

“Forget those damnfool realists!”
Salman Rushdie’s Self-Parody as
the Magic Realist’s “Last Sigh”

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MAGIC REALISM IS in danger of becoming what the Australian novelist Peter Carey has called a “cheap cliché” (11). Recently it has been so widely employed that it has lost its cachet as an *avant garde* form. The problem lies in its popularization by writers of divergent skills and the paradoxical critical depreciation of the form, which directly results from such mass popularity. Magic realism is the accepted juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary in a narrative that otherwise appears to be “reliable” and objective, but the extraordinary loses its extraordinariness when it becomes predictable through repetition. It becomes just a writerly trope. Such an emptying of the form has become troublesome for those writers who have come to be associated with magic realism. On one hand, Gabriel García Márquez, often cited as the father of the form, adamantly resists the imposition of the label magic realism on his work, as he argues that such writing is simple narrative trickery. García Márquez maintains that many of his European readers see the magic in his stories but do not see the realism, because “their rationalism prevents them seeing that reality isn’t limited to the price of tomatoes and eggs” (66). On the other hand, Salman Rushdie, whose novel *Midnight’s Children* is often cited as the quintessential postcolonial magic realist novel in “english,” has not rejected the label as firmly.¹ In his comments on García Márquez from 1982, for instance, Rushdie defends the form as capable of expressing a “genuinely ‘Third World’ consciousness” (*Imaginary* 301). However, it increasingly seems that Rushdie’s patience with the heightened predictability of the literary conventions of magic realism, and its critical reception, could be

growing thin. *The Moor's Last Sigh* is an answer to such disintegrating patience.²

While the novel is arguably magic realist, Rushdie effectively parodies the form to gain critical distance. *The Moor's Last Sigh* contains incidents and situations from common life which are infused with the extraordinary (for example, synagogue tiles act as ever-changing postcards for the deserted son of a world traveler). However, *The Moor's Last Sigh* parodies both magic realism and its celebrated magic realist predecessor, *Midnight's Children*, as it points to the inadequacies of the literary convention Rushdie himself helped to pioneer in an "english language" context.³ The early novel is a primary intertext for the later one precisely so that Rushdie can retain his signature style, point to the popular/critical appropriation of his form of writing and, at the same time, provide a critique of urban Indian politics, as he does in *Midnight's Children*.

There is an enduring conversation between *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Indeed, the dialogue is so loud that it is almost impossible not to eavesdrop. Although the novels were published fourteen years—and a *fatwa*—apart, the degree to which they interconnect evinces a self-conscious self-referentiality.⁴ The earlier text echoes synchronically throughout the later one: first by Rushdie's repetition of what has become his signature style, most notably his use of magic realism; secondly in the repetition of a familial narrative voice; and thirdly in the incorporation and development of specific characters from *Midnight's Children*, most notably A(a)dam Sinai/Braganza/Zogoiby. In typical parodic fashion, Adam, the character representing hope in one novel, becomes the harbinger of doom in the other. *The Moor's Last Sigh* is in many ways a repetition of *Midnight's Children*, but it is a repetition with a critical difference—a key element of Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody. The question becomes, when reading *The Moor's Last Sigh* as a parody of *Midnight's Children*, what is the critical difference? While magic realism is parodied in the novel, the parody is juxtaposed with an expansion of political awareness in the increased politicization of the narrative; the increased exposure of corruption in corporate India; the increased depiction of the

devastation wrought by religious fundamentalism in Bombay, and the increased hopelessness of a secular pluralism. Simply put, the repetition between the novels acts to highlight such critical differences.

While several critics and reviewers have noted the formal and thematic links between the two novels, few have attempted to provide a possible justification for such obvious repetition. The duplications between the texts have generally been denounced as derivative and lacking originality. For example, in the post-script to a book-length study on Rushdie's work, Catherine Cundy registers stylistic and thematic links between the novels but argues that *The Moor's Last Sigh* is inferior, because it is "less engaged and less heartfelt" than *Midnight's Children* (115). The criticism launched at Rushdie's latest novel centers on its sequel-like quality (in the most Hollywood manner). However, such criticism neglects to account for the somewhat hackneyed, but intentional, parodic elements that emerge with the intertextuality and are littered throughout the text.

