DEUS-EX-MACHINA: A MODERN SKEPTIC'S RELENTLESS SCRUTINY OF THE PRODUCTION OF ETHICS IN POST-COLONIAL LITERATURE AND POSTCOLONIALISM

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For My Parents

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Abstract

DEUS-EX-MACHINA: A MODERN SKEPTIC'S RELENTLESS SCRUTINY OF THE PRODUCTION OF ETHICS IN POST-COLONIAL LITERATURE AND POSTCOLONIALISM

Postcolonialism uses stories from the colonial world to confront global audiences with ethical problems. This dissertation examines the rhetorical strategies employed by writers to organize new communities defined in terms of Postcolonialist ethics. It analyzes the limits and failures of the new *ethos* by redirecting the same critical methods that Postcolonialism has used to undermine contemporary and Colonial representations. The theme of ethics allows authors and critics to tactically deploy otherwise contradictory arguments, and seemingly resolve them, at moments of convenience. In the cases being examined, it promises consequences and achievements that, given the logic of the story, are not likely to be reached except by *deus-ex-machina*. An author can use the rhetoric to make ethical demands in service to a good that has already been decided. For example, Salman Rushdie would have us feel we are already connected through stories of lived-experience and take responsibility for the proposed connections, even when the reality of the connections is untested, and the particular risks and rewards are unclear. Likewise, Amitav Ghosh would have us appreciate how the writing of history is a function of the archivist and historian, then act as though we have to redeem in the present something extra-representational that history failed to record. Then the critic asks for commitment to ideas "proven" only by his own interpretation of the chosen stories. To do so, he exempts

those ideas from the initial problematic of historiography and representation allayed against others. It is by way of this exceptionalist posture that Homi Bhabha focuses ethics on the revealed characteristics of that which had been defined as neither one thing nor the other without having to offer up an emerging figure for testing or "liberatory signs" for discursive analysis. The dissertation tests the ethics proposed in post-colonial stories and by Postcolonialist criticism; scrutinizes the discourse and its producers; and insists upon the equal right to refuse the new ethical order.

CONTENTS

DEDICATION ..... **iv**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS v

ABSTRACT vi

CONTENTS viii

THE ETHICAL PROBLEMATIC 1

1. THE EXCEPTION IS THE RULE: QUESTIONS OF METHOD 29

2. HISTORY|OGRAPHY OF THE DISAPPEARED 105

MODULATING BETWEEN HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY 113
FIELDWORK AND THE OTHER 134
UNKNOWN TO THE FIELD BUT IN IT 153
KNOWLEDGE AND NOTHINGNESS 167
THE ARCHIVE AND THE ARCHIVE 179

3. INTERSUBJECTIVE MEDIATION 209

THE USE AND ABUSE OF TEXTUALITY 224
BETWEEN YOU AND ME 243
POWER & AUTHORITY 254
RUSHDIE'S MAGIC 262
THE TIES THAT BIND 281
MY OWN PRIVATE SHIVA 293

4. THE ERROR OF COMEDY 317

FORMS, MODES, AND THE UNITIES OF POSTCOLONIALISM 319
WHAT IS AND WHAT SHOULD BE 335
STRUGGLING AGAINST HISTORY, MAKING IT 346
OLD NEWS IN A MATTER OF TIME 377
WHY HOMI BHABHA SAVES HISTORY 386
THE ERROR OF COMEDY 408

TOWARDS A CONSERVATIVE CRITICISM 416

WORKS CITED 443

THE ETHICAL PROBLEMATIC

The problem with representation, identities, and knowledge categories is that they cannot be controlled to the extent that those who inherit them, and those who deploy them, would want to control. Their effects on the world are unpredictable: they may not act like they were intended to act or be used by the right people for the right reasons. The bad ones have persisted too long. The good ones are too short-lived. These powerful signs have a problematic longevity or equally problematic brevity that interferes with their initially conceived usefulness. This interference affects all parties that use and are subjected to representation, identities, and knowledge categories. The well-adjusted member of society obeys too acquiescently for his revolutionary cross-town neighbor, and too ambivalently for those who favor undisturbed civil peace. "Minority"—the idea of minority and its actual realizations in definite behavioral patterns—may cease to serve the management of power as unpredictably as it may cease to serve the process of collectivization that would exert political pressure against hegemony, when before it had been promisingly useful to the various camps. A minority can claim certain rights in and of societies that recognize the concept of minority-rights; it can even make arguments to demand more entitlements. At once, it can be kept minor, a development perhaps contrary to the initial goals. Likewise, the identification of an historically oppressed people and the writing of their histories produce signs that might prove adverse to the promotion of other kinds of identities to further other political agendas, since the history that is used by a historiographer can be used against him or the people he represents, too. By telling stories of oppressed women, the writer inadvertently demonstrates the

backwardness of the particular culture and unwittingly provides evidence that it is not ready to join the modern world, a conclusion of course antithetical to the reason for telling the stories in the first place[1]. Despite passionate arguments about the power of language and ingenious models for signifying-practices, the production of signs still resists regulation and directive.

Yet writers and thinkers dealing with the problems of the world are not ready to dispense with problematic signs like the protagonists of history or the distinct genders, even spirits and specters, since power, source of the problem, is at the same time the reason for which the stories were initially conceived and subsequently reproduced. It is not simply a matter of having to participate in the circulation of power in order to confront cultural imperialism and dictate local changes[2]. For that, the writer should be able to count on the immediate reality of the particular situation to be sufficient cause for local action. There are real ethical problems. Who can see, and hear, and smell shantytowns butt against the outside walls of their house and not take up the cause to end poverty? Categories invented on Pennsylvania Avenue (1600 or 1900) will simply be inadequate for dealing with the real life of slums. The poor *is* poverty stricken, no matter what fantasies they are offered or what fantasies they experience, no matter which romantic or realistic narrative we read. Nevertheless, locating an immediate reality that resists generalization is not sufficient—not for those who know shantytown life and certainly not for those who do not. Writers in fact depend on circulating signs to broaden the reach and scope of their agency, to execute power moves in Washington D.C.

[1] Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe*.
[2] Auxter, Thomas. "The Debate over Cultural Imperialism".

concerning a village well outside its governance and far from the boundaries of its care. There are real ethical problems, they must be expressed in some way(s), and the expressions must elicit the right responses. Postcolonialist writers, in particular, while "witnessing" the oppressive powers of colonial discourse, its identity categories and cultural transformations, are engaged in a common project to issue signs that empower as much as the signs they replace had empowered the opposition, maybe even at the same global scale. Where once there was a subaltern, now there is a human speaking as a (former) subaltern, identifiable not by name but by what it wants; where once there was a primitive, now there is the ghost of that which modernity marginalizes. The appearance of the world "subaltern is supposed to command a certain measure of acknowledgement, respect and consideration, especially away from those real places where we might find those matching—however one wants to "problematize" "match"—the subaltern description and where subalterity is presumably lived-experience. Whether during colonialism, or deferred until criticism after decolonization, subalterity "emerges" at the site of address where power is being negotiated and, in many cases, *ethos* written. Subaltern and ghost are characters of the new stories.

To mitigate the recalcitrant reversals and changes to what they hope would happen, writers need both the right signs and the right—that is, ethical—use of signs. The signs of poverty must have the proper future, which is ultimately the end of poverty, and which must immediately stimulate such and such responses. This need has lead to the formulation of a paradigm, with varying terminology and concepts, in which antagonist discursive functions "check" each other and establish thereby a self-regulating system of representation. The effect is that we commit to the right signs until the time is

right for new ones; then it can be said the signs are in the ethical field. The idea of self-regulation is theoretically like that of the branched government modeled by the Constitution of the United States, although proponents of self-regulating signifying practices would never admit it, either because constitutionalism is basically a conservative idea, slowing change as much as possible by forcing it through a deliberative government, and limiting governmental power, or because admission might sound like an endorsement of the United States (and its ideologies) as the best model for the world. Perhaps it would also be tacit agreement with the so-called American Founding Fathers' rationalist fundamental judgment on man: our motives for power should never be trusted outright. Yet critics do seem to extend this practical distrust to the use of sign. Most at some point criticize previous historical categories with the argument from the problem of uneven power distribution. We inherit signs. We can also make new ones, to varying degrees of agency. If new signs signify, and they belong to a new structure, then they may stimulate phenomenological transformation; this is the constructionist function. Or, to appropriate Homi Bhabha's characterization, this is the propagandist function[3]. Signs may also be demystified, and structures exposed; the discursive formations that dictate how they are organized and used may be disrupted. This is the deconstructionist function. Theoretically it restores agency from discourse to that which the discourse addresses[4]. Obviously they are antithetical: if a person is trying to signify, his rival can thwart him by deconstructing his signification; if a person is trying to deconstruct, his rival can use structures of effects to sublimate desire towards

[3] Cf. "The Commitment to Theory". *The Location of Culture.*
[4] This would be us.

other signs. Either one can be argued is consciousness. The two are never as far apart as they might seem, and it seems the right kind of talent could marshal the conflict between them to serve one interest.

In fact, we do this all the time. Scholarly article-writing conventions of late 20th and early 21st century criticism place the deconstructionist perspective at the beginning and the propagandist at the end. A typical paper summarizes an idea; deconstructs it; rearranges existing terms to show a problem; and solves the problem by issuing new vocabulary, new relations, and perhaps new structures. It is the field's method *par excellence* for supplanting authority, and not coincidentally the social-cultural paradigm proposed by many field specialists. New ethics would cast these two "authors", the disorganizer and the propagandist, that is otherwise mutually at odds, together in order to produce new authoritative signs in a presumably directed—that is, ethical—way. The partnership can be repeated. Alternative signs of goodness are produced as needed, *for the Good.* Critics like Fredric Jameson, Gayatri Spivak, Bruno Latour, Homi Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty hope that new vocabulary and new stories can then be repeated, if not constantly, generated to benefit those who most need them[5]. To them, Freedom persists, while the language-tools change from "Christian", to "human", then "proletariat", then "unconscious", then "subaltern", then "hybrid", then "specters" and "bodies", then "migrant", then "human" (again); and tomorrow the organizing terms (the "assemblage", as Latour calls them) will change again to whatever proves effective in

[5] Cf. *The Political Unconscious*, "Scattered speculations on the question of value". *The Spivak Reader*. Ed Donna Landry, Gerald MacLean. New York: Routledge, 1996. 107 – 40, *The Location of Culture*, and *Provincializing Europe* especially "The Two Histories of Capital" 47 – 71, respectively. They all in their

response to tomorrow's oppression. Perhaps the analogy to the particular kind of government is avoided because it can lead us to judge the new political corrections as we now judge previous authority, and consequently to constrain the power of what present and future critics can do with signs of their own. Lately, Jennifer Forshee, Dorothy J. Hale, and Robert Eaglestone, even Bhabha who has applauded resistance to authority, do not hesitate much in calling for more direct government through ethical problems.

Ethical struggle represents an interest of our moment, says Bhabha[6]. Or at least, according to Dmoinic Ramsford and Tim Woods, "the word 'ethics' has been used a great deal in the last few years by literary and cultural theorists"[7]. This does not mean the problematics of power and representation have been abandoned. Instead, interventionists use the theme of ethics to reformulate the problems in ways that recommend some actions and constrain others. Especially advantageous is that ethics treat the good as self-evident. Skillfully formulated, ethical problematics can suggest how phenomena like economic globalization and cultural encounters might be justifiably regulated. The suggested agencies of control vary from the rule of law to political representation to culture products like novels. Indeed, whenever there is a title "the ethics of ...", there is likely to be the reauthorization of old agents, or admission of new ones: the "ethics of interpretation", the "ethics of the novel", the "ethics of poetry", the "ethics of the impossible"[8], the "ethics of vulnerability"[9], the "ethics of coexistence"[10]. Bhabha tries to

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various ways use dialectical history to promote an ahistorical Good, certain that the end is attainable and what is promised.

[6] "Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate". (1992)

[7] Introduction. *Critical Ethics*: *Text, Theory and Responsibility*. (1999) 1.

[8] Sangeeta Ray. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: in other words.*

[9] Eric Keenaghan. *Queering Cold War poetry : ethics of vulnerability in Cuba and the United States.* Columbus, OH: Ohio State U.P., 2009.

suggest there exists "the historical and ethical right to signify" which has been denied to some—many—by modernity[11]. What sets ethics apart from direct knowledge of the good is that regulation can justifiably persist, new rules written, as long as the ethical problematic remains; knowledge, especially secular knowledge of the good, does not necessarily entail such commitment. Whether the activating sign is subalterity or spectral, equality or "coexistence", upon the utterance of the controlling "problematic", we will be set in motion[12]. We will redefine our relationships to each other, write new laws, and reorganize into supposedly better societies—even if the last "better society" necessitated this latest intervention. Indeed, the turn to "ethical struggle" may have been in reaction to the possible diminishment of interventionary authority, should interventions be forced to argue for the particular interest and offer measurable signs of achievement, and be held accountable to them. This makes dismantling the authority difficult, if it comes to that.

Vague, high-minded ideals are indicative of persistent authority. For example, in formulating the "problematic" of "coexistence", Priya Kumar does not provide clear and contestable terms for success. Rather, it is felt at this time that secularism (decidedly Western), mediated by its concept of tolerance, cannot lead to "living together"[13], really, really living together. What is "living together? "Living together" is, depending on the ideas to be rendered inadequate, "cosmopolitanism" (Kumar's chapter 2), a peace beyond

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[10] Priya Kumar. *Limiting secularism: the Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film.* Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota P., 2008.

[11] "Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate".

[12] Incidentally, a sign is not just a word. A story is also a sign, if the meaning it signifies has to be signified through the retelling of the story: this I will call "allegory". Problematics are often allegorical: Kumar dose not quite know what "living together" means, or is unwilling to conceptualize it, and signifies it through the stories that demonstrate the inadequacy of secularism.

truce (chapter 4), and the dignity of home for everyone (chapter 5). The plot of this ethics is that, at another time, in another context, the prevailing concepts of that time and context will be inadequate, too, and new interventionist signs needed. But the goodness of the cause is steady. I have already mentioned Bhabha's attempt to enlist the concept of rights to create authority for his coutnermodernity. Ethics can be used in the context of law, too, to demand the same kind of long-standing commitment.

In a paper delivered at the International Studies conference, Barbara Buckinx suggests that ethics be used to write laws to govern transnational entities like corporations and NGOs[14]. Specifically she argues against normative "principles" of autonomy and social justice (especially since they vary across the globe) in favor of the normative "focus" on "power as 'non-domination'". Instead of having to argue for and even enforce social justice while affording autonomy, the "program of ethical change" operates under the simpler mandate of checking (or negating) domination. Instead of having to deliver an end, which also requires representing social justice in measurable terms (social justice is...), the "program" builds open-ended responsibilities and entitlements[15].

Buckinx's concerns and proposed solutions are typical. J. McMurtry, in "Ethical Value-Added: Fair Trade and the Case of Café Femenino", tries to preserve the ethical functionality of the concept of Fair Trade partly by arguing that new cultural values be included in calculations of what is "fair". In his ethics, the calculus of fair changes as

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[13] Ibid. xix

[14] "Global Networks and Global Administrative Law: Ethical Concerns". Columbus, OH: Ohio State U.P., 2009.

[15] So, for example, autonomy can be taken away if the corporation starts to dominate.

new signs (of what is unfair) are introduced, while the idea of fairness is consistently authoritative (i.e. we do not abandon it); in Buckinx, the authority to react to domination by producing new signs (and laws) never changes. In his article from *Ethics, Place and Environment,* also typical of the ethical turn, E.M Young tries to deconstruct the "tendencies in hegemonic discourses about hunger and environmental degradation"[16]. He likens his work to the literary criticism of Victorian representations of encounters with the poor: for him as for those critics, the romanticization of poverty distracts from genuine engagement with the structure of its cause[17]. The intervention of ethics shakes us from our wrongful fascination with images of what is wrong by forcing us to seek out the cause and do something about the phenomenon[18]. Buckinx, Young, and McMurtry, and many others across different disciplines, are trying to structure the dynamics I had characterized earlier: the right representations has to be mediated by the right use of signs.

As Young indicates, literary criticism contributes to the use of ethics by providing analogous, sometimes even paradigmatic, methods. The first step towards answering "how shall I live" is to redefine our relationship to inherited concepts similar to how criticism interprets texts: poverty has been romanticized; the primitive is a function of alterity, etc. The next step is to issue new signs and strengthen the ethical structure—the

[16] "Far-fetched Meals and Indigestible Discourses: Reflections on Ethics, Globalisation, Hunger and Sustainable Development". 21

[17] Young's methods are Marxist.

[18] Let us bracket the circularity of Young's argument for now. My point here is only that academics and thinkers are using ethics to control representation, and using ethics and representation to change the world after their (moral) image. Young's logic is circular because it assumes the premise that one is already seeking out and trying to eliminate poverty in order to "prove" its conclusion that one ought to be reprimanded for not having attacked the cause. In other words, one is already ethical, so act ethically. The rhetoric allows Young

field of ethics. That is not proverty, but this is! So I would add that some literature also participate in the project to ethically govern signification, for which suggestion I am only following others. Robert Eaglestone identifies the 1990s as the time when criticism turned to literature (again) for what good the latter can do, and critical theory began to focus on ethics[19] (in particular the ethical influence of Emmanuel Levinas on Derrida and Lyotard[20]); while Michael Eskin locates the ethical turn earlier, to the early 1980s with "*New Literary History*'s pioneering special issue 'Literature and/as Moral Philosophy'"[21]. "Literture is the place where ethical work takes place", Priya Kumar reiterates[22]. For critics basically functioning as ethicists, there is something about the literary that its texts—some of them at least—can produce the right signs. They can introduce the right support structures, too, since they can deploy *pathos* and other rhetorical tactics. And they can signify the ethical problems in such ways that subsequent demands can be made from them. Perhaps those looking for material to substantiate ethics are attracted to how problems of ethics can be constructed through telling stories of traumatic conflicts among various characters, rather than having to deal with the rigors of verifying propositions. Verification admits the possibility of disproof, and places the burden on the advocate of change. Literary contributions to new ethics signify poverty rightly by reimagining poor post-colonial farmers not as undeveloped, or yet-to-develop, but as humans

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to use reprimand to convince those on whom the reprimand works that they had already been trying to end poverty as such.

[19] "Navigating an Ancient Problem: Ethics and Literature".

[20] Ibid. 129.

[21] "The Double Turn to Ethics and Literature".

[22] *Limiting Secularism.* (2009) 237

unconscionably deprived of dignity and history[23]. The character that feels indignant has in truth been disposssed—and is owed in recompense. Criticism interested in ethics would then archive, reproduce and disseminate the literary signs of dignity lost and regained. Critics like Gayatri Spivak have already set up theoretical structures that justify ethically the authority of such signs, and the texts from which they come, to the approval of those who follow[24]. Eaglestone adds that "the work of J. Hillis Miler in the last ten years is perhaps the most concerted attempt to explore the ethical ramifications of this form of criticism"[25]. It must be noted that all these writers are turning to ethics as a matter of self-justified practice (like "doing military ethics with war literature", as Reed Bonadonna puts it[26]), and because it gives them the rhetorical advantage of moral highground. They are *not* looking to target ethics with vigor anyway close to approaching the vigor of criticism of, say, capitalism or hegemony.

Candace Vogler argues that true ethics needs practical not textual engagement[27]. I take a slightly different approach. I agree with Vogler that any ethical problematic modeled in a story has been formulate by its author. I would say, then, that the ethical engagement, if any, is between the text's producers and those whom it addresses. As literary critic, I am interested in the artifice of literature and the rhetoric in criticism that can serve and/or frustrate this interest of my time. What these writers write is not ethics

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[23] Cf. Amitav Ghosh's *In An Antique Land.* The university economist is the strawman for Ghosh's argument to redefine losses and gains. *In An Antique Land* is the subject of my chapter two.
[24] Dorothy J. Hale. "Fiction as Restriction: Self-Binding in New Ethical Theories of the Novel". The theoretization is incomplete, justifying Hale's intervention. Spivak's structure is told through the Marxist story of what is supposed to dialectically happen with the introduction of categories like "the subaltern". See also Sangeeta Ray's *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: in other words.*
[25] *Ethical Criticism.* 62.
[26] "Doing Military Ethics with War Literature".
[27] "The Moral of the Story". (2007)

as it is commonly understood and professionally applied in the present day, e.g. medical ethics, journalist ethics, academic ethics, but what we might call *ethos*. I take the term directly from Aristotle, as he uses it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, because the Aristotelian "*ethos*", when reapplied, has referential pliability and certain hermeneutical connotations that more accurately represents the ethical paradigm of Postcolonialism than "ethics". If *ethos* is the meaning behind habitual action, defined as the tendency to increase happiness, and loosely taught as "character", then the new ethicists advocate a program for redefining happiness and producing changing *ethos*, not amending the fixed rules of professional ethics. Professional ethics requires pre-existing identities like doctor and patient, or lawyer and client, Indian and English; a notion of Good that is steadfast and relative to the area of governance; specialized rule-making bodies; and institutional enforcement. *Ethos* can be radically conceived to not just accommodate but seek new representation, as though the meaning of life depended on it, an open process that supposedly benefits the right people by giving them the ability to reform the field of ethics, and write *ethos* that will be followed.

Homi Bhabha constitutes *ethos* through desire for and as reaction to the "migrant"[28]; his virtue is liberation. Exported from stories of "the historical and ethical right to signify"[29], figures like the "migrant" appear in the field of ethics, where they are understood as "real" and serve as the instrument of liberating transformations. Postcolonialism is the attempt to control the importation of such transformative signs into the dominant cultures ostensibly for the benefit of post-colonials. The likenesses

[28] The political concept of the "migrant" is explained by Homi Bhabha in "Statement for the *Critical Inquiry* Board Symposium", 42 – 349.

between this new *ethos* and that older idea of *raison d'être*, between character and conformity, between what is and what should be, are complications worth exploring. And it may turn out that Postcolonial ethics is as codified and rigid as any other, but uses rhetoric, and valorizes literature, because its advocates are not in authority. Aristotle observed that there are many different happiness and virtues (even as he goes on to extol the moderate ones); whether a modern producer of *ethos* admits to this complexity is a recurring question. Relatedly, ethical philosophy enables us to make decisions about our lives[30]; where Postcolonialism locates ethical decisions and how it structures them are recurring points of contention. For the moment, the term is meant to grant to proponents of late 20th early 21st century and Postcolonialist writing of *ethos* the benefit of doubt about those features that distinguish their projects from previous understanding and current commonplace practice of ethics. The difference *ethos*/ethics is provisional.

In the end, perhaps it is good that ideas inevitably fail. Civilization has a heart of darkness, and apprehending the horror means the philosophy of "civilization" will not beguile us the same way again. The new kind of ethics can profit from this threat of failure by seizing it as an opportunity for newness. Failure is redeemable. Postcolonialism redeems the failure of signification in post-colonial places by explaining it as an ethical problem. The "failure" of the hybrid to be native and to be civilized is interpreted as a (new) story of that which was neither native nor civilized. Signs replace signs when they need replacing. The world is transformed. If only a dialectic could be

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[29] Homi Bhabha. "Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate".

[30] Gerard J. Hughes. *Aristotle on Ethics*. 12. Hughes writes, "So Aristotle's train of thougth goes more or less like this: To live a fulfilled life, we need to be fuided by emotions which are balanced, and by habits of thought which enable us to see what is and is not relevant to our decisions, and why."

established where ideas come into being as they are needed and fall into disuse when they become disadvantageous, then we might move the world towards dynamic ethical existence. In the redemption of failure, in the elucidation of hybridity, the two functions for changing signification (construction and deconstruction), or the two fates of signification (its life and death), "complicate"—not check, not invalidate—each other. The conscious government of such a process can serve as the basis for an ethical human dramaturgy. Michel De Certeau's praxis[31], Bruno Latour's constructionism[32], Homi Bhabha's system of liberatory signs[33], Dipesh Chakrabarty's dialectic of historicism and ahistory[34], Rushdie's unfinished business[35], and Ghosh's archive of the disappeared human[36], are all attempts to structure such a drama.

This dissertation intervenes at the instance of the new[37] to analyze, assess, and offer terms for refusal. It questions the latest important ideas. It questions the support structures. It questions that authority which persists. It may be that, after thorough examination, people have no use for such worlds—the world that fulfills the particular ethicist's desire—or that such a world is driven to fall apart by the forces of its own enactment. Maybe it turns out the attempt to create an ethical global politi[38] runs counter

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[31] *The Writing of History.*
[32] "The Promises of constructivism". See also. "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern."
[33] "Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate". See also "The Commitment to Theory" from *The Location of Culture*.
[34] *Habitations of Modernity*.
[35] *The Satanic Verses*. Unfinished business is the argument for rewriting contemporary history (to ostensibly finish what is incomplete).
[36] This is featured in both *In An Antique Land* and *The Shadow Lines.* The archive in the former is familiar as the scholar's construct—the collection of important evidence—while the archive in the latter has been expanded to include memory unrecorded and uncollated.
[37] Of the latest intervention of the atemporal, if those who want to complicate history by proposing different temporalities are given the benefit of the doubt.
[38] Homi Bhabha. "Statement for the *Critical Inquiry* Board Symposium".

to our existing libertarian, market-based *ethos*. There is, in fact, no ethical problem. These considerations are difficult, but difficulty has not prevented writers from conceiving ideal structures for the production of *ethos*. Observed over time, the two functions are the "forces" that have replaced one system with another: by deconstructing and propagandizing, we made history. To control the functions is to govern history. If history is conflict, then the device that resolves the plot of history that has been going on for however long is, from the perspective of literary criticism, a *deus-ex-machina*. Detemporalized, so to speak, the *deus-ex-machina* is the good implicitly promised by the intervention. An interventionist may claim that the particular occasion may not be the last, but he must at some point deploy the difference of *his type* from others to distinguish his case. Otherwise, interventions would have us run in circles seeking signs that are new but no better than before, or repeating history that makes no difference. We are fortunate that some authors of literature have themselves set the production machine in motion for us. For now, we can describe the general dynamics, and analyze those works that "argue" for models for producing *ethos*. For now, Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1993) will serve.

Both novels are intimately engaged with the idea of history, particularly its power structure, and with the new, ethical *praxis* of historiography conscious of history's power and willing to use it. They look to the past in order to participate in the structure of authority that says we should base our present-day actions on a meaningful order of the past: namely History. For his novel Rushdie chose the trope of the pictorial arts to signify a way of understanding transformation. Consequently, the novel conceives history in discrete representations (the image-story) that transforms temporal existence.

A representative mosaic connects stories from different pasts and different geographies, and magically changes to harbinger times to come. A representative painting juxtaposes a past story with the present of composition, conjures the past as presence for the viewer, and in its own history, that is the story of what happens to the painting, traces the present passing into history (e.g. the mother of India paints the eviction of the Moors from Spain using as model her son who is descended from the last Spanish Moor). Although Rushdie nests stories within stories within stories until it seems no authentic knowledge is possible, because each merely cross-references another[39], he writes very much under the authority of History to clarify the past, connect various peoples, elucidate truth, and show the present what to do. In fact, the intricate connections among attempts to signify the past become incorporated into the ethical production of History. Rushdie's ethics is one of always already connectedness, especially "connection" as historical consciousness of the determinacy of conflicts, and all that such a philosophy entails. For the living, there is always the image of the dead. The dead fought each other. They fight the present (as ghosts and spirits). Thus the dead are quite alive in the ethical field as something more authentic than what history had heretofore made of them; the fight is not finished and *should* be. The resulting stories assume and dramatize an interrelated world, ephemerally captured in paintings and mosaics, looking to a new kind of history—a magical kind—to guide its ethical future. The desire for the authoritative images of History, the anticipated plenitude of complete connecting, motivates the *praxis* that pursues brave, new stories of the past and from overseas, *praxis* Rushdie began formulating as early as his first major novel *Midnight's Children*. Rewrite the past to

[39] A tendency, not coincidentally, of the Postmodern novel.

remake the present; rewrite the present to remake the future.

Controlling inherited past representation and contemporary writing of history is important to Ghosh's ethics, too. His novel treats history as visions of a living world imagined from documents that have been relocated, either temporally or spatially, out of that world. Both Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* and Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* are especially aware of the work of literature as agent of human culture and of literature formally as the enactment of its own failure. They take advantage of this "failure" by locating possible success *outside* the failing epistemology of history, and define success as a sort of literary method rather than in any specific concrete, testable term. It must be remembered that they can represent the "beyond" because they are *not* burdened with the responsibility of proof and argument. In Ghosh, the historiographer that repeatedly encounters strangeness, contradiction, disconnect, fragmentation, and untranslatability, does not give up on the project of history; or at least he does not conclude from these tropes that change is radically unpredictable and knowledge is futile. History is simply the best we can do, and some of us are able to do more and better than others. Instead, Ghosh transforms failure into a tautological-teleological method, valuable because it can project ideals, in particular ideal human relations, into the past and/or future. *The Shadow Lines* dramatizes the (self-correcting) procedure of historiography and treats history as an incomplete vision trying to catch up to past events through memory and imagining future ones from what it knows. History is not composed of great events and signs of progress, but unreconciled traumas that lie "beyond" and give purpose to it. Ghosh's idea of an ethical production of knowledge, mediated by the questions of historiography, but centered on the old theme that history is worth uncovering, is a

synthesis of the seemingly warring deconstructionist and constructionist principles that sustains the authority of both while subjugating their authority to *praxis/ethos* and *telos*. The former function establishes limits for an "outside" to be encountered, and the latter function reestablishes a now-corrected order of things. The story of coping with the violence of Partition ends by projecting reconciliation and reconnection across shadow lines. The work of conceiving and striving towards that *telos* is another example of the new ethics outlined above.

But the *telos* of reconciliation and reconnection, so hopeful and suggestive, lacks enough clarity for it to be realistically assessed and rejected with cause. How do we know we want peace on your terms? This indeterminacy raises an issue general to using literature to formulate ethical problems. Has the moral regulation of the production of *ethos* been transparent to those *it* addresses in what is promised? Especially when an intervention is "transformative", does that which is transformed know the changes being proposed? Has the proposed changes worked in those discursive communities that are represented as believing and practicing it, and would it work in the wider world to which the signs of the specialists and storytellers are sent? How do writers set up the dependency for meaning, a now-basic desire for the migrant and subaltern, to bind us to an assembly wherein they who can assume those now-privileged roles tell us what to do? What does the model promise exactly, and can it deliver what it promises if we want to empirically test it? What is the structure of promise? Why do we value promises, chase them, as though we need them to complete ourselves? When do we tire of them? What are *our parts* in all of this drama, one of which ethical cause, otherwised known as "transformation" or "*aufheben*", is the end of us?

Such questions tentatively confront new ethical models at two levels. They demand clarity at the level of practice and they force ethics to defend itself at the level of theory. In other words, they are the kinds of questions a skeptic asks a believer. For the moment, the questions need not be answered definitively; we can gain an important insight by merely asking them. From the questioner's point of view, a Salman Rushdie novel or Derek Walcott poem is symptomatic of the desire to make an ethical world and, depending on whether or not the work affirms the ideals that morally justify *the production of ethos*, a kind of gratification of that desire. It is a wish articulated. And the skeptic cannot believe that the expression of a wish in any way confirms the reality of that which is wished. It has to be interpreted and analyzed. If a statement is also a claim, it has to be tested. This skeptical demand for testability conflicts with the work of the acolyte or believer, who simply takes *The Satanic Verses* or *Another Life* as an authoritative text on the condition of being and the promise of becoming, and treats the story as a plan for future action. To him, meaning is sufficient, and the skeptic's scrutiny can seem nitpicky, distracting, orientalist, neocolonial, or counterrevolutionary, even profane. To him, there is no use discoursing on the nature of the promise of food when people are starving: there is only the problem of what to do. Yes starvation is problematic, but so is the drama of salvation, of giving what is taken, because at the very least it has been used by authoritarian regimes to consolidate and stay in power. Thus, the questions, though unanswered, reveal the nature of the conflict between the believer and doubter points-of-view that will arise when we intellectually question the production of *ethos*.

Let us for a moment suppose we are in the model ethical world. In that world, as

the propagandist speaks, his supposed antagonist waits in silence, yet-to-speak. The rest of "us" are instruments. According to the ethical drama, the reality of the correcting principle is preceded by something I can only call its authority, because "it" is not like its coeval opposite. "It" is not fully there; or rather, it is an empty machine awaiting user where the other is already being used; a piano awaiting fingers to strike; or better yet a pulpit awaiting holy man. By structuring authority, the case is being made for future use. Analogously, while the deconstructionist disorganizes cultural and psychological "centers", his rival principle lies dormant until the time is right to author new ideas and new representations. The preparation for future action may be observed in the life cycles of the new Postcolonial categories. The hybrid migrant, which presence dismantles essentialist ideas of individual belonging, has to settle, as Bhabha says.

> Migrants, refugees, and nomads don't merely circulate. They need to settle, claim asylum or nationality, demand housing and education, assert their economic and cultural rights, and come to be legally represented within legal jurisdictions.[40]

The unstated consequence is that Bhabha's ethics affords the migrant unimpeded choice of settlement and identity. In other words, "settling" is the migrant's (future) power, as the concept figures in the field of Law. Where does the authority that readies for the coming of the antagonistic principle work but in us (including "migrants") who have to listen to the "migrant" and respond accordingly—that is, ethically. Judging from which responses to the "settling" of migrants are lauded in Postcolonial theory and literature, the moral production of *ethos* asks us to watch for and obey yet-to-be authors who will

reform us, and apparently works well where it has found such a community of waiting believers. Both players of the drama must have authority at the same time, though their relationship, who is speaking and who is not, whose images organize the world and whose images have yet to be written, may change in the future (a change for the better, to be sure). Outside the community, the emerging speaker does not have instant authority. By introducing space-time and setting production in motion, we learn that the plan to ethically produce powerful signs requires a persistent supporting structure of authority which is able to make a case for voices yet-to-speak. Bhabha himself wants fiscal power to redistribute wealth across existing sovereign borders and competing ethics[41].

Postcolonialism now has the task of maintaining a proper drama between propaganda and criticism, the seemingly adversarial principles in its dialectical model for the production of *ethos* and the two allies directly named by Bhabha as he describes his method[42]. If they are not segregated and placed under a "liberatory" authority, the one will tend to nullify the work of the other before a story has had a chance to meaningfully change the world. If the conflicts that drive the plots are not resolved, sublated, redeemed by some sort of *deus-ex-machina*, they will be meaningless. The Postcolonial literature that tries to write a procedure for producing *ethos* is a drama of temporary conflicts and resolutions across this important boundary. In Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, one vision of the world is confronted by another or by matter (that of which the

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[40] Homi Bhabha. "Statement for the *Critical Inquiry* Board Symposium."

[41] "Indeed, to the extent to which *global* equity and justice demands the free flow of peoples and goods, taxation has a crucial role to play in providing migrants and the "poor" with social welfare, public goods, medical care, and educational benefits *at the national* level". "Statement for the *Critical Inquiry* Board Symposium". 347 emphasis in original. The competing *ethos*, of course, detest welfare states for various reasons.

[42] "The Commitment to Theory". *The Location of Culture*.

vision is and the people it affects). These confrontations force the peripatetic narrative to have to constantly adjust its truth-statements as its narrator travels. Revision after revision after revision, slowly and eventually a method emerges. The method for writing *ethos* is to modulate back and forth between limited deconstructive and constructive functions until a final construct, a synthesis, is produced. The *process* of revising, or how the narrator's stories of a traumatic past he has not directly experienced and remote places he has not visited get changed, becomes the *teleology* of the novel, the promise of a "cure"[43] to revisionist history its *telos*. Ghosh's historiographical imagining/revisionism organizes the developing consciousness of the protagonist (and of those reading the book). Our narrator becomes aware of his historical imagination, learns its possibilities and limitations, and in the final analysis comprehends the good as a practice of historiography. In other words, for anthropologist and novelist Ghosh, something positive comes from having to revise, and from its cause: mistakes and difficulties encountered while doing fieldwork.

There is something particular about Amitav Ghosh's narrative technique that allows him to transform conflict and the failure of imagination—on the part of some—into a method while avoiding the fatal problem of total fragmentation and moral relativism, and avoiding what will be the conclusions of this presentation. If he could not rely on the first-person subject to make authoritative decisions, the synthesis "method" might not seem so convincing. The "I" that narrates is sovereign, even if his memories are sometimes taken from and intermingle with those of others. Juxtapose *The Shadow Lines's* "disorganization" with the idiot's narrative from William Faukner's *The Sound*

[43] Whether or not, under direct cross-examination, it is said that we are never absolutely "cured".

and the Fury; there is little impetus to *make* sense in the latter—or the impetus is all ours[44]. But we do not have to venture into minds that fail to constitute. As a thought experiment, let us consider what a Ghosh novel would sound like if the author committed to exploring the complicated reasons for creating ideas and producing representation, in the way that a V.S. Naipaul novel does. After all, organizing a disparate group of people/s to one principle of ethical "historiography" is not as easy as enlightening a single mind already inclined to be ethical.

Wherever language and imagination are contested in a Naipaul novel, the confrontation is consequential but unproductive: it does not produce anything that people can take away and use to their advantage. In fact, the resultant change is usually not re-visionary synthesis but simply change in the manner of fashion (fatalism without the style of a Milanese catwalk). In Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*, there is no authoritative consciousness that learns to control the production of signs (even if there is a protagonist signified in the third person restricted narrative). Signs are substituted, disseminated, and transformed as an uncertain number of interests negotiate land, wealth, and power to their respective advantage. Any advantage rarely lasts, however, and after a while the authoritative allegories of "Africa", or "development", or "progress", are again abandoned for other ones. Sometimes they change simply because people are attracted to new things. The people in the book, especially the most passionate and righteous, those most certain of the good in what they do, now and in the past, are all signmakers engaged

[44] Of course, the first section of Faulkner's novel is not meaningful without contrast against the other two sections, and so even though it lacks the ethical impulse of Ghosh's disorganization, it still has at the very least novelistic purpose. We are not talking about abject *un*organization. And this is my point. Writing about the failure of language or "disorganization" means committing a disingenuous and suspect act. All that is left

in competitions with no moral end-result, no enduring, transcendental *telos*. The meeting-place at the bend in the river cannot support the kind of synthesis possible in Rushdie's magical Mumbai or Ghosh's divided Bengali Shore. Neither a market where different interests learn to trade nor an enlightened, ever-inclusive *polis*, its history is a sequence of business and conflict. There are times when the town seems peaceful, and the people who meet there tolerant, even cooperative, but the peace of these moments is perhaps questionable and certainly finite. History, never made in peace, finds a way of reasserting itself. The only possibility for sublimating the town's rebellious energy and reforming it, we soon learn, is to govern; and, in a bit of Naipaulian irony, the desire to govern it is exactly what drives the policing program and propaganda of the tyrant "Big Man". In contrast, the subjective narrative point-of-view lets Ghosh's protagonist "govern" phenomena and the conflicts of different interests without deploying apparent police power. Master of the society of his psychic functions, the narrating subject never despairs of his own incapacity, never becomes schizophrenic, and learns to correct himself ethically. The problematic of representation—long forgotten! Ghosh's narrator is a benign, almost enlightened "big man" of his own state; and he hints of a very powerful, single-minded, almost totalitarian kind of ethical intervention.

Naipaul's *oeuvre* explores the possible life and death of authoritative signs. The people that use them do not let them come and go quietly. Those critics and writers who would distance him from the proper representation of post-colonial conditions suppress the fact that Rushdie, Ghosh, Walcott—and they—are interpreting the same "reality",

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for analysis is to ask why, and so I am asking why writers like Ghosh "disorganize" and trying to evaluate the result of his attempt.

using nearly indiscerable principles of cause-and-effect, culture and matter, and differ only in the incontestable ideals they choose to protect, if any. They disagree about the truthful form for representing post-colonial places. Perhaps Naipaul's biggest fault is that he refuses to write a moral idea without understanding the agencies that propose it and benefit from it, and those who are ruled by it. In fact, attempts to write morally and ahistorically, as it were, produced historical consequences that lead to further attempts; and unless there is some radical change in premises, they will continue to. Those steps taken to protect virtues like freedom and the idea of post-colonial Independence turn out to be the most tyrannical, and particular actions are pardonable only to ardent believers of the cause. More importantly, Naipaul demonstrates with the clarity of a skeptic that, in history, what becomes the two "checking" principles in the new ethical paradigm have never acted in any controlled way, and that the promise of Good which justifies the dismissal of the old and the promulgation of new ideas (e.g. the promise of Independence) and new paradigms (e.g. all cultures in fragments) produce the condition for the lack of fulfillment. He follows an idea until it is falsified by reality, or it is supplanted by other ones. It is possible to read these unoptimistic radical conclusions in Rushdie and Ghosh, too—radical because the conclusion subverts all claims to a morally coherent universe—if we can resist that leap of faith which drives us to immediately synthesize moral order from conflicts and write ethical rules when confronted with "problems". In other words, if deconstructionist logic is consistently observed, then no idea should be able to establish authority as anything more than the weapons of respective, competing interests. And if an idea *is* authoritative, then there might be little that can be done to subject it to the ethical use of signs. The idea and its organization will

pass, but what follows their demise is unknown. The whole "system" plots dissolution. Perhaps no system was there to begin with. No Omnipotence descends to set things right, only *deus-ex-machina*; and the last to assume such authority turned out to be another Big Man. Naipaul himself erects no ethical program to purge the world of the foundational premises shared with Postcolonialism and redeem it by signifying the unknown that is not really not known: the authority of signs is truly unpredictable; indeterminacy truly indeterminate. Reasoning, then, from structural differences among the works of Naipaul, Rushdie, Walcott, and Ghosh, we can write a critique of the Postcolonialist production of *ethos*.

