

**THE (IM)PROPER NAME OF SALMAN RUSHDIE: HYBRIDITY, MIGRANCY,  
AND THE RUSHDIE PERSONA**

by

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## Abstract

Salman Rushdie's fiction is often celebrated for challenging colonial and postcolonial systems of power and representation, in part through inscriptions of marginalized subject positions that subvert normative assumptions about identity. Our understandings of those subject positions are influenced by the Rushdie persona, a cultural presence that is part author function, part literary celebrity, part writer / thinker in the contemporary marketplace, and part living body under threat. An idea in excess of Rushdie's lived experience and not entirely within his control, this persona occupies a position of social and material privilege and is regularly attributed qualities that position it as an exemplary authority on how to survive and succeed as a hybrid subject and migrant citizen. As a result, the persona exerts a limiting influence on the reading of Rushdie's hybrid and migrant protagonists by often rendering them as consistent with, rather than subversive of, the values of the dominant West. This project clarifies the effects of the Rushdie persona by theorizing its dominant qualities and conditions of production, and by analyzing the interplay between the persona and the protagonists of Rushdie's recent novels, memoir, and film: *Shalimar the Clown*, *The Enchantress of Florence*, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*, and the screen version of *Midnight's Children*. I argue the persona increasingly reduces the subversive potential of Rushdie's work, particularly with regard to the themes of hybridity and migrancy. However, there is still room to read against the persona's influence by occupying a critical position modelled by the filmic adaptation of *Midnight's Children* and within this dissertation – a position that requires an open-minded, skeptical encounter with the Rushdie persona.

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## **Dedication**

To my father, Robert Jan Hendrik Eikenaar.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Salman Rushdie's writing career and life in the public eye now span the better part of four decades; however, much of the subversive and transformative power of Rushdie's fiction and social interventions has waned. This is, I think, largely an effect of what I call the persona of Rushdie, a complex, specific and increasingly well-defined idea of Rushdie that circulates around the author and his fiction, but that is necessarily distinct from the actual, living individual, and is produced by a variety of discursive responses to Rushdie's writing and lived experience. While Rushdie, as a public figure, may have once been the placard-bearing, bombastic writer of editorials criticizing the racist social, political, and cultural systems of Thatcherite England, the more complex Rushdie persona that has now emerged is more likely to be identified with the figure of the Tweeting, acerbic guest on politically oriented and satiric late-night American television shows. The current Rushdie persona, as it has emerged through public discourse, the politics of publishing, and popular culture seems to have relatively little contestatory power, even as this persona maintains an aura of authority and exoticism within the hegemonic cultural framework of the dominant West. This might be due to a shift in the qualities of Rushdie's fiction. His early novels, published against the backgrounds of Margaret Thatcher's England, Indira Gandhi's India, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan, were heralded by many as vocalizing the experiences and concerns of marginalized, disempowered postcolonial subjects; his more recent work has received little such acclaim, despite being the subject of a great deal of academic interpretation and popular review. The biting, satirical commentaries of *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses* seem to have given way to narratives of semi-autobiography (*Fury*), violent action / drama (*Shalimar the Clown*), historical fantasy (*The Enchantress of Florence*) and

autobiographical memoir (*Joseph Anton*). Moreover, Rushdie himself has become the overt subject of his own writing. I do not want to suggest, though, that this shift is Rushdie's responsibility as the author of this work. Indeed, even the suggestion of responsibility is problematic because it raises questions of authorial intent and control, with regard to both Rushdie's fiction and the persona that circulates in contemporary culture. The novels may seem to have lost some of their edge and the authorial figure who infamously wrote back against the Empire from the heart of postcolonial England may have morphed into something of an apologist for American interventionism, but these changes are, I argue in this study, largely functions of the dominant political and cultural system within which these novels and this figure operate.

Rushdie's early fiction exposed the flaws of social, cultural and political systems in part by narrating the lives of marginalized hybrid and migrant subjects; while Rushdie's accounts of these subjects were never totalizing, they served two significant purposes: to introduce them, especially to the dominant West, and to affirm them, especially to the marginalized. In this, the work of the fiction was first supported by accounts of Rushdie's early biography and, later, also by accounts of his survival of the Affair<sup>1</sup>. Together, these

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "the Affair" throughout this work to refer to the events and circumstances beginning with the Ayatollah Khomeini's declaration, on February 14, 1989, of a *fatwa* against Rushdie, following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, and ending with the cessation of official British protection services provided Rushdie, on March 27, 2002. These are variously labelled in academic and non-scholarly texts as "the Rushdie Affair," "the Affair of *The Satanic Verses*," "the *Satanic Verses* Affair" and, metonymically, "the *fatwa*."



accounts attributed moral qualities to Rushdie's fiction, rendering them, if not authoritative, then at least trustworthy in their challenges to the dominant cultural systems of the West. After the Affair, Rushdie has continued to write, but his fiction has been less likely to be heralded as subversive or transgressive. This might be explained by a shifting social and historical context that underlies the interpretation of his novels: awareness of the marginalization of diasporic migrants has increased and, less positively, such stories have often been strategically exoticized by the production machines of a literary marketplace that reduces the political efficacy of the stories themselves. As a result, Rushdie's fictive narratives of contemporary hybrid and migrant postcolonial subjects might simply no longer be either surprising or particularly trustworthy to general and academic audiences. It might, too, be explained by a shift in the content and structure of the novels themselves, as is implied in several scholars' identification of Rushdie's earlier work as constituting the high point of his canon. I think, though, that the shift in reception of Rushdie's fiction can also be explained by the increasing influence of the Rushdie persona – a point I will develop throughout this study. Accounts of Rushdie's lived experience, interpretations of his novels, and Rushdie's own interventions into both his novels and the narrativization of his life have transformed Rushdie's public identity. This identity has become a figure in excess of a singular material body, or an author-function, or even a literary celebrity, and influences the interpretation of that fiction, especially with regard to its hybrid and migrant protagonists – that is, those protagonists whose narratives most closely resemble those of the author himself. In some cases, this seems harmless. For example, in *The Satanic Verses*, Saladin Chamcha's discomfort in London, his adopted place of residence, and desire to return home to India is often extended to the Rushdie persona through interpretations of Rushdie's

biography and fiction; in *Fury*, Malik Solanka's interests in intellectual history and concerns about the commodification of art and literature are similarly extended. In other cases, though, the similarities are concerning. For example, the Rushdie persona and many of his protagonists increasingly share qualities that are consistent with the values of the hegemonic culture of the West, including dominant heterosexuality, social elitism, and material and cultural privilege.

In this study, I hope to acknowledge some of the remaining contestatory potential of Rushdie's fiction by exploring the ways in which the Rushdie persona has emerged and developed, and by challenging any "easy" identification of this persona as a representative figure of contemporary, postcolonial, diasporic and hybrid experience. As I will show, the persona supports a focus on characters with which it shares similarities, and it thereby reinforces limited understandings of what it means to be a contemporary hybrid or migrant subject. It is, therefore, important to read against the influence of that persona, as I do in the latter sections of this study: first, by shifting the analytic focus to characters whose performances of hybridity and migrancy differ from those attributed to the persona, as a reminder that the persona is neither a representative nor exemplary figure, nor entirely in control of the interpretations of Rushdie's fictions; and, second, by looking beyond the binarism of identity suggested in counterposing the Rushdie persona and some of Rushdie's protagonists, in order to map a space of reading Rushdie that might restore, rather than foreclose on, the open-ended possibilities of his work.

## The Storyteller's Return and *Joseph Anton*

At the end of *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012), Rushdie's autobiographical account of his years in hiding during the Affair, Rushdie watches his British protection squad pull away from where he is standing in the doorway of London's Halcyon Hotel, pauses, and then steps onto Holland Park Avenue to hail a cab. It is more than thirteen years since the Ayatollah Khomeini's declaration of the now-famous *fatwa* and, significantly, a quietly triumphant moment of return to the normal, everyday activities of finding one's way unsupervised through the streets of London and making decisions unconstrained by security details and police handlers. It is, too, a return from Rushdie's second life of concealment and survival to an authorial identity temporarily misplaced and sometimes forgotten, even by Rushdie himself. After his first life of migration from India and Pakistan to England and the world of literary celebrity, and before his further migration to the United States and the world of popular celebrity, Rushdie endured the conditions of the Affair. It is hardly surprising, then, that the memoir celebrates Rushdie's return from the pseudonymous Joseph Anton, consistently referred to in the third-person singular throughout the memoir, to the first-person, singular Salman Rushdie, the author of several post-Affair novels, including, most recently, *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), as well as the screenplay adaptation of *Midnight's Children* (Mehta 2012).

In *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie describes the beginning of the Affair, marked by the declaration of the *fatwa*, as a departure from his authorial identity and as the originary moment of "a new self" (5), one fundamentally different from that defined by the rise of his literary celebrity, following the publications of *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. He was "no longer the *Salman* his friends knew but the *Rushdie* who was the author of *Satanic Verses*, a

title subtly distorted by the omission of the initial *The*” (5, original italics). Moreover, as he goes into hiding, “[t]he gulf between the private ‘Salman’ he believed himself to be and the public ‘Rushdie’ he barely recognized” grows daily (130), culminating in the forced adoption of an alias and a new history, the giving up of his name and his history, to become “an invisible man in a whiteface mask” (163), ‘Joseph Anton.’ It is, then, the death of ‘Joseph Anton’ that permits the return of ‘Salman Rushdie’, an event Rushdie marks thus: “Mr. Joseph Anton, international publisher of American origin, passed away unmourned on the day that Salman Rushdie, novelist of Indian origin, surfaced from his long underground years” (610). A few pages later, Rushdie stands in the doorway of a hotel, watches his protection squad depart, and, in a symbolic gesture of his return to normalcy, sticks out an arm to hail a cab.

The reference to Indian origin notwithstanding, *Joseph Anton*’s narrative of return is less to Rushdie’s biographical and cultural origins than to his authorial ones, his role as “a teller of tales” and a “maker of things that were not” (629). The memoir certainly evokes comparisons to the narratives of return that abound in Rushdie’s fiction, including, notably, those of Saladin Chamcha (*The Satanic Verses*), Kashmira Ophuls (*Shalimar the Clown*) and Emperor Akbar (*The Enchantress of Florence*), all of whom survive and succeed beyond their respective foils, Gibreel Farishta, Shalimar the Clown, and Mogor dell’Amore. This narrative of return, though, risks an oversimplification of what I call the Rushdie persona, a complex idea that is a product of the various discourses that surround his life and work, and also grounded in the material reality of Rushdie’s living, vulnerable body.

The Rushdie persona is a figure of postcolonial authorship rendered in various modes and through various politics of representation, and it is as multi-faceted as Rushdie’s

architecturally complex fiction. It is, too, an idea that, to borrow from Stephen Morton's description of Rushdie's "proper name," is "not anterior to the body of his fictional writing, but inextricably bound up with it" (24). For Morton, "the life of Salman Rushdie, or the events which become associated with the proper name of Salman Rushdie, are written in and through the fictional texts themselves" (24). It is, too, at least in part, as Catherine Cundy writes in emphasizing the determining effects of the Affair, "what Islam, critics, the media and the general public say [it] is" (65). Rushdie, as author, certainly may be what is claimed near the end of the memoir, "a teller of tales" and a "maker of things that were not" (629), and he is, undoubtedly, an imaginative storyteller, one whose literary contributions include mapping a great deal of the terrain of the postcolonial and contemporary literary worlds. However, as is clear not only in *Joseph Anton* but also in the published material around Rushdie and all of his work, he is more than an author-figure and a relatively straightforward "creator of shapes" (629). He is also what others say he is, including the 'Salman of Liberty,' a paragon of freedom of expression, 'Satan Rushdie,' a blasphemer against Islam, and a figure of both privilege and oppression, one possessed of a voice that enunciates on behalf of both the dominant cultural order and the non-dominant constituents of the colonized and neo-colonized world. As is implied in these competing accounts, Rushdie is a complex and divisive public figure, one whose dominant elements are neither solely those of his own creation nor subject solely to management by his own interventions, whether fictive, memorial, or editorial. The persona is, rather, a product of several discourses that compete, coincide, and are more often intertwined and reflexively constituted than independent and distinct. As I see it, the Rushdie persona results from the discursive resonance between readings of his biography and his fiction and, moreover, functions according to the values of

the dominant cultural system within which it is produced. In this light, the metonymic and quotidian figure of the taxi-hailing Londoner provides only a very limited and very partial answer to the question of identity – Who is Rushdie? – and thereby elides much of the complexity of the very public Rushdie persona.

In this study, I explore the significance of the Rushdie persona – an identity produced by several circulating narratives around the figure of the author and his work, and through specific material conditions – especially with regard to inscriptions and performances of postcolonial subject positions. I use the term ‘persona’ as metonymic shorthand for Rushdie’s cultural presence for several reasons: to marshal the associations of ‘persona’ as a literary trope; to distinguish it from other critical theoretical terms, including the Barthesian Author, Foucauldian author function, and literary celebrity; to signal the complexities of the interplay between Rushdie and his fiction, especially with regard to his protagonists; and to emphasize the need to attend to both the discursive qualities of Rushdie’s cultural presence and the living, vulnerable body of Rushdie himself. The persona, as I understand it, is based on real and imagined qualities of Rushdie himself, who consistently engages with accounts of his authorship and biography by contributing to and repudiating aspects of this persona. Moreover, this persona is endowed with qualities that suit specific artistic or political purposes, and my aim is to understand how the Rushdie persona enhances and limits the potential for Rushdie’s fiction to inform the reader’s understanding of what it means to be a contemporary, migrant and hybrid postcolonial subject.

Kenan Malik suggests the scope of this potential in writing that Rushdie’s work inscribes “the truth of human experience, and in particular the experience of change and transformation, of dislocation and belongingness” (Eagleton and McQuillan vii). However,

James Procter, with particular emphasis on Aijaz Ahmad's and Revathi Krishnaswamy's incisive criticisms of the representations of migrancy in Rushdie's novels, makes the "important point that Rushdie 'dematerializes' the migrant into an abstract idea" (45). Crucially, as I see it, this dematerialization is often correlated with accounts of Rushdie's self-acknowledged, privileged experiences of migrancy, suggesting at least a point of resonance between Rushdie's protagonists and persona, if not this persona's causal influence in limiting how Rushdie's migrant protagonists are read. Procter, though, extends Ahmad and Krishnaswamy's point about the dematerialization of the migrant by arguing that this "important point ... needs to be countered by a recognition that Rushdie himself has become a de-materialized, canonical abstraction" (45). I understand Procter's call to counter the reductive abstractions of migrancy in Rushdie's fiction as one that emphasizes the role of the reader, not only of Rushdie's novels but also accounts of Rushdie himself, in engaging critically and responsibly with Rushdie and his work, which I seek to do here. The persona is, certainly, a complex discursive construct, but it is also one that should be recognized as necessarily affiliated not only with his novels and the Affair but also with his material being. This recognition is, I think, particularly important as the immediacy of the Affair fades. Threats against Rushdie may have receded to some degree, but the violence of the Affair continues both to define elements of the persona and to influence the behaviours of Rushdie and those around him<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in January 2012, Rushdie pulled out of an appearance at the Jaipur Literary Festival after he received a threat of assassination in the event of his attendance (Burke n.p.)

Further, as the Rushdie persona becomes more clearly defined, it is becoming more important to evaluate it critically, rather than to work from assumptions regarding its qualities. Again, Procter's work provides a useful point of departure. He writes that Rushdie's "political imagination, with all its potentially progressive and reactionary elements, has been rendered overly coherent in the struggle to expose the limits and excesses of his migrant vision" (45), a point I want to extend in two ways: first, from the "overly coherent" qualities of Rushdie's political imagination to their correlates regarding the persona; and, second, from the struggle to articulate the meaning and significance of Rushdie's "migrant vision" to the corresponding attempts to explicate the migrant and hybrid qualities of Rushdie's contemporary, postcolonial protagonists. For example, the moral authority attributed to the Rushdie persona through his lived experience as a spokesperson for the marginalized, the survivor of the Affair, and a defender of freedom of expression, may have become almost axiomatic in recent non-scholarly and academic texts, but, as I discuss in Chapter 3, the qualities of that moral authority are significantly tempered by accounts of other characteristics attributed to the persona, including popular accounts of excessive pride and emotional immaturity. I see the tempering of the moral authority attributed to the Rushdie persona as a sign of the recuperation of the subversive potential of Rushdie's fiction and public identity by the culture of the West, one that is consistent with the persona's limiting functions as it influences Rushdie's novel's inscriptions of hybridity and migrancy, especially as categories of being that might challenge dominant, Western norms of identity. In the early stages of Rushdie's literary career, interpretations of his novels that celebrated their efficacy in revealing the flaws of the cultural, social, and political conditions of England, India and Pakistan were supported at least in part through emphasis



on the moral authority attributed to Rushdie for his own experience of those conditions. More recently, however, Rushdie's fiction and persona seem to enunciate on behalf of the metropole rather than the margins, vocalizing the cultural values of the dominant West, a shift that I explore throughout this study.

### **Thinking Identity in Rushdie's Fiction**

The storyteller's role is far from the only one attributed to the Rushdie persona, and *Joseph Anton* can be understood as engaged in a much more complex attempt at identity management than is suggested in its claims to foreground storytelling and survival. It is, after all, hardly unusual within Rushdie's canon in this regard: Rushdie's fiction theorizes possibilities of contemporary, postcolonial identity. Despite their structural complexities, Rushdie's novels are, as Joel Kuortti concludes of *The Satanic Verses*, organized according to principles of "identity and belonging" ("To Be Born Again" 125), an idea Geetha Ganapathy-Doré reiterates in writing that the questions of "Who am I?" and "Who else is there?" are the central problems of Rushdie's work (19). The "rich, complex and allegorically suggestive" character gallery that Kuortti identifies in *The Satanic Verses* ("To Be Born Again" 127) is a recurring element of Rushdie's fiction, and, as Ganapathy-Doré suggests, these galleries work to a certain end. M. D. Fletcher identifies that end as an attempt to resolve "a quest for identity and meaning" (17-18) and, for Fletcher, Rushdie's fiction "seems not only satiric and counter-discursive but also encyclopedic" (17-18). That is, Rushdie's characters and strategies of challenging the values and systems of the culture of the West are connected, a point Malik emphasizes. In the "Introduction" to *Salman Rushdie: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (2013), Robert Eaglestone writes that "Rushdie's novels

do have points, they address issues. That there is not one point or that the issues are not clear cut is not to deny that they are about something, that his novels *think*” (Eaglestone and McQuillan 6, original italics). For Malik, whose “Foreword” precedes Eaglestone’s introduction, the way Rushdie’s novels think is clear: they explore and expand the scope of possibilities regarding what it is to be human. He concludes that “at the heart of [Rushdie’s] view of storytelling, indeed at the heart of his stories, lies the importance of the human, both as a storyteller and as a truthmaker... it is here that the real significance of Rushdie lies...for the insistence on the importance of the imagination to the human, and of the human to the imagination” (x).

There are, I think, several points to be drawn from Malik’s extension of Eaglestone’s claim. The first is that Malik makes no overt mention of the political significance of Rushdie’s published work and, therefore, suggests the shift in emphasis to the personal that is identified by Sarah Brouillette and Peter Morey in their respective analyses of *Fury* and *Shalimar the Clown*. The second is that Malik’s conclusion about the novels’ accounts of “the truth of human experience” and emphasis on the link between imagination and ideas of the human signal an assumption about the potential of Rushdie’s work to define ways of being that exceed those of the dominant culture in which the work is produced and read. If Rushdie’s central characters are often theorizations of hybrid and migrant identities, their transformative potential seems to lie in their being surprising and strange, of introducing external, defamiliarizing elements to the cultural systems of the West, a point I explore in more detail in Chapter 4. Finally, Malik’s claim about “the real significance of Rushdie” seems to emphasize the author over his work, or, at the very least, to suggest a simultaneity of the author and his fiction, one that I read as a sign of the complexity of the interplay

between Rushdie's characters, especially the protagonists, and the persona. This interplay may result in the reduction of the transformative potential of Rushdie's protagonists, but it may, too, result in opportunities to insist on their strangeness with regard to the Western culture of the post-colonial world, especially as they undermine mainstream presuppositions about the nature of identity.

The study follows the turn to the personal in Rushdie's work and criticism that Malik signposts in arguing that Rushdie's novels are, primarily, lessons in "ways of thinking about stories and truth and about what it is to be human" (Eagleton and McQuillan vii). While a great deal of Rushdie scholarship focuses on the broadly political qualities of his fiction, including the reading of his protagonists as political symbols and allegories, I follow this turn to the personal by focusing on Rushdie's inscriptions of contemporary, postcolonial subjects as theorizations of individual subject positions. Specifically, I identify and analyze the qualities of hybridity and migrancy that permit the survival and success of Rushdie's most recent protagonists, especially as these offer instructive comparisons to the corresponding qualities of survival and success in the Rushdie persona. Conceptions of hybridity and migrancy are impacted by the persona and his fictional protagonists because they recur as major *topoi* in Rushdie's novels and are increasingly important aspects of globalized experience. These concepts are also regularly deployed as principles of analysis in postcolonial studies despite the fact that they are often defined in multiple and even contradictory ways, as is especially the case for hybridity<sup>3</sup>. Hybridity and migrancy, as a

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as Simone Drichel concludes, hybridity may be "unmatched in centrality in contemporary postcolonial debates" (604), not least because of the challenges of defining it and assessing its usefulness.

number of Rushdie scholars seem to assume, may have significant potential for challenging normative understandings of the lived experiences of contemporary, postcolonial subjects, but much of this power as evidenced in Rushdie's later work seems to be lost in the interplay between characters and author, as I will show. To some extent, exploring this interplay means following paths suggested by Brouillette<sup>4</sup> and Eaglestone<sup>5</sup>. Both argue for a turn back to Rushdie's literature via the figure of its author: Brouillette in focusing on Rushdie and other authors' "attempts at deliberate self-construction" (*Postcolonial Writers* 1) as they use their written work "to interact with their own paratextual histories" (3), and Eaglestone in tracing the changes in Rushdie's fiction marked by the figure described in *Joseph Anton*. For me, the crucial point of both directions in current Rushdie criticism is that of working through the considerable influence of Rushdie's public cultural presence in the reading of the fiction – that is, understanding the presence of the Rushdie persona, which necessitates a turning back to his literature via the idea of this persona rather than instead of, or in spite of, it. Rushdie's novels, particularly his earlier ones, are often remarked for their work in 'writing back' against cultural and political centres, but it is far from clear that this writing back continues today, especially with regard to the key postcolonial ideas of hybridity and migrancy. It is my hope, nonetheless, to restore some of the potential of Rushdie's fiction to 'write back' despite the overwhelming presence of this persona.

In the following chapters, I am concerned with providing an account of the identity of the Rushdie persona, especially its dominant qualities – including hybridity and migrancy – and the conditions of its production. I am also concerned with how this persona functions

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<sup>4</sup> See *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*.

<sup>5</sup> See "Po-Fa: *Joseph Anton*" in *Salman Rushdie*, eds. Eaglestone and McQuillan.

with regard to Rushdie's fiction, and I follow the account of the persona with an argument for its work in authorizing particular constructions of meaning in Rushdie's most recent novels. In responding to the questions of "What are the dominant elements of the Rushdie persona?" and "What are the implications of that complex persona for the reading of postcolonial subject positions in Rushdie's fiction?" I hope to clarify the constitutive elements and forces of production of the Rushdie persona as well as their work in challenging or reinforcing dominant cultural norms. As I argue, through an analysis of both scholarly and non-academic responses to Rushdie's work, the Rushdie persona is a recuperated figure, one that has been sanitized, by the dominant culture of the West, of much of its celebrated contestatory potential as a voice of the marginalized and oppressed, and that is deployed to a significant extent in the service of the privileged and powerful. The several roles inscribed in *Joseph Anton* – among them, Rushdie as persecuted artist, triumphant survivor, and revitalized storyteller – are founded on grounds of dominant masculinity, social and cultural privilege, and moral authority, and the Rushdie persona aligns more closely with the values of the metropole than those of the margins.

Moreover, as I argue in analyses of Rushdie's two most recent novels, *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence*, the Rushdie persona is engaged in a complex interplay with Rushdie's protagonists that reinforces Western values. The protagonists of Rushdie's novels are, defined by the political and cultural contexts of their respective narratives, but they are, too, theorizations of contemporary postcolonial identity that are often interpreted according to the impact of understandings of the Rushdie persona. For example, both popular reviews and scholarly analyses of *Shalimar the Clown* tend to focus on the novel's male, rather than female, migrant protagonists, often through identifications of the

male characters as authorial proxies. The novel's ontological hierarchy, in which dominant masculinity is valued over other forms of being, is reinforced by accounts of Rushdie's own dominant masculinity, and the scope of possibility regarding how to survive and succeed as a contemporary migrant is reduced. Similarly, in *The Enchantress of Florence*, the Emperor Akbar's hybrid qualities are much more likely to be identified and analyzed than those of his marginalized foil, Mogor dell'Amore, in both popular and scholarly readings of the novel, especially insofar as they resonate with accounts of Rushdie's in-between, privileged cultural position. As a result, Akbar's safe, productive hybridity is prioritized over Mogor's disruptive hybridity as a condition of individual success: one form of hybridity is clearly better than the other. Through the interplay between the Rushdie persona and his protagonists, the forms of hybridity and migrancy that reinforce and contribute to the systems of the dominant are established as being more likely to permit survival and success than those that disrupt and transform. This study, then, seeks to challenge the reductive tensions of the singular narratives around the persona, including those established by Rushdie himself, by restoring some of the transformative potential of his work. The narrative of the storyteller's return in *Joseph Anton*, for example, can be understood as a dominant account of the persona, one that defines specific ways of surviving and succeeding as a postcolonial, hybrid, and migrant individual, but there are other narratives at play, both in the memoir and Rushdie's novels, and their multiplicities and complexities allow the possibility of reading back against the persona and its influence.

## Rushdie's Public Identity

Rushdie's public identity is complex and multi-faceted, as I discuss in the following chapters, and *Joseph Anton* is a useful reminder that Rushdie is, first and foremost, a writer, one whose exceptional literary standing was established by the publication of the Booker-prize winning *Midnight's Children*<sup>6</sup>. His work has been consistently recognized for its literariness, including inventive wordplay, polyglot prose, complex architecture, entangled chronologies, intertextualities of high and popular culture, and deployments of realist and magic realist idioms. He is the recipient of a 1999 appointment as a French Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, the highest rank within the Order; a 2007 British knighthood for "services to literature"; and, most recently, the 2014 Hans Christian Andersen prize "due to the fact that he is an incomparable author... [who] enriches world literature" (*Hans Christian* n.p.). Rushdie's fiction has, too, been celebrated for its social, cultural, and political significance: Brouillette writes, in 2005, that Rushdie is one of the "definitive lead authors" of the literature "championed by postcolonial scholarship" (137) and Ganapathy-Doré concludes, in 2011, that *Midnight's Children* has "the honour of being the pioneering postcolonial novel" (48).

Despite his critical and popular success as a writer, Rushdie is, first and for most<sup>7</sup>, the figure at the heart of the Affair, and a symbol of contemporary, cultural conflict. Andrew

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<sup>6</sup> *Midnight's Children* was awarded the Booker Prize in 1981, the Booker of Bookers Award in 1993 and the Best of the Booker Award in 2008, the 25<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the prize.

<sup>7</sup> The punning wordplay of Rushdie's fiction is contagious. I have, though, attempted to limit its influence in the writing of this study.

Teverson, introducing his book-length study of the cultural contexts of Rushdie's work, concludes that "the name of Salman Rushdie has become so familiar internationally that even those who do not generally read literary fiction have heard of him and know something about the subjects concerning which he writes" (3), and one of the things I seek to address is what, exactly, is signalled by this name beyond reference to the living body of the author. Some of the familiarity Teverson alludes to may be due to Rushdie's literary success before the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, but much of what the Rushdie persona denotes and connotes is a consequence of the events following the *fatwa*. Ganapathy-Doré acknowledges this much in concluding, somewhat hyperbolically, that "Rushdie will be tragically obliged by Khomeini's fatwa [sic] to confront his own mortality and celebrate life by telling tales like Scheherazade" (104). Ganapathy-Doré's exaggeration is perhaps understandable, given both the tendency to the superlative in Rushdie's own prose and the effects of the *fatwa*: Rushdie was almost immediately forced into hiding by its declaration, lived under police protection from persistent threats of violence and death, and only resumed the life of an "ordinary citizen" (Rushdie, *Joseph Anton* 631) after thirteen years in hiding. Even a decade after the formal end of Rushdie's British police protection, the effects of the Affair do not so much linger as erupt, as is clear in the controversy surrounding Rushdie's absence at the 2012 Jaipur Literary Festival. There, Rushdie withdrew his attendance after being warned that assassins might make attempts on his life, and after some Muslim groups called for Indian authorities to prevent Rushdie from entering the country. Authors at the festival who attempted to read from *The Satanic Verses* in protest at Rushdie's absence were prevented from doing so by festival organizers out of fears of violent response, this more than twenty years after the first anti-Rushdie riots in India and England.



Largely as a result of the Affair, the Rushdie persona occupies a position of pop cultural significance that is both informed by and in excess of Rushdie's literary celebrity. His reception of the 2013 Asian American Writers Workshop (AAWW) Lifetime Achievement Award speaks to his standing in a world defined rather differently than his general services to and enrichment of literature suggest. The award, given as a recognition of contributions to Asian American literature (Asian American Writers Workshop, n.p.), was conferred on Rushdie in a decidedly hybrid cultural forum, one that included academic, literary, political, and pop cultural elements. The hybridity of the conferral seems only appropriate, given both Rushdie's consistent mixing of elements of high and pop culture in his fiction, and his multi-layered, pop cultural presence: Rushdie regularly appears as a guest on late-night American television shows, including Bill Maher's *Real Time with Bill Maher*, Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*, and Stephen Colbert's *The Colbert Report*, popular programs recognized for their focus on contemporary political events. In these appearances, Rushdie is called on equally as an author promoting his latest work and as an expert political observer and commentator, opining on topics ranging from the actions of Islamic nation-states to American foreign policy. Rushdie also regularly features in newspaper social columns and online celebrity gossip sites that report his affairs, proposals of marriage, and arguments with other writers. In this mode of representation, Rushdie is rendered as an *enfant terrible*, equally likely to be portrayed as a political provocateur, an aging womanizer, and an arrogant, argumentative curmudgeon. The answer to the question of Rushdie's identity, then, depends largely on the interrogative frame. As the subject of the Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa*, he is either deservedly condemned or unfairly victimized, and thus an exemplary figure of either blasphemy or freedom of expression; an undeserving recipient of expensive

protection or a symbol of an ethical response to threats of violence. As a consistent critic of fundamentalist Islamic terror, he is either an unrepentant, irresponsible fool or a champion of basic human rights. As a writer, he is a fantasist or an historian; as a best-selling author, he is a deserving recipient of literary prizes or an opportunist who has capitalized on the *fatwa* for his personal benefit. As a public figure, he is a celebrity and an established authority on topics ranging from medieval history to contemporary jihadism or a self-celebrating egomaniac. He is, as seems most likely and appropriate – given his celebratory performances of liminality both on and off the page – something, or, more accurately, several somethings, in between.

### **Rushdie's Literary Standing**

Rushdie is, too, a figure of some standing in the academic world, occupying what Aijaz Ahmad calls “a distinguished place at the very apex of ‘Third World Literature’” (125), defined, to that point, by the publications of *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses*. And such are the effects of Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* that Amin Malik begins his analysis of the novel with the assumption that “the literary world has never been the same since the publication of *The Satanic Verses*” (176), a difference signalled by the “unprecedented violence” and “universal implications” (177) of the Affair. Other signs of Rushdie's significance and its continuing growth include Emory University's 2006 acquisition of both Rushdie's archived material and Rushdie himself, as a Distinguished Writer-in-Residence, and the publications of several academic monographs within the last five years, including second editions of D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke's (2010) and Damian Grant's (2012), both entitled *Salman Rushdie*. For Goonetilleke, his second edition, following the

1998 original, is prompted by Rushdie's "relocation to the USA and his well-publicized reactions to 9/11, along with [his] recent novels set in America" (viii) and is thus an attempt to provide a "comprehensive, up-to-date study of Rushdie" (viii). Grant's second edition similarly accounts for the publication of Rushdie's five novels and several works of non-fiction in the twelve years following Grant's 1999 original, as well as some of Rushdie's significant lived experiences, including his divorce from Elizabeth West, marriage to and divorce from Padma Lakshmi, and British knighthood. The updates to Goonetilleke's and Grant's critical biographies thus suggest the growing prominence of Rushdie's work in literary studies, as do the publications of Monika Kluwick's (2011) and Ana Cristina Mendes's (2012) book-length studies of, respectively, magic realism and visual culture in Rushdie's fiction, as well as the regular contextualization of that work in Rushdie's biography.

Kluwick's monograph, *Exploring Magic Realism in Salman Rushdie's Fiction*, is an example of what Elizabeth Anker refers to as one of the "prevailing strains" of Rushdie scholarship, that which entails reading Rushdie's fiction as exemplifying particular modes of writing, including magical realism and postmodernism (149). Another such strain, for Anker, is scholarship that foregrounds "commentary on the anatomy of abstract political constructs often defined as formative of global modernity ... and the ambivalent postcolonial relationship to them" (149). Anker's point is well taken: Rushdie's place in postcolonial studies, well established by critical responses to his literature, is also grounded in oft-recognized links between his fictional representations of the cultural and political elements of postcolonial life and their critical theorizations. Dora Ahmad, for example, in arguing for the success of Rushdie's contestations of ahistorical, transcendent pasts and futures, identifies a

consistency between Rushdie's fiction and Edward Said's work in distinguishing between "fundamentalist origins and fluid beginnings" (9). The oft-celebrated, contestatory mode of Rushdie's fiction itself provides the title of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's landmark 1988 text, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*. A punning play on the title of George Lucas's film, *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*, Rushdie's "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance" is the title of a *London Times* article published in 1982, at the height of the success of *Midnight's Children*, and that celebrates the work of writers at the colonial margins. Finally, in perhaps the most consistently enunciated link between Rushdie's fiction and postcolonial theory, Rushdie's representations of hybridity are often compared to Homi K. Bhabha's. Rushdie's and Bhabha's works notably coincide in celebrating the liminal or in-between qualities of culture, whether dominant or marginal, and Qadri Ismail, in a review of Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands*, goes so far as to refer to Rushdie as "sounding like an intelligible Homi Bhabha" in criticising "fundamentalism of all sorts" and "[pleading] for the recognition of all cultures as syncretic" (n.p.).

Another, more recent, strain of Rushdie scholarship identifies a shift in Rushdie's later novels from the overtly political to the intensely personal. Thus, for example, Brouillette argues that *Fury* (2001) marks a shift in Rushdie's political preoccupations from the broadly postcolonial to the specifically self-interested ("Authorship"), and Morey concludes of *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) that the eponymous protagonist exemplifies a "shift from the political to the personal" that is common to almost all of the novel's main characters (224). This analysis of character is a departure from readings of political allegory in Rushdie's earlier work, one that Siddiqi marks via reference to Fredric Jameson's broad claim regarding

the national allegorical qualities of Third World literature. Siddiqi concludes that “[t]he shortcomings of Jameson’s tendency to generalize notwithstanding, his argument is applicable to Rushdie’s novels, which are pointedly framed as national allegories” (301). More specific examples of this mode of reading include Isaac Chotiner’s references to *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame* as exposures of “the corrupt dynasties and pathologies of two sundered societies (India and Pakistan)” (98) via the experiences of Saleem Sinai, Omar Khayyam and other characters in the novels, and Morey’s argument that the central characters in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* function as “allegorical participants” in the fates of India and Pakistan (215). In comparison to the protagonists of Rushdie’s earlier novels, then, and despite structural similarities between Rushdie’s early and later works, the protagonists of *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence*, work in a very different mode.

*Shalimar the Clown* is similar to *The Satanic Verses* (1988), both in terms of narrative structure – the non-linear sections of the novels are organized via the experiences of particular characters– and, as Teverson points out, narrative content and political scale. For Teverson, “the political conflicts with which [Rushdie] is primarily concerned are played out microcosmically in the lives of his central characters” (219), clear examples of which are Shalimar’s and Saladin Chamcha’s experiences of, respectively, the post-Partition conflict over Kashmir and the racial tensions of 1980s London. *Shalimar the Clown*, though, is less architecturally complex than *The Satanic Verses*: its narrative is presented without schizophrenic, hallucinatory perspectives and is also signposted with dates, titles, and easily recognizable public figures and events. Moreover, whereas Saladin Chamcha presents as a point of accessibility to the murky cultural and political landscapes of 1980s England and

India, Shalimar is, as Morey points out, almost completely depoliticized. Even Shalimar's reason for working as an Islamic terrorist emphasizes his individual rather than political motivation: he pretends to religious fanaticism in order to receive the training and tools that will allow him to fulfill his goal of killing those involved in his cuckolding. Saladin might be less an inscription of individual experience than a vehicle of political commentary, but Shalimar is most certainly the opposite.

A similar reversal is at play in *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), a novel which is at least partially engaged in providing accounts of the lives of two figures of political and historical significance: the Mughal Emperor Akbar and the Florentine civil servant, Machiavelli. Unlike in previous novels, though, the accounts of these figures function less as political commentary than as opportunities for the reader's emotional investment in characters who happen to be famous and historically verifiable. Thus, while the portrayals of Indira Gandhi in *Midnight's Children*, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (as Iskander Happa) and Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (as Raza Hyder) in *Shame*, Bal Thackeray (as Raman Fielding) in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and the Ayatollah Khomeini (as the exiled Imam) in *The Satanic Verses* coincide in caricaturing and villainizing them through biting satire, those of Akbar and Machiavelli are, in comparison, non-critical studies in their individual personalities and relationship to power. This might be explained by a shift in Rushdie's prose – the narrative conventions of *The Enchantress of Florence* are far more modernist and realist than the magic realism of Rushdie's early novels – one that permits the reader a greater proximity to the novel's characters and events. It might, too, be the result of the greater historical distance and, thus, reduced political immediacy of *The Enchantress of Florence* in comparison to

Rushdie's other novels. In either case, the shift from overt political commentary to character study is clear.

### **Consequences of the Affair**

A great deal of the content of the Rushdie persona stems from the Affair following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Figure of blasphemy to some, symbol of free speech to others, the Rushdie persona is variously produced by the several discourses of the Affair, including that of the *fatwa*, its believers and opponents, and Rushdie himself. Indeed, accounts of the persona stemming from the Affair are equally likely to be self-conferred as attributed and include Rushdie's metafictional devices, such as inscriptions of self-parodic characters, like Rashid Khalifa in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, and events, like the protagonist's isolated confinement in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, as well as non-fictional interventions, including essays such as "In Good Faith." In a thinly veiled fictionalization of the effects of Khomeini's *fatwa*, Rashid Khalifa, the Shah of Blah, storyteller *non pareil*, and father to Haroun, loses his ability to delight audiences in the face of threats from cruel, villainous political authorities. The framing device of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, in which the eponymous Moor is forced to write his life's story while imprisoned and under the threat of death, is a similarly thinly veiled fictionalization of the conditions of Rushdie's working life during the Affair. And in "In Good Faith," Rushdie responds to the accusation that he deliberately insulted Muslims by blaspheming against Islam in *The Satanic Verses* by contending that the novel is not "a text of incitement to racial hatred; or anything of the sort" (410) but, rather, an exploration of "the nature of revelation and the power of faith" (408). "In Good Faith," like many of Rushdie's written responses to the Affair, functions as a

statement of authorial intent, a clarification of the novel's purpose if not meaning, and an attempt to point out that the *fatwa* is, at best, misplaced.