The direct references in *The Moor's Last Sigh* to specific characters and incidents in *Midnight's Children* indicate that the novels should be read together. Of García Márquez, Rushdie has said: "It sometimes seems, however, that García Márquez is consciously trying to foster a myth of 'Garcíaland.' It's as though García Márquez is asking us to link the books, to consider each in light of the other" (*Imaginary* 302). Analogously, Rushdie's own echoing of his previous works suggests that he is also trying to foster a myth of "Rushdieland." In fact, all of Rushdie's six novels reverberate in their shared use of specific narratological features. In *The Moor's Last Sigh* many aspects of his "signature style" of storytelling are repeated. This style is multi-layered, combining a punning sense of humour; self-reflexive meta-fiction; fragmented spatio-temporal shifts; a disjointed and non-linear chronology; analepsis and prolepsis; impeding and retarding devices; hyperbolic, twisted, and telescopic language; the exploitation of "real" historical personages beside fictional characters; a picaresque autobiography with a rhetorical narrator; a direct reader address, and a regenerative style of storytelling. "Rushdieland" has a variegated landscape.

Furthermore, the family resemblance between the two narrators is unmistakable, even while their motivations may be contrasted. The narrator of *The Moor's Last Sigh* is clearly the offspring of the same creative mind as the narrative voice of *Midnight's Children*. He has inherited Saleem's narrative style, his rhetorical tricks, and his bombastic cynicism in addressing politics. Moraes and Saleem lead parallel Bombay childhoods, in spite of Saleem's ten-year seniority. The primary difference between the narrators lies, not as Cundy suggests, in the depoliticization of Moraes, but rather in his fundamental lack of egotism.⁵ Such a dearth of conceit signifies that, as a narrator, he is not "responsible" for history as Saleem is; rather, he is subject to its processes. Instead of changing the course of history as Saleem does time and again (even though in the second half of *Midnight's Children* Saleem loses much of his conceit), Moraes is without substantial political agency.⁶ The focus shifts from an emphasis on the self-absorbed narrator who directly *affects* history, as in *Midnight's Children*, to a concentration on the narrator as a Bombayite being *affected* by history. As a citizen of "Rushdieland," Moraes is an ironic inversion of Saleem.

"Rushdieland" is also populated by character-types: the cook who infuses his food with emotions and memories, the grandparents whose stories must be told before the narrator can be born, the compromised servant, the adulterous parents, the anguished sibling(s), and the questionable paternity. The stock characters in *The Moor's Last Sigh* are accompanied by fictional events that resurface from Methwold's Estates, Saleem's childhood home: Commander Sabarmati, who shot his wife and her lover in *Midnight's Children*, is reconciled with his wife and lives in Toronto in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Dom Minto, the ancient detective, returns as Bombay's leading centenarian private investigator. Even Cyrus Dubash, one of Saleem's boyhood friends, appears in a cameo spot after becoming the "magic child" Lord Khusro Khusrovani Bhagwan, and is consulted about Moraes's accelerated growth. A passing reference, by Moraes, to the "Braganza Brand" lime and mango pickles' growing popularity foreshadows the arrival of the most developed intertextual character, A(a)dam Sinai/Braganza-later-Zogoiby (199).

A(a)dam's history, recounted in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, is a synopsis of part of the story of *Midnight's Children*:

It seems he was originally the illegitimate child of a Bombay hooligan and an itinerant magician from Shadipur U.P., and had been unofficially adopted, for a time, by a Bombay man who was missing-believed-dead, having mysteriously disappeared fourteen years ago, not long after his allegedly brutal treatment by government agents during the 1974-77 Emergency. (342)

Although unnamed, Saleem figures prominently here in this overt reference to *Midnight's Children*. Saleem's story is finally, albeit rather mysteriously, closed. Further, A(a)dam's biological parents, Parvati and Shiva, are named shortly after his introduction into *The Moor's Last Sigh* (358). After recapping the story of A(a)dam's life in the previous novel, Rushdie links the texts by providing a narrative life for him between the two novels: "since then the boy had been raised in a pink skyscraper by two elderly Goan Christian ladies who had grown wealthy on the success of their popular range of condiments, Braganza Pickles" (*Moor's* 342). These elderly ladies are, of course, Mary Pereira/Mrs. Braganza, the ayah who switched Saleem and Shiva at birth, and her sister Alice (*Midnight's* 458). John Ball has suggested that *The Moor's Last Sigh* brings the political themes of its predecessor "up to date" as it extends *Midnight's Children* into the 1980s and 1990s. It also brings the individual fictional characters "up to date" in such a climate.

