

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

An entire historical tradition (theological or rationalistic) aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity – as a teleological movement or a natural process. ‘Effective’ history, however, deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations.

--Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 154

Salman Rushdie is renowned, or notorious in a way, to any knowledgeable reader in the literary world, not merely because of his continual output of works and persistent articulation from his Indo-Anglian stance,<sup>1</sup> but also because of a *fatwa* proclaimed against him by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the wake of the publication of Rushdie’s allegedly blasphemous novel, *The Satanic Verses*.<sup>2</sup> In order to avoid being assassinated by fundamentalist Muslims, Rushdie began his exilic life under threat of the fatwa. This is most likely one of the significant reasons that fascinate people with, as it were, his legendary biography, as much as with his novels.

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<sup>1</sup> Some would deem Rushdie an “Anglo-Indian” novelist inasmuch as he started receiving education in England as early as he was 14. Given that Rushdie is of Indian origin, “Anglo-Indian” is somewhat an unconscionable mistake.

<sup>2</sup> According to Daniel Pipes’s definitions, ‘fatwa’ is “[a]n opinion on religious [*sic*] doctrine or law delivered by a mufti (or some other Muslim religious authority),” while ‘Ayatollah’ refers to “[h]ighest level of religious official in Iran” (255).

With the admonition for ‘intentional fallacy’ kept at the back of their minds, some wary readers of Rushdie would not relate his biographical details to his novels as a necessary corollary. Notwithstanding, the critical awareness seems not to be applaudable while being applied to interpretation of Rushdie’s novels. Rather than taking up this hypercorrection, some others have noticed that Rushdie always writes as he lives. As Andrew Blake argues:

An author’s life and experiences do not tell us everything we need to know about their work, but in Rushdie’s case they offer some of the set of keys we need to understand why Rushdie writes in the way that he does. We need to look at the condition of the [Indian] subcontinent in which he was born, at the diaspora or spread outwards of people from South Asia into the rest of the world and at the life of an intellectual in London in the late twentieth century. (7)

Born in June 1947, two months earlier than India achieved independence, Rushdie has apparently been impinged on by the specific moment, as well illustrated in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. In *Midnight’s Children*, the narrator, Saleem Sinai, is born at midnight on August 15 in 1947. Past the midnight will India be freed from approximately 300 years of the British imperial power. Moraes Zogoiby, the narrator in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, though not born in the year of independence, has his eldest sister born in the year. They do not just so happen to come to this world in the year; rather, they are intended to witness the emblematic moment of India, as did the author.

Of his novels, *Midnight’s Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* are mainly set in the Indian subcontinent. All the three novels are, in a few ways, autobiographic and nostalgic. They are literary vehicles through which Rushdie

describes and transcribes his early life experiences. When asked about his opinions regarding the comparison between the childhood of Saleem Sinai and that of his own, Rushdie ingenuously replied:

I don't like Karachi, whereas I did like Bombay very much. But even Bombay has been more or less ruined as a city. . . . In Bombay nothing works. . . . Karachi is a city that has almost no urban life, because of the repressions in the culture. . . . I find society in Pakistan very closed, and that closed world is expressed in *Shame*. (*Conversations* 31)

Juxtaposing the yarns in these novels and the years he spent in India, one is likely to find that Rushdie's impression of India has been embedded in the stories. Unlike many trenchant and snide comments on characters and politics in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, *The Moor's Last Sigh* has a less political portrayal of India. The different emotions toward his hometown are also, in fact, brought about by the fatwa. Even though Rushdie "had come to school in England in 1961" and then settled in Britain in the late 1970s, he still "went back for most of the holidays," hence "a complete bombayite" as he professed himself (*Conversations* 31). He was capable of traveling to and fro between the two continents until the fatwa was pronounced in 1989. For him as a writer, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, published in 1995, has a certain singularity that his other novels do not have, for it is "the first book [he has] written about India without going to India" (Rushdie, *Conversations* 170).

Apart from the works centering on the Indian subcontinent, most of his novels are not entirely set in India or Pakistan. Especially, *East, West*, a collection of nine short stories, introduces to readers a variety of ways of living around the world. In these novels, he instead demonstrates diasporic movements and contact zones of

different cultures and races not just in India. Overall, he always writes as a cosmopolitan writer, even when fabricating the Indian stories in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Within the limited boundary (India) constructed in this novel, he is, as usual, anxious to let it take on an appearance of plurality, multitudinous voices, and palimpsestine traits of the backdrop of modern India that spans the entire twentieth century. The shifting transformation of cultures and the difficulties in locating identity, as Rushdie perceives himself, are underpinned in *The Moor's Last Sigh* by his unique subversive wordplay and ambivalent display of polysemous conditions of colonial and post-colonial societies in India. *The Moor's Last Sigh* has shared plenty of concerns and characteristics of Rushdie's writing with most of his other novels. In this novel, there are a lot of techniques and contentions by Rushdie that consistently resonate in his other works, albeit he is quite a productive author that writes in a wide range of diversified styles. This thesis is going to focus on *The Moor's Last Sigh*, as well as on Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "liminality."<sup>3</sup> A reciprocal clarification may well be derived from employing Bhabha's theory to appreciate Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*. On the one hand, the fictive narrative exemplifies Bhabha's ideas; on the other hand, Bhabha's remarks help shed light on the hidden meanings of this novel. Before a brief introduction to Bhabha's idea of "liminality," a review of the thickened plot of the novel in question will be given in order to sift out some important episodes from the nearly epic scope of the novel.

