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# **ORIENTATIONS:**

**The Positions and Aesthetics of Contemporary Migrant Fiction**

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A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English of  
the University of Dublin, Trinity College,  
In Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor in Philosophy.

**October 1999.**

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## SUMMARY

Touching on the work of David Dabydeen, Caryl Phillips, Fred D'Aguiar, Jamaica Kincaid, Michael Ondaatje, Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi I will examine, in this thesis, the political, aesthetic and historical orientation of contemporary migrant writing. This thesis argues that the contemporary migrant writer is an impassioned historian and theorist of the contemporary whose fiction attempts to rescue migrant history from the disorientating, de-historicised blur of a post-imperial present. The fictions of these South Asian and Caribbean writers will be read essentially as orientating fictions that attempt to re-orientate the post-imperial present historically, fictions that attempt to place the contemporary literary migrant on a historical map that explodes out of and reflects on the colonial. These fictions also read against the grand narrative of Western history by reading the migrant, not as a figure who evolved out of the originary ideology of national belonging but as a figure whose ancestry is founded on a history of displacement and migrant passage. In this thesis I aim to demonstrate how these writers read the migrant as a transitory, transformed figure by historicising, in their fictions, the transition from native to migrant, and by identifying and voicing post-imperial continuities and discontinuities in the contemporary. In this way, I will contend, these writers simultaneously reclaim a migrant history and define their contemporary migrant position in the post-imperium.

The migrant writers represented in this thesis will be read in relation to their historical orientation within a post-imperial world, but specifically in relation to post-imperial England. All of these fictions confront post-imperial England either as a place or as an idea born out of an anglicising colonial education and assert the migrant's power of self-representation in order to demythologise and re-historicise post-imperial England from a migrant, trans-national, globalised perspective.

The contemporary migrant writer's orientation to this post-imperium is partially explained, in this thesis, in relation to his or her identification with the persona of the 'literary migrant'. This figure of the literary migrant, I argue, has appropriated migration and its disorientations as a central thematic concern in their

fiction in order to formulate and develop a post-imperial 'migrant aesthetic'. This aesthetic, evolving out of an identification with aspects of Euro-American Modernism and out of a international and syncretic expatriate tradition offers a disillusioned and de-mythologising 'outsider' perspective on the post-imperium. Exploring, through metaphorical figures of amorphousness, decay and explosive energy and through grotesque, picaresque, and wanderingly digressive narrative structures the literary migrant represents the post-imperial contemporary as a disorientating, chaotic and volatile historical period, a period that requires re-orientating, re-historicing migrant readings.

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## Introduction

In this thesis I will explore the politics and poetics of contemporary migrant fiction.<sup>1</sup> Ranging across readings of writers from the Caribbean diaspora like David Dabydeen, Caryl Phillips, Fred D'Aguiar, and Jamaica Kincaid through the 'migrant/settler' perspective of Michael Ondaatje, the Indo-Anglian Salman Rushdie, and the 'post-migrant' Hanif Kureishi, I intend to examine writers whose orientation to England in some way defines their work, and who offer a unique contemporary 'migrant' perspective on the dimensions of post-colonial identity, history and writing. As we are living in an age defined by migration and in the light of the increasingly complex dialogues East and West on the ambiguous and indeterminate status of the migrant writer my thesis will aim, in this way, to respond to the need for a consideration of the work of migrant writers who illuminate the complex and often contradictory nature of the migrant's orientations to the notion of home, history, their adopted countries and to their own roles and functions as 'literary' migrants.

My use of the word 'orientation' has a number of related connotations in this study. The Oxford English Dictionary describes the verb 'orient' in terms of placing or arranging (anything) 'so as to face the east' or 'relative to the point of the compass' (Simpson 913). It is this process of claiming a position, a geographical orientation to one's history and education, that defines the project of the migrant writers discussed in this thesis. This positioning is also psychological and artistic; it is also about representing and arranging histories and 'bringing' histories into 'defined relations' to each other. It is a project that involves finding out 'where one is' situated in relation to the contemporary (931). This project of 'orientating' evolves out of a sense that the diasporically unstable post-colonial world is a culturally, historically and sociologically disorientating place to write from. The underlying tension in all of the migrant fiction featured in this study is between order and chaos, the struggle between the chaotic historical inheritance of an unmoored post-independence and migrant generation and that generation's struggle to define a personal, specific sense of history, place and identity. By paying close attention to the underlying poetics or aesthetics of the contemporary migrant writer, the metaphors and models migrant fiction uses to describe the 'contemporary' and historicise the past, I will illustrate how migrant fiction affords a valuable site in which to voice doubts and



questions regarding the representation of post-diasporic and post-imperial reality.

An important aspect of the migrant's unique perspective or position in relation to post-colonial reality, under review in this study, is their specific historical or time-orientation. In this thesis the migrant will be read as a figure that offers a uniquely historical route into comprehending contemporary post-colonial reality. The migrant fiction examined in this study argues that there is a need to find ways to 'write' history without placing history at a remove. This thesis reads the migrant as a historian who conceives of history as an integral part of our contemporary world. The migrant passages, crossings and journeys described in this study provide models for a 'continuous' map of post-imperial history, a historical map that explodes out of and reflects on the colonial. This thesis attempts to fulfil the need for a rigorous assessment of writers who offer a mobile and unsettled historical perspective on the ruins of Empire and the nation state, specifically, in this case, writers whose work grapples with the notion, from various distances and orientations, of a post-colonial 'English' ethnicity. This thesis will also make a timely intervention into debates on the agency and mobility of the contemporary migrant writer, the problems involved in 'voicing' migrant experience, and the status and loyalties of that seemingly uncommitted educated hybrid, the literary migrant. However, before I proceed, in order to 'orientate' the arguments and readings of this thesis I will, firstly, set out the specific boundaries of the argument by looking at the contexts of this study and the debates surrounding it.

### **Contexts and Debates**

This study is focused primarily on the historically and culturally 'disorientated' writing of second-generation South Asian and Caribbean migrant writers.<sup>2</sup> In order to contextualise the fiction of this 'disorientated' generation I will, briefly, explore how and why second-generation migrant writers, in their historical, geographic and cultural orientation in the 1980s and the 1990s, are different from and similar to their immediate post-war migrant forbears. In his essay 'The Occasion for Speaking' from his book, The Pleasures of Exile (1960), the Caribbean novelist George Lamming outlines some of the reasons his generation of Caribbean writers, such as Sam Selvon, Andrew Salkey and V. S. Naipaul, chose to migrate.<sup>3</sup> For many the journey to England was a search for recognition: 'These

men had to leave if they were going to function as writers, since books, in that particular colonial conception of literature, were not - meaning, too, are not supposed to be - written by natives' (14). Lamming presents the dilemma as an artistic one, but also as a choice between a 'provincial' native perspective and a privileged migrant perspective; 'To be a serious writer with opportunities for publication and recognition meant leaving the colonies, which were felt to be provincial and unsupportive of local arts' (6). The journey out of the colony is inspired by ambition, but also by the desire to acquire the distance and authority that a 'migrant' orientation to reality could provide. It is clear that this rite of passage from native to migrant, and from the provincial to the privileged provides a rough blueprint for the journeys contemporary migrant writers depict. The educated migrants of David Dabydeen's novels The Intended (1991) and Disappearance (1993), Salman Rushdie's Saladin Chamcha, Michael Ondaatje's Kirpal Singh and Hanif Kureishi's Karim Amir all embody the same mixed up ambition and self-contempt that Lamming describes.

However, there are important differences too. It is apparent that the second-generation migrant's orientation to history and the contemporary is quite different from that of their post-war and post-independence migrant predecessors. If the 1950s and 1960s generation set off as pioneers, explorers and adventurers, this contemporary generation, from the outset, is more reflective and concerned with following back, remembering and tracing the apocryphal in their histories. Part of this has to do with this generation's passage through the politicised 1970s; through witnessing the growth of Black power movements, and through events like the 1971 Immigration Bill and the 1980s riots at Brixton and Toxteth, events which re-shaped a literary and academic generation's perspective on migrant politics and history, and focused the decolonising project of their fictions. It is clear from the writings in this study that the second-generation migrant writer's sense of their migrant identity has gathered polemical and historical substance in the intervening years, and alongside this there has grown an awareness and a historicising curiosity in, a distinct native other. In the case of Salman Rushdie and of less polemical writers like Ondaatje and Kureishi there is even a sense of a developed migrant aesthetic. The first generation's interest in exploring an exile's sense of disorientated nostalgia has grown, over the years, into a more politically ambitious project to revisit, represent and recover the history of the migrant, to place the migrant in history. If the first generation were caught up in a

process of exploration and nostalgia, and with the excitement and disappointments of England, the second generation had acquired the sufficient temporal and psychological distance and the political know-how, to need to explain themselves to themselves. They became historical novelists as the inaugural moments of their historical beings, declarations of independence and pioneer crossings, came to be as mythical, mysterious and clouded as England had been to previous migrant generations. The expected orientation that did not occur for previous generations in England has led to a disorientated contemporary migrant fiction concerned primarily with history, and with the project of making sense of an history-bleached English present.

There is also the sense that this second-generation writes from a different literary climate from the 1950s and 1960s. With the growth of the post-colonial writing as a topic within universities, the development of post-colonial periodicals like Wasafiri, Ariel and Kunapipi and the progressive celebration and canonisation of migrant writers such as Rushdie, Ondaatje, D'Aguiar and Phillips through awards like the Booker prize, the Commonwealth prize and the Whitbread First novel award, the role of the literary migrant has grown in substance and stature. Situated in what Vinay Dharwadler calls the contemporary "'Babel-like" international market-place' (71) of the metropolis, migrant writing has consequently become more globalised in its perspectives. However, this thesis argues that the literary migrant, as a result of this new, elevated orientation in a rapidly growing, complex, and internationalised post-imperial world-culture has also become more self-conscious and self-reflexive, intent on both representing the chaos of contemporary international culture and in orientating and explaining, historically, the migrant's place in this chaos. For instance, D'Aguiar's self-reflexive slave narrative Feeding the Ghosts (1997), enacts and thematises the difficult process of creating an unauthorised, de-centred 'slaves' book'. The novel, set in the international zone of the sea, offers a model of an attempt to draw a specific, migrant history out of the chaos of a de-historicised post-imperial present.

How this disorientated second-generation writes about, around and revises the colonial and post-colonial ethnic traces of 'Englishness' in their identity is central to this study. Although England retains a powerful mythic and obviously linguistic, presence in these writers' fictions, England is no longer the map-central 'Headquarters' (Occasion

13) that Lamming described. The writers of this study have what might be called a 'globalised' perspective of England. Bruce King has pointed out that 'Whereas earlier diasporas felt uprooted ... there are now diasporas that are rooted both here and there' (17). This shift in perspective is reflected in the unsettled orientation to England of many of the writers featured in this thesis. For instance, Phillips, Ondaatje and Kincaid all write about England from shifting ideological and geographical distances. Whether it is written outside England, or at an ideological or historical distance from the post-imperium, the fiction featured in this study is in various ways, disillusioned or disassociated with the idea of England. Englishness is read by the literary migrant as an inescapable but malleable educational inheritance that must be confronted and subordinated to a migrant aesthetic. One of the aims of this thesis is to emphasise how this struggle against an English anglicising education depicted in these writers' fiction is the struggle to disentangle oneself from that colonial 'class of persons', described in Macaulay's 'Minute on Indian Education', that are native 'in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect' (430). The educated migrant writer's fractured, distanced and critical orientation to England is, in this respect, testament to his or her uncommitted outsider, post-imperial and anti-colonial perspective on English mores and manners. Eschewing Macaulay's ideological neo-colonial continuum these writers represent an outsider's culturally contaminated post-imperial version of England.

In this thesis I will also be arguing that the fiction of these contemporary migrant writers is informed by an awareness of their status as cultural anomalies or outsiders. Much of this fiction explores directly or implicitly the problems and contradictions of writing from the contentious, ambiguous post-imperial position of the 'literary migrant'. In fact the aesthetics of the literary migrant is clearly formed in disorientated response to the post-imperial world and the migrant experience. Considering the prevalence of a disorientated, outsider perspective amongst these writers it is unsurprising that almost all of them claim an allegiance to a Modernist aesthetic. The artistic loyalties and obsessions created by an 'English' education are clearly a determining factor in shaping contemporary migrant writing, but it is the revolutionary anti-linear, fractured and symbolic perspectives of Modernism that the contemporary migrant writer applies to their post-imperial canvas. Modernism is the chosen aesthetic of these writers for various reasons. Migrants' post-imperial re-

appropriation of Modernism often implies a re-contextualisation of its aesthetic and historical meanings. In the hands of the contemporary migrant writing the aesthetic of the end of Western civilisation becomes an aesthetic loaded with a sense of explosive beginnings, expressive of the burgeoning outburst of migrant writing of the dissolving post-war Empires of the West. This writing's Modernist perspective constitutes a rebellion against colonial realism and colonial history, two symbiotic, inseparable fictions. Modernism is frequently the guiding aesthetic behind these migrant writers approach to storytelling history. It proves to be an aesthetic that is ideally suited to the migrant writer's approach to remembering, that respects the interwoven fabric of the migrant's polyphonic version of history. Modernism is also claimed as a syncretic, international, and cosmopolitan aesthetic; an aesthetic that, as Raymond Williams argues in his essay 'Modernism and the Metropolis,' is historically formed out of exile 'within the changing, cultural milieu of the metropolis' (45). Modernism is claimed as an aesthetic based around the continual, cultural transit of ideas and texts, and against the idea of any definitive settlement into national or ideological verities. In this respect Modernism is claimed as an outsider aesthetic, reflective of the literary migrant's chosen peripheral orientation to both migrant communities and metropolitan culture. For writers, as various as Dabydeen, Ondaatje and Kureishi Modernism provides a model for de-centered, interwoven narrative structures, built up out of networks of unofficial stories and voices. The grotesque, for example is an expression of Rushdie's brand of post-colonial Modernism. It enables his mapping of the post-imperial subject and world as self-divided and disturbing, a disorientating amalgam of scattered histories.

This thesis's concern with the migrant's poetical and political orientation is prompted somewhat by how the migrant has been represented and historicised by contemporary metropolitan and anti-colonial theorists. I shall be attempting to move beyond the native-centered approach that defines Marxist and anti-colonial readings of the migrant. I shall also attempt to move beyond the work of theorists like Homi K. Bhabha, whose highly influential theories of 'hybridity', largely built out of his theories of the colonised native as a represented creature or a figure locked in a dialectic with the coloniser and who resists power through 'mimicry', approach the migrant as a neo-native. In many ways Bhabha's reading of the migrant (or of the post-imperial 'hybrid'), and the anti-colonial reading of the migrant, fail to acknowledge or examine the transition

from native to migrant as a transformation.<sup>4</sup> In this thesis I will be reading the literary migrant as a figure that has been transformed through the act of migration. In this respect I am picking up on the transitional-transformative connotation of the word migrate, the connotation that implies a movement 'from one place to another' and 'change' (Klein 502). This changed being, I will argue, is in charge of its own representation and can even be characterised by its self-transforming attempt to write themselves out of that neo-native coloniser/colonised dialectic. The migrant is defined in these writers' work as a figure that moves out of the realm of colonial discourse; in fact, this is read as the essential act that defines their identity as migrant. Most of the writers in this study describe the process of moving beyond this dialectic into a transitional blur, cloud, or into what Rushdie calls a 'vacuum of power' (*Satanic* 5), a place suggestive of both potential deformation and self-defined transformation. Migrancy is conceived as the creation of new discourse that allows for self-representation and counter-colonising. The 'hybrid' resistance strategies that attempt to assume the position of the 'inscrutable, indescribable, unspeakable' (34) are eschewed by the migrant writers in this thesis for the larger project of attempting to speak and define or orientate oneself through the acts of writing and revisionist reading, and even in some cases, as in Rushdie's representation of the grotesque, to articulate post-imperial experience itself as disorientatingly unspeakable.

In other words this thesis's approach is migrant-focused, and is meant to repute analyses of the migrant that devolve out of the opinion that the migrant is merely a culturally and politically deformed species of the native. A notable theoretical instance of this 'migrant as bad native' approach occurs in Aijaz Ahmad's 1992 study *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. In this book Ahmad is directly concerned with defining the politically compromised position of the educated literary or academic Euro-American migrant writer. Ahmad's critique is pitched against the writings of an ambitious cosmopolitan-based intelligentsia, personified in a figure like Edward Said, who, he argues, sees all non-English culture as regional (85). Ahmad believes that many 'radicalized immigrants located in the metropolis university' demonstrate an opportunistic kind of Third Worldism ... and a kind of self-censoring' (86), that the contemporary migrant writer isn't so much incapable of asserting a radical voice, as stifled and complicit in a de-politicising education process. In this thesis I will be arguing that the contemporary migrant writer defines the migrant position through the subject's struggle against the cultural and

ideological inheritances of history and an English education, that the migrant is not so much a turncoat native as a disorientated, historicised and historicising new species. In many ways these migrant fictions anticipate, enact and explore many of the criticisms that have been levelled at them. Abdelrahmen Munif, for instance, has pointed to the danger of becoming exotic (108), a problem that is confronted by both Ondaatje and Kureishi. For the former's entire oeuvre, the problem of writing the political in a lyrical, picturesque prose is a central issue, and for Kureishi the exotic, especially in his novel The Buddha of Suburbia (1990), is continually deflated through farce and parody. Critiques of the literary migrant often involve a critique of the literary migrant's 'aesthetic'.<sup>5</sup> In this thesis, I will attempt to approach the figure of the literary migrant, critically, via their aesthetic, through the medium that essentially expresses their orientation to the post-imperial world culture. This thesis argues that it is through the aesthetic that the literary migrant defines and defends their political orientation and enacts and conceptualises their notions of migrant power.

Central to all the arguments surrounding that Siamese entity, the native/migrant, is this question of power. According to native-centered approaches the migrant, as a result of his/her English education, is no more than a ghoulish, parasitic species of native, a neo-colonial lackey of the metropolis. I would like, in this thesis, to propose a native/migrant approach to the migrant, one that recognises the indissoluble antagonism between the two identities but also the potential power in that antagonism and in the migrant's transformed nature.<sup>6</sup> This model of the migrant finds expression throughout this thesis, most notably, perhaps in Rushdie's image, in The Satanic Verses of the tumbling, intertwined, wrestling figures of Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta; figures that are born out of the act of migration. This dual figure is, in these fictions, a figure that represents power, and is read as a synecdoche of the dissolving, migrant-colonised Empire. These fictions assert the agency of the native-haunted migrant and read that agency as devolving out of the educated literary migrant's new, privileged and historicised orientation to the post-imperial world. For instance, Rushdie, Ondaatje and Kincaid's fiction argues that migration is a process of education that involves transformations, that the native is lifted out of a perpetual colonial dreamtime into a historically widened post-imperial orientation.

This thesis is concerned with examining migrant writing in order to delineate

specific, disparate writers' sense of how 'migrant' and 'native' identity correlate and intermix, how the issue of power and agency, in the context of the literary migrant, becomes about a crisis of self-definition. The migrant writers featured in this study attempt to demonstrate various 'migrant' powers; the power to delineate oneself from one's education, the power to create a new poetic, to criticise, to assume a distance from colonial history, to historicise a post-imperial present, to be continually mobile, socially, geographically and intellectually, and ultimately to embrace choice and change. This attempt at self-definition is essentially a historical project, an attempt to temporally orientate the migrant in history by creating narrative structure, models and metaphors that encompass past, present and future. All of the migrant writers' aesthetics in this study are based on continuous models of history and narrative, from the Caribbean writers' use of the passage metaphor, through Ondaatje's 'wandering/meandering' aesthetic, Rushdie's and Kincaid's notions of a 'fall', to Kureishi's novels of picaresque quest.

It is indisputable that the writers of this study are aware of and express a sense of migrant power. They express, through their fiction, the pressures and energies of a migrant counter-colonisation, the transformative power of the migrant that V. S. Naipaul recognises in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) when he notes how 'immigrants altered our landscape, our population, our mood' (316).<sup>7</sup> Some of the migrant writers discussed in this thesis, such as Ondaatje and Rushdie, I will argue, clearly view the migrant as the subversive vector of post-imperial nationalist decline, a writing position that alters the population and mood of all host countries by actually pulling at the seams of a national identity. The representation of the migrant, in these writers' fiction, is of a potentially explosive, dangerously volatile entity. All of the writers in this study, however, collectively exert another type of power, the power of the outsider artist to criticise and re-formulate views of the post-imperial world.<sup>8</sup> Rushdie and Kureishi achieve this through satire and deflation, Kincaid through an exacting critique of place, whilst Dabydeen, Phillips, D'Aguiar and Ondaatje attempt to view the grand totalising narrative as a meandering network of stories, rumours and voices emanating from the void. All of the migrant writers in this thesis are involved in critical storytelling projects, all of their fictions demonstrate the reflexes of a voice struggling with itself and its origins on the page. All of these writers attempt a detailed and careful chronicling of the historical and cultural genesis of the migrant voice that speaks their fiction. In various ways these writers assert the power of the literary migrant to self-reflexively express an aesthetic,



theorise and find metaphors to describe their unique orientation to the post-imperial world, England and other migrants. The aim of this thesis, however is not to read the migrant/native as 'writing back' in these books so much as representing the native/migrant as a creature who evolves out of a history. The tension and dynamic of these writers' fiction, the simultaneous re-colonisation of migrant 'origins' alongside the progressive de-colonisation of nationalist and colonial origins will be read as the defining pattern of the contemporary migrant narrative.

### **Definitions**

It seems appropriate, in a thesis concerned with the contemporary orientation of the migrant and the theoretical and historical myths surrounding the migrant, to spend some time defining what a migrant is. It is necessary to point out that my use of the term migrant is essentially as a generic term, a term that contains and encompasses other more specific versions of migrant identity. In this respect all of the writers in this study are migrant writers whilst also representing and exploring other more specific migrant identities' such as expatriate, exile, and diasporan. I have already defined the migrant as a transformed being, and as a being who, like Rushdie's mutants, Ondaatje's succession of discarded skins, and Kureishi's trail of roles and disguises, expresses a transitory orientation to post-imperial time and identity. Ultimately, above and beyond any of the possible sub-species of migrants, this thesis will approach migrant identity through this transitory, transformed model of the generic migrant. The migrant will be read as a historically and culturally changeable being, and as a being that must, consequently, be historically contextualised and positioned in every individual reading. In all my chapters the migrant is viewed in this manner, as a historically uprooted and disorientated figure, caught in a limbo between restless, continuous migration and uneasy settling. In other words the migrant is viewed historically, read as a creature formed out of and expressive of the continuum of post-imperial history.

The writers featured in this thesis draw on two distinct histories in formulating their sense of the post-imperial migrant. The first and predominant version of history they draw from is the history of early modern, mercantile colonialism. It was this world system that legitimated the forced migration of Afro-American slaves, and all other later

colonial campaigns, culminating, eventually, in the European scramble for Africa and Asia of the Victorian era. As Robin Cohen has pointed out, early slave and indentureship forms of migrant coincided 'with the period of European expansionism and imperialism and came to an end with the rise of the anti-colonial nationalist movements' (2). The forms of migration that followed the Second World War are read in these fictions, as having evolved out of this colonial system of diaspora and forced migrations.

The second history these writers draw their vision of the contemporary migrant from is the history of the literary migrant. The literary migrant is a figure who evolved out of the practises of earlier cosmopolitan and colonial travellers, out of the European 'trade' world system of ideas and stories. As King has noted, 'Explorers, traders, conquerors, travellers, and pioneers were some of the early European writers' (5). This transcultural interchange in turn created a counter response, 'a parallel literature written by non-European's who came into contact with European expansionism' (5). If the literary aesthetic of the contemporary migrant writer is reflective of the erudition and richness of a cross-pollinating imperial culture, it is also a testament of a colonial native experience and draws its polemical, historicising, and critical perception from a long tradition of native protest throughout colonial history. However, this figure of the literary migrant is also drawn from a European tradition of literary protest, as much as from any colonial history.<sup>9</sup> This history of literary protest is the history of the outsider artist, the self-appointed social pariah who stands outside the frame of society in order to criticise it. This is clearly the inspiration for the outsider orientation adopted by both Rushdie and Kureishi, who respectively adopt Swiftian satire and farce to redress the follies of the post-imperial world. This outsider aesthetic may also be read as the inspiration for Rushdie and Kincaid's adoption of the persona of 'Lucifer' or Dabydeen's evocation of the figure of Caliban, as all are archetypes of rejection, and of angry counter-discourse. The twentieth-century cultural stream of the outsider artist has many syncretic, international sources for the contemporary literary migrant. One instance is the already cited expatriate/exile orientation of the metropolitan Modernist writer, another one, especially important to both Phillips and Kureishi, is the example of that 'bastard of the West', the 'interloper' (23) artist-migrant James Baldwin.<sup>10</sup> In this thesis I will argue that the two histories that converge to form the contemporary migrant writer's outsider orientations are built out of an identification with a colonial and literary history defined by crossings and cross-pollination. Such an

orientation provides the foundation for a de-mythologising, contaminated, alienated aesthetic, an unsettled, questioning aesthetic that is suspicious of all originary myths, national and ethnic, of belonging and affiliation.

There is an increasing danger of losing these senses of the 'migrant' and the 'literary migrant', when they are used beside other sub-species of migrant identity such as exile or expatriate or diasporan. Chelva Kanagayakum has argued that 'Even fundamental definitions of exile, expatriate, refugee, and immigrant have become increasingly problematic' (201). In this thesis the literary Rushdie and Ondaatje will be read as 'expatriate' in temperament, as literary migrants who feed off a Modernist Euro-American literary tradition, who have voluntarily removed themselves 'from their native country' (Simpson 286), and voluntarily assumed the role of ex-native. Rushdie, however, will also be read in the light of the term 'exile', as due to the fatwa, he transformed mid-career from 'expatriate' migrant to 'exile' migrant. Dabydeen, Phillips, D'Aguiar and Kincaid draw their aesthetic out of the continuum of diasporic history and represent the migrant as a metaphoric exile of history. Kureishi will be read as a settled migrant who possesses the expatriate's insouciant, uncommitted orientation to place. This expatriate migrant appropriation of the condition of exile, that is the 'forcible expulsion from one's native condition' (Simpson 285), is, despite the critiques it has been inspired by, primarily a rhetorical, metaphorical strategy that attempts to historicise post-imperial crossings by voicing the untold histories of inaugural diasporic exile that created the contemporary migrant writer.

This thesis will attempt to demonstrate in its readings that the position and aesthetic of the literary migrant derives from the recognition in their work of their part in a migrant history. The migrant orientation of the literary migrant will be read as a historicised position in relation to the post-imperial world, as the expression of an aesthetic, as a perspective on post-imperial 'reality'. There is a distinction to be made here between the words migrate and migrant, a distinction that helps define the spatial and temporal composition of the 'migrant' orientation described in this thesis. To 'migrate' describes a one-way process. It clearly posits a completed journey; 'to leave one place and settle in another' (Hawkins 530). Whereas 'migrant' is descriptive in a wider sense, it carries, as an adjective, a sense of being defined through travel and movement, and of a particular displaced past. To be a migrant

writer implies a continuing journey, and a continuous mobility. The restless migrant orientation expressed in the fiction of these authors is in many ways a renegade one. The ex-native, unsettled migrant is read as the definitive anti-citizen, as the rebel, fallen figure defined against the act of settlement.<sup>11</sup>

The rebel metaphorical connotations of the migrant appropriated by the migrant writer are often based on historically validated uses of the term. For instance, Rushdie and Ondaatje's attempt to define the migrant and the explosive nature of the post-imperial world in terms of nuclear metaphors is clearly indebted to early scientific readings of the word 'migrant', such as J. Walker's inaugural use of the term in his 1899 Introduction to Physical Chemistry in relation to the hydrogen atom (Supplement 210). Dabydeen and Kincaid's interest in the violent symbolism that can be read in the flowers of native soil can also be clearly traced back to early Ecological definitions of the word migrant, such as F. E. Clements' 1905 reading of the word as denoting an 'invading' cross-pollinating plant (Burchfield 210). These readings of the migrant, converge, as we shall see in images and metaphors of encroaching post-war clouds and raining, cross-pollinating seeds to present a portrait of the post-imperial world as haunted and defined by the explosive diaspora of migrants set off by the end of the great Euro-American war and consequent dissolving of Empire. These rebel readings of the post-imperial 'migrant' orientation will provide much of the substance of this thesis as they are expressive, in a larger sense, of the elusive, enigmatic aesthetic of contemporary second-generation migrant writing.

'Migrant writing' as a generic term itself needs to be defined and disentangled in order to contextualise how the migrant has been 'placed' within post-colonial literature. Migrant writing has been categorised variously as 'multicultural fiction' (Ramraj 214), as 'trans-cultural writing' by John Thieme (ix) and as the 'immigrant genre' (210) by Rosemary George. Perhaps the most compelling of these definitions is 'trans-cultural writing'.<sup>12</sup> It is instructive to observe how some of the migrant writers featured in this thesis are positioned in The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English in order to observe how the migrant can be accommodated within the notion of post-colonial literature. In this anthology Ondaatje, Phillips, Dabydeen and D'Aguiar are categorised under 'trans-cultural', Kincaid under 'Caribbean' and Rushdie under both 'trans-cultural' and 'Indian'.

Thieme explains the rationale of his 'trans-cultural' section: that it

'acknowledges the impossibility of confining migrants within the strait-jacket of national or regional labels' (ix). The anthology moves, however, back and forth between two potentially contradictory contexts, between the what it regards as primarily national and what it regards as trans-cultural, eventually acknowledging that 'finally all of the writing included can be seen to exist in both contexts' (ix). It is this instructive movement back and forth between national and cross-cultural perspectives that guides my approach in this thesis. The migrant is viewed specifically, in relation to England, the English colonial cultural residue in their writing, and the countries they pass through, but also as a cross-cultural being, a being whose anti-national, international, syncretic identity may be termed, like a nationality, as migrant. Kureishi in his essay 'The Rainbow Sign' (1986) and story 'With Your Tongue Down My Throat' (1986) echoes this movement back and forth between cultures, English and Pakistani, letting each reflect off the other. Kincaid and Phillips also attempt readings between geographical and ideological destinations, reading between America and England. Rushdie and Ondaatje read between an ambitiously wide range of destinations, Ondaatje reading between Sri Lanka Canada and England, and Rushdie reading India and Pakistan very overtly through England.

### **Structure of Argument**

In this thesis I will attempt to offer very specific case study readings of contemporary migrant writers' routes through or around England. The migrant writers in this study are chosen because they all write about the migrant experience self-consciously and self-reflexively, describing the process from native to migrant, historicising the post-imperial migrant and chronicling the processes of the literary migrant's education. They have been chosen because their orientation to the post-imperial world and their aesthetic are drawn out of and are reflective of migrant experience. The approach in this thesis is in some ways similar to Elleke Boehmer's Postcolonial and Colonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors (1995), in that it emphasises metaphor and narrative structure as a means of examining the 'migrant' orientation to the post-imperial world. This emphasis on the post-imperial migrant's aesthetic also takes its lead from colonial theorists such as Nicholas Thomas, who has argued that 'colonialism has always ... been a cultural process

... energised through signs, metaphors, and narratives' (2).

This thesis will provide a survey of post-imperial migrant approaches to the subject of contemporary England, with an emphasis on the two principle diaspora that have dominated contemporary English migrant writing in and about England; the Indian and the Caribbean.<sup>13</sup> However it must be added that this study is ordered, primarily, in thematic terms, through an attempt to explore distinct aesthetic and political perspectives on writing as a migrant in England. Texts are chosen primarily because of the patterns and processes they reveal as they map the progression between positions, from native to migrant, and from colonial to post-colonial. For instance, Kureishi is distinct from Rushdie in this study not through ethnicity, but through his English-born and bred approach to migrant identity, and through his consequently distinct poetics and politics. Ondaatje, in his turn is chosen as a unique example of the trans-national, trans-cultural writer whose migrant perspective on England is defined by the conflicting impulses to settle and to remain mobile. To illustrate this organisation in more detail I would like to finish with a summary-outline of the structure of argument.

## II

In my first chapter I will look at the writing of the Caribbean writers David Dabydeen, Caryl Phillips, Fred D'Aguiar and Jamaica Kincaid, all of whom are concerned with addressing their history under British colonial rule.<sup>14</sup> This chapter comes first because it provides an opportunity to ground the discussion in relation to the great inaugural and predominantly Caribbean first wave of literary migrants. The chapter also inaugurates, thematically, a sense of a migrant orientation grounded not so much in nationalist or blood ties as in the continuously transforming and transitory nature of diasporic and migrant passage. For Dabydeen the multiple metaphor of passage is used to describe an educational journey into the dark heart of post-imperial England. For Phillips it is used to express the mobility of a trans-migrant and trans-historical imagination. For D'Aguiar it is used to define the territory of a diasporic 'slave'. And for Kincaid it becomes a means for explaining the rite of passage into a 'fallen' post-imperial orientation to the world. For each writer, I will argue, the metaphor of passage becomes a route through history

into a historically grounded orientation to the contemporary world.

My second chapter will move to a specific close case study of the migrant/settler orientation of the contemporary migrant writer through an examination of the prose writings of Michael Ondaatje, from Running in the Family (1983) through In the Skin of a Lion (1987) to The English Patient (1993). In this chapter I will distinguish the voice of Ondaatje the migrant from that of Ondaatje the post-migration settler. In other words I will be identifying the aspects of Ondaatje's writing which developed out of his transcultural experience of migration, and which involve a creative disorientation of cultural and class certainties. Through tracing the positions and perspectives of Ondaatje's writing I will read him as a meticulous historian of the migrant up to the end of the Second World War. In this chapter I will read Ondaatje according to a 'migrant/settler' model of migration, reading him as simultaneously trans-cultural and culturally specific. Ultimately I will read him as a very specific species, the England-educated literary migrant, and attempt to explore how this orientation affects his representation of migrant experience and colours his approach when writing about 'polemical' subjects.

From here I will have a chapter on Salman Rushdie. As well as being central to any assessment of contemporary Indo-Anglian writing, Rushdie is perhaps the central contemporary migrant voice writing in England today. His oeuvre provides the most explicit, detailed and influential explication of a migrant aesthetic based on transformation and transition in contemporary migrant writing. Throughout his oeuvre, in books as various as Midnight's Children (1981), Shame (1983), The Satanic Verses (1988), Imaginary Homelands (1991), Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1991), The Wizard of Oz (1992), East, West (1994) and The Moor's Last Sigh (1995), Rushdie has viewed the colonial legacy of cultural displacement as the opportunity for the migrant who stands in-between cultures, commenting and criticising, to re-value and re-make 'Indo-Anglian' culture. The migrant of these narratives is drawn as a figure of post-imperial scepticism, as a secular doubter, atheist, blasphemer, and as a hybrid a naturalised saboteur of monolithic orthodoxies. Rushdie's migrants are always grotesques and it is through this figure of the grotesque that Rushdie's aesthetic negotiates post-migration reality as a chaotic place of continual mutation. It is through this figure that he attempts to present the migrant's view of the world. In the course of this argument I will also examine how Rushdie's further displacement from his Indian homeland as a result of the fatwa haunts

his work after The Satanic Verses and has led to an interesting and suggesting linking of the themes of exile and the magical powers of literature as the two central and inseparable themes of his later oeuvre.

In my final chapter I will examine the post-migrant orientation of the fiction of an apparently settled, English-born migrant, Hanif Kureishi, who grounds readings of the migrant's transformations and transitions within the context of English culture and society. Kureishi's fictions The Buddha of Suburbia (1990), The Black Album (1995), and Love in a Blue Time (1997), through their attempt to chronicle the culture and atmosphere of the contemporary and present the stories of a new, restless generation of migrants, bring the figure of the migrant up to the late 1990s. Kureishi's settled, half-English 'post-migrants' are represented as restless cultural adventurers who attempt to reconcile their mixed-race identities through apprenticeships into the mysteries of post-imperial English ethnicity and trans-national culture. Kureishi's fiction concludes this thesis by providing a model of the sort of sceptical, uncommitted, culturally curious, pre-millennial literary post-migrant position future studies of the literary migrant will have to reckon with.

Central to this enquiry into the post-imperial aesthetics and orientation of migrant identity is an interrogation of the values, commitments, potentials and agency of the literary migrant. In my conclusion I examine what all these migrant models, metaphors and narrative structures represent in relation to post-imperial England, and how their post-imperial horizons have shifted and widened. Moreover I will consider how the literary migrant's migrant aesthetic reflects on and revise notions of nationhood, place, colonial history, the contemporary and the roles and duties of the migrant writer in the post-imperial world.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> By 'contemporary' I mean to distinguish writing of the 1980s and 1990s from the first generation of migrant writing of the 1950s and 1960s, from writers like Wilson Harris, George Lamming and Sam Selvon.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this study 'second-generation' will mean migrant writers who are part of a generation that grew up in the 1950s and 1960s and eventually came to writing in the late 1970s or early to mid 1980s. There is, of course a difference between a birth-generation and a writing generation. For instance, Caryl Phillips calls himself late 'first generation' (Tribe 3).

<sup>3</sup> In most instances, 'first-generation' examples are plucked from a Caribbean tradition, because Indian writing, although it has a distinguished history of Indo-Anglian migrant scholars from Mulk Raj Anand to Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru, lacks a defined front-line 'first-generation' post-war generation of migrant writers. Salman Rushdie, as numerous commentators have pointed out, in many ways represents the late blossoming spearhead of the Indian literary migrant's creative renaissance in England. Richard Cronin has even boldly asserted that 'Modern Indian literature was born in 1981 with Rushdie's Midnight's Children' (206), an assertion that that appears to possess some truth given the waves of confident Indian voices following in Rushdie's wake. This confluence of Indian voices is notably vibrant and confident, even the most perfunctory list would need to acknowledge the work of writers such as Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chaudhuri, Rohinton Mistry, and Arundhati Roy. Having said that, the first wave of post-war Caribbean migrant writers set important literary, polemical and aesthetical precedents for all succeeding migrant writers in England. For instance, Lamming's discussion of the drives of the first generation and the nature of exile in his seminal text The Pleasures of Exile (1960) feed, decades later, into Rushdie's assertion in The Moor's Last Sigh (1996) of a sense of 'universal' post-imperial exile. It is also apparent that a writer, of the stature of V.S. Naipaul casts his literary shadow over even Rushdie's attempts at defining a distinctive Indo-Anglian aesthetic. In this respect contemporary migrant fiction is 'second-generation', it is a fiction written after the authoritative, inaugural response of Caribbean literary migrants. See Richard Cronin's 'India' in The Oxford Guide to Contemporary World Literature (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994). 204-220.

<sup>4</sup> For Bhabha's readings of post-imperial 'hybrid' culture and identity see The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994). Iain Chambers is another theorist who approaches the migrant from a post-structuralist methodology as an in-between being formed out of metropolitan discourse. See Migrancy, Culture, Identity (London: Routledge, 1993), and Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernism (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Pankaj Mishra's critique of the Indian writer Amit Chaudhuri in the Times Literary Supplement Feb 1998. 44-53. In this case, Mishra is critical of the fact that Chaudhuri seems to have found a 'congenial aesthetic in Bloomsbury', an over-delicate aesthetic that 'underplay(s) India's 'dust, grime and stench' (53). Mishra's preferred aesthetic, which he finds in the fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Rohinton Mistry, is a 'social and political enquiry type of realism' (50). Mishra's critique also serves as an interesting example of how the contemporary migrant's modernist leanings are read suspiciously by 'realist', native-centred critics

<sup>6</sup> For an instance of a view that challenges native-centered approaches that deny the possibility of native agency and power (and leave the idea of migrant agency and power unquestioned) see Benita Parry's 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse'. Oxford Literary Review 9 (1&2) 1987, 27-58. In this famous theoretical rejoinder Spivak and Bhabha are accused by the Fanonite critic Benita Parry of seeing too many 'native absences'.

<sup>7</sup> There is an implicit sense of migrant power in the work of Stuart Hall. Like Naipaul, he asks if the

migrant can colonise their host countries, and views the post-colonial per se as 'expressive of a diasporically formed global situation' (250). See Hall's essay 'When was "The Post-Colonial"? Thinking at the Limit,' in The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons, eds. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, (London: Routledge, 1996). 242-259.

<sup>8</sup> This power devolves out of a self-declared and somewhat utopian position, a position that is quite obviously 'inside' discourse and society but enacts stepping outside the frame into an outsider orientation towards history and the post-imperium. Despite this position's constructed nature it is clearly constructed as an attempt to signpost the need for outsider positional, rhetorical, historical and ideological strategies.

<sup>9</sup> The paradoxes of this position are perhaps best illustrated in the case of Salman Rushdie who draws his inspiration by his own admission from non-migrant Indian sources, such as G. V. Desani's All About H Hatterr (1948), from non-Indian 'migrant' sources like V. S. Naipaul, George Lamming and Sam Selvon (especially in the London scenes of The Satanic Verses), from European and American writers like Gunter Grass and Kurt Vonnegut, and from near contemporary 'trans-cultural' writers like Bruce Chatwin and Anita Desai.

<sup>10</sup> Baldwin's iconoclastic self-construction as a Euro-American trans-migrant, his status as a black, homosexual writer and his representation in fictions like Giovanni's Room (1956) and Another Country (1963) of polysexual and multiracial identities and communities offers a persuasive model to the contemporary migrant writer (that is echoed in Kureishi particularly) of a self-constructed, ambiguous and transitory mobile model of 'literary migrant' identity.

<sup>11</sup> A 'migrant' is defined in many ways against the figure of the 'native', who denotes not only the sense of 'a member of a non-European or less civilised indigenous people, a Black' but also a figure defined by geographical fixity and stasis, as 'one born in a particular place', and more specifically again, an identity explicitly linked with a defined 'national' identity deriving as it does from the Latin word, 'nativus, for nation' (Hawkins 558). In this sense, with these connotations of unchangeability the 'native' is clearly diametrically opposed to the 'changed' figure of the 'migrant'. A citizen is, in essence, a metropolitan version of the 'native', being a 'native or naturalised member of a State; an inhabitant of a city' (Hawkins 161). The rebel 'migrant', is read in this thesis as the outsider critic, who stands between the 'native' and metropolitan 'citizen', refusing to settle.

<sup>12</sup> For a full explication of the idea of transculturation see Mary Louise Pratt's book Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation. (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> This study, given the limits of the project, focuses on the two principal ethnic migrant groups in contemporary England, South Asians and the Caribbeans. The African diaspora is not represented because its influence and presence in contemporary England-focused migrant writing is less pronounced. Having said that, the fiction of the African writer Abdulrazak Gurnah, demonstrates an interestingly discursive, trans-national Afro-Anglian orientation towards England. See, for instance: Memory of Departure (London: Cape, 1987), Pilgrim's Way (London: Cape, 1988), Dottie (London: Cape, 1990), Paradise (London: Cape, 1994), and Admiring Silence (London: Penguin, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> This chapter is more discursive and scattered because, although the Caribbean presence in migrant writing is considerable, there is no one contemporary Caribbean writer that can focus a broad discussion on contemporary migrant fiction to the extent a writer like Rushdie or Ondaatje can.

## One

### English Passages:

### The migrant fictions of David Dabydeen, Caryl Phillips, Fred D'Aguiar and Jamaica Kincaid.

#### Introduction

In this opening chapter, I will survey the positions of four Caribbean writers whose fictions explore migrant experience in terms of notions of passage in relation to that geographical and ideological site, England. This Caribbean leitmotif of passage will be read in this chapter as the de-historicised inaugural historical moment that creates a migrant or exile, the mysterious event that permanently divides the migrant subject from its native self.<sup>1</sup> The notion of the migrant as passenger or a being in passage, as a transitional and transnational spectator, will be read in this chapter as a useful keynote model for a conception of the Caribbean migrant's unsettled orientation to England.

The notion of the passage acts as a multiple metaphor for the Caribbean writers examined in this chapter, a metaphor that effectively defines their orientation to the experience of migration, to their uneasy geographical and temporal settling in the post-imperium and to their various aesthetic projects as migrant writers. The metaphor of passage is used by these Caribbean writers to connote a number of re-visionary historicising approaches to the event of migrant passage. The most obvious of these connotations is geographical, is the idea of passage as a journey, voyage or crossing. This is the dominant connotation implied in The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of the word, where passage is read as a 'transition from one state to another; a journey by sea or air' (613). All other notions of passage in this chapter expand out of this notion of passage as a journey, or, to be more precise, as a journey to England. Given that the Caribbean dispersal is by no means focused in England, and the fact that, as Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh point out: 'Caribbean literature does not have a centre; the majority of the writers are based in diasporic cities in Britain, Canada and

the US' (25), this chapter is also concerned with American-based migrant writers, like Caryl Phillips and Jamaica Kincaid, whose fictions confront the idea and myth of England, whose passages to England are psychological and ideological.

This notion of transition, the notion of a movement from one state to another, implies more than merely a geographical trans-national crossing for many Caribbean migrant writers. In this chapter I will be arguing that contemporary Caribbean migrant writers use this transitional 'rite of passage' model to interrogate and revise migration as a psychological and generational process of re-orientation.<sup>2</sup> Through this notion of passage as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, from native to migrant, from motherland to mother country or through a more formal pedagogic apprenticeship from de-historicised ignorance to historicised awareness, the post-imperial Caribbean migrant is represented as a transitory, metamorphic being, a being whose historical identity as a migrant and whose aesthetic as a migrant writer is formed out of the process of passage.

This 'rite of passage' model is also indicative of the expansive and continuous dialogue of contemporary Caribbean migrant writers with the inaugural post-war 1950s and 1960s passage and literary obsessions of the previous Windrush generation of migrant writers. Part of the purpose of this chapter is to examine how this generational rite of passage is enacted in contemporary migrant writers' fictions, how attitudes to England, and to writing have changed in the second generation's fiction; how, indeed, contemporary Caribbean migrant writers are formed by and distinct from their forbears.

The 1950-1965 'literary boom' (Donnell 7) of Caribbean migrant fiction casts an imposingly authoritative canonical and thematic shadow over succeeding generations of writers. The original attempt by first generation migrant writers to describe the 'loneliness, alienation and the disorientation of the newly arrived immigrant finding his bearings' (Donnell 210) remains largely true for the contemporary Caribbean migrant writer. However it is clear that there are also striking differences in perspective, that the changed historical perspective of the contemporary Caribbean migrant writer has shifted their orientation to England and to their approach towards representing the history of migrant passage.<sup>3</sup> I would like to argue that the contemporary migrant writer approaches the subject of passage as a revisionary

historian, and attempts to translate the post-imperial disorientation of the migrant by tracing and recording the processes of a migrant version of history founded, not on national soil, but on the transitory historical passages that form migrant identity.

Another connotation of the notion of passage evoked in the writing of contemporary Caribbean migrant writers is rooted in this project of historical enquiry. The examination of temporal passages, passages of time and memory, of the convergence of the historical in the contemporary occupies the contemporary Caribbean writer both structurally and thematically. In this chapter I will argue that the fictions of the contemporary migrant writer demonstrate a broadly defined, diasporic, historicised orientation to the post-imperial present. They read contemporary passages, the passages of the 1950s mid 1960s and the middle passages of ancestral memory, together, in a historical continuum, re-positioning Caribbean migrant history and the transitory geographical orientation of the post-imperial migrant as the formations of a history of continuous passage. For Fred D'Aguiar and Phillips, this historical project is focused on remembering previous passages, in particular, the myth-misted, uncharted middle passage of diasporic and slave histories. For David Dabydeen the historical passage is a reverse passage in two senses; firstly in a temporal sense but also in terms of a project of re-visiting and re-writing the colonial model of a passage into a dark native interior. For Kincaid colonial history is inescapable, it ghost-writes the post-imperial present and echoes in the continuum of migrant history. Indeed, all of the writers in this chapter, bred out of the post-independence, race-conscious 1970s, from the England-based Dabydeen and D'Aguiar through to the American-based Phillips and Kincaid, demonstrate a broadened, historicised awareness either structurally or thematically of a triangular model of passage based on the middle passage trade routes from Africa through England to the Caribbean and America. In this chapter I will argue that this model reflects the movement in contemporary Caribbean migrant fictions away from England and towards an epic, historicised, geographically mobile orientation towards the post-imperium.

The revisionary, demythologising approach towards history demonstrated in the fiction of the contemporary Caribbean migrant writers is also applied to their readings of the literary passages of the colonial education. The practise of 'Lit crit' in

colonial schools and the study of literary passages was, as Helen Tiffin has pointed out, a powerful 'means of colonialist control' (144). The literary passage, the excerpt or exemplum acted as a decontextualised, mystifyingly ahistorical cultural banner or signifier of a mythical, untouchable England. Education through excerpt led to a fragmented depoliticised native consciousness. The middle-class scholarship boys of the 1950s and 1960s, like George Lamming and V. S. Naipaul were lured to an England built out of these fragments of literature and myth but also by the promise of an initiation, through education, into the mysteries of English culture. The connotation of the excerpt or short piece of writing implicit in the word passage is used in these fictions to reflect on the ideological substance of the educational passage of the contemporary migrant. The continuous quest of contemporary Caribbean migrant fiction is very much an extension of that original inquisitive, bemused and disillusioned piecing together of the fragments that compose the literary myth of England. In this chapter I will argue that the entity of the literary excerpt or passage is something that is continually confronted, re-written and re-contextualised in contemporary Caribbean fiction. The aesthetic of these writers has developed and formed itself gradually, as Lamming notes in 'The Occasion for Speaking', out of its contact with Western 'interloper' art, but also out of its confrontations with the processes of colonial British education policy, both pre and post-migration. These enquiries into the processes that 'educated the natives' through the inculcation of a written style of 'scholarship' English and through the study of lyrical passages, are adopted by contemporary Caribbean writers as a pathway into understanding the historical and textual processes that formed them as, simultaneously, colonial subjects and literary migrants.

As we shall see in the following study the connotations implicit in the Caribbean writer's conception of the notion of passage all conceive of passage as continuous process. This continuous passage is read alternatively as generational, historical, educational, ontological and psychological but always as the aesthetic structure that best explains the Caribbean migrant passenger's connections to the post-imperial world. In the same way as the Windrush generation defined themselves through their education, migration and writing from the figure of the native and the figure of the native writer they had grown out of, the contemporary Caribbean migrant

writers discussed in this chapter write to distinguish themselves from their native other and their migrant predecessors through their self-conscious and critical attention towards the cultural and historical passages and processes that have formed their post-imperial identity.

## **A Passage to England**

### **I**

In *The Intended* (1991) the Indo-Caribbean writer David Dabydeen charts the rites of passage through English society of a young, intelligent and ambitious Indo-Caribbean student. The difficult process of settling comfortably into English society and of 'learning the texts' that allow access into English culture are described in Dabydeen's novel in terms of a continuous passage. The subject makes an appropriate subject for a literary academic migrant's first novel. Dabydeen, educated in Cambridge and University College London, winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, and teaching Caribbean Studies in Warwick University, has clearly penetrated and become part of contemporary English literary culture. Consequently, his version of the 'rites of passage' novel reflects very particularly on the notion of passage as education, as an apprenticeship into the mysterious heart of a culture through the processes of reading and writing.<sup>4</sup> This quest is thwarted and dogged in Dabydeen's novel by moments of what might be termed the return of the repressed native, inescapably 'historical' moments that involve troubling passages of memory back into a pre-migrancy past, and into a native Guyanese childhood.

Close to the beginning of the novel there is a scene which enacts many of Dabydeen's ideas about the Indo-Caribbean migrant's history-haunted orientation to contemporary England, and about how this orientation is mediated through notions of passage and continuity:

In the London underground we were forced into an inarticulacy that delved beneath the stone ground and barrier of language, whether Urdu, Hindu or Creole, and made for a new mode of communication: as the train trundled through a dark tunnel we flashed glances at one another, each a blinding recognition of our Asian-ness, each welding us in one communal identity. In the swift journey between Tooting Bec and Balbarn, we re-lived the passages from India to Britain, or India to the Caribbean to Britain, the long journeys of a previous century across unknown seas towards the shame of plantation labour: or the excitement with which we boarded Air India which died in a mixture of jet-lag, bewilderment and waiting in long queues in the immigrant lounge at Heathrow - just like back home, the memory of beggars lining up outside a missionary church for a dollop of food from a white hand, and women with cracked lips crowded at a standpipe shoving enamel bowls to catch the few slow drops. In the glitter of duty-free shops and fluorescent lights you cannot hide the memory of poverty (16-17).

In this passage Dabydeen presents the process of urban travel as a metaphor for a psychic process, as an emotional and mental retreat into submerged tribal memory, a metaphorical descent into the underground of atavistic darkness. This meditation acts as an intervening passage or interstice in the text that disturbs the flow of the narrative, and the protagonist's progressive and energetic flight from his migrant self. He also explains, in detail, the motivation behind his nameless protagonist's drive to be assimilated and accepted in English society and the reason he chooses an education in 'scholarship' English to achieve this goal.<sup>5</sup> During his passage underground through the metropolis he experiences a sense of connection with the other Asian migrants he travels with, a common bond that allows the momentary submerging of their identities as Indian diasporans. This sense of connection is reinforced by a 'historical' epiphany, where, in the cramped communal space of the train, he relives and remembers previous migrant passages like the middle passage, and the post-war diaspora of the 1950s and 1960s. In the course of describing the persistent memory traces of previous epic journeys, from the middle passage to the contemporary influx of immigrants into



Heathrow airport, that haunt the metropolis, Dabydeen emphasises the continuous nature of the migrant experience.

Passage is read as a continuous process, a process that is relived and re enacted in the metropolis. Migrant lives are, in this passage, defined by an unsettled rootlessness brought about by a shared 'inarticulacy' and 'memory of poverty'. It is this sense that 'inarticulacy' or voicelessness defines the collective migrant identity that prompts the protagonist of The Intended to educate himself in English culture so he can become one of the voiced, so they can emerge out of the huddle in the passage hold. And it this sense that the 'memory of poverty' haunts the settling migrant that prompts his ambition to advance in society through his knowledge and understanding of 'scholarship' English. It is no coincidence that immediately following this epiphany the motion of the metropolitan train summons a literal memory of native poverty, of a sensual, childhood bus ride through a Guyanese landscape. This prolonged memory, compressed temporally within the passage of a journey across London, is a memory of discarded but persistent native affiliations. The passage culminates with the image of a boy, on the eve of departure from his childhood country, being reminded by his Aunt Clarice that 'You is me' (40), that blood memories persist.

It is also clear from this passage that the identification that occurs in the text is focused on other Asian migrants. This submerging and merging of migrant identities is reserved for descendants of the Indian diaspora as indentured 'coolies' to the Caribbean and as immigrants to England: 'For me, it was partly an adventure into the past, a shame relieved by a vague wondering as I sat next to the Asian whether I too would have been wearing a turban if the British had not taken us away to the Caribbean. (18).<sup>6</sup> However Dabydeen's novel, despite its careful 'regrouping of the Asian diaspora in a South London school ground', with a 'West Indian Guyanese'- 'the most mixed-up of the lot' (11) - as protagonist, is also concerned with examining the complex relationship between Afro and Indo-Caribbean migrants. In The Intended the Afro-Caribbean becomes the figure that embodies the Indo-Caribbean's uneducated, impoverished native other.

The novel describes a very specific critique of an attempt at a rite of passage away from an Afro-Caribbean native other. From the outset, Dabydeen's Indo-

Caribbean 'hero' defines himself against the Afro-Caribbean migrant: 'If they send immigrants home, they should differentiate between us Indian people and those black West Indians' (177). His earlier contempt for his simple Guyanese childhood playmate, Peter, the 'county coolie' (154), is quickly transferred, once he has migrated, onto the Afro-Caribbean community. The implication is that the Indo-Caribbean can transform himself into a respectable English figure, and is less racially and culturally other than the Afro-Caribbean. In another metropolitan passage, sharing a bus with rowdy Afro-Caribbean passengers, Dabydeen's student reflects that 'no wonder they're treated like animals ... all they do is dance and breed. Not one 'O' level between a busload of them and yet they complain they've got no jobs, no proper housing and no future' whereas he is 'different' (177). This attempt at defining an essential difference, from the native other, from the migrant trapped in continuous passage, and from the racialised alien is centered, in Dabydeen's novel, in the quest for an education, and in the attempt at mastering the literary passages of scholarship English.

Dabydeen's depiction of the migrant's attempt at mastering the literary texts of scholarship English is always questioning and playfully subversive. In the scene where Patel must design an answer for his English composition exam, the lyrical excerpts that make up English culture in migrant consciousness are presented as the famous, outmoded currency of a hackneyed culture. Patel passes his exam by manoeuvring memorised passages describing 'dawn and dusk' across the page. These passages are objectionable, and ripe for revision, because they bear no relation to the contemporary urban experience of the migrant in England. Instead they describe an ahistorical, colonial era, exoticising of the rural East, redolent of tiger hunts at dawn and sunsets. Dabydeen parodies the jaded, artificial, thesaurus clichés of Patel's 'exam' English, his use of 'splendid adjectives' like 'iridescent', 'pristine, and 'sepulchral', and questions how the attractive ornateness of the 'lyrical' passage can, through the application of an apparently 'timeless' language, maintain a powerful ideological hold on the present. He is also, however, slyly skeptical of the continuing authority of such literary passages. Patel, because of the nature of his exam question, finds he must reorganise the order of his memorised 'lyrical' fragments. It is through this reconfiguration of 'dusk' to 'dawn' and the consequent 'challenge of an unknown

middle passage which would end in familiar moonlight' (10/11) that Dabydeen implies that these texts can be re-arranged and re-inscribed.

The largest project of textual reconception attempted in The Intended involves an elaborate, complex reading of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899). Conrad's novel has always provided a paradigmatic 'colonial' textual pattern for post-colonial writers; its description of a passage into a dark interior provides Dabydeen with a powerful model against which to write. His narrative of a migrant rite of passage offers a reversal, as do many of the Caribbean texts in this study, of Conrad's archetypes of passage and cultural abnegation. Dabydeen's project of re-reading is placed in the particular context of his Indo-Caribbean student's quest to define an essential difference between himself and his Afro-Caribbean migrant other. The student's reading of the text is prompted by his ambition to master the great English scholarship texts and go to college. His reading of Heart of Darkness is therefore appropriately dutiful and conventional: 'I would select key passages from the text, read them aloud and dissect them in terms of theme and imagery, as I had been taught to do by our English teacher' (98). This 'imagery' and 'theme' spotting demands the same apolitical, ahistorical readings as the de-contextualised literary excerpts of colonial rule. It is clear from Dabydeen's preface to his scholarly work, The Black Presence in English Literature (1985), that he believes that it is the duty of writers and scholars to contextualise the lyrical fragments of a colonial education by adopting an 'approach to English Literature from the standpoint of empire' and out of a 'consideration of contemporary racist realities' (ix). Such an intervention occurs in the midst of the Indo-Caribbean's lazy 'lit-crit' when 'in the middle of a paragraph of Conrad's Heart of Darkness (98) he is interrupted by his Rastafarian, Afro-Caribbean housemate, Joseph. Joseph, through his particular ethnic make up and subversive counter-readings of Conrad becomes the central embodiment in Dabydeen's text of the Indo-Caribbean's uneducated, impoverished native other. In the figure of Joseph, the Afro-Caribbean becomes the native other, the haunting presence of the pre-migrancy version of the migrant.

Afro-Caribbean Joseph's intervention in the text begins with his challenging 'native' counter-reading of European Joseph's text. Joseph is 'not impressed' by his Indo-Caribbean room-mate's 'critical-skill', especially when he lazily interprets the 'bit

where them lying under the trees dying' (98) as 'part of the theme of suffering and redemption which lies at the core of the novel's concern' (99). Joseph challenges this 'lit-crit' interpretation of Heart of Darkness with an instinctive untutored politicised and historicised intelligence:

No it ain't is about colours. You been saying is a novel 'bout the fall of man, but is really 'bout a dream. Beneath the surface is the dream. The white light of England and the Thames is the white sun over the Congo that can't mix with the green of the bush and the black skin of the people'; white wants to reduce the world to one blinding color (94).

