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The Interplay Between Exile-in-Narration and Narrators-in-Exile in Salman Rushdie's
Midnight's Children, The Satanic Verses and The Moor's Last Sigh

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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of Salman Rushdie's _Midnight's Children_, _The Satanic Verses_ and _The Moor's Last Sigh_. The approach is twofold: (a) it seeks to establish an interplay between the concept of _exile-in-narration_ (theme) and _narrators-in-exile_ (form) as a reflection upon questions of rootlessness; and (b) it seeks to underscore this interplay as a recurring 'double bind' within each novel, such that the novels form _a loosely bound trilogy_ that functions as a developing discourse on individual and national identity from a decentred perspective. The aim is similarly twofold: (a) it proposes that the metaphor of exile as a polarized state manifests itself as either an unreflecting pull of opposites or as a thoughtful acceptance of the inter-connectedness between ideas, people, places and things; and (b) it argues that once this polarization becomes evident, it disturbs all static narratives of selfhood and community to the point at which they can be reconceptualized, and yet remain open-ended.

Résumé

Ce mémoire est une analyse de <u>Les Enfants de Minuit</u>, <u>Les Versets Sataniques</u> et <u>Le Dernier Soupir du Maure</u> de Salman Rushdie. La méthode est double : a) par l'interaction entre le concept de *"narrateurs en exile"* (la forme) et *"l'exile en narration"* (le thème) la question du déracinement de l'individu est soulevée; b) l'interaction est mise en évidence par le "double lien" qu'on retrouve dans chaque roman, et par lequel ces romans forment une trilogie amplement reliée et qui fonctionne comme un discours évolutif sur l'identité individuelle et nationale à partir d'une perspective décentralisée. L'objectif est double aussi : a) Proposer les métaphores de l'exile comme un état polarisé se manifestant soit comme une double tension irrationnelle ou comme une compréhension rationnelle des interactions entre les idées, les gens et les objets; b) montrer qu'une fois que la polarisation devient évidente, elle dérange toutes les notions statiques d'identité individuelle et communautaire au point de les réconceptualiser et les rouvrir.

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The successful completion of this thesis would not have been possible without Professor Max Dorsinville's investment in both the gruelling and the pleasurable aspects of the text. Many thanks are due to Professor Dorsinville for his support of my thesis, his partaking of ideas exilic and Rushdian, and his belief in my ability to complete this project despite the many conspirings of fate!

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I have written the work for one good reason: to shield myself from further blows of Fate, and to ensure me against drifting from isolation to utter eclipse, and, perhaps, deprivation of grub.

Because, friend, I have had a miff with Fate, for things are not what I thought they were, what they seemed they were, and what-might-have-been I wish they were!

— G.V. Desani, All About H. Hatterr

Introduction

The postwar era has given rise to a steady stream of displaced writers who are compelled to reconceptualize, in more fluid terms, their 'homeland', nation, language and origins. James Joyce, Saadat Hasan Manto, Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott, Jamaica Kincaid, and Miguel Angel Asturias are but a few writers of fiction who attempt to approach questions of identity from the complex perspective of the exile. No longer conjuring visions of Promethean isolation, the exilic condition is now commonly accepted as a geographical displacement as well as an existential state of mind; a matter of choice as well as a force of circumstance; a crisis of identity as well as an expansion of horizons; loss as well as gain.

A half-century after the partitioning of the subcontinent (at midnight, August 14, 1947), Salman Rushdie is one among many Asian writers to find himself 'imagining' India from afar, rather than living within its borders. He is also one among many international writers to find himself 'imagining' anew, rather than taking for granted, the now-distant concept of the 'homeland' from the perspective of exile. Indeed, for Rushdie, as well as for other writers

responding to the repercussions of commercial and cultural 'internationalism' and its concomitant eruption of post-colonial nationalisms, exile is a fact of modernity, the apparent persistence of which must be reckoned with on a lived and imagined level. As such, Rushdie's creative point of reference is often at odds with his immediate physical, socio-cultural and linguistic surroundings, resulting in a destabilization of conceptions of self and other, imagination and reality, and vice versa.

In his essay "Imaginary Homelands," Rushdie poetically articulates the plight of the modern migrant writer—specifically, the Indian writer living abroad. He writes: "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."[1] In Rushdie's ethos, therefore, exile is primarily a metaphor for displacement. Consequently, it is a paradoxical condition, for one's present is always somewhere or something other than one's past. Similarly, when seen through the creative lens, the exilic perspective can elicit both clarity and distortion, critical distance and self-doubt. However, as it puts the writer on the edge of his/her familiar orbit, exile can, in Rushdie's opinion, be used to its fullest potential to "push" literature "to the limits of what is possible, in the attempt to increase the sum of what it is possible to think" (IH 15).[2]

Exile as a physical, psychological and metaphorical condition is a recurring motif throughout Salman Rushdie's *oeuvre*. In Midnight's Children (1981), The Satanic Verses (1988) and The Moor's Last Sigh (1995), a striking contrast exists between the exilic condition as a central narrative concern and narratological perspective. This structural dichotomy is such that the novels may be read as a *loosely bound chronological trilogy* that pertains to and reflects upon exile in existential and formal terms.[3] It is the aim of this thesis to examine the interplay

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between *exile-in-narration* and *narrators-in-exile* as it carries itself out within and against constructs of Indian nationalist discourse and migrant politics.[4] By so doing, this thesis will focus on the contrapuntal development of a progressively more extreme thematic of exile located in historical and geographical linear terms, and a contrasting recourse to fragmented, self-reflexive and other exploded forms of narration.

This thesis, therefore, approaches Salman Rushdie's fiction as a developing body of work, wherein the exilic theme in relation to the act/art of storytelling is revisited within various narrative guises. By considering these novels individually and chronologically, each chapter accordingly addresses Rushdie's protagonists' re-visioning of a national narrative within the problematized binarisms of the exile's rootlessness.

In thematic terms, each of these novels finds its point of focus within the epic terrain of India; subsequently, each narrative finds itself at once centred within and marginalized by the mythic and historic playing fields of India's rise to autonomy from British rule, its simultaneous split from Pakistan, and its continuing internal socio-political rivalries. The narrator is thereby at odds with the constraints of History and *his* story such that he stands in direct opposition with them as the iconoclastic, satirical, carnivalesque voice.[5] As such, each novel is open to further analytical nuances: (a) the 'epic' mode in which personal memories are transformed into national and mythic proportions when told from a marginal or marginalized perspective; (b) memory as a viable and verifiable mode of perception as it comes to be dictated by distance and desire; and (c) Rushdie's concept of "India of the mind," in which the author's 'idea(l)' of Indian identity must be reconciled with the political, social and religious realities of his country of origin.[6]

In formal terms, Rushdie's narrators attempt to embody and transcend the length and breadth of subcontinental identity and history. Thus, as all-inclusive as they may seem to be in their perspectives, they nonetheless defy being reductively marginalized as individual voices locked into an inherently exclusive 'post-colonial' nationalist discourse. Accordingly, each novel seems to utilize (in opposition to thematic ends), the following narrative techniques: (a) multiple narrative perspectives--from subjective first-person to first- to third-person omniscience; (b) a self-conscious, iconoclastic narrator--to point towards the fallibility of the authorial voice, and to elicit a dialogic relationship between writer and reader; (c) irony and humour to highlight the often conflicting demands of divergent material and viewpoints; (d) carnivalesque generic slippages to debunk rigid literary boundaries and to reinforce Rushdie's own position as a writer working within and through Modernist and Post-Modernist traditions.[7]

As a consequence, Rushdie's novels seem to suggest that the static (historical/fictive) narrative act is self-limiting, at best, and proscriptive, at worst. The static narrative act, like the singular viewpoint--as Rushdie seems to continually point out--stifles creativity, precludes subjectivity, presupposes closure and perpetuates opposition. From a literary and historical vantage point, therefore, these novels necessarily attempt to challenge, if not resist, the imposition of boundaries behind which the creative, spiritual or political visionary may be all too neatly 'framed'. Specifically, the formal strategies underpinning the concept of *narrators-in-exile* are in dialectical opposition to the thematics of *exile-in-narration* that underline Rushdie's novels. The former argues for a free-flow of creativity, while the latter appears as self-imprisoning.

Indeed, many critics have rightly pointed out the self-belying tendency to conscribe

Rushdie's *oeuvre* within theoretical or generic borders. Yet, they ironically do so within or in relation to post-modernist or post-colonialist discourse and their contending, or, as the case may be, symbiotic positions in contemporary literary criticism.[8] While such scholarship is acknowledged for providing a valuable theoretical filter for the arguments to be presented forthwith, this thesis aims to provide a critique of Rushdie's fiction that incorporates as well the novels' own socio-historical hybridity: namely, by utilizing a more flexible theoretical approach. Thus, it will approach these novels by using a number of theoretical and critical sources made relevant by Rushdie's own use of them in his critical and/or creative writing.

In Chapter 1, The Imagined and Imaginable Community of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie's exiled protagonist is shown to embody the limitations of the singularly imposed model of the 'modern' nation as a wholly 'imaginable community'. This chapter examines the inter-relationship between Rushdie's concept of the imagined "India of the Mind" and Benedict Anderson's analysis of post-Enlightenment European nationalisms, The Imagined Community: The Origins and Spread of Nationalism.[9] Since this chapter introduces Rushdie's semantic of exile, it also benefits from a close reading of its protagonist's individual exilic viewpoint. In Chapter 2, The Imaginary Homelands of *The Satanic Verses*, the concept of the 'imagined community' is shown to falter when viewed in relation to the growing socio-political exigencies of minority diasporas within and without India. The theoretical model thus alludes to Edward Said's Orientalism, and his indictment of Orientalist dichotomies between east/west, us/them, etc. Furthermore, Rushdie's own collection of critical essays, The Imaginary Homelands, is used in relation to Said's definition of a "scrupulous subjectivity," the exiled intellectual's nemesis turned gift. Chapter 3, The Moor's Last Sigh: the Unimaginable Palimpsest, draws

heavily upon Partha Chatterjee's The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories. Chatterjee's analysis foregrounds Rushdie's disillusionment with India's growing sectarian violence, and thus helps to better contextualize the exiled protagonist's final capitulation to the fragmented versus the all-unifying vision of India. The concluding chapter links Rushdie's novels to Derek Walcott's notion of History as a "sigh," as discussed in The Antilles. Walcott's characterization of History as a self-destructive burden--when identified as an obsession with the past--and a liberating element--when identified with the present cycle of life--underscores the dialectical pull of opposites leading to the open-endedness of Rushdie's latest novel.

The objective of this thesis, then, is to demonstrate how each of these novels is a narrative construct designed to bring to light various states of exile from a thematic or formal standpoint. In other words, the various manifestations of the disenfranchised authorial voice are considered as counterpoints to approaches to identity formation as individual and/or national narratives. The exilic condition functions as a metaphor for each protagonist's shifting orientation from his country of origin, wherein the cultural insider turns political and/or social outcast in the wink of a narrative eye, thereby destabilizing notions of selfhood and, by extension, of nationhood. In the same (last but hopefully not least) breath up to his latest novel, Rushdie seems to transform his exiled narrators from 'revolutionary' to 'evolutionary' visionaries; from citizens set on literal and figurative flights of fancy, away from their "homelands" and exposed to despair, to migrants committed to self-seeking truth and self-acknowledged space. They evolve from dour historical heirs and pitiable national outcasts to satirical iconoclasts for whom humour is a primary act of liberation and language its main

armament.

Rushdie's novels, like their narrators, explore the condition of existing outside the body politic, that is, outside the subject of a national narrative. The critical lens with which each novel's narrator views the subject of the national narrative depends upon the extent to which he himself is subject to the condition of standing outside the continuum of his-story. Thus, in Rushdie's attempt to utilize the insider/outsider dichotomy as a valuable mode of perception in his three most controversial novels to date, he exposes what begins as his hopeful imagining of a secular, plural India in the historically centred Midnight's Children, unfolds in the landscape of The Satanic Verses, and closes with both a bleaker re-imagining of divisiveness and a creative de-centred and trans-historical breath in the The Moor's Last Sigh.

NOTES

[1.] This is Rushdie's concept of the exile's "double-perspective" as a state of "inbetweenness"—a concept which will be examined throughout this thesis.

[2.] All primary texts will be referred to in their abbreviated forms, including Rushdie's collection of essays, The Imaginary Homelands. As well, all secondary sources (including those referred to in "Notes") will be fully referenced in the Works Cited list.

[3.] The term *loosely bound trilogy* has been coined by the author of this thesis. To date, no scholarship exists regarding the fact that the novels to be studied herein reflect upon and develop concepts, ideas and notions of both exile and Indian nationalism in a consecutive and chronological manner. As such, this thesis offers an original contextualization of Rushdie's last three novels concerning India.

[4.] The terms *narrator-in-exile* and *exile-in-narration* have been coined by the author of this thesis, the conceptual analysis of which will be the central aim of this work.

[5.] While Rushdie's brand of humour calls for a study of its own, it is important to note that it most often carries the sharp, critical (and irreverent) undercurrent of the satirist's voice of 'protest'. In this manner, Rushdie may be seen to fall in line with a long-standing tradition of satirists, from Juvenai to Voltaire to Swift to Orwell. It is also interesting to note that "satire" may find its etymological roots in classical cooking lingo, which Juvenal called *ollapodrida* or "mish-mash" because his own particular style consisted of a mish-mashing or seemingly haphazard mixing of sources and elements (See "Satire," Dictionary of Literary Terms, 827; and Introduction to Juvenal's The Sixteen Satires, 9-64.) One of Rushdie's own favourite leitmotifs is, of course, the "chutney" motif or, simply, the Indo-Pakistani cooking motif—both of which

refer to the technique of blending a grabbag of spices to a perfectly harmonious and delectable whole. Similarly, Rushdie's encyclopaedic technique of blending or mish-mashing a host of seemingly unrelated allusions or sources echoes Juvenal's *ollapodrida*.

[6.] The concept of "India of the mind" arises from Rushdie's article "Imaginary Homelands" 9-21, in his collection of critical essays of the same title.

[7.] One need only view the essays in Imaginary Homelands to identify the literary company Rushdie keeps--i.e., his essays discuss authors as far-ranging as Nadine Gordimer and Mario Vargas Llosa. Of course, a fair amount of critical attention has already been paid to Rushdie's 'Joycean' style. As well, Hanif Kureishi, Sara Suleri and, perhaps, most signficantly, G.V. Desani are but a few modern writers of Pakistani or Indian origin to whom Rushdie is often compared, if only for their obvious links in terms of cultural and linguistic background. Non-English-language authors writing after the post-war era also reinforce Rushdie's literary stock: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Sadat Hassan Manto and Mikhail Bulgakov are, for example, writers to whom Rushdie refers within his own creative *oeuvre*. Rushdie, however, writes within and "through" modernist and post-modernist traditions because of his obvious source of inspiration from the classical Satirists, Indian oral traditions, the folk-tale tradition, and such cornerstones of ancient storytelling as the The Arabian Nights.

[8.] Arun P. Mukherjee for one critiques the inter-relationship between Post-Colonial and Post-Modern discourse as "totalizations . . . that end up assimilating and homogenizing non-Western texts within a Eurocentric cultural economy" ("Whose Post-Colonialism and Whose Postmodernism?" 1). Mukherjee includes--though not without her own reservations as to Rushdie's centre-margin rhetoric--Rusdhie's (among other non-native English writers) fiction as

subject to this 'totalizing' discourse that disregards the "indigenous roots" of such work by viewing it within a constrictive literary lens. Rusdhie himself argues against such totalizations of the non-native English author within his creative and critical writings. In particular, see "Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist," Imaginary Homelands 61-70.

[9.] Midnight's Children seems to parody Anderson's model of the "imagined community." However, it must be noted that the publication of Midnight's Children (1981) predates Anderson's study (1983) of contemporary nationalisms by two years, making Rushdie's concept of an imaginable national identity a creative foreshadowing of Anderson's theoretical model.

Chapter I

The Imagined and Imaginable Community of *Midnight's Children*

> *How, in what terms, may the career of a single individual be said to impinge on the fate of a nation? I must answer in adverbs and hyphens: I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively . . . . This is why hyphens are necessary: actively-passively, passively-metaphorically, actively-metaphorically, and passively-literally. I was inextricably entwined with my world. (238)*
>
> *- Midnight's Children*

The narrator of Midnight's Children presents himself as anything but an exile. On the

contrary, he *is* India and is infinitely locatable within India's teeming multitudes and

metamorphosizing borders. As "the offspring of [India's] Independence" (MC 291), Saleem

Sinai is the heir apparent to Indian identity as it comes to terms with its new-found post-

coloniality. Sinai's exile is thereby expressed as both a metaphorical and literal condition. It is

metaphorical because it is the translated experience of one whose allegiances and movements

skirt the newly-charted and volatile borders of the subcontinental landscape. It is literal because

it is the perspective from which he reconstructs and relates his story as one of India's border-

crossing minorities. Sinai's series of literal/metaphorical and voluntary/forced exiles are the

very impetus that give rise to his particularly 'epic' intent to interweave his story with the greater

fabric of Indian history, and, consequently, to expose the myth of his country's secular call to

nationhood. Finding his story to be but one fragment in the altogether ruptured reality of Indian

nationalism—a reality that is completely out of sync with the newly imagined nation as a secular,

plural and united body politic—Sinai wishes to 'imagine his community' anew. Given the

ambiguity of Indian identity, however, his desire to re-imagine, or rather re-form, the national

narrative is continually counteracted by his own narrative ambiguity. Indeed, Saleem Sinai

provides a highly detailed case-study of the dubious process of holding together the disparate

tethers of an unfolding national narrative from one whose own authorial stability is perpetually

in flux, that is, perpetually exposed as a poorly imagined construct. Thus, <u>Midnight's Children</u>

is the first novel in the author's loosely bound trilogy to put into question the nation's call to

independence from the perspective of an entirely self-conscious and disenfranchised authorial

voice. In light of Sinai's overt case of subjective self-consciousness, therefore, his greatest

anxiety is the fact that he, like his national narrative, is a fiction.

Midnight's Children is ostensibly the autobiography of Saleem Sinai; hence the first-

person, subjective "I" appears at the inception of his narration: "I was born in the city of Bombay

... once upon a time" (MC 9). Apparently, Sinai is already hinting at narrative ambiguity, the

"once upon a time" signalling the fabulistic tendencies of the narrator. Sinai's narrative

perspective reflects the uncertain times in which he lives: at the beginning of a new chapter in

his country's narrative, Sinai is self-consciously subject to the fact that his is a story that has

been 'created' anew. Hovering precariously between genealogical and historical uncertainty,

Sinai is walking a metaphorical tightrope between multiple versions, as well as multiple

subversions, of the story he wishes to tell from beginning to end. As he tells his story, therefore,

Sinai paradoxically reveals himself to be an illegitimate, hybrid and homeless child: i.e., by

belonging to multiple fathers and mothers, he is fatherless and motherless, and by occupying

multiple homes within and without the motherland, he is also homeless.

In her comparative analysis, "'The   Empire Writes Back': Language and History in

'Shame and Midnight's Children,'" Aruna Srivastava suggests:

Saleem therefore quite perceptively associates his enslavement to this view of history with his parentage. This idea of lineage is a patriarchal and paternalistic historical concept and Saleem needs to know who his father is: is he British or Indian? (21)

Sinai is, in this regard, a composite as well as a dissolution of Indian consciousness: by telling his story without a single stable point of reference (social, political, religious, personal, etc.), Sinai must inevitably speak for India's populace in all its narrative guises. Sinai's singular, cohesive identity is threatened to the point of incoherence, or, worse still, eradication. Constricted by history, constructed by country and caught up in time, Sinai's strongest conviction is the fact that he is immersed in multiple fictions. When he makes the self-consciously schizophrenic claim, "I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well" (MC 9), he is accordingly cautioning his reader to the fact that his stories will be as numerous as his perspectives.