Perhaps the clearest sign of a turn to the personal in Rushdie's work is that of authorial self-inscription, whether fictive or memorial. Rushdie's self-inscriptions in his earlier novels are generally given as thinly veiled biographical references, as in Saladin Chamcha's experiences of English public school (*The Satanic Verses*), or parodies, as in Gibreel Farishta's hallucinatory conversation with the author embodied as god (*The Satanic Verses*). After the declaration of the *fatwa*, though, Rushdie's fictive self-inscriptions are clearer and less parodic, including the silenced and shackled storytellers of, respectively, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, both of whom are recognizable as the persecuted figure of their *fatwa*-afflicted author. Consistent with this shift in the mode of authorial proxy from parodic to revelatory, if not self-justifying, are those attempts by Rushdie during the Affair to counter the claims that *The Satanic Verses* is blasphemous. For Brouillette, Rushdie's attempts to "affirm his authorial intentions" regarding the novel constitute the beginning of a process that continues in *Fury*, in which Rushdie does not so much parody himself via the figure of Malik Solanka as try to "re-centre his own authorship" (152). This process is, in effect, one of attempting to guide the reading of not only his fiction but also the Rushdie persona and, in this light, *Joseph Anton* is Rushdie's clearest and most recent intervention to date.

Rushdie's interventions in the discursive production of the Affair and the Rushdie persona also include op-ed pieces and letters to the editor, public appearances and interviews, and, most recently, his much-anticipated memoir. *Joseph Anton*, as such an intervention, positions Rushdie as the first – the original – victim of the fundamentalist Islamic terrorism



that subsequently gave rise to the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, and the 2010 attack on Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard. Both of these are consistent, for Rushdie, with Indian Hindu extremists' 2010 attack of an Indian movie star for saying that Pakistani cricketers should be allowed to participate in a tournament in India, and British Sikhs' 2004 attack of a Sikh playwright in England after the performance of a play they deemed offensive (*Joseph Anton* 629). Terrorism grounded in extreme religious views, here, is not limited to Islam, and the implication is not only that more, and perhaps worse, is to come, but also that Rushdie's experience should be understood as a beginning of something new.

In positioning Rushdie as the first victim of faith-based terror, and, as a consequence, something between a prophet of and a sacrifice to its violence, *Joseph Anton* thus attempts to change the dynamic of reading *The Satanic Verses*. The Affair, as several scholars have noted, shapes the reading of the novel – Fletcher notes that “the so-called Rushdie Affair has overshadowed analysis of Salman Rushdie's fiction” (1) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes that “a mere reading of [the novel] has become impossible” (“Reading” 79) – and *Joseph Anton* might be understood as attempting to inscribe a similar dynamic over the Affair itself. *Joseph Anton* is consistent with Rushdie's previous attempts to manage his public identity, especially in the context of the Affair, including through his published work, interviews and public appearances. It is, too, consistent with these previous attempts in deliberately engaging with other discursive contributions, including book reviews, op-ed pieces, letters to editors, articles, monographs, interviews and profiles, online postings, promotional materials, advertisements, and prizes and awards. The memoir's engagement with these materials varies: at some points, it functions as a corrective, as when it provides an explanation of Rushdie's “sinister hoodlum's gaze” (573), often taken as a sign of arrogance,

as a consequence of ptosis, a medical condition Rushdie eventually corrected through surgery; at other points, it works to either contest responses to Rushdie's fiction, as in its rejection of the blasphemous qualities of *The Satanic Verses*, or to affirm qualities attributed to the persona, as in its positioning of Rushdie as a paragon of Western freedoms as well as something of a ladies' man. As these examples demonstrate, the memoir also engages with attributive discourses ranging from the highbrow to the puerile.

The memoir's engagements with attributive accounts, including those of popular and academic media, are intriguing both for the demonstration of the variety of contributions to the Rushdie persona and the apparent selectivity among those contributions. One example is the issue of Rushdie's authorial professionalism, something which has played out in an epistolary exchange in *The Guardian* with the English novelist, John le Carré. During the Affair, le Carré defined Rushdie's act of writing and defending *The Satanic Verses* as irresponsible, concluding that "there is no law in life or nature that says that great religions may be insulted with impunity" ("Salman Rushdie and John le Carré," n.p.). At the time, Rushdie, aggrieved at the implication that *The Satanic Verses* is such an insult and that he had abandoned his responsibilities as an author by offering it for publication, responded by accusing le Carré of "eagerly and rather pompously [joining] forces with [Rushdie's] assailants" (Hoge n.p.), a point le Carré was quick to refute<sup>8</sup>. The account of this dispute provided in *Joseph Anton* is equally occupied in defending *The Satanic Verses* and the

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<sup>8</sup> The public reconciliation of the feud between Rushdie and le Carré, in November 2012, after the publication of *Joseph Anton*, was widely reported, including in *The Guardian*, the newspaper where much of the feud took place ("Salman Rushdie and John le Carré").

rectitude of its author, the result of which is to characterize Rushdie as particularly sensitive of his moral standing, as well as highly conscious of the way he is represented and perceived.

Another example of how Rushdie's writing works to characterize the persona is regarding the representation of women in his fiction, particularly in relation to the novels' predominantly male protagonists. This is a regular point of debate in academic work on Rushdie's fiction, and one that I explore further in providing an account of some of the dominant elements of the Rushdie persona (Chapter 3) as well as my readings of *The Enchantress of Florence* (Chapter 4) and *Shalimar the Clown* (Chapter 5). Briefly, Spivak concludes that Rushdie's project of writing women into history is a failure ("Reading" 82), but, in contrast, Nicole Weickgennant concludes that the failure is actually a deliberate, strategic misogyny, one that aims to bring attention to the lived inequalities of women in postcolonial contexts ("The Nation's Monstrous Women" 65-66). Rushdie, as an author, is, presumably, either brilliantly capable or woefully incapable of adequately representing women, and, in the context of this disparity, the memoir's accounts of Rushdie's marriages and affairs might be understood as not merely engaging with gossip column accounts of Rushdie's amorous escapades but also critical readings of gender in Rushdie's work. *Joseph Anton* might support, as it claims, Rushdie's appreciation of the power of women, but it might also signal a limited understanding of gender-based inequalities or, at worst, a misogyny that merely pretends to strategy. Regardless, it serves to further define the persona as both conscious of itself and consistently willing to guide its public reputation. Moreover, whether accounts of Rushdie's treatment of women – both in his fiction and personal life – are accurate descriptors of the man himself, they nonetheless contribute to our sense of Rushdie as a cultural presence.

Above all else, though, *Joseph Anton* suggests that Rushdie's survival of the Affair, and his celebratory return, are functions of specific personal characteristics in adverse conditions. The narrative of return to the author's original storytelling position is an attempt to inscribe particular meaning and structure to the Affair and, as such, is something akin to a *künstlerroman*, albeit one that works more to reaffirm the author's personal qualities, including literary brilliance and high moral character, than to account for their development. If one way of understanding the Affair amid the complexity of its political and religious roots is, as Malik writes, "as the first great expression of fear of a mapless world, the first great contemporary confrontation over identity and the resources necessary for sustaining identity" (Eaglestone and McQuillan ix), then one way of understanding Rushdie is as the pioneering and, possibly, exemplary, response to that confrontation. This is, though, a very limited response and one that overlooks the various competing narratives of the Rushdie persona, a reading of which complicates matters further.

### **Reading *Joseph Anton*: A Memoir**

Despite its attempts to engage with the many contexts of the Affair, its confiding tone, and its suggestions of the uniqueness of its insights, *Joseph Anton* should not be accorded either unqualified authority or privileged status in giving a definitive account of the Rushdie persona, especially with regard to the reading of his fiction. The memoir, though, is a useful tool of analysis. Eaglestone suggests as much in asking "How does *Joseph Anton* change how we read Rushdie or, rather, what changes in his fiction does this non-fiction archive trace?" (121), and Eaglestone's description of the book as "a special form of memoir, an *archive*, which demonstrates the development of Rushdie's thought and novelistic

practice” (115, original italics) suggests a specific kind of application. As the special form of memoir that Eaglestone identifies, *Joseph Anton* is not so much a narrative of the artist’s becoming – at no point does the memoir express doubt regarding Rushdie’s literary abilities – but one of the artist’s survival and triumph. Rushdie survives the Affair, rendered as a unique rite of passage, by placing artistic independence above all else, including both the external pressures to retract and recant as well as the internal need to be loved by everyone, and the memoir’s narrative of success is thus defined by Rushdie’s personal maturation as he constructs it. Reading Rushdie’s fiction in the context of this narrative of development thus permits an emphasis on the qualities and experiences of his protagonists that, like those of their author, permit their survival and success in contemporary, postcolonial contexts.

*Joseph Anton* is not unusual in Rushdie’s work as a self-conferral of identity, neither for its emphasis on particular characteristics of the Rushdie persona nor its engagement with other discursive contributions. Moreover, as with other accounts of Rushdie’s identity, both self-conferred and attributed, the stability of the identity claims in the memoir is limited and the narrative of a return to origins is, at best, partial and incomplete. Nonetheless, *Joseph Anton* is a useful starting point for this study, for several reasons. First, the memoir is Rushdie’s most complete and most recent self-conferral of identity and, as such, is both a clear marker of the turn in Rushdie’s work toward accounts of individual experience and a rich site for exploring the dominant elements of the Rushdie persona. Rather than reading the memoir for signs of its author’s intentions<sup>9</sup>, then, I read it for its contributions to the persona,

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<sup>9</sup> Procter writes “the always vexed question of intentionality is particularly problematic with a writer like Rushdie who has written so excessively and influentially on his own work ... if anything, Rushdie’s intentions have been granted too much authority,

particularly the points of resonance among the various discourses of his cultural presence. Second, the publication of the memoir, coupled with the almost simultaneous release of Deepa Mehta's film version of *Midnight's Children*<sup>10</sup>, has resulted in a great deal of promotional work, including book and film reviews, and interviews with and appearances by Rushdie. This material is not only useful in itself for my study, but it also signals the significance of this moment as a shift in the cultural function of the persona, one that bears analysis and explication. Third, the memoir's narrative of Rushdie's survival and success, and the conditions that govern both, is consistent with Rushdie's previous work, both fictional and non-fictional. It is, then, not only a clear example of the particular qualities and conditions required for postcolonial subjects' survival and success but also one that resonates with similar accounts in Rushdie's novels. Finally, *Joseph Anton* is a useful starting point for my analysis given its emphasis on the moral authority of the persona. Rushdie's casual, sidewalk wave to an approaching cab at the end of *Joseph Anton*, rather than his hurried, escorted rush to an armour-plated police vehicle, is a triumphant gesture, one that celebrates not only the material reality of Rushdie's survival but also its mode. Throughout the memoir, and whether as innocent victim, determined survivor, misunderstood artist, critic of faith-based terror, or champion of freedom of expression, Rushdie is consistently positioned as a figure of moral authority. In addition to the moral connotations of victimization and survival – Eaglestone writes that “*Joseph Anton* is the record, the archive, of a man persecuted for his

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serving to fix or stabilize the meaning or significance of this writing” (38). As I argue in Chapter 3, Rushdie's metafictional intrusions are similarly granted authority in stabilizing not only the meaning of his writing but also the qualities of the Rushdie persona.

<sup>10</sup> Rushdie wrote the screenplay and provides the voice-over narration for the film.

beliefs” (122) – there are other contributing elements to Rushdie’s moral authority, including those regularly, but not uncontestedly, bestowed on him for his criticisms of political corruption and inscriptions of the lived conditions of contemporary postcolonial subjects. In this light, Rushdie’s return to public life and his unencumbered storytelling role are not merely ontological successes but also ethical ones. As I will argue, though, Rushdie’s moral authority is tempered by other qualities attributed to him, and it is, therefore, a sign of how the dominant culture of the West works to recuperate elements of resistance or contestation.

The Rushdie persona is often reductively essentialized through accounts of his romantic liaisons or commentaries on Islam, and it is, too, often assumed as a determining factor in the political significance and success of his fiction<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, the persona is not only an iconic figure of postcolonial culture but also of particular postcolonial subject positions, including, notably, hybridity and migrancy. Procter concludes of Rushdie’s work that “his writing played an extraordinary and unparalleled constitutive role in the very formation of postcolonial theory,” wherein the “vocabularies of hybridity and migration register the taint of his presence” (44). Procter’s use of the adjective “taint” suggests an element of undesirability regarding Rushdie’s presence, or, at the very least, an influence that should be recognized and accounted for, as I hope to do in explicating the dominant elements

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<sup>11</sup> That is, the credibility of, for example, *The Satanic Verses* and *Shalimar the Clown* as narratives of migrant experience is often predicated on accounts of Rushdie’s presumed expertise and lived experiences of migrancy. As a result, and as I argue in more detail in Chapter 5, the novels’ success in writing back from the postcolonial margins against the colonial centre is influenced by the Rushdie persona, including through readings of both Rushdie’s lived experience and his apparent areas of cultural and political expertise.

and cultural functions of the persona, as regards these dominant themes of hybridity and migrancy. Readings of Rushdie's fictional characters often rely on identifications of their similarities to their creator, including through proxy and parody, or readings of parabasis, and the dynamics and conditions of the interplay between the Rushdie persona and his characters are particularly apparent with regard to their performances of subject positions that are often celebrated for their subversive potential. As popular and academic responses demonstrate, Rushdie's fiction is rich ground for interpretation. In particular, and as Spivak's and Weickgennant Thiara's conflicting readings of the representation of women demonstrates, it holds significant potential for the understanding of postcolonial subject positions. Too often, however, that potential is limited by the specific influence of the persona. It would be naïve to think that the close readings of Rushdie's fiction would not be impacted when the author has attained such a level of fame and created such controversy that he has, in fact, been outstripped by a persona that is neither the man himself nor a fiction. Nonetheless, the impact of this particular persona can be mitigated, as I argue in the second half of this study.

### **Reading against the Rushdie Persona**

The efficacy of the Rushdie persona's influence is partially the result of its moral authority, a quality that is defined through accounts of the persona as a storyteller, educator, victim, survivor, political activist, and social observer and commentator. Rushdie's novels, particularly through their author's metafictional intrusions, also contribute to the persona's moral authority by establishing a complicity and moral compact with the reader, one with particular demands. In *Shalimar the Clown*, for example, these demands are contextualized by the destruction of Kashmir, and Teverson concludes that the metafictional interrogatives



directed to the reader of the novel constitute a “demand for attention and a demand for redress” (225). The point I want to emphasize here is that this question-asking works to establish the Rushdie persona’s moral authority by imposing a moral imperative on the reader, one that is consistent with Rushdie’s post-narrative explanations of his work. For example, in the conclusion to “In Good Faith,” his 1990 essay delivered in response to the rhetoric of the *fatwa*, Rushdie writes

[t]he liveliness of literature lies in its exceptionality, in being the individual, idiosyncratic vision of one human being, in which, to our delight and great surprise, we may find our own image reflected. A book is a version of the world. If you do not like it, ignore it; or offer your own version in return. (*Imaginary Homelands* 412)

More than twenty years later, Rushdie delivers the same education towards readerly responsibility, writing in *Joseph Anton* that

[l]iterature tried to open the universe, to increase, even if only slightly, the sum total of what it was possible for human beings to perceive, understand, and so, finally, to be ... this was an age in which men and women were being pushed toward ever-narrower definitions of themselves, encouraged to call themselves just one thing ... and the narrower their identities became, the greater was the likelihood of conflict between them. Literature’s view of human nature encouraged understanding, sympathy, and identification with people not like oneself, but the world was pushing everyone in the

opposite direction, toward narrowness, bigotry, tribalism, cultism and war. (628)

Implicit in the characterization of the struggle between literature and the conditions of its reading is the responsibility of the reader to actively engage with the limits and proscriptions of those conditions, to insist on the novel's potential to better them or, at least, to demand the possibility of that potential.

The demand for a moral response may be laudable but it should also be critically evaluated, and not least because, as I argue in Chapter 3, the Rushdie persona's moral authority is imperfect at best. Nonetheless, the combined weights of Rushdie's moral authority, lived experiences of migration and hybridity, and presumed expertise in subjects ranging from political history to contemporary jihadism afford the persona a significant amount of influence over the meaning of Rushdie's novels, especially with regard to hybridity and migrancy. Rushdie's fiction continues to contribute to accounts of his identity, but, increasingly, it does so via points of resonance between his protagonists and persona. The persona functions as a limiting principle over the possible meanings of his fiction, and the complex, mutually constitutive interplay between the persona and Rushdie's protagonists signals Western culture's recuperation of their subversive excess. However, identifying the points of resonance between the persona and protagonists opens the possibility of reading against them and thereby increasing the scope of encounter with the contemporary, marginalized postcolonial subject. In the following chapters, I argue for an approach to Rushdie's fiction that follows a moral imperative by insisting on the possibility of reading his novels as accounting not for "*the* truth of human experience" (my italics), as Malik writes,

but *a* specific truth, or perhaps even several truths, and certainly not one at the immediate expense of others.

In turning directly to Rushdie's fiction, I follow a path similar to those of Brouillette and Eaglestone, whose respective studies conclude with calls to read Rushdie's novels through his authorial identity rather than away from or in spite of it. It is my hope, here, to complicate the influence of the Rushdie persona on understandings of his hybrid and migrant protagonists by exploring the interplay between them. 'Hybridity' and 'migrancy' are often used in postcolonial studies, but the specificity and purpose of those uses vary widely. In Rushdie's case, hybridity is most often attributed to his life and fiction in a celebratory fashion, but migrancy is less regularly claimed as a positive quality of either. This is significant because, as several scholars have pointed out, Rushdie's novels are concerned with representing the marginalized members of the contemporary, globalized world, especially the hybrid and the migrant. Much of these scholars' work is based on the assumption that Rushdie's novels hold transformative potential with regard to understandings of identity in the cultural system in which the novels are produced and read<sup>12</sup>. However, while some accounts of Rushdie's writing position are given in support of claims that Rushdie's fiction is reliably informed<sup>13</sup>, others are used to argue that Rushdie's lived

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<sup>12</sup> For example, as previously noted, Malik lauds Rushdie's fiction for inscribing "the truth of human experience, and in particular the experience of change and transformation, of dislocation and belongingness" (Eaglestone and McQuillan vii).

<sup>13</sup> As noted in Chapter 3, these accounts, like Brennan's conclusion that Rushdie "interprets (and translates)" decolonisation struggles "for a Western reading public" (*Salman*

experience limits not only the transformative potential of his own fiction but also what it means to be a contemporary, sometimes marginalized postcolonial subject. In the early stages of his career, Rushdie was variously recognized in popular and academic media as either a marginalized or privileged subject<sup>14</sup>, but he is now generally regarded as the latter. Certainly, Rushdie's upbringing and material success support conclusions, like Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan's, that Rushdie is clearly a "privileged figure" (162), and Teverson's, that "Rushdie occupies...a privileged position as a migrant intellectual" (9). Despite this recognition of his relatively privileged position, however, Rushdie continues to be regarded as an authority on the contemporary conditions of postcoloniality and diaspora. The problem here, as I see it, is that the considerable weight of Rushdie's authority and widely distributed fiction combine to establish a narrative of success for the postcolonial subject that is, if not prescriptive, then at least exemplary. Aijaz Ahmad's oft-cited analysis of *Shame* is a clear articulation of this problem, specifically with regard to the representation of migrant identity in Rushdie's novel. For Ahmad, the elite facets of Rushdie's biography qualify the fictive

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*Rushdie and the Third World* 166), position Rushdie as a cultural insider and, therefore, an authority and expert.

<sup>14</sup>For example, Fletcher concludes of Rushdie's ambivalent status as a postcolonial "insider" and "privileged outsider" that the question remains "of Rushdie's own standing in relation to the topics of his fiction – what his standing is and what his position is and how polemical he is in asserting it" (4). For Fletcher, writing in the early 1990s, the possibilities are equally valid of Rushdie's occupying either a marginalized or dominant position, but later scholarship is less optimistic.

accounts of migrancy in Rushdie's work, and analyses like Ahmad's suggest the governing influence of the Rushdie persona over Rushdie's fiction<sup>15</sup>.

### **Reinforcing the Exceptional: Gender Norms, Secularism, and Social Elitism**

Despite attributions of disrupting the status quo in a post-colonial context, Rushdie's fictions, like the persona, are unremittingly normative in gender terms. Rushdie's protagonists are lauded, within their respective narratives, for their performances of dominant masculinity, particularly their heterosexual prowess. Max Ophuls (*Shalimar the Clown*), for example, a famed womanizer and seducer of some of the most beautiful women in the world, remains, in his 80s, capable of turning the heads of young female joggers with the "erotic proximity of his snappy crackle of power" (7) and conducting an affair with a twenty-something Bollywood star. Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta are both pursued by beautiful and successful women throughout *The Satanic Verses*, as are Ormus Cama, in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, and Malik Solanka, in *Fury*. In comparison, homosexual activity between male characters is rare in Rushdie's fiction, described as abnormal and aberrant, and limited to the supporting cast. Hema Chari concludes of *The Moor's Last Sigh* that, while it more clearly articulates homoerotic desire than does Rushdie's previous work, especially through the minor, gay character, Aires da Gama, it also simplifies and regulates the complexities of homoerotic desire and gay identity via a heterosexual paradigm (Chima in Hawley, 284). For Chima, the novel's representation of da Gama's sexual identity signals "the anxiety of masculinity in postcolonial India" (293), and it is in explicitly naming and excluding homosexual behaviour that some of that anxiety is overcome.

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<sup>15</sup> I consider this interplay in more detail in Chapter 5.

Similar conclusions might be drawn of Shalimar's weapons instructor, Talib the Afghan, in *Shalimar the Clown*, whose nocturnal, homosexual activities are at odds with his desire to execute homosexuals, "those unnatural effeminate upon whom God expectorated most violently of all" (272), and the English ship's captain, Lord Hauksbank, in *The Enchantress of Florence*, whose homoerotic overtures to the protagonist, Mogor dell'Amore, are not only spurned but are also cause for shame (18). In both cases, the homosexualities of the novels' minor characters are immediately contrasted with the dominant heterosexualities of the novels' protagonists, and Talib and Hauksbank are rendered deviant while the central characters Shalimar and Mogor are affirmed as the aspirational norm. Mull Standish, the businessman and talent promoter in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, who works tirelessly to ensure the success of the protagonists' music careers, stands as a partial exception to the negative representation of gay male characters in Rushdie's fiction, but even his sexual behaviours and desires are presented as character flaws to be tolerated, at best. Moreover, Standish, like da Gama, Talib, and Hauksbank, is a minor character whose narrative significance is consistently contrasted with that of the novel's protagonists, all of whom are straight. Dominant, heteronormative masculinity, especially in contrast to homosexuality, thus presents as not only a positive quality but also a condition of narrative significance in Rushdie's fiction.

In addition, the likelihood of survival and success among Rushdie's protagonists varies at least partially according to their degrees of adherence to structured systems of belief, with the characters who perform the well-defined religious skepticism of the Rushdie

persona<sup>16</sup> granted the best odds, and their rigidly religious counterparts the worst. Thus, for example, the religious faithful, whether Hindu, Muslim or Jewish of the village of Pachigam in *Shalimar the Clown*, suffer the horrific violence of Partition-based atrocities while three of the novel's protagonists, Shalimar, Max Ophuls, and Kashmira Ophuls, none of whom are faithful to a religion, escape similarly violent conflicts. In an extreme example of the consequences of strict adherence to religion, Bulbul Fakh, the "iron mullah" (264) tasked with the ideological training of Shalimar's terrorist cell, is transformed into metal, part-by-part and piece-by-piece, until, after his death, "no human body was discovered" within the iron remains (316). Fakh's unrelenting and inflexible religious adherence results in both his death and complete corporeal dehumanization, an end that contrasts with Shalimar's escape from the world of faith-based terror permitted by his pretended conversion to the extremist, fundamentalist Islam preached by Fakh (267-9). Nor is this consequence unique to *Shalimar the Clown*. In one of the clearest examples of the benefits of religious non-adherence in Rushdie's work, the Mughal Emperor Akbar in *The Enchantress of Florence* successfully oversees the cultural and geographic expansion of his empire through a carefully maintained syncretism of several systems of belief. Akbar's personal and imperial non-adherence to

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<sup>16</sup> See in particular Rushdie's explanation of *The Satanic Verses* as an attempt at discursive provocation rather than blasphemy. After writing that the novel cannot be blasphemous simply because it engages with a fictional system of belief – "something like Islam" (*Imaginary Homelands* 398) rather than the real-world religion – Rushdie concludes with an emphatic self-definition: "[t]o put it as simply as possible: *I am not a Muslim*" (405, original italics). The logic of this clarification is that the novel is incapable of blasphemy precisely because its author does not adhere to the system of belief under apparent attack.

either Islam or Hinduism is celebrated throughout the novel and, moreover, contrasted with the personal and political failures of his strictly faithful ancestors and contemporaries. For Rushdie's characters, survival and success are conditioned by limited and flexible attendance to religion, and the exemplary figure of the postcolonial subject is defined in opposition to the religious purist.

Most importantly, the survival and success of the marginalized, postcolonial subject is, too, a function of social qualities that meet the demands of the dominant culture. Writing of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Anshuman Mondal concludes that the novel is consistent with Rushdie's other work in being

almost exclusively populated by characters with exceptional talents:

VTO are the greatest rock group of all time, Ormus is 'genuinely ahead of his time', and an entire troupe of lesser characters are all invariably brilliant, extremely beautiful, massively successful, or part of the global elite in some form or other. The novels thus reinforce the idea that fame and privilege are a reflection of one's talent, that they are, in effect, deserved. (176)

Mondal's claim more accurately applies to the protagonists than the minor characters of Rushdie's work: their exceptional beauty, intelligence, and artistry directly contrast with the considerably lesser talents of the backbenchers of Rushdie's character galleries. Nonetheless, the point is clear that Rushdie's narratives often focus on a socio-cultural elite. This does not necessarily mean that the novels cannot function to convey individual experiences of postcoloniality, but it does mean that the accounts provided seem to be very limited: they are the stories of the straight, male, and secular elite. These stories are, too, as Mondal points out,



narratives of deserved survival and success, in which characters with “exceptional talents,” defined according to the value system of the dominant culture in which they live, are far more likely to escape their positions of marginality.

This apparent failure of Rushdie’s novels is, I think, exacerbated by the influence of the Rushdie persona. For example, as I argue in Chapter 4, the persona’s greater similarity to the Emperor Akbar than his foil, Mogor dell’Amore, in *The Enchantress of Florence*, reinforces the novel’s implicit hierarchy of hybridities. This ostensibly preferred version of hybridity is consistent with, rather than surprising to, the values of the dominant Western culture within which Rushdie’s fiction is produced and read, and thus suggests the play of a recuperative cultural process. Similarly, in Chapter 5, I analyze *Shalimar the Clown* and argue that the survival of the migrant protagonists is governed by their varying performances of dominant masculinity and the ways in which they tend to their cultural roots. The similarity between the Rushdie persona and Rushdie’s protagonists with regard to their dominant masculinity is relatively clear: the successful characters of Rushdie’s novels are defined by their hypermasculinity and ability to deploy various forms of social power, as is the persona. Perhaps less obvious, but no less significant, is their similarity in terms of attendance to their cultural roots. Rushdie himself writes, in *Joseph Anton*, that the answer to the problem of his particular mode of migrancy, that of being “not rootless, but multiply rooted” (54), is to declare the necessity of embracing both his original cultural grounds, Indian and English, as well as his most recent, American. That embrace, however, is limited, and is better understood as a historical consciousness without obligation than a preserving attendance. This form of attendance manifests in the protagonists of *Shalimar the Clown* as an epistemological performance rather than an ontological one: Rushdie’s characters are

knowledgeable of their cultural roots, but they do not embody them. Indeed, the greater their cultural consciousness, the greater their odds of survival and success, as long as that consciousness does not stray into an adherence that risks violating the limits of the dominant cultural system.

In order to read against this exacerbating influence of the Rushdie persona, I follow a model suggested by Spivak's reading of instructive failure in *The Satanic Verses*. Spivak, as I note above, writes that the novel's attempts at representing a broad range of voices fail, and, instead, *The Satanic Verses* privileges a migrant voice that is "narrowly conceived" (82), not least because it is male. For Spivak, the novel thus constitutes a specific kind of failure – that of attempting "to write woman into the narrative of history" (82) – but these failures are "[o]ne of the most interesting features about much of Rushdie's [fiction]" (82). As Leela Gandhi points out, Spivak's conclusion follows her stated interest "in failed texts" (Spivak qtd. in Gandhi, "Elloven, Deeowen" 170), something that Gandhi echoes in her reading of failed inscriptions of transgressive political perspectives in *The Satanic Verses*. For both Spivak and Gandhi, the usefulness of *The Satanic Verses* stems directly from its inadequacies of representation – here, women and political perspectives, respectively – and I want to emphasize this approach of reading the instructive failures that arise from the interplay between the persona and his fiction. I understand Spivak's analysis as emphasizing both a specific failure of the narrative and the opportunity for constructive response that such a failure provides. In the case of the Rushdie persona and the hybrid protagonists of *The Enchantress of Florence*, the failure is that of over-emphasizing the fictionalized Emperor Akbar's elite mode of hybridity, given its similarity to that of the persona. The constructive response, then, is to focus on the differing mode of hybridity modelled by Mogor

dell'Amore, the Emperor's fictive foil. In *Shalimar the Clown*, the failure is that of over-emphasizing the shared elite qualities of migrancy between Shalimar and Max, the male protagonists, and the Rushdie persona. The constructive response, here, entails focusing on Kashmira, one of the female protagonists, especially insofar as her performance of migrancy differs.

## **Chapter Outlines**

This study is divided into two major sections. The first section, comprising Chapters 2 and 3, is concerned with theorizing the Rushdie persona and working through the implications of its dominant qualities, including cultural and material elitism, heterosexuality, and limited moral authority. Chapter 2, "Theorizing the Rushdie Persona," examines the persona's cultural conditions of production and evaluates its conception as a Foucauldian author function, a literary celebrity, and a living, material body. Given the unique conditions of Rushdie's lived experience of the Affair and his significant standing within postcolonial theory, it is, I argue, insufficient to conceive of Rushdie's cultural presence as any one of these three by excluding the others. Moreover, it should be understood as an idea that is inextricably linked to a singular, living individual. Chapter 3, "Recuperating Rushdie," follows by identifying the dominant elements of the Rushdie persona and considering how the persona functions.

The second section, which includes Chapters 4 and 5, provides analyses of hybridity and migrancy via close readings of Rushdie's most recent novels in the context of the Rushdie persona previously discussed. To some extent, the persona works according to the reductive dynamic Foucault ascribes to the author function – that of "[reducing] the great

peril, the great danger with which fiction threatens our world” (“What is an Author?” 118) – something that I describe as a recuperation of the transformative potential of Rushdie’s fiction. For Foucault, the figure of the author is “a certain functional principle” (119), “a system of constraint” (119), which limits the effects of reading fiction according to the principles of the culture in which that fiction is read. That is, the author-figure functions in the service of the dominant culture to reduce the dangers posed by the fiction with which it is affiliated by constraining its particularities of meaning. In a similar account of the process by which the dominant culture responds to threatening elements, Dick Hebdige argues that subcultures can be recuperated in the service of that dominant culture. Hebdige concludes that “a subculture engendered by history, a product of real historical contradictions” can be replaced by and in the dominant culture “with a handful of brilliant nonconformists, satanic geniuses” (110), exemplary representatives of the subculture in its recuperated form, who might contribute to the dominant culture. In Hebdige’s example of punk subculture in England, the process of recuperation resulted in the reduction, if not elimination, of punk’s transgressive potential: punk came to be defined “in precisely those terms which it sought most vehemently to resist and deny” (109). Foucault and Hebdige coincide in positing the construction of exemplary cultural figures as systemic responses to danger, a strategy of response in which the threat becomes the material for its own resolution. Finally, the Conclusion (Chapter 6) provides an argument for an open-ended, skeptical mode of reading the Rushdie persona that is itself modelled in the recent filmic adaptation of *Midnight’s Children*.

In this study, I define the Rushdie persona as one which is often posited as an exemplary representative of postcolonial culture, a satanic genius whose contributions to the

dominant culture are signalled by the standing of Rushdie's novels and the impact of the Affair. Rushdie's writing and lived experience might well define the persona as a trustworthy figure of political commentary, an inside-outsider informing the West, but that positioning also works to reinforce understandings of the persona as a native informer, a role in which the persona occupies moral ground but increasingly contributes in unsurprising and non-threatening ways to the hegemonic culture of the West. The dominant elements of the persona that permit its positioning as a figure of moral and political authority are, therefore, also those that signal its recuperation by the dominant culture. In this light, the shifts within the linear narratives of Rushdie's work and lived experience are overshadowed by the larger shift away from the positioning of the Rushdie persona as a subversive figure: it has been rendered sage but safe. The persona has, in short, been fixed, in the senses of being both stable and functional within the dominant cultural system, and its influence on the reading of Rushdie's fiction, especially with regard to facets of identity, works for, rather than against, the values of that system.

In the second section of this study, I turn directly to the protagonists of Rushdie's most recent novels, *The Enchantress of Florence* and *Shalimar the Clown*, in examinations of two subject positions that are regularly attributed to the Rushdie persona but often poorly defined: the hybrid and the migrant. The persona and Rushdie's protagonists are mostly heterosexual, secular, elite figures, and identifying their points of similarity, especially as shared points of disjuncture from the much broader scope of possible lived experience of contemporary postcoloniality, is useful in emphasizing this limited range. As I argue in more detail in the following chapters, some of the persona's characteristics are easily defined; however, its qualities of hybridity and migrancy are relatively unclear. Hybridity and

migrancy are, certainly, positive qualities in Rushdie's fiction: the characters who choose not to follow migratory paths are only very rarely permitted to live, and, as Ruvani Ranasinha points out, Rushdie's fiction consistently condemns the "absolutism of the Pure" (54) and celebrates the hybrid qualities of his protagonists<sup>17</sup>. On closer inspection, though, it is less apparent whether Rushdie's novels establish hybridity and migrancy as viable alternatives for postcolonial subjects by subverting dominant norms, or whether they affirm particular ways of being hybrid and migrant that are consistent with the values of the dominant culture.

Chapters 4 and 5 thus include clarifications of the characteristics of Rushdie's protagonists that determine their success in the contemporary, postcolonial worlds of Rushdie's novels, explorations of the interplay between Rushdie's protagonists and persona, and evaluations of that interplay with regard to the transformative potential of Rushdie's work. In Chapter 4, I analyze representations of hybridity in *The Enchantress of Florence* and argue that the interactions between the protagonists, particularly Mogor dell'Amore's concluding banishment by the Emperor Akbar, signal that not all forms of mixing are worthy of celebration in Rushdie's canon. Further, the reason for Mogor's expulsion – his incestuous, taboo parentage – suggests an extension of Robert J. C. Young's warning that hybridity is rooted in the dominant system's politics of reproduction and fertility: it is only accepted when it is productive according to the moral values of the dominant culture. Similarly, in Chapter 5, I analyze representations of migrancy in *Shalimar the Clown* and argue that the protagonists exhibit privileged, cosmopolitan qualities of migrancy that permit

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<sup>17</sup> Ranasinha's reference is to Rushdie's essay, "In Good Faith," in which Rushdie writes "*The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling ... It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure" (*Imaginary Homelands* 394).

survival and success, and mirror qualities of the Rushdie persona. Like Rushdie's other novels, *The Enchantress of Florence* and *Shalimar the Clown* offer accounts of individual identity that focus on the privileged and elite. This is, in itself, neither exceptional nor objectionable, and I am not arguing that it is better to conceive of the contemporary postcolonial subject as poor, disempowered, or entirely marginalized. The issue with these accounts is that these characters are not only political symbols but also exemplars of identity that adhere to specific conditions of success in contemporary, postcolonial frames, including the need to be masculine, heterosexual, socially elite, and non-religious. Moreover, their ontological range is so limited and ordered that Rushdie's novels yield definitions of the contemporary postcolonial subject that satisfy the recuperative demands of the dominant culture: mockery-free mimics are celebrated and subversive threats are contained. These safe protagonists resonate with the persona to produce a very narrow range of postcolonial subject positions, and while it is, certainly, important to understand these types of hybridity and migrancy, it is equally important to understand that they are not sufficient, nor totalizing. There is a risk of reading Rushdie's novels, especially under the influence of the persona, as providing accounts that undervalue other modes of hybridity and migrancy or obviate the necessity of recognizing the diverse challenges faced by the contemporary postcolonial subject.

As I argue in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, counterposing Mogor dell'Amore and Kashmira Ophuls to the persona makes it easier to recognize the persona's insufficiencies in representing only a particular, non-contestatory version of what it means to be hybrid and migrant. Reading back against the influence of the Rushdie persona by focusing on those characters who differ recognizably and significantly from the persona is an effective strategy

in determining the limitation in Rushdie's representation, but it also entails a risk of limiting conceptions of hybridity and migrancy to an either-or binarism: that is, either like the persona or unlike. In order to reduce this risk, a more open-ended approach is called for, and in the concluding chapter of this study, I argue for such a mode of reading Rushdie's fiction, one based on my evaluation of the effects of Rushdie's voice-over narration for the film version of *Midnight's Children* (Mehta 2012). In the novel, the protagonist, Saleem Sinai, is an unreliable narrator, prone to errors of fact and failed memory as he relates his story primarily to his audience of one: his attentive, skeptical wife-to-be, Padma Mangroli. In the film, however, the narrator – Rushdie reading Saleem's voiced-over lines – is apparently infallible and, moreover, Padma is entirely absent. The film positions the Rushdie persona, in something of a return to a Barthesian Author, as a figure of unique authority who confides in the audience: Rushdie may not appear on screen, but his scriptwriting hand and extra-diegetic narration are emphatically present, making it seem as though the persona itself has been given voice. However, in Padma's absence there is room to read against this authoritative dynamic by embracing a shift in the locus of responsibility for making meaning from the speaking Author to the listening audience, or, more precisely, to a point between. That is, despite the inescapable presence of the Rushdie persona in and around the film (and circulating around his entire canon), there is an opportunity for the viewer of the film to exert his or her own influence by occupying Padma's role of skeptical, critical engagement – a role I have embraced throughout my research.

In the Conclusion, I evaluate Rushdie's voice-over narration by judging whether it operates according to a principle of thrift or excess, either reductively constraining or strategically emphasizing particular elements of the film. Here, I follow arguments made by



Foucault and Ashcroft with regard to the influence of the author over a particular text. For Foucault, a system of constraint in the reading of fiction is a necessary condition of society – without such a system, fiction’s proliferations of meaning would continually overwhelm the dominant social order – and the argument that the author function limits the reading of a text supports an understanding of Rushdie’s voice-over as significantly limiting the film’s possibilities of meaning. However, Foucault is careful to point out that the particular system of constraint that relies on the author function as a principle of thrift is neither logically nor historically necessary. It may not be entirely arbitrary, but it is certainly conventional, and there may be, by extension, alternatives to the authorial persona’s constraining function, one of which is suggested in Ashcroft’s analysis of excess. In defining excess as a means of overcoming the “exclusion and relegation” faced by the postcolonial subject, Ashcroft argues that “it often seems as though the breaching of ... boundaries and restrictions – perhaps above all, the restrictions of the colonizing discourse – sometimes requires a strategy of excessive statement simply to establish identity” (*On Post-Colonial Futures* 117). For Ashcroft, there is no better example of this excess than Rushdie’s “irrepressible fictional exuberance” (118), especially given the particular vulnerability of Rushdie’s material body in relation to his lived experience of the Affair. In the context of this study, Ashcroft’s argument usefully establishes an alternative effect of reading in the presence of the Rushdie persona. Counterposed to the “system of constraint” that could see the Rushdie persona inscribe clear limits on the meaning of his fiction, the excesses of Rushdie’s novels that Ashcroft celebrates, in conjunction with an attendance to the material body of their author, invite a reading that emphasizes other ways of being postcolonial.