In *Midnight's Children*, Aadam, as a young child, embodies Saleem's tentative hope for the future: "the sons of the great unmake their parents. But I too, have a son; Aadam Sinai, flying in the face of precedent, will reverse the trend: Sons can be better than their fathers, as well as worse" (*Midnight's* 333).⁷ *Midnight's Children* ends with a shadow of a hope manifested in Aadam's birth, growth, and speech, even though such hope is tarnished by his dubious parentage. In *The Moor's Last Sigh* we find that Adam, who has lost the second a in his name (Aadam—Adam) and has been thus rechristened in honour of the lapsed Edenic figure, neither reverses the trend nor flies in the face of precedent. He bursts into the novel as the eighteen-year-old "boy-wonder" bringing the "birth of a new age" to corporate India (343).

Yet, his time as the “twenty-first century kid” is short lived (359). Saleem’s adopted son in *Midnight’s Children* becomes the adopted son of Moraes’s father, Abraham Zogoiby, in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* and thus usurps Moraes’s role as heir apparent. As he is raised in Mrs. Braganza’s notably Christian home, Adam’s allegorical Christian name signals his already predetermined end. In the rooftop garden of his newly adopted father, Adam causes his own fall. As he exits the text, we hear that he will “rot in jail” on multiple counts of corruption, drug-smuggling, arms dealing, money laundering, and procuring (*Moor’s* 370). In the figure of Adam, Saleem’s metaphorical hope for the future of India is truncated.

However, it would appear that Adam’s fate was sealed in 1987, eight years prior to the publication of *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, when, in reaction to current political events in Bombay, Rushdie wrote:

I remember when *Midnight’s Children* was first published in 1981, the most common Indian criticism of it was that it was too pessimistic about the future. It’s a sad truth that nobody finds the novel’s ending pessimistic anymore, because what has happened in India since 1981 is so much darker than I had imagined. If anything, the book’s last pages, with their suggestion of a new, more pragmatic generation rising up to take over from the midnight children, now seem absurdly, romantically optimistic. (*Imaginary* 33)

Rushdie redresses such romantic optimism through the satiric representation of the pragmatic generation’s attempts to modernize corporate India with computers and user-friendly language. Adam, the emblematic, cyber-minded member of generation-X, fails miserably. Rushdie parodies his own naïve optimism in the conclusion to *Midnight’s Children* through the decidedly apocalyptic incorporation of Adam into *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Not only does Adam fail individually, but his hubris-induced mistakes lead to the destruction of large portions of the city of Bombay.

In his essay “Imaginary Homelands,” written one year after the publication of *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie writes that the novel is neither as nihilistic nor as despairing as it was originally perceived; rather, the tension in the text lies in the “paradoxical opposition between form and content” of the narrative, where the multitudinous form is the “optimistic counterweight

to Saleem's personal tragedy" (16). The paradox to which he draws attention in *Midnight's Children* resonates throughout *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Again, the recent novel is a vehicle for Rushdie to update his observations on such an overly optimistic outlook. The narrative, which "teems" with the "non-stop self regeneration" of a multitudinous structure, is juxtaposed with a damning critique of contemporary Indian politics and urban society (16). In this instance, however, such a juxtaposition does not undermine the nihilistic aspects of the text precisely because the novel parodies the site of multiplicity—magic realism.

In the fourteen years between *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* magic realism has gained currency on the world market and been subject to considerable academic debate. The debate begins with the very configuration of the form itself. Some even see such an appellation as a forced imposition of a Western term on a transcultural mode of writing. While I understand this criticism, it seems that for the purposes of this paper, since Rushdie himself uses the term to describe García Márquez's writing (even while García Márquez is vocally against it) he has not always been averse to either the term or the concept.⁸ Nonetheless, in his recent novel Rushdie clearly employs magic realism with a large grain of salt (or spice in this case).

The German art critic Franz Roh coined the term "Magischer Realismus" in 1925 to characterize the return, in painting, to Realism after Expressionism's more abstract style. For Roh, such art is not just a simple imitation of the real but a "representation of what the real might be" (17). Initially, when the term was introduced into a Spanish literary context from Roh's visual art context, it applied to the fusion of geography, history, myth, politics, culture, language and the oral traditions of South and Central America. Alejo Carpentier, in his 1949 article entitled "On the Marvelous Real in America," defined "lo real maravilloso" as a "uniquely American form" (75) which reflected the extraordinary reality of the region; consequently, the study of magic realist literature was, until the late 1970s, often limited to Latin American locations.⁹ More recently, however, the popular form has become adopted by writers globally.