The narrator-in-exile is steeped within the chaos of 'jostling' narratives out of which he must create the central consciousness of his story. Sinai's greatest narratological challenge, therefore, is to make the voices of his "many-headed monster" (229)—his national community—cohere. Faced with such a challenge, the narrator must counter infinitely subjective viewpoints with an equal dose of omniscience, so as to give voice to the collective consciousness of an otherwise cacophonous plurality. In this regard, Sinai's call to narration is, above all, a creative ordering principle which must "end up meaning - yes, meaning - something" (9). The moment the narrator launches into an epic quest for meaning, he contradicts his initial desire to merely document the story of his life, or, for that matter, of his country. Indeed, if he is to make his-story meaningful, such realist modes of fiction will not suffice: Sinai must believe in the mythic

past and future possibilities of his people. Sinai's reaction is, as Edward Said suggests, in his essay "The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile," the first in a series of responses to 'exile' as:

> an experience to be endured so as to restore identity, or even life itself, to a fuller, more meaningful status. . . . Exile becomes the necessary precondition to a better state. We see this in stories about a nation's exile before statehood, a prophet's exile from home prior to a triumphant return. Moses, Mohammed, Jesus. (53)

Like the epic hero, Sinai's quest to make his story both cohere and "mean something," must, to some extent, follow traditional narrative modes. Sinai's creative act is thereby sanctioned by the highest kind of authorship: "(. . . As the Quran tells us: *Recite, in the name of the Lord thy Creator, who created man from clots of blood.)*" (MC 10)

In his study, The Theory of the Novel, Georg Lukacs offers an account of the 'epic hero' that parallels Sinai's call to historical greatness: "World destiny," asserts Lukacs, ". . . is what actually gives the events of the epic their content; the epic hero, *as bearer of his destiny*, is not lonely, for this destiny connects him by *indissoluble threads to the community* whose fate is crystallised in his own" (67; emphasis added). Sinai, like Lukacs's 'epic individual', claims a similar attachment to destiny: "I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was to be no escape" (MC 9-10). However, his extreme case of subjectivity irrevocably denies his call to 'epic heroism'. Through his narrative quest to trace the shared destiny of his community, Sinai discovers that he is both the product of its well-preserved falsities and their "perennial victim" (237). As a result, Sinai is a paradoxical epic figure: aware of the fact that his community is bound to a destiny it cannot, in its present condition, fulfil, Sinai scrutinizes (and, in some cases,

subverts) the narrative shackles of his (and his community's) historical and geographical

legacies, rather than faithfully reinscribing them into his narrative. He writes: "I must

commence the business of *remaking my life* from the point at which it really began, some thirty-

two years before anything as obvious, as *present*, as my *clock-ridden, crime-stained birth*

. . ." (9; emphasis added).

Sinai perpetually undercuts his own claims to epic status and/or omniscience by the very

self-consciousness with which he approaches his narrative, and vice versa. In his analysis,

Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation, Timothy Brennan draws a helpful

parallel between the national narrative as an imaginative construct and intellectual

preoccupation in the modern versus the traditional epic mode:

> Hobsbawm's description of the rhetoric of nationhood can be found also in Bakhtin's
> description of epic, where 'beginning', 'first', 'founder', 'ancestor', 'that which occurred
> earlier' and so on, are . . .valorized temporal categories corresponding to the 'reverent
> point of view of the descendant'. But . . . the novel . . . directed itself to an 'open- ended'
> present. In its hands, 'tradition' became what Hobsbawm calls a 'useable past', the
> evocation of deep, sacred origins - instead of further unquestioning, ritualistic
> reaffirmations of a people (as in epic) - becomes a contemporary, practical means of
> *creating a people*. (50; emphasis added)

Sinai's inability to faithfully reinscribe the tale of his nation's people as a singular political entity

is, perhaps, underscored by the fact that he is aware that his story only begins to mean something

as a creative act, a fiction. On the one hand, the 'fictive' nature of the epic project at hand

provides the narrator with the full poetic license with which to claim an omniscient and all-

inclusive perspective: "And now I, Saleem Sinai, intend briefly to endow myself-then with the

benefits of hindsight; destroying the unities and conventions of fine writing, I make him

cognizant of what was to come . . ." (MC 236). Indeed, Sinai intends to stir up his story in order

to stir up the "holey, mutilated" (10; sic) fabric—in all its sacredness and profanity—from which it takes form; that is, he will stir up the lost recollections of "the amnesiac nation" (460) to make their memories (their lost identities) whole again. But the fictionality of Sinai's venture implies that the national narrative is as open to a deconstructive analysis as Sinai's self-conscious pose as an epic narrator and hero: ". . . later perhaps analysts will say why and wherefore, will adduce the underlying economic trends and political developments, but right now . . . only subjective judgements are possible. Subjectively, then, I hang my head in shame" (435).

As his story unfolds, the narrator struggles to maintain his extraneous—albeit privileged—position because he is aware of the fact that the ever-multiplying story of his native India is, in real-time, collapsing *despite* his own epic reconstruction of its narrative. In this manner, Sinai requires omniscience "purely so that he can be permitted to think the following thoughts: 'O *eternal opposition of inside and outside!* Because a human being, inside himself, is anything but a whole, anything but homogenous, all kinds of *everywhichthing* are jumbled up inside him. . . . The body, on the other hand, is homogenous as anything. . . . *It is important to preserve its wholeness*" (236; emphasis added). Rushdie's conjoining of words ("everywhichthing"), bend the rules of syntax and grammar (the elements of 'form' itself), to reflect the thematic formlessness of Sinai's community, as well as the underlying interconnectedness of things as they are alternately exposed or concealed through language. Confronted by the clear evidence of fragmentation in linguistic and cultural terms, therefore, the exile's quest is akin to a complete reconstitution of identity.

To this end, the semantics of exile highlighted in the above quote will be shown to run rampant through Rushdie's *oeuvre*, such that Sinai prefigures the exilic perspectives and

motivations of the protagonists of The Satanic Verses and The Moor's Last Sigh. Not

surprisingly, then, the protagonists begin their stories after having come to 'the end' of their own

'active' roles in their family's histories. Interestingly, the Moor's national narrative itself has, in

his opinion, reached the definitive end that already haunts Sinai. Sinai, too, tells his story from

the removed perspective of one who is extricated from his nation's on-going reality, but,

representing the formative years of the newly-born nation, Sinai begins his story as a quest to

give his story meaning. His exile, unlike that of the Moor, is still very much invested in the

nation's future, and is, as such, more of a metaphorical and political state of being than a

permanent geographical displacement. Even though he extricates himself from the everyday,

Sinai's exile plays itself out within subcontinental borders. Indeed, Sinai's narrative is an

attempt to bring together the ingredients of a perfectly harmonized plurality--to make real

India's recipe for national unity. But, as the national narrative unfolds, so, too, does Sinai's

place within it, such that his is a history of proliferating loss. Sinai's final exile is, therefore, a

physical seclusion inside a pickle factory; within, that is, the overarching metaphor upon which

his national narrative rests, the metaphor of preservation: "Today, with the hindsight of the lost,

spent years, I can say that the spirit of self-aggrandizement which seized me was a reflex born of

an instinct for self-preservation" (175). It would appear as if Sinai's originally imagined

community--the community of India's new body politic--is fast becoming an illusion. Sinai's

final narrative act is not simply to stir together the ingredients of 'midnight's children', but to

preserve the original recipe of their coming together, lest they, like their narrator, become a

thing of the past: "Every pickle-jar (you will forgive me if I become florid for a moment)

contains, therefore, the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of

history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! I, however, have pickled chapters. . ." (459).

At the moment of his inception Sinai is the paradoxical manifestation of his newly-conceived nation's own political, social, historical and cultural ambiguity:

> . . . 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. (118)

Sinai and the other children of midnight are collectively racked with the ambiguity that arises from a country which is, itself, a 'sort of dream' anticipating self-actualization. The official birth of India's nationhood comes to signify the outward realization of this dream; and Sinai's birth makes 'real' the post-colonial home which was otherwise subject to the 'myth world' of his other historical father, William Methwold. Sinai's embodiment as the 'realization' of 'home' merely substitutes the myths of imperialism with the myths of a 'newly' stabilized Indian identity and a 'newly' secured place in history. Thus, in spite of the fact that Sinai's "lot is thrown" in with that of India, "the alienness of blue eyes remains" (107). The colonial legacy of Methwold's power over Sinai and his family is "impossible to forget" (114).

Sinai's sense of home as a harmonized point of reference is thereby eternally destabilized, a fiction. As such, Sinai's true heritage is less the newly-founded nation than it is the metaphorical and literal condition of a perpetually decentred state. Tracing back his ancestry to his (Muslim) grandfather, Aadam Aziz, Sinai encounters a legacy which he diagnoses as a "[p]ermanent alteration: a hole" (12)--the spiritual and physical manifestation of Aziz's various states of exile: "Doctor Aziz was [similarly] an orphan and a free man - except that his heart had fallen through a hole some seven inches across" (28). Sinai describes his grandfather's hole as

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"a vacancy in a vital inner chamber" (10); a vacancy brought to view upon Dr. Aziz's return to the East with the "travelled eyes" (11) of a colonial exile. When Dr. Aziz witnesses the 1919 Amritsar massacre of Indian civilians by the British Empire, he receives a second hole which counteracts the effects of the first: "'I started off as a Kashmiri and not much of a Muslim. Then I got a bruise on the chest that turned me into an Indian. I'm still not much of a Muslim, but I'm all for Abdullah" (40). The latter hole functions as the doctor's re-awakening as an anti-separatist, anti-colonial and pro-secularist. This self-affirming second hole is also the rift in the fabric of a purportedly unified Indian consciousness, one which is destined to fester like a disease of conflicting idealisms. For this reason, Sinai's final diagnosis of his grandfather's condition is the "disease of optimism"; the hope that India's secular call to unity will override the effects of the "permanent alteration" of the subcontinent into its political, cultural, geographical and spiritual parts (Pakistan and India; Muslim and Hindu, Majority and Minority, etc.).

Sinai's narrative stance enters the Indian political scene as a tabula rasa—a new beginning in the fabric of Indian history—as if his historical and geographical past has been erased to clear the stage for the new breed of 'midnight's children'. At the early stages of his post-coloniality, then, Sinai's historical and genealogical schizophrenia gives rise to his own brand of 'optimistic' ontological possibility:

> at the end of 1947, life in Bombay was as teeming, as manifold, as multitudinously shapeless as ever . . . except that I had arrived; . . . and by the time I had finished, I would give meaning to it all. You don't believe me? Listen: at my cradle-side, Mary Pereira is singing a little song:
>> Anything you want to be, you can be:
>> You can be just what-all you want. (126-7)

Baby-Sinai, much like infant-India, is obsessed with the "problem of defining itself" (130) in the often painful "awareness of . . . [its own] ambiguity" (149). However, the further Sinai delves into his story, the clearer it becomes that, contrary to belief, he and his newly imagined community are hopelessly divested of determining their own place, purpose and meaning within the greater canvas of Indian politics. In this sense, 'midnight's children' are not so much a clean slate as a newly defined state. Indeed, the basis upon which their future communality rests has been predetermined for them—a foundation which they must either accept or from which will find themselves expelled.

From the very beginning, Sinai is rooted in the physical and psychological realities of his ancestors' socio-political prevarications—a legacy that contributes to Sinai's earliest existential crisis: i.e., is he, or is he not, a 'real' member of his family, a 'legitimate' member of his community, a 'true' representative of his country? Sinai's earliest memory is the fact that his family makes literal his playful use of his grandparents' hole-ridden sheet as a ghostly masquerade: ". . . they reduced the awesome ghost to a weeping wreck. I fled, took to my heels and ran . . . feeling vaguely resentful that it [the sheet] had not been locked in the first place" (31). The perforated sheet is symbolic of Sinai's earliest awareness of the insider-outsider condition that will continue to be his legacy. In fact, Sinai's reference to himself as "the awesome ghost" is representative of the exilic narrator's tendency to distance himself from his narrative by use of the third person the moment he is conscious of his subject's (his family, community, country, etc.) indifference to his absence. Sinai's anonymity—as one of many 'ghosts' in the family tree—makes him metaphorically privy to a past from which he and his generation are otherwise severed. Anonymity thereby becoming a metaphor for the exile's

detachment from a singular sense of self, of belonging, Sinai uses his sheet as a 'peephole', so-to-speak, into the "jostling narratives" of his family's 'other' buried histories. In this manner, Sinai transforms his first experience of exile into a liberating apparatus; his metaphorical and physical distance from the sundering myths of his family become what Homi Bhabha refers to as "the language of metaphor." Bhabha writes: "Metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging . . . across those distances and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation-people" (The Location of Culture 291).

In this manner, the fragmented nature of Sinai's own condition--figuratively speaking, the disconnected 'holes' through which he comes to see his fractured world--is central to the paradoxical nature of the exile's "double perspective." In his essay, "Imaginary Homelands," Rushdie speaks of the "double perspective" as a fragmented way of seeing the world, a condition of finding oneself straddling culture, space and time:

> Fantasy, or the mingling of fantasy with naturalism, is one way of . . . echoing in our work the issues faced by all of us: how to build a new 'modern' world out of an old, legend-haunted civilization, an old culture which we have brought into the heart of a newer one. But whatever technical solutions we may find, Indian writers in these islands, like others who have migrated into the north from the south, are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. The stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of 'whole sight'. (IH 19)

Seeing the object of his/her vision (e.g., of the past, history, culture) neither in its entirety nor from the same angle to which he/she is accustomed, the exile, emigré, expatriate, etc, does not simply stumble upon a fragmented way of seeing, but a *new* way of seeing. Indeed, the split characters of The Satanic Verses (themselves an embodiment of the exile's "double perspective") enter their migratory states couched in the metaphor of rebirth. This new way of

seeing (the fragmented double vision) creates the possibility of making "trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquire[d] numinous qualities" (IH 12).

Sinai's approach to his national narrative changes according to the degree to which he stands securely within or insecurely outside his community (the ghostly masquerade of his childhood prank being but the first in a series of far more real states of not-belonging). Each of Sinai's exiles is a manifestation of his inability to find "the remarkable confidence of community in anonymity" (among India's multitudinous fragments) which Benedict Anderson considers to be the cornerstone of a secure national consciousness. Consequently, the greater Sinai's sense of not-belonging, the more acutely anonymous and alone he feels—an anonymity which merely brings him closer to the 'fabricated' nature of India's new 'unified' identity. Sinai thus points to both the dangers inherent in masquerading under false notions of selfhood or nationhood, and to the further constructability of Indian identity, as the case may be.

As previously noted, Rushdie's idea of the "imagined community" appears to prefigure Benedict Anderson's study of the formation of European national consciousness, Imagined Communities: The Origins and Spread of Nationalism.[1] Anderson defines the 'modern nation' as follows:

> . . . it is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.
> It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (Introduction 5-6)

Like Anderson, Rushdie may be seen to identify India's nationalism as a distinctly 'modern' phenomenon in which ". . . fiction [the shared languages of print capitalism] seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity" (36).

Although Sinai closely parallels Anderson's model of the process of nation-building, the shortcomings of a strictly European model—or, simply, of a strictly singular vision—of modern nationalism in the Indian context is alluded to in Sinai's failed attempt to reconstruct his own imagined community therein. The following section of this chapter accordingly traces the relationship between Sinai's progressively more literal exilic perspectives and his waning attempts at reimagining the national community in a manner which closely parallels Anderson's model.

By 'recasting' the Indian national community in a new light, Sinai's doubts as to its 'wholeness' ultimately expose the newly-conceived national identity as a poorly imagined construct. It is not surprising that Sinai's first (voluntary) exile is "an act of defiance" (MC 160) against the "demands of parents and history" (156); against, that is, a false sense of 'motherhood'. Hiding amidst his parents' 'dirty laundry', Sinai's innocence is shattered upon discovery of the "evidence of maternal *duplicity*" (162; emphasis added). The moment Sinai is aware of his peripheral, anonymous status, he develops a new-found suspicion of Mother India's purportedly undifferentiating love. As such, Sinai's exiles are Edenic falls into the world outside the privileged territorial space: i.e., to "the inner monologues of so-called teeming millions, of classes and masses alike, [which] jostled for space within [his] head" (168). Traditionally speaking, innocence lost is knowledge gained: Sinai's first fall is a discovery of the "inner monologues" of 'midnight's children'. However, the sacred and profane are, like most things in Rushdie's ethos, reversible or interchangeable entities—a leitmotif that underscores the double nature of the exile himself. In a reverse leap of faith that is typical of Rushdie's narrators-in-exile, such new-found knowledge is defined in sacred terms:

> Muhammad . . . heard a voice saying, 'Recite!' and thought he was going mad; I heard, at first, a headful of gabbling tongues, like an untuned radio; and with lips sealed by maternal command, I was unable to ask for comfort. . . . I struggled, alone, to understand what had happened to me; until at last I saw the . . . the mantle of greatness settling upon my shoulders. (163)

'Revelation' for Sinai is a form of social insight ". . . into [the] public affairs of India" (MC 173); that is, Sinai begins to gain access into the 'collective unconscious' of his people, from which he will later draw his creative material.

The moment Sinai accesses the 'collective unconscious' of 'midnight's children', his imagination falls subject to the "mythical layers" of time. (Sinai's subsequent exile takes place inside an "abandoned clocktower" [173].) Sinai's revelation is, by extension, a form of omniscience, an ability to step out of the particularity of his predicament and his time and fall into the universality of archetypes--i.e., into the "atavistic and universal, the product of 'the collective unconscious' [which is] inherited from our ancestors" ("Archetype" 58). But, rather than being put at ease by the universally binding nature of his ancestors' shared mythologies, Sinai's omniscience buries him deeper within the cultural, religious and social hodgepodge of midnight's children. Sinai's gift is also his Achilles' heel, for now his identity crisis is compounded by a new host of 'ghosts' from his past; namely, his distinctly Hindu ancestry which stands in "problematic" and "unclear" contrast to the ghosts of a Muslim heritage, a colonial past and a secular future:

> . . . And where in this scheme of things, am I? Am I . . . merely mortal - or something more? Such as - yes, why not - mammoth trunked, Ganesh-nosed as I am - perhaps, the Elephant. . . . whose symbolic value, it must be added, is highly problematic and unclear. (195)[2]

Slowly regaining access to the 'old', yet painfully aware of the grotesque ambiguities of his own

novelty, Sinai's epic fantasies to reshape the "raw, multitudinous realities of the land" are akin

to the exile's preoccupation "with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to

rule" (Said 52). The reality of 'midnight's children' merely reinforces the ever-alienating notion

of the fragmented body-politic, which compels Sinai to opt for the freedom of novelty by

deciding to imagine his own community: "expelled from one gang, I decided to form my own, a

gang which was spread over the length and breadth of the country" (207). Sinai's omniscience,

borne out of alienation and exile, paradoxically makes accessible the collective unconscious of

the already imagined community only to elicit a corresponding desire for the narrator-in-exile to

take it upon himself to imagine *his* community anew:

> . . . 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!' (174)

In this manner, the narrator-in-exile becomes fully aware of both the construction and

constructability of identity as "a contested cultural territory":

> a contested cultural territory where the people must be thought in a double-time: [as] the
> historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is
> based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event; [and as] the 'subjects' of
> a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-
> people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principle of the people as that continual
> process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and
> reproductive process. . . . [i.e., to] the site of writing the nation. (Bhabha 297)

Sinai's entry into the world of artistry is synonymous with his "national longing for

form" (MC 300). At first, Sinai is content to passively participate in the private, nocturnal and

hitherto malformed communications of the "yelling jabbering arguing giggling" (227) "nation-

people." When he is confronted with the "remarkably hierarchical" nature of his new gang,

Sinai's solitary search for meaning and purpose assumes socio-political dimensions—a reaction

which parallels the nation's own contentious hyphenations (i.e., between its Muslim and Hindu religious majorities, its simultaneous call to modernization and return to tradition, its economic and cultural aims, etc.). Sinai's narratalogical alter-ego, Shiva, makes literal India's perpetual socio-political duality "by dint of [Shiva and Sinai's] birth on the stroke of midnight]" (227), together with their self-seeking desire to singularly lead 'midnight's children'. The Sinai/Shiva duality echoes the "eternal opposition" thematic that torments Sinai throughout his narrative: "Shiva and Saleem, victor and victim; understand our rivalry, and you will gain an understanding of the age in which you live. (*The reverse of this statement is also true.*)" (432; emphasis added). Shiva and Sinai further foreground the thematic and formalistic duality to be found in the next two novels: i.e., Sinai and Shiva's simultaneous births confound their birth*rights* and/or undiluted claims to either Muslim or Hindu ancestry, partisan or secular politics, self-serving or altruistic motives to 'lead' their community. It is interesting to note that Shiva's name echoes, in mythological terms, this conflation and confusion of opposites:

> Shiva has three essential qualities. . . i.e. Truth, Energy and Darkness. With these three words, Indian philosophy has revealed three major basic principles of creation, i.e. of our own world, the world that exists, because we can see it and conceive it. Truth and energy put together create light, which permits us to see the truth and do justice, for justice requires the light of day. Energy plus darkness will acuse crime. . . . Solely among the Indian deities, Shiva embodies the contradictions of the universe and of human thinking . . . . Shiva, the master of creation, is also the God of Death. . . . Every sign and symbol can have more than one meaning, every coded message can be read in more than one way. We are staring at a mystery. Shiva is as complex as Man himself - and infinitely more so. ("Shiva," Indian Mythology 226;230)

While Shiva's desire to singlehandedly control 'midnight's children' appears to stand in direct opposition to Sinai's more 'creative' mission, he is ironically the progenitor of Sinai's supposed offspring (Aadam, the 'Ganesh-eared' son). Moreover, while his materialistic needs—

"Shiva, for whom the world was things" (MC 282)—appear to undermine his spiritual name,

Shiva's mythological namesake signals the contrary nature of India's own new call to

traditionalism, and further cautions against both Sinai and Shiva's 'singularly' imaginable

communities. Indeed, nothing is what it seems in Sinai's world, making perception itself a

duplicitous, or, at the very least, a dubious affair. So inextricably intertwined are Shiva and

Sinai that to reject one for the other is symbolic of the nation's own dismemberment into India

and Pakistan: ". . . . having exiled Shiva, I found myself hurled into an exile from which I was

incapable of contacting my more-than-five-hundred colleagues: I was flung across the Partition-

created frontier of Pakistan" (282).