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<sup>3</sup> While Rushdie was still working on *The Moor's Last Sigh*, he disclosed what this novel would manifest by referring to it as "a metaphor for the conflict between the one and the many, between the pure and the impure, the sacred and the profane, and as such is a continuation by other means of the concerns of my previous books" (*Conversations* 156). This passage can well reveal the fact that there are indeed a few motifs Rushdie would revisit in his works, and this novel is a revisioned continuation of his previous works at the end of the twentieth century. The conflicts, as Rushdie mentioned, as well as post-colonial ambivalences, resonate with Bhabha's idea of liminality.

### *The Moor's Last Sigh* as a Post-Colonial Novel

To read *The Moor's Last Sigh* as a post-colonial novel is much less controversial and problematic than to define Salman Rushdie as a post-colonial writer. As much as it seems to be a self-contradictory statement at first sight, Rushdie's biographical sketch always leads him to a post-colonial predicament--he can be thought of as a "Commonwealth writer"<sup>4</sup> rather than a post-colonial writer, for he has been educated in the West since young, and has thus been considered to be Euro-centric. A similar embarrassing situation has also occurred to Bhabha, as he starts "The Commitment to Theory" with the following remarks:

There is damaging and self-defeating assumption that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged. It is said that the place of the academic critic is inevitably within the Euro-centric archives of an imperialist or neo-colonial West. . . . Must we always polarize in order to polemicize? (*LC* 19)

Probably highly aware of the likely ensuing charges of Euro-centrism and elitism, Bhabha makes a series of rapid-fire questions, starting with: "Must we always polarize in order to polemicize" (*LC* 19). These questions indicate that a number of post-colonial critics and writers find themselves, at some particular moment, with their backs to the wall of diaspora or migrancy. By virtue of diasporic movements and descendants of the original shifting population, it has come to be inevitable that most post-colonial figures have multi-faceted identities.

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<sup>4</sup> In the article "'Commonwealth Literature' Does Not Exist," Rushdie mentions his experience of talking to a literature don who suggested, "As a commonwealth writer, you probably find, don't you, that there's a kind of liberty, certain advantages, in occupying, as you do, a position on the periphery" (*IH* 61).

When attention is turned back to the literary texts per se, the potential contestation seems to have been reduced to a less vehement degree. One of the reasons is that literature is fictive and somewhat imaginarily fabricated. The instant people categorize literary works as post-colonial, the term ‘post-colonial’ comes to be more inclusive than when they attempt to examine such writers as Rushdie and Bhabha, who are experiencing their exilic predicaments. In the passage exploring what post-colonial literatures are, Ashcroft offers a cogent and inclusive definition of ‘post-colonial’:

We use the term ‘post-colonial’, however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted. (*The Empire 2*)

This definition hints that some cosmopolitan writers, like Rushdie, can be seen as post-colonial. Even if still others tend to doubt him as a post-colonial figure, his work, beyond doubt, has been dealing with post-colonial concerns, such as placing the “ ‘outsider’ inside the text,” arranging for the “ ‘dispossessed’ in possession of language,” showing the “ ‘alienated’ decentering discourses of power,” and leaving the “ ‘disempowered’ recentered in their own empowering texts” (Parker and Starkey, 23).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> They are characteristics of post-colonial literatures observed by Michael Parker and Roger Starkey in the course of collecting essays on a few post-colonial writers.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie is apparently to revisit his motherland by limiting his focus on the four-generation da Gama clan in India. Different from Rushdie's previous novels, *The Moor's Last Sigh* is set almost entirely in India. It is more like a familial history than political commentary on nationhood, although it can be argued that Rushdie cherishes the past days of India as shown in this book. As much as the spotlight is turned on at the family story, Rushdie is not satisfied with simply telling a familial story. He mingles it with fantasy, mythical allusion, and historical facts. More important, he intends to display the colonial and post-colonial circumstances in India by arranging for the da Gama family to span the entire twentieth century.