Because of its Latin American literary origins, magic realism has been sometimes viewed as an exemplary form of writing from

the "margins." To this end, Jeanne Delbaere has labelled it as the "energy of the margins" in her essay of that title. By the same token, for Theo D'haen magic realism is a "strain of post-modernism" written by "ex-centrics" speaking from "a place 'other' than 'the' or 'a' center" (194). Yet, for D'haen the margin is anywhere outside of an undefined "privileged center" (195). Similarly, according to Wendy Faris, magic realism is "clearly designed for the entertainment of the readers" (163) as post-modernism often produced in the "peripheral regions of Western culture" (165). The political, social, and historical specificities of the "periphery" are troublingly vague in such a culturally "blind" definition.

Contradictorily, magic realism has also been perceived as more than a strain of postmodernism located in the "periphery." It has been imbued with the ability to carry resistance in order to "move the center" and "decolonize the mind," to use Ngûgî's phrases (albeit in other contexts).¹⁰ In this formulation magic realism is a suitable form for the inclusion of politicized commentary in what Stephen Slemon has seen as a prominent postcolonial discourse. Rushdie's comments on magic realism from 1982 demonstrate an analogous appreciation of the form. Rushdie's awareness of the form's political function is illustrated in his discussion of García Márquez's magic realism:

It deals with what Naipaul has called "half-made" societies, in which public corruptions and private anguishes are somehow more garish and extreme than they ever get in the so-called "North," where centuries of wealth and power have formed thick layers over the surface of what's really going on. In the works of Márquez, as in the world he describes, impossible things happen constantly, and quite plausibly, out in the open under the midday sun. It would be a mistake to think of Márquez's literary universe as an invented self-referential closed system. He is not writing about Middle Earth, but about the one we inhabit. Macondo exists. That is its magic.

(*Imaginary* 301-02)

In the same way, the India of *Midnight's Children* contains garish depictions of public corruption and extreme illustrations of private anguishes. In his early novel Rushdie uses the magic realism he attributes to García Márquez to uncover the thick layers that cover the surface of power and wealth in India. While

this is also true of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie's self-parody questions the efficacy of magic realism at unmasking corruption, if it is overused or used in so many instances void of such a commentary. Again, he parodies his own early idealism through his later repetition. This novel confronts the possibility that magic realism has become a fetishized form of resistance, emptied of any actual resistance value, even as Rushdie harnesses and then subverts the power of the fetish. The multiplicity that is available in the magic realism of *Midnight's Children* is no longer expedient in the context of *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

The question of postcoloniality, often problematically set up as a discourse of the multiplicity of the periphery, has elicited mixed responses from many corners including Rushdie himself. In two articles published in the popular press within a year of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, he argues for and against the idea of the postcolonial present. His comments in *The New Yorker*, summer 1996, contradict his comments in *Time* a year later. The first article, "In Defense of the Novel, Yet Again," Rushdie's chivalrous nod to Sir Philip Sidney, is a response to the exaggerated rumors of the death of the novel as reported by Professor George Steiner in his address to the British Publishers Association the previous year. According to Rushdie, Steiner claims that "it is almost axiomatic today that the great novels are coming from the far rim, from India, from the Caribbean, from Latin America" (49). Rushdie takes issue with this "very Eurocentric lament" (49) as he maintains, importantly, that

instead of the Death of the Novel might it not be simply that a new novel is emerging—a *postcolonial novel*, a decentered, transnational, interlingual, cross-cultural novel—and that in this new world order, or disorder, we find a better explanation of the contemporary novel's health. (50; emphasis added)

Rushdie's version of the postcolonial novel "crosses frontiers of knowledge as well as topographical boundaries" (50). While he does not revert to the geographic determinism, or to use Amaryll Chanady's term the "territorialization of the imaginary," of Carpentier, his definition of the postcolonial novel is in fact still geographically located. It has expanded the borders of "Rushdie-land." The characteristics he notes as distinctly postcolonial

are remarkably similar to his own signature characteristics. His definition of the postcolonial novel precludes fiction produced around the globe that is not “decentered,” not “transnational,” not “interlingual,” and not “cross-cultural.” He not only affiliates himself with other writers of the “far rim” (a term he objects to but uses rhetorically), he defines the fiction of those locations in terms of his own style—a style that has all the characteristics of an amorphous magic realism. He is sagaciously marketing a postcolonial product of which his own novel is the primary example—essentially creating a consumer desire for a coterie of novelists whose fiction is comparable to his own. Rushdie’s fiction is postcolonial by his own criteria.

