

**Tribhuvan University**

**Fallible Narration: A New Historical Reading in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children***

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**by**

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This thesis titled "Fallible Narration: A New Historical Reading in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Ananga Dhungana, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## Abstract

In *Midnight's Children*, the narrator, Saleem does not accurately recount the events in recent Indian history. At times he makes mistakes on details or dates, but he makes them intentionally, in order to comment on the unreliability of historical and biographical accounts. Rushdie's writing reflects the rephrasing and reworking of a writer's or a narrator's mind. He also addresses the reader in the informal second person, and in so doing engages the reader in his life story much as a story teller engages his listeners. Saleem is a homodiegetic narrator who can enter the fictional world and distort the reality by imposing his personal and subjective experiences as a character in the story. As a result, his identity is divided into two agents: one is the narrator and another is the focalizer. As a focalizer, he imposes his perspective in the focalizing process. Hence, his telling of history and focalization of the focalized turns to be misreading and misguiding.

To avoid such danger of misreading, according to narratologists, counterfocalization is needed and to investigate the power- relation in the focalization, according to new historicists, alternative reading is required. Saleem as the focalizer and his focalization is fallible because he is unable to narrate the story properly. Thus, readers have to be critical by means of counterfocalization and alternative reading depending on silences, gaps, incomplete voice and voice which are uttered but not clarified by the focalizer.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay, India on June 19, 1947. Rushdie's novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), won the Booker Prize and brought him international fame. Written in exuberant style, the comic allegory of Indian history revolves around the lives of the narrator Salem Sinai and the 1,000 children born after the declaration of independence of India in 1947. All of the children are given some magical property. Salem has a very large nose, which grants him the ability to see into the hearts and minds of men. His chief rival is Shiva, who has the power of war. Salem dying in a pickle factory near Bombay, tells his tragic story with comical effects. The work raised much controversy in India because of its unflattering portrait of Indira Gandhi and her son Sunjay, who were involved in a controversial sterilization campaign. *Midnight's Children* took its title from Nehru's speech delivered at the stroke of midnight 15 August 1947, as India gained its independence from England. Rushdie continued his studies at King's College, Cambridge where he studied history.

Rushdie is reading and rewriting history in its immediate aftermath; he can read in relation to the past but not to the future. His narrator, Saleem Sinai, is writing about his own lifetime, which began August 15, 1947, at the moment of Indian Independence, and he still has to live out his own future. Historical consequences have yet to be lived through. However much he tries to project his vision of his own and India's future at the end of the novel. Rushdie points this out himself, using the same metaphor of a cinema screen which he uses for metafictional commentary within the novel. The narrative's movement through time towards the present, and the book itself, as it nears contemporary events, quite deliberately loses deep perspective,

be come more partial. He felt it would be dishonest to pretend, when writing about the day before yesterday, that it was possible to see the whole picture.

While Rushdie's narrator attempts to give a comprehensive view, his efforts at comprehensiveness are continually subverted by the partiality (incompleteness/self-interestedness) inevitable in telling of events that intimately concern himself. There is always the recognition that other readings are possible and will be possible, indeed necessary, in the future. *Midnight's Children* explores the ways in which history is given meaning through the telling individual experience. For protagonist Saleem Sinai, born at the instance of India's independence from Britain, his life becomes inextricably linked with the political, national, and religious events of his time. Not only does Saleem experience many of the crucial historical events, but he also claims some degree of involvement in them. Saleem expresses his observation that his private life has been remarkably public, from the very moment of his conception. In a broader sense, Rushdie is relating Saleem's generation of "Midnight's Children" to the generation of Indians with whom he was born and raised.

The reader of *Midnight's Children* must piece together Saleem Sinai's narrative to extract meaning from it. As the narrative involves sudden shift back and forth in time, as well as many instances of illusion, the reader must solve the puzzle of Saleem Sinai's life. Similarly, the characters in the novel, in the process of their search for self-definition, must attempt to solve the puzzle of their own identities. For example, Aadam Aziz gains a familiarity with Naseem Ghani, who will one day become his wife, through a white perforated sheet. Aadam may move the hole in the sheet to examine any given area, in this way Aadam piece together a puzzle of Naseem's appearance.

Another way in which *Midnight's Children* opposes the Euro-centrism of

master discourses in by the use of the magic realist genre. This genre, originating from a school of painters, has been applied, at first, to such notable South American post-colonial writers as Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and, later, to a wide variety of post-modern and post –colonial writers as well. Its central features are characterized by a juxtaposition of realistic historical and detailed everyday events on the one hand, and fantastical or magical events, and material from fairy- tales and myth on the other. All described in an everyday language with a passion for story-telling, giving a sense that the fantastical is just as ordinary as the realistic.

All of these elements are present in *Midnight's Children* where everything is told by Saleem in his passionate narrative style which always tries to construct a good story; to such an extent that his wife Padma at one point exclaims, 'you'll be two hundred years old before you manage to tell about your birth' (*Midnight's Children* 38). Throughout the book a number of fantastical events occur alongside realistic ones, but Saleem nevertheless claims that his story is absolutely true. The most obvious example of the fantastic is midnight's children conference, the telepathic union of the children born at midnight on the Indian independence day, 15 August 1947, all of them with fantastical or supernatural capabilities, e.g 'transmutation, flight, prophecy and wizardry' (*Midnight's Children* 200). Saleem makes a point of telling us that this is to be understood in every literal way, thus underlining the mixture of reality with the fantastic; his fantastic in the novel, the fantastical has element of realism too: there is of course, the historical fact of the date, but also the number of 1001 Midnight children is not as unlikely as one might think. Rushdie, in 'The Riddle of Midnight: India August 1987', explains that his calculations show that there were probably more than 1001 (26).

Another feature of the novel is what we normally call 'fact' or 'truth' is



questioned. Again this is a way of blurring the boundary between real and fantastic to create a voice outside the master narrative. A good example of this is when India's independence is described not as a historical fact, but as a new myth to celebrate 'a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a fable rivaled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God (*Midnight's Children* 112). Rushdie questioned the existing juxtaposition of two concepts; money and God which is traditionally used.

This research tries to show how Salman Rushdie uses narrative technique and the concept of history in a very new way in *Midnight's Children* in order to place his story. These traditions, appearing in the colonial period, have constructed a notion of universalism in literature where the 'classics' of the western canon have set the order of the day (Ashcroft 91-92). Additionally, history has been written with Europe as the subject of all interpretations of history (be they Whig, Tory, Marxist, etc), thus constructing a master narrative which Chakrabarty calls 'the history of Europe', where even the histories of their world countries are written with Europe as subject (Chakrabarty 383). The theory of history presented in *Midnight's Children* attempts not to replace the centre in this traditional binary of centre and margin, but rather to deconstruct this binary in order to gain access to history and literature.

Salman Rushdie tries to break the binary by using a very different kind of narrative, a mixture of oral narrative style with all the colloquialisms typical of that style and a very formal style typical of written language. In addition to this other 'English's' like pidgin English are used. These elements serve to place the novel outside the Western tradition, even though it uses a language, English and a format, the novel which are central to the western literary canon. It analyses the style and genre of the novel to show how Rushdie accomplishes all this. It tries to show that the

novel fits into the magic realism which also helps to place the novel outside the master narrative, finally, I will look at the theory of history presented in the novel to show how Rushdie tries to break the binary of Euro-centrism. Chakrabarty describes this type of history as the appropriation of ‘the antihistorical devices of memory’ by India history in order to represent ‘the antihistorical “histories” of the subaltern classes’ (Chakrabarty 384); antihistorical in the sense these devices are not concerned with the ‘great’ events and battles of traditional history, but rather history of the individual. Thus Rushdie provides a voice for the marginalized and the subaltern, not just subaltern classes, but the subaltern individual.

In *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie rewrites history as protest, deconstructive and creative reworking of history which supplement historical facts in order to give a more comprehensive account of historical process and the continuum between lived experience and recorded history. Rushdie concludes that legends make reality, and become more useful than the facts. A linguistic and stylistic analysis of the first paragraph of the book shows how Rushdie mixes different kinds of style and language to create a narrative very different from traditional western book form from the beginning. Rushdie places the narrative within the oral tradition by constantly arguing with himself about how to tell the story. He uses typical colloquialisms e.g. ‘No, that won’t do’, ‘Well then’, ending a sentence with ‘as a matter of fact’ and beginning another with ‘and’; one sentence is never completed, again typical of the colloquial style; ‘it’s important to be more . . . ‘. He also, in the very first line, uses the all familiar ‘once upon a time’, which epitomizes the oral tradition of folk-tales, yet he immediately opposes this tradition by giving us the exact date and time of the action. He even draws a lot of attention to this by constantly elaborating on the details, again in a colloquial manner.

This colloquial style, like the folk-tale allusion, is abandoned without any warning; he suddenly starts to use a very formal style typical of written language, e.g. 'mere trifle', 'befallen', 'benighted moment'. The language sometimes becomes almost solemn, e.g. 'embroiled in Fate'; his talk about prophecies and destiny help to emphasize this solemn style. The formal style is seen in the syntax as well, e.g. in the use of a passive construction, 'had befallen', which is typical of formal written language. He also uses a sustained metaphor where the time of his birth becomes the 'occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks' which have 'handcuffed' and 'chained' him to history and his country; this sustained metaphor is, of course, not typical of everyday language, but rather of an almost lyrical written language; i.e. a completely different style from the first part of the paragraph.

But this style, too, is abandoned in the very last sentence of the paragraph, stating, in a very down-to-earth manner and with out any of the formal stylistic and syntactic features; 'And I couldn't even wipe my own nose at the time.' This last sentence cement the fact that in this book there is no fixed style or type of syntax; it change constantly. Even the language change, sometime moving into pidgin English. All this support the point that Rushdie is constantly trying to place himself outside the master discourse of the west. It could be said, and by some post- colonial authors and critics, that English, as the language of the colonizer, cannot be used to represent the problems of the colonized. However, for Rushdie there really is no alternative; India has around 15 major languages and writing in any of these would immediately give the narrator of the story a regional identity. This would make it impossible for Rushdie to introduce the narrator as a metaphor for India, which is a major point in the novel, instead of using a language to his own purpose of using the stylistic and linguistic effects.