At the beginning of the text, the first person narrator, Moraes Zogoiby, alias the Moor, traces back to the times of his great-grandfather, Francisco da Gama, on his mother's side. In the opening chapter, Rushdie had no sooner implied that Francisco was born on the wrong side of the blanket in descent from Vasco da Gama than set up a historic background for the text. The author verifies the mergence of history into the text by means of Moraes's narrative:

Pepper it was that brought Vasco da Gama's tall ships across the ocean, from Lisbon's Tower of Belém to the Malabar Coast: first to Calicut and later, for its lagoony harbour, to Cochin. English and French sailed in the wake of that first-arrived Portugee, so that in the period called Discovery-of-India. (*MLS* 4)

The name of 'Moraes' may well be intended as a reference to a Portuguese romancer in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, whose name was Francisco de Moraes Cabral, although this speculation of my own has not been confirmed by the author himself.

There is a stark contrast between Francisco and his wife, Epifania Menezes. The former is a nationalist while the latter is a pro-British philistine. Rushdie attempts to show the rupture of national recognition via opposing characters here. Another poignant disagreement between them is provoked by an episode in which Francisco requests 'Le Corbusier' to build up two follies on Cabral Island— one is East, and the other is West. They get to be the eyesores for Epifania, due to the opposite extremes in architectonic style. The struggle between the East and the West is not just Epifania's, but Rushdie's. His struggle is certainly different from what is described of Epifania's. Rushdie is so concerned about the 'liminal space' between the East and the West. Back on one of his previous novels, *East, West*, it can be argued that the conflict, the struggle and the reconciliation between East and West have been Rushdie's fervent concerns all along.

They have two sons, Camoens and Aires. Camoens marries Isabella Souza, whose outspoken remarks often irritate Epifania. Aires marries Carmen Lobo, who is barren. The marriage of Aires and Carmen is doomed to be a tragedy because Aires's mysterious life leads people into believing he is homosexual. Therefore, Aurora stingingly speaks of him as a "pain in the neck" (*MLS* 14). Camoens, somewhat like his father, is anxious for "a free country" that is "above religion because secular, above class because socialist, above caste because enlightened, above hatred because loving, above vengeance because forgiving, above tribe because unifying" (*MLS* 51). Rushdie jeers Camoens, or rather, India of post-independence, by mentioning the fact that the partitions of India (India and Pakistan, and later Bangladesh) and that the civil war came in the wake of independence, although India was set up as a secular country. In the text, Camoens died in 1939, so he could not witness the gap between



conception and execution.

Aires has no issue, while Camoens has one daughter, Aurora, Moraes's mother. Aires and Aurora inherently have premature whitening hair, which has long been a family characteristic. That gives Moraes an extraordinary impression of Aurora—"my mother Aurora was snow-white at twenty, and what fairy-tale glamour, what icy *gravitas* was added to her beauty by soft glaciers cascading from her head" (*MLS* 12)! However, Aurora is not a loving mother, whereas she works the image of Moraes into her paintings. In addition to the only son, she has three elder daughters, Christina (Ina), Inamorata (Minnie), Philomina (Mynah). Like Isabella, Aurora seems to have secret love affairs with other men, Pandit Nehru (Prime Minister of India) and Vasco Miranda (Goan painter).

The role of Aurora serves as the center of the text,<sup>6</sup> in part because her paintings divulge Cassandran fears for the nation. What she has painted in the text is also part of the narrative, in that her paintings sometimes display a macrocosmic view of her contemporary India. In 1947, Vasco pays his first visit to *Elephanta*, Aurora's bungalow on Malabar Hill. Penniless and falling in love with Aurora, the Goan painter agrees on her request to decorate the nursery. Moraes gets to consider Vasco to be a significant figure for him and his siblings, seeing that he gives the children "story-oceans and abracadabra, Panchatantra fables and new lamps for old" (*MLS* 152). The idea of "story-oceans" readily brings to mind another Rushdie's novel, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

Abraham Zogoiby, a Jewish clerk, meets Aurora in 1939 and falls in love with

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<sup>6</sup> Rushdie replied, when asked if Moraes bears much more resemblance to him than he realizes, "It's entirely possible. But I would say he's not the only person in this book who's a bit me because I think the character of Aurora, the painter, even though she is a girl, has some of my ideas" (Conversation 206).

her at first sight. He is determined to walk out on the Jewish community in Cochin, in order to elope with Aurora without regard to his mother's objection. Their marriage creates a more hybrid culture:

I [Moraes] salute their unmarried defiance; and note that Fate so arranged matters that neither of them – irreligious as they were – needed to break confessional links with the past, after all. I, however, was raised neither as Catholic nor as Jew. I was both, and nothing: a jewholic-anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was—what's the word these days? – atomised. Yessir: a real Bombay mix. (*MLS* 104)

Teenaged Abraham, one day, searches the Jewish Synagogue for his father Solomon Castile, only surprisingly to find “an old box marked with a Z and fastened with a cheap padlock” (*MLS* 78). A book in the box, written in Spanish, records a story of a Jewish woman “who took shelter beneath the roof of the exiled Sultan,” the last Sultan Boabdil of Moorish Spain; she stayed “beneath his roof, and then beneath his sheets” (*MLS* 82). Later on, she “stole his crown,” “crept away from crumbling Boabdil, and took ship for India, with a great treasure in her baggage, and a male child in her belly; from whom, after many begats, came Abraham himself” (*MLS* 82). The letter ‘Z’ on the box stands for ‘zogoybi,’ which means in Spanish ‘misfortune.’ The last Sultan Boabdil is nicknamed ‘Boabdil the Misfortune,’ and the Jewish woman takes his nickname as her surname. Abraham Castile is differently called Abraham Zogoiby after his father abandons him and his mother, Flory Zogoiby. As a result, Abraham Zogoiby passes the misfortune on to his only son, Moraes.