Despite Joseph's illiterate dependence on spoken readings of the text, the 'passion' and 'articulacy' of his 'reading' surprises his fellow reader (94). It is this inkling of a submerged native articulacy in Joseph that haunts the Indo-Caribbean's student's passage through the English education system. Joseph's counter-reading of Conrad, with its emphasis on the position of the African native and on the importance of colours, is influenced by 'negritude', the racial philosophy of Rastafarianism and an affiliation to a nativist position. It is clear Joseph functions in the text as a native 'conscience', a presence that represents another possible interpretation and response to the culture whitening 'dream' of England.

It becomes apparent that Joseph's critique of the reading practise of scholarship English 'lit crit' devolves out of a distinct native Caribbean aesthetic and approach to the English language. This aesthetic is evident in the dialect Joseph uses in the text; it is the unlyrical, angry, abrogative 'nation language' that has found its most confident expression in Caribbean poetry, from Edward Kamau Brathwaite to Linton Kwesi Johnson to Dabydeen himself. Joseph becomes the representative in Dabydeen's text of a resolutely Caribbean-inspired aesthetic.<sup>7</sup> Through the mouth-piece of Joseph, Dabydeen criticises not only the reading processes of the educated migrant but also the writing practises of the literary migrant. In an essay on the language of contemporary Caribbean poetry, 'On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in England Today' (1989), Dabydeen discusses the linguistic pressures on the

contemporary Caribbean poet: 'England today is the third largest West Indian island. Our generation is confronted by the same issues that Brathwaite and others faced in their time. The pressure then was to slavishly imitate the expressions of the Mother Country if a writer was to be recognised' (413/414). The pressure now is towards mimicry. Become 'universal' or else you perish in 'the backwater of the small presses' (413/414). This dilemma is staged in The Intended when the student, inspired by his reading of 'Lycidas', attempts to imitate the style of Milton's elegy to commemorate the death of his landlord's migrant mother from Pakistan. Joseph challenges this attempt to whiten and anglify a 'native' death: he argues that 'you can't write about Mrs. Ali like that ... Black people have to have their own words,' they 'can't live like parasites off white texts' (147). In this scene Joseph highlights the difficulty of describing native experience through 'scholarship' English, a difficulty that possesses as much relevance for the contemporary migrant novel as it does for poetry, which must similarly choose a version of English, and in effect, an audience.

The passage of the student into the pinnacle of the English educational system, Oxford University, is continually haunted by his previous contact with Joseph's native aesthetic. He realises that to step into this world necessitates a rejection of everything Joseph's 'backwater' aesthetic stands for, and of the Caribbean tradition of writing he represents. What he is rejecting is the apparent formlessness of Joseph's articulation: in Oxford he begins 'to despise Joseph and 'his babbling half-formed being' (198). This image of the 'babbling' native is a gesture towards Shakespeare's Caliban, a figure who has become, through the writing of George Lamming, an archetype for the angry, inarticulate slave-native in Caribbean literature. In his discursive The Pleasures of Exile (1960) Lamming explores the figures of Prospero and Caliban as colonial archetypes. In his novel Water with Berries (1972) the Caliban myth is applied to the native politics of Barbados. Dabydeen makes the connection explicit with his image of Joseph 'with his radio-cassette player on his shoulders like Caliban's log' (104). Like Caliban, Joseph is a haunting figure because 'His confusion held some meaning' and validity (197). It is this grudging acceptance of the validity of his native other's personalised, 'rambling', 'meandering' aesthetic that troubles the student in Oxford (102). The 'meandering' of this native discourse is caused by the diasporic history

writhing in it, it is an aesthetic redolent of the history and rage and poverty, the student is trying to forget and overcome through his education, but which continuously recurs. Contemplating Oxford he reflects that the writers who have grown out of a native aesthetic are formless 'mud', whereas English writers are 'the chiseled stone of Oxford that has survived centuries and will always be' (198). He suddenly longs 'to be white, to be calm, to write with grace and clarity, to make words which have status' (197), and ultimately chooses to use 'scholarship' English because he wants to write words that possess 'status', for an audience that has 'status'. His rejection of Joseph is partially the rejection of the failed 'backwater' artist he sees in him.<sup>8</sup> His rejection of Joseph, however, is equivocal, as, unbidden, he finds Joseph's 'broken words' (198) appearing in his writing. His version of English is, like the English of *The Intended*, the result of two very different educations, and becomes, inescapably, an amalgam of both scholarship and native English.

The figure who opposes Joseph's disturbing black skin, philosophy and passion, who counterpoints him, during the student's metropolitan education, with middle class whiteness and calm, is the student's English girlfriend Janet. She is the Miranda to Joseph's Caliban. As an 'English rose', she embodies the colonial myth of England, and it is in the careful charting of their symbolic courtship that Dabydeen explores the fluctuation in desires that occurs during the course of a migrant education in scholarship English.<sup>9</sup> Janet is represented as the ultimate literary text the student must attempt to master, she is a creature drawn from the lyrical passages of a colonial education: she is described as his 'fragrant' lover, as 'everything I intended' (243). Her fragrance, with its connotations of flowers, sets a keynote that is struck repeatedly by contemporary Caribbean writers; the notion of the flower as a signifier for a mythically beautiful and virginal England. However, Dabydeen's student protagonist does not accept this 'fragrant' myth wholesale, for the England surrounding Janet's alluring fragrance, the England he and his migrant friends inhabit, is a post-lapsarian, post-imperial and sex-saturated urban wasteland. As an inhabitant of this 'soiled new world', his encounter with this fabled creature of his colonial education inspires Caliban-like fantasies of 'reverse colonisation', fantasies of 'blackening' the English dream: he 'wanted to pounce on her, smearing blackness all over her genteel

Englishness' (161). The final contract of this literary migrant's education, however, turns out to be less aggressive, if just as equivocal. The contract involves a dual seduction, where the English rose is finally seduced and won by his 'gift of stories' (125), his 'exotic recollections of Guyana' (128). The implication here is that, the migrant writer, like Patel with his essay about tiger hunts and sunsets, must pander to the 'exotic' expectations of his white audience in order to advance in English society.

In The Intended the migrant's rite of passage through the English educational system is described in terms of reading and writing, and in terms of the interpretation and re-construction of literary passages. Dabydeen's novel is a book concerned with exploring the motivations of the contemporary Caribbean literary migrant and the processes that have formed him. An English education is read in the novel as an attempt to escape from the continuous transitoriness of being a migrant, and to escape the memory of poverty embodied in one's native other. The migrant condition is conceived of as the continuation of an endless historical nightmare: 'I wanted to get off ... I wanted to stop moving, I didn't want to go anywhere anymore ... I didn't want to be an eternal, indefinite immigrant' (244). The student protagonist's desire to 'become someone definite' (243), is essentially the desire to escape the continuous rootless motion, the constant dizzying transitoriness of the post-migration condition, that leaves you no time or space to establish a consistent identity, that leaves him feeling 'like someone blurred' (218). He is motivated by his belief that mastery of English culture, becoming as 'civilised' as an Englishman, spells the end of his culturally and physically transitory migrant status: in Oxford library he reflects, 'I am no longer an immigrant here for I can decipher the texts' (195). Dabydeen is equivocal about the implications of this education. It is in one sense a journey away from an idea of a 'nation language', and a connection with native roots. Dabydeen also argues that 'ignorance' would have prevented the student from making 'sense of what happened to Joseph' (246).<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, Dabydeen argues that the aesthetic of the Indo-Caribbean literary migrant, despite any attempt at identifying as English, is as inescapably bound to and inspired by a native history and the continual re-enactment of the migrant passage, as it is to the literary myth of England.

## II

'It was doubtful they could ever understand the mythic power of the garden which had drawn them here, a garden they could never possess, being holed up in poverty and city slums' (72).

In his second novel Disappearance (1993) Dabydeen charts another disillusioned educational rite of passage but this time from an Afro-Caribbean migrant's perspective. By exploring this passage through the eyes and ears of an Afro-Caribbean Dabydeen sets up a striking reversal of Conrad's paradigmatic journey into native savagery and clears a route for an enquiry into two 'native' histories, the history of England and the history of a middle passage from Africa. The notion of a reversed passage into the dark native heart of England is pronounced in Disappearance and, as we shall see, expands the project of his previous novel to dismantle the 'dream' England of a colonial education and to examine the potential deracinated 'whitening' of migrant identity inflicted by an education that is divorced from history.

Disappearance extends the 'migrant's education' narrative model set out in The Intended. Like the student of The Intended Dabydeen's narrator/ protagonist is again a nameless, transitional migrant intent on an educational rite of passage away from his 'native' self. Again he is in flight from the 'memories of poverty' of his early life in Guyana. It is through his education as an engineer that he can step out of the powerless anonymity of his previous 'native' condition. He experiences a redemptive sense of power over his previous namelessness when, as overseer of a Guyanese project, he works over 'bare-backed coolies moving earth whom I controlled with a Pharaoh's authority' (26). The price for this 'Pharaoh's authority' and assured sense of self however, is to be perceived as a new species of coloniser who 'act white man' (28).

Indeed the engineer of Disappearance might be read as a version of the student of The Intended, but at a more advanced professional, 'whitened' level.<sup>11</sup> Under the tutorship of his mentor, Professor Fenwick, the English Principal of the Guyanian Technical College, he has, like Conrad's 'Mistah Kurtz', 'gone native', but in this



reverse passage version of the colonial enterprise, he has lost himself by becoming a 'native' Englishman: 'a black man with an English soul' (60).<sup>12</sup> His 'disappearance' into the English machine as a colonising engineer, involves a deracinating conversion into a mechanistic 'robot' (104) version of Conrad's Kurtz archetype.

The result of such a self-abnegating education is a historyless temporal orientation:

I had cultivated no sense of past. I was always present, always new. I knew nothing about Africa ... my fetishes and talismans were spirit-levels, bulldozer rivets. I was a black West-Indian of African ancestry, but I was an engineer, trained in the science and technology of Great Britain. What happened long ago was not of my making and didn't make me. Better to forget the past which was so intangible and get down to the business of making a new country for a new age (16).

Dabydeen's engineer's project 'of making a new country for a new age', is focused, in particular, on engineering ways of holding back the sea: 'Every cell in my brain was absorbed in addressing the sea, there was no space for the sorrow of ancestral memory' (64). The sea, in *Disappearance*, provides a model for a restless 'native' history and Dabydeen's Afro-Caribbean protagonist's chosen career as a dam engineer - 'a dam was my identity' (132) - provides a metaphor for an education that provides a buttress against this history. This is illustrated during his time on the Guyanese project where he is described as 'a man of grammar' 'surrounded by (and buttressed by) books' (60).<sup>13</sup> Despite the engineer's view that 'The sea is beyond "human story"' (15), 'ahistorical', and unconfined by the 'dogmas of history', simply because 'It kept no archive of the ships that brought us from Africa' (132) he works to suppress it. This is because he sees it as the site and signifier of that middle passage and of the disturbing memory of poverty and hardship of his race's 'slave days, when we possessed nothing and were nothing' (64).<sup>14</sup>

This atavistic intuition becomes conscious and historically contextualised during his discussions with the English ex-colonial Mrs. Rutherford. It is with Mrs.

Rutherford that he receives an alternative 'reverse' education to the instructions of Professor Fenwick, an informal and historicised education. His reverse rite of passage under Mrs. Rutherford involves a re-connection with his 'native' past. The first sign of this re-connection occurs when he notices the African masks decorating her house. The masks made him 'withdraw' and consider and question his own 'native' past, that, for instance, there is no way of remembering 'African slaves in Guyana', there are 'no burial grounds' (38). The masks, evoking as they do 'vague stories of primitive violence' (38), are read variously as symbols of dissimulation, as the war trophies of colonial enterprise, but also as signifiers of a lost native vitality, as an ancestral gallery that reminds the engineer that he is 'African deep down' (38).<sup>15</sup> The masks quite literally 'unsettle' him, sabotage and reverse the work of his future-oriented, assimilationist education as engineer, driving him back into a consideration of his past through 'their evocation of a ancient specific order to which I was involuntary bound' (38). After prolonged contact with Mrs. Rutherford's alternative historicised education his temporal orientation has reversed and he cannot avoid seeing himself in newly racially defined terms', as the historical anomaly his white co-workers see him as 'A black-man in a striped suit' he 'felt like some prehistoric bone in the Hastings Museum which had suddenly stirred in its glass cabinet' (108).<sup>16</sup> It might be argued that under Mrs. Rutherford's influence, his buried racialness 'stirs' and he discovers himself as an atavistic creature.

Mrs. Rutherford's tuition also involves a reversal of the engineer's ideas about England, a recognition, through a passage into the dark heart of English history, of the possibility of reading the English as a savage, unregulated tribe. Up to this point the empowering aura of his English education and the example of his idealised, 'true Englishman' mentor, Professor Fenwick, has provided the 'main source of (his) knowledge about England' (81). His encounter with a distinctly anti-patriotic tutor, who calls the history of England 'a nasty business' (103) spurs his desire to enquire more deeply 'to find out the true nature of England' (133). The myth of England is re-examined, during this dialogue between ambitious anglophilia and disaffected Englishness through passages of memory and oral storytelling, through examining the historical rumours that compose a nation's sense of itself. From the colonial crimes of

her husband Jack, to the 'seedy narrative of adultery and civic squabbles' (93) that characterises post-imperial England, Mrs. Rutherford unfolds a history of English savagery and corruption.

It is though her archetypal English garden that Mrs. Rutherford explains her notion of English history. This garden, the symbol of a mythical 'venerable' (8) home counties England, the originator of 'English roses' and the lyrical passages of scholarship English, is read, quite literally, against custom, as a narrative of blood feuds and cross-fertilisation. The apparently 'written' narrative of English history is re-told, historicised and deconstructed using the same 'lyrical' symbols that were originally used to fashion colonial myths: flowers. Mrs. Rutherford insists that 'You only know a place when you identify the flowers' (68) and examine how they are 'rooted in English history' (69). This lesson in English history is precipitated by the engineer's naive musing 'that the names of flowers seemed so essentially English in their evocation of the lyrical – Lady's bedstraw, Lady's tresses, Queen's Anne's Lace, Dame's violet' (90). His reading of the mother country according to this iconography of benign femininity is seen by Mrs. Rutherford as the result of his 'colonial's sense of this place' (71). Her reverse reading of English argues that 'The true English nature ... is quite contrary' (71), that 'England was every bit as dark and diseased as the English claimed Africa was' (71). According to her version of English history the village of Dunsmere 'might as well be a village in the Congo' (117) such as those Conrad explored in Heart of Darkness. Her reading of English history essentially exposes the English garden as a violent 'wilderness' (67), planted with the flowers of ancient wars and the seeds of other cultures, the 'Dane's Blood' and 'Turk's Cap' (71) of conquests and counter-conquests. At the end of the novel the engineer, in passage from England, discovers a flower in pocket that he 'had picked by the wayside on my first day at work'. It 'still retained some of its violent colour' but he is 'appalled that the slightest movement could cause it to flake and disappear' (180). This last relic from the mythical English garden of colonial times, is characterised by fragility and persistent savagery or violence. It also acts as a final deconstructive, decolonising symbol, alongside the collapsing 'cliffs around Hastings', of a 'crumb(ing)' post-imperial England (121).<sup>17</sup>

In this 'reverse passage' education the migrant discovers the colonial myth of England is merely a rumour populated by colonial 'Ghosts' (165): 'nothing exists in England. Everything is a repeated story' (157). Through his dialogue with Mrs. Rutherford, he discovers that he does not have to be enslaved to the colonial myth of England. This new perspective evolves out of a sense that the story of England is merely an unauthoritative rumour, and that like the literary passages of a colonial education it can be reversed, re-interpreted, rewritten, retold. His historical conversations with Mrs. Rutherford demonstrate Dabydeen's novel's attempt at expressing a new, post-imperial 'freedom to make up the story of England' (167). The aesthetic of Disappearance attempts to trace and emulate 'the sinuous, the curved, the circular, the zigzagged, the unpredictable, the zany', and 'the invisibly buried' (167) nature of stories that compose national and native myth. This 'sinuous' 'unpredictable' model is also applied to migrant history, which is read as a continuum of meandering passages, a tangle of intertwining threads. This aesthetic demonstrates a Modernist awareness of the unauthoritative, overlapping nature of stories and of the meandering, 'unpredictable' apparently shapeless form of history and myth.<sup>18</sup>

In his two 'migrant education' novels Dabydeen argues that England is a fading colonial 'dream' or 'rumour'. The difficult tasks of applying the dreams and rumours of a colonial education to an unglorious contemporary England, and of reconciling one's native identity with this attempt to settle are confronted in Dabydeen's novels. In his version of Louise Bennett's famous model of migrancy as 'colonizin' Englan' in reverse', Dabydeen reverses the pattern of the colonial novel through a journey into the heart of English colonial mythology. In the course of this journey the 'native' darkness of English history is exposed.<sup>19</sup> Dabydeen's novel is a book that attempts to de-mythologise England, to confront the colonial progenitor of the contemporary educated migrant with a demonstration of how that education can be turned against its maker, how the self-aware migrant writer possesses the power of imaginatively colonising the mother country.

This self-awareness also carries intimations of a self-critique. Dabydeen's novels both argue that the migrant can disappear up 'his own disguise' and 'up the English cunt' of the mother country (Intended 159). They both warn of the pitfalls of

anglophilia, of misusing the potential 'freedom to make up the story of England' by continuing to be written, in thought and action, by a colonial education, or by a desperate ambition, born out of colonial poverty. The educated migrant is in this sense written as a potential re-colonising boundary-writer of English culture and society who must steer a course through the potentially 'whitening' English educational system. It is this transitory rite of passage, Dabydeen's fiction argues, that needs to be written about, contextualised, and re-connected to repressed native histories, and to the historical continuum of passage and migration.

### **Diasporic Passage**

If Dabydeen's novels provide a warning against assimilation into England, the Afro-Caribbean writers of this chapter resist England in their writing more vigorously, as a setting and subject for their fiction. Caryl Phillips's fiction is very explicitly involved in a project of remembering the two historical diaspora which have shaped his ethnic identity as a migrant Afro-Caribbean. Indeed, the most prevalent view of Phillips is that, as A. Robert Lee puts it, he writes 'less British than African-diasporic novels' (69). In this survey of his fiction I will examine how Phillips's diasporic orientation to history influences his representation of passage and place. It seems clear that Phillips's fiction looks beyond Britain, although taken as a baby from St. Kitts to spend his childhood in Britain, he now writes from an Euro-American base.<sup>20</sup> His oeuvre is similarly thematically unsettled and, written as it is from a diasporic orientation to history, appears to actively resist an identification with the idea and geographical reality of England.

In his first novel The Final Passage (1985), Phillips is concerned with remembering the post-war generation's 1950s passage to England. His epigraph to the novel is taken from T.S. Eliot's 'Four Quartets': 'A people without history/ Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern/ of timeless moments. So while the light fails/ On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel/ History is now and England'. In his novel Phillips applies Eliot's idea of a historical orientation grounded in the timeless

moment to his 1950s migrant context, and to a very specific 'people without history'. However, the temporal orientation of the migrants of The Final Passage discards Eliot's anglophile 'now and England' model; the timeless historical moment that the migrant exists in, like a fly in amber, is instead the unsettled blur of passage. In fact many of the temporal disorientations of The Final Passage are Modernist in inspiration. Phillips's unchronological approach to narrative, his choice to organise his plot structure in a non-linear fashion, as a scrambled configuration of timeless moments, disorients the reader's sense of when the passage begins and ends. This temporal disorientation serves to emphasise the diasporic perspective that guides Phillips's approach to narrative in The Final Passage, a perspective that reads passage as existing in a historic continuum. It is clear that Phillips's diasporic reading of passage in The Final Passage is part of a project of revising the archetypes of the 1950s Caribbean writer's representations of migrant passage and settlement. His separation of his novel into titled sections such as 'Winter', 'The Passage', and 'England', recalls some of the archetypes for the stages of passage and settlement of the 1950s generation.<sup>21</sup> One of the implications of this re-configuration of the 'timeless moments' that compose the migrant experience is that the diasporic migrant's experience is scrambled because his past hasn't been reconciled into an authoritative history and formally separated from his present, so that consequently he exists in a continuous unhistoricised blur. This diasporic conception of the migrant reads him as an exile of history, a perpetual wanderer, and implies that the title of Phillips's novel is ironic, for there is no end, no finality to the passage described in his text.

For Leila, Phillips's heroine, there is no opportunity to settle in England (121). Furthermore, her experiences of England are defined by continuous passage; Phillips repeatedly emphasises that his migrant's journey 'seemed endless' (123). These 'endless' vistas themselves comment on the diasporic migrant's continuous exile by evoking memories of poverty and monotony; during her 'bus journeys' to visit her sick mother in hospital she experiences 'endless views of decay and poverty' (129). This emphasis on the model of the migrant as a passenger, a passive spectator rather than a participant in English society is part of Phillips's uncommitted, unsettled diasporic

orientation to England (and to place in general), and reflects the resistance in his writing against the idea and reality of England.

This passive 'passenger' model, also, in the figure of Leila, offers a feminised reconception of the 1950s passage to London as a time of 'single men in single rooms' (Innes 21). For Leila's feckless, ambitious husband, Michael, England seems like a place of opportunity but for Leila it is a place of desolation. In this way Phillips represents England as a place of disunion which precipitates the dissolve of families and communities into restless individuals, but also the separation between two species of migrant; the male and the female, the assimilationist and the resistant, historicised migrant. There is a gradual sense that they are travelling separately as their passage progresses; Leila reflects that 'until he (Michael) spoke with her she would let him remain as a passenger on the same train, in the same carriage. She knew she would have to wait to find out his destination, unless ... something forced her to get off the train before him' (177). It is clear that by focusing on Leila's very separate passage Phillips is determined to read against the dominant masculine and assimilationist perspectives of the 1950s passage.

Phillips's account of Leila's passage is appropriately informed by the less prominent female tradition of Caribbean migrant writing up to this time. The Final Passage as Susheila Nasta has noted in her essay 'Setting Up Home In The City Of Words' echoes Jean Rhys's novel Voyage in the Dark (1934). In fact, the mixed-race Leila, considered 'the white girl' (40) at home, beaten by her mother for consorting 'with white people' (47), and eventually alienated in England, carries echoes of all of Rhys's mixed-race heroines and Rhys herself. By choosing to narrate the passage of the voiceless female migrant Phillips deliberately bypasses the heritage of male words on that passage and highlights the contemporary migrant writer's project of writing the voiceless and disempowered passengers of diasporic history into being. He also, through of his choice of a voiceless heroine, refers to the untold passages and voicelessness of a whole generation of women migrants.

Phillips's use of Rhys in The Final Passage is also thematic. The 'Idea of London as an illusion ... a dream built on the foundations of the colonial myth' (80) that Nasta argues, is developed in Voyage in the Dark is reflected in the imagery of

Phillips's novel. Leila's first impression of England is of the 'cold gray mist of the English channel' (137), an image that conceives of England as a myth formed out of island mist, and that regards England as another island rather than the authoritative mother country. This 'island' imagery continues throughout the novel. The smoky, amorphous, 'black (tunneled)' (126) metropolis, the cloudy, permanently 'overcast' (142) country is read as a site of continuous passage rather than the center of Empire or final destination to any journey.

The Final Passage also responds against the 'heroic and glamorous' (Donnell 283) aura surrounding the 1950s generation's passage and subsequent writing. Phillips's version of this passage, conversely, is written from the perspective of the fall-out of that generation's optimism, and of the 'long post-independence depression of the late 1960s and of the 1970s' (Donnell 282). Phillips's conception of England is consequently an extension of the previous generation's intangible dream model of the mother country and also an expansion of the 1950s generation's use of the English winter as a metaphor for the psychological desolation of the exile. England in The Final Passage is a site of negation; a place of deprivation, a prison or (as Leila discovers) a house that 'smelled of neglect' (161). During Leila's first view of the island, England is defined through lack:

There were no green mountains, there were no colorful women with baskets on their heads selling peanuts or bananas or mangoes, there were no trees no white houses on the hills, no hills no wooden houses on the shoreline, no clouds, just one big cloud (142).<sup>22</sup>

The litany of negations - 'there were no' - and the image of the 'one big cloud' represent England as an empty, ugly lie, an explosion of groundless myth. It is clear that it is part of Phillips's diasporic project to represent England in its post-imperial form as an uninhabitable myth.<sup>23</sup> His rejection of England in The Final Passage is achieved through his reversal of the topographical archetypes of the novel of colonial passage. Colonial novels, such as Heart of Darkness and A Passage to India (1924) apply a psychological atmosphere formed out of 'nothingness' to the topography of the



'East'. Sara Suleri has argued that in A Passage to India the Indian landscape is represented as a 'hollow symbolic space' defined by 'emptiness of geography' (144), and that geography is denied 'both connection and chronology' (145). Phillips's diasporic representation of a passage represents the geography similarly, emptied of meaning and without 'chronology', defined in terms of the cloudy blur of passage. As with Dabydeen, in this model of reverse passage there is the danger of losing one's identity; however, in The Final Passage the danger for the resistant Leila isn't loss of self through assimilation, but through becoming a living relic of a lost, native past; by the end of the novel Leila looks like 'a yellowing snapshot of an old relative, fading with the years' (204/5).

The Final Passage represents England from a diasporic, resistant perspective, pointing out the necessity for the diasporic or historically-minded migrant to learn from the 1950s passage and to look beyond the cloud of colonial myth, England, to define a future. However, as well as suggesting this historical re-orientation, Phillips points out the dangers through the eventual fate of his heroine, of fetishising a native past that is lost to you. Phillips's diasporic orientation is poised between these two positions. England in The Final Passage is represented as a stop gap location. Like Leila's 'neglected' house it 'no longer looked like a home', instead it possesses the transitory quality of a 'cheap hotel room' (200). Confronted with an uninhabitable English reality Leila instead chooses to identify with the diasporic memory of passage, a memory that offers a dream of passage over and above the English void: falling asleep she is 'sure that she could hear the sound of the sea' (200). This dream of passage away from England has roots in her earlier, discarded plans to marry Arthur. Arthur is the character in the novel who resists England, choosing instead to form an identity out of a passage to America to educate himself and out of a resolve to eventually 'plan a future on these islands' (81).<sup>24</sup> In the next section of this survey I will examine the constantly re-orientating development of Phillips's diasporic, anglophobic project in his novel Higher Ground (1989), through his exploration of an Afro-American diasporic perspective.

In Higher Ground. Phillips begins to write from a new polyphonic perspective. His novel is sub-titled 'A Novel in three parts'. This 'composite' approach to the novel

form, using disparate, geographically disconnected subdivisions to express a diasporic orientation to history becomes the narrative structure that defines his later, 1990s fiction. In this discussion of Phillips's composite novel I will focus on the middle passage of the novel, 'The Cargo Rap', because it represents the first attempt in Phillips's fiction at addressing the subject of America in any detail. It also offers an insight into Phillips's ideas on what the diasporic migrant writer's rite of passage away from that empty myth, England, might involve.

In 'The Cargo Rap' Phillips presents the instructional prison letters from an Afro-American internee to his family about life on the inside. This structure provides a means of addressing a larger Afro-American or diasporic community with the story of the tribulations of claiming a black education. During the passage of letters back and forth between this undefined historical and geographical diasporic divide, the prisoner describes an educational passage into black history. His interest in the formation of diasporic black consciousness is broad and big, including everything from an interest in Toussaint L'Ouverture's eighteenth-century slave rebellion in Haiti (117/118) to the philosophy of Malcolm X (68). This enquiry into a black, all-inclusive history is influenced by the polymorphous philosophies of 'Negritude'. Negritude offers a perspective on history that is Afro-diasporic in that it makes no brutal distinction between the Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American. Negritude, evolving out of several streams, from the America 'Harlem Renaissance' to the anti-colonial theories of Afro-European writers and theorists such as Léopold Sedor Senghor, Birago Diop, and Aimé Césaire, was truly a trans-national movement, linked ultimately, by an Afro-diasporic perspective. Speaking of the West Indian, in particular the West Indian historian C. L. R. James, and his famous book The Black Jacobins (1938), the prisoner states that 'Their history is our history for they too are African people captured and sold into American bondage' (123).

Phillips is essentially describing the sort of broad education in the oppressed history of Black consciousness that would be impossible for the migrant who remains intellectually and psychologically affiliated to that historical void, England. In one sense, Phillips's American letters are addressed to this de-historicised sector of the diasporic community. Phillips is clear that for him, at least, this sort of diasporic

education was not possible during the 1970s England of his adolescence. In his preface to The European Tribe (1987) he states that in the white-dominated, middle-class, British schools of his education 'I was never offered a text that had been penned by a black person' (1).<sup>25</sup> Furthermore he confesses that one of the 'most painful episodes of my childhood' was when his English teacher Mr. Thompson teasing him in front of the class said that 'he must be from Wales' (3). The source of his pain is the fact that his deracinated education had left him culturally and ethnically disorientated: 'The truth was I had no idea where I was from as I had been told that I was born in the Caribbean but came from England ... I could not participate in a joke which made my identity a source of humour' (3). The implications of Phillips's depiction of England as a 'cloud' island become clear in this context. America, is alternatively read as a site of where it is possible to re-orientate oneself diasporically and receive a black education.

Phillips's decision to oppose England and America in this way is inspired by his own experiences as a diasporic migrant and as a writer. It is in America that Phillips himself received his orientation in black history and literature and discovered himself as a writer. America is represented by Phillips in 'The Cargo Rap' and in his accounts of his own American experiences in the preface to The European Tribe as the site of self-education and invention, as a democracy of ideas. It is perhaps for this reason that Phillips is now largely based in America. America, according to Phillips, is a place where a process of creative disorientation and re-orientation occurs, where due to the omnipotent visible signs of migrations the migrant recovers their diasporic self. Describing New York, Phillips comments that 'the whole city seemed a testament to migratory patterns' (6).

America is also described by Phillips as the site where he discovered himself as a black writer. He states that after breathing in the richer multicultural atmosphere of America and discovering black novelists he hadn't encountered in Britain such as Ralph Ellison: 'I decided that I wanted to try to become a writer' (8). The choice between England and America is pitched as a choice between a continuation of his education in 'scholarship' English at Oxford leading eventually to an academic career and a channeling of that black consciousness he discovered in America through creative writing. He rejects the academic route back to England because it involves 'moving

away from the vast majority of black people', and instead decides to 'confront my own confusion and write' (8). This is the purpose of Phillips's writing, confronting the disorientation of having evolved out of a history defined by passage, and historicising the various passages that define diasporic identity. It is evident that Phillips rejects England as an integral influence on the formation of his own diasporic psyche and intellect in the foreword to The European Tribe but also implicitly in 'The Cargo Rap'. In both works America is read as the migrant mother country that the diasporan must reckon with. His shift of interest towards America in these works is also reflective of the political formation of the post-imperial world. Now that 'America has conquered Europe economically, politically and culturally' (121), America is evolving into the global mythographer migrants must confront.

However, despite Phillips's seeming fetishisation of America in the preface and foreword to The European Tribe and in 'The Cargo Rap' it is ultimately read as a prison that permits intellectual expansion but no political or physical expansion. America is read in a similar way to the poetics of deprivation that defined Phillips's vision of England in The Final Passage. In 'The Cargo Rap' Phillips's account of America is written in the claustrophobic slave 'cargo' hold of the diasporic migrant's continued traumatic, socially deprived passage through a racist society. It is clear from the attitudes the prisoner adopts to his 'captive' (123) and confined condition within American society that he regards himself as a descendent of a plantation slave. He adopts an attitude of self-abnegating stoicism as his armour against deprivation, he spurns possessions and reduces his needs, physical and emotional, to a subsistence level; he quotes Frantz Fanon, asserting that 'There is nothing they can take off me, except of course my life' (71). He even claims that 'Love is an emotion I have learned to eradicate' (68). When the prisoner iconoclastically argues that 'most of you cannot see your chains' (165) he is challenging the complacency of the settled perspective. The prisoner of 'The Cargo Rap' is very much cast in the role of the troublemaker son, and represents a new generation's unsettled relationship with their history. One of the implications of 'The Cargo Rap' is that the diasporic migrant needs to recognise him or herself as an ex-slave, that you need to be able to see your ideological chains to overcome them. Phillips is very clear, throughout his oeuvre, that this sort of re-

orientation only occurs as a result of historical enquiry: in The European Tribe he argues that 'Europe's absence of self-awareness seems to me directly related to a lack of a cogent sense of history' (121). Despite stressing the need for a historical grounding in diasporic history in 'The Cargo Rap' he also uses this story to illustrate the dangers in fetishising one's history by adopting a confined 'ghettoised' mentality. This internalised and enclosed mind-set is illustrated in Phillips's narrative when the prisoner is placed in solitary confinement at the end of the story.

One of the reasons Phillips might reject the prisoner's perspective is that the prisoner's assessment of black artists who rise in white society is often vitriolic and absolutist. The prisoner pours scorn on figures like Louis Armstrong, black men who compromised themselves to be assimilated into white society. When the prisoner describes the case of Richard Wright, the black writer trapped in the 'conundrum' of fearing 'white men but (wanting) to be like him in terms of privileges', he is describing the 'conundrum' Phillips himself faces as a 'literary' migrant (140). However, it is apparent that Phillips ultimately embraces the potential for an 'international' identity that can be claimed as both a diasporic migrant and as a writer. In his foreword to The European Tribe Phillips describes his 'peripatetic life' as a reflection of his 'chosen profession as a writer' (x). Phillips's position in 'The Cargo Rap', balanced between an angry ideological rejection of America as a place to settle in, and a rejection of the potentially 'ghettoised mentality' that results from a rigidly defined 'black' identity, is borne out of his diasporic and literary suspicions at the idea of settling on or fetishising any one set of affiliations or any one place.

Crossing the River (1993) represents Phillips's most epic approach to his diasporic project, tracing through a trans-national, composite narrative the Afro-American diasporic migrant's passage through history from the beginning of the slave trade to the Second World War. Phillips's novel, with its narrative of three African slave children lost in the flux of American history, represents a continuation of his Afro-American project in 'The Cargo Rap'. It is apparent, however, that as A Final Passage and A State of Independence represented fictional farewells to the mythology of place surrounding, respectively, England and the Caribbean, Crossing the River is

the work where Phillips moves beyond the enclosed, ghettoised view of America in 'The Cargo Rap' to view it from a trans-Atlantic diasporic perspective.

Crossing the River is the novel where Phillips contextualises America within diasporic history and stresses that, like England, it does not represent the ultimate destination of the diasporic experience. When the elderly Afro-American slave, Martha, travels the pioneer trail West, looking for freedom (74) away from the Virginia plantation (97) where she has spent her life as a slave, Phillips informs us that 'Her journey had been a long one' (97). It is evident from the shape of Phillips's book, with its African prologue, that Phillips means her journey to be read in the context of her original passage away from the African coast. She barely sees America as she travels, as her head is filled with an 'atavistic mist' (73). The title of the section her story is related in, 'West', blurs the distinctness of her journey towards the mythic west coast of America, relegating it to a stage in her diasporic odyssey.<sup>26</sup> It is clear that Crossing the River whilst emphasising an Afro-American diasporic perspective, also constitutes the beginning of a shift away from an emphasis on the American side of this ethnic alliance.

The first section of the novel, 'The Pagan Coast', describes an African passage, a reverse journey back into the 'atavistic mist' of diasporic origins. The story of the eldest lost 'slave' child's repatriation back to Africa as a Liberian missionary by his liberal American owner, Edward Williams, also provides another variation on the Heart of Darkness model of passage into Africa. However in this variation on Conrad's novel the man who is accused of an increasingly 'native' style of living (41) is black, and a returned exile. The quest in the novel becomes the search in the 'huge roaming jungle' (60) for a 'lost' black man, who has lost his 'Christian' reason and 'gone native'. However Phillips's perspective on this passage is that it is a process of finding or recovering oneself rather than a process of losing yourself. Despite the deeply compromised and chaotic nature of Liberian society Nash Williams, the missionary slave soon rejects his notion of Africa as a 'heathen' land, and begins to see it as an alternative to the limited forms of liberty he has discovered in America: 'We (colored men) need to contend for our rights, stand our ground and feel the love of liberty that can never be found in your America' (62).<sup>27</sup> The missionary, neglected by his

American father/owner, exclaims 'Why have you forsaken me?' (46). However his Christian missionary's refrain is also significant to the diasporan's religion of memory as a refrain to a betraying father/ancestor, and becomes suggestive in this story, of the beginning of a re-conversion back to historical faith in a lost African father.<sup>28</sup> Phillips's representation of Liberia does not involve fetishising it so much as dehistoricising it as a dark native cultural void; as the missionary remarks 'natives are a much-maligned people in this dark and benighted country' (31). In fact, Phillips suggests that this Africa is no different from the Africa of Heart of Darkness that its utopian potential evolves out of the fact that it is being seen through African eyes. When Edward, the white American goes in search of his 'lost' missionary, he views Liberia with disgust, with Conradian 'Western' eyes which are 'assaulted by ... natives who squatted idly', 'infantile shacks' and 'filth' (70). Phillips, in 'The Pagan Coast' argues back against Conrad that though the white man, like Kurtz and Edward, lose both their 'way and ... sense of purpose' (70) in Africa, the ex-African diaspora becomes re-orientated. However, by the end of Phillips's reverse-reading of Conrad, the missionary, like all the 'transient' diasporan children of the novel, has left a broken trail and disappeared.<sup>29</sup> There is no clear sense of settlement, whether African, American or English, at the end of any of the sections of Phillips's novel. In this respect, by representing all his diasporans as elusive, transient ghosts, defined by movement, Phillips seems to be reaching towards what might be considered a visionary diasporic perspective, rather than the simply nostalgic 'African-diasporic' perspective defined by Lee.<sup>30</sup> This visionary re-reading of Conrad, and of a reverse homecoming African passage is characteristic of the project underlying the whole work. The visionary perspective of Crossing the River is best, demonstrated in the novel's epilogue, which gathers together a temporally compressed diasporic history through the device of a lamenting, guilty ancestor/father figure, whose epic historical vision stretches across centuries and continents, compressing oceans into rivers and communities into voices:

I acknowledged greetings from those who lever pints of ale in the pubs of London. Receive salutations from those who submit to (what the French call) neurotic inter-racial urges in the boulevards of Paris. But my Joyce, and my

other children, their voices hurt but determined, they will survive the hardships of the far bank. Only if they panic will they break their wrists and ankles against Captain Hamilton's instruments. *Put 2 in irons and delicately in the thumbscrews to encourage them to a full confession of those principally involved. In the evening put 8 more in neck yokes.* Survivors all. In Brooklyn a helplessly addicted mother waits for the mist to clear from her eyes. They have stopped her benefit. She lives now without the comfort of religion, electricity or money. A barefoot boy in Sao Paulo is rooted to his piece of earth, which he knows will never swell up, pregnant, and become a vantage point from which he will be able to see beyond his dying favela. In Santo Domingo, a child suffers the hateful hot comb, the dark half-moons of history heavy beneath each eye. A mother watches. Her eleven-year-old daughter is preparing herself for yet another night of premature prostitution. Survivors. In their diasporan souls a dream like steel (235/6).

The father/ancestor of Crossing the River is presented as a democratically inclusive and expansive gatherer of voices, a cultural 'listener' in the vein of Walt Whitman. However his democracy is a democracy of the historically voiceless where there are no geographically defined boundaries, as in Whitman's America, binding them together.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the only binding structure that links them is their fellowship in the flux of a black history of passage and enduring survival. The polyphonic international perspective Phillips provides through this 'many tongued chorus' (1) offers a visionary account of the cultural richness of diasporic culture as a black culture formed out resistance and melody: 'I have listened. To reggae rhythms of rebellion and revolution dipping though the hills and valleys of the Caribbean ... Listened to: Papa Doc. Baby Doc. Listened to voices hoping for: Freedom. Democracy. Singing: Baby, baby. Where did our love go? Samba. Calypso. Jazz. Jazz ... I have listened to the sounds of an African Carnival in Trinidad. In Rio. In New Orleans' (236). His account also attempts to carry echoes of this international community's illustrious history of authoritative or historically-voiced words and deeds: 'Declaring: Brothers and Friends. I am Toussaint L'Ouverture, my name is perhaps known to you'. Sketches of Spain in



Harlem. In a Parisian bookstore a voice murmurs the words. Nobody knows my name. I have listened to the voice that cried: "I have a dream" (235).<sup>32</sup>

The cultural phantasmagoria Phillips presents in his epilogue attempts to be the echo-chamber of the diasporan's 'fractured' history (236). There is a sense however that the expansive and inclusive network of communities, histories and cultures that Phillips's represents in this epilogue, is largely willed but unearned. The diasporic histories of Crossing the River are too fragmented and ultimately too lacking in colour, depth and detail to merit this ethnic carnival as their finale. If Phillips's epilogue is unconvincing as a coda to his attempted symphony of voices, then its value in relation to his writing must ultimately be seen as theoretical, and as the most visionary passage of his oeuvre.

Phillips's argument in Crossing the River is that the diasporic migrant and his/her history is essentially untrackable and unmappable: 'There are no paths in water. No signposts' (236). However it is this 'pathless' terrain, Phillips argues, that inspires diasporan culture. It is, he argues a culture that is defined by its struggle with the ontological blur created by a condition of continual passage, a struggle against a slave heritage of namelessness and voicelessness, that survives, through constant self-regeneration.<sup>33</sup> When the father/ancestor declares 'You are beyond but not lost for you carry within your bodies the seeds of new trees' (236), he is pointing to diasporic culture's status as an international culture of dispersal and cross-pollination. Phillips's diasporically inspired aesthetic ultimately rejects the 'atavistic mist' (73) of a definitive African homecoming and the ideological mists that surround imperial and post-imperial England and America. Instead his aesthetic feeds off the historical and cultural momentum of diasporic passage.

Phillips's fiction essentially argues that all national spaces are ideologically uninhabitable stop-gaps for the diasporic migrant. There is a sense in his fiction that he views the role of the diasporic writer is to exist perpetually in elusive motion, unsettled, acting as a roving, historicising conscience of the post-imperium. In this survey of Phillips's fiction I have attempted to describe how his diasporic aesthetic progresses out of an antipathy for the colonial mythology of place, an antipathy that is originally centered in England and how his consequent fiction resists the power of this myth and

the concomitant myth of national belonging attached to it, at every turning-point in his career.

### **Slave Passages**

Although demonstrating less epic ambition, Fred D'Aguiar's slave history novels add an illuminating postscriptual and contextualising addendum to a discussion of Phillips's oeuvre, whilst unfolding their own unique historical perspective on the diasporic migrant. Born in London, brought up in Guyana, and now based in London, D'Aguiar's fiction shares Phillips's seeming disavowal of contemporary England in his work. D'Aguiar's position is even more extreme, however as he has resisted setting any of his novels in England. Instead he has focused, in The Longest Memory (1994) and Feeding the Ghosts (1997) on a very close examination of the problems involved in recovering slave histories.<sup>34</sup> I would emphasise the term 'slave' over 'diasporic' because, unlike Phillips, D'Aguiar does not attempt an epic diasporic approach to slave history which directly traces the diasporan's passage into the contemporary. Victor J. Ramraj describes Phillips's diasporic vision of Europe, in terms of 'former slaves (wandering) freely among the rubble of Europe's all-powerful cities' (220), whereas the 'slave-history' perspective of D'Aguiar's two novels lack this visionary historic breadth and direct concern with the contemporary. I want to argue that D'Aguiar's concern is, however implicitly, contemporary. His 'slave history' fiction describes the history of the educated slave as an educative rite of passage in terms that resonate with many of the concerns of the contemporary literary migrant.

In his first novel, The Longest Memory (1994), D'Aguiar writes a polyphonic but geographically and temporally static novel, set on a Virginia plantation in 1810. The polyphony, describing the death of a slave from a variety of viewpoints, respects the provisional nature of a 'slave' history, an unwritten history spoken 'from memory' (64). D'Aguiar's book, whilst presenting slave history in this provisional manner is also anxious to explain how the conditions of slavery precipitated this provisional approach to history, how the educated slave son, Whitechapel, is eventually driven

away from a written history, to composing 'in my head or aloud' (64). The dynamic of the story is the generational conflict between the self-abnegating, ideologically enslaved father and the rebellious son, who is a 'troublesome' slave (21), full of 'wrongheadedness' and 'anarchic spirit' (57). Both father and son are named 'Whitechapel', but there is a sense that the son's rebellion derives partially from the desire to define a new identity for himself to avoid seeing his father's dependent, 'nameless' history (15) repeated in himself. The son's apparent 'wrongheadedness' and the inspiration for his flight from the plantation lies in his status as an educated, literate slave. The educational process, a rite of passage from blind obedience to 'wrongheadedness' is, according to D'Aguiar, defined by generational conflicts. The father beats his son for reading (60) and warns him that 'Books will only bring you trouble' (116). In the son's poetic contribution to the polyphonic chorus of the novel he explores the pressures on his educated in-between position. He is hemmed in by the white man's law which forbids 'a slave to know how to write and read' and by his father who makes him promise 'never to open a book or pick up a pen'. It is only when his father betrays his flight that the full extent of the 'the abyss / between' father and son, and between educated and subjugated migrant becomes apparent (116). D'Aguiar's charting of the rite of passage of the educated 'slave' is described in terms of a fall, (with both Adamic and Promethian connotations) into forbidden cognisance of one's enslaved condition, into resistance against this condition, into attempted flight (or exile), and ultimately into the status of the pariah who no longer integrates in his community.

D'Aguiar's model of the educated slave's rite of passage in this way possesses striking similarities with the position of the contemporary educated migrant. The contemporary educated migrant is also, as a result of his education, a figure who is societally in transition, in-between, a figure who loses his native identity through a process of cultural translation but still represents what Phillips, in Higher Ground describes as the 'white man's nightmare': 'a nigger with a book' (170). However, D'Aguiar's 'rite of passage' model, historically positioned in the context of slavery, offers an implicit defence of the figure of that much-beleaguered figure, the educated diasporic migrant. In D'Aguiar's model, education is a liberating step out of physical

and ideological enslavement, out of a voiceless slave/native condition; education, according to this migrant-transition model, orientates the slave/native in history. D'Aguiar's project in The Longest Memory is, in this way, self-justifying. His liberating model of the slave's educational rite of passage into self-invention and self-definition seems to offer a historical interpretation of the educated migrant as a liberated, historicised figure imbued with the knowledge to read and recall a native history. This in turn authorises his diasporic migrant's project in The Longest Memory to remember, assemble and voice his provisional version of a slave history.

D'Aguiar's poetic third novel, Feeding the Ghosts (1997) is again concerned with this figure of the educated slave as liberator, rebel and historian, but also with explaining the historical origins of this figure's 'transitory' or in-between condition. This in-between condition is literalised in the novel as it is set predominantly in a transitory zone, at sea, during the course of a passage from Africa to England. The sea is the subject of much meditation in Feeding the Ghosts, it is given more attention in the book than England as it is considered to be, as the 'territory' of the 'middle passage', the historical and geographical zone that best explains the transitory nature of slave and ex-slave identity. In fact the choice of the sea as a setting de-stabilizes the power that an English history might have over such a nationally undefined story. Such an in-between story, set in a transitory zone, becomes, in D'Aguiar's book, the exemplary subject for and implicitly about that transitory creature, the educated, diasporic migrant. In Feeding the Ghosts D'Aguiar recovers this unlikely fathomless space as a signifier for the slave's displaced history. The de-historicised and displaced model of the sea in the novel is in dialogue with that other transitory de-individualised zone, the cargo hold, where slaves form 'one miserable tangled mess of humanity' (26). For, the sea itself is seen as 'slavery' (4), as the figure in the book for the enslaved, voiceless, permanently in-between historical limbo of transmigration: 'the sea is between my past and future ... The sea keeps me between my life' (230). The project of D'Aguiar in Feeding the Ghosts is essentially to remember and historically validate this lost 'suspended life', this 'life in abeyance' (73).

His transitory story has, again, like The Longest Memory, the transitory figure of the educated slave as the central character. The African, Mintah, can speak English,

is literate and Christian. In fact, her extreme civility bears a close resemblance to the central character in Phillips's slave history, Cambridge (1991).<sup>35</sup> Both are educated and christianised and consequently become slaves who are 'difficult to subjugate' (32). Mintah's and Cambridge's civility is read, in both texts, as potentially subversive because their civilised behaviour threatens the constructed ideological abyss that justified slavery, the apparent abyss between slave and the Western, civilised notion of what was human. Mintah's and Cambridge's behaviour is situated in a disturbingly transitory cultural territory which offers a challenge to the mask of English civility. In Cambridge Phillips applies a trope that explains England as 'a dependable garment that one simply slipped into or out of according to one's whim' (177). It is, he implies, an ethnic disguise anyone might potentially wear, or even, as in the case of his English heroine, Emily Cartwright, outgrow. When Cambridge asks his overseer, Mr. Brown, to treat him with decency (167), and when Mintah reminds the First mate, Kelsal, that 'I am baptised like you' (37), they are challenging the moral authority of English civility and exposing it as an ethnic code that merely puts an attractive gloss on brutality.

Again, as in The Longest Memory the thematic processes of D'Aguiar's slave book echo his project as a contemporary migrant writer. The 'civilising' rite of passage of the transitory, educated, contemporary migrant writer offers a similar threat to the crumbling veneer of a post-imperial England. Feeding the Ghosts argues thematically, but also through its very existence as a transitory version of history, that this transitory educational process is subversive, because it can enable a decoding of English cultural values. Education, in the slave history, is clearly identified as an active and resistant process. Cambridge believes that 'my knowledge of the bible instructed me that it is a man's duty, with God's blessing to outwit tyranny' (164). Mintah is similarly inspired by her education to oppose the tyranny of white man's version of law and history. This is demonstrated in her attempt to write a book that tells her version of 'what happened on' the slave ship, the Zong (152). D'Aguiar uses the device of the trial, and the intervention of Mintah's 'slave's book' (154) as a renegade testimonial within the trial, to introduce another provisional framework from which to examine the testimonial, unauthoritative nature history. This written 'slave's account' (158) also asserts the

power of the educated witness to remember atrocity, it keeps faith with Mintah's promise to the murdered slaves that 'I will remember you' (127). Mintah's voice is the voice of resistance and conscience, the voice that inspires hope and resistance on the ship, and that resists death, returning to haunt the crew with her ghost presence and eventually her 'ghost book' (119).

The idea of a 'ghost book' is also applicable to D'Aguiar's migrant novel and to his conception of his role as an 'ex-slave' writer. D'Aguiar, in Feeding the Ghosts essentially acts as a medium of the ghostly forms of slave history. His conception of the contemporary migrant writer, implied in the topic, themes and approach to history of his novel, is of the migrant as a 'return of the repressed' native, who, like the hidden, renegade presence of Mintah on the Zong represents a ghost in the 'English' machine that is capable of remembering and voicing white distortions of native history. The educated migrant according to D'Aguiar represents the triumph of 'someone who was meant to be no one' (93). This 'slave' perspective is also an indirect defence of a culturally ambiguous position. Phillips, in A State of Independence points out through the figure of Jackson the implications of letting 'the Englishman fuck up your head' (136) and becoming displaced from one's 'native' identity. In Feeding the Ghosts D'Aguiar sees this passage through the education system as potentially liberating, and asserts the educated slave/migrant's power to convert their English education to their own uses. His 'slave histories' offer an implicit defence of the position of the educated migrant as subversively iconoclastic, as someone who challenges the hegemony of white 'written' history and the myths of English civility. He reads the contemporary, diasporic migrant as wrong troublesome ex-slave, as a survivor, and as a committed historian. D'Aguiar writes an appropriately 'transitory' history of slavery. Alongside his interest in the literary middle passage lie other metaphorical concerns; such as re-setting (what was previously English) history in the liberatingly unauthoritative void of the sea, in rescuing history from the dehistoricised abyss of slave passage. It is a version of history borne out of his rite of passage as a writer in the English language; a history written self-consciously from the in-between position of the educated migrant.

## **Bypassing England**

In her novels *Annie John* (1983) and *Lucy* (1990) Jamaica Kincaid charts the rite of passage from native child to migrant adult, from Antiguan to American. Although neither of these novels are set in England, they both dramatise the native and migrant's obsession with the idea of England. Kincaid's model of passage, although it only involves two geographical locations, is tripartite, as it also involves an ideological, unvisited, bypassed location, England. Her conception of the rite of passage, from native to literary migrant, is of a passage towards historical self-definition that is mediated through processes of reading and writing literary passages, and defined by a continuous struggle against the de-historicising psychological shackles of an English colonial education. Consequently Kincaid offers a compelling reading of the migrant as a historicised being, formed out of the process of passage, whose approach to the notions of settling and place are characterised by questioning, scepticism and resistance.

In her first novel, *Annie John*, Kincaid describes the educational rite of passage of a 'good' native girl, who is torn between pleasing her mother (land), her British school, and defining her self against the half-Antiguan, half-English island that she loves and hates. Her sense of herself as different, as an outsider, as a writer and as a gestating migrant personality is betrayed in her response to a school composition competition.<sup>36</sup> Most of the girls write stories about England, about the post-imperial dregs of gossip, rumour and speculation still circulating the mythical mother country: 'One girl told of a much revered and loved aunt who now lived in England and of how much she looked forward to one day moving to England to live with her aunt' (40). All write restless stories about a fetishised 'away', whereas her story is notably, provocatively about the bonds of home. Writing about her fear of her mother abandoning her at Rat island and the terrifying gulf that grows between them as they swim, her story describes a rite of passage into the first inklings of a disillusioned, maturity:

A huge black space then opened up in front of me and I fell inside it. I couldn't see what was in front of me and I fell inside it. I couldn't think of anything except that my mother was no longer near me (43).

With its sudden 'Huge black space' (43) this passage anticipates the 'deep and wide split' (103) that opens up between them eventually as mother and daughter, anglophile and anglophobe, and finally as native and migrant. This split is prompted by the pressures of living in an English colony. The Anglo-Antiguan nature of the island's institutions are in some way embodied in her 'anglophile' Antiguan mother, who combines 'native' customs and beliefs with a mission to transform her daughter into an obedient and civilised 'young lady'. This civilising involves sending her to a 'manners' teacher, a piano teacher 'from Lancashire England' (28), to Bible study class (30), and ultimately to a 'ladylike' British school. This split between mother and daughter, this conversion from good native child to the uncivilised 'slut' (102) her mother eventually accuses her of becoming, is developed in both novels as a fall into a disillusioned, painfully historicised, impure migrant condition.

This progress towards an alienated historical awareness is charted in the novel through the course of Annie's educational rite of passage at her British school.<sup>37</sup> Her disillusion is already evident in her choice of composition topic. While most of the other compositions in the competition are based on a desire for England, Annie John's story resists the mythical lures of England. Her story is, instead, about the beginning of a sense of alienation and displacement. In this way her story betrays a historicised sensibility which the other stories, with their colonial residue of anglophilia, lack. Her story, with its 'deep and wide split', is a story that reveals the geographical and historical disorientation of a 'post' perspective, a perspective that demonstrates an awareness of post-imperial decline and a fantasy of disaffiliation from a home that is both England and Antigua intermixed, one speaking the other. This disillusioned fall into a historicised post-imperial perspective is figured in Kincaid's novels through disorientating images of gulfs and splits and holes. The 'huge black space' of Annie John's story represents a terrifying intimation of a history defined by traumatic passage and displacement and of a post-imperial world defined by migrations and separations.



Her story also betrays aspects of Kincaid's aesthetic as a writer with a 'post-imperial' perspective. Kincaid's interest in the daughter writer's bond to her mother/land has meant that she has usually attracted psychoanalytic-feminist readings to her work.<sup>38</sup> Her application of the mother/land trope is usually read as evidence of her sympathies with a feminist aesthetic and with a 'native' Caribbean literary and cultural traditions. However, in a 1990 interview with Selwyn Cudjoe she teasingly states that she doesn't see herself 'in any school', that she has 'no sense of a tradition in West Indian literature' (221) or of herself as a feminist writer. She does, however admit that there is a Modernist aspect to her work, and that she doesn't like realistic fiction (222) except for histories of the Caribbean and England. It is clear from this that two interests collide in her fiction; history and Modernism. Modernism, because it reflects her version of 'post-imperial' Caribbean 'reality' (222) and because it represents a disillusioned 'deep and wide split' from the authoritative realist traditions of native Anglo-West-Indian literature and historiography. History, because, again, it offers access to a potentially disillusioned and disillusioning discourse. Her composition story is, in this context, a declaration of aesthetic intent; she uses it to announce that she wants to write a new sort of disillusioned story, a story that responds to the traumas of colonial history and of a fall into a post-imperial world.

In the curious ellipsis or passage-gulf between Annie John and Lucy, Kincaid demonstrates her resistance to the 'written' narratives of the West Indian female migrant, and to the idea of England. In the final chapter of Annie John, 'A Walk to the Jetty', the heroine embarks on a passage 'to England, where I would study to become a nurse' (130). This is the fulfillment of her mother's 'lady-like' dream for her daughter, and represents a certain trend in Caribbean fiction, from Lamming's The Emigrants (1954) to Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) towards an ineluctable, myth-fulfilling passage to England.<sup>39</sup> However, Annie John clearly resists the 'written' direction of her life: she states, 'I didn't want to go to England, I did not want to be a nurse' (148). In Lucy, it is clear that Kincaid has chosen to resist this expected English passage for herself and for her heroine, for in this novel she writes about and from the perspective of a Caribbean migrant in America. The transforming nature of the rite of passage from native child to metropolitan migrant is implied in the way child Annie John takes a boat

to England at the end of her narrative only to arrive in New York by plane as the adult Lucy. The new name, Lucy, is there to suggest that the migrant's narrative is different that the migrant is a transformed being, though it does not necessarily suggest that Lucy is entirely distinct from Annie John.<sup>40</sup> Mordecai and Wilson have noted that Kincaid herself rejected her Anglo-Antiguan surname Richardson to enter the literary persona Jamaica Kincaid (275). It is clear that migrancy for Kincaid, through her own unexpected escape to America and eventual decision to become a writer there, is deeply connected with the notions of transformation and self-invention. So, the transition from Anglo-Antiguan Annie John to American Lucy (like the transition from Lucy to Lucifer) may be read as the culmination of an attempt to escape the written narratives that previously wrote her against her will as English.<sup>41</sup>

Lucy may be read as an attempt to bypass and demote the great post-war tradition of the passage to England. However Kincaid's interest in England survives her desertion to America. The America of Lucy is haunted by England, by the memory of an English colonial education. The adult Lucy's migrant vision of America is informed by the 'fallen', historicised sense of the post-imperial world that gestated in Annie John. In fact it might be argued that Lucy's fallen historical orientation represents the culmination of this process, that the process of migrancy is the definitive fall into a new historical perspective.<sup>42</sup> This perspective, Kincaid contends, is impossible before migration. In A Small Place (1988) she argues that the post-imperial 'native' nation lacks a historical perspective because it is embedded in a de-historicised 'tourist' culture: a 'native' people 'cannot see themselves in a larger picture; they cannot see that they might be part of a chain of something, anything' (77). The historicising perspective of Lucy is written to move beyond and oppose the Anglo-Antiguan, colonial current of history that 'teaches you how to be a good servant, a good nobody, which is what a servant is' (77). In Lucy Kincaid adopts a skeptical distance from the colonial world in order to view it clearly, to view it within 'the larger picture' of history. America is represented as a sort of neutral territory in which an exploration of the migrant's feelings for the two countries that formed her being, the colonial mother-country and mother-land, becomes possible. In this context, it might be argued

that Lucy offers a 'tour' of America through a lens darkened by its previous passage through a history under English colonial rule.

