



Abstract: This essay examines how Salman Rushdie appropriates the colonial linguistic medium (English) in *Midnight's Children* and embeds resistance within its commonplace and seemingly innocent lexical interstices through the insertion of Hindi/Urdu terms in his wordplay. This lexical hybridity may be examined as a creative example of Homi Bhabha's exegetical "third space" that is postmodern in its disruption of semiotic stasis and postcolonial in its disruption of the primacy of English. This paper contextualizes Rushdie's code-mixing of English and Hindi/Urdu lexical registers to produce multiple meanings and puns, maps select examples through L.G. Heller's mode of linguistic diagramming, and provides an overview of the resultant ideological considerations.

Postmodern Chic and Postcolonial Cheek:

A Map of Linguistic Resistance, Hybridity, and Pedagogy in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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I. Replacing Colonial Universalism with Hybridity

Salman Rushdie's work significantly disputes the traditionalist stasis of signs as well as the imperialist hierarchy of subjects and therefore qualifies as both postmodernist and postcolonial. In fact, Rushdie's investigation of his colonial position inevitably involves a (postcolonial) demonstration of his (postmodernist) shifting of (English/colonial) signs in ways that incorporate both postmodernist chic (play) and postcolonial cheek (resistance). While insisting that his ethos, experience, and, indeed, artistry cannot be adequately expressed without the aid of Indianisms and Indian neologisms – i.e.,

saying (in Indian words) that the colonizer('s language) is inadequate – he successfully challenges the ideological, experiential, and artistic universalisms imposed by colonial existence.

Linguistically, since the primary and necessary nature of English usage in Rushdie's work is 'always already' visible and understood, this paper will deal with establishing the Indian variations visible in Rushdie's practice of English. Astonishingly, while Rushdie's language in *Midnight's Children* was greatly responsible for its resounding and ground-breaking success, linguistic studies of his work are rare.¹ Braj B. Kachru lists a variety of extra-literary factors as part of Rushdie's vernacular: "contextual knowledges – historical, popular cultural, linguistic, and so forth," and "historical and cultural presuppositions" (61). I shall forgo these areas of marked cultural difference and concentrate, instead, on a few specific instances of Rushdie's lexical assertion – namely, his wordplay using Hindi/Urdu terms. In my view, Rushdie's radical gesture lies not in what Leela Gandhi terms "postcolonial revenge" (x), but rather in being able to embed resistance and associations within the seemingly commonplace and innocent lexical interstices of the colonial language itself.

Like several other postcolonial writers who must choose between what Ashcroft et al. simplistically term an "abrogation" of the English language and an "appropriation" of it (*Empire* 2-3), Rushdie chooses the latter mode, which is not only more politically visible but also

¹ A sound exception is an application of Noam Chomsky's generative grammar in Rushdie's literary play. See Christiane Bongartz and Esther Gilman Richey's "Checkmate: Linguistic and Literary Play in Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*."

more viable in the global literary marketplace. However, Rushdie refines the simple choice between “abrogation” and “appropriation.” While appearing to appropriate the English language, primarily by using it as the medium of transmission in his novel, he simultaneously affects transient abrogations by intermittently reverting to Hindi/Urdu, Indian languages. Weaving Hindi/Urdu into the predominantly English narrative medium works as a sophisticated insinuation of indigenous languages into the fabric of colonial English, rather than as either mere simplistic abrogation or appropriation. Rushdie’s method may technically be classified as code-mixing – combining English and Hindi/Urdu lexical registers – to produce multiple connotations. However, instead of code-switching and thereby alternating between English and Hindi/Urdu, he uses, as is demonstrated below through text and figures, what may be visualized as a code-simultaneity, a form of wordplay where the same word or phrase (sign) is bilingually encoded by the author and designed to be similarly decoded by the idealized (possibly bilingual) reader.