As a result of Rushdie's literary, popular, and academic standing, his fictive characters and persona function as increasingly coherent theorizations, if not exemplary models, of postcolonial subject positions. However, while the conditions of survival and success for the contemporary postcolonial subject inscribed in Rushdie's recent work resonate with those of the Rushdie persona, they need not hold as either fixed or prescriptive. Explicating the influence of the persona on the interpretation of his protagonists makes it easier to read against this influence, against the grain, as it were, and, as a consequence, to establish a broader space for the thinking of hybridity and migrancy. If, as *Joseph Anton* suggests, the recent shift in the narrative of the Rushdie persona is that of a return to a storytelling role, then it falls to the reader to respond by actively challenging the influence of the persona over the shape and meaning of the stories Rushdie tells, and thereby to engage in attempts to explore what it means to be a member of the contemporary, postcolonial world.

## **Chapter 2: Theorizing the Rushdie Persona**

In this chapter, I theorize the Rushdie persona as a specific and complex idea of Rushdie that is part Foucauldian author function, part literary celebrity, part market presence and part vulnerable, material body – all of which intersect and, thereby complicate any reductive reading of a persona. I also evaluate the tendency to interpret Rushdie’s fiction via his biography, and the identification of authorial proxies and mouthpieces in Rushdie’s novels, both of which contribute to this complex Rushdie persona, which is further influenced by Rushdie’s own fiction, non-fiction and public appearances, as I describe below. The emerging Rushdie persona is thus an idea that links the real, living person and the different, multiple and even contradictory, conceptions of Rushdie that circulate in the public sphere and impact the study of his work. The persona may be a fiction, and open to interpretation just like Rushdie’s fictive characters, but it has, nonetheless, significant influence on the analysis and understanding of Rushdie’s novels, especially with regard to the postcolonial themes of hybridity and migrancy.

### **An Argument of Rushdies**

In Salman Rushdie’s *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), Agostino ‘Ago’ Vespucci, a member of the novel’s supporting cast, is described as having developed from “a throng, a jostle, an argument of Vespuccis” (134) to become a character whose words and actions uniquely influence those around him and significantly affect the plot. The nouns “jostle” and “argument,” here repurposed as quantifiers, could serve equally to describe the Rushdie persona. Ago is not marked by conspicuous biographical similarities to his author-creator, as are many others of Rushdie’s characters, but Ago’s development from the argument of

Vespuccis parallels the complex, discursive production of the Rushdie persona. Like Ago, the persona emerges from a multitude of voices, some coinciding, some competing, and many of them insistent and loud. Unlike Ago, however, the jostling from which the persona emerges is greater in scope and scale. Rushdie's name, after all, is as likely to appear in the text of New York's society columns as the most recent editions of journals of postcolonial studies, and he is as likely to be described as a moral bankrupt as a paragon of virtue. My borrowing of the phrase "a jostle, an argument of Rushdies," then, is meant to introduce two qualities of the Rushdie persona. The first is the diversity of discursive contributions to the persona, ranging from the celebratory to the condemnatory, the prurient to the sanctifying, and the measured to the polemic, both academic and popular. The second is the persona's coherence as it has developed from this range of contributions to become a cultural presence with dominant, recognizable qualities, and that affects the reading of Rushdie's fiction.

In theorizing the Rushdie persona as a complex and particular idea, I want to insist on its specificity, arbitrariness, and ties to the material body of the living author in partial contrast to broader terms used to refer to an author's public identity, including "proper name," and "paratext."<sup>18</sup> Most of all, I want to distinguish my use of persona, as it relates to Rushdie, from the category of public identity suggested by more general reference to a writer's "authorial persona." For example, Lorraine York, in *Literary Celebrity in Canada*,

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Morton's *Salman Rushdie: Fictions of Postcolonial Modernity*, in which Morton refers to accounts of Rushdie's public life as contributing to his "proper name" (24), an identity necessarily distinct from Rushdie's actual person. See, too, Brouillette's "Authorship as Crisis in Salman Rushdie's *Fury*," in which Brouillette notes Rushdie's market presence as "brand name, as paratext, and as icon" (151).

distinguishes an author's celebrity figure as a particular mode of his or her public, "authorial persona" (140). York does not define "authorial persona," and her use of the term seems to be a means of contextualizing her discussion of authorial celebrity by broadly distinguishing between the author's individual, lived identity and his or her representation in public media. Similarly, Brouillette, this time with specific reference to Rushdie, contextualizes the author's market presence as a specific facet of Rushdie's general "persona [that] has been perennially celebrated and denounced" (85). While Brouillette's use of "persona" in referring to Rushdie's public identity includes the recognition of particular qualities conferred by media accounts of Rushdie's life and work, the term is not fully explored. I think it is important to theorize and define the Rushdie persona, and in this chapter I argue that the persona is part author function, part literary celebrity, part writer / thinker in the contemporary marketplace, and part living body under threat of death. The complexity of the persona requires an attendance to the conditions of its multimodal, discursive production, including those of the marketplace within which Rushdie's literature is produced, the readings of links between his fiction and biography, and the circumstances of the Affair that have brought the precarious life of the authorial body to the fore. In particular, the unique conditions of the Affair work with an overt moral force, demanding readings of Rushdie's work that respond, at least in part, to the conditions of the writing, including the vulnerability of his living body.

## **An End of The Affair: Rushdie's Discursive and Material Identities**

The *fatwa* declared against Salman Rushdie by the Ayatollah Komeini [sic] ... brings us face to face with the ... material reality of the author.... Suddenly we have lurched beyond the comfortable consideration of textuality, of the author as simply a 'function of the text,' and find ourselves facing the clear denominating line of post-colonial reality: the author's death.

– Bill Ashcroft (119-120)

In his markedly celebratory discussion of postcolonial excess in *On Postcolonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture*, Bill Ashcroft notes the “irrepressible fictional exuberance” of Rushdie’s novels and their transformative potential, one that contrasts with their particular conditions of production during the Affair (118). Ashcroft also sombrely concludes that the Affair, as a set of material conditions to which Rushdie is subject, requires an attendance to the vulnerable body of the author, one that renders Michel Foucault’s argument for situating the author as “the singularity of the absence” (Foucault qtd. in Ashcroft 120) in the discourses affiliated with that author not only inadequate but also irresponsible. For Ashcroft, “in Rushdie’s case we are made painfully aware that writers are more than absences, that the production of the text occurs in some material space” (120); the *fatwa* is not merely another contribution to the reading of *The Satanic Verses*, another discourse affiliated with Rushdie’s author function, but a distinct, persistent threat to Rushdie’s living self. Conceiving of an author as an absence in the discursive presence of the text may be an effective metaphor in the pursuit of ideal conditions of reading, but Ashcroft insists that in Rushdie’s case such a conception is a misconception. Ashcroft’s alternative,

however, risks limiting the possibilities of both Rushdie's identity and the meaning of his fiction.

As Ashcroft points out, Rushdie, as an authorial figure, is possessed of a particular presence rather than a specific absence, one that is at odds with Foucault's exclusion of the possibility of singularity for the author function. While Foucault writes that the author function "does not refer purely and simply to a real individual" but, rather, "can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects" ("What is an Author?" 113), for Ashcroft, Rushdie is crucially defined precisely in correspondence to the material body of "a real individual." The singularity of Rushdie's authorial figure is a consequence of the centrality of the Affair to Rushdie's material reality: the *fatwa*, as a threat of death, clarifies both the particularity and the vulnerability of the living body of the author. For Ashcroft, the rhetoric of the *fatwa* must be read as a determining response to *The Satanic Verses* rather than merely one more contribution to literary and cultural studies in general, and Rushdie's authorial identity in particular. Prioritizing the rhetoric of the *fatwa* this way, however, entails limiting the discourse with which it is affiliated to particular meanings or, more precisely in the case of *The Satanic Verses*, a Manichean structure of meaning: it is, or is not, precisely what the rhetoric of the *fatwa* defines it to be – an egregious inscription of blasphemy. This, in turn, risks framing Rushdie's author function and its affiliated discourse as a reductive binary: blasphemy or freedom of expression, on the parts of both the novel and its author. Other readings of the novel and its author would go missing or be delegitimized in this insistence on the material body of the author as conferring meaning.

The demand of attending to Rushdie's material reality, of engaging with "the unswerving judgement of a fundamentalist reading" (Ashcroft 119), involves a possible

return to the unique position of the Author as confidant, as discussed in Roland Barthes' seminal "Death of the Author." Barthes' work, which calls for the liberation of the meaning of the text rather than the elucidation of the author's intent, includes consideration of a particular problem of reading a text as a vehicle of authorial intent – that is, conceiving of the author as an explanatory figure, an authority who confides to the reader the meaning of the text (143). This account of the author is a warning of the limits of returning to earlier models of authorial authority and a system of reading in which the text is reduced to a single meaning generated by its author. It is, too, a warning to avoid returning to the expressionist-idealist model of a temporal linearity in the production of meaning, one in which "[t]he Author...is always conceived of as the past of his [sic] own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*..." (145, original italics). These singularities of meaning and its production stand in opposition to a conception of reading as a moment of enunciation in which the "modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text" (145), a moment in which possibilities of both meaning and authorship are multiple and non-definitive. Engaging with the *fatwa* as an "unswerving judgement," as Ashcroft does, risks positioning Rushdie precisely as a singular figure of authority with regard to the meaning of *The Satanic Verses*, even if only in opposition to the one generated by the infamous "fundamentalist reading" that now stands prior to both the judgment and the novel.

### **Rushdie's "literary-political goals"**

The study of the material conditions of Rushdie's literary production also seems to risk positioning Rushdie as a unique figure of authority over his fiction. In their introduction



to a 2013 special edition of *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, editors Sarah Brouillette and David Finkelstein note that focusing on the literary marketplace marks a recent and significant shift in postcolonial studies, one signalled by Graham Huggan's work in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. For Brouillette and Finkelstein, Huggan's emphasis on the study of the postcolonial literary marketplace clarifies conditions that, among other things, "privilege reaching a broad audience over helping a writer to fulfill her literary-political goals" (4). The phrase "reaching a broad audience," shorthand for attempts to increase sales through the branding and promotion of the writer's name and his or her books, is an important clarification that the literary-political goals of such books are often of only secondary import, though this is, perhaps, unsurprising. Huggan is careful to note that marketing postcolonial literature as exotic – through, for example, editing, book design, and promotion – limits the writer's options vis-à-vis resisting the effects of such exoticization. These options are, as Ana Margarida Dias Martins argues, to "disclaim, opt out of, or work within – while seeking to challenge – dominant systems of representation" (148). Writers who disclaim or opt out refuse complicity with the dominant systems of literary publication, but those who work within are at least partially complicit. This is not necessarily a problem. Huggan defines this working within as strategic exoticism, an authorial strategy of resistance to dominant systems that builds on Spivak's call, in "Post-structuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value," for postcolonial critics to inhabit colonial conditions and systems in order to critique them (cited in Huggan 7). Strategic exoticism parallels Spivak's strategic essentialism and is a call for postcolonial writers/thinkers to recognize their complicity with "exotic aesthetics" and, in the context of that recognition, to choose "to manipulate the conventions of the exotic to their own political ends" (32). This strategy is not, however,

guaranteed to succeed. It may be “the means by which postcolonial writers / thinkers, working from within exoticist codes of representation, either manage to subvert those codes...or succeed in redeploying them for the purposes of uncovering differential relations of power” (32); however, Huggan notes that strategic exoticism may actually be a symptom of postcoloniality, one that signals only an illusory possibility of the transcendence of the material conditions that underlie exoticization. For Huggan, the postcolonial writer working in this mode is at least partially complicit in the exoticization of his or her work, something I understand as the deliberate othering of the text in order to appeal to an audience composed of, to repurpose a phrase borrowed from Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan<sup>19</sup>, “the subject[s] of the dominant West” (159). In the end, the best-case scenario of strategic exoticism is transcending compromise in order to fulfil the writer’s goals, and the multitude of worse-case scenarios range from partial to complete sublimation of these goals. In all cases, the writer is complicit with the conditions of the marketplace in prioritizing the broad audience, even if the degrees of complicity might vary.

Huggan’s rhetoric of strategy and ends with regard to the writer’s place in the contemporary, literary marketplace, much like Brouillette and Finkelstein’s rhetoric of literary-political goals, offers a particular focus in analyzing the material conditions of Rushdie’s literary production, one that suggests, if not an outright adversarial relationship between the writer and the publishing machine, then one fraught with compromise. It also

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<sup>19</sup> In an analysis of Rushdie’s authorial position with regard to the hybridity inscribed in *The Satanic Verses*, Radhakrishnan argues that, while overly optimistic responses to the novel celebrate its shift away from “identitarian forms of thinking and belonging, in reality, hidden within the figurality of hybridity is the subject of the dominant West” (159).

suggests a specific kind of authorial intent by positing postcolonial literature as a vehicle for political transformation and its writers as figures committed to reaching particular political destinations. This may not be a return to the intended meaning of a particular text, but in emphasizing the need to clarify the material conditions of the production of postcolonial literature, Brouillette and Finkelstein suggest the importance of returning to an understanding of the political purposes of the text as arising out of specific socio-cultural positions and politics. Here, the writer is, in short, a figure of political engagement who not only stands prior to the text as vehicle but also directs it toward certain ends. In this approach, attending to the material conditions of postcolonial literature constitutes a partial return to the Author as a figure of unique authority over the political aims of the text, one whose attempts at political transformation are achieved through a process of confiding in and convincing the reader.

In Rushdie's case, readings of the political goals of his fiction often collapse into speculative claims regarding the intended meanings of his novels, supported by the content of both Rushdie's novels and, significantly, his biography. However, as James Procter points out, while Rushdie was certainly politically active in 1980s Britain, the details of that activity should not be held as an answer of sorts to "the always vexed question of intentionality" (38), specifically with regard to the work Rushdie produced during the same period, nor does Procter offer such biographical information in an attempt "to persuade the reader of Rushdie's 'real' or radical political intentions" (38). Rather, Procter argues that "such biographical 'background' information does suggest an important, alternative location for re-reading Rushdie's fiction of the 1980s and a means of questioning notions of prescribed political content" (38). This alternative opposes readings that assume political content "can

be decided in advance” (38) and “is somehow embedded within individual literary texts” (44) by the author, and calls for more attention to be paid to reflexively analyzing how we link socio-historic conditions and the relevant text. Since readings of authorial intent are not unusual regarding Rushdie’s fiction, whether in academic or popular responses, they regularly include speculations as to the political messages and significance of Rushdie’s work. However, this mode of reading, like Ashcroft’s demand that readers attend to the material conditions produced by the rhetoric of the *fatwa*, might limit the possibilities of meaning of the text to those of the author’s presumed political purpose, and it is at odds with critical theoretical work that calls for more open-ended ways of reading, ones that permit multiple possibilities of meaning and that destabilize the sender-receiver dynamics of the text as message. Moreover, it also risks too closely linking the postcolonial writer with the presumed political goals of his or her work, one consequence of which is the reductive characterization of both: the author becomes uniquely defined by his or her presumed political goals, and the novel is rendered a vehicle for them. It is my argument, here, that attending to the material conditions of the literary marketplace need not entail even a partial return to authorial intent, nor does attending to Rushdie’s material reality require an explanation of *The Satanic Verses* via the Barthesian Author’s political aims. It is possible, instead, to read the discourses affiliated with an author in the contexts of their material conditions to different ends, as Procter does in arguing for Rushdie’s place in a Black British canon, via his explication of the links between the writing of *Midnight’s Children* and Rushdie’s lived experience of 1980s London. For Procter, Rushdie’s biography does not necessarily provide insight into the social and political significance of his fiction, but it does support the claim that Rushdie’s novels, far from being written off as politically dated or

socially irrelevant, should be made to “do more work than the current fashions within postcolonial studies are making it do” (44), precisely because they signal the engagement between the texts and the social, political, and historical conditions of their production. In this study, I aim to make Rushdie’s fiction do more work to counter the influence of the Rushdie persona.

### **The Limits of Rushdie’s Literary Celebrity**

Another possibility for analyzing the material conditions of Rushdie’s literary production is modeled by Lorraine York’s book-length study of the author as literary celebrity and can be identified particularly in York’s account of Canadian author Michael Ondaatje. For York, Ondaatje’s figure of literary celebrity is a product of a particular material condition – the economic forces of literary production – but the identification of that figure entails neither its singular authority over the meaning of Ondaatje’s work nor the author’s presumed intent. In *Literary Celebrity in Canada* (2007), York provides examples of authorial celebrity figures that emerge, under particular material conditions, from the responses to the texts written by those authors. *Literary Celebrity in Canada* turns a scholarly gaze on what York identifies as the “peculiarly absent” figure of the author in contemporary studies of Canadian literature, an absence York attributes in part “to the refocusing of critical energies away from authorial intention in the wake of poststructuralist rethinkings of authorship and textuality” (3). So thorough is this distancing from theories of authorial intent that “many critics today shy away from even a distanced, theorized consideration of authorial personas as they are mobilized in the marketing of books” (139). Despite authors being “visible and active in the promotion of their wares” (3), scholarly responses to contemporary

literature either largely overlook authorial figures or direct their gaze in other directions. York acknowledges that those other directions are often productive, particularly for their analyses of ideology and power (3) but maintains the productivity of her own analysis along precisely those same lines. Rather than revisiting poststructural rethinkings of authorial intention, however, York analyzes the mobilizations of authors as figures of literary celebrity in the marketing of literature. As such, York's is a careful and specific return to the author figure as a product rather than a source, one made via the discursive paths of stardom and celebrity and through the cultural and political geographies of the economics of publishing, the dominant material condition of contemporary postcolonial literature.

York's book includes accounts of the celebrity status of authors who, like Rushdie, have significant presence in academic research and whose media coverage exceeds the "incidental or fleeting use of the discourse of stardom" (6). *Literary Celebrity in Canada* is a departure from other contemporary analyses of Canadian literature in two significant ways: it focuses precisely on the author as the object of the scholarly gaze, and it includes a great deal of non-scholarly material under its analytic lens. That non-scholarly material, disregarded by York earlier in her career as unsuitable for academic work, includes advertisements and promotions, interviews, magazine and newspaper profiles, prizes, and publishing statistics (12, 27). As figures of literary celebrity, York's subjects are all produced via the scholarly and non-scholarly responses to the texts with which they are affiliated but especially by the latter, the governing dynamic of which is the logic of the marketplace.

York argues that Michael Ondaatje's "literary celebrity is a contrary, hybrid affair" (144), one that "no other Canadian writer has known" (123); even in the company of Margaret Atwood and Carol Shields, Ondaatje's authorial figure stands out. Part of

Ondaatje's uniqueness in this regard is due to his canonization "by the literary and the mainstream film worlds alike" (123) following the success of *The English Patient* in both its book and movie forms. Another part of Ondaatje's uniqueness is also a consequence of an over-determining "exoticizing and eroticizing attention to his ethnicity" (124). That attention is not only present in "prurient junk journalism," including articles in *Toronto Life*, *Books in Canada*, and *Saturday Night*, but also in "more explicitly literary venues," such as a CBC Radio interview conducted by Eleanor Wachtel (138). And, finally, Ondaatje's celebrity is marked by his own resistance to it. York points out that Ondaatje's famed commitment to privacy is consistent with the commentaries on celebrity in his writing, ones that lead York to conclude that, for Ondaatje, celebrity is "useless at best, harmful at worst" (142) and "best ignored or denied" (143). The irony, here, is that Ondaatje's resistance to celebrity is incorporated by the market forces and media that produce it: his celebrity figure is partially defined by its own reluctance to occupy public attention.

This is certainly not the case for Rushdie. He may occasionally be reported as critical of celebrity culture<sup>20</sup>, but Rushdie's celebrity figure is characterized by its embrace of the spotlight through his social media presence, including Twitter, and appearances on late-night television shows, including *Real Time with Bill Maher*, as well as regular reports of Rushdie's A-list, social activity, ranging from dinner parties with Meg Ryan to his appearance on stage with U2. Despite this difference, however, York's account of Ondaatje's literary celebrity might work as an effective model of studying Rushdie's celebrity as a function of particular social conditions for the author. Like Ondaatje's, Rushdie's celebrity is

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Mike Collett-White's newspaper article "Rushdie Blasts Celebrity Culture."

part of the persona and is produced via the dynamics of the postcolonial literary marketplace. Rushdie, as celebrity, is, too, portrayed as a figure involved in its own production. Finally, the clarification of the over-determining attention paid to Ondaatje's ethnicity echoes in the consistent and varied uses of Rushdie's biographical information in the reading of his fiction. There are, though, limits to conceiving of the Rushdie persona as a literary celebrity. This is evident in Timothy Brennan's identification of the rise of "what might be called Third World cosmopolitan celebrities" (2), a group that includes Rushdie. Brennan notes the possibility of aesthetic and political misunderstandings in the process of "celebrity-making" (9), that is, of not only rendering particular authors as representative and exemplary of their geographic and cultural conditions of writing, but also of foreclosing on possibilities of meaning for the texts with which those celebrity authors are affiliated. York posits a more optimistic definition of celebrity-making, one that "at least holds open the possibility that being celebrated need not always be a negative thing, that it can operate and signify variously within culture" (11), and in Ondaatje's case, the study of his literary celebrity offers an opportunity for working through the material conditions of its production to expose the underlying system of value at play. This might be because Ondaatje's celebrity is almost exclusively a function of his literary work<sup>21</sup>. Rushdie's celebrity is much more complex: it extends beyond the literary to the political, academic, and pop cultural realms, and its significance and complexity are not least the result of the Affair's effects in propelling Rushdie to heights of infamy and fame previously unknown for a novelist.

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<sup>21</sup> The notable exception to this, as York points out, is the filmic adaptation of Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (Minghella 1996).



An example of the complexities of Rushdie's celebrity is provided in the text of the open invitation to the Asian American Writers' Workshop presentation to Rushdie of its 2013 Lifetime Achievement Award. The invitation, titled "Honoring Salman Rushdie," notes that for \$700 a guest can mingle with not only Rushdie but also "celebrity chef Dale Talde of Top Chef fame"<sup>22</sup> at a pre-party, DJ'ed by former Das Racist rapper Heems, in the Varick Room, "the speakeasy bar" at the home of the Tribeca Film Festival. After the pre-party, Zadie Smith, Jonathan Safran Foer and Téa Obreht read from Rushdie's work, Amitava Kumar moderated a discussion, and guests adjourned for dinner at the home of Faiza Patel, a director at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law ("Honoring Salman Rushdie" n.p.). Here, the proper name of 'Salman Rushdie' is not out of place among those of celebrity chefs, musicians, legal scholars, or writers, both of novels and non-fiction. The AAWW award may have been for Rushdie's contributions to literary culture, but the mode of its presentation matches the mode of Rushdie's celebrity in its mixing of the literary, the pop cultural, the academic, and the political, and the complexities and connotations of Rushdie's celebrity may threaten to obscure their conditions of production or, at least, to render them less accessible to the kind of analysis that York models in her study of Ondaatje.

Despite these challenges, considerations of Rushdie's celebrity are still important. Celebrity is, borrowing from Brouillette's analysis of *Fury*, "densely present" (153) in several of the discourses that circulate around Rushdie, ranging from the academic, as in Brouillette's analysis in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, of Rushdie's complicitous "authorial celebrification" (154), to the popular, as in Mike Collett-White's 2005 account in

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<sup>22</sup> Rushdie's celebrity resonates in popular culture: *Top Chef* is hosted by Padma Lakshmi, one of Rushdie's ex-wives.

the *Houston Chronicle*, of Rushdie's condemnation of celebrity culture (n.p.). Celebrity is, in short, a defining element of his cultural presence, and I have found it helpful to draw on both P. David Marshall's and York's studies of celebrity in giving an account of the Rushdie persona. In particular, Marshall's analysis of the celebrity sign as something that "sheds its own subjectivity and individuality and becomes an organizing structure for conventionalized meaning" (56) maps possibilities of the cultural functions of the Rushdie persona that I explore in Chapter 3. Marshall's claim that the celebrity is a figure that "structures meaning, crystallizes ideological positions, and works to provide a sense and coherence to a culture" (x) resonates with my argument that the persona works to recuperate much of the transformative potential of his protagonists and themes, structuring the hierarchical limits of what it means to be a contemporary hybrid, migrant subject.

More importantly, in the context of my study, positing Rushdie as merely a figure of celebrity seems to entail a forgetting of the living body around which the discourses of celebrity circulate, thereby rendering his material vulnerability invisible. In his *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, Marshall argues that celebrity is best understood as analogous to a complex, linguistic sign. Marshall writes that, "[l]ike the sign, the celebrity *represents* something other than itself. The material reality of the celebrity sign – that is, the actual person who is at the core of the representation – disappears into a cultural formation of meaning" (56-57). In the case of Rushdie, accounting for his cultural presence as that of a celebrity figure risks the same problem Ashcroft identifies in his analysis of Rushdie as an author function: a lack of attendance to Rushdie's material body. In this study, I provide an account of Rushdie's 'persona' in order to echo 'authorial persona,' and thereby signal the close ties between Rushdie's cultural presence and his fiction, to signal the discursive

qualities of its production, and to insist on a recognition of the vulnerable body of Rushdie himself.

If, as Brouillette writes, celebrity is “densely present” in Rushdie’s work, Rushdie, as an intervening authorial figure, is even more so: his metafictional intrusions and extra-narrative explanations explicitly foreground the persona as an expert who is highly conscious of the reading of his novels; this is distinct from the persona as author-function or literary celebrity. Rushdie’s interventions have given rise to a great deal of scholarly analysis and might signal, following Huggan and Brouillette, respectively, either his complicity with the forces of the contemporary, literary marketplace or his resistance to the sublimating effects of reading his authorial self via his fiction<sup>23</sup>. In this project, I am interested in the effects of these interventions on the Rushdie persona, one of which is that of increasing its complexity, and I posit the persona as a continuously circulating construct that is a combination of the discursive, material and cultural conditions affiliated with Rushdie and his work, including those of his own contributions. Used at least in part to distinguish its object of reference from similar terms, persona, in this project, is a signifier of Rushdie’s substantial cultural presence. My account of the persona draws on the several discourses and material conditions that circulate around Rushdie’s life and published material, and there are, certainly, elements of other accounts at play, including those of author-function and celebrity. This study is an attempt to navigate the several streams of Rushdie discourse, including theorizations of his public, authorial identity, in order to reach a site where it is possible to recognize the persona’s impact on the interpretation of Rushdie’s novels and to read against that influence. It is my hope that doing so will map a space in which the results of the interplay between the

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<sup>23</sup> I explore both these possibilities in more detail in Chapter 3: Recuperating Rushdie.

persona and Rushdie's fiction might be more varied. For example, the readings of *The Satanic Verses* and the Rushdie persona as either blasphemous or expressive of human rights and freedoms are important, but they should not be understood as final, totalizing or authoritative. Other readings may be equally significant, and it is crucial to maintain the conditions within which those alternatives may be produced. Similarly, studying the interplay between the persona and the protagonists of Rushdie's novels may increase the possibilities of reading against them as limiting models of what it means to be a hybrid, migrant subject of the contemporary, postcolonial world.

### **Points of Confluence: Navigating the Rushdie Archive**

My account of the Rushdie persona relies on both academic and non-academic material about Rushdie and his work. The academic material constitutes what Vijay Mishra, in a 2009 study of linguistic experiments in Rushdie's novels, refers to as a "vast" archive (390), and that quality also applies to the non-academic material. The quantity of scholarship, reviews, journalistic profiles, op-ed pieces, online commentaries and blog posts verges on overwhelming, and it also emphasizes Rushdie's relevance and availability to various media. In this vast, multimodal archive, authored by Rushdie and others, direct and indirect contributions to the persona range between extremes, from the prurient to the scholarly, for example: a gossip column witheringly reports Rushdie's most recent proposal of marriage to a New York socialite and characterizes him as a "horny child" (Camili n.p.) and Mishra's formal study emphasizes Rushdie's multilingualism and wordplay. The contributions of popular and academic media do not differ, though, as much as might be supposed of discourses that presumably rely on differing levels of rigor and substantiation. Popular media

tend toward clear claims and attributions, including those of Rushdie's personal characteristics and patterns of behavior, and academic media tend toward suggestions and implications, including those of Rushdie's authorial interests and abilities. However, direct and indirect attributions regarding Rushdie and his work appear regularly in both popular and academic forums, and they vary in degree of speculation. A newspaper interview might, for example, make reference to the putative effects of the Affair on Rushdie's latest novel through a close reading, and an academic analysis might include poorly grounded speculation as to Rushdie's purportedly considerable ego.

Fortunately, the streams of discourse within the archive include clear points of confluence that allow some partial certainties: specific biographical details, personal characteristics, and areas of authorial interest and expertise are repeatedly emphasized. For example, Mishra's characterization of Rushdie as well-educated is supported by Ian Hamilton's *New Yorker* profile, which includes an account of Rushdie's formal schooling, as well as the casual references in *Joseph Anton* to Rushdie's wide-ranging reading habits. Similarly, while Rushdie's characterization as immature and hormonal is less consistently supported, his emotional life as the point of emphasis is clear, perhaps especially because of the inconsistencies at play. In contrast to characterizations like Camili's, Rushdie makes several references to family in *Joseph Anton*, ones that are as likely to emphasize Rushdie's familial devotion as his marriages and infidelities<sup>24</sup>. Similarly, a guest piece by Rushdie in

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<sup>24</sup> Notable examples include Rushdie's admission that "[f]or thirteen of their fourteen years together he had been unquestioningly faithful to [Clarissa Ward] but in the fourteenth year ... there were brief infidelities during literary trips to Canada and Sweden and a longer infidelity in London" (66); details of his tempestuous, three-year affair with Robyn Davidson

the online recipe section of *Parade* suggests that he is emotionally mature and devoted to family<sup>25</sup> (“Salman Rushdie Recalls”). The points of confluence may or may not be points of consistency, but they do give rise to particular accounts; the various ways of describing Rushdie and his work cohere in rendering the main elements of the persona. Moreover, some characteristics are attributed with such regularity that they have become axiomatic. For example, in analyzing Rushdie’s role as a commentator, through his fiction, on British politics and culture, Huggan reminds his reader that “Rushdie is best known, of course, as a tongue-in-cheek chronicler of modern India, or as a dangerously facetious gadfly to Islamic religious orthodoxies” (86). Dora Ahmad’s analysis of fundamentalist Islam in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* opens with the claim that “the most obvious novelistic source on fundamentalism would, of course, be the work of Salman Rushdie” (1); Ahmad’s use of “of course” reminds her reader that Rushdie’s role as gadfly is founded on his expertise in the subject matter. In addition to these identifications of authorial roles, personal characteristics are regularly attributed to Rushdie, often with equal certainty. Profiles in interviews, op-ed pieces, and popular reviews of Rushdie’s work, as well as academic analyses, chronologies and contextualizations, reveal that Rushdie, “of course,” was raised in a Muslim family in India, is an atheist, studied at Rugby and Cambridge in England, and returned, briefly, to live with

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(67); and a whirlwind, 12-page account of Clarissa’s death, Zafar’s – Rushdie’s and Clarissa’s son – reaction, Rushdie’s burgeoning affair with Padma Lakshmi, and his divorce from Elizabeth West (579-590).

<sup>25</sup> The recipe, for lamb korma, is introduced by Rushdie as one of his favourites, includes mention of Rushdie’s son, Milan, and sister, Sameen, and is credited to Rushdie’s mother.

his family in Pakistan after completing his formal education. He is a father of two, an ex-husband of four, a dual citizen of India and Great Britain, a best-selling and multiple award-winning author, the victim and survivor of a multi-million dollar bounty that forced him into hiding under British police protection for over a decade, and, now, a free resident of New York. Less verifiably, according to commonly repeated accounts, he is a gregarious dinner party guest, both quick-witted and quick-tempered, and possessed of a considerable ego, justified according to some and out of proportion according to others. These accounts define the Rushdie persona in very specific ways.

### **Biographical Approaches to Rushdie's Work**

“Everyone knows that, in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first-person pronoun nor the present indicative refers exactly...to the writer...It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker” – Michel Foucault<sup>26</sup>

Despite Foucault's condemnation of the too easy equation of the author and “the real writer” as analogous to the logical fallacy of equating the writer and the first-person narrator of a novel, and despite Rushdie's own recurrent warnings against the conflation of the authorial persona with those of his narrators or characters<sup>27</sup>, it is not uncommon to encounter

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<sup>26</sup> “What is an Author?”, p. 112

<sup>27</sup> Aijaz Ahmad notes Rushdie's caution against “total identification” in the close identification of Saleem Sinai (*Midnight's Children*) with Rushdie himself (432), a warning that Rushdie repeats in a public interview with Jeffrey Eugenides (13). Rushdie also

such conflations in reference to Rushdie in both academic and popular publications. Rushdie's fiction is consistently read for its inscriptions of authorial proxies and mouthpieces, most of which are supported by comparing details of Rushdie's biography with the experiences of Rushdie's fictive protagonists. These readings, which rely on Rushdie's biographical details in explicating his texts, are occasionally supported by Rushdie's own responses to questions of biographical fodder in the construction of his work<sup>28</sup>, and they are often poorly grounded and speculative. More careful reviews and analyses of Rushdie's fiction attempt to deploy Rushdie's biography cautiously, sometimes self-consciously, as with Margarita Fichtner's 2001 review of *Fury* in *The Times Union*, a New York newspaper, in which Fichtner notes that "it is prudent not to dip too deeply into autobiographical parallels" (par 7) in reading Rushdie's work. Despite the warning, however, Fichtner herself immediately proceeds to render such parallels. Malik Solanka, the novel's protagonist, is described as being "like Rushdie" three times in the next two sentences (par 7-8); these likenesses are being "Bombay-born, Cambridge-educated, intellectual, middle-aged and rather sturdily shaped" (par 7), "a man who relishes the anonymous urban intimacies that only can be acquired by eyes, nose, ears and shoe leather" (par 8), and moving "to Manhattan from London" in flight from "a violent, nightmarish past" (par 8). Fichtner also notes that

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emphatically rejects both Saladin Chamcha (*The Satanic Verses*) and Malik Solanka (*Fury*) as self-inscriptions, instead writing that they are "anti- or opposite-[selves]" (*Joseph Anton* 596).

<sup>28</sup> An oft-cited example is that of the kipper-eating incident in *The Satanic Verses* (44), which, according to Rushdie, is "'one of the few stories I've used in fiction which needed no embellishment at all'" (Rushdie qtd. in Teverson 75).



Solanka's inamorata, Neela, is "modeled – down to the large scar that tenderly skews the perfection of one brown arm – on Rushdie's current love interest, the Madras-born model (and cookbook author) Padma Lakshmi" (par 12). Fichtner, though, refrains from mentioning other parallels: Solanka's and Rushdie's respective marital separations, their shared passion for football (soccer) and their well-enunciated atheisms. The limits of autobiographical dipping, it seems, must be drawn somewhere.

The emphasis on the dangers of conflating Rushdie's novels and Rushdie's biography is certainly worth noting, as Brouillette's analysis of *Fury* concludes: "[w]hat needs to be acknowledged is that [*Fury*] is not about Rushdie's life, but about 'Rushdie' as brand name, as paratext, and as icon" (151) – a caution to be continuously revisited throughout my study. Despite Rushdie's vociferous denial of autobiographical inscription in the figures of Malik Solanka (*Fury*) and Saladin Chamcha (*The Satanic Verses*), Solanka and Chamcha's descriptions as "anti- or opposite-[selves]" in *Joseph Anton* (596) only make sense if the reader is familiar enough with Rushdie's biography to note that the characters are, first, recognizably based on their author and, second, clear deviations from him in some key way. Nonetheless, perhaps precisely because several of his characters can be read as dependent on a knowledge of Rushdie, even as anti-Rushdies, and, therefore, as inhabiting similar planes of experience and values, the link between Rushdie's biography and his fictional characters persists. Thus, while Rushdie concludes that "it was puzzling that in both cases these characters whom he had written to be other than himself were read by many people as simple self-portraits" (596), the conclusion appears somewhat disingenuous, especially given a further qualification, this one of Rushdie's writing process: "writers had always worked close to the bull, like matadors, had played complex games with autobiography, and yet their

creations were more interesting than themselves” (596). These warnings, however, serve to emphasize Rushdie’s biography: if the key to parsing complex, autobiographical games is the relative degree of interest in the products of those games, readers can hardly be faulted for identifying Chamcha and Solanka as authorial self-portraits, however partial, especially if identifying them as authorial opposites requires a degree of familiarity with Rushdie’s biography. Certainly, following this logic, the prevalence of such identifications in Rushdie criticism suggests that accounts of Rushdie’s lived experience are at least as interesting as the narratives of his protagonists. This is another compelling reason to think through these conflations as productive of a persona rather than an author. Even though the accuracy of these conflations regarding Rushdie’s lived experience cannot, of course, be verified, they persist and, as a result, contribute to the reading of Rushdie’s fiction.

Fichtner is hardly alone in rendering parallels between Rushdie’s protagonists and biography, and it is not my intent to criticize either the impulse or the execution; indeed, I work through the links between the Rushdie persona and his characters in later chapters of this study. Rather, I wish to hold up Fichtner’s review as an example of the ways in which the protagonists of Rushdie’s novels are so often read: as expressive of particulars of the author’s life, whether as transpositions of lived experience, proxies and self-parodies, or as Rushdie mouthpieces. So prevalent is this mode of reading that Morton warns that Rushdie’s

background as a secular Indian Muslim who moved to Britain and subsequently to the United States is often read as a transparent reflection of his fictional writing. While Rushdie’s cosmopolitan background may certainly help to situate his fiction in a cultural and political context, it can also lead to crude *ad hominem* readings (as in

the case of *The Satanic Verses* affair), which dismiss Rushdie's fiction on the basis of his biographical background rather than critically engaging with the literary texts themselves. I would argue that the life of Salman Rushdie, or the events which become associated with the proper name of Salman Rushdie, are written in and through the fictional texts themselves. (24)

Morton's argument identifies inadequate responses to Rushdie's texts, readings that rely on the identification of fictional reflections of Rushdie's biographical details rather than critical, literary engagement, and, therefore, are less about the novels than the figure of their author. Morton's blunt assessment of the reception of Rushdie's fiction and, more specifically, reception that presents the fiction as transparent reflections of the details of Rushdie's background, can also be extended to include his personal characteristics, interests, and behaviours.

Clarifications of the cultural and political contexts of Rushdie's novels, as Morton notes, regularly incorporate elements of Rushdie's biography. For example, Brennan writes that Rushdie's novels capture an "interdependence of nationality and class with a precision that owes something to his Indo-English background" (11) and Hugo Rios, in an analysis of Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta as hybrid characters in *The Satanic Verses*, speculates that "the figure of the author contaminates this text because Rushdie also happens to be in the same place as his characters: he is also a stranger in a strange land and perhaps the prototype for his fictional creatures" (52). Similarly, Atef Laouyene's argument, that *The Moor's Last Sigh*, written during Rushdie's years in hiding, "[replicates] its own condition of production (both Moraes and Rushdie write the story while in confinement)" (159), clarifies a particular

context of the writing of Rushdie's novel<sup>29</sup>. Together, these examples elaborate Rushdie's artistic process, portraying the author as a *bricoleur* who takes the experiences at hand and uses them to construct his novels. While there may be nothing unusual about this, the insistence on Rushdie's biography in the interpretation of his work is noteworthy. Biographical readings of Rushdie's fiction cannot, ultimately, be verified, but they must be accounted for in theorizing the Rushdie persona.