The 'migrant' perspective of Lucy is presented as an antidote to the limited, history-parched perspective of the neo-colonial tourist culture of post-imperial Antigua. Her version of the post-migration experience implies a critique of tourism as a passive approach to assessing one's geographical relationship to history. The past persists in Lucy's vision of America, she is constantly conscious of her movement from the world of the work and production to the world of pleasure and consumption: on seeing a 'plowed field' from a train window she thinks 'Well Thank God I didn't have to do that?' (32). Lucy's 'migrant' perspective actively avoids regarding America with a tourist's unhistorical eyes.<sup>43</sup> She is constantly aware that the migrant's journey is not a pleasure trip, for if the tourist traditionally moves from a cold climate to a hot climate for pleasure, the colonial migrant moves from a hot climate to a cold climate in order to work. Lucy arrives in America 'wearing the mantle of a servant' (95) a sleeps in a maid's room which has the dimensions of 'a box in which cargo travelling a long way should be shipped' (18), and these dimensions ultimately influence her vision of America.<sup>44</sup> These transitory 'cargo box' dimensions explain why her migrant vision of America is so critical and disillusioned; it is a vision borne out of a history of cramped middle passages and displacement, slavery and deprivation

Kincaid's 'migrant' perspective is also borne out of a rigorous rite of passage through an English colonial system. It is therefore entirely appropriate that her heroine, Lucy, should approach place as a mythical text that requires historical de-coding. The passage where Mariah shows Lucy a field of daffodils exemplifies Lucy's approach to reading place and illustrates her 'historicised' habit of seeing England and the ideological remains of 'hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face' (31):

Along the paths and underneath the trees were many, many yellow flowers the size and shape of play teacups, or fairy skirts. They looked like something to eat and something to wear at the same time; they looked beautiful, they looked simple, as if made to erase a complicated and unnecessary idea. I did not know

what these flowers were, and so it was a mystery to me why I wanted to kill them. Just like that I wanted to kill them. I wished that I had an enormous scythe; I would just walk down the path dragging it alongside me, and I would cut those flowers down at the place where they emerged from the ground (29).

Lucy reads the vision of the daffodils not as flowers, but as the puerile appurtenances of an English 'lyrical passage' from her colonial education, as something essentially ideological, 'made to erase a complicated and unnecessary idea', like history.<sup>45</sup> In a vision extension of her argument in A Small Place her angry, historicised of the daffodils challenges the white middle-class vision of Mariah's touristic eye, that views the daffodils merely as commodities, consumables: 'they looked like something to eat and something to wear' (29). Mariah's joy at the sight of the daffodils is viewed as the equivalent of a 'person visiting heaps of death and ruin and feeling alive and inspired at the sight of it all' (Small 13).

Lucy's reading of the daffodils challenges the seemingly ideological innocence implied in images of 'play teacups or fairy skirts'. Her reading of the daffodils is also, implicitly, a critique of William Wordsworth's 'The Daffodils' (29) and the other archetypal 'literary passages' applied by British educational policies to colonise Caribbean minds with visions of an ideological innocent, pastoral England.<sup>46</sup> On first hearing about Mariah's love of daffodils, Lucy remembers 'an old poem I had been made to memorize when I was ten years old and a pupil at Queen Victoria Girl's School. I had been made to memorize it, verse after verse' (18). She recalls that when she had recited it successfully she was told 'how proud the poet, now long dead, would have been to hear his words ringing out of my mouth' (18). On hearing this she recalls 'making a vow to erase from my mind, line by line, every word of that poem' (19). The sight of the daffodils inspires the same terror as the poem, and the same desire to 'erase' the cultural taint of an English colonial education and history on her imagination. This drive to 'erase' the daffodils is motivated by a sense that they represent something that threatens to 'erase' and overwrite her identity. After her experience reciting the poem she is haunted by a 'dream of being chased by daffodils' and 'buried deep underneath them and ... never seen again' (19). In this American

scene that dream is recalled, for the daffodils, who act as a signifier for England in Kincaid's text, have effectively 'chased' her, and have made it difficult for her to relate to any other country; Antigua or America, without the mediating cultural lens of her English colonial education.<sup>47</sup>

Lucy's reading of the daffodils challenges the tourist perspective of Mariah, and implicitly, the perspective of that post-imperial tourist-coloniser, America, the country that views the world as an ideologically innocent, ahistorical natural resource, that can readily be assimilated into the American national product. Her challenge insists on an acknowledgment of the difference between their worlds, that 'at ten years of age I had to learn by heart a long poem about some flowers I would not see in real life until I was nineteen' (30).<sup>48</sup> By pointing out to Mariah how alien the daffodils seem to her, and the psychological estrangement wrought by an 'Englishing' education on her relationship with place, she effectively 'cast (Mariah's) beloved daffodils in a scene she had never considered, a scene of conquered and conquests' (30). Her 'migrant' vision, in a pattern that is repeated throughout the novel, converts everything she sees to the historical 'dimensions' of 'a scene of conquered and conquests'.

In Lucy the migrant journey is conceived of as the antidote to the 'pleasure tour', as a dissident historical description of the foreign. Psychological displacement is chosen over Englishness as a basis for a post-imperial identity, because it recognises the 'deep and wide split' that is central to the colonised's identity. The figure of the migrant is represented as a being that cannot settle, whose uncommitted, critical orientation to the post-imperial world is shaped out of a history defined by forced passage and dispossession. According to Lucy the post-imperial, post-migration condition represents a fall into endless and disillusioning historical perspective: 'a hole through which you fall forever' (34)<sup>49</sup> This is the void that confronts Lucy at the end of the novel as she attempts to write her story: 'tears fell on the page and caused all the words to become one great big blur' (183/4). This gulf of tears represents the 'blur' the 'fallen' migrant inhabits. Reading and writing, the skills inherited from an English education, are adapted in Lucy to the difficult task of self-definition and 'self-invention' (134), the struggle to read and write oneself out of the historical blur, to oppose the shapelessness and endlessness of grief with historical shape.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined how key figures of the 1980s and 1990s generation of Caribbean migrant writers, David Dabydeen, Caryl Phillips, Fred D'Aguiar and Jamaica Kincaid, apply a metaphor of passage to explore their constantly shifting orientation towards their historically blurred, displaced past. This metaphor, drawn out of the experience of migrant passage and the blood-memory of a history defined by passage, forms the basis of these writers' aesthetic. Born two generations into a disillusioned post-imperial world, these writers demonstrate a commitment to a broadly imagined, demythologizing/re-historicising aesthetic. To be precise the pattern of these writers' fiction is a demythologising rite of passage through the idea of England and towards a revised, re-historicised self-definition. All of the books examined in this chapter propose a confrontation with the idea of England, with the literary passages of English colonial education policy, and with its myth-laden version of history. The model of passage, whether historical, literary or in terms of a journey or rite of passage is used to explore the migrant's psychological orientation towards settling in an apparently post-imperial world, a world where the ideological ghosts of colonial history persist.

Post-imperial England is itself viewed as merely a 'ghostly' ideological signifier of its previous colonial self in these fictions. It is not conceived as a credible base on which to found an identity: to Dabydeen it is just a dream or rumour, to Phillips an amorphous 'cloud', an exploded colonial myth. The process of demythologisation, for Dabydeen and Phillips, involves a project of 'reverse' passage, a process of re-writing oneself via Conrad, Shakespeare diasporic history and negritude, out of England. For D'Aguiar the 'reverse' passage is primarily historical and involves rescuing a 'slave history' from the ideological purgatory English history has consigned it to. For Kincaid, the 'reverse' passage is conceived as a retreat from the mythological, post-imperial pull towards England; her writing describes a flight away from the 'written' narrative of England, and an eventual bypassage to America. The writers of

this chapter write about and re-contextualise the idea of England in order to move beyond it, to eventually bypass it for more urgent and relevant post-imperial destinations, such as America, Africa and mainland Europe. That England is beginning to be demoted as an in-between place in this fiction, by writers such as Phillips and Kincaid, is indicative of a new post-imperial 'tripartite' model of passage and migrant identity, a model that will be explored in more detail in the following chapter on Michael Ondaatje.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This study of the inaugural notion of passage also offers an appropriate beginning to this thesis.
- <sup>2</sup> By 'contemporary' I mean from the late 1970s through to the mid to late 1990s, which is the period when second-generation Caribbean migrant writing flourished in England
- <sup>3</sup> First-generation Caribbean fiction is often either exploratory, or nostalgic. When it is exploratory, as in the case of Sam Selvon's metropolitan novels, it reflects the work of migrant pioneers prospecting the mythical mother country, and when it is nostalgic, as in the case of much of George Lamming's fiction, it reflects a longing or obsession with a lost motherland. What first-generation Caribbean migrant fiction more rarely reflects, with the notable exception of V. S. Naipaul, a writer who writes across generations and generational trends, is a broad historicising perspective. In this chapter I will be arguing that sociological changes in the make-up of English society and the steady globalisation of migratory patterns have transformed and broadened the historical orientations of contemporary migrant writers.
- <sup>4</sup> Dabydeen, like D'Aguiar, is an example of that intriguing species, the contemporary post-colonial poet-novelist. It is instructive to consider how his poetry collections, Slave Song (1984) and Coolie Odyssey (1988) reflect on notions of passage in a distinctly different fashion to his novels. Contemporary Caribbean migrant poetry is more overtly political than the Caribbean migrant novel. Dabydeen's poetry approaches the notion of passage more directly and literally than his novels do, reflecting on the great historical crossings that have formed the contemporary Indo-Caribbean's identity. His poetry is also distinct from his prose through its balancing of 'scholarship' English with other Caribbean native, dialect forms of English.
- <sup>5</sup> The namelessness of Dabydeen's narrator/protagonist is itself striking and emphasises his transitional, undefined status as migrant.
- <sup>6</sup> Despite the heavyweight figures of V.S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon there has always been an 'Afro-Caribbean bias' to the Caribbean canon (Donnell 7). In this study Dabydeen stands out as the one representative of contemporary Indo-Caribbean writing but his writing also provides a unique balancing act between Indo and Afro-Caribbean perspectives. His 1996 historical novel The Counting House charts the progress of Indo-Caribbean indentured 'coolies' in colonial Guyana, and like The Intended examines with an unblinking honesty, the antipathy between Indo and Afro Caribbean. His second novel Disappearance (1993), as we shall see, charts an Afro-Caribbean passage through contemporary England
- <sup>7</sup> Joseph is also reminiscent of the rootless Afro-Caribbean characters of Sam Selvon's 'Moses' novels, most notably The Lonely Londoners (1956).
- <sup>8</sup> Joseph's failure, his descent into despair and suicide is attributed by Shaz to the negativism of nativism: 'When blacks can't make it, they give up totally and adopt a religion of being nothing' (135). However Shaz's opinion is dismissed by the student protagonist as a prejudice worthy 'of youthful Asian shopkeepers ... Shored up against the cold world outside the shop door', the 'world of uncertain citizenship' (134/5). Joseph's chosen passage through society, though extreme, is, viewed from the student's eventual 'shored up' position in the cocoon of Oxford library, seen as the 'adventurous' (135) quest of the renegade native artist.
- <sup>9</sup> The figure of the 'English Rose', a creature either built out of literary myth or serving the function of initiator into 'English' culture recurs throughout migrant literature written in England. In Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses (1988) the rose is Pamela Lovelace, a figure who embodies the post-lapsarian ruin of a once virginal, unspoilt England. In Hanif Kureishi's The Buddha of Suburbia (1990)



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the roses, Eva and Eleanor, are bold instructresses in the liberal literary and dramatic arts, and embody the seductive lures of metropolitan English culture.

10 This justification of the literary migrant's education and role as writer, as being grounded in a project of voicing the silenced native history, is, as we shall see central to the aesthetic of all the Caribbean writers of this study.

11 Dabydeen's engineer is also similar to Ondaatje's bomb disposal expert, Kirpal Singh, in his 1993 novel The English Patient. Both are apprentices to English masters or mentors, and both have risen by repressing and rejecting their native identity and developing technical skills that involve opposing and policing elemental, unpredictable and dissident forms of power, like the sea and falling bombs, that threaten the integrity of an English or anglophone identity.

12 The name 'Fenwick' is a reference to the engineer 'figure' Fenwick in Wilson Harris's novel The Secret Ladder (1963). The novel is about surveying in Guyana, and it is evident that much of the 'surveying' theme of Disappearance is re-writing either aspects of Harris the novelist and/or aspects of Harris the surveyor. Harris, in this context, casts a shadow over Dabydeen's novel as a literary mentor but also as a literary precursor to his engineer protagonist, as a figure who has been through the colonial English education system, and emerged at the other side a 'proto-master', a Pharaoh ruling over coolies.

13 This 'engineering versus the sea' model appears in the Sri Lankan writer, Romesh Gunesekera's first novel, Reef (1995). In this novel the sea is again conceived as an encroaching force of 'native' unrest, which the Marine engineer and theorist Mister Salgado hopes to stem through preserving the island's reef. Reef also, like Disappearance, uses this model to re-read The Tempest. In both novels the 'Ariel post-colonial servant/pupil' figure is embodied in the migrant, (Triton and Dabydeen's nameless engineer) whereas Prospero is ultimately read as a duplicitous, exploiting tutor, represented in both novels, respectively, by Mister Salgado and Professor Fenwick. This is also another reference to Wilson Harris the 'literary', book-butressed, surveyor.

14 The engineer's conception of the sea, although presented by him as a model for utopian mobility, might also be read as a historical abyss: 'I was seduced by its endless transformations, which promised me freedom from being fixed as an African, a West-Indian, a member of a particular nationality of a particular epoch. The stories of my personal life could easily be extinguished in its mass' (132). As we shall see other Caribbean writers, such as Fred D'Aguiar, read the sea in a similar, if distinctly less utopian way, as a model for the forgotten and unrecorded 'stories of ... personal life' in history.

15 In much the same way as European art, from Rimbaud to Picasso, has read and fetishised the 'primitive' as a signifier of a lost cultural and artistic 'virility'.

16 It might be said he discovers 'negritude' from an uncommon Anglo-African route

17 It is clear that these two projects - Deconstruction and ideological decolonisation - are parallel in Disappearance. One of the epigraphs to the novel acknowledges an awareness and indebtedness to the writings of the deconstructionist, Jacques Derrida, whilst the novel's rewriting of the Heart of Darkness model, almost a tradition in Caribbean writing from George Lamming's The Emigrants (1954) to Wilson Harris's Palace of the Peacock (1960), implies a revisionist, decolonising project.

18 Dabydeen's Modernist aesthetic is nothing unusual amongst contemporary migrant writers. Many of these writers are attracted to the idea of Modernism as an artistic revolution in European art that was borne, largely, out of the innovations of metropolitan exiles and their defence of the outsider position of the artist and his aesthetic. Modernism, besides offering migrant writers an aesthetic that coheres with their sense of post-colonial temporality and narrative structure, also provides them with an aesthetic that defends their besieged position as writers who have seemingly discarded 'native' identities and politics. Dabydeen and indeed many of the migrant writers discussed in this thesis claim Modernism as the

buttress that defends their seemingly uncommitted position, their choice to define themselves through their artist persona, and their international passport to a claim on a trans-nationally-inclusive aesthetic

<sup>19</sup> There are many contemporary novels that read post-imperial England in a similar light. For instance, there is the South African writer Christopher Hope in his novel Darkest England (1996) and the English novelist Julian Barnes in his novel England, England (1998).

<sup>20</sup> Phillips has previously been writer in residence at Amherst college and is presently Henry K Luce Professor of Migration and Social Order at Barnard college, Columbia University.

<sup>21</sup> In The European Tribe (1987) Phillips provides a 'stage' or 'phase' model of immigration, for instance he defines the first stage as 'a phase of labour movement, whereby single males leave to seek out the opportunities and find a place for the family' (123). This is the phase the fiction of the 1950s generation describes. The Final Passage however is also written in mind of the 'final stage of settlement' (123), and poses the question 'Does this phase ever end?'

<sup>22</sup> Phillips's comparison of England with the Caribbean might be compared to the imagery Rhys uses in her novels, Voyage in the Dark (1934) and Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), to define a wintry grey England against the colour and heat of the Caribbean. This reference to the 'big cloud' is, as we shall see a leitmotif of many contemporary migrant writers. For Kincaid the migrant's identity is a historical blur, to Ondaatje and Rushdie the cloud is nuclear, and symbolic of the great historical explosion of the Western Empires and civilisations into a chaotic diasporic world system.

<sup>23</sup> Leila's first boyfriend Arthur repeats the familiar post-colonial 'worldist' formula that 'to be a land of plenty there has to be a land of nothing, right?' (80). However as Leila's passage through England progresses it becomes clear that Phillips means to reverse this formula and represent the colonial 'land of plenty' as the post-colonial 'land of nothing'.

<sup>24</sup> Phillips's second novel A State of Independence (1987) provides a swift answer to the hopes of the returning migrant who hopes to 'make a future' in a previous homeland. In this novel the returning migrant, Bertram, discovers that his migration to England has been an irreversible fail from a native identity and orientation.

<sup>25</sup> My commentary on The European Tribe, is, for the most part, confined here to Phillips's discussion, in his preface and foreword, of his American education.

<sup>26</sup> The English sections of the book also lack distinction. The journal of the English Captain Hamilton is, of course, set at sea, and amounts to nothing more than a spatially undefined quotidian ship's log. It is taken, almost word for word from John Newton's The Journal of a Slave Trader. ed. Bernard Martin and Martin Spurell. London: Epworth Press, 1962. The story of Travis, the Afro-American G.I., is set in a section entitled 'Somewhere in England' (129).

<sup>27</sup> Although Liberia ultimately ended as a failed experiment, it obviously represents an important reference point in Phillips's history of black consciousness in Crossing the River. Phillips's representation of Liberia in 'The Pagan Coast' offers an interesting alternative perspective on colonial Africa to Conrad's Heart of Darkness. In this version the predicament of the black man is central, and his ancestral perspective of Africa as 'the beautiful land of my forefathers' is given its place beside other ideas and visions of what Africa is or can be (48). Nash's utopian vision of Liberia, despite its obvious squalor and neglect, is Phillips's version of how the black man goes 'native' or 'nativist', and hints at the reflexes of the visionary perspective of 'Negritude'.

<sup>28</sup> This transference of affections represents a clear movement away from an abusive colonial master/servant relationship. It is hinted that Edward's fatherly liberalism is an empty disguise, that his

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relationships with both Nash and Madison have at one time been sexually abusive, that he is, in short, a 'false' father substitute.

<sup>29</sup> At the end of 'Somewhere in England' Joyce is left with a child, but her diasporan lover remains essentially a mysterious figure. She doesn't 'even have a picture of him' (223).

<sup>30</sup> As the father/ancestor of the prologue to Crossing The River states 'There is no return' (2). Diaspora, like migrancy, is read by Phillips in Crossing the River and indeed throughout his oeuvre, as a continuous irreversible historical condition.

<sup>31</sup> In fact Phillips might be called, as Gay Wilson Allen calls Whitman a 'timebinder' (154). See Wilson Allen's The Solitary Singer: A Critical Biography of Walt Whitman. New York: Macmillan, 1955. It is clear that Phillips's attempt to bind diasporic history together as a transitory, historically continuous flux in Crossing the River owes something to Whitman's idea of time and community in Leaves of Grass (1855). In his 1855 preface to Leaves of Grass Whitman argues that 'Past and present and future are not disjoined but joined' (13).

<sup>32</sup> This cultural richness, it might be argued, is not reflected in the sparsely realist, almost utilitarian English of Phillips's novel. There is no attempt at abrogation, at creating an intertext of nation languages, instead Phillips chooses to write about an international culture using an international, culturally levelling language. Phillips's consistent application of the English 'lingua franca' to mediate his 'international' thematic preoccupations represents the one concession in his oeuvre to a settled cultural perspective.

<sup>33</sup> Phillips's diasporic perspective in Crossing the River demonstrates some similarities with Stuart Hall's notion of diasporic identity in the essay 'Diasporic Identity and Diaspora'. In this essay Hall describes two possible conceptions of diasporic identity. The first conception is the idea of 'the collective', 'one true' black identity, a conception that is central to Negritude' (393). The other view is of 'an identity based on constant transformation' (394). Hall argues that it is only from this second position that we can properly understand the traumatic character of the 'colonial experience' and that the past is 'always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth' (395). Phillips's reading of diasporic identity is closer to this second conception; it shares this 'transformative' model's concerns with re-reading the historical myths of belonging, and with the regenerative potential of disaffiliation and the intellectual mobility. The phantasmagoria at the end of Crossing the River represents diasporic culture as a stream of ideas and attitudes that draws its potent urgency and force out of the process of its difficult and painful passage through history.

<sup>34</sup> I omit D'Aguiar's 1996 novel Dear Future from this discussion because I am primarily concerned with D'Aguiar's 'slave' or diasporic fictions. Dear Future is a comparatively static Guyana-based novel that attempts to broach the 'native' politics of home in a 'magic realist' style reminiscent of Wilson Harris.

<sup>35</sup> Indeed, much of D'Aguiar's writing seems indebted to the extensive path clearing of diasporic history undertaken in Phillips's oeuvre. There are many echoes of Phillips in D'Aguiar work. The guilty, betraying father in The Longest Memory bears some resemblance to the guilty ancestral-father figure in Crossing the River, whilst the 'troublesome' son of The Longest Memory is a distant ancestor of the educated, troublemaking son of Higher Ground.

<sup>36</sup> This mixed-race position is explored in more detail in Kincaid's 1996 novel The Autobiography of my Mother. In this novel Kincaid's heroine Xuela is the daughter of an English father and Caribbean mother. Her father, representing the English coloniser, is appropriately a corrupt policeman who 'spoke falsehoods' whilst believing himself to be a 'man of freedom' (54).

<sup>37</sup> This is seen notably when Annie triumphantly writes 'The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up And Go' (78) below a picture of 'Columbus in Chains' in her school history book. Her 'blasphemous' (82) re-inscription of the official European version of West Indian history exemplifies her early resistance to her Anglo-European education, and anticipated the angry, scorchingly polemical voice of Lucy.

<sup>38</sup> Kincaid is regularly anthologised in collections of Caribbean women's writing, such as Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson's Her True True Name. London: Heinemann. 1989. Mordecai and Wilson put forward in their introduction the common feminist-psychoanalytic view of her fiction, that 'both of Jamaica Kincaid's books explore and affirm the mother-daughter relationship' (xiv). She has also been the focus of much scholarly work on the trope of the mother/land, for instance, Laura Niesen de Abruna's essay 'Family Connections: Mother and Mother Country in the Fiction of Jean Rhys and Jamaica Kincaid' in Motherlands. Ed. Susheila Nasta. London: Women's Press, 1991. 257-289.

<sup>39</sup> The device of the 'elided' passage occurs in Rhys's novel too, but in this case, between divisions within the novel.

<sup>40</sup> There might also be a sly reference, in this migrant persona, to the Lucy of James Berry's poetry. Berry, an Afro-Caribbean writer based in England, has written a series of poems about an Afro-Caribbean immigrant in England, called Lucy. It could be argued that Kincaid's Lucy is a deliberate American re-appropriation of Berry's archetypal 'Englan' Lady' (1982).

<sup>41</sup> In The Autobiography of my Mother names also signify one's relationship to England. The heroine Xuela resents that she must wear her husband's name 'Richardson', that her name is no longer 'the gateway to who (she) really is' (79). This is a fictional reiteration of Kincaid's rejection of her patrilinear name, of the marriage-name of England and colonial Antigua.

<sup>42</sup> The novel begins just after a fall, the fall of Lucy's plane into New York, and Lucy's later fascination with the possible satanic connotations of her name – 'I felt like Lucifer' (139) - suggest that Kincaid wishes to suggest that her migrant persona embodies a 'fallen' 'outsider' perspective of the world.

<sup>43</sup> Ngugi wa Thiongo in his essay 'Her Cook, Her Dog: Karen Blixen's Africa' argues that the European 'hunter for pleasure (or tourist) is really the hunter for profit, but on holiday' (133). Tourism is viewed similarly in Kincaid's A Small Place where it is seen as a neo-colonial form of imperialism. It is this sort of 'hunter for pleasure/profit' perspective of the foreign that Kincaid wishes to undermine in Lucy with its cynical, conscience/history tortured heroine.

<sup>44</sup> Her position in relation to the American family she lives with is quickly defined by the title of the first section of the novel; she is not a tourist, she is a 'Poor Visitor' (3), a migrant from the world of work. She is also a 'visitor' in the sense that her 'migrant' position in America is as an outsider and as a transitory. As she states herself 'I seemed not to be a part of things ... as if I were just passing through' (13).

<sup>45</sup> In The Autobiography of my Mother Xuela's English husband John Richardson keeps a book with English flowers – 'peony, delphinium, foxgloves' (144) - pressed between the pages. His book is a symbol of his nostalgia for his lost English childhood and 'the smell of rainfall in the English countryside' (144). This nostalgic, childish flower-book is synonymous with the dehistoricised version of England presented in the colonial 'literary' ideology. Kincaid's deflationary satire of English historiography implies that the psychological damage wreaked by the English colonial education system and their literary 'passages' originated out of childish whimsicality, out of colonial nostalgia and homesickness.

<sup>46</sup> Wordsworth's poem is described by Richard Mabey as 'Probably the best known lines in English poetry' (61). Kincaid uses the poem in her text as an archetype of an English 'literary passage'. Her

<sup>46</sup> Wordsworth's poem is described by Richard Mabey as 'Probably the best known lines in English poetry' (61). Kincaid uses the poem in her text as an archetype of an English 'literary passage'. Her argument against the colonial imposition of English culture may also be responding to V.S. Naipaul's 1964 essay "Jasmine." Naipaul ponders, in this essay, the idea of English literature as an 'alien mythology': 'There was for instance, Wordsworth's notorious poem about the daffodil. A pretty little flower, no doubt; but we had never seen it. Could the poem have any meaning for us?' (24). Naipaul is rather sceptical about this argument, as it, implicitly 'confines all literatures to their countries of origin' (24), though there is a sense, in his reading, that he is not distinguishing between literature as an educated pleasure and literature as an ideological colonial tool. Instead, he chooses to read this Caribbean aversion to English mythologies as 'really an expression of dissatisfaction at the emphasis of our formless, unmade society. To us, without a mythology, all literatures were foreign' (24). His reductive reading of post/colonial Caribbean written culture, eliding as it does a rich oral tradition, is clearly selective. Kincaid's fiction itself demonstrates an interest in the native 'obeah' mythologies, in fact her sense of an affinity with European Modernism is drawn by a sense that it reflects her native, surreal 'reality' (Interview 222). Kincaid's reading of the 'daffodils' is less touristically concerned with the pleasures of reading; her approach to reading the daffodils demonstrates how a colonial education's ideological legacy can resonate in the present. When Naipaul argues - through the trope of the childhood flower, Jasmine, that he never could put a name to, that you can be equally alienated from your own birth country, his emphasis is clearly on forging a 'migrant' identity. Kincaid's perspective is native/migrant, she carries the seeds of her colonial education with her, not only in her cultural knowledge and facility with words, but also in her self-awareness as a transformed and damaged historical being. If Naipaul reads the loss of a 'homeland' in the scent of Jasmine, it is clearly the loss of a country through will and migration. Kincaid reads the loss of a homeland in her vision of American daffodils but her sense of loss is grounded in a colonial history, in the ideological and physical domination of her Caribbean home by England.

<sup>47</sup> This is the great evil, according to Kincaid, of the English colonial project; that 'everywhere they went they turned ... into England, and everybody they met they turned English' (23).

<sup>48</sup> Helen Tiffin, in her essay 'Plato's Cave: Education and Critical Practises', has noted the disorientating tendency of the colonial education to impose the seasonal signifiers of England wholesale on every seasonless colony they controlled. She cites a catechistic question from a West Indian reader to illustrate the process in action; 'Question: Into how many seasons is the year divided?' Answer: Four; Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter.' (147).

<sup>49</sup> The 'mystery' of this 'hole in the ground' is described, in *The Autobiography of my Mother* as akin to the mystery of post-colonial identity: 'Who you are is a mystery no one can answer' (207). Although set in colonial times Kincaid's final novel clearly enacts and comments on the transition from the colonial into the post-colonial. The figure of the orphaned daughter, Xuela, states that 'The fact of my mother dying at the moment I was born became a central motif of my life' (225), an undefined 'post' era is heralded by the death of the colonial mother. However the novel is clear that the history of this dead mother persists in her transitory, 'post' daughter, that the 'account of (Xuela's) life has been an account of (her) mother's life as much as it has been an account of me' (225). Although rooted in a colonial history Kincaid's novel implicitly comments on the transitory, historically continuous nature of 'post' identities.

## Two

### **A History of Wandering: The Migrant/Settler Perspective of Michael Ondaatje**

#### **'A New Place'**

In this case-study chapter, I intend to examine the trans-positional, trans-national model of migrancy presented in the fiction of the migrant writer Michael Ondaatje. Ondaatje's version of the migrant's history, in his own self-inventing migratory trajectory and in his writing, highlights the dilemmas and contradictions of the migrant's position and loyalties within white Western culture and society. Furthermore, his unique background encompasses and enacts a myriad of possible positions, from mixed-race colonial to exile and migrant. All of the positions in Ondaatje's personal migration are tested and explored in his writing, particularly in his later prose works where the colonial and settler histories he recounts clearly correspond with his experience as a migrant. For this reason it is my intention in this chapter to focus on Ondaatje's last three books, the prose works in his oeuvre, which are specifically concerned with migrant histories. In his 1982 family memoir Running in the Family he begins by describing and confronting his origins as a born Sri Lankan, in a colonial family of Dutch and Tamilese ancestry. Educated in England, he eventually settled in Canada, the setting of In the Skin of a Lion (1987). From a beginning as an Euro-Asian colonial, he became an exile but also a kind of settler, the class of migrant that may easily take up a comfortable social position within a settler colony. It is from this position as an academic in Toronto's University of York that all his writing accrues but particularly his last work, The English Patient (1992), which is his most developed enquiry into migrant identity.

It seems necessary to approach Ondaatje's writings somewhat cautiously exactly because they have been borne out of and in the course of such a convoluted cultural path. His work deserves close scrutiny because it claims certain rights - to talk

about others, to re-possess and re-process histories, a license to be expansive, and a mobility between positions. Many of Ondaatje's critics have confronted him on the rights he claims as a writer and the particular ideological identity or position implicit in these claimed rights. Very few critics have however focused on or confronted his presumed mobility or even what his status as a migrant might mean in relation to his writings. This study will foreground questions particularly relating to the position of the migrant in relation to national identity, the narrative of history, and native origins. I will attempt to read Ondaatje's writing from the perspective of two of the conflicting positions he speaks from, the perspective of the migrant and the perspective of the post-migration settler. The 'migrant perspective' offers a view of the world that is wanderingly digressive, fragmented, restless, expansive and exploratory. His aesthetic provides an account of history, through fictional storytelling that is 'wandering' in three senses. In The Oxford Reference Dictionary to wander is defined as 'to go from place to place without a settled route', 'to diverge from the right way' and to 'digress from a subject' (Hawkins 923). Ondaatje's career as a 'migrant' writer and the aesthetic guiding his writing have both been described, by critics of his work and of his migrant status, as random, unsettled, digressive, politically divergent and unfocused. However part of the purpose of this essay is to look at the design behind this apparent randomness and to re-appraise his apparently unfocused, apolitical aesthetic.

In an interview with Catherine Bush, Ondaatje claims he was one of the first of what he describes as a 'migrant tradition', 'writers leaving and not going back, but taking their country with them to a new place' (240). The site of this 'new place' encompasses the same nexus of positions as the migrant perspective; it is a place where the claims and attitudes of both a colonial past and a post-migration present can interchange and react. The second perspective is the perspective of a species specifically created out of the experience of migration, the migrant who has settled down geographically, as a sort of 'post-migratory' settler. This post-migration settler perspective is 'settled' in attitude and characterised by conformism and quietist languor. This perspective is particularly prevalent in Running in the Family, Ondaatje's exploratory and elusive account of his colonial origins. In In the Skin of a Lion this perspective is represented by the attitudes of his Canadian 'settler' character, Patrick,

who is settled both as a historical entity and in terms of his political orientation. However the settler perspective is less dominant here, as it is represented as being locked in dialogue with the radical political impulses of the 'post-migration' migrant. By the time of The English Patient this perspective has been for the most part eclipsed by Ondaatje's growing concerns with interrogating the motivations and commitments of the migrant, but nevertheless lingers as one of the attitudes of the post-migratory Anglo-Indian settler, Kirpal Singh.

The tension between these two perspectives is primarily the tension between Ondaatje's conflicting desire to question, and the desire to settle, elide or put to rest questions. There is also the underlying conflict of the migrant, between the desire to possess the freedom of a sort of international passport of creative expression and the desire to be accepted as assimilated and clearly defined into a specific culture. Taking account of these perspectives allows a reading of Ondaatje's work which considers the complicated merging and falling away of backgrounds and foregrounds in his oeuvre without attempting to resolve contradictions or simplify his evolving idea of migration within the various cultural contexts of his work. Ondaatje's migrant journey is considered without attempting to contain it in check-pointed formulas, in order to see it again in terms of a pathway, whatever its dynamic, however meandering its course, a track which resonates, which possesses a history, the history of a specific journey that evolves and follows back.

### **Speaking In Tongues**

At the beginning of his family memoir Running in the Family, Ondaatje is in Canada but 'dreaming of Asia' and contemplating 'travelling back to the family I had grown from' (22). This project is envisaged from the first as an attempt to reclaim and record a lost colonial past, 'a childhood I had ignored and not understood' (22). It is apparent Ondaatje is haunted by his colonial and family origins and that his migration has not been a completed journey, that he has never completely settled. He requires a circuitous, questioning 'journey back' (22), a migration in reverse, for there is still a



lingering restlessness in his mind regarding where he has come from culturally, and what he has left behind.

Ondaatje uses the idea of the 'karapotha', or the foreigner, to explain his position in relation to his birthplace. He says 'I am the foreigner', but also 'I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner' (78), both acknowledging his distance from Sri Lanka and claiming a certain superiority of perspective, as a returned ex-colonial native, over other literary 'karapothas' like Edward Lear and D. H. Lawrence, whose opinions on the island form the epigraphs to the chapter. Ondaatje's position as a returning, educated observer, an outsider is however undeniably an uneasy one. The elegant surfaces of his memoir are haunted by this 'drama of (being) the stranger', the migrant foreigner and outsider, the discomfort and unresolved feelings of, as Iain Chambers puts it, 'living between worlds' (6).

The nature of his 'karapotha' position is helpful in explaining his representation of Sri Lanka in Running in the Family. Ondaatje writes from two conflicting positions, speaks Sri Lanka in two tongues. The first is in the guise of a cultural intermediary, an explorer, reporting from a distance, researching, referencing, enquiring into and commentating on Sri Lankan culture and history through the mediation of a patchwork of historical documents and quotes. This position is impersonal, the position of the returned and Westernised migrant traveller. The second position is more personal, confessional even, spilling out a loose thread of settler family legend, anecdote, rumour and memory. One of the old Ceylonese legends that Ondaatje remembers in his narrative is helpful in explaining how these positions work in relation to each other. In a chapter entitled 'Tongue' Ondaatje describes the native myth of the thalagoya lizard's tongue, which when eaten empowers the eater to 'catch and collect wonderful, humorous information' (72). Ondaatje's tendency, as a prodigal migrant, to speak in various tongues, to mix informative reportage with the sly 'wonderful' tales of the native storyteller, demonstrates how he attempts to simultaneously represent Sri Lanka as both outsider and insider. As a temporary mixed-race 'karapotha', one of the 'beetles with white spots who never grew ancient here, who stepped in and admired the landscape' (80), he combines the tourist's wonder and curiosity about Sri Lanka with the ex-native's insight and sympathies.

Ondaatje's style in Running in the Family, the 'tongue' that mediates all the positions he occupies throughout the text, is perhaps the most divided aspect of his migrant/settler perspective. Ondaatje is of the first generation of 'the real migrant tradition' of 'writers of our time', as he has declared in an interview with Catherine Bush (240). This position as an educated, literary migrant, a 'karapotha', is essential to an understanding of how he chooses to mobilise language in relation to the colonial history of Sri Lanka and his family. The fragmented poetry of Ondaatje's prose style is consistently experimental and suggestive but there is a sense that at times the collected realist tone and the frequently runaway lyrical style, is disconnected from the impressive radicalism of form. In all Ondaatje's writings there is an overt recognition and separation of the claims of aesthetics and politics. Ondaatje, as we shall see when considering In the Skin of a Lion, harbors a gravely Modernist suspicion of polemic and argues for the right to reach people and criticise exploitation through metaphor. The question of how critically focused Ondaatje's style ever aims to be, in this his family memoir, becomes more troubling when one asks the question that dogs every migrant testimony: who is the proposed audience of this writing? There is a sense at times that Running in the Family has been composed as a particularly sensual and exotic consumable, for a comfortably settled touristic audience, pleurably unfamiliar with its uncommon charms. Alongside the exotic flavours there are the more reassuringly familiar extravagances of upper class European behaviour. The memoir consequently has the tone of an anecdote that seeks to thrill and surprise by selecting the more eccentric and lurid qualities of a foreign culture, a tone that delicately ignores, like the careful tourist, the political trouble spots of Ceylon's colonial history.<sup>1</sup>

By writing in this way Ondaatje's style runs dangerously close to fetishising the idea of Ceylon as the paradisaical 'spice island'. He presents it as an exotic plantation of desires. One of his most suggestive chapter titles 'Tabulae Asiae', introduces a meditation on Ceylon as a type of colonial palimpsest, unfolding layers of uncertain history, false maps and curious legend. It is certainly debatable whether Ondaatje 'dreaming of Asia' (22) with at times the sensuality of a Baudelaire, does not himself succeed in inscribing the blank slate of the island with the consumer fantasies of Western nostalgia. There is also the danger of glamorising the 'Tropical gossip' (53),

of inaugurating new colonial myths, new 'Asian Rumours' (21), by revelling in the eccentricities, the 'drink and romance' (48) of Ceylon's consumer society. By yoking the natural sensuality of Ceylon to the unnatural sensuality of its colonial culture, Ondaatje represents the island as a leisured meeting ground between the Orient and the Occident. The fact that Ceylon was historically the meeting ground between East and West as a result of the commerce of imperialism is almost suffocated by the lush playfulness of the writing. There is a growing awareness in reading the memoir that the tension in his style is also the tension between the colonial and what follows colonialism, the burden of the former is always at odds with Ondaatje's stylistic ease and lyrical freedom.

Suwanda Sugunasiri, in a representative sortie with Ondaatje in her 1992 essay 'Sri Lankan Canadian Poets' (1992), has vehemently argued that Ondaatje's aesthetic is a disempowered one, that for instance, his 'attraction to Western romantic poetry (reflects) his apolitical stance' (64). She argues that 'he shared the Euro-Asian Community psyche, remote from ideology and indeed social reality' (63). Most importantly she calls him 'one of the bourgeoisie that fled the revolution' (63), an apolitical expatriate. It is clear from the sort of 'suspicious' criticism Ondaatje attracts that he is not being read as a migrant writer but considered, as Sugunasiri puts it, as '(through his community and class) the coloniser' (64), whose aesthetics are based on privilege, on settled 'bourgeois', white living conditions. She argues that 'What makes the label Sri Lankan inapplicable to Ondaatje is that he has "uprooted"', and is now 'ignorant of the history, culture and myth of the land and its people, and seems unable to relate to such a sensibility' (63). Sugunasiri's argument raises a number of questions regarding what sort of writer the migrant is meant to be. What is the appointed task of the migrant writer? Is it to become the critic of the new cultures he or she is exposed to, or to remember through their writing their native culture? Or can it even be both? Sugunasiri's assessment is ultimately limited because she mistakenly, in my opinion, attempts to assess Ondaatje's position as an aspirant 'native' Sri Lankan writer and as an aspirant polemical writer.

J. A. Thieme, in his 1991 essay on Running in the Family, also attempts to position Ondaatje stylistically as a writer of a settler tradition. He argues that

Ondaatje's work is 'typically Canadian in many of its preoccupations', specifically because of 'his post-modern investigations of language and form and his attempts to break down generic barriers in texts'(40). Thieme's approach demonstrates how a writer can be nationalised by how you choose to view his work, by what aspects of his aesthetic you choose to emphasise. Both Sugunasiri and Thieme tend to read Ondaatje against just one of the national identities he may claim, they effectively attempt to place him strategically and definingly on one point of his migrant journey. Thieme acknowledges the rich cultural heritage that created Ondaatje, stating that few writers stand 'at the confluence of as many cultures as him', but refuses to enquire into what it might mean to operate from the 'confluence' of so many cultures. By praising the Euro-American 'settler' in Ondaatje, Thieme over-emphasises the aspects of his work that sit most comfortably in Western assessments of his writing. Ondaatje's own conception of himself as a 'prodigal' 'karapotha' is a considered response to his 'position' as a migrant writer and respects that definition by representing himself as someone who has been formed by a variety of cultural experiences. For Ondaatje is not simply a Canadian or a Sri Lankan writer, at times his fictional enquiries clearly attempt to mediate cultures by speaking in various tongues, from the vantage point of an East/West 'confluence'. As with writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie, imputations of a solely Anglo-American literary heritage would be unfairly reductive. For Ondaatje writes from a position where the post-modern narrative can be read as a fusion with native storytelling techniques, a style whose origins are as mysterious as the proverbial snake who bites its own tail.

Part of Ondaatje's sense of his migrant identity is revealed in a moment in his memoir where he displays a wider cultural curiosity about native Sri Lankan culture and politics. Describing the 1971 Insurgency, where protest was daubed on the walls of a University which had become a prison, he recognises the claims of another, more polemical aesthetic, which manages to be creative in spite of and in response to pressures such as censorship and imprisonment. He also recognises and admires the very different aesthetic behind the angry power of the native poet Lakdasa Wikramasinha, whose poem admonishes: 'Don't Talk To Me About Matisse ... Talk to me instead of the culture generally-/how the murderers were sustained' (85 /6).

Direct 'anger' and polemic is defined as part of the territory of the native perspective, whereas Running in the Family demonstrates that Ondaatje's migrant aesthetic operates in an entirely different way. Ondaatje's frequent use of ambiguity and diffuse, evocative lyricism expresses his sense of himself as a literary migrant, as a prodigal 'karapotha', transformed by migration and a Western education into a distinct species to the native. What Ondaatje's migrant perspective attempts to offer instead, is the equally valid, if less passionate truth of ambiguity, the complicated nature of political affiliation in a colony, where rebels can postpone a revolt in order to play cricket (100/1). Ondaatje also succeeds in being political in a very personal, even confessional way in Running in the Family. He does this primarily by demonstrating a keen awareness of where he has come from politically by applying his ambiguous perspective to the colonial society he grew up in, but most powerfully by writing an unflinching, 'prodigal' son's portrait of his father.

It is in the later and more personal passages of his family memoir that Ondaatje's migrant perspective allows him to, at times, make use of his unique in-between position as an outsider to make interestingly subversive connections between national, colonial and family hegemony in Ceylon. Moreover all of these categories are represented as being intertwined. We are told, 'My father was superintendent of a tea and rubber plantation' (144) during the 'last era of a Colonial Ceylon' (169), and in the final chapters of the book he describes a general decay where the end of the easy life of the tea estate coincides with the end of his parents' marriage (172). Seen in this context, the book, especially in its detached portrait of his father, provides a vivid picture of late colonialism as a sort of malaise, of madness and alcoholism. Only in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), in her study of the 'white nigger' Cosway family, has a writer so powerfully dramatised the degeneration of a colonial regime as the story of a disease 'running in the family'. This unknown father and his father's disease are the central mystery of the memoir, of Ondaatje's enquiry into his past. In a chapter entitled 'Father Tongue' the nature of his father's mysterious hold on his memory is suggestively explored. In this chapter Ondaatje describes the genealogy of his father's drunken song: 'He had made it up', it was 'partly English and partly Sinhalese', 'it used brand and street names and gibberish' and consequently 'It made no

sense to anyone else' (194/5). Ondaatje's father's mysterious inaccessibility is explained by his drunken song, the song he invents out of his experience as coloniser and continues to sing as he stays in Sri Lanka after the rest of his family have migrated. This drunken song, that Ondaatje 'cannot translate' (201) may be read as the outmoded discourse of the old colonialism, the leisured coloniser's own degenerate pidgin that cannot be understood outside the class and generation that invented it. This is the 'tongue' Ondaatje might have inherited if he had stayed on and settled, so the urgency of his enquiry into the mystery of the man who stayed behind, the settler, the man he might have been, is unsurprising. The distinction being made here, is an important one. When Ondaatje speaks as a 'karapotha' he uses a distinctly different tongue from the native, and as 'prodigal' son he speaks a different language to his 'father tongue'. His double-forked tongue is spoken from the position of 'migrant', the stranger's ambiguous perspective.<sup>2</sup>

Ondaatje's portrayal of a colonial familial degeneration where 'Everyone was vaguely related' (41), and 'God alone knows' what nationality you might be, clearly traces the origins of migrant identity in the fragmenting structures of colonial culture. Even his lyricism, at times, is turned to a Wildean subversive use, describing how 'Love affair's rainbowed over marriages', a society where 'marriage was the greater infidelity' (53). J. A. Thieme has perceptively compared Ondaatje's prose to the 'rose-coloured filter' (45) of F. Scott Fitzgerald. This observation, meant as a criticism, is very suggestive in relation to how Ondaatje's style represents the colonial society of Ceylon. Sugunasiri's assumption that evocative lyrical writing is by definition politically 'disempowered' crudely underestimates the possibilities of political insight outside polemic. Ondaatje's elegant portrait of Sri Lankan society is a potent expose of the malaise of colonialism just as Fitzgerald's 'rose-coloured' book, The Great Gatsby (1925) is a highly sophisticated enquiry into American capitalism. They have in common a high literary aesthetic, which favors a deeply metaphorical language over the literalness of polemic. Such a lyricism seems appropriate when describing the 'nonsense' of a society which is 'not real' or of the 'real' world, and which is capable of, through exact lyrical phrases like 'Love affairs rainbowed over marriage', actually turning the values of respectable bourgeois, colonial society upside down.

It is ultimately difficult, however, to clearly ascertain the position of Ondaatje's migrant writing which on one level appears to court acceptance within the white Anglo-American literary establishment whilst at the same time disrupting the European colonial memoir's ethnic and narrative logic. This difficulty, I would suggest, is expressive of the deliberately ambiguous, often self-contradictory fluidity of the text, which at times fetishises the 'spice island' and at other times, through the medium of the same lyricism, makes a nonsense of the power structures of the island. At all times Ondaatje's evocative style is teasingly contrary and divergent, uncommitted to any finite position or version of the truth. Part of the reason for this lies in Ondaatje's deliberately diffuse, ambiguous approach to historicising both his family and Sri Lanka. In Running in the Family history is represented as rumour, as spurious gossip, as possible lies and embellishments. He states 'No story is ever told just once ... we will return to it ... and retell the story with additions. In this way history is organised' (19). Ondaatje 'organises' the colonial history of Sri Lanka in this way, out of fragments, and out of an awareness of the impossibility of writing a definitive history. In 'Tabulae Asiae' he states 'The maps reveal rumours of topography' (64), and proceeds to gather a version of his family's history in Ceylon, as an overlaying, a 'confluence' of impressions and gossip. His ancestor, arriving in 1600, is 'given a new name ... a Dutch spelling of his own. Ondaatje. A parody of the ruling language'. He then marries a Sinhalese woman and chooses to live 'at the centre of the rumour' (64). Ondaatje's version of colonial history views the colonised island as only 'pretending to reflect each European power' it encounters, whilst actually absorbing and transforming the apparent European history-makers, through miscegenation, and parody. This belief in history as a rumour, a continual divergence from and distortion of the 'truth', and his gossipy, anecdotal style, represent Ondaatje's adoption of an 'unsettled' approach to narrative and towards the history he has evolved from as a literary migrant. At this stage in Ondaatje's career there is a sense that he is attempting to establish a position in his writing where he can negotiate the diffuse and unreliable textures of personal and political history.<sup>3</sup> This position is mobile and exploratory. In Running in the Family he writes Sri Lanka from the position of both insider and outsider, and considers its dubious historical rumours with a scepticism that is formed as much out of his position

as unsettled migrant as out of his adoption of postmodern aesthetics. His writing, speaking elusively in the 'karapotha' explorer and 'prodigal' son's tongues, spills from the 'new place', the confluence between East and West, applying the gossip and folklore of both their oral traditions to the task of creating the migrant's history of the colony.

### **Telling History**

In Ondaatje's skewed re-writing of Canadian history, In the Skin of a Lion, the debate between the questioning migrant perspective and the quietist post-migration settler perspective continues through the dramatisation of the immigrant urge towards transformation and political change and the capitalistic impulse towards the mechanical labour of Empire building. In his 1995 essay 'The Secular Opiate', Christian Bok describes In the Skin of a Lion as an uncommitted, unfocused and 'mystifying' novel. Ondaatje is attacked here for his 'political disengagement' (12). Bok argues that Ondaatje is primarily 'interested in the effects of political praxis upon private experience' (20), in viewing politics from a safely settled distance. In another essay, 'Whose Side Is It On?' Julie Beddoes argues that, as in Running in the Family, there is a conflict in In the Skin of a Lion between its 'aesthetics and its ideology' (206). She feels that the novel's post-modern aesthetic practices neutralise or even oppose 'its tentative thematising of a radical class politics' (206).

In the Skin of a Lion is undeniably a novel full of internal conflicts, but neither Bok nor Beddoes seem to have considered that these conflicts might be deliberate, part of an aesthetic project with different sympathies from their own. It also seems necessary to qualify this by adding that like most fiction it occupies a number of positions, some directly opposed. It is true that the novel presents the reader with a story of failure and loss, and presents a peculiar lack of focus, a 'randomness' in approach but is this necessarily an ideological or artistic failing? When Bok dismissively states that both Patrick and Alice's thought 'privilege the mystique of ideology over the politique of ideology' (19), he is ignoring an important element of



Ondaatje's migrant/settler perspective. In the Skin of a Lion like all of Ondaatje's writing on migrants has an essentially dialogic dynamic. One moment in In the Skin of a Lion, where Patrick and Alice argue about politics, exemplifies the tendency of the novel to argue with itself. The dynamic of this exchange in political opinion, in microcosm, reflects the ebb and flow of political doubt and conviction that runs throughout Ondaatje's oeuvre. It offers room to interpret and for the reader to come to his/her own conclusions. When Patrick states 'I don't believe in the language of politics' (123) there is a clear correspondence to the 'metaphorical' prose style adopted by Ondaatje in all of his work. For Alice states, in an extension of Patrick's argument, that, as in her own mime acts, 'You reach people through metaphor' (123). At this moment the argument seems more like a monologue, extending the theoretical possibilities of Ondaatje's aesthetic, where the rights of a 'poetic' political language are advocated. However through the radical voice of Alice, Ondaatje introduces a truly critical perspective capable of challenging the often lazily unthinking values of his settler protagonist. She says, 'You believe in solitude, Patrick, in retreat, you can afford to be romantic because you are self-sufficient' whereas 'three quarters of the population of Upper America ... can't afford your choices, your languor' (123). She goes on to question Patrick's 'passive sense of justice', the 'dangerous' fact that 'Like water (you) can be easily harnessed' (123), all potent criticism of the stasis of the ideologically settled. Her voice, uncompromisingly angry and passionate, represents a new acknowledgement, if not acceptance, in Ondaatje's writing of a radical migrant perspective. For Alice's new and resultant activism has been fostered by her experience in the immigrant communities of Toronto and by her relationship with Cato, a Balkan ex- guerrilla. She asserts that 'You must name the enemy ... and destroy the power', 'Start with their luxuries - their select clubs, their summer mansions' (124/5). And this assertion sets the new tone of Ondaatje's Canadian novel where the 'rich' is a term of abuse, and their parties are no longer half-affectionately appraised as 'wild and spoiled' (34), as they are in Running in the Family. There is sufficient distance from Ondaatje's own personal history for him to attempt a more vigorous criticism, through the activist voice of Alice, of capitalistic settler values, the values most commonly associated with the literary migrant. So, although In the Skin of a Lion is not a

sustained argument against Marxism (or indeed against any dogmatic ideology), the novel is full of revelatory moments where Ondaatje argues with himself.

Patrick's balanced, liberal voice, suspicious of extremism, whether it manifests itself in oppression or resistance, revealingly exposes the neuroses of a settler whose uncertain relationship with the country he inhabits affects his attitude to positioning himself politically. Patrick argues that 'There is more compassion in my desire for truth' (124), because 'The trouble with ideology ... is that it hates the private. You must make it human' (135). Some of the main problems in Patrick's political perspective are revealed in this speech, and indeed are very likely responsible for prompting critiques of the 'mystifying' nature of the book. In many ways this liberal voice of Ondaatje's Canadian settler is also the voice of bourgeois quietism, of dreamy inaction and retreat into the self. Patrick seems naively idealistic, but also potentially dogmatic in stating a 'desire for truth'. Again, there is the voice suspicious of polemic, of the whole notion of 'ideology', but this time not in defence of art but arguing for the rights of the 'personal', the 'private', the 'human'. In many ways Patrick's values seem problematically reactionary, as they seem to assert the possibility of a certain truth, and defend the integrity of human values. Because of this, his position as reasonable arbiter, in-between Alice's radicalism and Harris's capitalistic megalomania seems unconvincing. It is clear he is, like Harris with his personal dreams of enterprise, more committed to the rights of the individual, than to the solidarity of any community. This is essentially the position Sugunasiri attacks when she calls Ondaatje one of the 'bourgeois who fled the revolution'. As Alice points out, his supposed compassion is dangerously close to being merely a romantic and theoretical quality, a symptom of his quietism because 'compassion forgives too much' and 'nothing changes' (123). Necessarily, the argument is unresolved, as its dialogic structure is primarily being used by Ondaatje to generate and test ideas (which in some cases will be developed in the course of the novel) about the possible political reactions and perspectives of migrants to the capitalist structure of the West. In this context Patrick's much derided role in the novel begins to make sense and can be viewed another way, as part of Ondaatje's exploration of the historical consciousness of an unradicalised, Canadian settled majority, locked in a dream state.

If this argument reveals a divide in Ondaatje's conceptions of 'settler' and 'immigrant' positions there is a general sense in In the Skin of a Lion that his ideas are broadening, particularly in his complex and radical reconception of the figure of the migrant. Ondaatje's literary approach has been criticised for its apparent de-rationalising 'mystifying' tendencies, especially by Marxist critics, in relation to his tentative 'literary' representation of political ideas. Bok has claimed that Ondaatje is suffering from 'ideological delusion'. Ondaatje has attempted to explain his rationale in his choice of language in his interview with Bush. He argues that fictional discourses are important because 'The newspapers have such power over the story and portrait of Canada' and that as they 'are moving in a certain politically right-wing direction ... this becomes the official voice of the country' (247). So to offer another perspective he proposes that 'One of the things a novel can do is to represent the unofficial story, give a personal, complicated version of things'. He states 'I think a novel can become in this way, a more permanent and political reflection of your time' (247). There are moments in In the Skin of a Lion that reflect this perspective, that apply a 'metaphorical', 'literary' language to politically insightful purpose. A key passage which describes the work of the migrant dyers, and explores the migrant from this metaphorical perspective, is worth noting as it combines this with a historically rounded context, taking account, on both levels, of the complicated class and racial dynamics of migrant identity:

Dye work took place in the courtyards next to the warehouse. Circular pools had been cut into the stone - into which the men leapt waist-deep within the reds and ochres and greens, leapt in embracing the skins of recently slaughtered animals. In the round wells four-foot in diameter they heaved and stomped ensuring the dye went solidly into the pores of the skin that had been part of a live animal the previous day. And the men stepped out in colours up to their necks, pulling wet hides out after them so it appeared they had removed the skin from their own bodies. They had leapt into different colours as if into different countries.

That is how Patrick would remember them later. Their bodies standing there tired, only the heads white. If he were an artist he would have painted them but that was false celebration. What did it mean in the end to look aesthetically plumaged on this October day in the East end of the city five hundred yards from Front Street? What would the painting tell? That they were twenty to thirty-five years old, were Macedonians mostly, though there were a few Poles and Lithuanians. That on average they had three or four sentences of English, that they had never read the *Mail and Empire* or *Saturday Night*. That during the day they ate standing up. That they had consumed the most evil smell in history, they were consuming it now, flesh death, which lies in the vacuum between flesh and skin, and even if they never stepped into this pit again - a year from now they would burp up that odour. That they would die of consumption and at present they did not know it. That in winter this picturesque yard of colour was even more beautiful, the thin layer of snowfall between the steaming wells. Below-zero weather and the almost naked men descend into the vats at the same whistle and cover themselves later with burlap as they stand waiting (130/1).

Although this passage is as lyrical as much of Running in the Family this lyricism becomes a keen critical tool in Ondaatje's hand, and keeps true to his stated commitment to oppose the 'illusionary' fads of newspapers. Describing the men after they had submerged themselves in the poisonous dye, he then moves on to ask: 'What did it mean ... to look aesthetically plumaged on this October day in the east end of the city five hundred yards from Front Street?' There is an awareness here of the dangers of an 'innocent' lyrical style, of the dangerous potential for a 'false celebration' of the 'picturesque' in this scene. He then proceeds to provide expansive details of the migrant's lives, all the small and important facts that prevent people from merely becoming attractive images: 'That on average they had three or four sentences of English' (130). Linda Hutcheon has pointed out that mastery of the English language was the key to full citizenship in the Toronto In the Skin of a Lion describes. To be non-English was to be 'dis-enfranchised, unnoticed, unhistorical' (98). For the

educated Ondaatje the migrant writer, as someone who possesses the essential currency already this may be read as an attempt to engage with a very different sort of migrant. These unsettled observations are loaded with a new awareness and responsibility and represent an attempt, as a sort of brother migrant to speak for the migrants with no voices, by telling their 'unofficial' story. There is a new expansive curiosity here, and the careful measuring of lives through impressions and concrete detail distinguishes the style of In the Skin of a Lion from Running in the Family. The most radical aspect of this change is that much of this expansive detail has to do with work and the meagre, oppressed lives of migrant workers. We are presented with a 'behind the scenes' world of production where before we had an extravagant world of consumption.

Ondaatje is illuminating on the status of the migrant in Canada. On one level, his book is an acknowledgement that the migrant workers were often the true, unheralded life-blood and history makers of Canada. As G. Woodcock has observed 'immigration transformed the life patterns of ... Toronto ... from a dull Sabbatatian, Anglo-Scottish city into a lively, cosmopolitan one' (313). Every page of Ondaatje's novel emphasises migrants pivotal role in building modern Toronto. On another level, Ondaatje's novel is an indictment of the forces in early twentieth-century Western society which attempted to make the migrant worker anonymous, to write him/her out of history. He goes on to comment that the dyers, working in the worst jobs imaginable, 'consumed the most evil smell in history' (130), that they were poisoned and marked by exploitation, that their work obliterated their personal history. They were literally 'branded' by capitalism. This happens on a number of levels. They suffer a 'flesh death' (131) in the dyeing pits and are given English names to facilitate their employers. As Dennis Duffy argues, in In the Skin of a Lion: 'We do not share some socialist vision of a boundaryless, global fraternity of workers' instead 'we witness ... stark evidence of the faceless, interchangeable nature of manual labourers and the pressure pushing them to migrate wherever there were jobs' (134). What Ondaatje argues is that migrant identity in the West is a condition closely linked to class, with being poor and homeless, with lack of social status. Even the white migrant of the novel, the 'settler class' immigrant, Patrick, can be a slave in the New World; the coloniser's labouring class is also its internal colonised. The very essence of immigrant

identity, in the book, is its fragility and this fragility is the direct result of poverty. The migrants in the novel, are not in full control of the constriction of their identity, as Chambers has noted, their 'Identity is formed on the move' (25). In fact possessions and identities are considered disposable, made and unmade to accommodate the necessity of moving on. Caravaggio 'carries the necessities of his trade with him', but we are told when he 'quits a year later he will cut the thongs with a fish knife and fling the blocks' away (28). This constant metamorphosis is contrasted with the stasis, the settled lives of the moneyed, 'property holds the rich to earth' (223). There is a sense that Ondaatje is attempting to imagine beyond his circumstances, to imagine and translate other migrants' experience.