The development of Sinai's new body politic is thereby stunted once Sinai's birthright is

confounded by Shiva's equal claim as the "natural leader" (227) of midnight's children. In his

conception of the "nature of political love," Anderson states:

> . . . in everything 'natural' there is always something unchosen. In this way, nation-ness
> is assimilated to skin-colour, gender, parentage and birth-era. . . . And in these 'natural
> ties' one senses what one might call the 'beauty of gemeinschaft'—a halo of
> disinterestedness. (143)

When his genealogy is made suspect as the "(Child of an unknown union. . .)" (MC 243), Sinai

is catapulted into his "first [involuntary] exile" (240); an exile that is the antithesis of belonging

and birthright. Ironically, the inauthentification of Sinai's "natural ties" reverses Anderson's

concept of belonging as a beatific "disinterestedness." Sinai's exile is, of course, a form of

rejection, an inauthentification of the "natural." Consequently, Sinai's expulsion from the

"unchosen" permits him to choose his community—to consciously reinvent, for himself,

'national ties' in the absence of birthright. It is not long before Sinai realizes the epic task at

hand: i.e., he must begin to reform his community altogether, for "every *form* restores the *absurd* to its proper place as the vehicle, the necessary condition of *meaning*" (Lukacs 62; emphasis added). Sinai's desire to reform the national narrative stems from his more detached, less directly implicated, position of the exile: i.e., by witnessing rather than engaging in the gradual deformation of the "atavistic longings . . . regionalist loyalties and prejudices" of the "new-born secular state" (MC 245), Sinai is able to conceptualize the need for reformation.

Far from being a 'revolutionary return' to the motherland after an eye-opening exile, the returned narrator is overcome by the endlessly generative differences and dualities of "masses-and-classes, capital-and-labour, them-and-us" (255). Sinai's omniscient perspective is thereby reduced to extreme subjectivity again, and he begins, as did his creative career, to use his-story for self-serving ends: "I confess: what I did was no act of heroism. . . . I began to cut pieces out of newspapers. . . . Cutting up history to suit my nefarious purposes. . ." (259). Isolated from the social (even upon his reentry into the homeland), Sinai's motivations become purely political. Sinai's use of print capital as a justifiable means towards reconstructing his community seems to echo Anderson's recipe for bringing the disparate threads of the nation together: "[w]hat, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human diversity" (Anderson 42). In Sinai's imprudent manipulation of national events, such "explosive interactions" merely distort the effects of his creative 'principle(s). Like the contending powers of Indian nationalist discourse, Sinai "proliferates metaphor and masters illusion" (Brennan 98). Just as Sinai manipulates the media as a 'master of illusion' in his narrative longing for form, the media, in his absence, has

managed to out-manipulate him: "Telegrams, and after telegrams, telephones, were my undoing;

. . . it would be was easy to believe that the controllers of communications had resolved to regain

their monopoly of the nation's air-waves" (295). In this sense, Sinai is complicit in the

"repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative" (Bhabha 297), and, as such, mirrors the

nation's project of creating its own 'false' or 'staged' sense of community.

By illustrating the potentially calamitous effects of Sinai's misuse of the media, the

duplicity of the national project itself is disclosed as a mass manipulation of history. Territory,

like information airwaves, Sinai soon learns, is divisible. Not surprisingly, then, Sinai's most

physical exile is his complete severance from Indian current affairs: i.e., he becomes one among

millions to cross the newly devised border of Pakistan. In Bettina Knapp's psychoanalytic study,

Exile and the Writer, the author discusses the paradigm of "exoteric exile":

> [a] permanent, physical departure from the land and banishment to areas outside of the
> boundaries of the country [of origin]. . . . whether voluntary or involuntary, [it] may be
> identified . . . with extroverted behavioural patterns. . . . An extroverted mode of psychic
> functioning implies that meaning, value, and interest are applied mostly to external
> objects rather than to inner, subjected matters. (Introduction 1-2)

Sinai's exile in Pakistan corresponds almost exactly to Knapp's definition. Finding "Indo-

Pakistani relations deteriorated, [and their] borders . . . closed" (MC_317), Sinai is no longer

privy to the "inner monologues" of community. Consequently, his sensory powers are

externalized to the extreme: "alone, out of the world and out of all time . . . he began to describe

odours with all the perspicacity of his miraculous nose" (319). This new "extroverted mode of

psychic functioning" permits Sinai to envision the "simultaneous dimensions" (Said 55) of his

two countries, such that "both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring

together contrapuntally" (55). Immersed as they are in the theatre of war, these worlds do not

exist harmoniously for Sinai; rather, he is 'bombarded' by the very 'fact' of their coterminous and equally disorienting realities (or, rather, un-realities):

> The terrible fatalism which had overcome me of late had taken on an even more terrible form; drowning in the disintegration of family, of both countries to which I had belonged, of everything which can sanely be called real . . . I sought the oblivion of . . . death. (MC 341)

When Sinai's new national affiliations to Pakistan are literally uprooted by his former country of origin, Sinai enters "a kind of life in death" (Ibieta, Literature and Exile 73). Now homeless, stateless and orphaned, Sinai claims to be "purified" of "past present memory time shame and love, a fleeting but also timeless explosion in which I bow my head yes I acquiesce yes in the necessity of the blow, and then I am empty and free . . . wiped clean as a wooden writing-chest" (MC 343). Sinai's fall from the knowledge of both worlds thereby situates him in a deterritorialized, no-man's land. Unencumbered by history, country or time, the narrator is restored to a state of narrativistic innocence to the point at which he may truly "remake his life."

Or so he thinks. "No matter how well they do," writes Said, "exiles are always eccentrics who feel their difference (even as they frequently exploit it) as *a kind of orphanhood*. Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his right to refuse to belong" (52; emphasis added). By channelling his new life back into the very theatre of war from which he gained his freedom-from-attachment, the "weapon of [Sinai's] stiffened will" becomes his 'refusal to belong' to Pakistan, even as he participates in its military defence. Sinai's estrangement from all manner of familial, historical, political and social attachments thereby strips him of any conscience as well as of any collective consciousness. In short, his active role in history and his personal attachment to his-story is substituted by the total and

absolute detachment of a passive participant. By "abandoning consciousness" (MC 351), Sinai's

subjective "I" is transformed into the overtly objectified 'He': "not I. He. He, the buddha" (360).

When Sinai begins to relate his own Conradian journey into "the historyless anonymity

of rain-forests" (36), he refers to himself entirely in the third-person. At first, Sinai's exile

functions at a disseminative and potentially self-destructive level as a complete estrangement

from civilization itself. It is also within this state of extreme anonymity that Sinai first

experiences "the sense of release, of critical distance, . . . of fusion or shock of cultures and even

of languages . . . [wherein] originality of vision must almost necessarily derive from the

transgressing and transcending of frontiers" (Bevan 4). Now border-less, "stories came issuing

from his mouth . . . because he was reclaiming everything, all of it, all lost histories, all the

myriad complex processes that go to make a man" (MC 364-5). Unburdened by questions of

identity and belonging, Sinai is able to transcend the subjective narrator's self-consciousness.

Conversely, Sinai's seamless gift of elocution renders him bereft of all manner of 'perspective':

"the buddha had forgotten his name. (To be precise: his first name)" (365). By dint of his new

ability to contain (and relate) history in all its narrative dimensions, Sinai is rendered incapable

of the one, albeit limited, advantage of the first-person narrator: namely, subjectivity. As a

narrator-in-exile completely robbed of all sense of self, Sinai is further stripped of the one

liberating advantage of an overt case of self-consciousness: namely, the state which Rushdie has

been shown to describe as the "double perspective" and which Edward Said describes as a

"scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity."

The concept of 'looking back' at one's country of origin from the perspective of an

emigré, expatriate or political refugee is a central concern for Edward Said, as it is for Rushdie

and most other immigrant writers. Said and Rushdie seem to most closely share the view that

exile—the double perspective of straddling at least two geographical and cultural points of

reference—can be used to its fullest creative and critical potential. Said writes: "I am speaking of

exile not as a privileged site for individual self-reflection, but as an alternative to the mass

institutions looming over much of modern life. If the exile is neither going to rush into an

uncritical gregariousness nor sit on the sidelines nursing a wound, he or she must cultivate a

scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity" ("The Mind of Winter" 54). In Sinai's case, his

sudden ability to transcend all self-consciousness—to transmit stories without any conscious and

conscientious understanding of them—is not so much a critical reimagining as it is a perpetuation

of the falsities they may contain.

When Sinai finally returns to his country of origin, his detachment from his community

is, paradoxically, complete. Once physically (that is, geographically) severed from community,

Rushdie seems to suggest, there can be no return—the return itself being a primarily physical

event. Sinai's extreme feelings of alienation from the present-day realities of India compel him

to mournfully write *off* the community he has longed for, and to assume the metaphor of exile

itself: ". . . inside the basket of invisibility, I, Saleem Sinai, complete with my loose anonymous

garment, vanished instantly into thin air" (380). Now a returned exile, as well as a self-

consciously peripheral member of his community, Sinai's transformation into the vaporous

abstractions of a life without historical attachments—without the "insidious nostalgia for times of

greater possibility" (MC 436)—causes him to react against the "*burden of history*" (382); and to

posit, for himself, the question—indeed, the possibility—of his own identity: "Who what am I?"

(383). Hence, Sinai comes to the realization that the ultimate "crime" of his history "had

detached [him] from two worlds, not one; . . . trapped in the web of interweaving genealogies, it

may even have occurred to [him] to wonder what was beginning, what was ending . . ." (413;

415). Arriving full-circle at the beginning of his narrative "I," therefore, Sinai writes with the

awareness that the narrative of 'midnight's children' has continued despite his attempts to

preserve its original beginning. As such, newness for Sinai is a Shiva-like contradiction, an

ending:

> I understood once again that Aadam was a member of a second generation of magical
> children who would grow up far tougher than the first, not looking for their fate in
> prophecy or the stars, but forging it in the implacable furnaces of their wills. Looking
> into the eyes of the child who was simultaneously not-my-son and also more my heir than
> any child of my flesh could have been, I found in his empty, limpid pupils a second
> mirror of humility, which showed me that, from now on, mine would be as peripheral a
> role as that of any redundant oldster: the traditional function, perhaps, of reminiscer, of
> teller-of-tales. (447)

A narrator-in-exile borne across the fledgling years of India's independence, Sinai, self-

consciously subjective in his point of view, seeks salvation in the public and potentially 'epic'

nature of his narrative undertaking: that is to say, "to confide in paper, before *I* forget. (*We* are a

nation of forgetters)" (37). As alienated citizen, refugee and banished outsider, Sinai matures

into a narrator-in-exile who returns "to the city of his birth to stand illuminated in a cellar"

(455). When Sinai releases his fleeting control of the collective, all-inclusive consciousness of

'midnight's children' to "the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes," he betrays his own

attempt at re-forming the national narrative. Since Sinai concludes his-story in the 'full-blown'

awareness that "the awful pressure of the crowd" (463) may engender a further de-formation of

the 'dreams' of his once imagined community, Sinai's final 'act' may be interpreted as anything

but reconstitutional. Paradoxically, by leaving his story open to further revision—if not also to

further embellishment—Sinai is also leaving the 'dream' of his imagined community open to

something greater than his own self-aggrandizing obscurity and self-legitimizing history.

Indeed, Sinai's <u>Midnight's Children</u> makes the 'dream' of India's independence an unforgettable

story; ironically, it also keeps the 'fact' of its fictionality alive.

NOTES

[1.] As was mentioned in "Notes" of the Introduction, the publication of Midnight's Children predates Anderson's study by two years. As such, Rushdie's concept of Sinai's imagined and imaginable community appears to anticipate the theoretical model posited by Anderson.

[2.] Ganesh, the Hindu deity, is a recurring motif throughout Rushdie's novels. Ganesh becomes a central motif in The Moor's Last Sigh, and also the direct link between the novels: Sinai's 'Ganesh' or elephant-eared son, returns in The Moor's Last Sigh. Moreover, the Elephant God, as a central Hindu symbol, comes to represent the growing Hindu fundamentalism that continues to plague India. Mythologically, Ganesh is Shiva's son, he is the "God of sciences and skills." Most importantly, perhaps, Ganesh "is the first scribe and it was to him that Vyasa dictated the Mahabharata epic" (Indian Mythology, pp 106-8).

Chapter II
The Imaginary Homelands of *The Satanic Verses*

Exile is a dream of glorious return. Exile is a vision of revolution: Elba, not St. Helena. It is an endless paradox: looking forward by always looking back. (205)
- The Satanic Verses

The secular ideal that is also the new official faith of Sinai's India—a community only

recently divided on religious grounds—is, in The Satanic Verses, one of several "ideas" in

question. Here, the offspring of 'midnight's children' have been 'borne across' countries,

cultures, languages and time. As such, the narrative of displacement or the "imaginary

homeland"—as a fertile place of inquiry—highlights "the provisional nature of all truths" (IH 12).

Despite, or, perhaps, because of such new-found 'worldliness', this narrative will also

obsessively trace "the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, *land, belonging, home*" (SV

4). Rushdie continues to develop a mythology of migrancy wherein the search for home is

*questi*oned in light of its attendant idealisms. The trope of exile is further translated, and so will

"mean something" as all *trans*lations must: i.e. "across, through and beyond" the original text

(the body politic of 'midnight's children') to its newly imaginable contexts (the diasporic body

of 'midnight's children'). Consequently, both the narrator and his narrative are continually 'in

flight', as together they are perpetually crossing literal and figurative frontiers. An omniscient

narrator now speaks 'for' as well as 'through' the babelian languages and histories of a 'migrant'

body politic so as to enter an international, interlingual and intertextual narrative. In this

manner, The Satanic Verses reflects upon exile as a literal and metaphorical condition in an

attempt to transform the often 'punitive' position of belonging nowhere into its liberating

antithesis, namely, belonging everywhere.

While Midnight's Children began as a resounding nationalistic "I" only to dissipate into a cacophonous plurality, The Satanic Verses begins within the context of an already exploded narrative of "characterless pluralities," rendering the narrator immediately indistinguishable from his characters. The 'question' of authority itself becomes the primary and explicit principle around which the narrator organizes his stories, for, by questioning the central authority behind any organizing 'idea(l)', the narrator-in-exile, like the Devil himself, must come to terms with his own claims to omniscience; particularly in light of the fact that by 'belonging everywhere' he is still 'characteristically' homeless. Omniscience cast alongside subjectivity, the exile flirting with centrality, the sacred falling prey to profanity, east hovering precariously over west, Rushdie's *doppelganger* motif continues to reflect the double perspective of the insider/outsider condition. The quintessential narrator-in-exile must, therefore, both question and quest for the "essential centre," wherein the metaphor of exile itself serves as a pivotal juncture between narrative obliteration and imaginative reinscription.

In his epigraph, Rushdie cites Daniel Defoe's "The Political History of the Devil," in which Satan's "empire in the liquid waste or air" is a form of "punishment" for the quintessential exile's "unsettled condition." The citation foreshadows the novel's thematic and formalistic underpinnings of exile, while belying any wholly romantic notions of the physical and spiritual homelessness inherent in such a condition. In his work, Defoe clearly delineates the Devil's 'omnipresence' in the material world from his decided lack of 'omniscience' therein. Similarly, Rushdie's narrator must contend with the fact that his omniscience is subject to the 'material' limitations of his own body of knowledge accumulated through space and time. More

implicitly, the epigraph calls attention to a long-standing tradition of Orientalist perceptions of

Islam, among which Defoe "gave it as his considered opinion that ... in Mohammed, Satan 'set

up the boldest, the grossest, and the most senseless of all impostures that ever was in the world. .

.'" (Baine, R. 58).[1] The 'devilish' naming of Prophet Muhammad as 'Mahound' underlines

Rushdie's claim to "reclaiming, or unpoisoning the name" ("Interview" 56); while his revival of

the polemical 'affair' of the "the satanic verses" from Islamic history underlines the author's

desire to "write back" forgotten or misappropriated moments in history for the purposive ends of

his fiction.[2]

By the end of Midnight's Children, the 'one-thousand-and-one' offspring of India's

independence are reduced to "[s]hivering in the *December cold* . . . walled-in and waiting . . .

four hundred and twenty, the number of trickery and fraud" (MC 436; emphasis added).[3]

Similarly, at the beginning of The Satanic Verses, this remaining fraction reappears (also from

'wintery' captivity):

> *Out of thin air:* a big bang, followed by falling stars. A universal beginning, a
> miniature echo of the birth of time . . . the jumbo jet *Bostan, Flight AI-420*, blew apart
> without any warning, high above the great, rotting, beautiful, snow-white, illuminated
> city . . . Proper London, capital of Vilayet. . . . While at Himalayan height a brief and
> premature sun burst into the powdery *January air* . . . and the thin air was full of bodies,
> descending from the Everest of the catastrophe to the milky paleness of the sea.
> *Who am I?*
> *Who else is there?* (SV 4; emphasis added)

In keeping with Rushdie's vocabulary of exile, the hijacking and subsequent destruction of

"Flight AI-420" releases the migrant Indian passengers to a vaporous state—between past and

present, belonging and not-belonging, history and novelty, incarceration and freedom, death and

rebirth, etc.[4] In this manner, an entirely disembodied voice now introduces the narrative with

the question that Sinai posited towards the end of his narrative. The existential question

prefigures the contextuality and constructability of identity with regard to the narrator and his

characters. In Michael Siedel's Exile and the Imagination, this narrative posturing is central to

the 'alibi' or 'allegory' of exilic writing as "a necessary *elsewhere*":

> Narrative forges two kinds of scenes, the first a counter or allegorical space where the 'I
> am' of character projects a being that sustains an inscriptive sovereignty, and the second
> a mimetic space that limits the absolute otherness of the 'I am' by supposing a
> recognizable world to which it is answerable. (Introduction 15)

This allegorical/mimetic split has already found its antecedent in Sinai's narrative which,

for all intents and purposes, could not reconcile 'history as allegory' with the exigent realities of

India itself (i.e., communal rivalries, sectarian violence, the legacies of colonial rule, etc.). In

The Satanic Verses, however, the narrative "I" is always "elsewhere" and "speaking otherwise,"

for his stories, in allegorical and mimetic terms, are all over the map, so to speak. As Rushdie

states, ". . . the physical fact of discontinuity, of his [the writer's] present being in a different

place from his past, of his being 'elsewhere'. . . . may enable him to speak properly and

concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal" (IH 12). If anything, such temporal

and spatial discontinuity enables the narrator to juxtapose the universal alongside the particular,

"the miraculous alongside the mundane" (IH 376), "I" alongside "who else," the subjective

voice alongside the objective world to which "it is answerable." In narratological terms, then,

Siedel's split is herein internalized to the extent that the omniscient, sovereign "I" embodies not

one but two 'central' characters, each of whom represents the narrator's double perspective;

each character, in turn, is subject to an existential and literal 'splitting', proliferating the allegory

of exile. The narrator, along with his characters, is at once 'everywhere and nowhere':

Up there in air-space, in that soft, imperceptible field which had been made possible by the century and which, thereafter, made the century possible, becoming one of its defining locations, the place of movement and war, the planet-shrinker and power-vacuum, most insecure and transitory of zones, illusory, discontinuous, metaphoric because when you throw everything up in the air anything becomes possible - wayupthere, at any rate . . . *characteristics* were acquired. (SV 5; emphasis added)

On the one hand, then, Salahuddin Chamchawala (or Saladin Chamcha) characterizes the "linear, temporal" realm to which the narrator is answerable if he wishes to be 'true' to himself, his world and his time. On the other hand, Gibreel Farishta (or Ismael Najmuddin) characterizes "simultaneity ... [the] multiform, protean" realm to which the narrator aspires if he wishes to be 'true' to his role as a Creator working within Messianic time. In other words, the narrator and his 'characteristic' I's are one and the same, such that their juxtaposed narratives are an attempt to forge the "linear and Godlike" (IH 382), the provisional and universal, the political and spiritual, modernity and tradition, the devilish and angelic, doubt and faith, east and west, and so forth. As mentioned, this thematic and stylistic 'doubling' is offset by a recurring 'central' question, an ongoing quest to determine, in Rushdie's words, "whether or not there is an essential centre. And whether we are just a collection of moments, or whether there is some kind of defining thread" ("Interview" 58).