Moraes is nicknamed ‘the Moor,’ but the title of this novel is not directly associated with him. It is derived from two sources, one of which is Vasco Miranda's

painting that he sells to C. J Bhabha:<sup>7</sup>

I have called it *The Artist as Boabdil, the Unlucky (el-Zogoybi), Last Sultan of Granada, Seen Departing from the Alhambra,*’ said Vasco with a straight face. ‘Or, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. I trust this choice of title will not give Abie-ji any further cause for taking offence. Appropriation of surname and family tall-stories and such-much personal material. Without, I regret, asking a by-your-leave. (MLS 160)

This painting is dated to the time when Vasco still stays with Aurora. Encouraged by Vasco, Aurora also makes a picture named *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Not merely by pedigree, but by reference to the painting, Moraes is associated with the last Sultan Boabdil, and that can help explain his misfortune. He is born with an exceptional physique. That is, he grows up twice at the speed as normal people, and looks like 72 years old when he is only 36. And also, he has a giant physique due to abnormal metabolism and a club-like right hand.

In fact, Moraes is born under the curse of Flory and Epifania. After Abraham turns his back on Flory, he faces some cash flow problems and goes back to ask his mother for jewels. However, Flory is only willing to grant his request on condition that he gives her his firstborn male child and promises to have the child raised in the Jewish ways. Flory dies before Moraes comes to this world. As for Epifania, when she is in a critical condition, Aurora happens to come in the presence of her. And yet, Aurora would neither call for help nor aid her grandmother in any possible ways, hence Epifania’s curse—“a house divided against itself cannot stand, . . . may your

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<sup>7</sup> Bhabha is mentioned here, but it does not follow that it has something to do with Homi K. Bhabha.(MLS 159). Instead, the title of the scholarly essay “Imperso-Nation and Dis/Semi/Nation: Dialogics of Eclecticism and Interrogations of Authenticity in A. Z.” is certainly a put-on of Bhabha’s essay “DissemiNation: time narrative, and the margins of the modern nation” (MLS 329).

house be for ever partitioned, may its foundations turn to dust, may your children rise up against you, and may your fall be hard” (*MLS* 99).

Moraes is initiated into his first sexual experience by the help of an attractive governess. And, he later finds that telling stories gives him an erection. From the moment on, he realizes he is born a storyteller. After venturing into the world, he met his beloved Uma Sarasvati. Some people nickname Aurora and Uma respectively ‘Amrika’ and ‘Moskva,’<sup>8</sup> thanks to the tensions and mutual hostility between them. Falling victim to a war between his love and his mother, Moraes turns out to get expelled from home. He is later accused of murdering Uma and is thus incarcerated for a while, owing to some incidental activities involving true and false poison capsules. Released, he acts as a strikebreaker in the pay of Raman Fielding, in the Bombay underworld. Fielding is the boss of a Hindu paramilitary group. He is a “Frog King, a Mainduck Raja whose commands could not be gainsaid” (*MLS* 232). He has been seen as a satirical depiction of cartoonist-turned-politician Bal Thackeray, for he is named after Tom Jones, and his name is thus an allusion to Bal Thackeray, who also has an English novelist as his namesake, the Indian-born William Makepeace Thackeray.

The struggle in the organized crime between Moraes’s father and Fielding leads to the murder of Fielding and the destruction of half of Bombay. Disappointed and frustrated, Moraes decides to go to Andalusia, the center of the Moorish Spain, so as to come across Vasco Miranda, who has made a fortune by selling kitsch to Westerners. When Vasco and Aurora first meet each other, Vasco professes himself to

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<sup>8</sup> “America and Moscow. Rushdie’s mentioning of these two poles of the Cold War is significant because of India’s precarious position as a ‘non-aligned state’ that was wooed by both the United States and the Soviet Union (but conquered by none)” (“References”). See “References in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*” for more information. Available: < <http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/Ref.html> >

be her soul mate. Subsequently, he steals her Moor paintings because he has come to be jealous of her gift.