In this paper, I use L.G. Heller’s linguistic diagramming of multiple meanings to decode Rushdie’s code-simultaneity in English and Hindi/Urdu lexical registers to produce multiple connotations. As the seven diagrams that follow show, this postmodernist multivalent play on words – chiefly puns that pivot around homonymy, polysemy, and iconicity – can also be read as a series of pedagogical strategies that carry postcolonial consequences. Finally, I discuss the exclusivities and limitations imposed by Rushdie’s lexical practice and provide a heuristic frame of reference for several of the ideological

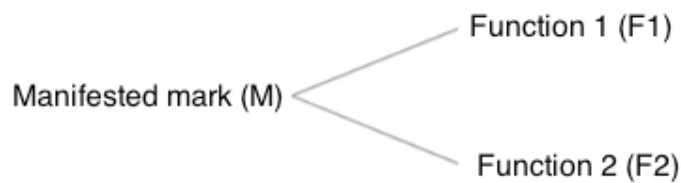
concerns evoked in the paper.² Ultimately, in constructing the ideal reader of Rushdie, I propose that Rusdhie's lexical hybridity may be examined as a creative example of Homi Bhabha's exegetical "third space," which is not a predictable dialectical site but, instead, "the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (38). Rushdie, therefore, moves beyond both colonial prescription and postcolonial polemic into a transnational (rather than nationalist-universalizing) resourcefulness.

II. Wordplay as Subversion and Resistance

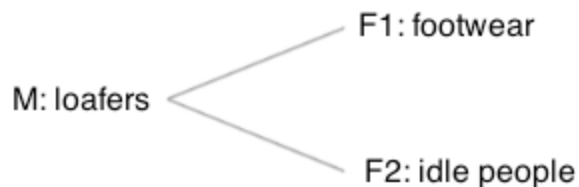
This paper uses L.G. Heller's diagramming of multiple meanings to demonstrate the shifting ante of Rushdie's linguistic ingenuity. In

² For the purposes of this paper, I choose the following descriptions of the terms postcolonial and postmodernist. Stephen Slemon describes postcolonialism as "a specifically anti- or post-colonial discursive purchase in culture" (5). This is a more activist view of postcolonialism and seems significantly more empowering than the passive historical location provided by Ashcroft et al., who insist that the term "does not mean 'post-independence' or 'after colonialism,' for this would be to falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process. Post-colonialism, rather, begins from the very first moment of colonial contact" (117). Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan locate the power of postmodernism "in its capacity to dissolve, or perhaps to denaturalize, the relation between the sign and the referent" (204). I also utilize the relationship between postmodernism and postcolonialism. As Ashcroft et al. point out, postcolonialism and postmodernism share overlapping issues: "[t]he decentering of discourse, the focus on the signification of language and writing in the construction of experience, the use of subversive strategies of mimicry, parody and irony – all these concerns overlap those of postmodernism and so a conflation of the two discourses has occurred" ("Part IV" 117). However, I respect and appreciate the eloquent efforts of postcolonial theorists to prevent the cooptation of postcoloniality into western academy-centered theorization, and I hope to have avoided a conflation between the terms postcolonial and postmodern.

Heller's diagram below, Function 1 (F1) and Function 2 (F2) relate to the same Manifested mark (M) (272).



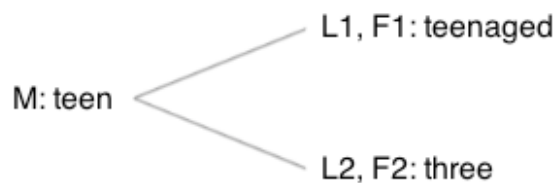
Heller's structuring of multiple meanings may be easily applied to *Midnight's Children* as Rushdie works on a level where puns and the multiplicity of meanings are significant. Consider, for instance, the way in which he uses the English word "loafers." Rushdie's actual use, "hand-holding street loafers," works by provoking confusion through comic imagery as he plays upon (and plays up) the twin evocations of "loafers" in English as idle people and items of footwear (75). The diagrammatic realization of this linguistic structure may be adapted from Heller's original diagram as follows:



In the above example, Rushdie illustrates postmodern plurality through his practice of the English language while simultaneously indicating his self-assured understanding, competence, and performance of English.

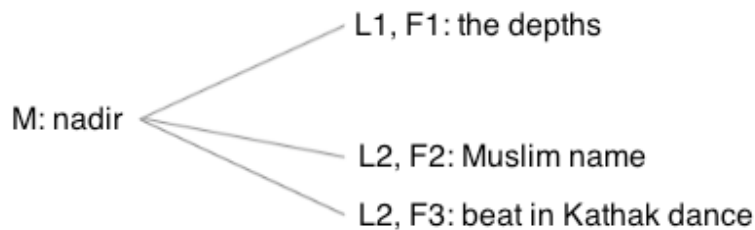
Rushdie's use of English in *Midnight's Children* takes a political, postcolonial turn when he insinuates Hindi/Urdu vocabulary into the text. The term "teen," applied to a beautiful girl in her teens, has a seemingly transparent signification, but, in juxtaposition with the

unknown word “batti,” it is apt to take on the attributes of a transferred, distorted, and ultimately foreign sign (53). In discussing the following example, it becomes necessary to introduce an additional factor into Heller’s diagrammatically realized structure – that of a second (and seemingly secondary) language. Therefore, the amended diagram would need to incorporate the idea of Language 1 (L1) and Language 2 (L2) into the extant model and would appear as follows:



Rushdie’s practice becomes linguistically and, perhaps more importantly, politically complicated by the element of a second language, Hindi/Urdu. The resulting foreignness challenges English – the language from within which it works – first, by flouting its lexical and semantic (colonial) boundaries and, further, by demonstrating that the ex-colonized enjoy the possibility of choice and plurality in utterance because of their multiglossic linguistic base. Considered representative of the ex-colonial, Rushdie is shrewder than Caliban, who learns the colonial language in order to forthrightly put it to its harshest use. Rushdie is, instead, one who exhibits his annoyingly playful familiarity with the colonial language in order to subvert it with multiglossic mischief and “corrupt” its purity and predictability through the importation of alien expression, both linguistic and creative.

To further overwhelm the non-Hindi/Urdu reader, occasionally in *Midnight's Children*, the meanings available in L2 may outnumber those accessible through L1 alone. In the following example, Rushdie works out a sophisticated allusive image inspired by the Proserpine myth and plays upon the Plutonic associations of the word "nadir" as different (but not separate) from the Muslim name Nadir (meaning "rare"): "Nadir Khan, who loved his wife as delicately as a man ever had, had taken her into his underworld" (58). Further into the novel, the word is split into two syllables, "Nadir. Nadir. Na. Dir. Na," and works itself into a pitch, "Nadirnadirnadirnadirnadirnadir" (161), thus mimicking the vocalized beat of Kathak, an Indian classical dance form.



As the predominance of Hindi/Urdu in the above example signals, the numerical designations L1 and L2 should not be understood to imply an evaluative hierarchy of languages. In fact, in this case, they are, arguably, arbitrary designations since English, L1, does not (as frequently expected) indicate the author's mother tongue; L1 is simply the primary medium of expression due to the historical mischance of colonization. Rushdie tries to establish that the signifiatory quality of words is arbitrary and indefinite and that diglossic code-exchanges are possible. We may use these analyses of Rushdie's technique to creatively argue that now, unlike colonial

times, there can be no privileging or hierarchy among languages – between imposed “standard” and indigenous stock – despite nominal, numeric tags to the contrary.

The authenticity of so-called standard English is called into question in *Midnight's Children* by the usage of numerous Indian words that have been expropriated into the English language. A cursory examination of even a small extract of *Midnight's Children* reveals an ongoing use of Indian words – either words that originate in India or Indianisms inherited via India's Islamic tradition – that are transferred into English. Though Traugott and Pratt state that, in India, “only a few native words were borrowed” into English (362), Rushdie is aware of “the unparalleled intermingling that took place between English and languages of India” (*Imaginary* 81). *Midnight's Children* demonstrates, for instance, the preponderance of the words Buddha, Scheherazade, open-sesame, cheroot, khaki, Mughal, Allah, Mecca, purdah, hookah, and dhoti, all within the first five pages of a novel otherwise written in English. The preceding words occur without explanation, as they are comprehensible signs requiring no elucidation, and, if elucidation is indeed required, they may be easily located in any standard English dictionary. Here, the L2 signs seem linked to L1 through expropriation, though, as even cursory research will show, they originate from L2.

III. A Postcolonial Education: Multiple Meaning as Pedagogy

To reconstruct the above expropriation set in motion by English colonialism and convert it into an assertive appropriation, Indian

words not yet acknowledged by standard English and standard English dictionaries also occur frequently within the text: *Midnight's Children* is continually punctuated/punctured by Indian words, several inscribed into the text without the apologetic self-consciousness of italics or an end-of-the-novel glossary.³ Indian words are, instead, accompanied by glosses occurring immediately, thereby creating an artificial, yet casual, continuum of English and Indian utterance. The offered elucidation may be parenthetical: "the nakkoo, the nosey one," (16), "I saw that Isa, that Christ," (16), "donations of whole villages ('gramdan')" (260). Less patronizingly, they are run-ons: "a four-anna chavanni piece" (73), "little dia-lamps of earthenware" (115). Here L1 words function as inadequate substitutes for the original L2 signs, a pattern that provides its own commentary.