Returning to the first lines of the novel, another point to be made about them is that they are repeated several times throughout the book, though they are used in different contexts. This is a way to break up the usual linear structure of narrative of the western canon and it is a technique which is used throughout the book; events are constantly being foreshadowed, and previous (in the temporal sense) events and characters affect present events and characters without any apparent sign of causality. Example of the first pervades the book, though one of the first is when the brandy bottle of the boatman Tai becomes a foreshadowing of Saleem's father's drinking (*Midnight's Children* 17). A good example of the latter is that the perforated sheet through which Saleem's grandfather Aadam Aziz is forced to love his wife 'dooms' Mumtaz to her attempt to learn to love her husband, Ahmed, part by part and force Saleem to see his life in fragment (*Midnight's Children* 107). The element of linearity in history, which is, after all, the main temporal feature of the narrative is credited to Saleem's wife, Padma, 'bullying me [Saleem] back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened-next (*Midnight's Children* 338). Thus the linearity of the narrative is not the natural mode of circular or spiral time which runs along side the traditional linear time, constantly crossing and affecting the latter.

The language, narrative style and technique all place the novel outside almost anything written in Europe before the post-modern period, and thus creates a space for a very different voice in literature, clearly distinct from the western canon. This in spite of the fact that it uses elements from the western tradition, e.g, the first person narrator, and form of a memoir or a diary.

As mentioned the traditional interpretations of history all have an idea of a purpose in history, be it the advancement of the empire and the education of the 'primitives', the rise of the nation and nationality of the resolution of class difference.

Saleem's story, however, is the story of realizing that there is no purpose. This is a fact which is hard to accept for Saleem, though from the beginning he fears that his life 'might turn out to be utterly useless, void, and without a shred of purpose' in spite of all the prophecies, the ministers letter which have all created a 'glowing and inescapable mist of expectancy' around him (152).

The Midnight's Children Conference (MCC) is a symbol of this fact. The MCC, consisting of children born at the exact time of the independence of India, is a symbol of India, of the diversity of the people of India. But Rushdile has said of India that never in its ageless history has there been united India; it is a country of 15 major language, multiple races, religious and cultures. Likewise, the MCC consist of all sorts of voice with different ambitions, described by Saleem as 'a many headed monster, speaking in the myriad of tongues of Babel. Nevertheless, Saleem, as the leader of the Conference, has great confidence in the MCC's ability to change the world, confident as he is that the MCC must be there for a reason and have purpose, but Shiva quickly disillusions him; '*What purpose, man? What thing in the whole sister- sleeping world got reason*' (*Midnight's Children* 22). Saleem's feeble answer is: 'But history' (221); but, mentioned, history does not have a purpose in *Midnight's Children*. Saleem refuses to face this fact, however, even if there are sings of disillusionment, e.g. when Soumitra, the time-traveller, foretells their downfall; or when the first conference is held ending, as it does, in a cacophony of voices each expressing a different ideology and aim (228); and of course there's Shiva, always the voice of disillusionment- and in the Hindu religious the god of destruction.

Slowly, however, Saleem has to realize that the only purpose they have in their annihilation. On the surface it seems strange that annihilation can be a purpose, but when you consider the view of history presented above it makes sense; their

destruction is a symbol of the meaninglessness of Hegelian history- their purpose, in the narrative, is to show that there can be no purpose in history, that all the ideologies, which they represent cannot be realized. Additionally, as they are an analogy of India, their destruction also signifies and used possibilities of the Indian independences; the impossibility of uniting such a diverse people in the nation state.

The role of fragmentation in the formation of identity also applies to nations, particularly to India. The fragmentation of the large British colonial territory into Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, whose cultural, religious, political, and linguistic traditions differ, presented a tremendously complex and intimidating task. Therefore, India's early days as an independent nation were fraught with division and strife. Rushdie draws a comparison between India's struggles with its neighboring people and Saleem's struggles with various family members and with the other members of the Midnight Children's Club. Rushdie also demonstrates Saleem's fragmentation through his actual physical mutilations, both on the school playground and under the doctor's knife.

Rushdie also uses metaphorical allusions to fragmentation or disintegration that indicate the loss of a sense of identity. For example, Rushdie describes both Aadam Aziz and Saleem Sinai as possessing a void or a hole in their centers as a result of their uncertainty of God's existence. In their respective last days, Rushdie describes the "Cracking and eventual disintegration of their exteriors. Saleem identifies many people as his parents. His biological parents Wee Willie and Vanita, are in some ways the least important of suggestion. Each time Saleem finds a new father, he experiences a rebirth of sorts. This multiple metaphorical parentage also relates to the feeling of homelessness and exile as well to the fragmentation of identity and memory that plague Saleem throughout the novel.



## CHAPTER II

### Methodology

#### Narration

Narration is assimilating information and retelling it. Anyone would listen closely if they knew they were going to retell what they had heard. Just like when you've seen a documentary and tell your friend all about it the next day, you will remember it better. Most people narrate easily because we tend to do this as people relive events (or books) with others. He has probably told you all about some event he witnessed or every detail of a show he saw. This is the same thing. It's casual and natural, which is why it differs from a book report:

This is not really a problem. If the necessary characteristics can be defined, these same characteristics can then serve as the point of departure for the next phase: a description of the way in which each narrative text is constructed. Once this is accomplished, we can then examine the variations that are possible when the narrative system is concretized into narrative texts. This last step presupposes that an infinite number of narrative texts can be described using the finite number of concepts contained within the narrative system. (Bal 3)

Narration is a very powerful learning tool that tells us perfect attention and absolute recollection is an asset to employer, teacher, and the nation. Students have the powers of perfect recollection and just application because they have read with attention and concentration and have in every case reproduced what they read in narration.

A narrator is an entity within a story that tells the story to the reader. It is one of three entities responsible for story-telling of any kind. The others are the author and the reader (or audience). The author and the reader both inhabit the real world. It is



the author's function to create the alternate world, people, and events within the story. It is the reader's function to understand and interpret the story. The narrator exists within the world of the story (and only there—although in non-fiction the narrator and the author can share the same persona, since the real world and the world of the story are the same) and presents it in a way the reader can comprehend:

The theory of narration, as it has been developed in the course of this century, offers various labels for the concept here referred to. The most current one is point of view or narrative perspective. Narrative situation, narrative viewpoint, narrative manner are also employed. More or less elaborate typologies of 'narrative points of view' have been developed, of which I shall include the most well-known in my bibliography. All these typologies have proved more or less useful. They are all, however, unclear on the point. They do not make a distinction between, on the one hand, the vision through which the elements are presented and on the other the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision. (Bal 42-144)

The concept of the fallible narrator became more important with the rise of the novel in the 19th Century. Until the late 1800s, literary criticism as an academic exercise dealt solely with poetry (including epic poems like *The Iliad* and *Paradise Lost*, and poetic drama like Shakespeare). Most poems did not have a narrator distinct from the author. But novels, with their immersive fictional worlds, created a problem, especially when the narrator's views differed significantly from that of the author.

A writer's choice of narrator is crucial for the way a work of fiction is perceived by the reader. Generally, a first-person narrator brings greater focus on the feelings, opinions, and perceptions of a particular character in a story, and on how the

character views the world and the views of other characters. If the writer's intention is to get inside the world of a character, then it is a good choice, although a third-person limited-omniscient narrator is an alternative that doesn't require the writer to reveal all that a first-person character would know. By contrast, a third-person omniscient narrator gives a panoramic view of the world of the story, looking into many characters and into the broader background of a story. A third-person omniscient narrator can tell feelings of every character. For stories in which the context and the views of many characters are important, a third-person narrator is a better choice. However, a third-person narrator does not need to be an omnipresent guide, but instead may merely be the protagonist referring to himself in the third person:

In speaking of the narrator, I do not mean the so-called 'implied author,' either. Since this term is used rather often, I think it best to devote a few words to it. The term was introduced by Booth (1961) in order to discuss and analyse the ideology and moral stance of a narrative text without having to refer directly to a biographical author. As such it preceded the generalized use of the term 'narrator'. In Booth's use of the term, it denotes the totality of meaning that can be inferred from a text. (Bal 18)

A writer may choose to let several narrators tell the story from different points of view. Then it is up to the reader to decide which narrator seems most reliable for each part of the story. An unreliable narrator is a force behind the power of first person narratives, and provides the only unbiased clues about the character of the narrator. To some extent all narrators are unreliable, varying in degree from trust-worthy Ishmael in *Moby Dick* to the mentally disabled Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury* and the criminal Humbert in *Lolita*. Other notable examples of unreliable narrators include

the butler Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*, Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* and Verbal Kint in the film *The Usual Suspects*. One of the most famous examples of an unreliable narrator in American literature is Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*. All of Henry James's fiction is based on the narrator's point of view and the limitations of their narrations and the motivation behind what they reveal. Unreliable narrators aren't limited to fiction. Memoirs, autobiographies and autobiographical fiction have the author as narrator and character. Sometimes the author purposely makes his narrator persona unreliable such as Jim Carroll in *The Basketball Diaries*.

A narrative is a construct created in a suitable medium (speech, writing, images) that describes a sequence of fictional or non-fictional events. It derives from the Latin verb *narrare*, which means "to recount" and is related to the adjective *gnarus*, meaning "knowing" or "skilled". The word "story" may be used as a synonym of "narrative", but can also be used to refer to the sequence of events described in a narrative. A narrative can also be told by a character within a larger narrative:

The notion of the narrator needs still further positioning, however. I do not mean a story-teller, a visible, fictive 'I' who interferes in his/ her account as much as s/he likes, or even participates as a character in the action. Such a 'visible' narrator is a specific version of the narrator, one of the several different possibilities of manifestation. (Bal 18)

A narrative is a story or part of a story. It may be spoken, written or imagined, and it will have one or more points of view representing some or all of the participants or observers. In stories told verbally, there is a person telling the story, a narrator whom the audience can see and/or hear, and who adds layers of meaning to the text nonverbally.