In “India at Five-0,” however, the *Time* magazine article that both celebrates and laments fifty years of post-Independence India, Rushdie claims that the end of “postcolonial India” has come in an age of overwhelming “disenchantment” (22). So while he argues that the postcolonial novel is alive and well in *The New Yorker*, he claims that the postcolonial age is over in *Time*. Victor J. Ramraj makes sense of this disjunction as it is manifested in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* by pointing to Moraes’s mother’s family, the wealthy spice trading da Gamas (particularly Epiphania, Camoens, and Aires), as representing the last of the anglophilic Macaulay minutemen. Following Rushdie’s lead in *Time*, Ramraj further contends that Moraes’s immediate family represents the beginning of the end of postcolonialism. Their deaths signal the destruction of the postcolonial age in India. It seems that while the postcolonial age is essentially finished, for Rushdie it may still be documented in the postcolonial novel form. Or, perhaps this notion too is being parodied in this obvious example of a “decentered” and “transcultural” text reminiscent of *Midnight’s Children*. The first half of the novel takes place prior to the Emergency, as it presents a parallel history to the one depicted in *Midnight’s Children*. This time, however, the focus is on the Jewish, Christian, and other marginal (but not marginalized) populations of India. After these parallel histories have been presented Rushdie can proceed to tell the story of post-postcoloniality. It is as if he is filling in the holes of an under-exposed history by using an over-exposed form.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh* Rushdie expands the conventions of magic realism, where the extraordinary is situated predominantly at the level of incident, to the level of characterization. The multiplicity of characters echoes the multitudinous structure of the novel. This too is another element of his self-parody. The Zogoiby family, a "far-from-ordinary clan," are the extraordinary, the elite of Bombay society (13). They are described in superlatives: the most talented (Aurora is the most accomplished artist in India's history), the most corrupt (Abraham deals in flesh, drugs, and arms for profit), the fastest growing (Moraes's aging process is twice as fast as normal), the strongest (Moraes's club-fist can knock out the meanest opponent or the most obliging servant), the most manipulative (Uma, Moraes's lover, succeeds at having him disowned by his family), the most beautiful (Ina, Moraes's model sister, is voted the role model of the year, beating Indira Gandhi two to one), the most religious (Minnie, Moraes's Catholic sister, joins an Order of Nuns and is chastised for willingly suffering too much), and the most righteous (Mynah, Moraes's activist sister, is the leading young feminist lawyer in the country). While Moraes does not embrace his extraordinariness, he does accept it: "I had to pay for being exceptional: though, as I have said, I had no desire for exceptionality—I wanted to be Clark Kent, not any kind of Superman" (164). In this mock-epic the protagonist requests his own deflation. Instead of desiring comic strip superhero status, as Adam seems to, he desires an unattainable ordinariness. For some, because of an accident of birth (or the writing of a controversial novel), the ordinary is unfeasible. Rushdie's self-parody is firmly entrenched as he indicates that extraordinariness is not always the site of strength. Such a mockery of difference also adds to Rushdie's underlying critique of the proponents of magic realism who envision the form to be politically imbricated, as he himself did.

As magic realism is the juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary, the extraordinary characters are juxtaposed with everyday Bombay life. There is a popular presence in the shadows of the novel. When she arrives in the city, Aurora sketches the quotidian lives of the "people" of Bombay. She goes

among them as the “unblinking lizard on the wall of history, watching, watching” and drawing (131). She is a “social realist” artist:

She returned day after day to her chosen scenes, and in slow steps the magic worked, people stopped noticing her; they forgot that she was the great lady descending from a car as big as a house and even had curtains over its windows, and allowed the truth of their lives to return to their faces. (129)

So even Aurora’s extraordinariness, like the exceptionality of all the characters, is over time accepted as ordinary. Yet, this acceptance is only an illusion, quickly dispelled in the murder of each member of the Zogoiby family, except Moraes. Although it is more spectacular in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, such destruction of extraordinariness has its roots in *Midnight’s Children*, where exceptionality is sterilized out of the children born in the midnight hour. The extraordinariness of Moraes, his accelerated growth, and his club hand, become agents of destruction rather than metaphors of social change in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Magic realism can not be viewed as a positive counterpoint to the pessimism in the novel when the extraordinary is so thoroughly destroyed in the text.

