialogic aesthetics ceases to play a dissenting, counter-hegemonic role *vis-à-vis* monologic authority, be it political, religious and authorial, and becomes engaged in flaunting its own metafictional self-awareness. There is also a shift from a preoccupation with the genesis of the author and his text to a preoccupation with the afterlife of the work of art and the modes of its reception by various readerships. In the process, the authorial subject is reframed: it is no longer the split subject of his initial phase, but engaged in an ambivalent relationship with his work, which is now the carrier of the processual, fluid identity previously accorded to the author. In the end, the literary work itself becomes an agent of creation in its own right, as it spills over into reality and radically reshapes it.

In the first novels of our corpus, there is an undeniable grounding in the specific cultural and historical context of the Indian subcontinent, without which neither author nor text are imaginable. This contextualised nature of authorship enables the author to assume a viable ideological position, albeit one fraught with omissions, gaps, distortions and various crises of representation. Here, literature is able to impart transcendental sublimity and to subvert the conceptual and political *status quo*. In the later novels, this defining context is abandoned and this leads, among other things, to the betrayal of the author's postcolonial, dissenting credentials. Imprisoned in the world of his own imagination, which ends up being his only existential reassurance, the author in the last novels is engaged in a generalised exploration of the themes of authorship, fiction and rootlessness that are no longer the productive Third Space of postcolonial hybridity, but instead imprison the author in a solipsistic world where only fiction reigns, but also, potentially, serve as a conduit to a universalising outlook.

This leads us to reconsider Rushdie's authorship in the context of the famous polemic between Julien Benda and Paul Nizan, which pivoted around the issues of universal or context-specific intellectual engagement. Benda's *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1927) located true intellectualism in the dedication to the pursuit of eternal and disinterested values (not unlike Plato's ideal Forms) and the avoidance of any involvement in practical concerns. Benda speaks of abstract and eternal values that should be the intellectual's main concern (he cites Truth and Justice, usually capitalised), and although he can be reproached for excessive generalisation and abstraction of his argument, he envisioned this non-particularist and universalist nature of the true intellectual as the only guarantor of his ideological independence and autonomy. Without it, he would fall into the trap of the prevailing ideologies of racism, nationalism, or class-consciousness (Benda speaks of "passions").⁷⁰² Writing in the aftermath of the Dreyfus affair, as a witness to the hatreds and prejudices that polarised France and made it an object of scorn for the rest of the civilised world, Benda formulated his own ideal of the intellectual who avoids becoming part of the irrationality and excesses of ideologically motivated opinions and actions by maintaining a disinterested distance from everyday affairs and by devoting himself to the universal and unchanging values of justice, truth, and reason.

This, however, according to Paul Nizan, "denoted a refusal to talk about the things that really mattered, 'war, colonialism, the speed-up of industry, love, the varieties of death, unemployment, politics... all of the things that occupy the minds of this planet's inhabitants.' More than this, it was an attempt 'to obscure the miseries of contemporary reality.'"⁷⁰³ In his *Les Chiens de garde* (1932) he formulated a doctrine of commitment, which saw the intellectual's true mission not in laying a claim to a higher moral authority from a position of detachment from everyday reality, but on the contrary, in being wholeheartedly engaged in the issues and dilemmas that shape his world.

With *Fury* and *Quichotte*, Rushdie seems to confirm his distancing from the passionate engagement that defined his earlier output and to assume an intellectual position of Olympian heights, as a result of which his authorial alter egos become increasingly incapable of making

⁷⁰² Julien Benda, *La trahison des clercs*, e-book, available on http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/benda_julien/trahison_des_clercs/benda_trahison_clercs.pdf.

⁷⁰³ Jeremy Jennings, "Of Treason, Blindness and Silence: Dilemmas of the intellectual in modern France," in *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie*, ed. Jeremy Jennings and Anthony Kemp-Welch (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 71.

sense of their cultural, political, and ideological context and of assessing their roles and responsibilities therein.