The narrator also has the opportunity to monitor the audience's response to the story and to modify the manner of the telling to clarify content or enhance listener interest. This is distinguishable from the written form in which the author must gauge the reader's likely reactions when they are decoding the text and make a final choice of words in the hope of achieving the desired response:

The distinction between narrator and focalize is crucial here. For the conversion scene implies an important statement on vision: conversion is defined as seeing, not in a positivistic or in a psychological but in a narratological sense; seeing differently, and seeing difference turns the fibula around, makes the character different. The turn-around is, for him to see individuals instead of the devastating, de-humanizing bureaucracy of numbers. (Bal 19-20)

Whatever the form, the content may concern real-world people and events. This is termed personal experience narrative. When the content is fictional, different conventions apply. The text is projecting a narrative voice, but the narrator is ontologically distant, i.e. belongs to an invented or imaginary world, and not the real world:

Focalization is the relationship between the 'vision' the agent that sees, and that which is seen. This relationship is a component of the story part, of the content of the narrative text: A says that B sees what C is doing. Sometimes that difference is void, e.g. when the reader is presented with a vision as directly as possible. The different agents then cannot be isolated, they coincide. That is a form of 'stream of consciousness.' But the speech act of narrating is still different from the vision, the memories, the sense perceptions, thoughts that are being

total. (Bal 147)

The narrator may be one of the characters in the story. Roland Barthes describes such characters as 'paper beings' and fiction comprises their narratives of personal experience as created by the author. When their thoughts are included, this is termed internal focalisation, i.e. when each character's mind focuses on a particular event; the text reflects his or her reactions:

The fact that 'narration' has always implied focalization is related to the notion that language shapes vision and world-view, rather than the other way round. As far as it implies that language can be isolated from its objects only artificially, for the duration of the analysis that idea may very well be squared with the practice endorsed here. (Bal 19)

In written forms, the reader hears the narrator's voice both through the choice of content and style (the author can encode voices for different emotions and situations, and the voices can either be overt or covert), and through clues that reveal the narrator's beliefs, values, and ideological stance, as well as the author's attitude towards people, events, and things. It is customary to distinguish a first-person from a third-person narrative (Gérard Genette uses the terms homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrative respectively). A homodiegetic narrator describes his or her personal and subjective experiences as a character in the story. As a result, his identity is divided into two agents: one is the narrator and another is the focalizer. As a focalizer, he imposes his perspective in the focalizing process. Therefore, his focalization can not be taken as real since he imposes his ideology prejudice, beliefs, etc. that entirely distort the reality. Homodiegetic narrator Saleem who is also the focalizer enters the fictional world and distorts the reality. Hence, in reality, his telling of history and focalization of the focalized turns to be misreading and misguiding. To

avoid such danger of misreading, according to narratologists, counter focalization is needed and to investigate the power- relation in the focalization, according to new historicists, alternative reading is required. Saleem as the focalizer and his focalization is fallible because he is unable to narrate the story properly. If the reader ignores his failure of telling story, they can not properly understand the meaning of the text.

Saleem, the focalizer, can not portray the true picture of the focalized because of his prejudice and self evaluation that even can not evaluation himself. That's why he is not ready to take his responsibility for own narration. When he attempts to understand the focalized, he turns to be self- centred. Thus, readers have to be critical by means of counterfocalzation and alternative reading depending on silences, gaps, incomplete voice and voice which are uttered but not clarified by the focalizer.

Such a narrator cannot know anything more about what goes on in the minds of any of the other characters than is revealed through their actions, whereas a heterodiegetic narrator describes the experiences of the characters who do appear in the story and, if the story's events are seen through the eyes of a third-person internal focaliser, this is termed a figural narrative. In some stories, the author may be overtly omniscient, and both employ multiple points of view and comment directly on events as they occur:

This is emphatically not to say that the narrator should not be analyzed in relation to the focalizing agent. On the contrary, precisely when the connection between these two agents is not self-evident, it becomes easier to gain insight into the complexity of the relationship between the three agents that function in the three layers- the narrator, the focalizer , the acto and those moments at which they do or do not

overlap in the shape of single 'persons.' (Bal 19)

Tzvetan Todorov (1969) coined the term narratology for the structuralist analysis of any given narrative into its constituent parts to determine their function(s) and relationships. For these purposes, the story is what is narrated as usually a chronological sequence of themes, motives and plot lines. Hence, the plot represents the logical and causal structure of a story, explaining why the events occur. The term discourse is used to describe the stylistic choices that determine how the narrative text or performance finally appears to the audience. One of the stylistic decisions may be to present events in a non-chronological order, say using flashbacks to reveal motivations at a dramatic moment.

Narrative technique can be divided into two subgenres: the traditional narrative and the modern narrative. Traditional narrative focuses on the chronological order of history; it is event driven and tends to center upon individuals, action, and intention. For example, in regards to the French Revolution, a historian who works with the traditional narrative might be more interested in the revolution as a single entity (one revolution), center it in Paris, and rely heavily upon large figures such as Maximilien Robespierre:

The foregoing definition of narrative fiction also gives rise to a classification of its basic aspects: the events, their verbal representation, and the act of telling or writing, in the spirit of Genette's distinction between 'histoire', 'recit' and 'narration' (1972, pp; 71-6), I shall label these aspects 'story', 'text' and 'narration' respectively. (Rimmon-Kenan 3)

Conversely, modern narrative typically focuses on structures and general trends. A modern narrative would break from rigid chronology if the historian felt it explained

the concept better. In terms of the French Revolution, a historian working with the modern narrative might show general traits that were shared by revolutionaries across France but would also illustrate regional variations from those general trends (many confluent revolutions). Also this type of historian might use different sociological factors to show why different types of people supported the general revolution.

Historians who use the modern narrative might say that the traditional narrative focuses too much on what happened and not enough on causation. Also, that this form of narrative reduces history into neat boxes and thereby does an injustice to history:

Narratology also deals with a common denominator of various types of narrative. This common denominator is found to be the 'story' a non-verbal construct which narratology abstracts from the verbal text as well as from other sign-systems. Deconstruction, on the other hand is interested in the verbal, rather than non-verbal, similarities between all types of narrative. (Rimmon-Kenan 131)

Historians who utilize the traditional narrative might say that the modern narrative overburdens the reader with trivial data that had no significant effect on the progression of history. That it is the historian's duty to take out what is inconsequential from history because to do otherwise might commit an injustice to the reader, whom may end up believing that minor trivial events were actually important.

First-person narrative is a literary technique in which the story is narrated by one character, who explicitly refers to him or herself in the first person, that is, using words and phrases involving "I" (referred to as the first-person singular) and "we" (referred to as the first-person plural). The intensity of such confessional intimacy can be striking. First-person narratives can appear in several forms: interior monologue, as



in Dostoevsky's novel; dramatic monologue, as in Albert Camus' *The Fall*; or explicitly, as in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Since the narrator is within the story, he or she may not have knowledge of all the events. For this reason, first-person narrative is often used for detective fiction, so that the reader and narrator uncover the case together. One traditional approach in this form of fiction is for the main detective's principal assistant, the "watson", to be the narrator: this derives from the character of Dr Watson in *Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes* stories.

First-person plural narrators tell the story using "we", that is, no individual speaker is identified; the narrator is a member of a group that acts as a unit. The first-person-plural point of view occurs rarely but can be used effectively, sometimes as a means to increase the concentration on the character or characters the story is about. Examples: William Faulkner in *A Rose for Emily* (Faulkner was an avid experimenter in using unusual points of view - see his *Spotted Horses*, told in third person plural), Frederik Pohl in *Man Plus*, and more recently, Jeffrey Eugenides in his novel *The Virgin Suicides* and Joshua Ferris in *Then We Came To The End*.

First-person narrators can also be multiple, as in Akutagawa's *In a Grove* (the source for the movie *Rashomon*) and Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury*. Each of these sources provides different accounts of the same event. The first-person narrator may be the principal character or one who closely observes the principal character (see Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* or F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, each narrated by a minor character.). These can be distinguished as "first person major" or "first person minor" points of view:

I shall refer to the relation between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented with the term focalization.

Focalization is, then, the relation between the vision and that which is 'seen', perceived. By using this term I wish to dissociate myself from a number of current terms in this area, for the following reasons. (Bal 142)

First-person narrative can tend towards a stream of consciousness, as in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. The whole of the narrative can itself be presented as a false document, such as a diary, in which the narrator makes explicit reference to the fact that he/she is writing or telling a story, such as in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Narrators may be more or less conscious of themselves as telling a story, and their reasons for telling it and the audience that they believe they are addressing also vary wildly. In extreme cases, a frame story presents the narrator as a character in an outside story that begins to tell his own story.

First person narrators are often unreliable narrators since a narrator might be impaired (as in *The Last Film of Emile Vico* by Thomas Gavin), lie (as in the *The Book of the New Sun* series by Gene Wolfe), or manipulate his or her own memories intentionally or not (as in *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro). Henry James discusses his concerns about the romantic privilege of the 'first person' in his preface to *The Ambassadors*, calling it "the darkest abyss of romance.

Perhaps the most convoluted example of a mixed media kind of point of view is Joseph Conrad's novelette *Heart of Darkness*, which has a double framework: an unidentified narrator describes (in first person plural) Marlow, the protagonist, telling his own story in the first person. Thus we have a "we" introducing a "he" who talks about "I".

Texts encourage the reader to identify with the narrator, not with the author. Literary narration can occur from the first-person, or third-person point of view. In a

novel, the first person is commonly used: "I saw, We did," etc. In an encyclopedia or textbook narrators often work in the third-person: "that happened, the king died", etc. For additional vagueness, imprecision, and detachment, some writers employ the passive voice: "it is said that the president was compelled to be heard...". The ability to use points of view effectively provides one measure of someone's writing ability. The writing mark schemes used for National Curriculum assessments in England reflect this: they encourage the awarding of marks for the use of viewpoint as part of a wider judgment regarding the composition and effect of the text.

Most novels are narrated in "third person omniscient", or in "third person limited". A third person omniscient narrator can shift focus from character to character with knowledge of everyone's thoughts and of events of which no single character would be aware. The third person limited point of view picks one character and follows him or her around for the duration of the book. The narrator may be more observant than the character, but is limited to what that one character could theoretically observe. In a minor variant on third person limited, narrator may "travel" with a single character, but the point-of-view conventions may be extended to allow the narrator access to other characters' thoughts and motivations. Another common variant is for a novel to have different third person limited points of view in different sections.

Third person limited point of view became the most popular narrative perspective during the twentieth century. Third person limited is sometimes called the "over the shoulder" perspective; it shows the story as though the narrator could only describe events that could be perceived by a viewpoint character. It can be used very objectively, showing what is actually happening without the filter of the protagonist's personality, thus allowing the author to reveal information that the protagonist doesn't

know or realize. However, some authors use an even narrower and more subjective perspective, as though the viewpoint character were narrating the story; this is dramatically very similar to the first person, allowing in-depth revelation of the protagonist's personality, but uses third-person grammar. Some writers will shift perspective from one viewpoint character to another.