In the intervening years between the publications of *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* the political situation in India deteriorated (according to Rushdie, who is explicit in his condemnation of Indian politics) with the assassinations of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, bombings in Bombay, Muslim-Hindu Riots, and the growth of right-wing religious fundamentalism.¹¹ The recent novel is a strong indictment of such contemporary politics. The “Bombay Central” section, in particular, portrays the dissolution of Bombay, Moraes’s family, and to a lesser extent, India. In this section, the level of magic realism is minimal. Perhaps the content is too caustic to risk undermining it with even a subtle self-parody. Parody is eclipsed by Juvenalian satire, when Moraes is rescued from a rat-and-cockroach-infested prison to become a corrupt Hindu-fundamentalist politician’s hit-man. James Harrison has argued that, in *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie’s “treatment of Indira Gandhi as the Widow ‘out Swifts’ Swift” (46). I would add that his treatment of Bal Thackeray in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* out-Rushdie’s Rushdie.

In "Bombay Central" the narrator's family is annihilated. Moraes's mother tumbles to her death; his father and sister explode, separately; the face of his fiancée, Nadia Wadia, is slashed; Bombay is nearly destroyed in bombings, and Moraes becomes a murderer seeking vengeance for his mother's death. *The Moor's Last Sigh* is haunted by the many members of Saleem's family (his mother, father, two aunts, grandmother, and cousin) who die in the bombing of Karachi in *Midnight's Children*. Yet, the magnitude of violence enacted in this section is unparalleled in *Midnight's Children*. It is also even more of a sardonic commentary on the political situation in India than the description of the Widow's act of mass sterilization during the Emergency in the earlier novel. We are left with the widespread destruction of a whole family and a whole city. Still, the section ends with the disfigured former Miss India, Nadia Wadia, speaking of hope: "The city will survive. New towers will rise. Better days will come. Now I am saying it every day. Nadia Wadia, the future beckons. Harken to its call" (377). We leave the section, and India, with the idea of regeneration delivered in a tone reminiscent of an early 1990s version of a self-help seminar. Yet this illustration of hope hollowly echoes Saleem's hope at the end of *Midnight's Children*.

Nadia Wadia's speech provides an ironic counterpoint to the devastation wrought on Bombay. In his review of *Brazil*, Rushdie criticizes Terry Gilliam's film because it presents a one-sided dystopia. Offering only token (and therefore ineffective) individual resistance is, he argues, a romantic trap, because it is "too easy" and therefore futile. For Rushdie, a dystopia is more effectively presented if there is some kind of dissension among the optimists and the pessimists. Nadia Wadia's speech is just such an act of dissension in its optimism. Yet, in this novel, the self-critical element is always at hand, as Rushdie only half-heartedly presents an alternative to the dystopia. The pattern of destruction and a subsequent tongue-in-cheek regeneration resurfaces in Rushdie's parodic work. We glimpse the apocalypse in Book Three of *The Moor's Last Sigh*. The "hope-filled" ending of the section, however, only parodically presents a post-apocalyptic landscape as an alternative to the dystopia.

The catastrophic content of *The Moor's Last Sigh* corresponds to Brian Conniff's apocalyptic vision of magic realism. In his discussion of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Conniff asserts that the overall optimism that usually accompanies magic realism has a darker side: "it can depict events strange enough, and oppressive enough, to make apocalypse appear not only credible but inevitable" (168). While an inevitable narrative disintegration is the result of both *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, there is a more consistent movement toward a destructive climax in the latest novel. This is first evident with Moraes's accelerated growth and subsequently with the general rate of destruction in the text. Rushdie's emphasis on the paradoxical tension between content and form (between optimism and pessimism) in *Midnight's Children* indicates that it is unlikely that his use of magic realism is to signal catastrophe. This is sufficiently achieved in the novel's ominous content. *The Moor's Last Sigh*, however, parodies such a paradox as it reaches and transcends an apocalypse. Magic realism in *The Moor's Last Sigh* mockingly imitates the role of the multitudinous paradoxical counterpart to the menacing content. It cannot hold such unproblematic counterpoint status because of the inevitability of destruction in the novel.

While the third section of *The Moor's Last Sigh* details the destruction of Bombay, the fourth, and final, section follows Moraes's personal ruin. The novel concludes with a parodic return to the brief moment of speculative optimism offered by Nadia Wadia. Before such a point can be reached, however, the narrator travels through his own slough of despair. In the replicated Alhambra prison tower of Vasco Miranda, his mother's ex-lover, we learn that the story of Moraes's life has been told in a Scheherazade-like attempt to remain alive. He is imprisoned and made to write his own history to satisfy his captor and prolong his life. While he tells his story, his fellow inmate, Aoi Uë, is forced painstakingly to dismantle a painting to reveal the image hidden underneath. Such a paradox of construction and deconstruction stands in contrast to Rushdie's own avowed paradox of form and content in *Midnight's Children*.