There is also a radical element, particularly in the metaphoric content of the dyers passage, in Ondaatje's connection of ideas of race and class. It is true he doesn't deal with racial differences beyond the West, all of his migrants are Europeans. However, Ondaatje's passage is still a remarkably suggestive description of the 'dyed' ethnicity of the migrant worker in Canada. Although the dye workers are European immigrants, this scene conceives of national and class identity in relation to dyed colours. There is the lingering trace of a racial meaning behind this metaphor too; a gesture towards a treatment of 'coloured' migrants, the type of migrant Ondaatje's work is peculiarly silent about until The English Patient.<sup>4</sup> We are told that the dye pit workers 'leapt into different colours as if into different countries' and momentarily this sounds liberating, a 'transcendence' of national identity even. However because of this work it 'appeared they had removed the skin from their own bodies' (129). The dye pits may be seen to represent a grotesque parody of the national 'melting pot', it is a site where racial difference is dissolved and dyed to suit the demands of industry. Ondaatje's image is a striking one, not least because of how it assaults the idea of the 'transcendence' of national identity by describing it as a sort of 'abyss' where differences are dissolved.

It is clear that Ondaatje's conception of migrant identity, and metaphoric style, represents a challenge to the narrow and harmful capitalist values of the comfortable 'settler' West and its traditional realist modes of representing the working classes. In the character of Patrick, Ondaatje takes this critique a step further, and questions the

'ethnic' authority of the 'white Caucasian'. Although born in Canada, Patrick, as a member of the 'settler' immigrant class, feels a strong sense of unbelonging. We are told: 'He is the one born in this country who knows nothing of the place', a 'searcher gazing into the darkness of his own country' (156/7). Ondaatje is implying that Patrick is ignorant of the immigrant history of his country, for this passage comes directly after Patrick's reading of Cato's letter to Alice where he finally makes the connection that the men he saw skating on the river as a child were Finnish labourers. He is also, however, attacking the notion of a stable settler identity, that settlers like Patrick are as alien and alienated to Canada as the more recent European migrants. In this context, Ondaatje's insistent identification as a migrant, may be seen to be part of an attempt to dissolve notions of ethnic pre-eminence which surround the figure of the 'settler', whether s/he is from the West or an ex-colonial Euro-Asian. In an early scene of the novel Patrick 'looks into his school geography book with the maps of the world ... testing the names to himself mouthing out the exotic. Caspian. Nepal. Durango' (9). He then 'closes the book and brushes it with his palms, feeling the texture of the pebbled cover and its coloured dyes which create a map of Canada' (9). Patrick experiences the map of his country with a child-like wonder, not with the recognition of a place that possesses integral associations of blood and the weight of history, but with a sensual disorientation. For Patrick, the settler colonist Canada remains an untranslatable sensation, an unpenetrated texture. This scene suggests that the settler colonist's status is akin to the disorientated unsettled migrant. It illustrates, with its veils of searching moths driven by no other impulse than desire, Ondaatje's belief that a 'sense of place' is always irrational, and cannot be rationalised by maps and names.<sup>5</sup>

Patrick is a migrant in another sense too. His 'settler' temperament alienates him from the modern world, so that when he first arrives in Toronto we are told, 'He was an immigrant to the city', that 'in the city he was new even to himself' (54). This thematic Modernist aesthetic also seems to spread into and influence the form and much of the thinking behind the novel, especially with regard to the attempt to represent the world from a migrant's perspective. Dennis Duffy makes the Modernist connection in his essay when he remarks that *In the Skin of a Lion* represents 'an implicit postmodern re-enactment of the Modernist project begun in James Joyce's *A*

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, but draws the conclusion that the text's ultimate subject is 'the art of narrative' (129). However, writing from the 'new place' of the migrant's perspective, Ondaatje's Modernist poetics widens to encompass the actual dimensions of the migrant's story within history. Another reason Ondaatje's protagonist Patrick seems alienated is because, in this novel the protagonist's story is de-centralised. We are repeatedly reminded that Patrick, the outsider, is also 'not a hero' in narrative terms. Patrick the 'watcher' is to be considered in the 'third person' (156). Ondaatje's oblique Modernist approach is clearly influenced by what he describes as 'the moment of cubism' (34), a revolution of perspective that marginalises all of his character's stories, considering them all simultaneously and in relation to each other. For instance, section two of the novel, 'The Bridge', is, on one level, 'about' Alice, about why 'What she will become she becomes' (41) because of her experience falling off the bridge and meeting Nicholas Temelcoff. On another level this section of the book seems to be telling the bridge-workers' history. Similarly, the whole book, whilst relating moments from Patrick's life tells of other lives, both at the same time. It is at once 'only a love story' (160), and the story of immigrant lives. One of the epigraphs to the novel is a quote from John Berger: 'Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one' (36). Patrick himself comes to realise that 'His own story was no longer a single story but part of a mural' (144). In his interview with Catherine Bush, Ondaatje talks explicitly about the influence of the aesthetic experience of the mural on his novel. Talking specifically in relation to the work of the artist Diego Riviera he describes the feeling he wanted to create: 'The experience of walking into a room and being surrounded' (245). The experience he describes, of being 'surrounded' is primarily a sensual one. The sensuality and density of the writing in In the Skin of a Lion is suggestive of the direction Ondaatje is going with his notion of an unofficial history. It is apparent that the unofficial version is not only another radical version, but also an attempt to tell many concurrent versions, to conceive of history differently too, sensually, emotively. To tell the unofficial version is not only a political choice, it is an aesthetic one too. In his interview with Sam Solecki, Ondaatje has stated 'I avoid reading books on politics. It's a funny thing ... political theory I find impossible to read. I have to be affected emotionally or in a sensual way before



something hits me' (45). His writing assumes the reader is this way too, and attempts to affect the reader by surrounding him or her sensually. This is why the political and the love story must work together, concurrently. Both are necessary to Ondaatje's sensual aesthetic, because, as we shall see, Ondaatje's project is to present history in terms of the actual dimensions of unofficial stories, in terms of small moments of private experience, hidden interior spaces, and in the context of seeing history as expressive of human experience.

Ondaatje's multiple narrative avoids the temptation to tell the 'single story' of traditional monological historiography which consigns the 'other' stories to the margins. Patrick's earlier expressed respect for the rights of the personal, the private, begins to make sense within the structure of the novel when it becomes clear that Ondaatje's novel expresses, in its form, that history is composed of an interweave of personal moments. Patrick's idea of the 'human' seems more intelligible and less 'mystical' in the context of this history. I would agree with Fotias Sarris that 'One of the implied functions of In the Skin of a Lion is to humanise history and consequently, its corollary, ideology' (195). But I would be more rigorous in looking into what humanise means in this context. Ondaatje's invitation is to read 'human' stories into history and part of his intention can be explained through Sarris's contention that 'stories can shed light on the individual's place in the world and his or her relationship to history and society' (195). Private experience can be contextualised and politicised through stories Ondaatje is searching for the political that exists in the private, is acknowledging that these categories are inseparable. This is why the concept of the 'human' is so important to Ondaatje's aesthetic. In the 'web' of events 'surrounding' him Patrick feels he can discern 'order, very faint very human' (13415). It is here that it becomes clear that Ondaatje's view of history is too randomly unformulaic and concerned with the sensual nature of subjectivities to accommodate the resolutely formulaic view of history of dialectical materialism. This human order is faint because 'part of the human element is randomness' (135). The human element in Ondaatje's novel, then, is not so much humanist as an adjective connoting the 'ungoverned', 'meandering' course and interchange of lives.

The movement of the narrative is neither linear nor circular, instead it 'meander(s)' (146). For example, the first section 'Little Seeds' carries within it, in its relating of the defining moments and epiphanies, memories and inspirations of Patrick's childhood, the seeds of what he will become, of ideas that will grow outwards as the novel weaves back and forth, gathering threads. The seeds of explosive on his father's clothes are the seeds in Patrick's mind that ignite his later anarchist urges. It is through this growing outwards, and weaving back and forth that Ondaatje links the private and the public, and can attempt to escape the restraints of traditional historiography and his own personal perspective to write 'something ungoverned by the family he was born into or the headlines of the day' (145). Beddoes's argument that In the Skin of a Lion refuses to 'clearly reflect or represent anything other than its own processes' demonstrates how far this novel's critics have been from recognising the sources and rationale behind its aesthetic. Beddoes's call for 'clarity' may be read as suspect in its turn, as it is basically the re-iterated demand for a sustained, committed polemic.

If the ending may be criticised for being disappointingly tentative, resolutely unresolved, it seems fair to argue that this is a novel whose meaning is not to be seen as culminating in its ending. For In the Skin of a Lion is a novel driven by the principle of constant metamorphosis, constant evolutions and degenerations between states. Seeing history from the metropolitan migrant's perspective it presents a story, which like Iain Chamber's Modernist version of the modern city, 'can only be caught in fragments' (106). Attacking the notion of 'demarcation', it presents a complex of intersecting peripheries as the substance of experience, and attempts to view the birth of a modern Western 'global' city's history as being bound up with and formed out of immigrant lives from its foundations. Ondaatje's faux-Modernist narrative, and the processes it describes, provides a very suggestive new parallel to the revolution of perspective occurring globally, throughout post-modern cities, as a result of immigration. Ondaatje's generous vision in In the Skin of a Lion of the nation as heterogeneous, and his realisation (through Conrad) that 'men are infinitely varied' represents a movement in his work towards a more expansive and inclusive, democratic mode of writing. History is 'told' as a web of concurrent, personal stories, is made accessible as a tale of

migrants. Moreover his application of a 'migrant perspective' in the novel is more focused and critical. He uses it as he did in Running in the Family to make a 'nonsense' of settler ties and values, to provide, as Chambers puts it: 'lateral accounts of social relations, that invalidate the usual claims of blood, class, and frontiers' (5).<sup>6</sup>

### **Presumed English**

In his most ambitious work, The English Patient Ondaatje looks more closely at, and attempts to historicise, the moment of crisis which the previous two books anticipate in their explorations of the two aspects of Western 'civilisation' which made 'World' wars possible in the first place, imperialism and capitalism. If the first two books are pre-books, concerned with their own imagined present The English Patient is definitely a 'post' novel, concerned with, and poised at the edge of a prospective, uncertain post-war age. It is Ondaatje's most developed thesis on the experience of migrancy, and his first book to confront the notion of a future, and to consider what the migrant's place in it might involve. There is something simultaneously elegiac and dynamic in the 'metamorphic' content of the novel. One passage, in particular, possesses the same narrative energy as In the Skin of a Lion: 'We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves' (261). There is a sense in this passage of attempting to map out the psychic landscape of a lifetime. It presumes a certain position of authority in relation to what is past. The English Patient provides an elegy to the outmoded 'romanticism' of the pre-war years, to the love affair of Count Almásy and Katherine, but it also seeks to offer, in its portrait of the desert, a metaphor for the damaged 'psychogeography', as Chambers puts it (5), of the post-war age. For it is no longer a place where 'nomads of faith ... walked in the monotone of the desert and saw brightness and faith and colour' (261), it has become a site of disorientation and existential doubts. It is this 'psychological' approach which deepens the perspective of the imaginative truth Ondaatje posits; that as result of a sort of universal 'historical' trauma the post-war

generation is psychologically migrant, removed from the emotional certainties, and the received ideas which constituted a 'psychic' home.

More specifically for the first time in his career, Ondaatje describes the moment of this historical trauma from the perspective of a migrant from the East, the Indian Kirpal Singh. In the unique chapter entitled 'In Situ', Ondaatje devotes himself exclusively for the first time to the task of seeing the migrant up close and in focus. It is his most detailed and personal exploration of a migrant's experience and finally addresses in illuminating detail the neglected mid-point of his own migrant journey, by exploring Kirpal Singh's relationship with his 'Englishness'. It could be described as the settler Ondaatje looking into his migrant self. In many ways this chapter is the culmination of Ondaatje's stated desire in his interview with Solecki, to use writing 'to make order' and 'to understand something about yourself' (45). The power of his portrait of Kirpal Singh is, in its unrelenting honesty and precision in tracing the gradual growth of an, at first, unmindful migrant's self-consciousness.

The chapter begins in Westbury, England 1940, as Kirpal Singh the 'sapper', 'descended, into the giant white chalk horse of Westbury, into the whiteness of the horse, carved into the hill. Now he was a black figure, the background radicalizing the darkness of his skin and his khaki uniform' (181). Again, as in In the Skin of a Lion Ondaatje presents the migrant's racial otherness, through a powerful image. In our first meeting with this migrant, on English soil and chalk, he is presented as being 'radicalized' in relation to the place he stands, his 'blackness' is accentuated against the 'white background' of the English soil. This image can be read in a number of ways. First of all, he is 'radicalized' in relation to the 'settler' country. As a migrant he jars, he does not fit in. The possibility of an easy assimilation is slim, as his difference is startling. Kirpal Singh is there because 'He joined a Sikh regiment and was shipped to England' (182). In some ways Kirpal bears some comparison to the migrants of In the Skin of a Lion. We are told that 'This was the Heroic Age of bomb disposal' but 'It was, however, a Heroic age whose protagonists remained obscure, since their actions were kept from the public for reasons of security' (184). It was a time 'when agency and a lack of knowledge and equipment led to the taking of fantastic risks' (184). Kirpal is, in this respect, like the anonymous and exploited Toronto migrants drafted in

to do difficult, dangerous jobs. There seems however to be a greater commitment on Ondaatje's part in this book to bring this particular migrant's story into focus, to tell his 'unofficial story'. As the image of Kirpal and the white horse suggests we are to move closer to this migrant, we will see him more clearly, and moreover not only will he not be anonymous he will be represented as 'radicalised' in relation to his English settler cultural experience. He is to be sharply differentiated and individualised, his psychology, his history, his attitudes will all be highlighted against this 'background'.

An important aspect of this background, historically, is that the book is set towards the end of the Second World War. This, Ondaatje's novel argues, was a more politically turbulent time for the migrant than in In the Skin of a Lion. For a start, the bombs in this novel are more dangerous, the territory of this novel is more fraught, and both bombs and territory are more powerfully applied as politically loaded metaphors. The new territory of the war is more problematised in terms of migrant identity and power, it is a literal minefield. And why? We are told that England is host to '2,500 unexploded bombs' (183). In Westbury, a 'historic location' (184), the sappers are examining 'the stomach of the giant white horse ... carved into the rolling chalk hills in 1778' (184). There is the fear that the precious English landscape is being colonised, 'radicalized' by something dangerous, explosive. The sappers are essentially carrying out an exercise of conservation, of English heritage. In this context, the white horse may be read as the 'Leviathan' of the Nation and the inspection of the 'historic location' of Westbury can be read as being inspired by the fear that some foreign body has insinuated its way into the belly of the beast. Ondaatje is attempting to remember the war as the ethnic revolution it was, when countries were changing structure internally, and old Empires were on the edge of dissolving. In one sense the hidden danger is the migrant. Migrants are represented as 'bombs' in this novel.<sup>7</sup> The idea of the migrant as bomb is explored repeatedly throughout the book, as Ondaatje reads the migrant as integral to the explosiveness of the time. Singh, remembering his treatment in India by the English authorities, whilst enlisting as a soldier, makes a connection between how the foreign bodies of both actual bombs and native flesh are cautiously inscribed and categorised, 'There is always yellow chalk scribbled on the side of bombs ... Just as there was yellow chalk scribbled onto our bodies when we lined up in the

Lahore courtyard' (199). The soldiers are examined to ascertain 'Our weight age, district, standard of education, dental condition, and what unit we were best suited for' (199). In this image the processes of colonisation are shown as akin to the practise of bomb disposal, in both cases the process involves making the dangerous unknown intelligible and categorisable. Both involve an anatomically detailed dis-empowerment, a tearing out of the fuse or heart of the machine in order to 'neutralise' it. There is, however, an element of unpredictability in these apparently 'neutralised' weapons. The problem has to do with the way they were constructed. We are told, 'People think a bomb is a mechanical abject, a mechanical enemy. But you have to consider that somebody made it' (192). Colonialism, it is implied, has created these potential time bombs, and the war is merely a natural development of the imperial adventure. Even the apparently 'neutralised' ones, the migrants, like Kirpal Singh, and the neo-colonials are unpredictable. This idea, of course, is an act of imaginative license on Ondaatje's part. Most colonies had not exploded historically at this time. He is writing prophetically, from the vantage point of contemporary history, and reading into the post-war moment the beginning of the fractures, when the idea of Empire emerged so irretrievably damaged it was only a matter of time before the colonies would, like India in 1947, explode in the coloniser's face.

It is clear that Ondaatje sees Kirpal Singh as dangerously powerful despite his 'colonised' position. Part of his strange power in the book has to do with him possessing a worker's mechanical 'language'. He is representative, possessing what is described as a common native faculty: 'Most people in his village were more likely to carry a spanner or screwdriver than a pencil' (188). This secret, non-literary knowledge possesses an essential inviolability, it is un-inscribable, protected from the dominant culture's parlance. It is also representative of a more kinetic culture, a young, energetic native culture emerging out of the ashes of a dying settler civilization. All of this has interesting correspondences with Ondaatje the literary migrant who has chosen a pencil over a screwdriver. Kirpal Singh is a different sort of migrant, more closely bound to a 'native' tradition, but equally capable of finding a way of using the coloniser's knowledge more proficiently and adaptively than the coloniser. 'What he saw in England was a surfeit of parts that would keep the continent of India going for

two hundred years' (187). It is a knowledge bred out of cultural impurity, and the necessities of an underdeveloped culture to be resourceful in order to survive: 'One coated an overheating car engine not with new rubber hoses but by scooping up cow-shit and patting it around the condenser' (188). It is this adaptive native power that Ondaatje is recognising and paying homage to by attempting to make his writing reflect and develop a broader perspective on the migrant's history in this century. It is this adaptive power that makes Kirpal Singh, and the migrant per se in this period, such a frightening new species. A new species that is better able to adapt to the pace of the war: 'This was the way the war progressed. Every six months or so the enemy altered something' (191). This is why Kirpal Singh manages to defuse a new type of bomb that kills his English mentor Lord Suffolk, because historically 'They were at a new stage now' (191), when the migrant is beginning to explore his/her relationship to power.

Kirpal Singh's position in relation to these tumultuous changes is full of contradictions. After glimpsing Melville's novel Pierre, or the Ambiguities in Suffolk's book case and considering how coldly he has been received, he calls himself 'Singh. And the Ambiguities' (188). Ambiguity defines his 'migrant' position, he is both Singh the bomb defuser and Singh the bomb, and therefore a potential threat to the power structures he serves. He is a neutralised' bomb, but dangerously adaptable, he is passive and silent but ultimately unpredictable, a figure who highlights the cultural explosiveness of the era. It is in this ambiguity that the figure of Kip begins to resemble Ondaatje the migrant/settler, that his portrait begins to resonate the problems of possessing an ambiguous relationship to both native and settler forms of power.

Initially, Singh is happy to serve the status quo under his English patron Lord Suffolk. Ondaatje takes great care to describe this relationship as it re-enacts the colonial power dynamic. It illustrates the process of 'post-migration' colonisation, where the temptation for the migrant is to 'settle' back into old subordinate patterns. Lord Suffolk exemplifies a certain brand of pre-war Englishness. We are told that 'Lord Suffolk was the best of the English', his retreat is called 'Home Farm' (186). On these terms, Suffolk is portrayed as an archetype or even a cliché of English civilised culture, the wellspring of national identity. Under this patronage, or regressive

bondage, Kirpal Singh has entered a sort of colonial time warp: 'half of his time during the war had taken place in the slipstream of this lord who had never stepped out of England' (187). Ondaatje is not afraid to confront the initial, self-abnegating reactions of this unpoliticised migrant to English culture. We are soon told that 'He was beginning to love the English'(190). He becomes proud of the knowledge he has been endowed with, he 'knew he contained more than any other sapper, the knowledge of Lord Suffolk' (190). He is proud like the collaborationist neo-colonial, (and this comparison is instructive, as it suggests that some migrants never move beyond the processes of colonialism) to be a receptacle of another's knowledge. We are told that 'He was expected to be the replacing vision' (196). He is meant to become a mouthpiece of earlier intentions, and happily denies his own innovation by dedicating his work on bomb disposal as 'Drawn by desire of Lord Suffolk by his student Lieutenant Kirpal Singh' (196). At this stage in development Kirpal Singh's story seems only to offer a critical model of the pit-falls for the naive, apolitical and therefore 'easily harnessed' (123) migrant.

However, Kirpal Singh's relationship to power and resistance is unfolded by Ondaatje in a subtle and nuanced way, in an attempt to describe the slow, and troubled paths to political consciousness. The defining moment, for Singh, is Lord Suffolk's death, an event that anticipates and enacts the withdrawal of the English coloniser from India. It is a terrifying moment when 'everything now depended on Singh' (195). He now 'had suddenly a map of responsibility, something, he realised, that Lord Suffolk carried within his character at all times' (193). This trauma forces him to reassess his attitude to his own power, to acknowledge that 'He was one of those never interested in the choreography of power', who actively avoids coming into his power, hiding 'in Italy for the rest of the war' (196). This moment brings to the surface memories of India that suggest he has carried with him to England, his old 'native' responses to power. We are told: 'He was accustomed to his invisibility', and moreover that 'the self-sufficiency and privacy Hana saw in him later' was 'a result of being the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world' (196). This story of a struggle against an inclination towards 'self-censorship' and privacy is suggestive of the tensions in Ondaatje's writing, more generally and in his aesthetic of the 'private'.



In a crucial passage, where Kirpal Singh remembers being daubed with yellow chalk and wonders how his activist brother would respond to such indignity, Ondaatje looks into two 'native' responses to colonialism:

I did not feel insulted by this. I am sure my brother would have been, would have walked in fury over to the well, hauled up the bucket, and washed the chalk markings away. I was not like him. Though I loved him. Admired him. I had this side to my nature which saw reason in all things. I was the one who had an earnest and serious air at school, which he would imitate and mock. You understand, of course, I was far less serious than he was, it was just that I hated confrontation. It didn't stop me doing whatever I wished or doing things the way I wanted to. Quite early on I discovered the over-looked space open to those of us with a silent life. I didn't argue with the policeman who said I couldn't cycle over a certain bridge or through a specific gate in the fort - I just stood there, still, until I was invisible, and then I went through. Like a cricket. Like a hidden cup of water. You understand? That is what my brother's public battles taught me (200).

Kirpal Singh 'had discovered the overlooked spaces open to those of us with a silent life', he seeks privacy, silence, and invisibility in response to 'his brother's public battles' (200). His response, although passive, possesses tenacity and a certain adaptive power. Moreover Kip still does 'whatever (he wishes)' and in the way he wants to (200). There is no doubt about his serious and reason-governed will and power to act. The only difference is that unlike his brother, he acts only for himself. There are echoes here of the passage in Running in the Family when Ondaatje talks admiringly of the 'powerful and angry' (85) polemical aesthetic of the native poet Lakdasa Wikkramasinha. Both passages are haunted by a foreign potential 'side' to the migrant's personality, by the troubling figure of the more activist 'brother' native. This is an important and complex figure in Ondaatje's writing, an unsettling native presence which partially explains Ondaatje's contradictory tendencies. In one breath he implicitly criticises himself as a self-serving literary migrant and in another he

implicitly presents his refusal to be inscribed, and his intention to critically inscribe the experience of being a migrant as a justification of himself as a self-aware agent.<sup>8</sup> The crisis of this process, of Ondaatje's representation of Kirpal Singh, is the moment when this passive, private Indian who 'hated confrontation' (200) eventually confronts the English patient and in doing so finds his voice and becomes visible to himself.

The scene in which Kip confronts Almásy about Hiroshima and Nagasaki seems to me to be the crisis point of the novel and the culmination of Ondaatje's thoughts about the relationship between East and West:

I sat at the foot of this bed and listened to you, Uncle. These last months. When I was a kid I did that the same thing. I believed I could fill myself up with what older people taught me. I believed I could carry that knowledge, slowly altering it, but in any case passing it beyond me to another. I grew up with traditions from my country, but later, more often, from your country. Your fragile white island that with customs and manners and books and prefects and reason somehow convened the rest of the world. You stood for precise behaviour. I knew if I lifted a teacup with the wrong finger I'd be banished. If I tied the wrong kind of knot in a tie I was out. Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it, as my brother said, because you had the histories and printing presses?

You and then the Americans converted us. With your missionary rules. And Indian soldiers wasted their lives as heroes so they could be pukkah. You had wars like cricket. How did you fool us into this? Here ... listen to what you people have done (283).

The crisis forces Kip to recognise the historical bitterness of his relationship with the 'English patient': 'I grew up with traditions from my county, but later, more often, from your ... You ... converted us. With your missionary rules. You had wars like cricket'. He describes Hiroshima's 'streets of Asia full of fire' (284) as the historical culmination of an earlier form of colonisation. For both events are guided by the same

'tremor of Western wisdom' (283), that attempted to civilise other countries, that constructs bombs. That the confrontation is based on a case of mistaken identity has ceased to matter, for a number of reasons. For Kirpal Singh it is because 'When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman ... You all learned it from the English' (286). In Running in the Family we are told that the 'English ... (were) seen as .... snobs and racists ... separate from those who had intermarried' (34). So, 'Englishness' in Ondaatje's experience epitomises the most ethnically rigid form of settler culture, it is his personal archetype of the pre-war coloniser.<sup>9</sup> In the earlier 'In Situ' chapter he has already set up the conditions that could make Singh's response to the English patient seem possible, by minutely exploring the dynamic of the migrant's relations with the English, the struggle of the ex-native to become that evolving being, the migrant. Singh's contact with and patronage under the most outdated aspects of English civilisation through Lord Suffolk, return to haunt him in this moment and he finally becomes truly 'radicalized' in relation to his English colonial and migrant experiences.

The fact of mistaken identity is significant in itself in that it points to how much Western identity has blurred to the East all its nations are uniformly guilty, as Kip comments 'American, French, I don't care' (285). They have also become indeterminate because of the prevailing sense that Western civilisation is 'dead', that this moment in twentieth century history marks 'The death of a civilisation' (286). This impression brings Kip to an awareness of his awkward position in relation to the most honorific moment in history and the history which preceded it 'seeing everything ... in a different light' (284), it suddenly comes to him that 'His name is Kirpal Singh and he does not know what he is doing here' (287). Ondaatje notes in Running in the Family that 'From the 20s until the war nobody really had to grow up' (34). The pre-war years were not merely the dreamtime of the settler classes and the West but also the political infancy of the migrant. This revelatory moment is Kip's coming into knowledge and maturity. He is no longer the naive migrant who laughed at the play 'Peter Pan' with Lord Suffolk, no longer the migrant 'who refuses to grow up' (197).

Mark Simpson, in a notable 1994 essay which foregrounds the Kirpal Singh plot has written suggestively on the similarities between Kirpal Singh and Kipling's

Kim, and how they both experience a defining moment of insight into their position in relation to the colonial map of the world. Kim's epiphany is accompanied by the words 'I am Kim. And what is Kim?' Edward Said, in his introduction to the novel describes this epiphany as the 'therapeutic vision' 'of a young white man coming back to earth in a vast country like India'(260), a vision of everything being in its proper place that was only possible because of the economic reality of the 'security of British rule' (260). Said compares it to the 'moral reawakenings' of Victorian novels, which enact 'a seeing of oneself in the larger scheme of things' (20). For Kim it is a moment of 'orientation' in relation to the colonial world map. Kim's vision effectively 'neutralises' any will to oppose, 'curing him of his doubts' (20).

Kirpal Singh's revelation, fulfilling his native brother's prediction that 'One day, (you) will open your eyes' and stop 'trusting the English' (217), on the other hand, is the definitive post-war moment of identity crisis and disorientation in relation to how the world has been ordered. Disorientation, in this sense may be read as a new orientation to historical time and colonial territory, in fact we are told that the fire of the bomb 'rolls across cities like a burst map' (284). This moment is akin to the crisis of Lord Suffolk's death, again Singh has been handed a 'map of responsibility'. Unlike Kim, Kip, guided by his new orientation to the colonial map, is no longer prepared to sit 'at the foot of the bed' (283) and be the passive recipient of 'older' avuncular cultural knowledge. Through this politicising epiphany Ondaatje dramatizes the immediate post-war period's crisis of identity and the growing alienation and disconnection between cultures East and West.

It is here that his consciousness of existing on the cusp of peripheries becomes useful as he attempts to describe the historical and private moment, which is both metaphoric and polemical, where the East and the West meet and fail to make contact. If 'It feels like the end of the world' it is because it is the end of an era where lovers like Kip and Hana could at least pretend to be just 'A boy and a girl' (288). Against the desert background of the war the love affair between Almsy and Katherine provided a moist oasis, a sensual, selfish refuge. Love, represented in Hana and Kip's love affair, is no longer a refuge in itself after the war, in fact it has become one of the sites of conflict. This is Ondaatje 'unearthing, baring history' (251) layer by layer, until the

'last Eden' (of a boy and a girl) 'after news of the bomb' (252) has been shattered 'From now on ... the personal will forever be at war with the public' (292), and when 'eyes meet in (a) half-dark room' as they do when Kirpal Singh and Count Almasy confront each other, that room will have grown and be 'crowded now with the world' (286). The moment inaugurates a changeover in power, historically and in terms of Ondaatje's career. It indicates a new commitment in his aesthetic and his writing to represent the migrant in such a way that acknowledges the native roots of that identity, and which respects the native's culture, specificity and anger. This commitment seems to me to be based on a committed response to what Ondaatje believes is the truth of this moment historically, that the inauguration of the 'post-war' period was a 'radicalising' moment in history. If his earlier work seems 'unradicalised', as many of Ondaatje's critics seem to believe, perhaps it is due to Ondaatje's commitment to reflect the 'pre-war' period as a time of gestation for the migrant, before the figure had properly defined itself historically and become 'radicalized'.

In the confrontation between the two sides of Ondaatje, migrant and settler meet, one coming into his migrant power as the other faces the final dissolve into indeterminacy. As the patient says after describing Caravaggio's David with the Head of Goliath, 'Kip is my David' (116). The narrative reads the post-war moment as a time when 'Youth judge(s) age', and the sick man of the West, stands at the edge of a new order. Almasy, the 'disposed' figure in this narrative, is also, like Kirpal Singh, an 'international bastard ... born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere' (176), and therefore is an equally suggestive figure in relation to Ondaatje, the 'literary' migrant.<sup>10</sup> For it is the fate of this scholarly, indeterminate man to end up being presumed English, or collaborator, as duplicitous. In this way the story of this ambiguous figure dramatises the attitudes and eventual fate of the literary migrant of uncertain, undeclared origin, who claims an international passport of expression. Like Ondaatje the patient is a cultured and eclectically knowledgeable cultural commentator and explorer. He 'speaks in fragments, about oasis towns, the later Medicis, the prose style of Kipling' (96), and in doing so, like Ondaatje, he teases his audience 'leaving them never quite sure who he was' (98). Like Ondaatje, he is both distanced and intimate, is capable of speaking of himself in tongues, in the third person, as 'Almasy'. Like

Ondaatje he is a literate history teller who claims his life 'even as an explorer has been governed by words' (161).

It is within the patient's 'history of me', his Herodotus (119) that we find again Ondaatje's narrative aesthetic, a history which 'sought out the supplementary to the main argument' (119). The history teller who has learnt that 'in the desert it is easy to lose sense of demarcation' (18), attempts, like Ondaatje, to tell a story with no boundaries between private and global history. Demarcation between teller and story is gradually lost as the tale proceeds and it soon becomes clear that Ondaatje is using the composite figure of the patient to represent a dying 'pre-war' version of history, for the 'references in his book are all pre-war' (96), and to express his belief that 'We are' as individuals 'communal histories, communal books' (261).

The war represents a violent re-birth for the patient in a number of ways. During the early stages of the war he was one of a group of idealistic 'desert Europeans' (135), whose 'psychogeography' had been altered by contact with desert spaces. Consequently he 'wished to remove the clothing of countries' (139), to 'erase nations' (138). His wish is granted when he emerges naked from his fiery plane like one newly born and is wrapped in 'his cloth placenta' (49). He now has a 'black body' (3), 'no face' (46), and is apparently 'nameless' (52). In the wake of the holocaust of the plane crash, the patient appears as a figure that expresses the confusing, subtle shifts in post-war identity where 'pre-war' identities have been obliterated or transformed. 'Everything about him was very English except for the fact that his skin was black' (96). It is clear that the war has also radicalised the patient, made him as ambiguous as Kirpal Singh as Ondaatje the mixed-race literary migrant, his presumed Englishness only one side of his parodically indeterminate identity. This Englishness is only one of the 'tongues' he speaks that has become prominent as a result of his love affair with an English-woman, and his possessive obsession with her English body. In this context, the patient's Englishness can be viewed as his lingering fetish for the woman who battled for ownership with him and finally 'disassembled' (155) him, a nostalgia for the violent, decadent affair of colonialism whose memory traces still hang on and haunt the post-war 'psychogeography'. The other side to his newly interpreted identity is his new 'blackness', it is his literal other side, out of the dissolve of old notions of national and

racial identity during the war his body and his meandering 'psychogeography' has become the figurative site of an identity that exists outside 'demarcation'.

It is also evident that the 'psychogeography' of Ondaatje's 'literary' values are also under review. The 'crumbling villa' where the 'world' is suddenly crowded, on one level represents, in microcosm, through its various refugee inhabitants, the decay of the 'settled' ethnic, religious and social structure of a new post-war world. It is the moment when the 'God alone knows' ethnicity of Running in the Family has finally taken over and within the context of the 'ungoverned' 'randomness' of the 'human' element, is breeding conflict in all parts of the world. It also indicates the expansive renovation of Ondaatje's own 'House of (English) Fiction' situated as it is in a novel of international migrants and geographical locations. This space turns out not to be the settled refuge, or one of the agreeably 'silent places', Kirpal Singh seeks. Instead of an ahistorical refuge, the villa turns out to be a lumber room of narratives, where cultural values are processed and recycled throughout the course of the novel. The villa with its sprawling library represents the state of the Euro-American 'House of Fiction'. It is, as a result of the processes of The English Patient under renovation, and under assault, from the revisions of Ondaatje's 'migrant' perspective.<sup>11</sup> We have already seen how this renovation worked in relation to Kim. Kirpal Singh is himself a contributing presence to this renovation, a storehouse of cultural knowledge. He possesses the migrant's awareness of cultural transactions between East and West. His response to Suffolk's 'study of Lorna Doone and how authentic the novel was historically and geographically' (184), is less concerned with authenticity than the inter-connections between cultures, for to him 'it sounded like a familiar Indian fable' (185). He is also ready to assert the richness and authority of his own culture, that 'London is a recent town compared to Lahore', and that 'The word bungalow comes from Bengali' (209). There is a more general awareness that in the background, outside the villa as well as inside, Herodotus's 'Histories', the English patient's bible, is being re-written, in the margins, being stuffed with letters, scraps, personal papers. The narratives of the West are being re-inscribed, re-evaluated. The 'architecture' of the novel (216), as Mark Simpson puts it, expresses this renovation. It 'threatens to collapse' (217), its boundaries break down revealing 'instabilities' (218). The English Patient attempts to

be a testament to the fact that the revolution of this time, this dissolving of cultural boundaries, will also be literary, and will be expressed in the post-colonial revisions of migrant writers like Ondaatje. There is also a quietly desperate sense in the novel that these old 'innocent' pre-war stories are needed, like nurses, in these last moments of the war, to comfort and reassure because all around a vision of the world is falling apart. The new vision will be an uncomfortable one, and is partially expressed by the Kirpal Singh's migration to England, and the transformation it precipitated, which by the end of the novel is read, through his wary attitude towards the world, as a fall into a troubled knowledge of a dangerous world.

By the end of the novel the refuge of the villa is exploded as an idea or an option. There no longer seem any viable places of escape, and Ondaatje seems to be saying that the idyll of a belief in a privacy that can exist outside history is redundant in a post-war world. But his villa has also been the very rigorous site of reworking conceptions of a 'displaced site' where the different strands of old narratives can be gathered and re-woven. Eleanor Wachtel in her 1994 interview with Ondaatje, has asserted that 'One of the book's main stories is' that 'No one wants to go home' (260). The crumbling, displaced site of the villa is the 'post-war' alternative to 'Home' that the novel offers. It is a 'disorientated' location, its inhabitants brought together and scattered by the four winds. It is temporary, literally only a camp or shelter. There is no possibility of settling there. The novel's four migrants' journeys from the villa are equated, and linked temporally with a passing into the new post-war era. And despite any settled location on the global map the characters do achieve, psychological homelessness is to be the theme of the era they enter, a post-war era of dissolving canons and nations, houseless fictions, questing exiles and migrants.

At the end of the last chapter of the novel, Ondaatje writes into the future for the first time in his career and we are allowed a glimpse into Kirpal Singh's post-war life. 'Years later' (299) as a busy doctor in India Kirpal becomes occupied with the memory of Hana and his love for her. Even during their war-time intimacy Ondaatje is careful to delineate the divisions in their East/West relationship, when 'their continents met in a hill-side town' (286) and discovered a 'turbulent river of space between them' (301). It is clear that Ondaatje believes this river has widened during the intervening



years. There is a sense that for Kirpal Singh, the war and the trauma of the indefusable bomb of Hiroshima have made the post-war world irrevocably suspicious. His 'psychogeography' has been altered forever. As a sapper he was 'able to imagine the worst devices, the capacity for accident in a room' (111). The memory of Hana is haunted by a historical hyper-consciousness, as it is initially conjured in his mind by the sight of 'a chemical burn on the arm of (a) girl' (300), an image loaded with ineluctable memory traces of Hiroshima. In the final scene in the book Kirpal suspiciously watches his small daughter 'struggling with her cutlery, trying to hold the large weapons in her small hands' (301). In the same moment his mind is in the West imagining Hana: 'Her shoulder touches the edge of the cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor' (302). The scene describes how Kirpal's post-war perspective is tainted by a sense of a latent danger in things, where cutlery can seem like potential 'weapons'. When the West brushes against the edges of the East, even in the imagination, even from a great distance, and years later, it creates tremors in the mind. Ondaatje's representation of the inescapable ties between East and West through the long-distance memory traces of an old love affair suggestively illustrates how even the realm of the personal, of private reverie and experience has become contaminated in Ondaatje's new post-war conscious aesthetic.

This gradually expanding vision of the nature of and the context in which to view the migrant, developed through Ondaatje's oeuvre, allows him to enact a whole host of possibilities and doubts about the 'positions' of the migrant in the 'pre-war' and 'post-war' world. His work offers a diversity of cultural perspectives and locations, and offers him, as a writer, the license to talk about Sri Lanka, Canada, America, Europe, Africa, and India. The question which haunts Whitman's attempt at commanding all the perspectives of the American 'self' in 'Song of Myself' similarly haunts Ondaatje's attempt to explore so many migrant positions. Can he speak for so many? His own conclusion in The English Patient suggests that such a distinction matters little, as Kirpal Singh discovers, to live in the West as a migrant from the East is to be natural heir to the compromised 'in-between' position of the outsider and collaborator, not to mention a deep sense of doubt regarding Western 'civilisation'. In

fact, as In the Skin of a Lion argues, to be a migrant of any colour, in the capitalist West is often synonymous with living on the outside of society. Ondaatje's position as migrant writer is claimed in full acceptance of the fact that it is a troubling, deeply compromised position.

### **Conclusion**

Ondaatje has taken his countries with him and writes from a 'new place', sometimes settled in his outlook and sometimes disorientated. Part of this awkwardness has to do with his own personal history, but Ondaatje's most developed conception of migrant identity is also formed out of the legacy of the psychological trauma of the Second World War. The migrant is also the alienated post-war outsider, and this figure is central to his work, with its 'karapothas', searchers, and desert explorers. It is from this position, which does not involve a positive claim to the status of hybrid, so much as the acceptance that he is neither completely coloniser nor colonised, that Ondaatje attempt to present a simultaneous history, both private and national, considering both individuals and communities, of imperialism, capitalism and immigrancy in his work. He has a claim to being considered a historical novelist of migrancy. Through the development of his ideas and writings the figure of the migrant emerges out of a history of colonialism and capitalism into a figure of and for a post-war world. This figure is historicised in such a way that it becomes historically intelligible. The ambiguity of this figure reflects the mobility of a new species who is as compromised and troubling as any figure who could only have come into being as a result of an imperial history. Kirpal Singh of the 'ambiguities' is a figure who illustrates the two tensions motivating the migrant, the radical desire to be identified as neither the native nor the coloniser. It is this admirably ambitious tendency in Ondaatje's writing, his acceptance of the post-war age as a tangle of indeterminate identities and increased racial conflict, and most of all his digressive, divergent and unsettled historical reconceptions of the figure of the migrant which constitutes his claim to be considered a migrant writer. Ondaatje's case highlights problems facing interpreters of migrant writers who stand at a 'confluence'

of cultural peripheries whose careers and writings don't throw up easily identifiable agendas. Not least of these problems seems to be the notion that stylistic elegance and lyricism represents an abdication of political enquiry and historical insight. Ondaatje's case, on the contrary, suggests that migrant writers deserve not only the rigorous ideological screenings they seem to attract, but also the critical attention that an emerging new species deserves, that takes account of the contradictions and potential for discoveries unfolded in their writings. The sense in Ondaatje's oeuvre of encountering a new historical species deepens in the next chapter where I will argue that the fiction of Salman Rushdie reads the migrant as a metamorphic, transitory, and transmutant split-subject being who has evolved out of the explosive and chaotic history of the post-imperium.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> In this respect Running in the Family offers an interesting contrast to Jamaica Kincaid's savagely polemical anti-touristic text A Small Place (1988) or even Caryl Phillips's anti-touristic tour of Europe in The European Tribe (1987). Ondaatje's approach to place in this text is somewhat reflective of his rootless trans-national, transpositional orientation as a migrant writer, whereas Kincaid approaches place from a less discursive, more overtly 'historicised' position.
- <sup>2</sup> David Dabydeen applies a similarly double-forked approach in The Intended (1991) voicing England through both his protagonist's 'scholarship English' and Joseph's native 'nation language'. This split voice/subject motif in migrant narratives reaches its culmination in Salman Rushdie's great novel of the split-subject migrant The Satanic Verses (1988)
- <sup>3</sup> This is clearly the strategy Dabydeen applies in his 1993 novel Disappearance in order to represent history as an intertext of rumours and stories, as an intertext of the 'personal'.
- <sup>4</sup> Although historically Toronto was constructed by the European migrants that Ondaatje devotes his novel to, the colour imagery in In the Skin of a Lion is so pronounced, and the 'skin' leitmotif so suggestive, that there seems to be a clear gesturing towards the theme of the 'coloured' migrant that he was either unwilling or unprepared to confront until he wrote The English Patient.
- <sup>5</sup> The ambiguous position of the settler colonist is comparable to that of the post-migration settler in that neither is entirely at home within their new country nor clearly identifiable as either native or colonist.
- <sup>6</sup> This attempt to make a 'nonsense' of post-migration settler blood ties is repeated and developed, as we shall see, in Hanif Kureishi's individualistic and iconoclastic post-migration fictions The Buddha of Suburbia (1990), The Black Album (1995) and Love in a Blue Time (1997).
- <sup>7</sup> As we shall see Rushdie also uses this migrant/bomb metaphor at the beginning of The Satanic Verses.
- <sup>8</sup> This figure of the native 'other' is also evoked, in Fred D'Aguiar's novel Feeding the Ghosts (1997), in the figure of Mintah, and in Dabydeen's The Intended in the figure of Joseph.
- <sup>9</sup> Englishness also represents here (as it does in relation to Ondaatje's career as a writer) an educative or ideological system or process that the migrant, literary or otherwise, must confront.
- <sup>10</sup> There is an echo here of James Baldwin's notion of a 'bastard of the West', though in this case the illegitimate impure position is applied to an international context.
- <sup>11</sup> The English Patient has an interesting history in relation to the reworking of narratives. It is instructive to consider how a meditative, elliptical book that approaches the adventure of books like The Charterhouse of Parma (1839) ironically has itself been rewritten cinematically as an 'innocent' war romance. The 1996 film resolutely foregrounds the Almasy/Katherine romance, a plot where the war is viewed as the main crisis of the narrative, a crisis for Western progress and European desire. The Kirpal Singh and Hana subplot is elided, as are the 'In Situ' scenes, the confrontation with the English patient as is Hiroshima. The 'migrant theme' of the novel doesn't effectively exist. What we have instead is the European 'settler' version of the novel where Ondaatje's migrant re-writing of the war has itself been overwritten in a Western renovation of his story.

### Three

#### **The Post-colonial Grotesque: Salman Rushdie's Migrant Version**

##### **The Post-Colonial Grotesque**

In this chapter I will explore Salman Rushdie's representation of the migrant as a new metamorphic historical species, a being expressive of the mutations and explosions of the post-imperium. To be specific, I hope to demonstrate how Rushdie's writing attempts to provide a migrant's version of Indo-Anglian history through a post-colonial appropriation of the 'grotesque'. Rushdie's use of the grotesque is guided by a nuanced awareness of its varied history as an aesthetic term, and it is this supple cultural awareness, furnished by a cosmopolitan upbringing in Bombay and a very English education in Rugby and Cambridge, that allows him to bend it to his own use, and apply it, with a new intelligence, to a post-colonial context. In his hands the grotesque becomes the aesthetic of the outsider; comic, satiric, uncanny and absurd, a versatile and malleable mode that adapts itself to the changing priorities and obsessions of his art and the post-colonial history he describes. To understand how Rushdie's migrant version of history has developed, and how his grotesque aesthetic expresses his vision, it is instructive to backtrack (following the paths marked out in his fiction by other books) and trace the fluctuating historical application of the term.

The word 'grotesque' derives from ultimately the Italian word for grottoes, 'grotte', from the derivative adjective, 'grottes', and finally from the term that describes its first manifestation as an artistic device, 'la grottesca'. These were a kind of decorative ornament consisting of a melange of forms. Like the later 'melange' paintings of the Milanese Guiseppe Arcimboldi (1527-93), their function, beyond their function as entertainments, was to challenge the viewer's perception of what is human and what is real by depicting the human form as an intermingling of animal and vegetable forms. In sixteenth-century France, with the humanist writer Francois

Rabelais, the grotesque found its first major artist, who put it to extravagant celebratory uses through his satiric representation in Gargantua (1534) and Pantagruel (1532) of the human body as a gigantically fertile and anarchically rank area of study. In the eighteenth century the use of the term changed. The grotesque had always found uses in its long history within the church to mark out the territories of the sacred and the profane, but in the 'Age of Reason' its use as a cultural device, as a means to classify what was considered 'unnatural', and to separate it from social norms and Neo-Classical standards of harmony, balance and proportion marked the beginning of the narrow 'civilised' response to the grotesque that places it outside society. More specifically, as this was a time of early imperialism, the grotesque, through the revival and remodeling of a more virulent strain of the colonial stereotype, became a powerful tool in the classification of the colonised native as culturally and morally deficient. It is this tradition of the outsider that Rushdie draws from and resists, a tradition where the outside exists outside Europe. It is in the work of Jonathan Swift, especially in his satire Gulliver's Travels, (1726) that Rushdie finds a literary precursor; in that Swift is another writer who used the grotesque to satirise social norms through a bold distortion of the viewing lens and whose representation of the figure of the outsider, of the whole order that constitutes outside and inside, is problematised by the grotesqueness of both society and the individual. As Gulliver discovers, we are all natives of the Yahoo tribe.

The Victorian period provides Rushdie with less likely resources, principally Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) and Through the Looking-Glass (1871) both of who provide models for the rifts and distortions in reality with their earth-subsiding rabbit holes and back to front looking-glass worlds. Most Victorian and early American gothic manifestations of the grotesque, however, occur in the figure of the double or the doppelganger, a figure that shadows Rushdie's writing. The double, in stories like William Wilson (1839) and The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886), is the nineteenth-century Gothic materialisation of the grotesque, it is a figuration of the human, that like the grotesque, disturbingly hints at multiplicities and mutation, both psychological and physical.

It is in twentieth-century authors, however, such as Milan Kundera, Gunter Grass and Thomas Pynchon, that Rushdie finds contemporaries in his aesthetic,

contemporaries that write the sort of satirical, historically askew political fables that would become his specialty. It was through contact with Gunter Grass's The Tin Drum (1959), with its vision of post-war history as stunted and malformed, figured in his dwarf protagonist, Oskar Matzerath, that Rushdie found the inspiration to embody India in grotesques such as Saleem Sinai and Moraes Zogoiby.

This history of the term, as it is European, and as Rushdie's education was based in England, demonstrates a definite western bias, but, as of course there was a much earlier Bombay 'sympathetic' education, there are naturally many Eastern reference points in Rushdie's work. The Koran is naturally a key text though for distinctly secular and obviously polemical reasons. The Ramayana that great Sanskrit epic of ancient India, as a work of Hindu mythology and as a secular story of exile, influences Rushdie's mythic, epic secular approach to the novel. However, for the child who grew up in a house where books were 'kissed' and 'worshipped' (Good 415), for literary and affectionate reasons, the parent text is the appropriately fantastic, superabundant and sprawling epic The Thousand and One Nights, the model for his apparently 'magic realist' inspired style, and for his exuberant and often folktale-ghoulish deployment of the grotesque.

Borrowing from all these sources, Rushdie's post-colonial grotesque represents an invading world view, a perception of the world as estranged and impure, that upsets the boundaries that Western hegemony has created to divide the illegitimate from the legitimised, and to portion the globe into ideological hemispheres, the east from the West. Rushdie's grotesque version of reality foregrounds the vision of the post-colonial outsider, the migrant, an iconoclastic vision of the world that asks political questions about home and away, challenging the general refusal to see unsettling realities, attacking deep-seated preconceptions about what is normal, and asking whose desire and reality creates the world. Rushdie's varied and playful application of the term is an important political tool in his attempt to challenge the ideological remains of the colonial world-view, but it is also clearly an aesthetic, drawn at the periphery, (tinged by the cultural memory traces of the gargoyles of medieval marginalia), and integral to his vision of modern, migrant culture as fluid, adaptable and questing.<sup>1</sup>

## Nuclear Fictions

Even in his earliest novels, Grimus (1975), Midnight's Children (1981) and Shame (1983), Rushdie's representation of state histories and family sagas, flight and exile, is already guided by an aesthetic devoted to exploring the limits of the outsider's rage and agency. Power is challenged in these novels by grotesque figures situated on the margins of society. In Grimus the scarred, cursed Flapping Eagle is always the pariah in every society he comes in contact with, despite or because of his secret gifts. Similarly, Saleem Sinai and Suyifa Zinobia are both excluded and damaged figures, with frightening and unrealised hidden powers. In these early novels the figure of the pariah or the exile, whose powers are frustrated, stillborn or sterilised, is the dark precursor, or the shadow side of Rushdie's later representations of the migrant. His oeuvre is haunted and dominated by this figure; he uses it repeatedly, from different angles, to explore the cultural formation and perspective of the migrant.

In Grimus, Rushdie's science fiction fable, the surface of the writing seems more philosophical than political. For this reason it is open to criticism for its cultural fuzziness, not to mention its extreme post-modern pretension. Its chief value lies, however, in the fact that it presents, if nothing else, the far-reaching grotesque cosmos of myth, literature, fantasy and history that Rushdie's later fiction explodes out from. Eastern and Western cultures meet most overtly, in this novel, on a philosophical level; the epigraph quotes include T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets and Farid-Ud-Din-Attar's The Conference of Birds, and announce through their juxtaposition, the work of a post-modernist, eclectic imagination. However this early novel also announces, in philosophical gestation, important themes and questions, relating to the migrant, that will be more fully developed in later novel. Ideas about the 'neuroses and displacement activities that exile creates' (15), and the culturally enclosed reality structures people create to protect themselves, are played out in a cosmic, mythic, culturally diverse and unmoored hyperspace.



Even at this early stage in his thinking Rushdie is critical of how 'Displaced person's are...' (180) 'Always counterfeiting roots' (82). The self-elected pariah Mr. Gribb doesn't agree in 'creation myths' or with the universal preoccupation with 'origins'. Instead, in opposition to this regressive curiosity he asks, 'surely maturity is of greater interest than birth?' (148). This question hits at the heart of Rushdie's fiction; is the migrant an evolved figure who has grown out of a slavish adherence to roots; can roots be replanted; are origins irreplaceable, inescapable? The problem of maturity, of self-inspired action and thought, is the poser the book isn't ready to confront. Grimus may be described as a 'destruction myth', a failed quest narrative whose goal isn't adventure and self-discovery, but confrontation with one's invented false identity and self-annihilation. It enacts a deliberate and violent erasure of a certain slavish, ill-fated type of migrant, and of the Draconian rule of a culturally enclosed and origins-obsessed model of the civilised universe. The novel is self-consciously written as a secular 'Divine Comedy' that ends, not in Paradise, but through the destruction of the 'Rose', (the model, as in Dante for the ordering of the book's universe) in profound disillusion and entropic chaos. In fact as we shall see, this is the narrative pattern of Rushdie's first three novels, (and such is the fate of all Paradises in all of Rushdie's books as, to Rushdie, all Paradises are false).

The dynamic in this novel is the power struggle between Flapping Eagle and his inventor Grimus. Flapping Eagle struggles for the power of autonomy, the power of self-invention, but is fated for his whole life (as the inauthentic double of Grimus) to always follow the lead of others. His journey up Calf Mountain is, unwittingly, a regressive journey back to his origins, to quite literally meet his maker. That Rushdie feels ambiguous about this instinctive elastic drive away and towards origins is clear in his elaborate melding of Flapping Eagle and Grimus through the intervention of the Subsumer machine and in the final defiant act of destruction. There is a clear gesturing that these two drives exist within the one person and that to exist in a prolonged Golden age is unbearable; that to dwell in origins, in moral and political infancy, is intolerable. The pessimism of the work lies in the fact that the migrant precursor Flapping Eagle is passively subsumed into the cultural vision of his other; in later works the dynamic of the double is more open and alive to possibilities. Grimus is an anarchic work of

disillusion. Anarchic in that it ends with the violent severance of illusions and in that it can offer nothing to replace these illusions with. Rushdie is certain, at the end of the novel that the false Eden of Calf Island, of origins, of primeval mist must implode as it is inherently unsustainable. In narrative terms it maps the process of un-creating one's constructed self, wiping clean the slate of ideological identity, smashing sacred cows (and calves). That is why there is no replacing habitable vision.

In Midnight's Children, Rushdie's presentation of the same problem is dramatically different. His second novel begins with the moment of disillusion, and this time in a clearer cultural context explores what a re-visioning of the world, through the lens of Indian history, might involve. Saleem Sinai begins his account of his family's history with the story of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz's spoilt prayer to Allah. In Grimus Rushdie's education, and by implication his worldliness as a migrant is apparent in the intercultural texture of the narrative. In Midnight's Children Rushdie looks more deeply into the implications a migrant's education might have on his version of the world. In this case it is the migrant Aadam Aziz whose prayer is spoilt, and faith exploded, as a result of a European education. The prayer involves kissing the earth, a symbolic act of worship of the spirit invested in the home soil. During this kiss he bloodies his nose against a tussock. The shock of impact suggests a 'coming back to earth' in the sense of losing a sense of the spiritual, as ironically, the result of having lost one's sense of roots in a foreign country. The immediate results of this shock are twofold. Aadam resolves 'never again to kiss earth for any god or man' (4), the loss of national and religious fervor, sleeping partners in the home soil, is simultaneous. This scene inaugurates Rushdie's long fictional argument with the claims of the earth (with all its ideological baggage of national and religious identity) on the life of the body and the mind.

The second consequence is that Aadam now sees things differently. The reason for his new orientation to his homeland is, Rushdie informs us, a foreign education: 'he had spent five years away from home. Now, returning, he saw through travelled eyes' (5). His 'vision' is 'altered', disillusioned, politicised and secularised in ways that prevent an engagement with his homeland on national and religious levels. His education in Heidelberg has destroyed his Muslim faith; as he attempts to pray

'Heidelberg invaded his head' and he hears his friends 'Oskar and Ilse Lubin the anarchists, mocking his prayer with their anti-ideologies' (6).<sup>2</sup> The Germany of Aadam Aziz's education is also, clearly, with its anarchist Oskar, the fictive Germany of Gunter Grass's The Tin Drum where Rushdie received his own education, as a writer and a thinker, on the possibilities of the post-war and post-colonial novel, for approaching history as a grotesque allegory.

Migrancy, then, is connected from the first in Rushdie's fiction, with reading, illicit knowledge and social mobility; with movements from the attitudes that supposedly inhabit the soil to one's own, intellect-moulded attitudes. To be a migrant is to have one's attitudes overhauled, to be secularised and placed in opposition against the interlinked verities of faith and national fervour. It offers the essential distance necessary to question and reformulate the politics of one's homeland. Rushdie writes here against the idea of culture based on religion - instead, he argues, it can be based on renewal and questioning. It is a state of unearthedness, of newly discovered intellectual and cultural rootlessness. This scene enacts the first primal moment when the migrant, in an epiphany, recognises irreversible separation as a fact. It is apparent this moment possesses a resonance for Rushdie, the educated migrant. In his essay 'Imaginary Homelands' he states that the whole project of Midnight's Children was born out of 'how much I wanted to restore the past to myself' (Imaginary 9/10).

In Midnight's Children part of this unearthedness is figured in the new perception of the Aziz dynasty, a new travel-muddled vision. Aadam feels 'inexplicably - as though the old place resented this educated, stethoscoped return', that as a result of the years in 'Germany home as a refuge has become a spoilt Paradise' (5). However this estranged vision doesn't derive entirely from a separation from the values of home but from a natural born and equally reasonable distrust of Western estimates of Indian history. In 'Heidelberg' Aadam learns that 'India - like radium - had been discovered by the Europeans', 'even Oskar (Or Gunter, are we to presume?) was filled with admiration for Vasco de Gama, and (this) was finally what separated Aadam Aziz from his friends, this belief of theirs that he was somehow the invention of their ancestors' (5). Again, as in Grimus, the problem of being recognised as one's own invention recurs, but this time, the cultural context is easier to read. Endemic, intrinsic attitudes

attitudes in Western historiography, Rushdie argues, are tilted at an unacknowledged colonialist angle. The educated migrant is torn, ripped in two through his acquisition of a vision of the world that rejects him.