In third person limited the narrator is outside of the story and tells the story from only one character's view. The character's thoughts are revealed through the narrator. The reader learns the events of the narrative through the perceptions of the chosen character. Third person limited uses pronouns such as, he, she, they, their, herself, himself, themselves, etc. Historically, the "third person omniscient" perspective was more common. This is the tale told from the point of view of the storyteller who knows all the facts. An example of this would be "little did he know" when told by that third person, such as a narrator. The primary advantage is that it injected the narrator's own perspective and reputation into the story, creating a greater sense of objectivity for the story. The disadvantage of this mode is that it creates more distance between the reader and the story. A variation is where the narrator is a character in the story; a small amount of the story might be told in first person.

Some make the distinction between "third person omniscient" and "universal omniscient;" the difference being that in universal omniscient, the narrator reveals information that the characters do not have. This is also called "Little Did He Know" writing as in "Little did he know he'd be dead by morning." Currently this style is out of favor. There is also a "Third person objective" perspective which tells a story without detailing any characters' thoughts and instead gives an objective point of view. This point of view can be described as "a fly on the wall" and is preferred in newspaper articles.

First person narration is used somewhat frequently. The first-person point of view sacrifices omniscience and omnipresence for a greater intimacy with one character. It allows the reader to see what the focus character is thinking; it also allows that character to be further developed through his or her own style in telling the story. First-person narrations may be told like third person ones; on the other hand, the narrator may be conscious of telling the story to a given audience, perhaps at a given place and time, for a given reason. In extreme cases, the first-person narration may be told as a story within a story, with the narrator appearing as a character in the frame story. In a first person narrative, the narrator is a character in the story. This character takes actions, makes judgments and has opinions and biases. In this case the narrator gives and withholds information based on its own viewing of events. It is an important task for the reader to determine as much as possible about the character of the narrator in order to decide what "really" happens. This type of narrator is usually noticeable for its ubiquitous use of the first-person pronoun, "I".

The narrator can be the protagonist (e.g., Gulliver in *Gulliver's Travels*), someone very close to him, who is privy to his thoughts and actions (Dr. Watson in *Sherlock Holmes*), or an ancillary character who has little to do with the action of the story (Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*). A narrator can even be a character relating the story second-hand, such as Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*.

The first person narrator is the type most obviously distinct from the author. It is a character in the work, which must follow all of the rules of being a character, even during its duties as narrator. For it to know anything, it must experience it with its senses, or be told about it. It can interject its own thoughts and opinions, but not those of any other character, unless clearly told about those thoughts.

In autobiographical fiction, the first person narrator is the character of the

author (with varying degrees of accuracy). The narrator is still distinct from the author and must behave like any other character and any other first person narrator.

Examples of this kind of narrator include Jim Carroll in *The Basketball Diaries* and Kurt Vonnegut in *Timequake*. In some cases, the narrator is writing a book ("the book in your hands"), therefore it has most of the powers and knowledge of the author.

A small number of novels have been written in the second person, frequently paired with the present tense. A relatively prominent example is Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*, where the central character is clearly modeled on himself, and he seems to have decided that second-person point of view would create even more intimacy than first-person, creating the feeling that the reader is blind, in a sense, and the plot is leading him or her along. It is almost universally agreed that second-person narration is hard to manage, especially in a serious work. Other examples of second-person narrative are the *Choose Your Own Adventure*, in which the reader actually makes decisions and jumps around the book accordingly; most interactive fiction; and different chapters from many novels written by Chuck Palahniuk.

This type of narration is most common in interactive fiction. Role-playing games could also be considered second person fiction. The second person format has been used in at least a few popular novels, most notably Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*, and Tom Robbins' *Half Asleep in Frog Pajamas* as well as many short stories. When done well, the readers imagine themselves within the action, which can be used to place them in different situations, for example in Iain Banks' novel *Complicity*, where the chapters that deal with the actions of a murderer are in the second person. Most stories written in second person are probably closer to first-person with "you" replacing "I".

In literature, person is used to describe the viewpoint from which the narrative

is presented. Although second-person perspectives are occasionally used, the most commonly encountered are first and third person. Third person omniscient specifies a viewpoint in which readers are provided with information not available to characters within the story; without this qualifier, readers may or may not have such information. In movies and video games first- and third-person are often used to describe camera viewpoints; the former being a character's own, and the latter being the more familiar "general" camera showing a scene. The second-person may also be used.

Narratology is the theory and study of narrative and narrative structure and the ways they affect our perception. In principle, the word can refer to any systematic study of narrative, though in practice the use of the term is rather more restricted. It is an Anglicization of the French word *narratologie*, coined by Tzvetan Todorov in his *Grammaire du Décaméron* (1969), and has been retrospectively applied to many studies that were described otherwise by their authors. Although a lineage stretching back to Aristotle's *Poetics* may be traced:

Narratology is the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that 'tell a story. Such a theory helps to understand, analyse, and evaluate narrative. A theory is a systematic set of generalized statement about a particular segment of reality. That segment of reality, the corpus, about which narratology attempts to make its pronouncement consists of ' narrative texts' of all kinds, made for a variety of purpose and serving many different functions. (Bal 3)

Due to the origins of the term, it has a strong association with the structuralist quest for a system of formal description that can usefully be applied to any narrative (the analogy being with the grammars by reference to which sentences are parsed in some

forms of linguistics). This aim has not, however, characterized all work that is today described as narratological, Percy Lubbock's groundbreaking work on point of view, *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), is a case in point. Jonathan Culler argues that the many strands of (what he regards as) narratology are all united by recognition "that the theory of narrative requires a distinction between 'story' - a sequence of actions or events, conceived as independent of their manifestation in discourse – and 'discourse', the discursive presentation or narration of events", but admits that this is only implicit in the work of many of the authors he is grouping together in this way.

To a certain extent, the designation of work as narratological or otherwise may have more to do with the university department in which it takes place than with any specific theoretical position. Although a narratological approach can be taken to any narrative at all, and the classic studies (for example, Propp's) were often of non-literary narratives, the term "narratology" is most likely to be encountered within the disciplines of literary theory and literary criticism: examples of systematic narrative study that would not typically be described as narratological would include sociolinguistic studies of oral storytelling, such as those of William Labov, and studies in conversation analysis or discourse analysis that deal with narratives arising in the course of spontaneous verbal interaction. However, constituent analyses of the type where narremes are considered to be the basic units of narrative structure could be included either in linguistics, in semiotics, or in literary theory:

The point of narratology, defined as reflection on the generically specific, narrative determinants of the production of meaning in semiotic interaction, is not in the construction of a perfectly reliable model which 'fits' the texts. Such a construction presupposes the object of narratology to be a 'pure' narrative. Instead, narrative must be



considered as a discursive mode which affects semiotic objects in variable degrees. (Bal 14)

Narratology examines the ways that narrative structures our perception of both cultural artifacts and the world around us. The study of narrative is particularly important since our ordering of time and space in narrative forms constitutes one of the primary ways we construct meaning in general. Given the prevalence and importance of narrative media in our lives (television, film, fiction), narratology is also a useful foundation to have before one begins analyzing popular culture. The pages in the narratology site therefore attempt to introduce important theorists of narrative and the basic terms needed to explain both fiction and film.

Roland Barthes's original critical work provides an alternative way of thinking about narrative plot, one that refuses to be bound by traditional (what Barthes terms "readerly") structures. Barthes's distinction between hermeneutic and proairetic codes is also extremely helpful in thinking about the two driving forces of narrative form.

"Story" refers to the actual chronology of events in a narrative; discourse refers to the manipulation of that story in the presentation of the narrative. These terms refer, then, to the basic structure of all narrative form. Story refers, in most cases, only to what has to be reconstructed from a narrative; the chronological sequence of events as they actually occurred in the time-space (or diegetic) universe of the narrative being read.

Whereas 'story' is a succession of events, text' is a spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling. Put more simply, the text is what we read. In it, the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order; the characteristics of the participants are dispersed through some prism or perspective ('focalizer'). (Rimmon-Kenan 3)

In literature, it's even harder to present material in real time. One example occurs at the end of the *Odyssey*; *Odysseus* here presents the story of his adventures to Penelope in almost pure "story" form, that is, in the chronological order of occurrence. Stories are rarely recounted in this fashion, however. So, for example, when the *Odyssey* actually begins, we do not find ourselves at the chronological start of the story but in medias, when Odysseus is about to be freed from the isle of Calypso (which actually occurs nearly at the end of the chronological story which Odysseus relates to Penelope). Discourse also refers to all the material an author adds to a story: similes, metaphors, verse/prose, etc:

Narration can be considered as both real and fictional. In the empirical world, the author is the agent responsible for the production of the narrative and for its communication. The empirical process of communication, however, is less relevant to the poetics of narrative fiction than its counterpart within the text. (Rimmon-Kenan 3)

The diegesis of a narrative is its entire created world. Any narrative includes a diegesis, whether you are reading science fiction, fantasy, mimetic realism, or psychological realism. However, each kind of story will render that time-space continuum in different ways. The disbelief that we all perform before entering into a fictional world entails an acceptance of a story's diegesis. The Star Trek franchise is fascinating for narratology because it has managed to create such a fully realized and complex diegetic universe that the narratives of all five t.v. shows (TNG, DS9, STV, Enterprise, the original Star Trek) and all the movies occur, indeed coexist, within the same diegetic time-space. An important event in one of the movies affects all of the other shows and films in the franchise.

Focalize (focalizer, focalized object).

The term can refer to the person doing the focalizing (the focalizer) or to the object that is being perceived (the focalized object). In literature, one can achieve this effect through first-person narration, free indirect discourse, or what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as dialogism. In film, the effect can be achieved through various camera tricks and editing, for example POV shots, subjective treatment, over-the-shoulder shots, and so on. Focalization is a discursive element added to a narrative's story:

This topic is closely related to the notion of focalization, with which it has, traditionally, been identified. Narrator and focalization together determine what has been called narration – incorrectly, because only the narrator narrates, i.e. utters language which may be termed narrative since it represents a story. (Bal 19)

A story within a story sometimes tells another story, as in, for example, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. As in Mary Shelley's work, the form echoes in structure the thematic search in the story for something deep, dark, and secret at the heart of the narrative. The form thus also resembles the psychoanalysis interpretation of uncovering the unconscious behind various levels of repressive, obfuscating narratives put in place by the conscious mind. As is often the case (and Shelley's work is no exception), a different individual often narrates the events of a story in each frame.