Since this quest for "an essential centre" is "the defining thread" of the narratives that contain it, the search itself propels the narrator through his stories, leaving his own centrality equally open to debate throughout. Hence, by 'knowingly' questioning his centrality, the narrator is able to take greater liberties with the movements and migrations of his characters so as to emphasize his *and* their marginal status; a marginality which arises despite or because of his apparent omnipresence:

> 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?
>> Of what type - angelic, satanic - was Farishta's song?
>> Who am I?
>> Let's put it this way: who sings the best tunes? (SV 10)

Interestingly, the narrator-in-question seems comfortable enough with his insider/outsider

condition to consciously and ironically exploit it as a center of privilege. In this sense, he is not

as much out to 'prove' his story or his centrality therein, as he is to see what imaginative leaps of

faith he can make with it. This privileging of the insider-outsider position is paralleled in Said's

use of exile as a paradigm for "scrupulous subjectivity."[5] For Said it is a model to adopt when

working (perhaps too comfortably) within central powerhouses of authority. For Rushdie and

his narrators it is the basis from which to ask "extraordinary questions, [and] open new doors in

our minds" (IH 423). When viewed within Said's understanding of exile as metaphor, the

omniscient narrator's claims to marginality, together with the ironic distance he sets between

himself and his creations, may seem less paradoxical:

> [W]hile it is true to say that exile is the condition that characterizes the intellectual as
> someone who stands as a marginal figure outside the comforts of privilege, power, being-
> at-homeness . . . it is also very important to stress that that condition carries with it
> certain rewards and, yes, even privileges. . . . One of course is the   pleasure of being
> surprised, of never taking anything for granted, of learning to make do in circumstances
> of shaky instability that wouldconfound or terrify most people. . . . [To] look at situations
> as contingent, not as inevitable, look at them as the result of a series of historical choices
> made by men and women, as facts of society made by human beings, and not as natural
> or god-given, therefore unchangeable, permanent, irreversible. (Representations of the
> Intellectual 59;60)

As was seen with Sinai, this "de-linking of distress from dislocation," (Krishnaswamy,

"Mythologies of Migrancy" 137) is not always possible, even when accompanied by a

"scrupulous subjectivity." For instance, the overtly subjective Sinai's "'imaginary homelands' almost always are wrapped in a miasmic atmosphere of guilt, complicity and folly in which individual resistance seems futile, and collective resistance practically inconceivable" (142). Sinai's very attempts to reimagine (or fictionalize) India result in his inability to ever feel 'wholly at home' there again: by exposing the treachery of history, of India-as-fiction, Sinai will never again be at home in the historical depictions of India-as-fact. In contrast, the exilic condition can be used to its fullest advantage for the preternaturally disposed narrator whose primary location and point of reference is, from the outset, 'wholly imaginary'. This is not to suggest that the narrator unproblematically embraces the idea of homelessness; rather, it suggests that his search for home, for a sense of place, no longer implies a need to 'wholly belong' therein. It is neither the sole locus of distress nor one of several limitations in question; rather, it is the metaphorical point of origin from which to arrive at a "single, existential question: How are we to live [to belong] in the world [at large]?" (IH 18).

When *Flight AI-420*—the transoceanic flight from familiar terrain to foreign territory— falls from the sky, the narrator smugly asks: "did they imagine there would be no side-effects?" An archetypal fall deserves an archetypically consciousness-raising landing, the narrator seems to suggest, for "Higher powers had taken an interest . . . and such Powers (I am, of course, speaking of myself) have a mischievous, almost wanton attitude to tumbling flies." Since the process of flight signals Gibreel and Saladin's already uprooted states, cultural displacement (or, in this case, a "wanton" narrator), simply forces them to accept the inevitability of change. It is interesting to note, however, that prior to their expulsion from *Bostan*, the passengers "circled over England's shore like a gigantic seabird. Gull. Albatross. . . . [and] a curious detachment

from reality had come over the aircraft, a kind of inconsequential casualness, a fatalism, one

might say" (87).[6] Like a migrant bird, the aircraft's passengers seem to have set their sights

upon a particular target (namely, the *Vilayet* or foreign land that is England), which suggests a

conscious attempt on their part for seeking out new territory. However, in view of their

"detachment from reality," they do not seem to have a clear perception of what their search, or,

conversely, their descent (as is foreshadowed by the ominous "albatross"), may entail: could it

be the death of them? The narrator who clarifies that "[i]n the matter of tumbles, I yield pride of

place to no personage . . ." (SV 133), insists to the contrary: "No, not death: birth" (87). Or,

more precisely, re-birth. Rebirth as "process," as a continuation of former states of being to

newly imaginable heights (or depths).

Expelled from one garden, the characters' postlapsarian states must be understood and

developed within the context of their prelapsarian choices; if, that is, they are to learn 'how to

live' in the world once again.[7] It should come as no surprise that Gibreel and Saladin's

respective flights away from the motherland are the direct result of a loss of faith in kith, kin,

country and God. In their newly-acquired self-awareness the characters begin to realize that they

are becoming transmogrified versions of their past selves: self-awareness, of course, makes their

'otherness' overtly obvious. "Exile," writes David Bevan, "viscerally, is difference, otherness"

(Literature and Exile 3). And the exile's narrative must accordingly develop "in a two-faced, a

Janus-headed manner; . . . in a kind of progress-by-regression" (IH 384).[7] Since their falls are a

form of "bearing a-cross," the characters and their narratives begin to assume transcontinental

socio-political dimensions as well, for, as Said suggests: "[e]very scene or situation in the new

country necessarily draws on its counterpart in the old country. Intellectually this means that an

idea or experience is always counterposed with another, making them both appear in a

sometimes new and unpredictable light . . ." (60).

Andrew Gurr, in his study of <u>Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern</u>

<u>Literature,</u> accurately suggests that for the "colonial writer"—i.e., the writer moving from the

colony to the imperial centre--the search is not so much for the "solipsistic self" as it is for the

"psychosocial identity" that accompanies any itinerant search for 'home'. He writes:

> . . . [an] emphasis on the psychosocial identity instead of the ego created the possibility
> of communication outside the creating self. The very process of identifying the social
> causes of alienation makes the universal of the particular, the general case from the local
> island. (137)

This would appear to hold true for the post-colonial writer as well, excepting, of course, that the

lines between the centre and margin are now less conspicuous; and, perhaps, making the need

for universalizing "the social causes of alienation" that much stronger. Restorations (or

reclamations of identity and, by extension, faith), are, for the migrant self and/or the migrant

author, inescapably politicized in their aim, and inescapably universal in their reach. In other

words, if Gibreel and Saladin are to find a secure, stable identity in their future habitats, they

must do so in the full-blown awareness of their religious, social, cultural and political histories;

within the context, that is, of their 'original' loss of faith and place in the India of their past. As

the split selves of an omnipresent narrator, such deterministic rummaging involves "[t]he full

Virgilian descent [that] is the exile's dream, a new lease on future property" (Seidel 13). Since

his migrant characters are now each living uncertainly within the hollow shells of their past

religious avowals or disavowals, this 'descent' involves a return to the roots of Islamic faith and,

still further, to the nature of faith itself.

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The metaphor of exile—as prefigured by Satan's "unsettled condition"—suggests that to be at once inside and outside is to 'possess' a double perspective that can either distort or clarify, debilitate or liberate. As such, the exilic or unsettled condition—as a paradoxical state of inbetweenness—becomes a place of doubt and, if consciously exploited, a fertile place of inquiry: "an imaginary homeland." Since exile-as-metaphor is "central" to the thematic and stylistic structure of a multitextual narrative, the narrator is able to privilege 'doubt' as the primary point of origin for blasting open the possibility of newly imaginable histories. In fact, the narrative itself mirrors this splitting or 'blasting open', such that the narrator is indistinguishable from his two doubting protagonists, and may defer laying unequivocal claim to either his omniscience or centrality. The subsequent search for home becomes a metaphorical search for the "center" or state of 'being at ease' with oneself (and one's questions). For Saladin and Gibreel, who are not merely in the process of flight but in the process of fleeing, any such forward-moving steps toward self-affirmation and self-determination must be achieved in the "scrupulous" awareness of their Indian heritage and histories; in light of the "unfinished business" of their past. For a narrator wrestling with two such embodiments of good and evil, angel and devil, *farishta* and *shaitan*, this search entails a descent into the psyche of both doubter and believer; a return to the archetypal confrontation between satanic intervention and divine inspiration; and, by extension, a comparison between personal and historical tests of 'faith'.

The latter half of this chapter attempts to trace the numinous tests of faith each protagonist must endure before he is to find a sense of place, an 'essential centre', if at all. By so doing, the manner in which each character embodies both the functionary and visionary role of the narrator himself is brought to light, such that their exilic experiences and subsequently

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heightened self-consciousness, "with all its attendant qualities such as individualism and isolation, even more than their compensatory principles of artistic freedom and integrity, becomes the essential pre-requisite of the artist" (Gurr 10). In other words, by tracing Saladin and Gibreel's experiences of exile, the narrator will come to expose both the fecundity and liminality of the imaginary homeland as a metaphorical place for any such reclamations of voice, of centrality, of "land, belonging, home."

Immediately prior to tracing the events leading up to their falls, the narrator describes Gibreel and Saladin's moment of re-awakening:

> These were the first words Gibreel Farishta said when he awoke on the snowbound English beach with the improbability of a starfish *by his ear*: "Born again, Spoono, you and me. Happy birthday, mister; happy birthday to you.'
> Whereupon Saladin Chamcha coughed, sputtered, *opened his eyes*, and, as befitted a new-born babe, burst into foolish tears. (SV 10; emphasis added)

Juxtaposing Gibreel's unquestioning auditory call to renewal with Saladin's open-eyed hesitations, the narrator hints at the manners in which each character may come to assimilate their migratory experiences and inevitable transformations. While Gibreel's magnanimity is certainly appealing, Saladin's puerile reaction will in fact become the more durable of the two perspectives. The passive/active dichotomy underlined by each character will in turn underline the extent to which the narrator will come to wrestle with their respective histories. Although the narrator defers 'taking sides'—because, of course, to do so would be a form of *self*-denial—the characters' reactions foreground the implicit privileging of Saladin's instinctive resistance over Gibreel's blind acceptance.

When the narrator effortlessly slips back in time to Gibreel's acting career as India's "most acceptable, and instantly recognizable, face of the Supreme," he does so without fanfare,

since "[f]or many of his fans, the boundary separating the performer and his roles had longago ceased to exist" (17; sic). Gibreel's centrality as the star of "popular genre movies known as 'theologicals'" is attributed to "the magic of his persona . . . in crossing religious boundaries without giving offence" (16). As such, his rebirth on English soil is, in and of itself, nothing to write home about. Furthermore, Gibreel's knack for reinventing himself—by absorbing the "countless deities of the subcontinent"—shares an uncanny resemblance to Sinai's self-proclaimed knack for absorbing the many-headed voices of midnight. Fortunately for this narrative, perhaps, the omnipresent narrator is privy to past as well as present claims to centrality, and appears to treat Gibreel's self-made deification with a healthy dose of suspicion:

> Or, but, thenagain . . . always. There are secular reincarnations, too. Gibreel Farishta had been born Ismail Najmuddin in Poona, British Poona at the empire's fag-end. . . . Ismail after the child involved in the sacrifice of Ibrahim, and Najmuddin, star of the faith; he'd given up quite a name when he took the angel's. (17; sic)

This tempered suspicion towards Gibreel is further justified by the 'illness' that is alternately referred to as the "Phantom Bug," the "Ghostly Germ," the "Mystery Malaise" and the "Nameless Ailment" (11, 15); again, it faintly echoes the "disease of optimism" motif plaguing Sinai's generation. Ironically, Gibreel's miraculous recovery leads to his withdrawal from the limelight, to his apostasy and, finally, to his ill-fated love affair with the British-born Everest-climber, Alleluia Cone. When the narrator alludes to the factual destination of Hindu pilgrimages (at the southernmost point of mainland India) as the defining moment, location and as yet undetermined source of Muslim-born Gibreel's disease, the transposition of the 'illness' motif from Midnight's Children to The Satanic Verses becomes apparent. Here, too, any such blind forms of acceptance or 'optimism' in India's secular identity require 'vanquishing':

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... taking part in a fight scene set at the point on Cape Comorin where it seems that three oceans are truly smashing into one another. Three sets of waves rolled in from the west east south and collided in a mighty clapping of watery hands just as Gibreel took a punch on the jaw, perfect timing, and he passed out on the spot, falling backwards into tri-oceanic spume. ... To begin with everybody blamed the giant English stunt-man Eustace Brown, who had delivered the punch. ... But it was not the punch that had flattened Gibreel. (27-28)

Receiving a mortal blow from the 'imperious' hand of a 'hired' English stuntman, Gibreel's fall can and is blamed on superior western 'armed' forces. The diagnosis of the defamatory illness is a far murkier business, however, and it soon grips the nation as well: "[i]f Gibreel died, could India be far behind?" (29).

Gibreel's plunge to "tri-oceanic spume" is the country's plunge into the belief that the "image" (i.e., Gibreel) of religious harmony is concomitant with the socio-political 'constitution' of India itself; that is, the 'optimistic' belief that the image is an accurate reflection of reality. India's fate, therefore, seems inextricably tied to the ill-fated star who embodies, one might say, their collective disease.[8] Ironically, then, Gibreel's 'recovery' is India's recovery, but it is conversely the death of the belief that Gibreel's "countless deities of the subcontinent" may coexist, if not intermingle. As such, Gibreel's recovery signals 'change' "to a startling degree, because he had lost his faith" (29). His loss of faith in God and, by extension, in his 'theological' career is substituted by "a terrible emptiness, an isolation, as he realized he was talking to *thin air*" (30). Echoing Sinai's fall to vaporous anonymity, Gibreel's moment of doubt is immediately translated into the metaphor of exile. And who better, of course, to speak for Gibreel when he is gripped by his own "isolation" than an exilic narrator who is intimately acquainted and acculturally adept in de- and re-contextualizing the vocabulary of exile. Hence, the narrator's formal inquiry—conducted in his own characteristically equivocal

manner--seeks to account for Gibreel's 'flight':

> Why did he leave?
> Because of her, the challenge of her, the newness, the fierceness of the two of them together, the inexorability of an impossible thing that was insisting on its right to become.
> And, or, maybe: because after he ate the pigs the retribution began, a nocturnal retribution, a punishment of dreams. (32)

Having arrived at the moment of Gibreel's flight, the narrator proceeds to turn his

attention to Saladin--Gibreel's alter-ego and nemesis--and his moment of departure from the

motherland. These juxtaposed narrative flashbacks clearly demonstrate the narrator's need to

adapt and readapt himself to the demands of his own narratological split. Since Saladin's flight

has been an on-going and conscious attempt at dissociation from the motherland, the narrator

must befittingly "drag" his character back through time:

> Damn you, India, Saladin Chamcha cursed silently, sinking back into his seat. To hell with you, I escaped your clutches long ago, you won't get your hooks in to me again, you cannot drag me back. (35)

It is interesting to note that the transition from present to past for Saladin becomes a transition

from realism to fable, from the overtly subjective "I" to the dissociated "He" of a past he refuses

to in any way connect to his present-day reality:

> Once upon a time - *it was and it was not so*, as the old stories used to say, it happened and it never did - maybe, then, or maybe not, a ten year old boy from Scandal Point in Bombay found a wallet lying in the street outside his home. . . . it was full of cash, - and not merely rupees, but real money . . . Pounds sterling, from Proper London in the fabled country of Vilayet across the black water and far away. (35)

This inversion of the personal to the impersonal, this generic juxtapositioning of fantasy with

reality is merely a continuation of Rushdie's bi-polarizations. "It was" is interchangeable with

"it was not," belief is counterpoised with disbelief, such that a given perspective is continually

challenged by 'an-other' point of view. In former times, London was a dream awaiting

actualization; 'now' it is the reality to which Saladin clings. The self-conscious return to the

past that the narrator is attempting to evoke in his character calls back to view the contrived

reality that is Saladin Chamcha in light of the buried reality that is Salahuddin Chamchawala.

From Saladin's point of view, such digressions merely call attention to the dream-like quality of

his waking world: i.e., the "English" world he wishes to cultivate within himself to the extent

that his former "Indian" self is no longer recognizable. When the narrator recalls Saladin's

earliest migration to England with his father, he questions the flight in the syntax of either/or, in

terms of oppositional pairing; or, conversely, he presents both the 'head' and 'tail' of the

proverbial (flipped) coin:

> How far did they fly? Five and a half thousand as the crow. Or: from Indianness to
> Englishness, an immeasurable distance. Or, not very far at all, because they rose from
> one great city, fell to another. The distance between cities is always small; a villager,
> travelling a hundred miles to town, traverses emptier, darker, more terrifying space.
> (41)

The narrator's challenge is to bring his characters to the self-realization that all such

polarities are continually 'omnipresent'. His intermittent returns to India are an excruciating

reminder of a "double exile" in which any such "sunderings" between old and new allocations of

home are spatially, temporally and, most obviously, linguistically "irreparable." Saladin's

condition is, in this context, akin to to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's "model of the 'black hermit' or the

'chosen son'" which Andrew Gurr suggests is indicative of the colonial exile's unique plight:

> [This] is involuntary deracination—the child is chosen long before he can have any
> awareness of what is to happen to him—and because there is a direct debt, a financial
> obligation, the ties to home are stronger and more painful. The journey into exile is if
> anything even longer, because the gulf between home and the metropolis is dug deeper
> by that most basic of cultural differences, language. The language of education is

English, the medium for successful publication is English, the language of international contact—and even on national contact within the educated elite—is English. Home is a different language. It is a double exile, in culture and in the tongue by which the exile chooses to live and work. (28)

Saladin's loss of faith is a loss of faith in any power that can at once 'open up the world' without providing so much as the illusion of security to fall back on should the 'new world' fail to understand him, and vice versa; more precisely, a loss of faith in the father-figure who, upon being "an open-sesamist," withheld "a magic lamp" (SV 69).

Bereft of so much as the illusion of a centred sense of self, home and language, Saladin finds Gibreel's cinematic centrality nothing more than "a banal kind of egomania" (83). Ironically, Saladin's own career as "the Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice" (60) parallels Gibreel's egocentric talents. In keeping with the media-speak these characters at once personify and parody, the difference between them may be viewed as a matter of 'location': where Gibreel finds 'big screen' stardom in the homeland, Saladin's 'small screen' leading role in "The Aliens Show" merely reinforces the "idea of aliens-as-freaks," of Saladin's own marginalized position in "America, Eurovision, the world" (63). The narrator attempts to reconcile his character's precarious predicament by dragging him back to the realities of kith, kin and country so that he may more easily identify the tenuous and duplicitous world of his "reliable, English self" (73). Consequently, Saladin's present-day reality becomes irreversibly haunted by the "dream" of what he "was leaving behind." His self-affirming claim that "[h]e was a member of the real world" (74) sounds stereotypically like the self-deprecating voice of the colonized 'mimic man' he has groomed himself to be, and subsequently raised to the level of 'art' or a 'freak show' (depending on one's perspective!). In this sense, the claim to a 'real' membership to

Englishness is the fantasy that he 'alone' has created as a substitute for a new world devoid of "magic lamps"; a fantasy that he must accordingly un-create if he is to "counter falsehoods" with "[n]ot only the need to be believed in, but to believe in another" (49). Given their 'performative' histories, Gibreel and Saladin head to the *Vilayet* of their intended destinations not as themselves, but as 'falling stars' on the (radar) 'screen' of 'British-controlled' air-space. It is worth noting, then, that when their plane is finally tracked down, "radio messages crackled. *Do you want permission to land.* But no permission was requested" (87). Gibreel and Saladin's imminent arrival upon the scene of the 'fabled' city is, in a manner of speaking, an alien space-invasion; one which will have a mutually explosive and defamatory impact on all parties concerned.

In his article, "Postcolonial Differend: Diasporic Narratives of Salman Rushdie," Vijay Mishra correctly points to the nature of said 'impact': that is, "precisely the threat of the new, the threat of 'ideas' no longer commensurable with pre-existing epistemologies" (12). While both characters experience 'change' in its exaggerated form, responding to their 'new' lives in the *Vilayet* from the extreme perspectives of angel or devil, it is important to note that their transformations occur for one and the same reason: the "terror of losing [their] mind[s] to a paradox, of being unmade by what [they] no longer believed existed . . . for blinding [themselves] to past hardships so that the future could come into view" (SV 189; 190); i.e., the underlying tragic flaw of Sinai's imaginable community.