A troubled lack of faith becomes in Rushdie's oeuvre a central characteristic of the migrant. The migrant is a sort of national atheist, a sceptic of the soil, heir to no particular replacing vision but to a complicated and traumatised merging of incompatible visions. As Rushdie puts it, Aadam Aziz 'was caught in a strange, middle ground, trapped between belief and disbelief' (6). This scene inaugurates a sense of national and religious loss, a definitive unmooring from all the apparent verities of an orientated sense of place. When Aadam Aziz is 'is knocked forever into that middle place', having strayed from the prayer: 'Guide us to the straight path', from here on the narrative journey, the words, the construction of sentences, paragraphs, the flights of the imagination, and the guiding aesthetic of the narrative will be wild, crooked, twisty, and grotesquely malformed. They will be characterised by perforations and cracks, holes and rents, improbabilities, blasphemies, possible lies and impossible truths. Although Midnight's Children is not overtly a novel about migration it does begin the debate in Rushdie's oeuvre about the baffle between two versions of the world; one hybrid, impure, grotesque and the other purist, monolithic, and apparently legitimate. And the grotesque version reflects how the author's technique has been self-consciously guided by his migrant status. As 'Time and migration' have 'placed a double filter' (Errata 23/24) between the author and his subject, this is evident in the text's grotesquely malformed account of Indian history. As Rushdie admits in his essay 'Errata: or Unreliable Narration in Midnight's Children', what ultimately interested him in this novel was this 'process of filtration' (24) of the migrant mind.

To understand the nature of the originating milieu of this grotesquely malformed and aslant migrant vision, Aadam's 'traveled eyes' may be read as closely related to the 'city eyes' (92) of Saleem Sinai. The migrant version is always metropolitan in character for these are eyes formed by cities, Heidelberg for Aadam, but for Saleem, and for Rushdie, Bombay, that 'Star of the East! With her face to the West' (106) as he calls it in The Moor's Last Sigh (1995). The vision born out of the migrant experience of foreign travel, Rushdie asserts, has important roots in a much

earlier metropolitan, cosmopolitan Bombay education in perception. In his essay on the genesis of Midnight's Children 'Imaginary Homelands', Rushdie argues that the colonial metropolis is similar to the reconstructed figure of the migrant. He states that 'Bombay is a city built by foreigners on reclaimed land' while he 'who had been away so long that I almost qualified for the title' (4), is also partially a creation of foreign ingenuity. This is an important confession, as it, again, clarifies Midnight's Children's provenance as a migrant, fiction, as a work that expresses a migrant version of reality. For although the post-colonial Indian metropolis (and not the migrant) is the true subject of the book, it is a subject viewed through the fractured lenses of Rushdie's 'travelled eyes'. However, Rushdie is also implying that the experience of migrancy and the experience of growing up in a colonial city are very similar in the sort of education they offer the native. This is a consistent theme throughout Rushdie's oeuvre, and one I will return to, how the colonial city itself is a site that enables native transformations.

The native of the colonial city, Rushdie suggests, is a naturalised Modernist. Bred out of a culturally impure, self-estranged milieu, and having developed 'city eyes', the native already possesses an in-built outsider's awareness of the grotesquely composite nature of post-colonial urban reality. 'City eyes' refers to a cross-cultural, cosmopolitan mode of perception (a product of both Hollywood and Bollywood), which is illustrated in Rushdie's choice of metaphor, in Midnight's Children, for his particular angle on post-colonial reality. It is drawn from that populist, cross-cultural art, the art that dominates metropolitan India, cinema:

Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sifting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually ... tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves - or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality (197).

When Rushdie uses the word grotesque in this context he is not simply referring to something of Brobdingnagian size - there is also a question of distance, and of the distortion created by distance. The back row of this cinema may be in one sense,

London, England, but the argument seems to also suggest that reality itself 'is a question of perspective' (197), of physical and social position. That the reading of this ever-shifting 'reality', formed out of arbitrary matter, out of chance, out of juggling atoms of light, is prone to distortions, goes to the very root of Rushdie's post-colonial grotesque aesthetic. The inherent illusionism of this grotesque reality is not revealed so much as a pernicious lie but as an apolitical sham that you have to adjust your eyes to. Rushdie's grotesque aesthetic, tuned to the illusory nature of the 'modern' experience, as it reflects the disillusioned version of the outsider, sets out to be a disillusioning mirror on post-colonial reality.

Just as Swift uses shifts in proportion in Gulliver's Travels to re-view society, in Midnight's Children Rushdie applies the grotesque to the 'human geography' (277) of Indian history, through the battered and deformed figure of Saleem Sinai, who with his 'facial birthmarks', bald head and snot-filled 'cucumber nose' (3), is a child of Rabelais and the composite 'Grottesca' paintings. In a scene that illustrates Rushdie's allegorising technique, the tyrannical anglophile Emil Zagallo uses the grotesque dimensions of Saleem's body to instruct the class in what he terms 'human geography'. Saleem's face is interpreted as a map of India his birthmark 'stain' is Pakistan. Saleem's body, and the ravages inflicted upon it during his life, are used, as the novel progresses, to imply a grotesque map of Indian history, his grotesqueness becomes a symbol of both what India already was after a colonial history, and what post-independence history inflicts upon it. If Flaubert's grotesque is the grotesque as pornography, Rushdie's grotesque reads the body as a scarred geo-political map of the post-colonial world. The technique works by excessively and satirically literalising historic processes, by inscribing them on the map of Saleem's skin. As Moraes Zogoiby, the grotesque protagonist of The Moor's Last Sigh notes, he lived out 'the literal truths of the metropolis so often applied to my mother and her circle' (161). To literalise is to distort, to an extent, but Rushdie implies, in Midnight's Children that it also provides an antidote to the understated, illusionistic bureauspeak of state propaganda. It acts, not so much as a distortion of the actual as a more full-blooded, fleshed-out form of truth-telling. So when Saleem's body is operated on by the state machine at the end of novel, and has his magical power of telepathy and storytelling

removed, Rushdie is offering a grotesque version of the forced sterilisations of Indira Gandhi's 'Emergency' years.

Saleem's grotesque nature, as well as indicating his status as a figure of India, also points to another seemingly contradictory status, as outsider. Saleem, it is implied, has evolved out of a grotesque reality, he is the literalised creature of a colonial history. In the specific hybrid nature of his protagonist's mixed composition, as a child of the Indian Vanita and the English William Methwold and as a child brought up by the wrong parents, Rushdie uses Saleem to remember the complex nature of post-independence India. Historically, he argues, India's (or Saleem's) Indian parents were not his parents, that a pure-blooded, post-independent India is itself an illegitimate ideal. It is, he suggests, the grotesque fate of anyone born into the post-colonial world, to be situated on the outside.

In fact the wildly digressional, provisional nature of Saleem's story would seem to indicate that there is no periphery, that narrative, recorded history, received reality is composed of the incidental, of juggling dots. Midnight's Children is a novel without defined margins, its narrator and hero emerges out of, and reflects the voice and history of the national marginalia of the 'many-headed monster' of the Indian crowd. In this outsider's version of history there is a fluid congress to and from the fertile, teeming, grossly corporeal margins. In fact the whole breathless tension of the novel lies in Saleem's race to tell his story before the 'cracks' in his being claim him and he returns to the anonymous voicelessness of the crowd. This tension demonstrates Rushdie's awareness, as an educated migrant, of the privilege and difficulty in assuming the position that voices the crowd, and the native. Although Saleem is not a migrant he reflects, in his telling of the story, the problems and inevitable distortions of a migrant version of history. He is, like Flapping Eagle, another precursor of that migrant, as he relates an estranged history of outsidership from within. The 'angle' of his tale itself approximates a migrant's distance from the subject. The implication of Rushdie's argument in Midnight's Children has repercussions for his later, more overt expression of a migrant's version. If India is estranged from itself if there was a rift in the fabric of post-colonial reality that preceded and influenced the fractures that evolve

out of the migrant's experience, then the grotesque may be taken as the norm and history may be read as situated on the outside.

A grotesque perspective also prevails in Rushdie's bleak satiric novel Shame and is accompanied by a very direct explanation of the sources of this approach. When talking of the exodus to Pakistan of Ryder and Bilquis Hyder when they are attacked for being immigrants or 'mohajir', Rushdie comments 'I too, know something of this immigrant business. I am emigrant from one country (India) and a newcomer in two (England, where I live, and Pakistan, to which my family moved against my will). And I have a theory that the resentments we mohajirs engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds that is to say, we have flown' (269). There is a new self-referential approach interspersed with Rushdie's history of Pakistan; an attempt to explicate why his history is slanted in the way it is. His history 'conquers ... the force of gravity' in that it has moved beyond certain historical ideas, such as the Nation State. This is as much a personal statement as it is a political one, it announces a distance, the distance of the migrant writer from his subject, and alludes to the 'unearthliness' of the migrant's position. He confesses that 'however I choose to write about over there, I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors' (269). Rushdie is confessing that his is a 'post' version, all of his fiction reflects history as written after a rupture, after the mirrors are shattered and identity has flown the coop, after migrancy, post-war, post-independence, post-colonial, post-structuralism.

Such a history is necessarily distorted, a grotesque 'looking-glass' history where all the mirrors are smashed. The outsider hero of this book is, like Saleem, another native foreshadowing of the migrant, however he moves slightly closer to Rushdie's definition of the migrant. His name is Omar Khayyam Shakil, an approximation, or badly translated version of the 'real' Persian poet Omar Khyyam. The original Omar was 'never very popular in his native Persia, and he exists in the West in a translation that is really a complete reworking of his verses' (269). Rushdie, or the narrator-Rushdie, is quick to form a connection: 'I, too, am a translated man. I have been borne across. It is generally believed that something is always lost in



translation. I cling to the notion - and use in evidence, the success of Fitzgerald-Khayyam, that something can also be gained' (269). This is effectively an assertion of the value of distortion, of the translated, of the intercultural collaboration, of the amalgam that is the educated migrant. It is clear that Rushdie's Omar is a creature of his anti-aesthetic and is his grotesque anti-hero. He asks the reader, 'what manner of hero is this?' who is 'Dizzy, peripheral, inverted' (269), spinning out of a normal orientation to reality. Again, this grotesque, like Saleem, is a symbol of a wider reality-system; in this case, the unique cultural experiment called Pakistan. In the case of Shame the project is clearly an attempt to turn the fractured lens of the grotesque against the apparent natural-born legitimacy and authority of Pakistan, against the lazy tyrannies of totalitarian ideologies.

This critique is closely bound to Rushdie's deep suspicion, as a migrant and as a historian, of the myth of golden beginnings, of Paradise, of origins. His complex reflections on his own origins are revealing. Rushdie calls Shame his 'novel of leave-taking', 'my last words on the East from which, many years ago, I began to come loose. I do not always believe myself when I say this. It is part of the world to which whether I like it or not, I am still joined, if only by elastic bands (28). This is a deliberately ambiguous statement of intention; the East will not stop being Rushdie's subject at any stage in his career, but now after this novel of confession, the fact of East/West inseparability will be more overtly treated in his oeuvre here on. His migrant position is layered (as he argues post-colonial history is), as a Bombayite he has always seen the East through the lens of the West and as a migrant he will always see both East and West through the fractured lens of the other. The 'leave-taking' ritual becomes a leitmotif of Rushdie's fiction. However his position implies that this is not a patriotic salute to the power of roots, but a tribute to the power of 'elastic bands', bonds that pull both East and West. His suspicion of roots has to do with their connection with the soil, and its ideologies, 'To explain why we become attached to our birthplaces we pretend that we are trees and speak of roots. Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths sprouting through the soles. Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places' (86). The foundation of migrant identity, if it can be called that, is less static, it is formed away from the earth. 'The

anti-myths of gravity and of belonging bear the same name: flight. Migration, n., for instance in flight, from one place to another. To fly and to flee: both are ways of seeking freedom' (86).<sup>3</sup> In this way Rushdie explains his migrant aesthetic, it is based on the idea of unrestricted mobility and a secular positing of anti-myths, and a distance from the earth. The freedom sought through this act, is not necessarily freedom from a place, but from restrictive categories that pin identity to a banner.

Rushdie's critique of Pakistan in Shame is related to his migrant defiance, his rejection of national origins. He even makes a direct comparison between nations and migrants: 'When individuals come unstuck from their native land, they are called migrants. When nations do the same thing (Bangladesh), the act is called secession. What is the best thing about migrant peoples and seceded nation? I think it is their hopefulness' (86). Rushdie is critical of Pakistan because it secedes but has a foundation of untenable myths. It represents a retreat, a regression into past mythologies, and not a revolution. Both Pakistan and the migrant are comparable in that they represent the opportunity for self-invention. Both possess 'empty luggage', are potential blank slates: 'We have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time ... I may be such a person, Pakistan may be such a country' (87). Rushdie points to the initial potential for both countries and migrants, during their initial flight. The air becomes the essential anti-element to the orthodoxies of the earth; it is the element where mutability and re-invention are possible. Pakistan, according to Rushdie, 'was a word born in exile, which then went East, was borne across or translated, and imposed itself on history; a returning migrant, settling down on partitioned land, forming a palimpsest on the past' (87). This palimpsest, unfortunately turns out to be an 'Insufficiently imagined' and a 'failure of the dreaming mind' (87) because it is based on a rewritten, myth-laden past.

Shame is a novel that, through explicating the case of Pakistan, warns of the pitfalls of formulating a migrant identity, of founding a nation and of settling on national soil. What Rushdie is criticising is not simply a reversion back to national and religious myths, but also a disturbing failure of imagining. The word 'Pakistan', we are told, is an acronym, the glib invention of migrant Muslim intellectuals in London. It fails as an idea because it proves to be a poor translation of the contemporary based on

falsifications of the past that 'Carves up Indian history' (87). It is, in short, disjunct from a true understanding and acceptance of its history. Imagination is the inner quality, (and the only nation) that Rushdie permits the migrant to apply to home building. He states 'As for me: I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginative countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist' (87). The 'fantasist' element in migrant consciousness is important; it is created out of long-distance longing, and out of a utopian desire for new states of being. In the case of Shame when the project is less utopian and more corrective, questioning satire (Rushdie's usual mode), the fantasy involves grotesquely fractured re-imaginings. However, the satire doesn't focus completely on Pakistan. The limits of Rushdie's migrant imagination widens with each book. On the other side of his 'Looking-glass Pakistan' (118) lies England.

Shame is the first book in Rushdie's oeuvre where he overtly traces the cross-cultural, post-migration cultural sources of his narrative ideas. In Chapter 7, 'Blushing', he traces the imaginative growth of his brain-damaged character Sufiya Zinobia out of an amalgam of stories of tragic Pakistan teenagers' lives in East End London: 'a daughter' murdered by her father 'because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain' (115), a violent girl who strikes back at her persecutors, and 'a boy from a news clipping' who spontaneously combusts, his 'skin on fire' (117). These are the ghosts inside his heroine; we are told that 'Sufiya Zinobia grew out of the corpse of that murdered girl' (116). These are his narrative origins, the inspiration for his migrant's version of Pakistan; secular, metropolitan stories of damaged migrant lives. If national myths act to sustain and inflate a sense of self it is clear that these migrant stories criticise and attempt to demystify the process by which the familiar becomes naturalised in national memory. Sufiya is a grotesque figure not only because she represents Pakistan's limited, brain-fevered imagination, but also because she is the embodiment of the pain, violence and anger of Indian migrant experience in England.

However, the dead girl of his imagination 'finally eluded me ... and I realised that to write about her, about shame, I would have to go back East to let the idea breath its favourite air' (116). This is how Rushdie explains how his book came to be 'about'

Pakistan and not about migrants in England, the book he would eventually write in The Satanic Verses (1988). Yet as Rushdie's chapter, 'Blushing', indicates: 'All stories are haunted by the ghosts of the stories they might have been' (110) and if the grotesque figure of Sufiya is an uncanny, 'not-at-home' creation, it is because she is partially a re-patriate from England. The grotesque in Shame works similarly to Rushdie's use of it in Midnight's Children, it embodies and represents the voice and rage of the 'anonymous' (117). It also provides the first hint in Rushdie's writing that the grotesque represents the unharnessed energy of the alienated migrant's 'power'. When discussing the archetypes of Sufiya, he confesses: 'I feel gleeful about this notion; it's a seductive, silky thing, this violence, yes it is' (116). He feels this way because he realises he is discussing something dangerous, an unfixed element, unlike the earth, that can move in any direction. So when he states 'We are energy; we are fire' (116) he is describing how human power is not explained through attachments to the earth, it is grotesquely unpredictable and explosive.

And this is how Rushdie's early 'nuclear fictions' all end, with explosions. The narrative trend of Rushdie's three most pessimistic books, whose subject is the struggle of the grotesque outsider to express their voice and maintain their identity, is to move towards the dissolve and re-absorption of the one into the many. In Grimus the language of physics is introduced to describe this process:

Deprived of its connection with all relative Dimensions, the world of Calf Mountain was slowly unmaking itself; its molecules and atoms breaking, dissolving, quietly vanishing into primal unmade energy, the raw material of being was claiming its own (319).

The entropic break down of the culturally enclosed system of Calf Mountain represents cultural rupture, the explosion of post-modernity.

In Midnight's Children the explosion is occurring in the post-colonial world. Saleem describes being swallowed by 'the crowd without boundaries': 'Yes they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one, two, three, four hundred million, five hundred, six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust' (436). Rushdie has already

described post-colonial reality as composed of vagrant atoms, here he develops the idea through the 'fission of Saleem', who declares 'I am the bomb in Bombay, watch me explode' (435). Through the 'widening cracks' of his grotesque hero, Rushdie is describing the post-independence explosion, the coming apart at the seams of that umbrella idea India, formed during the Raj.<sup>4</sup>

In Shame another ill-conceived idea explodes, but this time Rushdie describes an actual bomb:

And then the explosions comes. A shock-wave that demolishes the house, and after it the fireball of her burning, rolling outward to the horizon like the sea, and last of all the cloud, which rises and spreads and hangs over the nothingness of the scene, until I can no longer see what is no longer there, the silent cloud, in the shape of a giant, grey and headless man, a figure of dreams, a phantom with one arm lifted in a gesture of farewell (286).

This more literal bomb completes the picture of the revolution Rushdie is describing in these scenes. A great center, or nucleus, in history has exploded and broken down, in turn Rushdie's fictions declare themselves as belonging to the second half of the twentieth century, they are overtly post-colonial and post-war. They are part of the great energy released by this revolution, a revolution so massive, multiple and continually metamorphic it can only be described in terms of the grotesque. The gargantuan cloud figure of Shame is both the 'phantom' of Hiroshima and the ghost of that historical anomaly, the failed migrant Pakistan. Rushdie's early novels point to the broken seals of powers that were opened by decolonisation and announce an age where the fixity of earth-bound ideologies are being overrun and challenged by new energies. In these novels the migrant is a shadow and is embodied in the pariah, in the native and in the post-colonial nation as a frustrated power, an unchanneled energy. It is only in Rushdie's next novel that the migrant becomes his overt subject and is used to explore and define the grotesque dimensions of post-colonial modernity.

## Split Affinities

'How does newness come into the world? ... How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is?' (6).

Ironically, considering the novel's tragic, inflammatory history (not to mention its consequences for its author) The Satanic Verses (1988) may be read as Rushdie's most redemptive novel about the migrant. It is certainly the novel that takes on the theme the most explicitly, and in the most detail. The novel's importance as a meditation on Indian migrancy in England has been effectively eclipsed by the other controversies surrounding it. In this reading precedence will be given back to Rushdie's migrant version of post-colonial reality, and the question of blasphemy will be reviewed in relation to this context, the context of his aesthetic. The London archetypes for Sufiya Zinobia are foregrounded in this novel. Rushdie has not, however, said his final farewell to the East. This is also the first work in Rushdie's oeuvre which overtly and consistently thematises an East/West dialectic. Consequently, this is a novel of disorientation, of actual trans-continental flights and crossings, and a novel of distortion, of shifting perspectives. This airborne, mobile representation of migration, from the very first pages, stands in interesting contrast to the (nearly contemporary) writing of a great first-generation migrant forbear, V. S. Naipaul, in his novel The Enigma of Arrival (1987). Naipaul's novel, very tellingly (in the sense it speaks volumes about what Naipaul prioritised at this time in his career) lingers repeatedly on the gradual degenerative patterns of life in the English countryside. His migrant narrator's meditations on the landscape demonstrate the preoccupation of someone that is absorbed by, but historically inescapably removed from, the 'Western scene'.

In his review of this novel Rushdie notes its 'sense of exhaustion' and its 'bloodless prose' and asks why Naipaul 'unlike most of his fellow-migrants, has chosen to inhabit a pastoral England' (Naipaul 148). Rushdie's reading, as a migrant writer himself is of course 'interested'. He goes on to say, after mourning his migrant forbear's anglo-fetishism: 'A version of England is dying too' (148), a version Rushdie is keen to relegate Naipaul to, through his assessment of his novel. This

antipathy can be explained as a difference in aesthetic. Naipaul looks to the soil, to dung-heaps, silage sacks and leaf-mulch, without national fervour, but with the fascinated fervour of the alien, as if it were moonrock to be analysed. To Rushdie this is pointless, it is gazing into the Empire's navel. He diffidently ignores the earth and strikes the keynote of his later work; identity formed out of the air, on the move, explosive, metamorphic, elusive, visionary and diffusive.

This difference in approach is instructive as it points to some of the differences between first and second-generation migrants. The vision of the first generation (partially due to being the pioneers of the Imperial metropolis, and therefore first witnesses of its ordinary, unimperial shoddiness) has grown jaded, and somewhat settled on the national soil. This vision seems morbidly obsessed and degenerative, whereas the vision of the second generation, due in some ways to a wider European education, is less focused on understanding England, than exploring the regenerative potential in the explosive culture of East/West interchange. It is clearly a vision that shares something of the cosmopolitan viewpoints of the West, and is more concerned with how to make a mark on its landscape.

In The Satanic Verses Rushdie begins with an explosion and moves on from there. For the first time he is writing a book that addresses what the repercussions of the cultural and political explosions of the late twentieth-century on the migrant might be. The opening scene of the novel describes a plane explosion from which two figures are thrown into the open air. This is a novel that postulates migrant identity is formed in the element of the air. As in Shame Rushdie is again 'comparing gravity to belonging' (86). This theme is introduced in the novel's epigraph, a passage taken from Daniel Defoe's The History of the Devil. This is the beginning of Rushdie's use of a demonic archetype for the abject, vagabond migrant. In fact, Rushdie writes in the persona of the devil in The Satanic Verses, hinting at his identity at one point he quips, 'Who am I? Let's put it this way: who has the best tunes?' (10). Rushdie takes on the demonic mantle with relish because it is a suggestive archetype for the condition of the migrant, it posits an apparently disempowered position founded on literally nothing besides a limitless mobility.<sup>5</sup> However, as Rushdie's novel argues, the migrant's placelessness represents a potentially liberating site.

Through the profusion of imagery of the opening chapter several views of the migrant and migration are formulated. The guiding thesis to all of this imagery of the airborne is that migration constitutes a 'secular' fall, a fall into a secular knowledge. Rushdie's migrant heroes fall out of plane named after one of the gardens of Paradise (31) which implies their demonic status but also defines them as sceptics or questioners of the earthbound myths of origins, of nation and a one true faith. Religious faith represents in this context a type of certainty and a fixed position in relation to the earth. The fall has multiple meanings. It represents a fall into a different notion of culture and a grotesque merging of identities. As it is a fall precipitated by an explosion it also signifies a fall into a mature reorientation towards the grotesque interpenetration of post-colonial history, into the cultural truth that we are 'post-lapsarian' men and women, 'we are now partly of the West' (*Imaginary* 15). For Gibreel Farishta this fall will represent a literal loss of faith and bring about a dark night of Muslim soul, hounded by blasphemous dreams, whilst for Saladin Chamcha, the fall is a reversal of fortune that affords him an insight into how life is for the majority of migrants in England. For both, it also represents a fall into metaphorical cloudiness.

The two migrants make their first appearance in the novel falling through the air into the clouds. Their new disorientation in the air is the result of flight, the condition for having flown. There are echoes of the nuclear cloud of *Shame* in this scene. However, the implications seem less resolutely destructive in this context. The energies at work are more equivocal, the falling migrant becomes a symbol of fertility and cross-pollination, as seeds from a cloud, but also as an invading bomb. It is both a vision of the virtues of cultural transformation, and an ironic version of a racist image of the migrant as the vector of population explosions, but also as the post-colonial bomb 'zeroing in on London' (39), 'Alphaville', the site of colonial origins (4). Air and seeds are emphasised over the earth and its soil, whilst fluidity and mobility are emphasised over solidity and stasis. The air is an element that breeds grotesque forms: 'Hybrid cloud-creatures', 'gigantic flowers with human breasts dangling from fleshy stalks, winged cats, centaurs' (6). The migrant's peripheral empire is a grotesque one, filled with half-formed creatures. The status of these half-forms is, as always with manifestations of the grotesque in Rushdie's fiction, ambiguous. Are they



metamorphic, evolving intermediate beings, in process, or grotesque mutations, historical refugees from the great explosions of the century? Both possibilities are played out in Rushdie's oeuvre. This points to the most important feature of the migrant's grotesque empire', it is a 'power-vacuum', the 'most insecure and transitory of zones', illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic, (5). The 'power vacuum' is a useful model for the migrant's unearthly condition, a zone where creative evolutions are a possibility, as are abortions. The ontological cloudiness of this zone affects the nature of the migrant too: 'Chamcha was seized by the notion that he, too had acquired the quality of cloudiness, becoming metamorphic' (6). This is, The Satanic Verses argues, the great test and liberation presented by migrancy, as Rushdie states in 'Imaginary Homelands': 'To be an Indian writer in this society is to face, every day, problems of definition' (Errata 17).

The figure of the migrant that emerges out of this theoretical space of the air is a wrestling, divided creature, another of Rushdie's grotesque double acts. Whilst wrestling in the clouds the two men interpenetrate personalities. Homi K. Bhabha is the obvious theoretical reference point for such a representation, as the word 'hybrid' is referred to several times.<sup>6</sup> Bhabha's native Indian bible, perhaps his prime example of the hybrid at work in colonial culture, is described as 'a mimic, hybridised Word of God' (118/19). Rushdie's grotesque aesthetic differs in some important respects from this expression of the hybrid. In Bhabha, opposition is formed on the homeground by the native out of an evolving relationship with colonial culture; with Rushdie this relationship is formed out of the act of flight, out of renunciation of the native self, within the 'power vacuum' created through these acts. When the plane explodes fragments spill out: 'broken memories, sloughed off selves, untranslatable jokes ... the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words. Land, belonging, home' (4). Migration is depicted as a flight that precipitates a regenerative explosion, where the native and the new fall into unprecedented configurations.

In its foregrounding of themes of textual authority versus textual fluidity The Satanic Verses seems initially similar to Bhabha's notion of a 'hybridised Word of God', but there are important distinctions to be made. Rushdie's grotesque is more confrontational than Bhabha's hybrid. He does not write a native bible; his book is a

demonic anti-bible, an unauthoritative scribble in the margins of sacred codex. As Rushdie states in his essay 'In Good Faith', his novel offers the 'devil's version of the world' (403), the migrant's version. As we shall see in the case of Saladin Chamcha, Rushdie has contempt for the idea of mimicry when applied to a migrant context, it is a mutation of the migrant condition. In order to overcome his slavish mimicry of English values, Chamcha is confronted with his grotesque, untranslatable migrant self. The migrant's re-writing involves a more conscious subversion. Aside from the deliberate blasphemies, there is Rushdie's attempt to 'reclaim language from one's opponents' (402), which is exemplified in Jumpy Joshi reworking of Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech: 'Humanity can be thought of as a river of blood' (234).

Rushdie's 'power-vacuum' may be populated by hybrid half-breeds, but his figure for the migrant as two figures wrestling is chiefly informed by the comic, incongruous aesthetic of the grotesque. The emblem on Gargantua's cap cuts a very similar figure to the wrestling Gibreel and Saladin: it depicts 'a man's body with two heads, looking towards one another, four arms, two arses, such as Plato, in *Symposia*, says was the mystical beginning of men's nature' (31). This is the mystical beginning of the migrant in the novel too, it is a multiple creature bred out of the 'power-vacuum' of flight and falling. This emblem of the migrant evokes the migrant's internal struggle for definition. It also points to the project of the book, to test out two opposing versions of migrant identity. One will abort, the other, despite being disagreeably mutant, will succeed.

The Satanic Verses is primarily a psychological novel, a study of the splitting that occurs in the fabric of migrant identities. Most critics have, in light of the fatwa, concentrated on the blasphemies of the Gibreel Farishta 'plot'. For the purposes of this study precedence will be given to the neglected Saladin Chamcha 'plot', as this is where Rushdie's theories of migrant identity are largely focused and this 'plot' is the unread, forgotten project of The Satanic Verses. It is through the figure of Saladin Chamcha that Rushdie represents an 'assimilationist' migrant, who obeys the ethos of 'Mrs. Torture's' England, the 'cult of the individual' (84), and builds a successful life for himself based on a rejection of his past, and his native history. He needs an English wife to make this metamorphosis a success, and in the wealthy Pamela Lovelace has

tried to marry traditional, respectable England. Rushdie slyly suggests the virgin England he has attempted to marry does not exist anymore (if it ever did), his wife is a post-lapsarian, modern Pamela as her surname hints; she is as historically impure as he is. As both are attempting, through marriage, to deny the perceived shameful heritages that attracts the other, they are both, literally, closed books to each other.

Consequently Chamcha is disorientated when he returns to India: 'It makes me giddy because it feels like home and is not ... makes my head spin' (58). He has used 'away' as a comfort zone, an escape, and when he returns he realises 'that his blood no longer contained the immunising agents that would have enabled him to suffer India's reality' (58). This is the reality of metropolitan India, of Bombay, of a former colony, an interpenetrated culture: this is the 'old despised disorder' (54) that threatens Chamcha, reminding him of an impure colonial past that he will never be completely English, nor completely Indian. He fears and rejects India because it 'jumbled things up' (54). It reflects everywhere the grotesque chaos of 'post' reality (whereas he is the chief manifestation of this reality when in England).

Chamcha's Indian ex-lover Zeenat Vakil, poses the greatest challenge to him, as she redresses his weak grasp on the contemporary, - 'you still think of normality as being normal' - (280), whereas the abnormal has become the norm, because the periphery has overrun the centre. She also provides a dissenting voice that openly questions his redundant quest for authenticity. She has written on 'the confining myth of authenticity' and argues that 'we're all bad Indians' (53), that is they are all impure Indians, and all 'demonised' by the West, regardless of whether they conform. Her argument, interestingly, only goes halfway towards approving of the Indian migrant, and reveals certain ambiguities in Rushdie's thinking on the migrant that will only become oven at the novel's end. The notion of the 'bad Indian' is a leveller. However, even in Zeenat's inclusive vision of Indian society the absentee migrant stands apart as a sort of cultural untouchable. Under this activist criteria, (a criteria that haunts Rushdie, the migrant who may never return) Chamcha is scolded as 'a deserter' (53), who has stepped out of all meaningful cultural equations. In Chamcha, Rushdie provides a very poignant model of how compromised migrancy can be, how there are false migrants; Chamcha is more a 'bad Englishman' than anything else.

The disorientation created by this return visit to India and the flight back to England, a replaying of the original migrant experience, brings about Chamcha's splitting, his grotesque transformation. The grotesque is always a poetically appropriate device in Rushdie, as the satirically literalised punishment always suits the crime. Chamcha is literally one of 'the mimic men of English' (297), a 'voice-over' actor; so it is his voice that begins to transform first during the flight. He discovers his power of mimicry is failing: 'His voice was betraying him' (49). His speech 'unaccountably metamorphosed into the Bombay lilt he had so diligently ... unmade' (34). The ethnic disguise of his English accent 'slips ... like a false moustache' (53). These slippages represent the return of the repressed, which in Chamcha's case is his native shadow self.

This is the beginning of Chamcha's mutation into 'Salahuddin Chamchawala' (37), his re-education into what it means to be an unassimilated alien in England. In the plane's explosion Chamcha's invented English disguise is completely exploded, and the grotesque nature of the migrant beneath is finally exposed and examined. Chamcha has attempted to be accepted as respectable, but Rushdie insists on the inherent freakishness of the migrant. This is more than a denial by Chamcha of his status as an unforeseen historical anomaly, it is also an attempt to deny the revolution in the reality system of the post-imperial world. Even in his English disguise Chamcha is a grotesque because whatever he tries to be he is inevitably a translated man: 'An Indian translated into English medium' (58), and in Rushdie's universe translations are always impure versions. This is why Chamcha becomes, through the literalising lens of satire, the sort of migrant he has evaded being through kow-towing, a parody of the freakish outsider, a demonised, degraded stereotype. He enters the previously invisible world of the 'temporary' unassimilated migrants. The image of the looking-glass is used to describe this initial transforming of perspective that occurs in India: 'When you have stepped through the looking-glass you step back at your peril. The mirror may cut you to shreds' (58). *The Satanic Verses* is the migrant's Through the Looking-Glass reflecting the disorientated, distorted perspective of the migrant Chamcha as he tries to negotiate a grotesque reality that confounds reason.

Chamcha represents a potential pitfall for the migrant, where the migrant adopts 'disguises' to hide his native self (49). Rushdie is arguing that rejection of one's native self should not be the foundation stone of the migrant's self-invention, the virtue of migrancy shouldn't be reduced to a pallid form. According to Rushdie, the migrant's opportunity for self-invention is too great to waste; in fact it is a secular virtue, an act of non-conformist defiance and intellectual independence: 'A man who sets out to make himself up is taking on the creator's role' (49). Rushdie believes the migrant can attempt something bolder than mimicry. This is more than a denial by Chamcha of his status as a unforeseen historical anomaly, it is also an attempt to deny the revolution in the reality system of the post-imperial world.

Through the new grotesque proportions of Chamcha Rushdie explores the potential dimensions of migrant power. Transformed into a devil he eventually decides to 'enter into his new self ... loud, stenchy, hideous, outsize, grotesque, inhuman, powerful' (286). The grotesque, the demonised, and the migrant are all placed together in this incarnation, and the figure for the outcast explored through the greatest pariah myth, of the devil. The proportions of Chamcha increase until he comes to resemble the emblem of a demonised community, a demonic zeitgeist. The 'image of the dream-devil started catching on, becoming popular' as a symbol of 'defiance and a warning'. Chamcha becomes a 'hero' as a 'devil cult' develops 'among young blacks and Asians' (286). Rushdie explains why this figure, and why the grotesque, represents power: 'It's an image white society has rejected for so long that we can really take it ... occupy it ... reclaim it and make it our own' (287). Rushdie is pointing to a common strategy of minority communities to re-appropriate the worst stereotypes levelled at them. His English migrant community wears their alienation in their grotesqueness and it becomes the signifier of their outsider status.

The great ritual act of this cult turns out to be a celebration of the forgotten migrants of English history. Slaves, rebels and pioneers like Mary Seacole, Septimus Severs, Grace Jones, and Ignatius Sancho are remembered and given form in wax-works (282), while there is a (nuclear) 'Meltdown' of wax dummies of great oppressors from Mosley to Thatcher, into a grotesque 'melting pot' of modern identity, out of the foreground and into 'formlessness' (293). This is a grotesque re-enactment of the

eighties race riots of 1981 in Brixton, and 1985 in Toxteth, an attempt to define culturally and ideologically the energies at work in those events, what they meant to the communities that produced them. This scene emphasises again the central place of a historically-informed orientation to migrant culture. The remembering of history is in itself empowering in Rushdie's eyes, to him it is the cultural matrix of identity.

In fact Chamcha's fallen experiences as the demonic other constitutes an education into the nature of modern England. In his essay 'The New Empire Within Britain', Rushdie asserts his belief (via E.P. Thompson) that 'British thought British society has never been cleansed of the filth of imperialism' (131). He takes his argument one step further, arguing that 'Britain is now two entirely different worlds, and the one you inhabit is determined by the colour of your skin', and that 'A gulf in reality has been created' (134). It is this gulf using the grotesque, the aesthetic of splitting and disjunctures that he explores in The Satanic Verses.

And it is here that he describes how a reversal of power is occurring, that a new version of the colonial relationship is taking place: 'Native and settler, that old dispute, continuing now upon these soggy streets, with reversed categories' (353). Gibreel and Chamcha represent a new consciousness that sees London, not as the once powerful matrix, but as of Lilliputian significance. Gibreel's grandiose delusions give him the sense that he strides the city like a colossus. Roland Barthes, in The Empire of Signs (97), argues that the organism of the city is founded on a 'very Western ideal, based on a desire for an established center', where the values of civilisation are 'gathered and condensed' (30). It is the site of 'Smug, impenetrable bourgeois affluence' where 'To be real (and not temporary) is to be economically valid' (19). Rushdie reads the colonial center with reversed categories as uncivilised, irrational, and contradictory: 'O most slippery, most devilish of cities' (354). Chamcha's anglophile eyes are initially fooled and see 'attractively faded grandeur' (439), this is why his initiation into migrant identity involves becoming an economic non-entity. Gibreel, alternatively sees a city that, without its Empire, is no longer the economic power it once was; it is 'a wreck, a Crusoe-city, marooned on the island of its past, and trying, with the help of a Man-Friday underclass to keep up appearances' (439).

Gibreel's contempt is searing: 'These powerless English! - Did they not think their history would return to haunt them' (353). He is confident of his ability to challenge the city's complacent 'normality': 'City, I am going to tropicalise you' (353). Although his self-importance is inflated here, he represents the possibly unconscious attitude and actual dimensions of power of the post-colonial migrant. In his book Decolonisation, Raymond Betts argues that one of the results of decolonisation was the 'unplanned and perplexing colonization of the former colonial nations by the former colonial peoples', and that consequently the 1980s Rushdie describes gave birth to a 'new, densely patterned European cityscape'(76). At the 'Meltdown' prompted by Chamcha's cult of the demonised (or the awakening of the migrant's consciousness as oppressed), Dr. Uhuru Simba states 'we are other than what we would have been if we had not crossed the oceans ... we have been made again: but I say that we shall also be the ones to remake this society' (414). Although Simba represents an extreme version of the activist migrant, his articulation in this instance reflects Rushdie's visionary historicising of migrancy in The Satanic Verses; in this power-vacuum there is no turning back, and the migrant, as a collective post-colonial movement is both a vector and agent of change; 'newness will enter this society by collective, not individual actions' (415). This version of post-colonial reality insists that 'Not all migrants are powerless ... They impose their needs on their new earth, bringing their own coherence to the new-found land ... imagining it afresh' (458).

Another power (a power perhaps specific to the educated, and in this case literary migrant) The Satanic Verses asserts is the power of language. Rushdie believes 'Language is courage' (281), and part of the project of the novel is to emphasise that language that is called blasphemy is criticised because it is radical, oppositional and questioning. The theme of writing the outsider's unauthoritative version is contained within the book in the scenes where the prophet's scribe, appropriately named Salman, (who sees himself as 'Shaitan' or the devil in a dream), has the diabolic idea to 'change things', to re-write the prophet's version, 'polluting the word of God with my own profane language' (368). His discovery, that when the changes go unnoticed how cheap the words of the revelation were, is the key to his argument, that there is no authoritative version, there are just competing versions, ultimately 'It's his word against

mine' (368). To blaspheme under these conditions is to apply impure truths, the immigrant's version. In the novel, Baal, the spirit of satire, and of the blasphemous oppositional version, is (prophetically) forced to go underground. It is clear that even before it was attacked Rushdie's book was a defence of an oppositional, 'underground' version of history. In The Satanic Verses he uses grotesque satirical portraits, of the literally demonised migrant, and the crumbling nature of postcolonial reality in order to reject 'a portrait of himself ... as monstrous' (408). The collision of the grotesque and the satirical is at the source of Rushdie's aesthetic. His books are comedies in the sense that they present a version of reality where history is replayed as grotesque farce, where history is confronted with its literalised grotesque stereotypes, where the official order and harmony of society is viewed through a distorting mirror as a misrepresentation of the chaos of post-colonial society.

Rushdie's vision of the grotesque in this last instance, is part of the view, expressed in the book that the 'post' world is not homogeneous', that it is grotesquely 'incompatible' (295). This is the verdict of Alleluia Cone's Polish migrant father, gained from his experience as a war survivor. Rushdie is emphasising that the migrant, as the refugee of the 'post' revolution, whether it be war or colonialism, is as a naturalised historical outsider, heir to an international culture of dissidents, victims and opposers of the monolithic ideologies of the nation state. His peripheral position allows a seer's perspective into the grotesque fabric of twentieth-century reality. The migrant possesses a visionary perspective, unique amongst the complacent imperial center where people 'had forgotten to see' (336).

Rushdie argues that reality exists in layers, like a palimpsest, there is a choice 'between two realities, this (seen) world and another that was also right here, visible but unseen' (351). Gibreel assumes quite rightly that the 'doctors had been wrong to treat him for schizophrenia; the splitting was not in him, but in the universe' (351). The grotesque reality of the 'post' explosion fall-out is only visible to those who, in the political construction of their being, are split entities, and therefore open to the fact that the 'incompatibility' of post-colonial reality requires a double visioned perspective. Again it is the modern city that is the focus of Rushdie's attention, it 'is the locus classicus of incompatible realities' (314). London, as a result of the fall-out of



decolonisation, is represented as a 'Pandemonium', a devil's city that has 'lost its sense of itself' (320). In Rushdie's view, the only national model that befits this 'post' fall-out world is a 'polli-nation', the nation created by the scattered seeds of broken cultures and nations.

Part of this vision of the world is influenced by physics, and part of it comes, by Rushdie's own admission in his essay 'In Good Faith', from a western book, William Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790-3). Blake's philosophy, like Rushdie's, argues that 'Without Contraries is no progression' (xvi). The grotesque version where the conventional is turned on its head, and the natural order is all topsy-turvy, argues that this disorder is the crucible for great unrest but also for powerful energy and potential creative change. Like Blake, Rushdie's devil personifies energy and his angel represents conventional thoughts, so for both writers 'Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy' (xv). The chief value of Blake for Rushdie, especially in his defence of his novel as a scion of a secular tradition of writing, is how he claims a home in the 'imagination'.

This attitude explains Rushdie's easy appropriation of Blake and other European writers. In an address to other post-colonial writers in his essay 'Imaginary Homelands' Rushdie argues that the 'imagination works best when it is free', and that as 'Western writers have always felt free to be eclectic ... I am sure we must grant ourselves an equal freedom' (20). Rushdie goes on to define the possible borders of the 'Indo-Anglian' migrant's imagi-nation: 'Indian writers in England have access to a second tradition, quiet apart from their own racial history. It is the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group ... the past to which we belong is an English past, the history of immigrant Britain' (20). Rushdie defines his position in relation to this 'political history of the phenomenon of migration' as a 'literary migrant': 'Swift, Conrad, and Marx are as much our literary forbears as Tagore or Ram Mohan Roy and it is perhaps one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his parents' (20). This is to be the basis of migrant identity, over and above nation or religion, cultural 'Cross-polli-nation', the choosing of one's cultural parents. This is the 'International' aesthetic he claims in his passionate defence of The Satanic Verses. 'In Good Faith', arguing that it

is a novel that doesn't necessarily have to be read as the work of either a heretic Muslim or the deracinated fraud 'Simon Rushton' (405).

Rushdie realises that this grey area between heretic and 'white mask' needs to be disentangled from his conception of the migrant, and in doing so makes his clearest statement regarding his migrant aesthetic. He defines himself as 'a modern, a *Modernist*, urban man' and emphasises the point '*I am not a Muslim*', rather he has 'lived (his) life as a secular, pluralist, eclectic man' (Good 405). His novel is secular in that it dissents from 'imposed orthodoxies' of all types ... Hindu communalist sectarianism, Sikh terrorism, the fatuousness of Christian creationism and the narrower definitions of Islam' (396/7) and it is pluralist in that it is for a grotesque 'change-by conjoining' (394). He states 'If The Satanic Verses is anything, it is a migrant's eye view of the world' (394), the migrant's version. He goes on to say, 'those who oppose the novel most vociferously believe intermingling with a different culture will weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion' (394). This aesthetic, in its very substance is formed out of opposition; his opponents are 'apostles of purity' (394), offended by his novel because it is characterised by impurity, both cultural and ideological. Most importantly perhaps, this aesthetic is engaged with and aware of the political. In Rushdie's essay 'Outside the Whale' he argues with George Orwell's fatalism about politics and literature working together, because Orwell doesn't consider the possibility of 'comedy, satire, and deflation' (98). These are modes of political writing that 'set up and overturn stereotypes, books that draw new and better maps of reality' (100), in this case a map that takes account of the topography of post-colonial diaspora.

The Satanic Verses argues that the unfixed nature of the migrant, its cultural mobility, makes it inherently powerful. What is mobile escapes classification, what is intermediate is still alive, evolving and fluid. The grotesque body is manifestly multiple, composite, formed on the move, adaptable and moves with the grotesque current of contemporary history. This is why the flawed Saladin Chamcha survives and the insular 'Mr. Perfecto', Gibreel Farishta, enclosed in Islam's timeless dream history, who demands 'Clarity, at all costs' (353) does not. In the fates of his two migrants Rushdie points to the dangers of deracination, but also its opposite, racial and religious

fundamentalism. The tension of the novel lies in the migrant's problem in engaging with his history while still maintaining control over their interpretation of that history.

The ending of The Satanic Verses represents a departure, and a bifurcation from the usual narrative pattern. There are two endings to this bipolar book, two possibilities are explored, where 'One seeks ... to be transformed into the foreignness he admires, the other preferring, contemptuously, to transform' (426). One is apocalyptic like the previous three, allowing the forces of chaos to triumph. Gibreel, tortured and possessed by the ideologies of nation, specifically Muslim, like his predecessor, Saleem, comes 'apart at the seams' (438). However Saladin Chamcha represents a departure, he is Rushdie's first survivor. Saladin represents a new grotesque type for Rushdie, a grotesque whose grotesqueness is his ultimate strength, and his salvation. Saladin survives because 'of all his wrong-doing, weakness, guilt ... his humanity' (547), because of the irregularity, the impurity in his make up. This is part of Rushdie's project to equate the grotesque with the 'human', and to undermine the 'civilised' notion of the 'human' mis-use as a vehicle for creating the border between the insider's and outsider's version of history.

The ending of the novel also describes a shift in the migrant's generational orientation to history. Part of this shift involves a rejection of an idea of England. With the death of Chamcha's father comes the death of his inherited 'museum values' concerning England (399) and consequently Chamcha's 'old English life seemed irrelevant like his stage-name'. Chamcha's enchanted native orientation to England is dispelled, so that by the end of the novel he can state 'I have no illusions' (539). There are parallels here with Rushdie's experience. In 'Imaginary Homelands' Rushdie relates how he 'grew up with an intimate knowledge of, and even a sense of friendship with, a certain kind of England: a dream England ... Sadly it's a dream from which too many white Britons refuse to wake' (18). It is also, Rushdie implies, a persuasive dream for many migrants, especially of the previous generation, and it can be argued that Chamcha is presented as a corrective figure who offers a redemptive model of the awakened migrant.

For Chamcha, now both the shadow of his father and of England had lifted it 'looked like the start of a new phase, in which the world would be solid and real, and in

which there was no longer the broad figure of a parent standing between himself and the inevitability of the grave' (535). This is the beginning of Chamcha's recognition of himself as part of the 'newness', of his temporal re-orientations: 'I must think of myself from now on, as living perpetually in the first instant of the fixture' (535). Chamcha is only capable of considering the future because he has finally overcome the ideological chains of his past: 'Childhood was over, and the view from the window was no more than an old and sentimental echo. If the old refused to die, the new could not be born.' (547). If the early novels speak only of degeneration, The Satanic Verses enforces the idea that regeneration can come out of destruction.

Rushdie's conception of Chamcha as a newly-awakened, forward-looking figure is part of the conception he is attempting to form of the archetypal second-generation migrant. The radical psychic change the model is based on involves a rejection of England and a rejection of a 'childhood' orientation to home. Both orientations are too locked into earthbound, ordinary notions of colonial affiliation for Rushdie's liking. The second-generation migrant is a figure who revives Rushdie's call in Grimus for a new appreciation of maturity in relation to orientation. Chamcha turns away from the view of the 'window of his childhood' because of a resolve to 'make an adult acquaintance with this place, this time' 'embrace this city, as it is, not some childhood memory that makes you both nostalgic and sick. Draw it close. The actually existing place. Become its creature: belong' (541). Home, for the second generation migrant can only be founded once colonial origins have been rejected. Orientation can only occur after disorientation, one's reality-system needs to be questioned before it can be re-assembled. This is for the migrant the true passage into that utopian temporal space, the post-colonial, it can only occur after the spell of the mother country has been broken. Rushdie's incongruous aesthetic is also part of this regenerative project. Explaining his use of naturalism alongside fantasy in Midnight's Children Rushdie suggests it offers 'a way if echoing in the form of (his) work the issues faced by all of us; how to build a new, "modern" world out of an old, legend haunted civilisation' (19). The concern of the grotesque, through distortion and redress is also to create something new.

Although Chamcha does not return to his roots, but to a new orientation of home, with the matrix of migrant identity that is the post-colonial cosmopolis of Bombay, there is a surprising conservatism in the end of the Chamcha 'plot'. Rushdie devises an end to the Chamcha's rootlessness through settling, a making peace with the earth through political awakening and activism. It could be argued that this sudden re-positioning involves Rushdie evading addressing the prolonged condition of migrancy, that it is a utopian plot device (conjured self-consciously out of a genie's lamp) that evolved partially out of his own nostalgia. This nostalgia deepens in the post-fatwa fiction, as does the utopian longing. It also seems to imply a fear of existing too long inside the 'power-vacuum', the fear of 'falling into some rootless limbo' (406). There is no conception, either way, through Gibreel or Chamcha, of a life 'away', in England or elsewhere. This can be explained partially by reading The Satanic Verses as primarily a psychological study. Place is not ultimately important in Rushdie's work. The movement into a truly post-colonial orientation that the novel describes is a psychological and not a temporal or geographical orientation. Home must be returned to or confronted as an idea, it must be demystified and overcome.

### **Questioning Home**

Rushdie's mood and priorities as a writer change post-fatwa. Themes to do with the rights of the imagination and speech take on an unsurprising prominence and the treatment of the figure of the disorientated outsider, the migrant, takes on a certain wistfulness and poignancy; as it evolves into the fully fledged exile. In this sense it can be said that perhaps like no other book in history, The Satanic Verses is a book with an aftermath, an afterlife in its author's later writings. From the point of view of 1999, the Rushdie 'crisis' can be seen to have had a surprisingly renewing effect on Rushdie's writing. The constructed grotesqueness of the devilish and maligned pariah (a theme anticipated in The Satanic Verses) and the grotesqueness of the 'rootless limbo', the disorientating reality system this outsider occupies, still concern Rushdie. In fact there is a remarkable thematic consistency in his work; the later work just, in the light of the

fatwa, foregrounds a sense of pleasure and gratitude in the writing process and an interest in the powers, claims and impulses of art and the imagination.

Rushdie's first major post-fatwa work, Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990) was well-reviewed in a way that was practically indistinguishable from the original defence of The Satanic Verses within the literary establishment. Again, the reviews applauded the rights of storytelling, and more particularly Rushdie's fabular foregrounding of these rights in his new book.<sup>7</sup> However, reading Haroun I am struck that it is not an overtly defiant or angry book. Rather it is written with Rushdie's lightest touch and ostensibly presents a gentle and humane fairy-story for children (and adults). It seems on first glance a calculatingly unpolemical literary gesture. It is, as the most enthusiastic of reviews stated, a triumph of poise amidst chaos, hope amidst death threats and a potentially eviscerated career, and knowing verbosity. Although Haroun is deliberately uninflamatory, Rushdie has not abandoned the grotesque or even his characteristic nudging satire; however this time around the grotesque is less corrective and, as it is applied to the heroes of the tale, it is more expressive of his project to 'humanise' the creatures of the 'outside'. As a result of this change of focus Rushdie succeeds in writing around the considerable obstacles put in place by the fatwa, to produce a book that not only could not offend, but would defend his position in a playful manner and touch on how his notion of the migrant had grown and changed.

The story begins in the 'saddest of cities', a city 'so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name' (15). Rushdie begins his first post-fatwa book with an indictment of a culture that has rejected its culture, that has turned its back (as the world did on him) on its stories, particularly its biggest story, history. Such a place, in Rushdie's eyes, is inevitably characterised by desolation and amnesia, it is a place out of touch, or exiled from itself. It is the storyteller, Haroun's father the 'Shah of Blah', that Rushdie claims is the source of redemptive memory in society. Rushdie believes the storyteller is a sort of unofficial historian, a performer and re-toucher of the past who restores any place that is out of touch with itself, to a new understanding of its own history. It is clear from the beginning that this work will be an impassioned defence and plea for the rights and powers of stories, storytellers and their gifts, and their essential place in society.

The source of the city's sadness becomes clearer when it explicitly affects Haroun; his father's storytelling gift dries up and his mother leaves him and his father for another man. The root of these two crises may be read as emblematic of the predicament of the migrant writer: to remain inspired despite one's separation from the mother (land). The story itself, from here on, becomes a vehicle, a flight-machine (like *Butt the Hoopoe*) of fancy, that is written to demonstrate the power of the migrant imagination, of the mind cast adrift from its moorings. Haroun's quest can be read as prompted by the need to right the psychological disorientation caused by his mother's desertion. This disorientation is represented by his traumatised eleven minutes attention span, a psychic rupture that implies a lack of commitment to the present moment, a symptom of the city's historical disconnection. The purpose of the quest, and the book, is to dispel this historical (and personal) sadness. Consequently Haroun's adventure pits the values of flight, fancifulness, movement, and enquiry against those of fear and stasis and censorship.

In the fabular opposition between the two sides of the story planet, Gup and Chup, Rushdie explores the politics of storytelling and silence, dark and light. The Gups represent a society founded on and sustained by words. The Gup army is called a 'library', whilst the soldiers are called 'pages'. It is a society that is nourished by its emphasis on free speech. To Haroun, the Gup war counsel seems undisciplined and free, but the Gups argue 'what is the point of giving persons Freedom of Speech ... if you say they must not utilise same?' (114). The implications of this cultural freedom, the freedom of the 'power-vacuum' of air, hot and otherwise, is demonstrated in the Gup's successful campaign: 'The Pages of Gup, now that they had talked though everything so fully, fought hard, remained united and in general looked like a force with a common purpose' (184). Community, Rushdie argues, is nurtured through debate: 'All these arguments and debates, all that openness, had created powerful bonds of fellowship between them' (185). Conversely, the Chupwalas represent a society that is based on a fear of words. This fear leads to repression and censorship: 'In Chup city the schools, the law-courts and theatres are all closed now, unable to operate because of the Silence laws' (101). Consequently they are a divided community, as 'their vows of silence and habits of secrecy had made them suspicious and distrustful of one another'

(185). Rushdie argues that the chaotic, grotesquely impure culture of debate and questioning promotes a healthy society; and that a community's identity can actually be founded on a policy of debate, and the acknowledgement of differences, can be founded on values that have no grounding in national or religious models.

However Rushdie is careful not to become absolutist on the virtues of the Gups, especially as there is a 'Manicheanistic' division between silence and speech, darkness and light in his topographical map of the story planet. One side, the side representing silence and fear, is in perpetual night and the other side, the side representing speech and freedom, is in eternal sunlight. However Rushdie notes 'it's not as simple as that, for silence had its own grace and beauty (just as speech could be graceless and ugly); and ... Action could be as noble as Words' (125). The Chup citizens are represented as ultimately sympathetic, the 'creatures of darkness could be as lovely as the children of the light' (125). Rushdie is careful not to let the Manicheanistic orientation of his story-planet stand either. In fact the climax of the book occurs when the power of Haroun's wishing re-orientates the planet: 'I wish this Moon, Kahani, to turn, so that it's no longer half in light and half in darkness' (150). Haroun's wish, to re-orientate the story-world, contains within it the metaphorical seeds of another utopian wish, the desire to demolish the East/West mind-set that creates the war between two versions of reality and the foundation of the binaries that police the borders between outside and inside, the grotesque and the normal. Rushdie's novel is an attempt at largeness and utopian re-imagining, and alongside his more obvious reproofs, the nature of Haroun's wish emphasises Rushdie's disapproval of the Western Eggheads (a passing nod to Said and other theoreticians of the East/West divide perhaps?) who are the originators of this immense division through the hegemony of their theories, the 'Processes 2 Complicated 2 Explain' that maintain 'the Eternal Daylight and the Perpetual Darkness'. Rushdie overly argues against censorship and fundamentalism, but there is a more subtle argument in his text that calls for a position that integrates night and day, that is 'human' without applying that term oppressively, viewing the human as a model for fallibility and impurity.

Rushdie's project, to explore and uncover the underlying construction of post-colonial reality is guided in Haroun by a new belief in the need for magic, miracles and



a movement beyond what is accepted as normal or real. There are repeated attacks on the superficially sophisticated perspective of the metropolitan viewpoint: 'That's the trouble with you sad city types: you think a place has to be miserable and dull as ditch-water before you believe it's real' (114). Appropriately the villain of the piece is the 'weasley clerkish type' Khattum Shud, the ultimate shadowy bureaucrat. Rushdie argues that 'the worst things of all can look so normal and, well dull' (152). Again there is a reversal of categories, where the normal is viewed as suspect. It is instructive to read Haroun beside Rushdie's 'migrant' reading of The Wizard of Oz (1993) some two years later. It is here that Rushdie points out that the traditional aesthetic of the film: 'home and safety (are) represented by geometric simplicity', 'whereas danger and evil are invariably twisty, irregular and misshapened' (21). Rushdie is quick to confess his aesthetic loyalties, admitting to 'a sneaking regard for the witch' and 'a secret sympathy for all persons of her witchy disposition' (17). Haroun takes that sympathy for the outcast the witch-hunted, the grotesquely misshapened slightly further. In Rushdie's version the heroes of the tale are grotesque. Rushdie's 'plentimaw fish' and Iff the genie with his 'grottesca' silhouette, are amiable outsize monsters whereas the villain, Khattum Shud, is 'normal looking.

It is through this figure, Khattum Shud, that Rushdie criticises the assumptions and attitudes that are cloaked by the label 'normal'. Khattum Shud, whose name means 'end of story', represents on one level, the censor who attempts to purify and destroy stories, the stuffy literal-minded philistine who argues in a Gradgrind fashion 'You'd have done better to stick to Facts ... You'd have done better to have stayed home' (155). In this context staying home becomes a metaphor for leading a safe life, untransformed, being unadventurous and unimaginative mentally too; in other words a complete denial of Rushdie's mobile and questioning aesthetic. This questing aesthetic is not, however, without its contradictions. Rushdie cites the song, 'Over the Rainbow' as an endorsement in The Wizard of Oz of the pleasures of being 'away' (as opposed to home). Judy Garland, he argues, in this moment 'embodies ... the human dream of leaving, a dream at least as powerful as its countervailing dream of roots' (23). There is a great tension, he argues, in the film between these two dreams. This tension also exists in all of Rushdie's writing, and not least in Haroun, in its desire to quest and

question, but ultimately in order to find a better orientation to home. In his assessment of The Wizard of Oz he complains about the ending of the film and its 'conservative little homily', 'There's no place like home' (56). This contempt for the ideology surrounding the idea of home, is not simply to do with an aversion for the sentimental. In Haroun and The Wizard of Oz the ideas of quest and home oppose each other. As in The Thousand and One Nights, or the breathless Midnight's Children, the book is written, the story is told, against the clock, in defiance, the telling of stories is presented as heroic in itself. Home represents an ending. As Iff comments on the possible effect of the novel's version of Ruby Slippers, 'Wishwater', 'When your wish is granted, home you go to bed, and end of saga' (9).