The different kinds of narration are categorized by each one's primary grammatical stance: either 1) the narrator speaks from within the story and, so, uses "I" to refer to him- or herself (see first-person narration); in other words, the narrator is a character of some sort in the story itself, even if he is only a passive observer; or 2) the narrator speaks from outside the story and never employs the "I":

A point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing things, a certain angle, where 'real' historical facts are concerned or fictitious events. It

is possible to try and given an 'objective' picture of the facts. But what does that involve? 'Objectivity' is an attempt to present only what is seen or is perceived in some other way. (Bal 142)

Focusing a third-person narration through the eyes of a single character even when an author chooses to tell a narrative through omniscient narration, s/he will sometimes (or even for the entire tale) limit the perspective of the narrative to that of a single character, choosing for example only to narrate the inner thoughts of that one character. The narrative is still told in third-person (unlike first-person narration); however, it is clear that it is, nonetheless, being told through the eyes of a single character. A famous example of this form of narration is James Joyce's "The Dead" (in *Dubliners*). A narrative can also shift among various third-person-limited narrations.

Any story told in the grammatical third person, i.e. without using "I" or "we": "he did that, they did something else." In other words, the voice of the telling appears to be akin to that of the author him- or herself. This is perhaps the most common sort of narration and was particularly popular with the nineteenth-century realist novel. Third-person narration in which the teller of the tale, often appears to speak with the voice of the author himself, assumes an omniscient (all-knowing) perspective on the story being told: diving into private thoughts, narrating secret or hidden events, jumping between spaces and times. Of course, the omniscient narrator does not therefore tell the reader or viewer everything, at least not until the moment of greatest effect. In other words, the hermeneutic code is still very much in play throughout such narrations. Such a narrator will also discursively re-order the chronological events of the story.

### **New Historicism**

A method of literary interpretation called 'New Historicism' is, at the present moment, the dominant procedure for studying British Romantic literature in the Anglo-American academy. Indeed, its practice is so pervasive that its hegemony is being protested by scholars who feel they might be penalized if they write in any other way. New historicism rejected the notion that it was a theory or a specific doctrine. It rejects the formalist notion of aesthetic autonomy and they situate literature within a broader cultural network: "New Historicists variously recognize the ability of literature to challenge social and political authority" (Habib 762).

There are a number of similarities between New Historicism and Marxism, especially a British group of critics making up a school usually referred to as Cultural Materialism. Both New Historicists and Cultural Materialists are interested in recovering lost histories and in exploring mechanisms of repression and subjugation.

The major difference is that New Historicists tend to concentrate on those at the top of the social hierarchy (i.e. the church, the monarchy, the upper-classes) while Cultural Materialists tend to concentrate on those at the bottom of the social hierarchy (the lower-classes, women, and other marginalized peoples): "The new historicism is marked by a 'methodological self-consciousness rather than the old historicist faith in the transparency of signs and interpretive procedures" (Habib 764). New Historicists are, like the Cultural Materialists, interested in questions of circulation, negotiation, profit and exchange, i.e. how activities that purport to be above the market (including literature) are in fact informed by the values of that market.

However, New Historicists take this position further by then claiming that all cultural activities may be considered as equally important texts for historical analysis: contemporary trials of hermaphrodites or the intricacies of map-making may inform a Shakespeare play as much as, say, Shakespeare's literary precursors:

Literacy criticism found itself in the contradictory situation of justifying the study of literature as an alternative mode of knowledge, one more fundamental than that of science, but requiring the development of an analytic and 'scientific' methodology to confer on it the authority to make such a pronouncement. This history of criticism is riddled with such contradictions, and they go a long way to explain the tensions in the twentieth century over the recognition of the role of 'theory' in literacy studies. (Waugh 29)

This is not to say that no other kinds of criticism are being written. Yet even romantic criticism that is not in the New Historicist vein often proceeds today by referring to it, either antagonistically or apologetically, as what historicist philosophers like Michel Foucault or Louis Althusser would call the 'dominant ideological formation' among current literary critical methods.

Of course, there have always been intellectual trends in the methods in the natural sciences. But the current default predominance of New Historicist assumptions and procedures in the academic field of British Romantic literature and culture is noteworthy for additional reasons. New Historicism is also more specifically concerned with questions of power and culture (especially the messy commingling of the social and the cultural or of the supposedly autonomous self and the cultural/ political institutions that in fact produce that self).

Stephen Greenblatt's brilliant studies of the Renaissance have established him as the major figure commonly associated with New Historicism. Indeed, his influence meant that New Historicism first gained popularity among Renaissance scholars, many of whom were directly inspired by Greenblatt's ideas and anecdotal approach. This fascination with history and the minute details of culture soon caught on among

scholars working in other historical periods, leading to the increasing popularity of culturally- and historically-minded studies. This general trend is often referred to as Cultural Studies: "Plato anticipates the contemporary theoretical method known as New Historicism, which analyzes literacy texts as socio-political discourses rather than as timeless aesthetic objects" (Nightangle 41- 42). It is difficult to introduce this school is that a number of different approaches to history and culture often get lumped together under the category of "new historicism." The sheer number of historical and cultural studies that have appeared since the early 1990s, including the dominance of the still-larger umbrella term, Cultural Studies, makes the cordoning off of a group of critics as "New Historicists" difficult.

Michel Foucault is quite possibly the most influential critic of the last quarter-century. His interest in issues of power, epistemology, subjectivity, and ideology has influenced critics not only in literary studies but also political science, history, and anthropology: "The new Historicism, argued that analysis of literary text could not be restricted to texts themselves or to their author's psychology and background; rather, the larger contexts and cultural conventions in which text were produced needed to be considered" (Habib 766).

Foucault's willingness to analyze and discuss disparate disciplines (medicine, criminal science, philosophy, the history of sexuality, government, literature, etc.) as well as his questioning of the very principle of disciplinarily and specialization have inspired a host of subsequent critics to explore interdisciplinary connections between areas that had rarely been examined together. Foucault's accusation is the idea that difference, so integral to this concept of writing, is itself elevated to transcendent status. As a result, a primordial status is granted to the notion of writing: the play of representations which was previously gathered up into an image of the author is now

extended within gray neutrality. The privileges of the author are effectively sustained by attributing a "transcendental" causality to "writing" itself, and there is effectively reintroduced into criticism "the religious principle of hidden meanings" requiring interpretation (Habib 767).

Foucault also had the ability to pick up common terms and give them new meaning, thus changing the way critics addressed such pervasive issues as "power," "discourse," "discipline," "subjectivity," "sexuality," and government. New Historicist criticism first try to understand what historicism is, what problems it tries to solve and what other problems it creates in doing so, and, of course, whence it arose historically, in both the long run and short term. It is abundantly clear that New Historicism means studying literature in relation to its historical contexts, but a wealth of possibilities and problems lie buried in the innocuous phrase, 'in relation to'.

The words 'historicism' and 'romanticism' were both first widely used in the early years of the nineteenth century in Germany and in England. After the decimation of Germanic territories in the post-revolutionary Napoleonic wars (see chapter on 'The historical integrity, 'Germany' being then only a loose confederation of thirty-nine states, not unified in its modern form until 1871. Hence these historians began their researches with a purpose, although their idealized goal was a history without prior interpretations, only what really happened, as critics repeatedly state rigorous scientific rules of evidence and interpretation were marshaled to produce 'results' of a definite ideological tendency. In this foundational episode of historicism, we see an eighteenth-century philosophical ideal—a belief in the rational progress of all mankind (though usually limited to European civilization in practice)—giving way to a new nineteenth-century national or political 'law' or origins, technically applicable to any people anywhere, but implicitly intended to justify the existence of this or that



European nation.

Michel Foucault seeks throughout his work to make sense of how our contemporary society is structured differently from the society that preceded us. He has been particularly influential precisely because he tends to overturn accepted wisdom, illustrating the dangers inherent in those Enlightenment reforms that were designed to correct the barbarity of previous periods (the elimination of dungeons, the modernization of medicine, the creation of the public university, etc.). As Foucault illustrates, each process of modernization entails disturbing effects with regard to the power of the individual and the control of government. Indeed, his most influential work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, paints a picture of contemporary society that sometimes resembles George Orwell's 1984. He explores the ways that government has claimed ever greater control over and enforcement of ever more private aspects of our lives.

In particular, Foucault explores the transition from what he terms a culture of spectacle to a "carceral culture." Whereas in the former punishment was effected on the body in public displays of torture, dismemberment, and obliteration, in the latter punishment and discipline become internalized and directed to the constitution and, when necessary, rehabilitation of social subjects. Historicism becomes more interesting when it addresses questions of perennial philosophical importance, such as the relations between fact and fiction in history and aesthetics. Traditionally, the aptness of literary skills to the evocation or re-creation of the past has helped to distinguish historical explanations from scientific ones, for which fictional assistance is usually thought to be a disadvantage. And the philosophical legitimacy of poetic and other literary practices has been enhanced in proportion to their historical uses. More recently, though, New Historicisms have presumed on this discursive friendship

and have explained away literary effect as an entirely historical phenomenon. The final irony in this story, though, results from the return to prominence of the idea that history has come to an end.

Jeremy Bentham's nineteenth-century prison reforms provide Foucault with a representative model for what happens to society in the nineteenth century. The "Panopticon" is the perfect that would be structured in a way that cells would be open to a central tower. In the model, individuals in the cells do not interact with each other and are constantly confronted by the panoptic tower (pan=all; optic=seeing). They cannot, however, see when there is a person in the tower; they must believe that they could be watched at any moment: "the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so" (Foucault, "Discipline" 201). Foucault's historicism is less linear and more diffuse, charting the circulating movements of power in many spheres or society outside the strictly political. Besides the power of class and money, there is, for example, the power of professions or disciplines, the complex powers of gender, the power of language-which is the source and form of the discourses in which we inevitably chart past contests of power.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **Fallible Narration: A New Historical Reading in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children***

The versions of history proliferate endlessly, every version being a provisional reconstruction, though as Rushdie would agree the broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed, in the sense that it is never possible to know all the facts about anything, even the smallest act. Literature is, in part, the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality; but any account, whether it is given the status of history or fiction, is a reinterpretation, an attempt to read

significance into events according to a selected frame of reference. Rushdie takes some pains to reveal the interests at stake in choosing one frame of reference over another. Though Rushdie uses the parallel with archaeology, his closeness to India culture, which gives energy and vivacity to his text is such that his narrator creates himself through his writing of Indian history; he lives out the very events he is retelling.