It is from his position in the imitation Alhambra in Spain that Moraes looks back and remembers his life in Bombay. It is not

surprising that Rushdie has created a migrant narrator in *The Moor's Last Sigh* who relates his story from outside India (as opposed to Saleem who narrated from within Bombay). A key point of difference between the two novels is the latter's movement to a space beyond the nation. Both prisoners in the tower are migrants. One is in self-exile and one is co-opted into it. Unlike Padma's role as listener in *Midnight's Children*, Aoi's position in the text, as the narrator's immediate audience and confessional judge, provides another migrant's perspective on the issues Rushdie is criticizing. If *Midnight's Children* is predicated on the metaphor of the birth of India, as Neil ten Kortenaar has argued (45), then *The Moor's Last Sigh* is predicated on the combined metaphor of the life-cycle of the nation: its premature growth, its subsequent demise, and its movement into a post-national space. While Saleem is a crumbling figure of national allegory, Moraes is forced into a migrant position beyond the nation. For Rushdie, the migrant is subject to multiple perspectives. He "suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier" (*Imaginary* 125). The multiplicity, then, that could provide a potential balance to the ominous content of the novel, can be found in the postnational stance of the narrator.

The Moor's Last Sigh, however, is far from being a celebration of postnationalism. The description of the metamorphosis of the town of Benengeli after Vasco Miranda's arrival is scathingly critical: "the once-quiet village which had been the Leader's preferred Southern retreat became a nesting place for itinerant layabouts, expatriate vermin, and all the flotsam-jetsam scum of the earth" (327). Similarly, the portrait of the "Street of Parasites" in Benengeli is captious magic realism in its extraordinary lack of individuality (390). Rushdie uses the "plain" sight of the migrant narrator in order to criticize specific national politics and satirize the universalizing face of globalization in its creation of conformist vermin, scum, and parasites. Magic realism is employed in this critique when ordinariness is hyperbolized to create a sense of the extraordinary in the zombification of the characters on the postnational street. It is clear that such multi-

plicity is not the solution, nor is it a positive counterpoint to ominous content.

The parasitic village is soon replaced by a harsh but natural landscape of rough grass and dried waterways, as Moraes frees himself from the prison tower and nails his "story to the landscape in [his] wake" (433). The novel closes with Moraes's journey from Vasco's imitation Alhambra to the "real" ruins of a "monument to a lost possibility that has nevertheless gone on standing, long after its conquerors have fallen; like a testament to lost but sweetest love, to the love that endures beyond defeat" (433). In having Moraes fulfill his quest, Rushdie, it could appear, is again falling into the romantically optimistic trap for which he criticized himself in *Midnight's Children*, as he lyrically and metaphorically points to the possibility of endurance and regeneration beyond destruction. In such a reading a reclaimed faith in "hope" is evident in the final words of the novel, as the narrator lies dying by a tombstone with the "hope to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time" (434). As with Nadia Wadia's speech that concludes "Bombay Central," the future beckons.

And as with Nadia Wadia's speech, the ending can also be read parodically. Rushdie emphasizes the futility of persistent hope in his expansive and hyperbolic catalogue of the glories of the Alhambra that impossibly extend "beyond annihilation" (433). He uses several overblown similes in his description of the endurance of "Europe's red fort." Such a mock-epic catalogue of regeneration beyond destruction stresses Rushdie's movement away from precisely such a pattern. The catalogue culminates in a devastating parody of hybridity, as the enduring Alhambra represents the need "for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self" (433). Such a merging of frontiers might just lead to an international Street of Parasites on a grander scale. Again, in a self-reflexive maneuver, Rushdie parodies both himself and contemporary notions linking subjectivity and hybridity. The novel's parodically optimistic ending, like all the parody in the text, once again points to the inadequacies of the conventions of magic realism that Rushdie had previously identified as the carrier of an

optimistic counterpoint to the ominous content in *Midnight's Children*.