Home and the ending of storytelling are the forces resisted in Haroun, but home is ultimately as desired and privileged as it is in The Wizard Of Oz. His ending similarly involves a return to home and motherland, and an apparent restoration of order, what might even be called an exile's dream of a homecoming. His monochrome 'sad city' is a version of the grey Kansas he bemoans in his essay on The Wizard of Oz: 'And this is the home that there's no place like? *This* is the Eden that we are asked to prefer to Oz?' (28). As Rushdie points out Oz exists beyond the ending of the first film and book: 'later works chart Dorothy's return journeys where eventually Oz becomes home' (57), and this is also the dynamic built into the end of Rushdie's book. Haroun is given the hoopoe, the inner flight machine, the permanent resource of the imagination, to keep after his journey. Although home is re-claimed the story-world isn't dismissed as illusory but as the continual refuge and resource of the migrant. In fact the story-world is recognised as part of the real world at the end of Rushdie's book. The sad city's forgotten name is revealed to be Kahani or story. In this way the world is recognised as a place where stories never end, where stories are continuous. This is the ultimate fulfillment of Haroun's final wish for a 'happy ending' (207). If the world, if life is viewed as a story then it escapes the limits of books which must end. With its name, and by implication its history restored, the city can renew itself culturally, can build new stories that respond to its past. Despite Rushdie's wariness of happy endings he constructs one that beautifully outlines how tentative and hard-earned they must be. This happy ending derives from the power of Haroun's visionary imagining and will, as

he creates his own re-orientation of the world. He can now return to the sad city and detect a 'change of mood' although 'Nothing's really changed' (211).

Again, as with The Satanic Verses, this re-orientation is psychological and historical, rather than topographical. The idea of developing a mature orientation to home recurs again here. It is clear from Rushdie's conclusion in The Wizard of Oz that he doesn't believe that Haroun has returned to the same home he left: 'once we have left our childhood places and started out to make up our lives we understand that the real secret of the ruby slippers is not that "there's no place like home" but rather there is no longer any such place as home ... except... for the home we make which is anywhere... except ... the place from which we began' (57). Home, Rushdie argues, has to become away before you can fully and honestly see it as it is and develop a mature, evolving time-bound relationship with the place that created you. It is important to grow out of an originary notion of home, one that exists in the past. Once lost, home is never found again, it can only be re-invented through an imaginative relationship with the present. The questing that brings this time-bound orientation is an inner process, it involves historicising oneself in space and time. This is the orientation Haroun returns to at the end of the novel, an orientation that is connected to time, and history. He wakes up to find a new fully functioning clock, and concludes 'time is definitively on the move again round these parts' (211).

This is the first 'ending' in Rushdie's oeuvre where a utopian outcome is conjured up out of the power-vacuum of his imagination, where wishing is given power. The actual story, the process of writing as the essential connection with a broad conception of home is formulated here as the precious thing to be saved, the essential root of existence. I would argue that this new pre-eminent emphasis on literary expression, on language leads to a re-valuing of the migrant's relationship with the whole notion of roots. If Rushdie has rejected an idea of roots in relation to national or religious identity, he believes in the idea in relation to stories, and provides a clear model for an international culture of the migrant. Iff the Water Genie laments the spread of darkness to the Wellspring of the Story Sea: 'The oldest stories ever made, and look at them now. We let them rot we abandon them ... We lost touch with our beginnings, with our roots, our Wellspring, our Source' (146). There is a cultural

source to claim, Rushdie argues, though he qualifies this by stating, in his essay 'Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist': 'it is absolutely fallacious to suppose that there is such a thing as a pure, unalloyed tradition from which to draw' (67). His story-ocean, another fluid, unearthly model for culture, expresses this idea beautifully. It is a model of culture as a stream, as moving, as fluidly interpermeable, as Iff declares: 'Any story worth its salt can stand a little shaking up' (69). This model of grotesque impurity is the only originary model Rushdie accepts. His originary models consistently avoid touching the ground. Culture, for Rushdie, is a stream, and home is ultimately founded in the air-stream of the imagination.

### **Mixed Up**

Rushdie's next work East, West (1994), a book of short stories, provides another more comprehensive exploration of the East/West orientation that pervades Western ideas of how the world is structured. To be specific, the focus of the work is again England and India, in fact the collection represents one of Rushdie's most direct and insightful reckonings with the imperium, England. Taken together the stories provide a metropolitan, ironic look at the geography of the post-colonial mind; at attitudes between East and West, at how they overlap, at whether they exist. The stories are generically diverse as befits a work of cultural interchange and exploration; they borrow from fables, fairy-tales, pastiches, meditations, essays, historical enquiries, science fiction, family memoir and stories which are indefinable hybrids. This generic and connotative chaos is carefully (and appropriately) contained by a structure based on the divisions between East and West, but, notably, as a migrant's work it isn't divided into two parts but into three; its sub-sections refer to East, West and the trans-cultural migrant orientation of 'East, West'.

The first section of the book, 'East', offers a playful, knowingly unexpected take on the 'native' experience, a migrant's version of the pre-migrancy experience. In 'Good Advice Is Rarer Than Rubies' Miss Rehana travels to the British Consulate for an interview to get a British passport to go to her husband in England. The surprise

comes when it emerges that Miss Rehana doesn't want to go to England, that England represents the restrictions of an arranged marriage. She is happy, and freer in India, happy being Indian. In constructing such a narrative Rushdie is simultaneously writing as a homesick exile and as a knowing metropolitan who is ready to acknowledge that England no longer dominates modern India's psyche. Indeed, Miss Rehana's indifference is so complete that she substitutes England with its capital, claiming her fiancé lives in 'Bradford, London' (15). In her interview she gets all the questions wrong, 'all completely topsy-turvy you see' (15). East, West is a narrative defined by the 'topsy-turvy', in it Rushdie applies his grotesque aesthetic to the distortions of cultural and linguistic, to the incongruity of persons, words and ideas which refuse to translate. It is also implied, in this reference to the 'topsy-turvy' that Indian reality is an inversion of the legitimised normality of England. Rushdie's narrative is about the choice that can be made between the two and the consequences of this choice when it is made.

The story confronts two Indian types; old, colonial India and contemporary, post-colonial India. The metropolitan Miss Rehana is a representative of a modern post-colonial generation that values its Indian identity. Muhammad Ali the antiquated con-man, a 'native' type straight out of a Kipling story, feels she must be desperate for a British Passport, who is sure that she believes England is a fabled land of opportunity, as he does. Muhammad, an untravelled version of Chamcha, believes the ideology of the Empire he has grown up inside: 'It is the curse of our people ... We are poor. We are ignorant, and we completely refuse to learn' (12). However, through the figure of Miss Rehana Rushdie asserts that power and choice exists at home too. She can be independent 'go back to Lahore and my job', 'as ayah' (15). Her smile is 'the happiest thing (Muhammad) had seen in his long, hot, hard, unloving life' (16). Rushdie emphasises in this story the existence of a 'colonial mentality' that can seep into post-colonial reality, but he also asserts the power of the post-colonial metropolis to create a new type of native with a more felicitous orientation to their colonial history.

In his 'West' stories Rushdie continues his project, begun in 'Good Advice' to demonstrate a healthy disrespect for the sanctity of English canon and culture. In his angry essay 'Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist' he argues for a broadening of

literary categories, arguing that the term 'Commonwealth' puts non-Western writers into an 'exclusive ghetto' and narrows English literature into something 'topographical, nationalistic, possibly even racially segregationist' (63). The inventors of Commonwealth literature regard 'books which consciously try to break with tradition' as 'highly suspect', whereas Rushdie's aesthetic values 'Books which mix traditions' (66). 'Yorick', 'a cock and bull story' (63), is a good example of Rushdie's re-visioning aesthetic at work. The definitive work of English literature, *Hamlet* (1600-01) is presented as fodder to be re-worked, a pastiche made up of the digressions of a character who is only a passing reference in the original. In Rushdie's re-version, the author of the text is Yorick the Fool, and we are told that the 'tradition sown from West to East' and back again is of 'fool' writing. This is not merely disrespect but also outlines Rushdie's aesthetic, which is to, as fools traditionally did, entertain but also slyly criticise, satirise, poke fun and question authority whilst courting it.<sup>8</sup> Rushdie's aesthetic opposes the meditateness of tragedy with comedic, incongruous, lateral minded meditations. The fool presents a model for the literary migrant's position, as an outsider on the inside, a compromised, peripheral figure who wields power by reflecting back the workings of state, grotesquely distorted.

In 'At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers' Rushdie returns to his long struggle with how to orientate himself in relation to his roots, his home. In this story-essay the West is drawn as a zone occupied by outcasts, émigrés, political refugees. The ruby slippers are represented as objects that possess the power of 'reverse metamorphosis' (92); they allow a return to childhood, innocence, home, the past, pre-war history. The slippers, as shoes are fetish objects and the obsession with them and all they represent implies that an idea of home is being unduly fetishised. When, at the end of the story, the narrator gives up the auction, he is also giving up the dream of home, and wakes up 'refreshed, and free' (101). The implication is that the 'dream of home' represents an engagement with redundant and enchaining illusions. This larger conception of the 'dream of home' implies a broadening reformulation of the migrant too. To be a migrant is to have grown into an acceptance of all the things the regressive dream of home denies-death, history, the body and the world in all its grotesqueness. It is this dream of home, Rushdie argues, that keeps the migrants in a limbo; when he is

involved with the auction the narrator of the story experiences a 'loss of gravity' (101). In this context the loss of gravity of Rushdie's 'power-vacuum' is presented as potentially dangerous. The migrant needs some solid values to resist the particular brand of fetishisation of originary myths that occurs at the auction, the market of illusions that is Western capitalism. This critique represents the beginning of a new accentuation in Rushdie's oeuvre, a shift of emphasis to the contemporary mythologies of Western culture, the enchanting but deceptive culture where 'Everything is ... for sale' (98).

In 'Chekov and Zulu' the warning to the migrant not to give into nostalgia is even stronger, and the warning against the implications of anglophilia is the most merciless in Rushdie's oeuvre. In the story two migrant bureaucrats play out elaborate Star Trek fantasies. Zulu is troubled by his involvement in the Western administrative of foreign affairs, as a diplomat, and eventually in his parallel and synonymous role-playing existence as a 'diplonaut'. Chekov, an unredeemable version of Chamcha, has 'sold out' it is implied, not only to Western capitalism but also to the illusions of being part of the world of the Enterprise, the Star Trek spaceship whose name holds inescapable connotations of Western imperialist and capitalist philosophy. Chekov represents the migrant who is assimilated into British culture and who is proud to be a 'professional servant' of the imperium (151). He states: 'I love London ... I see the remnants of greatness and I don't mind telling you I am impressed' (155).

Zulu is politicised by the Sikh massacre following Indira Gandhi's assassination and resigns as an act of conscience. Through this politicisation he reclaims his own vision of history and survives with integrity. Chekov, who is appropriately named after both the Asiatic-looking Russian crew member of the Enterprise and Chekhov, the Russian writer of 'landed' ennui, is delineated as the more cerebral of the two, but it is implied that he is too sophisticated. Chekov complains 'With my natural radicalism I should have been a terrorist' (156), but instead he is swallowed whole by Western culture. This is a particular danger for the educated migrant, Rushdie implies, the danger of deracination and the atrophy of one's instincts. Chekov thinks more than Zulu, the 'simpleton warrior prince' (156) but is finally less capable of decisive action. In this political morality tale Zulu returns to the East/West

crucible of the Indian metropolis, while Chekov is ironically overtaken by the politics he has ignored and is killed in the terrorist bomb, that kills Rajiv Gandhi. Rushdie concludes 'The tragedy is not how one dies ... It is how one has lived' (170). Rushdie's survivor, the Rabelasian grotesque Zulu, bodily sensual and instinctual, his potency implied by his 'thick' cock (158), provides a fantasy model of the adaptable, activist migrant that is in some way an antidote to the cultural stereotype of the 'native' that his name implies. Chekov is Rushdie's first casualty of Western illusionism; he ends up inhabiting a negation of the 'power-vacuum', the apolitical limbo of cultural 'outer space', and ultimately death.

As in The Satanic Verses Rushdie issues a stern warning to the migrant, that anglophilia is a form of cultural masochism, a self-punishing fetish. In one sense this narrative of return versus atrophy is puzzling, the stark choices seem limited for a creature that exists in a 'power-vacuum'. It could be argued that Rushdie is deliberately presenting two extremes, the Yin and Yang of migrant impulses, is enacting the psychological truth each native is haunted by, a neo-colonial ghost, an Anglophile doppler that threatens to crush its instincts. The question however remains; where is the position Rushdie occupies himself? Instead of the fantasy of an activist homecoming, where is the representation of that other possibility, the migrant living 'away' indefinitely, defiantly unassimilated?

It is only in the last and best story of the collection that Rushdie approaches representing a position similar to his own, and it is here that he finds words to describe the tensions that exist within that position. 'The Courter' is Rushdie's most eloquent, elegant and moving statement on the East/West divide, and the aesthetic that evolves directly out of the linguistic and cultural tensions of the migrant experience. In the courtship between the two 'Eastern' migrants, the 'Porter' turned 'Courter', 'Mixed-Up' and the Indian ayah 'Certainly Mary', Rushdie describes the magically creative and suggestive techniques people develop to communicate without a common language or culture. It is a story situated in the unmarked territory of migrant interchange. And it is consequently characterised by mix ups and uncertainties, all manner of culturally-based misunderstandings. This focus emphasises culture above race as it concentrates on the 'magic' (176) of migrant language, and on the newness that the migrant brings through



their contact with an alien culture, how they creatively re-vision what is old and established and jaded and make it fresh.

The children call the 'porter' a 'Courter', by mistake, and like many of the mistakes in this story the accidental change of emphasis possesses a metaphorical truth and resonance. Mixed-Up's real, Eastern European name is alien to the Indian children with its 'Communist consonants, all the z's and c's and w's walled up together without vowels to give them breathing space' (170). As they find his language impenetrable they nickname him 'Mr. Mxyztpik' after a comic book character from another dimension, or for short, Mixed Up. He is re-invented therefore, not by English culture but by other migrants, in a cross-cultural interchange. The 'Jumble-Ayah' (181) calls the word 'shop', 'shoot'. The narrator's father calls baby bottle 'teats', 'nipples' and causes a controversy with an English shop assistant. The migrant lovers model themselves on the Flintstones couple, the 'Rubbles' (189), as they play in the rubble, the broken pieces of culture, in the aftermath and ruin of Empire. This seems to be the fulfilment of the migrant's revolution Rushdie alludes to in his essay *Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist*: 'What seems to me to be happening is that those people who were once colonised by the language are now rapidly remaking it' (64).

The grotesque is at play in this story linguistically through the distortion and mutation of words in puns, songs, names, apparent facts and re-made truths. Rushdie's version of migrant culture in this story demonstrates an awareness that culture is formed by accident, by trial, and error, through courting newness, and that newness cannot emerge without this impurity. The migrant's ground is shaky, characterised by doubt, compromise and therefore a potential for an unprecedented cultural mobility and re-invention. The story is a 'romance of re-naming' (178) which imbues the adaptive processes and rituals of migrant culture with the chivalric grace of high civilisation.

On the chess-board of their courtship, we are told that Mixed Up 'retained much of the articulacy and subtlety which had vanished from his speech' (194). For Mary chess becomes an intimate cultural experience: 'It's like going with him to his country' (195). She describes the experience in terms of 'wonder' and 'discovery' (193), and it is interesting that these words, on her lips, in the aftermath of Empire sound different, like the pronouncement of a post-colonial 'brave new world'. To

Rushdie the migrant experience is where the creative discoveries are still to be found, the rubble of the 'post' world contains the building blocks of culture. The lover's re-appropriation of the notion of the 'civilised', of chess, which to the English gentleman is 'the great formalisation of war', as an 'art of love' (195), reverses categories again by questioning the rightness of valuing the colonial desire for territory above the migrant's exploration and widening of international culture.

The story of the ayah and her courter ultimately touches on the dilemmas of the protagonist, as one of the new generation who will inherit the culture they have pioneered. He realises the first generation's story has a wider relevance for all migrants: 'I see now that it is not just their story, but ours, mine, as well' (178). In the most striking image in his oeuvre Rushdie describes how the impulses of both generations differ. Relating how the ayah's homesickness affected her heart, Rushdie describes how it 'kicked and bucked in her chest like the wild horses in "The Misfits"', that 'her heart, roped by two different lovers, was being pulled both East and West, whinnying and rearing, like those movie horses being yanked this way by Clark Gable and that way by Montgomery Clift, and she knew that in live she would have to choose' (208). For the older generation migrant, the choice is determined by their experience of rootedness in a national culture. We are told 'Certainly Mary' 'never said plain yes or no, always 'O-yes -certainly or no-certainly-not' (176). Her certainty is untypical, it represents the certainty of an older generation of Indian who hankers for the certainties and stability of home. The narrator, conversely, because he is younger, of a more culturally adaptive and experimental generation 'could hardly be certain of anything' (177). At the end of the story, the protagonist, somewhat like Rushdie, chooses to live uncertainly: 'I, too, have ropes around my neck ... pulling me ... East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, choose, choose. Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoes, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both ... Do you hear? I refuse to choose' (211). These ropes, like the 'elastic bands' of *Shame* keep the species of migrant Rushdie has chosen to be, caught in a continual state of deferment, the generative 'power-vacuum' of migrant culture. It is this tension of straining ropes, of wrestling doubts that opens up the space in Rushdie's fiction that is genuinely creative as it claims the right not to commit to any absolute identity, either British, or Hindu

the right not to commit to any absolute identity, either British, or Hindu nationalism or Muslim fundamentalism, the right therefore to speak from new unmarked territory.

### **Metropolitan Marginalia**

The Moor's Last Sigh (1995) represents a return to the big novel, and the first significant return to the subject of India since Midnight's Children. As with Midnight's Children it uses the form of the family saga to explore the mongrel, illegitimate history of India. It is also a very specific paean to cosmopolitan, metropolitan India. Like the pre-fatwa novels this is a story of exclusion; perhaps his most poignant story of outsidership: 'the story of the fall from grace of a high-born cross-breed' (5), a story which points very clearly to the generative milieu of Rushdie's aesthetic, the cross-breed matrix of the post-colonial metropolis. The book is also, simultaneously, the history of the fall of post-independence India, and an indictment of the neo-colonial hegemony of the West. The characters as before are large, expansive mythic figures who, like Saleem and Chamcha, represent the zeitgeist of the times they live in: Aurora is described as a 'supernatural Entity whose presence ... defined the age' (220). Moraes Zogoiby, the 'cross-breed' son of metropolitan Mother India 'Aurora de Gama' is a 'truly, modern Lucifer' (5), another version of the devil, another Wandering Jew.

As the narrator of this story it soon becomes clear how Moraes's fall, and his position as outsider has prompted his grotesque aesthetic: 'Banished from the natural, what choice did I have but to embrace its opposite? Which is to say, unnaturalism, the only realism of these back-to-front and jabberwocky days' (3). Contemporary history is again seen as deserving an approach, a lens that highlights its grotesquely inverted, non-commonsensual nature. This is the history we get in The Moor's Last Sigh, a history of the outside where the migrant is central.

The family's history, we are informed, runs out of unexpected channels. The de Gama dynasty (like India) is marked by 'Disharmony' from the very beginning. It begins, we are informed, with the explorer who, according to European history, discovered India, Vasco da Gama. The family descend from him and from his

inauguration of the colonial history of India. In other words Rushdie is highlighting that post-colonial history must acknowledge how the West from the conception of the colonial contract has bedded down with the culture of the East, and how the East, from that moment on, ceased to exist as a discrete entity. Rushdie, in the early sections of the novel addresses the question of 'What India was before independence' (32), and unearths in the figure of Camoens de Gama a number of conflicting versions. Camoens the Marxist spice merchant millionaire, colonial capitalist and colonial subject, represents, as India does, a grotesque amalgam of incongruous positions. He is certainly preferred as a model for colonial Indian identity over Epifania with her traditional Anglo-Indian Catholic values. Camoen's grotesque 'doublenesses', we are informed, reveal his 'beauty', 'his willingness to permit the coexistence within himself of conflicting impulses is the source of his full, gentle humanness' (32). This is the same dualistic 'humanness' demonstrated in the narrator of 'The Courter' who refuses to choose, and in the deeply flawed but redeemably human Chamcha who returns home with a matured migrant's eye. Again Rushdie argues that the categories that make up the norm in humanity and history are in fact grotesque. If we must accept the myth of roots we must at least acknowledge their twisty nature.

The most complex and conflictual 'many-headed monster' of the book is the superabundant metaphorical figure of Aurora. In her, Rushdie updates the village myth of Mother India as 'arch-cosmopolitan', 'as much the incarnation of the smartyboots metropolis as Mother India was village earth made flesh' (102). It is apparent that he is dealing with the particular soil that grew him: 'Motherness ... is a big idea in India, maybe our biggest', in this idea the land is conceived 'as mother' (137). More specifically she also represents Rushdie's confrontation with the cultural soil of his upbringing and early education in a secular socialist metropolitan milieu, or what Vasco Miranda less charitably describes as the culture of 'useless flicking art-johnny clever-dicks' (160).

Aurora also becomes representative of a metropolitan type of artistic sensibility, and is applied, in the novel, as the lens that expresses Rushdie's grotesque aesthetic, documenting through her painting the secret histories of post-independence India and the psychological disjunctions and rifts in the relationships between mother

India and her 'cross-breed' children. Her vision is expansive and inclusive of every aspect of the 'many-headed monster' India. Her bedroom mural 'pullulated with figures, human and animal, real and imaginary' (58), moving outwards, like a model of the novel's allegorising, from family to society and then beyond history completely into the grotesque marginalia of myth and fable. In these margins she describes places where the ideologies of myths and of history meld and 'where creatures of her fancy, the hybrids, half-woman half-tiger, etc' (59) populate space. Her vision is satirical, topsy-turvy, and characterised by carnivalesque reversals, where 'de Gamas served as (beleaguered) waiters' at 'a parody of the Last Supper', and where Catholics and Anglicans are parodied, respectively, as 'fish' and 'dogs' (102). The canvas of her imagination, like the 'power-vacuum' of the air is a space where ideological affinities can be reviewed and new connections can be formed. It is an imaginative space where everything history and myth are seen as intermingled. Her composition enlarges from the personal to the throng 'for beyond and around and above and below and amongst the family was the crowd itself ... the crowd without boundaries' (102). By exploding the notion of the family as the 'centre' of the tale, (and effectively the notion of the centre per se) by a broad contextualising of the medium of history and myth it swims in: 'She was suggesting the privacy of Cabral Island was an illusion', and that 'this endlessly metamorphic line of humanity was the truth' (60).

She progresses to paint India's post-independence history (as again does Rushdie) through an allegory of the fall of Boabdil, the last Moor of Alhambra. This Spanish, Moorish allegory, (with Ferdinand and Isabella as the neo-colonial force that have grasped the reins of the economy), is an attempt to move beyond the Indo-Anglian dialectic that underlies most readings of post-colonial India. The Moor's Last Sigh is more of an international mongrel than Midnight's Children, as it looks beyond England. England's hold on Indian reality is tenuous in The Moor's Last Sigh. The English presence is always on the cusp of dissolve, of being assimilated: 'Fort Cochin', a staking-post of England's apparent rule is described as 'a constructed mirage of Englishness' (95). The illusion of Empire is already fading: 'the frontier between the English enclaves and the surrounding foreigners had become permeable, was beginning to dissolve' (95). The reason for this is that the English perspective on what India is or

should be as limited and absolutist as Hindu nationalism, it cannot impose itself sufficiently against the overwhelming plurality of Indian social reality. The English characters in the book are represented as uniformly insignificant, redundant because their racism presupposes their belief in a '*natural order of things*' (96), when India is more accurately represented through Rushdie's 'unnaturalism' as a grotesque chaos.

This is the India which Aurora's revisionist art reveals, 'the culture of Indian Islam that lay palimpsest-fashion over the face of mother India' (298). Her art reveals the complex palimpsest of the present, the 'not-quite Alhambra' (226) fractured reality of a country that has always been defined, or blurred, by cultural multiplicity. The artistic realm of her art, and Rushdie's book, is this grotesquely incongruous reality, her version of Malabar Hill is a grotesque neological site named 'Mooristan' and 'Palimpstine' (227). Using the two most obviously opposed cultures of India and suggesting through a vision of 'interweaving', that they are, and always have been historically interlinked, is just the premise of Aurora and Rushdie's aesthetic. Moving outwards from that initial connection her art attempts 'to create a romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation; she was using Arab Spain to re-imagine India' (234). Her premise is a metaphor 'of the present, and the future, that she hoped would evolve', 'a golden age' that brings together all denominations, 'Jews, Christians, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains' (234).

Aurora's vision, in this respect, is similar to the India of her son Moraes Zogoiby, the narrator of The Moor's Last Sigh. Moraes's perspective is presumably similar to Rushdie's, after all Moraes's unusual magpie education carries echoes of the eclectic education of the metropolitan, literary migrant Rushdie became: 'gathering to myself all names of shiny scraps of facts and hokum and books and art history and politics and music and film' (240). At one point the narrator Moraes pauses to evaluate the version of India he has described: 'Christians, Portuguese and Jews; Chinese tiles promoting godless views; pushy ladies, skirts not saris, Spanish shenanigans, Moorish crowns...can this really be India? At such a time of upheaval, (Nehru and Jinnah) of the ruinous climax of divide-and-rule, is this not the most eccentric of slices to extract from all that life?' (85). This question is rhetorical for he quickly adds 'Are not my personages Indian, every one?' (85). Rushdie is arguing here for a re-evaluation of the

idea of India as something other than a body of land, or a nation, as an elusive, incongruous, absurdly indefinable cultural notion, as grotesque. Like the rubble-strewn migrant culture of 'The Courter', 'India was uncertainty' (95). In his essay 'Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist' Rushdie argues that the 'very essence of Indian culture' is that 'we possess a mixed tradition, a melange of elements as disparate as ancient Mughal and contemporary Coca Cola America ... Muslim, Buddhism, Jam, Christian, Jewish, British, French, Portuguese, Marxist, Maoist etc' (67).

An aspect of Aurora's art, like Rushdie's, that marks it as cosmopolitan and modern is that it is secular art, in her vision 'Only God' the ultimate centre 'was absent' 'or indeed any other representation of any other divinity' (60). Aurora's art (and Rushdie's) can only be all-inclusive if it is secular; it is, for Rushdie, the only pluralist aesthetic, for religion is too tied-up in India (and elsewhere) with nationhood and territory. Aurora, like Rushdie, is an 'epic-fabulist' (174) an artist of whose aim is to portray a different history, a history without a centre, without an 'inside', that is composed of the marginal. It is clear that when, like a 'flaneur', she sketches the slum-city, her 'lizard on the wall' signature is the mark of an artist who expresses an 'outsider view of history' (132).

If one half of the Moor's ancestry is artistic and born out of an inclusive vision of India the other is migrant and cursed; his father Abraham Zogoiby is the archetypal outsider figure, a child of 'miscegenation', the 'miscegenation that occurred between Boabdil and a nameless Spanish Jew' (69). As a 'cross-breed', a half-Jew, and with a surname, Zogoiby, that means 'Unlucky', he represents the blood-line in his son's veins (and as we shall see in post-independence India) that is connected to a history of the rejected, colonial and otherwise, the internal exile. This represents a return to the figure of the pariah of the early novels, to a figuration of the migrant (and the involuntary exile of the fatwa) in a vision of India that is a metropolitan 'cross-breed'. Moraes is another grotesque like Saleem Sinai and Saladin Chamcha, and again, like his predecessors the nature of his grotesqueness literalises the spirit of post-independence metropolitan India. Moraes grows and ages at twice the normal rate, his speeded-up life expresses the tensions of a period of history in India (and for the migrant) which is so disorientatingly fast-moving, and so directed by massive economic forces, that there

is a difficulty defining where society or the individual is heading. Moraes 'like the city itself; Bombay' represents a population and urban explosion, he 'mushroomed into a huge urbane sprawl of a fellow', 'expanded without time for proper planning without any pauses to learn from my experience or my mistakes or my contemporaries, without time for reflection' (162). Rushdie's grotesque portrayal of Moraes is an indictment of post-colonial India; he is another child whose gifts are wasted, and like Pakistan he represents another ill-conceived, cursed idea. Like Saleem Sinai, this outsider represents how much India has excluded and rejected parts of itself; how it has refused to embrace its incongruities.

Rushdie's grotesque rendering of Moraes also represents his argument with and affection for metropolitan excess; he is a 'skyscraper ... a one-man population explosion, a megalopolis' (188), dogged by the feeling 'of being ugly; mal-formed, wrong' (153). As a 'Bombay-mix' (104) he is representative of that grotesque 'cross-breed' Bombay: 'the bastard child of a Portuguese English wedding, and yet the most Indian of Indian cities', where 'all-India met what-was-not-India', the city that 'belongs to nobody, and to all' (350). The narrator's description of himself is somewhat similar: 'I was both, and nothing' 'a jewholic- anonymous, a cathjew nut a stewpot, a mongrel cur' (104). Both definitions of modern Indian identity highlight the dilemmas involved in making sense of a pluralist society. It is here, with this anomalous model of modern Indian society that Rushdie deliberately echoes the dilemmas of the migrant's position. His model of post-colonial reality is similar to the 'power-vacuum' that Moraes the outcast, as figure of the migrant, occupies. Moraes is multiple with latent transformations and therefore also off-the-map, indefinable. Like Bombay Moraes is a 'historical anomaly' (172) and a cultural magpie, the matrix of all the incongruous rifts in identity that came out of a colonial history, not least of which is the migrant.

Rushdie's argument is particularly focused, as ever, against the enchanting illusionism of post-colonial reality: 'How, trapped as we were in the Hundred percent fakery of the real, in the fancy-dress weeping-Arab kitsch of the superficial could we have penetrated to the full, sensual truth of the lost mother below? How could we have lived authentic lives? How could we have failed to be grotesque?' (185). The grotesque



is the condition of post-colonial reality, it is the norm of a reality that has evolved out of a colonial history. The term is not strictly pejorative, in fact Rushdie's fiction continually argues that the acceptance of the grotesque is essential to an acceptance of what the world is. This is why Moraes, as a literal child of this grotesque history of the margins is persuaded by his experiences that 'it is the idea of the norm that is bizarre, the notion that human beings have normal, everyday lives' (206).

However, *The Moor's Last Sigh* argues that the reality of the grotesque, the pluralist position of Indian society (and of the migrant) is fraught with pit-falls and potential chasms. Like Aurora, Rushdie's art expresses the vision of a 'Cassandra' that foresees 'fissures', and a tumbling into the 'Abyss' (234). Rushdie's novel argues that a pluralist society, a pluralist identity can only be founded after there has been an honest enquiry into the true, impure channels that run together to form any modern nation. The problem of post-independence India, for Rushdie is that the new generation have grown up too fast, too superficially, economically and ideologically, without any knowledge of their history. Such a society is represented by the likes of Adam Braganza (the child of Saleem Sinai's India), who is unreflectingly obsessed with the new, and completely absorbed by the parlance and culture of neo-colonial, multi-national hegemony. Rushdie's suspicion at the potential misappropriations of pluralism is exemplified in figures like Vasco Miranda and Uma Sarvati, figures who have reinvented themselves, but only in order to deceive and further their careers. Vasco Miranda 'in the pursuit of his chosen future ... had shed all affiliations, a decision which implied a certain ruthlessness, and hinted, too, at instability' (157). Uma is a communalist mythographer in trashy pluralist clothing, someone who adapts her personality to whoever she speaks with, a treacherous 'Chimene' (247) with no integrity of being; very much the zeitgeist of the 'vainglorious', propaganda-engorged times.

After his affair with Uma, with the sugared, dissembled, empty ideologies of originary politics, Moraes assesses what she represents: 'what had happened was ... a defeat for the pluralist politics on which we had all been raised ... it had been pluralist Uma, with her multiple selves, her highly inventive commitment to the infinite malleability of the real, her modernistically provisional sense of truth, who turned out

to be the bad egg' (272). As well as pointing to the narrow reading of history and subsiding foundations the modern face of communalist politics is based on, Rushdie's argument has much broader implications. The recurrent dilemma for post-colonial society in Rushdie's fiction is also, naturally, the dilemma of the educated metropolitan migrant; how do you re-invent one self out of flux, in a meaningful way? What do you discard and what do you keep? It is this dilemma that prompts his investigation into the winding course of the historical stream, and his argument that it is only possible to form a meaningful identity against an understanding of your history. This focus on history is essential to Rushdie's project in The Moor's Last Sigh he writes a grotesquely marginal history in order to emphasise how the migrant outsider has always existed in the weave of history.

The crisis of this unmoored generation and for the synonymous outsider protagonist occurs in Moraes's blasphemous cursing of his mother/nation whilst having sex with Uma: 'Screw her the stupid bitch' (252). This scene is also a metaphorical re-enactment of what was perceived as Rushdie's own blasphemous rejection of his Muslim identity. This sub-text, the sub-text of a state of exile imposed as a result of a mis-reading of intention is hinted at in Moraes's description of his incomprehension: 'had my reading finger perhaps slipped from the sentence of my own story on to this, other, outlandish, incomprehensible text that had been lying, by chance, beneath' (285). This passage also reinforces Rushdie's idea of incompatible versions of realities existing side by side, and enacts, once again as in The Satanic Verses, a fall into the 'Underworld' of anonymity. The blasphemy in both cases leads to exile, a forced retreat into interiority, in Moraes's case this is represented as the solitary confinement of a prison cell. The policy of reclaiming names begun in The Satanic Verses is continued here: 'The names you have given me - outcast, outlaw, untouchable, disgusting, vile - I clasp to my bosom and make my own' (295/6). Part of this re-evaluation involves recasting the significance of this fall: 'My tumble is not Lucifer's, but Adam's' (or even Aadam's) (296). Rushdie is arguing that the marginalised outcast is not a devil but human, and he emphasises this by legitimising the 'Moor's' exile in a series of paintings by Aurora that describe the exile of modern India from itself.

This reclaiming and recasting of the marginalised is the elegiac subject of Aurora's later paintings, her 'Moor in Exile' sequence. In these paintings the Moor is depicted as 'jetsam', in a collage landscape of the rejected where people are 'composed of what the metropolis did not value', sundry 'detritus' made up of, amongst other things, 'burned books' (302). As the 'Grottesca' paintings interrogate the integrity of the human by depicting a grotesque whole made up of 'severed body parts', Rushdie's model of the post-colonial metropolis is of a grotesque organism made up out of everything it has rejected. In this way he suggests the borders of society, the idea of the outside and the inside, are fictitious, politically motivated illusions. The 'invisible' people that Aurora (and Rushdie's) art rescues from cultural oblivion are close relatives of the 'temporary' people of The Satanic Verses, 'people who did not exist' because they challenge the integrity of society's identity.

The cloud that involuntary exile has cast over Rushdie's conception of the migrant state is apparent in his representation of the Moor as 'a standard bearer of pluralism' but also as a 'semi-allegorical figure of decay' (303). This is part of Aurora's 'new imagining of the idea of the hybrid' (303). Aurora decides that 'ideas of impurity, cultural admixture and melange were capable of distortion ... and of weakness' (303). This proves true for Moraes because although he discovers his power away from his mother, becoming a fighter using his deformity, his misshapen hand as a 'club', he is essentially 'unmoored' and corrupted by the communalist politician 'Mainduck' (300). In this respect The Moor's Last Sigh represents a rather unredemptive return to the pessimism of the early novels and a return to a more exclusively corrective, satirical application of the grotesque. Rushdie's conception of the grotesque 'power-vacuum' of post-colonial reality has been equivocal from the beginning, there has always been the potential for decay and mutation. However the 'hybrid' state is just one manifestation of the grotesque in Rushdie's fiction. The most liberating parts of the novel are the passages that refer to the more ebullient grotesquerie of the marginalia of history, the crowd, the inclusive conception of society that post-independence neo-colonial India has become 'unMoored' from.

After the demystification of this corrupt, neo-colonial, capitalist India is complete, and Abraham's Cashondeliveri Tower explodes, raining down 'Imported

soil, English lawn grass and foreign flowers' (375), from its roof-top atrium, the economic lie of independence is over for Moraes and there is a turning away from the illusions of the metropolis; it is 'no longer my Bombay, no longer the city of mixed up, mongrel joy' (376). He finds himself 'looking forward to Spain - to Elsewhere' (376). The challenge of this adventure 'away' is the same as always, to maintain gravity, and integrity of values in a foreign land. This is initially portrayed through the familiar trope of airborness, in the disorientation of plane journey, with its seductive houri stewardesses, the sense of having 'slipped in time' and of having lost 'place, language, people, and customs' 'the four anchors of the soul' (383). In Spain, the disorientation increases, Vasco Miranda's village proves to be Dantesque limbo, a 'village of the damned' (389), where 'lost souls' (who have presumably lost their four anchors), Rushdie's term for expatriates, eke out a parasitic half-existence. Towards the end of the novel the question of what happens to an unmoored aesthetic, an aesthetic alienated from its motherland, begins to take precedence and it is in relation to this predominantly psychological theme that prompts Rushdie to portray Spain as a Daliesque nightmare: 'I had reached an anti-Jerusalem: not a home, but an away. A place that did not bind, but dissolved' (388). Rushdie's grotesque landscape provides a detailed metaphorical topography of 'away'. It is defined by treacherousness and inhabited by chimenes. Rushdie calls it 'Indian country' because the pressures of away are perilous and 'because there was no room for a man who didn't want to belong to a tribe, who dreamed of moving beyond; of peeling off his skin' (414). This is one of the pivotal dilemmas of Rushdie's oeuvre, how do you move beyond the categories of earthbound identity and still maintain the ideological gravity of the 'four anchors of the soul'.

Moraes's quest (like Rushdie's) is to find the lost spirit of his motherland in art, as he realises that spirit no longer resides in neo-colonial India. The Japanese painting restorer Aoi Ue becomes, as his companion in captivity, a metaphor for the sustaining qualities of art. This relationship becomes a poignant parable of his relationship with his art during his post-fatwa years of exile: 'she provided our necessary disciplines' and 'shaped our days' (422). The novel ends with the brutal

murder of his art and inspiration, the destruction of that precious faculty Rushdie celebrates in Haroun, the imagination, the last refuge of the migrant.

It is this murder that gives the ending of the novel its melancholic wistfulness, a note that rings slightly falsely considering the robust vigour of Rushdie's post-fatwa writing and career. Moraes, a literal Wandering Jew, flees to the original Alhambra, the original historical Eden of this novel: 'a testament to lost but sweetest love' and of an 'end to frontiers' (433). The Alhambra is the final grotesque model in the book of a space without frontiers, a place that is designed to distort one's perception of outside and inside; this is the edifice that Rushdie bases the topography of his novel on. It is the last monument in the story to Rushdie's attempt to tell a grotesque version of history, of the rejected and incongruous elements that have existed since colonialism's conception, of the sabotage of pluralism by the forces of neo-colonial capitalism and nationalist chimenes, of the pattern of disintegration in post-colonial Indian history.

### **The 'Multiversal' Odyssey**

'Study history ... In this century history stopped paying attention to the old psychological orientation of reality. Character isn't destiny - famines, global disasters are'(432).

#### The Satanic Verses.

In Rushdie's most recent novel The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999), earthquakes and the breaking apart of ground, the foundations of earthbound ideologies and orientations, are described as the norm. 'Stability' we are told 'is what's rare' (500). What is more, in Rushdie's novel, earthquakes describe the particular political climate of the neo-colonial Third World: 'To many Third World observers it seems self evident that earthquakes are the new hegemonic geo-politics, the tools by which the superpower quake-makers intend to shake and break the emergent economies of the South, the Southeast, the Rim' (554). The earthquakes of the novel are described as Euro-American weapons of neo-colonial rule in this passage, but to Rushdie they also

represent something more unpredictable, the great after tremors of the great explosion of the post-colonial world, the ripples of that spreading chaos, the demonstration of historical energies and powers that are so elementally vast, they are beyond the control of individuals.

The earth, in this context, is formulated by Rushdie as itself a 'power-vacuum', a site of uncertainty, a re-formulation which simultaneously discredits the apparent 'stability' of ideas of nation and religion, and re-claims this earth-in-violent-flux model of post-colonial reality as a site the migrant can equally feel 'at home' in. In fact, the trend of Rushdie's thinking seems to suggest that as the figure of the migrant is a symptom of the 'post' explosion, it is better equipped to inhabit the violently chaotic reality it has created. It is clear even from a much earlier expression of the migrant position, in his essay 'Imaginary Homelands' that Rushdie believes the migrant is the creature of the age we live in, and that it is inspirational territory to inhabit as a writer: 'Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy' (15). The grotesque is a means of understanding the contradiction of being both 'plural and partial', in its manifestations in the hybrid and in the idea of the margins, in the idea of the double and the mutant. And Rushdie's adaptive grotesque aesthetic is essential to an understanding of the tumultuous, historically anomalous, distorted and estranged version of post-colonial reality he presents in The Ground Beneath Her Feet.

This novel supplies his most articulate, clarifying and challenging defence of the migrant's grotesque version, and of the its claims as a radical and enabling aesthetic:

Disorientation is loss of the East. Ask any navigator: the east is what you sail by. Lose the east and you lose your bearings, your certainties, and your knowledge of what is and what may be, perhaps even your life. Where was that star you followed to that manger? That's right. The East orients. That's the official version. The language says so, and you should never argue with the language.

But let's just suppose. What if the whole deal-orientation, knowing where you are, and so on - what if it's all a scam? What if all of it – home, kinship, the whole enchilada - is just the biggest, most truly global, and centuries-oldest piece of brainwashing? Suppose that it's only when you dare to let go that your real life begins? When you're whirling free of the mother ship, when you cut your ropes, slip your chain, step off the map, go absent without leave, scam, vamoose, what-ever: suppose that's it then, and only then, that you're actually free to act! To lead the life nobody tells you how to live, or when, or why. In which nobody orders you to go forth and die for them, or for god, or comes to you because you broke one of the rules, or because you're one of those people who are, for reasons which unfortunately you can't be given, simply not allowed. Suppose you've got to go through the feeling of being lost, into the chaos and beyond; you've got to accept the loneliness, the wild panic of losing your moorings, the vertiginous terror of the horizon spinning round and round like the edge of a coin tossed in the air (176/7).

It is clear that Rushdie's version both opposes the 'official version' and argues with 'the language' that supports it. For him the East is the site of disorientation, the source of the revolutionary explosion in 'post' reality, the originary site, through decolonisation, of the diasporic global 'chaos'. There is a return here to a conception of this chaos as creative, a restoration of the ideas of impurity, the outsider, and the powers of the migrant artist as liberating models. Rushdie is, again, arguing with ideas like orientation, an idea in his conception akin to 'home kinship', the 'most truly global, and century-oldest piece of brainwashing'. He uses the contemporary phenomenon of rock music as an iconoclastic global cultural context to re-cast the migrant's 'step(ping) off the map', 'whirling free of the mother ship' as an act of mythic daring and bravery. There are echoes here of the joyful adventurousness, the questing imagination of Haroun. This passage represents his most emphatic endorsement of the 'freedom' that results from flight, from daring; as a result 'nobody orders you to go forth and die for them, or for god'. Stepping off the map, being mobile means you have the freedom to

live outside official ideologies. This daring act also implies a brave acceptance of a secular universe ruled by the disorientating dice-rolls of chance, where the horizon is always 'spinning round and round like the edge of a coin tossed in the air'; it involves living in uncertainty. There are echoes of older arguments here, that you must go 'away' and 'accept' flux to be finally at home with what the post-colonial world is, to possess a 'mature' and liberated perspective on the illusions of orientation.

The vehicle for Rushdie's liberating aesthetic in The Ground Beneath Her Feet, and for his conception of where and what an identity can be based on, is as ever a cultural rather than a national model. In short it is the international currency of storytelling. Rushdie quotes Robert Graves's formulation of the virtues of the popular 'tale': 'writers found that the popular tale gave them a wider field for their descriptions of contemporary morals and mores, punctuated by philosophical asides, than any more respectable literary form' (387). This version of the tale is recognisable in Rushdie's writing; the informal tone, the interest in the modern, 'post' condition, the folklorish cartoon brio. In this novel Rushdie is interested in a particular version of the popular tale, the myth, perhaps the most culturally well-travelled and permeable, and grotesquely adaptive of all oral forms. Rai, the storyteller of the novel, deals in myths, and his attraction to them is explained in the fact that he finds that 'Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Marxism, the Market, utterly fail to enthrall' (503). These it is implied, are static, didactic dogmas, whereas myth, the novel implies, can react to the contemporary, are living narratives. Myths are used in the novel to suggest a medium that translates from culture to culture, changing and being changed, the most malleable and secular luggage of culture, and therefore the best foundation for an identity that has seceded from the nation state. Rushdie's model for transnational migrant identity is a cultural one, based on pollination and imagination.

Consequently his international mythographer Rai, is a culturally incongruous being, 'anomalous, oxymoronic ... an un-Indian Indian' (337). Rushdie makes the point that the international, the culturally diffusive figure of the migrant, is a naturally estranging grotesque, a creature who offends all our cultural biases. However, The Ground Beneath Her Feet presents such a resolutely international, multicultural version of post-history that this creature, as either globe-trotting rock star or photographer



seems in their element their time, the explosive 'post' period where the pattern of history is anomalous.

Rushdie is careful, however, to point out how the malleability of myth can lead to dangerous distortions. In a section of the novel which also points to the redundancy of the neo-colonial 'dream' of England, Rushdie links Sir Darius's Anglophilia with a politically naive, nationally based brand of myth-making. Darius 'dreamed of England ... as a pure, white Palladian Mansion set upon a hill' (86), as the epitome of civilisation, as part of a classical 'Golden Age' of Greece and Rome. Darius and Methwold (the colonial father of Saleem), prompted by this appreciation of a mythical England, bury themselves in an investigation of Indo-Aryan myths only to be woken from their mythopoeiac sleep by the Second World War and the End of the Empire. Unwittingly they have based their theories on the racial-supremacist philosophy of George Dumézil, never suspecting that his theories that refuse to accommodate the figure of the outsider in its vision of history could find such a terrible application in twentieth century history in the racial terrorism of the Nazis.

Darius's response to Dumézil's version of history is to enquire, 'But what about *outsideness*?' (42), a question Rushdie's novel asks repeatedly in its representation of post-colonial history and the migrant. Darius makes an important discovery in the course of justifying the outsider's necessity to history, that 'the only people who see the whole picture ... are the ones who step out of the frame' (43). This, Rushdie argues, is the privilege gained from stepping off the map, a heightened vision, unaffected by the prejudices of those shackled to the ideologies of the earth, an overview of the contemporary. This vision is realised in Rai in his role as international photographer who acts as witness and recorder of the trouble spots and eruptions of the 1960s and 1970s. Ormus has an even more radical insight into the nature of modern reality. He sees a 'doubling in the whole of existence' (419). He has a literal double vision as he can see the contemporary both as it is clearer than anyone else, and as it appears in the moment in all its indefinable flux. Rushdie believes culture is hard to make sense of in the now, the 'post' world of his novel is represented as grotesque, composed of parallel 'irreconcilable' versions of reality (351). Rushdie's version claims that 'The maps are wrong' (352). 'East is West' (353), that basically 'Everything you

thought you know: it's not true' (353). This is the world formed out of that other global mythmaker, popular culture, a grotesque world reflecting back the world in broken fragments of information and misinformation. It is a world interwoven out of the parallel universes of the global media, what Rushdie calls the 'multiverse' (375), a world where different versions of the world contend.

The grotesque 'multiversal' nature of modern reality and the privileged double vision of the migrant are not read as results of post-modernity in the novel, they are seen as a result of the explosions, and splittings of the post-colonial world. Bombay, or the post-colonial metropolitan milieu, may be read as the source, as always of the grotesque distortions of this novel. In 1960 we are told that Bombay is 'cut in half' (164). Rai warns of the implications of such continual territorial splitting: 'You can't just keep dividing and slicing - India- Pakistan, Maharashtra- Gujarat - without the effects being felt at the level of the family unit, the loving couple, the hidden soul. Everything starts shifting, changing, getting partitioned, separated by frontiers, splitting, re-splitting, coming apart' (164). This passage returns to the idea of fission that acted as a leitmotif in the early novels. Rushdie is arguing in The Ground Beneath Her Feet that the invention of the post-modern is partially borne out of the eruptions and tremors of post-colonial history and that the migrant, as a creature of that history, is also a natural heir to and seer of post-modern reality: 'The West was in Bombay from the beginning, impure old Bombay, where West, East North and South had always been scrambled like codes, like eggs, and so Westernness was a legitimate part of Ormus a Bombay part, inseparable from the rest of him' (96).

The particular brand of Westernness which attracts Ormus in this novel is American. There is a discernable shift away from England into wider cultural territories in The Ground Beneath Her Feet and a new, particular fascination with American culture. This new interest is political, closely linked to America's emergence as the super-power of neo-colonial rule; as Rai comments: 'Over the years I saw the hand of mighty America fall hard on the back-yards of the world' (419). Applying the international currency of myth to the contemporary, Rushdie, whilst describing the war in Indo-China, uses the figure of the Trojan Horse as a symbol of the deception of neo-colonialism. After the military war, the gift of the horse of popular culture is the

opening foray in a far more ruthless war. For within the horse hide the 'real warriors of America-the big corporations, the sport culture of basketball and baseball, and of course "Rock-n-Roll"' (441). Again the casualty of this neo-colonial invasion is the grotesque history that Rushdie's writing works to preserve. 'Discontinuity, the forgetting of the past' Rushdie argues, 'this is the Wooden Horse at the gate of Troy'(441).

In the migrant's navigation of the irresistible cultural lures of England and America, Rushdie maps out a new variation on what the West means to the Indian migrant. Ormus is drawn to 'funky America', not 'defunct England' (251). 'Nowadays' he states 'England is ersatz America, America's delayed echo' (251). Ormus is attracted to America 'where everyone's like me, because everyone comes from somewhere else' (252), because it is the migrant continent. However Rushdie points to the power England possesses, even in its, post-imperial decline, over its former migrants. Ormus writes a song called 'Ooh Tar Baby' about how England has enchanted him. Like Odysseus he is detained by a Circe-like figure, Antoinette Corinth, on route to America. 1960s England is described as a place addled by mysticism, populated by 'a broken generation, which has told itself a great lie-that it represents hope and beauty' (287). The Tar Baby of Ormus's song is England itself. The song describes how England 'kidnaps people ... seizes hold and won't let go'. Rushdie calls this fixation of the migrant 'stuck-love' (275/6), a variation of the anglophilia of Chamcha and Chekov, part of the lingering enchantment of colonialism. It is clear, however, that at the end of the novel, that it is America, through its domination of global culture is the mythmaker that ultimately shapes the modern world and that migrant must come to terms with. In the final paragraph, Rai's daughter, Tara, the 'unstoppable American kid' uses her zapper to navigate the multiverse.

However this multiverse is dominated by images of Ormus and Vina the mythic migrant heroes of the book. Rushdie sees the migrant as ultimately central to the structure of the post-colonial 'multiverse'. In this book there are no falls; the protagonists jump - they voluntarily leap off the map. The inference is that migrancy, the submission to disorientation, is heroic. In the grotesque duality of his migrant heroes, Rushdie explains the source of their power: 'Each is Pygmalion, both are Galatea. They are a single entity in two bodies; male and female constructed they

themselves' (148). They are heroic in their doubleness, in that they are simultaneously there creation and creator, in their 'creation of two bespoke identities, tailored by the wearers for themselves. The rest of us get our personae off the peg, our religion, language, prejudices' (95) but they are expressions of the ontological freedom that results from migrancy. Migrants are, Rushdie contends, cultural pioneers who transcend the limits of culture imposed from a national model, 'A group of micro-organisms grown in a nutrient substance under control conditions' (95), who have stepped out of the frame of national affiliation.

### **Migrant as Navigator**

Ultimately Rushdie needs to be regarded as a history writer committed to 'denying the official, politician's version of truth' (Errata 14), a fiction writer whose version of history argues that although we do not all regard ourselves as outsiders, we are nevertheless all grotesque and historically speaking, all migrants: 'It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated' (12). In Rushdie's fiction this past is pre-war, pre-independence, pre-'post-modern'. The origin of Rushdie's grotesque version of the twentieth-century history, and the aesthetic he applies to express his view, is based on his reading of colonial history, his belief that both the East and West have evolved out of the colonial 'adventure' into a fractured time defined by 'rudderlessness' (Sacred 387), disorientation. This revolution is read in terms of an explosion, a fission: 'Just as an atom, when split, releases colossal energy, so the old, rigid orthodoxies of colonial Europe produced, by being broken, the unparalleled outburst of newness and excitement that the modernist movement has been' (388). This is the aesthetic of the post-colonial fission, grotesque modernism, an aesthetic that tries to find 'new angles at which to enter reality' (Errata 15) and is 'based on the idea of inconstancy, metamorphosis, or, to borrow a term from politics, "perpetual revolution"' (Good 418). The migrant is the creature of this revolution, who has embraced its potential for cultural freedom, and as someone formed out of the colonial experience, is born to navigate this 'power-vacuum'. Rushdie believes that your

chosen versions of culture(s) are ultimately your identity, that culture unlike nationhood is portable. It travels, back and forth, East and West, high and low. The history of the migrant in Rushdie's oeuvre, is read as the history of the twentieth-century, the grotesque lens required for the former fits the patterns of the latter too. As Rushdie states in his essay 'In Good Faith' the 'migrant condition' provides 'a metaphor for all humanity', and 'Like many millions of people, I am a bastard child of history' (394)<sup>9</sup> The case of Hanif Kureishi, in my final chapter will illustrate some of the problems of writing and historicising the migrant in England, post-Rushdie. Kureishi's post-migrant perspective on the contemporary, and his foreshortened post-1960s, pre-millennial temporal orientation is reflective of his sense that there is a need for readings of the migrant that are grounded in the contemporary moment, that chronicle the half-settled second-generation migrant up to the cusp of twentieth-century, and that reflect the de-historicised, post-colonial perspective of an restlessly fixture-orientated post-migrant generation.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> In its peripheral outlook Rushdie's grotesque peripheral orientation is similar to the de-centered modernist approach to storytelling in Michael Ondaatje's fictions.
- <sup>2</sup> The inaugural education described in Rushdie's fiction describes a disillusioning, demythologising European education. It is instructive to note that Rushdie's oeuvre explodes out of this liberating notion of a European education and that his international and syncretic migrant aesthetic evolve out of this interpretation of a European education. Equally, Jamaica Kincaid and David Dabydeen's resistant, culturally suspicious, and sceptical aesthetic evolves out of their reading of the colonial English education as an insidious form of cultural indoctrination.
- <sup>3</sup> This section of Shame has attracted more criticism from anti-colonial critics than anything else in Rushdie's oeuvre. The most notable critique comes from Aijaz Ahmad, from the chapter, 'Salman Rushdie's Shame: Postmodern Migrancy and the Representation of Women' in his book In Theory: Classes Nations. Literatures (1992). In this assessment of Shame Ahmad argues against Rushdie's representation of migrancy as 'an ontological condition of all human beings' (127). He also questions what he considers Rushdie's 'High Modernist' belief in the 'availability of all cultures for ... individual consciousness' (128), what he calls Rushdie's 'myth of excess of belongings' (127). This attack on Rushdie's 'innocent myth of migrancy' (158) in some ways conceals what amounts to a defence of other Marxist, nationalist, even nativist counter-myths which Ahmad feels Rushdie's novel threatens. Ahmad is essentially attacking Rushdie's provocative, politically blasphemous representation of 'the idea of origin (as) being a mere myth' (130). Ahmad's analysis, however, reveals traces of bullish literal-mindedness which obscure the manoeuvres of his own 'linguistic quicksand' (135). Rhetoric-insensitive, he chooses to read Rushdie's claim that Shame is 'a novel of leavetaking' (134) as literal, when in fact it is an ironic convention of style that is repeated throughout his oeuvre. It is clear that Ahmad's reading of Rushdie is as much a collision of aesthetic values as it is a collision of counter-myths of the post-colonial world. When Ahmad dismisses the novel as a 'cartoon' 'spoof' (142) he chooses not to consider this 'spoof's' satiric potential. Similarly his claim that Rushdie is guilty of 'possible misogyny' (142) in his monstrous representation of Sufiya Zinobia seems drawn from a rather conventional reading of feminism and a rather literal reading of Rushdie's brand of realism. It seems highly debatable that Rushdie's figure of 'the virgin who is a vampire' is really 'the oldest misogynist myth of all' (148). After all Rushdie's 'grotesque realism' (144) emerges from (amongst other fabular sources) contact with that encyclopedically mobile folk-tale aesthetic of that supremely renegade feminist re/mythographer Angela Carter. Furthermore, it is clear that Rushdie is aware of the implications of Ahmad's study as a whole, specifically its attack on the literary and metropolitan migrant intellectual and writer. In his introduction to The Vintage Book of Indian Writing (1997) Rushdie responds to what he sees as the ideological 'roots' of these arguments. These roots are 'parochial' (xiv) in perspective and bound to a dourly literal and 'rigid, class-war view of the world' (xiv), there is even 'a whiff of political correctness about them' (xiv). Furthermore, he notes the irony that 'many of the attacks on English-language Indian writing are made in English by writers who are themselves members of the college-educated, English-speaking elite' (xiv).
- <sup>4</sup> In one sense Rushdie's Midnight's Children picks up the thread of history from Ondaatje at the end of The English Patient (1993). Both novels are interested in historical ruptures that are 'nuclear' in nature, however Ondaatje is interested in historicising the moments leading up to this whereas Rushdie's resolutely 'post' orientation is concerned with the aftershock of this moment with the tremors it sent through the post-imperium.
- <sup>5</sup> Kincaid, in Lucy (1990), also assumes this devilish persona of 'Lucifer', as a position that simultaneously implies dispossession, power and mobility.

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<sup>6</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. Signs Taken For Wonders. The Location of Culture. London: Routledge 1994. 102-122.

<sup>7</sup> In her public letter to Rushdie Nadine Gordimer argues that the fatwa 'casts a shadow over the free development of literature everywhere' (Letters 45). Lev Kopolev commends Rushdie's 'courageous resistance' as it 'keeps the memory of all martyrs of free speech alive' (Letters 115/6). 'India Today', reviewing Haroun, read it as 'an oblique, lyrical defense of his artist's license, so rudely and terminally impounded by the Islamic gendarmes' (30). A. N. Wilson, writing in the 'Sunday Telegraph' praises Haroun for shining 'like a bright light in a world increasingly fearful of freedom of ideas' (34).

<sup>8</sup> This insider-outsider orientation is even more pronounced in the half settled post-migrant fiction of Hanif Kureishi, which, as we shall see in The Buddha of Suburbia (1990) adopts a similar satiric, deflationary approach to both the migrant and the metropolitan position per se, reading the role playing assimilationist as a slipperily elusive, uncommitted figure.

<sup>9</sup> This sounds like another variation of James Baldwin's declaration of 'bastard' status, this time applied more generally to the impure, migrant-formed, mutant that is imperial and post-imperial history.

## Four

### **The Contemporary Migrant: Post-Migration Apprenticeships in the Fiction of Hanif Kureishi**

#### **A Career in the Contemporary**

In this final chapter, I want to re-contextualise and contemporise the figure of the literary migrant, to view the migrant as a figure for and historian of the contemporary. Using the case of the writer Hanif Kureishi, this study will look at a species of migrant writer who deserves consideration because he grapples with a representation of the migrant's position as a creature of the contemporary, and whose aesthetic depends on and feeds off an understanding of the contemporary. To define Kureishi's sense of the 'contemporary' it is instructive to compare Kureishi's temporal orientation as a writer to Rushdie's. Rushdie is concerned with how myth and history recur in the present whilst Kureishi is concerned with synchronising his writing to the flow of the present moment. Rushdie's version of the contemporary is, as The Moor's Last Sigh and The Ground Beneath Her Feet demonstrate, mythic-historical whereas in this chapter I will be arguing that Kureishi attempts to capture the 'real time' contemporary, that he attempts to be a historian of the recent. Rushdie is a historical storyteller, a rememberer of historical depth, whose notion of the contemporary stretches back to the moment of India's independence, whereas Kureishi's conception of the contemporary is shallower, confined to an examination of the years following the cultural revolution of the 1960s.