Criticism of the production of *ethos* contributes to ongoing literary discussions by reading a group of texts as allegories of moral order and structures of authority, and by analyzing certain theoretical statements on the subject matter now in terms of authority rather than sympathetically within the theories' respective paradigms. It is therefore deliberately at cross-purposes with producers of *ethos*[45]. The "emergent" is not given power automatically. The work that tries to fix the future fixes a grammar for signifying it, and that is a literary act. If we compel an ethical theory—even our own—to have to repeatedly justify itself and explain its practice, we can expose its inherent contradictions, fundamental assumptions, and flaws in execution for the wider, still unconvinced world to examine and judge. The "theory" that promises depends on the shelter of certain belief to meet the skeptic's questions. Ironically, in its defensive posture the contested "theory" leaves itself open to analysis. Forced to defend the "things" that populate the ethical

field, it can be systematically criticized and reasonably evaluated. Faith in ultimate Good and the moral perfectibility of human society, for instance, reveal themselves as first principles no amount of reasoning from observation can support; yet, to the believer, no amount of reasoning can disprove. Skepticism asks those questions faith says must not be asked.

The faithful, of course, have questions that the skeptic can never satisfactorily answer. I leave that business to someone else. Reconciling faith and reason or synthesizing a "complicated" middle-ground is not the only good of scholarship. Indeed, bad scholarship begins with compromise. Even if study does not result in catholic improvement or any other persuasive utilitarian reason, we will have learned much along the way. We will have discovered a way of reading (the figurative language that affirm ethical ideals); rhetorical strategies for expressing the moral wish to create a good world (as, for instance, dramas where imagination confronts the real); ideas about ethics and power emerging out of similar and dissimilar local writing conditions; proposed model solutions for various kinds of prescient problems, including the problem of representation, the use of social power, and inherent human values; a group of texts from different discursive and geographical locations, espousing different ideologies, linked by comparable literary strategies and moral outlook; the function of authority in Postcolonialism as it goes "global"; and more generally how people issue and value literature to create advantageous power negotiations. All this knowledge is not bad, even if it does not seem to serve the Good in particular.

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[45] but then, why do the two have to be mutually exclusive? Can we not know how a piece of writing plays on our emotions, *and* still make up our minds about whether to do as suggested by the ideas it communicates, or

No direct judgment is being passed on either witnessed "things" or ethics, but on the literary strategies for writing those "things" and locating them in the ethical field. Judgment is being passed on the authority that governs the production of *ethos* and those who establish that kind of authority, and those who take advantage of it. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the evaluation allows one conclusion that seems to be missing from criticism today: invalidation and rejection of that which prevents analysis of intervention and vociferously protects its stakes. Someone is not telling the truth. Someone is making things up for their own purposes. Interventions ought to be deliberated. Such readings may never be justifiable when judged by ability to produce desired outcomes, when *that* is the criterion, but they definitely provide knowledge to master negotiations, however briefly effective is that knowledge.

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not?

1. THE EXCEPTION IS THE RULE: QUESTIONS OF METHOD

Literature… is a language, and a language in itself represents no truth, though it may provide the means for expressing any number of them.[1]

How can a text be rigorously analyzed when it invokes an inarguable redemptive Story and is delivered by an author who would not be denied? A story redeems when its understanding of things is based on the teleology of some higher moral intelligence; the Story is inarguable because it asserts authority to speak from the highest. It is an authority that treats unfavorable assessment to be no less than denial. The theodical rationale that man is evil because *that* is part of the unquestionable Good serves as a simple example. Of course, such stories assume what they "prove" in order to "prove" what they assume, and may well have made up characters, ideas, and things, kernels of what supposedly had been denied, in order to gain what has yet to be disclosed. If for proof they recall supporting testimonials from the archive of human products, they may simply be recycling the logic, as a new testament introduces new tenets and re-cycles the old faith. If for argument they deconstruct a rival's categories and narratives, they may simply be arguing that the rival is wrong for not supporting them. These works run the gamut from the inane and blunt to those that deftly exploit emotions and desire, and from propaganda to literature. Recognizing the tautology of the justifying logic, however, does not make contestation any easier. Like the idea of God/s underwriting the sacred, the Story protects both the text and producer of the text from scrutiny; moreover,

depending on the ambition and skill of the writer, a text can invoke Story to claim dominion over that which would disagree with its propositions, refute its observations, and refuse its claims. Under such authority, when a Story-teller speaks, his words have the mystical, magical effect of remaking the world in his image; when they do not, when he lacks that authority, this type of storyteller seeks to establish it.

Poets and novelists and for that matter any language-user can dream of that kind of power and try to signify what they think they want. And they have. They have dreamt of the final account and they have written down their dreams. It may be as simple as one word: Peace. Or Shantih. Shantih. Shantih. Or "liberatory". And they have been disappointed. Then, in some cases, a teller can make the Story fall apart beautifully and regain some measure of the imagined certainty, meaning, truth, what have you, through the order of Art: this, too, is tautological, and may be considered the spirit of literary Modernism[2]. Was there ever a still point of the turning world, an omphalos, to have been lost[3]? Perhaps not, but the experience of loss is authentic, and consciousness of it important, so it goes. In other cases, a teller insists in one breath that language is slippery and the world in flux, then in another demand unwavering commitment to a character type, the word of the other, his cause, or change, the unexamined idea of change, because the goodness of doing so never changes. Against wondrous signs and their ambitious producers, literary criticism also developed to a point where it could to take dependable positions of doubt in order to study the work of art. It could skeptically conceive

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[1] Northrop Frye. *Anatomy of Criticism*. 354

[2] To be sure, this periodization is debatable. It depends on, for instance, or perhaps determines, how Keats's equation "beauty is truth, truth beauty" is interpreted.

adamantine truth or teleological history as yet another human function, and look for real consequences of the various ways signs address and are interpreted. By analyzing the production of beauty and truth, and by discovering how words are variously used to lay claims, criticism enables its audience to make up their own minds about any text. And perhaps most importantly, students and scholars of literature learn to hold signs as indeterminate, neither true nor false, but with the capacity to tell the truth, or to lie, and to hold ideas in tension, what Keats called, in reference to Shakespeare's literary skills, negative capability. But the important and limited responsibility of criticism to analyze and demystify is abandoned when the critic and that which he would criticize pursue their high-minded purposes.

This change in purpose is accompanied by a shift in mode from skeptical analysis to the writing of *ethos*. *Ethos* is not overt directive, although it can be communicated as such. Usually, the self-directed motivation is subtler, composed of assemblages of ideas and things that move subjects to repeat speech and actions. The repetition is almost compulsory, insofar as the actor can keep repeating the task to be rewarded (or avoid reprimand), even if consciousness of being ethical is recollection of moral intention. And, as with all regulatory mechanism, ethics does not come into view to be scrutinized until there is a violation, an instance that can be cited as unethical. The writing of *ethos* is supported by a range of discursive functions found variously in literature and literary criticism. Criticism today abounds with schools that have made the ethical turn, and new niches continue to emerge fully employing the mode. For instance, various Cultural

[3] "still point" comes from T.S. Eliot's poem "Burnt Norton", part of the *Four Quartets*; the omphalos is used by Joyce to pivot between Homer's world and his own.

Studies subspecialties, from the more established African-American Studies, and Latino Studies, and Asian-American Studies, to the newly recognized queer/disabilities/crip theory, to the up-and-coming Fat Studies, justify their interpretations by appealing to self-appointed and deliberately open-ended imperatives like social justice. Justice calls for relating to culture in these ways, proponents will say. To substantiate its calling, each school has developed new vocabulary, interpretations and theory. As a result, standards for literary evaluations, for example, what might have been called *le mot juste*, which defined literature and good literature, have been changed again, and are now determined not by traditional beauty or deft use of language but by service to that which the various schools hold to be the highest purpose: every story shall be measured against the ideal Story that *should* be told[4]. Interpretation must be an act of affirmation. One result is that really poorly composed works are promoted because they say or can be used to say the right things. Furthermore, curriculums are developed to establish and reinforce the desired identities. Much more is expected of "literature" and "criticism". This genus of criticism is recognizable by the relatively heavy investment in signs (again), as though the right ones lead to fulfillment where all others fail, and in moral authority superior to all human activities, while the species may be identified by the particular vocabulary and texts featured in the campaign. Producers of ethics have not only sanctioned ways of speaking, but also developed the particular apparatus by which critical decisions are made. They are so fully committed to the ethical turn that the good of conforming knowledge and representation in the ethical field has become self-evident. The stories that signify e*thos* are revelations of Story; hence the difficulty of contestation.

[4] Take for instance the critical argument of exclusion.

The turn specifically taken by Postcolonialism may be identified by looking for subtle relocation of characters and plots interpreted from post-colonial objects of literary study into other fields. If "post-colonial" describes conditions common to those places that once held special interests to Colonial Empires, that were once colonies, then "Postcolonialist" may be used to describe a set of special interest in them now. There is interest in what can be made of the various conditions, their causes and what they mean, and of course how to understand post-colonial persons. There is interest in the knowledge derived from interpretation, and the establishment of new culture from it. Characters like the resisting mimic or the emerging subaltern, which were conceived because the paradigm of colonizer/colonized failed to account for the complexities of colonial history, become fundamentally important to these new visions of the world. And the world now follows new plots. The new plots are oriented on certain concepts and characters; ethical decisions are made in reference to them. The fact that characters and plot are composed from accepted past events and present conditions only lends them added substance, and claims about them, with them, on their behalf, greater credibility, as though human lives, the world, the cosmos, constitute story—the Story—living itself out. The plots in which they are redeemed replace those plots in which they are not. Literary criticism's points of contact with ethical projects follow from our discipline-defining questions: in what kind of story—or Story—do these figures stand, and what is the language in which the stories, and so the *ethos*, are written?

Admittedly, study of post-colonial realities do in many cases justify revising how we understand a particular culture and history, because we have taken many representations as referential without test, ideas as truth without reason. Something like

the noble savage was thought to have existed that did not; therefore it and the many "truths" that are based on it are relegated to the archive as a real idea that produced real consequences but on no real basis, and come to understand the error that was made. Realizing that the "noble savage" configured in stories about new worlds were created to motivate the public that consumed them, perhaps we also learn to be on guard for any rhetoric that uses the function of alterity to structure motives for ardent subjects. Since rhetoric is always being used, we are on constant guard. We are especially guarded when the rhetoric tries to teach whomever it addresses a new language, structure new subjectivity. Those who are not risk becoming instruments of sign-makers, and we guard against both them and structures that grant the latter authority and power. Additionally, the examination of new cultural products from places under the stress of tremendous changes and outsized expectations has given us new knowledge of how culture and people function, and how they may yet function in the next several decades or so. And, to an extent few seem to acknowledge, we also learn how a "culture" malfunctions and malfunctions to the point where it must be concluded that either the representation of *a culture* is false, or interpretations in support of it are so. Anglophone literature is a participant of that which it documents. We can study it and use it to study how a new language is formed from old and sometimes extant languages, and how the new is used to produce identity formations no different from how the old was used. We interpret. We invalidate. We demystify. Postcolonialists are more ambitious.

Homi Bhabha often reminds us yet once more that some persons addressed by Colonial discourse could and did resist conversion into Colonial subjects: the subject and

the addressee are not the same[5]. Moments of hybridity in which the would-be subject seems neither one thing nor the other are really moments of cultural production and resistance. Subsequent studies of hybridity catalogue various tactics of power, and Postcolonial theory has been amply applied to texts across various times and genres until the catalogue is vast and descriptions like the Postcolonial Middle Ages make perfect sense[6]. Interpreting widely, however, would not necessarily produce *ethos* and is not the relocation I meant. What is a well-stocked library with few texts circulating? The relocation to which I refer is found in another story told by Postcolonialists, often implicitly but no less authoritatively. Indeed, it may be more authoritative because latent. As we will see, Bhabha's analysis of hybridity is usually a story within the Story, a story of hybrids within the Story of Struggle, the moral-ethical implication being that, measured against Empire builders, who were self-evidently unethical, *we* are responsible when one of those *ethos*-defining characters figures among us. Either we observe or we impede "the historical and ethical right to signify"[7] as revealed in the study of culture. The function of the "Postcolonialist" relocation is to introduce this very type of character and overarching plot to *current and future* decisions. When Bhabha finally lists the demands of the hybrid "migrant", he reveals the purpose for promoting the concepts and

[5] Cf. "Signs Are Taken for Wonders". *The Location of Culture*.

[6] Cf. the collections *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages*. Eds. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2005. and *The Postcolonial Middles Ages*. Ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. See also Nichols, Stephen G. "Writing the New Middle Ages". *Neohelicon*. 33.1 (2006): 141 – 169. Nichols examines how "the Middle Ages have something important to tell us about ourselves and our age", *after* pointing out (in the same sentence) that we are fascinated by the Middle Ages precisely because it functions as the other in our self-conception. Although he does not pursue the skeptical analysis that follows from the idenitification of "our fascination", his initial framework does raise the question of whether "the Postcolonial Middle Ages" indicates a period of history more aptly described through concepts that emerged in the study of Colonialism and Decolonization in the last three centuries, or the Postcolonial Middle Ages is the "Middle Ages" imagined by Postcolonialists to "confirm" their rhetoric.

all that they entail[8]. He reaches the real end of the story—the Aristotelean teleological cause—and in disclosing this end, he demonstrates how a writer can use a story to assiduously slide moral meaning from anti-colonialism to socialist medicine and other entitlements. Moreover, the "theory" sets up a structure for making further claims in the time of intervention. When one feels one cannot decide against the specific demands, and veto each line as it emerges from obscurity, because it puts one too unconscionably close to neocolonialism, the new ethical structure is more or less fully formed. Postcolonialism, therefore, may be understood as common if not coordinated strategies for appropriating critical practices like historical and cultural revision to produce a species of *ethos*. It is epitomized by the *ethos* that the ethical person cannot fail to meet the demands for settling these figures.

Although I said that the key figures of Postcolonialism are relocated among us, I could have also said that the present, with its concepts and its things, is being relocated from the many stories in current use to the s/Story against Colonial power. Economic development as understood implicitly in the World Bank's World Development Indicators database is now economic development as observed by the "social anthropologist" in an antique land. You and I are supposed to be different after the intervention. The past is studied, but it is we who are to be transformed. Meaning in the present is signified through allegories of the Colonial past and post-colonial places. Contemporary grievances and past victimhood are superimposed. Suddenly there are new emergencies. And rather than resist and contest what is being said, we who are

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[7] "Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate"
[8] "Statement for the *Critical Inquiry* Board Symposium."

being addressed by the interventionists become good subjects of the discourse and effective instruments of its esteemed purveyors. After much skepticism about how people manipulated each other by producing historic callings, it seems we are still obliged to history. We are all obliged to answer the call of history. We speak these "liberatory signs"[9]. According to Edward Said, "positive knowledge of languages and history was necessary, but it was never enough…".[10] I am intervening at the latest point of address, where knowledge of hybridity is not there for us to do with as we choose, but tells us what has to be done. One could complicate Postcolonialism with other post-colonial examples, and argue that post-colonial realities have complexity insufficiently theorized in a Postcolonialism dominated by South Asian literature, history, and criticism, but this means participating in the same structure of authority derived from "ethical" representation of the post-colonial[11]. I want to push harder, and from a more conservative position. Naipaul is post-colonial. Bhabha is Postcolonialist. Mahasweta Devi, borned and educated on the subcontinent, writing about it, and choosing to advocate for the suffering Indian masses and the non-institutional expressions of which[12], is both. The distinction between post-colonial and Postcolonial means that one can study literature written from post-colonial, by a post-colonial person, or about a post-colonial place, without being Postcolonialist and without having to become one. Why relocate?

[9] "Freedom's Basis"
[10] Preface. *Orientalism*. (2003) xxv.
[11] Chu Yiu-Wai's article "The Importance of Being Chinese: Orientalism Reconfigured in the Age of Global Modernity" is an example. By astutely going back to Said's Orientalism, Chu can claim common heritage with and equal status to the Postcolonialism dominated by South Asians and their examples.
[12] And authenticated by the intellectual Gayatri Spivak, who translated some of her stories.

The new, or renewed, relationship to the philosophy of history is one of the best indicators of the turn[13]. The (re)turn to uncomplicated history and the turn to self-evident ethics, at least in literary criticism, serve political initiatives that are very much in line with each other. Already for the novelist Amitav Ghosh and the critic Dipesh Chakrabarty, skeptical questions about the writing of history—the questions of historiography—are merely starting points of contention. History is not just a construct to be deconstructed, *but also* a field, a mode, a form of rhetoric, for creating issues and taking the past and the present to task; that is, history is what it was before the advent of modern doubts about it. Indeed, for Chakrabarty, who in *Provincializing Europe* includes himself into the Subaltern Collective project of writing the histories of the peasants of the subcontinent[14], the concerns of historiography serve as a way to address Western Theory about signifying practices already deemed valuable elsewhere. Both writers take issue with the valorization of the philosophy of social and economic development that drives the most powerful sectors of the modern world, particularly when the plot of development assumes progress is always preferable, if not inevitable. Historical consciousness leads to a race to be the most developed, they fear. Both make their cases by complicating the apparent truth that development is the absolute pattern of history. In Ghosh's *In An Antique Land*, Egyptians fellaheens marvel at modern ideas and things without understanding how those things and ideas affect the way they live. As

[13] Besides patent statements like Robert Eaglestone's: "criticism must be sensitive to the way in which language reveals the other *and our responsibilities to the other*" (*Ethical Criticism*, emphasis mine). It must be noted that Eaglestone locates the ethical turn all the way back to Levinas and modernist critical paradigms. The modernist paradigm, however, is no longer able to offer an ethical criticism (30). Eaglestone seeks to revitalize criticism's production of *ethos* by advocating for the use of a critical mode that (once again) steps out of the text (what he calls "epi-reading"). So we agree, in not about anything else, then at least about the latest turn.

a result, the peasants unknowingly superannuate themselves; they understand their way of life as an error in time that Modernity must correct. In *Provincializing Europe*, writing in a different mode, but effectively building the same characters, the same world beyond modernity, Chakrabarty makes the same argument. Addressing the subaltern collective, he claims that the kind of critical history being written about India *by Indian historians* (presumably with the best of intentions) may inadvertently keep its subjects in the "waiting room" of history, because certain characterizations mark their subjects as less developed and unready for the modern age. Thus a charge against gender inequalities based on a history of oppression may locate a society or culture at a previous stage of history, before the advancement of individual rights, and actually lead to disadvantages in current global political and economic power distribution. Concurrently, since standards for historical development are set by Western societies, historians reinforce the sense of superiority of that which they are not supposed to. In other words, historicizing does not always advance the cause. Chakrabarty proposes a partial return to ahistory in his next book *Habitations of Modernity*: I say "partial" because it is done while also historicizing.

I do not dispute Chakrabarty's initial observation that certain kinds of representation will produce effects undesired by the original producers. Only near-absolute authority could ensure that words and ideas always excite the wanted reaction; then again, this is a truism. Chakrabarty's insight is that the ill-effects may be unseen because they occur in a different context. Stories that help individual rights hurt in global stature by justifying rival political agendas. Given the principle positions of the audience he claims to be addressing, namely the subaltern group, his public relations warnings are

[14] See for instance the introduction to *Provincializing Europe*.

to be expected. I might have elaborated on the warning, adding to the catalogue and reaffirming the presumptions with more examples from across different contexts, if I were from the same school.

Nor can I find a way to disagree with Ghosh's stories of lost and found, since they are based on his engagement with the world and his lived experience. For him, Nabeel really did disappear from history. And this disappearance, he feels, is a consequence of a world in which Moderns are but actors. Even if there had been no Nabeel, there remains the fictive imagining and the narrator's feelings, which are apparently real; I cannot very well argue that the narrator is not distressed. Then again, Ghosh is determined not to let his experience stay just his experience, Nabeel just Nabeel-to-Amitab/v[15]. He has published. He has identified points of value and established patterns of behavior in his published works. He has introduced categories and concepts, plots and ideas. He writes about problems and offers resolution. He would not want "Ghosh feels" to moderate the idea of disappearance-redemption, or claims based on the trope. Therefore, whatever exceeds those supposedly unassailable idiosyncratic limits of experience, whatever tries to assert itself as a thing, real, and true, is subjected to skeptical study, however much the writer may resist.

In these preliminary examples and throughout the analysis, what I want to expose is the structure of authority which underwrites and is reinforced by literary and critical practices, and which is epitomized by Chakrabarty's declaration that not everything has to be historicized, for the simple reason that I want to reserve the compelling decisions for myself and for us severally. The novelist and the cultural critic have already made up

their minds about which ideas and concepts are to be subjected to historical criticism and which raised above such critiques. Enduring such critiques are those "things" in terms of which good behavior is defined: archetypes, events, change, etc. The writers have found them in history and in antique lands, and if only we would find these things ourselves we cannot help but come to the same ethical conclusions. The suffering fellaheens and slum-dwellers are ready example, disappearing and reappearing as the plot calls for, changed by external forces yet retaining some indomitable essence as the argument demands. This superposition of mutability and durability is necessary to raise the latest demand of ethics, and the idea of good it implies, above faults and errors to which previous versions have been exposed. Peasants are historical; the idea temporally and temporarily occupied by the peasant is understood as ahistorical[16]. And "above" it all is the empty signifier that makes redeeming these characters meaningful and seemingly possible—the promise of ethics. That which is promised does not have to be realizable for the discourse to be authoritative: as anyone looking forward to the afterlife knows, the redemption of a promise may be deferred.

Now imagine a method like Nietzsche's study of moral categories[17], a kind of historicism, continued, extended, and leveled against the latest attempt to rewrite the good and you will get an initial sense of that against which my investigation runs. A genealogy of liberation, I suppose, or a genealogy of Postcolonialism[18]. I am not

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[15] "Amitav" is the narrator's given name (also the author's); "Amitab" is how the Egyptians pronounce it.

[16] I make no claims on peasant; rather, I am talking about the idea of the peasant that appears in texts, and referencing the kernel that allows writers like Ghosh to use the representation "fellaheen" as they have.

[17] Cf. "The Genealogy of Morals".

[18] Here is a telling engagement. Nietzsche himself was not above offering redemption. I am only using the suggestion of a method, in particular its antisocial impulse, to help juxtapose against the language of morality. Steven V. Hicks makes an interesting attempt to formulate a new "coherent and attractive

Nietzsche, nor do I want to be. But I am similarly wary of any attempt to stymie analysis and exempt special stories and their morals from the kind of de-authorization that his criticism can do. The newly discovered Good is one in a long line of many other *propositions*, including the ones it would replace; likewise the new story and new *ethos*. The mere fact that Chakrabarty's is new does recommend it against the "old"[19]—against the modernity he would superannuate. Indeed, if the same critical arguments, perhaps the critique that character-types are really straw-man comparisons to the ideal (and not just the Western ideal self), were genuinely and consistently applied to the new propositions, would not the conclusions be the same? Could the new be new *and* nothing? It would and it could; and I think that is why Chakrabarty and a host of other writers insist on maintaining the fundamental authority to use the rhetoric of the ahistorical *in conjunction* with the complexities of historicization.

Invoking ahistory saves the writer from having to answer for past and present failures. Invoking ahistory exempts particular acts, rhetoric, language, events, the important ideas supposedly exemplified by history, from the history of how misguided

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ethical/sociopolitical alternative for our postmodern world" by comparing and contrasting Hegel and Nietzsche, and comparing and contrasting his own alternative against them. He concludes that the postmodern world needs the redemptive power of Hegel's sense of social reconciliation, and when that is inadequate, the redemptive power of Nietzsche's sense of self-created, self-directed meaning. In contrast, I would not "synthesize" from each, but set the philosophers against each other to better understand the tension between social institutionalization and individual initiative. Yes, this tension can produce what Hegel, Nietzsche, and Hicks try to get away from (namely nihilism); yet I also think a world driven by this tension is better than that which would try to redeem it. The reason why Nietzsche and, say, Postcolonialism contrasts well is that they are both using redemptive plots, only they diverge enough to show what the other tries to get rid of. It may be that I lean towards another antipode, too, where certain kinds of antagonism do *not* need to be reconciled, much less redeemed, and nihilism is not bad *per se* unless your sense of self or politics require the kind of reaffirmation that comes from common belief in Meaning. Steven Hicks. "The Project of Reconciliation and the Road to Redemption: Hegel's Social Philosophy and Nietzsche's critique".

[19] Although there is a tendency to seek newness in scholarship. It remains to be seen whether this tendency comes from the demands of the profession (to publish original works) or from a predisposition of many in the profession to seek whatever is promised by newness.

similar attempts have been, and how badly they ended. Actually, invoking ahistory spares the historian himself from having to satisfactorily answer the question of why the world seems to continue to defy modeling, a question immediately raised when he speaks against all other previous histories as false or self-serving. Invoking ahistory saves him from being perceived as the next failure *before* his promising rhetoric has had a chance to disappoint, whether the cause of failure is an erroneous model (implying that the right one may eventually be found) or the insufficiency of all modeling. Invoking ahistory exempts him from the determinism to which all others in history are subjected, and from the logic to which other arguments from history are held; in fact, to which the historian subscribes the moment he links events in time. And invoking ahistory ensures that nothing, not even hypothetically, comes *after* him (to avoid opening the possibility he will have failed). Historicization follows the impulse of doubt, especially about ideas that are received as transcendental or "timeless", or eventual (i.e. *telos*), and a producer of new *ethos* must at some point get rid of or suppress this competing function. The rhetorical effects that reconcile logically antithetical modes are common to redemptive discourses, and a skeptical study of post-colonial literature will see many of these features, these *deus-ex-machina*, being used.

The meaning of these stories—the stories of women's struggle in the household cited by Chakrabarty—are not relative to different cultures or historical periods like the philosophy of development is bounded to what Postcolonial critics call Modernity. Their ideas and their morals are ahistorical[20]. The purpose for starting certain kinds of arguments about historical representation, then, is to set the stage for introducing the

incontestable ideas and "things" that support the vision and for suppressing criticism of the unstated visionary authority to reapportion power. This is the relocation I meant. Stories do transport. They transport not only (different) virtues and values but also the authority to argue from those "things". Ahistory is another set of rules, another mode. If Postcolonial things were suspected of being instruments for creating the undisclosed formation, and the stories interpreted and analyzed as such, fervor for new government by new math would diminish. And fervor would diminish if it were recognized that a strategy must be used *on someone*, specifically on that which would be transformed, not that which already has the proper understanding. If the tautology is recognized, and the reasons for its use made transparent, we may decide to refuse to beg the question of "what has been erased", and figure out that, between Chakrabarty's habitations and "development", which more accurately describes conditions next quarter, next year, next decade, next century; which is the more advantageous *ethos*; and/or which does not suppress our respective interests and development to the demands of others.

Modulation from history to ahistory allows the writer to redeem any and all other evidence that may be used to resist, even all the other ahistories out there. One does not make a play for ahistory to admit that whatever is ahistorical is simply what one believes at this place and time, or that in some other time and place, in modernity, for example, the ahistorical means nothing. Chakrabarty's point of view implicitly collects all political entities under the auspice of power redistribution so that they—we—are, in effect, already subjects of the (new) government that would be in charge of which. The subject is responsible to those *ethos* signified by a text that uses both the historicist and

[20] Just as Moderns hold on to their ahistorical ideals, to be fair.

ahistorical modes. Failing to meet expectations, for instance assessing then rejecting somebody's entitlement claims made as the emerging "other", is tantamount to denial of this "vision". That which is othered by the philosophy of development must be given means through which it (or its representative the interventionist) can transform any discourse that keeps it waiting. The story *qua* "vision" is *not* to be judged by the same criticism that has identified the desire for development as Western or the pursuit of consistent order as bourgeois, because judgment retards this power. The vision is exempted from the critical apparati used against other visions. Here is, once more, the authority to control categories and shape argument, exerting itself as difficulties to unsympathetic scrutiny, contestation, and rejection.

Out from under this authority, we can begin to ascertain the reality of the intervention that addresses us, check it, extrapolate its real effects, and take stock of risks and rewards. I want us to be able to audit the critic's books and question his accounts when we need to, as we need to; the need is arguably greater whenever there are patterns of obstruction. Chakrabarty wants to pick and choose, and his ultimate deciding factor is power: his critiques, directed against some senses of history, extolling others—the native ones—challenge *any* representation that hinders establishing *the* power distribution he wants. The emerging figures do not have what he believes is their just share of power; this is the deciding issue. In its service are deployed functions like historicism and ahistory, analysis and propaganda; the functions are deployed such that one mode temporarily compliments the other and in the end reinforce the kernels of out of which political and ethical statements are made. To use Chakrabarty's metaphor, old habitations are torn down *and new ones built*. Historicizing is good when it helps shuttle

power to the right "sites". Historicism must be suppressed in favor of ahistory when it hurts: indeed, ahistory is simply a utilitarian rule against historicizing, as suggested by Chakrabarty's phrase "not everything has to be historicized". Even the truth—the truth of past or present oppression of women—should be submitted to power politics.

For Ghosh, Modernity subtracts[21]. The culture and society of the agrarian village lose when they have to compete against it. Villagers and ordinary people disappear in its nationalist wars and its global capitalist development. Problems are exacerbated under bad government (and, though Ghosh never explicitly talks about it, an ineffectual citizenry). Modernity too often ignores these experiences, according to the novelist. The ethical function of his novels is to introduce those kernels which would have been subtracted (and filled)—that is subtracted when not dignified. This is no ordinary algebra. By deftly modulating between deconstructive and constructive rhetoric, he reaffirms that which is beyond the superfluity of signs, beyond the errors of human understanding, beyond the faults of human manipulation, and which happens to be located in the ethical field. Kernels like the slave of MS H.6, or Nabeel, or even the cosmopolitan trade network of the Indian Ocean in the 13th century, are emptied (i.e. deconstructed signifier) and filled (historical referents) and emptied and filled again. The repetition actually reinforces the sublime durability of the kernel[22]. According to the

[21] He does not thoroughly characterize "modernity". Rather, he positions it as the larger world beyond the societies of Egyptian villages and threatening it. It is also the world juxtaposed against the medieval cosmopolitanism in which lived the historical subject whose life the historian is now trying to recover. The one certain ascription is that modernity seeks to spread its idea of economic development, which is part of its philosophy of history, so that, in *In an Antique Land* modernity is often nearly equivalent to global industrial capitalism.

[22] The difference will be seen in comparisons to Naipaul's sense of history. The empty-fill modulations mark a kernel of language, according to Slavoj Zizek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Zizek likens the action of

discourse, the kernels are not "third categories"; they are not the writers' additions at the time of address. They function, in fact, as the sole and indisputable anchors of the field: the different *ethos*, discovered in the search for the slave of MS H.6 and from interacting with well-meaning peasants, all derive meaning from the figure of the disappeared-to-be-redeemed. *In An Antique Land* basically proposes that we should hold the same concept and value for the sublime human being and the same ethics for encounters with other human subjects that (some) social anthropologists of the present hold. The ethical person *qua* anthropologist is responsive to and responsible for the disappearing-reappearing kernels found in the attempt to recover history.

Again, I do not dispute Ghosh's claim that village agriculture loses in competition against modern industrial production, nor even that unscrupulous post-colonial governments have forced many to call on their ancestors for redress: we work from the same facts. And I appreciate how his stories try to convey the sense of loss, which may hardly be felt by those already interpellated into or who have chosen the existence Ghosh calls "modernity". Stories help complete the archives and some do so with literary merits. Part of the enjoyment of reading *In An Antique Land* is to experience and analyze how Ghosh makes Nabeel-the-disappeared indicate that there had been something invaluable erased to be redeemed (how he plays with the kernels of language), just like reading T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, Wordsworth's *Intimation of Immortality*, or Shakespeare's sonnets. Additionally, he and I may very well agree to the utility of some of the same moderate political principles, for I recognize that the world is more likely to

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emptying-filling to a cartoon character suffering the physical rules of falling only to return to normal for the next fall; he characterizes these destructible yet recoverable objects as sublime.

be at peace when people are not invested in ideals and representations to the point that getting others to recognize our signs, and correlatively appeasing others whenever they try to signify, rule over everything we do. But he, you and I may have come to these tentative agreements differently, and that will have made all the difference.

Ghosh deconstructs culture, specifically modernity, but in his story-telling there are moments when he shifts rhetorically away from deconstruction. Indeed, deconstruction takes up only brief moments in the novel. After the complications of historiography, Ghosh turns to rather conventional history in which modernity is one of many actors, interactions between moderns and their "others" are uncomplicated, and the value of things constant. An explanation of a "failed" cultural encounter is deconstructionist, but Ghosh almost always attempts to construct a subsequent universal understanding. History is pedagogical and authoritative, again. From acrimony to peace, from subtraction to reparation, and from cultural misunderstanding to deep appreciation of everyone's respective Culture, these are his narrative's ethical tendencies. The rhetorical shifts, the modulations, then, represent his philosophy of history. What I want us to be able to do is to conduct the "next" sublation beyond Ghosh's intervention, and all the turns of the pattern the text claims to have observed. And then the next one after that. And then the next, relentlessly.

What does this mean? It means that while there is no doubt about Ghosh the story-teller, there is doubt about Ghosh the philosopher, the politician, and the moralizer, as he tells his sad stories. It also means that what is being deconstructed is not necessarily Nabeel's statements or the slave's feelings, the "person's" inherent value or their humanity, but Ghosh's story, and in particular the discourse of which the texts are

instruments. Especially important is skeptical assessment of what exactly has been subtracted. Can we not listen to Ghosh *and* evaluate his stories free and clear of the authority that permits him to shift modes and write moral categories; or rather, can we not deconstruct the modulations since they *distinguish these kinds of stories from other stories of and/or written under post-colonial conditions*? To write *ethos,* Ghosh needs to make the losses figure heavily on the general Balance Sheet, the One documenting liabilities to which we are all exposed, so that we feel obliged to do something. To that end does he employ the drama of the disappeared-reappeared, tragedy when characters lose that—let us call it "humanity"—which fills the kernel, comedy when the stuff of a kernel, such as the dignity of a culture discounted by modernity, is restored to the social imagination. If the story is well executed and moves readers deeply, and the reader lets emotions and imagination rule ethical thought, then it may be able to suggest that Nabeel-the-disappeared and the slave-that-reappears, and the village-life threatened by economic development, refer to something deeply entrenched in the ethical field. Nabeel and the slave of MS H.6 have to be recovered, or otherwise be egregiously lost. Without a rhetorical shift, Nabeel the laborer would simply be a function of the dominant socioeconomic organization: his significance, his value, fluctuates in time, eventually hitting zero, and that which is claimed to have been (unethically) subtracted turns out to be simply an offer, a price, Ghosh's price, or social anthropology's price, for which there are (currently) few takers.

To be sure, it is *we* to whom the stories are addressed. It is *we* who recover the significance of the disappeared. Whatever is subtracted *we* compensate. It is we who redeem to tolls of history as priced by *In An Antique Land*. Ghosh is promoting the

alternative philosophy of loss-and-redemption, and because commitment to this philosophy wavers when controversies arise, the sense of loss varies, and other pursuits are deemed more worthwhile, the producer of *ethos* must really prevent criticism that would question the validity of losses and gains, the accounting system, and what is promised. What is to be gained by pursuing the cosmopolitanism allegorized as the cultural encounters that produces the slave's story? Under the authority of story-telling, entitlement becomes open-ended, and the paperwork on which demands are filed can be as easily erased and rewritten as another story told. Against this kind of commitment, let the few of us do so who can enjoy Ghosh's stories, and choose to question them, live apart from the world that would be set up by their morals, and use different math. Or are we, are some of us, the unethical ones as defined by moralists, simply barred from making up our own minds about our relationship to comedy and tragedy, to the story and its producer?

Even cursory examination shows the impact of Ghosh's kind of stories and Chakrabarty's kind of criticism on the ethical field would be far-reaching. This should not be surprising. To reach far is the purpose for producing them in the first place. I had earlier represented ethical imperatives mainly as injunctions *not* to do (bad) things. The new ethical position regard ethics as dramatic positive actions: the ethical person must *do* this and that; in so doing, he fulfills the responsibility to the other. Chakrabarty and Ghosh are but two examples of many others using the same strategies. A look askance may help illustrate the difference in obligations; then it will be evident from which side of the difference these writers are already operating.

The American television show *Seinfeld* considers ethics in its series-ending episode. The show's sense of humor is irreverent, absurdist satire, and actually quite old. The characters' constitutions get them into bad situations, from which they are extricated, often by some *deus-ex-machina*, some windfall or other. They are extricated so that they can basically get into more trouble. And they do not learn. They do not feel the need to change. In some ways, the live-action sitcom is like a cartoon. The intelligence of the show is that it repeats with difference our everyday routines and the odd ritualistic meanings we invent for ourselves. It acts out the occasional thoughts that we might forestall or censor (like trying to profit through the economy of scale from the bum's business of collecting deposits on recyclables). And it plays up the tension of seeing hard-to-like and possibly unethical characters made by the very culture that we call ours. I qualify "unethical" with "possibly" because the characters have their own codes of conduct, their reasons for doing things, the gratification they expect, and the codes are some of the ones we observe in this world. The absurd and the reasonable are not so clearly delineated. Some people find the show objectionable for the same reasons others find it humorous.

In the series finale, the four New Yorkers, having been stranded in a podunk town, stand by, comment on, and laugh at a fat man being carjacked. Several times the man yells "help"; the protagonists would have no part in it. They are arrested under a local law for failing to be good Samaritans, which to their sensibilities is an absurd expectation for society to place on any individual. To some fans and many observers, the two-year jail sentence they get at the end is righteous karmic retribution for all of the things they have done. To others, the end is galling. To a few, it deviates from past

escapes. To me, it is consistent with the show's intelligent sense of humor (the *deus-ex-machina* abandons them in an out-of-the-way place that is weirdly morally conformist). The only thing that troubled me was how part of the show's audience did not understand their own desire to not only turn decisions they have already made for themselves (like whether to help or not) into Law, but also punish those who would not change accordingly. Hypocrite lecteur, truly.

Both the frivolous program cited above and Postcolonialism are aware of the difference between negative and positive obligations/rights. The philosophical difference correlates to differences in the scope and force of ethical demands, and so in the authority of the ethicist and the moralist. It is the difference between, say, professional ethics, and "the production of *ethos*", between "doctor, do no harm" versus "help". And as we will see, it also is indicative of many other kinds of cultural, political, moral, and epistemelogical differences. When the law criminalizes carjacking, there is an unenumerated "list" of decisions that are reserved for us. As long as we do not take someone's car by force, as long as we do not carjack, what we do is our business. When the law presumes obligation on everyone's part in a matter, it has in effect chosen a narrow set of actions that must be performed over all others. The difference between opting in and opting out is no minor quibble. Between the story of villagers turning to the ghosts of their ancestors to maintain their way of life and the story of villagers forced *unethically* to crisis that makes them supplicate to protecting spirits lies a host of unexamined values and expectations. Although Postcolonialism is not a body of Good Samaritan laws, it aims to institutionalize structures for writing the very same kind of obligation and expectation: the "right" of _(insert figure here)_ to "signify" may be

violated if, when he yells "help", or makes his dearest signs, we do anything else but what is expected. A producer of *ethos* can follow Rushdie's lead in *Midnight's Children* and establish a broad matrix of ethical ties-that-bind which forces everyone, even in the context of medicine, to self-evaluate in terms of broader moral and political struggles. It is not just a matter of thinking of others, but letting that which claims to have been othered to answer the ethical question "how shall I live"; to feed us magical chutney, so goes Rushdie's metaphor for writing history. To establish a much more expansive ethics is also why Homi Bhabha measures colonial oppression against what he conceives is "the historical and ethical right to signify"[23], instead of the modern concept of self-determination; the latter is a negative right and entails no obligation on anyone's part to help that "self" signify[24]. And on behalf of migrants, Bhabha is already talking in legal terms.