In the end, Rushdie's fiction problematizes history. As self-consciously autobiographical fiction, *Midnight's Children* is much more explicit about its interpretive processes and rhetorical strategies for reading and rewriting history, Saleem Sinai, the narrator, finding himself mysteriously handcuffed to history by the temporal coincidence of the birth and India's arrival at independence, puts himself at the centre of a vast web of stories which constitutes post-colonial India history and which is his own life story. In his quest for individual identity through several generations, of Indian independence Indian history, of Pakistan and its partition, of the state of emergency, of Indian myths both Hindu and Muslim, and of the thousand and one children born in the first hour of India independence, August 15, 1947. As Saleem challenges us on the first page of his narrative, "I have been a swallower of lives: and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well" (*Midnight's Children* 9).

Since its publication, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* has been viewed as a modern epic of India, dealing with many important historical moments from the Jallianwala Bath incident of 1919 to the emergency of 1975. The story covers the three generations of Saleem Sinai's family of which history parallels with that of India's. The self-conscious narrator as well as the narrator Saleem Sinai, provides us with an alternative version of India's modern history from his point of view. In the

very beginning of the novel, we are told that the protagonist "was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947," more precisely, "on the stroke of midnight at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence." The time of his birth matters because it has made him "mysteriously handcuffed to history, [his] destinies indissolubly chained to those of [his] country"(MC 1). Thus, Saleem's has a strong reason to believe that he is somewhat responsible to write or interpret some events which happen to him in his life. In a sense, he is prophesied as histories that are destined to witness the fate of his country.

However, Saleem's history is different from those we know about India. In his personal version of history, he largely draws upon Indian mythology and endows the midnight's children with magic power, and employs-the fairy tale opening "once upon a time." Although his facts may be very difficult, even preposterous for those non-Indians to comprehend, they are quite true for most of the Indians. Therefore, the simple dichotomy is insufficient to account for the border between reality and fantasy in a place like India. In fact, Rushdie to a large degree aims to challenge the conventional prepositions of writing history as unity, continuity, and objectivity. Like fiction, history is textualized, a kind of human fabrications. Hutcheon further elaborates that historiographical metafiction's "selfawareness of history and fiction as human constructs" can serve as a basis for the "rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (5). Therefore, history no longer functions as a discipline of the only legitimate documentation of the past events; instead, it is ideological product. The sophisticated narrative strategies are designed to deal with Saleem's random and chaotic story as the narrator says; "there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumors, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me,

just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well" (MC 4). Throughout the novel, Saleem's story is often interrupted by what Hutcheon calls "narcissistic narrative" (1).

Saleem's ambitious belief to tell many stories makes his narrative fragment, digressive and episodic. The narrator exposes his conditions of writing to others, comments on his own narrative, exchanges opinions with the narratee Padma about how to tell a story and sometimes speaks directly to the reader. While he writes, his illiterate listener Padma sits beside him showing her emotional responses to his stories, questioning their credibility, and sometimes even forcing him to change the way he tells the story. In other words, he doubts whether the complex reality can be objectively represented in the narrative. For example, Saleem feels obliged to tell his story, but he is also aware of the mistakes he has made. I am rushing ahead at breakneck speed; errors are possible, and overstatement and jarring alterations in tone; I'm racing the cracks, but I remain conscious that errors have already been made, and that, as my decay accelerates (my writing speed is having trouble keeping up), the risk of unreliability grows . . . in this condition, am learning to use Padma's muscles as my guides (MC 325).

In his attempt to create himself through narrative, Saleem is forced attention to his process of historical recreating and to his work of "preserving" in the appealing, domestic-literary analogy of pickling: "And my Chutneys and kasaudies are, after all, connected to my nocturnal scribbling – by day amongst the pickle-vats, by night within these sheets, I spend my time at the great work of preserving, memory, as well fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks" (38).

What Saleem does is to weave an elaborate web of correspondence between national events and his personal life, dissolving preferentiality into fantasy, "forging"

connections in order to confer meaning on chaos, as he is well aware:

And am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning that I'm prepared to distort everything – to re-write whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role? Today, in my confusion, I can't judge. I'll have to leave it to others. For me, there can be no going back. (166)

Knowing that he is imprisoned by his egotistical frame of reference, so that his interpretation of history is always to some degree fictive and always an over-interpretation, he still can't do anything else but trust his own memory:

Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own. (211)

Especially, Saleem would add, in the two countries to which he belong, India and Pakistan – though- though to be fair, "Nobody, no country, has a monopoly of untruth"(326). There is a ceaseless play of opposition in the text between the desire for coherence and meaning, versus the possibility that everything is random and meaningless. Saleem's narrative enacts this tension. Against his artful correspondence his "national longing for from" (300), are set the "perforated sheet" and the empty pickle jar- image that subvert the attempts of the text at coherence and comprehensiveness. Indeed the perforated sheet introduce as the title of the first chapter of the book, is Saleem's talisman.

As the fragmented signifier, it is a warning against the narrator's attempts and

the reader's desire to discover total meaning where everything is inescapably plural, discontinuous, fragmented. The focus is on the gaps and the reading they gender:" the trick is to fill in the gaps, guided by the few clues one is given. Most of what matters in our lives takes place in our absence" (427). But Saleem's reading of history, like his pickling process, yield an artificial product, for coloring and spicing are important in giving immortality to the raw materials. Inevitably there are distortions:

A certain alteration, a slight intensification of taste, is a small matter, surely? The art is to change the flavour in degree, but not in kind. [. . .]. One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be strong for some palates; their smell may be overpowering, tears may rise to eyes; I hope nevertheless that it will be possible to say of them that they possess the authentic taste of truth [...]. That they are, despite everything, acts of love. (461)

Here the analogy finally breaks down, for unlike pickled fruit and vegetable whose flavour can be synthesized, the words which from the pickle of history retain their openness and contradiction, and "the process of revision should be constant and endless"(460). For Saleem's history there is still one empty pickle Jar, "for the future cannot be preserved in a jar [...]. Because it has not taken place" (462). Narratology is complicated by the fact that different theorists have different terms for explaining the same phenomenon, a fact that is fueled by narratology's structuralist background: narratologists love to categorize and to taxonomize, which has led to a plethora of terms to explain the complicated nature of narrative form.

The "fantastic heart" of Saleem's story are the Midnight Children, those thousand and one miraculous" children of the time: fathered, you understand, by history" (118), possessing "the highest talents of which men have ever dreamed"

(199). And it is as the teller of their story, a black part of India's history," secret macabre untold "(421) that Saleem confirms his own meaning, through betrayal and defeat. He tells his story of the joyous discovery of the Midnight children through his private". All India Radio," his own miraculous telepathic gift, where his " transformed mind" provides the communications centre for all the children to take to one another, of the " 1001 alternative realities" they offered, and of their potential as a " third principle" to destroy the old endless dualities of India. But such promises were not to be fulfilled: "if there is a third principle, its name is childhood. But it dies, or rather, it is murdered "(25). The destruction of Midnight's children which Saleem believes is the deepest motive behind the declaration of State of Emergency, is the black heart of his story and that which confirms their meaning and their place in India's history. Their magical powers are annihilated by the Window's Hand the castrating Mother figure Mrs. Gandhi. They are all," test- and hysterectomised":

Children who had lost their magic: she had cut it out of us, gorgeously with wide rolling hips she had devised the operation of our annihilation... gone forever...the originally one thousand and one marvelous promises of a numinous midnight. Drainage below: it was not a reversible operation. Who were we? Broken promises; made to be broken. (438)

At this point in the text, reversible operation take place between metaphor and reality or as Saleem puts it, "Reality can have metaphorical content; that does not make it less real" (200). Castration is presented as unmitigated horror, for just as it spells dismemberment of the self, so it denies futures. This structure of discourse also leads us to question the reasons behind each of the narrations since, unlike an omniscient narrative perspective; the teller of the story becomes an actual character with



concomitant shortcomings, limitations, prejudices, and motives. The process of transmission is also highlighted since we often have a sequence of embedded readers or audiences. Narration refers to the way that a story is told, and so belongs to the level of discourse.

It is the belief that historical change occurs in linear form so that the course of history may be predicated but cannot be altered by human will, and that history is determined by immutable laws and not by human agency:

Hence, the dilemma of historical interpretation can easily lead to a kind of aesthetic formalism on the one hand, which denies history any constitutive role in the formation of texts, and on the other hand, to a historical view of texts as culturally and socially determined, a view that reduces emphasis on authorial intention and agency. (Habib 761)

The nature of history and the problems of the representation of it in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* are from the viewpoint of New Historicism that discusses in class that the proclamation of universal truth in history can no longer sustain; but different versions and perspectives of interpretations in the histories.

The importance of sensitive close reading of texts continuous even when we venture outside a text into its archive, meaning not just the library but all the kinds of evidence that can be brought to bear upon it. All facts are not equal, and some may be false, or even falsified. Some understanding of the rules governing historical evidence will save the novice historicist the embarrassment of treating different orders of information as if history outside the text were all the same thing, an undifferentiated mass. The original authority and subsequent provenance of all evidence should be known, so far as possible. Corroboration of source evidence is at least as important in scholarly writing as it is in journalism. The anecdotes and memoirs surrounding

famous texts and artists can be distorted by petty or significant interests as often as those attaching to famous political figures and events, if not more so. The New Historicist working in the Foucauldian vein most commonly attaches her findings to one discourse or another existing at the time (the anti-slavery discourse, for example), for which she can readily find contemporary parallels. Historicism is not inconsistent with formalism, certainly not at the level of practice: the historicist critic can also be a good formalist critic. When a reader fails to understand the conventions of a text, for example, or has a tin ear in responding to a poem's political impact, the literary historicist need not give up the ability to distinguish a good text from a worse one, even if he feels that is not necessarily the most important decision to make about the text in question.

Within the postmodern moment, the traditional ideas that every history is viewed as the coherent, objective, and continuous unity have been strongly questioned and challenged by the new historicists who doubt the validity of the representation of the history and examine the factors manipulated behind it: "It was the literary text not as somehow unique but as a kind of discourse situated within a complex of cultural discourses religious, political, economic, aesthetic which both shaped it and, in their turn were shaped by it" (Habib 761). For the new historicists, history no longer serves as a transparent medium through which one can have a full picture of the past; rather, it works for a particular class or ideology and therefore it is always contaminated, oblique and subjective.

Rushdie's novel is classified as a sort of metafiction of which the author is highly conscious of himself during the process of his writing. The writing about the past history is like historiographic metafiction which foregrounds the problematic and intricate relationship between the history and the cultural context.