Speculations on the lived experiences of the author in his or her fiction can shift the analytic focus not only to the figure of the author but also to his or her presumed thoughts, interests, and motivations. This is particularly so in Rushdie's case. Teverson, for example, in his *Salman Rushdie* (2007), includes several identifications of biographical elements in Rushdie's fictional works in support of this kind of claim. Of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Teverson concludes that "it is not difficult to hear an echo...of Rushdie's own state of mind" (101) in the banishment, arrest and imprisonment of the eponymous Moor. Teverson also speculates that the recurrence of "occult forms of knowledge" in Rushdie's novels is grounded in his contact with the *zeitgeist* of 60s and 70s England (78) and that the portrayal of Pakistan, in *Shame* and *Midnight's Children*, as "a bleak and unforgiving place in contrast to the wonderfully various and endlessly recreated India" reflects Rushdie's "personal distress" at his family's relocation to Karachi from Bombay (76). Teverson's several identifications of lived experience extend beyond biography to implications of authorial interest and motivation, as does Abdulrazak Gurnah's identification of the links between Rushdie's life and that of Saleem Sinai, in *Midnight's Children*. In the "Introduction" to his

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<sup>29</sup> *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, the first work of fiction Rushdie produced during the Affair, is also often read as reflecting the author's confinement.

edited collection, *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie* (2007), Gurnah briefly reviews details of Rushdie's personal and professional lives, and presents *Midnight's Children* as stemming from a link between the dates of Rushdie's birth (June 19, 1947) and India's independence (August 15, 1947)<sup>30</sup> and relying at least partially on actual events in Rushdie's life. The suggestion of biographical fodder, however, strays into speculation: Gurnah writes that after completing his education in England, "Rushdie went to Karachi where his family now lived but only stayed for a few months, disenchanted by the crude and heavy censorship in the work he did with Pakistani RV during this period, and perhaps, as he makes Saleem Sinai say, because it was not Bombay" (3).

In these examples, the identifications of Rushdie's biographical details imply an authorial dynamic, the inscription of lived experience, and establish areas of Rushdie's authority and expertise. The slippage to biography, though, also works to reverse the analytic and ontological dynamic: the focal point shifts from the text to the author; thus, the novels, rather than read as vehicles of the author's lived experience, are used as evidence of the importance of particular elements of Rushdie's biography and of the author's states of mind. Florian Stadler, in his analysis of *Shalimar the Clown*, concludes that the novel's nostalgic, utopian accounts of Kashmir are grounded in Rushdie's "special relationship with Kashmir, being of Kashmiri ancestry himself" (198), a claim that assumes Kashmir's biographical and affective significance. Kashmir may be, as Teverson points out, "the homeland of [Rushdie's] maternal grandfather and one-time favourite location for Rushdie family

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<sup>30</sup> Rushdie himself enunciates this link in writing that the coincidence of birth created "the germ of a novel, *Midnight's Children*" in his essay, "The Riddle of Midnight" (*Imaginary Homelands* 26).

holidays” (217), but identifying its fictional portrayal as an effect of Rushdie’s fond regard emphasizes Kashmir’s significance to the author over its value to the formal qualities of the novel. It also risks limiting the novel as expressive of the author’s experience, emotions and intent.

Other critics go even further in linking Rushdie’s biographical details and his novels, identifying fictive renderings of the real-world people and events that figure prominently in Rushdie’s life, as well as authorial proxies and moments of parabasis. Teverson, for example, writing about criticisms of the “undigested” representation of Padma Lakshmi, Rushdie’s fourth wife, as Neela in *Fury*, notes Rushdie’s “long history of transposing people of his acquaintance into his fiction,” and points out that Rushdie’s wives figure prominently in his novels:

Clarissa Luard, wife number one, appears as Pamela Lovelace in *The Satanic Verses*. Marianne Wiggins, wife number two, appears as Uma in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, and her early life in America (as the daughter of a fundamentalist preacher who committed suicide) provides the basis for the childhood of Vina in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Likewise, *Fury* contains a representation of wife number three, Elizabeth West, (and child number two) in the personas of Eleanor and Aasman. (105)

Dora Ahmad points out a similar transposition in the conflation of the villains of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* with Rushdie’s non-fictional, intellectual enemies, as when the fictional Raman

Fielding, a semi-digested Bal Thackeray, pursues goals that are opposed not only to the multiculturalism of India but to Rushdie's own presumed "ideal of a hybrid India" (5).

Ahmad also contends, as does Laouyene, that, in spite of readings that conflate Rushdie with Moraes Zogoiby, the eponymous Moor, "Rushdie's proxy within this novel is not the Moor but the protagonist's mother Aurora" (6), the justification for which is the comparison of artistic practices and success: the work of Rushdie the writer and Aurora the painter is irreverent, hybrid, best-selling and critically celebrated. Nor are Ahmad and Laouyene alone in identifying such proxies in Rushdie's work: others include Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta in *The Satanic Verses*, Max Ophuls in *Shalimar the Clown*, and the narrators of *Shame* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Similar claims could also be made for the identification of Mogor dell'Amore and Niccoló Machiavelli as Rushdie proxies in *The Enchantress of Florence*, based on, respectively, their inscriptions as a multicultural, multilingual, migrant fabulist and storyteller, and a tragically misunderstood and vilified writer who is both celebrated and condemned by figures of political power<sup>31</sup>.

In other readings of Rushdie's novels, his characters are not identified as authorial proxies, embodiments of various facets of Rushdie's biographical details, but authorial mouthpieces. Anshuman Mondal, working from Nico Israel's identification of parabasis in Rushdie's novels, the strategy "in which the author-figure emerges either self-consciously or from behind the narrator or character," writes of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* that "it is difficult not to conclude that Rai, Ormus and Vina are on occasions mouthpieces for Rushdie himself" (174). Similarly, in an endnote to his analysis of *Shame*, Aijaz Ahmad writes, "I

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<sup>31</sup> I address these readings of authorial proxies in Chapters 4 and 5.

would not want to suggest an identification between author and narrator throughout the book. In the passages I cite here, however, this identification is quite compelling” (432). Such passages include one in which Omar Khayyam Shakil reflects on the meaning of Sufiya Zinobia’s murderous behaviours, a reflection that Ahmad identifies as entirely beyond the character’s capacity for “imaginative understanding” (149). Instead, for Ahmad, “[t]his is, of course, Rushdie himself speaking” (149); the biographical reading here is not that of correspondence to real-world individuals or structures, but, rather, a speculative rendering of narrative events as correspondent to Rushdie’s thoughts and beliefs. This act of distancing oneself from claiming knowledge of authorial intention while, at the same time, claiming that knowledge, is common in Rushdie scholarship, and it points to a crucial role of the Rushdie persona: re-orienting the discussion and analysis of these readings of intention and biography, without giving them absolute claim to veracity.

Like Mondal’s, Ahmad’s criticism avoids consideration of authorial intent by positing specific passages of Rushdie’s novel as social and political commentary offered directly by the author. In affirming the deployment of Shakil as a partial proxy and mouthpiece, Ahmad attributes to Rushdie impressive abilities of imaginative understanding, as does John Mullan, in his review of *Shalimar the Clown*. Mullan argues that, despite Rushdie’s desire for readers to “see [the novel’s] events through different eyes” (83), putatively those of the four leading characters for whom the novel’s sections are named<sup>32</sup>, the viewpoint remains Rushdie’s. Mullan concludes that this element of the narrative structure fails, and

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<sup>32</sup> All of the novel’s protagonists are known by more than one name, including India Ophuls, aka Kashmira Noman and Kashmira Ophuls. For the sake of consistency, I use the name “Kashmira” throughout, except in conflict with source material.



[o]ften you sense Rushdie pressing his case: ‘Everywhere was now part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another’s were no longer our own, individual, discrete. This unsettled people.’ These are supposed to be India’s thoughts, but they feel like the author’s. While they reveal Rushdie’s aspirations for his novel, they also reveal its biggest flaw – why his characters cannot be themselves. (83)

For Mullan, the emergence of the author’s thoughts through one of the novel’s protagonists is a structural failure of the narrative<sup>33</sup>, and one that serves to foreground both Rushdie and his authorial intentions. Here, though, the identification of Kashmira Ophuls not as an authorial proxy but as a mouthpiece suggests a limit in the relationship between Rushdie’s authorial persona and his characters, one that is consistent with Anker’s reading of Max Ophuls from the same novel. For Anker, “[b]ecause Max is a self-transforming, exiled figure for the public artist, the novel invites its readers to interpret him as a proxy for Rushdie himself” (158). The emphasis on Max’s role as a public artist is somewhat curious, though, given Max’s brief and, relative to his other accomplishments, insignificant artistic career. He is more easily recognized as a different figure of representation: a Jewish refugee from Nazi persecution, or a war hero, or a disgraced politician, none of which directly invite the reader’s identification of Rushdie himself. Indeed, despite Mullan’s conclusion, and given

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<sup>33</sup> Here, I focus on the contributions to the Rushdie persona of this apparent failure. In Section II, I consider its implications in the context of the persona’s influence in the reading of Rushdie’s fiction. The failure that Mullan and Ahmad identify seems to be one of reading rather than something that inheres in the text.

the oft-fulfilled temptation in Rushdie scholarship to identify authorial proxies, the invitation to read one of the characters as an authorial proxy might better be extended to Max's daughter, India. India's biographical details certainly better correspond to the author's: she is born in India with family ties to Kashmir, educated in England, resident in the USA, and, at one point, forced into hiding from an assassin. Moreover, she may not be an artist of Rushdie's stature, but India is, like Rushdie himself, multi-lingual, well-versed in high and popular culture, well-travelled, and wealthy. Given these similarities, India might be not only a mouthpiece for the author, as Mullan claims, but also a proxy, except for her sex. Overlooking the female protagonist in this way is not unusual, though, and with the notable exception of Aurora Zogoiby (*The Moor's Last Sigh*), and despite their presence in several of his novels, female protagonists are not identified as Rushdie proxies in either critical or popular readings.

### **The Persona as an Alternative to Biographical Dipping**

If not *themselves*, Rushdie's characters are often read as Rushdie *himself*, biographical and vocal proxies that contribute to the argument of Rushdies, but they are limited in the range of their personal characteristics and biographical details and the scope of that argument is well-defined. As a result, the Rushdie persona is less a sustained argument than a coherent resolution, less plural than singular. The Rushdie presumed to be inscribed to varying degrees in the characters of his novels is brilliant and creative, male and straight, multicultural, migrant, and a figure of social and material success. Readings of authorial proxy and parabasis work to emphasize and exclude particular elements of identity, consistently relying on and repeating assumptions about Rushdie. The production of the

persona, here, might be understood as a circular repetition around a defined centre: some of Rushdie's biographical details establish a basis for readings of his novels, and those readings reinforce the significance of those details. These explanations of Rushdie's fiction via the biographical details of its author constitute what I might call, after Fichtner's comment on autobiographical parallels, biographical dipping, and are governed by and reinforce dominant understandings of the Rushdie persona. Moreover, identifications of proxy and parabasis via biography rely on preconceptions of the author and the apparent limits of the relevant characters – for example, Aijaz Ahmad's conclusion that Shakil is incapable of the feats of imaginative understanding he performs in *Shame*. And while these limits might occasionally hold – there is, certainly, little evidence within the novel with which to counter Ahmad's conclusion – others do not. For example, while Mullan concludes that India Ophuls, in *Shalimar the Clown*, is, like Shakil, simply incapable of the depths of reflective analysis ascribed to her, it is not immediately clear that India is actually incapable of this reflection according to the logic of the text. India is not only exceptionally intelligent and well-educated but also given to extended philosophical reflections, a characteristic she shares with characters ranging from Saleem Sinai (*Midnight's Children*) to Shakil (*Shame*) to Emperor Akbar (*The Enchantress of Florence*). In this case, the attribution to Rushdie himself rather than his character herself suggests the better-defined abilities and predilections of the former; that is, Rushdie as author is not only foregrounded but better aligned with the narrative contribution Mullan identifies. Here, understandings of Rushdie's biographical material seem to outweigh the literary qualities in not merely reinforcing preconceptions of his mental life and acuity but reifying the persona's intellectual qualities in a reductive, essentializing

process that elides the distinction between the persona and Rushdie's lived, material reality, and renders both fictional narrative and persona fixed.

One alternative to biographical dipping in reading Rushdie's fiction is to focus exclusively on the formal, literary elements of the work, the benefits of which are clear in analyses of the account, in *The Satanic Verses*, of Saladin Chamcha's return to India from England to care for his dying father. Teverson notes that the published version of this event is a revision:

[b]etween his completing the first draft of *The Satanic Verses* and the final version, Rushdie's father, Anis, died of cancer.

This event prompted Rushdie to change the ending of the novel so that the character Saladin Chamcha, who had originally returned to India too late for a reconciliation with his dying parent, now managed to return in time for a death-bed scene.

(88-9)

Teverson is quick to point out that the novel's account of reconciliation should not be read as straightforward autobiography, concluding, of narrative events such as this, that Rushdie "is not a writer who uses autobiography as a means of self-exploration and personal revelation ... but a writer who finds in autobiography points of departure for narratives with different kinds of significance" (71). Nonetheless, in speculating as to Rushdie's motivation for revising the scene, Teverson suggests at least a partial conflation of fictional and biographical narrative: the death of the father as a (w)rite of passage for both Saladin and his creator. For Ian Gregson, however, this narrative event is unique within *The Satanic Verses* not for its last-minute modification, prompted by Rushdie's biographical circumstances, but its

deployment of “a thoroughly realist idiom” (128-9). It is, therefore, evidence of the novel’s complex architecture. The account, which opens the novel’s final chapter, echoes Saladin’s previous return, given much earlier in the novel in a decidedly non-realist idiom. In this first story of return, the prose clarifies – in both content and form – Saladin’s emotional upheaval on visiting his father, Changez, in the hope of forgiving or being forgiven past wrongs. The visit does not go well, quickly descending to anger and accusation:

Of what did the son accuse the father? Of everything:  
espionage on child-self, rainbow-pot-stealing, exile. Of turning  
him into what he might not have become. Of making-a-man-of.  
Of what-will-I-tell-my-friends. Of irreparable Sunderings and  
offensive forgiveness. Of succumbing to Allah-worship with  
new wife and also to blasphemous worship of late spouse.  
Above all, of magic-lampism, of being an open-sesamist ...  
Rub, poof, genie, wish, at once master, hey presto. He was a  
father who had promised, and then withheld, a magic lamp.  
(69)

Neither amid nor around this stream of consciousness reflection is there definitive clarification as to how much, if any, of these thoughts are spoken aloud, and the paragraph functions as a textual performance of Saladin’s emotional turbulence, one that verges on incoherence. As such, it clearly contrasts with the novel’s later account in which Saladin returns to India to care for his father after receiving the news that Changez is dying of multiple myeloma. In the middle of the night, as Saladin helps his father from the bathroom to his bed,

he blurted out, at this least appropriate of moments, an appeal for reconciliation. ‘Abba, I came because I didn’t want there to be trouble between us any more ...’ *Fucking idiot. The Devil damn thee black, thou cream-fac’d loon. In the middle of the bloody night! And if he hasn’t guessed he’s dying, that little deathbed speech will certainly have let him know.* Changez continued to shuffle along; his grip on his son’s arm tightened very slightly. ‘That doesn’t matter any more,’ he said. ‘It’s forgotten, whatever it was.’ (526, original italics)

Here, the conventions of dialogue, including attributions, italics for inner speech and quotations marks for outer vocalization, clearly distinguish between Saladin’s thoughts and spoken words; further, the movements of the son and father in walking to the bedroom from the bath parallels and supports the request for reconciliation, and its approval. This paragraph is no less effective than the previous in its textual performance of Saladin’s emotional state; moreover, the shift in idiom works in tandem with the shift in content to support Saladin’s development. The care for and reconciliation with his father are crucial events in the narrative of Saladin’s redemption, one that contributes significantly to the novel’s concluding distinction between the schizophrenic, amoral Gibreel, and Saladin as his reasoned, contrite opposite. The shift to the realist idiom that Gregson identifies highlights the shift in Saladin’s affective and moral position – in short, his maturation – and is especially apparent when contrasted with the events following Saladin’s first, emotionally chaotic return home. After the first visit, he leaves his father’s house to board the terrorist-filled plane that explodes over England and marks the beginning of the course of his transformations; after the second, he

remains, eventually confronts Gibreel, and finally concludes his complex, intensely personal journey.

In this case, Gregson's formalist reading works to productively supplement Teverson's strategy of identifying points of departure: the idiomatic shift signals the late incorporation of autobiographical material and also emphasizes the repurposing of that material. This formalist complement to biographical dipping, though, is not always so clear, as is evident in Gregson's reading of a fictional Gary Larson cartoon in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. The fictional cartoon is described as presenting Vina Apsara, the novel's ill-fated, pop-star heroine, hiding in the company of Jesse Garon Parker, the novel's alternate reality version of Elvis Presley. For Gregson, the description of the cartoon is a clear example of the novel's lesser literary quality in comparison with Rushdie's earlier work: the account of the cartoon functions as a "postmodern platitude" and a "doubling of trivialities" (129), rather than as part of a strategy of textual complexity and enrichment. What Gregson does not mention, though, is that the cartoon is an extratextual reference, a link between Vina's fictional biographical narrative and Rushdie's real-world one. The fictional "The Far Side" cartoon reinscribes the actual Larson cartoon, published in 1994, that depicts Rushdie and Elvis as roommates, sneaking a peek through window blinds at the world they no longer inhabit. The fictional cartoon is a reference to Rushdie's lived experience of the Affair, including its circulation in pop culture, and biographical dipping here permits the possibility of reading the cartoon as a commentary on the novel's conditions of production. In this light, the cartoon is not a "doubling of trivialities" but satire, a mocking critique of the social, political and cultural conditions suggested by Larson's original.

In their exclusive emphases on the literary qualities of Rushdie's work, these formalist approaches seem to work better as alternative beginnings than endpoints for reading Rushdie's work, ones that complement or counter the biographical contexts. Another alternative, one that works in a similar attempt to avoid overemphasis of the autobiographical elements of Rushdie's fiction, is suggested in Morton's clarifications of the cultural and political contexts of Rushdie's work. Like other recent Rushdie monographs, Morton's *Salman Rushdie: Fictions of Postcolonial Modernity* (2008) opens with a chronology but, unlike those of, for example, Teverson (2007), D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke (2010), and Damian Grant (2012), Morton's "Timeline" includes relatively little biographical material. While Teverson's, Goonetilleke's and Grant's chronologies all include mention of Marianne Wiggins, Rushdie's second wife, in the entries for 1988 and 1989, Morton's appear as follows:

**1988** US shoots down Iranian passenger flight

General Zia, the US ambassador and top Pakistan army  
officials die in mysterious air crash

Pan Am flight 103 bombed over Lockerbie; 270 people  
killed

Soviet troop withdrawals from Afghanistan begin

Benazir Bhutto's PPP wins general election in Pakistan

Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*

**1989** Death sentence issued against Rushdie by Iranian

leadership (Khomeini)

Fall of Berlin Wall



*Exxon Valdez* oil disaster

Student protestors massacred in Tiananmen Square,

Beijing

Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, which wins

Booker Prize for fiction

Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*

Morton's "Timeline" entries are similar in content and, as such, consistent with his attempt to advance discussion of Rushdie's fiction "by paying particular attention to the political events and popular discourses that inflect Rushdie's writing" (16). The implications of Morton's "Timeline" are those of a body of work that is best understood in social, political and historical context, rather than in strictly biographical terms. Here, Morton's exclusion of biographical detail might be strategic, a deliberate under-emphasis that attempts to counteract the possibilities of "crude *ad hominem*" (24) readings of Rushdie's work that foreground Rushdie's biographical information and render Rushdie's fiction primarily as a vehicle for that information. The shift, though, from an overemphasis on biography to political and cultural context entails a risk of insufficiently attending to Rushdie's lived experience as the author of that fiction, one in which the *fatwa* becomes simply another element of the *zeitgeist* that informs Rushdie's writing, alongside environmental disasters and political protests.

Yet another alternative to the longstanding practice of biographical dipping in Rushdie studies is that of using Rushdie's inscriptions of biographical detail as material for reading the text within which that detail operates – that is, of relying on it to teach the reader how to read the novel at a metatextual level. For example, Simon Gikandi argues of *The Satanic Verses* that, "[w]hile Rushdie's novel cannot be described as autobiographical in the

strict sense of the word, clearly recognizable references are written into the narrative so that the figure of the author – his experience of migrancy and his reading of the Western canon, in particular – is an unmistakable presence in a novel in which the authorial voice is largely absent” (210). For Gikandi, Rushdie’s self-encoded, “unmistakable presence” works to authorize the novel as a postcolonial, catachrestical narrative as well as to provide clues as to how it can be read. This self-encoding, including “the parodic – and again unmistakable – presence of the author in both the figure of Saladin Chamcha and Salman, the Persian, the prophet’s scribe” (210-211) and “Saladin’s struggle with the kipper in an English public school, an episode that comes right out of Rushdie’s autobiography” (211), must be recognized in order for the novel to be read as a postcolonial narrative – that is, one engaged in the cultural politics of transgression and contestation. It is perhaps for this reason that the novel should be understood as an exemplar of the literary-political texts of postcolonial literature rather than a self-reflexive and less political postmodern narrative, that Gikandi omits mention of Rushdie’s self-encoding as an omniscient but stubbornly unrevealing deity who appears to Gibreel Farishta throughout the novel.

Gikandi’s reading of Rushdie’s biographical self-inscriptions in *The Satanic Verses* is particularly appealing in contrast with superficial responses that construct the novel as blasphemous or self-indulgent, and it might usefully be extended to *Midnight’s Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, all of which follow the patterns of political critique and authorial self-encoding prevalent in *The Satanic Verses*. It is, though, limited as a strategy of approach to Rushdie’s more recent work, given the shift in that work to an increased deployment of realist idioms and a reduction in metafictional intrusions, and more personal, rather than broadly political, concerns, both of which contribute to confluences of Rushdie’s

fiction and the persona. Further, biographical dipping in this mode overlooks the functions of self-encoding with regard to the Rushdie persona as a figure of postcolonial identity, one that might be evaluated, like the novel, in terms of its cultural-political transgressions and contestations. Like Morton's emphasis on the political, historical, and cultural contexts of writing, Gikandi's argument for the authorization and decoding of Rushdie's fiction seems to risk an insufficient attendance to the material body of its author.

If, as it does in this project, and according to Ashcroft's imperative, reading Rushdie's work requires the dual responsibility of attending to both the texts and the material body of the author, perhaps the most useful mode of biographical dipping is that of identifying the "points of departure" from autobiography to fiction that Teverson locates within *The Satanic Verses*. Reading in this mode, though, introduces problems of consistently and accurately identifying these points. It also risks analytic slippages: narrative events might be reductively rendered as points of departure from biography to fiction and nothing more in working from presumptions of Rushdie's autobiography. These problems suggest that it is not only the "crude *ad hominem*" analyses criticized by Morton that limit the scope of possibility in reading Rushdie's fiction and, similarly, the persona, but also any mode of biographical interpretation. Crucially, though, these are problems of degree and certainty, rather than absolute distinctions between autobiography and fiction. The governing imperative of this study – to restore some of the contestatory potential of Rushdie's fiction regarding its accounts of contemporary, postcolonial identity – demands that biographical interpretation of Rushdie's novels and the author himself serve to expand the scope of possibility of Rushdie's fiction, especially with regard to its inscriptions and theorizations of identity. This might follow from modes of biographical dipping that reveal the conditions of

the textual landscape created by the author, and, in this light, formalist, historicist, and poststructuralist approaches should be welcomed as doing the work of rendering the distinction between autobiography and fiction clearer. These clarifications in themselves, however, may have relatively little impact with regard to the interplay between the Rushdie persona and Rushdie's fiction. Even when Rushdie's protagonists are carefully distinguished from their author, the points of similarity between them exceed the points of difference, with the result that the persona and Rushdie's protagonists coincide in defining what it means to survive and succeed as a contemporary, postcolonial subject, in both the fictive worlds of Rushdie's novels and the real one within which they are read. In Chapters 4 and 5, I explore these definitions with regard to hybridity and migrancy, but before doing so I consider the significance of the persona, particularly with regard to the dominant culture of the West – one of Rushdie's main reading publics.

### **Chapter 3: Recuperating Rushdie**

In this chapter, I explore Rushdie's authorial intrusions with regard to the production of the persona, first tracing them in his fiction and extra-textual commentaries. I then discuss their effects in contributing to the moral authority associated with the Rushdie persona. I also trace a shift regarding perceptions of Rushdie's social and political interventions and conclude that the persona has been recuperated for the West: it has been embraced within systems of Western privilege and is, increasingly, a product of the same. Thus, while one idea of Rushdie's public identity may remain, for many, the "Salman of Liberty" (*Joseph Anton* 365), a spokesperson for and defender of freedom of expression, another version presents a specific idea of Rushdie that does not so much critique or subvert the dominant culture within which it operates as sustain its dominance.

#### **Authorial Intrusions: Metafictional and Post-narrative**

Rushdie's authorial intrusions, both metafictional and extra-textual, make it difficult to identify clear points of departure from autobiography to fiction in Rushdie's novels and complicate any clear separation between the persona and its real-world correlate: Rushdie, himself. This will continue to be a tension in my analysis, as Rushdie, the human being, is an unknown, even as his public and literary persona abounds in the public sphere. As becomes clear in analyzing and writing about the effects of Rushdie's authorial intrusions, there is an ongoing slippage between Rushdie and the persona that threatens an absolute distinction between Rushdie, the person, and the idea of Rushdie, the persona. Some of this slippage results from the fact of Rushdie's written contributions to his public identity, many of which are important but none of which are definitive. Moreover, I do not want to suggest that

Rushdie, the person, bears sole responsibility for the idea of Rushdie, which I name the Rushdie persona, especially with regard to its influence in the reading of his fiction. Still, the idea of the persona is useful to a better understanding of the readerly effects of the Rushdie canon and here I address the specific consequences to that persona of the recurring device of authorial intrusion.

Rushdie's intrusions often counter the biographical dipping that informs many of the analyses of his work, especially regarding the conflation of Rushdie's personal qualities and lived experience with those of his protagonists, but they also work to destabilize the authority of the texts in and around which these intrusions occur, to support readings of the transformative, political goals of his fiction, and to define his moral authority as the survivor of the Affair, voice of the marginalized, and defender of basic human rights. As a result, Rushdie's intrusions are not only contributions to the qualities of his literature but also to the Rushdie persona and its politics, but they do not serve exclusively to augment his subversive cultural presence and the contestatory potential of his work. Rushdie and his fiction may be often celebrated for their work in "writing back" against dominant systems of power, and Rushdie's current appearances as a social commentator and critic, including in forums ranging from PEN to late-night television, suggest that his political activity is as great as ever, but the quality of that activity has changed. The Rushdie persona is no longer equated with the idea of a placard-bearing, anti-racist protester of 1980s London, nor that of a consistent critic of the cultural, political, and social effects of systems of neo-colonial power.

Rushdie's authorial intrusions with regard to his fiction occur in two modes: metafictional and post-narrative, or what Shailja Sharma refers to, respectively, as the "frequent slippages" in his novels, and the "explicatory glosses through which Rushdie has

sought to project the authorial meaning of his work” (598). These intrusions consistently foreground Rushdie’s authorial presence and support specific readings of his novels by explaining their purposes and production, by identifying points of departure from autobiography to fiction, countering what Rushdie characterizes as misreadings of his fiction, and accounting for the personal and professional conditions of their writing. Rushdie’s authorial intrusions also contribute to the persona by defining it as a paragon of the right to freedom of expression, a representative voice of marginalized, postcolonial communities, and a highly conscious figure, not only of itself but also its several environs: social, literary, academic, popular and religious. However, while Rushdie’s commitment to literary freedom and elucidation of the radical inequalities of the contemporary, postcolonial world is given a significant platform for expression by way of his considerable social standing, his moral authority is, crucially, tempered by other qualities attributed to the persona, including elitism, emotional immaturity and self-promotion. This tempering is, I think, a clear sign of the constraints on the political efficacy of his work that are imposed by the dominant culture in which the Rushdie persona operates.

### **Metafictional Intrusions**

Metafictional devices are common in Rushdie’s fiction: the pluralization of historical narratives and the juxtaposition of fictional characters and historical figures that serve to undermine the text’s authority as an historical record<sup>34</sup>; stories-within-stories that, as Fletcher

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<sup>34</sup> Here, I am thinking of readings like Stephen Slemon’s recognition of the strategic and “wide pluralizing of origins” in magic realist prose, including Rushdie’s, and particularly

writes, “call attention to the textual nature of novels ... as written” (11); and literary, scholarly, and pop cultural intertextualities that, for various scholars, reduce Rushdie’s prose to the level of empty narrative tricks<sup>35</sup>, place specific demands on the reader<sup>36</sup>, or serve to locate Rushdie’s novels in particular geographic and cultural locations<sup>37</sup>. Compared to these other metafictional devices, Rushdie’s slippages into his fiction, his authorial intrusions ranging from autobiographical inscription to direct self-representation, are less common, and are clearest in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, *Luka and the Fire of Life*, *Fury*, and *The Satanic Verses*. In both *Haroun* and *Luka*, Rushdie enters the text as the renowned storyteller Rashid Khalifa, “the legendary Ocean of Notions, the fabled Shah of Blah” (*Haroun* 22), and father of the eponymous protagonists. The dedications of both novels are consistent with Rushdie’s several confirmations in post-narrative interviews that they were written for his

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that which engages with history and historical records. For Slemon, that pluralization of origins “annihilates the privileging or monumentalizing of any one of them” (17).

<sup>35</sup> See Gregson, p. 129.

<sup>36</sup> Keith Wilson, for example, writes of *Midnight’s Children* that “Rushdie clearly presupposes for his work ... an ideal reader [who] is deemed to have a facility at intertextual cross-referencing” (65). This argument, though, is opposed by the general position suggested in Mishra’s criticism of the “assumed compact between the writer and the (Western) reader” (395) with regard to Rushdie’s fiction. Mishra points out that “the compact is an uneasy one since it presupposes mastery of cultural capital which is a matter of social and cultural acquisition and not simply of birth” (395), and, thereby, suggests not so much an inadequacy of either the compact or the novel itself, but, rather, the characterization of the ideal reader.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, my preceding discussion of Morton’s “Timeline.”



sons, Zafar and Milan, respectively, and support identifications of Rashid as a direct representation of the author in his role as father, or vice versa. Similar readings of authorial self-inscription dominate the reception of *Fury*. Brouillette, in writing of the “generally hostile” reception to *Fury*, notes that “a complaint about the novel that appears repeatedly in the literary press is that it is merely a memoir, a calculated effort at self-construction and defence designed to deflect the public criticism of his private life” (139), including Rushdie’s “leaving his third wife and their son to move to New York and start a relationship with Padma Lakshmi, a Miss Universe contestant and model half his age” (139). And while Neil ten Kortenaar, like Brouillette, is careful to avoid identifying the novel as a memoir, instead referring to *Fury* as “a sort of allegory of the author’s career” (“Fearful Symmetry” 357), his restraint is easily in the minority among popular and academic responses. *Fury* is most often read as the most autobiographical of Rushdie’s novels, and its protagonist, Malik Solanka, as a direct representation of Rushdie himself, rather than an independent fictional character, veiled proxy, or figure of self-parody. In these cases, readings of Rushdie’s self-narrativizing consistently foreclose on possibilities of meaning in favour of readings of presumably direct inscriptions of Rushdie’s lived experience, and the determining link between the persona and Rushdie’s characters is often reduced to personal, memorial revelation. For example, Solanka’s obsessive pursuit of Neela Mahendra is unlikely to be read as anything other than Rushdie’s real-world pursuit of Padma Lakshmi, despite the novel’s framing of that pursuit as desperate attempts to, in turn, reject, deflect, and absolve Solanka of his infidelity, abandonment of his son, and madness-inducing bouts of rage, any of which might serve as social commentary on lives beyond that of Rushdie’s own. It also overlooks the novel’s arguments regarding the commodification of art and the role of the artist: Solanka’s Little

Brain, a “female time-traveling doll” (16), makes him a millionaire through television and marketing deals, inspires one character to model her life on his creation and another to start a revolution. As a result, Solanka is forced to the repeated realizations that his work governs him much more than the reverse and that his ostensibly artistic process is fraught with political implications and ethical compromise.

Rushdie’s narrativization of the authorial presence in *The Satanic Verses*, however, differs in that it preserves a greater distance between the author’s fiction and biography and, therefore, allows a greater likelihood for reading possibilities of meaning other than the strictly biographical. This is not to say, though, that Rushdie’s self-inscriptions in *The Satanic Verses* are less obvious than in *Haroun*, *Luka*, or *Fury*; indeed, Kuortti writes that, in addition to the protagonists, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta,

[t]here is one more ‘character’ that needs to be mentioned, one whose appearance in the narrative is as sporadic as it is intrusive: it is the narrative voice, the first-person narrator. The narrator shows up in the text explicitly to comment on things [...] to put questions [...] give directions to the reader [...] or to comment on his own metanarrative position. (“To Be Born Again” 127)

In offering these comments and directions, and especially in reflecting on his own position with regard to the narrative, the first-person narrator demonstrates an awareness of his and the reader’s roles with regard to the text. In addition to this recurring vocal intrusion, the persona’s intrusion in the novel also takes the form of an embodied authorial presence, uncannily reminiscent to the author’s own embodied self. During a fight between Gibreel and

his lover, Alleluia Cone, Gibreel retreats to the bedroom of Alleluia's London flat and sees God:

Gibreel's vision of the Supreme Being was not abstract in the least.

He saw, sitting on the bed, a man of about the same age as himself, of medium height, fairly heavily built, with salt-and-pepper beard cropped close to the line of the jaw. What struck him most was that the apparition was balding, seemed to suffer from dandruff and wore glasses. (*The Satanic Verses* 318-9)

As Kuortti notes, "the resemblance with pictures of Rushdie from that time is striking," but for Kuortti, and unlike in *Haroun*, *Luka*, and *Fury*, this resemblance "works towards undermining any simple, simplistic mimetic readings by foregrounding the process of production" ("To Be Born Again" 128) and resisting the elision of biographical distance. Kuortti's characterization of this sparing, "ironic representation of authorial presence" (127) in *The Satanic Verses* is consistent with Fletcher's analysis of the "self-referentiality and intertextuality" that are familiar devices in Rushdie's work, ones that "call attention to the textual nature of novels ... as written" and thereby "[undermine] the authority of the text" (11).

Kuortti's conclusion, following Fletcher's, suggests a general effect of Rushdie's intrusions in calling attention to the "textual nature" of his novels, but other scholars argue that Rushdie's metafictional intrusions have a particular consequence: they foreground the figure of the author, although it might be more precise to say that they foreground the figure of the Rushdie persona. Catherine Cundy, for example, concludes that "[e]ven though *The Satanic Verses* is largely concerned with who is the controlling power and guiding force

behind any utterance, the very foregrounding of the argument and Rushdie's own intrusive authorial interventions make it difficult to argue that he steps back from the narrative in any true sense" (82). Indeed, given Kuortti's own identification of Rushdie as a character within the novel, an authorial intrusion in excess of narration, it is easier to conclude that Rushdie steps not back from but directly into the novel, something that prompts ten Kortenaar to conclude of the metafictional narration in *The Satanic Verses* that Rushdie "never just blasphemes ... he always proclaims, 'Hey! This is me blaspheming here!'" (350). Nor is *The Satanic Verses* unique in this regard. Aijaz Ahmad writes of *Shame* that "the narrative within the book itself is controlled transparently by repeated, direct, personal interventions on the part of the narrator – who is, for the purposes of our interpretation here, mainly Rushdie himself" (123). The qualification is important: this figure cannot be Rushdie himself but it is very much identifiable with him and, like the authorial proxies I have considered above, contributes significantly to the Rushdie persona.

The authorial intrusions in Rushdie's novels are similar to his other metafictional devices in that they destabilize the texts, but in foregrounding the presence of an author, they also contribute to the persona's authority, a recent example of which is the undermining of the certainty of the historical record in *The Enchantress of Florence*. Like many other Rushdie works, *The Enchantress of Florence* variously treats the historical record as definitive, authoritative, unreliable and insufficient. At one point, the narrative completely entangles its own fictional historical record with the one referenced in the novel's research bibliography, attributing accounts of the fictional, eponymous enchantress, Qara Köz, to the real-life scholars Bartolomeo Spina, Gian Francesco Pico della Mirandola, and Andrea Alciato. Spina's history, which, of course, does not actually include reference to the fictional

enchantress, is condemned for vilifying her as a witch, and, in a metafictional gesture typical of the novel's treatment of history, the vilification is immediately dismissed as "a defamatory supposition for which there is no evidence whatsoever in the historical records of the time" (273). Qara Kōz's existence and overwhelming, enchanting charisma are not dismissed, though, implying that it is Spina's negative characterization of the enchantress, and not her existence, that is a fabulation. The real and the imagined are intermixed and, in a destabilization of the authority of history and of the text as an accurate record of events, presented by the narrator-historian with equal onto-epistemological force.

In this example from *The Enchantress of Florence*, the authorial intrusion remains implied, but in suggesting the inadequacies of the historical record, the narrator-historian acquires a specific presence in excess of the novel's framing device. If neither the extra-textual nor the fictive historical records are to be trusted, it is because their unreliability has been pointed out by the narrator, an authorial figure who can, it seems, be relied upon more than the narrative itself. Rather than enlightening the reader as to the truth of events, the author-narrator establishes common ground with the reader from which to engage with conflicting versions of the truth. In this instance, the narrator is the putative author and is, therefore, easily identifiable as the Rushdie persona who manifests as a stable element and, if the text itself is undermined, the figure it represents, the author himself, is not. A similar effect is produced in *The Satanic Verses*, specifically when Gibreel encounters the author-as-god in Alleluia Cone's bedroom. Here, the narrative is destabilized by a refusal to enlighten Gibreel as to whom he has discovered:

'Who are you?' [Gibreel] asked with interest... 'Ooparvala,' the apparition answered. 'The Fellow Upstairs.' 'How do I know you're

not the other One,' Gibreel asked craftily, 'Neechayvala, the Guy from Underneath?'" At this point, the Deity loses patience:

"Whether We be multiform, plural, representing the union-by-hybridization of such opposites as *Oopar* and *Neechay*, or whether We be pure, stark, extreme, will not be resolved here.' (*The Satanic Verses* 318-9)

Here, the refusal of enlightenment might be directed to both Gibreel and the reader of the novel, but the stage is now set for a similar refusal that establishes common ground with the reader. As Saladin Chamcha wonders about the nature of divine intervention, the author-as-god shifts modes of address and speaks directly to the reader:

I'm saying nothing. Don't ask me to clear things up one way or the other; the time of revelation is long gone. The rules of Creation are pretty clear: you set things up, you make them thus and so, and then you let them roll... I sat on Alleluia Cone's bed and spoke to the superstar, Gibreel. *Ooparvala* or *Neechayvala*, he wanted to know, and I didn't enlighten him; I certainly don't intend to blab to this confused Chamcha instead. (408-9)

These refusals, directed in varying degrees toward both the protagonists and the reader, serve as reminders of the constructed nature of the narrative, and they also emphasize the unique power and presence of the intruding author. Whether Gibreel is guided by "[t]he Fellow Upstairs" or "the Guy from Underneath," and whether the reader is being addressed from above or below, is of secondary importance: what matters most is that it is at the author-narrator's behest that the reader is left to confront this ambiguity.