Clearly by bring up a difference that admittedly—deliberately—limits ethics, this investigation differs from some of the literature and much of the criticism it studies in terms of the range of possible responses to "migrants", "hybrids", "mimic", "subaltern", "post-colonial", or any other figure that is represented as emerging from the margins of modernity or recovered from obscurity, any that commands attention, that motivates action. A story like Ghosh's can call forth a manageable list of the unethical, or inspire a palimpsest of the ethical. The ethics of interpretation can be discovered by trying to answer a test question like "can we read any story, enjoy it, think about it, defy its expectations, transform it for our own various uses, file it in some archive, or leave it to

[23] "Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate".

its writer and its fans?" The more qualified the answer, the deeper the turn. There is an undecided middle-ground and vast indeterminacy in the critical interpretation of literature. There is the same between you and me. Against this, authors and critics who insist certain stories are more than stories use story-telling as an instrument to gain greater power and authority. At the very least, to set up entitlement demands, the stories have to be foremost in many minds, because they can rewrite palimpsest-like obligation that have not yet been met (unfinished business, to use Rushdie's phrase from *The Satanic Verses*) and create subtracted "things" for which the present and future are responsible. The story of the burning bush is not just a story. The story of the fire sermon is not just a story. The story of alienation and consummation to be wished is not just a story. The story of neocolonialism is not just a story. Achieving these effects requires shifting away from the critical modes. The characteristic shifts in modes are in truth attempts to introduce structures, including archetypes and plots, that support the production of *ethos*. The negotiable middle-ground and indeterminacy disappear; correlatively the authority to moralize and redeem, with all of its contradictions and mysticism, is greatly expanded. The slippery slope is slipperier when the demand moves from help against carjacking to deliberately open-ended signifiers like "dignity"[25] or "the right to signify". In fact, if my comparison of signifying structures is inappropriate because the issues of post-colonialism cannot be taken frivolously, its conventions cannot be satirized, then the authority I want to scrutinize is already exerting its influence.

[24] With either right, we must be care to watch the disappointed who tend to escalate pursuit of such "rights". Self-determination can—has—lead to ultranationalism; I wonder what the right to signify would lead to.

How, then, can stories of significance lost and other basic structures of Postcolonialist productions of *ethos* be read critically, the ideas in them be contested, the "things" tested, when the stories and the accompanying critical theories are configured to peremptorily rebuff any unsympathetic critique as denial of the always already significant? Are some of the texts offered as must-read even literary? How can we possibly dispute, and therefore genuine agree with, claims about what a story is? How can we determine if some "thing" is neither present nor absent? If the story-tellers' causes are just, then demystification of their composition methods and rhetorical strategies, and verification of the very things that passes for things, should not preclude us from recognizing so. If they require the protection of circular logic and final authority, then the reasons for scrutiny would be not just suspicion about the cause but more importantly resistance to the surreptitious instrumentalism being established.

In response to my observations above, a radical critic—say, a Marxist critic—may claim that his philosophy has always been ethical, that, in fact, from Georg Lukacs to C.L.R James to Louis Althusser to Fredric Jameson, criticism has always been ethical[26]. As such, the characterization that a turn was made *to ethics* misrepresents the work that

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[25] "dignity" comes from the language of such institutions as the United Nation, specifically its *Declaration of Human Rights*. Having established "dignity", the UN uses it to produce a variety of *ethos*, from healthcare to disability. 15 Mar 2009 < http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/convtexte.htm>

[26] Cf. Terry Eagleton. *Criticism and Ideology*: *a study in Marxist Literary Theory*. There is also an interesting, if not somewhat suspect, collection of articles edited by Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus trying to build a history of engagement between Marxism and postcolonial studies. The articles themselves may not be suspect, but the auspice under which they are collected is. Bartolovich states in her introduction that both sides have ignored each other, when they could converse to their mutual benefit. C.L.R. James, if he were alive, would disagree. In fact, Eagleton and Jameson would. Be that as it may, the writers contributing to the collection seems to accept that critical study has been ethical since before what I am characterizing as a turn. *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies.*

critics and literary critics have done. At the very least, criticism did not have the outlook I am describing, and the challenge would be to show that I am *not* creating a turn because I want to occupy the position of that away from which criticism has wrongly turned. In other words, I may be arguing from illusionary nostalgia. I agree and disagree. The distinction here, as throughout, hinges on implicit disagreements about the range *and limits* of the critical and/or ethical decisions to be made, and differences among the various standards for determining what is ethical, what is unethical, what is indeterminate, what is a lie, and what is nothing. In the final analysis, I may represent no more than a clash of ethics.

A respond to this challenge can be formed at several levels simultaneously. Some are demonstrated above; the full range will be used in the detailed analyses to follow. First there is a semantic issue: the meanings of "criticism" and "ethical". As with many semantic issues, the stakes have not been made transparent—the related disputes of "consciousness" comes to mind. But the issue can be elucidated with questions that force each of us to clarify our principle positions. One dialogic question would be: is ethics and criticism synonymous? The question needs to be answered consistently before we could continue, because when left unanswered, a producer of *ethos* can "invalidate" any reasoning that threatens the centrality of his morals by changing the relationship of the two signifiers in the middle of analysis. I would concede the point in return for consistency. I would concede to the hypothetical Marxist counterclaim, if that means the Marxist would no longer be allowed to contradict it by assuming that *only* revolutionary or anti-capitalist *ethos* is truly critical; at least he should not be able to turn to this characteristic argument of last resort, since it would contradict the critical rule deployed

to fault my version of history. In other words, I am prepared to give up the minor position to gain another that is more valuable (and that ironically can be used to prove a point about the turn). I am willing to surrender the characterization that what had been criticism has already begun moving towards the production of *ethos*, because the counterclaim provides a rule of invalidation that can subsequently be used against the exceptionalist posture assumed by the latest published exhortation to be good and do good. How this happen is something assiduous rhetoricians and critics know: the rhetorical stance assumed by Marxists, by radical critics, by Ghosh with his history|ography, and Chakrabarty with his a|history, are exactly the same as the relatively conservative one being invalidated[27]. The projectors are the same, just with different images.

Since we are dealing with signs, I will characterize my method in terms of Structuralism-after-Poststructuralism[28]. Let the characterization entail no commitment to Structuralism, though it parallels the Structuralist impulse to know *in a way that is decidedly different from how another, including the subjects of study, may "know"*. Disputes over signs and history *are* important: as instruments, they are proxy controversies for what is really at stake. Without history, all that an interventionist can say is that I want the world to be the way I want it to be or you should dignify his signs by doing that. Without history, it would be hard to find a structure for creating moral meaning *outside* of the community of believers. And it would be hard to expand that

[27] Cf. Michel de Certeau. *The Writing of History*. In any writing of history, there is always the Other against which is contrasted the present historiography. This is because the Other is a function of the subjecitivity that produces the text, not any antagonist identified by it. So even self-reflexive writing will valorize the self-reflexive observer as liberal and self-aware and considerate, against other writers who are not.

community. History is a common language and a public discourse[29]. History can be written to espouse a philosophy in less direct, yet much more engaging, even penetrating ways. Therefore, the philosophy and core moral judgments are not always apparent and opened to attack, least of all when the rigors applied to conventional modern historiography are suspended. In order to really understand the turn, an interventionary discourse has to be forced to police its rules, and reveal its most protected ideas. The first rule, seemingly applied to all parties, says: Either criticism is ethical, or not, and either ethics is critical, or not. My description implies that criticism was not ethical before the turn; the description is wrong because criticism was. The second rule—the hidden one—is: deploy the first rule against selected ideas, texts, and writers *but then* nullify it so that it cannot be used to criticize and controvert the ideas, texts, and writers that need to be propagated. Criticism of new alternatives can be blunted by, for example, confining the logic of evaluation to Capitalism, the West, Modernity, or some other which an intended audience automatically feels is unethical. In more overtly theological structures, it may be confined to Earthly logic. It is this second rule that identifies antagonists and orchestrates the modulation: the rule designates who can and when to denounce binary exclusion *and* who can and when to use it; it designates when to and who can use the function of the Real against representation *and* when to and who can operate in the referential mode again. Any skeptical description of change would be historicized, just as ideas of the *status quo* are, while the meaning of change is promoted under the implied

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[28] Based on that which is elucidated by Jonathan Culler in *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism.*

[29] At least common among those signifying economies in which circulate the stories that are supposed to promote change.

privilege of the ahistorical. Without mastering the story-teller's and critic's methods, arguing over whether the spirits of village life are untranslatable or economic development alienating, over the reality of transformation and promise of world-wide revolution, returns very limited results, and certainly is not effective in contesting producers of Postcolonial *ethos*. The discourse is not only prepared for the attacks, it counts on them. To really know how and why some stories are written, how some "theories" come to their explanations (and what ideas they introduce but do not explain), we need to violate the second rule, and other hidden rules, and examine those factors, those "things", that basically authorizes usage. Where the rules seem to have their strongest effect is, of course, the field of ethics.

To test the rules of the subject being studied, we also look at the history in which the writers and critics act, not just the history they write, and calculate the effects of the discourse that changes modes, not just the sublime of which they dream. As a thought exercise, we historicize where the texts and the writers who think ahistory is important. "Criticism" can refer to the institution consisting of professional scholars, intellectuals, and pedagogues supported by the university system, academic presses, and journal publishers; the rules would be set by the institutional underwriters, and of course critics themselves. Then, there is the more nebulous cultural formation, founded on ideas such as independent investigation or analysis of how language is used. This is the "criticism" that can change—or seem to—because of something the critic says; at the same time, it is difficult to grasp, and perhaps most difficult to change, as familiarity with Foucault's analysis of discourse and Bhabha's struggle with the lingering authority of colonial ideas and things would have already suggested. The two are intimately related, although

comparing the two complicates a history of either one alone; that is why we examine both. To study literature, which is the institutional mandate, a professional literary critic invariably deals with the formations and comprises their next iterations. The history of both is traceable through the critical conversations. Given this, the turn may be neither what I nor my hypothetical critics characterize it to be.

Both formation and institution fall within the ideals of modern Western higher education, one of which is that study, though conventional, should be unfettered by imperious demands from external doctrine and dogma. "Free-thinking" the idea used to be called, though the term is now almost a throwaway[30]; it is, in fact, an implicit value in Professor Chakrabarty's critique against blindly following post-colonial nationalist historical categories. University education performs a limited function, within which it has no undue limitation. Wondrous signs are demystified. Everything gets analyzed—everything from why a laborer feels alienated from his work to how a propagandist can use those feelings to project an un-alienated wholeness to be wished and incite violence. Everything is examined, including why and how writers use story to create cultural signs, then use those signs to argue for necessary and real change. Nothing is promised from this learning save individual enlightenment, and perhaps a society in which there are educated, enlightened individuals. However, when it is assumed that "Western" reason *cannot* be critical or that its criticism is always already unethical, usually because historically some products of academia have been used to support behavior now considered heinous, as, for example, described by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978),

[30] Cf. Anthony Collins. "Discourse of Free-Thinking". 1713. New York: Garland, 1978.

then obviously my description of the turn *from* criticism becomes questionable[31]. The turn is not away from criticism to *ethos*, as I described it, but *to* true criticism. Furthermore, when it is thought that critiques should actively advance specific moral imperatives—to transform, as it were, and not just to transform but transform into, say, a more spiritual society[32] in which a person can invoke the authority of "spirit" to make claims—the limits placed on knowledge derived from the institution of criticism can be, well, limiting. The turn is an institutional correction, and the correct use of the institution[33].

Again, a counterclaim based on history could be useful, and I can see myself conceding. I might concede because the counter to my claim also admits there has been change in time. The difference is how and how far we are willing to go to characterize that change, how much we believe in the plots that assure dependable causality (change is not chance) and the stories that redeem (change is for good). It may very well be that the institution to which I refer as "criticism" has failed to uphold its foundational principles, or strayed from its founding mandate; or it may be that the cultures that created the institution, themselves changing, have failed to sustain it. If any of these causes-and-effects are true, we have to know. In fact, Said's observations suggest, or may be interpreted to suggest, that we ought to stridently preserve our skeptic's independence from moral, political, and economic interests, those we inherit *and those struggling for*

[31] The insupportable assumption is that another can. In fact, that assumption violates the problem of translation, for how can another perspective claim to understand the inner workings of its subject and its other: Western culture.

[32] Cf. Ashis Nandy. *Bonfire of Creeds: the essential Ashis Nandy*.

[33] For an interesting discussion of the history of "postcolonial" practices in the academic institution, see Bart Moore-Gilbert. "Postcolonialism: between nationalitarianism and globalization? A response to Simon

atttention, that would have us invent "things" to know, not slide unthinkingly to the next vision. Is this not the most appropriate *critical* response[34]? An ideal wrongly executed does not make another ideal suddenly right. A concept demonstrated to be baseless does not mean another has been proven. History that did not happen does not mean this other pattern is suddenly meaningful. Why commit the same error? Why set sail to find the omphalos? Why not use the faculties which Said, and Chakrabarty, and Ghosh, and Bhabha use to analyze the authority they believe wrong, only this time why not use them on the ideas and concepts of Said, and Chakrabarty, and Ghosh, and Bhabha which would be, but are not yet, in authority? The discovery of a signifier without referent cannot legitimate other signs. At least it ought not to strictly by the same method and in the same mode. Nothing cannot prove anything—that is, except when "nothing" is really something erased yet saved in a higher accounting: some "thing", like the postcolonial, the migrant, already saved in the highest of Accounts.

Instead, a little over three decades its publication, S.N Balagangadhara and Marianne Keppers understand the critique of *Orientalism* as justification for "the creation of alternative theories"[35] specifically directed at the West. I agree, partly. While some of the arguments used may be legitimate, *Orientalism*—or that interpretation of it—

During". The article is somewhat dated, and of course Bhabha's characterization of Postcolonialism carries much more weight.

[34] Herbert Lewis claims that the influence of *Orientalism* on Anthropology is crippling, because it transforms the discipline into occasions for the self-aggrandizing of radical activist scholars to shout over other kinds of work. "The reputation of the field has plummeted and the discipline seems increasingly irrelevant," Lewis complains (783). What Lewis describes is the ethical turn in his discipline that makes every "anthropological" engagement, with either people or text, into an occasion for producing *ethos.* Now, there will be inevitable disagreement about the good of the turn; both will seek to characterize the same historical phenomenon with different reputations. "The Influence of Edward Said on Anthropology." *Israel Affairs.* 13.4 (October 2007): 774–785.

[35] "Reconceptualizing the Postcolonial Project". (2009)

establishes what could be near-blanket authority to approve representations. Balagangadhara and Keppers interprete Orientalism as epistemological correction, not just proof to the contrary, they justify wholesale transformation of that which had been Western. I disagree with the nature of the "correction" and the call for—the commitment to, as Homi Bhahba says[36]—(new) theory. The new Account and its history, the new system of interventionist signs may very well have bypassed the very (modern) rigors allayed against old and extant ones[37]. By giving up the initial position, I gain the use of the now-transparent functions that would have been used to invalidate my too nostalgic history of criticism. Longing for some phantom lost fullness is not allowed. One cannot just deploy rhetoric and rewrite things for one's chosen purposes. I agree. That the test functions will be derived from post-colonial literature and Postcolonial criticism should make it harder for the subjects of study to repudiate critiques of them. The functions can be skillfully turned against the new production of *ethos* to reveal a kind of fundamentalist authority that insists the things in the ethical field are there because stewards of the good say so. It can be used to resist the instrumentalism of using "critical knowledge" to gain new subjects. When a critical discussion about the reality of change attempts to install some new ideals, and establish authority to regulate over others (over us), then critical analysis has to have the skills, the wherewithal, perhaps even the obligation, to engage what is most precious to the interventionist, too. After all, how can we tell the "things" of history in the ethical field, new things (already old) like hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, have not been instituted to work in ways of which we are not aware and

[36] *The Location of Culture*.
[37] Because, as Balagangadhara and Keppers argue,

how can we reject authority established to disable our objections? Perhaps I am a bad historian, but then the turn is not what those who would steer us make it out to be, either.

The functions of truth and morality, and of course ideas of objectivity and history, because they can support judgment for one story over another—or others—are prominently used by critics, once again, in response to modernity (and postmodernity). Not all stories are created equal; the producers of *ethos*, speaking objectively[38], telling the truth, and serving Good, can tell us which is which. The new stories and new interpretations—History—are offered against the seeming irresponsibility of a modernity that valorized individual freedom from history, reality, representation, anything and everything. Since we are still modern, even with all of the post-this and post-that floating about, the "ethical turn" is still being made; however, a monolithic history of literary criticism may illustrate why there developed a community of scholars and a method, so to speak, in which the turn seems already taken. Between Hayden White's formalism outlined in *Metahistory* (1973) and *Tropics of History* (1978) and Michel De Certeau's praxis from *L'Ecriture de L'Histoire* (1975, English translation 1978) are differences the discipline has considered important enough that criticism, especially of post-colonial literature, now closely resembles the one and not the other.

In *Metahistory*, White constructs a matrix of historiography with coordinates derived from rhetoric and literary analysis. History is story-telling, after all, and to begin to elucidate the stories, we have to classify their forms. The method is similar to Northrop Frye's attempt to draw up a scheme of genre, his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957),

[38] Even about subjectivity.

and Kenneth Burke's grammatology[39], the latter of whom White cites. Of course their respective languages of formal differences differ. While concentrating on historians and philosophers of history from the 19th century, White seeks to "provide a new perspective on the [then] current debate over the nature and function of historical knowledge". His is a "poetics of history". According to formalist analysis, the historian searches for a form of story-telling that can adequately explain human events. The search does not have to be done consciously, and "Vico alone in his time period [late 17th, early 18th century] perceived that the historical problem was precisely that of determining th extent to which a "fabulous" or "mythical" apprehension of the world might be adequate, by any criterion of rationality, as a basis for understanding a specific kind of historical life and action"[40]. In other words, (and in Vico's argument against Descartes his contemporary) rationality is the steadiness of form—*any form*. It follows that the historical sensibility of a time period is its formal characteristics, not what it ostensibly professes. The Organicist argument eschews universal and causal relationships, and talks of history in terms of the Whole. The Comic plots toward reconciliation. Hegel's dialectical teleology is Organicist and Comic[41], and explications of Hegel consider why he might have chosen to organize the world as such. To characterize his historical stages, Hegel is also monumentalist; Monumentalist history is metonymic, an individual part standing for the whole. Nietzsche thought the Monumental undermined the impulse to future greatness by always defining it in terms of the past, and therefore chose the ironic mode to philosophize his "Critical historiography".

[39] Cf. *A Grammar of Motives.*
[40] *Metahistory.* 52

> Critical historiography is history in the mode of Irony, historical thought carried out in the conviction that everything is frail and worthy of being condemned, that there is a flaw in every human achievement, truth in every falsity, and falsity in every truth. This mode of conceiving history is creative when it acts in the service of present needs and undermines the authority of the past and the future.[42]

For our own investigation we are interested not only in the nature of White's fomralist knowledge, but also its own impetus, and its perceived inadequacies. By formally categorizing the historic texts, White introduces multiplicity and complexity; complexity and multiplicity are phenomena of modern doubt, and what White doubts is "historical consciousness" as professed by his subjects of study. The "spirit" of 19th century historiography may be what Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, or Croce claim it to be; or it may be the formal pattern common across the different stories they would tell of the fate of mankind. The latter is White's contribution to history, historiography, and literary criticism during the 1970s.

Because formal analysis alone of, to choose an example, Marxist historical texts does not reinvigorate the Marxist grand-narrative to inspire the present (it is supposed to do the opposite, in point of fact), a "poetics of history" cannot fully satisfy the desire for the kind of knowledge that also entails responsibility. Formalism in general acts just like

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[41] Ibid. 30
[42] *Metahistory*. 351

the last form to be explicated in its seminal theoretical texts[43]: distrusting Consciousness, it indexes rhetorical strategies and offers its readers a catalogue of compositional elements which can be recombined into whatever form meets the pursuit of the moment. Final decision is not White's impulse. He writes:

> In my view, there are no extra-ideological grounds on which to arbirtrate among the conflicting conceptions of the historical process and of historical knowledge appealed to by the different ideologies. For, since these conceptions have their origins in ethical considerations, the assumption of a given epistemological position by which to judge their cognitive adequacy would itself represent only another ethical choice. I cannot claim that one of the conceptions of historical knowledge favored by a given ideology is more "realistic" than the others, for it is precisely over the matter of what constitutes an adequate criterion of "realism" that they disagree. Nor can I claim that one conception of historical knowledge is more "scientific" than another without prejudging the problem of what a specifically *historical* or *social* science ought to be.[44]

With critical knowledge derived from the explication of history *qua* text, it may be possible to learn to stand free and clear of the burden imposed by the subject(s) of study. But when a writer needs to do the opposite, and ask his audience to trust in the truth of a form, and burden the knower with history; to allow "the past" to lay claim on the present,

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[43] Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination*. His forth mode travesty is perhaps ironic with outright repudiation. Or, perhaps irony would travestize, but also considers the possibility of reproducing the *status quo*.

[44] *Metahistory*. 26

as Benjamin says[45]; when the moment absolutely demands particular stories and consciousness committed to right action, a writer must turn aside from formalism. Or, to put it another way, historians require an audience that does not take the formalist approach but simply acts "in service of present needs".

Michel De Certeau turned to psychoanalysis for concepts, method, and, I would add, a grand narrative, to "ethicize" historiography. His turn was part of a movement that continues to be crucial to Postcolonialism. And while he has been gaining readers in English in the 1990s[46] (he published in the 1970s in French), I am not making a case that he had direct influence on our subject; he did not respond to Hayden White[47], nor was he cited copiously by Postcolonialists. I do claim that *The Writing of History* is representative of changes in criticism which Postcolonialism would develop and expand. De Certeau introduced the authority of the other to the production of historical knowledge. History as revealed through historiography is the present constructing itself vis-à-vis the strangeness of the past. Questions of how the other has been erased stand in for (the broader set of) questions of how and why historians wrote. Throughout de Certeau's inquiry, there is, of course, an implicit responsibility *to* the other often treated as self-evident. First, the responsibility is implied by its negation: in Europe at the advent of the printing press and the formation of nation-states, ascending powers used the practice of writing history to suppress heterogeneity. Particularly under threat were oral cultures and village life that did not fit into the new rational order. Then, in the last part

[45] *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Thesis II.
[46] Wim Weymans. "Michel de Certeau and the Limits of Historical Representation". 162.
[47] Carrard, Philippe. "History as a Kind of Writing: Michael de Certeau and the Poetics of Historiography". 469

of *The Writing of History,* de Certeau characterizes Freudian analysis as a breakthrough for Western historiography. As such, in identifying Freud as an ethical turn (in analysis), Certeau was trying to steering historiography. The meaning of the form is latent, not patent (as Formalism tends to interpret). More importantly, de Certeau enlists the ethics of psychoanalysis that defines responsibility in terms of "othering" to regulate the practice of writing history. The function of alterity is constitutive of writing. We cannot delete it, but we can interpret the ever-changing signifying acts. We ought to especially analyze *our own acts* and why we try to fit the world into the historical order. Historiography is really the study of how a moment gives form to itself directly and indirectly through the past/present binary. The ethics of historiography, it follows, is how to fulfill this responsibility to the other, which is at the same time responsibility to the self; and this, ironically, requires a kind of recommitment to knowledge[48]. It also requires submitting to arbitration (over which forms, which representation, properly consider the other and which do not), a phenomenon important to our investigation as a structure of authority. The measure of right knowledge is action. Rightful *praxis* of the moral grand-narrative produces the formal artifact, which in certain engagements will be realist historiography and in other, in Ghosh, for instance, a novel. Rightful *praxis* produces *ethos*.

A critique of the production of *ethos* can find its way partly by contemplating how the past—the near past and last four decades—led to the present. White's poetics of

[48] Which is why Win Weymans can argue that de Certeau practiced the human sciences even while the constructs of "objectivity" are under question. "Michel de Certeau and the Limits of Historical Representation".

history and what Carrard calls de Certeau's "poetics of historiography"[49] represent divergent goals for criticism. Since both base their study of historiography on critical methods for reading literature, their goals also represent contemporaneous divergence in literary criticism. Formalism and *praxis* differ in the kinds of *demands* made by the respective problematic—or what the new knowledge entails. As such they also differ in the values that underwrite those demands—the demand that *this* story be read and *that* history be known. The ethical turn is fully made only if the unresolved issues that had led to the investigations of historiography are completely buried by the latest writing of history[50]; if the demands are, say, received as historical responsibility. In a way, the critical method I am outlining follows de Certeau's; only, historiography intervenes (again) nearly simultaneously to the latest writing of history. Practically this means the production of *ethos* is subjected to criticism that came before and that continues to exist coeval to it. As producers of *ethos* write history, criticism of projects that seek to reconfigure the field of ethics would deconstruct the enabling function of alterity. We ask, for instance, how does Chakrabarty formulate history/ahistory to structure a latent image of the world? What kinds of people populate this world, and why is it desired? Why should I want it, and listen to the stories in which it has been imagined? How does Ghosh configure his historical category, and why? What is this "Modernity" that seems to threaten not only post-colonial places but our moral development? And finally, what interests are arbitrating the "encounter" with the supposed other. I admit an objection to

[49] "History as a Kind of Writing: Michael de Certeau and the Poetics of Historiography"

[50] The turn is "full" in psychoanalytic institutions, since the various groups have established respective authorities for issuing *ethos*, and the various members obey them. This is why I say above that various

this resistant redeployment of our literary and critical inheritance is that, in questioning *praxis* and promise, it owes little to the subject(s) that it studies.

De Certeau seems to leave whatever comes out of the historiographic analysis episode as something to be determined, trusting the negotiation with the other to be self-correcting. Yet to those who have greater political ambitions and revolutionary ideologies, *praxis* can be both too free and too restrictive. Recognizing the function of alterity opens up possibilities, yet the possibility is too great that the struggle with otherness reproduces the presumably "repressive" structures of the *status quo*. So while De Certeau borrowed the ethics of psychoanalysis, Luce Irigaray criticized it for failing to genuinely deal with what analysis had begun to uncover.

She claimed in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974, English translation 1985) that psychoanalytic theories of the subject from Freud to Lacan did not theorize female subjectivity, because they subjected women—or what has to assume the position of "woman"—to the inherited "masculinist" framework. Actually, Lacan tried to remove hierarchy from Freud (the hierarchy of self-consciousness) by using the language of the "specular"; for instance, he introduced the "mirror stage" in which the mind develops limits, and the specular-I, apart from—because before—the intervention of the phallus, the constitution of self/other, and the final functions of desire. Lacan did not characterize his mirror stage as such, but it served the purpose of mollifying concerns about hierarchy (or verticality, in specular language). He also recoordinated the mind to move the psychoanalytic schema away from our tacit valorization of consciousness. For Irigaray,

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schools of Cultural Studies have already made the turn. The methods from a few decades ago, and the principles they value, may not help them produce the kinds of knowledge they want to produce.

even the new "flattened" space developed by the revised theory is inadequate; she is particularly concerned with the future of the other.

> When the Other falls out of the starry sky into the chasms of the psyche, the "subject" is obviously obliged to stake out new boundaries for his field of implantation and to re-ensure—otherwise, elsewhere—his dominance. Where once he was on the heights, he is now entreated to go down into the depths. These changes in position are still postulated in terms of verticality, of course. Are phallic, therefore. […]
>
> Man only asks (himself) questions that he can already answer, using the supply of instruments he has available to assimilate event he disasters in his history. This time at any rate he is prepared to lay odds again, and, give or take a few new weapons, he will make the unconscious into a property of his language. […] And since there can be no question of using the same plan/e for this "strange" speech, this "barbarous" language with which it is impossible to conduct a dialogue—read, monologue—the discovery will be set out hierarchically, in stages. Will be brought to order. By giving here a little more play to the system, here a little less. The forms of arrangement may vary, but they will all bear the paradox of forcing into the same representation—the representation of the self/same—that which insists upon its *heterogeneity*, its *otherness*.[51]

The accusation is that when the Other emerges, it is immediately assimilated into another version of that system which forced it to emerge (look, the other!). This, of course, is the

paradox of theory-making by that which desires; or irony if tropology supercedes logic; or dialecticism if history supercedes logic. Most of us want our favorite theory to be true, and if it requires the other to speak, then the other ends up saying that which would make true the theory that introduces it. It remains unclear what would happen if, as Irigaray seems to want, hierarchy, or verticality, were to be annihilated: if we do not repeat ourselves. Nevertheless, Irigaray's radicalism helps to locate the ethical turn, because movements like Postcolonialism have the twin impulse to strongly prevent repetition of the same and arrange for repetition of what is right.

One way to place the ethical turn in a continuous history of criticism is to characterize it as a growing confidence, after a period of rebellion against any semblance of systematization, with the task of formulating from specific critical methodology general motives for action. Critics have always had to make choices[52]; the ethical turn is distinguished by the production of those signs needed to reproduce those choices in a targeted population *after* a period of relentless scrutiny of discursive oversight. Basically, the new thought is that we ought to submit to regulation, again—except this time we will get it right. The critic can prevent the assimilation of the other if the other-now-emerging is used to assimilate the dominant as other. Of course, this requires contriving devices that prevent the critical counterresponses that, well, point out and argue from the contradiction. It means championing certain forms over others, too. One popular device, the one that recurs throughout the literature, and so the one with which we seem to keep having to contend, claims that contradiction is really dialecticism. The

[51] *Speculum of the Other Woman*. 136 – 137.
[52] Tobin Siebers. *The Ethics of Criticism*.

antithetical functions of dismantling systems of representation and representing systematically, of deconstruction and construction, are necessary to and reconciled by the story. That story was the story of what happens to the world with categories like "subaltern" in it. The story was Said's diminishment of Western power, and is reproduced by S.N Balagangadhara and Marianne Keppers as they invoke his critique to champion "alternatives". The new story assimilated the past and present, but there seemed no need to hedge because its moral stature was self-evident. Postcolonialism had the benefit of a story with unquestional morals: the struggle against Colonialism. Michael Eskin places it in the early 1980s[53]; Robert Eaglestone places the turn in the 1990s[54]; although we agree that the turning point was marked by the idea that literature can serve moral philosophy. Eskin assessed according to what criticism thought literature can say, while Eaglestone by what criticism thought literature can do. The oddity is that, if measured phenomenologically, Eaglestone's method, but with the scope expanded to include studies of Anglophone literature produced in, from, and about former colonies, studies that had sublated structuralism and deconstruction, history points to the time to which Eskin points. Criticism turned to ethics with the justifications, the opportunities, offered by Said's *Orientalism*; Spivak's use of the Marxist story to justify simultaneously the deconstruction of subalterity and the construct of the subaltern identity[55]; and of course the much-cited end-of-decade stock-taking that is *The Empire Writes Back*: so in the late 1970s and especially the 1980s. The advantage that stories of

[53] "The Double Turn to Ethics and Literature".
[54] "Navigating an Ancient Problem: Ethics and Literature".
[55] Which Derrida would do in his own way with *Specters of Marx*.

Colonialism and its consequences beyond decolonization can function as moral allegories was undoubtedly a determining factor.

Critics like Said extended what de Certeau would regulate as "*praxis*". They used stories that could easily evoke feelings of guilt and indignation to influence the arbitration of formal representation under the authority of the other—of what we should rightly call those who claim to have been othered. Postcolonialist ethics is implicit in its explanation of form. Let us return to one of Postcolonialism's prime controversies, the first one discussed above, but now in a different context, to see where this arbitration has left literature and criticism. V.S. Naipaul has been accused of representing lack in post-colonials and their societies. The societies depicted in novels like *The Mimic Men* (1967) and *A Bend in the River* (1979) lack for the moment civic order, social stability, discipline, limits, and transparent power structures (in particular, the institutions that ensure peaceful transitions of government); the people lack the desire, will, and/or education to work to alleviate their problems. These problems are cultural. To fix them, the people must change the ways in which they interact with each other and with the world. Among the difficulties are vestiges of colonialism, most starkly the continuing animosity among antagonist races and subaltern classes created to administrate the colonies or brought together from disparate places to labor in colonial economies. Then, there are some difficulties the newly liberated people cause themselves, not just out of inactivity, but also through rather zealous stabs at transformation. In many places, equating decolonization/independence to greatness only to find that reality does not support the false estimation leads to problematic attempts to compensate. Compensation often leads to the centralization of the authority that can continue to massage hurt pride.

Subjects turn to the nativist rhetoric of charismatic tyrants. The problems are intractable to the degree that the first people to fix the cultures will bear tremendous costs. And those who do find some measure of success ironically create other problems because they did not think things through thoroughly and skeptically. Making quick cash, they ruin the economy. Post-colonials can clamor for the nationalization of major industries, but no one of talent and abilities will want to work on their new terms, and the move enables favor-doling tyrants by giving them the economic leverage of *de facto* owners of industry. The costs may rise to the point where emigration and exile are better alternatives than staying to fight.

The charge against Naipaul, made by critics like Haidar Eid[56] and by Ghosh himself[57], focuses on the fix. The charge is that Naipaul uses the wrong standards. They are Western standards. Naipaul sees the Caribbean, India, and Africa, under Western Eyes (to borrow from Conrad)[58], and his representations promote Western intervention and neocolonialism. The arguments are very much from the same school of thought that Chakrabarty and Ghosh use in their respective complaints against the philosophy of historical development. I am not here to apologize for Naipaul, although I have no objection to defending him on particular points. Besides, well-crafted novels like *A House for Mr. Biswas* should be read, interpreted, criticized and enjoyed, and either it is a low estimation of the reader or overestimation of the novel (or both) to think that *Mr. Biswas* will spur a new round of colonization. Be that as it may, one way to understand

[56] Haidar Eid. "Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and Neo-Colonialism as a Comparative Context".
[57] Amitav Ghosh. "Naipaul and the Nobel".
[58] I tried to mimic this by looking at Naipaul's subjects with the economist's eye in the previous paragraph.

the turn is to study the exchanges between Naipaul's *oeuvre* and its critics[59]. I will take the ostensible arguments in the charge against representation of lack/undeveloped and deploy them the moment an advocate—it is usually the same critic in the same piece—substitutes into the same structure to represent another, say the West, as lacking something that post-colonials happen to hold in abeyance.

The methodology that tests both Naipaul and the charges against him, that would test any and all sides, is rather easy to find. Bhabha poses to critical study the question "what is to be done?"[60]; let us answer "nothing, for now". If post-colonial peoples and places are full of whatever it is they are full of, then let them also be full of clan warfare, rigid patriarchy, superstition, feudalism, xenophobia, nativism, whatever it is that Naipaul misreads. Let them be full of zeal for the clan, and love for the Father of the social group. Let fullness deplete as it will. Let no one intervene, because the place of and reasons for intervention have always been invented to reaffirm the interventionists' senses of self. Tyrrany is just something we do not understand, except as our "tyranny". Let no one actively help or hurt. This is the general rule reverse engineered, as it were, from the specific charge against Naipaul's Westernist representation.

Furthermore, since the "fullness" of culture or society (that proves lack is not lack) would be unavailable to anyone other than the very people who live it, no statement, no counterclaim speaking directly to, say, the West, could be based on it, either. No statement could be based on it because that would violate—twice—the very principle used to invalidate the novelist. It, too, would be ethnocentric. It presumes to

[59] I would not call it a "conversation" because there is a lot of cross-talking.
[60] *Location of Culture*. 23

comprehend the subject about which it speaks, and that which it addresses. Invention, intervention, and ethnocentricity are synonymous. This is the logical corollary. Indeed, not even self-representation is to be trusted, since, as the work of Chakrabarty and Ghosh suggest, they are exposed to the same error of representing lack-to-be-filled. So in a sense, to be truthful, genuine, and consistent, that which would be represented as full or lacking should really be considered neither lacking nor full; and in the end nothing is to be done. We are all muted by our own presumed uniqueness; or rather everyone sings so uniquely no other is capable of hearing.

The radically otherness of reality, and of other cultures, other people, deduced as the failure of one set of representations to represent all, does not have to disconcert. It simply reminds us that language is a tool which we humans use with, on, for, and against each other. We are subjects and users of language. Consequently we are limited by the language we use, whether it is "Western" or "rationalist" or "liberatory" or "translational". Yet having discovered these limits, everything becomes possible: we are no longer bounded by what has been represented as real or true or necessary, and know that language enables. Some of us may struggle to establish new approaches to the world. Some simply return to respective versions of things, only now we know they cannot fulfill whatever had been promised to secure ardent moral or ideological commitment to them. In fact, this critical perspective is part of the history of criticism the institution, as it is nothing other than the function of the Real developed during the rise of "Theory". A sign is not the thing itself, but acting as if it were referential enables us to do things, at least until the Real defies this expectation of plenitude. The same reasoning used to point out that post-colonial Trinidad and Africa may not be meant for

development can be and has been repeated against various texts, languages, beliefs, and ideology, such that it should discover to us an error across systems. We learn that history does not dictate those places develop into the secular, rational, libertarian societies that support the kinds of small, private, independent businesses run by many of Naipaul's protagonists. Under new or renewed rigor, we learn about the world without "learning" to be beholden to mystical illusions, old or new. Moreover, we learn that we learn in various ways, and can begin to judge without exception the new categories or hold them off. There is no reason to surrender to another way just because, and surely not when interventionists are making the same promises of goodness, fulfillment, *telos*, redemption, whatever to suppress the function of the Real, which previous interventionists and colonial administrators had made. The function of the Real does not have to be suppressed, does not have to disconcert, unless so much energy and sense of being had already been invested in the discovery of "things" and their meaning.

I know the scenario I just described is dissatisfying to interventionists, just as formalism had been. Bhabha is not interested in reducing the number and types of representations in the archive, nor reduce the authority to reconstitute material from the archive into new meaningful statements. Ghosh is not asking modernity to leave antique lands alone. Chakrabarty is not saying let ahistory (whatever it is) fight against history for control; nor is he Buddhist-like renouncing historical existence. In response, they are met by an intelligent skepticism. Yes, Modernity is not the only thing under the sun, but why is Modernity, as these writers presume, obliged to the other things under the sun? That the fullness of post-colonial places cannot be left to their own devices indicates that the stories and *ethos* are meant for export and to discomfort: the thing in itself, the

characters in themselves, the aporetic moments, are meant *for another*, meant for those yet to be transformed after reading the stories. These comprise the countermodernity that Bhabha finds, reproduces, and distributes[61]. The significance is meant for *us* and takes for granted we are meant to be transformed; and this justifies our scrutiny. In analyzing "Africa" or post-colonial places, we are not so much denying those things in themselves as we are deciding on how to take Africa-in-itself-for-the-West, and post-colonial-places-in-themselves-for-Modernity. Feigned indifference reveals the structure of new ethics and how that structure serves the ambition to transform.

Charges like neocolonialism are more ambitious than charges of unfair business practice. A neocolonial power intervenes and transforms another culture to exploit its peoples and resource. Certainly the values that underwrite the charge of neocolonialism are different from the values that underwrite the argument of development/progress; in the latter, villagers ought to be given a choice to be incorporated because they represent untapped resources and *undeveloped* economies[62]. They do not have to choose; neither do we. The critique of neocolonialism, and the Postcolonial discourse underwriting it, can be used to make more demands. The Postcolonialist list of actions to be considered almost as unethical as colonizing someone is rather extensive. And the Postcolonial list of relations is extensive, too, seemingly connecting any and all entities not by physics or economy but (also) by responsibility, obligations, and ethics. Authority makes the lists easily revisable: just tell another story that resembles the plight of the colonized, just

[61] "Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate"
[62] Cf. Hernando de Soto. *The Mystery of Capitalism: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*.

reference those "things" being installed in the ethical field. Speak; I am bound to hear. And so art thou…

Critiques like the one against Naipaul end up reaffirming that which had to have been assumed to "disprove" him (the fullness that falsifies lack), which means that, in the first place, they are violating the criteria used to evaluate others, and more significantly, they are trying to create convolutions to thwart the free and critical assessment of their veracity, their purpose, and their consequences. Meanwhile, they are asking for commitment to as yet unproven and untested characters, plots, and dramas. In most cases, critics like Chakrabarty and fiction writers like Ghosh want to change that culture to which they have submitted their othered-figures. This fact could be masked if some (other) writers were to be repudiated for using representations that cater to Western values and modernist sensibilities. In fact, repudiation can make it seem as though there *is* an Africa in-itself that is culturally rich, endowed with extensive historical, political and ethical rights, when of course that Africa, too, howsoever anyone signifies it, is in-itself-for-another—for us. All the interventionist has to do to achieve this effect is subtly modulate from analysis of lack and alterity to traditional history.