Vasco Miranda imprisons Moraes and lets him live only as long as he writes the story of his life. Finally, Moraes escapes with Miranda's blood on his hands. The final chapters turn back to the first chapter. In the opening chapter, he makes an allusion to the German scholar Martin Luther, and seems to compare himself with the scholar. In the final passages, he suggests that he will resurrect, intentionally mentioning Jesus on the Mount of Olives, Arthur sleeping in Avalon, Barbarossa in his cave, Finn MacCool lying in the Irish hillsides, and the Worm Ouroboros on the bed of the Sundering Sea. Finn MacCool is a giant in Irish legend, who sleeps as well. The Worm Ouroboros appears in a book of the same name by E. R. Eddison and sleeps until wakened by dramatic changes. All of these characters are sleeping, and go to sleep in one world but will awake in a different one. In doing so, Moraes' resurrection is thus hopefully implied by referring to these sleeping figures at the end of the whole story.

To view *The Moor's Last Sigh* as a whole, its façade is apparently a family saga, but the core of the story is not as simple as it seems to be. Colonial encounters taking place in the family saga have resulted in many substantial issues that are open to discussion. In the novel, influenced or intruded by the colonial power, India inevitably is faced with a transcultural space that gives rise to the fusion of cultures, conflicts between different ideologies, and tugs and grapples between cultural groups. This transcultural space is a contact zone of cultural difference where colonization has become a catalyst for the most of the issues in question. Moraes is, no doubt, the center of the complicated nexus of cultural difference. Cultural difference makes identification more urgent and more important. Faced with the colonial desire and

fantasy, the identification of colonial subjects is always associated with the search for recognition and a sense of belongingness. Colonial discourse always cajoles colonial subjects into recognition with the colonizers. By and by, they are also inclined to feel a sense of belongingness toward the colonizing power. However, colonial discourse is never so overwhelming that some of colonial subjects are still resistant to the identity that the colonizers endeavor to impose upon the colonial subjects, which is well exemplified by Anglophobes in the household, including Francisco and Camoens. It has become a moot question as to whether or not colonial subjects should accept the colonizing power as the dominant culture and identify themselves as a subaltern group. This moot point tears the household in half, that is, Anglophobes and Anglophiles. It also illustrates an ambivalent situation in which colonial subjects paradoxically exude a vein of repulsion and attraction toward the colonizers. Not only do colonial subjects feel this ambivalent mixture of emotions, but the colonizers, like D'Aeth, also experience such an ambivalent situation. This ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized is what Bhabha terms 'ambivalence' that always emerges from 'liminality' or 'liminal space.'

### **Homi Bhabha's Concept of Liminality**

Liminality is not exclusively spoken of in post-colonial parlance; it "derives from the word 'limen', meaning threshold, a word particularly used in psychology to indicate the threshold between the sensate and the subliminal, the limit below which a certain sensation ceases to be perceptible" (Ashcroft et al, *Key Concepts* 130).

Notwithstanding, Bhabha is concerned about 'liminality,' instead of 'limen.' For him,

liminality, as an interstitial space or in-between space, is distinct from simply the word 'limit.' To begin with, Bhabha promulgates that "[i]t is the trope of our time to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond" (LC 1). In order to illuminate "a tenebrous sense of survival" which marks "our existence today" on the borderlines of the 'present,' Bhabha thus hints at "the realm of the *beyond*," in which cultural engagement is bound to be present (LC 1).

He contends that the 'beyond' is an existent state where we have been while we are approaching the end of the twentieth century. Or rather, we are, in fact, inhabiting a particular spatiotemporal axis where we seem to have no proper name to designate the 'present' other than the controversial prefix 'post.' Bhabha defines the 'beyond' as follows:

The 'beyond' is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past. . . . Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the *fin de siecle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in French rendition of the words *au-delà* – here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth. (LC 1)

Bhabha finds it too simple a definition that 'post' denotes either a break with the past or a bond with the past. Also, the sense of disorientation in the 'beyond' negates the traditional and holistic continuity in history. He soon colligates the 'beyond' realm with what he calls 'in-between' spaces or simply 'interstices.' The articulation of

cultural differences takes place in these in-between spaces. These in-between spaces also provide “innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (LC 2). As Ania Loomba observes, “[i]n Homi Bhabha’s view, highlighting the formation of colonial subjectivities as a process that is never fully or perfectly achieved helps us in correcting Said’s emphasis on domination, and in focusing on the agency of the colonized” (232). This observation resonates with the need, which Bhabha considers “theoretically innovative,” “to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities” (LC 1). In this realm, the idea of society is defined by activities of negotiation, collaboration, and contestation. What nativism desperately seeks for is supposed to be modified into new signs of identity to the extent that cultural engagements are produced performatively; in a nutshell, absolutely originary role-playing is never possible in these in-between spaces. The boundary between black and white, colonizer and colonized, civilized and primitive has been obscured, for they get to dynamically tint each other with their own colors in these spaces, insofar as “the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (LC 2).