## Post-narrative Intrusions

One function of the intruding author may be to anticipate and counter attempts to stabilize the meaning of the text, a consequence of which is an affirmation of the presence of the author as authority, but Rushdie's post-narrative explanations do double-duty in both foregrounding the Rushdie persona as a unique authority and working to counter the uncertainties engendered by the narrative's metafictional devices. Rushdie's explanations are often attempts to stabilize and control the space of reading. If the authorial intrusions in *The Satanic Verses* are concerned with refusing to define particular elements of the text, of deliberately refraining from revelation of either purpose or meaning, Rushdie's "explicatory glosses" regarding the novel are concerned with precisely the opposite. The Rushdie persona is thus foregrounded and, interestingly, governed to some extent by Rushdie's attempts to interpret and perhaps construct his own public identity for the reader.

In his 1990 essay, "In Good Faith," Rushdie writes that *The Satanic Verses* is, as he "profoundly hope[s], a work of radical dissent and questioning and reimagining" (395), the purposes of which include dramatizing "certain ideas about morality" (*Imaginary Homelands* 401) in order to emphasize morality as "internal and shifting ... rather than external, divinely sanctioned, absolute" (402-3). The most insistent explanation, though, is that of countering the rhetoric of the *fatwa* by denying the inherently blasphemous quality of the novel. Rushdie writes that "the first purpose" (399) of the novel's dream sequences, in which Gibreel Farishta witnesses "the birth and growth of a religion something like Islam" (398), "is not to vilify or 'disprove' Islam, but to portray a soul in crisis, to show how the loss of God can destroy a man's life" (399), and, further, to "[ask] the reader to think about the validity of religion's rules" (400). If a fine line is drawn here between the "something like Islam" of the

novel and the religion of the real world, it is, for Rushdie, nonetheless a definitive one: *The Satanic Verses* simply cannot be blasphemous because it engages with a fictional system of belief. This corrective to an apparent misreading of the novel – the explanation of *The Satanic Verses* as a work not of blasphemy but of discursive provocation – is consistently given in Rushdie’s essays, op-ed pieces, interviews, and his recent memoir, *Joseph Anton*. Indeed, one way of understanding the memoir is as a sustained attempt to ensure a particular reading of *The Satanic Verses* by defining the conditions of the space of reading, including by recapitulating the argument of “In Good Faith” that it is the right of the “storytelling animal” to “take the grand narratives to task,” rather than the right of the “closed society” to dictate the terms of the story and its meaning (*Joseph Anton* 360).

*Joseph Anton* is consistent with other explanations offered by Rushdie regarding his fiction in that it serves as a corrective to reductive misunderstandings of Rushdie’s work, including those that result from biographical readings of his novels. Indeed, in many cases, Rushdie’s explanations are concerned precisely with disrupting readings of links between his biography and fiction, as is clear in Aijaz Ahmad’s account of an interview following the publication of *Shame*:

Asked directly ‘How closely can this narrator be identified with the author, with yourself?’ Rushdie responded as follows: ‘Pretty closely. Much, much more closely than you could identify Saleem Sinai. But beware of total identification. This is a novel, which means it is invented, and that includes the bits that appear not to be invented.’  
(qtd. in Aijaz Ahmad 432)



Rushdie's warning against "total identification" is not unique to the interview quoted by Ahmad; it is, rather, consistently given in responses to questions about the extent to which his fiction is informed by his lived experience. In a 2008 public interview with Jeffrey Eugenides, Rushdie says

when people talk about *Midnight's Children* as being autobiographical, I always say that the great difference is that I had a happy childhood, you know. I mean, my memory of my childhood is of being pretty uneventfully happy, and Saleem, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, has a very fraught and turbulent and difficult childhood. Quite, really the opposite of mine. (Eugenides 13)

In a similar, drily humorous account of his experiences during the filming of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, in which he has a cameo as himself, Rushdie writes,

It was harder than he expected to play a character called Salman Rushdie whose dialogue was written by someone else... He himself tried to write a bit of extra dialogue for "Salman Rushdie" – obviously – but it was all cut out of the finished film, except for one exchange ... Somebody asked him how autobiographical his books were and he replied, 'You know, nobody's ever asked me that before.' (*Joseph Anton* 605-6)

While they contrast in tone with Rushdie's direct, insistent warning against "total identification," the indirect, teasing rejoinders are no less emphatic in attempting to correct what are, presumably, errors of reading a public identity that is open to interpretation.

Rushdie's interventions may succeed to some extent in foreclosing on that open-endedness by pointing to the real, lived life of the author, but ambiguities between that lived life and its fictionalization continue to invite interpretation.

Rushdie's post-narrative explanations of his work certainly suggest a cognizance of the essentializing process of biographical dipping, but underlying these attempts is an implicit acknowledgement of the limits of challenging the elision of Rushdie's life and fiction. In the memoir, Rushdie reflects on the completion of the manuscript of *The Satanic Verses*, concluding that "[w]hen a book leaves its author's desk it changes. Even before anyone has read it, before eyes other than its creator's have looked upon a single phrase, it is irretrievably altered. It has become *a book that can be read*, that no longer belongs to its maker" (90-91, original italics). This might, perhaps uncharitably, be read as an abandonment of responsibility: paraphrasing ten Korten, it could be Rushdie declaring 'Hey! It's not my fault!' Alternatively, this might be read as an acceptance of the limits of authorial control over writing and reading, and, further, a recognition of the qualities of the space in which meaning is and has been produced around *The Satanic Verses*. Regardless, and whether Rushdie's declarations of the limits of authorial control exceed his several attempts to exercise that control, these post-narrative authorial intrusions reinforce characterizations of the persona as keenly aware of the conditions of reading Rushdie's work and, moreover, the readings of the persona, itself.

In a brief analysis of *The Enchantress of Florence*, M. Madhusudhana Rao refers to Rushdie as "the 'conscious' artist" (22), an appellation that echoes other scholars' conclusions about Rushdie's self-reflexive intrusions in the reading of his work. Teverson, for example, points out that Rushdie's writing exhibits a characteristic "self-consciousness"

that Teverson defines as a “willingness to incorporate an analysis of the cultural locations from which it is written” that works to anticipate and respond to criticisms that might be raised of Rushdie’s work (8). And while Teverson carefully refrains from statements of authorial intent, the implied attribution to Rushdie is clear: the characterization of Rushdie’s writing as self-conscious suggests, at the very least, an author who is consistently active in the interpretation of the fiction with which he is affiliated. For others, including Huggan, Rushdie’s artistic consciousness extends beyond concerns with the meaning of his work. Huggan concludes, in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, that Rushdie, like many postcolonial writers, is cognizant of his complicity in the exoticization of his fiction as a marketing strategy (32, 81). Huggan suggests that Rushdie is aware of the vulnerability of his work to recuperation by the dominant culture (81) and that Rushdie’s complicity in exoticizing his work is doubly strategic, attempting both to further the marketplace success of his novels and to enlighten readers of those novels as to the problems of such exoticization. For Huggan, Rushdie is a figure who is “partly interpellated, partly self-conferred” (70), a claim that carries the implication of a figure who responds to the determining, hailing call and, therefore, emphasizes Rushdie’s responsive engagement in managing his public persona. This claim is partially echoed in Brouillette’s argument that Rushdie’s central narrative preoccupations after the onset of the Affair are those of attempting to re-centre his own authorship of his fiction (152), of wanting “to matter as an author of his text’s meaning” (152), even as he laments “the lack of authorial control allowed to him” by the forces of literary production (154). Like Huggan, Brouillette emphasizes Rushdie’s awareness of his position – inscribed in his fiction – as an author marketed via his biographical details but reaches a different conclusion regarding his authorial interventions. For Brouillette, Rushdie

is both aware of his position as “an author *figure* lionized by the global media and by multinational publishing” (152, original italics) and also engaged in attempting to expand, if not overcome, the limits of that position. Despite the different ends identified by Huggan and Brouillette, in both cases Rushdie is rendered as highly conscious of the conditions of production not only of his novels but also the public, authorial figure associated with them. Huggan and Brouillette’s emphases on Rushdie’s presumed consciousness of both his writing position and the authorial self associated with his work might signal, respectively, Rushdie’s complicity with the exoticizing forces of the contemporary, literary marketplace or a resistance to the sublimating effects of reading his authorial self via his fiction, but I take their shared emphasis as a discursive contribution to the Rushdie persona that has its own effects. One effect is simply that of contributing to the complexity of his authorial persona, and thereby distinguishing it from accounts of Rushdie’s author-function or literary celebrity, and another is that of foregrounding his authorial presence with regard to his fiction. This foregrounding increases the likelihood of reading Rushdie’s novels according to the influence of the Rushdie persona. My particular interest regarding the influence of the persona has to do with inscriptions, in Rushdie’s recent novels, of hybridity and migrancy as postcolonial subject positions. I return to this in Chapters 4 and 5, but, first, I consider the persona’s scope of influence.

### **Metafictional Intrusions and the Moral Authority of the Rushdie Persona**

In addition to foregrounding the persona’s presence in his novels, Rushdie’s metafictional intrusions contribute to the persona’s moral authority by establishing a level of complicity with the reader that, especially in his more recent work, often exacts particular

demands. In some cases, the authorial intervention establishes a shared point of view that exceeds the protagonists' limited perspectives. For example, early in *The Satanic Verses*, the narrative shifts modes of address, from third-person omniscient to first-person plural, as a mysterious voice begins to whisper questions in the ear of Mahound, the prophet-to-be: "What kind of idea are you? Man-or-mouse? We know that voice. We've heard it once before" (95, original italics). Here, the immediate shift from the interrogatives directed at Mahound to the commentary directed at the reader privileges that reader by establishing a shared point of view with the putative author-narrator and, further, guides a particular reading of the elements of the story. In other instances, like the refusal to enlighten Saladin described above, establishing this shared point of view has a moral implication: not only is the narrative not to be trusted but the reader *should* not trust it. This reading is consistent with Fletcher's conclusion that authorial interventions in *Midnight's Children* work to underline "the moral points to be gleaned from the story" (13), a point that implies a hierarchical relationship. Among the several metafictional devices that Fletcher identifies in Rushdie's work, the intervention of the narrator is significant as a strategy of education that functions according to a top-down model: the persona is an expert and moral compass that quite clearly knows better, in the senses of both epistemology and ethics; the reader is an ignorant and willing student.

If, as Fletcher concludes of *Midnight's Children*, the authorial intrusions within *The Satanic Verses* demand attention to the broad moral themes of the narrative, similar interventions in *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence* demand the reader attend to specific moral points. For example, in *Shalimar the Clown*, a paragraph-long series of unanswered questions requires a particular response from the reader: the condemnation of

those responsible for the destruction of the Kashmiri village of Pachigam. The questions left unanswered in the text – among them, “Who lit that fire? ... Who shot those boys? Who shot those girls? ... Who clubbed that grandmother? ... Who burned the library? ... Who poisoned the paddies?” (308) – require that the reader assign moral responsibility for the horrific details of the destruction. A similar response is demanded of the reader in *The Enchantress of Florence*, in the account of the suicide of a minor character, Angélique, also known as the Memory Palace. After recovering her suppressed memories, including those of her family’s murder, her kidnapping and her forced prostitution, Angélique throws herself through a window to her death. Here, a second-person, direct form of address is used – uniquely in the novel – in a paragraph-long, metafictional intrusion that conflates Angélique and the reader through its opening phrase: “While you were anaesthetized to the tragedy of your life” (191). The passage continues with a clarification of the inescapable horrors of living with memories of abuse and loss, and, finally, the only possibility of resolution:

that you run as fast as possible until you reached the edge between  
the worlds and then you didn’t stop you ran on across that border as if  
it wasn’t there as if glass was air and air was glass, the air shattering  
around you like glass as you fell. The air slicing you to pieces as if it  
were a blade. It was good to fall. It was good to fall out of your life. It  
was good. (191)

This demand to the reader to empathize with Angélique and to condemn the circumstances of her life and death stands out for both its idiom and content. *The Enchantress of Florence*, like much of Rushdie’s previous fiction, consistently presents women as objects rather than subjects, and prompts Ursula Le Guin, in a review of the novel, to conclude that its female

characters are “stock figures, females perceived solely in relation to the male...they have no autonomous being” (1-2). For Le Guin, however, the episode of the Memory Palace, Angélique, is a recognition of the problems of that lack of autonomy and provides a glimpse of “a very different book, [and] almost a different author” (2). It may be a very brief glimpse, but it serves nonetheless to undermine the female objectification that otherwise typifies the narrative. As a result, it also reinforces the author-narrator’s position of moral authority by revealing his cognizance of the novel’s limited representation of women.

These authorial intrusions, unique in their respective novels, and less common than in Rushdie’s earlier fiction, emphasize the reader’s privileged position with regard to the narrative, work to establish a collusion with the persona, and encourage specific responses. Another type of demand, though, is made of the reader in establishing the relative positions of the persona and the reader of Rushdie’s novels. Fletcher’s suggestion of a hierarchical model of education that I understand as placing the persona in a position of authority over the reader is consistent with an implication of the narrative of artistic and emotional development in *Joseph Anton*. In the memoir, this narrative is signposted by Rushdie’s several references to “the trap of wanting to be loved” (277), his recognitions of the consequences of that trap, ranging from his failed marriages to his unprincipled attempt to assuage the anger of the “people who would never love him” (284), including the book-burners and the would-be holy assassins, and, finally, the claim of escape from that overwhelming desire. Reflecting on the poor reception and sales of *Fury*, Rushdie writes that it “was painful ... but in the end it released him into another kind of freedom,” that of not wanting to be loved by everyone (619). Here, Rushdie’s escape signals a greater independence, one that recasts weak sales and scathing reviews as unimportant in comparison with his artistic practice and freedom from

self-doubt. In this light, *Fury* is a message from “an intellectual, linguistic, formal, and emotional journey,” one that “he hoped readers would enjoy” but not that he was willing to abandon if those readers did not (619). Rushdie concludes with a message to his readers: “*If you can’t come with me, I’m sorry...but I’m still going this way*” (619, original italics).

Regardless of whether the message is read as a statement of artistic principle, unchecked arrogance or self-preservation, it establishes the endpoint of a narrative of personal development and implies a position of unique authority. Clearly, then, the Rushdie persona as presented by the author himself is a figure of contravention and excess, one that stretches the limits of literature and, as a result, may be beyond not only aesthetic but also moral judgment.

### **Post-narrative Intrusions and the Political Persona**

Rushdie’s authorial intrusions work to subtly define the moral authority of the persona, but the post-narrative explanations Rushdie offers as the victim and survivor of the Affair are far more explicit in defining the persona as a paragon of basic human rights. In “Is Nothing Sacred?”, the Herbert Read Memorial Lecture delivered on Rushdie’s behalf on February 9, 1990, almost one year after the declaration of the *fatwa*, Rushdie writes “[t]he only privilege literature deserves – and this privilege it requires in order to exist – is the privilege of being the arena of discourse” (15). Though he makes no direct references to either *The Satanic Verses* or the *fatwa*, the immediate context of his claim is apparent, not least for the implied comparison of the sanctities of Islam and literature, one that concludes with an implicit denial of both:



The reason for ensuring that that privileged arena is preserved is not that writers want the absolute freedom to say and do whatever they please. It is that we, all of us, readers and writers and citizens and generals and godmen, need that little, unimportant-looking room. We do not need to call it sacred, but we do need to remember that it is necessary. (16)

Without that “privileged arena,” human existence becomes unbearably limited and imprisoning, and sanctity should be denied on the grounds that it reduces the scope of what might be questioned. The function of *The Satanic Verses* in that room is to challenge such limits and affirm that scope: the novel is not an attempt at blasphemy or denigration but intellectual provocation.

More than two decades later, Rushdie repeats this claim in *Joseph Anton*, affirming that it is the right and responsibility of the storyteller to “take the grand narratives to task” (360) in order to provoke critical engagement with, rather than unquestioning acceptance of, them. Here, the claim is given as an answer to “a question of profound importance ... *Who shall have control over the story?*” Who has, who should have, the power not only to tell the stories with which, and within which, we all lived, but also to say in what manner those stories may be told?” (360, original italics). In responding to the moral interrogatives, Rushdie’s explanations of the non-blasphemous purpose of *The Satanic Verses*, like his caution against “total identification” in the reading of *Shame*, are warnings against a particular mode of misreading, one that moves beyond ontology and epistemology to ethics. Readings of blasphemy in the novel might not be preventable – Rushdie concludes that “[t]he book has gone out into the world and the world has remade it” (90) – but they are deficient,

the products of those who should not have the power to guide reading and interpretation, whereas the author clearly should have that power. Here, the post-narrative explanation works to condition the space of reading by establishing the limits of not merely rational but ethical literary engagement.

In addition to contributing to the persona's moral authority in its attempts to condition the space of reading his novels, the memoir's account of Rushdie's life in hiding during the Affair inscribes his lived experience within a broader, political narrative of good and evil. The memoir's affirmation of the individual's right to several basic freedoms, including those of literary expression and safe public movement, defines the unmourned passing of 'Joseph Anton' and the revival of 'Salman Rushdie' as a triumph of principled survival, one Rushdie anticipates half-way through the memoir. He writes "[t]he symbolic icon-Salman his supporters had constructed, an idealized Salman of Liberty who stood flawlessly and unwaveringly for the highest values, counteracted and might just in the end defeat the demon version of himself constructed by his adversaries" (365). Here, the good-and-evil imagery not only emphasizes the moral authority of Rushdie's constructed persona but also plays into the memoir's narrative of the rise of globalized, fundamentalist Islamic terrorism. On the opening page of the first chapter, "Prologue: The First Blackbird," Rushdie writes that "when the world was exploding around him ... the lethal blackbirds were massing on the climbing frame in the school playground" (3), both a reference to a scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) and a metaphor for the gathering to come of the "winged storm" (618), the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. *Joseph Anton* contextualizes the Affair via 9/11: as the story of Rushdie's "little battle," "[t]he prologue," comes to an end, America grapples with its larger battle, "the main event" (626). The Affair is, in this light, a part of the

narrative of attack and victimization by the forces of fundamentalist, Islamic terror, the birds that first target Rushdie and, subsequently, the United States. This positioning of the “First Blackbird,” the *fatwa* and its consequences, against the “winged storm” might ostensibly clarify the relatively minor severity of Rushdie’s victimization, but it also emphasizes Rushdie’s position as a victim similar to those of 9/11: in both cases, the victims are conferred a moral authority that permits of very little question. Moreover, the comparison highlights Rushdie’s alignment with America and the West in at least partial contrast to the alignment with the Indian East that defined his early public identity.

It is an irony of the Affair that it has provided Rushdie not only a moral authority that exceeds his characterization as blasphemous but also a great deal of the standing required to be heard as a political commentator and activist on a global scale. This large-scale political activity is, as Laila Lalami points out in a review of *Shalimar the Clown*, consistent with Rushdie’s stated desire “to have some power because he believed a writer should be able to use it to speak out on the big issues of the day” (par 3). Lalami’s reference to the dozens of instances in which Rushdie has used his fame and standing to intervene in cases of authorial persecution frames the Rushdie persona as politically engaged from the earliest stages of his writing career but only capable of greater degrees of influence after his initial literary success with *Midnight’s Children* and the circumstances of the Affair (par 7). The persona occupies a privileged platform from which to speak out on political issues, one that Rushdie himself acknowledges in conceding that “his fame does get him more coverage than scholars and activists who are likewise advocating for reform” (Lalami par 7). However, for Lalami, as for many reviewers of Rushdie’s work, it is important to remember that Rushdie’s political activity is a consistent quality of both his biography and fiction. Gregson, for example,

argues that the magical realist elements of Rushdie's early novels are "deployed metaphorically in order to explore political issues" (111) and that Rushdie's metafictional, authorial interventions function "to make explicitly political claims" (111). Cundy rejects biographical dipping – in Cundy's words, "the overlaying of text onto life [is] rarely particularly useful" – but concludes that Zeeny Vakil, Saladin's lover in *The Satanic Verses*, mirrors Rushdie as "a committed and unselfish political activist" (79). And Rushdie himself, in *Joseph Anton*, is careful to remind the reader of his pre-*fatwa* political credentials, writing that the morning after being awarded the Booker Prize for *Midnight's Children*, he "was standing with a placard outside Downing Street to protest the arrest of the great Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer" (292-3).

Other scholars read Rushdie's post-*fatwa* persona as no less politically engaged but argue there are clear shifts in the qualities of that engagement. Brouillette, in her comparison of *Fury* (2001) and *The Jaguar Smile* (1987), Rushdie's non-fictional travel narrative about post-Sandinista revolution Nicaragua, concludes that Rushdie's "perspective on the subject of the political uses of culture has changed" (139). For Brouillette, the shift in Rushdie's politics from "a general attention to the politics of contemporary nation-formation" (140) to an "increasingly solipsistic fascination with the status of his own authorship" (151) is one of subject and scale. And while the problem of comparing the political goals of Rushdie's fiction and non-fiction may complicate Brouillette's conclusion, other scholars identify similar shifts in Rushdie's politics. Ruvani Ranasinha, for example, identifies several changes in Rushdie's "relationship with the East" (54), including one following the banning of *Midnight's Children* in India, and the most striking of which is that "[p]ost-*fatwa* Rushdie seems more emphatically dismissive of those who resist his vision of liberal

multiculturalism” (55). Mondal similarly identifies a change in the political articulations of Rushdie’s written work after the *fatwa*, writing that Rushdie’s pre-*fatwa* work, including both his fiction and his essays, articulates “a broadly left-wing politics from a postcolonial perspective, challenging the hegemony of the ‘West’, dismantling its dominant and damaging representations, promoting multiculturalism and anti-racism, and contesting the binary model of centre and periphery, West and Rest” (173). This articulation contrasts with “most of the articles collected in *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002*” (173) which, for Mondal, are consistent with mainstream US media responses to the events of September 11, 2001, and some of which “President George W. Bush would happily agree with” (173). Here, the shift in Rushdie’s political identity is very specifically defined as consistent with contemporary, conservative America.

There is an important irony in the changed politics of Rushdie’s work that informs my understanding of the persona: the shift “reinforces the very boundaries that it would hope to erase” (Mondal 182). The *fatwa* certainly forced significant changes in Rushdie’s personal life, including that of a nomadic, police-protected lifestyle, but the evidence for a similar “dislocation in his political and ideological affiliations” (Mondal 173) is less clear, especially to a position of inscribing, rather than contesting, social and political boundaries. Christopher Rollason suggests that a more complex dynamic is at play between Rushdie’s lived experience and the politics of his work in noting the widely circulated idea that Rushdie’s recent fiction performs an ideological shift from his earlier novels but questioning whether that shift to an “uncritical stance on the West is actually reflected in, say, the in many ways very anti-American *Shalimar the Clown*” (145). Morton similarly complicates the identification of a change in Rushdie’s politics, concluding that “Rushdie’s representation of

US foreign policy from a South Asian perspective in *Shalimar the Clown* highlights ... a broader tendency in his writing to rethink the geographical axes and cultural histories of modernity from the standpoint of a postcolonial writer” (32). In Rushdie’s recent novels, the shift may be in immediate political context rather than ideology, as is suggested in Morton’s identification of a particular consistency of viewpoint in Rushdie’s fiction, and also in Gregson’s argument that Rushdie’s recurring caricatures of political figures demonstrate a “political outlook” that is avowedly anti-authoritarian (124-5). The consistent attempt to reveal the workings of power by sweeping back the curtain may be a more accurate defining principle of the politics of the Rushdie persona than the identification of a shift in its politics: the targets may have changed, but the mode of attack remains the same.

Regardless of whether the shift in the politics of Rushdie’s work is better understood as one of historical context or ideology, the political qualities of the persona permit its deployment as an authoritative and moral figure of political commentary on topics ranging from American foreign policy to fundamentalist Islamic terrorism to literary freedom. This is, in itself, not a radical shift in Rushdie’s public, cultural functions: Rushdie has long been recognized for providing important contributions to the thinking around the political conditions of postcolonialism. However, his contributions are now as likely to be made in webcast interviews as his published work, and, more significantly, since 9/11 are more likely to be aligned with the values of the dominant West than against them. Rushdie might want to insist on preserving the memory of his commitment to radical political action – as he does in recalling, in *Joseph Anton*, his placard-bearing days in the 1980s – but his contemporary, extratextual political activity is less likely to consist of protest marches than television appearances. More importantly, his contemporary activities are less likely to augment the

subversive potential of his fiction than to advocate for the cultural conditions that have permitted him such great success in the literary marketplace.

For some critics, Rushdie's fiction has consistently required the participation of its author in order to accomplish its presumed political goals. Brennan concludes in 1989 that Rushdie not only contributes via his fiction to a cohesive "creative community" that poses "radical decolonisation theory" ("Cosmopolitans" 7) but that he also has a responsibility "to the decolonisation struggles he interprets (and translates) for a Western reading public" (*Salman Rushdie and the Third World* 166). This extra-textual responsibility is in part, as Brennan argues, required by the shortcomings of the fiction to fully articulate the project of decolonization: as far as Brennan is concerned, Rushdie should supplement the necessarily limited and partial account of decolonization in his novels, something he often does by implicitly authorizing his fiction, through extratextual accounts of his lived experience, as informed and, perhaps, authentic. There is, though, a significant condition to this authorization: Rushdie is, as York concludes of Brennan's argument, one of a select few celebrity, Third World writers "producing a portrait of their home spaces for a global audience that caters to that audience's expectations" (York 136). Rushdie authorizes accounts of postcolonial experience as not only representative but also palatable to the tastes of the dominant West. There is, here, an echo of Huggan's argument about Rushdie's complicity in strategically exoticizing his fiction, but there is, too, the more problematic implication that Rushdie's work may be, despite being celebrated for its enunciations on behalf of the marginalized, irretrievably embedded in the metropole, and, therefore, compromised in vocalizing on behalf of the margins.

## Public Interventions: the Persona as Expert Commentator

Rushdie's social and political commentaries are also given independent of his novels. He is frequently called on as an expert commentator, on subjects ranging from literature to politics, from celebrity culture to religion, and in forums ranging from book reviews in well-established newspapers to late-night television shows. Here, Huggan's reminder of Rushdie's "best known" role, circa the Affair, as "a tongue-in-cheek chronicler of modern India, or as a dangerously facetious gadfly to Islamic religious orthodoxies" (86) stands in useful contrast to the dominant qualities of Rushdie's public role in a contemporary frame. Rushdie may, as he does in *Joseph Anton*, emphasize his work in chronicling and critiquing England's political landscape, especially its postcolonial, Thatcherite version, but doing so draws attention to the absence of such biting critique of his most recent country of residence, America. Huggan's reminder, too, recalls identifications of Rushdie and his work as engaged in criticism of centres of power, whether social, political, or religious, via both his oft-celebrated, contestatory strategy of writing back and also his position as the "insider" and the "privileged outsider" (Fletcher 5), one for whom, according to Brennan, "the distinction between inside and outside has been obliterated" (2). For Teverson, Rushdie "writes as an 'outsider' from several cultures and an 'insider' of none" (10), occupying a privileged position that Rushdie himself describes as that of the human comma between cultures (*Joseph Anton* 429). In this position, one that Sharma terms "perpetual in-betweenness" (599), the Rushdie persona is certainly "un-British" but it is also un-Indian and, given Rushdie's move to and embrace of America, un-American. It remains, though, despite its several unbelongings, uniquely and ironically credible: Rushdie's lived experiences as the inside-outsider render the persona both expert and reliable.



In this role of inside-outsider, Rushdie is often assumed to be possessed of a unique expertise on Islam, one that stems at least in part from his repeatedly avowed non-adherence to the religion of his birth and childhood. This non-adherence carries an implicit criticism of Islam, one that is consistent with a dominant perspective in the West, especially since 9/11. However, as Teverson concludes, “Rushdie, despite his lack of belief, regards Islam as his birthright, and returns repeatedly in his writing to the narratives of Islam that have had a significant shaping effect upon his identity” (73). Morton similarly refers to Rushdie as “a secular Muslim” (“There were Collisions” 338), a characterization Rushdie elucidates:

I was born an Indian, and not only an Indian, but a Bombayite –  
Bombay, most cosmopolitan, most hybrid, most hotchpotch of Indian  
cities. My writing and thought have therefore been as deeply  
influenced by Hindu myths and attitudes as Muslim ones [...]  
Muslim culture has been very important to me, but it is not by any  
means the only shaping factor. (*Imaginary Homelands* 404-405)

Rushdie’s clarification concludes with an emphatic claim: “To put it as simply as possible: *I am not a Muslim*” (405, original italics). Teverson’s and Morton’s characterizations are slightly at odds with Rushdie’s own, but the underlying point is clear: the Rushdie persona is inherently secular and, while culturally influenced by Islam, it is not defined by rigid adherence to that religion. Indeed, the renunciation of Islam, combined with the events of the Affair, seems to have lent the persona an increased authority in excess of practitioners and scholars of the religion. As a result, Rushdie is often approached as an expert on the topics of fundamentalist Islamic terrorism, as in “Inside the Mind of Jihadists,” a 2006 interview in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, and literary freedom, as in Lalami’s 2005 review of *Shalimar*

*the Clown*. This shift from relatively oblique commentary via fiction to direct analysis and critique via political media, though, suggests more than simply a shift in the quality of Rushdie's political identity. It is, too, I think, a sign of the persona being implicated in support of the cultural and political systems that it might otherwise question or critique and thereby undermines that critique. In short, as an anti-Islamist, Rushdie has been embraced by the colonial and neo-colonial powers with which he might previously have been at odds.

A recent example of Rushdie's contemporary public interventions signals this recuperative shift. In the wake of the January 7 2015 attack on the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris, Rushdie was quick to publicly intervene by condemning the attack as an example of the intolerant, violent tendencies of adherents to fundamentalist faiths. In a Tweet published hours after the attack, Rushdie writes,

“Religion, a mediaeval form of unreason, when combined with modern weaponry becomes a real threat to our freedoms. This religious totalitarianism has caused a deadly mutation in the heart of Islam and we see the tragic consequences in Paris today. I stand with Charlie Hebdo, as we all must, to defend the art of satire, which has always been a force for liberty and against tyranny, dishonesty and stupidity.” (“Salman Rushdie,” *wsj.com*, n.p.)

The Tweet establishes a clear, adversarial binarism between us, the non-extremist citizens of the West, assumed by the “we” and “our” of the Tweet, and them, the faith-based extremists, of whom the Islamic terrorists are one example. It also clearly aligns Rushdie with practitioners of the “art of satire” and, thereby, suggests his credibility in analyzing and

condemning the attack. This authority is made clearer during Rushdie's subsequent appearance, on January 9 2015, as a panel guest on HBO's "Real Time with Bill Maher." Here, Rushdie, who is neither a French satirist nor a political cartoonist, is affirmed as an expert on the Charlie Hebdo attack, first as a political commentator by virtue and extension of the qualifications of Rushdie's fellow guests, Carly Fiorina, Republican presidential hopeful, and Paul Begala, former advisor to president Bill Clinton. Second, Rushdie's empirical expertise is suggested by several oblique references to the Affair, including Rushdie's dry comment, "don't come to me for a defence of Islam" ("Real Time"). This positioning of Rushdie as an authority, however, follows with a simplification of Rushdie's commentary. Maher redirects Rushdie's attempts to discuss the details and complexity of the conflict underlying the Charlie Hebdo attack by reductively summarizing the attack as a consequence of the "bad ideas" inherent in Islam. No mention is made, for example, of the recent history of religious and political tension in the area, and, at the end of the segment, Rushdie is limited to emphasizing the need for free speech in combatting the proponents of those "bad ideas." This is, undoubtedly, a crucial facet of the event, but it is also a demonstration of the lack of more nuanced criticism of either the conditions that gave rise to the Charlie Hebdo attack or more complex analysis of the various responses to it. More importantly, in this study, it is a sign of how the Rushdie persona's credibility is limited in terms of scope and complexity.

It is a sign of Rushdie's cultural standing that his social media intervention and subsequent public appearances were themselves the subject of media coverage. But, in a sign of what I see as the Western recuperation of the persona, Rushdie's Tweet and public appearances were covered in a very specific way. Just as in the "Real Time" segment, a

number of media responses to Rushdie's Charlie Hebdo interventions affirmed Rushdie's authority by linking the Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* with the actions of the Charlie Hebdo killers, then limited the scope of that authority by simplifying Rushdie's interventions as a defense of free speech. This is, I think, a reduction of the persona's political efficacy that parallels the tempering of its moral authority.

### **From The Affair to the affairs: Rushdie's Pop-cultural Persona and Tabloid Morality**

The Rushdie persona is often defined by exoticizing and infantilizing narratives, including those provoked by Rushdie's presumed sexual identity and behaviours, narratives that work to limit the persona's moral authority within the dominant culture. As the immediacy of the Affair has receded and, with it, the recognition of the persona as not only a paragon of freedom of speech but also a figure of persecution and vulnerability, accounts of Rushdie's lived experience have shifted in their points of emphasis. Teverson usefully summarizes this shift: "One of the consequences of the *fatwa*, as Martin Amis famously quipped, was that the Rushdie he knew 'had vanished into the front page'. In the longer aftermath of the *fatwa*, D. T. Max observed in *The New York Times*, Rushdie executed another disappearing act, this time into the gossip columns" (103). As Teverson points out in support of Max's observation, details of Rushdie's marriages and divorces have received "substantial press coverage, often in papers that do not customarily show an interest in literary fiction" (103). Rushdie is, now, equally likely to be asked about his current relationship status as life in hiding, for example, in Patricia Cohen's interview 2008 in *The New York Times* ("Now He's Only Hunted by Cameras"). Regular mention of Rushdie's wives and lovers is also made in *Joseph Anton*, prompting Isaac Chotiner to conclude that it

might be “silly” to include a summary of Rushdie’s love life in a review of the memoir but that the details “take up considerable amounts of space” (103). The emphasis on Rushdie’s romantic partners implies an authorial persona notable for its hypermasculine and heterosexual appetite, but accounts of Rushdie’s performance of dominant (i.e. heteronormative) masculinity also suggest its imperfection. For example, in an article for *The Windsor Star*, Doug Camili reports Rushdie’s rejected proposal of marriage to a New York socialite and calls attention to Rushdie’s public, sexual identity via a series of rhetorical questions: “Why am I not surprised she declined and returned his seven-carat ring? The fact that he’s much older? His four previous failed marriages? His reputation as a serial womanizer?” Camili’s speculations conclude with another possibility, this one suggested by Rushdie’s emotional immaturity: “Sal had just dumped another young society queen, Devorah Rose, who later called him a ‘literary genius with the emotions of a horny child’” (par 1). Together, the qualifications of Rushdie’s performance of dominant masculinity work to not only infantilize the persona but also to exoticize it, especially in light of other, similarly limiting, attributions.

Rushdie may be, as Camili’s casual report and Rushdie’s own record of achievements suggest, a “literary genius,” but accounts of his artistic brilliance are, like those of his moral authority, regularly qualified. And while claims of the decline of Rushdie’s fiction might be supported through literary analysis – Rollason, for example, concludes that the use of magic realism in *The Enchantress of Florence* is inferior to that in Rushdie’s earlier novels (244) – other qualifications are differently grounded. For example, scholarly and popular work consistently attributes to Rushdie an unseemly arrogance that has for decades overshadowed the qualities of his fiction. Ten Kortenaar concludes, in a 2008 *Twentieth-Century Literature*

article, that Rushdie is a firm “believer in his own genius” who “understands his originality as something ... like prophecy” (“Fearful Symmetry” 342); Zoe Heller claims, in a review of *Joseph Anton*, that Rushdie’s pervasive sense of himself is as “an embattled, literary immortal-in-waiting” (4); and Rachel Riederer comments that Rushdie’s reception of the Asian Americans Writers’ Workshop lifetime achievement award was not “for modesty” (par 2). All of these, to some extent, echo Mary Kenny’s characterization of Rushdie, in 1993, at the height of the Affair, as ““bad-mannered, sullen, graceless, silly, curmudgeonly, unattractive, small-minded, arrogant”” (qtd. in Teverson 82). Teverson’s summary of accounts of Rushdie’s arrogance draws on the oft-cited incident in Rushdie biography of Rushdie’s reported response to being beaten to the 1983 Booker Prize by J. M. Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K*. After allegedly accusing the judges of bias and behaving rudely at a social engagement, Rushdie, according to Teverson, “indulged in a highly publicised sulk” that “helped to establish the familiar characterisation of Rushdie that persists in the media to the present day: that of Rushdie the egotist” (82). Whether these various allegations against Rushdie are true, they nonetheless circulate as part of the persona which is defined, ultimately, as un-British. As Rushdie himself points out in *Joseph Anton*, this negative representation is further supported by *Daily Mail* accounts during the Affair that cast him as “ungrateful” for the protection supplied by the British government and, therefore, “arrogant” and “unpleasant” (175), but it is not, as Rushdie suggests, limited to attacks, like Kenny’s, in the tabloid press. Hamilton concludes that, regardless of Rushdie’s actual, post-Booker loss behaviour in 1983, “Rushdie was perceived to be uncool, undignified, un-British” (105), a response consistent with Liz Calder’s description of Rushdie’s “excitable, passionate,” and, therefore, “un-British” reaction to winning the Booker Prize in 1981, for *Midnight’s Children*

(Calder qtd. in Hamilton 105). Winning and losing, it seems, are irrelevant: the “un-British” quality of the persona remains the same.

The point I want to emphasize here is that these accounts of Rushdie’s behaviour work to produce the persona in very specific ways and to very specific ends. Scholarly conclusions like ten Kortenaar’s and tabloid media speculations like Kenny’s both succeed in defining the Rushdie persona, if not necessarily Rushdie himself, as almost unforgivably arrogant, a quality that functions as a marker of non-belonging in the communities of the West. This, in turn, limits the credibility and moral authority of the persona as a specific, complex sign of Rushdie’s cultural presence. The qualification of the persona as an undeniably brilliant writer but also an obviously “un-British” outsider is a reductive, racialized exoticization that, like the infantilizing “sulk” and “horny child” attributions, crucially reduces Rushdie’s moral authority. Without an unqualified moral authority, the Rushdie persona, in making critical, social and political comments, can be either rejected or accepted according to the needs and desires of the dominant system – hence, the contradictory ways in which this persona is mobilized for political and ideological purposes. Accounts of Rushdie’s work and lived experience permit the persona some standing and power within the dominant cultural system: for example, his credibility as a spokesperson against Islam and for the freedom of the press is never questioned. However, this credibility appears to be enjoined only by those that support the dominant hegemony rather than subvert it. Further, the infamous heterosexual appetite and literary brilliance function differently, as mimicry of the dominant without mockery, and these characterizations may continue to feed bigoted notions of the Indian male as savage rather than civilized. These contradictions may continue to both confer and deny authority to the authorial persona, depending on the

context. Whatever the case, the Rushdie persona is permitted only a limited range of performance within the mainstream West: it is not only rendered as a non-threatening, minority subject in relation to diaspora, but also one aligned with the norms and values of the dominant culture, particularly with regard to conceptions of migrant and hybrid identities and experience. However, in personal terms, it is aligned with a hypersexuality and infantilism that is reminiscent of colonial British stereotypes of the Indian male. If Rushdie's suggestion, in *Joseph Anton*, of the temporary re-naming he undergoes during his years in hiding carries a promise of return to the subversions and contestations for which he was celebrated early in his career, no such promise is borne by the reductive stress on the persona's personal qualities, nor on the persona's rather limited political potential.