Naipaul's stories are bad because when they interact with the ethical field, they hinder the facile revision, creation and deployment of the kernels and what is promised by those actions, the same way that psychoanalysis of desire, armed with a concept like false plenitude, can undermine the ability of new language and new signs to make promises of fulfillment and gain adherents, or even the same way that the theory of evolution by natural selection can undermine a "theory" of creation by challenging the latter's explanations of observable things. Naipaul's post-colonial stories hinder the kind

of relocation of culture that allows Postcolonialism to address the world as the next possibility. Naipaul hinders not because he fails to consider but because, learning from him, one is always prepared for the next iteration, the next attempts to signify as antithesis and synthesis, the next abject failure. Naipaul hinders not because he makes different promises than Postcolonialists but because he writes of realities that allow us to assess those promises as, shall we say, less than ideal. There is distinction between "fire" as fire and "fire" as the cause of panic, but not an either-or difference. The same distinction exists for signs of right action. Upon being addressed by a story, one is prepared to scrutinize *ethos* in the logic set out by the discourse *and* as discourse affects real human events. It is not just that the resolution of contradictory imperatives and the redemption of conflicting aspects (of for example oppression and liberation) are discovered to be rhetorical *deus-ex-machina*; history, dialectical history as understood from the skeptical study of colonialism and post-colonialism, is made by those that had been so affected by the machines, for instance by the idea of Independence[63], as they now struggle to secure the greatness that had been promised. Competing, "checking" impulses do not necessarily support viable self-government. Sometimes the repercussions extend only to a person and his family, as in the case of the Biswas; sometimes whole groups of people are affected, as in the town at *A Bend in the River*. Moreover, it is out of the logic of the discourse where other values, like Naipaul's alledgedly Eurocentric ones, can contest ones inherent to Postcolonial criticism. The inclusion of Naipaul in the literary tradition may be used to limit what is done with stories, and this is why many critics consign him to the other side and treat him as if he

[63] Which is to be distinguished from actual independence.

has betrayed the cause inherent to the post-colonial that he is. He figures in their drama as a way of thinking to be repudiated.

Indeed, the more entrenched problem may be that Naipaul's competing representations, his categories, his plots, his novelistic forms, *can* be confirmed where others (because they are only consummation to be wished) cannot, which is why the standards and the reasoning, not the evidence, have to be attacked. The argument from lack (applicable to any representation) is made in many cases because the counterevidence is (also) lacking. There *is* violence that destroys existing infrastructure, drives out would-be entrepreneurs, and builds nothing that would last, and however that violence started, it is perpetuated by self-governing post-colonials. The violence is perpetuated not in pursuit of decolonization but in the pursuit of the promises of Independence, the apocalyptic sense of new beginning that opens Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and drives the last consolidation of power in Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*. "Fullness" is a front, a projection, hope, and likely a lie. If there were no need to build blind commitment to the "ethical" representations of Africa and the good that it promises to achieve, if, say, Naipaul is wrong because Africa is truly great, why not disprove him conventionally with evidence? Instead, since the thing itself cannot be counted on to correct, as gravity "corrects" the foolhardy, the sense of greatness must be discursively regulated[64].

[64] I am not arguing absolutely against discursive regulation: I would argue that to even discuss those regulations transparently we have to be in a different mode (where those regulations can be stricken down). In other words, it may be in our best social interest to prevent public knowledge of our genetic dispositions, but it may also be in our best interest to remind ourselves that we are deliberately preventing ourselves from researching something that we *can* know, and with that knowledge restrain ourselves from making other things up; the "argument" that genetic similarity entails bonds of brotherhood has to be done in a different mode. Likewise, in studying post-colonial cultural products, such as literature, we can guard against

Let us take the logic one step further. Even if given that post-colonial Africa is great *in potentia*, why cannot the key to stable post-colonial independence be economic development driven by the middle class of shopkeepers and traders? Why not have arguments about the future, comparing pluses and minuses of the various proposals, rather than tie one arrangement down—or giving it more weight—by referencing something like the inscrutable being of a people? Is it because the prosecutors and the courts in which the charges are heard have already made up their minds about the potential of these places to be full of that which capitalism always lacks, that which modernity always subtracts? Future greatness must be of a specific kind, then. Naipaul violates the second rule, or, observing chronology, and the fact that Bhabha used the novelist as a foil in his early criticism, the second rule was put in place to enable the characterization that some of what he did is wrong. It is not as if Naipaul were writing about the future; rather, by recording the failures of post-colonial revolutions and transformations, many well-intentioned and carried out by people of the "right" color or speaking the "right" language, he is incorrect for a politics that uses history to make promises about the future as if that future is necessary, real, undeniable, even already here. And because he is incorrect for the politics, the attacks on him are freer than the same arguments represented as complications to subaltern historiography[65]. Naipaul is repudiated for what else can be done with the discourse that sanctions the repudiation. The controversies between Naipaul and his critics can tell us how the ethical turn is

misrepresentation, without somehow shifting modes and conjuring some sort of solidarity by appeal to a commonality like "customs" (this is done by Amitav Ghosh and Derek Walcott).

supposed to function, how *ethos* is produced, how to test and contest it, and how to extract usable knowledge from interventionist texts.

One discovery is the desire among many post-colonials for power on par with, or superseding, that which had once dominated, and it is not coincidentally a central theme in Naipaul's criticized *oeuvre*. In seeking the "things" that would fulfill desires and ambition, post-colonials ironically create problems like dependence on patriarchs to reaffirm exaggerated senses of self or blind pursuit of tokens of greatness. Independence leads to dependency. And in many cases, some post-colonials create problems for many other post-colonials. These propositions can be tested. Actually, Naipual tests them, or shows them tested in the tumult of post-colonial history. In *A Bend in the River*, he compares the different philosophies of history *as wielded by respective users in time*. A European priest believes in the strength of his civilization; its collapse tests his belief. An African boy believes Africa *is* great; the reality of Africa tests his belief. Neither will be the last statement, but some philosophies, some ideologies, serve their believers in success and in failure better than other philosophies serve theirs. Either the priest or the boy will prosper; or both, or neither. Let us see. Let us see, furthermore, whether this overweening desire for newness, for the New, because of what it promises, is being exported elsewhere, to possibly unwanted effects. Either Naipaul is right; or his critics; or neither; or their ideas are indeterminate and we need more rigorous studies for greater clarity. The last options are vitally important but often omitted from criticism. We should be free enough to accept them as outcome to our tests of what has been said. At

[65] Chakrabarty is very careful to pay respect to those whom he will complicate, and in fact represents his intervention as a way to strengthen the kind of historiographical projects with which the Subaltern group is

least we do not, as a rule, exclude considering the proposition that, although not everyone should live as we do, they are still responsible, and we are not, for the things they want. In the end, we may reject both Father Huisman's Civilization and Ferdinand's chauvinistic post-colonial Africa because their desires are totalitarian.

The upshot of this last, "empiricist test" is not that it yields a final vision of Africa, or post-colonialism, or the world as it is at present; rather, by it we can come to steady disagreement. On one side, developed nations are the reified "things" many understand them at present to be. On another, on Nandy's and Chakrabarty's and Ghosh's, the idea of the nation is bad because it forces people to identify as essential, eternal antagonists. There must be a Hindu nation, and a Muslim nation, on the subcontinent, pointing weapons at each other. Nationalists must be "translated" away from such thinking. But there is now a third interpretation, a fourth, maybe more. Actually, many more, of that I am sure, with complicated interactions. "Nation" is a momentary rhetorical strategy used to produce and control collective agency, less reliable than may be wished, more threatening than may be realized. And/or "nation" is an organization ideal based on real practices and used to reinforce them. People with commonalities organize into nations to protect some of those things they have in common under the pretense that they belong together. Sometimes they do, sometimes they do not. The particular problems cited are not caused by the idea of "nation", but by the mismanagement of the desire which leads men to grasp at the idea and invest so much energy in identifying with a nationality (and against its foes). This means the desire can grab hold of another idea (like globalization, or ethics) with the same expectations and

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involved.

cause similarly widespread damage pursuing it. Post-colonial problems indirectly result from the failure to analyze why the Independence historically hard-fought and won should continue to inspire such a transformative possibility, and why a story playing on that theme should mean so much. The problems directly result from the failure to realize that to transform culture is to transform people, who may feel, or know, better what is best for their respective futures. Transforming clans into a nation or developing village economies into industrial economies can cause problems, but this does not mean the clan and the village—and whatever else serves as the other to modernity—holds some sort of secret kernel Postcolonialism can use to justify *its* transformation. From this point of view, the argument against "nation" is actually limited to zealous nationalist desires, especially the kind that seeks to rule without credible mandate, and makes enemies (including betrayers from within) just to have cause[66]. Furthermore, extrapolating from the work of transformation on native cultures, transforming from nation and modernity carry with it great costs and risks; plus the change may not leave us better off. When limited, the argument against the idea of the nation does not prompt the rest of us to relocate to, and invest in, the *new* organization with which the critic or writer hopes to replace what currently exists. There is no reaching for a new almighty Order.

I repeat: there would be little for me to say if the critique against Naipaul is simply that his words, whether true or false, do not support Postcolonialist values and Postcolonial political ambitions. Whether he is inaccurate is not at issue, he is just

[66] Just as the argument against African "culture" is limited to those practices that lead to the consolidation and continuation of the power of the Big Man leaders.

unhelpful. In fact, why bother with texts and hermeneutics, moreover with criticism and strategies to install "things" in the ethical field from the interpretation of stories: just list the demands. At a certain level, we simply disagree with each other about the limits of what may be demanded. We disagree about how we should live, how we should let each other live, the values of things, and matter-of-fact declarations of values can lead to a tolerant kind of peace and understanding (that we disagree). Whatever is (at first) claimed as alternative is really alternative. Only because Postcolonialism seeks to introduce stories and theories, ideas and things, that would gain currency over other *ethos* do I have reason to analyze. Only because Postcolonialism wants to establish a discourse to facilitate the kind of transformation/translation to which we may not consent and/or which may be deleterious do I need to intervene.

To that end, I am compiling into a method a series of tests that violate and therefore may be able to expose Postcolonialism's rules. The method is adversarial, and can be applied to any rhetoric suspected of shifting modes. The rules are implicit to use, perhaps unsystematically, even subconsciously, but elucidated they may read as follows: when upholding a sanctioned politics, the argument from lack and the analytical modes that facilitate the argument are allowed; when not upholding the sanctioned politics, the argument and the modes ought to be suppressed. This is extended to writers of fiction[67], who can depict "lack", and more importantly the lack of lack, more adroitly than writers of representations that have to pass more vigorous vetting, since the former control both a representation and the "reality" it references. A producer of *ethos* can "confirm" what is erased with the same control that allows Salman Rushdie to pretend there *is* magic and

clairvoyance. According to Chakrabarty, the Postcolonialist writer should definitely take this license, because even if—especially if—the adverse propositions can be confirmed by observation and experiment, the writer would still be able to characterize them as "Western", pro-Western, or some other placeholder ready for *ad hominem* attack. The rule is second only because it could only be demonstrated after extracting the first (the critical rule of invalidation). Since in truth it regulates the deployment of the rules of invalidation and criticism, it may be called the Rule of rules. The Rule intervenes in every topic from determinist historiography to economic development to the idea of what is literary and literary study—what is criticism.

My own critical method is really a complex cascade of conditional arguments deployed to discover in a story and its discourse the rules of invalidation. It is to discover the Rule/s of rules. It looks for *patterns* of paradox, contradiction and internal inconsistencies, but unlike Foucault, and of course unlike Postcolonialism, or more like the former and less the latter, it does not project meaning onto the "irruptions", or occasions that evidence hybridity, to try to establish them as the causes-in-themselves[68], then or now. The cascade of tests is necessary but not because there are contradictions and inconsistencies. The cascade of tests is necessary because the formation being analyzed developed at intervals in different hands with paradoxical first principles and antithetical impulses. The turn is really a series of turns, each reinforcing or introducing more "things" to the field. For instance, to historiography Ghosh re-introduces historical

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[67] Perhaps the strategies comes from or were inspired by them

[68] Foucault changes his position. In the relatively early *Archaeology of Knowledge*, once we find the irruptions, we can re-pattern language to form other kinds of continuities. In his later works, the struggle for power takes on more metaphysical properties.

being, and to historicism Chakrabarty introduces ahistorical virtues. And to theories of language, Bhabha introduces the figure of the addressee *and the plot of its liberation*, so that the failure of subjectivization would come to mean something more than the inevitable inadequacy of all signs[69]; so that, in the end, *ethos* can be produced. Bhabha wants to use contradiction to write interventions[70], and when his methods are reproduced the contradictions are reproduced as well. The point is to test for which contradictions, which ambivalence, which translation, which stories, Bhabha's criticism, and Postcolonialism in general, will *not* tolerate.

This also means the method is necessary because in criticism after the ethical turn, so many ideas are already assumed, so much authority has already been put in place, and so many signs already reproduced. In fact, the strategies by which some stories and criticism elude scrutiny are already regarded as self-evident, that the only way to criticize is to approach indirectly and repeatedly: entertain the several possible scenarios conditionally; pursue each possibility until the end of its logic; and then compare and contrast them to see why in the first place certain points were made ambivalent while the truth of other points appear clear as daylight. Exhaust the *deus-ex-machina* that promises to fix things if only such and such were done as much as modernists would exhaust it—as much as Samuel Beckett exhausts the promise of Intervention[71]. The complexity of the

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[69] what he calls "the politics of address". *Location of Culture* 25.

[70] "When I [Bhabha] talk of *negotiation* rather than *negation*, it is to convey a temporality that makes it possible to conceive of the articulation of antagonistic or contradictory elements." *Location of Culture*. 25. Bhabha then continues to explain how his is a non-teleological "negotiation" of history, without acknowledging that the committed are motivated by *the promise* of the good of intervention. It is this promise which saves his "negotiations" from being simply power maneuvers throughout history, conceptualized under different names, inevitable nonetheless. As Jameson writes in *The Political Unconscious*, what matters is the utopian promise, not the *telos* itself.

[71] Cf. *Waiting for Godot*.

criticism is proportional to the complexity of the rhetoric and the scope of the discourse. Unfortunately, the cascades make communicating the overall skeptical arguments immensely difficult, because, as demonstrated above, the analyst will need to agree with the antithesis of his initial point in order to, several steps later, more effectively disagree; and because he will assume the subject's points-of-view to gain access to core principles that can then be exposed to modernist counterarguments.

In the cases of Chakrabarty's a|history and Ghosh history|ography, deconstruction splits at the question "what general argument(s) can be extrapolated from the charges against the philosophy of historical development?" If none, then the attack is insupportable; it is fine to assert, albeit (now) unconvincingly. If there is an argument, then we will need to proceed through a cascade of decisions that have been structured for us, beginning with the initial problem, keeping out wits about us. One argument leads to cultural subjectivism; another depends on objective evidence. Here is the first:

> The philosophy of historical development is wrong because it imposes a particular frame-of-reference inappropriate for a particular people or a particular culture. (1)

To subject (1) to a truth test, that is if we are permitted to, then we need further clarification of what is appropriate, and what not.

> The philosophy is inappropriate because it uses one frame-of-reference to understand another, *and frames-of-reference* (e.g. language, culture) *are limited by the different that identifies one as not the other*. (1.1, 1.1.1)

The second proposition, (1.1.1), what would be the middle term of an Aristotelian syllogism, implies all knowledge is relative. Anything less forces us down a different path. And so it can now be counter-argued that the philosophy of a|history is inappropriate because it uses post-colonial conditions to understand Western socioeconomic organization. In fact, we can synthesize from (1) the general ethical rule: we know the world as we know it respectively, you know it as you do, I know it as I do, and no one will intervene in the lives of others. To each his own, that is the way of the world. Cooperate when best. Compete when necessary. Let them who conceive gravity as a dimension of space-time, and society as an instrument to secure freedom for individual development, develop as they would. Let them who are afraid of ghosts cower and supplicate as they would. Proposition (1.1.1) only recommends knowledge as a function of the identity of the knower, identity which it has to presume, and does nothing to invalidate the particular history or language *for its rightful extensions*. To do so, to turn around and tell another person about the faults of his perspective, is to violate the very argument used against another frame-of-reference. In fact, let each calculate the other using his own terms, with the understanding that the other has already done likewise. As such, a nation, a people, Naipaul's people, Ghosh's people, Chakrabarty's people, can be dumb, mediocre, anonymous and great, just as we can, all at the same time. Of course, I contrived this scenario when I discussed the common critique of Naipaul, and noted at that time, as I reiterate now, that the policy of non-interference is well short of the ambition of interventionists who begin with (1).

The other judgment for inappropriateness would simply admit the true purpose of writing texts that seem to make the argument. And it would actually address the above

conservative conclusion, which is unwanted by interventionists. The Postcolonialist critique needs to invalidate the idea that I have chosen rightly for myself and you for yourself when we do not make the "right" choices. When the decision is no longer a function of the knower's identity, the argument might read:

The philosophy is wrong because it does not benefit the right people. (1.2)

The utilitarian argument does away with the complications posed by having many possibly valid frames-of-reference and value systems. The knower's *new* identity, as it were, is variously defined in relation now to this ethical demand.

When articulated as directly as above, however, the argument complicates other propositions. For instance, if (1.2) were true, then benefit and right would enter into question. Right and benefit are now the determining concepts; knowledge and philosophy merely serve to espouse them. But there are other measures of benefit to consider besides Chakrabarty's power balance or Ghosh's antique joy, beside anything an emerging author might say; plus there is the null conclusion—the "no such thing"—which no one really wants to talk about. We may counter with American success stories, and say, a philosophy benefits those who can best develop it[72], as it should. The rest is nothing of significance. Indeed, let us economize decisions about benefit, capitalize on Lyotard's postmodern condition[73], and choose philosophies that best suit us respectively like we choose narratives. This "Modern" counterclaim I leave unargued, but it shows the need to reset the point of clarification. The analysis ends up cascading back to (1) again. It cascades back to the earlier point of differentiation/clarification in the critical

[72] As usual, I do not advocate this point-of-view, but am asserting it for argument's sake. The point of view still makes philosophy an instrument of goals, even if the goals are now many.

method, only with new differentials. This means the argument (against the philosophy of development) now reverts and follows the other path: the philosophy is wrong because one system of benefit cannot understand another (1.2.1). Enough of these convolutions and the writer would no longer be able to elevate his revealing stories, his history, above the status of being *his* instrument, to the level of History, so that we would act out *it* and not anything else.

Or critics of the philosophy of historical development can argue objectively, which maintains the primacy of the idea of History by appealing to historical referents. At various other points in the previous cascade, there would have been a tendency to (re)turn to this mode. History is uncomplicated by the study of historiography, the problematic of representation, the function of alterity. There is a tendency to treat "Nabeel" and Nabeel-to-Amitab as Nabeel, the peasant's struggle as Struggle. The subtraction of Nabeel from history by history is real, not just felt. In this mode, the argument is "objective" insofar as it depends on comparisons between the reference in the proposition and the real object, between Nebeel-to-global-development and Nabeel. In this mode, we are not talking about commodities and fungible labor, we are talking about reality and truth—even metaphysics. In this mode, historical being is uncomplicated by what we have learned about language and representation in the last half century.

To proceed, however, the side making the positive assertion has to agree to be tested; otherwise, the conversation reaches (again) the impasse that conversations

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[73] *The Postmodern Condition*.

between believers and skeptics always reach. If the Postcolonialist argument took this route, it may say that a particular history is wrong because it fails rigorous proof.

> The philosophy of historical development is invalid because it cannot account for an internal contradiction. (2.1)

In other words, history is hypothetical explanation of facts, and since incompleteness is a fatal flaw of an explanatory system, however great the explanation sounds, the particular hypothesis of development is plainly wrong. Contradictory history would be wrong no matter who writes it. To be sure, there is an exception to this demand for self-consistency, the same as mentioned before, which will be discussed below. Indeed, there must be something much more useful, more productive, about the exceptionalist position for Ghosh and Chakrabarty to shift to it, rather than argue consistently using (2.1).

Since history is supposed to be truthful explanations of events in time, another way to disprove history is to present counter-explanations of the same examples, or counter-examples for the same general rule.

> The philosophy of historical development is invalid because it is not supported by public tests of the evidence. (2.2)

This is a great argument when the history being criticized aspires to totality, universality, metaphysics, to be History, since a single counter-explanation or counter-example will contradict the authority to speak from the highest. One circumnavigation disproves the flat-earth "theory"[74]. Unfortunately, this alternative mode requires the Postcolonial critic to come up with a counter-explanation or find counter-example *that passes the same tests*. If the counter-explanation or example does not pass the same tests, then we know

the criticism is attempting to use the objective mode to replace some representations with other (unproven) ones, one Africa with another, one philosophy with another, and we cascade back to a former point of differentiation. Without passing the same tests, the "counter-example" is no counter-example, but a trick based on the specious reasoning that when one imagines something better/other than X (say, X = Naipaul's Africa), the something-better-than-X (Postcolonialism's Africa) automatically invalidates anything to do with X. In other words, the practice of anchoring esoteric and moral ideas in objective reality[75] is contested by skeptical empiricism, and the first test is to see if propositions, ideas, concepts, representations, stories, can even be tested. Untestable is the *deus-ex-machina,* to us who doubt.

Chakrabarty shifts to the objective mode often, as when he writes feminist history. In this mode, the evidence that some women did resist their subjectivization to inferior positions in society contradicts and invalidates historical stereotypes and essentialist characterizations. They tell moving stories of their struggle, some of which we have yet to learn to read. This is when one should historicize, and what one historicizes are the (bad) stereotypes. The problem arises for Chakrabarty when the idea of determinism inherent to the claims (society, discourse, patriarchy, etc. made women into what they are) enables other arguments, like ones that evaluate societies based on their respective ideas of women, so he claims concept of ahistory *while in the objective mode* to project his value in ideal objects[76]. In fact, in *Provincializing Europe* he had been careful to parry the charge that the idea of woman he valorizes is basically Western and bourgeois

[74] Perhaps many, many more had been required to make the "theory" *unconvincing*.
[75] Which, from the psychoanalytical perspective, is desire seeking the love-object.

(e.g. head of household, property owners); the argument for ahistory in subsequent writing asserts outright the use of the exceptional, protective authority. According to Chakrabarty, it is not a matter of developing cultures to the point at which they recognize equal and indiscriminate individual rights (and look like a European society), but achieving the proper state-of-affairs which includes but is not limited to the demands made on behalf of women. The problem, for me, is that ahistory, and concepts like it, allow the writer to exempt selected "counter-examples" and certain promises of history from the same tests. I am not really testing whether women are as inferred from Chakrabarty's rhetoric; rather, I am preparing to contest claims, like what is the proper state-of-affairs, that will be made based on those "things" considered ahistorical. In other words, I am anticipating the next modulation, which pivots on that kernel of personhood from property rights to equal share of total collective wealth, because it has been made by other writers at other times.

Ghosh uses subjective and objective arguments, too. Both historiography and history have moments of objectivity. Historiography is in the objective mode when Ghosh writes the history of writers of history, their texts, and the causes and consequences of the particular textual productions: the mode objectifies subjective points-of-view. Ghosh will slip into the subjective argument, assuming each observer of history has an untranslatable perspective on it, only to modulate again to objectively describe human relations past and present (the idea of Custom facilitates mutual respect, for example). While his narrators question the version of reality they inherit, rarely are they as unreliable with respect to their core ideals and values as a narrator of Empire like

[76] i.e. the sublime objects of ideology, after Zizek.

Conrad's Marlowe is to his. In fact, the modulations reinforce the kernels of Ghosh's value system: this is why I continue to call his trope "history|ography". While he tells the story of disappearance-redemption, the math he questions is really the math that does not value Nabeel as he should be valued. Modernity does not always recognize the values that it should, so Ghosh modulates until he projects a history that allows him to keep those values fixed, as though they were always already there. Like many other writers and critics, he echoes Salman Rushdie's longing for a time and "other" cultures in which stories commanded more of our ethical imagination, and story-tellers wielded more cultural authority than they do today[77]. The Postcolonial set of ideas, concepts, and *ethos* are important because the Postcolonial writer says so. This *ad hominem* argument is the exception of which I have been speaking. It overcomes the multitude of viewpoints and clear-sighted if resistant thinking by sheer authority.

Bhabha also modulates. He does so very effectively and efficiently. Sometimes, he modulates within the span of one sentence. It may be argued that he can do so because predecessors and contemporaries had already erected the requisite structures and populated the ethical field with the necessary kernels. Bhabha followed both "high theory" *and* the return to history towards the end of the last century, so the modes were already available to him. In Bhabha's rhetoric, then, is enacted the ethical turn. A word like "negotiation" signals deconstruction, when old structures are destabilized enough that signs do not have quite the meaning they should have; paradoxes and contradictions are historical evidence of negotiation. Meanwhile, a word like "emergent" evokes a

[77] Salman Rushdie. "Interview". *The Paris Review* 47.174 (Summer 2005): 110

story—Story—in which whatever character[78] emerges is acting in allegories of power where moral values have already been decided. The moral value of "emerging" and the justice of "negotiation" do not change: only the forms of the idea change. The ideas are not, for instance, to be taken as another tactic in the genealogy of morals for creating cultural value where there *may not be any*. Furthermore, something tells critics and story-tellers it is good to look for negotiation and emergencies, and they pass on the ethical imperative. Bhabha follows this procedure for example whenever he historicizes the French thinkers of "high theory", such as Foucault, after appropriating their antiestablishment critical methods. In fact, transition from from theories of discourse (formalist, Structuralist, Poststructuralist, Deconstructionist, etc.) to authentic and authoritative representation was the ethical turn; it is the ethical turn being "taken" again and again.

Bhabha locates Foucault's desires in the context of twentieth century Western Poststructuralist thought *and* relocates Foucault's objects of study (discursive formation) into plots of historical human agency (resistence). The shift is quite subtle. Bhabha parrellels argument (1.1) above: he cordones the analysis into a point-of-view. According to him, Foucault misreads cause and effect. Colonialism left some *people(s)*[79] little to appropriate and revise *in the ways that Foucault may recognize as constituting agency*. The French thinker does not because he is himself in a formation, the expression of which is desire for revisionary "archaeology". Foucault's *ethos* is European existentialist and his analytical mode makes it seem as though significance can only be

[78] Whether a person, people, continent, hybrid, mimic, ghost…
[79] Bhabha uses the plural "peoples".

gained by revising inherited discursive formations into new ones. Alterity in Foucauldian archaeology is the inability to do this. By turning to traditional history, Bhabha ostensibly corrects for the legacy of colonialism[80] that serves as the other to Foucault's archaeology. What Bhabha is also doing is inserting "people" and their stories (and ability) where there had only been linguistic dysfunction (discontinuity)—and not so much "insert" as superimpose. He superimposes the morality of anticolonial conflict where there had been only functions of power, so that it may guide *present archaeological decisions*. In appealing to the history of colonization, resistance, and decolonization, Bhabha introduces to interpretation the characters and reorganizes criticism according to the plots that are central to the formation of *his* ethics. Characters like the hybrid struggle against productions of cultural difference; the outcome of which plot is deferred, and the purpose is certainly good. By shifting to history, he gives greater credibility to the Postcolonialist archaes of liberation (in which Foucault has become now one of many fragments), when, if the same procedure he uses against Foucault were used against Bhabha, the new reading would be recognized as simply another formation to be reorder as *we* are capable of doing. Foucault is open-ended on the matter of the new archaes that are formulated—in this sense he is postmodern. Bhabha has already qualitatively evaluated certain archaes—the "liberatory" ones—and continues to modulate from "theory" to the histories that decide in their favor.

The difference between Foucault in the early 1970s and Bhabha in the 1980s and 1990s can explain the Postcolonial intervention. It is even more starkly political than that which was between White and de Certeau. The Postcolonial intervention may be

[80] Colonialism created conditions in which some people needed signs of history but could not make them.

characterized through the subject not of *but constituted by* the stories and interpretations, theory and propaganda, that are sanctioned. But, as Bhabha has said on other matters, the stories only address us; we are not yet its subjects. If Bhabha comes after Foucault, what comes after Bhabha?

If my analysis is deemed "Western", or "modern", since its impulse is to demand the sort of consistency that became dominant first in the philosophies and critical theories of the West, and its dichotomies the type that Western philosophy and criticism use (or used to use), then I will simply note that I am just adapting Postcolonialist strategies, selectively incorporating what Chakrabarty and Bhabha are doing as Chakrabarty and Bhabha selectively incorporate other kinds of analysis. Reason and skepticism are the negotiation strategies I advance. And if I were more rhetorically adept, I may say I advance them on their own untranslatable merits, all the while knowing that I would be using them to obstruct the establishment of authority to dictate with cultural productions like story-telling how the world is supposed to be. Indeed, Postcolonialism should laud the free and resistant adaptation of strategies it has formulated. This analysis is no less than the *next* negotiation—unless the concept of "negotiation" and method of modulation were really instruments for furthering those values which are specifically non-negotiable. If "negotiation" and modulation were instruments being used without transparency of purpose, then my "modern" analysis, or any analysis skeptical of instrumentalism, would be perfectly justified.

For its gambit, recursive modal analysis reifies whatever the new discourse for producing *ethos* reifies, be it reality/Real, history/ahistory, order/irruptions, forgetful/recovery, whatever difference is used to support the fundamental moral-ethical

judgment implied in the production of *ethos*. The discourse under examination constructs the modal difference when it segregates the functions it uses to place itself in the world: the function that deconstructs Western and Modernist signs has to be used but kept from deconstructing the function of the "translational" that produces new signs and new commitments; historicism used but kept from targeting ahistory. Close readings of some major post-colonial and Postcolonial (they overlap) stories and the languages that they use will demonstrate as much. The critical method is recursive and modal because it parallels the discourse being studied, and at any point during the cascade of conditional differentiation, a Rule of rules may emerge and deconstruction be forced to restart at an earlier point. In a way, what has been learned after so many years of studying literature is being used, only the texts being scrutinized are not just those Thomas Macaulay might have approved, but (also) those that are circulated as representatives of the new truths and moral order. Let us serve neither one master nor the other.

The point of relentless scrutiny is not to summarily dismiss. We test because we want to be able to read texts and analyze discourse with the same intelligence, freedom and authority as those who would go on to produce *ethos* from their own interpretations. We need to be free to think at the highest level of authority about that which addresses us. I want to reserve the power to understand *ethos* for us, and reserve for us the power to not only produce *ethos* of our own but also limit the authority of the ethical field. If story-tellers and critics can break free of historical and cultural determinism to make up their own minds about reality and representation, and can judge what is true, what is false, and what is not subjected to true/false, then we should aspire to the same critical power. We should assume that power even if in the end we decide it is right to distribute power such

that no center, no Story, has the ability, the authority, to do as some Postcolonialists want to be able to. If decisions are to be made about stories, then let you and I make them, each and every time we are addressed. If the unknown can be positioned in a plot of human moral development, suggesting it is knowable—that it is, in fact, already known—then you and I in our critical capacity must figure out how to scrutinize the un|known that addresses us. If hybridity indicates that people can resist the instruments of Empire's cultural production, including literature and tradition, then we, too, should resist becoming instruments. In fact, by making the kind of opening gambit I have outlined, a critique of criticism incorporates criticism. Postcolonialism's knowledge of discourse, ideology, and the production of culture is recognized as useful but not used unthinkingly to support "form[s] of calculation and strategic action dedicated to social transformation"[81], in a beautiful travesty of Bhabha's promise to be non-teleological[82]. Nothing is done that will be out of the ordinary. A theory of "equality" can be met by a theory of merit. A theory of rights (to signify) can be met by, well, another theory of rights (libertarianism). A theory of self-representation is met by theory of deception. *Ethos* is scrutinized with the same forcefulness and the same genuine possibility for invalidation that are used to scrutinize other discursive productions, from Montesquieu's, to Kipling's, to Naipaul's. Knowledge from stories are compared and contrasted with knowledge in other forms. Perhaps here is a significant discovery. What best characterizes the ethical turn may be that *ethos* and its support structures, including

[81] *Location of Culture* 23.

[82] The key difference, perhaps the fundamental difference, is the lack of love for transformation, for newness. The fetish of the new, the pursuit of the promise of the New, keeps a subject in a moment of translation, when

stories that act like Stories, are never subjected to the kind of honest criticism that can decide what has been said is truthfully nothing, or worse a lie. Once cleared of the discursive formation and its double-standards, we will no longer be at disadvantage in the complex and ongoing negotiation of the authority to signify. The new propositions and their grandiose promises, derived from stories, can be scrutinized as much as the old ones and their grand illusions.

As for the turn, both criticism and the production of *ethos* are ethical: they just follow different, if not conflicting imperatives. A changing profession has simply tried to shift the *ethos* of the institution by using institutional authority to establish and expand structures for the production of *ethos*. The study of good stories is being used to promote stories to be studied because of the good they can do. I take back one of my claims: perhaps nothing has changed

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ideas and concepts are influx, from translating back, as it were. Note how in all of Bhabha there is the undercurrent that radical change is always better than changing too little, or not at all.

2. HISTORY|OGRAPHY OF THE DISAPPEARED

In An Antique Land is Amitav Ghosh's report on how the signs of history can affect the various peoples among whom they were circulated. Specifically, Ghosh examines the function of identification in the modern discourse that champions progress and development. The signs include categories, concepts and commodities, such as "Egyptian", industrialization, and a diesel water pump, respectively, that in various combinations constitute historical identity. In nearly all the settings of the novel, they act in unfamiliar ways. The signs do not seem to fit reality anymore. The old stories that gave them meaning do not seem suitable, anymore. Some of the examined identities are decidedly deleterious to those who unthinkingly adopt them, like the villager who wants to own a diesel water pump simply to demonstrate how developed he is. When such signs circulate in former colonies, they do not describe what is natural or represent what is true, but contribute to making post-colonial conditions: what once belonged to Empire now belongs to "the developing world". Ghosh no doubt chose the specific contexts to demonstrate the real effects of a discourse and compare disparate consequences of its philosophy of history. Indeed, the investigation framed by these questions—that is, the repeated foray into the field in expectation that answers to them are found "out there"—already relocates the observer from his normal vantage to those places where his is but one of many different perspectives across space and time. The discourse that happens to dominate is one of many other no less legitimate possibilities.

Contextualized thusly, the present can no longer represent itself by reproducing the same "modernist" stories[1] of History. "History" is just another structure, another text, and certainly erroneous if it claims to understand everything. The world view being questioned can no longer be regarded as immutable, inexorable, the inevitable culmination of human existence. Development towards that which the dominant culture already is is not the natural course of human events. The evidence is the failure of prevailing stories to cipher unexpected phenomena in the antique lands: the stories are inadequate. The industrial machine loses cultural cache. Other signs lose significance, too, especially the signs of nationalism. It is believed that when discourse is destabilized and de-authorized as such, those who dominate through historiography lose their self-assurance. At the very least, they should be uncomfortable with things as they are. At its most consequential, inadequacy forces a present that can no longer reproduce itself through old stories to turn to new ones. The culture that produces bad history, and that would have been sustained by its signs, has to change.

Furthermore, the change initiated when history fails to signify is meaningful. Indeed, the implicit value of the intervention is so strongly held that, even if the merits of a specific case have yet to be proven, failure and change must never be treated as haphazard. It is Ghosh's pattern to doubt the *status quo* but cordon off the critical acumen that would scrutinize change. The plausible theory that the inadequacy of History is a function of signification—of *any* system of signs—gets suppressed in favor of what seems to be once more traditional historical explanations of causality. We should

[1] I do not mean literary Modernism but the kind of history that claims human history has entered the modern era.

believe that inadequacy is caused by something, by some liminal “thing” that is fundamental because it resists exact representation. And inadequacy makes sense in a larger scheme of things, which is fundamental, too, for that scheme is more comprehensive than the now-superannuated phenomenology. Just as (it is claimed) the development of the diesel engine seems “natural” to modern history, the causality of the emerging “thing” is predictable, almost intelligent.

What makes a report like Ghosh's problematic is that the change it implicitly reaffirms belongs to a story that is uncannily familiar, even as it represents the change as genuine engagement with that which was excluded, unconsidered, or unknown. The cause of failure is clear and the arguments from which observations are clearly directed at us, so encounters with the post-colonial “out there”, however real and beyond comprehension, seem to also function as instruments for something else “here” where we stand. The recurrence of familiar unknowns puts any encounter under suspicion: these new ones as much as, say, encounters between Cortez and natives. I speak of neither the emerging thing-itself nor strangeness; nor the skeptical difference interposed by the question of historiography. I speak of their implications—the difference of difference, as Derrida says—or what is supposed to happen because of encounters. Modernity, fellaheens, social anthropology, the slave of MS H.6, Nabeel, these are actors in the new production about meaningful change. The water pump imported to the Egyptian village by a well-to-do village leader (i.e. status symbol) stands in direct contrast and comparison to the water pump used by modern societies (i.e. industrial tool). It is effectively both tool and fetish when it functions as a sign of historical development; not to mention that a fetish can also be a tool for bypassing the critical evaluation of industrial capitalism.

Examples like the water pump serve as object lessons. The exercises may become more sophisticated when the object is a character that appears in and disappears from history, and that can speak for itself, but the first lesson remains the same. There are more things in the world and time than are comprehended by Modernity, and that which comprehends them and takes them into proper account is better suited to answer the question of how to live. I question the "better" accounting.

Ghosh is not above hoping that the questions of historiography and encounters in the field cause no worse than destabilization and actually produce new stability, perhaps of a distinctly different kind. Instead of ubiquitous "development", there would be other social arrangements and lived-experiences. Instead of imperial projects and nationalist wars, there would be something like cosmopolitan gaiety. The new may seem at first to be prompted by simply a desire for a plan of action, and therefore open-ended, but there are ideals and order of "things" shielded from change. There are "things" and ideas that make development problematic, and the new plan properly "ethical". The procedure, the "fieldwork" done by him for whom received ideas of history are now inadequate, is only half of a tautology: the procedure is justified by premises that guarantee the questions are meaningful, yet for support the questions have to cite what is "found" using the procedure. The narrator finds in antique lands that which modernity unethically discounts, namely the slave and Nabeel, yet the antique lands are what they are because modernity already discounts them. Or, to put matters on the scale at which Ghosh writes most fluently: you are important because you are not, and you are not important unless you are. The "promise" is that which convinces us to act according to a logic that has us run around in circles chasing after "things". This is why "emergence"—yours or that of

"the slave of MS H.6"—into history, politics, existence, or any other setting, would have felt familiar, and why the "things" given to the "other", whether land or acknowledgement, seem what you have always wanted. Doing so again and again confirms what has been heretofore presumed and promised, and strengthens resolve. The tautology has the convincing appearance of engaging reality, and suggests that anything promised by and found in the encounters is more real than invented. The circular logic is acted out in self-justified, self-fulfilling rituals often championed as *praxis.* As can be seen in the Marxist versions of *praxis*, the determining decisions have already been made, values assigned, and stakes claimed.

The novelist asks us to imagine being "in a [particular] antique land" in which we are and are not quite ourselves, and in which we can be more, because socializing in those particular fields with the given figures can transform us for the better. Such an ethics may be provisionally called *anthropological-historiographic* ("a-h" for short) because the context, the material, and the self-disciplined procedure for constructing the past/present fantasy originate from those academic projects aimed at finding out how people long since dead had lived; and because Ghosh frames the novel as the history of a social anthropologist writing history. The devices he uses are common across various productions of *ethos.* From this ethical position, one talks about the past to obliquely order the present. It is the obliqueness of this order that interests us, because it is a literary feat. To make a "real" person disappear but not entirely, then reappear but not completely, requires skillful orchestration of *pathos.* But we should also ask why Ghosh has chosen the oblique structure of past/present to give meaning to the present—why the superposition that seems active in both past and present, yet belongs to neither past nor

present, is needed for the production of *ethos.* The "antique land" fantasy serves as a coherent field for ethical action meant to address contemporary issues of identity, representation, encountering differences, cultural antagonism, and social division. An a-h *ethos* is supposed to reproduce the difficulties of anthropology and history[2] at the widest scale possible as a way to promote better communication, establish mutual understanding, and structure social relations. Ghosh seems to desire a world that can entertain such a fantasy, a world in which identities are incomplete, contingent, and easily amenable; interpersonal relations are based on social practice and tradition rather than ideology; familial identification are sustained despite the havoc wrought by diasporas; and men assume the best of men as they confront them, and of themselves as they argue for more power. Historiography and history as such are instrumental.