Gibreel and Saladin epitomize, in their newly mutating states as illegal aliens, landed immigrants, exiles, emigres, expatriates--in a word, as 'novelty'--the futility of reconstitution without a concomitant and thorough examination of past constituents. By extension, if Gibreel

and Saladin are the 'new' body politic of the diasporic community, their wholly 'unreal' place in the *Vilayet* similarly points toward the futility of constructing "nationalisms through a homogeneous and synchronous imagining of a collective body" (10). Thus, the five fictionalized locations in The Satanic Verses--namely, cosmopolitan London and Bombay, the "many-headed" *Desh* of the Imam, the *Titlipur* of Ayesha's call to martyrdom, and the *Jahilia* of pre-Islamic history--are each instances in which the 'collective body' is challenged and/or shaken by the 'idea' of the new.[9] While London and Bombay must each confront and accommodate their growing and mutating ethnicity or plurality, the diverse terrains of *Desh, Titlipur* and *Jahilia* are challenged with the idea of the singular. Each territory, however, may be viewed as a place in which "overall authority . . . isn't very popular: an all-rounder in an age of specialist statues" (99). These threatened socio-political constructs of "overall authority" mirror the volatility of an omniscient narrator working within an overtly eclectic and hybridized text. The narrative itself--like the cities it fictionalizes and the characters it describes--changes and mutates. In Rushdie's words, "[i]t keeps turning into another kind of book" ("Interview" 58). Gibreel and Saladin, as its central characters, effectuate the narrative's metamorphic quality: their messianic and linear perspectives force the narrative as a whole to accommodate temporal and spatial fluctuations--e.g. between seventh century Jahilia to twentieth century London. Again, the narrator is faced with the very challenges his characters force upon the cities they inhabit: each must accommodate and create a form in which the 'acting overall authority' may approach the historical and transcendental without seeming to bring "a judgement upon, an invalidation of, the religious faith [or the lack thereof] of the characters' being described . . . [that is] a form must be created which allows the miraculous and mundane to co-exist at the same level - as the

same order of event" (IH 376).

In a text that is at once a celebration of the hybridity and fluidity of identity and a search

for the "essential centre" (keeping both the secular and sacred viewpoint in mind), the narrator

must approach his stories in such a way as to emphasize binary opposition as the "true dialectic

of history" (Rushdie, Shame 266)—without which the very challenge to accommodate 'change',

'difference', 'otherness' would not exist. The exilic condition, in this context, simply becomes a

point of reference from which this dialectic is most readily apprehensible (and, by extension,

most immediately comprehensible) precisely because it is itself an inherently binary condition.

By first having suggested that Gibreel and Saladin's narratives are the divergent forces at work

within the narrator's exilic perspective, the fact that these two oppositional forces may be seen

to complement each other is entirely reflective of Rushdie's paradigm of collapsible polarities.

The Gibreel/Saladin polarity is the "Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha" (SV 5) complex—one

which is further brought to view by Rushdie's fictionalization of 'Mahound's call to prophecy

and the 'Imam's call to 'revolution', for both figures are shown to rise to the 'singular' from

marginal positions of exile. Furthermore, these narratives function as an extension of Gibreel's

new-found perspective as the archangel and, as such, occur as his "dream" state. Since the

Mahound/Imam stories emanate from Gibreel's viewpoint, they necessarily also both counter

and counterpoise the struggles Saladin faces from his exilic perspective: that is, like Saladin and

Gibreel, Mahound and the Imam each become one of two simultaneously interchangeable and

contrary responses to exile: that is, exile as possible revolution and exile as possible evolution.

Through the Imam's involuntary exilic perspective, Rushdie envisions the extreme

manifestation of "the paradox of exile." The Imam's exile is described as follows:

Who is he? An exile. Which must not be confused with, allowed to run into, all the other words that people throw around: emigre, expatriate, refugee, immigrant, silence, cunning. . . . The exile is a ball hurled into the air. He hangs there, frozen in time, translated into a photograph; denied motion, suspended impossibly above his native earth, he awaits the inevitable moment at which the photograph must begin to move, and the earth must reclaim its own. These are the things the Imam thinks. His home is a rented flat. It is a waiting-room, a photograph, air. . . . The curtains . . . are kept shut all day, because otherwise the evil thing might creep into the apartment: foreignness, Abroad, the alien nation. (205-6)

While the narrator admonishes his reader not to confuse "the exile" with "all the other words

that people throw around," he proceeds to describe the Imam within a vocabulary of exile with

which his reader is, or should be, quite familiar; a vocabulary with which the "expatriate,

emigre, refugee, immigrant" have also been described. The Imam-as-exile is not so very

different from that of a narrator who models himself after the quintessential exile: all three

exiles are "suspended impossibly above [their] native [or narrative] earth." It seems equally true

of Defoe's Satan and Rushdie's narrator to suggest that they have managed to transform

'suspension' into 'suspended animation': in this sense, the narrator "moves" his own

"photograph" since he has seemingly opted to embrace the 'whole moving picture' over the one

static photograph which he can never fully recapture. The Imam's 'reclamation' of his past,

however, is qualified as a return to a singularly static "Untime" (215)--the antithesis to the

narrator's fluctuations "across, through and beyond" time. For this reason, perhaps, the narrator

has no qualms about imposing an equally singular identity upon the Imam: "who is he? An

exile." In contrast, the "who am I?" with which the narrative began is still "up in the air," still in

the 'process' of translation. Therefore, it is still open to the possibility of translating the exilic

experience into something more than the physical limitations manifest in being "here and not

There" (206).

55

'Mahound/Muhammad's' orphanhood in and exile from Jahilia similarly elicits the revolutionary impulse activated in the Imam. Jahilia is a city in which "religious practices" have been licentiously mixed with "the tempting spices of profanity . . . [and] [t]his is the world into which Mahound has brought his message: one one one. Amid such multiplicity, it sounds like a dangerous word" (103). Multiplicity in Jahilia is paradoxically duplicitous, because it is a static multiplicity that rejects, if not fears, opening itself up to the fluidity of the new. (Note: water is the enemy in desert-bound Jahilia.) When Mahound compromises the new, singular vision for Jahilia's old idols, he risks repeating or replicating an intrinsically flawed equation: that is, of the morally bankrupt as practitioners of faith. When cast in the shadow of the prophet's revelations of 'one God', 'one Idea', 'one Ideal', such moments of accommodation can be nothing less than satanically inspired. But the prophet—as a visionary rather than a mere re-visionist—is not about to succumb to the cyclic pressures of history, "the commodius vicus of recirculation" (Gurr 12). In this manner, he is able to set a new precedent out of which, one might say, contemporary "BabyLondon" or Bombay must, like Jahilia, look toward a new vision of re-formation; if, that is, their inherent multiplicity does not transmogrify their inhabitants into the "monstrous" or "grotesque." While the Imam's exile is a revolutionary impulse rearing back toward the "untime" that makes unwitting martyrs of its followers, Mahound will eventually return from "the new beginning of Time" (SV 125) that makes saints and citizens of its fringe-dwelling "water-carrier immigrant slave" (104) disciples.

Gibreel's visions of the Prophet and the Imam's moments of reckoning draw the narrative back to his and Saladin's moments of reckoning in the *Vilayet* of their own future. Gibreel's dream-visions enable him to understand "something of what omnipresence must be

like, because he is moving through several stories" (457). But Gibreel's insight into sacred and sacrilegious affairs strips him of the ability to discern the difference between "the waking and dreaming states." Gibreel is, in this sense, still a superimposed image that is disconnected from the reality of his immediate physical surroundings. Saladin's demonization, on the other hand, has situated him in the midst of a reality that, once lived, cannot be expunged from his consciousness: "[i]llegal immigrant, outlaw king, foul criminal, race-hero, Saladin Chamcha was getting to be true" (288). When the two actors stand face to face once again, the narrator demands to know, once and for all, just who and what they really are:

> Well, then. - Are we not coming closer to it? Should we even say that these are two fundamentally different *types* of self? Might we not agree that Gibreel, for all his stage-name and performances; and in spite of born-again slogans, new beginnings, metamorphoses; - has wished to remain, to a large degree, *continuous* - that is, joined to and arising from his past; . . . so that his is still is a self which, for our present purposes, we may describe as 'true' . . . whereas Saladin Chamcha is a creature of *selected discontinuities*, a *willing* reinvention; his *preferred* revolt against history being what makes him, in our chosen idiom, 'false'? (426)

Given the narrator's desire to get to the 'heart' of the matter in question, it may be assumed that such stark polarizations will not easily satisfy. Hence:

> - But, and again, but: this sounds, does it not, dangerously like an intentionalist fallacy? - Such distinctions, resting as they must on an idea of the self being (ideally) homogenous, non-hybrid, 'pure'; - an utterly fantastic notion! - cannot, must suffice. (426-7)

Indeed, this "idea of the self" as either two inhospitable halves struggling to inhabit an 'idyllic' whole, or one idyllic whole torn between two vying polarities, is clearly not going to "suffice" for a narrator who privileges his ability to travel freely between the "linear" and "God-like" hemispheres of his imagination; a narrator who revels in his ability to remain grounded in the here-and-now while letting his imagination soar into the "wayupthere (sic)" of possibility.

"But, and again, but," when Gibreel and Saladin proceed to step out of the *Vilayet* of their past and back into the India of their future where "[c]ommunalism, sectarian tension, was [is] omnipresent" (518), transformations are still underway; and his (the narrator's) question is still open to debate. While Gibreel's narrative of transcendence culminates in a postmodern narrative of punctuationless "discontinuities," Saladin's narrative coherently and 'realistically' evokes "the past, so that he knew nothing was forgotten, nothing lost; that in spite of the years of self-imposed sequestration he remained joined to the world" (527). The narrator, it would seem, is losing sight of one fixed 'idea' of *his* self in light of an 'other'. Once he returns to the 'homeland', then, Gibreel is once more subject to the "sickness" from which his flight to the transcendent began. Now that his visions have been unleashed upon a reality-in-flux, the disease that was formerly 'optimistic'— the disease that imposed the image of religious and racial harmony upon the many-headed nation-state of Bombay-London—is now the 'death' of him and of his centrality therein. Interestingly, as Gibreel's narrative dissipates into dissonant abstraction, it is as if this is the direction in which the 'eternal' dreamer has been heading along, in which language—and meaning—ceases to be sacred and communities cease to articulate 'faith' in forms that are mutually comprehensible. When Gibreel literally takes his own life with Saladin's newly inherited, albeit redundant, "magic lamp" (546), he rids his 'other half' of the onus of false senses of security, such that the "moonlight" may now more naturally engender "the illusion of a silver pathway, like a parting in the water's shining hair, like a road to miraculous lands" (547).

In The Satanic Verses, exile is a binary state that is subject to the dialectic of history; its outcome may either be interpreted as a process of reversion/conversion or revolution/evolution;

its impulses may similarly be viewed as visionary/revisionary or static/fluid, etc. However, for

the exile and for the populace in whose midst the exile lurks, it is both a metaphorical and literal

condition which disturbs the status quo, forces the new upon the old, and compels some 'form'

of change in an otherwise myth-ridden, image-laden world. In this manner, the point at which

Gibreel's 'magic' no longer predominates is the point at which it may 'live on' in Saladin's

world or, rather, as an integral though not exclusive part of the narrator's mind's eye. From it

miracles can lie 'ahead', but only with and through a conscious and conscientious 'faith' in the

'human' power to imagine and "master the river of words of time of blood . . . the ability to

conceive a thought, to speak it, and by doing so to *make it* true" (281). Ironically, the narrator--

who describes his world from the privileged site of homelessness--ends his narrative quest by

landing his characters 'back home'. By so doing, he situates his characters not so much in the

imaginary homeland of the exile, but, rather, in the 'India of his [scrupulously subjective] mind'.

NOTES

[1] Such Orientalist perceptions of Muhammad and, by extension, Islam are indicative of a body of work written and published by non-Muslims beginning in the late 18th Century. Among others, Edward Said's Orientalism offers an extensive analysis of the subsequent impact and penetration of Orientalist thought on western and eastern scholarship alike.

[2] While it is not the aim of this paper to explore the controversy surrounding The Satanic Verses, nor the author's subsequent defense, I believe it is necessary to point out that Rushdie's *oeuvre* (composed of literary works, essays, interviews and lectures) seeks to reclaim the marginalized voice from ideologically prescribed 'powers of description'. As such, the novel's title itself signals one of many such attempts at reclamation.

[3] The number 420 is rife with cultural symbolism and it highlights the "duplicitous" nature of 'midnight's children'. In colloquial Urdu, the number is used as a derogatory term for a "cheat" or an untrustworthy character, the origins of which can be traced to the Indian Penal Code 420 for corrupt or fraudulent activities. The number is also used in a popular Indian film, *Shri 420*, to which Rushdie alludes in Gibreel's "song" (Chapter I). 420 also refers to the true-to-life hijacking of Air India flight 420 in 1982 by Sikh dissidents.

[4] Like so many of Rushdie's allusions, "rebirth" as a leitmotif in The Satanic Verses is an amalgamation of Islamic, Christian, Judaic, Hindu, and Buddhist beliefs.

[5] See page 28, Chapter I, for Said's definition of "scrupulous subjectivity" from his article "The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile."

[6] The 12th Century Sufi Saint Muslin-ed-Din Sa'di composed *Bustan* and *Gulistan* (referring to Islam's twin gardens of paradise). The work is a mixture of prose and verse containing

dissertations on "justice, good, government, beneficence, earthly and mystic love, submissiveness," etc. It is said to contain the essence of Sufic wisdom. Here, the flight away from the motherland is named after Bustan, and the flight of return is named after Gulistan which has been said to be a "lighter and more humourous compilation than the Bustan" (Reuben Levy, ed., Stories from Sa'di's Bustan and Gulistan). See also Idris Shah's The Way of the Sufi for Sa'di's eminent role in the development of Sufic philosophy.

[7.] Rushdie attributes his paradigmatic "progress-by-regression" to Tom Nairn's discussion of nationalism. Using Nairn's model, Rushdie concludes: "the crisis of nationalism in India . . . can be traced to political, not religious, origins." See "In God We Trust, " Imaginary Homelands.

[8.] Note, Gibreel's nemesis, Rekha, screams: ". . . God knows what diseases you brought" (SV 26).

[9.] Rushdie weaves Urdu and Hindi vernacular throughout his *oeuvre*, the meanings of which are implicitly construable, but never overtly identified. In this case, *Desh* is the *Hindi* term for "the land of"; Jahilia is an Urdu term (of Arabic origin) referring to the period preceding the revelation of the Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad as one of "ignorance." Finally, the *Vilayet* to which I have alluded throughout simply means the "foreign territory" (also of Arabic origin). All Urdu and Arabic translations are derived from the Urdu and Arabic dictionaries cited at the end of this thesis.

Chapter III

<u>The Unimaginable Palimpsest of *The Moor's Last Sigh*</u>

*How many of us feel, these days, that something that
has passed too quickly is ending: a moment of life, a
period of history, an idea of civilisation, a twist in the
turning of the unconcerned world. . . . A double-
speed existence permits only half a life. . . . If a birth
is the fall-out from the explosion of two unstable
elements, then perhaps a half-life is all we can
expect. (145)*
                    - The Moor's Last Sigh

Saleem Sinai's newly-born but fast disintegrating community of 'Midnight's Children'

serves as an apt precursor to the protagonists of The Satanic Verses and their 'falling out' with

Mother India. Reminiscent of Midnight's Children's 'hope' for the future (in Aadam Sinai) and

The Satanic Verses' social conscience (in Zeenat Vakil), The Moor's Last Sigh is a thinly veiled

guise of Mother India's continuing family saga. This seemingly final novel of Rushdie's loosely

bound trilogy is a 'tumble back' toward the events leading up to Indian Independence, and a

'tumble forward' to what may be deemed as both Sinai and Farishta/Chamchawala's post-

independence future. Thus, the Moor's story travels full-circle through narrative space and time,

that is, 'backwards and forwards' to Rushdie's present-day India. As with each of his novels,

these fictive, historical and temporal digressions are integral to the otherwise chronologically

developing metaphor of Rushdie's 'paradox of exile'; chronological because with each novel

there occurs a linear progression through time, and, digressive, because with each step into the

future Rushdie's protagonists find themselves one step further removed from their first love,

their country of origin. Indeed, the open-ended quality of Midnight's Children and The Satanic

Verses encounters its finality in the bindingly circular narrative of The Moor's Last Sigh.

Narrated from the most extreme of all exilic perspectives thus far experienced by Rushdie's

protagonists, The Moor's Last Sigh, as the title itself suggests, signals the narrator-in-exile's

sense of closure as he approaches his national narrative. In other words, the Moor's epic role as

quester and questioner is over: the nation is a fact, its unity a fiction, and faith but a matter of

highly 'classified' national security. This story, therefore, will be the narrator-in-exile's final

reflection upon the paradox of exile: now most acutely subject to the folly of his own

imaginative illusions, the narrator-in-exile is also most self-consciously aware that, in the final

analysis, only the creative act can liberate him from the unimaginatively repetitive shackles of

his-story.

As has been shown, Saleem Sinai's self-consciously subjective birth and subsequent

exilic experiences embody the birth and disintegration of 'midnight's children', or, rather, the

dissolution of Sinai's self-made claim to omniscience through a unifying national voice.

Figuratively speaking, the migrant body politic of The Satanic Verses is unable to give voice to

the already uprooted and sundered community, and must resort to a wholly disembodied

omniscient narrator to recast its fragmented identity within any revelatory light. This narrative

posture engenders not simply a detached view of the homeland, but also of the spiritual crisis at

its roots, a crisis which first needs to be reckoned with on an individual level. This is best

illustrated in the Gibreel/Saladin complex—the narratological, existential split within the

omniscient narrator's own consciousness. Unfortunately, by the time (real and imaginary) the

Moor is to write *his* story, the crisis of 'faith' played out in The Satanic Verses is magnified on

an epic scale within the Indian homeland of Gibreel and Saladins's future. Consequently, the

Moor narrates his story at a time when he is "alone now, motherless ... appear[ing] to lose, in

these last pictures, his previous metaphorical rôle as a unifier of opposites [The Satanic Verses],

a standard-bearer of pluralism [Midnight's Children], ceasing to stand as a symbol - however

approximate - of the new nation . . ." (MLS 303). The current family epic that is the history of

the nation comes to be narrated by an overtly subjective, first-person narrator who has little to no

control over his own destiny, much less that of his nation's peoples. Moraes Zogoiby, the

narrator-in-exile of The Moor's Last Sigh, finds himself relegated outside his-story and, much

like his predecessor Sinai, he, too, must tell his story in a rush against time. Moraes—a.k.a. the

Moor—is "chained to history" in a way that would make even the likes of Sinai cringe, for he is

compelled to tell his story under nothing less than the threat of extinction—a severe 'sentence'

for one who self-confessedly claims to signal the 'end' of the family line. While Sinai's mission

was to imagine his community anew before it turned into something unidentifiably grotesque,

and the omniscient narrator of The Satanic Verses sought to put back together the pieces of an

altogether displaced, dis-possessed narrative, the Moor tells his story for the sheer purpose of

survival. In this respect, the Moor must relate his story before he, like his subject matter,

disappears under the accumulating layers of time that together compose (or decompose?) the

unimaginable palimpsest of History's darker truths.

The Moor's story is told from an extreme perspective of physical, cultural and emotional

exile; that is, within the confines of "Vasco's folly," a 'has-been' artist's self-made exile in the

fictional Spanish town of Benengeli—aptly named after the narrator of Cervantes' Don Quixote.[1]

Rushdie's allusion to Don Quixote prefigures the Moor's world as one with a Don Quixote-like

penchant for superimposing fantasy over reality. The Quixote link underscores the author's use

of the 'palimpsest' as a metaphor for the manner in which History 'confines' one to a singular

version/vision of events under which multiple layers may lie undisclosed, or erased. The palimpsest model makes credible the multiple, layered texture of the Moor's own family history and lineage. The Quixote allusion, both thematically and formally, reinforces Rushdie's link with Spanish history—and the dense, complex religious and ethnic habitational patterns it implies—as one of many *under*lying canvases of the Moor's otherwise acutely *Indian* history. In this manner, the expulsion of Boadbil (the last sultanate of Moorish rule) from Spain in 1492, together with Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama's anchoring in the Indian harbour of Cochin in 1498 (on behalf of the newly-installed Christian seat of rule), become the historical axis around which the Moor's tale pivots. On the one hand, Vasco and Boabdil are symbols of the Moor's family's claim to an entirely atypically 'Indian' ancestry—which, in Rushdie's ethos of culture, is a typically mixed Indian heritage. On the other hand, Rushdie's portrait of contemporary Indian nationalism as an escalatingly *ethnocentric* movement with a "Hindu preference for the eternal stability of caste" and "'natural residents'" (299) is underscored by the Moor's parallel universe of Benengeli—a symbol of the darker side of Spain's modern history, where the "folk had been plunged into deep mourning" (387) over Franco's death.