#### **Chapter 4: Hybridity, the Rushdie Persona, and *The Enchantress of Florence***

Throughout Rushdie's literary career, hybridity has been ascribed to both his lived experience and his writing; hybridity, itself, however, remains poorly defined in many analyses of both his life and his work. As a result, it is an important but somewhat ambiguous quality of the Rushdie persona. Yumna Siddiqi, for example, refers to Rushdie as a "champion of the hybrid" (297), and Siddiqi thus emphasizes the importance of hybridity to both Rushdie's fiction and biography, both of which contribute to the persona, but it isn't immediately clear what, precisely, is being championed beyond a general process of cultural mixing. As I will argue in this chapter, these kinds of broad descriptions assume positive qualities of hybridity and conceal what is, at best, a self-contradictory facet of the Rushdie persona: its hybridity seems consistent with the transformative ends of the literary-political goals often attributed to Rushdie's fiction, but closer examination reveals that its loosely defined hybridity actually works to reinforce the dominant values of Western, hegemonic culture. Siddiqi's reference seems to draw on oft-made assumptions in postcolonial studies of the power of hybridity to effect disjunctures and positive changes in dominant systems and cultures, a point Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri make when describing hybridity's role in "[the] postcolonial political project" as affirming "the multiplicity of differences so as to subvert the power of the ruling binary structures" (144-5). Moreover, assumptions regarding hybridity's inherently productive qualities often draw on Homi Bhabha's critical theorizations of hybridity, ones that are themselves regularly linked with Rushdie's fictive ones, but, as I discuss below, Rushdie's theorizations of hybridity should be treated carefully, and not only because they are not mere echoes of Bhabha's thought. Hybridity certainly has great potential "to affirm the multiplicity of differences" by introducing ontological excess

and epistemological doubt to cultural, social, and political hegemonies that are, as a result, destabilized and transformed. It is far from clear, though, that the hybridity of the Rushdie persona fulfills any of this potential.

In order to better define the persona's hybrid qualities, I briefly trace the history of hybridity in postcolonial studies and analyses of Rushdie's fiction. Next, I outline the poorly defined hybridity of the Rushdie persona, and, given what are often non-specific accounts of Rushdie's lived experiences of hybridity, I turn to Rushdie's fiction to determine the ways in which his fiction is most likely to contribute to the persona. More specifically, I analyze the protagonists of Rushdie's most recent novel as fictive theorizations of hybridity that exemplify the concept and partially define the Rushdie persona. Given the reflexive and constitutive interplay between Rushdie's protagonists and persona that I have described in the preceding chapters, the inscriptions of hybridity in Rushdie's novels offer some of the best promise for clarifying, in detail, the qualities of hybridity in general, and in the persona, in particular. It is to this end that I compare the protagonists of *The Enchantress of Florence*: Akbar, the Mughal Emperor, and Mogor dell'Amore, an intruder at the Emperor's court. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the hybridity of the ruling elite, embodied by Akbar, is conservative and works to maintain the status quo of racial, class, and gender superiority by syncretically absorbing elements of subcultures that might contest the dominant cultural system. In opposition to Akbar's syncretic hybridity, the novel posits a chaotic hybridity – embodied in the figure of the foreign invader Mogor – that is surprising to and disruptive of hegemonic norms. I conclude this chapter by arguing that Akbar's mode of hybridity is more consistent than Mogor's with the positive, reproductive hybridity generally ascribed to the persona; Akbar's syncretism is a clearer explication than Mogor's chaos of the Rushdie

persona's loosely defined hybridity. However, while there are distinct limits to Akbar's mode of hybridity, there is also room for optimism in the reading of hybridity in the novel. As I will show, the hybrid play of Akbar's foil, Mogor, offers greater promise for fulfilling hybridity's subversive potential because Mogor's hybridity operates in a mode of surprise, competes with Akbar's syncretism, and is, therefore, more likely to fulfill hybridity's potential to affirm difference and transform the dominant system.

### **Hybridity as a Category of Identity**

Part of the challenge of defining the Rushdie persona's hybridity is a consequence of the term itself. Hybridity is a challenging concept in postcolonial literary studies not merely because it is, as Procter notes in his analysis of *Midnight's Children*, a "notoriously nebulous notion" (39), but also because it is difficult to distinguish from other, similar terms used to refer to the identities of postcolonial subjects. In discussing hybridity's "vexed and debated history" (3) as a critical term in postcolonial studies, Joel Kuortti and Jopi Nyman point out that "hybridity is often discussed in connection with a set of other terms denoting 'intercultural transfer' and the forms of identity such a change generates" (4). For Kuortti and Nyman, these other terms seem to be held as equivalent to hybridity, at least for the purposes of analysis in their own collection, but other theorists are less quick to assert such equivalence. Anjali Prabhu begins her "Introduction" to *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (2007) with a clarification regarding terms that refer to cultural mixture and concludes "it is important to be able to identify what politics are implicated by the use of a specific term born within a particular theory" (2-3). Sabine Broeck, in her analysis of contemporary uses of hybridity in postcolonial studies, emphasizes the usefulness of a

specific term in pursuit of an explicit purpose, and Broeck is particularly clear in her criticism of contemporary uses of hybridity, writing that “[r]ecently ... it has circulated as a circumatlantic ubiquitous metaphor, lining up connotations which are strangely timeless, and disinvested in particular locations, or histories” (Kuortti and Nyman, *Reconstructing Hybridity* 43). Broeck’s own choice of hybridity as the term around which to organize her argument, then, stems from its prevalence and privilege in contemporary postcolonial literary studies and her recognition of the need to restore its immediate, contestatory power in the pressing context of its regular, non-critical deployment.

Hybridity is also difficult to use as an analytic lens or principle because it is often assumed to be inherently positive and productive. Prabhu notes that “[h]ybridity is an enticing idea in current postcolonial studies” because of its seemingly limitless promise: “it is claimed that it can provide a way out of binary thinking, allow the inscription of the agency of the subaltern, and even permit a restructuring and destabilizing of power” (1). Prabhu, though, is careful to distinguish her support for strategic, purposeful uses of hybridity as a principle of critique from this “exuberant type of hybridity that, it is claimed, poses an effective challenge to oppressive forces of the increasingly globalized world” (1-2). For Prabhu, this exuberant approach disproportionately privileges subaltern agency, suggesting “that hybridity is a positive, resistive force to cultural hegemony” (7), and overlooks both the lived realities of hybrid postcolonial subjects and the material barriers to posing lived experienced as a challenge to the dominant order. Broeck makes a similar point in arguing for caution with regard to constructing the historical realities of postcolonial subjects in terms of hybridity. For Broeck, hybridity has become a floating signifier devoid of referential grounds and, as a result, articulates the values of Western cultures. Restoring hybridity’s

function as an epistemology of displaced people and cultures thus requires historicizing hybridity in the context of whiteness. In this study, then, I focus on hybridity with an understanding of the difficulties in its use, as well as the potential. Hybridity may not always be a clear and coherent principle of analysis, and it may be often uncritically used to celebrate Rushdie's work, but it nonetheless remains a defining trope of that work and a recurring concept in reviews and analyses of Rushdie's fiction and biography. Cautious definitions and analyses of hybridity hold significant potential for resisting hegemonic Western ideas of identity, and it is with this in mind that I evaluate the hybridity championed by the Rushdie persona.

### **Rushdie the Hybrid**

As with other qualities of the Rushdie persona, hybridity is attributed through accounts of Rushdie's lived experience, reviews of his work, and Rushdie's own interventions. Jonathan Neuman, for example, refers to hybridity as "the most recognizable trope of Rushdie's fiction across nine novels and three decades" (678-9) in a review of *The Enchantress of Florence*; Weickgennant Thiara argues that "the exploration of the concept of cultural hybridity lies at the heart of Rushdie's work" (415) in an analysis of the same novel; and Kenan Malik, in an analysis of Rushdie's literary career, claims that Rushdie "always saw himself as a man inhabiting a world 'in-between' three cultures – those of India, Pakistan and England" (Eagleton and McQuillan, vii). For Malik, the principal occupation of Rushdie's fiction is that of reconciling multiple inhabitance, of exploring – as Rushdie writes in *Joseph Anton* – how the world and its intermingled and intermingling postcolonial inhabitants join up (*Joseph Anton* cited by Malik in Eagleton and McQuillan vii-viii).

Interestingly, these accounts of hybridity as a general process of mixing or intermingling seem to uncritically assume the hybridity of Rushdie's life and work as contestatory and purposive, and thus consistent with his literary-political strategy of writing back against the metropole. The hybridity associated with the Rushdie persona is, in short, assumed to be a means of destabilizing the systems of power that operate in the contemporary, globalized world. Moreover, the tone of claims like those above is consistently celebratory, and Rushdie's own non-fictional work is similarly positive. In writing about his childhood in Bombay, that "most hybrid...of Indian cities," Rushdie notes that he "was already a mongrel self, history's bastard, before London aggravated the condition" ("In Good Faith" 404). The defining roots of Rushdie's self, the social, political, and religious circumstances of his birth and upbringing, are mixed, impure, and worthy of celebration, as are those of his children. In *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie reflects that, during Elizabeth West's pregnancy, "[a] favoured name was emerging. 'Milan,' like Kundera, yes, but it was also a name with an Indian etymology [sic], from the verb *milana*, to mix or mingle or blend; thus, *Milan*, a mingling, a coming together, a union. Not an inappropriate name for a boy in whom England and India were united" (505). It is difficult to read this passage as anything but celebratory of hybridity as cultural mixture, and I understand this and other attributions as working to characterize the persona as inherently hybrid and, further, as presuming that this hybridity is both productive and exemplary.

Not all critics, though, are quick to affirm the positive qualities of the hybridity in Rushdie's fiction and lived experience. Weickgennant Thiara, for example, argues that Rushdie's novels do not uncritically celebrate hybridity but, rather, carefully contextualize its expression in systems of power. This argument echoes similar identifications of Rushdie's

fictive treatments of hybridity by Dora Ahmad, Samir Dayal, and Loretta Mijares in their analyses of, respectively, *Shame*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and *Midnight's Children*. Mijares concludes that hybridity is unevenly experienced and that the lived experience of the racial hybrid is complicated by various markers of identity, including class and economic position, a dynamic that also proves true in *The Enchantress of Florence*, as I demonstrate below.

Moreover, Mijares' conclusion echoes Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan's argument that Rushdie's "hybrid self" (159), something I understand as akin to the Rushdie persona for its discursive origins, is a figure of privilege rather than marginalization. Radhakrishnan writes that *The Satanic Verses* may be "a singing celebration of hybridity"<sup>38</sup> but that the various responses to the novel expose the "semantic insufficiency" of the term (161). Hybridity, for Radhakrishnan, does not maintain its own singular logic when used in the several discourses of the Affair and he is thus prompted to pose several questions: "Who is Rushdie, and when his hybrid self speaks, who is being spoken for? How and in what direction does Rushdie's hybridity add up?" (161). In answering these questions, Radhakrishnan points out that Rushdie is, certainly, a victim of the Affair, one deserving of sympathy, but also, equally undeniably, a "privileged figure" (162). Regardless of the slippage in Radhakrishnan's analysis between Rushdie, the individual living person, and the authorial, speaking figure, what remains clear is that Rushdie's "hybrid self" is more clearly "metropolitan" than

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<sup>38</sup> Radhakrishnan's qualification is a reference to both the opening of *The Satanic Verses*, in which one of the protagonists falls through the clouds, singing, and Rushdie's defense of the novel, "In Good Faith," in which Rushdie asserts that *The Satanic Verses* "celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling ... It is a love song to our mongrel selves" (*Imaginary Homelands* 394).

“postcolonial” (159), a distinction Radhakrishnan introduces to emphasize differing degrees of privilege. As with other accounts of hybridity in Rushdie’s writing and biography, I understand these more nuanced analyses as contributing to and redefining the Rushdie persona, although in a more cautious and critical way than is suggested by the many decidedly celebratory attributions to the Rushdie persona that affirm the power of Rushdie’s hybridity, both lived and inscribed, to contest the dominant cultural hegemony of the West.

### **Histories of Hybridity**

Here, in order to establish a critical context for evaluating the Rushdie persona’s hybridity, I briefly review the term in postcolonial studies. A comparison of two histories – Kuortti and Nyman’s in 2007, and Young’s in 1995 – establishes hybridity’s wide and varied uses as well as its potential as a tool of analysis and site of cultural transformation, but it also reveals emergent problems. In their Introduction to their edited collection, *Reconstructing Hybridity: Post-Colonial Studies in Transition*, Kuortti and Nyman emphasize hybridity’s currency and applicability “to a wide variety of cultural texts and phenomena” (10), affirming hybridity as a productive analytic tool. Their central tenet is that “the power of hybridity can be seen in its ability to question what appears natural and complete, to problematize naturalized boundaries” (11), but they also acknowledge that “the traditional usage of the concept of hybridity is embedded in the narratives of evolution” (4) and that other theorists argue “that the term promotes nineteenth-century ideas of race and miscegenation” (4). This acknowledgement references Young’s influential history of hybridity in his *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. There, Young traces the various uses of hybridity as an ontological and epistemological principle and delineates two paradigms, biological and linguistic, that have given rise to contemporary



understandings of hybridity in postcolonial studies. In doing so, Young lays the groundwork to support his claim that hybridity is a rich and well-established site of investigation but also to caution against assumptions of its inherent usefulness.

As Young points out, hybridity, whether biological or linguistic, “has been, and can be, invoked to imply contrafusion and disjunction ... as well as fusion and assimilation” (8). Linguistic hybridity, as Young notes in his review of Bakhtin’s work, describes the “double-voiced” quality of language,” its “fundamental ability to be simultaneously the same but different” (9), and biological hybridity similarly describes plants, animals, and humans. Biological (and racialized) hybridity was initially concerned with reproductive fertility, and colonial practices included the identification of the hybrid, whether plant, animal, or human, as distinct from its biological antecedents due to its inability to reproduce. As became clear to colonial authorities, however, most hybrids, human or other, could reproduce; miscegenated offspring were thus not new, infertile species but a continuation of their forebears, and degrees of hybridity were then introduced to account for fertile hybrids. Simply put, when the first definition of hybridity failed, a second was constructed in an effort to maintain a distinction between the biologically pure and the impure, despite the clear limitations on accurately identifying either. For Young, this is indicative of the vulnerability of the concept of hybridity as it could just as plainly be used as a colonial tool of “injustice, hatred and oppression” (8-9) as one of celebration of difference. Biological hybridity is an example of a racial theory that logically defeats itself in application because it is inherently unstable. However, “it can easily be objected that hybridization assumes, as was often the case with the nineteenth-century theorists of race, the prior existence of pure, fixed and separate antecedents” (11). Hybridity, then, might destabilise itself but stabilise the very antecedents it

could contest, which is a crucial problem at the very root of the concept. Further, as Young notes, “[h]ybridity as a cultural description will always carry with it an implicit politics of heterosexuality” because sexual reproduction is the means by which it is identified (11). Even as the concept has shifted from a biological to a discursive and, finally, a cultural descriptor, hybridity remains rooted in the politics of reproduction and fertility.

### **Critical and Fictive Theorizations of Hybridity: Bhabha and Rushdie**

The critical theorizations of hybridity most commonly associated with Rushdie and his fiction are Bhabha’s. Shameem Black, in *Fiction Across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late Twentieth-Century Novels*, notes that her project is “indebted to the influential discourse of hybridity emblemized by such theorists and novelists as Homi Bhabha and Salman Rushdie” (55). She thus implies the inherent similarities of Bhabha’s critical theorizations of hybridity with Rushdie’s fictive ones. Loretta Mijares establishes this link more clearly in her 2003 article, “‘You are an Anglo-Indian?’ Eurasians and Hybridity and Cosmopolitanism in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*,” concluding that “Rushdie enacts imaginatively what Homi Bhabha, most notably, articulates theoretically” (129). Indeed, so close are Rushdie’s and Bhabha’s respective accounts of hybridity according to some that Ganapathy-Doré is able to attest that Bhabha’s theorizations of postcolonial subject positions borrow from Rushdie’s fictionalizations of those positions (6), and Qadri Ismail, in his analysis of “In Good Faith,” describes Rushdie as sounding like “an intelligible Homi

Bhabha<sup>39</sup>” (168). The dynamics of the interplay between the critical and fictive theorizations aside, what remains clear is that Bhabha’s and Rushdie’s accounts of hybridity are regularly received as remarkably consistent.

Crucially, this apparent similarity suggests the contestatory power of Rushdie’s fiction with regard to its inscriptions of hybridity. Bhabha’s work is often lauded for exposing the insufficiencies of systems of power and mapping alternatives within those systems. For Kuortti and Nyman, Bhabha is “the foremost theorist of hybridity” (3) whose “major contribution is the idea that the *intercultural* space where hybrid identity is formed is a space of in-betweenness and liminality” (3, original italics). Similarly, for Young, the possible benefits of hybridity’s invocations are particularly clear in Bhabha’s work, whose embrace of “restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity” and celebration of “the permanent revolution of forms” (11) permits the contestation of colonial norms. And for Hardt and Negri, writing with reference to Bhabha in their conclusion to *Empire*, “the mere fact of hybridity has the power to destroy hierarchy *tout court*. Hybridity itself is a realized politics of difference, setting differences to play across boundaries” (145). In this light, Bhabha’s hybridity is a powerful tool with which to address central problems of postcolonialism, particularly those of identity as relating to power, precisely because it exposes the necessary insufficiencies of any system of power. This same power to expose the inherent flaws of the dominant cultural, political and social systems of the West might, then, be assigned to the hybridity theorized in Rushdie’s work.

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<sup>39</sup> In a remarkable coincidence, Bhabha’s son, Satya, plays the part of the protagonist, Saleem Sinai, in the 2012 film version of *Midnight’s Children*. Rushdie provides the voice-over for the post-diegetic Saleem, reflecting on and explaining the film’s events.

For others, though, Bhabha's work is less obviously effective in exposing such flaws, and criticisms of Bhabha's critical theorizations of hybridity might extend to Rushdie's fictive ones. As Kuortti and Nyman note regarding criticisms of Bhabha's work by theorists such as Aijaz Ahmad and Benita Parry, the "poststructuralist / postmodernist and textual emphasis" (9) of Bhabha's hybridity seems to limit its usefulness. That is, the endless chain of hybridity's textual signification may preclude or limit consideration of its material conditions: the abstract qualities of Bhabha's theory of hybridity may be foregrounded before any applied analysis defining and evaluating the lived experiences of hybrid subjects. Moreover, these theories distract from or even take the place of such applications, as Hardt and Negri point out in arguing that Bhabha's project is limited precisely because of its particular response to expressions of power via frameworks of binary divisions. These contestations rely for success on the very structures that they oppose, and, in this light, Bhabha's hybridity is an adversarial discourse that, as Anthony Easthope argues, might serve to oppose colonial power structures but which cannot move beyond them (341). There is an echo here of Young's warning that the hybrid can serve to stabilize the primacy of its forebears, a risk that is especially serious in the context of Rushdie's strategy of writing back. In the end, the hybrid subject, as a product of markedly different biological or cultural antecedents, might not destabilize either of them or the system within which they have reproduced. If Rushdie's fictive theorizations of hybridity work similarly to Bhabha's critical ones by exposing the insufficiencies of a given system of power, they might succeed in destabilizing and subverting dominant social norms. However, it might also be the case that Rushdie's fiction fails in ways similar to Bhabha's critical theories, distracting from the lived realities of hybrid subjects or affirming the stability and value of their precursors.

There are, then, several cautions to heed in explicating the hybridity of the Rushdie persona. As Young warns, hybridity's rendering of "difference into sameness, and sameness into difference" might permit reconstruction of the same as "no longer the same, the different no longer simply different" (11). The open-endedness of such renderings might entail a homogeneity of difference, a universalizing of hybridity that severely limits its power to transform by affirming everyone as inherently hybrid and, therefore, always and already "the same" on a fundamental level. Particular hybrids, too, might serve to stabilize their antecedents, thereby validating them and the hegemonic system within which they operate. Finally, the hybrid might carry implications of fertility and heterosexuality, connotations that are rooted in the initial, colonial uses of the term and that might exclude other possibilities of what it means to be hybrid. Indeed, the hybridity of the Rushdie persona, as defined through references to Rushdie's children like those above, certainly carries these implications. Accounts of Rushdie's lived experience, whether Rushdie's own or those of others, and analyses of Rushdie's fiction suggest a particular mode of hybridity: a non-specific blending of cultural antecedents that is unlikely to change the dominant cultural system. It is important, however, to remember that this non-specific blending is one that bears closer examination and clearer definition, and that it is one mode of hybridity among others defined in Rushdie's novels. In order to better define this mode and others, I turn to Rushdie's most recent novel, *The Enchantress of Florence*.

### **Two Hybridities in *The Enchantress of Florence***

Hybridity is a prominent and recurring trope in *The Enchantress of Florence*, one that is assumed as a positive, productive and singular principle in several analyses. Joann Conrad

and Christopher Rollason, in separate reviews, identify hybridity as a central element of the novel, and Ursula Le Guin, while not naming it as hybridity, comments on the novel's mixing of historical and fictional genres, thereby noting a textual hybridity, as does Simon Baker. These general accounts of the text's hybrid qualities are usefully supplemented by more specific analyses of the novel's religious, linguistic, and architectural systems, by Jonathan Neumann, Rashmi Dube Bhatnagar, and Weickgennant Thiara, respectively. Neuman argues that the novel's Mughal religious structures exemplify hybridity as a syncretic product of discrete influences – Islam and Hinduism – and Weickgennant Thiara similarly identifies the novel's representation of Mughal architecture as a product of the same. In an exploration of the novel's imagining of Urdu's etymological roots, Bhatnagar argues that the language's "innermost being is...irreducibly hybrid" (581) given its constitutive synthesis of at least seven distinct linguistic antecedents. In these analyses, hybridity is assumed to be a complex process of mixture that draws on stable antecedents, and hybridity is rendered as a principle of systemic order that works to enhance the dominant cultural system within which it operates.

However, *The Enchantress of Florence* clearly distinguishes two different and competing modes of hybridity through the construction of its protagonists, Emperor Akbar and Mogor dell'Amore. Akbar and Mogor both fall within Weickgennant Thiara's very broad working definition of hybridity, following Rushdie's own, as "a malleable and open concept with which all forms of cultural intermingling can be described" (416). However, Akbar's and Mogor's experiences of hybridity differ along lines of class and economic position that lead to completely distinct sites of power. Moreover, they embody different modes of hybridity, and the ontological and epistemological excesses of these modes work to

different ends. Akbar's is a syncretic hybridity that supports the cultural-political system within which it operates, but Mogor's is a chaotic hybridity that attempts to change that same system. As I argue below, Akbar's is the dominant, if not definitive, mode of hybridity in the novel, one that resonates with qualities of the Rushdie persona due to the similarities between Akbar and the persona, including, notably, their moral authority. Nonetheless, Mogor's extra-systemic hybridity can be read as a viable alternative to Akbar's syncretism, and Mogor's hybridity better affirms difference in order to challenge the ruling binary structures of postcolonial and neocolonial systems.

Its title notwithstanding, *The Enchantress of Florence* is primarily the story of two men: Akbar "the Great" (27), the "Elephant King" (8), the "Emperor of India" (23), "the Shahanshah, the king of kings" (69), and Mogor dell'Amore, otherwise known as Uccello de Firenze, otherwise known as Niccolò Antonino Vespucci, who purports to be Akbar's uncle. Mogor is, he claims, the son of the Emperor's grandfather's sister, the eponymous, banished and forgotten enchantress, Princess Qara Köz, and he travels from post-Machiavelli Florence to the Mughal court at Fatehpur Sikri in an attempt to claim what he believes is his rightful place as, according to Mogor, "*a prince of the blood royal of the Mughal house*" (339, original italics). There, he is received by Akbar, and it is quickly established that the two protagonists are remarkably similar: they are both charismatic, ruthless, and possessed of strong, and strictly hetero-, sexual appetites. Like Akbar, who has the significant advantage of royal tutors and advisors, Mogor is well-educated, well-spoken, and quick to learn; the last is apparent in his deft study of the complex social, political, and religious dynamics of Akbar's empire. Indeed, such are Mogor's powers of mind that Akbar, whose own intelligence is emphasized throughout the novel, contrasts Mogor favorably to Akbar's own

son, describing Mogor as “a man a king might talk to in ways that his own flesh and blood would not understand” (82). Despite these similarities, however, Akbar and Mogor differ radically in their embodiments of hybridity.

Akbar’s hybridity is syncretic and defines him as a figure of intra-systemic excess. The “Universal Ruler” who is “greater than the king of kings who ruled Persia before the Muslims came” (Rushdie, *The Enchantress* 307) is also “[a] Muslim vegetarian, a warrior who wanted only peace, a philosopher-king: a contradiction in terms” (33), the simultaneous embodiment of one category of being and its opposite. Moreover, Akbar, as his several names and honorifics suggest, had “been born into plurality” as “the definition, the incarnation of the We” (31); he is, “in sum, too *much* to be a single human personage” (30, original italics). That excess is emphasized in his failed attempt at using the first-person singular form of address, the singular ‘I’ rather than royal ‘We,’ in an experiment confined to his interaction with Jodha, his favoured queen. Akbar’s ontological excess, though, is both exemplary and legitimate: as the descendant of Babar, he is the rightful ruler and embodiment of the Mughal Empire, and it is only appropriate that Akbar exceed the limits of personal identity that apply to all others within his cultural system, but, crucially, without exceeding the limits of that system itself. In other words, Akbar may be unique but that uniqueness is one of exemplification: he embodies the ontological limits of identity in the Mughal Empire.

Mogor, like Akbar, embodies contradiction, but his hybridity is disruptive and defines him as a figure of extra-systemic excess. Mogor is a product of mixed cultural antecedents, Mughal and Florentine, and socioeconomic positions, middle-class and royal, but his embodiment of mixture is neither syncretic nor exemplary. Akbar’s multiplicity of names



serves to ground him within the Mughal cultural and political landscape, but Mogor's several names emphasize his rootedness outside the Empire. Among his many sobriquets, Mogor is most often identified according to the colour of his hair: he is the "yellow-haired liar" (47) who attracts "many curious glances, on account of his yellow hair as well as his height, his long and admittedly dirty yellow hair flowing down around his face" (9). It is after several such overt references to his hair that Mohini, a minor character and Mughal companion of Mogor, clarifies its significance as a marker of "his exotic appearance" (63). Mogor is, in short, the embodiment of the Other in the heart of the Mughal Empire, and his ontological excess is an implicit challenge to this Empire and, especially, its embodiment in its ruler.

Akbar's role in the novel is that of facilitating syntheses of existing cultural antecedents to a specific end: producing non-threatening contributions to the dominant system, the Mughal Empire that he has inherited. Neuman and Bhatnagar suggest as much with regard to the novel's representations of Mughal religion and language, respectively, and Weickgennant Thiara is clear in defining Akbar's role as that of sanctioning and controlling competing cultural elements of the Empire, this time in unifying Muslim and Hindu principles of design. This "Akbari synthesis" (418) celebrates Akbar's achievements of socio-political harmony through mediation of distinct cultural antecedents and, for Weickgennant Thiara, Akbari synthesis constitutes a type of hybridity distinct from Rushdie's previous "unruly" and "rowdy" iterations (415-416). Weickgennant Thiara thus identifies two types of hybridity in Rushdie's fiction, each of which is directly linked to the architecture of a particular place:

Mughal hybridity as represented in *The Enchantress of Florence* is different from Bombayesque hybridity; it is

associated with the search for harmony in uniting different styles, ideas, and cultural practices. Mughal synthesis is a more considered and planned experiment, an elite endeavour, rather than the chaotic and vibrant hybridity of Bombay's streets.

(416)

In this light, *The Enchantress of Florence* is a testament to “the relationship between cultural hybridity and the spaces that enable such hybridity to flourish” (415), a narrative that emphasizes the benefits of hybrid products, the places that give rise to them, and the singular authority that sanctions both. However, while Akbari synthesis might be deserving of praise for its provision of a space “where culture, ideas, and people can meet in a creative fashion” (423), Akbar’s hybridity is also “an ordered synthesis which is orchestrated by a few for the many to emulate.” It is, in short, an elite, top-down concept very unlike the “creatively chaotic Bombayesque hybridity that Rushdie celebrated in previous novels” (418). Akbar’s hybridity might be “a force for abundant creativity and inspiration,” but it is also a cultural encounter “that is carefully nurtured and orchestrated from above” (428). Mogor’s invasive, extra-systemic and utterly surprising hybridity thus stands in stark contrast to Akbar’s careful synthesis of known antecedents. Mogor is a contestatory figure in the novel, one who embodies and performs the strategic reversals for which Rushdie’s early fiction, especially, is celebrated, and the purpose of which is to subvert the assumptions underlying colonial norms.

Mogor makes possible the novel’s reversal of place, in which the East is celebrated for its cultural achievements and the West is condemned for its lesser accomplishments, in contradistinction to far more traditional and hegemonic Orientalisms. The novel, in

juxtaposing Renaissance Italy and the Mughal Empire, implicitly challenges an assumption of Western civilization contemporaneous with Oriental chaos. The base licentiousness and political instability of the Florentine city-state contrasts the architectural, musical, and poetic achievements of the Mughal Empire. On his first sight of Sikri, Mogor reflects that “it was one of the grand cities of the world, larger, it seemed to his eye, than Florence or Venice or Rome...He had visited London once; it was a lesser metropolis than this” (8). In a similar passage, Jodha, Akbar’s favoured wife, considers Akbar’s power and the cultural centrality of his court, reflecting that, in addition to domestic poets and artists,

the court was also full of foreigners, pomaded exotics, weather-beaten merchants, narrow-faced priests out of the West, boasting in ugly undesirable tongues about the majesty of their lands, their gods, their kings...When the emperor showed her the pictures they brought with them of their mountains and valleys she thought of the Himalayas and Kashmir and laughed at the foreigners’ paltry approximation of natural beauty, their *vaals* and *aalps*, half-words to describe half-things. Their kings were savages, and they had nailed their god to a tree. (47-8, original italics)

Here, the West pales in comparison to the East, but not merely in terms of place. Jodha’s contempt extends beyond geography to include the inhabitants of the West: their celebrations of the inferior are not only laughable but pitiable, signifying savagery and barbarism. These reversals are consistent with Rushdie’s celebrated strategy of writing back against the British Empire in his earlier work, one that relies on tongue-in-cheek commentary and caricature to

expose the Orientalist assumptions at the heart of the divide between the putatively dominant centre and the oppressed margins.

Mogor's reception in the Mughal Empire is a similar reversal of often unacknowledged and prejudicial assumptions but one that is more nuanced. As the embodiment of the exotic within the Mughal Empire, Mogor is a focal point of an inverted Orientalist gaze. As the Emperor listens to Mogor tell his story, Akbar reflects that

the lands of the West were exotic and surreal to a degree  
incomprehensible to the humdrum people of the East. In the  
East men and women worked hard, lived well or badly, died  
noble or ignoble deaths, believed in faiths that engendered  
great art, great poetry, great music, some consolation, and  
much confusion. Normal human lives, in sum. (329-30)

This reflection challenges the development-backwardness dichotomy and also serves to displace the location of and basis for the purportedly normal. The West is stripped of its centrality in the definition of normalcy in favour of the East; the putative centre in a Eurocentric worldview and its purported margin are inverted, and Whiteness itself becomes peripheral. Mogor's initial presentation to the Mughal Emperor, ostensibly in the service of the Queen of England, is not as an ambassador to the geographic and cultural margins but as a messenger to the centre of the world. An early exchange in the novel between Akbar and Mogor emphasises Akbar's position in the world, at least as it is understood in the Mughal Empire. When Mogor whispers to the Emperor about heliocentrism, "a concept which could still get a man burned at the stake for heresy back home," the Emperor laughs and responds, "This has been known for hundreds of years...How backward your reborn Europe seems to

be” (152-3). Mogor demurs, “I meant only to say that Your Majesty is the sun” (153), a metaphor that begs heliocentric completion: Akbar is the centre of the system, around which all things revolve. The emphasis on Akbar’s position, in turn, begs the question of margins, a question answered by Mogor’s embodiment of the periphery. Consistent with Rushdie’s strategy of writing back from a position in the so-called margins, Mogor’s position is one of speaking the truth to power by contesting its centrality, and Mogor has unique power in this role.

Mogor is possessed of a singular ability to qualify Akbar’s absolute authority, an early demonstration of which is given during Mogor’s tour of Akbar’s “embroidered and mirrorworked Tent of the New Worship...a debating chamber in which the adoration of the divine was re-imagined as an intellectual wrestling match in which no holds were barred” and where “[a]rgument itself...[was] the only god” (79-80). Inside the Tent, Akbar reflects on the impermanence of its construction, linking the inevitability of the Tent’s destruction with that of Akbar’s Empire, and holds this exchange with Mogor:

‘Only when we accept the truths of death,’ the emperor declared, ‘can we begin to learn the truths of being alive.’

‘Paradox, sire,’ Mogor dell’Amore answered cheekily, ‘is a knot that allows a man to seem intelligent even as it is trussing his brain like a hen bound for the pot...This is indeed a hall of mirrors, full of illusions and inversions. A man may wallow in the bogs of paradox until his last day without ever thinking a clear thought worthy of the name.’ (80-81)

Akbar's fury at this response causes him to "spit and splutter" and the other occupants of the tent fall into a "silent terror" (81), awaiting the deadly consequences of Mogor's disrespect. The Emperor, though, reverses himself: "all of a sudden, the storm passed, and the emperor began to laugh. He slapped Mogor dell'Amore on the back and nodded vigorously. 'Gentlemen, an outsider has taught us a great lesson,' he said. 'One must stand outside a circle to see that it is round'" (81). Here, Mogor's perspective from the periphery is celebrated: rather than punishing Mogor's cheeky contradiction, Akbar rewards the outsider's transgression of the Imperial border, and the resulting modification of the Emperor at its centre.

Mogor's unique ability to challenge and shape Akbar's philosophical musings makes it tempting to read the relationship between Akbar and Mogor as a small-scale reversal of colonial norms, one in which Mogor performs an excess that clarifies the limits of the dominant system by exceeding them, and thereby exposes the system's inherent arbitrariness and instability. This dynamic seems to underlie Ben Amara's conclusion that the novel's strategic reversals, and in particular Akbar's imagining of a culture of freedom and equality, deconstruct the myth that European culture is both unique and the original site of humanism. For Ben Amara, the novel thus employs a "deft reversal of the orientalist gaze" in which "Mughal India, the East, is often portrayed as more tolerant, philosophical and progressive than Europe" (13), but these successes are not as uncomplicated as Ben Amara suggests. Mogor's success in speaking back, signalled by his metropolitan audience's temporary silence and incoherence, is not only brief but also, crucially, defined by Akbar. Mogor's intervention is defined as insightful and humorous, rather than disloyal, by the imperial centre, which retains its power to determine the periphery. *The Enchantress of Florence* also

flattens the differences of human experience, as is clear in Mogor's response to Akbar's exclamation regarding the similarities of events in the histories of Florence and Sikri: "'This may be the curse of the human race...Not that we are so different from one another, but that we are so alike'" (137). This recognition of inherent similarity, at first glance, seems to offer significant promise for the novel's transgressive potential, and its reversals, whether geographic or cultural, seem to hold a promise of ontological and epistemological excess. The novel's strategic reversals, however, are limited by the narrative's universalizing of what it means to live in the joined up, multiply inhabited world. It is hardly sufficient, even in the context of a broadly defined postcolonial political project, to posit that humans are, in essence, more alike than different, and all that is required to correct inequalities of contemporary lived experience is to recognize this essential similarity.

### **Akbar's Synthesis vs. Mogor's Disruption**

Even more significantly, the novel's strategic reversals are limited because they are not Mogor's but Akbar's. This is important for my study for two reasons: first, the novel's reversals of cultural and political inequalities are of only limited success because they are governed by the dominant ruling system that they might seek to change; and, second, the hybridity of the Rushdie persona is more likely to be defined as consistent with Akbar's syncretism, given the figures' similar positions of control and moral authority. First, then, the crucial element in the failure of Mogor's claim to a legitimate place in the Mughal court is the means by which that claim is evaluated: Akbar applies a moral code that reaffirms his particular embodiment of the Empire. As its head, Akbar must respond to threats, whether ontological or moral, in a manner that preserves the integrity of the Imperial body. An early

event in the narrative makes this clear and also foreshadows the novel's conclusion. Despite extensively ruminating on the relative degree of his enlightened rule in contrast to that of his grandfather, Babur, Akbar chooses to quell a minor rebellion by executing the young Rana who is its leader. This act of *realpolitik* mirrors Babur's own response of two generations before: Babur beheaded the young Rana's grandfather in order to cement his own political dominance. This event affirms Akbar's unique authority and foreshadows the novel's resolution, and, in the context of this analysis, clarifies the narrative's dominant mode of hybridity. Akbar may be willing to mix some cultural elements within his Empire, but they are only those that contribute to the Empire according to already established ontological and moral precepts. This means that the novel's hybridity is, in the end, syncretic, and that elements that cannot be resolved within the dominant system by contributing to it are discarded or destroyed. Akbar may be capable of considering conflicting ideas and values, some of which are misunderstood and shocking to the more traditional members of his court, but he remains responsible to the demands of the cultural / political system that preceded him, and that he represents as its head.

The clearest example of Akbar's authority in the novel is given in the resolution of Mogor's claim to royal Mughal blood. Mogor's complex legitimizing narrative is provided to Akbar, whose status and power are unmatched in all facets of the Empire. He is, after all, "the Universal Ruler, king of a world without frontiers or ideological limitations" (307), the centre and fulfillment of a realm accountable only in superlatives, and uniquely capable of validating or refuting Mogor's claim. After listening to the several narrative digressions, geotemporal shifts and historical juxtapositions that constitute Mogor's elliptical response to the question of his parentage, Akbar demands a conclusion to the story. Mogor responds that



Qara Kız, through a combination of her own powers of enchantment and the inconstant chronological conditions of the New World, halted her aging process and was able to bear a child at an otherwise impossible age. Having heard this final claim, Akbar retreats to his private chambers to consider the limits of possibility and concludes that Mogor's story cannot hold. Akbar's dismissal of Mogor's claim, however, is neither based on its temporal impossibility nor Mogor's individual qualities but, rather, on Mogor's embodiment of taboo. When Akbar refutes Mogor's claim to royalty and banishes him from Sikri, he rationalizes the decision on the truth of Mogor's history, as determined by Akbar alone, that Mogor is a product of incest. Mogor is both the son and grandson of Ago Vespucci and Akbar dismisses him because "such a child, the offspring of an amoral liaison, could not be recognized as a member of the royal family...that one word, *incest*, placed him beyond the pale" (340, original italics). Here, the narrative recalls Young's analysis of colonial definitions of hybridity by confirming both Akbar's power and the moral basis for his evaluation: Mughal blood is itself mixed but it can be differentiated from Mogor's by the Emperor's application of a morality that trumps ontology. Thus, despite Akbar's description of Mogor as the Emperor's intellectual peer and possible *farzand*, the values of the Mughal Empire demand no less than Mogor's exile from the court at Sikri – the exclusion of that which would contaminate. Mogor's origin is irrevocably compromised according to the moral standards of the dominant system, and while his oral history succeeds as a partial genealogical proof, it fails as a legitimizing narrative. Mogor's claim in the novel is uniquely soluble: it resolves in royal waters, ones that may draw on different streams but that are free of polluting influence. The similarities between Mogor and Akbar, and the potential contributions Mogor might make to the Empire, are less important than Mogor's impurity, as determined according to

the Empire's existing moral code. Mogor might occasionally speak the truth to power, and he is uniquely permitted some contestation of the dominant centre, but in the end, Akbar remains in power while Mogor fades into exile, and both characters' places are determined by the compatibility of their hybridities with the dominant culture's moral system.