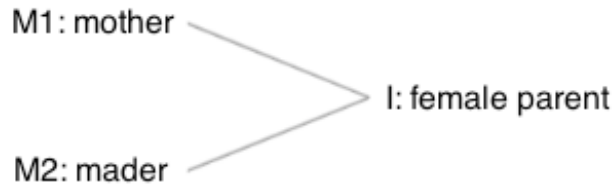
At least two modes of bridging (apart from the parenthetical and run-on explications described above) are obvious. First, though Indian words within Rushdie's predominantly English text are accompanied by translative elucidation, Rushdie may also assume playfully, and perhaps presumptuously, that they are, or should be, recognizable signs: "Talaaq! Talaaq! Talaaq! The English lacks the thunderclap sound of the Urdu, and *anyway you know* what it means. I divorce thee. I divorce thee. I divorce thee" (62; emphasis added). Or more severely: "Mr. Butt's stockpile, boxed in cartons bearing the words AAG BRAND. *I do not need to tell you* that aag means fire. S.P. Butt

³ Most South Asian writers in English prior to Rushdie use glossaries as a matter of course. See, for instance, work by R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, or Mulk Raj Anand. Even post-Rushdie, glossaries continue to exist in otherwise anti-colonial and postcolonial work. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is a case in point.

was a manufacturer of matches" (71; emphasis added); "The acronym CUTIA, *of course*, means bitch" (348; emphasis added). Putting himself in the role of the ex-colonial educator, Rushdie even reinforces the knowledge he has disseminated through tantalizing quizzes. Having repeated a phrase *passim* from the very first page (his pet-name, Piece-of-the-Moon), he leaves the Hindi/Urdu version standing semi-independently on the brink of an ellipsis and assisted only by a deliberately incomplete translation. Rushdie thus encourages the reader to make the bridging translative association: "her innocent chand-ka-tukra, her affectionate piece-of-the-. . ." (108).

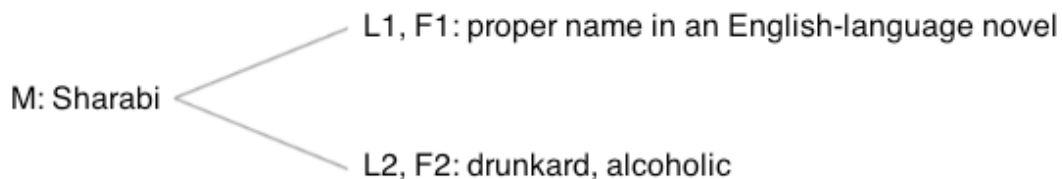
While Ashcroft et al. believe that the idea of "alterity in metonymic structure establishes a silence beyond which the cultural otherness of the text cannot be traversed by the colonial language" (*Empire* 54-55), Rushdie attempts to facilitate linguistic traffic between the two states – the colonial and the once colonized – by asserting the similarities within their Indo-European linguistic heritage. Rushdie draws attention to the fact that European languages and several Indian languages share homonymic referents: "Americans and other foreigners lived (like Evie) in Noor Ville; arriviste Indian success stories ended up in Laxmi Vilas," he says, underlining the similarity between Ville/Villa and Vilas, signs descriptive of a dwelling (180). In another instance, he writes, "Fatima Jinnah, the *mader-i-millat* or *mother* of the nation" (322; emphasis added). At other times, the similarity is thematically suggested; for example, the originator of the Sinai clan (in the novel), Aadam, is clearly an Adamic

character. In analyzing this particular technique, it is necessary to see both signs, English/European and Indian, as referring to the same prototypical ideal. A diagrammatic representation would therefore recognize that both Manifested mark 1 (M1) and Manifested mark 2 (M2) refer to a single Ideal (I):