In An Antique Land is an allegory in which antagonistic, mutually misunderstood people are first rendered tolerant by the dependency of global trade, then collected into a vaguely-defined community by an ethical "imaginary" mediated by the idea of human affinities. Not only is the imaginary open to all sorts of revisions, but people also come to look for that which would revise them, as though this unknown would complete them. They depend on each other for meaning, and become governable through that dependency. As such, the novel is one of many contemporary idealistic expressions of the promise of globalization that is part of modernity and that, it claims, has happened before and beyond the Modern. This is why Priya Kumar thinks *In An Antique Land* contributes to an imaginary that promises the kind of coexistence beyond mere

[2] from a certain age in and wing of the disciplines' development

tolerance[3]. Homi Bhabha would agree, since he urges: "We need to affirm the careful virtue of tolerance, but also to move beyond it, to achieve an imaginative virtuosity of "identification" which we humanists—artists, poets, historians, literary scholars—enact every day in our attempts at writing, reading, and interpretation"[4]. This particular wishful expression is structured as a scholarly discovery of the past and disregarded present. Globalization forces and facilitates such encounters, but outside of academic protocols. In reconstructing the Medieval Indian Ocean economy and reporting on contemporary post-colonial societies, Ghosh attempts to show the present what it lacks, so that, in an old rhetorical move we have seen used by Geoffrey of Monmouth to construct his once and future kingdom[5], antiquity and the post-colonial also represent that unfinished work which the present is obliged to carry out. Our once and future cosmopolitan! The whole storyline of loss and recovery, disappearance and reemergence, expresses and justifies the new philosophy. The promise of that philosophy is transparent well before the first-person narrator confesses that he longs for such a world.

Other questions remain. Conservative, comparative, and rational questions remain, like what *exactly* does the expansion of the a-h *ethos* from a set of self-selecting practitioners promise? Promises can change the world unexpectedly, especially if they are not kept; what are the possible consequences of expanding the field governing myriad human relations? Can we test and contest what is said, even while acknowledging, as is the politically correct protocol at present, the basic existence of the authors? Can we

[3] "I [Kumar] argue… that desirable constructions of the past *can* play a powerful role in shaping the contours of a different present and future 'to come'. Above all, Ghosh's imaginative narrative about a cosmopolitan past is an act of memory that points to possibilities of living together in the present". *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film*. 79.

listen, and decide to do something else? Why this tautology over that? Does it disable other valuable intellectual functions? The violence of historical conflicts is a recurring theme in Ghosh. It is not that we ought to argue against peace itself, at least peace that is the end of conflict and violence. Rather, as "peace" often comes in purposely vague terms, and/or authoritarian tone, we are analyzing the terms for "peace" and the methods that use the desire for peace to make both direct and unacknowledged demands. Moreover, some categories, and some "things" that are treated as newly emerging from "anonymity", have already been decided as good for us, or for peace, or just because. So I recall the question that has been pushed out of the ethical field, why envision an attractive or revolting image of the past, and why insist that the past *had been* so? Or more bluntly, can we legitimately reject the new economy, new values, new ideals, new figures, new identities, being constructed? The answer now seems to lie not in what new knowledge is offered by alienating experiences, but what can be achieved when the "new" confirms what we already know, or think we know; what we—some of us—have already fantasized about and decided? Because writers like Ghosh aim to acquire authority and power and reorganize both, to the extent that at the very least they can relocate "us" Moderns to antique lands and represent "us" in allegories of intimate existence under one roof, their words need to be doubted and analyzed as much as we doubt and analyze the discourses that unthinkingly reproduce the present. What seems peculiar is difficult of questioning Ghosh as Ghosh questions modernity; of questioning *the decisions* that would intervene and have us believe in "the idealized portrait of a

[4] "Statement for the Critical Inquiry Board Statement".
[5] *History of the Kings of Britain.*

hospitable world in the medieval past"[6] as the "displaced intervention" questions *the decisions* that have post-colonials believe in nationalism and linear historical development. All interests already admit: these questions are critical. This criticism is not directed at the literary work for failing to be literary, but against the use of fiction to establish broad behavioral imperatives and to censor the ability to evaluate and make decisions by sovereign individuals who can.

modulating between History and historiography

Ghosh's novelization of research begins straightforwardly with a description of the scholar's object of inquiry: the biography of "the slave of MS H.6". The stepwise discovery of the slave's identity is the ostensible motive for the narrator's actions, a recurring meditation of the book, and the promised clarity of any reading experience—in other words, the story's plot, theme, and *telos*. Who is this "slave"? What is his name? Shall he (to borrow from Dickens) turn out to be the hero of his story? What does he stand for? Who cares? These are natural first questions and the answers to them constitute an interpretation of *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh's best literary work heretofore. Not unexpectedly, when translated to general practice, the work of recovering and imagining those figures such as the slave becomes an ethical imperative. Their stories become a part of our stories.

The short prologue is a history of the slave. More precisely, it is the history of the documents that supposedly trace the slave. These documents are mainly personal letters exchanged among various Middle Eastern traders, to one of whom the slave belonged.

[6] Priya Kumar. *Limiting Secularism*: *the Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film.*

By far the most assertive, secure, and final statements in the book are those that speak the history of anthropological-historical archives and of the things that belong to them; the history of the slave is self-consciously speculative. The archive includes not only documents that mention the slave, which are scattered throughout the world in various collections (so an "archive" in theory), but also geographical facts; the etymology of words, especially place-names, often across different languages; and the narrator's own subjective fieldwork experience. The simple syntax, list of names and titles, and details of where evidence may be found give these statements the form and sound of scholarly facts. Whenever understanding of the present or the past meets a moment of incompleteness, incoherence, or danger, the narrative switches, often abruptly, to these more secure subject matters and the discourse of scholarship with which the prologue introduces "the slave of MS H.6". The slave died a long time ago, but the conflation—the synecdoche of document and being—serves Ghosh well.

> The slave of MS H.6 first stepped onto the stage of modern history in 1942…. The slave's first appearance occurred in a short article by the scholar E. Strauss, in the 1942 issue of a Hebrew journal, *Zion*, published in Jerusalem. The article bore the title 'New Sources for the History of Middle Eastern Jews' and it contained transcriptions of several medieval documents".[7]

"The slave of MS H.6" acts as a proper name until Ghosh bestows on the missing figure appellation worthy of new-found/newly-recovered humanity. Finding the rightful name is part of the novel's ethical development. Ethics begins as the prologue has, with the

affirmation of the archive, the archivist, and his production, which again are temporary structures. It promises a local habitation and a name. These elements will coordinate the ethical field, as, for instance, when the slave of MS H.6, the unit central to decision-making, is discovered in and taken from the archive by the archivist. What they produce is quite familiar: history. Without affirmation and promise, "the slave of MS H.6" would have very different meaning, or mean nothing at all: it would be as if Ghosh pulled the fiction out of thin air.

The search for "the slave of MS H.6", or how we may begin to answer the question of who he was, has to be conducted through the writing in which he is mentioned. Again, Ghosh suggests this limitation when he correlates the slave to Strauss' article. Yet, the limit is introduced that it may be surpassed, as suggested by the novel's plot development. To the writing is performed a complex series of signification that lead from "the History of Middle Eastern Jews" to the archive of journal publications containing *Zion* to the history of the document (and Strauss) to the "stage of modern history". Just as a proper name would, the "stage" bestows on figures like "the slave of MS H.6" untested referential certainty: there *were* and *are* such people. And after a while, it may even seem as if there were and might be wonderful worlds with such people in it. Certainly "the slave of MS H.6" has moved beyond the initial limit of the historical documents and the repositories that hold them. The slave is "more" than the writings that mentioned it. No slave stepped on any stage, to be sure, but the felicitous phrasing—the metaphor—reinforces the slave's being. It is an ontological metaphor, and functions analogously to the ontological argument that perfection necessarily exists because

[7] *In An Antique Land* 13

perfection entails existence. Since there is a document, there must be corresponding reality and truth; there must be, for why else would there be this document? Both are as believable as if the god that was lowered onto the stage to put things right, but then again, such devices have believers. More importantly, the "stage" of history grants a kind of credibility to what Ghosh supposedly finds while searching for an answer to a question of history. Already it hints of the changes to the discursive function of characters when they are finally active in the ethical field. Of course, at the beginning of any search, the "things" to be found are only promises.

The prologue then shifts from the time in which the document MS H.6 was rediscovered, the beginning of the second World War, to the time of its writing, the summer of 1148 A.D., when "the greatest Crusader army ever assembled camped in the orchards around Damascus". Although dates are the surest indicator of a change in setting, there are also subtle shifts in tone and centers of description. From the citation of Strauss's article, and mention of the pertinent archive "the National and University Library in Jerusalem", the prologue proceeds to lyrically describe the "busy season" of "cosmopolitan" Palestine. It continues to employ this modulation throughout. The words of historians are no longer considered in the reality of documents but as statements giving access to the truth of real historical events. They are incorporated into the non-cited text as seamlessly as quotations from world leaders or eyewitnesses are incorporated into an article from the front page of the New York Times. Lost becomes found. This procedure is familiar to academics and university students, too, as one way of increasing authority by simultaneously evoking and distancing another to which authority has already been given. The difference between a quote from yesterday's White House press release and

MS H.6, is that there is a history in which the latter has significance, too—significant enough to require all this work. What should be clear, then, even before the narrator has spoken of his own situation as a researcher, is that *In An Antique Land* will treat the products of history both historically and historiographically. From the former perspective, MS H.6 is a document the historian Strauss introduced—or reintroduced—to the world in 1942; this, at least, is one of the object's historical properties. From the latter perspective, MS H.6 is a statement used to reconstruct the life-history of the so-called slave of MS H.6; just as the words of an Arab historian are made to comment on the Turcoman horsemen routing the Crusaders in the summer of 1148 A.D. "After this battle 'the German Franks returned' wrote the Arab historian who had so dreaded their arrival, 'to their country which lies over yonder and God rid the faithful of this calamity'"[8]. Beside a shift in historical moments, there is also a modulation between the historical perspective (with which the prologue starts) and the historiographical. To complicate matters, part of the history of the MS is that it was introduced historiographically as a source of Jewish history. Reusing the text means changing its value. Ghosh's novel goes on to explore such "links" between the two perspectives. The complicated modulation depends on the citability of things from the archive like Khalaf's letter, their dual-property as specific objects (of history) and abstract statements (on history).

The book ends by commenting on the same theme, the reality of documents and how they determine history, but from what is nearly the opposite direction. Where the emergence of a past life into the present via the historical archive marks a secure starting

[8] *In An Antique Land.* 15

point, the disappearance of one life, the life of the narrator's friend Nabeel, from the present marks an open but equally secure concluding point.

> There were more than a dozen of us in the room now. We were crowded around the TV set, watching carefully, minutely, looking at every face we could see. There was nothing to be seen except crowds: Nabeel had vanished into the anonymity of History.[9]

To complain that there is no trace of him in history implies that there should be. Nabeel should be on stage, or television. If one story of *In An Antique Land* follows the archeology of "the slave of MS H.6", then the story of Nabeel has the effect of reaffirming that which is to be found. After all, Nabeel was already "there" to be lost; the archivist-narrator did not just make him up. So was the slave of MS H.6 lost once, and now is found. Indeed, the vanishing of Nabeel presumes that historical being precedes the writing of history, and the latter can and must properly correspond to the former.

In truth, there is little difference between what is found and what is lost, whether constructed or unearthed, documented or referenced, since they are all functions of signification. Like developed, and developing, and undeveloped, they are all signs. Or, even without semiology, consider that the things of history are what each of us make of them, though some will ardently insist that Nabeel *is* real, and a few can do what Ghosh does. What Ghosh does is modulate. The effect of projecting a "real thing" *and* lamenting "its" *missing* trace, as though writing determines reality, is very useful. The rhetoric allows Ghosh to subtly conflate the "things" of one story with "things" in the other: Nabeel in the story of the slave of MS H.6, and vice versa. More importantly, it

exempts the “thing” from the logic of the story, even as the “thing” bears such importance that it might even define everything around it. The figure sometimes occupied by Nabeel, sometimes “the slave of MS H.6”, is determined by history and it is not. It/he is what he/it is independent of our writing, except that we must write him into what he (already) is. “Found” and “lost” are different manipulations of the text/real distinction, and, as is the correlative whenever we deal with rhetoric, the drama of losing and finding reinforces the text/real distinction: it is the writer's specific manipulation that makes such and such “real”.

The key to the rhetoric is having a difference and emphasizing either one or the other while enjoying the privilege of using both at any time. By modulating from one story to another while never wholly invalidating either—either of the ones he uses, that is—the writer can implicitly create a superposition occupied sometimes by a product of writing and sometimes by the real thing. The effect is that, while the writer contemplates the limits of historiography, he can still refer to historical being and historical truths. I call the figure that is sometimes the slave of MS H.6 and sometimes Nabeel, sometimes textual and sometimes real, a “superposition” because the writer maintains both despite contradiction. MS H.6 and the slave are not “linked” so much as they/it are both at once. Likewise is Nabeel and the missing signs of him. In fact, superposition is needed to dramatize the kind of loss (and found) central to Ghosh's philosophy and ethics. Nabeel in the story of MS H.6 assures that fieldwork-praxis has a point to it; MS H.6 in the story of Nabeel assures that something can be done to redeem the disappeared. In what is essentially a game of hide-and-seek, it can be used to insist that there exists an unknown

[9] Ibid. 353

which is independent of historical determination, yet that *must* be acknowledged by the present or fall to nothing/anonymity.

These sections on MS H.6 and Nabeel in the narrative of *In An Antique Land* exemplify Ghosh's technique. Sometimes "the slave of MS H.6" is a function of textual documentation: it would be nothing without recorded memory; it has to be traced. Sometimes "the slave of MS H.6" refers to a "thing" (not necessarily material object) beyond this and that document, beyond neglect and omission. Which "slave of MS H.6" is meaningful is a matter of convenience—for Ghosh's production of *ethos.* Actually, "the slave of MS H.6" is both, since both are available to and used by the same writer in the same narrative. Both have to be present at different times in *In An Antique Land.* The superposition is constructed by coordinating the two extant modes of history and historiography. Each mode has its unities, its first principles, its logic, its purpose and its deliberate blind-spots; each has its organizing questions. The two modes are not mutually exclusive, but contrast against each other. As history is an explanation of human events, the unities of history are intelligible patterns of change and temporal uniformity[10] , among others. Historiography tries to explain how history has variously been written, so the cast now includes the latest authoritative text and the historian that wrote it. Hayden White's work exemplifies this critical perspective. Actually, the singular difference between history and historiography may be the idea that the writing of history is also the effect and cause of history. This means historiography may turn to history for explanation. For the new explanation to supplant the previous thoughts, the history to which it turns must be more comprehensive than the one it replaces, or true

where others have been false. In other cases, instead of history, the explanation of historiography relies on theories of power, as for example the discursive analyses of Michel Foucault.

If they relentlessly pursued what they started, the analyses of historiography should at some point encounter the problem of uncertainty. They should even without the systematic thoroughness of Formalism, or the self-doubt of Poststructuralism, for the determining condition is that all three start by resisting the authority of the dominant writing to exclude itself from the causality of human events. The complications of historiography certainly discredit any historian who claims outright objectivity, or force him to exclude himself from all other historians who were determined by cultural socio-economic interests, and power. The analytical methods of historiography can be applied to interventions as well as to the writings of the *status quo*, and to present promises as to past promises. The new should question itself. Furthermore, the reasons for rejecting the old are the same as the reasons for rejecting the new—unless there are exceptions. If Ceasar wrote *The Conquest of Gaul* to increase reputation and change the dynamics of power, then what distinguishes *In An Antique Land* except a difference that has already been decided? Caesar had already decided on certain differences, too, and we are able to now make up our own minds; so perhaps we can do the same with Ghosh's writings. The exception is no more than another rhetorical device like *ad hominem* attacks. There is no Story that is not a story being used by story-tellers (requiring some other explanation). There are lots of characters and plots and endings, but no Character, Plot, or Ending. Most writers stop short of indetermination, or redeem it by making it part of another

[10] That the rules change entirely tomorrow from today.

story, for understandable reasons. When Ghosh/the narrator talks about MS H.6, he is simply describing its history. Only when his description of the relationship among documentation, historians, and history begin to raise questions about the validity of the last, do we enter into historiography. And he does just this when he correlates "being" with an act of the scholar: the very dramaturgy he introduces to enable *his* story. The analyses of historiography can be written in the same prose as history: with few exceptions, Ghosh's prose-style does not change dramatically whether a manuscript or a "real person" is the subject. The problematic is the crucial determinant. From this difference, the two primary modes ought to diverge ethically, too, especially because the production of *ethos* requires commitment to Character, Plot, and Ending.

Historians are certain enough to draw conclusions about change through time. The world can be understood temporally. The historian's ethics is focused on the veracity of historical statements, whether truth is empirical, metaphysical[11] or theological[12]. Of course, those who come to history may also expect a story with some sort of moral, which is why physics (and some historys) do not seem to satisfy. Physics, specifically cosmology, can be interpreted a kind of history with a very large scope that entails little moral-social obligation; it would be history but for the additional, latent, necessary demand. Even the most "rational" History, then, is in a sense the rationalization of why the desired Good has yet to manifest but will, and choruses of historians have made plenty of indirect moral statements commenting on the seeming tragedies of the world. Contrastingly, students of historiography are sure enough of the limitations of textuality

[11] The laws of history are akin to the laws of physics.
[12] History is the work of some superior intelligence, usually additionally qualified as good.

and signification that they can begin demystifying the historian's History: the writing of history is also historical, such that every claim makes itself meaningfully by pretending to be transcendental, metaphysical, or final. Correlatively, statements that have been "textualized", or historicized as something that (also) exist in time, lose that authority over us which is derived from the truthfulness or reality of what the texts say. Every Good is a claim made by another human *like those before and beside him*. Every *ethos* written to serve the good is an exercise of power. The value of Nabeel/the slave of MS H.6 is a function of desire, politics, power, whether Ghosh's or a people's. The ethical claims made on behalf of the character is an instrument he can exercise on another.

If new *ethos* are to be produced, the antithetical imperatives to build (or rebuild) and to deconstruct have to be segregated and organized. The problematic derived from the analysis of the explanation with the explanation's own analytical functions, cannot be introduced to the intervention, even as the intervention introduces it to the *status quo*. The critical difference of history/historiography has to stop making a difference. So the production of *ethos* modulates between the two functions such that, in the end, it secures authority and stimulate action—that makes the slave "more" than MS H.6, and Nabeel "less" than what he supposedly was and always is. When Ghosh is telling us through history and historiography about peasants, at some point the values he attaches to them are detached from evaluator and evaluation, from his decisions, and understood as inherent to the thing-itself and universally true. Suddenly we believe in something "more" than people competing and fighting with words. The two modes converge (at the superpositions) because they belong to a discursive formation, of which *In An Antique Land* is an enunciation. The authority to discourse as such, to segregate what would be

antithetical perspectives and contradictory logic in order to make new claims, supersedes each of the functions alone. This is why, as we will see[13], writers want to grant the literary authority over the analytical, and rhetoric over logic. Since Ghosh follows many other writers—and critics—in modulating between the historiographer's certainty of the text and the historian's certainty of Meaning, we may work under the assumption that all of them have found something productive in using the technique[14].

Just as it is irresponsible to believe that the confession of a lie makes other statements automatically truthful, it would be irresponsible to give too much authority to whatever else Ghosh writes just because of his framing device. It would be irresponsible to refuse to analyze how the novelistic conceits and figural language function to make signs for the writing of *ethos*. The omniscient third-person narrator is a literary instrument; so is the sensitive archivist. In the first place, Ghosh does nothing new and original to the trope of modulating between history and historiography. Although his decision to write an historical novel partly (or mainly) by writing about the experiences that mediate the final product immediately complicates the idea of History, the ambivalent interplay between history and historiography has been novelized with greater subtlety, beauty, and consciousness of consequences: for instance, by Toni Morrison in *Beloved*. Ghosh had reasons for employing the idea straightforwardly, whether he was conscious of them or not. By remaining simple in his treatment, he avoids some of the difficulties of Morrison's novels, especially the difficult idea of irreconcilable trauma. Nevertheless, in both writers' novelistic discourse, complications brought by one mode to

[13] in the next chapter.
[14] Whether they have worked in modernity is another matter.

bear on another, the reason there are modes in the first place, are soon forgotten. They stop the logic that started with the history/historiography distinction. Enough about constructedness or deconstruction, discourse and power, the "new" historical novel seems to say, let us at last build something good again. Let us be committed, once more. Such a call epitomizes the ethical turn. Success depends on the writer's technical expertise.

In that same first section of the prologue emphasizing the documentary basis for the construction of history, the narrator loses his critical historiographical ken and becomes immersed in history.

> It was not until 1942, the very summer when Khalaf's letter slipped quietly into twentieth-century print, that the Middle East again saw so great and varied a gathering of foreigners. Nowhere were there more than in the are around Alexandria; the Afrika Corps and the Italian Sixth Army, under the command of Erwin Rommel, were encamped a bare forty miles from the city, waiting for their orders for the final push into Egypt, and in the city itself the soldiers of the British Eighth Army were still arriving—from every corner of the world: India, Australia, South Africa, Britain and America. That summer, while the fates of the two armies hung in the balance, Alexandria was witness to the last, most spectacular, burst of cosmopolitan gaiety for which the city was once famous.[15]

The important proposition of the first sentence is deliberately contained in the *dependent* clause; it takes over for the weak independent clause "it was not until 1942", while that which could potentially raise further issues with history about to be written is cordoned

off in a modifier[16]. The transition to the proper perspective is complete by the last sentence. Whether or not Alexandrians would have agreed with the characterization, the nature of the category under which the prologue connects the two separate times is the same. This gay resemblance lies outside of the history of the document, being about the world in which documents exist as finite things[17]. It also exceeds what the historical document can say, for the comparison can only be made at some point in time *after* the document was written. It is broken by the clash of armies. In a very theological way, joy belongs to History proper as something at work *in* history but not *of* it. The years 1942 and 1148 are linked in two ways. They are the time of the writing of Khalaf's letter, and the time in which it "slipped quietly into twentieth-century print", respectively; this is the continuity provided by the document. They are also comparable moments of great historical confrontation; this is the point of resemblance. Ruminating on the major historical convergence of cultures and civilizations, the paragraph sets up the major theme: the meta-narrative of late twentieth-century cultural conflicts, when "cosmopolitan gaiety" is lamentably lacking. The rhetorical shift from letter to gaiety is expertly done.

The modulation is repeated throughout *In An Antique Land.* For long stretches of the narrative, after demystifying some modernist historical self-conceptions, Ghosh gives himself over to the traditional historical novel. History affords the writer generalizations about characters and setting their particularities, their dress, their outlook: the biography

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[15] *In An Antique Land* 15

[16] This does not mean that Ghosh will ignore the history of the document. It just means that he knows that too much attention to historiography ignores the promises of history. He knows, as I will show, that the two perspectives are incompatible.

of the slave of MS H.6 has to be historically accurate, after all. Yet history is also the discourse in which the novelist can best represent his desires. History is where Ghosh can consider the slave as though the character were alive, and therefore the character-type truthful; that is where Amitab meets Nabeel, too, and where he loses him. So, again, it would be wrong to grant the narrative authority because of a framing device, especially now that the sophism[18] can be seen. The traditional historical novel is the form that evokes, as history generally is the form for representing, reality; one returns to it when one needs historical reality to "confirm" ideals. *In An Antique Land* is not so much about historiography (although it is still intimately tied to the idea of writing History), but about that world of cosmopolitan gaiety in which the slave traveled, and that of the traveling scholar, and their histories. Ghosh desires, and with the novel he posits objects of his desire. The novel ignores for extended passages its distinguishing trope, which is based on the history of the archival document, in order to narrate the historical experiences of a beginning anthropology student doing fieldwork ostensibly organized around the search for the biography of the slave of MS H.6. Much of *In An Antique Land* is devoted to describing the worlds in which the student moved, tales of an Indian's immersion in contemporary Egyptian village life, told in a transparent way uncomplicated by the problematic of determinacy and cultural relativism insinuated by the familiar framing device. This is history, not historiography, and cosmopolitan gaiety and a host of other redeeming ideas are *exempted* from the possibility of a lie to which the modern idea of development is exposed. Why do we not interpret those scenes set in the past as the

[17] After all, it is not the document that is gay.

protagonist's idiosyncratic dream, mediated by his psychopathologies and personal traumas, except out of an unconsidered consideration for Ghosh, who needs that dream-world in which humans behaved better to speak with the authority of the Truth or Real. History lost is the historian's gain.

For one thing, repeatedly modulating between history and historiography changes the unities and terms of the discussion possibly without notice, and certainly without argument. The slave that was only cursorily important to the historical business of the documents gains dramatically more significance and takes on greater value in the history that Amitab/Ghosh writes. The letters between traders mention him only in passing, often as an afterthought, a perfunctory conveyance of salutation to one of the trader's business representative. None of them mentioned him by his name. Perhaps he was one of the many who played nearly insignificant, highly exchangeable, parts in that cosmopolitan gaiety rarely seen again, but it cannot be said that he caused any of that gaiety or its dissolution. It cannot even be said that he appreciated his present in terms of cosmopolitan gaiety, or did anything to sustain it. He did not make history; why should the anthropologist spend resource learning his name and staging his life? Why should he be "alive" and important now? Even Strauss, who reissued the document, values it differently: it documents the lives of ancient Jews. To accord the slave such a central place in the modern telling of the history of middle-eastern trading, then, is to engage in revaluation while by-passing logic and argument; to take certain artifacts from the archives of available material and explode them (as one might show an inset of the skin

[18] In the modern sense, and so as influenced by generations of philosophers opposed to using rhetorical skills to make weaker positions appear stronger.

held by St. Peter in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* and call it the Renaissance's statement on man[19]) so that they are now of greater importance than before. Perhaps they are even of utmost importance.

Modulation, though literary, can be used in criticism, too. Dipesh Chakrabarty shifts from historiography to history to establish unities that would credit arguments against modernity (as it is). In *Provincializing Europe*, the subject of his critique is the historiography of India, but the nature of the problematic is the same there as in Ghosh's novel. History as development, with modernity as its *telos*, unduly benefits those that can claim to be at the highest level of development while disadvantaging those that are placed in the more primitive stages. By reducing history to artifice, one of many episteme, one of many imaginaries, not only can a writer justify the reconfiguration of history such that it does not disadvantage the "undeveloped" but he can also tell stories that have power to determine human relations as much as development history does. Thus, Chakrabarty is trying to keep the critical powers of methods such as historicism inherited from the European Enlightenment, but keep it contained, while empowering other political forms which have been marginalized by the drive towards modernity, forms like irrational collectivization under the authority of some local deity, or its enlightened avatar. "It [European thought] is both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the various life practices that constitute the political and the historical in India".[20] Historicism is indispensable because it demystifies certain cultural values, like the "Hindu machine"; yet, because it also reduces those categories which should belong to

[19] Actually it is important, because it is the exception. It is the absence of the Renaissance knowledge of anatomy, and that beauty which is God's gift to man. Even the devil that guards the dead is fleshed out.

Chakrabarty's metaphysics, such as the figure of the oppressed, it also threatens the establishment of new cultural values as something more authoritative than might be commanded when understood as artifice. It allows the historian to establish a tradition of resistance expressed in terms of protective ancestral spirits, a rhetoric that is, in *In An Antique Land*, common to the peasants of Egypt and India. Of course, Chakrabarty can object to the development of India on the grounds that it produces poverty, is corrupted, benefits only those who control politics, or disrupts practices that need to be preserved as part of India's heritage. His attempts to create a competing idea of modernity that can satisfy much more than the "Western" one suggests we ought to, later on, investigate the tacitly exclusionary relation between historicization (plus other analogous critical methods) and the making of the new Indian political subject.[21]

The deliberate revaluation of something unimportant, and for the reason that it had been unimportant, unacknowledged, or unknown, suggests that, besides the difference history/historiography, there is another difference, another boundary condition, and therefore another undisclosed set of decisions to be analyzed. Producing a new

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[20] *Provincializing Europe* 6

[21] My dispute with Chakrabarty will not be about the forms of modernization taking shape in India. Rather, it will be about the mystification of certain categories like spirit in order to effectively put in place anti-capitalist values and other forms of authority, without rational argument and realistic measure of consequence. That these representations are structured to address, circulate among, attacks the traditions of, and calls for changing, the many *not* authorized to self-represent Indian history enters them within our critical purview, and that they employ literary strategies if not objects of literature enters them into the critical domain here employed. Chakrabarty's advocacy of atemporality, for instance, protects the righteousness of certain demands under the argument that scrutinizing them would mean becoming detrimentally and oppressively "Western". But, though atemporal categories like the supernatural characters of myth and divine figures of religion may hold authority in those places and times the historians mention, would "believers" recognize the meanings they have in, for instance, the story of globalization? To approach them does not mean to "colonize" believers. Furthermore, that some historical beings once believed in something of the same "spirit" cannot authorize their new meanings. I want us to be able to interpret, analyze, contest, and possibly dismiss, what new as old and old as new "spirits" have to say, especially if we want to contain the cause of

document, or rediscovering an old one, does not necessarily create new history: the discursive structure necessary to make the figure for which Nabeel and the slave of MS H.6 stand is much more sophisticated. Argument alone may not work, either. *In An Antique Land* does not argue for increasing the value of the slave and Nabeel, not at least in any way such that its case may be rejected (or their values decrease). Our reason for being "in an antique land" comes from beyond the seemingly self-imposed limits of the archive, and even the world of encounters. Although a reading of ethics in Ghosh's major novel focuses on the narrative modulations from object-evidence to statement (and back) that belie the procedure of modern historical imagining (and that form the novel's technical interest), the History "recovered" by the "ethical" anthropologist is too idealistic, and his relation to it too nostalgic[22], for "ethics" to be simply a call for conscientious scholarship and healthy skepticism. As preliminary analysis of narrative techniques already suggests, the production of *ethos* depends on successfully modulating back and forth between history and historiography in order to signify that which asks for the commitment of action.

Segregation and organization of rhetoric produces modes. Modes, as Northrop Frye studied them, are contrasting sets of rules of composition that correspond to different rhetoric, and, in literature, different genres[23]. Similarly Hayden White compared the different modes of historiography[24]. Realism has a set of formal features of

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problems rather than letting victims, or their advocates, establish ever more demanding and controlling social machines that could reproduce problems present and past in our own societies.

[22] Cf. Gaurav Desai. "Old World Orders: Amitav Ghosh and the Writing of Nostalgia". For homesickness of a different mood, see Ian Almond. "Post-Colonial Melancholy: An Examination of Sadness in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*". Orbis Litterarum: International Review of Literary Studies. 59.2 (2004): 90 – 9.

[23] *Anatomy of Criticism.*

[24] *Metahistory*.

character, plot, ending, etc., and adheres to such and such rules for interpretation. The same is true for history and historiography. I would also add that analysis and propaganda are different modes. Even if Homi Bhabha says that the work of an academic theorist and a propagandist are simpatico[25], there are certainly enough differences that an analyst does not feel like he is reproducing the particular propaganda he is analyzing, or that she has to protect propaganda from (possibly) reactionary analysis. The mode in unsympathetic hands can do great damage. There is great variety of permutations; neither critic fully accounted for why one form took precedence over others during a time period or in a community of speakers, but they do make a point to say that when realism is truthful, it is truthful by convention.

Be that as it may, patterning into modes makes it easier to organize rhetoric for signification. The writer can imply in one paragraph using these formal cues that a meaningful life entails these obligations and in the next assume that the meaning of life is whatever we make of it. If she modulates rightly, she can avoid the suspicion of contradiction—the contradiction of subscribing to determinism and independence at the same time. And if she has the skills, she may even be able to signify *by* modulating. This would be my contribution to formalism, except that the idea often recurs in dramaturgy. Dramas depend on expert orchestration of divergent if not conflicting points of view: the unities correspond easily enough to the speaking characters. George Bernard Shaw does this in *Man and Superman*, a comedy, however reluctantly one. The important characters of the play adhere to their respective romanticism, rationalism, and radicalism, even as the play reorganizes their society from what it was in the beginning to

[25] Cf. "The Commitment to Theory". *The Location of Culture.*

what it is in the end. Especially important is the ability to use historiography to deconstruct history when a rival controls the texts, and write history to substantiate one's ideals (while parrying possible deconstruction). Finally, sometimes the modulations become the new authoritative form. The new phenomenology is founded on (the erasure of) the initial difference. By then, the important decisions will have already been made for us. This is close to what Ghosh hopes would happen as he criticizes modernity.

Modulation seems to open up possibilities because it enables us to reconsider history. Yet anyone who has seen a yoyo will know that however deft the trick, the moving object is still bound. The tricks only work, in fact, because the object is bound; many of them, especially the ones where the object is suspended, are impressive because they seem to defy the basic condition. Phenomena like the slave of MS H.6 and Nabeel bind to us and us to the field of ethics. The ethical field, that out of which we make our decisions, can be subtly, secretly, and sometimes heavy-handedly, self-righteously constrained and organized, at least by competing values. The decisions of what to explode, and what to keep; what to lose, and what to find; when to modulate across the history/historiography difference; and whose ideas suffer inadequation; have already been made somewhere else. If we are to decide for ourselves, we will need to discredit the fundamental boundary.

fieldwork and the other

The first chapter, "Lataifa", brings us to the village of that name in Egypt a few hours by car southeast of Alexandria. The narrator introduces the villagers in turn, often with a story about how they met and an interesting anecdote that discovers their particular character. Ustaz Mustafa, university educated, speaking classical, literary Arabic[26], asks the traveler about Hinduism. The sedentary Abu Ali, in whose house the traveler stays the first time he is in Lataifa, benefiting from his positions both as a provider of government subsidized goods and at the town's main crossroad, talks to his tenant-"guest" about money. For his part, "Amitab", as he is called by the Egyptians, pays special attention to the village's social hierarchy, economy and structures of kinship; and its place in the greater world of Egypt and beyond—with an eye for detail and in simple syntax that recalls the fieldwork notes of a student of culture, albeit with enough "literary" words (adverbs like "laggardly") to let us know we are still reading a novel. In one scene, he meets a number of people in Shaikh Musa's house whose relations to each other and to others in the village remain vague.

> 'So she is of Aby-'Ali's lineage then?" I asked Ahmed.
>
> 'Yes,' said Ahmed, 'Abu-'Ali is her father's first cousin. His half-sister is her grandmother as well as Jabir's. She still lives in their house: you've met her.' […]

[26] Niloofar Haeri explores the uses of classical Arabic in lay culture in *Sacred Language, Ordinary People*: *Dilemmas of Culture and Politics in Egypt*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2003.

> ‘Yes,’ said Ahmed, ‘Abu-‘Ali’s father was her great-grandfather’s bother. And of course, his father, Abu-‘Ali’s grandfather, was my great-great-grandfather’s brother.’
>
> By this time I had lost my way in this labyrinth of relationships. It was only much later, when Shaikh Musa helped me draw up a complete genealogy of hamlet of Lataifa (all of whose inhabitants belonged ultimately to a single family called Latîf) that I finally began to see why he was always so careful never to voice a word of criticism about Abu-‘Ali: his wife, Sakkina, was Abu-‘Ali’s great-grand-niece. The lines of the genealogy led inexorably to the conclusion that Abu-‘Ali had played a crucial part in arranging the marriage. (53)

In Lataifa, genealogy is a social formation nearly as important as national identity, perhaps more so since it, and not the national identification “Egyptian”, determines everyday conduct. Amitab/v has been installed there to learn Arabic, which he will need in order to trace the history of the slave of MS H.6. Throughout the long first chapter, the scholar “goes native” insofar as he becomes part—albeit an exotic part—of a community that will miss him in *his* eventual absence; and that he will miss, too. Eventually the narrative leaves off those discursive expositions of genealogy and economic structure that indicate the history/historiographical modulations and begins treating the characters with humane sympathy.

For Amitab, the motive for knowledge and self-knowledge comes from the necessity of his specific situation. He needs to know how the people of Lataifa view each other, so that he knows how to conduct himself. In the example cited above, he is

assessing how much help he can get from Shaikh Musa to break his lease with Abu-'Ali. That an Indian Bengali and student of anthropology should encounter the "labyrinthian" complexities of kinship in an isolated village with surprise is itself surprising. It points to the writer's mode of address: the narrative of "insight" dramatizes for a popular "Western" audience the idea that structures of familial and social relations can take unfamiliar form (which is anything not resembling the so-called nuclear family or the state) by appealing to the pleasure of satisfying a curiosity about relatedness among an abundance of people. As such, this living game of drawing the family tree also structures the learner's relationship to the anthropological observation as something slightly different from textbook learning: for we—readers who are perhaps more educated or cosmopolitan than the "popular audience"—already know that agrarian societies with little immigration will have complex matrices of interrelation, usually extended kinship patterns organized around patriarchical or matriarchical centers; and we already know that marriages are arranged to create alliances, thus restricting certain behaviors between two "houses" and even people incorporated in those respective houses; and we already know that in such societies the individualist notion of transparent, fixed identity (I am who I am whether I am married to your daughter or not) is not as important as other modes of identifications. We know, but still we learn anew. We know such arrangements were the experience of some others remote to us in time and space and culture; still…. The "appeal" of anthropological knowledge has an objective correlative. It is the figure of Sakkina, the "dark one in the black dress"[27], who does not seem to fit in the house of Shaikh Musa in the village of Lataifa where Amitab is sent to seek

[27] *In An Antique Land* 41

knowledge, that leads him through a series of misapprehensions to the inexorable conclusion of Abu-'Ali's authority. Amitab concludes that, even if Shaikh Musa wanted to, he was not free to help the unhappy tenant.

The scholar learns of his own condition as producer of knowledge when, while "gazing" at the objects of his scholarship, from which he is separated by culture or time, the objects defy his expectations and he is met by a gaze in return. Laura Mulvey's context for her concept is film[28]. Yet what comes to us as the gaze has been variously formulated in models for interpersonal relations, and philosophies based in one way or another on that kind of interaction, especially if we focus on the gaze as a symptom of power asymmetry. Whether the result of the master-slave dialectic of Hegel, or struggle for freedom in Jean Paul Sartre, the gaze is the perspective one adopts as self-evident but which is really ascribed to another. In Hegel's phenomenology, the master is master only because the slave sees him as such, and vice versa. From the alienating social experiences, each thinker progressed differently. In Sartre, the individual determines who he is by controlling how others take him. The gaze objectifies whatever is gazed at. It also socializes him, insofar as he becomes dependent on another for identity. The dyad grows all the more complicated when the object is another thing (like the viewer) that also gazes. Jacques Lacan has proposed the most complex theoretical structure for the gaze. The gaze, Lacanian psychoanalysis explains, functions like a superego demanding transparent identification from the supposed viewer (of himself), of which he as viewer is

[28] The article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is relatively well-circulated, and the concept even more widely distributed by its progenies. I read that which is anthologized in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Robyn R. Warhol, Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP; 1997. 438-48

unawares most of the time. It is self-directed but perceived as coming from without. Unlike Freud's supervisor, Lacan's has a public dimension: it is a social construct. When the "object" returns the gaze in such a way that inadequates the viewer's order of identities, especially his confidence in his own self-evident identity, the very structure of subject identification becomes transparent. Consequently the subject is free to take responsibility and make decisions. In (Lacanian) clinical practice, this is achieved through the process of transference, where the failure of the psychoanalyst to fulfill his function as an object of desire allows the patient to come to terms with his own desires. Lacan proposed this as the ethics of psychoanalysis.[29] Social theorists who tend to think culture oppressive are especially attracted to the public nature of the cause of the gaze, because we can conclude from the theory that the problems of the world result from a particular system or structure, not individual identities or how we choose to treat each other, and we can formulate totalitarian countermeasures against totalizing regimes. Feminists who took up this model ascribed the cause of the gaze to patriarchy, and thought the return of the gaze by "objects", which are really disempowered subjects, can critically disrupt patriarchal power by asking the viewer to contemplate his own position.

Common across all these theories and philosophies is that idea that the return-of-the-gaze discovers to the gazer his own conditionality, whether the specific conditions are determined by existence, the Symbolic Order, or a structure of power by various names. It is not so much that he knows just what he sees, but learns how the function of seeing is structured. The same learning takes place when the subject is "othered" by that which

[29] Jacques Lacan. *Seminar VIII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis.* Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Denis Porter. New York: Norton. 1992.

stands as the other. The other embodies negation, or lack, in ideal self-identification: the fellaheens function as the other to the identity "developed", as they stand in for that which is undeveloped or still developing. Michel de Certeau has also written that, in the construction of history, the past functions as the other of the present, and *vice versa*[30]. When a supposed historical sign fails to signify the past/present difference (for instance, when a fellaheen is neither primitive nor modern), the structure that produces subjects that identify in historical terms is open for critique. The "return of the gaze" in *In An Antique Land* may be seen in several encounters between "anthropologist" and "natives", which sometimes result in mutual estrangement (though not disengagement), and compromise.

The most dramatic objectifications of Amitab usually occur in large public gatherings, and demonstrate culturally determined epistemological limitations. The main reason these occur in private conversations is that he can control them better than he can a crowd intent on showing him up. Correlatively, in personal interviews there is no audience for which a villager defines himself relative to the foreigner. But when there is an audience, Amitab gets pulled into pre-established routines. There was the time when Mabrouk's father asked the outsider to pronounce on the quality of the "Indian machine", a new diesel water pump he just bought with profits made from selling carrots at a fortuitous price. Playing his part, Amitab inspected the machine.