New historicists tended, then, to view literature as one discourse among many cultural discourses, insisting on engaging with this entire complex in a localized manner, refusing to engage in categorical generalization or to commit to any definite political stance. Indeed, new historicists have been criticized for accepting uncritically Foucault's somewhat disembodied and abstract notion of power which floats free of political and economic agency. They are also accused of arbitrariness in the ways in which they related literary text to other cultural discourses. (Habib 762)

The mode of writing attempts to encourage the readers to reconsider the so called valid interpretation of the history which functions as a kind of writing constructed by ideological discourses in a certain period. At the same time, through the self-reflexive techniques, it also stirs us to question our own credibility of interpretation of the history from a particular socio-political context.

Already we can feel a tension between immutable laws or by contingent human beings and the stress on the behaviour required of historians suggests that human agency and attitudes do have a tendency to interfere with strictly law-governed behaviour. Terms used by New Historicism are presented in alphabetical order; however, someone beginning to learn about New Historicism needs to stay conscious of the fact that this school is particularly heterogeneous, with many different critics interpreting terms in their own way. Critics have indicated those terms that are particularly tied to an individual theorist, as well as those terms that are used differently by two different critics.

The notion that has impeded a proper examination of the author's disappearance is that of critique, where this term implies a signifying system

constituted by relation and difference, embodying a rejection of the notion of simple, self-contained identity. While Foucault acknowledges that this notion stands for a remarkably profound attempt to elaborate the conditions of any text, he charges it with subtly perpetuating the existence of the author. This poststructuralist notion of writing says Foucault, has merely transposed the empirical characteristics of an author to transcendental anonymity (Habib 767). A definition of historicism is a theory that all social and cultural phenomena, all categories, truth and values are relative and historically determined, and can be understood only by examining their historical context, in complete detachment from present day attitudes and that historians must therefore study each period without imposing any personal or absolute value system.

The theory of history presented in *Midnight's Children* is an attempt to deconstruct the traditional Western theories or interpretations of history; Imperial, National, Marxist, etc. These theories, which are based on the Hegelian teleological view of history, all have the same notion of a purpose in history. Though the purpose or goal of each of these interpretations is different they all ignore what does not exactly serve these goals, e.g the histories of the subaltern. The basis of these interpretations is, if not always the complete objective truth, then at least a certain reliability of the fact presented. Rushdie says that we can not encapsulate the whole of reality in narrative. He ridicules the project of realist art in its attempt to represent life as it is (75). In the novel, Nadir Khan's room-mate had tried to reproduce the whole of life in his painting but had found it impossible: "Life had once again perversely, refused to remain life-size"(49). Rushdie views history as an indefinable because we see only what we wish to: "A person must choose what he will see and what lie will not" (375).

In *Midnight's Children* a very different view of history is presented; a view

which seems to be founded on Nietzsche's theories about falsity and truth. He claims that these two concepts do not exist; all we have is a never ending amount of interpretation: there is these two concepts do not exist; all we have is a never ending amount of interpretations: there is '[n]o limit to the ways in which the world can be interpreted. [...] there are no facts; everything is in flux, incomprehensible, elusive' (Nietzsche 384). This same view is expressed in *Midnight's Children* where Saleem's history does not pretend to be objective or to have a purpose. It doesn't even claim to be true. Saleem once admits to lying "To tell the truth, I lied about Shiva's death" (443). Saleem's unreliability as a narrator emphasizes the nature of history:

And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a sallow of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well (9).

In fact, the reliability of the narrative is questioned many times in book, though never explicitly by the narrator and main character Saleem, but the reader is constantly made aware of the unreliability, because of what he/ she is told by Saleem. For example he admits that he fills in the gaps of the story (*Midnight's Children* 19) but he does not see any problems with this himself. In fact, he continually claims that what he says is absolutely true; that is incredible, fantastic story is not to be understood as a metaphor, but as the 'literal, by-the-hairs-of-my-mother's – head truth' (*Midnight's Children* 200).

Saleem also questions the truth validity of traditional history, e.g. when describing the war of the Rann. What usually constitutes facts in traditional history, e.g. the invasion of territory in the war, is shown to be a web of lies and

interpretations when it comes to the official descriptions of the event during the war: 'In the first five days of the war Voice of Pakistan announced the destruction of more aircraft than India had ever possessed; in eight days, all-India Radio massacred the Pakistan Army down to, and considerably beyond, the last man. [ . . . ] Nothing was real; nothing certain' (*Midnight's Children* 340). In the face of all these lies anything becomes a potential truth. Thus Saleem claims that 'the story I am going to tell [ . . . ] is as likely to be true as anything; as anything, that is to say, except what we were officially told' (*Midnight's Children* 335). Additionally, sometimes 'truth' or reality becomes so unbearable that it cannot be believed. Saleem experiences this in the Bangladesh war and he witnesses the massacre of hundreds of innocents. The atrocities are so horrifying that they refuse to believe that what they see is actually true.

From the narrator's facial expressions, he can sense his error and then modifies the direction of his narrative. "The dance of her musculature," Saleem continues, "helps to keep me on the rails; because in autobiography, as in all literature, what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe . . ." (MC 325). When Padma shows interests on her face, Saleem speeds on telling his story. Although Padma is illiterate, she is like readers, eager to know the rest of the story. She keeps questioning "what's next?" and pulls back strayed Saleem to the right narrative track. In this respect, Padma becomes the co-producer of Saleem's narrative. Besides unlike traditional historicists who allege to be omniscient of the past events, Saleem sometimes gives up his narrative authority, leaving the events unexplained. For example, when Padma asks what happened to Mary Pereira, in anger, Saleem shouts at Padma, telling her to find out the truth herself. In his narrative, Saleem himself asks questions that he can't answer:

But there are cracks and gaps . . . had I, by then, begun to see that my love for Jamila Singer has been, in a sense a mistake? Had I already understood how I had simply transferred on to her shoulders the adoration which I now perceived to be a vaulting, all-encompassing love of country? [. . .] When when when? . . . Admitting defeat, I am forced to record that I cannot remember for sure. (MC 461)

Like many other histories, there must be events which can't be explained or understood by reason; however, these might be neglected on purpose in order to secure the authority of the historicist' interpretations. Rushdie juxtaposes pieces of town gossip to create the mystical setting of both the fiction and realities are used to describe various events and incidents in the novel.

In the novel mainly the dream like fallible narration takes over when Saleem appears. He is a personification of independent of India. Then his identity vanished and transformed into a fantasy like fiction. In the novel, we find two conflicting perspectives, one based on a rational view of reality and the next on the acceptance of the fantasy. Saleem, therefore, warns: "It's a dangerous business to try and impose one's view of things on others" (212). In somewhere, there is the lack of clear opinions about the accuracy of events and the credibility of the worldviews expressed by the characters in the text the, technique promotes acceptance in fallible narration.

Saleem wonders if he is "prepared to distort everything to re-write the whole of history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?" (166).

Saleem embarks on a desperate search for meaning as he attempts to link his own history with that of the nation. He comes to realize that "I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all have been seen done, of everything done-to-

me" (383). Thus, learning" the lesson of No Escape" from history. Saleem resolves to recount history. Saleem, who admits earlier of being "a swallower of lives" and in which a "consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving" (9), is infected by the "urge to encapsulate the whole of reality" (75) in his writing. Saleem, therefore, involves in a mission of preserving the past in totality. By searching for one unified meaning accepting a multiplicity of meanings, Saleem, physically "cracks". The cracking of his body parallels the cracking of his writing. When truth is anything the rules want it to be and what you see cannot be trusted, reality cases to exist. Narrative technique is intended to create a false effect, mixing personal and realistic details with fictional one. Shirley Chew writes:

*Midnight's Children* (1981) is an amazing display of the municipality of which Saleem is at once the victim and the celebrant [...]. No sooner has narrative genre or convention been fixed upon that it is subverted, and the impression is given of Saleem manipulating his multicultural resources with gusto even as they continuously threaten to overwhelm him. (72)

In the face of this, Saleem describes his childhood as infinity of alternative realities' and his adolescence as 'an equally infinite number of falsenesses, unrealities and lies' (*Midnight's Children* 326). Thus relationship to reality is compared, by Saleem, to the notion of reality in Hindu religion: here the world (or reality) is a dram-web which we only see through 'dimly' (*Midnight's Children* 211). It is a web of illusion and deceit and, thus, cannot be trusted in any way. When any external reality is a lie focus is turned to the individual and indeed for Saleem all that matters is Saleem; to him it is therefore not a problem to claim that the actual cause of the war was that his dream of Kashmir affected the governments of India and Pakistan to go



to war; and that the purpose of the war was to keep him from his sins (*Midnight's Children* 339).

Another consequence of the lack of reality reinforced the individual to find a new concept of truth, and for Saleem this is his memory: 'Memory's truth [...] it creates its own reality' (*Midnight's Children* 211). But of course this concept of truth only has any validity for the individual, and indeed Saleem admits that no one can trust another person's memory. Here he again draws the validity of his own narrative in question; if another person memory can't be trusted and Saleem's narrative is constructed from memory then it must be untrustworthy. But Rushdie, comparing this fragmentary, fallible memory to a broken mirror, actually claims that the broken mirror can be as good as a flawless one ('Imaginary Homelands' 11). This is because the fragments, when separated from the whole, become symbols of his past life. Trivial events could therefore attain a much higher value for him, just like a broken piece of pottery becomes a window into the past for the archaeologist ('Imaginary Homelands' 12).

Likewise, to Saleem the unreliable and fallible nature of memory is not a problem. To him facts are unimportant; all that matters is 'what the author can manage to persuade the audience to believe' (*Midnight's Children* 270-271). Salman Rushdie, in a interview with Una Chaudhuri, admits that the whole narrative is based on his and other peoples memories and, thus, is full of mistaken dates, myths, etc. However, he claims that is intentional; he did not want to write something that had official documents but rather something that had a kind of remembered truth. He elaborates on this in his essay "Errata": or, Unreliable narration in *Midnight's Children* where he says that he actually tried to accentuate these 'mistakes' in order to put focus on the memory, the way it distorts our recollection of the part (23-24).