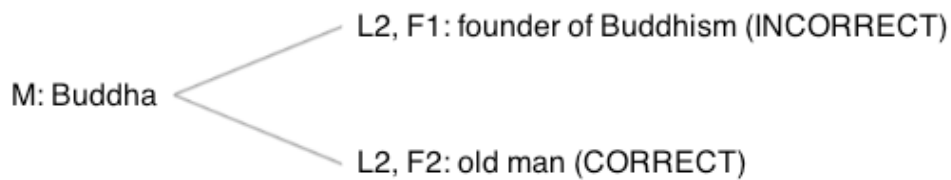
Rushdie's strategies are frequently pedagogical, modeled on examinations and mnemonic explications. His next strategy retains a pedagogical slant yet refractorily avoids bridging any perceptive gaps. Rushdie demonstrates quite exhaustively in the first half of the book that Indian words and names can be (and, in his book, are) utilized to exploit multiple references. Roughly halfway through the novel, Rushdie withdraws from continually and comprehensively explaining his bilingual constructions and begins to intermittently leave words unglossed, their puns and ironies untranslated. The Rani of Cooch Naheen in *Midnight's Children* is nominally modeled on the historical Rani of Cooch Behar. However, "Cooch Naheen" quite simply (and tellingly) means "nothing at all." A doctor in *Midnight's Children* who encourages alcoholics is given the name Dr. Sharabi, "Sharabi" a direct translation of "drunkard." These examples are, if at all, amusing only because of their untranslated, mischievous, attention-seeking secrecy (132). The first-person narrator in Rushdie's *Shame* describes himself as a "translated man" (23), and translation (both linguistic and "political," as Timothy Brennan puts it) is important to

Rushdie's technique in *Midnight's Children* (61). Rushdie's avoidance of translation can similarly be termed political: it is capable of working as a pedagogical spur on an ideal reader, who, aware that the names could potentially possess an alternative signification, contrives to uncover it. These names have a dual function – one in English, the other in Hindi/Urdu – but one function is hidden to non-Hindi/Urdu speakers. Thus, while the original diagrammatic model may be retained, the function in Language 2 (L2, F2) appears as a shaded region, not “universally” apparent.



Occasionally, Rushdie's pedagogy extends to the “trick question,” seductively offering linguistic and cultural assumptions and misunderstandings that only the very wily are wise enough to sidestep. For instance, since Eurocentric narratives, whether literary or historical, are apt to see all non-Europeans as the immanent other and notoriously, as Christopher Columbus does, see all natives as “Indians,” Rushdie satirizes European geographical and cultural confusions and racist simplification in throwaway phrases like “young goondas, that is to say hooligans or apaches” (408). Rushdie not only mimics European misinterpretations of Eastern/Indian concepts via Orientalism but also abets such misinterpretations. For instance, he conjures up an *Arabian Nights* “djinn” as Ahmed Sinai moralizes to his watching son: “Never believe in a djinn's promises, my son! Let them

out of the bottle and they'll eat you up!" (131). Saleem then reflectively summarizes his father's life as "a life-long struggle with djinn-bottles" (and, in case the reader still doesn't get it, makes the double entendre obvious on the next page by describing his father's "chinking green bottles, full of djinn. And whisky too" (131-32). Here, the intoxicating Oriental djinn is replaced by the commonplace alcoholic gin of western culture. Other arduously learned items of Oriental culture, such as Buddha (the founder of Buddhism), are re-translated to reveal alternative meanings such as "the old one" (247). In the preceding example, both available functions of the word are in Language 2 (L2). However, the easily recognized first function (which, incidentally, may be looked up in a standard English dictionary) is incorrect in the context in which Rushdie places it; the second meaning, less current in the west, is correct.



Rushdie thus suggests that to share meaning and pleasure at the postmodernist junction of the two languages is to simultaneously, in the liberalist tradition, recognize that human connections exist beyond temporal and spatial categorization and memory.

However, individual agents of human intercourse, as Rushdie shows us in *Midnight's Children*, are apt, in speaking, to polarize themselves by attempting to represent their ethnic, rather than individual (linguistic) character. Ahmed Sinai, for instance, invents a Mughal lineage, and William Methwold, somewhat more credibly,

claims a concrete colonial ancestry, asserting that he is a descendant of the same Methwold who founded the city of Bombay. Because they continue to cling to these rigid bastions of colonial hierarchy, Ahmed Sinai and William Methwold are unable to authentically speak the other's "language" and switch off their codes. Rushdie invokes, for purposes of comedy and comment, what Homi Bhabha terms the idea of mimicry, with its attendant ideas of "slippage": "Ahmed Sinai's voice," says Saleem, "has changed, in the presence of an Englishman it has become a hideous mockery of an Oxford drawl" (96). Where Rushdie goes beyond Bhabha's article is in declaring that colonial utterance is guilty of slippage too, even if only by conscious carelessness. Methwold expansively says, "Or, as you say in Hindustani: Sabkuch ticktock hai. Everything's just fine," (97), corrupting what is better transliterated as "teak-tark" into a phrase over which he can impose an accustomed (and infantilized) spelling and pronunciation. As the Indian and the Englishman attempt the other's language, Rushdie ironizes both, but he also makes clear that the Englishman's condescending effort and enunciation falls lower than that of the earnest colonized Indian.