> I walked around the pump amidst a deathly silence, nodding to myself, occasionally tapping parts of it with my knuckles. Then, placing both hands on the diesel motor, I fell to my knees and shut my eyes. When I

[30] Cf. *The Writing of History.*

> looked up again Mabrouk's father was standing above me, anxiously awaiting the outcome of my silent communion with this product of my native soil.
>
> Reaching for his hand I have it a vigorous shake. 'It's a very good makana Hindi,' I said, patting the pump's diesel tank. 'Excellent! 'Azeem! It's an excellent machine.'[31]

The episode is interesting because it shows that one of the functions of the object is to rehearse already familiar signification, to reproduce the ritual of identification in a different time. Amitab speaks in the same way that the only water pump in Lataifa "speaks" of the newfound wealth of Mabrouk's father. His lack of expertise in internal combustion and mechanical engineering is irrelevant; it only matters that he can stand as perfunctory judge because he comes from the same place as the machine, and that he can fulfill the drama by playing the part accorded to him. The object is not inert, as we might typically regard an object of a scientific experiment. It is a placeholder arranged for a performance full of meaning. The structure of the gaze manifested during the episode of al makana al-Hind is interesting, too, for it is directed at both Amitab and the fellaheen subjects gaze and are gazed upon. The people gathered round the machine gazes at Amitab, "anxiously awaiting the outcome", and gaze upon themselves insofar as they accept that order in which his judgment defines who they are. Amitab gazes on them as an expectant audience and on himself as one who has to commune "with this product of my native soil". To gaze does not mean to apprehend with the eye or the mind's eye independently and individually. It means to identify through the perspective of

something else, and in this case the gaze is not from Amitab or Mabrouk's father or the rest of the village but the Symbolic Order that identifies and relates them to each other. The Order at Lataifa seems to be traditional: Amitab plays his role well because he politely follows local tradition to the extent allowed him, instead of invoking other more exacting evaluative criteria (of science, for instance) that would not signify the same as tapping and communing.[32] For us, the point is not to rile up those who identify with Lataifa, and might lament its loss, but to analyze critically the *ethos* that are enacted in Ghosh's dramatization of encounters between the anthropological subject and its others.

Amitab/v encounters during fieldwork problems of translation. Like the inadequacies of the object representation and opaque extended family structure, problems of translation can disrupt conventions enough to show the structure of power that maintains them. In this capacity to expose rule of structure (in both sense of rule) do translation problems recur throughout Postcolonial literature and criticism. Yet unlike the episode of al makana al-Hind, these moments also show the extent to which Amitab can be brought into Lataifan understanding. Again, Amitab is the Indian, or the doktór al-Hind, but he cannot speak as "fluently" on some issues as when he "judges" the water pump. For example, he is often asked about the worship of cows, and other stereotypical Hindu practices—differences which reaffirms Lataifan and Nashawy Muslim identity. In one episode he is accosted by a group of people lunching under a shady tree during harvest. 'Tell me, is it true what they say, that in your country you burn your dead?'

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[31] Ibid 73

[32] We shall see instances of the same in the novels of Salman Rushdie and in the criticism of Dipesh Chakrabarty.

> My heart sank: this was a question I encountered almost daily, and since I had not succeeded in finding a word such as "cremate" in Arabic, I knew I would have to give my assent to the term that Khamees had used: the verb 'to burn', which was the word for what happened to firewood and straw and the eternally damned. […]
>
> 'Even little children?' said Khamees. 'Do you burn little children?'
>
> 'Yes,' I said, regretfully. 'Yes, we do—we burn everyone.'
>
> 'But why?' [Busaina] cried. 'Why? Are people fish that you should fry them on a fire?'
>
> 'I don't know why,' I said. 'It's the custom—that's how it was when I came into the world. I had nothing to do with it.'
>
> 'There's nothing to be surprised at, really,' Zaghloul said wisely, gazing at the horizon. 'Why, in the land of Nam-Nam people even eat their dead. My uncle told me: it's their custom—they can't help it."[33]

In this example, the problem of translation emerges out of something else that also distinguishes this scene from other encounters: for some reason, Amitab wants his immediate audience to understand cremation as it means to those who practice it, whereas he felt nothing preventing him from claiming without knowledge or testing that the water pump is a good Indian machine. Sometimes he can pass for the object from India, and interactions with natives have a sense of ritual already staged; sometimes, as in this exchange, he is not satisfied to play the part of one whose people burn their dead.

Amitab's attempts to translate the meaning of "cremation" also stems from an anxiety about his listener's fear inspired by the image of burning the dead. This desire to translate the "original" or "authentic" meaning of a culturally relative phenomenon suggests that the question of ethics cannot be answered by returning the gaze alone. While it is necessary to become aware of ones own perspectives in relation to other perspectives, awareness is insufficient for easing the kind of anxiety the narrator has. It does not satisfy his desire for an understanding that arbitrates both "cremation" (and its culture) and those who do not understand the phenomenon. Between the machine and cremation in a difference that is key to deconstructing the function Ghosh hopes to initiate by traveling to the place of the other and bring it to us *vis-a-vis* the novel.

Zaghloul clears the problem of cross-cultural understanding by shifting the concept of relatedness from comparisons against his own specific individual conditions to an abstract universal we might call (though he, uneducated, may not call) conditionality. Conditionality contrasts with quality, in that the former does not seem to depend on alterity like the latter. From "tall" or "short" to "height"; and short is not the lack of tallness. This is an old liberal strategy, and the ideal consequence of alienating encounters with the other. To manage the abstraction, the Egyptian changes the system of relations from cremation and burial to "custom", more specifically *inscrutable* custom, which assures him that each culture has its own particular version for dealing with the dead. Then he interpellates himself into the new order of things. The condition is that we cannot help but dispose of the dead. It has to be universal, because otherwise we can

[33] *In An Antique Land.* 168

make claims of quality, again[34]. The lack of direct translation preserves each custom's individuality. This is how a writer overcomes the problem of translation without having to ascertain for certain the foreigner's un-translated meaning or the foreign thing-itself—in this case, cremation. The meaning of these moments that close the issue of translation is clear when we place them immediately next to each other.

In Lataifa, the teacher Ustaz Mustafa tries to convert Amitab to Islam. 'Tomorrow', he said, 'I will take you with me to the graveyard, and you can watch me reciting the Quran over my father's grave. You will see then how much better Islam is than this "Hinduki" of yours'[35]. His potential convert gives excuses for why he cannot accompany Ustaz Mustafa to see indisputable reason for adopting a new (old) perspective. Refusing to let go of the opportunity to enlighten, Ustaz Mustafa decides he must walk the field with Amitab.

> We walked in silence for a while, and then he said: 'I am giving up hope that you will become a Muslim.' Then an idea occurred to him and he turned to face me. 'Tell me,' he said, 'would your father be upset if you were to change your religion?'
>
> 'Maybe,' I said.
>
> He lapsed into thoughtful silence for a few minutes. 'Has your father read the holy books of Islam?' he asked, eagerly.
>
> 'I don't know,' I answered.

[34] We could other those who do not dispose of their dead but leave corpses to rot. Any small distaste from my irreverent characterization supports the characterization that conditionality has to be universal for it to function as Ghosh wants it to. In this particular section I do not argue that Ghosh wants to create conditions that are universal, not yet anyway.

> ‘He must read them,’ said Ustaz Mustafa. ‘If he did he would surely convert himself.’
>
> ‘I don’t know,’ I said. ‘He is accustomed to his own ways.’
>
> He mulled the issue over in his mind, and when we turned towards Lataifa he said: ‘Well, it would not be right for you to upset your father. That is true.’
>
> After that the heart went out of his efforts to convert me: he had a son himself and it went against his deepest instincts to urge a man to turn against his father. And so, as the rival moralities of religion and kinship gradually played themselves to a standstill within him, Ustaz Mustafa and I came to an understanding. (52)

In what Dipesh Chakrabarty might call an ethical moment, we find a lucid dramatization of the ethical-work[36, 37]. Mustafa finds a reason to desist from converting Amitav, who is now taken not only as a Hindu, but also a father’s child. The latter characterization makes him relatable without the need to comprehend the meaning of the Hindu religion, and is the ethical insight needed to change their relation. Being the son of a father, it would seem, constitute one of those vaunted kernels. We should also learn from this reasoning that there is something exclusionary about religion preventing the compromise ‘he has his religion and I mine, which we both believe with similar conviction’. In fact, it

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[35] Ibid. 50 - 1

[36] Chakrabarty calls for looking at these ethical moments in *Habitations of Modernity*, particularly in the last chapter wherein he provides an anecdotal moment from his own life.

[37] Joyce’s chapter “Hades” from *Ulysses* is the more nuanced and complex depiction of changing orders of relation; and the novel as a whole explores the relatability of humans under the authority of mothers and fathers.

is this exclusion which gives rise to Mustafa's proselytizing. Additionally, the swerve from one order of relations to another characteristic of compromise happens when that other order has a central figure of authority presiding over it as authoritative, or more so, than that which presided over the old; for the two are said to be in conflict. In this case, the authority manifests as Mustafa's respect for the will of (all) Fathers. Briefly considered is the thesis that Amitab's father is wrong like his son, or more so for inculcating his son in blasphemy, but "deep instinct" prevails over religious indoctrination. Mustafa's pious "deep instinct" is exhibited not just in having a son, as Amitab surmises, but in performing rituals over his father's grave. It is as if Mustafa reasoned "he has his father, and I mine, whom we both are obliged to obey, whatever each father wishes". Zaghloul's conclusion (about rites of the dead), then, might now be interpreted as an attempt to relate three different cultural practices regarding treatment of the dead, his, Hindu cremation, and Nam-nam cannibalism, under the one authority of Custom.

There is much to gain from the failures highlighted by the problematic of translation, just as we have seen there is much that can be gained from the problematic of historiography. There is more when the story can be dramatized in a setting like Lataifa. The effect is evident in Zaghloul's reply: a certain kind of relatedness without fully realizing the meaning of what is related, and commitment without fully realizing what relatedness entails. Moreover, this relatedness is mediated by forms of authority, to judge from Mustafa's response. For the proselytizer (who, it must be said, is of the most benign

variety of the kind), authority comes from common respect for fathers[38]. For Amitab/v, the immediate authority is instituted by his discipline. His venture into the antique land only reaffirms this authority by seemingly confirming that which it, father-like, considers important. To Amitab, cremation has a meaning and several definitions, and there seems to be something about the former that cannot be translated by any of the latter. The former is the lived-experience (or something else inscrutable) that Amitab is trying his hardest to signify, and the latter is an anthropological observation that relates this act to others in the category of "custom". Whatever it is, the meaning of cremation has to be assumed, and accommodated. Ghosh does even not attempt to communicate the meaning of cremation to his general readers through free-indirect discourse: if he did, he would face the same problematic his protagonist faces. Nevertheless, the meaning demands respect and entails a set of proper—that is, ethical—behavior. "Cremation" ought not be deconstructed like the commodity fetish that makes the diesel pump desirable. The explanation of "custom" is a compromise, necessary and of the right kind: it does not publish the true meaning but gives the idea a kind of rough shape and the possibility of explanation in full. It does not satisfy Amitab's sense of the meaning of "cremation" but offers it as a sign of something more easily translated to the Lataifan worldview. More importantly for the production of *ethos*, "Custom" is responsible. It reproduces the sacred that already governs in those cultures which feel the most strongly about the dead, and we can say that, generally, Ghosh's kind of synthesis reproduces the strong feelings already attached to what is untranslatable and what is missing from history. The narrator

[38] The respect is also conservative, for every father wants to reproduce himself, at least his religion, in his son; this becomes problematic when the father wants something clearly wrong.

pretends to lose something between meaning and definition, and to find meaning between definitions and compromise, for greater gains. What is gained is an authoritative protocol that reproduces the effect of encounter across cultures and peoples.

Zaghloul synthesizes an order (of last rites) by assigning to other peoples "customs" that, although he does not fully comprehend, he presumes ineluctably hold meaning for the respective practitioners. This is the very reason why Zaghloul brings to consciousness the "Nam-nam", strangers to both Muslims and Hindus. For this kind of synthesis, one must always look for the other who lives so meaningfully. Mustafa is able to reconcile the conflict between Hinduism and Islam by imagining the infidel religion as something meaningful to another father like his and like him. The meaning of Hinduism he does not grasp; the meaning of filial piety he can accommodate. Thus "custom" is issued under the authority of piety: by observing this universal liberal category, we please the Father. It ceases to be absence of (muslim) sanctity. These formations in the field of othering add another dimension to the discourse, a sort of sublime depth which might be called the axis of meaning. Both sides in the analogy between historiography and ethics bear this out. The orderliness of meaningful structures forms a plane, while the meanings themselves can be imagined along a different axis to be "filled in" or "evacuated" according to the claim that needs to be made. For example, there is an order of customary "burial rites" in which a particular culture "fills in" its respective practice; this is the order Zaghloul synthesizes that lets him relate different peoples (without seeming to judge them). The other, literal side of the analogy shows clearly that the acknowledgement of meaning creates a "beyond" to the ethical field. Zaghloul's synthetic category "custom" (the independent synthesis is meant to confirm the

universality of Ghosh's anthropological category) allows him to overstep the limits of Lataifa, analogously the extent of his ethical context; to travel by imagination to worlds he admittedly cannot understand; and to come to decision by positing things under the uncontested authority of others. Whether beyond Lataifa or beyond the ethical field, the so-called deep structure of meaning obstructs analysis, because the presence of compromise formations seems to predicate ceding authority to another based on something dubious and protected from contestation as believers protect the "ghosts" of their stories. Meaning-for-another affects the ethical field, as a moving charge affects an electromagnetic field: only the charge that comes from beyond into our field is actually structured in our field by another for his purposes. What fantastic power is wield by him who can populate the field with deep meaning (again). Analysis must be aware of the authority of this opaque dimension; and ethics should beware of what someone represents as lost, particularly when people start to adopt *ethos* founded on these shadowy things.

The problematic of translation and its resolution in "custom" are created for the modern to prejudice his experiences. The fieldwork in which they arise is created for the same, too. The modern is straw-man and target for change; in the antique land, she pushes for development and makes fellaheens think of themselves as a warp upon time. This does not mean the task of translating is without real problems: I refer only to that which belongs to these stories with the same desirable endings. That is, we may be othered in actual encounters, our languages may fail, our knowledge fails, but we can resolve to demystify our own ideas rather than commit to new beliefs. Since I have not piety for my father *and his religion* that Mustafa has, I have no need to conceive of cremation as either sacred nor profane: the disposal of the dead by fire is neither profane

nor sacred. As such, it would be harder to convince me to "come to an understanding"—the new understanding Ghosh wants. So you cremate? I understand it is a custom, a structure. Let me show you these ovens we've just developed; plus we have a variety of packages, including one where we will scatter you anywhere you want, for the right fee. In other words, there is no sacred, secret referent "cremation" to which I bear obligations yet to be demanded. Instead, the aporia leads to further deconstruction of those signs that behave like cremation, and those that want us to observe them to please the father. Perhaps this is the tolerant but uncommitted modernity against which Ghosh is really contending, besides the contemporary phenomena of nationalism and sectarianism. What I have been calling "the field of the other" is really a function that assures the alienating experience produces the likes of "custom"—Ghosh's "custom", and not, say, Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology.

History (when analyzed as historiography) is the rhetoric that gives descriptions the impression of material references, and ideas the impression of timeless truthfulness. A people can turn to it to seemingly confirm the story of development. A writer can turn to it to allegorize the recovery of communities uniting current foes. Similarly, the field of the other projects substantiates the supposed cause of problems of translation, from which "reality" other claims will then be made. Effectively, it makes "things". The "thing" is not cremation-itself but the phenomena which demands a new translation to include and accommodate the deep feelings of those who "cremate" (and those who bury the dead, too). The kind of translation, the kind of "knowledge", that gives its speakers "custom", is respectful, obliging, almost obsequious. Ghosh's antique land is filled with prejudices. Encounters with the unknown tend to yield the same phenomena; like Zaghloul, Mustafa,

and Ghosh, he who ventures there is likely to find the same "things" even if he formulates concepts and uses metaphors given to him by his particular lived-experiences. He will run into the same boundary conditions—for example those marked by the problems of translation—and, in the field of the other, believe he has come upon undeniable referents. This is because in the field of the other, he are already the subject of the anthropology-historiography protocol. He may even play comparable parts in the story that observers like Amitab/Ghosh tell themselves to make their work meaningful; that story is signified indirectly because disclosure would subject it to the analysis of historiography, too. Since the experiences are supposedly in the field, whatever is "found" appears to be independent of founder and rhetoric.

While it cannot be known whether the anthropologist drew his conclusions from genuine and skeptical engagement with the field, or missionary-like he has found what he wanted to find, we know that the reproduction and dissemination of his fieldwork propagates the truth-fulfilling function of changing phenomenology. Change minds and reality by changing what is taken as real; make the new come true by convincing others that the new is truth and already here. Whether or not there was Nabeel, Ghosh is trying to project referents so that we can feel as if we encounter such things and be transformed by the experience *and* change how we find things so that we make that which we are supposed to experience finding. Fieldwork is setting for stories espousing the philosophy of loss-and-found. Furthermore, the production of *ethos* has to subvert the critical function which was initiated against the *status quo*, exactly because of what I am doing. My critique is not of the other, whatever it/he happens to be today, or yesterday, but of the rhetoric that projects change as though it is already set to happen. The criticism

extends to any Postcolonial production of *ethos* that has a setting for the other which functions as fieldwork does in *In An Antique Land*.

To the ethicist, I would say, I hear you, but let us research and verify your claims before responding to them, and certainly before committing to the rules that govern your *praxis.* Let us analyze before admitting "things" that then will be used later, perhaps in political demands, perhaps for social entitlements, perhaps against some of us. Especially, let us figure out what we are not supposed to find; let us find what we are not supposed to find in the past and the present, in the *status quo* and in the promises of intervention, and ask why not. After all, we have been tricked before, as your act of intervention itself suggests. Let us respect your deep feelings, but let us not be obliged to such depths that we cannot decide tomorrow and thereafter; let us consider you, but let us contest how the *object* of your feelings, your ancestral ghost, or cremation, or self-worth, figure *in that which has ambitions to change us also*. Indeed, cultural tolerance based on the barest of recognition that there are plenty of people who live differently could have been developed "at home"—or at least by French Structuralists and American liberals. The trope of adventuring into the field and digging up the archive function to "substantiate" change as already "out there" to be found. This relocation adds other functionality to untranslatable "custom" and to lost-found "things" like Nabeel/the slave of MS H.6, so they can be the causes of change. I am simply questioning that which encountered the field of the other and the authority to bring those "things" to the field of ethics.

unknown to the field but in it

Alienating encounters with alterity generates knowledge that has "Custom" for one of its fundamental concepts. To borrow Bhabha's neologism, such knowledge may be called "translational", as it is limited by problems of translation[39]. We know as best we can about custom without access to the particular phenomena themselves. Yet the "translational" can be criticized for also creating exceptions to those limits it defines, just as the history/historiography difference is introduced to create the exceptional value of Nabeel/the slave of MS H.6, and to promise the same kind of historical clarity that had been promised before the intervention of the difference. They are rhetorical devices, among other things. In other words, the problems of translation are surreptitiously enabling. What Bhabha calls "translational" is a function of encounter between the old (idea of the nation-state) and the reality (the antithesis of globalization). Such encounters diminish the authority of the *status quo* (thesis) and produce a new[40]. We are arguing, as much as we can, over what is to be this "new". This should not be surprising since problems of translation and problems of historiography are used by the same ethical project; in this case, by the same writer in the same work. Knowledge is "translational" if and only if knowledge entails the agreement of another, the authenticator. Cremation *must* be known as those who practice cremation know it, and human life, the peasant life, *must* be known as those who are peasants; if not, then they who have access must approve. Demanding that knowledge of cremation *should be* the authentic translation of

[39] Cf. "Statement for the Critical Inquiry Board Statement".

[40] "Our experience of the global is not a face-to-face encounter with a "new" social or cultural phenomenon; it only comes to life as a representational reality when the nation-space cedes its sovereignty in order to *accede*

"cremation", just so that current epistemes fail and have to go through "custom", produces a wholly different kind of knowledge than asking the name for the practice of disposing the dead by fire; in the end it may not even be an epistemological demand. The demand creates kernel of authenticity that is unknown and inaccessible, except to certain authorities that are superior to the problematic of translation.

The problem is that this something inscrutable to us—to its critics—will be used to claim authority *outside of its customary location.* Just look at where the demand is placed: it is not placed on those cultures that already cremate. Nor is it placed on the losing economies, which are given access to untranslatable secrets that must, as a rule, command value. The unknown and the untranslatable tell us what to do. The unknown *is* what to do, phenomenologically at least, for never do we really get to get at the thing-itself: the unknown is known. In a text that demonstrates with and/or draws conclusions from the problematic of translation, what gets "translated" is not the phenomena like "cremation", but demand and obligation. Demand and obligation are features of the new language. Translation as such is a privilege. Un-translatability, too, is a privilege, for they are two sides of the same coin(age). Translational knowledge privileges those who approve when sufficient consideration has been given to the "meaning" of the kernel of the untranslatable, so effectively those who can claim to reveal the missing and the unknown. As such, it serves not the knower (who is being transformed, as it were) but the few who can identify as translator. Therefore, it is to the translator's authority to which we aspire, not so that we can deny the existence of little villages and bad

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to the transnational or global reality that embeds itself, or *intercedes,* into the ongoing life of the nation" ("Statement for the Critical Inquiry Board Statement").

governments, nor to make everyone appreciate cremation or circumcision, but so that we in the end are not disadvantaged by that which is or will be legislated under the name of the inscrutable.

The question to ask of encounters in the field of the other may be "what is *unknown* and *inaccessible* but must always be acknowledged as there?" The answer, however, lies in *the pattern of access.* Particularly it concerns access to that "thing" which is unknown to us but must be. It concerns that which is liminal and should not be. The location of the answer might have been surprising, had we not experienced the development of discourse analysis and deconstruction. As we had studied the patterns of authority that wrote "civilization", so do we study now the patterns of authority to write "the other". In fact, this approach should be expected since the purpose of ethical representations is that they benefit some people over others; they do so by discriminating access. To critically understand stories that modulate from history to historiography, and from demystification (of the Indian machine) to synthesis (of Custom), the question ought to be: why these things and not other? Why development and not cosmopolitan gaiety? Why capitalistic societies of interpersonal contracts and not socialistic societies of collective dependence? And how does the right choices look clear and natural? Should we be confronted by moments of aporia, why cannot you or I have access to test these unknowns of which the interventionist makes much? The discussion in the Egyptian village concerns no less than the idea of History, although its tenor is less abstract than discussion on the same subject by a panel at a Modern Language Association convention. Because the exchange shows a problem that is perhaps

intractable, Ghosh stages it well after those little moments of understanding which now seem maybe too hopeful.

> … Within moments a dozen or so people had crowded around me, and I was busy affirming that yes, in my country there were indeed crops like rice and wheat, and yes, in India too, there were peasants like the fellaheen of Egypt, who lived in adobe villages and turned the earth with cattle-drawn ploughs. The questions came ever faster, even as I was speaking: 'Are most of your houses still built of mud-brick as they are here?' and 'do your people cook on gas stoves or do they still burn straw and wood as we do?'
>
> I grew increasingly puzzled as I tried to deal with this barrage of inquiries, first by
>
> tractors; water-wheels and not pumps; donkey-carts, not trucks, and yes, in India too there were many, many people who were very poor, indeed there were millions whose poverty they would scarcely have been able to imagine. But to my utter bewilderment, the more I insisted, the more skeptical they seemed to become, until at last I realized, with an overwhelming sense of shock, that the simple truth was that they did not believe what I was saying.
>
> I later came to
>
> stood in the rungs above, the circumstances of those below had become more or less unimaginable. I had an inkling then of the real and desperate seriousness of their engagement with *modernism*, because I realized that the fellaheen saw the material circumstances of their lives in exactly the

> same way that a university economist would: as a situation that was shamefully anachronistic, a warp upon time; I understood that their relationships with the objects of their everyday lives was never innocent of the knowledge that there were other places, other countries which did not have mud-walled houses and cattle-drawn ploughs, so that those objects, those houses and ploughs, were insubstantial things, ghosts displaced in time, waiting to be exorcised and laid to rest. It was thus that I had my first suspicion of what it might mean to belong to an 'historical civilization', and it left me bewildered because, for my own part, it was precisely the absoluteness of time and the discreteness of epochs that I always had trouble in imagining.[41]

In this passage Ghosh fleshes out his straw man "modernism", to which sense of history "an antique land" might be considered his counterexample. It is countermodernity. In the first place, Lataifa serves as a place where a practice can meet its strange counterpart under the presiding category custom. This has resulted in moments of understanding, however limited to Zaghloul or Mustafa or Amitab. Yet the passage above shows another possibility: the unproductive discovery of disagreeing points-of-view such that that which speaks as the other is not naively believed to be what it represents itself to be. What makes poverty, homebuilding material, and fuel source incomparable (say in terms of economy) where rites of the dead or filial piety might be "fitted" into another order? Amitab's pronouncement on the Indian machine, his attempts to communicate the sacredness of cows and cremation, the villagers' gaze and their questions of the stranger,

[41] *In An Antique Land*. 200 – 1, emphasis mine

their attempts to communicate what is sacred to them, all have a benign, even magnanimous air about them. They certainly do not threaten to invalidate the respective meanings that are important to the several cultures. The same cannot be said for insolent modernity here, which destroys the would-be "innocence" of peasants, and turns substance to ghosts. And apparently, no father wants his son to continue to develop. The feelings that accompany the peasants' circumstance, mainly Ghosh's, signal to the reader that the costs of development—a few huts here, a village there—are to be revalued. The cost must be driven up in excess of "a warp upon time", higher than the reward of the useless water pump, indeed, so high that it is inaccessible to the episteme that contains the concept of historical development. Indeed, it is this "loss" which renders incompatible the two senses of history. Modernism and Amitab's supposedly non-absolute, non-discrete history disagree over the value of the fellaheens, among other differences.

If it can be said that the philosophy of development has decided against wooden plows, then it must also be said that the new discourse has decided against the philosophy of development. To undermine development, a new math is needed, for which new identities—a new "imaginary virtuosity of "'identification'", as Bhabha says[42]—are be needed, too. Furthermore the new math can only distinguish itself if the "historical civilization" does not have access to the "loss", because if it/we did, it/we—or its/our agent the university economist, would simply calculate that nothing excessive has been lost and more has been gained by mechanizing farming. This can be done if it is said—if it is ruled—that development fails to do the proper accounting (of that to which it is not

given access). Additionally, failures and unknowns must reshape the ethical field, and everyone must be in it. The brief exchanges between Amitab and the fellaheens and so many like it across twentieth century literature, so many other encounters that seem to make up for those written during colonization and colonialism signifying imperialist ideology, reveal that identifying a problematic is not sufficient for agency. It is insufficient for the dominant that others to now feel "othered". The other (to the dominant) must be given not only exclusive access to what is theirs, *but also* privilege knowledge of universals—access to us. The new "knowledge" is determined by a rightful accounting of plows, and fellaheens. So the ethical problematic must take over, become the authority of life, inasmuch as masses of people, not just the maladjusted post-colonial, now are burdened with and enlightened by the failure of ideas and continual redefinition *in* the ethical field. History in discrete epochs and strict chronology is not disproven by historical evidence, or by the proposition of an equally likely alternative; it is wrong because of its effects. It *qua historiography* makes the wrong kind of history. The missing generalization is a moral edict which Amitab/Ghosh also carries around with him wherever he goes: it is the decision that has already been made outside the field.

Perhaps the privilege of access to that which shapes the entire ethical field is more perceptible if we irreverently defy some unspoken rules. Amitab creates orders of relation that "solve" the riddle of meaning as revealed by the problematic of authentic translation. He already carries this order with him into the antique lands. He carries it in a cab in India. It gives him that vocabulary from which "custom", "kinship", and "archive" comes; to which is added by liberal fellaheens the universal form of authority

[42] "Statement for the Critical Inquiry Board Statement".

the father. But it also forbids. It does not let him disrespect "cremation", or Islam, or fathers. In fact, for all of his attempts to test the reality of cultural identities, the narrator refrains from those situations that could possibly lead to serious conflict. Taboo makes "unknowns" as much as the redemption of failure makes ideals.

Amitab's cross-cultural forays are hardly threatening. He goes out of his way to make himself benign. He lets Abu-'Ali bully him, and children of the villages infatilize him, make him into a child who has to learn the ways of the world. And, although women can be a minor curiosity, Amitab's crossings are *never sexual*. Local women are off-limits. At one point, he tries to convey to the peasants of Nashawy, a more populous neighbor to Lataifa, the idea of cremation—to no avail. In their minds, nothing distinguishes between acts of burning: burning a man is like burning wood, or worse, the punishment of hell. A woman who fears the India that burn their dead says to Amitab: 'you had better not go back […] Stay here and become a Muslim and marry a girl from the village'. Amitab does not reply, and takes the opportunity afforded by another question to discourse on the geopolitical and physical barriers, the "ribbons of war" and "hairiness of yaks" on the Hindu Kush, that would prevent a journey from Egypt to India by donkey. In publishing himself so, he follows the conservationist *ethos* of anthropological fieldwork, which justifies and excuses his presence. These disciplinary limitations complicate the idea of a general ethics. They predetermine the kinds of "gazes" the writer is willing to suffer, even seek to suffer, so that his conclusions about community and identities must be criticized in part on the kinds of tests to which he subjects his theses on cultural understanding. His mere being does not threaten the order of Lataifa. One wonders what might the conditions of his thinking have turned out to be

if Amitav Ghosh had been (or had chosen for narrator) an American Egyptologist, say from the Midwest, who is documenting rural Egypt (i.e. not-Cairo); or if he had been a *yahoudi*. The first objection to Ghosh's drama of cultural understanding, then, lies with the self-limited phenomenological possibilities of the character Amitab, because if he in some ways exemplifies the organization of thought around the question of ethics, he may only be able to give decidedly meek answers.

Still more problematically, the restricted level of engagement seem best suited to answer how to conduct anthropological work, not how to live, since living means at least having the possibility of entering freely into the kinds of relationships that might offend the native culture by upsetting their coordinates of right and wrong. This is especially important when local customs and antique lands would pass final judgments on that in which they have no direct involvement. Here, conforming the existential conditions of living to the academic limits of scholarship means repressing the sexual Hindoo Indian Amitab among Muslim Egyptian peasants. Or else in these "other" places, one's ability to sublimate libido must be wonderfully efficient and practical, and there is no need to talk about voluptuous Arab women or the loveliness of "the dark one with the black dress". This is a very serious issue that any call towards extending an academic *ethos* beyond its normal field must address. Ghosh should not be faulted for failing to recognize the sexuality of the various cultures he visits—there is a universalist assumption about women and sex of debatable merit in that critique which diverges from the specific domain of our inquiry into the particular structures of cultural engagement the novel willingly entertains. Nevertheless, sex is a possibility, and as we want to secure the limits of the novel's ethical field, we have to investigate the extent to which

the novelist is willing to dramatize cultural encounters: what can be brought to bear on another and what must be left at home, so to speak. The problematic continues to resurface as the Lataifans make fun of Amitab's penis: they have not actually seen it, but entertain themselves by fussing about one who represents to them the "other" of circumcision. The traveler facing the return of the gaze is often asked to rehearse the state of foreskins in his culture (and the worship of cows, too, and the cremation of the dead). As to be expected, such skirmishes are lighthearted. In fact, they strengthen the bond between traveler and natives even as the difference remains in stalemate. However, the return of the problematic comes to such a traumatic point at the issue of female clitoral circumcision, and the consequent physical inability to enjoy copulation, that the narrative has to enlist the aid of clinical discourse to talk about certain experiences between the sexes, before dropping the subject entirely. That phenomenon and its meaning, it would seem, are located far outside of the field of differences that might be treated benignly. There are things not surrendered to "custom".[43]

It is clear now why Ghosh's narrative can speak confidently about etymology or geography: at these levels it does not have to deal with the messiness of and potential fight over meaning. It avoids the issue of what new meaning to take, like which history to believe in and live by. And it can actually preserve *status quo* meanings on the order of place names, next to other meanings. That place to which we can only point is "Cairo" to the West, and "Masr" to the natives; Cairo and Masr are meaningful to different

[43] One need only look at those bolder writers who do imagine or record cross-cultural sexual adventures to see many of the issues Ghosh is avoiding. It has to be stated that Ghosh does address feminist issues in *The Shadow Lines*, but there, because the novel is about the Bengali culture from which he comes, the dangers of having the problem of translation turned against him is not as glaring.

people. As the narrative traces the different names that have been used to refer to the place we now call "Egypt", it never encroaches directly upon any particular significance. Indeed, Amitab never shares this history of Egypt with the Egyptians (which is why I refer to the "narrative" instead of Amitab). Dramatizing the etymology of names is a tool of historical criticism well-rehearsed in Nietzsche (*The Genealogy of Morals, Beyond Good and Evil*), Deconstructionism, and Postcolonialism. The history of names (for that which is the same) reveals human agency, and the present name loses its essentialist characteristic—or is supposed to—because it is now seen as the product of various acts of naming. What is remarkable in *In An Antique Land* is not the "new" perspective that sees essences as linguistic constructions misapprehended for reference to the transcendental. Rather, the writer's timidity, his conditional commitment to the logic by which he draws the ethical field, signals an agenda hidden maybe from him, certainly from us, and should alarm us there and wherever we find attempts to elevate the perspective constructed from etymology or geography to a position of authority. For, if the history of place names is the history of conquest, then why create out of the several names a meaning for each *now unconquerable* by the others? Why not call Egypt by "Egypt" precisely because the name denotes the historical fact that it was conquered and is what it is today as a result of that conquest? After all, when the narrative describes where the historical artifacts of Egypt may be found, which perhaps unlike proper names are not held as dear by people in the present, it is unabashedly criticizing the appropriation of what was Egypt into the museums of the West as part of that Age of Empire. By treating "Masr" as something that can only be misapprehended/conquered by another (i.e. the West) and that endures every misapprehension/conquest, Ghosh is setting up a protective mechanism which

seems as essentialist as the other way of looking at Egypt, though "Masr" may denote an essence "different" from "Cairo". Could he be protecting through his history of place-name the same thing that he leaves untouched when he is silent on sexuality, yet loving strokes when he appeals to the authority of fathers? Are there some things that lie above contestation and beyond the ethical field we change by our decisions? Ethics, it seems, is not always clarifying—just do it™.

Most people come to decisions as conflict touches something important to them, something conflict is not supposed to touch. Yet we are never put in a position where we can comfortably decide how to treat Lataifa, how Lataifa is to treat us: those decisions have already been made. By locating (his) Lataifa beyond the ethical field produced through encounters, Ghosh protects it from the reach of decision and the agency of the unsympathetic decision-maker[44]. The Lataifans have had their time, we might conclude, just as ours will be over, too, perhaps too soon. Since we have a taste for Lataifa through contact that produces the ethical field, this exclusion produces the tantalizing effect of look but do not touch. Look at our humanity, but do not stare too long into the pettiness, disadvantages, and horrible emptiness of our mysticism, the everyday of our lives—at least, do not do so to the same degree you would modernity. There is further asymmetry in "knowledge" derived from such encounters. Whatever insight we learn is not taught to the "natives". Whatever decision Amitab makes, he has not decided for the people he meets. Zaghloul perhaps sees widest of them—although that view is still limited—but he has little agency. They so ridicule him that it seems farfetched any villager would take up his tolerant sentiments anytime soon. The more assertive Amitab they miss when he

leaves, but he takes care not to fundamentally alter their society (in contrast to governments and socioeconomic pressures). Such protection is in perfect keeping with guidelines for anthropological fieldwork—interfere as little as possible—except that anthropology has come to a point where it understands the observer does affect the data, the data the observer. The respect accorded to the term "Masr", the "life" of historical things, Amitab's sexual silence, the polite respect for fathers everywhere, the community based on non-economic relations, are symptoms of a desire that manifests in anthropological terms as non-interference—because those "things" are there in the village, after all—and give notice that there are incomparable core values underwriting the project. Because the symptomatic a-h *ethos* wants to spread, asking us to take as given what Ghosh's anthropology and historiography take for granted, we ought to see what hidden desired value-system it carries. If we follow the a-h *ethos*, to what have we tacitly agreed? And because any justification for deconstructing previously held notions into a field that decision then transforms is disingenuous when juxtaposed against the selective protectionism shown in the limits of Amitab's engagements, we must ask of advocates for the production of *ethos* the critical question: what is the reality of those "things" that they should be given authority to exert from "beyond" our critical ken? Who pulls them into our field, access them, decide on them?

The fact is that confrontations between "Western" ideas and their critics are often staged so one side can change the other, but not the other way around. Although criticism would seem to have eroded the authority of any episteme, projects like Postcolonialist production of *ethos* do not subject *all* concepts to invalidation, *all* signs to

[44] The real Lataifa would be that which is slowly bulldozed by modern Egypt, until it is no more.

the same inadequation. It is no different in Ghosh. Celebration of life in Lataifa and Nashawy, and nostalgia for the past (in a certain image of the past strikingly antithetical to images of imperial grandeur or national awakenings), are accompanied by anxiety about impending changes. Modern socioeconomic practices, and that always-evil phenomenon of war, pull places like Lataifa into a network of labor migration and transform the way people live. Some of the children Amitab got to know in his first stay with the fellaheens are missing when he returns eight years later. They have gone to Iraq to fill a labor force vacated by Iraqis that are now fighting Iran. At first, their families were proud of the money they sent back, and "outside" was the place to be. Now they fear for the children's safety. Iraqi soldiers returning to find that foreigners have taken their jobs are attacking them. Worse, diasporous, the Lataifans find that the meanings of life, work and community have changed—they have become "modern". The narrative's sentiment on this issue contrasts telling against its willingness—no, even stronger, its desire—to relocate other identities so that *they* may be defamiliarized and changed. Nothing about *them* is sacrosanct. We are supposed to problematize the idea of modernity in its ambition to "develop" because that sense of development, which has managed to seize Lataifans, too, leads to unwanted change; though we in the twenty-first century, from our secular locations, seem to have had enough want to have left behind that kind of world which depended on the language of ghosts and spirits and cosmopolitan gaiety to hold it together. Change *to* Lataifa is bad, the narrative deems, change *by* Lataifa is good. I do not at this point want to evaluate the morality of change, although that seems to be the place whence the producers of *ethos* come and where ethics leads us. I only want to note that an author can use an a-h *ethos* to erect "things" that

protect one set of identities or cultural matrix over another. The author has already decided. If anyone finds himself called on to object, thinking I have misrepresented Ghosh's protective, conservative tendencies in a decidedly confrontational way, he may be right. But let him also find that the production of *ethos* has to advertise itself in terms—the terms of history and historiographical limitations—that do not disclose the partisan effect it has at heart. It will be this very undisclosed difference between the regime of ethics (who is to decide based on what) and the agency of change, betrayed indirectly through the "spaces" that are created in the ethical field through which values enter "from beyond", that opens up the project of new ethics to criticism. The goal of such a project is to create a self-perpetuating, self-correcting system of representation that grants agency to people from certain camps: change by them is good; change to them bad.

knowledge and nothingness

The issues of access and synthesis may be traced back to the unknown that had initially destabilized the *status quo*. Perhaps he never grasped the thing-itself, but the synthesizers (Amitab/v and Zaghloul) still has access to the meaning of cremation because his "custom" adequately references it. It is in the terms that would satisfy acknowledgement (for something that could be fiction) where *ethos* is dictated. I admit there are things we do not know—*I* do not know. Beyond the ken of men is *not* necessarily nothing. And if induction holds true temporally, we will keep making mistakes. But that which I do not know or am wrong about, I meet on terms I can work out, decide on, scrutinize, maybe with unrelenting skepticism. Although at times I have

to take someone's word on their authority, my doctor, for instance, I try my best to disadvantage myself to as few as possible. And I get second opinions. I make the ultimate decisions. Does unknown mean unknowable? What consequences could there be if we try to be ethical *and submit* ethos *to the same rigorous examination ethics demands of its field?*

Suppose we happen upon a strange event, the cause of which we do not yet know. A straight stick appears bent when part of it is dipped in clear, standing water. A calm and reasonable reaction may be to withhold conclusion, reserve judgment and investigate further. One could admit that there is nothing more that may be confirmed than the feeling of the strangeness itself along with the observation. Of course, we have already begun guessing how and why. Some are hypotheses, some are not testable (although they sound good). Perhaps little water-nymphs mischievously bend our baton, to see what fools we mortals be, as Will says. Or the spirit of our stick—the stick-spirit—tends to be more vertical in water than in air. Or water reflects the true nature of stickhood, says a Platonists, or God looking down, for are not sticks the pathetic copy of living plants which grow upright (and they the imperfect mimesis of the εἶδος of plant)? We could ask someone else, perhaps Snell. Suppose Snell sees this bending, too, and together we repeat the "trick" with other sticks, finding the same result with every stick we try. Suppose furthermore that Snell, being no less imaginative but not captive to supernatural ideas, gives us his explanation. Are we happy with water-nymphs, since most of classical literature has "seen" them and many cultures believe in something similar? Or are we

more comforted by the ideal form of stick, because it confirms a maker of the form[45]: the stick-maker, or God, and all the meanings that *that* entails? Or maybe the cause is refraction due to changing velocity as light passes through different mediums, a cause that says nothing about water-nymphs and stickhood, but denies their authorities to stand as *the* reason our stick "bends".