The intricate layering of tale upon tale that the palimpsest model exemplifies is Rushdie's India—or Life itself:

> The city itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World Beneath Over World, black market beneath white; when the whole of life was like this, when an *invisible reality* moved phantomwise beneath *a visible fiction, subverting all its meanings* . . . how could any of us have escaped that deadly layering? How trapped as we were in the hundred percent fakery of the real . . . could we have penetrated to the full, sensual truth of *the lost mother below*? How could we have lived authentic lives? How could we have failed to be *grotesque*? (184: emphasis added)

This "visible fiction" is, of course, reminiscent of the "fakery" plaguing Sinai's generation at the

earliest stages of its post-colonial birth and development. "The lost mother below" is further reminiscent of the 'Mother India' who was meant to raise a healthy community of 'midnight's children'--a mother now "lost" to the grotesqueness of her "many-headed" progeny that is the subverted "dream" of a united India. For the narrator-in-exile, then, the palimpsest model is central to the way in which he will fashion and understand his story, for by the time he is to recount ". . . the legends of the battling da Gamas of Cochin . . . as they come down to [him] . . . by many re-tellings" (11), the "full, sensual truth" of the family--of 'midnight's children'--is long lost. Consequently, the Moor is by far the most sceptical of Rushdie's exiled narrators. "[E]xpelled from his story, [and tumbling] towards history" (2), how can he fail to be sceptical? Given the "polished and fantasticated" (11) nature of his family's history, he is quick to remark that he must either "make light of the dark" (5) or remain quite self-consciously subject to the lies it may very well perpetuate.

Rushdie's light/dark dichotomy illustrates the exiled narrator's continuing paradox of exile. The need to 'make light' of an otherwise uncomfortable predicament is the exile's need for a sense of humour when faced with the darker facts of his/her own history. Ironically, by 'making light of the dark', Rushdie's exiled narrator will be the one to bring to light (to view) the darker elements of his own history. Such word play points to the very doubleness of meaning that is the exile's legacy, a doubleness that is at once both to the exile's enlightenment and gloom. By seeing the doubleness in things (i.e., the classic bi-product of the insider/outsider condition), the narrator-in-exile is not so easily duped by the singular version of his story. Such word-doubling occurs not simply through the author's play on words and phrases, but also through his invention of word-pairs, which are to be found throughout the Moor's narrative; for

example, Vasco Miranda's ominous command: "Follow your instincts and *out*stincts!" (417), and the state of being both "incognito or *out*cognito" (411; emphasis added). Although this double perspective points to Rushdie's proliferating metaphor for India's duplicity, it is not, in the final analysis, to be valorized or confused with the concept of doubleness: "the *doubleness* in Grandfather Camoens . . . his willingness to permit the coexistence within himself of conflicting impulses . . . that hate-the-sin-and-love-the-sinner sweetness, that historical generosity of spirit, which is one of the wonders of India" (32; emphasis added). Rather, duplicity is the *in*ability to accept or perceive "the doubleness" in things, which, in its extreme case, becomes the "catastrophic conflict" (32) of the Moor's family divide. Again, given the Moor's extreme exilic state, he is able to perceive a coexistent doubleness in things, events, people, and is able to point to the divisiveness of family affairs, and the duplicity inherent in any claims to family unity from the outset. As has been seen in the former novels, however, the narrator-in-exile's double vision permits him to perceive from the outside what he is unable to act upon from the inside. This is most evidently 'brought home' in the novel's matter-of-factly titled opening chapter, 'A House Divided'--a house whose divisions will continue to proliferate until the Moor and his story stand alone and homeless.

The duplicity of India is, in historical terms, best delineated in Partha Chatterjee's study of Indian nationalist discourse, The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and PostColonial Histories. Before comparing Chatterjee's historical examination of Indian nationalism with Rushdie's imaginative account of Indian history, it is worth noting that Chatterjee's analysis is posited as a bone of contention with Benedict Anderson's assertion that the "imagined political community"--i.e., the modern nation--is a particularly *European* invention which "the rest of the

world" (Chatterjee 5), within its *post-coloniality*, came to imitate. The project of Indian

modernity as it pertains to the nation, Chatterjee argues, cannot be viewed as a purely borrowed

European idea. If one were to follow the course of Chatterjee's argument, those who have

attempted such political transpositions--such as Nehru--would tend to fall into the palimpsestic

trap, of which the Moor is clearly wary. Implying that the European model is simply and

categorically transferable over its former colonies is to overlook their own agency:

> anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society
> well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing
> the world of social institutions and practices into two domains - the material and the
> spiritual. *The material is the domain of the 'outside,'* the economy and the statecraft, of
> science and technology . . . In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be
> acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. *The spiritual, on
> the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. . .*
> nationalism declares the domain of the spiritual its sovereignty and refuses to allow the
> colonial power to intervene in that domain. . . . here nationalism launches its most
> powerful, creative and historically significant project: to fashion a 'modern' national
> culture that is nevertheless not Western. (6; emphasis added)

On the one hand, India's nationalism is a binary affair: material and spiritual, inner and outer,

inside and outside. (Rushdie's semantics of exile are immediately apparent here.) The duplicity

of India, on the other hand, surfaces within the spiritual domain of which Chatterjee speaks, the

domain with which Rushdie is most concerned within his creative writing: "the domain," to use

Chatterjee's words, "bearing the *essential marks of cultural identity.*" The spiritual domain

undercuts the notion of secularity as propounded by the likes of Nehru, and may point to the

underlying duplicity of India for its own fundamentally 'essentializing' nature. Chatterjee and

Rushdie would appear to agree that the essential nature of Indian cultural identity was not, as

Saleem Sinai had hoped, to be marked by its secular pluralism, but rather by a sovereignty of

culture over and above notions of diversity. Such a view of Indian identity, in keeping with its

'modem' (i.e., post-*colonial*) discourse, "insists that these collectivities have a fixed, determinate form, and, if there are several to which an individual can belong, that there be a priority among them, so that it becomes imperative to ask: 'Are you a Muslim or a Bengali first?'" (222-3).

This essentializing vision of Indian society is escalated to such a fanatical extreme by the Moor's age that it is something with which the narrator must self-consciously contend throughout the telling of his tale--particularly since his own cultural make-up is utterly confounded by his family's multiple ethno-religious minority status, one which would undoubtedly ring false should it be reduced to a single communal allegiance:

> Christian, Portuguese and Jews; Chinese tiles promoting godless views; pushy ladies, skirts-not-saris, Spanish shenanigans, Moorish crowns . . . can this really be India? Bharat-mata, Hindustan-hamara, is this the place?. . . No, sahibzadas. Madams-O: no way. Majority, that mighty elephant, and her sidekick, Major-Minority, will not crush my tale beneath her feet. Are not my personages Indian, every one? Well, then: this too is an Indian yarn. (MLS 87)

Interestingly, the essentializing "affairs of state" (87), as the Moor refers to them, find their earliest beginnings within the Moor's own family. The Moor's great-grandmother, Epifania Menezes (1877-1938), epitomizes the colonized consciousness, wherein the seeds of imperial loyalty are so securely embedded that any native attempts at colonial resistance are nothing short of self-betrayal.[2] When the British Raj is on the brink of collapse, however, Epifania's imperialism is merely transposed, and continues as an undifferentiating, self-serving struggle for political power--which, in her case, means from Portuguese to British to 'Hindu' fealty:

> the matrilinear principle, for which Cochin, Travancore and Quilon were famous, and according to which the disposition of family property would have been a matter for Madame Epifania to decide rather than the late Dr. da Gama, could by no stretch of the law be held to apply to the Christian community, being part of Hindu tradition alone.

'Then bring me a Shiva lingam and a watering can,' Epifania, according to legend, was heard to say . . . (28)

This is Rushdie's bleakest vision of Indian nationalism. His portrayal of Epifania, and later of the Moor's father, signal the exploitative, essentializing nature of all self-serving struggles for power, regardless of their minority status, regardless of their "marks of culture." In such a vision of Indian politics, the call to tradition is itself a call to power, and colonial rule plays but one part in a longer, more complex history of struggles for power. Colonialist discourse, with its legacy of opposition—e.g., us/them, east/west, native/other, modernity/tradition—set up an orientalist model which may well have served the early Indian historian's predication of subcontinental civilization as temporally and culturally divisible into periods of enlightenment and periods of dark medievalism (the latter referring to any and all 'invading' cultural or political bodies, including the British Raj). Echoing the orientalist view of Islam, Moghul rule may also be seen to have fallen under the latter 'dark' period, leaving "ancient India . . . [as] the classical source of Indian modernity" (Chatterjee 102). In other words, orientalist dichotomies were to continue under Indian nationalism, but through a different political lens, and serving a 'post-colonial' agenda.

Chatterjee's assessment of Indian nationalism may also be apprehended in terms of Rushdie's semantic of exile. If Indian nationalism sought to conserve if not reinvent tradition without compromising the project of modernity, it subsequently fell into the discourse of oppositional pairs. Keeping Chatterjee's model in mind, Rushdie's exiled narrators' sense of homelessness, or the condition of not feeling 'at home' even within the homeland (as has been seen with both Sinai and Saladin), may be seen as a purely political and historical condition:

> Applying the *inner/outer distinction* to the matter of concrete day-to-day living separates the social space into *ghār and bāhir, the home and the world*. The world is the external . . . the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. . . . The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world– and woman is its representation. (120; emphasis added)

In the Moor's world, too, the spiritual domain within has been exposed as a mere prop for the continuing success of the material domain without, and neither reflect the original, visionary conception of 'home'. On describing his 'homes', the Moor writes:

> Cabral Island, the first of my story's four sequestered, serpented, Edenic-infernal private universes. (My mother's Malabar Hill Salon was the second; my father's sky-garden, the third; and Vasco Miranda's bizarre redoubt, his 'Little Alhambra' in Benengeli, Spain, was, is, and will in this telling become, my last.) (MLS 15)

Befittingly, every setting within the Moor's world is described as an existential and physical form of exile that is, not surprisingly, also a state of permanent opposition, an Edenic-Hell, a fallen paradise, a paradox. The good-evil duality within the Moor's world, however, no longer functions as the hidden oppositional binary pair (Saleem/Shiva), nor as the exposed internal rift that binds or breaches one's faith in character (Gibreel/Saladin). Rather, the "knowing Eden" (206) of which the Moor speaks is quite simply an all-pervasive fact of life from which no one is, though many pretend to be, free.

These four "Edenic-infernal private universes" correspond to the growing political divisions of the Moor's world; divisions which are central to his extreme sense of exile. For while he is immersed in the everyday world of family life, he is severed from the people who comprise it, one member at a time, by the corrupting bodies of various socio-political, religious, economic and private allegiances. The Moor's homes are Edenic because they protect him from the encroaching knowledge that the affairs of state do not operate in the interest of his vision of

'home' (i.e., as the "romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation" [227]). The homes are private

Hells because their 'protectionism' perpetuates the Moor's own escalating sense of isolation

from his family who "were incapable of being reconciled" in their conflicting but "fiercely held

opinion" of how the affairs of state should handle the affairs of home (243). The Moor's homes,

built as some of them are on the water's edge of Bombay's 'reclaimed' land, function as a

twofold symbol for India's interreligious/racial/communal harmony and its "unfortunate"

opposite. In other words, India's "resident" minorities (most specifically, Muslim, Christian,

Jew) are, in the Moor's vision of the world, compelled to sink or swim within the upsurging

Hindu nationalist tide.[3] One might say that the Moor is but 'caught up' within the murky

business of having to take sides in the battle over property rights:

> In a way I had been in Indian country all my life . . . Not even an Indian was safe in
> Indian country; not if he was the wrong sort of Indian, anyway . . . In Indian country,
> there was no room for a man who didn't want to belong to a tribe, who dreamed of
> moving beyond; of peeling off his skin and revealing his secret identity - the secret, that
> is, of the identity of all men - of standing before the war-painted braves to unveil the
> flayed and naked unity of the flesh. (414)

Within the "naked" truth of the Moor's Edenic-Hells, each family member is slowly but

surely stripped down to his/her own unflatteringly corrupt or corruptible 'bare' essentials,

thereby exposing the myth of the Moor's Edenic vision of home, and rendering it inherently

bankrupt. These bare essentials directly echo Chatterjee's conclusion regarding Indian

nationalist discourse as an oppositional pairing of "false essentialism":

> . . . in the confrontation between colonialist and nationalist discourses, the dichotomies
> of spiritual/material, home/world, feminine/masculine, while enabling the production of
> nationalist discourse which is different from that of colonialism, nonetheless remains
> trapped within its framework of *false essentialism.* (Chatterjee 134; emphasis added).

The Moor's most unequivocal self-assessment—"I have been living in a *folly*"(MLS 54; emphasis

added)—reflects the folly which began in the guise of Sinai's "dream." The Moor's world is

diseased by the perpetuating legacy of delusion, of "magic lampism," to which Sinai and every

subsequent generation of 'midnight's children' fell prey. (Saladin's father promised his son a

magic lamp only to renege on the promise.) The imperfect past (continuous) tense, "have been

living," could, in this sense, be stretched across Rushdie's novels to subtly implicate the Moor's

fictive predecessors. In keeping with 'tradition', *Abraham* Zogoiby quite literally casts out his

son, the Moor, from the family's fortune, and adopts none other than Saleem Sinai's orphaned

bastard son, Aadam:

> 'Adam Zogoiby.' Known before that as: 'Adam Braganza.' And before that: Aadam
> Sinai.' And before that? If, as the admirable sleuths of the press discovered and
> *afterwards informed us,* his biological parents were named 'Shiva' and 'Parvati,' and
> considering his - forgive me for harping on them - really very large ears indeed, may I
> suggest, 'Ganesh?' Though 'Dumbo' - or 'Goofo,' 'Mutto,' 'Crooko' - or let's settle for
> 'Sabu' - might be more appropriate in the case of the detestable Elephant Boy. (358;
> emphasis added)

Aadam (now Adam) is India's other white elephant: the outer, material domain of the

'world'. Adam, therefore, is modernity incarnate: globalization, "not Ram [of *Rama*n Fielding's

RamRajyaist, Hindu Nationalist 'Battering Ram'] but RAM [of Adam's techno-cratic takeover]"

(343). Paul A. Cantor, in his article "Tales of the Alhambra: Rusdhie's Use of Spanish History

in The Moor's Last Sigh" speaks of Benegeli, the pseudo-multicultural village of the Moor's

exile, as the epitome of "the latest form of imperialism, multinational capital" (334). Cantor's

definition of "commercial cosmopolitanism" can just as accurately describe the nature of

Aadam/Adam's imperialistic domination over the Moor's family. Cantor continues:

> . . . the commodity culture of capitalism abstracts from the local, from anything that roots
> a people in their soil, and substitutes instead a world of falsely universal brand names . . .
> This commercial cosmopolitanism *denatures* human beings . . . a mere pastiche, whose

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unity is superficial. (334)

Rather than being India's hope for a plural, secular nation, Aadam becomes India's symbol of a

total, overblown expansion into the global market, his 'elephantine' ears now akin to "Star TV

satellite dishes" (MLS 341); his call to a united "we" a mere front for "developing" those

citizens who do not conform to the "management's" needs "to optimise manpower utilisation"

(342). Working Sinai's son into the fabric of the Moor's world as the usurper and subsequent

demise of the Moor's family empire, Rushdie seems to make no bones about the fact that this

story is a return to the question of Sinai's dream-world, one which appears to have made its

entry into the real world dead-on-arrival, or, at the very least, escalated its project of modernity

at such a rate as to leave behind the original dream in its 'long-buried' wake. Indeed, one of the

Moor's final admissions reveals that his exile in Benengeli had begun as a search for his artist-

mother Aurora's masterpiece, *The Moor's Last Sigh*—a search, that is, for the 'lost' portrait of

himself. However, the Moor's search is an afterthought of sorts, and, as such, an after-the-fact

mission, an anti-heroic anti-quest. Once the portrait is retrieved, no form of homecoming will

await the recovered heirloom nor the quester's return. Any indication of a return to the

homeland seems, if anything, out of the *question.*

It is helpful to examine Rushdie's mother/artist figure, for she is the dynamic, centrifugal

force within the novel, such that her art is the creative axis around which the Moor's story

oscillates. The mother's art underscores, perhaps, the most telling binarism within the Moor's

story: the changeable artistic narrative act versus the static historical narrative act. The mother

continues to carry the visionary torch behind which the prototype of the secular Indian nation

stands illuminated, but her ambivalent nature seems to point to the protean nature of Indian

national identity and the rapidly changing modern times in which she lives. Chatterjee's

assertion that women were to become the relegated representation—or, rather, instruments—of

the spiritual domain of 'home' in the binary affair of Indian nationalism is echoed in Rushdie's

interpretation of Indian nationalist discourse: "Motherness - excuse me if I underline the point -

is a big idea in India, maybe our biggest: the land as mother, the mother as land . . . Ladies-O,

gents-O: I'm talking *major mother country*" (137-8). However, Rushdie's Aurora-figure seems

to act as the author's attempt to undermine such rigid forms of representationalism. Similarly,

his protagonist seems equally critical of representationalist trends which, like art itself, are mere

invention. The Moor writes:

> The year I was born, Mehboob Productions' all-conquering movie *Mother India*
> . . . hit the nation's screens. Nobody who saw it ever forgot that glutinous saga of village
> India made by the most cynical urbanites in the world . . . [where] the Indian peasant
> woman is idealised as bride, mother, and producer of sons; as long-suffering, stoical,
> loving, redemptive, and conservatively wedded to the maintenance of the social status
> quo. (137)

The Moor's mother, Aurora, thus stands counter to the contrived 'motherly' side of

India's nationalist campaign: "Aurora was a city girl, perhaps *the* city girl, as much as the

incarnation of the smartyboots metropolis as Mother India was village earth made flesh" (139).

Paradoxically, she embodies its material side only to the extent to which she is still able to cut a

traditional figure, thereby further resisting any inexorable affiliation to her husband's

technocratic protegé and surrogate son, Adam. While her artistic vision of India runs decidedly

counter to the box-office national icon, *Mother India*, Aurora's persona is never fully realized, or

is forever in the process of being realized, as the case may be. Inhabiting the middle ground

between "'. . . truth and make-believe'" (137), Aurora appears to be the 'Mother' who

continually eludes India, because "even now, in the memory, she dazzles, must be circled about and about" (136). In other words, although Aurora's name evokes notions of 'newness' and 'luminosity', the idea of the 'new', in her case, is also 'paradoxically' permanent.

Aurora's defining masterpiece, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, is the last in a series of 'Moor paintings', which, though modelled after the exiled Sultan, 'captures' the Moor's essential characteristics as the anti-hero, the homeless son: he is the "haunted figure . . . a Ghost That Walked, and sank into abstraction . . . a composite being as pitiful and anonymous as those amongst whom he moved" (303). When fully revealed, Aurora's double Indian/Spanish Moor portrait is the defining palimpsest upon which the motif itself is hinged. The hidden portrait underneath is of the Moor's father, or, as some would have it, Aurora's suspected assassin, making the Moor not so much a wishy-washy subject as subject—like all things in Rushdie's world—to misrepresentation of the duplicitous kind. The Moor's family saga is, in this light, the painful awareness that history repeats itself, such that his story is but one more palimpsestic layer under and over which the "we" of plurality and secularity is but a fiction: "So we were invaders now, were we? After two thousand years we still did not belong, and, indeed, were soon to be 'erased'" (364).

The Moor, like his story, is under threat of erasure. Thus, the only perceivable truths to be found in Aurora's works (in the evidence of the family matters at hand) are the "harsh essentials," the pure emotions which are captured within the subjects' expressions. The most revealing quality of *The Moor's Last Sigh* is its subject's reaction to his exilic condition, for that is all that's left of him that is real, or knowable:

the so-called 'dark Moors', those pictures of exile and terror which she painted after my

departure, and which include her last unfinished, unsigned masterpiece . . . which, for all its great size had been stripped to the harsh essentials, all its elements converging on the face of its heart, the Sultan's face, from which horror, weakness, loss and pain poured like darkness itself, a face in a condition of existential torment reminiscent of Edvard Munch. It was a different picture from Vasco Miranda's sentimental treatment of the same theme as could possibly be imagined. But it was also a mystery picture, that 'lost painting' . . . (218)

Hovering over the Moor's story is the fact of his exile, for the psychological, existential void that is concentrated in the exile's expression is his crisis of self-perception—the "who am I" of The Satanic Verses' disembodied omniscient narrator. The Moor's true split with "Indian country" is, as such, the Moor's detachment from Indian affairs, a suspension of belief in the lost Eden— the essentially self-creating, self-perpetuating myth of his predecessors' past. The Moor's shedding of all visible ties to the "Indian country" of "false essentialism" is, in this light, also the exile's conscientious dissociation from the authorial and authoritarian canvas of History. While 'capturing' the Moor's exilic anguish, the mother's abstract art, in keeping with her namesake, paradoxically releases him from further re-inscription within the rigid, representationalist, 'essentializing' stroke of History's 'midnight's children'.