So, Saleem ends up having shown that the master narratives of history and media are lies, that there is, indeed, no objective reality, thus leaving the individual to construct his/her own meaning. In place of these master narratives he introduces memory as the only basis of truth for the individual, though he admits that it is a 'heterogeneous but *usually* coherent version of events' (*Midnight's Children* 211). From this quote it is clear that to Saleem there are as many truths as there are people in the world. This view is also expressed by Rushdie in his interview with Chaudhuri, where he says that a country as populated as India must also have 'a very large number of versions of the truth in it' ('Excerpts'). The consequence is that voice of the subaltern, in this case Saleem, has much validity as the master discourses of the West, and yet Rushdie has avoided just replacing the centre of the centre-margin binary. He has created a history, or rather an infinite number of histories, which achieve what Chakrabarty rhetorically asks for: 'a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices [...] so that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous' (Chakrabarty 388). The false dates and names which appear throughout the narrative are a means to this end in that they help to emphasize not just the unreliability of the narrative, but also the fact that he has an interest in telling the story, a point he wants to get across ('Errata' 24), i.e. like the traditional histories he tells the story in a particular way to get his point across, but unlike traditional histories he exposes the purpose within the narrative as well as questions the validity of his own narrative:

It was a fiction marvelously and perfectly familiar with the modern and postmodern experiment of the novel, a book self-conscious about its being a novel, a novel, a work and postmodern experiment of the

novel, a book self-its being a novel, a work of an author exploring the; storyteller with the absolute narrative command of a master. (360)

Part of the criticism against the book, according to Rushdie, has been the people have expected it to be not a history but 'the history' while other have criticized it for what it levels out ('Errat' 25). However, this kind of criticism is to judge the novel from within the binary; complaining that it does not replace the centre in the centre-margin binary. Yet that is exactly what Rushdie is trying to avoid; 'history is always ambiguous' claims Rushdie ('Errata' 25).

The novel embodies various postmodern features-confusion and violation of the borderline, adaptation of a self-conscious narrator, questioning of the totalizing impulse, and discussion about the act of literary creation itself etc. Juliette Myers comments: "Rushdie exploits the ability of postmodern fiction to draw on innumerable fictional and factual sources as a means of representing the world" (67). Rushdie is using history to describe the events which are used to describe various events and incidents in the novel. History is related to the Muslim society in which the time after A.D.622 is called Mohammedan era. So the beginning point of the history is regarded from the very departure of Mohammad from Mecca to Medina in A.D. 622. So Rushdie is discussing the events of our time but the readers are confused in such use. Thus, this simultaneous use of both the calendars is very subtly intended to produce the effect of magic or unreal and real at the same time. This blurring of present with the past, magical with the real becomes the cause of fallible narration.

The constant shift back and forth in time during Saleem's narration becomes a dominant element in the telling of Saleem's life story. The narrator frequently refers to event or feeling that take place much later in his life. As a result of these shifts in time, Rushdie refers to almost every life event far before its occurrence and full

description in the novel. This method not only speaks to the tricks time plays, and to the unreliability of measures of time and the telling of history, but also to the theme of fragmentation. Much as Saleem must piece together the numerous elements and phase of his life and heritage, the narrator call upon the reader to solve the puzzle of Saleem's narration which does not follow chronological or linear logic but rather rides the waves of his emotion.

Salman Rushdie's writing emphasizes sensory experience as a means of expressing or receiving emotion. Smells, tastes, sights, sounds and feeling abound in Rusdie's description of life experiences. Rushie also establishes an intimate connection between sensory experience and memory. The symbolic role of the spittoon is the narrative to circle back on itself without losing its forward momentum. As the silver spittoon continues to appear in different contexts, Rushdie builds meaning into the image and provides the reader with a familiar angle of insight into the meaning of his tale. A Particularly extraordinary silver spittoon inlaid with lapis lazuli appears at the beginning of the story and follows the course of the narrative almost until the end, where it is eventually burried under the rubble of civil reconstruction by a bulldozer. The silver spittoon becomes a link to reality for Saleem.

However, years before *The Satanic Verses* would catapult him into global consciousness; *Midnight's Children* had already established his reputation as a writer of incredible talent. It's presented as the memories of Saleem Sanai, a man 'handcuffed to history' by dint of his having been born on the stroke of midnight at the moment of India's independence form Britain in 1947. Along with the other 1000 'Midnight's Children' have born in that first hour of India's independence, Saleem's life parallels the first thirty years of Pakistan and India's existence as independent

nations. However, beyond just being linked to the history of the subcontinent, the children also possess a variety of supernatural powers including Saleem's own ability to let the children telepathically 'meet'.

However, Saleem's intimate knowledge of all the other children will prove to be more of a curse than a blessing as history continues inexorably around them. Saleem's dreams of uniting the children to guide India to a glorious future are as doomed as any dream of uniting the fragmented peoples of India. Saleem does not just recount his story in a dry authorial monotone but with the voice of someone who seems truly alive to the reader, aware of his own flaws as a storyteller and responding to the inbuilt critique of his lover/fiancée Padma, answering the possible objections to his tale that may reader might have. Rushdie is aware that any first-person narration is potentially flawed but actually uses those potential flaws to his advantage, making them an integral part of the novel.

One of Rushdie's great skills is in his use of words. At times, *Midnight's Children* has an almost poetic rhythm, his language conjuring up a sense of India as a place, mixing the mystical and banal, using all the sense, even smell and taste, to capture the essence of character and country. Readers are drawn into Saleem's world and by weaving the fantastical story of the children in among the real history; reader can actually understand what these events meant to the people who experienced them. Finally, *Midnight's Children* is of interest in terms of history itself. Even if reader know only the broad outlines of Indian and Pakistani history this book can actually educate reader about the thirty years of seemingly wasted opportunity and mutual antipathy between the countries and the people. Saleem's link to history meaning he finds himself at the crucial points of history, despite his best efforts to avoid them, form the first days of India's independence through the first Pakistani coup and the

war for the independence of East Pakistan/Bangladesh through to the climax in the days of Indira Gandhi's Emergency'.

Salman Rushdie blurs the boundaries between history and fiction. It has the stories about national histories; are attempts to give a more comprehensive and comprehensible form to documentary history; and offer supplements to incompleteness or revisions of official histories. Rushdie views that there are so many different stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives, events, miracles, places, rumors, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane. It is the sheer multiplicity of stories, of alternative versions of history, that Rushdie tells his fiction; its uncomfortably subversive power. He cites referential authority, for historical events and documentary evidence for his framework; but his novel operates on the margins of preferentiality, introducing other stories-invented and fantastic and private-which put the official historical records in question.

He does not necessarily deny the official records (though they sometimes do); but by offering many other versions of history- so many different stories – he refuses any claim to absolute truth in the official versions. It is in this sense that he is subversive political acts: the canon is shown to be arbitrary rather than true, devised by concealing or eliminating other resistant readings, and, in its mixture of rhetoric and referentiality, as much a fiction as these fictions which expose it. He is writing about crisis points in his nation's history. Rushdie is writing in a modern post-colonial context about India since Independence and the subsequent evolution of Paskistan and Bangladesh. He is engaged in acts of reclamations as they reread and rewrite the past. He reads history in a different way form those people actually involved, and distanced from the history. Rushdie is "out of country" (being an Indian but living in north London while writing about contemporary Indian history), so that he is forced to deal

in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost. His fiction is imaginative recreations, which he describes in very similar ways that he is actually doing of memory and about memory, so that his India was just that his India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions.

## CHAPTER IV

### Conclusion

*Midnight's Children* deliberately foregrounds the problems in writing history. Indeed, the self-reflective techniques reshape our knowledge to history. Saleem is caught in dilemma when writing about his life. His interpretation of his own autobiography is in fact paradoxical in nature: he both totalizes and detotalizes his own past. On the one hand, he is aware of the necessary distortions in language, in his writing; on the other, he has to represent his life through language. The protagonist exposes the ruptures and leakage in the history which the traditional historicists endeavor to smooth.

In the process of construction and deconstruction of his writing, reader can approach the truth and have to live within imperfection. However, it could be a positive sign because the novel draws our attention to the process of the representation, instead of the result of it. We may further consider some problems: how should we distinguish the facts from the events in the past? If our knowledge to the past (history) is constructed, does it imply that the past (or reality) doesn't exist at all? If history is merely a version, then how should we deal with history? We may further consider how other factors such as power manipulate in this making of history.

The multifarious responses from various sources will display the richness of the novel. A novel can have multiple interpretations. However, the present study aims to analyze how Rushdie blurs the borderline between history and fiction in the novel. Incursion of fantastic elements into a realistic plot and setting a leading exponent of the genre is the British novelist Angela Carter. It is disputable that the world fallible is justifiably included in the term a realist impulse can be detected; the main concern of the novelists involved is to explore what they can see as contemporary reality,



rather than to provide an alternative to it.

The post-modern and post-colonial writers use real and surreal and fictional and real in their novels. Such types of amalgamation of these opposite poles can be found in Rushdie's *Midnight Children*. He blurs the demarcation line between history and fiction, natural and supernatural and the past and the present. His easy and unhindered crossing of such borderline on the one hand becomes an important alluring aspect for the readers on the other it becomes at the same time a source for confusing them.

Today, after two decades of post-modern and post-colonial writing, *Midnight's Children* may not seem so radical novel as it did when it came out, but this is only because many of the stylistic features and its narrative style have been adopted by number of post-colonial and post-modern writers. One of the reason why *Midnight's Children* became so popular, and why so many later authors have 'copied' its style, is due to the way it uses the English language in a radically new way, mixing colloquial and formal language and mixing British English with vernacular Pidgin English. This style seems to make it possible for the post-colonial writer to reach the vast audiences of the English-speaking world, while retaining a voice which is radically different form the voices western tradition.

The fragmentary nature of memory as the sole basis of the narrative, indeed of truth and reality, has been very appealing to the post-modern literatures. It also succeeds in redefining histories and approaches the ideals of post-colonial histories as described by Chakrabarty. In addition to this, the novel is narrated with a passion for story-telling with all the oddities of characters and where anything is possible-it's not what happened which matters, but what the author can persuade the audience to believe. This features make the novel not just a major work of literature, central to the

new post-colonial 'canon', but also, and in my opinion just as important, an absolute joy to read. It is also in the sense of ambivalent. Even the use of narrative technique is intended to create a magical effect mixing personal and realistic details with fictional ones. We find the characteristic of post-modern, bizarre, and even surrealistic imagery in this novel. Rushdie conscious intrusion into the story is conspicuously accentuated by very personal informal language. The narrator, a fictionalized version of Rushdie himself within a story as much as Saleem by himself directly into the story, lie blurs the distinctions usually found between the real world and the fictional world.

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