Suppose we encounter another kind of bending. Sometimes stars are not where they are supposed to be, if we were to trace a direct line-of-sight between them and us in a Cartesian coordinate universe. Rene might say that there are two stars: the one we saw is now obscured; the one we see now was obscured previously. But the changing distance between the supposedly two different stars makes this explanation dissatisfying. I cannot imagine what Isaac might say. I can say now that the phenomenon elegantly confirms what has to be the revolutionary and most imaginative theory of the twentieth century. Spacetime is curved, and the light has simply traveled straight along the curvature created by immense centers of gravity. Sir Arthur, who first brought this parallax to us, knew of course that his observations confirmed Einstein's theory of relativity.

Before we go and test these various ideas, or in these instances retest them, let us contemplate approaches to the unknown—the same unknown that is always affecting our ethical field. To consider an anomaly as nothing substantial without investigating more thoroughly is close-minded foolishness. Yet is it not the same to attribute the reason for it to explanations already at hand, especially when the continual insistence that the thing is

[45] Or, in the night, imagining some fear
How easy is a bush supposed a bear.

unknowable shelters the attributions, and those who make them, from scrutiny and contestation? The anomaly may be something. It may be nothing. It may be something but nothing important. Then again, it may be nothing we have known heretofore; its importance still to be worked out. Should we not find out? Take for example an issue more controversial than bent sticks.

Suppose like Ghosh we are given testimony of ghostly interventions. What kinds of questions do we ask; what kinds are we allowed to asked; and what kinds are rhetorical—verbalized to initiate the ritual of call-and-response in which the answer is supposed to be self-evident? Zaghloul the storyteller recounts to Amitab the story of Sidi Abu-Kanaka. "The story was an old one, he said; even when he was a child there were very few people alive who had witnessed the events of that time, and they too had never seen Sidi Abu-Kanaka in the flesh: he had died long before they were born".[46] Out of respect the villagers had buried him in a special grave. When the government decided that a canal was to be built through the village, straight through the graveyard, the workmen found that they could not dig past the tomb of Sidi Abu-Kanaka. When they opened the tomb, "the people who had gathered there saw for themselves, what they would never have believed otherwise: that the Sidi's body was still whole and incorrupt, and that instead of being affected by the decay of time, it was giving off a beautiful, perfumed smell" (139). The faithful concluded that the Sidi had protected the village. Ustaz Sabry, another teacher like Ustaz Mustafa, regarded the story with incredulity. 'This is the story that people tell here,' Ustaz Sabry said to me [Amitab], as I scribbled furiously in my notebook. 'You see how the fellaheen can thwart the government when

they choose…' (140). Years later, while tracking down the possible name of the slave in Mangalore, Amitab encounters a similar story from his taxi driver, in which, too, a respected spirit protected a village from government-enforced technical progress. The Indian driver asks his fare if the latter had ever heard of such a marvelously unique story. The similarity of the two stories connects the two places, of course, but on an order that need not have filled out their specific meaning—cultural "understanding" by resemblance. What matters the shape of the tomb, the composition of the ground, eye-witness testimony, government work orders, the actual merits of the persons? It is necessary only to comprehend and appreciate that the stories hold meaning *for some others as real as we*. And if we continue to pursue the specific meaning of each, to investigate the ghost or spirit, we find that it keeps getting deferred: for Zaghloul and the taxi driver are only repeating as fact something they themselves have never empirically confirmed: for the reality referenced by the story is a past only some others, presumably indexed by an indeterminate "they", could have lived. The issue here is clearly land ownership. The ghost of Abu-Kanaka exemplifies the Postcolonial unknown encountered in the field of the other: its reality is already determined by decisions already made where the Postcolonial has stakes. If the reality of the ghost is tested, and the ghost was found to be a fiction, or a lie, then the discursive instrument goes away. Even if the expression were interpreted as defiance in the signifying systems of peasants, it would not necessarily signifying "lost ownership" as authoritatively as property titles or arguments of immanent domain: it would not say that the fellaheens have some secret and deep attachment to the land which, like cremation for Hindus, must be appreciated, even

[46] *In an Antique Land* 138

respected. If a theory of ghost were subjected to the same invalidation as a theory of gravity, then where there was already little physical power, there would be little authority to stop bulldozers.

I want to entertain a major philosophical distinction between the scientific unknown and the Postcolonial unknowns that "bend" decisions in the ethical field, because the latter appear to be more like a known/belief in the guise of an unknown. I do this fully acknowledging Bruno Latour's critique that, contrary to how we think it objective, science is just as mediated as any other kind of knowledge is mediated. Its objects are no different from ghosts. I am not trying to get at the thing-itself, but I base my distinctions on two concepts which Latour glosses over: differences in mediation, and different degrees of mediation. Latour's repeated attempts to elevate the authority of certain kinds of objects *and* increase the authority of new mediators suggest as much. Furthermore, if one does not admit the differences of type and degree, then one cannot judge socialism superior to colonialism without being hypocritical. If there is no difference, why change? By analyzing the different approaches to aporias and the hypothetical unknown causes, each of us can decide for ourselves to which mediation (or philosophy) we want, or against which we would not fight, *to the extent that those who intervene have decided for themselves and for us*; we can limit how mediating structures, like socialism or religious organizations, or even historiography, are deployed, the inscrutable "unknowns" to which their users can hold us accountable; and we guard against the establishment or maintenance of a superstructure of Mediation that makes it difficult to do the previous two tasks.

Let us designate the unknown of science "X_s" and the unknown of literature "X_l". X_p is the unknown in Postcolonial literature. The Xs are the "objects" of their respective desires. We move to the world of Xs in order to find the "fulfillment" of our hypothesis. There we can test and confirm or invalidate Snell's law, test and confirm or invalidate Relativity. And if you think you have an X_s, I, too, should be able to confirm or invalidate your relationship with it. Otherwise, X_s is only "X_s", something that exists only on paper. X_l may never be tested. How are we to ever confirm "eternal summer", or "the slave of MS H.6", as real, or even more real than real, except by accepting the mode of literary proof given by the respective authors. This is not to say that X_s is radically new, and X_l always old, built out of several universal tropes. Relativity originates (dialectically, we might say) out of research into mechanics and E&M. And who can only guess at all the influences that contributed to the making of T.S. Eliot's unimaginable zero summer? Neither are the objects of science and literature steadfastly separate. In the history of science there are many instances when contemporary prejudices "reshaped" unknowns in the image of knowns, and human scientists refuse to submit to the authority of shockingly counterintuitive or even profane observations. For a span of time, Newton was the god of physics, having revealed God's universal laws, and any attempt to prove Liebniz's equation that $e=mv^2$ was considered heretical. Even Einstein viewed quantum mechanics incredulously, famously exclaiming that God does not play dice in response to the uncertainty inherent to how we can know the universe described by the theory[47]. What matters most for our meditation is how X_s organizes the

[47] No third party attributes to uncertain X_s the claim "do not develop your technology that oppresses me with velocity and position".

field of science, X_l the field of literature, and X_p the field of Postcolonial production of *ethos*. Thus when travel brings us to an unknown, I am not questioning its radical newness. The benign familiarity of these unknown, though, should arouse suspicion. Certain barriers to investigation, like the problem of translation, set the skeptical mind to work. Why make this particular idea inaccessible to translation? I want to distinguish the willingness of those who would speak of or for X to entertain radical imagination *and* suffer that imagination to public methods of invalidation, from the rather priestly prerogative of creating meaning and protecting the structure of power by mystifying specific meanings. In other words, I, the experimenter and critic, am gauging the writer's reaction as I try to pour acid on his X? Moreover, I ask, is there a tendency to reserve judgment or immediately jump to a greater order of meaning? Is it a retrovirus that attacks cells of the human immune system, and/or confirmation of God's petty favoritism?

Writers of literary X do not want X to be radically unknown or ultimately unknowable; and Postcolonial literature, as statements about lived-experience from certain locations issued to the public, has definitely staged its X to teach something *to be acted upon as knowledge*. How often do we hear modern writers lament that we have no more mystery in the world. This suggests that for some, mystery is a rapidly declining way of seeing the world that is, like old-growth forests, in need of conservation. Mystery needs to be put back, reseeded. Why the unknown needs to be institutionalized is interesting; but the more telling question to ask is how has demystification—if such an event has actually happened—made certain people anxious to return Mystery to public prominence and authority. After all, gods and angels had their time, and the

cosmopolitanism of the slave can still be found, albeit as a story of the past, or in some peasant village being antiquated by domineering moderns. I have made the above comparison to science simply to highlight the theatrics of encountering X in literature, of which the audience may not be conscious: for the man who travels to a strange world (or stranger's world) looking for the slave of MS H.6 has staged his findings at a level akin to the man who wanders into the desert looking for god has already staged his conversations. Wandering the ethical field in which others have had a hand, let us be more skeptical of what we are supposed to find.

The fields in which we ask "how do I live?" are shaped by several different "forces" which are not necessarily "natural" to it[48]. It is often presented as having an inherent intelligence, an order that looks suspiciously moral, idealistic, sometimes otherworldly, that fulfills the wish of some other, and it is held "together" by these points of resemblances which supposedly have an untranslatable depth of meaning to them. Again, this is not a critique of determinism. Speaking in terms of an ethical field and decision, we have already acknowledged the existential limits to "choice": the chooser is inexorably incompatible to the field of his choices, having to choose; and the idea of absolute freedom is a construction—freedom from what?—philosophically untenable[49]. Whether revealed or constructed by an author, the field is mediated. The a-h ethical field from *In An Antique Land* passes from the hands of Amitav Ghosh: its intelligence commingled with his desires, its motion with his fears. Although he is not asking us to occupy a specific field, the site of Amitab's study and decision-making, Ghosh is making

[48] Since I brought up relativity and quantum mechanics, I should really stop using the antiquated idea of "force". Even in Newtonian mechanics, force is really just the proportion between mass and acceleration.

a case (albeit as such cases can be made when one writes literature) for us to find our own way by ethical analogy, by confronting strange, new worlds—new to you, Prospero says. In other words, he is not trying to turn Lataifa, Nashawy, and Mangalore into the new tourist destinations. How else does he do so but get us to desire an object of history by producing both desire and object. We should pursue the meaning of our "slaves of MS H.6" *in the way that he has Amitab pursue his*. The slave is precisely the unknown that organizes the ethical and the historical. History promises meaning, and *ethos* shows us the way. And what does history promise *In An Antique Land*? What is produced by following the a-h *ethos*? The slave, of course. Ironically, this makes us a slave to history—or the slave of the scholar of the slave of MS H.6—because when we believe that history can show us answers to the defining ethical question (which it asks), we abide then by the authority of him who can "speak history". It seems as though, if only we knew who this slave was, we would know the world better, act better in the world; and so we ask someone in possession of the secret. Ethics in this respect is *the desire to pursue such "things"* as the slave of MS H.6, as given by the social anthropologist, and have them "complete" what is missing in us and missing from our conception of the world. The criticism against the production of *ethos*, then, after we have found traces of these unnatural "forces" in our ethical field, is not about mediation *per se*, but concerns the structure of authority that allows someone, maybe anyone, to apparently access the unknown "other" and surreptitiously, perhaps deleteriously, change us to fit the supreme intelligence—the Superunknown—without having to go through the ethical field where

[49] But of course we will not cease from pursuing it.

he may be subjected to scrutiny, even disbelief. We should detect that there is something sinister in an author that bypasses the very network to which he brings us traveling.

There is tension between history and historiography, felt stronger the more we doubt, a tension that pivots on the X_p, and stems from seemingly incompatible authority of judgment. In one moment the writer of X notifies us of his discovery. X defies what we thought it to have been. From this, we are to conclude that our way of looking at things, the episteme that identifies X, is inadequate; for, to borrow a phrase, there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our/your[50] philosophy. Nevertheless, irreverent scrutiny reveals that there is one who does know what X is and is not, one capable of discerning better than we the X that is supposed to elude apprehension. This new knowledge momentarily surfaces after a period of inadequacy. The slave of MS H.6, for instance, is supposed to be obscured by dearth of evidence. His emergence into history was an accident, an incidental valuation of the document by a scholar in search of something else (i.e. the history of Medieval Jews). The reconstructed life of the slave is a consequence of Amitab's experience. He is a product of Amitab's existential condition, and his ethical imagination. Yet his history, which is also the History that makes sense of him and value him as more significant than anonymous afterthought, or nothing, can speak from the traditional all-seeing vantage, judging *us* to be inadequate. Inadequation entails something "real" beyond our present world-view, but we are not to take that reality which has been constructed by historiography. Amitab's product becomes the slave's life, just as the story of Zaghloul's imagination becomes the

Sidi's ghost. Ghosh's point, of course, is not to determine with exacting rigor and conclusively the reality of the slave. His accomplishment is that he gets us—some of us—to *pursue* the figure of the slave, think its meaning is to be had, notwithstanding critical reservations. As with the object of history, X_p has not been talked about in order to decide what it is. Instead, it organizes the debate between the various points-of-view, one that would make "the slave" a structure of writing, and another that believes it can know the historical referent, rendering each inadequate in-and-of-itself. The inadequacy of the old allows the writer to orchestrate a third way of *treating* $X_{p.}$—again, the ontology of X_p is supposed to remain obscure and speculative. The new treatment does not explicitly provide a third category for that which the orchestration has been using to "inadequate" other ideas. It is a productive tension, the same way that we use springs to create oscillating motions and keep time; but its proponents would claim that what inadequation produces is not a synthesis like that which has been inadequated. Whatever it really is, the resultant compromise organized around X feels more staged and forced the more we doubt. For, are we not already pulled into a network, at the center of which is an unstated cause, when we overthrow the authority of what-is (or now-what-was) for that of the speakers of inscrutable X?

The calculus of X, which revalues all that we know, has even structured a place from which a supposedly unknown X comes. The intervention of this other "place" is further evidence that, for all the problems raised by looking at history as structures we built, the new order giving meaning and value to X (whether it is the slave of MS H.6, or

[50] Depending on which text is master. The difference can actually take us to very different interpretations: is Hamlet a rationalist or the addressee trying to resist subjectivization; or an analysand coming to terms with

Lataifa, or cosmopolitan gaiety) must treat X as though it were not just human invention; and must get us to do the same. I am being figurative, to be sure, but only to mimic the figurative language that is history. Real things disappear into this strange realm called "anonymity", where their value is temporarily saved so that they can be redeemed. This is what has happened to "Nabeel". Reciprocally, dead things, historical things, often come from beyond and are realized in the ethical field. "The slave of MS H.6 first stepped onto the stage of modern history in 1942"[51]. "It was not until 1942, the very summer when Khalaf's letter slipped quietly into twentieth-century print, that the Middle East again saw so great and varied a gathering of foreigners"[52]. From where? From the archive.

the archive, the structure of the unconscious, and the production of historical *ethos*

The archive is and is not new. Likewise the things it holds, though some such as are represented as yet-unknown, and go missing once in a while. An archive is a repository of important documents to which the scholar can turn again and again for knowledge. In both literal and figurative ways, archives grant access to the past. Looking at MS H.6, one looks directly at something the past produced. Still, one can only grasp the artefact, not the past itself, and certainly not all of history; that requires an act of the mind. There are many different archives, each with different scopes and purposes. Although each is limited by available material and resources like money and space, the common and collective collecting ambition of archives is to contain as much as

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what he already, subconsciously, knows. These differences are echoed throughout the present document.

[51] *In An Antique Land* 13

possible for as long as possible, so that posterity can look back both comprehensively and chronologically. Archives promise that history is to be found within them; on this promise were they founded and are they maintained. Furthermore, they allow us to check the historian's work, so that anyone (theoretically, that is) can expose the historian's transformation of the primary text or write history from the same method. The public function is eminently modern, and distinguishes modern historiography from, say, the ecclesiastical historiography of Medieval monks with privileged access to language, scrolls, and the authority of the church[53]. The difference in how the writing may be accessed and assessed may mean a difference in the historys themselves (although the modern requirement of verification may be able to discriminate, too). This work will also be housed in an archive, perhaps a few, and in some of those possibly a few shelves down from the fiction it studies. Which archive houses it depends on its historical importance. Or is it the other way around? Actually, since archives are finite and make decisions about their collections, yet work by representing themselves as merely housing already significant evidence, they could very well determine what is history; this in addition to the fact that the historian makes similar decisions. Failure to apprehend the dialect between material and promise can produce several fallacies.

One fallacy is that history must be archived. For one thing, the notion fails to contemplate the possibility that history may not care if humans have instruments like the archive to know it. For another, it ignores the fact that an archive cannot contain history-itself, only artifacts and evidence; like the previous reason, there has been a failure to ask

[52] Ibid. 14
[53] The work of the venerable Bede comes to mind.

"what is history?" Another fallacy is that anything represented as having come from an archive, anything that cites products of the past, must be history; this ignores the limits of the archive, and the speculative and interpretive methods of the historian, the possibility that he is lying. Making the mistake of the second fallacy leads to the correlative falsehood that propositions must be meaningful to you and me because they have been reasoned from material in *our* archive. It would be as if one had to live with the changes to one's living area by a decorator who has rearranged things, throwing out some and "updating" others. The new arrangement, however fabulous, remains to be tested; the proposed history remains to be tested, too. Actually, these mistakes should not occur if we really understood how archives are made and history is written. The archive theoretically exists as and for the historian to do his work, and becomes apprehensible, perhaps changeable, when the historians' work is questioned[54]. Ghosh himself introduces the difference of differences by treating history as historiography. We ought not make those mistakes if we learn how the Cairo genizah ended up in the Cambridge University Library, and how one of its documents is redeemed by the new humanist historian as MS H.6. Conceived as a repository for documents, from religious poetry to the Book of Wisdom (what becomes the New Testament book *Ecclesiastes*), that should not be trivially thrown away because they mention the name of god, the genizah accidently carried signs forward into the future as they fell into disuse: It was a trash pit.

Ghosh spends a great deal of resources talking about the pit into which Medieval Jewish communities deposited their useless documents. Religious rules forbade throwing out documents that bore the name of God. Genizot housed "named" documents

[54] A Heideggerian observation.

(*shemots*) that were no longer needed; the documents in the genizah at the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo survived to be discovered at the turn of the twentieth century by the Cambridge professor of rabbinical studies Solomon Schechtor[55]. Of course, I may have written that the documents *cannot* be destroyed, but that statement would have naturalized the rules governing holy names. They can certainly be destroyed. Also, while I write "discovered", I have mitigated the discomfort I feel about the word's imperialist connotations with the fact that modern scholarship made the Cairo genizah what it is today, and what it already is in Ghosh's novel. The meaning of the genizah is founded on the sacred. The sacred marked these documents, keeping them important (if in a different way) well after their secular utility had passed. But the genizah is *not* the archive. It becomes an archive after "discovery" by modern scholars. And the modern scholar Amitav Ghosh, well on his way to earning a doctorate from Oxford, discovers the slave of MS H.6 in the archive *constructed* from appropriating the material of the Cairo genizah. If you are discomforted by the idea of Europeans discovering The New World, why would you not feel the same about Ghosh's discovery of the central figures of his brave new—old—world? There has been a change in meaning. The slave is important (to Ghosh) for his ability to carry humanism and cultural tolerance to the past as qualities *in* the past. He was not so important to his contemporaries, who did not document him beyond throwaway gossip and wage receipt. The tracings of him—e.g. MS H.6—were not being archived at the time.

[55] "The Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collection is a priceless accumulation of centuries-old Hebrew manuscript material and Judaica, recovered from the Cairo Genizah in 1896-97. It has occupied a place of honour among the literary treasures of the University of Cambridge for more than a century and is housed at Cambridge University Library." <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/Taylor-Schechter/Collection.html> accessed 05 July 2006

At the same time, we ought to explore why we may substitute the Cairo genizah for the archive, and *vice versa*, so uncomplicatedly; why Ghosh follows the scholars Schechter and Goitein into "it". Perhaps the genizah already has that something which builders of archives are trying to capture themselves: call it power; the sacred; perhaps the sense of community structured by religion that got men together to build synagogues in which genizots would be a specially designated space, and that kept them together through rituals of worship. The modern archive—for example, the libraries of Cambridge—and the genizah have similar semiotic structures. The documents in both bear the respective imprimatur of that which not only found depository but dictates what is to be done. That authority keeps us from destroying the documents. You can see the modern presence of value in the reactions you would provoke as you try to set fire to historical documents. Both genizah and archive are constituted by their respective transcendental signifiers, which "being" is confirmed by the rules that govern the use of names and the documents bearing them. The great and telling difference between medieval Judaism and modern historiography, is that genizot held useless documents until they may be properly destroyed, while the historiographic archive holds, in theory, documents the significance of which awaits "resurrection". Perhaps it is this difference of the same structure which allows historians to substitute the name of the sacred, and perhaps the rules of human relation. Could this be the small yet ever so important difference between religion and history? To forget the difference that emerges from my deliberately profane representation of the "sacred" things in the previous paragraph, to forget that the tracings of the slave were not being archived at the time, but could be easily represented as though they were, is to unduly authorize the historian, sanction her

desires, and facilitate the unconsidered transformation of rules that constitute the sacrosanct. We can frustrate this act by returning to the archive, and by recognizing the basic value differences between the archives of plundering colonialists and humanist anthropologists, and the material they contain.

Other "animations" from the Taylor-Schechter Genizah collection include the use of medicines;[56] legal studies of Islamic laws[57]; the voice of the naked and the poor then and now, or how to appreciate the "unexpected cross-cultural and world-historical features of poverty and charity);[58] the education of children;[59] the extent of the silk trade;[60] and many more.

The archive turns trash to truth. It is troubling that there seems to be obstructions to deploying the reciprocal function for alternate (read: my) purposes: can we not just archive the latest historiography, the latest "truth" of cosmopolitanism, as it did its predecessors or contemporaries (e.g. modernity)? To question these hidden regulations, we need to learn how to repurpose the function of the archive.

Post-War French historians, beginning with Fernand Braudel, and the *Annales* school, formulated a modern concept of the archive. The archive was a construct of the new kind of historiography. Historians were reacting to narrative history typified by

[56] Efraim Lev, Zohar Amar. "Reconstructing the inventory of material medica used by members of the Jewish community of medieval cairo according to prescriptions found in the Taylor-Schechter Genizah collection, Cambridge". *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*. 108.3 (2006): 428 – 444.
[57] Hassan S. Khalilieh. "Legal Aspects from a Cairo Geniza Responsum on the Islamic Law of the Sea: Practice and Theory". *Jewish Quarterly Review*. 96.2 (2006): 180 – 202.
[58] Mark R. Cohen. "Feeding the Poor and Clothing the Naked: The Cairo Geniza". *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. 35.3 (2005): 407 – 421.
[59] Judith Olszowy-Schlanger. "Learning to Read and Write in Medieval Egypt: Children's Exercise Books From the Cairo Geniza". *Journal of Semitic Studies*. 48.1 (2003): 47 – 69.
[60] Moshe Gil. "References to Silk in Geniza Documents of the Eleventh Century A.D.". *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*. 61.1 (2002): 31 – 39.

Ranke, Burckhardt, Fustel de Coulanges, "Michelet above all",[61] which professed to tell things as they really happened. The history of World War II is the story of the rise of Hitler. The history of colonialism is the narrative of how New Delhi was built. In narrative history, "the life of men is dominated by dramatic accidents, by the actions of those exceptional beings who occasionally emerge, and who often are the masters of their own fate and even more of ours".[62] The narratives offer "a gleam but no illumination; facts but no *humanity*".[63] Social history is inadequate, too, for it is in "danger of forgetting, perhaps even of denying, the inimitable essence of each individual".[64] To meet the "formidable but challenging responsibilities"[65] of historiography—i.e. to ethicize history—Braudel proposed "a ponderous history"[66] (under the principle that no history can be self-contained) that examines life over the *longue durée*[67], set in contradistinction against the history of events. The historiographical concept is counterintuitive.

> So, to put things more clearly, let us say that instead of events, we would speak of a short time span, proportional to individuals, to daily life, to our illusions, to our hasty awareness—above all the time of the chronicle and the journalist. Now, it is worth noting that side by side with great and, so to speak, historic events, the chronicle or the daily paper offers us all the mediocre accidents of ordinary life: a fire, a railway crash, the price of

[61] Fernand Braudel. *On History*.
[62] Ibid. 11
[63] Ibid. 11 emphasis mine.
[64] Ibid. 20
[65] Ibid. 6
[66] Ibid. 12
[67] Ibid. 27

> wheat, a crime, a theatrical production, a flood. It is clear, then, that there is a short time span which plays a part in all forms of life, economic, social, literary, institutional, religious, even geographical (a gust of wind, a storm), just as much as political.[68]

What Braudelian history does is seek out the structures of human life, not to archive them, but to reanimate from the archive of structures the human being and recover from the great catastrophes of history[69] essential humanity. The everyday routines are important not for their magnitude but their endurance. The historian picks and chooses from "chronological realities" of the past[70] to allegorize the human *in* time. This human, then, can stand in the historian's own time. The purpose of this "ponderous history" of the *longue durée* is—not surprising given mid-twentieth century French thought dominated by Sartre—to unburden us of history's great traumas by recovering the concept of the human from the inadequation of human actions. Understanding the limits of the past opens the future for the present. Implicitly this is the tenor of what has to be done with the historian's archive of structures.

> The second and far more useful key consists in the word *structure*. For good or ill, this word dominates the problems of the *longue durée*. By *structure,* observers of social questions mean an organization, a coherent and fairly fixed series of relationships between realities and social masses. For us historians, a structure is of course a construct, an architecture, but

[68] Ibid. 28

[69] Braudel laments, "What an endless century [the nineteenth century] has been, indeed, leaving its bloody mark on Europe and on the whole world," and grieves, "Our age [the first half of the twentieth century] is only too rich in catastrophes and revolutions, dramas and surprises". (7)

> over and above that it is a reality which time uses and abuses over long periods. Some structures, because of their long life, become stable elements for an infinite number of generations: they get in the way of history, hinder its flow, and in hindering it shape it. Others wear themselves out more quickly. But all of them provide both support and hindrance. As hindrances they stand as limits ("envelopes," in the mathematical sense) beyond which man and his experience cannot go. Just think of the difficulties of breaking out of certain geographical frameworks, certain biological realities, certain limits of productivity, even particular spiritual constraints: mental frameworks too can form prisons of the *longue durée*.[71]

Like the sacred name of God, the human, the Human, that which stands "free" of "geographical frameworks, certain biological realities, certain limits of productivity, even particular spiritual constraints", marks the documents of Braudel's archive. The archive holds his "parts" together until the historian reanimates him in the forms demanded by and suitable for his time[72]. Thus, the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, 1945 may be an event in time, but it is not history. Rather, we ought to tell history from those long running structures disrupted and/or transformed by "Little Boy" and "Fat Man". A history of the twentieth century, then, may tell how, well into the

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[70] Ibid. 28
[71] Ibid. 31
[72] Braudel opens the seminal paper "The Situation of History in 1950" with: "'History is the child of its time.' So its preoccupations are the same as those which weigh on our own hearts and minds. And should its methods, its projects, those answers which only yesterday seemed so rigorous and dependable, should all its concepts suddenly collapse, it would be from the weight of our own thinking, our own study, and, most of all, the experiences we have undergone. (6)

twenty-first century, the Japanese continue to produce and consume in manga and anime various visions of utopian regeneration after apocalyptic destruction[73]. History is a story of how humans structure their lives to deal with events great and small. The archive of the *longue durée* contains the structures out of which the historian conjures the existential human. The real limits, and so the authoritative domain of the archive, is not time, but meaning. When Ghosh wanders through the archives of material, he is tautologically trying to find patterns of the same.

Braudel's archive is open-ended. The *longue durée* is only a historiographic perspective on how to constitute the kind of ponderous history that would assuage a century traumatized by catastrophes. That the archive is never meant to be completed is evident in Braudel's measured criticism of Maximilien Sorre's *Les Bases biologiques de la géographie humaine: Essai d'une écologie de l'homme*.[74] While Braudel admires the book, he criticizes Sorre's reductionism. Actually, the critic is ambivalent about his own critique. Braudel recognizes the necessity of reducing man to biology and geography for the purpose of study; yet he is sure that the reduction must be contextualized such that the fullness of the human being and the splendid complexities of his societies are reaffirmed. "Geographers know well that geography (like history) is a very unfinished science, much

[73] Probably the most famous from the genre is Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira*. The boy Akira had great power. Unable to control it, he destroys Tokyo, and starts WWIII. After WWIII, he is put in cryogenic stasis. The narrative takes place in neo-Tokyo after Akira's pacification, and chronicles how another boy Tetsuo comes to manifest the same kind of destructive psychokinetic powers Akira had once possessed. In a familiar limiting step, Tetsuo's power drives him mad; he grows into a monstrously powerful and powerfully monstrous organism that threatens to annihilate neo-Tokyo. Akira awakens; absorbs Tetsuo's powers, reducing him thereby to a human boy again; saves neo-Tokyo; and remakes the world. In the anime version, conventional power takes the forms of guns and tanks, police and soldiers; monstrous power is organic, shapeless, ever-growing, and all-consuming, like a malignant tumor—it manifests as Tatsuo's right arm; and apocalyptic power is the bright heart and billowy shape of an exploding atom bomb.

[74] "Is There A Geography of Biological Man?" *On History*.

more unfinished than the other social sciences. Perhaps even as unfinished as history itself, that other ancient adventure of the intellect".[75] "Geography seems to me, in its totality, to be the spatial study of society, or to take my thoughts to their conclusion, the study of society through space".[76] Because in his reduction Sorre excludes social man, he has excluded a determinant, i.e. society, in his human history. The more appropriate method, according to Braudel, must account for both the social and geographical environments, and the student. But the importance of the critique of reduction for Braudel is not to make men into the instrument of another force, to substitute society for weather, soil condition, proximity to water, etc., so much as it is to indirectly validate the agency implied when we learn that we are leaning the structures (social and geographical) of human existence. The implication of Braudel's argument is that if the concept of biological man is reductionist, then there must be a "more complete" man (that which was reduced); if existence is reduced to structures, then there must be life beyond signs. Notice how the limitation of method actually opens up the concept of "study" and by extension the "student". In turning "the spatial study of society" to the "study of society through space", Braudel renders geography, and presumably any other specialization, including history, inadequate to the plentitudinous idea of study; furthermore, grants greater autonomy to the object of study, since geography cannot understand society or man, comprising only one field of study looking for a limited list of structures, and an unspecified plenitude to the student. "Study" seems to always desire breaking out of established frameworks, and to be engaged in such studies means to have

[75] Ibid 114
[76] Ibid 115

already entered into relation with the object in a certain, predetermined way, its inscrutable fullness evident in the inadequacy of our specialized fields of knowledge. This is the essence of humanism. The premise that historically related structures are disseminated across disciplinary fields puts Braudel somewhere in the middle of that history of structuralism which runs from Claude Levi-Straus to Michel Foucault.

The Cairo genizah contained history in a sense by accident. The history modern scholars make from the genizah is *not* the sense of marking and marked time of the people who organized themselves around the synagogues into which attic or basement they threw the stuff that becomes their historical remains. In fact, some thinkers view the increasing influence of the idea of historical consciousness, epitomized so well in twentieth century scholarship on the genizah, as the religion's westernization[77]. To this Western sense of history I would add historiographical consciousness, in which history is subordinated to human agency and limitation. The idea of Genizah scholarship is ironic, in the sense that the intent suggested by the word genizah, Hebrew for "hidden place", meets its antithesis in the scholar's act of recovery, reconstitution, and publication. It is a rather vampiric desire to live according to the message of these reanimate dead (even if they are reconfigured into new things). And like the vampire's bite, the latter thing has transformed the former into one of its kind. Modern scholarship plays hide and seek with the past through the genizah archive. There is further irony. The difference in the motive of depositors to that of scholars ironically reveals something about the nature of the historiographic archive which plays such a large part in the kind of history Ghosh is

[77] Ismar Schorsch. *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism.* University Press of New England. 1995.

trying to write. *Shemots* belong to a system of meaning, at the center of which is the Name found on all *shemots* that make them what they are. "Evidence" has been preserved for modern history because another order had given them value—and not as historical evidence. The Omnipresence of the Name is familiar. If a similar kind of preservation-value were to be found attached to things in our historical archive, can we not suppose that an analogous "sacred" authority has underwritten those values; has marked all of the things of the archive with its name? After all, the sacredness of the fragments in the historiographic archive is the meaning they once had for some other, though modern archivists would probably only admit (doing so self-critically, of course) to the god-like powers of curators, universities, governments, and other agents of culture, perhaps ideology, or even Capitalism.

Discursively—that is, to the point of view profane to both—the archive which

> appropriates the material from the Cairo genizah is very much like the genizah: they both contain always already sacred things. Steven M. Wasserstrom begins a paper delivered to the third congress of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies by comparing his feelings for Schechter with Keats's for Homer.[78] Already we see that an archive can lend itself to worshipful construction: the vaults of the Vatican, the glass cases in the U.S. Library of Congress. Wasserstrom belongs to that school of archeologists who want to recover "magic" in the archive. Wasserstrom's reason is, ostensibly, that recent and present-day scholarship from Schechter to Joseph Dan (who wrote an article on magic in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*), in disregarding magic as unimportant

[78] "The Magical Texts in the Cairo Genizah." *Genizah research after ninety years: The Case of Judaeo-Arabic Studies.* Eds. Blau, Joshua. Stefan C. Reif. Cambridge:Cambridge U.P. 1992. 160.

because of their own feelings about it, erroneously missed that magic was integral to the historical community. Yet, like much of the scholarship on recovery, there are times when the critic seems to be criticizing the present ideologies which do not care for that which it considers superannuated (like magic), a critique that neglects the different responsibilities of scholarship, and the various ways we learn how we live. It certainly tries to pass off the object of scholarship as evidence of beings to which we are in the present responsible. Just because *they* lived in magic does not mean we ought to ourselves. Are there not differences between magic as magic to believers, magic as cultural practice improperly overlooked in the study of culture, and magic as the *next* method to integrate a *new* community? The objects in the archive from which such "alternative" histories are written now bear a mark of the sacred similar to that on which is written the name of God. While it is true that Schechter and Dan missed the mark, what they failed to adequately describe are the communities they studied, and the history they were trying to write. What has the fact that beings in history once believed in magic (without testing magic, to be sure) to do with us, who have seen the failings of history, have learned more and learned to test everything? Is it the responsibility of modernity to contain everything, the way that the historiographical archive is presupposed to contained? Ah, we glimpse here a possible shift in responsibilities, which indicates the production of *ethos*. Because Ghosh and so many other writers (including many other Postcolonial writers who have to deal with past cultural upheaval and) use the strategy of loss-and-found to/in history, we need to identify the structures for shifting responsibilities, which include individual "fragments" made incomparable, invaluable by an unique mark and the

projection of a whole-in-making which may be impossible to complete. Wasserstrom concludes by comparing the worship of Schechtor by scholars of the Genizah to a magical act.[79]

Ghosh uses the world projected/deduced from the Cairo genizah, with anthropological eyes, and humanist *ethos*, to give his inscrutably human X local habitation and a name. Where is X in relation to this open-ended archive; furthermore to our ethical field? Well, if X were the slave of MS H.6, then X comes directly from the suddenly expanded archive. At least, the slave of MS H.6 does so in its *historiographical thingness*, *qua* that from which history is written. If one were to chronicle the emergence of the slave into modern history, one would have to talk about the Cairo Genizah, Solomon Schechter, and Cambridge University Library, exactly as Ghosh does to open the novel. A scholar works on the archive to put the slave of MS H.6 into history, which is to say, put that history into the present. The archive allows us to know what had been unknown—but was there to be known. It holds the objects that are already pregnant with meaning. Yet, once we are introduced to X, X seems to take over, and we leave the archive for history proper. Relations are changed. The slave gets a name. He is no longer one of innumerably many. And obviously he cannot be "reduced" to nothing. We might ask, "whereto has the archive receded, which had been so important for preserving and bringing back the past, when the slave is no longer 'it' but 'he'?" but the question misses the mark ever so slightly. The archive has not gone anywhere. Historiography and history are humanistic bedfellows in this politics. The former has not gone anywhere

[79] The cultivation of worshipful responsibility to the hero of oppression through magical histories will be discussed in chapter 3.

at the instance of the latter. The structure of the archive preserves the individuality and individual worth of the things it contains. If X is derived therefrom, X is incomparable[80]. X is real. There is a document of the slave. The little village in Egypt never disappears in the value system produced by global market competition. Something there is that recognizes the village's value in-itself; *that* is the archive. The historiographer's archive exists *for* history and for the construction of X. At the same time, history is *in* the archive, but not of it. History has to be known through writing, but the historiography is not to be read like any of the other texts it cites and uses. It is odd this knowledge might be forgotten, though it had been important to understanding the discursive power of canon formation. It is odd that it be forgotten in *In An Antique Land* even as it is introduced. It is odd that this knowledge has to be forgotten in order for the Archive to reassure.

In drawing a slightly ill-fitted comparison between the genizah and the modern archives, which are both alike and not, I am trying to characterize the collection of past material in a way that makes it possible to question the veracity of that which has been "found", as it represents itself. Liken the archive to a collection of signs. The Archive is that which readies material for signification, by assuring that meaning is "out there". The purpose of suspending all signifiers above the depth of meaning is to figure out, all signs being equal, the combinatorial significance of the different elements that gets erased

[80] Incomparability should be distinguished from identity as a different though related desire. Identities are exchangeable, like capitalism's currency. Thus I can substitute one peasant for another peasant, and another critic can substitute for me. Incomparability is a concept meant to prevent such exchanges by positing an inscrutable uniqueness. Think of it as the special characteristic of a mother's ideal love for her children, for she loves each the same and never more than the others; yet also loves each beyond compare and never divides her love like she may divide their inheritance. Think of it, too, as how humans wish to be loved by the monotheist personal god.

when we plunge headlong into meaning. Why this character, that plot, these vices, those virtues, and such an ending? So, too, should the stuff of the archive be loosened from what has already been made from it (e.g. Ghosh's slave) and what is lost to it (e.g. Ghosh's Nabeel), though ethics requires taking them seriously. Braudelian history determines its archive, not the other way around; yet to understand Braudel's writing *as history* requires forgetting this, the historiography complication. There is a similar forgetfulness in the "imaginary" of a historical slave's human life, and further selective forgetting when we enter into the field of ethics. The critical investigation of how a writer like Ghosh populates the field of ethics should extend beyond adding interpretations that end up confirming the unknown-now-known. It should seriously consider questions that change, or restore, various relations *to* the archive (not from it) and to those who back and forth from it to the real world. One may be: is there an archive for every X, such that other archival stuff do not dilute the power of the particular figure to affect the present, and the "absence" of material is contained as something on which to focus our attention instead of nothing[81]? As a historian of the *longue durée* seeks patterns for an archive that evidence the human figure it seeks to reaffirm, so does Ghosh seek material, both documents and other historical things deduced therefrom, that evidence the human figure central to the field of ethics.

Perhaps the nature of the archive and historical consciousness, and of the transformation marked grammatically by changing from "it" to "he" (and certain "he's" to "it"), can be gleamed from the methodological abstinence and familiar unknown

[81] Instead of nothing producing no material to be contained by anything.

detected at the limits of the ethical field, the places to which Amitab, as he moves into position to write history, care not or dare not venture. Let us say that abstinence is a refusal to add sex to the archive, leaving it "outside". The "unknown" renders the archive incomplete, again presuming an outside. These places, topics, and values that do not belong to ethics, do not wholly belong to the archive either (which is supposed to contain everything). That is to say, sexual practices never get added to the collection (can they not be collated under the heading "custom"); and a woman's body is not like vellum, a thing of the archive testifying to the meanings held dear by a society. One can say that sex and women, already outside the archive, are never subjected to the process of being estranged, turned into evidence and turned back again into life's meaning under the direction of the historian. Nabeel, modern counterpart to the slave of MS H.6 *qua* unerased historical being, is also excused from deconstruction and reconstitution. He is always "he", and the threat is that modernity turns him into an "it", a migrant laborer, before relegating him to "anonymity". The complication is that avoidance and protection *makes* him|it part of the archive, partitions in which create the different modes.