Paul Ilie, in his study of Spanish literature in relation to exile as a consequence of the Franco era, speaks of "eviscerated contemplation" as the state of finding oneself inhabiting a "hollowed present tense." There is a striking similarity between Ilie's and Rushdie's semantics of exile as 'paradox':

> Exilic space therefore can be either favorable, if perceived as a surrounding buffer, or unfavorable, if perceived as a limitless abyss. . . . a *hollowed present tense facing backward and forward to the substantive illusions of the past and the future.* Like the emigré, the ethnic provincial resident who transfers his home to another region has to cope with the memory of his prior existence. He is one and the same person who now grapples with difficulties in a *polytemporal framework.* . . . The individual is split into several personages inhabiting time dimensions which converge upon *an empty 'now.'*

This "eviscerated contemplation" parallels the "harsh essential" quality captured in the Moor's

expression. Now without any trace of the "forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, *land,*

belonging, home" (SV 4), nor the 'truth' of his parents' past, the Moor's search should function

as a quest to make at least his present alienation "mean something." Sinai had, after all, left it

up to the Moor's generation to make *hi*story meaningful. As has been shown, the Moor's

potential as an Indian epic hero went up in flames, along with Sinai's son. The Moor's exile,

therefore, seems to suggest that he is compelled to write his story in hindsight alone, a form of

hindsight that merely signals a "lost" world, the true path back to which is immediately

subverted by yet more questions. For example, even at the pivotal narrative juncture of his

discovery of the father as the mother's assassin, the Moor is riddled with a two-page long series

of questions. Given the multiple, repeating pattern of his own exile within the parameters of his

story, the Moor's reimagining of the family saga from such a physically removed perspective

does in fact provide him with the feeling of having swum "beyond the limit of [his] breath"

(290). As such, it does not so much alter the already subverted course of his-story as it does

indicate the extent to which the Moor is already beyond the limits of History.

It is interesting to note that the two sections in the novel which consist of italicized

narratives coincide with the Moor's complete removal from the India of his past. The first

section describes the Moor's expulsion from the family home, and it is the only section narrated

entirely by a third-person omniscient voice. More interestingly, it describes the mother's

progressively more abstract perception of her son since his expulsion: "*He was black and white.*

He was living proof of the possibility of the union of opposites. . . . The palace fell. Its image

faded; into white" (MLS 259). The subsequent italicized section appears at the novel's end, and

it is appropriately narrated from a tombstone (Boabdil's perhaps?). When the Moor is outside

the ebb and flow of family affairs, he stands outside India in the "empty now" of which Ilie

speaks. Unlike his exiled predecessors, even when the Moor speaks of his individual present

and future he does so outside the constructs of his-story. As the Moor's name (Moraes Zogoiby)

suggests, his is a history of the minority, the exile, wherein any claims to "land, belonging,

home" are either *long*-forgotten or mere illusions.[4] As the son of Abraham Zogoiby (Zogoiby

meaning "unfortunate"), the Moor's lineage hearkens back to the exilic histories of Spain's

Muslim and Jewish communities, and is, as such, indelibly cast within history's wheel of

unfortunate cast-outs.

The exile's condition, standing as it may, "outside" the continuum of the histories with

which he was once intimately familiar, paradoxically compels the exile to relate his story in the

full-blown awareness of time. This awareness of time is the archetypal interplay between exile

as a formal narrative device and thematic perspective. The pattern finds its precedent in the

migratory omniscient narrator's ability to swing the narrative pendulum from ancient history to

religious lore to contemporary pop culture. On the one hand, The Satanic Verses' omniscient

narrator seemed free of time's constraints, and managed to negotiate the "polytemporal

framework" just enough to find his faith in the homeland once again. On the other hand, the

Moor's world has far surpassed questions of faith, the speeding biological clock of his condition

a testament to nothing more than the immediate material crisis at hand: "If so much revelation,

why not Revelation? - This is no time to discuss theology. The subject on the table is terrorism,

and a secret nuclear device" (334). Although the Moor claims that he is "the only member of his

family to give a fig for the past" (204), he is living proof that the immediate past is merely the folly, the "what-happened-nextism" disease which plagued Sinai's age: "It was a time for consequences, not backward glances: for what-happened-next, not what might or might not have gone before" (363). Here, the exile's archetypal illusions of a revolutionary future (a return) are quashed by the time he relates his story:

> As if sensing the establishment's need for cheering up, he [Ezekiel the cook] embarked upon a gastronomic programme combining nostalgia with invention and stirring in a generous sprinkling of hope. . . . 'Baba sahib, sit only and we will cook up the happy future. . . . We will cook the past and present also, and from it tomorrow will come' . . . The illusion of the future which Ezekiel the cook had restored to me in his kitchen stood revealed as a chimera. (273; 280)

Even Sinai's original recipe for a perfectly blended chutney of Indian plurality is an illusion no longer worth returning to. The only thing to which the Moor does find himself "looking forward," therefore, is "Spain . . . Elsewhere" (376), an "empty now." This is because the Moor's world has already self-destructed by the time he finds himself in exile. The Moor's body has aged twice as fast as his mind, a phenomenon of escalation which runs parallel to the escalating, self-destructive violence plaguing his unreflecting society:

> 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 experiences or my mistakes or my contemporaries, without time for reflection. How then could I have turned out be anything but a mess?. . . *My inside and outside have always been out of sync.* (161-2; emphasis added)

The paradox of time, as seen in the extreme case of the Moor, appears to be Rushdie's last word on his narrators' attempts to revisit the national narrative from an exilic perspective. Time itself is twofold from the perspective of the exiled narrator. It is both circular and linear, since the exile stands outside the time-frame of the object of his perception (from past to

present), and yet can watch it move forward into the future without him.[5] But once the exile has stepped out of the continuum of his story's timeframe, he is able to view it in the totality of its history. No longer a part of the story he narrates, the exile is able to view not only the emptiness that his particular absence leaves behind, but the absence of a general sense of continuity itself.

As has been discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, where there are gaps in the narrative there is a narrator to fill them in, to "make light of the dark." This tendency to fill in the gaps is the narrator-in-exile's self-conscious awareness of the fragmented nature of memory, and its enormous potential for error. The desire underlying the exile's tendency to sew together the threads of a disjointed narrative is the desire to paint the canvas in full, to provide the bigger picture where there are only unrelated shards. However, as soon as this desire sets in, the exile is faced with his first creative challenge: when peeling back the layers of time and memory to find a possible point at which to begin his story, the narrator-in-exile comes up against the palimpsest view of history. Histories, like cultures--particularly ones as vast and ancient as India's--lie palimpsestically over each other, at worst, and fluidly complement and blend into one other, at best. In either case, any definitive referential point is obscured. In this manner, the search for one's beginnings is a never-ending affair. The narrator-in-exile--whose sense of time inhabits at least two space dimensions, each carrying its own vision of events--is particularly wary of falling into the trap of linear, finite time.

This inability to conceive one's story at a manageable, finite point in time may account, in part, for the epic narrative upon which Rushdie's narrators embark, narratives which begin at different pivotal moments (each its own beginning of sorts) along their culture's historical meridian. In his study of the multi-spatial, multi-cultural Caribbean as a "polyrhythmic" text,

A. Benitez-Rojo speaks of culture itself as a point without beginnings:

> Culture is a discourse, a language, and as such it has no beginning or end and is always in transformation, since it is always looking for the way to signify what it cannot manage to signify. . . . Its intrinsic desire is conservation. . . . Thus we may speak of cultural forms that are more or less regional, national, subcontinental, and even continental. But this in no way denies the heterogeneity of such forms. (The Repeating Island 20)

His point of reference now being at least doubly greater than it was prior to his new-found condition, the exiled narrator must directly contend with "the heterogeneity of such forms." The exile must endure the peculiar condition of telling one story while living another. Like Benitez-Rojo's endlessly signifying model of multiple reference points, the narrator-in-exile is pitted not merely against the question of beginnings, but of whose beginnings and where. At best, the exile will be able to juggle these multiple beginnings (as did The Satanic Verses' omniscient narrator) so as to find enough common threads with which to create a basis of comparison, a grounding, a home, meaning. At worst, the exile will lose his/her narrative threads and so lose the intricately balanced fabric of his story(ies) to the point of utter incoherence. Most of Rushdie's narrators-in-exile walk a fine line between the two reactions, and so succeed in creating enough bases of comparison to make sense of their histories. But where Sinai (whose exile hovered over the ambiguous borders of the subcontinent) was limited to a more finite period of Indian history, the omniscient narrator (whose main points of reference hovered between Britain, India and Mecca) was more concerned with the existential, spiritual crisis at his communities' roots. In both cases, the narrators were unable to establish a forward-moving, coherent development to Indian Independence, making their 'national' narratives, at least, come to nought. The Moor's is an extreme case of exile because his story has, in fact, come to a definitive end. Consequently, he is compelled to face the particularly circular predicament of

his narrative.

The Moor's national narrative, in particular, is bound by the hands of time. In fact, the circular motif is in no way subtle here. So extreme is the Moor's condition that he is 'forced' to tell his story from within the confines of a "*circular* cell" (MLS 419; emphasis added). The Moor's exile also charts its own circular flight pattern: at first a voluntary escape from an exploding Bombay, his exile becomes a forced incarceration within the "folly" of his past, only to again become a matter of choice once the idea of home itself is lost. The final chapter of the novel also reinforces the circularity of the Moor's narrative as it begins with the novel's opening words: "I have lost count of the days since I began my prison sentence . . . ." The Moor's exile is physically circular as long as he is trapped by his circular story. The narrative itself is metaphorically circular since it is a repeating narrative. But the Moor, by the very fact of his extreme physical exile, is able to see more than the *Indian* tale he is once again forced to recount. In this manner, the Moor is physically free from the story of his Indian past and is able to see its circular pattern from the outset. It would not be far-fetched to assume that Rushdie has, in this seemingly final national narrative, endowed his exiled narrator with the power of Brahma himself—the ultimate power of one who stands completely outside History and Time and is free to create life anew:

> For Hindu philosophers, time begins when Brahma emerges from his period of dormition in the bosom of the world ocean and begins to *breathe out*. All things take shape and this world is created. When Brahma breathes in, all material things disintegrate and their essences are reabsorbed by Brahma's spirit, so that none of the physical world is left. Time stops. *When it pleases Brahma to awake again and breathe out, an entirely new world begins and with it, a new time.* . . . Time itself is often regarded as the chain and the wheel from which every person has to liberate himself by ceasing to look forward to the future or regretting the past. Those who have achieved *moksha*, liberation, are absolved from time. They are in a state of not-being . . . where time has no more power

over them. ("Time," <u>Indian Mythology</u>, 246-7; emphasis added)

It is certainly not difficult to see Rushdie's overarching metaphor of the Moor's 'sigh' here, of the act of 'exhalation' as the act of 'overcoming' history: "I am what breathes. I am what began long with an exhaled cry, what will conclude when a glass held to my lips remain clear. It is not thinking makes us so, but air. *Suspiro ergo sum.* I sigh therefore I am" (MLS 53). This sigh, therefore, is at once the creative and destructive breath that signals the end of the national narrative of 'midnight's children' and the beginning of another period in Indian history. Moreover, since mother and son are artist-figures whose destructive potentials are always counterpoised by a creative principle, the exile's trope of doubleness or ambivalence is synonymous with this creative-destructive balance. The sigh, then, is also the sigh that belies the gloominess of History that entraps rather than liberates, destroys rather than creates.

On a formal level, the Moor's ability to perceive the repeating circular, essentializing patterns of History in multiple space-time dimensions enables him to narrate his own family saga in mythic time; time that is synchronous rather than repetitious; syncretic rather than chronological. In syncretically—versus chronologically—layered time, the narrator-in-exile's approach to his national narrative is akin to a chronicler of sacred figures and events, who at one and the same time must attempt to remain faithful to his/her role as a documenter of a finite moment in time. For example, the late 19th century chronicler Mahendranath balances sacred and human history as folows:

> Mahendranath is clearly conscious of the requirements of authentic documentation. And yet, as soon as he passes to the reporting of the master's sayings, he not only abandons the formal structure of a national narrative prose, he surrenders himself completely in his journey with Ramakrishna through the fluid space of mythic time. . . . Mahendranath's careful construction of a narrative grid was designed to authenticate the historical truth

of his master's sayings; yet the truth is seized only after it has escaped the grid of historical time. (Chatterjee 54).

By similarly escaping the "grid of historical time," the narrator-in-exile is able to expose the palimpsestically-layered nature of History's rises and falls. The narrator-in-exile exposes the similarities between otherwise unrelated historical events, making their connections equally open to interpretation and deconstruction, rather than leaving them unrecognizable and eternally binding. Rushdie's own technique continually seeks to escape linearity and conflate fact and fiction, to weave numinous moments of History (religious and other) to the extent that each novel becomes an endlessly proliferating metaphor for a continuing search for "truth," or for the dangers inherent in any closed-book approach to 'Truth'. What the reader is left with is an open-ended text, despite the text's own apparent circularity:

> . . . both the text and the reader will transcend their statistical limits and will drift toward the decentred centre of the paradoxical. . . . The result is a text that speaks of a critical coexistence of rhythms, a polyrhythmic ensemble whose central binary rhythm is decentred when the performer (writer/reader) and the text try to escape . . . (Benitez-Rojo 22; 28)

While the Moor's tale does unfold chronologically, from one generation to the next, the Moor is always privy to his narrative in its entirety, in its unfortunate circular pattern of coming to nought--as "the fag-end of an age" (352). Now inhabiting another cultural, historical space altogether, the Moor is also privy to the circular pattern of the rise and fall of Moorish rule in medieval Spain, as well as modern Spain's absolutist regime. The Moor makes the connection between the exilic histories of each culture's (India and Spain's) expelled or minority communites and charts for them a common circular history. This common circular history is the Alhambra/Battering Ram motif which runs throughout the Moor's Indian-Spanish narrative. The

Moor's last Indian home on 'Malabar Hill' (a loose anagram for Alhambra) is the Alhambra's

Indian mirror-image:

> *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 it defeats, 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.* (433)

Boabdil's palace of fractal-like possibility is Rushdie's deliberately paradoxical (if not

polemical) alignment of a former empire with the modern ideal of 'midnight's children'. In this

respect, Cantor is right to point out that Rushdie's alignment of Moorish Spain's

'multiculturalism' with the modern notion of "democratic multiculturalism . . . calls into

question any simple equation one might be tempted to make between imperialism and

monoculturalism on the one hand or between anti-imperialism and multiculturalism on the

other" (326).[6] This is Rushdie's attempt at debunking any readymade or underhanded claims to

either cultural sovereignty or cultural plurality, such that 'multicultural' India is seen as a

sovereign culture, and Moorish Spain as culturally plural. In this sense, even Benengeli's

acutely 'modern' case of 'internationalism' is exposed as yet another "pose, attitude, sham,"

where "rootless foreigners" who inhabit the "denatured part of Benengeli" do not mix with the

locals, and feed off their own "parasitical" eclecticism (394).

By locating the histories that Spain and India have in common, the Moor is ultimately

able to expose the myths that both cultures seek to perpetuate towards their own

historiographical ends. The Indian Moor, "expelled from his story" (5), can stand in parallel to

the expelled Boadbil and mourn the 'loss' of the Alhambra not as a former empire, but as a

testament to Islam's aesthetic ability to harmonize its cultural influences. By so doing, the Moor

exposes both the myth of Catholic Spain's portrayal of Muslim rule as unequivocally evil, and

the myth of Moghul rule in India as categorically 'invasive'. In the same breath, even claims to

cultural purity—cultural plurality's negative other—become fundamentally paradoxical. In this

sense, his character Raman Fielding—a caricature of India's true-to-life militant leader of Hindu

extremism—is a man who, by virtue of inhabiting as culturally diverse a region as the

subcontinent, cannot help but undercut his own call to racial, cultural, religious purity.

Paradoxically, Raman harbours a love for the great Urdu (Pakistani) poets, "Faiz, Josh, Iqbal,"

and "the glories of Fatehpur Sikri and the moonlit splendour of the Taj," alongside his

reclamation of the "true nation . . . from beneath the layers of alien empires" (MLS 299). In

such a re-imagining of his story, the Moor's readers can find—in the layered texture that is his

historical mishmashing of figures and events, facts and fictions—things seemingly far removed

brought close to home; portraits seemingly complete given an added dimension, texture,

meaning.

But what of the narrator, "alone now, motherless"? The Moor's forced exile in "Vasco's

folly," after all, epitomizes the delusional point of view of the exiled artist who is obsessed with

reimagining, and, by extension, reinventing home. Thus, all versions of home are follies in the

Moor's world if they, like reclaimed land and palimpsestic paintings, insist on *existing* over

someone else's territory without so much as a peek back at their former way of being, their

previous foundation, their original landscape, their prior aesthetic—at, that is, their history.

In his article, "The Politics of Escapism: Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh," Sujay Sood

argues that the Moor's escape "is a sign of Rushdie's escapism as it elevates the needs of the

individual, the subject of history, over the globally chaotic present with its political, economic,

and technological urgencies" (100). The Moor certainly escapes from a self-destructing

Bombay, but his escape is a "move beyond" the "folly" of self-invention, whether of homes or

nations or individuals. The Moor's final extrication from family affairs is a self-conscious

judgement over his own problematical desire to reimagine the national narrative. As such, he

does not so much escape from the India of his story as he does reject, and finds himself rejected

by, an unfolding history that never coincided with his 'dreamed-up' version of events. It would

seem as though the narrator-in-exile who is intent on reimagining home—whether from the

outside or inside—is as liable to superimpose his own vision of home onto a pre-existing

landscape as any power mongerer. The Moor's escape is less an "elevation of the needs of the

individual" as it is a rejection of the individual's (the exile's) tendency to imagine a national

narrative to the extent that it overshadows an ongoing reality. It is not surprising that the final

verdict on matters of reality over fiction are aptly voiced by Zeenat Vakil—the art-critic and

social activist who persuaded The Satanic Verses' Saladin to stand committed, one way or

another, to the 'humanitarian' cause.[7] Vakil's pessimistic critique of Indian affairs is an eerie

foreshadowing of her eventual demise in a terrorist bombing of the 'Zogoiby gallery' (where she

and Aurora's art go up in flames). As such, Vakil's concluson echoes the palimpsest model of

history:

> 'I blame fiction,' she said. 'The followers of one fiction knock down another popular
> piece of make-believe and bingo! It's war, Next they will find Vyasa's cradle under
> Iqbal's house, and Valmiki's baby-rattle under Mirza Ghalib's hang-out. So, Ok. I'd

rather die fighting over great poets than over gods' (351)

In the final analysis, the author appears to most closely share Vakil's view, for language--

the power to imagine--becomes the Moor's only hope of escape from his-story's shackles.

Language literally keeps him alive, and language is his last and sole companion. However,

everything in the Moor's world, as in Sinai and Saladin's world, has its nararative other. If

language represents salvation, it also represents the potential for destruction. In this light, the

Moor's companion-in-exile (Nehru's namesake Jawaharlal, the stuffed dog) merely points

toward any continuing belief in a Secular India as a self-delusional belief in fiction, rather than a

liberating hold over the imagination. Only when the Moor finally leaves Jawaharlal behind does

he turn a new page in his story and look toward a real new beginning for himself and his world.

In The Moor's Last Sigh, the artistic vision is not to be unqualitatively lauded, for it has

its own sorry potential for creating and perpetuating the "false essentialism" of illusion and

becoming its own unimaginable palimpsest. In this sense, the narrator-in-exile may be most

prone to self-delusion, reimagining as he does the national narrative from an entirely removed

and often self-inscribed perspective. Like all things Rushdiesque, the narrator-in-exile is also

the least prone to remaining bound within a circular, repetitive narrative given his uniquely

double--if not poly-temporal--perspective. The imagination with which the Moor approaches his

story is his only hope of freedom from the more-often-than-not painful reality and circularity of

his life's tale. In the Moor's story, freedom of thought does not miraculously imply change; the

power of words is not, in and of itself, enough to change an indifferent landscape: "A sigh isn't

just a sigh. We inhale the world and breathe out meaning. While we can" (54). By sighing out

his story, albeit in hindsight, the "Moor's tragedy" is 'essentially' the "tragedy of multiplicity

destroyed by singularity, the defeat of Many by One" (408). Having "nailed [his story] to the

landscape" (433), however, the Moor steps out of the "circular cell" of history. The Moor's Last

Sigh is a 'last sigh' for the burden of History; it is a sigh beyond the insanely unreflecting times

of his-story; a sigh beyond History's shackles.