Just as Moraes leads his pursuers "X marks the spottily" to the treasure of himself, *Midnight's Children* leads to *The Moor's Last Sigh* in the later novel's overt intertextuality (3). Yet, as Rushdie notes of the "assonances in the Márquez *oeuvre*," it is "easy to let the similarities overpower the considerable differences of intent and achievement in his books" (303). A key variation between Rushdie's two novels rests in the critical distance the recent novel achieves from the romantic optimism located in the multitudinous structure of the earlier one. Contemporary magic realism may fail as a balance for ominous content precisely because it is tempered by its predictability. With its increasing popularity, magic realism is paradoxically being drained of the potential for multiplicity and perhaps even resistance. The penetrating difference between examples of Peter Carey's "cheap cliché" kind of magic realism and the form of *The Moor's Last Sigh* lies in Rushdie's juxtaposition of parody and content critical of topics ranging from Indian politics to censorship.¹² In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* Rushdie describes the process of storytelling in terms of hungry fish swallowing stories floating through the water, digesting them, and producing new ones from fragments of the old: "no story comes from nowhere; new stories are born from old—it is the new combinations that make them new" (86). It seems that in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie has consumed his own work, regurgitated it, and created a new story from fragments of the old. However, the crisis in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* lies in the fact that the Ocean has been polluted by the "filth" of overly diluted stories (75). Perhaps Rushdie uses parody in *The Moor's Last Sigh* to highlight just such a crisis in his own contemporary Stream of Stories and to rescue his own Ocean in Rushdieland before the environment is so polluted that no fresh stories can be told.

NOTES

¹ Wendy Faris credits *Midnight's Children* to be "the novel that exemplifies the mode of magical realism best" (164).

² Rushdie has one of his characters, Vasco Miranda, advise Aurora Zogoiby: "Forget those damnfool realists! The real is always hidden—isn't it?—inside a miracu-

- lously burning bush! Life is fantastic! Paint that—you owe that to your fantastic, unreal son" (*Moor's* 174).
- 3 Linda Hutcheon argues that "parody develops out of the realization of the literary inadequacies of a certain convention" (*Narcissistic* 50). Hutcheon's theories of parody developed in *A Theory of Parody* are most relevant to my argument.
 - 4 The links between the two texts are more pertinent than is implied by the notion of "intratextuality"—or an echoing of an author within his own work. Strictly speaking, the links between the works of a single author are not often considered intertextual but in this case it is more illuminating to grapple with the possible motivation for overt self-referentiality than with cross-writer referentiality.
 - 5 The role of the "political" in relation to the narrator is often brought into contestation by critics who compare the novels. For example, Cundy writes: "The political is still in evidence in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, but the Moor himself is not handcuffed to history in the way Saleem was" (116).
 - 6 In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem laments: "Why, alone of all the more-than-five hundred-million, should I have to bear the burden of history?" (382). Saleem's life is set up, from the auspicious moment of his birth, to parallel the country's growth and development. See ten Kortenaar's "Midnight's Children" for a full discussion of Saleem's allegorical role in the novel.
 - 7 This point is also made by James Harrison in *Salman Rushdie*: "for Saleem to remove himself from the scene leaves the stage clear for Aadam Sinai to resume the story—and India perhaps to resume the history—that should have taken place" (47). Harrison's reading of Aadam at this point seems particularly optimistic.
 - 8 See Cundy's discussion of the debate in the "Critical Overview" chapter of *Salman Rushdie* for comprehensive coverage of the pros and cons of using the term in this context.
 - 9 Geoff Hancock's 1980 anthology of magic realism in Canada, simply titled *Magic Realism*, exemplifies the explosion of interest in the form in locations outside of Latin America.
 - 10 See Ngũgĩ's collections of essays *Moving the Centre* and *Decolonising the Mind*.
 - 11 Throughout *Imaginary Homelands*, for example in "The Assassination of Indira Gandhi," Rushdie comments on the deterioration of Indian politics.
 - 12 *The Moor's Last Sigh* is riddled with comments about the need for artists to have freedom from censorship. See the saga of Aurora's painting, *The Kissing of Abbas Ali Baig*, as an example (234). The novel also unambiguously refers to Martin Luther's nailing of the *Ninety-Five Theses* to the doors of Castle Church in Wittenberg and to Luther's "Here I Stand" speech at the second hearing at Worms when asked whether he defended his books or repudiated their "errors." Echoing Luther, Moraes states "Here I stand, I couldn't have done it differently" (3). It is clear that Moraes's refusal to repudiate his earlier writing has its parallel in the stands taken by Luther and by Rushdie himself in reference to his reaction to the *fatwa* placed on him because of *The Satanic Verses*.

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