This resolution to the central problem of the narrative signals that Akbar's hybridity is incompatible with Mogor's, and that non-syncretic hybridity is limited in its introduction of difference and consequent transformation of the dominant culture's "ordered synthesis." The resolution also clarifies the type of hybridity attributed to the Rushdie persona by *The Enchantress of Florence*, which is the second point I want to make about Akbar's role and narrative position. Akbar's, rather than Mogor's, prominence in both popular reviews and critical analyses of the novel is, I think, a sign of an easier identification of Akbar with the dominant qualities of the Rushdie persona, including the intelligence, education, and dominant heterosexuality that Akbar and Mogor share, as well as Akbar's social and material privilege, and unique ontological control and moral authority. Akbar's control over the narrative's possibilities and his mixing of religions, architecture, and languages in the Mughal Empire suggest a controlled process that itself mirrors the writing of the novel within which it takes place, and begs comparison to the author's role. Crucially, the reproductive dynamic of Akbar's hybridity is consistent with the loosely defined hybridity of the Rushdie persona. Like Akbar, the Rushdie persona, in its roles as author, multicultural representative, and father, can be understood as engaged in a process of top-down, productive synthesis, as performing an hybridity that is certainly more syncretic than disruptive. Finally, Akbar's moral authority, clearly contrasted with Mogor's embodiment of taboo, resonates with the definitive, albeit flawed, moral authority attributed to the Rushdie persona, a quality I have

considered in Chapter 3. Thus, while *The Enchantress of Florence* defines two modes of hybridity through its protagonists, the circular and constitutive interplay between the persona and the novel's protagonists foregrounds Akbar's hybridity, as creative synthesis, over Mogor's, as disruptive contestation. This particular focus, in turn, both reinforces the dominant elements of the Rushdie persona that initially supported the easier identification with Akbar, and reveals the persona's hybridity as syncretic, and, therefore, unlikely to disrupt the dominant system within which the persona is produced and operates.

There is, though, room for optimism in interpreting the novel's accounts of hybridity. Akbar's decision to refute Mogor's claim to Imperial legitimacy may be consistent with the moral code of the Mughal Empire, but it is also a failure, as revealed by its immediate consequences. In an historically accurate episode, Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's capital city, is abandoned because its water supply mysteriously dries up less than two decades after the city's construction, for reasons that contemporary historians cannot explain. In the novel, this abandonment almost immediately follows Mogor's expulsion, and the drying of Sikri's water supply is explained as the fulfillment of the curse intoned by Mogor in his first days at Akbar's court, when he faces possible execution: "'Before you kill me, great emperor,' the foreigner boldly said, 'I must warn you that if you do so you will be cursed, and your capital city will crumble...'" (95). In a watered-down fulfillment, Mogor is not killed but expelled; Sikri does not crumble but dries, and Akbar is forced to order the city's permanent evacuation. The consequence of Mogor's rejection and Akbar's apparent triumph is the loss of the very site of ordered synthesis that contrasts Mogor's disruption. In suggesting the fall of Sikri as a consequence of Akbar's judgement against Mogor, the novel reinforces the Emperor's power at the centre of *The Enchantress of Florence*, but it also emphasizes the

precariousness of that position. The novel's end is consistent with Weickgennant Thiara's claim that Rushdie's representations of hybridity are "always interested in showing the dangers and pitfalls in cultural intermingling, since an unequal distribution of power can lead to one party dictating the terms of encounter" (418). In this light, Mogor's expulsion is clearly dictated via the radical imbalance of power between himself and Akbar, and Akbar's mode of hybridity is never in danger. Akbar's cultural dominance at least partially fails, however, when Mogor curses the city. The subsequent abandonment of the site of Akbar's authority and control, though, signals the consequences of dictating the terms of intermingling, and Sikri's fall, then, is a promise of inevitable consequence. In the novel, Akbar's hybridity may triumph over Mogor's, but the cost is high and the implication severe. Syncretic, top-down hybridity functions to reinforce the values of the dominant system from which it grows and to which it contributes, but its very ground is dry and destined to become infertile. Here, then, the novel confirms Young's warning that hybridity's colonial discourse of fertility and legitimacy persists, but it also affirms the instability of this discourse. And by extension, the novel's account of Akbar's and Mogor's competing hybridities suggests that the hybridity of the Rushdie persona might now be limited and syncretic but that it could be re-defined.

## **Conclusion**

As many critical theorizations of hybridity and celebratory analyses of Rushdie's fiction and lived experience suggest, the hybridity of the Rushdie persona might work to challenge the cultural hegemony of the West, but, as my analysis makes clear, it might also reinforce this hegemony, specifically by reaffirming a dominant politics of heterosexuality

and fertility. Certainly, the often vague definitions of the hybridity that characterizes the Rushdie persona, ones that assume the benefits of a non-specific process of cultural mixture, suggest that the value of hybridity lies in its safe, productive intra-systemic contributions rather than its chaotic, extra-systemic disruptions. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the truth of how the world joins up, in terms of individual, hybrid identity, is given in the triumph of syncretism over disruption, and *The Enchantress of Florence* emphasizes a mode of hybridity that is unsurprising to the cultural and political systems within which it operates. Through the triumph of the static qualities of Akbar's creative syntheses and moral defense of his Empire, hybridity is rendered less strange, and the result is a narrowed conception of what it means to survive and succeed as a hybrid subject. Mogor's expulsion is a clear sign that the novel's hybridity does not work to destabilize the dominant cultural system of the Empire by clarifying the logical insufficiency of its normative values; instead, the application of those values limits hybridity's range of possibilities, preventing the introduction of different ways of being. This, in turn, reveals the non-specific hybridity attributed to the persona to be safe and productive, rather than subversive and transformative, in the dominant cultural system of the West.

If Rushdie's fictive accounts of hybridity are, as Ismail claims, intelligible versions of Bhabha's theorizations, they should be carefully explicated in contexts that clarify their implications with regard to the hegemonic culture of the West. Bhabha's own work is often subject to this kind of analysis, and much of the value of Bhabha's critical theorizations of hybridity lies in their instability and open-endedness, characteristics that run counter to Akbar's, and the Rushdie persona's, somewhat paradoxically, fixed and closed hybridity. At the very least, deployments of the concept of hybridity should be cautious rather than overly

celebratory. As with Bhabha's theorizations, Rushdie's fictionalizations of hybridity might have only limited effect, especially if they are understood as adversarial discourses. The contestatory potential of Bhabha's hybridity, though, lies not only in its opposition to dominant systems but also in its instability. The ontological restlessness that Young identifies in Bhabha's theorization, the quality that permits its consistent and continuous escape from recuperation by systems of power, is also the quality that might permit the contestatory potential of Rushdie's accounts of hybridity, without which his hybrid characters serve to not only highlight the limits of their opposition to systems of power but also to reinscribe them. In other words, the transgressive potential of both Bhabha's and Rushdie's accounts of hybridity lies in the possibility of their working in a mode of surprise, of consistently disrupting dominant norms by not merely opposing but exceeding them, and demanding responses other than exclusion. In their most promising challenges to the dominant social order, individual hybrid subjects embody onto-epistemological excesses, performing their identities in ways that cannot be accounted for by the dominant order's systems of being and knowledge, and that also result in transformations of that dominant order. In short, hybridity at its best, like any good surprise, is disruptive and cannot be ignored. As it is in most of Rushdie's novels, hybridity is one of the defining features of *The Enchantress of Florence*, and it should be understood as not only much more than a nonspecific blending of disparate elements but also a syncretic process that obeys and contributes to the normative system of the dominant culture, especially because it is through these novels that the hybrid qualities of the Rushdie persona is determined. To this end, foregrounding Mogor's hybridity in order to contrast it with Akbar's maps a way of reading against the novel's syncretic hybridity, especially as supported by the influence of the Rushdie persona. Mogor may not succeed as a

contestatory figure within the plot itself, but, if the analytic spotlight is turned on him, he might succeed as a transformative figure in the larger narrative of hybridity attributed to Rushdie and to his work.

## Chapter 5: Migrancy, the Rushdie Persona, and *Shalimar the Clown*

Migrancy, like hybridity, is consistently theorized in Rushdie's fiction and has become a defining quality of the Rushdie persona, likely because Rushdie was one of the first postcolonial migrant writers to garner world-wide attention and his early novels deal explicitly with the challenges of migration. However, extant analyses of Rushdie's biography and fictive representations of migrancy are more likely to criticize them as non-representative of the realities of the contemporary post-colonial population than celebrate them as exemplifying this population's lived experiences. The problem of this non-representation is that many lived experiences of migrancy are overlooked or implicitly contrasted to those associated with Rushdie's biography and fiction. Rushdie's writing position in providing accounts of migrant experience may be, as Teverson concludes, "not entirely unworkable," despite Rushdie's lived experience as a "privileged migrant Indian intellectual" (10), but it is not so much the writing position I am interested in here as the characterization and influence of the Rushdie persona. As Shailja Sharma writes, in an analysis of *The Satanic Verses* – a novel that is, certainly, "about migrancy in general and about South Asian immigrants to Britain in particular" (596) – Rushdie's lived experience is that of a postcolonial migrant, but the presumed links between his fiction and biography foster "[t]he myth that Rushdie represents, in some unproblematic way, the experience of immigration" (598). It is this myth of simple representation that I want to challenge: it is important to recognize that the Rushdie persona, as a figure of migrant experience, is neither definitive nor exemplary.

In this chapter, I provide an account of the Rushdie persona as representing a specific idea of migrancy, then compare the migrant qualities of the protagonists of *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Satanic Verses*, and examine the interplay between the persona and these



protagonists. As they are with regard to hybridity, the persona and Rushdie's protagonists are engaged in a mutually constitutive interplay with regard to their performances of migrant identity. Rather than establishing a range of equally viable migrant ontologies, the interplay between the migrant persona and the migrant experience portrayed in *Shalimar the Clown* suggests a hierarchy of migrant identity according to which survival and success are the results of being socially and materially privileged in very specific ways. This privileging of a specific type of migrant experience narrows the scope of migrant experience and, as such, provides an opportunity for reading against the dominant characteristics of migrancy modelled through the interplay between the persona and Rushdie's protagonists.

### **Migrant Qualities of the Rushdie Persona**

The persona's migrant qualities, like its hybrid ones, arise from Rushdie's lived experience and his written work. For example, Eaglestone identifies migrancy as one of the defining themes of Rushdie's autobiographical *Joseph Anton*, and Sharma, in tracing Rushdie's lived experiences of migrancy, reminds the reader that Rushdie has lived in India<sup>40</sup>, England, and the U.S.A., and is now "a migrant caught between three countries" (599). Both Sharma and Eaglestone characterize Rushdie as a figure of cultural and ontological instability: Sharma writes that Rushdie is "unable to exist comfortably in any one" of the countries to which he has migrated (599), and Eaglestone concludes that "the final position in *Joseph Anton*" regarding migrancy is that it entails "a constant sense of struggle" (122). That struggle, though, is of a different order than basic survival. Eaglestone

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<sup>40</sup> Sharma overlooks Rushdie's first migration to Pakistan that might further support her characterization of Rushdie's migrancy.

notes that, for Rushdie, “to live in the ‘joined-up’ world is to live constantly embattled between positions” (122), but it is important to note that those positions are ones of culture and ideology rather than subsistence and shelter. Sharma similarly points out that Rushdie’s refusal of “the relative securities of belonging to one country alone” (603) is permitted by his social and material resources. For Sharma, Rushdie may certainly be “a migrant caught between three countries, unable to exist comfortably in any one” (599), but he can exist comfortably in-between, at least in material terms, simply because he has the means to do so.

The Rushdie persona clearly entails a position of social and economic privilege, something that Rushdie himself acknowledges about his social position in writing that he is “one of the luckier ones” within the population of the “age of migration” (*Joseph Anton* 54). This acknowledgement, though, is a significant understatement, as is clear in comparison to the unlucky ones who, as Rushdie notes, face “problems of homelessness, hunger, unemployment, disease, persecution, alienation, fear” (54). Rushdie may have endured something like the latter three problems as a result of the Affair, but the first four are not part of his lived experience, and I think the distinction is crucial. Rushdie’s material privilege made it possible to endure his life in hiding from threats of violence: he may have been uprooted, but he was never utterly homeless, nor did he suffer hunger, unemployment, and disease. Instead, it remained possible for him to live in relative comfort and to move across international borders. The point I want to emphasize here is that accounts of Rushdie’s experience of migrancy contribute to the persona’s exemplification of migrancy as privileged and volitional: it is a choice in response to particular conditions rather than a necessary outcome of those conditions. The Rushdie persona is, in short, not a model of migrancy as

forced displacement, and it is this distinction that renders it non-representative of the less fortunate members of the “age of migration.”

Rushdie’s fictive narratives of successful migrancy are, too, those of the luckier ones, a point of consistency that leads many critics to condemn Rushdie’s novels for something that verges on irresponsibility. Procter effectively summarizes a regular criticism of Rushdie’s accounts of migrancy in his novels – that they fail to correspond to the lived realities of the less privileged migrant citizens of the contemporary, postcolonial world – noting Aijaz Ahmad’s concern that Rushdie’s fiction universalizes migrancy “as an ontological condition of all human beings” (Ahmad qtd. in Procter 37), and Revathi Krishnaswamy’s conclusion that “Rushdie de-materializes the migrant into an abstract idea” (Krishnaswamy quoted in Procter 44). For Ahmad, writing in his oft-cited analysis of *Shame*, the elite qualities of both Rushdie’s biography and his prose compromise his fictive accounts of migrancy, something that contrasts with Bhabha’s celebratory reading of *The Satanic Verses* as giving an account of the contemporary migrant’s view of the world, but that is consistent with Sharma’s suggestion that Rushdie’s fiction is better understood as representing the view of a very small minority within the migrant population. Sharma writes that the range of differing experiences of migration “is one of the crucial distinctions to be made in any discussion of the subject” (597) and that Rushdie’s fiction elides those differences in favour of a “metafictional trope” of migrancy that invokes “an absolute of rootlessness and hybridity” (605). In *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie is careful to distinguish between his relatively privileged experiences of migrancy and other, presumably more common experiences, but Sharma points out that Rushdie’s apparent consciousness of radically

differing experiences of migrancy is seldom reflected in his fiction. Moreover, for Sharma, there is a clear interplay between Rushdie's life and work with regards to migrancy.

Regardless of whether Rushdie's protagonists can transcend their author's privileged position, as a condition of their production, the debate itself suggests the transformative potential of Rushdie's fiction. That is, the criticism that the interplay between Rushdie and his work inaccurately portrays the lived experience of the majority of the contemporary migrant population signals the assumption, following Malik, that Rushdie's novels could expand "the truth of human experience, and in particular the experience of change and transformation, of dislocation and belongingness" (Malik, in Eaglestone and McQuillan vii). As it stands, however, the limits of that truth are very much in evidence. The less privileged migrants of Rushdie's novels are very clearly distinguished: they die often painful deaths or disappear, fading as the narrative spotlight chases the privileged and elite whose qualities of migrancy resonate with those of the persona. As privileged migrants, Rushdie's protagonists seldom face the problems of basic survival but, rather, the problems of heterogeneity and multiple belonging, problems of identity that, for Rushdie, culminate in the question of whether it is "possible to be – to become *good* at being – not rootless, but multiply rooted" (*Joseph Anton* 54, original italics). Like accounts of Rushdie that attribute his literary successes to the navigation of his hybrid identity – his ability to draw on his several cultural antecedents without being answerable to them – the accounts of his migrant protagonists emphasize the need to acknowledge their cultural histories in performances of identity that align with the values of the dominant system, especially dominant masculinity. Together, these accounts suggest a hierarchy of being "multiply rooted," and confirm that in Rushdie's fiction only specific, privileged migrants are likely to experience survival and success.

### *Shalimar the Clown*

In clarifying the qualities and effects of the interplay between the persona and Rushdie's migrant protagonists, I turn to *Shalimar the Clown*, Rushdie's 2005 novel of obsessions and betrayals in a terror-filled, globalized world. The novel follows four protagonists across three continents and three generations and thereby maps distinct paths of postcolonial migrant experience. As does *The Satanic Verses*, the novel that Bhabha has lauded for inscribing "the migrant's view of the world" ("Novel Metropolis" 16), *Shalimar the Clown* follows a non-linear chronological and geographical path in weaving the overlapping stories of its migrant protagonists. Ranging from race-rioting Los Angeles in the 1990s to resistance-fighting Western Europe in the 1940s to both free and military-occupied Kashmir in the decades between, the narrative is one of violent social upheaval in several contexts, structured according to the experiences of four characters for whom the novel's sections are named: Kashmira Ophuls, the could-have-been daughter and might-have-been victim of the eponymous Shalimar; Boonyi Kaul, Kashmira's mother and Shalimar's adulterous wife; Max Ophuls, Kashmira's father, Boonyi's partner in adultery, and Shalimar's most public victim; and Noman Sher Noman, a.k.a. Shalimar the Clown, the precocious acrobat turned unwitting cuckold, turned ruthless assassin. This structuring, unique among Rushdie's novels, marks a shift in emphasis from the broadly political to the precisely personal: *Shalimar the Clown* is consistent with Eaglestone and McQuillan's assertion that Rushdie's "novels *think*" (6, original italics), as well as Malik's conclusion that Rushdie's fiction provides accurate accounts of human experience. This particular novel, though, is not engaged in thinking specific political contexts except in a contextual way; it is, rather, focused on detailing the personal experience of four relatively privileged migrants

within those contexts. The remaining characters, many of them unlucky migrants, are very clearly distinguished from these central characters: they die often painful deaths or disappear, fading as the narrative spotlight chases the privileged and elite.

However, while the novel is engaged primarily in thinking about individuals qua individuals rather than as symbols of the effects of social and political disruption, it thinks those individuals in particular ways. In this chapter, I explicate the qualities of the successful migrant in *Shalimar the Clown* and briefly compare them to those in *The Satanic Verses*. I also explore the interplay between the persona and Rushdie's protagonists and argue that this interplay works to limit the scope of possibility of what it means to be a successful migrant. Given its non-linear structure and various inscriptions of migrancy – ones that differ along lines of religion, class, and gender – *Shalimar the Clown* initially seems to present a variety of possibilities of migrant experience. In particular, Kashmira Ophuls (*Shalimar the Clown*) and Saladin Chamcha (*The Satanic Verses*) can be read as explicating the alternatives ten Kortenaar identifies regarding the marginalized migrant's survival in the metropole: stay and attempt to establish new roots, or leave and embrace old ones, neither of which permits transformation of the new ground (343-4). Moreover, *Shalimar the Clown* consistently theorizes migrancy as a struggle for survival and success, the results of which vary according to the protagonists' abilities to negotiate and deploy violence, and to perform an elite cosmopolitanism that entails the dominant masculinity, religious non-adherence, and limited attendance to cultural roots that recur in Rushdie's fiction and resonate with qualities of the persona.

## Shifting from the Political to the Personal

*Shalimar the Clown*, as several scholarly analyses point out, is certainly concerned with the political themes that recur in Rushdie's canon, but it is more concerned with individual characters and signals a shift in emphasis from the broadly political to the intensely personal. That is, while the novel is a vehicle of political commentary on the conflict over Kashmir, American international relations, and global terrorism, it has generally been read in published academic work as operating on a different scale than, say, the broad satire that is *Shame*. Here, an exception proves the rule: Elizabeth S. Anker, in her analysis of the representation of human rights abuses in the novel, concludes that *Shalimar* "subordinates the ordinary particularities of singular characters' lives to more epic, totalizing conflicts" (149-150). Anker thus maintains a degree of consistency with other scholarship on Rushdie's fiction that emphasizes its broadly political implications and, while her argument might deviate in content from the emphases she identifies in "prevailing strains in Rushdie criticism [that] foreground ... commentary on the anatomy of abstract political constructs" (149), the focus on Rushdie's characters as primarily symbolic remains. Anker's analysis, though, is at odds with several other academic responses to *Shalimar the Clown*, including Florian Stadler's: according to his analysis of the novel's accounts of terror and globalization, the narrative focus is very much on characters as individuals. For Stadler, the basic structure of the narrative, in which the sections are named for the protagonists – Kashmira, Boonyi, Max, and Shalimar – and related from their points of view, works "to link different geographical territories, social and political worlds, and histories" (192) and, while the novel "debates the wider political dimensions of terrorism, [it] is more concerned with

the effects of terrorism and the state's counter-terrorist measures on the individual characters" (194).

Stadtler's emphasis on the protagonists as challenges to nation-based "conceptualizations of postcolonial identity" (192) is echoed in Siddiqi's and Morey's separate conclusions that *Shalimar the Clown* constitutes a shift in Rushdie's fiction away from the nation toward the post-national, individual subject. For Siddiqi, the novel "looks to a transnational, cosmopolitan realm to flesh out a new global subject of culture and politics" (306), and, for Morey, it is a departure from Rushdie's previous representations of broad national, political and historical contexts, specifically for its "evacuation of the political by the personal" (221). Thus, while Saleem Sinai (*Midnight's Children*) and Moraes Zogoiby (*The Moor's Last Sigh*) might be read primarily as national allegories, the characters of *Shalimar the Clown* are "the local, *symbolic equivalents* for national and transnational tensions and dilemmas" (215, original italics). This symbolic equivalence is not the allegorical representation of global, political tensions but, rather, evidence of Rushdie's technique of "constructing close correspondences between people and locations, but also between personal and regional histories" (217). Morey's reading of the scalar emphases of the novel, moreover, is not a simple reversal in which individuals are emphasized over collectives or ideas. In framing his analysis through the political and psychoanalytic, Morey contends that the evacuative depoliticization of the characters is a problem that results in either stasis via melancholia or resolution via mourning and provides an example of how, as Teverson writes, the political conflicts of Rushdie's narratives play out "microcosmically in the lives of his central characters" (219).



The shift in emphasis from the global to the local, and from the broadly political to the intensely personal, is clear throughout the novel. The international political consequences of Max's adulterous affair with Boonyi, conducted while Max serves as the American ambassador to post-Partition India, give way in the narrative to the stories of Boonyi's return from exile to her home village of Pachigam, and Max's initial rejection and eventual embrace of fatherhood. Similarly, Shalimar's training as a faith-based terrorist emphasizes its arduous mental and physical demands over its socio-political conditions, and his assassinations of political figures around the world are only briefly recounted in their presentation as means to the end of enacting his personal revenge against Boonyi, Max, and their daughter, Kashmira, for his cuckolding. In short, the novel does not offer a broad critique of terrorism but, rather, a case study of a terrorist. Even the final scene, a violent conflict between Shalimar and Kashmira, is framed as a competition of obsessive revenge rather than as a war between generations and cultures. The details of the protagonists' lives are thus rendered as singular consequences of the political, economic, and social impacts of the workings of various systems of power and less in support of broad political commentary. This foregrounding of the protagonists also serves to emphasize their different experiences of migrancy, including the particular qualities that govern the novel's characters' varying experiences of survival.

### **Exception as the Norm: Migrant Subjects in *Shalimar the Clown***

As do many of Rushdie's other novels, *Shalimar the Clown* emphasizes the struggles of its migrant protagonists to succeed as citizens of the contemporary, postcolonial world. Indeed, Bhabha's claim that *The Satanic Verses* presents "the migrant's view of the world" and that the migrant's dream is one of survival ("Novel Metropolis" 16) could be extended to

Rushdie's more recent novel. So, too, though, could the criticisms made of Rushdie's fictive migrants, and accounts of Rushdie's own lived, migrant experience. The emphasis on survival as the criterion of successful migrancy begs questions of how representative Rushdie's fictive protagonists are of contemporary migrant populations, to what extent they might occlude other possibilities of theorizing successful migrancy, and how the dream of survival is achieved. Moreover, as Ganapathy-Doré writes, Rushdie's novels may explicate the migrant subject's translation "by the fact of being borne across borders" (6), but the details of what is lost and gained in the process are often not fully explicit. In this section, I consider in detail the individual qualities common to the protagonists of *Shalimar the Clown* and evaluate them as criteria for migrant survival, according to the logic of the text. Like the persona, Rushdie's protagonists are certainly not broadly representative of the qualities and experiences of the majority of the contemporary migrant population, and, together, they obscure other possibilities of migrant identity.

Descriptions of the protagonists of *Shalimar the Clown* bring to mind Mondal's comment, in an analysis of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, that Rushdie's fiction is "almost exclusively populated by characters with exceptional talents" (176). Shalimar, Boonyi, Max, and Kashmira are all exceptionally beautiful and possessed of impressive abilities of body and mind. Young Noman Sher Noman, nicknamed for the famed Mughal garden of Shalimar and his role as a tightrope-walking clown in his troupe's performances, is "the most beautiful boy in the world" (Rushdie, *Shalimar* 54), highly intelligent, and prodigiously athletic, capable, at fourteen, of not only strolling across a rope but "tumbling, pirouetting, prancing so lightly that it seemed he was walking on air" (55). These qualities persist through Shalimar's life: on first encountering him, Kashmira reflects that Shalimar at forty is "a

handsome man, even a beautiful one” (10) and, after his arrest for Max’s murder, Shalimar’s defense attorney hopes for “a young jury with a female bias” because Shalimar is “highly attractive” (378). Shalimar’s exceptional athleticism also persists, honed by training as a professional terrorist and assassin, and he is capable at forty of killing guard dogs with his bare hands, impressing hardened inmates by completing three hundred consecutive chin-ups, and violently repelling four attackers during a surprise, prison-yard attack.

Maximilian ‘Max’ Ophuls is a similarly exceptional physical specimen, renowned for both his wartime exploits and sexual prowess. Nicknamed “the Flying Jew” (158) for his escape from Nazi-occupied territory during the Second World War, Max is a “giant of the Resistance, a man of movie-star good looks and polymathic accomplishment” (161), including artistic, academic, and political successes. Even in advanced age – he is approximately 80 at the novel’s opening – Max remains capable of distracting, with “his charm [and] the erotic proximity of his snappy crackle of power” (7), a young woman jogging past Kashmira’s apartment building and conducting a secret affair with Zainab Azam, a Bollywood star in her mid-twenties (26). The affair with Azam mirrors Max’s adulterous relationship a quarter of a century earlier with Boonyi, Kashmira’s mother, a woman whose beauty exceeds even that of the Indian movie star.

The most beautiful of Pachigam’s young women, Boonyi, is also the most accomplished dancer in a village undisputed as producing the best performers in Kashmir, and it is in dancing the preeminent role of Anarkali that Boonyi comes to Max’s attention. Boonyi, already established in the narrative as an unrivalled object of sexual desire throughout Pachigam’s Kashmiri valley, overwhelms Max, who, despite the responsibilities of his role as American ambassador to India and Boonyi’s marriage to Shalimar, is incapable

of rational thought in the face of “the ancient imperatives of desire” (Rushdie, *Shalimar* 181) and engineers an affair. Fully complicit in their adulteries, Boonyi abandons her husband, travels to India, and takes advantage of Max’s wealth and power to train as a professional dancer. However, she wastes her beauty and skills through a self-indulgent greed that sees her gain so much weight that, when Max tires of her and arranges for her return to Pachigam, she no longer fits through the doorway and has to literally be broken free of the confines of her apartment. Boonyi’s grotesque transformation is exceptional, though hardly lauded in the novel, but it is also only temporary. At the end of the affair, Boonyi returns to Kashmir and, through manual labour and dedicated self-deprivation, she recovers her unrivalled physical beauty.

Before her geographical and physical returns, Boonyi bears Max a daughter, India Ophuls, later named Kashmira Noman, and, finally, Kashmira Ophuls, whose story bookends the other events of the novel. *Shalimar* opens with a 20-page character sketch of the inevitably beautiful Kashmira on the day of her twenty-fourth birthday and traces her birth in India, childhood in England, and young adulthood in southern California. In Max’s absence, the teenaged Kashmira “had been a truant, a liar, a cheat, a dropout, a thief, a teenage runaway, a junkie and even, briefly, a tart plying for trade in the shadow of the giant gas cylinders behind King’s Cross Station” (350), but in 1990 Los Angeles, having been rescued by Max and spirited from England to L.A., Kashmira is well-educated and an aspiring documentary film-maker. Moreover, the rebelliousness of her adolescence has been channeled into martial arts training, including boxing, wing chun kung fu, and archery, this last of which Kashmira practices at an Olympic standard.

The protagonists of *Shalimar* also occupy exceptional social positions, ones that allow them better living conditions and greater freedom of movement than the other, less fortunate characters. These positions are partially due to their mental and physical attributes, but they are mostly determined by their families' wealth and social standing. Boonyi and Shalimar are the children of Pachigam's leaders, Pandit Pyarelal Kaul and Sarpanch Abdullah Noman, respectively, and, as such, live in the village's best dwellings (46), receive the best education available, and are accorded degrees of respect and envy. Max, who "grew up in a family of highly cultured Ashkenazi Jews" in an "undeniably charming mansion house" in Strasbourg (138), is educated in France's best schools, and moves in elite social circles in Western Europe; and Kashmira, despite being the illegitimate product of Max and Boonyi's adulterous affair, is raised among the British upper crust and consistently enjoys the privileges of wealth, thanks first to the patronage of Max and his wife, Margaret Rhodes, and later to the inheritance of Max's estate. In another sign of their social and material privilege, all four characters are permitted ease of cross-border travel, ranging from Max's professional relocations from France to England to India to America; to Boonyi's departure from and return to Pachigam from Delhi; to Shalimar's cross-continental travel as a terrorist and assassin; to Kashmira's movement among India, England and America. Despite the violent political contexts of their migrations, including western European battles during the Second World War and skirmishes among Indian, Pakistani, and Kashmiri liberation military forces, both immediately following and decades after Partition, none of the protagonists experiences any significant difficulties of cross-border travel. In this regard, they are similar to many of the protagonists in Rushdie's other novels, including those of *The Satanic Verses*: they are

not forcibly displaced from their homes but, instead, choose to leave. This degree of agency even further distinguishes them as privileged migrants.

### **Secularism and Migrancy**

Other, less obviously exceptional, attributes receive a great deal of explicit narrative attention in *Shalimar*, including the religious non-adherence of the protagonists. Despite Boonyi's, Shalimar's, and Max's observant Hindu, Muslim, and Jewish families, none of them adheres to their religions of birth or any other organized system of belief, thus further distinguishing them from the host of minor characters whose religious faith is a defining and, ultimately in the novel, a limiting quality of their lives. Indeed, Boonyi's vituperative response to Max following her abandonment at the end of their affair is a rare example of religious affiliation among the protagonists. In their final interaction, Boonyi bombards Max with "empty threats" and less empty "accusations of betrayal" before concluding with "another, older line of attack": "I should have known better than to lie with a Jew. The Jews are our enemy and I should have known" (205). Here, though, Boonyi's identification of Max as the Jewish enemy is less likely to hold as a self-declaration of religious identity than a sign of Boonyi's failed aspirations as a professional dancer, guilt at leaving her husband, and self-disgust. Boonyi's non-adherence to Hinduism is well-defined throughout the novel, including through her preference for the teachings of the exiled, naturalist prophetess Nazarebaddoor over those of her Pandit father, and when she balks at marrying the Muslim Shalimar neither for religious reasons nor lack of love but the "claustrophobia" of having to spend the rest of her life in Pachigam (114). This non-adherence to religion is also clear in Shalimar's reflection, when deciding whether to marry Boonyi, that "[t]he words *Hindu* and

*Muslim* had no place” in their story (57, original italics). For Shalimar, the forms of religious adherence are simply means to an end, as is made clear during his training as a professional terrorist and assassin. In a crucial event, Shalimar offers a false conversion to Bulbul Fakh’s fanatical version of Islam after witnessing an eighteen-year-old recruit strip himself naked and offer a declaration of his self-abnegation in support of the iron mullah’s cause:

Shalimar the clown rose to his feet and tore off his garments. ‘Take me!’ he cried. ‘Truth, I am ready for you!’ He was a trained performer, a leading actor in the leading bhand pather troupe in the valley, and so of course he could make his gestures more convincing, and imbue his journey toward nakedness with more meaning, than any eighteen-year-old youth. He stripped off his shirt and shouted out his acquiescence ... The passion of his avowals made an impression on the iron mullah. (267-8)

Of this false conversion, Morton writes, “[b]y passing as an Islamic fundamentalist, Shalimar ... suggests that belief is nothing more than the performance of rituals of religious devotion” (351), a characterization of religious adherence that is not inconsistent with Rushdie’s other work and that suggests one endpoint of the surviving migrant’s cultural hybridity: the empty, mimicking, performance of identity and, perhaps, faith.

In *Shalimar the Clown*, this endpoint is a hallmark of the surviving migrant, as is suggested in Siddiqi’s analysis of the novel’s competing accounts of cosmopolitanism. In an analytic move reminiscent of Radhakrishnan’s distinction between postcolonial and metropolitan hybridities, and consequent clarification of Rushdie’s closer alignment with the privileged rather than the marginalized of the dominant West, Siddiqi identifies two forms of

cosmopolitanism in *Shalimar the Clown*, vernacular and elite, distinguished by the degrees to which they maintain an ethos of syncretism. For Siddiqi, vernacular cosmopolitanism “takes its perspective from the peripheries of global power” (295) and is preferable to its elite correlate, that “of a small transnational class that has multiple passports and visas and the means to travel freely” (307), in that it “mediates between the universal and the particular, the global and the local, is culturally anti-essentialist, and represents a complex repertoire of identities, allegiances and interests” (294). This form of cosmopolitanism, according to Siddiqi, manifests in the novel as *kashmiriyat*, “a regional spirit of communal harmony and cultural syncretism” (295).

Siddiqi’s reading of *kashmiriyat* is consistent with Patricia Fernández-Kelly’s conclusion that *Shalimar the Clown* nostalgically imagines Kashmir as “an in-between place where everyone must accommodate other people’s unique self-definitions” (472) and Stadtler’s that the novel’s Kashmir is a place defined by “its secularist, tolerant multi-faith ethos” (195). Evidence of this accommodation and tolerance is provided, as Morton points out, in the Hindu maharaja’s commission of a banquet that is “a celebration of Kashmir’s syncretic cultural heritage” (347) and, more explicitly, in the interreligious marriage of Shalimar and Boonyi that is foreshadowed in Pachigam’s kitchens. On the morning of the banquet noted by Morton, the day of Boonyi and Shalimar’s births, Boonyi’s father, Pandit Pyarelal Kaul, explains to his wife the reason for his good mood:

‘Today our Muslim village, in the service of our Hindu maharaja, will cook and act in a Mughal – that is to say – Muslim garden ... Who tonight are the Hindus? Who are the Muslims? Here in Kashmir, our



stories sit happily side by side on the same double bill, we eat from  
the same dishes, we laugh at the same jokes.’ (Rushdie, *Shalimar* 71)

In the Kashmir of the novel, a place governed by *kashmiriyat*, religious adherence does not preclude religious tolerance, but there is, too, a suggestion that religious syncretism is more a governing principle of the recipe book than the social contract. Thus, fourteen years later, when Shalimar’s father, Sarpanch Abdullah Noman, echoes the Pandit’s syncretic claims in declaring the village’s support for the interreligious marriage of Boonyi and Shalimar, his words ring with desperation:

‘We are all brothers and sisters here,’ said Abdullah. ‘There is no  
Hindu-Muslim issue. Two Kashmiri – two Pachigami – youngsters  
wish to marry, that’s all. A love match is acceptable to both families  
and so a marriage there will be; both Hindu and Muslim customs will  
be observed.’ (110)

Together, the Pandit and Sarpanch’s political authority remains sufficient to quell opposition within the village but *kashmiriyat*’s rescue from the recipe pages as a principle of social governance is only temporary.

The disastrous failure of Boonyi and Shalimar’s marriage signals what Stadtler calls the irretrievable loss of “what was worth celebrating about Kashmir” (195), something Siddiqi defines as the infusion of “cosmopolitan values with the promise of an organic community” (307). For Siddiqi, this loss is an inevitable consequence of “an internationalism divorced from the ethos of cosmopolitanism” (299), and one that reveals the impossibility of its own existence. *Kashmiriyat*, as a nostalgic invocation of a lost ideal of cultural exchange, fails at the levels of both the local and the global, and it represents not merely the simplified,

imagined loss of an imaginary homeland but also a defining quality of the failures among the contemporary, marginalized, postcolonial population. The devotees of *kashmiriyat*, including, in particular, Boonyi's and Shalimar's fathers, are helpless to prevent either the collapse of their children's marriage or the faith-based conflicts that divide and destroy Pachigam, while Boonyi and Shalimar are granted measures of success because they abandon it. Their empty performances of cultural ideals, including hollow protestations of religious adherence, thus constitute both the divorce from the ethos of syncretism that Siddiqi describes and a condition of their survival.

### **Violence and Migrancy**

As Siddiqi's characterization of the failure of vernacular cosmopolitanism implies, violence overcomes syncretism in *Shalimar the Clown* and is a determining principle of the characters' survival and success. Moreover, violence makes migrancy possible in the novel: it is in response to threats and attacks that the characters prosper – to varying degrees – by escaping their homelands or suffer by remaining in place. Not even the most pacifist of responses is sufficient, as is clear in the case of Boonyi's father, Pandit Pyarelal Kaul. Faced with the failure of his daughter's marriage, his son-in-law's violent response, and the increasingly violent post-Partition conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, even the optimistic Pandit enters "a darkness of his own":

The love of Boonyi and Shalimar the clown had been defended by the whole of Pachigam, had been worth defending, as a symbol of the victory of the human over the inhuman, and the dreadful ending of that love made Pyarelal question, for the first time in his life, the idea

that human beings were essentially good, that if men could be helped to strip away imperfections their ideal selves would stand revealed, shining in the light, for all to see. He was even questioning the anticomunalist principles embodied in the notion of *Kashmiriyat*, and beginning to wonder if discord were not a more powerful principle than harmony. (238-9)

Once the most vocal proponent of *kashmiriyat*, the Pandit collapses under the weight of a dreadful ending to love and the growing discord in Kashmir. Pyarelal Kaul, though, is far from unique in being conditioned by the novel's violent events: every character, no matter his or her narrative significance, is affected to some extent. In his discussion of the various representations and scales of violence in the novel, Stadtler writes that "Max is shaped by his experience of violence and this has a profound effect on his vision of the world" (197); similar claims could be made regarding Boonyi, whose return to Pachigam entails her acceptance of her eventual death at Shalimar's hands, and Shalimar, as evidenced by his work as an assassin as well as an excerpt from a letter written during his incarceration: "My life was going to be one thing but death turned it into another. The bright sky vanished for me and a dark passage opened" (60). The conditioning effects of violence are also clear with regard to Kashmira, the recipient of Shalimar's letter, whose increasing disregard for her own safety corresponds with her more violent martial arts practice and her eventual execution of Shalimar at the novel's end.

The novel's protagonists are clearly conditioned by violence, but they also demonstrate the ability to control it and its effects, albeit to varying degrees, thus further distinguishing themselves from the novel's minor characters. This control signals their

agency as migrants, reinforcing their distinction from those for whom violence results in forced displacement or death. Max's famed exploits include escaping the Nazi occupation that sees his parents captured and sent to concentration camps, where they are tortured and killed; Boonyi is granted a reprieve of several years from execution, during which one of her childhood friends is raped and commits suicide; Shalimar evades the battle between Indian and Kashmiri liberation forces that results in the deaths of all other members of his terrorist cell; and Kashmira avoids Shalimar's attempt to kill her after his escape from prison, while her bodyguards are assassinated. For Max and Boonyi, who are both eventually killed by Shalimar, their negotiations of violence may be limited, but they do exceed those of the novel's supporting cast. In the clearest examples of the protagonists' greater degrees of agency and control, Shalimar and Kashmira both demonstrate proficiencies for violence through their combat training and practice. Stadler writes of the novel's violent events, including Kashmira's retributive execution of Shalimar on the novel's last page, that, "[i]n the end, the individual is trampled underfoot as violence begets more violence: a vicious circle from which there is no escape" (197). This conclusion is certainly consistent with the Pandit's metaphorical and, later, literal collapse, Max's and Boonyi's horrific deaths at Shalimar's hands, and Shalimar's own seemingly inevitable death via Kashmira's arrow. However, the novel does more than simply condemn the devastating impact of the cycle of violence; it also posits violence as a defining quality of human agency. Towards the close of the Second World War, Max reflects that "[p]erhaps violence showed us what we meant or, at least, perhaps it was simply what we did" (174), thereby suggesting if not an inherent usefulness then at least a social significance, albeit a clearly negative one. In this light, the protagonists' varying degrees of control with regard to their violent contexts might signal

their potential for survival and success in a globalised world. Writing of Rushdie's much-lauded celebrations of migrancy in his fiction, Leela Gandhi argues that Rushdie's novels exonerate their characters' migrations, which might be read as abandonments, by "[insisting] upon the uninhabitability of the subcontinent" which they often call home ("Ellowen, Deeowen" 158). In *Shalimar*, the uninhabitability of the migrants' homes is the result of violent conflict that establishes a simple, clear binary: stay and die or leave and live. Violence, then, functions as a condition of possibility of migrancy, one that the protagonists hold in common and that exonerates them in their various abandonments of home.