NOTES

[1] The links with Cervantes' masterpiece cannot possibly be explored within the 'confines' of this thesis, but they certainly beg further study. Paul A. Cantor's article, "Tales of the Alhambra: Rushdie's Use of Spanish History in The Moor's Last Sigh," briefly exposes the Moor-Quixote link via the name of Rushdie's fictional town and Cervantes' fictional Arabic narrator.

[2] Epifania's birthday (1877) roughly coincides with Chatterjee's calculation of the birth of Indian nationalism or Indian national sentiment as a claim to Hindu majority power. See Chapter One, "Whose Imagined Community," The Nation and its Fragments.

[3] All three of Rushdie's novels are set, at least in part, in India's largest port-city Bombay, the 'Gateway of India'. At least two-thirds of Bombay's coastline is man-made, reclaimed land. Rushdie, of course, plays with the idea that such land reclamations point to the arbitrary, volatile, 'saleable' nature of not simply the Indian coastline but of any 'claims' to borders and boundaries--whether expanding or contracting. To reinforce the point, Bombay has historically been bought and sold, its very name change from Bombay to Mumbai suggesting quite clearly the usurpation of Bombay assets from one controlling body (the British Raj of the colonial era) to another (the Hindu-coalitionist run government of the contemporary post-colonial era). Rushdie does not refer to Bombay as Mumbai (its new official name) unless he does so through his caricature of the real-life militant leader of right-wing Hindu fundamentalist sentiment, Bal Thackeray (himself a former newspaper cartoonist) and his RamRajyaist organization, the MA (MA for 'Mother' India, perhaps?) or Mumbai-Axis. Interestingly, The Moor's Last Sigh, an all-out attack on the unapologetic Thackeray-like trend of Indian

nationalism, has been banned in Thackeray's main seat of power: the State of Maharashtra which surrounds Rushdie's much-loved city of Bombay.

[4] Rushdie's encyclopaedic use of historical figures and events should never be underestimated, particularly when it comes to names. The Moor's name, Moraes Zogoiby, is no exception. As a nickname, its historical echoes are clearly aligned with Spanish-Muslim history. Rushdie's cloaked allusions are those which most closely reveal his play on words and names as a method by which to most fully engage his readers in the process of analysis, of making the pieces of his historical jigsaw fit in order to derive, for oneself, what the big picture might be. The Moor's name is, perhaps, a striking example of such name-play. As a first name, Moraes appears to be an allusion to Francis R. Moraes who authored an early biography of Prime Minister Nehru (Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography). The Moor carries 'Jawaharlal', his anglophilic Uncle's stuffed dog, into exile with him, making, perhaps, the Francis Moraes-connection that much more convincing.

[5] Here the circular nature of time may be viewed in terms of the Hindu concept of the creative-destructive wheel of circular time. Given the complexity of the concept itself, it is impossible to delve into the logisitics of Hindu time within the scope of this thesis. I believe that the Moor's view of time brings in both the generally-acknowledged metaphor of 'cyclic history, of history repeating itself', as well as the Hindu wheel of repetitive time. Circularity and linearity are constantly juxtaposed here because of the religious and spatial borders that Rushdie and his narrators inhabit. While it will be shown that the metaphor ot the 'last sigh' itself is an allusion to Brahma, it would be amiss to relegate Rushdie's entire view of time as purely Brahmanical. In fact, Rushdie's use of time, like his use of history, may sometimes seem

confounding simply because he plays with both occidental and oriental concepts of time, and both Semitic and non-Semitic concepts of time, often conflating each to the point that none can be clearly recognized, but all become symbolically varied approaches to our complex, interconnected histories.

[6.] This is all the more credible given the fact that the original 'anti-imperial' mission of India led to the equation of the 'Hindu ethos with the Indian way'. This is an inherently exclusionary ethos because it equates 'Hinduism' with 'Indianism', the implication being that to be truly Indian you have to be Hindu. See R.S.S.S.'s founder M.S. Gowalkar's We or Our Nationhood Defined. Also, see (leading ideologue and activist of Hindu nationalism) V.D. Savarkar's Hindutva.

[7.] A "Vakil" was traditionally the personal counsellor of the Sultan. A Vakil's rank is equal to that of the "Wazir" (the Sultan's minister). The Arab-speaking world continues to use the term in roughly the same official sense today. See Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, page 1284, for a complete definition and etymology.

Conclusion: "Or, but, thenagain"

> *'If they believe that story, they'll believe
> anything,' Haroun thought. 'Now surely
> they'll lose their tempers and give him the
> third degree.' What actually happened was
> that Prince Bolo gave a loud, dashing foolish
> laugh and thumped Rashid Khalifa on the
> back, making him blow soup out of his
> mouth. 'A wit as well as an adventurer,' he
> said. 'Good show! Fellow, I like you well.'
> And with that, he slapped his thigh. (100)*
> *- Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

Midnight's Children, The Satanic Verses and The Moor's Last Sigh form a *loosely bound*

chronological trilogy which develops and reflects upon the interplay between *exile-in-narration*

and *narrators-in-exile*; between, that is, the exilic condition in thematic and formal terms. The

theme of exile is brought to light as a metaphorical and literal ontological state. Exile functions

as a decentredness, a state of inbetweenness that ruptures linear progressions of space and time.

The narrator who approaches his story from the perspective of exile is thereby thrust into a

wholly fragmented narrative. The narrator-in-exile's immediate response to his fragmentation is

to trace his present state back to the remembered past of his socio-historical origins—of, that is,

his lost sense of belonging, home, community and national identity. The more severe his term of

exile, the farther removed the narrator is shown to be from the subject of his story, such that his

past, like the individual and national narrative he wishes to recapture, must inevitably be

imagined rather than lived.

"Imaginative truth," writes Rushdie, "is simultaneously honourable and suspect"

(IH 10). Once the narrator launches into a creative mission in which his point of reference is no

longer physically in sync with the subject of his story, his narrative becomes an attempt to

fabricate, rather than duplicate, the reality he has left behind. Such an approach to his story is, therefore, "honourable" because it carries within it the potential for enlightenment, and "suspect" because it carries within it the seeds for self-delusion.

In these novels, the dichotomy between imagination and reality is but one of many polarizations. Indeed, most things in Rushdie's creative *oeuvre* share this doubleness, a motif most poetically carried out within and through the condition of exile itself. Caught not simply between geographic and cultural space, but also between past and present, the exiled narrator is endowed with a "double perspective" that is either at eternal odds with itself, or manages to strike a healthy and, at best, "scrupulous," balance. Doubleness thus repeatedly manifests itself as the dichotomy between inside and outside, center and margin, objectivity and subjectivity, good and evil, light and dark, creation and destruction, imagination and reality. As such, each oppositional pairing is at one and the same time a coexistent unit, but it is a co-existence that is not unambiguously harmonious. It is, by its nature, polarizing--a pull 'between' states, ideas, selves. However, in Rushdie's semantic of exile as a binary condition, his characters suffer not so much as a result of the polarities within them, but as a result of their self-delusion when unable to acknowledge or accept their own dichotomous states and worlds--as a result, that is, of the illusion of an unambiguous unity or 'essentializing' wholeness.

Sinai's negative other, Shiva, is his nemesis and downfall precisely because he is unable to recognize or acknowledge Shiva as a part of himself, and so unable to reckon with his own destructive tendency for self-aggrandizement. The Satanic Verses' omniscient narrator's consciousness is, in this light, a figurative continuation of the Sinai/Shiva split. Without reconciling his two warring halves--without attaining an awareness of his tendency to be both

all-consuming and self-consumed, to be both faithful to an art and faithless to a fault--the wholly disembodied omniscient voice cannot hope to achieve the critical distance *and* proximity (i.e., an acceptance of a past to which he is still connected) required to 'return' to questions of "land, belonging, home" (SV 4). As a narrative most concerned with questions of the immigrant experience and the tensions between the Eastern and Western hemispheres, the omniscient narrator struggles to achieve a self-acknowledging voice that takes all of its parts into equal consideration--the Indian *and* the English. Finally, the doubleness found in the Moor's world is the overt manifestation of the *dis*unity of opposites or polarities in their extreme forms of contention. Doubleness, in the Moor's narrative, proliferates into divisiveness and duplicity. The Moor's polarization, therefore, is carried out between his story and History, wherein his personal story is no longer concerned with the question of a 'return' so as to piece together a fractured narrative, as it is with the question of remaining forever locked within the circularity of a repeating narrative of rupture, divisiveness, and despair. The Moor's 'last sigh', therefore, appears to be a final embrace of decentredness. As such, it functions as his sense of release from both the pull of his story and History; a final recognition that his personal narrative and that of History are intertwined--or interlocked, as the case may be--but where History 'sighs' with the onus of time, the Moor's narrative breathes with the possibility of change.

In his 1992 Nobel address, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory," Derek Walcott speaks of the "sigh of History." Walcott's poetry and prose articulate the plight of those faced with the often painful awareness of a ruptured individual and historical narrative. His metaphor for the ruptured narrative is a 'broken vase' which requires a 'loving' hand to 'remake' it into a new and renewed wholeness. Rushdie's response to the creative act as a necessary re-visioning

is at once apparent in Walcott's poetics. Walcott's paradigm of History as a self-destructive

burden and a simultaneous liberating element echoes both the dichotomous nature of the Moor's

'last sigh' as a sigh of loss for the end of one version of Indian identity, and a sigh of relief for

the shedding of the singular static vision; a sigh, that is, of renewal 'in light of' the past.

Rushdie's own paradigm of History as something to be overcome, not so much as to obliterate or

forget past wounds, but as to keep the world open to change, and the idea of the 'new', is

conversely echoed in Walcott's poetics:

> The sigh of History rises over ruins, not over landscapes . . .; History can alter the eye
> and the moving hand to conform a view of itself; it can rename places for the nostalgia
> in an echo . . .; [But] For every poet it is always morning in the world. History a
> forgotten, insomniac night; History and elemental awe are always our early beginning,
> because the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world, in spite of History.
> (296; 301; 303)

In what has, for the argument propounded by this thesis, been considered to be Rushdie's

fictional trilogy, the 'last' in the series has been shown to be the bleakest vision of India's

polarization—its divisive socio-religious politics—narrated from the most extreme physical

perspective of exile. However, when viewed through the creative lens of Rushdie's paradigm of

History—itself a binary concept that more easily lends itself to an obsession with the past, rather

than to an integral but modest part of a self-renewing cycle of life—the Moor's 'end'—his release

of the past vision of 'midnight's children' is also a 'beginning', an avenue for redefinition and

reconstruction, "in spite of History." As such, the Moor's narrative is a "sigh" *beyond* History.

It is a self-conscious acceptance of loss and a simultaneous opening for "newness [to] come into

the world" (SV 8) in the "hope to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time" (MLS 434).

But, for the Moor, as well as for Sinai and Gibreel/Saladin, the process of breaking away

from the shackles of a relentless, repetitive History of divisiveness--from "breaking away from

the main" (Walcott 297), is necessarily not a passive act. As characters experiencing alienation,

destabilization, decentredness and exile, the figures of Rushdie's novels are, perhaps, most able

to take the imaginative leap past History because of their fall from grace. They have each, after

all, 'fallen out of' their respective Edens--their comfortable and unquestioning 'insider'

positions--and are consequently forced to take another look at it from the angle of the 'outsider'

and its insight into both the insider and outsider perspective. This is the exile's doubleness: of

knowing what it means to 'belong' only to experience the fact of *not* belonging with a greater

level of self-consciousness; of living, in some cases, the conscious lie; of obtaining, by choice or

force, a new perspective and thereby becoming the 'other'; of being *un*confidently anonymous;

of being "alone now, motherless" (MLS 303). The extreme position of the exile, the

insider/outsider, who, in Walcott's words, "conjugates both tenses simultaneously: the past and

the present" (297) is, in this sense, a 'literal-metaphorical' manifestation of the doubleness and

divisiveness with which all narratives must contend if they are to "break away from the main"

(297) and still remain 'whole'.

Granted, the romantic echoes here are undeniable, as are the more ancient ones, but the

enduring beauty of Rushdie's characters' plights is not found in their romantic or spiritual

'suffering' as in the individual poetry of their struggles to be heard beyond the staid narrative,

beyond the echo of the "many-headed monster" (MS 229). "Tonally," writes Walcott, "the

individual voice is a dialect; it shapes its own accent, its own vocabulary and melody in defiance

of an imperial concept of language, the language of Ozymandias, libraries and dictionaries, law

courts and churches, universities, political dogma, the diction of institutions" (297). In

Rushdie's case, this "individual voice" as "dialect" is his innovative language of translation, the language of shared laughter "in spite" of the exilic condition.

Rushdie has been repeatedly criticized for 'making fun'—with his detached cosmopolitan sensibility—of both communitarian concerns and communal linguistic traits, rather than for satirizing them toward 'real' critical social ends. Thus, his interlingual mixing and punning of Urdu, Hindi and English has been targeted as a simplistic assault on language and culture. Author Anita Desai, in her contribution to a linguistic study entitled South Asian English, provides a valuable understanding of the use and misuse of vernacular by writers of Indian and Pakistani descent writing in English:

> Those purists who speak of the desirability of one language, one tradition, one culture must come from a more secluded, more elevated part of the world than I do. In my experience, Indian life has always been an amalgam of so many languages, cultures, and civilizations that they formed one very compactly woven whole, a fabric of different textures and colors, so inextricably woven together that to pull them apart would be to tear the fabric, to turn a perfectly serviceable garment into a pile of unusable rags and shreds. (221-2)

In the same study, however, Rushdie's 'brand' of linguistic punning and interlingual marrying is indirectly criticized for the fact that it not so much represents the richly variegated linguistic patchwork of India (and, indeed, of the migrant), as it does view that patchwork from the 'amused' perspective of an 'outsider'. Writers such as Rushdie, Bapsi Sidhwa argues, "can manipulate English as only the English can, with confidence and aplomb, and being of alien origins in England they can avail themselves of a licence not available to native English authors." However, when it comes to their incorporation of non-English languages into their creative writing, the compliment is retracted: "But, no matter how much I may admire their verbal and structural innovations and flamboyance . . .[T]hey are a new breed of British writer

and their vision of the subcontinent and its cultures is essentially that of an outsider. They pick

from the culture what is, from the Western point of view, exotic, amusing, bizarre, salable . . ."

("Creative Processes in Pakistani English Fiction" 239-40).

Both gifted subcontinental writers who, like Rushdie, use English as their language of

creative communication, Desai and Sidhwa's perspectives epitomize the difference between the

mongrel, fractal-like worldview that Rushdie embraces and the idea of the 'essential', the pure

and the containable which, for better or worse, he speaks out against. When he most

vociferously articulates this view in his critical writing, it is more often than not in defence of

the non-essentializing, malleable and evolutionary nature of language:

> Indian writing in English has been called 'twice-born' (by the critic Meenakshi
> Mukherjee) . . . [which] rest[s] on the false premise that English, having arrived from
> outside India, is and must necessarily remain an alien there. But my own mother tongue,
> Urdu, . . . was also an immigrant language [and] became a naturalized subcontinental
> language long ago; and by now that has happened to English, too. English has become an
> Indian language. . . . Indian English, sometimes unattractively called 'Hinglish,' is not
> 'English' English, to be sure, any more than Irish or American or Caribbean English is.
> And part of the achievement of English-language Indian writers is to have found literary
> voices that are so distinctively Indian, and also as suitable for any and all the purposes of
> art, as those of other English-language writers in Ireland, Africa, the West Indies and the
> United States. . . . These writers are insuring that India--or, rather, Indian voices (for
> they are too good to fall into the trap of writing *nationalistically*)--will henceforth be
> confident, indispensable participants in that literary conversation. ("Damme, This Is the
> Oriental Scene for You!" 54)

In Rushdie's ethos, language, like art, is not meant to be static. Conversely, the

complementary assertion must be made that those things which language and art inevitably

comment upon and signify are also not static entities--a fact perhaps most readily felt by the

exile and the "fusions, translations, conjoinings" (SV 8) of space, culture and language so

evidently thrust upon him/her. Rushdie's characters' greatest freedom, therefore, is derived

from the power of words, and the concomitant ability to recognize that every verbal act, every

'sigh' is a process of breathing out or articulating potentially new forms of meaning in the

world—meaning that can either create new possibilities or destroy former assertions:

> 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. (MLS 428)

Replete with (multilingual) consonants and vowels, then, Rushdie's depiction of History

as a static and binding narrative act is countered by a narrative that explodes with wordplay,

invention, humour—explodes with the newness of "fusions, translations, conjoinings." The

narrative itself becomes a 'bearing-across' to push "out the frontiers of what is possible"

("Damme" 54). Perspectives are multiple, as are socio-cultural understandings of space, time

and History. The further removed from the 'homeland', the greater the narrative explosion, and

the greater the 'new' connections to be made therein. Thus, the narrative slips between the

traditional and the modern, the sacred and the profane, since it draws equal sustenance from all

of its available sources. The intertextuality of Rushdie's *oeuvre*—the mixing of the sacred with

the profane—is, of course, Rushdie's polemical use of a poetic licence that recognizes 'no

bounds', and which has led, in part, to his own forced exile.

Weaving a kaleidoscopic patchwork of History and fantasy, fact and fiction, Rushdie's

canvas is a moving picture of image, metaphor and form that is always "multitudinous, hinting at

the infinite possibilities" as the "optimistic counterweight to . . . personal tragedy" (IH 16). But,

more importantly perhaps, the kaleidoscopic narrative is, it would seem, the nature of memory

itself: fragmented, formless, fallible, changeable. And the art of story-telling, like the historical act, is an act of memory that both consciously and unconsciously selects the end-product that is the individual or communal narrative.

Roland Barthes, in "Literature Today," speaks of the misconception of the reader and writer's literal understanding of the 'real'. The real, he asserts, is knowable by inference, and further represented through a process of selection (conscious or not). This makes literary realism—as a representation or documentation of social reality—a paradoxically 'mythical' or misleading concept. The writer (the individual) is, of course, reality's filter. Moreover, the vehicle through which the real is conveyed is language and its own "system of meaning" (Critical Essays 159). Barthes writes:

> . . . literature is on the contrary the very consciousness of the unreality of language: the 'truest' literature is the one which knows itself as the most unreal, to the degree that it knows itself as essentially language; is that search for that intermediary stage between things and words; is that tension of a consciousness which is at once carried and limited by the words . . . . (160)

As a writer who is very much concerned with the changeable nature of social reality, the fallibility of memory and the instability or constructability of form, Barthes's assertion is particularly applicable to Rushdie's view of literature as a mode of representing the particularly 'unreal' quality of the world as the paradoxically hidden reality, the buried truth. Hence, the overworld and underworld motif becomes the centrifugal force around which the Moor's world oscillates: "Banished from the natural, what choice did I have but to embrace its opposite? Which is to say, unnaturalism, the only real -ism of these back-to-front and jabberwocky days" (MLS 5). In Rushdie's *oeuvre*, even language, as a means by which to represent the world, reflects the doubleness of form, the "unreality" that limits by virtue of pinning down a black-

and-white picture of the world, or frees by virtue of 'giving' "the lie to official facts" (IH 14).

In the final analysis, language and the imagination are, for Rushdie, not simply tools for bringing "newness into the world", but for doing so in the most pleasurable way possible. As the "unreality of language" discloses the "grotesque" contortions of form as, perhaps, more true-to-life than the "pure," the absurd more honest than the congruous, the reasonable, Rushdie's imagination must transcend the sinister underworlds his narratives almost inevitably uncover by 'making' "light of the dark" (MLS 5). Darkness and light are, once again, co-existing polarities and must be acknowledged as such. With darkness unearthed as a ubiquitous reality, it cannot or should not be overlooked again.

But how do we hope to endure the darker element, the negative other? Rushdie's narrators seem to ask. With a derisive complicity and a self-exonerating smirk? Perhaps. But also with a self-acknowledging smile, an equal and equalizing lightness of being; with, that is, a shared laughter. And why should we laugh History away? Rushdie's novels seem to ask. Why should we laugh 'past' History, at all? Rather, why shouldn't we face up to it, why shouldn't we face it, eye-to-eye? In fact, why not make our History laugh along with us, until together we can shoulder its burden, transcend its weight, and say, "'Born again, Spoono, you and me. Happy Birthday, mister, happy birthday to you'" (SV 10).

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