Bhabha quotes an African-American artist Renée Green’s description of a stairwell as “a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness” (LC 4). The liminal space is employed to describe an in-between space or interstitial space in which strategies of singular or communal selfhood will be elaborated. It also incorporates post-colonial ambivalences that describe a complex mix of attraction and repulsion. Therefore, cultural differences and cultural hybridities form a discursive



arena in this liminal space. The stairwell, Green's architectural site-specific work,<sup>9</sup> metaphorically exemplifies Bhabha's idea:

The stairwell as liminal space . . . becomes . . . the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (LC 4)

So incompatible is it with the sustained binary logic that Bhabha poses a few likely questions himself. The core of these questions is simply to speculate on how subjects can be formed in-between different communities or facile divisions such as race, gender, and class. One of his replies to the self-produced questions is an incident taking place in Great Britain in the wake of *The Satanic Verses*—"Black and Irish feminists, despite their different constituencies, have made common cause against the 'racialization of religion' as the dominant discourse" (LC 2). This incident is employed to indicate how hazardous it is to stay in the binary logic. Also, it helps to validate the existence of the liminal space. In this liminal space, there are a lot more figures that are far more complex. As Bhabha has reiterated in the book, cultural hybridities always arise out of negotiation from the interstitial perspective. That is, post-colonial discourse inhabits in this liminal space that is a dynamic and instable process of affiliation, contestation, or engagement.

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<sup>9</sup> Green, an art historian, exhibits an installation artifact in The Institute of Contemporary Art (Long Island City, New York). She makes use of the museum as a metaphor instead of simply using the gallery space. She further describes the stairwell as a "liminal space" which lends itself to Bhabha's appropriation of the idea.

According to Bhabha, 'liminal space' or 'liminality' is an umbrella term that designates an in-between space where cultural difference emerges. It is also a contact zone where different cultures meet, clash, and negotiate. Therefore, the contact zone comes to be a twilight zone that is an ambiguous region among different cultures and contains some features of each culture or even a concoction of cultures that is called 'cultural hybridity.' As this interstitial space is a location where different cultures converge, its hybrid state is never pure and not belonging to any single culture, but it is paradoxically all the cultures it incorporates. Metaphorically speaking, the Da Gama-Zogoiby family illustrates the liminal space where the central character and narrator, Moraes, inherits different features from numerous cultural groups, including Moorish Arabs, Jews, Portuguese, Mongolians, and Hindus. The fact that he both belongs to these cultures and is excluded from each of these cultures well illustrates the significant idea of ambivalence in the arena of liminality. Bhabha's idea of 'liminal space' is conducive to the evaluation of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, insofar as the relationship between colonizer and colonized and complicated cultural contact in the household altogether delineate an ambivalent and in-between space.

Cultural hybridities are certainly celebrated in the liminal space. In post-colonial discourse, the liminal space may be promptly regarded as an exclusive process the colonized and minority groups have gone through. But then again, a variety of colonial and post-colonial confrontations take place in the liminal space, and the colonizers are also most likely to perform their cultural identities on borderline thresholds. Abandoning an emphasis on the opposition between colonizer and colonized, Bhabha asserts that any oppositions as such can be mixed and have

“reciprocal recognitions”<sup>10</sup> (qtd. in *LC* 8). A few episodes in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* are, advertently or inadvertently, subsumed under Bhabha’s model of crossing the borderline. For one, a British Anglican, Oliver D’Aeth, is looking on India with ambivalent feelings while staying in the colony far away from his homeland:

Yet he knew, in his dreams, that this place was and would continue to be his home; he would continue to walk along this hillside path . . . Oliver D’Aeth knew enough to be sure that the frontier between the English enclaves and the surrounding foreignness had become permeable, was beginning to dissolve. (*MLS* 94-95)

This passage can also elucidate Bhabha’s next conceptual model of ‘the unhomely.’ He claims that “the intervention of the ‘beyond’ . . . establishes a boundary” and that “it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world—the unhomeliness—that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (*LC* 9). In fact, his model of ‘the unhomely’ is still based on what he thinks of ‘the interstitial space,’ for he is anxious to clear up a possible facile ascription of ‘the unhomely’ to being homeless by uttering:

To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomely’ be accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres. . . . Although the ‘unhomely’ is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites. (*LC* 9)

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<sup>10</sup> The phrase is Frantz Fanon’s that is quoted by Bhabha in order to elaborate that an agency of empowerment can be found on the grounds of cultural displacement and social discrimination. Bhabha thinks that “Fanon’s desire for the recognition of cultural presence as ‘negating activity’ resonates with [his] breaking of the time-barrier of a culturally collusive ‘present’” (*LC* 9).

So far, Bhabha focuses on the liminal space that is situated in-between past and present, colonizer and colonized, black and white, theory and politics, time and space, etc. Not that he simply draws a tenuous line between those pairs, but he postulates liminality in-between those seeming oppositions. Liminality is, for Bhabha, a pathway through which ‘doublenesses and ambivalences’ thus originate.<sup>11</sup> Similar ambivalences permeate *The Moor’s Last Sigh* as well. Whether these ambivalences are delineated in the form of narratives, characters, or languages, they are intended to be ambivalent so as to embody the liminal space in the novel itself.