The 'contemporary' or post-1960s migrant is, according to Kureishi's fiction, second-generation, settled, and post-immigrant.<sup>1</sup> Touching on the state of migrant fiction in England in the 1990s and hinting at the complexity of future directions migrant writing might be compelled to take as generational fault lines deepen, Kureishi's contemporary orientation provides an appropriately reflective and forward-looking perspective with which to close this study of migrant representations and writers of the 1980s and 1990s.



Kureishi, as we shall see, provides a sceptical commentary on the position of the migrant within the contemporary world. The equivocal, questioning and often paradoxical aesthetic of his essays, fiction and plays, evolves out of his conception of the second-generation migrant as an ontologically and nationally uncommitted and unfinished creature. Through examining Kureishi's restless, pre-millennial perspective on the most current mutations of migrant identity I want to explore how the contemporary post-migrant continues to be represented as a questing, restless, transitory being. I also want to examine how the contemporary English post-migrant's relationship to history has shifted, and how his relationship to education has moved beyond the colonial, how he instead undergoes apprenticeships and initiations in post-1960s popular culture.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter I will also consider what the commitments of a post-immigration aesthetic might be, how it might guide a writer's approach to storytelling and to history, and how it has been received by post-colonial critics. Finally, I will attempt to take account of the contemporary generational and ethnic conflicts that haunt post-migrant identity at least as much as the relatively abstract memory traces of an originary migration.

These conflicts are explored throughout Kureishi's oeuvre in a slipperily sceptical style that involves constant disclaimers and amendments. For Kureishi the anti-immigration politician's appropriations of the figure of the second-generation post-migrant requires re-evaluation and re-appropriations by post-migrant writers. In his essay 'Bradford' (1986) Kureishi comments: 'When I was in my teens, in the mid-Sixties, there was much talk of the "problems" that kids of my colour and generation faced in Britain because of our racial mix or because our parents were immigrants. We didn't know where we belonged, it was said we were neither fish nor fowl ... We were frequently referred to as "second-generation immigrants", just as there was no mistake about our not really belonging in Britain' (134/5). Kureishi is careful to disown the term 'second-generation immigrants' in this instance because the term is ideologically and pejoratively connected with a permanent state of national unbelonging, in such a way that politically and practically would deny him the basic right of citizenship.

Kureishi is, however, psychologically and culturally equivocal about the notion of national belonging when he isn't defending the migrant's right to citizenship

from anti-immigration ideology. In his essay 'The Rainbow Sign' (1986) he states 'I have never wanted to identify with England', though despite this 'some kind of ... identification with England remains' (99). He quotes Orwell to explain this involuntary cultural indoctrination, confessing that 'the suet puddings and the red pillar boxes have entered (my) soul' (99). Kureishi's orientation to England throughout his oeuvre is defined by this ambiguity, the conflict between a culturally settled and a culturally resistant orientation to England. In this chapter I will be arguing that this ambiguous orientation is the key to positioning the contemporary post-migrant, to view them as historically unmoored, culturally restless post-migration settlers. The argument underlying much of Kureishi's defence of the pre-millennial English migrant is that, at this point of history, this is where the migrant begins to ideologically rub shoulders with the settler. The post-migrants of Kureishi's fiction are the new half-settled settlers, the post-migration settlers, sons and daughters of a second Empire.

Kureishi is quick to distinguish his post-migrant generation's version of cultural ambiguity from the politician's representation of a generation of ill-at-ease misfits. In 'The Rainbow Sign' he rejects the notion that his generation were 'caught between two cultures' (135), particularly as it is expressed in the Powellite 1967 speech of Duncan Sandys that argues that 'The breeding of millions of mixed-race children would merely produce a generation of misfits and create national tensions' (75). He is keen to counter 'I wasn't a misfit; I could join the elements of myself together. It was the others, they wanted misfits; they wanted you to embody within yourself their ambivalence' (75). In this respect Kureishi's version of the post-migrant's cultural ambiguity is triumphant and empowered; indeed Kureishi's version of the pre-millennial migrant is a more fluid, silkily ambitious, and sophisticated creature than the 1960s could have ever envisioned. It is a creature of a generation of writers who as the children of sealed migrants pick up their parents' narrative and attempt to extend and revise it from their own position in history. This attempt at understanding and revision is encoded in Kureishi's plots. His stories are narratives of apprenticeship and initiation, of educations in the crafts of acting and writing, role-playing and self-representation, education as a search for a skin that fits (of whatever shade) and as a

career in dissembling. His books are about the continuous and frustrated quest to settle, and the dilemmas and compromises settling involves.

Part of the purpose of his aesthetic is the attempt to use storytelling as a means towards orientating the self in the flux of the contemporary. Kureishi's version of the migrant is very much based on his own experience as a 'literary' migrant and on his own sense of the status of the migrant in western society as being determined by their absorption and manipulation of western culture. In 'The Rainbow Sign' he argues that 'stories ... help me see my place in the world and give me a life in the present and the future. This was surely part of the way I could understand myself' (99). Stories, both through reading them and writing them, offer the migrant access to a settled identity, both psychologically and economically. They are currency in Kureishi's often ruthless pre-millennial world, they can tell him who he is, and demonstrate he is someone. This emphasis on a culturally broad 'education' is part of the project of Kureishi the literary migrant, because the eventual power that emerges from it, of self-representation, is what allows him to finally make sense of his complex post-migration identity.

### **The 'Almost' Englishman: the Post-Migration Picaresque**

In the very first sentence of his first novel, The Buddha of Suburbia (1990), Kureishi provides a model for that pre-millennial, mixed-race post-migration settler he outlines in his essays. His narrator, Karim Amir, states:

I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories ... Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mix of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it ... looking for ... any kind of movement (3).

The modifying adverb, 'almost' is a seemingly casual but railroading addition to the opening sentence. The word 'almost' suggests something slightly different from in-between. It is a teasingly ambiguous assertion of an 'almost' entirely settled and culturally integrated identity, an almost assimilated but resistant state. Part of the tease is that the idea of Englishness that this uncommitted creature partially adheres to is itself radically different from the nationalistic ideology that hectored and moulded his father's generation. Kureishi's idea of England is, as we shall see, one that has been reformed by immigration and the energies of new settlers. This 'new breed' of migrant is however incompletely settled and as a child of a certain suburban class and of mixed-race ancestry, is, we are told, inheritor to a temperamental restlessness. It is this vague affliction, and this alone that links the pre-millennial migrant to the larger history of migration in Kureishi's novel. History is parodically and glibly a bland configuration of 'here and there', 'continents and blood' to Kureishi's 'almost' Englishman, a creature defined by an ahistorical immersion in the moment. The blood memory of migration in The Buddha of Suburbia is satirically translated into an interest in 'movement', advancement, and social mobility.

However there is another aspect to Kureishi's conception of the post-immigration mixed-race subject in The Buddha of Suburbia. In 'The Rainbow Sign' Kureishi describes the shadow side to the 'almost' Englishman. Recounting his experiences during a return visit to Pakistan he relates the incredulity of his Pakistan relatives when he refers to himself as an 'Englishman': 'Why would anyone with a brown face, Muslim name and a large well-known family in Pakistan want to lay claim to that cold decrepit island off Europe where you always had to spell your name' (81). He is consequently told that he is not a Pakistani, that he 'will always be a Paki' and that he 'couldn't lay claim to either place' (81). This is the choice offered to the post-migration settler, a choice between two distortions or parodies of national identity, and Kureishi's novel explores the experiences of both types of migrant. The individualistic 'almost' Englishman is always placed beside the community motivated and cursed 'Paki'. Kureishi's sceptical, parodic, and deliberately distorted notion of ethnicity in The Buddha of Suburbia highlights his sense that ethnicity is a provisional ideological construct and that the 'second-generation' mixed-race migrant's ethnicity is a

politically volatile mixture 'of continents and blood'. Watching his dad make love to Eva, Karim ponders: 'Was I conceived like this?' Was he formed out of a 'Christian curse from the mouth of a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist' (16). For Kureishi the question is merely rhetorical, the figure of the 'almost' Englishman is self-evidently a culturally explosive and eclectic being, a figure for the rebellious and culturally restless son.

The Buddha of Suburbia is a novel that attempts to demonstrate some of the differences between the first-generation migrants and their 'almost' English children, a novel that explores the relationship between fathers and children. It is a novel that sets out and examines the archetypal Kureishi plot, where fathers provide very little guidance and the succeeding generation must discover their own orientation to England. Karim's father, although a dominating presence in his son's life and through his Buddha pretensions, is ultimately an inadequate guide. It is Karim who must lead his continually culturally disorientated father 'by the hand'. We are told that although his father had been in England 'over twenty years' he 'still ... stumbled around the place like an Indian just off the boat' (8), that his father has not moved on from his original immigrant orientation to England. In his essay 'Bradford' Kureishi argues that the second-generation inherited a culture that has already been partially colonised by the preceding generation and which they are more equipped to deal with. He states 'It had been easier for us than for our parents', there is a naturalised cultural sense that 'post-immigration' Britain was 'where we belonged'. He goes on to say that 'Far from being a conflict of cultures, our lives seemed to synthesize disparate elements: the pub, the mosque, two or three languages, rock n' roll, Indian films' (135). This new generation may be 'almost' English nationally and culturally, however they are eclectically syncretic. His argument stresses that the cultural values of the 'almost' English have shifted somewhat from the exclusive, home counties, Eliotic notion of Englishness the preceding generation attempted to penetrate, and that ironically, his father's generation's Anglophile education has left them culturally stranded and bewildered.

It is this difference in education or in acculturation that distinguishes father and son from each other, and it is this new orientation to a new brand of Englishness that defines Karim's generation from their migrant predecessors. The education of the

father's generation are represented in the novel through Haroon, Karim's father, and his brother Anwar. For Anwar and his wife Jeeta, as for the majority of migrants, migration means a social fall into 'Paki' status when they live 'in one dirty room in Brixton' (26), and progress through a rigorous work ethic to become small-time shopkeepers. The path of Haroon is different and foreshadows in some ways his son's eventual 'almost' Englishman attitudes. 'Dad' is a lazy dreamer, used to servants, an Anglophile who expects to discuss Byron with the locals in pubs, and who neglects his studies and settles for a dreary existence within the civil service. 'Dad', Karim concludes 'was going nowhere' (27). This is a stinging rebuke from a generation whose ethos is movement and advancement. In fact the post-immigration settler's ambition may be read as a response to the perceived dreary lack of cultural and social mobility and sophistication of the preceding generation. When Haroon and Anwar eventually reach crisis points and choose to turn away from English mores, it is, again, read as a symptom of their irremediable unbelonging. Reflecting on Anwar's hunger fast and his father's Buddhism, Karim speculates that 'Perhaps it was their migrant condition living itself out through them. For years they were both happy to live like Englishmen. Now as they aged they appeared to be returning internally to India, or at least to be resisting the English here' (64). This adoption of Indian attitudes is read as an exile's nostalgia, a retreat from the uncivilised and unprecedented cultural terrain of contemporary England.

There are, however, a few important, possibly historically inescapable, similarities between the generations. In 'The Rainbow Sign' Kureishi recounts how his father 'came to England from Bombay in 1947 to be educated by the old colonial power' (73). As a 'literary' migrant it is clear that Kureishi shares a trace of his father's veneration for the English language. In his introduction to his collected plays Kureishi argues that 'My father's book love supported a view of the world. He respected people who could speak or write "good English": (I noticed this form of respect was common among Indians of a certain age and class)' (ix). It is a belief system that sees the English language as 'yoked to humane values' and Kureishi confesses that 'Early on I may have unconsciously absorbed this assumption' (ix).

What makes Kureishi, Karim and Jamila different from their fathers (with the notable exception of Haroon) is that they are not merely products of this cultural inheritance, as their cultural values are formed and extended by a second, and very different educational experience. They have all, in different ways, been formed by the cultural and political revolutions begun during the 1960s. It is clear that Kureishi has re-channeled the English language's potential to express 'humane values' and in The Buddha of Suburbia uses it to express his own new settler 'view of the world'. The Buddha of Suburbia is also very self-consciously a product of a literary migrant's experience in that it ironically describes the dilemmas of the migrant who is learning a culture, like an essential social code, in order to advance. Kureishi in his introduction to his collected plays describes his own alternative education in the Royal Court Theatre, a Marxist, iconoclastic apprenticeship that provided an 'excellent education in the arts and in living' (viii). In the novel, Karim and his father's education in 'the arts' through the mediation of Eva's 'purple ideas' (9) and books is similarly theatrical, though less overtly political. What she does provide for both father and son is a 1960s inspired education in living and what she inaugurates is a revolt against a conventional Anglicising education and career (7). Karim, as a result of her mediation fails his A-levels and begins his apprenticeship in the theatre world.

Karim also receives a vicarious education through his friendship with Jamila. She has received the 'highest-class' (52) education in the arts and politics through the mediation of a librarian, Miss Cutmore. This cosmopolitan education supplies both Karim and Jamila with the tools to test other cultural identities and to move away from a purely English notion of culture, 'sometimes we were French ... and sometimes we were black American. The thing was we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and niggers and Pakis' (53). This is part of Karim's education in the 1960s inspired arts of self-invention and role-playing but for Jamila it is only the beginning of a process of self-questioning and reformation. While Karim is inspired by the more hedonistic and selfish sub-cultures of pop and improvisatory theatre, Jamila's self-education is ultimately inspired by the colour-conscious radical and civil rights movements of the 1960s. Fired by the example of Angela Davies, Aretha Franklin, and the new feminism, she 'learned karate and judo' (56), listens to

black music, takes a lesbian lover and joins a commune. Consequently she turns against the white Euro-American biases of her education under Miss Cutmore. This political hyper-consciousness, although gently mocked by Kureishi, also provides a useful foil to Karim's more playful and uncommitted scepticism. Jamila's suspicions provide a useful and consistent counterpoint to Karim's whims, and she is the politicised 'Paki' conscience that haunts his 'almost' English career. When Jamila begins to hate Miss Cutmore 'for forgetting she is Indian' the debate between these two very different children of the 1960s is inaugurated:

Jamila thought Miss Cutmore really wanted to eradicate everything that was foreign in her. 'She spoke to my parents as if they were peasants,' Jamila said. She drove me mad by saying Miss Cutmore had colonized her, but Jamila was the strongest-willed person I'd met: no one could turn her into a colony. Anyway, I hated ungrateful people. Without Miss Cutmore, Jamila wouldn't have even heard the word 'colony'. "Miss Cutmore started you off", I told her (53).

Karim is, despite a rather colonialist fixation on gratitude, more aware of the ambiguity of their situation. He is aware of the paradoxes inherent in a sophisticated politicised and historicised European education, so that although Jamila resents Miss Cutmore for 'colonis(ing) her' 'Without Miss Cutmore...' they 'wouldn't have even heard the word 'colony' (53). This is perhaps the central tension in the make up of the educated migrant; a post-colonial resentment that gradually focuses as it grows out of a European education. Karim is aware, however, that there are different types of education, and the one that their generation has received at least possesses the potential for such developed choices as the free rejection or adoption of an ethnic identity.

It is in the narrative of Karim's education as an 'almost' Englishman that Kureishi finds the form that will best express the type of story he wishes to tell himself to explain himself as a post-immigrant settler. In his introduction to his collected plays he explains his early reserve regarding the novel form, stating that he believed 'The novel was posh, written by gentlemen' (xiii). These 'gentlemen' the great white males



and the 'pseudo-gentlemen' authors of the first generation of migrants wrote in a tradition Kureishi feels uncomfortable extending. It is unsurprising his fiction takes its structure and spirit from a less ordered and gentlemanly species of prose, the rogue narratives of the Spanish and English 'picaresque'. The Buddha of Suburbia is a picaresque novel in that, as Harry Sieber notes, the picaresque 'is a style of fiction' (1) that Kureishi's novel playfully applies to a contemporary, immigrant situation. Kureishi's attraction to this 'rogue' genre as a reluctant novelist seems compelling. The traditional picaresque depiction of a shifting feudal social structure, of metropolitan social mobility, of ambition and class resentment, of the apprenticeship into society of a new species, presented through a wide social lens and an episodic structure, are all appropriated (and racialised) by Kureishi in The Buddha of Suburbia in order to historically contextualise the dilemmas of his new settlers. It has also been noted by Sanchez that the picaresque is of compelling modern interest because 'it is concerned with marginality' (xv) and the traditional 'half-outsider' model of the picaresque seems particularly applicable to Kureishi's 'almost-Englishman'. Perhaps most compelling, for a writer concerned with finding a route into the 'contemporary', the picaresque's subversive treatment of the servant/master relationship, and of the historical shifts in power structures this implies, offers Kureishi an ideal means through which to explore the conflicts of an unsettled post-imperial era.

The most striking picaresque quality of Kureishi's text is of course his novel's socially and morally vagrant picaresque or rogue, Karim, and his bawdy, breathless, restless, and mercilessly satiric first-person narration. Like the picaresque Karim is a creature 'always in the process of becoming' (Picaresque 66). His life is described in terms of an apprenticeship into society through dissembling. This picaresque deferment of a settled identity is expressed through Karim's acting career. 'Role-playing' or acting, according to Sieber is 'a central motif in the protean career of the picaresque' (73). Both Karim and Haroon rise socially by parodying forms of Indian identity. Haroon in the guise of Buddha attempts to look 'exotic' and 'exaggerated his Indian accent.'<sup>3</sup> 'He'd spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, and now he was putting it back in spadeloads' (31). His son Karim, during his career tests out a number of masks: Mowgli from The Jungle Book, his 'Paki' uncle Anwar, and the 'fish-out-of-

water' immigrant Changez. In the post-immigration context of The Buddha of Suburbia the adoption of masks signifies a sceptical questioning of the migrant's potential roles in society: the masks ask 'Who will I be in this society?' and moreover 'Who must I be to rise?'

Ironically, it is their Englishness that Karim and Haroon must disguise to progress in society.<sup>4</sup> The switching back and forth between familial, suburban Englishness and theatrical Indianness is one of the most pleasurable tensions of the novel. This constant role-playing of stereotypes highlights the point that ethnicity, in this newly settled, post-imperial England, is a troubled concept. In his essay 'Bradford' Kureishi is very clear on what constitutes contemporary post-imperial 'Englishness': ethnic melange. His list includes 'yoga exercises, going to Indian restaurants, the music of Bob Marley, the novels of Salman Rushdie, Zen Buddhism ... therapy, hamburgers, visits to gay bars, the dole office and the taking of drugs' (143). Kureishi's list implies that there are no 'ethnic' certainties after an 'adulterated' colonial history, and that national identity is an artificial construct, a fraudulent 'disguise' or costume that we may choose to cast off at any time. As Shadwell notes 'Everyone looks at you I'm sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic ... what stories of ... elephants we'll hear ... And you're from Orpington' (141); post-migration ethnicity cannot be read on the skin. The 'almost' Englishman may be 'Paki' on the outside (or even ambiguously 'Creamy' like Karim) and English, or American on the inside. Shadwell concludes his analysis of Karim by commenting that 'The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century' (141), and in The Buddha of Suburbia the immigrant becomes, as a representative of the complex ethnic fabric of English society, a figure for the contemporary melange of Englishness.

Each of Karim's roles as an actor confronts him with aspects of the history of black identity in the colonies and in Britain, and involves a process of replaying and exploding powerful racial stereotypes. In the play Karim nicknames 'The Jungle Bunny, he is cast 'for authenticity' (147) as Kipling's wild native boy Mowgli, but is asked to disguise his accent and mid-tone skin colour. 'Playing native' (whether colonial or 'Paki') and playing 'authentic' for Karim, as an 'almost' Englishman, is always a grotesquely unnatural act, which is only necessary because of the Western

need for comfortable, uncomplicated representations of black identity. Kureishi includes a litany of pre-emptive critiques of 'The Jungle Bunny' within his text; Haroon calls Karim 'a black and white Minstrel' (157), and Jamila condemns the play for 'pandering to prejudices ... And clichés about Indians' (157). However, these critiques read like reflex reactions, and the satire of The Buddha of Suburbia is driven, through the mediation of its joyfully irrepressible picaro by a playful set of political ethics. The most powerful critique of the play occurs within Karim's subversive performance of his role when he abruptly lets his 'Eastern' 'native' disguise slip to reveal a glimpse of a more complex ethnicity that is equally capable of stereotyping Englishness: 'I sent up the accent and made the audience laugh by suddenly relapsing into cockney' (158). Each of Karim's roles is used to reflect on the narrative and processes of The Buddha of Suburbia, each offers a one-dimensional rendering of characters that Kureishi paints in more flawed, rounded detail. Karim adopts personae based on both Anwar and Changez, and in his final role, in a soap opera, he plays a western cliché approximate to himself; 'the rebellious student son of an Indian shopkeeper' (259). This sly echoing of narratives and versions of the often 'wretched, comic character' (220) of the migrant is part of Kureishi's primarily comedic method of critique. His presentation of farcical stereotypes within the structure of the novel, as roles cast off like skins, stresses the point that these are the racial and immigrant stereotypes the new settler generation must confront and outgrow. The Buddha of Suburbia in its 'between the acts' scenes is presented as part of that project of representing the post-imperial, new settler generation in all their ethnic and ethical confusion.

Karim's crisis as an actor and imitator occurs when he enters Eleanor's circle and realises that rich people 'had histories' and the cultural facility to recount 'them as stories' (176). He is forced to question himself and ask, whether he is just an actor in other people's dramas, an imitator incapable of creating something new culturally or of translating his experiences. The answer to this is Kureishi's presentation of The Buddha of Suburbia as Karim's story, his first person narrative.

Considering the novel as Karim's novel, the story of a dissimulator reacting to the pressures of a particular time, casts it in a particular light, as a historical chronicle in the mode of that great nineteenth-century picaresque novel by Stendhal, The Red and

the Black (1830). This is a connection Kureishi makes himself in The Buddha of Suburbia at a defining moment when Karim is forced to make his first compromise as an actor. Contemplating the humiliating prospect of smearing a 'jar of shit-brown cream' on his skin to become Mowgli (146) Karim thinks 'of Julien Sorel ... dissimulating and silent for the sake of ambition, his pride often shattered, but beneath it all solid in his superiority' (146). It is clear that Karim is not being presented here as merely a defeated and compromised figure but also as a taboo-smashing adventurer and iconoclast. Both Sorel and Karim offer models for a new type, both rise from versions of the petty bourgeois, both are offered to the reader as half-triumphalist, half-instructive anti-heroes, both are sons of a second Empire reacting against unheroic times and both are situated in narratives defined by a series of moral and political dilemmas.<sup>5</sup> In this way both Stendhal and Kureishi present the 'heroes' of their chronicles as representatives of the dilemmas and desires of the eras they respond to, the picaro 'almost' Englishman of The Buddha of Suburbia is, for Kureishi, the figure who best represents the contemporary condition of England.

There are two simultaneous narratives that explain post-imperial England and the new settlers that define it in The Buddha of Suburbia. Following the model of the picaresque novel, Kureishi interweaves an economic narrative with an erotic narrative. The traditionally class-obsessed economic narrative of the picaresque novel is reviewed and racialised to suit the ethnic texture of contemporary England in The Buddha of Suburbia. Kureishi insists on reading class and race as intertwined categories in the novel. He effectively offers an extension of his argument in 'The Rainbow Sign', that 'Racism goes hand in hand with class inequality' (92). Karim's narrative of social mobility and acute suburban class-consciousness is haunted by spectral glimpses of that other unspoken aspect of his ethnicity. Travelling in a train with his Uncle Ted he is troubled by glimpses of other migrant lives:

Before crossing the river we passed over the slums of Herne Hill and Brixton, places so compelling and unlike anything I was used to seeing that I jumped up, jammed down the windows and gazed out at the rows of disintegrating Victorian houses. The gardens were full of rusting junk and sodden overcoats;

lines of washing criss-crossing over the debris. Ted explained to me, 'That's where the niggers live. Them blacks' (43).

The topography of this alien territory is drawn largely in terms that seem to signify the decay or disintegration of Victorian, triumphalist colonial England. The 'Victorian houses' have themselves been colonised. Karim's fleeting view of this 'compelling' almost fabled alien territory, redolent of rioting and ghettoisation, from the train window, is suggestive of the great divide that exists between him and the West Indian migrants. At this stage in his development Karim is prepared to discount 'Them blacks' as another species. His ambiguous mixed-race colouring allows him to defer commitment to any settled ethnic identity. His nickname 'Creamy' suggests he is off-white, a suitably modified ethnicity for an 'almost' Englishman, whilst he is careful to qualify the term black by describing himself as 'off black' and 'more beige than anything' (167). It is not until he is confronted with a literal spectre, of Gene, the West Indian actor, and previous boyfriend of his actress girlfriend, Eleanor, that he re-considers his ethnicity.<sup>6</sup> The suicide, Gene, represents Karim's other, the actor who, because he is fully black, cannot dissimulate his ethnic identity and rise in the city.<sup>7</sup>

Karim's encounters with the theatre world (like Kureishi's encounters with the Royal Court) re-focus his ideas about class, and about how in a class-ridden society like England even the liberals are prepared to let class issues over-ride racial ones. The director Pyke argues that his play will be about the 'only subject there is in England - class' (160). The Buddha of Suburbia resolutely challenges this notion. When Pyke's play is produced Karim, again the subversively comic foil, 'seemed to be in a different play to the others, a farce perhaps' (221), the twin issues of class and race clash and compete. Karim gradually loses patience with the simplistic dogmatism of Terry's working class party-line and the working-class posturing of the theatre group where 'concealment of ... social origins' (171) is the fashionable social currency. There is also the gradual awareness that he is, along with his rival 'Heater' the 'local road sweeper' (who really wants to discuss 'what bothers him in Huysman'), a mascot for his social group. As Heater rises because he is 'a sort of symbol of the masses' (175) Karim realises he is merely a representative of 'blackness' (175). Out of this realisation grows

a sense of the limits of a new settler's education and career, and of a certain cultural kinship with the native 'English' working-class: 'We were rougher; we disrupted the lessons'(178).

The economic narrative of the picaresque novel, a narrative structure that involves social mobility, class conflict, masters and servants and apprenticeships in the wiles of city manners is closely linked in The Buddha of Suburbia to Karim's ambition to master the great colonial metropolis, the city of London. The novel charts his progress out of the suburbs and through the hierarchical maze of the city: 'London seemed like a house with five thousand rooms, all different: the kick was to work out how they connected, and eventually to walk through all of them' (126). The city is drawn as a cultural, behavioural and linguistic code that must be broken and hence the potential arena of self-invention. But the city is also drawn as a site of disorientation:

The city blew the windows of my brain wide open. But being in a place so bright, fast and brilliant made you vertiginous with possibility: it didn't necessarily help you grasp the possibilities ... I felt directionless and lost in the crowd. I couldn't yet see how the city worked (126).

This disorientation partially denotes the potential loss of identity that can occur in the city, but also of the deliberately artistic, 1960s-inspired 'lose yourself to find yourself' trip Karim has embarked on in order to unravel suburbia from his being. There are traces in this ambitious economic narrative of an atavistic return to the materialistic work-ethic of 'Paki' migrant culture but it is clear that Karim is a creature of the post-hippy generation: 'the spirit of the age among the people I knew manifested itself as general drift and idleness' (94). Consequently his ambition is leavened by a natural inclination to drift, and ultimately he thirsts for fame more than wealth. This rise through the arts suggests that Karim's metropolitan journey towards fame and self-representation corresponds in some ways to the predicament of the literary migrant and reflects the dilemmas and compromises of the post-immigration artist working in contemporary England. In this sense The Buddha of Suburbia fulfills a very specific aim as a story that enables Kureishi to understand himself as a literary migrant.<sup>8</sup>

The erotic narrative of The Buddha of Suburbia is centered on its picaro hero's quest through the city. The city itself is drawn as a tease and seducer and the adventures of the desire-driven Karim provide the reader with post-imperial 'Rake's Progress', a bawdy satire that examines the erotic in order to highlight contemporary social issues. The 'masters' of the picaresque novel are replaced by mentors, all of whom seduce Karim either physically or ideologically. Karim's love for Charlie is wrapped up in the desire of wanting 'to be him' (15), of coveting the white boy's skin and natural-born social mobility. Karim's attraction to Terry makes him vulnerable to being lured into party politics. Karim, though ultimately a survivor, falls foul of some of his mentors. He is initially charmed and flattered by Pyke's attention but ends up being buggered, duped, humiliated and cast off by him. It is his love affair with the upper class 'English rose' Eleanor that teaches him his harshest lessons about pursuing acceptance in England. Comparing his mistaken infatuation with his West Indian predecessor Gene, Karim reflects that:

We pursued English roses as we pursued England; by possessing these prizes, this kindness and beauty, we stared defiantly into the eye of the Empire and all its self-regard - into the eye of Hairy Back, into the eye of the Great fucking Dane. We became part of England and yet proudly stood outside it (227).<sup>9</sup>

However it must be noted that this speech keeps in play the equivocal power relations between 'rose' and 'pursuer'. The speech changes direction mid-way (a typical Kureishism) and re-groups its sense of power: 'We became part of England and yet proudly stood outside it' (227) describing a position that seems approximate to the position the 'almost' Englishman occupies. The Buddha of Suburbia qualifies the representation of the immigrant in thrall to the myth of England by suggesting that the cultures have both interpenetrated to the extent that now the seduction works both ways.<sup>10</sup>

The erotic narrative of The Buddha of Suburbia is characterised by a picaresque emphasis on the politics of bodily pleasure. This is part of a long debate Kureishi holds throughout his oeuvre, arguing against and between conservative

elements in English and Muslim culture, the twin orthodoxies of Islam and Thatcherism. The whole milieu of suburbia, and its children, like Ted and Jean, with their easily outraged suburban moralities, and callow Tory lovers, is clearly drawn as the sociological location and state of mind that Thatcherism will grow out of and feed from during the 1980s. The novel moves stealthily towards an ironic, bathetic resolution to its restless, last-gasp exploration of desire and possibilities, by ending, its dreams of the future still clutched to its chest, on the cusp of the 1980s and impending Thatcherism. Clearly, as the novel was written at the end of the Thatcher regime, many aspects of her philosophy reflect back on the action of Kureishi's retrospective homage to a 'lost' age.<sup>11</sup> According to Thatcher's philosophy 'To pursue pleasure for its own sake was wrong', and for Kureishi her philosophy represents a sinister return to 'pre-war Methodist priggishness' (Eight 112), and consequently to an imperial style, siege-mentality notion of English ethnicity. Karim's English mother suffers from this suburban lack of bodily awareness, regarding her body as an 'inconvenient object surrounding her' (4) and it is this limitation that ultimately breaks up the Indo-Anglian contract of the family, as both Karim and Haroon embark on their very sensual journeys towards that very un-English goal, self-fulfillment. The culture that opposes suburban puritanism in The Buddha of Suburbia is explored by Kureishi in his essay 'Eight Arms to Hold You' (1991). This essay argues that the Beatles were 'Baudelairean dandies' (112) who 'represented pleasure' (111) and that, by implication that the culture of pop represented a revolution that dented pre-war notions of English culture. He goes on to draw out a comparison, opposing Thatcher with John Lennon as the two poles of English culture, the former reacting against the revolution of pleasure-seeking and the political consciousness spearheaded by the latter.

The 'almost' Englishman, Karim, discovers in pop music a culture that his generation can claim, a culture that steers away from the elitist and puritan orthodoxies of Muslim and English culture.<sup>12</sup> As Karim discovered during his time in Eleanor's circle 'knowing the way around a whole culture ... was invaluable and irreplaceable capitol' (176) and pop music and the whole surrounding architecture of youth culture is a democratic cultural currency that the post-migration generation is born into. Pop music and culture is, as Kureishi notes in his preface to The Faber Book of Pop (1995),



'an argument where anyone can join in' (xvii). It provides an appropriate cultural context to situate Karim's desires and ambitions in because the energies of both pop music and the new settler springs from a 'generational itch' (xii), pop is a culture of re-inventions, curiosity, sexual experimentation and rebelliousness. Eva and, in particular, Charlie, are, as Karim's initiators into pop culture, the catalysts of his quest out of suburbia. At Eva's house Karim experiences 'a world of excitement and possibility' (18). Her bathroom with its perfumes and cosmetics 'represented a world of sensuality, of indulgence and feeling' (92) that captivates him and reminds him of his bodily self. Unlike Jamila and her leftist politics, Eva and Charlie teach Karim a different lesson from the 1960s, the pop culture contention that identity is image. When Charlie transforms into his new persona, Johnny Hero, Karim is spellbound and jealous: 'one strong feeling dominated me: ambition' (154). This is the epiphany that propels Karim into his career of role-playing and dissimulation; this is the lesson Karim learns from pop, the lesson of self-invention. Pop culture, (like the picaresque culture of the swindling, dissimulating, gambling rogue) is, as Kureishi notes, unique in that it is an area 'in which this belief in mobility, reward and opportunity does exist' (Eight 117).

Pop music, like the picaresque, is also an inspiration for the type of novel Kureishi writes in The Buddha of Suburbia. There is the potential within pop culture, as there is in the picaresque, for providing Kureishi with a structure to write a chronicle of the contemporary. As Kureishi notes in The Faber Book of Pop the novel, alone, is 'not capable of taming the contemporary beast' (xvii). He moves on to argue that 'writing requires justification' because of pop's 'direct emotional exposure, the bodily presence, the palpable force on body and mind' (xvii). It is clear pop music drives the relentlessly bodily, light-winged, anarchic aesthetic that governs The Buddha of Suburbia, and that Kureishi has chosen pop alongside the picaresque to leaven the novel because it represents an 'ungentlemanly' art that 'rejected a certain notion of literature' (ix) that is elitist and culturally self-enclosed. In this respect, as a democratic and syncretic culture 'pop' clearly offers a model, in The Buddha of Suburbia, of a culture of social mobility, sub-cultural interpenetration and underground experimentation, a culture that offers an exhilarating opportunity and attractive refuge for the racial migrant, where 'difference' is valued and can be played with, distorted,

and fashioned. Kureishi argues in The Faber Book of Pop that the culture of pop is meant to 'Embody exhilaration' (xvii) and it is this quality, 'exhilaration', which defines much of The Buddha of Suburbia. Chelva Kanaganayakum, in his essay 'Exiles and Expatriates' has described The Buddha of Suburbia as an 'alienation' text (203). However I would argue that it is an 'exhilaration' text, a text about a post-immigration education through youth culture and the 'liberal' arts.

Kureishi is not merely, however, a novelist of surfaces, a sketch-artist of the zeitgeist. His leavened novel form still has political and philosophical substance. He is also a writer who evolved out of the politically conscious 1970s, and out of 'a generation who, schooled in Gramsci, saw all culture' (Pop 16), including pop, as political. However in comparing pop to the business of storytelling he is careful to qualify his critique of the novel, for 'not everything provided the sustenance of a deeper understanding' (16). The Buddha of Suburbia is also the product of a mind that believes that 'it seems ridiculous to talk about the demise of the need to tell and be told stories' and that 'The appetite for sustained and serious stories, that make demands on the engaged imagination of the reader ... cannot be fulfilled by television or music' (16).

Kureishi's apparently 'formless', episodic picaresque aesthetic eschews a post-structuralist direction. This is because he believes that ultimately 'formlessness, fragmentation and breakdown can only make sense in the context of assured ordering, connecting and meaning' (16). Kureishi's first commitment is to the task of 'making sense' of the contemporary and 'explaining' a new generation to itself. He is a writer who sees society as being composed of stories, and as a literary migrant he views those stories as largely untold, overlaid by cliché and awaiting compilation. The connection between literary migrant and role-playing migrant becomes apparent in this context. The peripheral stories Karim finds himself surrounded with, as an actor and interpreter of stories, stories of shopkeeper's rebellious sons and bewildered immigrants, are the stories Kureishi is concerned with re-connecting or re-ordering as a writer. The aesthetic of The Buddha of Suburbia is quite Modernist in its insistence on a connectedness between stories, in its vision of society as a network.<sup>13</sup> The type of 'movement' espoused and enacted by Karim in The Buddha of Suburbia is a reflection

in some way of Kureishi's aesthetic at work. It is very much drawn out of Modernist conceptions of metropolitan society and artistic communities. In his essay 'Modernism and the Metropolis' Raymond Williams states that 'the open, complex and mobile society' of the city 'led to consolidation of movement' (165), 'movement' being, in this context, a simile for social mobility. It is evident from this that The Buddha of Suburbia is an attempt to account for a very specifically literary or artistic form of social mobility within a wider post-immigration context.

As a mixed-race, 'almost' English migrant writer operating from the metropolis and deploying an aesthetic based around a Modernist model of metropolitan social mobility and sensual exploration, Kureishi is of a class of writers who have been criticised, by anti-colonial critics, of various degrees of duplicity, political bad faith and careerism.<sup>14</sup> Elleke Boehmer has argued that migrant writers have 'drawn criticism for being without loyalties, lacking in the regional and local affiliations which are deemed to be so necessary at a time of mass globalization' (239). The Buddha of Suburbia examines this, crisis of existing 'without loyalties', of role-playing or inventing identity on the move; in fact it may be argued that the satire of the novel anticipates, contains and examines much of the criticism levelled at the literary migrant of recent years. In the case of Kureishi the notion of cultural 'loyalty' is problematic. Like his hero James Baldwin, he does not believe in the separatism implied in 'cultural loyalism'. In his essay 'The Rainbow Sign' his position is partially explained through his mixed-race ethnicity: 'My mother was white. I had to live in England' (77). Baldwin represents an important and ethnically liberating precursor for Kureishi as he provides a model of the 'writer who could enter the minds and skins of both black and white' (79).<sup>15</sup> This is part of Kureishi's project in The Buddha of Suburbia, beyond the satirical portrait of a half-cynical arriviste, there is a half-affectionate portrait of an 'almost' Englishman resolutely uncommitted to either England or its 'Paki' migrants, gathering the threads together of his ethnicity.

Kureishi examines the nature of this 'uncommitted' position within his text. Karim is repeatedly criticised within the text for his lack of commitment. He is attacked by Terry for his lack of enthusiasm regarding party politics: 'You don't care about anything ... You're not attached to anything, not even to the party' (240). Jamila

claims his acting is moving him 'away from the real world' of 'unemployment, bad housing, boredom' (195). The doubleness of 'Creamy's' ethnicity is generally not tolerated, is read as duplicity. When Karim tells Changez of his intention to base a character on him, Changez retaliates 'you're a little English, with a yellowish face like the devil' (184). When Karim must decide between using Changez as the inspiration for a role and going against his friend's wishes, he is aware for the first time 'of having a moral dilemma' when 'before I'd done exactly what I wanted; desire was my guide' (186). In The Buddha of Suburbia Kureishi is interested in the situations that arise out of an 'uncommitted' position. Like many other migrant writers such as Timothy Mo in his political satire The Redundancy of Courage (1991) and Bharati Mukherjee in her migrant 'road' novels Jasmine (1990) and Leave it to Me (1998), Kureishi is interested in writing the novel of ethical dilemmas, where the post-immigration migrant, becomes a figure for the contemporary's uncertainties and provisionality. The 'uncommitted' position according to Kureishi is partially the historical reflex of a generation born into an incongruous age with the unique privilege of ethnic choices, and partially an extension of his own beliefs regarding the writer as a secular, sceptical arbiter who in order to gather together all positions operates from an 'outsider' position, suspicious of dogma, of the often unreflecting pull of national and religious affiliations. Part of the tease and challenge of The Buddha of Suburbia is that this version of the 'outsider' is deliberately represented as a troublingly duplicit 'rogue'.

The Buddha of Suburbia is itself a 'rogue' narrative a deliberately provocative, confrontational novel about ethical and ethnic doubt and scepticism. It is a novel that seems to describe, ironically, the political malaise that anti-colonial critics have accused the literary migrant of falling into. Aijaz Ahmad has argued that 'The East, reborn and greatly expanded now as a "Third World", seems to have become, yet again, a career' (94).<sup>16</sup> This attack against the careerism of the literary migrant, (which on one level is an attack against celebrity and success) fails to account for the specific, culturally interpenetrated post-immigration context Kureishi writes out of and about, or indeed the great variety amongst migrant writers' projects. Ahmad's allusion to the migrant writer's conversion of the 'East'/'West' into a 'career' is also somewhat askew in placing the post-immigrant's cultural and literary orientation. Kureishi, like many

migrant writers and post-migrant writers, doesn't write about the East as much as he writes about the 'East' in the 'West', a phenomenon he represents himself. What The Buddha of Suburbia demonstrates is that the post-immigration novel can address the ethical dilemmas, alongside the exhilaration of the post-immigrant's situation, and that the career of the post-immigrant literary migrant does not feed off the 'East'. Its primary energy and inspiration is drawn from the widening cultural divide opening up between two generations of migrants.

The often native-centered and migrant-suspicious approach of anti-colonial critics, (that seems to discount the presence of a whole migrant underclass without a voice), is evident in Gayatri C. Spivak's reading of The Buddha of Suburbia. In her essay 'The Burden of English Studies' Spivak refers to The Buddha of Suburbia in order to illustrate a distinction she makes between the migrant and the post-colonial native. With undisguised disapproval she quotes from the passage where Karim reflects on Anwar's burial, a passage where he states that he does feel a connection, after all, with 'these strange creatures ... the Indians' (212). Again, Karim, the ethnically ambiguous 'almost' Englishman is critiqued for possessing choices, itself a species of duplicity, and implicitly for a lack of discernable commitment.<sup>17</sup> There are, however, a number of gray areas in Spivak's critique that The Buddha of Suburbia illuminates. Spivak, unlike Kureishi, does not adequately distinguish between the literary migrant, or careerist migrant 'author' and the fictional figure of the 'uncommitted' migrant that is represented and parodied through Karim, nor does she distinguish between types or generations of migrants. In her essay, Spivak does not consider the gulf between the 'almost' Englishman and the 'Paki'. She does not involve herself in an analysis of the other 'underclass' migrants represented in the novel, like Anwar and Jeeta whose choices are somewhat limited, nor does she examine how choices can also be viewed as, and are viewed in The Buddha of Suburbia as political and ethical dilemmas.<sup>18</sup>

Spivak's argument devolves principally out of her elucidation of the position of that much contested intellectual property, the rural native. The anti-colonial critic's priorities are with the post-colonial native, their insights on the migrant's situation only devolve out of their attempts to define the native against the migrant. If Spivak's post-

colonial is a figure for the native I would argue that Kureishi's settler is a figure who represents an identity that has attempted to move away from an identification as either a native or migrant. What Spivak's interjection does highlight is the need to interrogate, in a detailed fashion that she does not attempt, the 'intersecting' facts of the post-immigration migrant's identity. A closer reading of the passage Spivak selects from The Buddha of Suburbia reveals an unsurpassable tentativeness in Karim's attempted identification with an Indian identity:

But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now - the Indians - that in some way these were my people, and that I'd spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them. Partly I blamed Dad for this. After all, like Anwar, for most of his life he'd never shown any interest in going back to India. He was always honest about this: he preferred England in every way. Things worked; it wasn't hot; you didn't see terrible things on the street that you could do nothing about. He wasn't proud of his past, but he wasn't unproud of it either; it just existed, and there wasn't any point in fetishizing it, as some liberals and Asian radicals liked to do. So if I wanted the additional personality bonus of an Indian past, I would have to create it (212-3).

He felt 'in some way' that 'these were my people, and that I'd spent my life denying or avoiding that fact'. He consequently feels 'ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them' (213). Judged against the pattern of the book's plot, and the continued 'collusion' of Karim up to and beyond the ending of the book, this does not seem to be a passage about choice. It is a passage about loss, about disconnection, about settling, and about unhealable fractures in one's ethnic identity. In economic terms the migrant exercises more choice than the native but in terms of translating, of changing or choosing, swapping between identities The Buddha of Suburbia argues that there is a longing for identification but not an actual possibility of

choice. The book is about the refusal to choose but behind this refusal lies the possibility that there is no choice.

The conclusion of this passage is illuminating in distinguishing the sceptical, politically uncensored attitudes that characterise the 'uncommitted' position of Karim in The Buddha of Suburbia and distinguish it from the somewhat dogmatically 'pure' verities of national, religious, party and anti-colonial politics. Karim reflects that 'he wasn't proud of his past, but he wasn't unproud of it either; it just existed, and there wasn't any point in fetishizing it, as some liberals and Asian radicals liked to do. So if I wanted the added personality bonus of an Indian past, I would have to create it' (213).<sup>19</sup> This is patently the attitude of a mixed-race, post-immigration settler whose generation-length distance from colonialism makes a connection with an Indian ethnicity somewhat uncertain and difficult. What Kureishi is arguing through Karim's assertion that he would have to create an Indian past if he wanted one, is that the migrant generation he is concerned with has undergone an apprenticeship in an 'uncommitted', ambiguous, interpenetrated culture. It is a culture where ethnicity, as the unnatural heir to racial identity, is no longer controlled purely by natural 'blood' ties but possesses an artificial, cultural fluidity.

Karim's narration in The Buddha of Suburbia is written in a self-consciously ironic manner. In his introduction to My Beautiful Laundrette (1986) Kureishi writes that 'Irony is the modern mode, a way of commenting on bleakness and cruelty without falling into dourness and didacticism' (5). The 'ironic mode', alongside pop and the picaresque is a reflection of Kureishi's post-immigration aesthetic; it becomes in The Buddha of Suburbia a way of connecting with the contemporary and of avoiding the absolutist rhetoric of Islam, Thatcherism and anti-colonial discourse. The picaresque narrative of The Buddha of Suburbia attempts to be ideologically buoyant, to weave past dogmatism and cant. Kureishi is a writer who consistently 'resists demands for positive images' (65), and is as critical as Ahmad, but through irony, of, as he puts it in My Beautiful Laundrette the 'running wogs of capitalism' (Beautiful 9).

The key to the post-immigration aesthetic that governs The Buddha of Suburbia is revealed in how Kureishi chooses to end his novel. The closing scene of the novel is a dinner party, held to celebrate the beginning of a new era personally and

politically, Karim's new career on television in a soap opera and the rise to power of a new government. The motley gathering around the table of a dramatic re-configuration of his old Indo-Anglian family causes Karim to reflect on the vicissitudes of his life:

I could think about the past and what I'd been through as I'd struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in the future I'd live more deeply./ And so I sat in the center of this old city I loved, which itself sat at the bottom of a tiny island. I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn't always be that way (283/4).

The ending of the novel is as casual and deliberately inconclusive as any preceding episode of Karim's life. In fact the tone of the scene is one that implies continuation rather than ending. Karim's career promises the continuation of the soap opera of his life in the future and the model of the soap opera, another popular art form Kureishi approves of, is suggestive of the sort of endless, expansive narrative Kureishi's version of the popular, contemporary novel aspires to be.<sup>20</sup> This soap opera model shares with the picaresque novel its episodic structure and freedom in plotting. This picaresque, soap opera-like 'mess' of life Karim refers to is reflected in the free narrative structure and episodic abruptness of The Buddha of Suburbia. In his Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (1988) diary Kureishi confesses 'I'm no good at plots, at working out precisely what the story is' (74). The 'mess' of Karim's story and Kureishi's aesthetic of narrative is artfully contrived and is even deigned to reflect Kureishi's vision of a 'disintegrating' society, a contemporary mutation of a 1960s ideal, of a 'fluid, non-hierarchical society with free movement across classes' (Rainbow 77) and that these classes will eventually be dissolved.

The ending or 'continuation' of The Buddha of Suburbia also describes the culmination of Karim's thinking on his apprenticeship and career in dissimulation and role-play, that process of 'locating' one's self and considering 'what the heart is'. Maiorino has argued that 'picaresque marginality implied neither exclusion nor alienation ... instead it fostered dialogism' (305), and in The Buddha of Suburbia the



struggle for 'self-location' is represented as a dialogue between two ethnic forms of marginality, the 'almost' Englishman and the 'Paki'. The dialogistic plot structure of Kureishi's post-immigration novel, is designed to pose essential questions about the problems involved in orientating and settling in the contemporary English landscape. If the picaresque structure, according to Sanchez, offers a 'rethinking of the origins of modernity' (305) in The Buddha of Suburbia its function is to examine and rethink the migrant from a contemporary historical perspective.

### **An Apprenticeship in Scepticism**

The 'ironical mode' of The Buddha of Suburbia is prevalent again in Kureishi's second novel The Black Album (1995). In this book the knowing hedonism of The Buddha of Suburbia is challenged by a 'fundamentalist' brand of puritan political fervour. The dialogic qualities of The Buddha of Suburbia is very pronounced structurally in this 'debate' or 'argument' novel, and the idea of society as a symposium is developed and extended. Shahid Hasan's apprenticeship in doubt and sceptical questioning, in search of a viable position, offers up a compelling metaphor of a whole post-immigration generation's attempt to settle by claiming an identity and a version of home.

Alongside this political apprenticeship Kureishi provides the portrait of a more specific education, the literary migrant's apprenticeship in thinking and writing. The milieu of the novel, Shahid's student bedsit in Kilburn, North West London, provides an allegorical setting that mirrors the concerns and practices of the novel. The house is both a house of study, and of leisure, it is situated in a region of the city inhabited by immigrants, and it has the character of an immigrant domain in that it is both a multicultural and a temporary dwelling. The house is also, like the novel, a site that represents a disparate community in debate; it is a 'universe of insistent voices' (29). Outside his room Shahid can hear 'arguments, murmurings, conversations in Punjabi, Urdu, English, and cacophonies of all babbling away' (29). The student-house represents the microcosmic world of the house of fiction and ideology, it represents the cultural terrain Shahid must prospect in The Black Album, as he attempts to make sense

of his own experience and position in society through writing and sceptical thought. There are also echoes of a more philosophical model in the student-house, with its connotations of intoxication and open discussion, as a symposium (though in this novel it is a symposium where the notion of open discussion is under pressure).<sup>21</sup> This debating student-house and the whole sceptical current of the novel, with its ebb and flow of doubt and belief also refers back to Kureishi's own educational roots as a student of philosophy in London University.

The fatwa against Salman Rushdie provides the keynote for the debate in The Black Album. It is the subject that all the other issues cluster around like iron-shavings around a magnet. The fatwa is the political crisis that tested the cultural and political attitudes of a whole generation of young immigrant Muslims, and in The Black Album Kureishi uses the same event to explore the cultural and ethical confusions of the contemporary. The Black Album is primarily concerned with the cultural values of the settling post-immigration generation, their reading approach to history, and most specifically, to the contemporary. The Black Album is, like The Buddha of Suburbia, another apprenticeship novel, another novel that describes a political education and an initiation into society, and a refusal to settle. Shahid, like Karim, is concerned with learning how to interpret and translate a culture. However, in The Black Album this translation occurs through writing. The novel attempts to describe, more explicitly than The Buddha of Suburbia, the processes and dilemmas of a writer's apprenticeship.

The generational tensions of The Buddha of Suburbia have deepened in The Black Album. The action of the novel is precipitated by Shahid's father's death, and the phantom of this absent father haunts his son's research into contemporary England. The divide between father and son is cultural. Shahid feels his parents' generation have lost something, because 'They don't love the arts' (7). His father, especially, is so attuned to his capitalist work ethic and the desire to be respectable that he has become culturally blind and likes colonial writers like 'Erskine Caldwell and Monsaratt' (63). When the father dies the family 'fly apart' (13) and the father's 'absence' and the absence of his cultural and political perspectives is felt 'at the centre of things' (22). It is clear that Shahid's quest is an attempt to replace the preceding cultural and political vision of his father. The purpose of Shahid's education is, we are informed, 'to

distance himself from the family and also to think about their lives and, why they had come to England' (6). This questioning education is the impetus that drives the plot of The Black Album forward and motivates Kureishi's extensive enquiry into the nature of contemporary England. Kureishi argues that Shahid cannot live forever in the shadow of his father's 'philosophy', and as with The Buddha of Suburbia, a relocation to London signifies the beginning of the son's apprenticeship in thinking for himself. With this symbolic and inaugural act of argument and scepticism, the rejection of the father and his vision of society, Shahid's journey of curious questioning begins.

Shahid, like Karim before him, moves through a series of mentors, most of who act in some way as father substitutes. His first alternative educator is his 'satirical' uncle Asif (5), a peripheral but essential figure in Shahid's education because he provides a model of a secular, sceptical and politicised intelligence and because he bequeaths a collection of books to his nephew. He is also important because he offers Shahid essential advice on the reality of settling and the importance of choosing one's position in the new country carefully. This turns out to be advice that resonates throughout the whole of The Black Album as it focuses on the problem of forming a relationship with history: 'It takes several generations to become accustomed to a place ... beware of making a calamitous marriage' (44/45). It is consequently unsurprising that Shahid vacillates so much between mentors. The other peripheral educator of the novel is Shahid's brother, Chilli, who offers his services as a 'reality guide' (34) but proves to be a disappointing 'Virgil' (42), for when he isn't aping the postures and ideas of their father, he is pretending to be an American gangster.

Shahid's two principal mentors on this journey are, however, his college tutor and lover Deedee Osgood and his neighbour and teacher in the laws of Islam, Riaz Al-Hussain. The tension of the novel is created by the powerful attraction feels towards these two figures, and through his constant movement between them. Shahid is more curious than Karim, and a more active enquirer into immigrant culture. His interest in Riaz and his fundamentalist version of Islamic doctrine is borne out an intellectual determination 'not to be a closed person' (6). Moreover it is a very considered attempt at testing out one aspect of his 'historical' or ethnic identity to see if it fits him, he 'wanted to belong to his people. But first he had to know them, their past and what

they hoped for' (76). His attraction to Deedee is more complex and less obviously political. She represents food and sensuality and pleasure but also thought and engagement in culture, the moment and the contemporary. The dialogue between these two simultaneous enquiries is kept in play by Shahid's constant re-evaluations of his ideas, his moments of doubt and renewed questioning. Like The Buddha of Suburbia, The Black Album is a novel of dilemmas and 'uncommitted' doubt. The dialogic structure of The Black Album, where pre-conceptions are frequently reversed and turned on their heads, enables Kureishi to maintain a taut intellectual atmosphere of sceptical enquiry.

For example, on leaving Deedee after a night of sexual experimentation and warm intimacy, Shahid suffers a crisis of conscience, a sense of having betrayed his new Muslim friends, a sense that these two aspects of his life are incompatible and that he must choose between Deedee and Riaz. Taking his cue from the reformed hedonist Chad he wonders whether he is merely 'drowning his senses' in 'banal fantasies' (108), and neglecting the activist good works of Riaz's group. In The Black Album such ethical dilemmas are simultaneously intellectual and ethnic dilemmas, they confront, as in The Buddha of Suburbia the priorities of the individual with the priorities of the community, the activist with the figure of the 'artist' migrant.

To Kureishi this ethical and political confusion is instructive and necessary to the thinker who wishes to avoid becoming dogmatic and cyclopic in their reasoning. The confusion Shahid exists in for most of the novel is viewed as a creative disorientation or 'dereglement' of the senses:

His own self increasingly confounded him. One day he could passionately feel one thing, the next day the opposite. Other times provisional states would alternate from hour to hour; sometimes all crashed into chaos. How many warring selves were there within him? He couldn't begin to tell wrong from right ... Everything was in motion ... history was unwinding in his head into chaos, and he was tumbling through space. Where would he land? (184).

This historical chaos is, according to Kureishi, the terrain that the new settler migrant occupies. Consequently The Black Album insists on the ethical and political ‘mess’ of contemporary England, and of the necessity of cultivating a tough-mindedness that can negotiate this mess of modern reality without insisting like Riaz or Chad on absolutes. Towards the end of his apprenticeship in English culture Shahid’s scepticism has grown to the extent that he is questioning the notion of ethnic identity as fixed and indissoluble, as he asks himself: ‘How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed’ (228). He comes to believe, as a result of existing in constant ethical and political disorientation that ‘there is no standpoint’ (145).

The Black Album despite its dialogism is less equivocal than The Buddha of Suburbia in defending the fights and claims of pleasure. The novel ultimately constitutes a consistent argument against the potential puritanism and tyranny of the politics of intellectual and ethical purity. This argument evolves primarily out of Shahid’s relationship with Deedee, as pupil and lover. Deedee herself is a superabundantly fertile symbolic figure, representing a whole nexus of positions. She is partially built out of the ‘English rose’ archetype of Eva, as she is another initiator into English society and metropolitan sensuality. However she is more politically ambiguous than either Eva or Eleanor. Like Jamila she is a self-educated working-class woman, with a history in activism. The sensual (or sentimental) education she provides Shahid with awakens him to the politics of bodily pleasure. As Shahid argues back and forth between positions, attempting to resist the voice of puritan reason, he realises that Deedee is such a persuasive and attractive force because she ‘had turned the key on his feeling’ (10). Unlike the fundamentalists, who deny the body as sinful, Deedee succeeds in touching both Shahid’s body and his mind.

This is partially because she is schooled in the contemporary youth culture of the city. As another late child of the 1960s she is committed to testing the limits of her experience; the slogan on her office wall reads ‘All limitations are prisons’ (21). She is also committed to introducing Shahid to the ‘limitless city which had no shape’ (47). Like Karim, Deedee is a creature of the metropolis, naturally attuned to the currencies that shape contemporary culture. . Taking Shahid out for a night on the town she quips ‘You could say it’s an education’ (49) and it turns out to be an essential aspect of his

apprenticeship into popular culture. The city is drawn, in The Black Album, as a site (or 'bottomless pit') of bodily pleasures, a charged sensate site of feelings and desires. After his initiation into the metropolis Shahid can sense that the city has a 'carnal atmosphere' and that 'sexual tension was everywhere' (103). Deedee takes drugs 'because they make me feel' (47). Deedee's and Shahid's forays into the city also give Kureishi the opportunity to chronicle a decadent era of 'Elysian' raves (21). Like The Buddha of Suburbia with its portrait of the last years of the 1970s, The Black Album is an epochal narrative that, with its 'end of decade' parties and book-burnings (50), attempts to examine the simultaneously vibrant and desolate character of a whole era. Kureishi's depiction of Shahid's journey through the cultural whirlpool of the city is deliberately equivocal. Shahid's sense of losing his orientation through taking drugs is viewed in fits as a creative 'deregulation' of the senses and as a 'drowning' of his senses.

Deedee's contribution to Shahid's ideas on the politics of bodily pleasure, however, goes much deeper than this. She is also Shahid's academic tutor and provides a model in the book of a certain 'uncommitted' academic approach to contemporary culture. Her position is clarified and defined in relation to the position of her Labour party activist and academic husband, Brownlow. They split up because Brownlow is 'only interested in politics' (46). Deedee's approach to culture isn't so relentlessly political. Her rejection of the dourness of Brownlow's class-obsessed, pure 'Party' politics (96) which maintained that 'only those striving for change can be good' (97), is a considered protest against the idea that political activism is in itself noble. The Black Album argues, through its representation of the 'committed' actions of Riaz's group and Brownlow, that activism becomes merely specious if it isn't considered or if it is attached to dogma and prejudice. Deedee, alternatively, occupies a less noble position; her conception of culture is accommodated to the 'mess' of the contemporary. She consequently exists in doubt, and uncertainty; she has given up the desire 'to be certain anymore. She would wait for experience and knowledge' (97). Her position is sceptical and ideologically disillusioned, she has moved beyond the idea of a theoretical and activist commitment to any single party or dogma. She also turns out to be the author of Shahid's ideological disillusion, and of his eventual acceptance of a more

experiential approach to living. 'Live, if you can, here tonight' (97) is her motto. Her ethos is so sceptical, tentative and malleable to the moment because it is formed in response to a sense that 'all convictions' are 'human, aesthetic, fallible' (111) and is thus suspicious of the specious 'aesthetic' architectures that can justify activism of any stripe because it is active. Her ethos is bodily and sensual because it embraces the 'human', and the flawed, fallen flesh; it is 'humanism' poised on late twentieth-century decadence, a defence of the erotic and 'feeling' human body in all its permutations. Her hero, Prince, is emblematic of Deedee's multiple and often incongruous positions. He is the figure in the text for disorientating and 'uncommitted' incongruity: 'He's half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho too' (21). Prince, in this formulation, and in his controversial Black Album represents the culmination of Kureishi's interest in the links between pop, race and sexuality.<sup>22</sup> Racial and sexual ambiguity are at the centre of his allure, but there is also the promise in his ambiguities, (as there is in the pop-inspired sexual ambiguities of The Buddha of Suburbia) of continual self-renewal and self-invention.