IV. Assumptions, Interstices, Et Cetera

Rushdie's technique in the above examples, sometimes explanatory and sometimes exclusionary in its attitude towards non-Hindi/Urdu-speaking (presumed western) readers, should not, however, be over-valored. First, to maintain or insist that Rushdie's linguistic frolic constitutes a conscious and sustained postcolonial agenda is to ignore

the postmodern fragmentations and contradictions evident in its application. While the postcolonial agenda exists (at varying levels of credibility), it nevertheless remains a linguistic prank, an aside rather than the primary intention or achievement of his writing. Moreover, as similar linguistic techniques may be discerned in his later work as well, for Rushdie to persistently and completely alienate his western audience (which is responsible for, among other things, creating, feting, and protecting the Rushdie phenomenon, especially in the post-Fatwa phase) would be suicidal on several levels. Furthermore, the postmodern infirmity of the author dictates that any and all interpretations of the text (even if not postcolonial) are acceptable, independent of the author. Thus, Rushdie's postcolonial agenda, of necessity, abandons an overarching system and conciliates itself with impudent minutiae.

Thirty-five years from the first publication of *Midnight's Children* (1981), it is easy to overlook or be unaware of the book's liberationist and pioneering usage of Indianisms. As Josna Rege reminds us, *Midnight's Children* set a precedent for other Indian-English novels that feature "both a fluency in standard English and a confidence with the language that allows the confident use of various kinds of Indian English" (365). Rushdie deliberately flouts Thomas Macaulay's infamous "Minute on Indian Education," which proposes English education for middle-class Indians so that they may "refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great

mass of the population" (430). In fact, Rushdie attempts a personal revision of the process by using the "vernacular dialect(s)" of India in order to enrich "Western nomenclature." However, his effort, though laudable, cannot be termed universally postcolonial. As Bill Ashcroft shows in "Constitutive Graphonomy," the use of indigenous words in the English text allows "precisely cultural difference rather than cultural identity [to be] installed . . . because identity itself is the function of a network of differences rather than an essence" (298). Though I argue that Rushdie's use of a particular (non-English) language signals diversity and polymorphousness, one may reason that, if several of the unexplained plays on language are inaccessible to English-language readers, they are likely to be just as unapproachable for other ex-colonial readers from (approximately and in alphabetical order) Africa, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, or even the United States.

In fact, and in fairness, Rushdie's work cannot even be regarded as pan-Indian. Rushdie's linguistic frolic is based on the choice of a single language subset (Hindi/Urdu) from an overall set consisting of 1652 mother tongues and 18 constitutionally recognized languages listed in the Government of India census report.⁴ This choice of Hindi/Urdu is, at best, essentialist and, at worst, discriminative, based

⁴ My use of "Hindi/Urdu" to describe Rushdie's Indianisms is again problematic, privileging the nationalistic-communalistic term "Hindi" over the minority-communalistic term "Urdu." As Rajendra Singh and Rama Kant Agnihotri clarify, "The non-academic folk-lore construes Hindi and Urdu as two different languages, which is what they have become except for the linguist. In this folk-lore, Hindus speak Hindi and Muslims speak Urdu, though what they speak may be the same" (17).

on the numeric and social predominance of Hindi/Urdu speakers in India. Ironically – and this is, again, another of the postmodern paradoxes inherent in the work – it is Rushdie's appropriation of English that is preferred for a relative pan-Indian usage. As Kachru clarifies, English becomes necessary: "English does have one clear advantage, attitudinally and linguistically: it has acquired neutrality" (292). Further, the adoption of English may also reflect the postcolonial tragedy of a generation of writers alienated from their native languages by mandatory (socialized or legal) education in English.