Green’s museum installment is described by Bhabha as a “borderline work of culture” (LC 7). He goes on to provide a further definition of the borderline work of culture with the following remarks:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (LC 7)

In order to understand ‘cultural translation,’ the term ‘transnation’ has to be introduced before we can further appreciate how Bhabha develops the idea of ‘translation.’ As a strategy of survival, culture, for Bhabha, is both transnational and translational. Owing to migration, cultural displacement, and diasporic experiences and movement, culture

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<sup>11</sup> In the course of the interview by David Bennett and Terry Collits, Bhabha admits his “own love of doublenesses and ambivalences” (*Literary* 238). In the mean time, he warns of “a danger in producing kinds of facile generalizations” that is reiterated in *The Location of Culture* (*Literary* 239).

can well be transnational. And also culture is translational because spatial histories of displacement and migration, accompanied by a frenzy stemming from global media, invoke complex issues and questions as to how culture signifies and what is signified by culture. Being both transnational and translational, culture is never pure and original and transcultural influence is inevitable. For example, even though *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a story mainly concerned with what has been happening in a Hindu family, in fact, it represents various modes of representation among different cultures by making cultures converge in Da Gama-Zogoiby family. The reciprocal influences of different cultural practices also show that the transcultural process is, most of the time, ambivalent in the in-between space of various cultures.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie's juxtaposition of past and present seems to entertain Bhabha's ideal template of borderline works of culture. With the past history of Moorish Spain as its backdrop, Rushdie's India in the twentieth century does not simply foreground as the dominant present. Most of the time, the Moorish Spain has become a transnational and translational culture that intervenes into India, crossing time barriers so as to produce inventions. These interventions and inventions arise, as Bhabha argues, in the liminal space where competing cultures and communities affiliate, collaborate, or negotiate with one another. In doing so, Rushdie attains newness while deliberately creating an interstitial space where cultural differences and hybridities can be articulated.

Bhabha is opposed to holistic and essentialist views of cultural differences, for he insists that "[t]he representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition" (LC 2). Also, his warning against universalizing and generalizing cultural difference

prefigures a relatively recent issue, multiculturalism, which is extended from post-colonial discourse. One of the frequently asked questions about multiculturalism is what it is like in post-colonial and post-modern societies and how different cultures can be displayed, amalgamated, or assimilated with one another. For Bhabha, multiculturalism is highly relevant to liminality in that “the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause” comes from “posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective” (*LC* 3). In some respects, Rushdie keeps posing questions of the kind by thoroughly juxtaposing two multicultural countries—Moorish Spain and modern India. Besides being arranged in-between past and present, Moorish Spain and modern India, *The Moor’s Last Sigh* presents profound entanglements in-between Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish cultures, where multiculturalism may be very likely to gain a sense of the new in the liminal space.

### **Rushdiean Narrative: History or His Story?**

The Rushdie Affair provokes again a thorough rethinking about the relationship between fiction and reality. In the aftermath of the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, some publishers and translators of the book have been killed, for the book has been accused of travesty Muslim beliefs, and thus it is thought upon as blasphemous. Even though it brings down on him the anger and attacks from the Muslim fundamentalists, he chooses to voice and defend himself as ever in all possible manners. In one of his responses to the *The Satanic Verses* affair, he tries to re-locate the position of *The Satanic Verses* and elaborate on its relation to the world:

At the center of the storm stands a novel, a work of fiction, one that

aspires to the condition of literature. It [*The Satanic Verses*] has often seemed to me that people on all sides of the argument have lost sight of this simple fact. . . . It felt impossible, amid such a hubbub, to insist on the fictioality of fiction. . . . I am not trying to say that *The Satanic Verses* is ‘only a novel.’ . . . The ones I care most about are those . . . that attempt to do what the word *novel* seems to insist upon: to see the world anew.

(IH 393)

*The Moor’s Last Sigh* is another fiction of Rushdie’s that is certain to call forth polemical attention to the relation of the book to modern India, not to say the world. In this novel, Rushdie synchronizes the twentieth century history of India with the imaginary events that occur in the da Gama-Zogoiby family. Aside from the dynastic introduction to the family in the first few chapters and some fifty pages at the end to arrange for Moraes to stay in Spain, the central bulk of the story takes place in Bombay where Rushdie was born. It hence becomes more understandable why interviewer Charlie Rose asked him how much of the story might be his story<sup>12</sup> (*Conversation* 206).