### **Differing Paths of Migrancy: from *The Satanic Verses* to *Shalimar the Clown***

Qualities of successful migrancy in *Shalimar the Clown* include religious non-adherence, social and material privilege, and negotiation with and control over violence. Insofar as they define the migrants of the novel, they also define the migrants of Rushdie's other fiction, particularly the protagonists of *The Satanic Verses*. Moreover, while these novels differ significantly with regard to the geographic endpoints of their respective, successful migrants' paths, they theorize similar claims: the successful migrant is one who does not transform the values of the new culture in which he or she takes root but, instead, performs identity according to them.

In *The Satanic Verses*, as Leela Gandhi writes, accounts of migrancy are mainly given through "the competing migrant rationalities of Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha" ("Ellowen, Deeowen" 162), both of which inscribe narratives of return from England to India. In this light, the question of the successful path of migrancy in *The Satanic Verses* can be understood as a question of competing failures: neither Farishta's revenge-

fuelled journey of obsessive madness and murder, nor Chamcha's self-determined abandonment of the colonial metropole in favour of the previously uninhabitable home, permits his survival in the new ground that is England. The lesser failure here is simply that of survival – Chamcha lives, Farishta dies – and is characterized in some scholarship as an awakening of cultural consciousness in which Chamcha is “redeemed from England” (Gandhi “Elloven, Deeowen” 162). For Catherine Cundy, Chamcha's return is an affirmation of the postcolonial subject's ability to “define his or her own identity by a ... process of opposition” (108) to the dominant culture. Cundy's reading of Chamcha's return follows her emphasis on a scene in which Chamcha, while watching television as he recovers from his goatish transformation, chances across an image of a “‘chimeran graft,’ two trees bred into one” (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* 405). The image is immediately inspiring: “There it palpably was, a chimera with roots, firmly planted in and growing vigorously out of a piece of English earth...If such a tree were possible, then so was he; he, too, could cohere, send down roots, survive” (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* 405-6). In the midst of his recovery, Chamcha latches on to this image “that validates diversity within unity and sets the seal on his own process of rebirth and synthesis” (Cundy 108-9) but ultimately rejects it in favour of a complete reclamation of his Indian roots. Chamcha's failure of migrancy might then be understood as a success of a different kind of postcolonial subjectivity, a “restoration of identity” in the face of racism and the absolutism of expectations of cultural purity (108). However, as Simon Gikandi points out, Chamcha's return

seems to undermine the whole ideological thrust of Rushdie's project.

In other words, if the identity and power of *The Satanic Verses* depend on its ability to question modern and colonial notions of

identity, including the ideals of home and return, why does it end  
with a kind of begrudging affirmation of such ideals? (223)

In answer to this question, and in opposition to Cundy's optimistic reading, ten Kortenaar concludes that the novel's account of the migrant "is never subversive. At best it is compromising and at worst soul destroying...at the end of Rushdie's novel, the only solution for a mimic man like Saladin is to return to roots and rediscover his Indian self" (343-4). For ten Kortenaar, neither of the novel's possibilities of migrancy – the re-rooting in new soil and the return to old ground – holds transformative potential beyond its effects on the migrant himself.

Ten Kortenaar's conclusion is borne out in *Shalimar the Clown* by Kashmira's performance of Chamcha's alternative: a compromise of her cultural antecedents in a re-rooting rather than a return. Before her violent act of self-definition at the novel's end, Kashmira travels from Los Angeles to Kashmir, where she falls in love with Yuvraj Singh, the son of Abdullah Noman's friend, Sardar Harbans Singh. Kashmira's love is, however, short-lived: after she visits her mother's grave in the ruins of Pachigam, Kashmira is overwhelmed with a desire for revenge against her mother's killer, Shalimar. She leaves Yuvraj and Kashmir for Southern California, where Shalimar has been put on trial for Max's murder. There, Kashmira offers crucial testimony that guarantees Shalimar's conviction, and Kashmira retreats to her new home, inherited from her father. And so, in the novel's final pages, and before her deadly confrontation with Shalimar, Kashmira watches late-night television in L.A., recovering from the exhausting pursuit and prosecution of her parents' murderer. However, unlike the image of the hybrid, re-rooted tree that inspires Chamcha, images of basketball and late-night talk shows have little effect on Kashmira. Far more

compelling is Shalimar's invasion of her home, an act of murderous intent that inspires Kashmira to turn out the lights, put on a pair of night-vision goggles, and wait, Olympic-calibre bow and arrow at the ready. Unlike Chamcha, whose response to the possibility of re-rooting is to return home, there will be no similar return for Kashmira. She will, instead, destroy the last sign of her cultural antecedents and, like the chimeran graft, send down new roots, albeit ones watered with blood.

Migration is required in *The Satanic Verses* and *Shalimar the Clown* as the only response that permits the individual's survival of the conditions of the uninhabitable home, but the novels' paths of successful migrancy diverge. Chamcha and Kashmira respond to the challenge of migration with radically differing embraces of their roots. Chamcha's migrancy follows a path of geographic and cultural return, thereby inscribing a wholehearted and sustained embrace, and Kashmira's only partial and temporary embrace ends in the sending down of new roots in new ground. The crucial difference between the migrants' responses, then, is that of the mode of acknowledging their roots. Chamcha's return in *The Satanic Verses* is a validation of the individual subject's cultural roots, an attendance to origins that entails a performance of marginality at the dominant centre and, in turn, a tension that must be resolved. Chamcha's return to India is thus a resolution of the threat of cultural subversion via his abandonment of the centre, motivated by his recognition of its greater degree of uninhabitability. This is not to say, however, that Kashmira's inhabitation of the centre constitutes a destabilizing move. The limits of her acknowledgement of her cultural antecedents is given in her impending execution of Shalimar, an act of self-defense and survival that marks her re-rootedness. Hers is not a performance of marginality at the dominant centre but its rejection, and, consequently, an affirmation of the limited frame of



possibility that ten Kortenaar identifies in *The Satanic Verses*: the migrant's mimicry lacks the possibility of a mocking edge.

*Shalimar the Clown*, which defines the successful migrant's scope of attendance to his or her cultural roots by explicating the alternative implied in *The Satanic Verses*, seems to foreclose the possibility of a transgressive performance of marginal identity within the dominant centre. If, as Morey suggests, the problem of the novel's migrant protagonists is that they "appear to be suffering from some kind of nostalgic melancholia" as a function of "the problems they have in ridding themselves of the burdens of their pasts" (224), Kashmira's final act is a cathartic resolution. That is, the migrant's struggle in the novel is resolved through a process of re-rooting that entails an expurgation of the past in favour of the present: the endpoint of the path of migration is not achieved by maintaining a balance of new and traditional cultural roots but through consistent attendance to the new and gradual erasure of the old. In this light, Kashmira's path of migrancy is a failure of syncretism consistent with that of her grandfather, Pandit Pyarelal Kaul, one that entails the triumph of violence over cultural amalgamation. Moreover, Kashmira's is, too, a failure equivalent to Chamcha's in *The Satanic Verses*. Despite her occupation of the dominant centre, and like Chamcha's exile to the margins, Kashmira's path does not end in even minor transformation of the social, cultural, or political system but, at best, only the migrant figure herself.

### **Overlooking Kashmira: the Influence of the Rushdie Persona**

The Rushdie persona entails a specific idea of migrancy, one of elitism, privilege, and agency, and it occludes the entirely contrasting experiences of the vast majority of migrants. The problem, as I see it, is that the persona exemplifies a specific idea of migrancy that

influences the interpretation of *Shalimar the Clown*. The interplay between the persona and Rushdie's protagonists occludes fictive accounts of migrancy that are precisely not those of the privileged, with the consequence that much of the novel's potential is lost with regard to the thinking of migrancy. This is, I think, manifest in an oversight in popular reviews and scholarly analyses of the novel: there is very little consideration of Kashmira in the extant literature, despite her narrative significance. The naming of the novel's opening and closing sections – "India" and "Kashmira," respectively – marks the story as one of individual character development, and her narrative enclosures of the stories of her father, mother, and should-have-been father and would-be assassin, emphasize her centrality.

One reason for Kashmira's diminished presence in published academic work might be the established practice of reading Rushdie's characters as case studies in, if not necessarily allegories of, the effects of political conflicts on a personal scale, one that plays out in analyses of Shalimar and Max. Morey, for example, writes that the narrative is presented "through the experiences of a set of characters from the fictional village of Pachigam, most notably Shalimar, the Muslim tightrope walker with the village's entertainment troop, and Boonyi, the beautiful Hindu dancer" (216), but relatively little is said about the latter. Morey may also overlook Max here, but Anker compensates by noting that "Shalimar's rival and nemesis Max Ophuls" is "the other of the novel's two protagonists" (151), the first being, presumably, the eponymous Shalimar, whom Siddiqi identifies as "the central character in the novel" (295). And while Morton warns against overlooking "the significance of Boonyi and Ophuls' daughter Kashmira" (347), his own response to that warning is limited: for Morton, Kashmira is "not only a sign of Max Ophuls' sexual relationship with Boonyi; she is also a symbol of American imperialism in South

Asia” (347). Kashmira thus serves to represent aspects of Max’s personal and professional lives, and she is, at best, a trace effect of the workings of dominant masculinity.

However, another reason for overlooking Kashmira might be the influence of the Rushdie persona, the qualities of which more clearly resonate with the novel’s male, rather than female, migrant protagonists. Despite similarities between the novel’s account of Kashmira’s migration from England to L.A. and accounts of Rushdie’s lived migrations from India to Pakistan, England, and New York, the persona’s overwhelming masculinity supports closer identification with the novel’s male protagonists. And of Shalimar and Max, the latter much more closely resembles the persona than the psychopathic killer whose migratory pattern is determined entirely by the path he must follow in order to complete his revenge. Anker writes that “[b]ecause Max is a self-transforming, exiled figure for the public artist, the novel invites its readers to interpret him as a proxy for Rushdie himself” (158), but there are, too, other common elements between them. Max, like the Rushdie persona, is defined by his dominant masculinity, social and material elitism, tempered moral authority, and negotiations of violent contexts, as well as his marital infidelities and embrace of fatherhood. Moreover, younger Max, like younger Rushdie, is, as Morton notes, “a liberal intellectual” and “a liberal internationalist” (343) while Older Max is more politically conservative, thus performing a similar political shift regularly attributed to Rushdie<sup>41</sup>. Max’s successive political roles are as a French Resistance fighter, American ambassador to India, and “occult servant of American geopolitical interest” (*Shalimar* 335); he is, in the end, a defender of human liberty on whose hands there is “a quantity of the world’s visible and invisible blood” (*Shalimar* 335), and whose moral authority is thus tempered by the means of his liberal

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Mondal, p. 173.

political goals. Here, the similarities between Max and the persona exceed points of resonance, with the implication that other, differing accounts of successful migrancy might be overlooked, including, again, Kashmira's.

There may, then, be potential in the reading of Kashmira for restoring some of the novel's scope of possibility of what it means to be migrant. Kashmira may be, like Max and the Rushdie persona, a figure of social and material privilege, but, given the novel's consistent linking of violence and gender, the mode of Kashmira's survival might subvert its account of dominant masculinity. Siddiqi, in explaining Shalimar's motive for violent revenge as the defense of his masculine honour, writes, "[t]o the extent that Rushdie's own account of the violence in the novel has any political dimension, it is ... a gendered politics of wounded masculinity" (303). There is, certainly, a great deal of textual evidence to support Siddiqi's contention, even beyond Shalimar's own violent behaviours. In one of the clearest examples of the novel's sexual politics, Shalimar's mother barely evades death at the hands of religious insurgents intent on enforcing gender-specific codes of behaviour; she is raped and killed during the Indian army's destruction of Pachigam, the motivation for which stems largely from Boonyi's rejection of the army commander's sexual advances. The events may be condemned, but they nonetheless emphasize the sexual objectification of women that persists throughout the novel, and which finds very little exception.

Kashmira's deployments of violence, though, might violate the principle that Siddiqi identifies. The exceptionally beautiful and intelligent Kashmira is, above all else, a fighter: she is verbally combative in challenging Max, rebuffing would-be lovers, and condemning Shalimar, and, finally, physically combative in resuming her martial arts training after Max's death and using her skills of archery as an opportune means of revenge against her parents'

murderer. Her violent behaviours might, then, be read as reversals of the gendered politics of “wounded masculinity,” especially in light of her similar reversals in her personal relationships. Even before breaking off her relationship with Yuvraj Singh, Kashmira responds to his hurt, adoring request that she “mind his absences more” by telling him, “‘I’m the guy ... and you, my dear, are the girl’” (392). However, the position marked by Kashmira’s flippant rejoinder is, at best, a partial and temporary borrowing of male power, one that contrasts her status as a sexualized object, emphasized during a training session with her boxing coach, Jimmy Fish. As the training session becomes unusually aggressive, Fish calls a time-out and reminds Kashmira of the disparity in their abilities and strengths: “‘Listen,’ he said. ‘You’re a beautiful lady, you don’t want me to damage anything you can’t fix’” (337). When Kashmira ignores the reminder, Fish adopts a paternal tone and elaborates:

“You’re not paying attention,” he said ... “Let me put the pads back on my hands and you can get yourself a great workout, tone that body you got there, that’s like a national treasure. You work with what God gave you and stop dreaming. You think I’m fighting you here? Baby, you can’t fight me. You fight me, you’re dead. Pay attention now. This is serious.” (337)

What is serious, apparently, is the limit of Kashmira’s ability to deploy violence against a male opponent, one who can damage or destroy the defining element of his female opponent: her physical beauty. Boxing, for Jimmy, is a profession and, as the threats reveal, a form of violence with devastating effects; for Kashmira, it is a hobby that permits her self-maintenance as a worthy object of the heteronormative gaze.

It is tempting, however, to read Kashmira as enacting at least a partial subversion of the dominant masculine qualities shared by Max and the Rushdie persona. Kashmira is a rare female protagonist in Rushdie's fiction and, even more unusual, a character whose reversals of gendered norms of behaviour seem to be directed at, rather than permitted by, male characters. However, as becomes clear in both the training session with Fish and the novel's final scene, in which Kashmira prepares to shoot Shalimar with an arrow, the book's gender politics are as devoid of contestatory substance as its protagonists' performances of religious identity. In the end, and like Fish, Shalimar, the professional killer, is unable to fully express his potential for violence against his amateur opponent – in this case, due to his night-blindness and Kashmira's night-vision goggles – with the implication that, in a fair fight, Kashmira wouldn't stand a chance. The disjunction here parallels that between the migrancies of Kashmira and the Rushdie persona, with the implication holding for both: Kashmira is less an exemplar of female autonomy than a strategic foil for male agency. The discrepancies between Kashmira's and the persona's migrancy, then, do not permit a broader space for conceiving of the contemporary, marginalized, postcolonial migrant because they are resolved through the novel's politics of gender.

Nonetheless, even if the reading of Kashmira's appropriation of violence as a subversion of dominant masculinity identity returns an affirmation of the gendered politics that support the novel's consistent, sexual objectification of its female characters, it remains important to examine this specific failure of the narrative. Kashmira's performance of dominant masculinity may not be a point of distinction between her migrancy and the persona's, and it may not be directly productive in restoring some of the novel's scope of possibility in the thinking of migrancy, but it does define a space for critical engagement.

*Shalimar the Clown* is open to the same criticism Spivak makes of *The Satanic Verses* – that is, it is a failure of the representation of women<sup>42</sup>, and it is also open to the productive response that is implicit in the recognition of such a failure: in this case, that the novel's account of successful migrancy is a gendered one that excludes the female subject. Further, because Kashmira's narrative of migrancy has been overlooked at least partially due to the influence of the Rushdie persona, reading her narrative, even as a particular kind of failure, offers an opportunity for reading against the interplay between the persona and Rushdie's protagonists.

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<sup>42</sup> In Chapter 1, I discuss the importance of Spivak's criticism to this study.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the interplay between the Rushdie persona and the protagonists of Rushdie's novels, the scope of possibility regarding both the themes and tropes of migrancy and hybridity is limited. Further, an ontological hierarchy is established that clearly suggests some ways of being migrant and hybrid in the contemporary, globalized world are better than others. In order to challenge this hierarchy, I emphasize protagonists who differ recognizably from the persona, as I have done in Chapters 4 and 5 via analyses of Mogor dell'Amore and Kashmira Ophuls in, respectively, *The Enchantress of Florence* and *Shalimar the Clown*. Focusing on those characters who recognizably differ from the persona is useful for thinking through issues of identity in Rushdie's fiction in that such readings establish a productive tension that works to challenge both the implied hierarchy of identity often supported in Rushdie's work, and, ultimately, to undermine the persona's influence in guiding the readings of Rushdie's fiction. I do not want to suggest, however, that there is an easy, either-or binarism for theorizing migrancy and hybridity. That is, I think it is productive to counterpose Max with Kashmira and Akbar with Mogor as examples of specific opportunities for responding to the persona's influence on the reading of hybridity and migrancy in Rushdie's postcolonial fictions. However, I do not want to imply that these binarisms are comprehensive and that being a migrant or hybrid subject means being like either Max or Kashmira, or Akbar or Mogor. Rather, I want to emphasize a broader scope of possibility: there are not simply two paths or modes but many, both in-between and beyond the positions defined by the protagonists of Rushdie's novels.

In this Conclusion, then, I argue for a general strategy of response to the Rushdie persona's influence in Rushdie's fiction and in reworkings of that fiction for the big screen.



In doing so, I first briefly return to *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence* to emphasize their general cautions against reductive, singular narratives, warnings that I extend to the persona's stabilizing influence with regard to theorizations of identity in Rushdie's novels. *Shalimar the Clown*'s clarification of the problems of narrow, singular accounts of identity can extend as a warning against the influence of the Rushdie persona itself in contributing to a dominant narrative of how to survive and succeed as a contemporary hybrid, migrant subject. Similarly, *The Enchantress of Florence*'s warnings against the narrator's influence over misreadings and misconceptions of history as an accurate record of events can extend against the persona itself, which is revealed as an unreliable figure of authority. Second, I turn to the filmic adaptation of *Midnight's Children* (Mehta 2012) to argue for another mode of engagement with Rushdie's work that requires a continuous questioning of the Rushdie persona in pursuit of an open-ended, critical engagement that does not reduce to facile theorizations of identity based on the experience of the author himself. To this end, I analyze the voice-over narration in the film and conclude that it offers an opportunity for the reader to respond to the persona and, thereby, restore some of the potential of Rushdie's fiction to theorize and represent different possibilities of identity for the hybrid and/or migrant subject.

### **A Caution against Reductive Narration: Max Ophuls in *Shalimar the Clown***

In *Shalimar the Clown*, Max Ophuls is a complex figure, a dramatized hero to his public audiences and a flawed, variously repentant figure to his private ones, particularly his wife, mistress and daughter. The complex, often competing narratives of Max's identity, however, are not always apparent to those around him. Indeed, several of the defining events

of Max's life are the results of only partial accounts of his lived experience: his persecution during the Second World War is the result of a singular emphasis on his Judaism; his banishment from India is the result of focusing on his scandalous affair with Boonyi and ignoring his diplomatic successes; and his guardianship of Kashmira is granted because his social standing and material resources trump his history of abandoning his wife and child. As these examples show, the public, political elements of Max's identity consistently overcome the private and the personal. It is, though, Max's murder that best exemplifies the dangerous limits of reductive, politically based narratives of identity. Max, "the Resistance hero, the philosopher prince, the billionaire power-broker" (27) who moves in L.A.'s elite social circles, is persuaded to appear as a guest on a late-night talk show, but, to the host's shock and anger, Max regales the audience not with Hollywood anecdotes but with a polemic against the religiously motivated destruction of Kashmir. At the end of the show's taping, the host supervises the editing of the interview, thereby producing "a greatly abbreviated version" of Max's diatribe that "distorted the ambassador's meaning" (29). The misrepresentation is so severe that Max's lover, Zainab Azam, accuses him of anti-Muslim and pro-Hindu biases sufficient to support a comparison to the political extremes of Leon Trotsky and Michael O'Dwyer<sup>43</sup> (30). In her outrage, Azam rails against Max to Shalimar, going so far as to "[wish] he was dead" (30), and Shalimar, after weeks of waiting for the right moment to kill Max, is only too happy to respond.

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<sup>43</sup> Trotsky was killed in Mexico, presumably on the orders of Joseph Stalin. O'Dwyer was killed in London, in an act of revenge for O'Dwyer's endorsement of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre.

Max's murder confirms the consequences of a principle of identity that is theorized throughout the novel: identities are complex and dynamic, and failing to account for these qualities has disastrous consequences. The phrase Max coins about national identity during his ambassadorship from America to India – "*India is chaos making sense*" (25, original italics) – clearly applies to Max himself, but the significant events of his life are grounded in static, rather than dynamic, narratives of his identity. Even if Max should be understood as a figure of chaos making sense, his narrative is nonetheless defined by reductive, fixed accounts of chaos made sense. The present progressive tense of Max's epigram can fail, and Max's death, catalyzed by such a failure, emphasizes the caution in the novel against stable, singular accounts of identity. Here, reading Max as a cautionary figure, one for whom the incomplete, and especially public and political, accounts of his identity have deadly consequences, provides a reminder that any such account is necessarily incomplete, and I extend this caution to the Rushdie persona's effects with regard to representations of hybrid and migrant subjectivities. The persona reinforces limited accounts of the truth of human experience, ones that should be understood as possible but often appear exemplary.

### **A Caution against Authority: the Unreliable Narrator-historian in *The Enchantress of Florence***

A similar warning against the logical sufficiency of any particular narrative is given in the destabilization of the historical narrative in *The Enchantress of Florence*. History, whether that of post-Partition India or 16<sup>th</sup>-century Florence, is consistently presented as entangled and unreliable in Rushdie's fiction, and for many scholars, this presentation of history works to challenge and subvert dominant codes. Fletcher, for example, notes that

Stephen Slemon and Aruna Srivastava separately conclude that *Midnight's Children* “poses an ideological, post-colonial opposition to ... linear, imperialist history” (85), specifically through its magical realism. JoAnn Conrad reaches a similar conclusion about *The Enchantress of Florence*, writing that the narrative is not so much a melding of history and fiction as a “nonlinear and horizontal” (433) presentation of seldom-connected historical simultaneities, including the contemporaneity of the Mughal Empire and medieval Florence. I agree that this juxtaposition is effective in highlighting the inadequacy of the principle of linearity with regard to historical narrative. Moreover, I think that the novel also works to challenge the authority of its narrator-historian and, by extension, the Rushdie persona’s influence.

In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the grounds of the historical record are entirely unstable, both inside the narrative and out. That is, while the novel’s fictive historical record is, like those of Rushdie’s previous novels, fallible and subject to revision by the protagonists, the historical support for the novel is also presented as unreliable. While Bishnupriya Ghosh concludes that “the novel...was a labour of love, twelve years’ worth of reading the fifteenth-century *Baburnama* ... followed by methodical research into the parallel world of sixteenth-century Florence ruled by the infamous Medicis” (21), and Christopher Rollason concludes that Rushdie “[blurs] the fiction/non-fiction divide by listing his historical sources in alphabetical order, over a six-page bibliography which might more aptly grace a straightline academic study” (241), the novel does not celebrate its own historical accuracy. In addition to the research bibliography at the novel’s end, there is a bibliographic *mea culpa*:

## A NOTE

This is not a complete list of the works I consulted. If I have inadvertently omitted any source from which material has been used in the text, I apologize. Any such omissions will be rectified in future editions if I'm notified. (356)

In the appended bibliography, source material might remain inadvertently unacknowledged, but the more significant omissions are the various supplements to the historical record offered within the preceding narrative. For example, the novel includes references to three extra-textual, defamatory accounts, produced by real historians, of the fictional, eponymous enchantress, Qara Kōz, that are not listed in the bibliography and are, presumably, entirely made up. Here, the destabilizing effect is doubled: the refutation of apparently factual, historical source material in favour of more complimentary accounts highlights the fictive quality of the narrative as historical alternative, and the absence of these sources in the bibliography emphasizes the impossibility of determining absolute historical accuracy. Despite the inclusion of bibliographic entries, then, the novel's message is that the historical record is fallible and so, too, is the narrator-historian. This warning against reliable authority can extend as a warning against the Rushdie persona's influence, itself. If the failure of Max's fluidity of identity in *Shalimar the Clown* is a caution against reductive and limited conceptions of identity, one that extends to the influence of the persona in stabilizing particular accounts of what it means to be migrant or hybrid, then the destabilization of the narrator-historian's authority over the narrative as an accurate record of events is a similar warning against the consequences of relying on any specific authority as a figure speaking truth.

Cautions against narrative certainty and authorial reliability are a hallmark of Rushdie's fiction, including with regard to the incorporation of autobiographical detail. Hamilton, in describing Rushdie's fictive adaptation of the story of his mother's first marriage, rendered as an Arabian Nights-style fantasy in *Midnight's Children*, concludes that "Rushdie's books are full of such tricks: time and again, autobiography is re-experienced as fairy tale" (92). Thus, while Rushdie's books may "have a spirit of connection with real life...[r]eaders who try to tease out links between Rushdie's life and Rushdie's fiction are likely to end up feeling teased" (92). Hamilton's word play here, reminiscent of Rushdie's own, works to emphasize the problems of biographical dipping. It also suggests the possibility of reading Rushdie's fiction in a state of engaged indecision: being teased, after all, leaves one in an in-between state of excitement and annoyance in which several possibilities remain equally valid. And while opportunities to feel teased are suggested by *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence*, they are even clearer in the 2012 film adaptation of *Midnight's Children*.

### **The Rushdie Persona Speaks: Voice-over Narration in *Midnight's Children***

The cinematic inspirations<sup>44</sup> of *Midnight's Children* and Rushdie's decades-long commitment to the novel's screen adaptation are well documented<sup>45</sup>. It is, then, somewhat

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<sup>44</sup> Florian Stadler's *Fiction, Film, and Indian Popular Cinema* offers a concise account of the influence of cinema on Rushdie's writing, especially *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the film that inspired Rushdie to write his first short story.

unsurprising that, while Deepa Mehta's directorial hand is clear in the film, including through her vibrant colour scheme and "characteristic hand-held camera work" (Stadtler, *Fiction, Film* 81), Rushdie's influence is even clearer. Rushdie authored the adapted screenplay and also provides the voice-over of the protagonist, Saleem Sinai, that introduces, connects, and supplements the diegesis. This voice-over narration is, I think, a vocalization of the Rushdie persona, and while this characterization may be somewhat determined by the nature of my engagement with Rushdie's work, it is supported by the emphasis on Rushdie's voice-over in reviews of the film and the problems of assigning it to either the on-screen Saleem or the off-screen Rushdie. Reviews of the film variously praise or dismiss Rushdie's extra-diegetic narration, but they all agree in noting its significant presence: as Robbie Collin points out for *The Telegraph*, Rushdie as narrator seems to have more "lines of dialogue than any other character" (n.p.). However, despite what Collin's quantification suggests, Rushdie as narrator is not like any other character in the film. The voice-over is not simply that of Saleem's reflective narration, largely because Rushdie's distinctive, recognizable voice is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with the on-screen Saleem, the nominal protagonist for whom Rushdie is supposedly speaking. Equating the voice-over with Saleem is also made difficult because Saleem does not appear on screen until 36 minutes (in the diegesis) and 32 years (in the plot) have passed, during which Rushdie's voice-over has already intruded ten times. However, the voice also cannot simply be Rushdie's own because to render it as such is to return to problems of authorial intent and biographical dipping, given that the voice-over

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<sup>45</sup> Rushdie himself provides an account of his unsuccessful, pre-Mehta attempts to adapt the novel to the screen in the essay, "Adapting *Midnight's Children*," published in *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002*.

delivers lines adapted from the novel and at least nominally attributed to the fictive narrator. It is, rather, the voice of the Rushdie persona, and as such, it offers an opportunity for a specific kind of critical engagement with the film.

There is some irony to the occlusion of the film's on-screen characters by the Rushdie persona, given that one of the film's dominant themes is identity and that the voice-over is a suturing device for the events of the narrative, but there is, too, a measure of fulfilled expectation in the persona's foregrounding and celebration. It is consistent with the reading of Rushdie's fiction as expressive of his lived experience, and his protagonists as authorial proxies and parodies, and, if this is a failure of the film, it is not an entirely unexpected one. In the film, as in Rushdie's novels, the characters give way to the persona, their multiplicities of language and identity are often overwhelmed by the singular, monolingual, voiced-over of the author-cum-scriptwriter-cum-narrator. It is, though, not only the film's characters who are lost but also several appeals of its content and form. Here, distinguishing the qualities of the film's voice-over permits some clarification of its effects.

In her influential essay, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space," Mary Ann Doane defines several types of extra-diegetic narration, including a documentary-style commentary in which the "disembodied" voice speaks "without mediation to the audience," "establishing a complicity between itself and the spectator," "interpreting the image" and "producing its truth" (42). In Mehta's film, Rushdie's voice-over clearly works in this mode of unconfined commentary, and not only for the film's initial, sustained absence of a body to which the extra-diegetic voice might belong. The voice of the disembodied narrator is that of someone possessed of a knowledge of events well in excess



of any particular character, and who is capable of both enlightening the audience and rendering specific events as fodder for aphoristic generality.

In one sense, Rushdie's voice-over works according to Foucault's principle of thrift, limiting the choices available to the audience: the film's story is precisely and only the one that the persona tells. However, Rushdie's extra-diegetic voice-over might also be understood as an example of what Ashcroft calls "excessive statement" (*On Post-Colonial Futures* 117), here, a recurring, vocalized declarative that works by consistently repeating certain ideas. In this sense, the narrator might be understood as usefully emphasizing particular elements of the film. There are, though, limits in conceiving of the Rushdie persona's scope of influence as falling on a scale between the opposing principles of thrift and excess, especially with regard to Mehta's film. The voiced-over narration of Mehta's film version of *Midnight's Children* seems to hold little promise as a model of reading Rushdie's work against the recuperative grain, as seems evident in the adaptation of the novel's narration to the screen. As Billen points out, one principal difference between the narrative voices of the book and the film is that of affect. In contrast to the novel's despairing ending, in which Saleem anticipates his own death and prophesizes generations of midnight's children "sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes ... unable to live or die in peace" (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 533), "[t]he film concludes contrarily and against fireworks" (Billen n.p.), its last voiced-over line concluding that "'Our lives have been, in spite of everything, acts of love'" (Mehta, *Midnight's Children*). Here, the optimistic revision suggests recuperation, rather than subversion, in its simplistic rendering of the lives of the midnight's children as positive, self-directed expressions of identity rather than constrained marginalizations produced by the systems of the dominant culture. The lives of the

midnight's children are no longer given as the inevitable, devastating consequences of the workings of power or even as cautionary tales; they are, instead, redefined as love stories, occasionally tragic, but, in the end, all complete. The heteroglossia that might expand the scope of the film's postcolonial voices, as it does in the novel, is filtered through the narrator and thereby reduced to a singular meaning provided by the persona. In "producing the truth" of the film's story, then, the voice-over limits the characters to being exactly who the persona says they are, and it also seems to eliminate alternatives of meaning by not merely guiding the diegesis but also stabilizing it.

Another significant difference between the book and the film, however, is that of the extra-diegetic narrator's audience: rather than delivering his voiced-over lines to Padma Mangroli, Saleem's companion and primary audience in the novel, Rushdie speaks directly to the film's spectator<sup>46</sup>. This poses a specific problem for the film. In the novel, Padma's mix of open-mindedness and skepticism permits, rather than occludes, the possibilities of Saleem's magical realist flights of narrative fancy. Despite Saleem's supposedly superior knowledge of storytelling – unlike the well-read narrator, Padma is illiterate – Padma governs the content and form of Saleem's story. With the support of Padma, the earthy and grounded "lotus-goddess of the present" (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 170), Saleem is capable of impressive feats of narrative excess. It is, too, because of Padma's insistence on the "banal chain of cause-and-effect" (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 338) that Saleem's non-

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<sup>46</sup> According to a 2008 *Times of India* article, Nandita Das claims to have been asked by Mehta to play the part of Padma in the film. The role was presumably cut from the script before filming began in 2011 (Dasgupta n.p.).

linear, acausal narrative is permitted sustained consideration by the reader. Without Padma, the film's attempts to replicate the novel's narrative feats are defeated.

Padma's proximity to the narrator is also crucial: at one point in the novel, Padma abandons Saleem, and, after two days have passed without Padma's return, Saleem notes that "[a] balance has been upset; I feel cracks widening down the length of my body; because suddenly I am alone, without my necessary ear, and it isn't enough" (170). When Padma's absence is further prolonged, Saleem reflects that "I feel confused. Padma has not returned ... and in her absence, my certainties are falling apart" (189). Without Padma, Saleem is uncertain, his balance upset, the consequence of which is a paucity of narrative content that manifests as insufficiency of narrative ground. The novel thus anticipates the reductive effects of Padma's absence in its filmic adaptation, and it is clear that, without Padma as narrative foil, Rushdie, as voice-over narrator, has no choice but to follow a linear chronology of Saleem's life. As a result, the film, like Saleem during Padma's temporary abandonment of him, must "become reconciled to the narrow one-dimensionality of a straight line" (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 170). In the novel, it is only on Padma's return to Saleem that narrative disorder is reinstated; given Padma's permanent absence in the screen version, the film provides no such opportunity for recovery. In contrast to the narrow, definitive story presented by the film's omniscient commentator, the version of events given by the novel's narrator ranges from the verifiable to the wildly speculative and even the historically inaccurate. In an interview with T. Vijay Kumar, Rushdie responds to a question about the novel's unreliable narrator by emphasizing Saleem's partiality: "Saleem's ... version is just one version. And it is, like any version, occasionally suspect. I thought by creating a tension between the narrative voice and the form of the book I would be able to

prevent the novel from being read as a kind of attempt to be an oracle” (35). The statement of authorial intent notwithstanding, the tension produced by the narrator’s unreliability is an important element of the novel. The productive tension that arises between the novel and the reader, and that is largely permitted by the interplay between Padma and Saleem, however, seems to be lost in the film and turns the persona as narrator into a type of oracle.

The loss of Padma may not be resolved directly by the film but the extra-diegetic narration suggests a resolution by putting the audience in Padma’s place. Like Saleem’s metafictional intrusions in the novel, in which he directly addresses the reader rather than Padma, Rushdie’s voice-over narration of the film demands a response from the audience, the mode of which can certainly be understood as teasing. In inscribing Padma’s absence absolutely, the film allows the viewer the possibility of occupying her roles as skeptic and support, and, as a result, not merely deciding what to accept, challenge, and reject among the on-screen events but also negotiating meanings that exceed the diegesis.

### **Return, and Constant Imagining**

“You want to know about it? Here’s everything. There’s nothing else to say.” – Rushdie describes *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* as the definitive account of the Affair (Billen, n.p.)

We are constantly imagining into being the world in which we live. – Rushdie qtd. in Eugenides 37

If *Joseph Anton* is, as Rushdie suggests in an interview given to Andrew Billen, the last word on the Affair, the word itself seems to be “return.” In addition to being a

celebration of Rushdie's survival and, thus, a return from a life of hiding and police protection to unsupervised freedom, *Joseph Anton*'s conclusion is an affirmation of a return to Rushdie's storytelling role "in the universe of once upon a time, of *kan ma kan*, it was so and it was not so" (630), one that Rushdie is at pains to call attention to throughout the memoir. Rushdie may have produced several works of fiction and non-fiction during this period but its end, signalled by the official withdrawal of British police protection, offers a promise, tinted by nostalgia for his pre-Affair life, of better working conditions for the writer and, presumably, of better work to come<sup>47</sup>. In this light, *Joseph Anton*'s story of return mirrors the narrative arcs of many of Rushdie's protagonists: Gibreel Farishta's journey home (*The Satanic Verses*), Saleem Sinai's (*Midnight's Children*) and Kashmira Ophuls' returns to family (*Shalimar the Clown*) and Emperor Akbar's re-affirmation of the governing principles of his Empire (*The Enchantress of Florence*). But as with so many other elements of Rushdie's work, their narratives of return are far from singular and reliable, and the return suggested in *Joseph Anton* is no exception.

Despite Rushdie's claim that *Joseph Anton* is the final word in a complex narrative about a singularly complex figure, the constant imagining of the world in which we live includes both the Affair and the figure at its centre. There will, in short, be more to say about Rushdie and his work, both previous and to come, and much of what will be said will both contribute to and be informed by the Rushdie persona. Rushdie's unique and significant

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<sup>47</sup> In recent interviews, Rushdie has several times mentioned his work in TV screenwriting and interest in other big-screen adaptations of his books, including *Joseph Anton*. In addition, Rushdie's forthcoming novel, *Two Years, Eight Months, and Twenty-Eight Days*, will be published in September 2015.

cultural standing is as much a consequence of his representations in the world beyond his written work as it is of that work itself, and, after the Affair, it may never be possible to liberate the persona from its singular association with the material conditions of his lived experience. It may, too, be impossible to liberate Rushdie's fiction from the influence of the persona. The interplay between the persona and the protagonists of Rushdie's fiction is, to some degree, recursive: the identification of authorial proxies and mouthpieces in the novels contributes to the construction of the persona which, in turn, supports further such identifications. One way out of this recursive interplay is for the reader to not only identify the persona but also question its influence.

I have argued that the Rushdie persona and Rushdie's recent fiction work to educate the reader, to define ways of being a contemporary hybrid and migrant subject that are likely to result in not only survival but also success. Critically engaging with Rushdie's fiction via the persona, however, might entail a dialogic relationship rather than a pedagogical one. To this end, it is useful to be aware of the persona's conditions of production, including its varied discursive streams, and to affirm the persona's qualities, both in order to recognize the similarities and differences between the persona and Rushdie's protagonists and to define a storyteller beyond the text who may be questioned in order to expand the story's possibilities of meaning. The importance of doing this is not limited to a responsibility to Rushdie himself, although it should be remembered that one of the persona's defining qualities is the living, material body of the author. It is crucial to remember that critically engaging with the fiction via the persona does not mean engaging with Rushdie himself. The reader in Padma's role will engage with Rushdie's novels with a recognition that both the persona and its protagonists are, like the celebrated and satirized nation in which they are often grounded,

examples of “chaos making sense,” and an understanding that the reader’s role is crucial in maintaining the instability of that phrase’s present participle. Reading Rushdie’s work not merely to name its failures but to describe its absences and, therefore, its other possibilities, goes some way to restoring its transformative potential. It is, then, Padma’s role that I have embraced throughout this study in order to consider the persona’s impact on readings of Rushdie’s fiction and to suggest possibilities for re-reading that fiction’s hybrid and migrant subjectivities. The Rushdie reader who can fulfill Padma’s role according to the open-minded insistence of its original occupant will be capable of imagining possibilities of identity far in excess of their recuperation.

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