This is not to declare Rushdie unaware of the fact. Though committed to a "determination to create a literary language and literary forms in which the experience of a formerly colonized, still-disadvantaged people might find full expression" (*Imaginary* 394), Rushdie is also aware of the impossibility of accurately reflecting the Indian situation thematically and technically. In fact, as the following quotation shows, it is not only impossible but also unnecessary to attempt to depict the entire Indian panorama of ethnicity and identity. According to Rushdie, "My view is that the Indian tradition has always been, and still is, a mixed tradition. The idea that there is such a thing as a pure Indian tradition is a kind of fallacy, the nature of Indian culture has always been multiplicity and plurality and mingling" ("*Midnight's Children and Shame*" 10). Helen Tiffin similarly declares that "pre-colonial purity can never be fully recovered. Post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridised, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to

create or recreate independent local identity" (95). It should be noted, however, that while Rushdie's idea predates even British "pre-colonial purity" and decentralizes British colonialism to promote and prove the success of hybridity, it is nevertheless exclusionist. As Jenny Sharpe reminds us, "the colonial subject who can answer the colonizers back is the product of the same vast majority that silences the subaltern" (100). Though Rushdie has not claimed to represent all of India, it is necessary to acknowledge that his work persists, even if passively, in class exclusion and uncertainty, in order to avert constructions of Rushdie as monolithic and homogenized Indian.⁵ The idea of the ideal reader of Salman Rushdie is similarly uncertain and does not automatically indicate or empower an Indian (or Hindi/Urdu-knowing) reader. Tim Parnell's evaluation of Rushdie's commendable literary "schizophrenia which results from Rushdie's efforts to address both a Western and a subcontinental readership" (236) alertly identifies Rushdie's readership and his preparation for this readership as encompassing both Western and Indian worlds. While much of this paper argues that aspects of Rushdie's writing may remain invisible to the poorly prepared western reader, I am aware also that appropriate comparisons of *Midnight's Children* to European novels such as *Tristram Shandy*, *A Passage to India*, and *The Tin Drum* have been made by western critics (such as Timothy Brennan and Keith Wilson), not Indian ones. This, in itself, is an important lesson regarding the

⁵ G.J.V. Prasad identifies a solitary South-Indian sentence construction (54). However, this does not provide us with any active examples of South-Indian lexical items. Rushdie does use words of South-Indian extraction, such as "cheroot" (*Midnight's Children* 5), but this seems to me to be a perhaps passive/unconscious usage.

possibilities and pitfalls of complacency. Further, Rushdie's "play," while not immediately accessible to western critics, is not inaccessible. Consider the work of committed scholars such as Paul Brians and Joel Kuortti, who have, by virtue of application and collaboration, mapped astoundingly elaborate accounts of Rushdie's shifting use of languages and signs.⁶

Thus, the idea of a hybrid "third space," removed from binary constructions redolent of 'us' and 'them,' best expresses Rushdie's situation. Bhabha's conception of a third space, based emotionally and ideologically on a Fanonian repudiation of binary politics, is described as a destination, "though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be reappropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (37). Rushdie's lexical hybridity is accordingly defined not by its English or Hindi/Urdu, nor by assertions as to the authenticity and purity of either language, but by the inventive and unorthodox juxtaposition of English and Hindi/Urdu. This juxtaposition creates a third space that does not profess unity or harmony but, instead, releases explorable, neologistic, and interstitial tensions that validate both languages; either language used in isolation offers only an incomplete experience of the text, and neither is claimed to be superior, though both are deemed necessary. Though international

⁶ See, for instance, Paul Brian's guide to *The Satanic Verses* at http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/anglophone/satanic_verses/index.html and Joel Kuortti's index at <http://www.intralinea.org/monographs/zanettin/sr/svindex2.htm>

and equalizing, the assertion that both languages are necessary is nevertheless postcolonial, since the language that it effectively champions is the indigenous Hindi/Urdu, which replaces the colonial centrality of English with a representative postcolonial multiplicity.

Ultimately, with Rushdie, as in the work of many postmodern writers, the chief dialect in use may well be idiolectic. Thus, as the author explores his polylinguistic possibilities, how are readers to recognize if they are being misled, if they are being made owls of? The proposed message is that, in order to understand, the reader (whether Indian or “Other”) must make an earnest attempt and conclude the reading experience with confidence, not in having understood but in having tried. Alertness and preparedness are required for the dangerous journey that Rushdie provides as well as for the shifting postmodernist planes of intention and understanding that the reader must navigate. Rushdie’s transnational charting is consciously postcolonial: his insistence that the reader understand – or attempt to understand – a non-colonial language in order to achieve the “third space” is, in itself, an appropriate and enduring intimation of his postmodern chic and postcolonial cheek. ©

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