*The Moor’s Last Sigh* is his first full-length adult novel since the fatwa. He is passionate again to voice and present the history of India in a translatable way in this novel. In spite of his denial of this novel to be his own story, he admittedly correlates it with some of his personal experiences and attitudes. Overall, the novel is, as it were,

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<sup>12</sup> Here’s Rushdie’s reply to Rose’s question:

I would say it’s not, really. And what I’d say is that if every time you use a first person narrator, as I’ve done in this book, then inevitably a chunk of your experience and your attitudes and your feelings and passions will come out through his mouth and will come out through his experience. That’s true. I do not deny that. That is true about this book. However, he ain’t me. And I think it’s often the case when writers have used point of view Characters in a very intimate way that there is an attempt to associate them, and yet Bellow Is not Herzog. (*Conversations* 206)

a concoction of half history and half his story. Such a concoction demonstrates not only the intricate diaspora, but historical displacement as well. Rushdie endeavors, by means of this novel, to achieve a ‘double vision’ that is far more complicated than Bhabha uses it to assess *The Satanic Verses*—“Salman Rushdie writes the fabulist historiography of post-Independence India and Pakistan in *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame*, only to remind us in *The Satanic Verses* that the truest eye may now belong to the migrant’s double vision” (LC 5). The one in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* has turned an international and multicultural vision, albeit it mainly relates stories occurring in India.<sup>13</sup> This is a singularity of this novel; set principally in India, it surmounts the limits of time and space. Rushdie utilizes the first person narrator’s voice to shuttle between past and present, Spain and Indian, and even among a variety of cultures. It displays rupture and fusion alike, just as Bhabha clears up the liminal space.

There is an episode that might be a distant allusion to a possibility that *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is the successor to *The Satanic Verses*, in order for Rushdie to go on to voice. The Goan painter Vasco Miranda tells Moraes, “To be the *offspring* of our *daemonic* Aurora is to be, truly, a modern *Lucifer* [emphases added]” (MLS 5). The demonic image and Lucifer both hint at Satan. And also, Moraes, as son of satanic Mother, is expelled in the end, hence his soliloquy and mumbles to himself—“Placed beyond the Pale, would you not seek to make light of the Dark? Just so. Moraes Zogoiby, expelled from his story, tumbled towards history” (MLS 5). The act of ‘making light of the Dark’ somewhat coincides with his motivation to write *The*

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<sup>13</sup> It seems to substantiate Bhabha’s idea of ‘new internationalism’ in that “[f]or the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora . . .” (LC 5)



*Moor's Last Sigh*.<sup>14</sup>

Rushdiean ambivalences in this narrative bear a resemblance to Bhabha's liminality—"the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing* in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond" (LC 5). Rushdie on the one hand presents frontiers that collide or even collapse, but on the other he thereby produces a variety of ambivalences. For instance, pro-British figures and Anglophobes are arranged in the same household. However, genuine ambivalences are not simply those conflicts among them, but more of the inner contradictions in each individual that result from cultural hybridity in a multicultural society.

As Perloff indicates in his critique, "Nations and cultures, he [Bhabha] argues both here and throughout *The Location of Culture*, must be understood as "narrative" constructions that arise from the "hybrid" interaction of contending national and cultural constituencies." These narrative constructions Rushdie employs to fabricate his story that is a multinational and multicultural world. This world is located in India where Portuguese exploration, Mughal dynasty, and British imperialism altogether sediment on this ground in the long run. No wonder Rushdie has Moraes tell readers

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<sup>14</sup> Seven years later since the fatwa, Charlie Rose held an interview with Rushdie, expressing it was easier to arrange the meeting than earlier with concern about his security. Rushdie mentions his feelings and plans in reply:

I think that's a kind of indication of the fact that I'm just trying to get things back on the road here. . . . I feel most of the time as if I can get things done now in a way that was previously very difficult, and actually, having the novel [*The Moor's Last Sigh*] come out has in some way, in *some* mysterious way, it's changed the air. Suddenly *Satanic Verses* feels really like a long time ago, and people want to talk about books again, and it just seems to have cleared up something. (*Conversations* 199)

He goes further to clearly reveal his feelings of writing this novel:

I thought it was all right, this book [*The Moor's Last Sigh*], when I finished it. I also thought that it finished something,--a kind of project which really I've been embarked on for 20 years, ever since I started writing *Midnight's Children*. . . . [I]t's the project to try and describe the world I came from and the world I came to and how those two collided. (*Conversations* 200)

that “English and French sailed in the wake of that first-arrived Portugee, so that in the period called Discovery-of-India—but how could we be discovered when we were not covered before” (*MLS* 4). On top of hybridity and multiculturalism, this thesis is also to explore nationness<sup>15</sup> under Rushdiean narrative and how these three main issues are related to the liminal space that Bhabha proposes.

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<sup>15</sup> It is Bhabha’s phraseology not only in *The Location of Culture*, but also in *Nation and Narration*. It is similar to ‘nationality’ or ‘nationhood’; however, ‘nationness’ offers a nuance of meaning because it hints at the ambivalent figure of a nation in the liminal space.