Prince is also attractive to both Deedee and Shahid because he is a representative of the uncensored imagination. The Black Album is a novel that is committed to the free expression and currency of ideas and opinions. The themes of the forbidden and blasphemous that characterised Rushdie's polemical novel The Satanic Verses (and its eventual 'reception') are slyly echoed throughout The Black Album. The title of the novel with its clear reference to Prince's notorious underground record, hints at how Kureishi's novel will translate the scandal of Rushdie's text. Pop culture is again used to leaven the tone and widen the cultural lens of Kureishi's novel; Prince's record is presented as the youth culture version of Rushdie's forbidden text.<sup>23</sup> Taking its cue from Prince, Kureishi's novel is a text that approaches the political, the racial and the notion of the forbidden through the erotic. The erotic, in Kureishi's The Black Album, is the meter of political consciousness.

For instance, Riaz and his 'fundamentalist' followers are read by Shahid, and eventually rejected, in relation to their attitudes regarding the body, pleasure and challenging art. Chad the reformed music and drug addict, having been 'rescued' by Riaz, is converted to a new ascetic extreme. His response to Shahid's music collection

(and especially to a bootleg edition of Prince's Black Album) is that 'Pop music is not good' (16). Shahid, eager to test the humanity of his mentor Riaz, deliberately leaves another forbidden erotic text, a pornographic magazine, on full view in his room and watches for a response through his key-hole. He is disappointed to discover that Riaz is dourly incurious, and that his attitudes to the erotic pervade his political and cultural perspectives: 'folly didn't entertain him, he wanted to conquer it' (124). Kureishi's argument in The Black Album consistently implies that the erotic and the pure, the sacred and profane, are categories that have been colonised by political ideology. It is clear from this that Kureishi's novel is a very specific gesture towards the post-immigration generation of Muslims or ex-Muslims, that the novel is a very particular attempt at exploring that community's problematic historical orientation.

Kureishi's text is also an attempt at highlighting the political power of an erotic aesthetic, specifically the subversiveness of art that is devoted to pleasure. The postcards on Shahid's wall of 'Matisse, Hockney, Picasso', photos of 'Ginsberg, Burroughs, Jean Genet' (16) forms a cultural melange of the aesthetic tradition that The Black Album celebrates and emulates. In this sense, with its broadly eclectic notion of the potential cultural heritage a post-immigrant may draw from, The Black Album is clearly the self-justifying product of a 'literary' migrant. However Kureishi argues and demonstrates in The Black Album that the aesthetic of the erotic or the forbidden is a powerful tool for the new settler writer. Shahid's commission to dictate Riaz's puritan poem, 'The Martyr's Imagination' involves the same process of translation and appropriation that Rushdie refers to in The Satanic Verses when his character, Salman the scribe, rewrites the sacred words of Mohammed. Kureishi is clearly making a point about the importance of a healthy disrespect for the notion of tradition and that the new settler generation of migrants, if they are to create a vibrant culture of their own, in the contemporary, need to adopt a wary reverence for forefathers, literary and otherwise. The erotic in Kureishi (as in Rushdie) is a deflationary, sceptical, satiric tool. The erotic subverts the aura of moral seriousness that imbues political dogma with authority. When Shahid attempts to concentrate on Riaz's manuscript, desire intervenes and he gets an 'erection' (63). One of his unwarranted responses to his encounter with Islam is the idea for an erotic story entitled 'The Prayer-Mat of the



Flesh' (111). Even Kureishi's irony-laden satire of the aubergine bearing the mark of the prophet is borrowed from the earthy deflationary farces of The Thousand and One Nights.

Shahid's initiation, through Deedee's instructions, into the pleasures of the sensual and the aesthetic of the forbidden is an essential part of his apprenticeship as a literary-minded migrant, a migrant who values art and wants to create it. 'Desultory reading was' Shahid's 'greatest pleasure, with interruptions for pop records' (17). Through Deedee, however Shahid learns the value of stories. He learns that there is more to literature than sensation, that 'serious reading required dedication' (111). The sceptical, questioning qualities of Deedee the teacher are qualities she has learned through her own apprenticeship in the literary. Her approach to reading is, we are told, 'to enter it, extend it, ask questions' (111). Deedee is consequently the mentor who always 'stimulated' Shahid 'to think' (112). She represents openness, and an active approach to culture that insist 'There must be ... debate' (184). Her response to Riaz's book burning is to cite the 'History of Censorship' and to emphasise the 'Importance of immorality' (184), the cultural importance of forbidden texts. It is her influence that encourages Shahid to attempt to debate the taboo Rushdie book with Riaz's group and eventually to defend it. In his introduction to the debate he manages to summarise many of the concerns of Kureishi's novel: 'storytelling ... Why we need it? If we need it? What is taboo and forbidden and why ... How censorship benefits us in exile here' (152). Riaz argues that 'all fiction is ... a form of lying' (152) a perversion of his absolutist idea of truth. What Shahid values in literature is, the creative and ethical disorientation Riaz is opposed to, the disorientation of reading about 'The most fantastic characters ... entrapped in the profoundest dilemmas of living' (62). The Black Album is about an empowering apprenticeship through literature into 'new emotions and possibilities' and profoundly challenging personal and political dilemmas (62).<sup>24</sup>

Kureishi's novel is also about an apprenticeship in writing. Alongside his academic writing Shahid struggles to express himself and his dilemmas through fiction. He begins by copying his favourite writers, 'Chandler; Dostoevsky, and Hunter S. Thompson' (60) but as with Riaz's poem demonstrates a healthy disrespect for the

authority of their texts by amending them and writing his own version. Kureishi implies that imitation can lead eventually to the honing of one's own voice, that the apprenticeship in writing is more than an education in a craft it is also part of the process of making sense of one's experiences as a migrant. This is demonstrated in the furious story of racist bullying, 'Paki Wog Fuck Off Home', he writes in 'cunt-fuck-kill prose that expressed him, like a soul singer screaming into a microphone' (60). The Black Album in its attempt to describe the apprenticeship and endeavours of an amateur 'literary' migrant, argues that writing is a powerful vehicle for expressing and making sense of the agonies of the migrant experience.

Writing is also a place, as The Black Album demonstrates, where the disorientating pull between possible ethnicities, between the 'almost' Englishman and the 'Paki' can be explored. The Black Album is a novel where English and Muslim ethnicities are tried on again and again and each time retailored to suit the fashions of the contemporary. Shahid, during his journey through English culture, experiences an apprenticeship in contemporary English ethnicities and encounters along the way several versions of blackness. During his tour he assesses Riaz's siege mentality approach to Muslim ethnicity, Strapper's attempt at black whiteness, Chilli and Zulma's wholesale appropriation of white metropolitan capitalist values, and Zulma's eventual unaccountably abrupt conversion to a front-line, native oriented anti-colonial position. He witnesses the parallel but failed apprenticeship of Chad, the black boy adopted by a white couple and brought up as 'Trevor Buss' with 'no roots, no connections with Pakistan' (107), who finds he can't fit into contemporary England, and is ill-equipped to question, navigate and appropriate the cultural models surrounding him. His adoption of a fundamentalist brand of Islam is represented as a renunciation of cultural autonomy and proves to be a strategy that, quite literally, blows up in his face. As Deedee comments 'Trevor Buss's soul got lost in translation' (107). Shahid preserves his by adopting the sceptical and questioning role of cultural translator. It is of course Deedee's Prince-inspired model of cultural, sexual and racial ambiguity that Shahid finally embraces, because it is the model most equipped to enable continued mobility in the ethnically complex structure of contemporary society.<sup>25</sup>

Shahid is attacked for adopting an indefinably ambiguous cultural and ethnic position. Like Karim, and of course 'Simon Rushton'/Salman Rushdie, he is accused of duplicity and called a 'double-agent' (195) when his rebellious act of re-writing comes to light in Riaz's group. Kureishi argues consistently throughout his oeuvre that ambiguous ethnicities always arouse suspicion and even aggression in ethnocentric England, as Cherry remarks in My Beautiful Laundrette: 'I'm so sick of these in-betweens. People should make up their minds where they are' (19/20). The Black Album is partially about the uneasy struggle involved in choosing an ethnic position. It is a novel defined by self-questioning. As Shahid considers the ethnic fabric of the world 'breaking up into political and religious tribes', in a perpetual state of 'civil war', he wonders 'where did he belong?' (111). He is non-committal about settling on any predefined political identity: 'These day's everyone was insisting on their identity ... as if without a tag they couldn't be human. (76). The 'human' is reclaimed by Kureishi as a category that offers an alternative to a generation involved in a process of self-discovery, that finds, as Shahid does, that most national and religious 'political' identities have been effectively hijacked and limited by cyclopic zealots like Brownlow and Riaz.

The 'human' also offers an effective umbrella term to encompass the values of a culturally eclectic position. Shahid demonstrates his unsuitableness as a novice Muslim in his blasphemously secular and personalised approach to prayer; while listening to Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' 'he celebrated to himself the substantiality of the world, the fact of existence, the inexplicable phenomenon of art, humour and love itself ... itself another sacred miracle' (62). His approach to prayer may be called 'human', in that it is drawn out of the 'mess' of life. It may also be described as aesthetic. The eclectic position associated with the 'human' in The Black Album gains part of its 'humanity' from being culturally comprehensive, and possessed of the sceptical, 'uncommitted' inclusiveness of the 'outsider' metropolitan artist. Deedee calls for an explicit commitment to this 'outsider' artist position when she orders Shahid to pray inside a toilet cubicle: 'I am an atheist, a blasphemer and a pervert' (133). The Black Album is, however, focused on exploring the natural resistance there is within an ethnocentric society to entering this 'no-man's land'; Shahid is quick to argue back that

he doesn't 'want to be at the outside of everything' (133). Shahid is drawn to Riaz's group because he wants to fit into some form of community. However he is eventually compelled by his brutal expulsion from Riaz's group to take hold of his identity as an individual. He does this through embracing the sceptical, international ethnicity of the outsider artist. As he argues himself 'Any art could become "his" if its value was demonstrated' (112); culture is the 'every-man's land' of The Black Album. The ethnic is intertwined with the cultural in The Black Album because it is the product of a literary migrant and ultimately describes the apprenticeship of a literary migrant. Kureishi argues in The Black Album that cultural inclusiveness is the key to social mobility and autonomy. Beside this argument, unsurprisingly for a novel that explores the crisis of the fatwa, there exists a passionate defence of the ambiguous 'outsider' ethnicity of the literary migrant.

The ending of The Black Album like the ending of The Buddha of Suburbia is another provisional 'continuing'. The disillusioned Shahid and Deedee flee the troubles of the city. They escape the responsibility of having 'to think about anything' (230). After the chaos unleashed by the book-burning there is no commitment to anything beyond the moment, and they will stay together 'As long as it's still fun' (228). The ending of The Black Album lacks commitment because Kureishi's characters are always drawn as 'continuous' beings who exist moment to moment, as Shahid notes about himself his 'selves ... mutated daily' (189). It is evident that at the end of the novel Shahid remains uncommitted even to Deedee and everything she represents. There is no sense that he is in any danger of making the 'calamitous marriage' his uncle warned him against. This is because Kureishi's post-migrants are motivated by desire and curiosity, and are on a continual quest to stay present in the contemporary.

One of the best ways of 'staying present', Kureishi suggests, is through writing. The act and art of writing, the attempt to 'make sense', is the only commitment Deedee and Shahid are left with by the end of the novel. After his final break with Riaz's group and on the eve of his flight from the city, Shahid finds solace through writing:

Among unmarked essays, letters and newspaper clippings he found a fountain pen and began to write with concentrated excitement. He had to find some sense in his recent experiences; he wanted to know and understand. How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed? Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self: surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world. He would spread himself out, in his work and in love, following his curiosity (228).

Shahid feels instinctively that 'There must be innumerable ways of being in the world. He would spread himself out, in his work and in love, following his curiosity' (228). The literary quest to explain and describe the contemporary is also continuous, and his aim by the end of the novel is to reclaim himself from this continuum through writing. It is implied that writing, like other living, 'human' activities like eating and sex is a continuous, after-the-holocaust necessity, that it is an essential tool for those that commit to living in such a way that 'embrace(s) uncertainty' (190).

Shahid's choice of Deedee, although not an absolute commitment to any position, represents a definite movement away from the shadow of his father's generation and all the ideologies represented by the false historical fathers that went before, of Islam and 'running wog' migrant capitalism. 'Shahid' eventually 'had to admit his father was wrong and find his own direction' (63). Deedee offers an equivocal alternative, she is a figure for Shahid's half-settled acceptance of contemporary English metropolitan culture at its most progressive, but also of the sceptical, disillusioned, ideologically unsettled mind. Her position represents a compromise, a retreat from a bleak, violent political world where activism struggles to make an impression into the refuge of writing and theory.<sup>26</sup> Deedee also offers an alternative to Riaz's 'work'. There is a sense that Shahid is attracted to the anti-racist activism of Riaz and his cohorts, but that ultimately he values the democratic expansiveness of Deedee's theoretical position. Riaz' work, set in the Bengali council estates and Mosque is ultimately viewed as too ideologically ghettoized for the restless literary post-immigrant. Ultimately, the ending of The Black Album enacts the dissatisfaction of the literary post-migrant with the contemporary choices available

within England. The novel ends with a flight, a flight from commitments, but also a retreat or flight from England enacted within England.<sup>27</sup> The 'ending' of The Black Album neatly allegorises the quandaries of the new settler, literary, post-immigrant. Ideologically committed to the 'no-man's land' of 'almost' English ethnicity, dogged by a cultural and political restlessness that is inspired by the desire to remain mobile in society, dissatisfied but emotionally bound to the contemporary English landscape, Kureishi's post-immigrant is a permanently unresolved creature. It is clear that The Black Album, like the inflammatory book which inspired it, finally represents a version of the novel as 'a question' (189), an endless, inexhaustible question.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Pre-Millennial Migrant**

In his 1997 collection of short stories, Love in a Blue Time, Kureishi explores how the post-immigration settler negotiates 1990s England. There is, in the collection, a new context for his 'settling' theme, Karim's metropolitan 1960s-inspired generation has grown up and became less exhilarated and more domesticated. Love in a Blue Time is full of stories of new homes, in-between places and periods, unsettled lives, mid-life crises and restless, frustrated desires. Most of the stories unfold a meditation on the meaning of commitment and conjoining, and the unpredictable patterns of love and desire. The 'blue time' of the title refers to Kureishi's perspective on the 'contemporary beast' from a 1990s vantage-point.<sup>29</sup> It is a time of reflection after the 'remorseless velocity' of Thatcher's perpetual revolution of the mid-1980s. The word 'blue' also refers to the mood of the stories. These are aftermath, post-coital disillusioned tales, of dead end relationships and compromised careers, where the memory of the 1960s and of youthful idealism haunts the middle-aged desires of the present.

The stories also signify a return to Kureishi's previous debate between the 'human' aesthetic, forever poised at the lip of the 'bottomless pit' of pleasure, and the notion of commitment, whether political or artistic. The title story, for instance, concerns itself with the banal tragedy of a generation's dissipated political and artistic potential; Jimmy is a vagrant 'Keith Richards' whereas Ray, the narrator, is a washed

potential; Jimmy is a vagrant 'Keith Richards' whereas Ray, the narrator, is a washed out businessman, who has lost political faith and creative focus. Although eclectic in its choice of milieu and viewpoint, Love in a Blue Time is itself a whiter and more middle-class fiction than before, and its philosophising is closer to the tone of the European metropolitan novel of writers like Milan Kundera, who interrogate the political through the erotic, than ever before. Kureishi's interests have shifted slightly from the resolutely post-immigrant focus of his previous two novels. The binding element is the period the work is concerned with, and Kureishi's concerns lie largely in exploring a particular generation, whether white or black or mixed-race.

Desire, as ever, is the subject of Kureishi's meditations, and the motivator in many of his character's restless lives. In the story, 'Blue Blue Pictures of You', desire is described as the vehicle for 'All of life ... from politics to aesthetics', and 'a caress, not to speak of a kiss, could transport you from longing to Russia on Velasquez and ahead to anarchism' (107). Desire, in Love in a Blue Time, is the universal medium of all 'human' physical and cultural interchange. Kureishi's continued obsession with this theme of desire, or the erotic, is I feel, a provocative stand against the puritan dourness, political dogmatism, and unironic earnestness of the critics who read the metropolitan migrant's position as a betrayal of neo-colonial 'Third-world' politics. What Kureishi attempts to offer instead, through his discourse on desire, is the flawed politics of the 'human', and a metropolitan position whose justification lies finally in its fluid cultural inclusiveness, that it can and will assume and present all positions, from longing to Velasquez to anarchism (52). However, it is also true that in the hands of a post-migrant writer like Kureishi the theme of desire takes on, inevitably, more specific meanings. Desire, in Love in a Blue Time is also represented as evolving out of metropolitan restlessness in a 'A city of love vampires' (142), and the endlessly 'restless' stirrings of 'blood'. Even the non-migrant characters seem to suggest an extension of Kureishi's previous allegories of the literary migrant as a sort of cultural Wandering Jew, unsettled and uncommitted.

Kureishi's treatment of desire in Love in a Blue Time is also influenced by the period in which the stories are set. There is a muted, jaded decadence to much of the atmosphere of Love in a Blue Time, if we take the 'fin de siecle' as what Charles

(202), Love in a Blue Time may be called a work of the twentieth century, disillusioned, fag-end-of-history 'fin de siecle'. If Kureishi's previous two novels attempted to place the post-migrant in the context of the 'end of the decade' atmospheres of the 1970s and 1980s, Love in a Blue Time is about the atmosphere the pre-millennial post-migrant breathes. In the title story we are told that 'Life had become like a party at the end of the world' (16). The party at the end of the twentieth-century is more strained, however, than the previous one, for in Jimmy and Ray's lives the 1960s repeats itself as farce in the 1990s. The 'optimism' and political fervour of that generation has blurred in the pre-millennial 'blue' time into rootless hedonism and decayed values. Ray, we are told, 'no longer had any clue what social or political obligations he had, nor much idea where such duties could come from' (9). In 'D'accord Baby' the narrator's 'progress from revolutionary to Catholic reactionary' is seen to be 'indicative of the age' (52).

The story, 'Lately', the title itself hinting at Kureishi's temporal orientation as a historian of the contemporary, neatly describes the difficulty of Kureishi's contemporary project as a writer through its epigraph by Kierkegaard: 'Our lives can only be lived forward and only understood backwards' (148). The contemporary of 'Lately', (and indeed much of Kureishi's collection) is sparsely underwritten because it is set in the ungraspable present but also because the nature of the decadent 'contemporary' of Love in a Blue Time is a decayed shadow of its former historical self. This story, written after Chekov, the author of the listless, expresses the mood of the whole collection, by charting the rootless, restless, pleasureless pleasure-seeking of a pre-millennial English community. The setting of 'Lately', a small seaside town, is somewhat pastoral; it is set away from but reflects on the mores and values of the London. The story describes how two refugees from this metropolis, Rocco and Lisa, disturb the equilibrium of the community with their promiscuous, uncommitted approach to relationships and to life. The story enacts a restless straining against the edges of pre-millennial England, and expresses a deep dissatisfaction with the patterns of metropolitan and English life, and ultimately a flight away from the idea of England. The fabric of marriages and relationships is shown, in this anarchic story, to be fragile, and the dissolution of the bonds of pre-millennial trust, community, kinship and



marriage is enacted in the final scene when Lisa and Rocco make a bonfire out of all their collective possessions.

In 'Lately' Kureishi describes an ideological 'duel' between pleasure and work ethic, between the playboy Rocco and the businessman Vance. This old debate between work and pleasure is continued throughout Love in a Blue Time and in the story 'My Son the Fanatic', the debate returns to an explicitly post-immigrant context. In this familiar tale of fathers and sons Kureishi provides a historically validated twist on the theme of the generational divide. The first-generation work ethic is usually contrasted to a generation of wastrel sons; however here the austere son is contrasted with the boyishly pleasure-loving father, who 'led almost a boy's life in the cabbies office' (120). The son, Farid, the antithesis to the 'almost Englishman' in that he is a figure of the revisionist native, is a throwback to the old, neglected traditions of Islamic faith.<sup>30</sup> Kureishi's introduction to his screenplay for My Son the Fanatic (1997), explains the historical context for his idea. It was, he states, 'provided by my thinking about the fatwa against Salman Rushdie', the 'intellectual terror' of that time (vii). The fall-out of the fatwa was that 'In Britain many young Asians were turning to Islam, and some to a particularly extreme form often called fundamentalism' (vii). Kureishi explains these conversions by historicising their predicament, noting that the 'background to the lives of these young people includes colonialism ... And then, in Britain, racism' (xi). He also notes that 'Where belonging hasn't occurred ... there is, understandably, 'in the children and grand children of the great post-war waves of immigrants, considerable anger and disillusion' (xi). These conversions nevertheless perplexes him: 'was this Puritanism a kind of rebellion, a brave refusal of the order of the age?' (vii). Indeed Farid argues that 'Some of us are wanting more besides muddle. Belief purity, belonging to the past' (39). Kureishi offers an explanation for this ethnic phenomenon that is more widely suggestive, explaining to some extent the pre-millennial, decadent mood of Love in a Blue Time. 'Clearly, where there is a 'crisis of authority', when, it seems, people aren't certain of anything because ancient hierarchies have been brought down, the answer is to create a particularly strict authority, where troubling questions cannot be admitted' (vii). The post-immigrant in this 'crisis of authority' context, sensitive to the tremors of existing in a post-imperial world and as a

creature that encompasses all the ethical and ethnic dilemmas of our 'post' era, is viewed by Kureishi as a figure for pre-millennial modernity.

The dilemmas in 'My Son the Fanatic' have to do principally with how the new settler generation negotiates the 'mess' of contemporary England. The first sign of Farid's conversion is that he becomes tidier: 'Instead of the usual tangle of clothes, boots, cricket bats, video games, the room was becoming neat and ordered' (119). This is indicative of his suspicion of disorder, the chaos of his historical ancestry. The reversal of the typical pit-fall the errant migrant son encounters, Parvez discovers that his son is not a drug addict, (at least not literally), as he first expects. However his conversion is eventually viewed as equally anomalous as any addiction especially as it involves a renunciation of a formal education. This is in tune with the general 'educational' patterns of Love in a Blue Time. Kureishi's stories are either inhabited by people trapped in compromised dead-end careers or by 'dissipators' like Jimmy and Farid, characters who have renounced an apprenticeship in the 'mess' of contemporary English culture, and who like Chilli and Chad in The Black Album, consequently renounce their full, sceptical 'human' potential and become one-dimensional caricatures.

The generational twist of 'My Son the Fanatic' creates a new tension in Kureishi's treatment of the father/son relationship that is detectable in the changed patterns of the previous dialogue between generations. It is now the son, Kureishi argues who says 'You are too implicated in Western civilisation' (125), and the father who replies 'But we live here' (126). 'My Son the Fanatic' is Kureishi's first fiction to focus on the figure of the father and to write from his perspective. This is because the father of 'My Son the Fanatic' is close to the generation of Karim, he is one of that generation of rebellious sons, grown up, who are discovering that like their own fathers before them, they have no philosophy to bequeath to their sons. Bettina's response to the news of Farid's conversion is to offer him a solid alternative: 'Give him a better philosophy' (53). The best Parvez can muster is a faint echo of the pleasure principle that motivated Karim and Shadid: 'Enjoy yourself without hurting others' (128). The problem with the 'human' aesthetic that governs Kureishi's defence of pleasure and art, is that it does not fit a clear philosophical shape, it is the same shape as the 'mess' of

life, it requires an acceptance of an 'impure', fallen post-imperial social structure. This philosophy, a sort of post-imperial humanism, can only be sustained in acceptance of political decay and disorder, through an endlessly sceptical, curious and questioning approach to the world.

Kureishi's exploratory 'human' philosophy is formed in reaction against two forms of static Puritanism the post-migrant generations are caught in-between, capitalism and fundamentalism. As Kureishi notes in his introduction to the screenplay of 'My Son the Fanatic', 'Constraint could be a bulwark against a self that was always in danger of dissolving in the face of too much choice, opportunity an desire' (x). Blood 'restlessness' and curiosity we the qualities Kureishi's fiction consistently suggests is the answer to this 'constraint', and the narrative of 'My Son the Fanatic' like The Buddha of Suburbia and The Black Album, is ultimately the story of how these impulses cause the dissolution of a family, and by implication the ethnic integrity of a community. In the screenplay of 'My Son the Fanatic' this is more explicitly suggested, as the mother returns to India, the son leaves home, and Parvez is left with his tentative alliance with the prostitute Bettina. Kureishi is naturally suspicious of the ethnic and ethical integrity of communities based on national and religious affiliation, especially in a society that is defined by the endless splittings of desire. His view of a society in dissolution is reflected in his post- modern aesthetic: 'For a writer there cannot be just one story, a story to end all stories in which everything is said, but as many stories as one wants, serving all sorts of purposes and sometimes none at all' (x). The family is a figure in Kureishi's oeuvre, (as it is in Orwell's much earlier conception of English society) for the dissolving 'grand narrative' of post-immigration English society. England he argues is now a symposium of competing ethnicities, the dissolve of Empire has turned it into a continuous episodic and endlessly rambling narrative.

In his novella-length story 'With My Tongue Down Your Throat' (1986) Kureishi looks at another divided family.<sup>31</sup> Through the perspective of a post-immigration daughter, Nina, he explores the cultural 'no-man's land' of the mixed race settler. Nina anticipates the visit of her sister from Pakistan with excitement, expecting there to be a connection between them. The 'mirror' (67) she expects turns out to be there to be unrecognisable version of herself and her story turns out to be an

apprenticeship in her own 'difference'. Nina's sister resists and rejects her dissolute, working class, 'almost' English approach to culture. When Nina takes her on a tour of her territory, council estates and urban wastelands, her privileged 'native' sister complains 'my father told me of such gorgeous places... And you show me filth' (70)<sup>32</sup> When Nina visits her father her outsider's status becomes brutally apparent when her father berates her, calling her 'A mixed race wastrel, a belong-nowhere, a problem to everyone, wandering around the face of the earth with no home like a stupid-mistake-mongrel dog that no one wants and everyone kicks in the backside' (100). In the house in Pakistan, Nina lives in a separate part of the house, from the rest of the family. She chooses to occupy this 'no man's land' as she is by nature used to the individualistic, opportunistic structure of society in England. Her predicament is similar to the situation Kureishi describes in 'The Rainbow Sign' when he returned for a visit to Pakistan and found that his 'feckless, rather rootless life in London' where he attempted 'to live independently ... by chance and reason' (85) sat ill at ease with the community values of Pakistan. Nina's story like Parvez's and Farid's follows the model of 'The Rainbow Sign' and deals with the 'transcendence of family and the Victorian values of duty and obligation' of 'community life, which offers fellowship 'but at the expense of movement and change' (86).

'With My Tongue Down Your Throat' is a rather unique work in Kureishi's oeuvre, using as it does a first-person female and working class perspective. Kureishi's text is aware of the problems of translating the 'other's' migrant experience, so, in the last act of the story, Howard, Nina's mother's hated English boyfriend is revealed as the true author of the story. In this way Kureishi's problematic position, as resented educated translator of the less-educated migrant's story, writing for 'middle-class wankers' (106), is enacted and assimilated within the text. Like Howard, Kureishi is 'speaking in tongues' (102); he is, like Karim and Shahid, a role-player who attempts to explore, occupy and speak from many positions. This inclusiveness is part of his profane aesthetic, as like Howard, he believes that no material is 'sacred' (104).

The theme of 'voicing', of being spoken, is very important to Kureishi's rendering of the new settlers position within post-immigration England in Love in a Blue Time. According to Kureishi the chief danger for this new generation is the

possibility, through a disassociation from history and a lack of investment and curiosity in their culture, of being spoken by others. This is the fate which all of Kureishi's characters, from Karim to Shahid and Nina, skirt around during their apprenticeships. Indeed the son in 'My Son the Fanatic' ends up sounding 'as if he had swallowed someone else's voice' (126). Kureishi's story 'We're not Jews' through its adoption of a child's perspective, provides a parable of the voiceless 'incomprehension' of a generation attempting to make sense of the contemporary, and the mystery of the particular ethnic circumstances one is born into. The mixed race child Azhar was 'accustomed to being with his family while grasping only fragments of what they said. He endeavoured to decipher the gist of it ... silently moving his lips without knowing what the words meant, whirling, all the while, in incomprehension' (49). Storytelling is, of course, part of the process of 'making sense' of the mysteries of belonging and ethnicity for Kureishi, but there is also a clear warning in Love in a Blue Time that the non-literary post-immigrant generation must invest in history, and in the whole 'mess' of contemporary culture and assert a voice, or else risk being spoken.

The final story of the collection, 'The Flies' offers another Kureishi 'continuous' ending. The flies of the title are presented as a metropolitan plague that is accepted as normal. As one character states, 'the century is old ... what do you expect?' (206). Decay is accepted as the norm in the post-imperial 'fin de siecle'. The clouds of flies representing decay and uncertainty introduces an apocalyptic tone to the end of Kureishi's collection. The clouds signal the disintegration of marriages, families and the structures of modern life, of all institutions that try to contain wandering desire. The 'almost' England of the end of the story is revealed to be full of families, which are, like Karim, Shahid, Rocco, Lisa, Parvez and Nina's broken families and relationships, too 'disparate' to be contained. The degeneration of post-imperial England is represented in these stories of disunion and disaffiliation through the chronicling of the break-up of the post-migration Indo-Anglian marriage and of England's relationship to the idea of community, marriage and commitment per se. The post-migration settlers of these stories embody the continuous blood-restlessness that defines Kureishi's post-immigration orientation, the blood-restlessness of the settled but dissatisfied post-migrant. The final image of the book provides a model for

the pre-millennial post-immigration 'settler' as a figure for the contemporary. It is of a night full of endlessly wandering men, a generation who cannot settle, haunted by the unsettled cloud of a post-imperial history.

### **The Committed Sceptic**

In this conclusion to a chapter describing the fiction of an 'uncommitted' migrant writer I feel it is appropriate to finish with an assessment of the commitments implied in the position Kureishi adopts in his work. Firstly, I would argue that Kureishi's 'historical' perspective on the migrant is unique, that he offers a model of the migrant writer as decadent. This decadence derives largely from Kureishi's attempt to place the migrant in a post-immigration, pre-millennial context, to view the post-imperial age without recourse to the colonial, a channel of history that did not touch the generation he is concerned with directly. In other words he attempts to write as a historian of the contemporary.

His fiction, to be specific, is in constant dialogue with the 1960s and 1970s, his historical and aesthetical perspectives on our post-imperial times are drawn from his readings of these periods. His veneration of the 1960s is balanced by a nuanced scepticism regarding the less redeemable follies of the period. He states in the introduction to *My Son the Fanatic* that the 1960s provided inspiration for his deflationary aesthetic, by pulling 'things apart with laughter and questions' (vii). However he is quick to add that 'the 1960s, in the West with its whimsy and drugged credulity, also helped finish off the Enlightenment with its new age culture' (vii). The 1960s, with its outburst of popular culture and political protest, nevertheless dominates his historical perspective. His portrait of the last three decades of this century as being defined by the generational shifts and restlessness of a post-immigrant generation is again influenced by tremors of the 1960s into the 1970s and beyond. In his introduction to his collected plays he attempts to describe the importance of his new historical perspective: 'There was the ending of something-the psychological loosening of the idea of Empire and (simultaneously) the start of something else, which involved

violence', the contamination of racism and years of crisis. The questions that a multicultural society had to ask had hardly been put' (xv). These are the questions, however that his writing attempts to address.

His other commitments are revealed in his aesthetic. His commitment to storytelling is part of his quest towards self-understanding, as his artist-character Eshan meditates in 'Blue, Blue Pictures of You': 'To represent oneself a changing being, alive with virtues and idiocies-was, for Eshan, the task that entailed the most honesty and fulfillment' (108). This is partially an ethnic quest to 'join the elements', or reconcile the contradictions of that 'new way of being British' (102) that Kureishi represents through the figure of the 'almost' Englishman. This quest also inscribes a transitory, metamorphic model of identity that holds fast to the Kristevan notion that 'the fact of belonging to a set is a matter of choice' (41), and that the reductive politics of identity pigeonhole, and limit, everyone. There is also a commitment to intellectual quest and questioning in Kureishi's manner of storytelling. In his novel *Intimacy* (1998) his protagonist, whilst defending his own fecklessness, describes the energy that underlies Kureishi's storytelling: 'unrest, disquiet, curiosity and the desire for more' (97). This unsettled, voracious intellectual restlessness is the energy that drives Kureishi's narratives. It is an energy borne, like pop music, out of a generational dissatisfaction, out of doubt, out of the need to redress and outgrow the previous generation. Kureishi is, as the protagonist of *Intimacy* claims to be, a 'committed sceptic' (127). By expressing the processes of this sceptical, restless intelligence, through Karim, Shahid and others, Kureishi's narratives reveal a commitment to allegorise the cultural and political apprenticeship of the 'literary' migrant, to sceptically confront and assess the compromises and insights of that position. Most of all, the sceptical, restless energy of Kureishi's storytelling is his way of orientating his record of 'history' to the disorientating condition of the contemporary. As he states in his essay 'Finishing the Job' (1988) his focus moves deliberately away from 'the prepared centre of things'. Instead his 'human' aesthetic inclines towards the 'mess of life, 'towards the edges, details, irrelevancies' (155). The model Kureishi presents of a committed, restless, regenerate chronicler of post-imperial, pre-millennial England's post-1960s, degenerated, de-historicised decay, offers a final ambiguous model of migrant identity.

Indeed Kureishi's half-settled, half-resistant, half-degenerate, half-regenerate model of the migrant offers the sort of persuasive and nuanced description of the figure of the contemporary migrant that future studies of this new settler migrant will have to encompass.



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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This term post-immigrant describes the post-migration, second-generation, settled migrant. This term possesses a certain currency amongst critics and sociologists of the settled migrant. For instance, in a 1995 essay A. Robert Lee describes Kureishi as one of a generation of migrant writers who write at the 'post immigration front-line' (76). See A. Robert Lee, 'Changing the Script: Sex, Lies and Videotapes - in Hanif Kureishi, David Dabydeen and Mike Phillips', *Other Britain, Other British*, ed. A. Robert Lee (London Pluto Press, 1995) 69-89. Other useful studies that reflect on this second generation, post-immigration settlement include; James L. Wator, *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977); Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London. Pluto Press, 1984); Peter Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire: An Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 1988); Harry Goulbourne, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Post-Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Avtar Brah *Cartography of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Like Dabydeen, Kureishi's fictions describe journeys or apprenticeships into England and English culture. However this chapter is concerned with defining the differences between the migrant education that evolves out a colonial relationship with England and the post-migrant's post-1960s settled 'insider's' approach to a migrant-colonised, culturally-impure England

<sup>3</sup> I believe Haroon's awakening and career as Buddha may be interpreted as a genuine attempt at creating self-knowledge, and as a psychic return to Indian attitudes but it is also an artful exploitation of 'Eastern' ethnicity for the sake of advancement. The most obvious, and appropriately 1960s-inspired reference point is the Maharashi, the great pseudo-mystical charlatan who milked rich liberals for profit. Haroon is a slyly wrought migrant reworking of the Maharashi (Karim at one point refers to him as 'Sexy Sadie'), and becomes in this incantation an archetype for the migrant as rogue, moving deftly through 'middle class rooms with their "oriental aromas"' (62). Haroon's 'mystical' awakening out of a long bureaucratic sleep and resultant career is therefore also working to counterpoint his son's rise in society through acting and dissembling. Part of Kureishi's point is that the lack of distinction in the West between eastern ethnic stereotypes allows a Muslim, like Haroon, to see himself as a Buddhist guru, that Eastern ethnicity is a potential theatre trunk of disguises for the eastern migrant. It is the 'exotic' Eastern that attracts and sells in the West Kureishi argues, rather than the less palatable politicised identities that devolve out of a 'Third World'.

<sup>4</sup> Salman Rushdie, in *The Satanic Verses* uses migrant acting and ventriloquism to make a slightly different point. Saladin Chamcha is very much a migrant of the first-generation mentality who rises in society in an English disguise, with an English accent. Chamcha is merely a slavish mimic, whilst Haroon and Karim's role-playing is, as we shall see, more subversive.

<sup>5</sup> These unheroic times are respectively the Bourbon Regime and the late 1970s. Both eras are defined by a decline into a restless and ruthless materialism, a materialism that erodes the idealistic and adventurous instincts of both Sorel and Karim. The late 1970s are drawn as a period of decline through its subtly meticulous historicising of musical trends, principally the transition from Glam to punk (and if John Lennon is Kureishi's Napoleon, Karim's Napoleon is definitely David Bowie).

<sup>6</sup> As with Joseph from David Dabydeen's *The Intended* (1991), Kureishi creates, with Gene, a disempowered West Indian 'other' for his 'Indian' (and in this case mixed race) protagonist. Both novels suggest that this 'other', because he is more politicized and identifies with (and perhaps even embodies) 'blackness' more virulently, is rejected and victimised by the metropolis.

<sup>7</sup> The specificity of Kureishi's arguments regarding the immigrant become apparent in this section of the novel. Part of Karim's apprenticeship in the city involves a re-focusing of who he is ethnically.

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Kureishi's interest in the post-immigration settler has a specifically Indo-Anglian bias, a bias fascinated with miscegenation and the fortunes of a particular mixed-race generation.

<sup>8</sup> Kureishi's notion of the 'literary' migrant, it must be pointed out, is in some ways different from Rushdie's idea of the roles and priorities of that persona. Both fetishise art and literature but their emphases and preferences are quite different. Kureishi's post-immigrant aesthetic is in many ways less high-brow and less 'literary' than Rushdie's 'migrant' aesthetic, less concerned with etymologies and language and history. Kureishi is as influenced by music as he is by literature in his writing, and he is more interested in the reflexes and attitudes of contemporary 'youth' and 'popular' culture than he is in the idea of plumbing the deep ancestral streams of a literary and historical tradition.

<sup>9</sup> Eva is the chief mentor of Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (and the catalyst of Karim's aspirations in society). It is also possible to view her in this context as the definitive 'English rose' of the novel.

<sup>10</sup> This type of representation occurs in Pyke's play through Karim's lusty stage-Changez 'arriving at Heathrow with his gnat-ridden suitcase' (189) arid believing all the rumours that white women are easy prey for Indian men. Kureishi likes to confound stereotypes and expectations however in his 'between the acts' scenes and consequently Changez ends up with an Asian prostitute-mistress and playing devoted house-husband and nurse-maid to his estranged lesbian wife.

<sup>11</sup> Although the novel pre-dates Thatcherism it was written after almost a decade of her 'revolution'. *The Buddha of Suburbia* possesses the celebratory energy of a novel self-consciously set in those last pre-Thatcher years when certain notions about the 1960s revolution still seemed tenable. Kureishi is particularly interested in this English orthodoxy in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. As a result of the Rushdie fatwa, his interest shifts in his second novel and he makes that other 'English' orthodoxy, Islam, his subject in *The Black Album*.

<sup>12</sup> In this prospecting of a culture that post-1960s generations can claim as a refuge from the sectarian nationalist politics *The Buddha of Suburbia* is similar to Rushdie's 1999 novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. However, their distinct approaches to the subject of pop reveals the differences in their aesthetics and in their notion of and distance from the notion of 'contemporary'. In Rushdie's novel pop - and the contemporary time it implies and expresses - is placed at a fabular distance and mythologised, whereas Kureishi's realist novel is more interested in pop culture and committed to capturing and chronicling its immediacy and vitality as an expression of post immigration real-time.

<sup>13</sup> The picaresque is itself in its episodic construction and its endeavor to tell a life in a series of moments, a prefiguration of Modernism.

<sup>14</sup> I mean 'Modernist' in the sense that Williams defines when he writes about the 'open ... and mobile' structures of migrant, metropolitan, literary communities.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, in his 1956 novel *Giovanni's Room* Baldwin writes from the perspective of an all-American white man called 'Butch' who is struggling to repress his homosexuality. In this novel and in the multisexual, multiracial cast of his 1965 novel *Another Country*. Baldwin provides an important precursor for the sort of novel that Kureishi attempts to write a novel that, taking inspiration from Baldwin's pre-Civil Rights model, reads the politics of race, sexuality and class as interdependent.

<sup>16</sup> In his *Times Literary Supplement* article 'Lure of the Hybrid: What the Post-Colonial Indian novel means to the West', the novelist Amit Chaudhuri attacks Rushdie and the post-Rushdie stream of Indo-Anglian migrant writers for their willful, often fabular, possibly careerist appropriation of the mantle of the 'Indian' 'English' novel from native practitioners of the art (5). Chaudhuri's article demonstrates a deep suspicion of the cultural, geographical and ideological 'location' of migrant fiction. There is a sense in Chaudhuri's article that he believes that the Indian 'English' novel has been hijacked by the post-colonial migrant, a sense that migrant writing based in England, due to the geographical, metropolitan location it is written from, is inherently a corrupt version of 'native' and 'regional' 'Indian'

'English' writings. Chaudhuri's analysis is, like Ahmad's, insensitive to the post-immigration context of many of these writers. Being 'native-centred', his critique argues against how the nature of 'native' 'Indian' 'English' writing have been misrepresented by the forms of the Indo-Anglian migrant novel, without sufficiently distinguishing between the species and sub-species of that migrant genre. See Chaudhuri's 'Lure of the Hybrid: What the Post-colonial Novel Means to the West.' Times Literary Supplement Sep 3, 1999. 27-8.

<sup>17</sup> There is a sense in Ahmad's and Spivak's critiques, as there is throughout the narrative of The Buddha of Suburbia that the migrant is viewed as a sort of ethnic and class traitor. It is undisputed and inevitable that some migrant's have educations, careers and choices, both ethnic and otherwise; however Kureishi's text, indeed his entire oeuvre, because it is focused specifically on the figure of the migrant, offers a more comprehensive study of the various routes and roles the migrant may take through Western society. Spivak's reading of the migrant is in its own way 'uncommitted', the migrant is only viewed as a figure standing in the post-colonial native's shadow, as a figure possessed by a tainted nativeness. The migrant is never granted in her analysis, the validity of a discrete identity; is never, as her critique claims to attempt, made distinct. See Spivak's 'The Burden of English Studies.' The Lie of the Land, ed. Rajeswan Sunder Rajan. (London: Routledge, 1993) 150-174, and Ahmad's In Theory: Nations. Classes. Literatures (London: Verso, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> It is unsurprising that Spivak's critique contains these blind-spots. Her notion of the post-colonial is essentially a narrow one, it fetishises the rural and working class and even presumes, due to a distaste for the metropolitan, that these categories must go together. The inner-cities, suburbs and council estates of much of Kureishi's writing seem to be somewhat alien sociological zones to Spivak. It is clear that Spivak is attempting to rescue the term post-colonial from an exclusive metropolitan, migrant application but it is not clear exactly why the post-colonial should become the exclusive property of the rural, native subject either.

<sup>19</sup> Kureishi's use of the word 'fetishized' is undoubtedly provocative, designed to raise the hackles of anti-colonial critics and theorists. It is a characteristic Kureishi gesture and is mirrored in the irreverent, culturally impure attitudes of Karim throughout The Buddha of Suburbia. When the black actress, Tracey, describes Karim's unflinching character-piece based around his uncle Anwar as objectionable because 'it shows black people ... As being irrational, ridiculous and fanatical' (180). Karim protests that her remark 'feels like censorship' (184). Spivak's reading of Kureishi's Sammy from Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (1988) (like Tracey's reading of Karim's Anwar), is somewhat unironic and didactic, ill-equipped to read Kureishi's satiric, self-conscious portrait of an arriviste. Kureishi's portrayal of Karim is itself appropriately uncensored, and attempts to record the survival instincts of a generation who confront a post-colonial, post-immigration England and whose politics refer specifically to this landscape. See Spivak's 'Sammy and Rosie Get Laid.' Outside in the Teaching Machine. (London: Routledge, 1993) 243-254.

<sup>20</sup> Another source for this 'endless narrative' is, of course, The Thousand and One Nights. That 'Eastern' model for the continuous, unfinished story is translated by Kureishi into a medium for conveying a sense of the perpetually unfinished story of the contemporary.

<sup>21</sup> The idea of the symposium is suggestive in considering the function and structure of The Black Album. The word 'symposium' denotes, according to the OED: 'a conference or collection of essays on a particular subject' (834). The Black Album named after Prince's infamous collection provides its reader with a contemporary conference on race, sexuality, politics and pleasure, and is, as its title suggests, an 'album' or compilation of opinions and arguments.

<sup>22</sup> Prince is also, as an American artist, a route into a wider cultural application of racial, musical and sexual ideas. He is a standard bearer, with his backing group the 'Revolution' of a post-1960s, post-Civil Rights, black 'pop' appropriation of the incendiary politics of identity.

<sup>23</sup> Through the Prince parallel Kureishi is picking up on the fact that the blasphemous in Rushdie's banned text was often connected to the erotic and the sexual. For instance, offence was taken at the scenes where the prostitutes assumed the personas of the Prophet's wives in order to titillate their customers.

<sup>24</sup> Kureishi is very clear that the hedonist like Chilli, the former 1980s yuppie and 1990s 'dissipater' (7), is the product of Shahid's father's culturally contemptuous generation, while the inhabitants of the council estates, like the drug-pusher Strapper, 'living without culture' are 'powerless and lost' (113). Literature ultimately provides an anchor for Shahid, while both Chilli and Chad '(lack) ballast' (208) and founder, Shahid is kept afloat by the questions and enigmas of literary culture.

<sup>25</sup> It is also pre-eminently the position of Kureishi the mixed-race settler.

<sup>26</sup> However, this compromise is also drawn as part of the acceptance of the 'human', of the compromised, chaotic nature of life. In this respect, the ending of the novel echoes the retreat at the end of Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh, when the Moor returns to Alhambra to sleep and hope that he will wake again in 'a better time' (432). In this respect the ending of The Black Album is representative of the pessimism amongst intellectuals and writers following the Rushdie affair.

<sup>27</sup> This flight, involving as it does a proposed excursion to a Prince concert, might be read as a flight from the dull orthodoxies of class-ridden, fundamentalist English politics into the more playful, American, gender and sexuality-conscious, post-Civil Rights style of fashioning political identity.

<sup>28</sup> If this model of an 'endless question' is applied to the racial and class issues touched upon in the book it becomes clear that Kureishi's commitment is to writing fiction that are meant to provoke rather than provide 'answers'. His novel is composed as a debate, an exploration of possible untenable positions, an attempt to provide a model of the process involved in orientating oneself in the issues that obsess England towards the end of the century.

<sup>29</sup> Love in a Blue Time represents the culmination of Kureishi's historically shallow chronicling of the post-1960s 'contemporary', and carries an implicit critique of his shrunken historical perspectives. The 'contemporary' of these stories is often historically and culturally bleached and denuded, and his 'contemporary' protagonists are represented as rootless and historically unmoored

<sup>30</sup> In her analysis of Sammy and Rosie Get Laid Spivak uses the hedonist son Sammy and his native father Rafi as models of the intrinsically 'different' (243) models of the 'migrant' and the 'post-colonial'. Kureishi's model of the son as revisionist native in 'My Son the Fanatic' and The Black Album offers a persuasive generational reversal of this model of the 'migrant' son and 'post-colonial' father.

<sup>31</sup> This story is the fictional equivalent of Kureishi's essay 'The Rainbow Sign', moving as it does from England to Pakistan and back again, and providing along the way a portrait of ethnic and cultural outsidership.

<sup>32</sup> Again Spivak's model of the privileged migrant and choiceless post-colonial is given a twist by Kureishi. The urban working-class post-immigrant is a figure Spivak does not account for in her work.

## Conclusion

The concern of this thesis has been to interrogate the values, commitment, potential and agency of the contemporary literary migrant, to define the politics and poetics of migrant identity. In this thesis I have examined how contemporary migrant writers position themselves in relation to the post-imperial world and how they attempt to circumscribe a distinct 'migrant' aesthetic. The migrant position and aesthetic described by the writers in this thesis express a distinctly outsider cultural and intellectual orientation to the post-imperium. During the course of this discursive argument the migrant writer has been represented in a succession of roles; as an impassioned historian, a secular critic, as a sceptic and blasphemer, as a grotesque chimera, as double-faced deceiver and anomaly, as a dissident against origins, as a dissimulating role-player picaro and as a continuous, wandering passenger. In each of these critically mobile, metaphoric manifestations the migrant is conceived as offering a valuable peripheral, 'outside the frame' orientation on the contemporary, and of voicing or embodying a migrant's version of history.

In this thesis I have argued that the position of the migrant is defined by his or her historical or temporal orientation in the post-imperial world. More than anything else, this thesis argues that migrant writers are impassioned historians and explainers of the contemporary, that they are the writers with the historical perspective most suited to navigating the chaotic, dissolving shapes of a post-colonial world. The fictions by migrant writers featured in this study enact the orientating, historicising process as a journey into and through disorientation, as a processing of fragments, stories and rumours and eventual acceptance of the contemporary's deformities. As well as tracing these wandering, questing narrative patterns, these fictions also attempt to position migrant identity by looking at the metaphors and motifs the contemporary literary migrant uses to explain the historical shape of his or her migrant journey and the identity of the migrant. The migrant writers of this study describe this process of historical, temporal and psychic positioning through a number of treacherously implosive and explosive motifs; through images of gulfs, earthquake cracks, crevices,

abysses, 'power vacuums', falling bombs, and clouds. This is the cloud-mass Rushdie's Gibreel and Saladin fall through, the cloud-island Phillips's Leila sees instead of England, the cloud-bomb that hangs over post-war history at the end of Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1993), the chaos Kureishi's Shahid detects in history, the blurred migrant identity both Dabydeen's nameless protagonists and Kincaid's Lucy wrestles with. A post-imperial orientation, these writers argue, is defined by ethnic, ontological and cultural cloudiness. This cloud leitmotif emphasises the disorientating blur of post-imperial reality and identity that the contemporary migrant writer must confront in order to untangle a history.

The contemporary migrant writer's view of history is expressed through metamorphic, transitional metaphors and continuous models of narrative. This approach to narrative and history is consistent throughout this study, from the Caribbean writers who define their post-imperial orientation through the continuous act of passage to the representation, by Kureishi, of the blood-inherited restlessness within contemporary post-migration settlers.<sup>1</sup> The idea of a continuous historical past, traditionally used to support a notion of timeless national identity is used here to denote the opposite, to historicise a colonial migrant ancestry founded on displacement and passage. All of the fictions in this study present models of continual endless journeys. All of them recognise and voice imperial continuities and discontinuities in the post-imperial present. There is a sense that these transitory, metamorphic fictions redefine migrant writing's conventional role as standard bearer of post-coloniality's epochal temporality. They argue instead that the migrant needs to be reconsidered as a continuous transitional figure who embodies all the colonial continuities and discontinuities of post-colonial identity. This visionary continuous/discontinuous model of narrative is reflected in the temporal orientation of these fictions: in the proleptic temporality of Rushdie and Kincaid's fiction, the 'endless story' model of Kureishi's picaresque, Ondaatje's network of living stories and histories, the reverse historical passages of Dabydeen, Phillips and D'Aguiar. In short, these fictions attempt to negotiate the disorientation of the contemporary by processing the past in order to re-orientate the post-imperial present.

Migrant literature has been read by Elleke Boehmer as ‘symptomatic of the pull of history’ as testament to ‘the fragility of the “grand narratives”’ (244). Each writer in this study, because of the shifting terrain of their migrant journeys offers a de-centering, displaced orientation on the grand narrative of Western colonial and post-colonial history. These migrant fictions approach history obliquely, from the margins, or the underground, presenting histories that are rogue, grotesque, peripheral or polyphonic. In these migrant fictions the grand narrative of history is boldly appropriated but also approached rather self-consciously, sceptically and questioningly, from the perspective of the outsider. For instance in Shame Rushdie includes a playful disclaimer to his appropriation of Pakistani history. In response to the challenge ‘Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to the subject!’ he asks ‘Is history to be considered the property of the participants solely? Can only the dead speak?’ (23). The migrant writers discussed in this thesis of all claim history as their property, taking on the role of medium and translator for the ghosts of the native and migrant ghosts of the past. Alongside this historical project the Whitmanesque, ‘timebinding’ migrant writer also attempts to voice the contemporary native and migrant, to write an inclusive version of history that binds the marginal stories of history together.

It is clear that the migrant writers discussed in this thesis stake a claim as philosophers or theorists of the contemporary, of the temporal composition of the post-imperial. These writers, through their storytelling approach to history, find ways of representing history without placing history at a remove, provide readings of history as an integral part of our contemporary world. Rushdie approaches the contemporary through myth whilst Dabydeen and Kincaid approach it as a ‘written’ literary narrative. Phillips and D’Aguiar approach it as mediums, listeners and recorders of echoes in the historic vacuum. Kureishi approaches it as a chronicler, and Ondaatje writes as a cubist. All of these writers, in various ways, channel the potential of the migrant writer to represent what Arif Dirlik calls the postulated ‘colonial’ premise (302) of post-colonial identity. Migrants, by describing the metamorphic nature of the migrant but also by narrating the historical transitional process from native to migrant, make the post-colonial contemporary seem more comprehensible. The native other haunts the migrants of these fictions: Kip’s activist native brother, Gibreel Farishta, Annie John,

Dabydeen's Joseph and D'Aguiar's Mintah all shape the migrant narratives of these writers. In fact, there is a sense that this figure of the native is an essential aspect of the contemporary migrant writers' historicised and transitional temporal orientation.

For instance, Kincaid's exploration of the psychology of the native's metamorphosis into migrant in Annie John (1983) and Lucy (1991) offers a critical testimony of pre and post-migrancy experience through a detailed enquiry into two daughters' troubled relationship with their mother country and motherland. The wrestling figure of the native/migrant, for Rushdie, is figured in the emblematic figures of the falling wrestlers, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. In Dabydeen's Disappearance (1993) the nameless West Indian protagonist makes the uncomfortable transition from coolie status to that of educated migrant engineer, who must wield a 'Pharaoh's authority' over his coolie underlings to police his difference from them. Ondaatje, as well as charting his journey as a writer from colonial to 'karapotha' migrant, charts the transition of the Indian engineer protagonist of The English Patient (1993) from the acquiescent apprentice migrant Kip to the historicised, resentful international orientation of the migrant/native, Kirpal Singh. For Kureishi, as the inaugural crossing is more than a generation old, the tension is between generations, between nostalgic native fathers and restless future-oriented migrant sons, and even, in the case of Kureishi's story and screenplay My Son the Fanatic (1997), between migrant fathers and native sons. These writers offer a unique self-reflexive, 'before and after' view of native and migrant experience, powerfully dramatising the transformation into a migrant orientation as a fall into an inalterably widened historical knowledge of the world.

All of these migrant fictions historicise this 'post' or fallen world in terms of violent rupture and unravelling. For Ondaatje and Rushdie the violent transition into a 'post' world is explained through a bomb leitmotif. The wasteland of the post-imperium, defined by transmutations is viewed as a time existing in the aftershock of an explosive historical moment. In the conjunction of cloud and bomb leitmotifs in these writers' fictions there is a sense that the contemporary, and its diasporic tremors are read against the explosions of the Second World War. For Rushdie and Ondaatje the originary 'post' term is not post-structuralism, post-modernism or post-colonialism but



post-war. The Hegelian idea of Europe as the end of history is challenged in these fictions. They read the explosive, entropic end of Western civilisation as the spark that ignited the beginnings for renegade migrant atoms.

Indeed all of the writers discussed in this study read the 'post' period as the coming of age of the migrant. This sense of power is most evident in these writers' representation of post-imperial England. Rushdie and Ondaatje see England as invaded by migrant bombs that mean to tropicalise and colonise the mother country. For Phillips and Dabydeen post-imperial England has become emptied out of meaning, and for Kincaid it is elided and reduced to a pernicious idea. For Kureishi however, the post-migration England-based writer, England is approached through Karim with the excited eyes of the metropolitan colonist, by Shahid with the curious eyes of the sceptic, but ultimately in the stories of Love in a Blue Time (1997), with a sense of restless, unsettled dissatisfaction. For many of the writers I examine in this thesis England is viewed as merely an intermediary, stop-gap destination. For Ondaatje, Rushdie in The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999), Chilli in The Black Album (1995), Phillips and Kincaid, England has been supplanted by North America as the country migrant writers of the late millennium must confront. In her essay 'The Novel's Next Stop' Maxine Hong Kingston has argued that 'We need to write the Global novel. It's setting will be the United States, destination of journeys from everywhere' (203). It needs to be, she argues, a novel that 'imitate(s) chaos' because it is to be a 'novel (that) comprehend(s) our times' (203). The fictions of the migrant writers discussed in this thesis attempt to write novels that 'comprehend' and 'imitate' the chaos of the post-imperial world. However although their fictions point towards the possible future global direction of the migrant novel, America is never fully realised as an alternative in these fictions. The myth of England, although tarnished, is still the defining cultural/colonial myth these fictions are concerned with, if there is an alternative model to England or the colonial motherland/mother country binary in these fictions it lies in the cultural or aesthetic position the literary migrant adopts. Although, as Anton Shammas has pointed out, 'Walcott's overquoted line ... "I had no nation now but the imagination"' (77) seems a little tired, there is a sense in these fictions that the orientation of the literary migrant is defined, in some way, in relation to their aesthetic.

It is through this syncretically international aesthetic that the contemporary migrant projects beyond national and tribal borders. It is also through their aesthetic of the forms of post-imperial storytelling and narrative that the migrant writer asserts their model of a migrant history, a model based on the transitional experience of diasporic passages and migrations.<sup>2</sup>

In this thesis I have argued that the contemporary migrant writer attempts to remain rooted in the present, whilst, Janus-like, looking towards the past and the future and towards the East and the West. The migrant is conceived in these orientating fictions as a creature born out of a period of decolonisation, out of the transition from a colonised identity to a post-colonial identity. In this respect, the migrant is an important transitional figure in any examination of the processes that authorise the post-colonial period, the processes of decolonisation that have been read by critics and historians to inaugurate the theoretical end of anti-colonial agency and resistance. The fictions of these writers succeed in positing an alternative view of colonial history as endlessly recurrent, by psychologising post-colonial history as haunted by an inextricable native/migrant history of displacement and migration. The self-defining project of the contemporary migrant writers discussed in this thesis moves ultimately towards a true 'crossing over' into a history-informed orientation of the post-imperial contemporary.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Indeed this thesis has attempted to reflect these writers' temporal orientation to the post-imperium by ordering these chapters chronologically, according to the version of history that they use to inform their readings of the contemporary. Consequently, the Caribbean writers, with their sense of a diasporic historical continuum begin the thesis, Ondaatje ensues with his pre-war, colonial perspective, followed by Rushdie's 'post' orientation and finally Kureishi's post-migration pre-millennial perspective ends the study by bringing the migrant into the contemporary.

<sup>2</sup> For further debate on the topic of the problems of establishing a resolutely 'nationalist' identity in the post-colonial world. See Partha Chatterjee's The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) and Homi K. Bhabha's 'Dissemi-Nation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation' in Nation and Narration (London: Routledge 1990) 291-322.

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