As Rushdie's latest novels end with an exaltation of the author and a degradation of the ideals he espouses, there is a feeling of the completion of an authorial cycle and the bequeathing of the postcolonial agenda to the next generation of authors, whereby the Author-Father hands over his legacy to his future textual Sons. On the other hand, as Rushdie's postcolonial authorship replaces the author's initial passionate engagement with a particular historical and national context for indeterminacy/ambivalence and a more literature-informed worldview, it strives to overcome the intellectual constraints imposed by the historical/national narrative and to advocate for a more universalist framework within which to view the meaning of fiction and literary practice. The postcolonial paradigm is not so much abandoned as gradually transmuted into a more encompassing narrative embracing other (hi)stories and introducing new challenges for postcolonial fiction.

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie is one of the most prominent postcolonial authors and his literary and intellectual engagement has radically restructured the landscape of contemporary Anglophone literature. In his novels and essays, he celebrates his hybrid, mongrel (Indo-British-Pakistani and lately American) identity and brings the East and the West into a dialogical interaction linguistically, historically, culturally and politically. The aim of this thesis is precisely to examine Rushdie's dialogical aesthetics, which permeates his entire *oeuvre*.

Taking as its basic theoretical and conceptual framework Bakhtin's dialogism and adapting it to the postcolonial perspective which best illuminates Rushdie's literary endeavour, our thesis undertakes to trace the evolution of Rushdie's conceptions of authorship. Therefore, our main focus of interest is the figures of writers and writing subjects who contemplate and reflect on the nature and purpose of their craft, their authorial identity and their positioning in society and intellectual history in, through, and by means of, (their) writing; the aesthetics of the texts they produce and their subsequent agency in the world through the various ways they are interpreted and appropriated. Thus, the principal aim of this study is to emphasise authorship as a special category of storytelling, a specific craft and vocation giving expression to a conscious and purposeful project. To this end, our corpus includes novels by Rushdie that engage with this theme in the most sustained way: *Midnight's Children* (1981), *The Satanic Verses* (1988), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), *Fury* (2001) and *Quichotte* (2019).

Keywords: Aesthetics – Author – Authorship – Dialogism – Hybridity – Identity – Postcolonialism – Reader – Text – Transgression

Résumé

Salman Rushdie est l'un des écrivains postcoloniaux les plus éminents et son engagement littéraire et intellectuel a radicalement restructuré le paysage de la littérature anglophone contemporaine. Dans ses romans et essais, il célèbre son identité hybride et met en scène une interaction dialogique linguistique, historique, culturel et politiquement entre l'occident et l'orient. Le but de cette thèse est précisément d'examiner l'esthétique dialogique de Rushdie, qui imprègne l'œuvre de cet écrivain.

En s'appuyant sur le dialogisme de Bakhtine comme base théorique et conceptuelle et en l'adaptant à la perspective postcoloniale qui éclaire son entreprise littéraire, le présent travail s'engage à tracer l'évolution des conceptions de filiation auctoriale de Rushdie. Par conséquent, l'objectif principal de notre étude est d'examiner les figures d'écrivains et d'auteurs qui contemplant la nature et l'objectif de leur métier et de leur identité et construisent une réflexion concernant ce métier et cette identité. Nous analysons l'esthétique des textes et la capacité d'intervention de l'auteur dans le monde à travers les façons différentes dont ces mêmes textes sont interprétés et appropriés. Ainsi, l'objet de cette étude est de mettre en lumière l'auctorialité comme une catégorie de narration spéciale, un métier spécifique et une vocation qui manifeste un projet délibéré et ciblé. À cet effet, notre corpus comprend les romans de Rushdie qui illustrent cette thématique de la façon la plus soutenue, à savoir *Les enfants de minuit* (1981), *Les versets sataniques* (1988), *Le dernier soupir du Maure* (1995), *Furie* (2001) et *Quichotte* (2019).

Mots-clés : Auctorialité – Auteur – Dialogisme – Esthétique – Éthique – Hybridité – Identité – Lecteur – Postcolonialisme – Réception – Texte – Transgression

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