X is the poetic figure, a being of history and force of ethics. Poetics, in particular the trope of loss-and-found, allows the writer to construct a figure that is "more" than that which may be attributable by contemporaneous thoughts or behavior, yet sufficiently defined to make demands on our own senses of self. X is more than what we think it is; more than what we think we are. Constructed out of the stuff of history, which is now housed in the historiographer's archive, it gains the kind of authority we grant at present (still) to history. A cosmopolitan gaiety *in history* is more authoritative than one revealed

or reasoned *a priori*[82]. In fact, it may become "more real" in history than we are in our present, just as mutual tolerance is "more real" than sectarian animosity. And that authority begins to tug on our sense of responsibility if the author can coax us to interpellate ourselves into the same reality/history. By X are we re-defined. In Ghosh, the mode for interpellation is resemblance, or affinity, among the figures which we conceive ourselves to be and other figures in history. It is important to note here that the sense of alterity is suppressed in favor of doubling and resemblance. The function of *negation* is still important; it is needed to make the present *not* what it is supposed to be. But even if both are necessary functions in the structure of signification, affinity with the "other" is more important than alienation. Ghosh shows the shortcomings of the present by comparing it to the present's temporal others (e.g. past, atemporality, etc.), and uses the shortcomings to reconstruct a "better" human that is *in* history but not *of* it. He is successful only if we project X from figures of literature to figures (represented) in literature. Of course, calling X a "poetic figure, a being of history and force of ethics" can be interpreted as a demotion of "him" to "it".

We have to examine the movements from "it" to "he" and, in seemingly the opposite direction, from "Nabeel" to anonymity, to understand the real function of the archive, not just what it is supposed to be in practice. This movement is produced wherever Ghosh modulates from historiography to history; and the reverse movement (e.g. of Nabeel) is modulation in the other direction. The archive is only one stop. The slave sheds his historiographical tether to MS H.6 in order to become a thing of history, existing fully therein; MS H.6 is merely a citation. "The slave of MS H.6 emerges […]".

[82] It is not within the scope of this work to dispute whether that should be as it is or not.

Concurrently, the historian disappears, because history is larger than he now, something he is a part of; something—we will have to remember later—that we, too, are (supposedly) a part of. It is the dexterity of such modulations, the smooth transitions from telling the history of the archival fragments to the history of the twelfth century and of Lataifa and Nashawy, the well-plotted juxtaposition between relatively dry discussions of the origins and variety of dialects of Arabic and the childish wonderment at Ben Yui's cosmopolitan capacity to negotiate commerce and social relations in languages ever new (to him), that lets us call Ghosh a good writer. The modulations are done such that we cannot say history is the personification of "the slave of MS H.6", the way that we might say, for instance, that the nightingale is personified in one of Keats's odes. Such "demotion" would mean disbelieving in the authenticity of the historical propositions of which the slave is the subject: that the slave is emblematic of a real past with real meaning and that his life somehow tells us about ours. The archive provides the fragments, and a line of reasoning in which the reality of the fragment "speaks" about another reality that was once whole—in this case a whole person and a whole society in which he lived. The first part is the theoretical structure of the archive, the second its authority. Thus, the archive may be a storage unit, but its function is to authorize the production of knowledge and meaning: the archive serves the Archive. Under the auspice of archival authority, a writer can happen upon X and be justified in bringing it into (historical) being. The slave *did* exist, this *is* his story, and his story is our story, too.

In the "fullness" of historical being, the slave exerts what seems to be another kind of authority, and begins to reshape our ethical field (our own ontological context). We do not live in the archive—or few of us do—and of those that do how many can be

said to really live? This is why, although there is an ethics that leads to the formation of an historiographic archive, and we can use the archive to imagine the conditionality that reveals our ethical field, the ethical field and the archive do not coincide. The thing in the archive is not necessarily the same in the ethical field; the slave of MS H6 is not the slave of MS H6. Maybe we can say of the relationship between the two, that the formation of an archive is necessary but insufficient to the production of *ethos*. Or, metaphorically, what we need to do is momentarily bury ourselves in the archive before returning to life. Modulation enables this "return" from the field of historiography to the field of ethics, so that if we suffered ourselves to be pulled along for the trip, we find ourselves suddenly at a point where, recognizing the meaning of the slave, but not really apprehending it yet, we have nevertheless tacitly agreed to the authority of slave and his master Amitab/Ghosh. The slave is a sign of history: the master[83] speaks of him, through him, as him.

When we read *Discourse on Method* or *Capital*, *Notes toward a Definition of Culture* or *the Location of Culture*, all in the archive, we read for the pleasures of meaning, and for a while we assume that language is referential. This does not mean we read the texts as gospel; at least in secular modernity we do not. The reader, whatever she turns out to be, has to start with the supposition that what she holds in her hands is meaningful, even if to later criticize in a different mode. And so, though we may have Said's analysis of the book as an intimate product of the Culture of Empire in mind, meaning and the beautiful composition of meaning compel us to return to *Mansfield Park*. The great difference between a "traditional" engagement with literature and the

[83] Master of whom we ought to be asking, too.

coming to life of X, is *authority*. This is the "surprise". To exert pressure on our ethical field, X cannot rest as fragments on our shelves, nor just as an object for our reading pleasure. It must "speak" meaningfully to us as Fanny Price might once have spoken to another generation; as Marx did and continues to do for others; as Descartes continues to in modern lyrics of solipsism; as Homi Bhabha does to those who would "terrorize" essentialist cultural hegemony. But does meaning have to do the kind of work that some ask it, believe it, to do? Many of us can read episodes of slumming in Dickens without suddenly running to the nearest ghetto and stump for change. We can still know the meaning of "poverty", know the difference between "the poor" and "the impoverished", and keep the world as it is. We can, unless I have failed to understand what an interventionist means by meaning. Or, the interventionist measures meaning as a rather magical relation to words and fanatical authority. The poor is poor. Is not the meaning of poverty something else? Authority is how the inert matter of the archive enters upon the field of ethics, where the call to action is always already organized. Authority is how the "truth" of history by-passes our management of pleasure and the various ways we might respond to meaning. I suspect that, like the field trips we take as children, there are ulterior purposes which we do not discern until we have the wisdom and experience of age.

I am bracketing final judgment on the ontical veracity of the slave. Amitab's slave need not have existed for the novel to "work". It only has to emerge in modern history in the fullness of being, for it/he is a pivot between the archive and History's fullness. We might respond analogously to the authority invoked by the cliché tagline "based on a true story", but in the case of the tagline, we know better that just because

there may be real events that bear out when researched, does not mean that the "story" made for our consumption based on the "true story" is true. To understand the power of this modulation, we must take a look at the position of "the writer" and "the [sympathetic] reader". (In a sense, we are the critical reader, but because the critical reader tends not to give over to the authority of what is said, we should begin naively. We want to look at the reader who believes that life has meaning discernable in a structure of time.) The difference between the reader and the archive, between us and artifacts, a difference critical to the perspective of historiography, disappear under the rubric of History. If some sign, some artifact, from the archive can be revitalized as an image of history, then it, or "he", can begin to influence a readership, for the reader who believes has already submitted the fullness of *his* being to the History's grasp, and entered into the order of historical being as revealed by the historian. In History, the slave and the reader are coextensive: they both live as full beings, only at different times, under different existential conditions—the slave, Nabeel, the narrator and us. Producing this coextensionality is not only why Ghosh at strategic points in the novel suppresses his complicating trope of writing the writing of history, but it is also why he keeps reiterating the compromise formations we have seen in Zaghloul, Mustafa, and Amitab. Where Zaghloul is able to compare himself as a being of (one) custom to Amitab as another being of (another) custom; and Mustafa conceives both Amitab and himself as sons beholden to fathers; the reader of history who believes begins to understand that the "being" of the slave's history can "speak" to his own because the speech is in the same language. We are all examples of various customs. We are all children of our fathers. In this way Amitab, the idea of Amitab the Indian, functions in Egypt. In this way, the

kernel of the slave functions across time. The ordering system of History provides the calculus in which X figures along side the reader, where the two can touch, can inhabit each other the way that (to anticipate ourselves), in *The Satanic Verses*, the modern Bollywood actor Gabreel communes with God's prophet who founded Islam, and the modern novelist becomes the prophet's scribe. This happens only after fragmentation and inadequation of extant knowledge in the archive. It happens away from it, too, and in spite of the doubt that might have followed the discovery that history is determined by the present of writing. Authority legitimates both the interfering modes historiography and history, and facilitates modulation back and forth between the two, so that the producer of *ethos* can continue to reinvent the present: to presumptively right the writing of history. Final judgment on the ontology of the slave, or on us—even if that judgment is our "indeterminacy"—only disrupts such smooth back and forth. This does not mean, however, that ontology is not used by the historiographer to bracket off the question of signification when the particular sign that might be questioned had been deployed to serve as instruments of an already-decided good. There is one History and its figure is the slave.

According to the narrator, Nabeel disappears into "anonymity". There are other types of disappearances, of course, which Ghosh could have possibly written: disappearance into thin air, disappearance altogether into nothing—the nether whence we come naked and wailing—death without redemption. He could have simply dropped Nabeel, and without having built the character much either. Why does Amitab/Ghosh arrange for Nabeel, who begins life in full rather than as document in the reality of the novel, to escape annihilation? There is a superficial answer, and a related answer that

digs deeper. Nabeel's absence is constructed around the care of others for him—of his family, the village, and Amitab; or should I say care is constructed around the hole of that now marks the place where his historical being should have been. The idea of anonymity acknowledges this care in the lack of an object of care, in its redemption. Nabeel cannot disappear into thin air, or something like that, because the terms for his disappearance, the narrator implores, must connote the real importance he still holds, perhaps more so in his absence. Anonymity is in this way like memory.

What, though, if there were no anonymity? What if anonymity, made up of memory, perhaps even vaguer, like that thing we should have remembered but did not, is like memory, and perishes when remembering minds perish? What if, like memory, there are many anonymitys: yours, mine, his, and hers over there? What if *that* means a writer cannot remember *for* you and *for* me, that is, plant the critical memories in our collective mind and make them hauntingly significant? Could it be that Nabeel, like countless many other human beings, is unimportant to the rest of the world, to the future and making a place for him in anonymity bestows prominence and longevity to an otherwise perishable and insignificant thing? What is the cost of insignificance, to society, to Nabeel, to his advocates, to us, to the children that we procreate and that replace us? To follow Nietzsche's attempt to restore individual agency: what if God (deus) is dead, and the Archive (machina) inanimate?

Turning to nothing would be worse: there is no possibility of recovery, much less significance, out of nothingness. The historian cannot use abject nothingness. Recovery in that case would be creation *ex nihilo staged as recovery*. The narrative arranges for Nabeel's disappearance through the threat of violence in Iraq in the same way that it

arranges to have unknowns like cremation, or the slave, that are really known. There is something called cremation that has meaning. There is someone called Nabeel who had been. I do not claim that Amitab/Ghosh paid Iraqis to erase Nabeel, or that he invents cremation. The invention is the *debate* over cremation. What has value is Nabeel's erasure. As paradoxical as it sounds, knowing the unknown assures or persuades us that there is *something* beyond worth striving for, a death that is not death. Anonymity preserves Nabeel in this sense. He remains *something* still, even if now unrecognized. He should not even be there. So, beyond the fact that he is missed by other people, the relegation of Nabeel to anonymity betrays that the greatest fear for the writer of history, is that historical beings, in the end, have no value, no meaning. We live our moment and we pass away. We affect each other across space and time, making each other's lives difficult, but really to no end. No Superunknown records our being, redeems us. The archive constructed to house the dead and the discourse established to do them justice will eventually fail to do what they were meant to do: that is, allow us to access redemptive meaning in the plan of history. "Nothing" here does not have to indicate vacuity, because the thingness of a thing is constituted by significance, meaning, care: not metaphysical nothing, but historical nothing. The complete disappearance of Nabeel into nothing would imply that there exists, either in this world or at the end of time, no order of things that accords a place for everything. Violence has suggested the possibility of *Nihil*, and the abject deauthorization of History to speak through historical cases, as only it can. Thus, "anonymity" intervenes between conscious being and abject insignificance, and preserves the ideas of the archive, meaning, and the modulation between two kinds of

being that has been called “recovery”. The new order represses Nabeel (into anonymity) where he remains to return, or so goes the story that creates the figure of value.

Actually, the threat to Nabeel’s value is realized as a lack of documentary evidence: he does not show up in new reports. It is the grassy form where the mountain hare has lain, to use Yeats’s image[84]. Lack of traceable artifact is a ubiquitous trope in literature promoting the voice of the silenced, and it is also a favorite of Ghosh. The character Tridib’s existence is threatened the same way. The narrator there in *The Shadow Lines* has to recover the lost memory of violence by digging through newspaper archives. In the short article “Dancing in Cambodia”, Ghosh projects the sublime durability of the human from his appreciation for the survival of a cultural sign: traditional Cambodian dance survived colonialism and it survived Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. Evident once again is the importance of being able to shift mode, and to carry the relatively secure ontical status from one to the other. Nabeel is real, so there must be real signs of him (and of the humanity subtracted by the modern politics and economics). The lack of significance is an assault on the former, and an assault on the former is morally outrageous. There are real signs of the slave of MS H6, so there must a slave of MS H6 (with conveniently humanist characteristics). A denial of the latter is a denial of the former, and the former of course we can surely hold in hand. Thus the uncertainty introduced by historiography is founded on the certainty in the text. Using the trope of loss-and-found, and by modulating between two modes, Ghosh transforms textual certainty into certainty about historical being. With historical being compelling once again, he can create kernels that shape the ethical field as things to be recovered. To

appreciate the ethical turn, and why producers of ethos turn to history (again), we simply replace certainty with authority.

Nabeel's loss is the slave's gain. The slave's gain is Nabeel's loss. Ghosh structures the superposition for his contemporaries, using the Archive to promise truth and fieldwork to project reality. The loss of Bomma is eminently modern. After all, the builders of genizah did not care about him. Nor did anyone from the many intervening years. And previous modern scholarship looked into other, more significant matters. But, of course, something there is in the loss that holds authority for all time. Affinity is the structure of temporal comparison; it renders sensible the use of the same figure for both slave and laborer. Additional, affinity positions such figures as "more" than the product of respective methods and relative producers. So affinity is also that which escapes the rule of time and error of misrepresentation. Notice how the slave of MS H.6 sheds its limits—all those limits of textuality that we spend delineating in modern man—as the novel progresses, to the point where Ghosh surrenders ownership of the story to it/him. This act of giving to the "more" human figure is the apex of *praxis* and the *telos* of ethical development by analogy to anthropological work. The problem of translation, revealing the matrix of custom that forms in Zaugloul's mind and that already forms the anthropologist's, helps shape the figure: the figure is the presumed holder of untranslatable meaning. Like custom—no, as the practitioner of custom—it is unique and ubiquitous. And it is as real as, but not delimited by, the remains from which it is composed. Thus, in history|ographic novels such as *In An Antique Land*, the modulation between two modes which on their own are supposed to criticize one another actually

[84] "Memory". *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. New York: Scribner. 1983. p. 149.

creates a hidden figure that is "more" than anything which we have at present, although it is composed of the various sure things of the historical present. Indeed, this may define the novelistic and ethical strategy. Not only is the form an expression of a writer's circumstance and disposition—say his post-colonial condition—but the figure also gains extra-subjective—or inter-subjective—authority. It is treated as a real thing, and one that fulfills what in the field of othering had been wanting (those "things" were just representation).

What have I done? I have introduced that part which is crucial to the criticism of the production of *ethos*. I have introduced the reality of humans and experiences and judgments in the plural to confound the ethical impulse of some to hold targeted audiences accountable to the same X. It is a reality that *requires no monadic synthesis*, a modernity that understands the function of alterity in the production of knowledge but suffers no crisis that would allow interventionists to spiritualize it. Call the reality wayward multiplicity, or resistance to power, or simply the representative voice of a discerning, calculating, rational reading public. By whichever name, it questions the rule of the one anonymity, the one archive, the one history, the one ethical field, accessible to selected authors; and interferes with the right to rule, to construct rules, to act in the name of X, under those discourses. We may not be satisfied with things as they are; only the foolhardy would reflexively turn to the old or the new, somebody's new and somebody's old, as though these "things" may somehow fulfill the grandest of promises and satisfy the most urgent of desires.

And the cause for complicating waywardness is old. It resisted the rule and rules of empire. It resisted the establishment of whole classes of subjects like subaltern. Later

on, it resisted the rule of the one Structuralism. The field of othering coordinated by Ghosh and other Postcolonial dramaturges of post-colonial encounters imply it. I recall it not to argue for the truth of absolute freedom *from* ethics, but to restore a certain kind of freedom and indeterminacy *to* ethics. It is the modernist kind. This is especially important wherever we can trace in any discussion of ethics the ambition to gain authority over as broad a range of human activities as possible by controlling knowledge categories, including new ones like spirit-against-modernity or humanism-against-labor. In this case, skeptical knowledge of the Archive and of Fieldwork is like skeptical knowledge of the Symbolic Order. The knowledge is hard to acquire when the discursive regulations are especially strong, and today there is nothing stronger than invoking the evils of colonialism, and the specter of the much victimized other, to not only preemptively rebuke any challenge but also establish authority to make demands. A person's mysticism, his agent-unknown, his loss-and-found, is his inter-subjective instrument, and should be treated as such by those near and far who are supposed to subject themselves to him. Imagine that you are unconvinced of some of my categories and categorical propositions, perhaps because they do not affirm the fullness of life or being; I am simply imagining those narratives that produce ethical moments by modulating between two seemingly antithetical modes meeting the same recalcitrant doubt. So yes, I am also beginning to criticize the discourse that places you and me and the deep categories of ethics in a field of ties-that-bind. That discursive network, built from stories that represent themselves as rearrangement of fragments from a shared archive, is the subject of the next chapter.

3. INTERSUBJECTIVE MEDIATION: O BRAVE, NEW WORLD WITH SUCH PEOPLE IN IT.

My life has given me this other subject: worlds in collision. How do you make people see that everyone's story is now a part of everyone else's story? It's one thing to say it, but how can you make a reader feel that [connectedness] is their lived experience?[1]

Two major post-colonial writers of fiction who contrast strikingly in their politics and preferred literary modes both address the issue of authority. Both want authority for their writings to do more than simply be "literary". Both want authority to speak the truth. V.S. Naipaul accepts the limitations his age has placed on the category "literature" and those modes of signification that are considered literary. To reestablish authority, he switches modes. In an interview in the New York Times, he proclaims that non-fiction is the form of writing best suited for promoting action in the present-day. Naipaul's position is not difficult to understand. He worked briefly as a journalist in the 1950s, and has produced travel books and documentaries[2] on social problems, some of which have given him notoriety for the perspectives he takes on the problem of Islamic fundamentalism. His writing, both fiction and non-fiction, is concise and realistic[3]; his tone comic though increasingly tragic. For Naipaul, agency may be measured in terms of the ability to use current authoritative signifying mode, which begins with understanding how mysticism, belief, culture, discourse, authority, power, and promise, relate to each

[1] Salman Rushdie. "Interview". *The Paris Review* 47.174 (Summer 2005): 110

other and to the reality of experience. It requires having frames-of-reference more comprehensive than the local in order to disclose the local fantasies and track their consequences. And it is more or less an individual endeavor against social or collective determinism, of which Naipaul himself is a paragon.

Unlike Naipaul, Salman Rushdie wants to expand the authority of literary writing. In an interview promoting his book *Shalimar the Clown*, the novelist claims the world is such that "everyone's story is now a part of everyone else's story"[4]. The far-reaching claim needs to be verified. We need to know unambiguously what has been proposed; verify the propositions; if they are true, measure their extent and limits; and learn to use the knowledge to advantage. Yet for Rushdie, the immediate if not fundamental task is not epistemological but signification: "It is one thing to say it [that everyone's story is now a part of everyone else's story]," he wonders, "but how can you make a reader feel that [that] is their lived experience"[5]. Without directly advocating that creative writers and critics be acknowledged as legislators of the world, he imagines there were societies (especially difficult to find in U.S. history, he says) in which writers like him were asked for their voices[6]. He conceives of a "conversation" in which they took part, a democracy in which these voices, together with many others, were free to argue over the organizing ethical problematic epitomized in the question of "how shall we live"[7]. More importantly, these voices have authority. Their power is measurable as effects of the

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[2] David Pryce-Jones. "V.S. Naipaul – Biography". << http://nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/2001/naipaul-bio.html>> 18 October 2005.
[3] The writer adheres to the conventions of literary Realism.
[4] *Paris Review* 47.174. 115.
[5] *Paris Review* 47.174. 115.
[6] *Paris Review* 115 – 116.
[7] Again, this is Derrida's question in *Specters of Marx.*

signs they issue. This assembly, this modern forum, so to speak, rests on three important indivisible principles Rushdie takes for granted: a reality already understood as "worlds in collision"; the social triangulation epitomized by the idea that everyone's story is now a part of everyone else's; and the structure of feeling called "lived experience" through which the stories, and the new connections they foster, are to be interpreted. With varying emphasis, all of these aspects are featured in Rushdie's novelistic discourse. Many of the tactics used to establish precedence for the production of *ethos* are familiar to us as literary devices.

The question of "how do you make people see that everyone's story is now a part of everyone else's story" provokes technical, philosophical, and moral questions which should be asked of all writing that has basically set for itself the same task[8]. We can take these three aspects of Rushdie's concept of stories more generally as starting points for an analysis of a Postcolonial project[9]. They are evidence that the ideas posited and circulated by that cultural movement in which Rushdie figures differ from those of post-colonialists like V.S. Naipaul, although the writers all deal with similar material-cultural conditions at and shortly after the dissolution of the European Empires. More significantly, they differ in ways that necessitate the legitimization of alternative modes of signification and the establishment of forms of authority apart from those that are institutional at present. Worlds may or may not collide, but Postcolonialists want collisions that produce certain already-evaluated outcomes, not abject violence, a multitude of narratives (e.g. Postmodernity), indifference, or true indeterminacy. No one

[8] An additional qualification: Rushdie is not prescribing the practice for other writers. I bear the responsibility of making the general claim.

would deny this, I think. Yet I think my characterization will highlight some differences that might generate ire if not logical disagreement. It is not a matter of unduly criticizing Rushdie; he is one of many possible beginnings to the analysis of a project for which he serves as a decorated example. And when ambitious and disciplined, Salman Rushdie is a good novelist. Indeed, I began with Amitav Ghosh, who is much more focused on constructing the central kernels of ethics where Rushdie revels in trying to holding together the disparate fields in which the kernel figures. At issue is really Rushdie (and Ghosh) the moral legislator, or the provider of so-called evidence cited by moral interventionists: the producer of *ethos*. Rushdie's task for a writer invokes a mode of thinking and a system of values filled with their own assumptions, implications, and problems.

A person who shares Rushdie's fundamental assumptions about the world might take as self-evident his concept of story, and at face-value the statements of his stories. To him, the ethical writer has to figure out a method for understanding the interconnections of the world and secure mechanisms to overcome resistance that keeps the reader from "feeling" the truth. The problem is one of properly, truthfully representing reality. Most of the questions raised from this acceptance of the writer's task will concern technique: how can a story that is part of everyone else's be communicated? Which modes, plots, and characters, make readers feel the true connections? What overarching imperatives are revealed by the undeniable ties that bind East and West? With this way of thinking, the writer's measure of success has to be widespread and truthful consciousness of existing reality.

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[9] One that is perhaps different from current scholarly definitions and from post-colonial self-representation.

A more philosophical person may probe into the kind of world characterized by the proposition that "everyone's story is now a part of everyone else's story". Is the characterization truthful? Are there limits and counterarguments? Are there bad connections? Can we compare; that is, if the present world may be characterized as interconnected by way of collisions and mediated through stories, what other realities have there been and can there be? Even if a world connected by story-telling were real and present, it does not have to be the next reality—certainly not the *sole* reality. Actually, such a world seems a significant alternative to existing economic and social relations like market economies or political alliance to protect commonly held ideals, that there is something suspicious about Rushdie's urgent consciousness-building: the world is not quite yet what it is supposed to be, so claims presuming its existence are untrue, contradictory, or deliberately misleading.

We know this much: the insistence on *recognizing*, or feeling, to the point of almost living out another's story certainly moves the point-of-view away from the world-model advocated by Adam Smith, in which people are related through systems of wealth-production, but do not need to comprehend each other in any other mode, nor the system as a whole, in order to operate and prosper. A person's story does not matter except insofar as it allows you or me to identify potential buyers or sellers; or, even less sympathetically, one person matters to any other person only to the extent that she plays her part in a story that is for a moment useful to him. On the other hand, the philosophy of literary relatedness is not exactly Marxist, even if the dependence on others for "how to live", structured by the "better" consciousness of colliding worlds, places the point-of-view closer to collectivism: individuals are to act *as a connected whole*. So although we

know that increasing connectivity is characteristic of Rushdie's ethical project, what we need are clear connections we can rigorously test. When we have clarity, we test the veracity of the connection, and question why this particular person would want to "connect" here and now and in that way. Scrutiny is especially important when the expression of a philosophy of interconnectedness, in an attempt to objectify personal *ethos*, makes claims about reality or history; which are also, however indirectly, claims about what we are supposed to be.

To parody, to satirize, to travestize[10], is to mimic an existing discourse while strategically changing certain elements until vice or folly reaches a level of absurdity ready to be ridiculed. The changes are witty and ironic, which are part of the genre's entertainment. The satirical and similar deconstructive modes in Rushdie's story-telling feature two qualities—two rules of reading—meant to establish and reinforce the connectivity that enables the production of *ethos*. The vice—and this is key for reform-minded producers of satire—is not to be understood as the satirist's invention, caused by *his* preposterous amendments, *his* magic, but as something already extant in that which is being satirized. Though satire is formulaic, what knowledge the formula yields it yields objectively. The vices that drive the action in Tartuffe were not invented by Moliere but already existed in France. In fact, adverse contemporary reception of the play is often interpreted as demonstrative of how well the playwright's mirror *did* reflect society; furthermore, producers who reset the context of the play hope to do the same[11]. By the

[10] After the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin.

[11] See for instance a 2002 production (set in New York City) as reviewed by Bruce Weber. "Setting Molière in the 1930's: Not Anti-Religious, Just Anti-Fanatic". NYTimes. 29 January 2002. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/29/theater/theater-review-setting-moliere-1930-s-not-anti-religious-just-

same principle, Swift's modest proposal would not work quite as well, if a strong deniability can be maintained through appeal to qualitative philosophical and ethical differences between *actively* eating babies and *passively* leaving the poor to deal with whatever they suffer (or shipping them off to Ireland and Australia). That is, we may not be connected to poverty as we are to baby harvesting. Nor are you and I connected by the common revulsion to the idea of harvesting babies strongly enough for me to correct my other vices, as it were. Likewise dramatic differences among responses to the possession/merger of Gabreel and Mahound, or to the unfinished business that binds colonial and post-colonial relations, complicate any claim about specific present connections.

For satire to extend beyond the discrete moment of its production and discover true and inherent vices, there has to be an intermediary concept that (already) connects the satirical to what is being satirized; furthermore between that and, well, us. There has to be a series of triangulations, perhaps a "system". A novel, with its covers, copyright pages, opening lines and a final chapter, is finite. It is one of many that can be related to other species in a variety of ways. Likewise, an utterance is also isolated by time, by idiolect, by language, by culture: in fact, by the many devices used by Postcolonialists to complicate Eurocentric totalizing representation. Let us take our cue from Rushdie and call that which connects utterances and novels the "story". Story allows one instance, such as the satirical, to make claims on previous ones[12]. Instant connection! A ghost

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anti-fanatic.html?scp=1&sq=Setting%20Moli%C3%A8re%20in%20the%201930%27s:%20Not%20Anti-Religious,%20Just%20Anti-Fanatic&st=cse>

[12] without it, would intertextuality make sense? How can we tell if the latest text is some poor hack's attempt to create authority by appropriating words from famous works, but for a concept like story.

already "connects", for the structure of belief recognizes that ghostly apparitions are of the same spirit (or soul, or what have you) in the living and the dead. Formal similarity is taken for identical substance: the ghost that *looks* like your father *is* your father; that is, if thou didst ever thy dear father loved. The same recognition, the same triangulation, is being established through the concept of story. If a subject were interpellated into a story the vices of which are revealed by satire, then the subject may take responsibility for the vices, rather than just consign them to the characters of the new texts or people from those other worlds

The modern satires that he writes allow Rushdie to claim to be revitalizing—fictionalizing, he often says[13]—the same story as that which he satirizes. As such, it is part of a broader strategy. Since many of the stories he targets, from the origin of Islam to the history of Colonialism, are considered to be true, the implication is that satire, and generally fiction, can (also) tell the truth that supplants. The claim is misleading. It is misleading to treat history and satire as repetition of something that is already there, only different, as Homi Bhabha sometimes does[14]. The stories are *not* the same; if they were, the satirist would have no purpose, really, and ought to have gone into the business of reprinting faultless facsimiles. Satirists, in particular political satirists, and their critic-allies, can make claims about the nature of that which is being satirized, yet also introduce *new* differences. Rushdie's most famous work *The Satanic Verses* plays with connections among different societies and sects. It connects different former colonial territories, and different times, when it claims the English do not know their history

[13] In response to the controversies over *The Satanic Verses*, for instance.
[14] *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2004.

because history happened overseas. What the English think they know but do not, what anyone does not know, comes back to them as ghosts, as "unfinished business". Rushdie's "unfinished business" is a type of connection revealed when historical blindness is satirized: when history is reproduced with absurdist dramaturgy[15]. The novel also parodies a *contemporary* understanding of the founding of Islam, the provocation caused by which suggesting that the conservative business of maintaining religious authority is never finished, either. Dramatically different responses to Rushdie's stories of sacred ideas testify to *new* triangulation: for all the collisions that have already happened, satirizing the founding of Islam produces collisions that might not otherwise have happened, and produces them here and now. Rushdie provokes on purpose. Bhabha, too, for that matter. Rushdie's novel introduces new ideas and "realities", including the value of such provocations. The deliberate erasure of the agency *of the intervention*—of the *new* difference intervention is supposed to make—complicates philosophical investigation into the truth of connectedness by letting a writer obscure skeptical judgment of his claims. Ironically, the difficulty faced in deconstructing the supposed interconnective structure of story-telling testifies to authority that has already been established.

[15] There can be normal unfinished business, which do not demand the dramatic changes added by Rushdie. For instance, a claimant can arrive in court with an unfulfilled contract or some other recognized accord, and demand that business be "finished", but of course the purpose of ghostly unfinished business is to form attachments and make demands where they do not have authority. If I kicked you off of my property, to get back on you would have to either take me to court and produce a legitimate claim, or, under the kind of rhetorical society Rushdie would establish, tell a story about how I kicked you off of my property, full of ghosts and other inventions, signifying your experience of a claim-denied.

At one level, Rushdie's novel demonstrates how themes like religion, history, Empire, and National Independence are interrelated[16]; at another, it uses them to produce a surfeit wealth of new symbols and new concepts that are taken up and disseminated by subsequent writers[17]. The profane angels and ghosts from overseas of *The Satanic Verses* have since guest starred in many subsequent productions, where they are treated as figures no less powerful than the angels and ghosts of religious leaders. Thus, even with satire meant to diminish the authority of symbols, there is a wish for symbolic power. A critique by way of satire can end up substituting one set of ideas for another—or it can try to—by superimposing the new onto the old as if it/they had already always been thus. Rushdie, satirist and inventor of Gabreel and Chamcha, Aleesha and Mahound, re-teller of jingoist Independence and mythic Origins, is in the business of ghost-making. The titillating promise made upon the "discovery" of human interconnections and the frustration felt when they are not acknowledged should already hint at desires common to would-be ghost-makers.

In general, the problematic for anyone who satirizes, parodies, and the like, is that producing *ethos* requires shifting away from those literary modes and writing ideas and discovering "things" to which people can seriously commit (again). Eventually, as Rushdie acknowledges in *The Satanic Verses*, to make the words of the prophet authoritative, Baal the profane impostor has to be executed. For Islam to take hold, the satanic verses have to be erased. We have been granting Rushdie his connectivity as

[16] Although *The Satanic Verses* directly references the English as the target of "overseas" historiography, Rushdie to his credit targets everything. *Midnight's Children*, for instance, published before *The Satanic Verses*, explores the "overseas" history between what will become the separate antagonistic states of India and Pakistan: the story of India is part of the story of Pakistan, and *vice versa*.

though we lived only in his novels, or in the self-selected assembly of thinkers who take ideas like "unfinished business" as self-evident; by his philosophy and his rules. The reality for him and for writers allied to the same "business" is that they have to establish authority; this problem is implied by Rushdie's consternation that we do not "feel" connected, and consequently we do not obey story-tellers. Producing *ethos* requires establishing signifying structures and conventions that can, given enough time and irreverence, provide material for future satirists. The writer must provoke, differentiate, then synthesize, all the while *preventing* the quick sublation of his efforts in the same dialecticism. Indeed, as problematic as the task of recommitting to rules and signs is for satire, it is more so to criticism in which there are analytical functions that destabilize like satire destabilizes. To signify history as unfinished is to destabilize present discourse founded on historical categories. Yet, if history is unfinished, the audacity to "finish" historical consciousness is but another instance of Hegel claiming German philosophy as the final synthesis of history; which means that criticism of philosophies based on the desire for synthesis since Hegel can be strategically deployed to point out the "vices" of criticism that attempts to use the promise of History. How can any writer whose arguments at some point are based on the idea that humans revise and invent history, not just their own histories but *the* history of which others must serve as a sign (the other), in order to create the version they want, suddenly speak in transparent historical terms? One function of the latest ethics project very nearly cancels the other.

In fact, they should, were it not for project-saving devices that stave off bleak or at least irresponsible counter-analysis. These I have been calling "*deus-ex-machina*", as

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[17] Like Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*.

they, on the strength of belief, reconcile what is otherwise irreconcilable in order to plot desirable endings. The *deus-ex-machina* seems to solve intractable problems, but of course, to the non-believer, the problematic remains. The problematic remains because the machine remains needed. One device may be as simple as stubbornly asserting that *some* patterns are too profound to be satirized, *some* experiences too abject to be the butt of jokes, and *some* business too urgent to be left unfinished. Some things should *not* be historicized, Dipesh Chakrabarty writes[18]. Why? How do we know? Because the story-tellers feel that they are and tell us so. The story they tell is the Story. And by "some", I mean the ones considered important by the story-tellers. Recognizing the use of *deus-ex-machina* prompts yet more lines of inquiry, only now criticism must target those structures that allow an alternative philosophy to appear self-evident: criticism that can, for a moment, meditate on the possible conclusion that there is no such Story upon which Rushdie can rest his ethics.

Ghost, transformation, unfinished business from overseas, and all these "things" that are produced to destabilize *status quo* consciousness, are "more" than any past or even present instability, in the same sense that superstitious fear makes an eclipse "more" than just the momentary coincidence of earth, moon, and sun. Indeed, a decision has been made elsewhere that ghosts and transformations are "more" than non-institutional reactions to local circumstances faced by believers. More than phenomena, these are wondrous signs. They have meaning. They have symbolic authority. They cannot be dismissed. Destabilizing identity, or discovering other subjects, is the first step of an experience which ultimately leads to the formation of ethical connections—connections

[18] *Habitations of Modernity*.

that, as a rule, must be "more" than, must transcend, the complex condition and history of their production. Initially, an object appears to be different from what discourse identifies it to be. Other expectations, other desires, are disappointed for the same effect. English history fails. The discriminations of English history, its characters—the paki, for example—fail. Ghosts appear. "Overseas" begin to churn. It is not the objects that are inadequate, nor the specific concept, but the "story", the discourse. The failure of objectification is supposed to reveal the presence of other subjects, especially in the form of objects that can "speak", and from there to the conclusion that objects and subjects are both functions of discourse. So a demonized Saladin Chamcha actually turns into a demon; the transformation, although impossible, in its extremeness, reminds us of the power of stereotyping to dehumanize. If we were speaking in terms of identities, we might say, London treats the postcolonial badly: it violates the rights of individuals. Let us turn him back to what he was, as we would have Puck transform Bottom back[19]. But Postcolonialism has already taken the ethical turn, such that even a liberal interpretation is supposed to be too conservative: when the postcolonial-object can be recognized as postcolonial-subject, it is believed that political and cultural agency can be favorably—that is, morally—redistributed. The demon transforms from his cloven hooves by rewriting the story[20]. The wog, speaking as wog, moreover speaking as the oppressed, and taking full advantage of the direct access to others afforded by the authority of story-telling—his story being another's, after all—is able to during the ethical moment shift

[19] William Shakespeare. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
[20] The angel that could not shoots himself.

identity formations and the culture of London even to the point at which he loses his "wogness" and becomes something else entirely.

Again, those changes to the *status quo* which take the forms of ghost, transformation and unfinished business face the same problematic faced by the changes that produce satire. The destabilization of extant signification initiated by recognizing other objects-subjects is double-edged. It may diminish ideological authority by demonstrating that objects are not always what ideology represents them to be. If it does, its critique should also lead us to suspect all representations of experience, and especially the kind that forces us to listen to and act on the unexamined words/experience of another, for the same reason. Qualitative differences begin to disappear. This threatens the production of *ethos*, because it undermines the authority to make basic moral claims for others in the same way it undermines the authority to issue ideological commands. He who sustains extant ideology and he who would transform make the same kind of promise; the latter can be felled by the very instruments deployed against the former (and *vice versa*). To a much greater degree than a skeptical phenomenologist contemplating how solipsist subjects can ever connect and cooperate, or a postmodernist choosing the most effective narrative for an occasion, an ethicist needs to convince a significant number of people that ultimately it is *his* texts which reveal what is right and what needs to be done. He needs to overcome the instability created by the experience that led to the discovery of other subjects. He needs to contain the *aporia* and redeem the failures that had initially granted him critical authority. He needs, in a sense, authority greater than that of a writer or critic of literature. A producer of *ethos* needs to modulate from the ambivalence and indetermination that enable textual analysis to something much more

committal. He needs a straightforward language that is more than just language. He needs to make "things", and that which is promised by their existence.

The structure of interaction suggests that producers of ethics are mimicking at least in one mode the plot Edmund Husserl used to characterize cognitive development from the subjective to the objective. Late in the 19th century, Husserl formulated intersubjectivity to explain how, in a world that is fundamentally phenomenal, we can cooperate to move a desk and furthermore conceive of desk absent observation (in other words: "desk"). The observer confronting the reality of experience finds evidence of other subjects like him. From the intersubjective experience is formulated a theory of object-things. Objectivity, then, what Heidegger would later call the ontical[21], is a function of intersubjectivity. Analogously, something like intersubjectivity (in practice) allows a modern/postmodern writer interested in ethics to swerve away from what would otherwise be pure—that is, logical—subjectivism, ever-sliding signifiers, and indeterminate simulacrum. Only instead of "desk", the experience produces what Bhabha calls "liberatory signs"[22] like "hybridity", or better yet, the open-ended, unassailable claim-making signifier already in use called "dignity". As part of an intersubjective experience, that is, when perceived as "real" as desk, a ghost can "speak" with greater authority. Not everything is a function of the modern rational observer alone. New intersubjective "things" emerge from experience. The problematic of representation yields to the representation of *ethos*. If discourse could modulate to that of

[21] *Being and Time*. The important feature of the ontical for this analysis is that it is operative: it is established through the disciplined production of knowledge as an enabling function and becomes understandable only through a discipline's self-questioning. A desk is a thing; the thingness of desk enters consciousness when the furniture-maker questions his enterprise.

which we only become aware through ontology, what is felt would become very real, and what is said become true, once again. Those out of power wish for such a predictable phenomenology. As outlined in the previous chapter, Ghosh's modulations is an example of this strategy; previously written history is reduced to the materiality of evidence, then archived, then reconfigured to reveal, once again, historical being. In a sense, Postcolonialists are reaching back to moments of greater certitude to deal with the condition and consequences of Poststructuralist and Postmodernist doubt.

the use and abuse of Textuality (or always already not-yet connected)

Descartes started his philosophical questioning by doubting everything he inherited. He was eventually able to secure a working first principle by excluding from doubt the cognition that doubted. Let us say that modern doubt can no longer be "solved" by a philosophical supposition like Descartes's[23]. There is not a leap of faith that makes doubting doubtfulness, or similar "redeeming" functions, meaningful. The certainty on which consciousness and ontology is founded is itself questionable[24]. Actually, uncertainty may not even be necessarily problematic to cause radical change; that is, doubt in reaction to the apparent failure of a perspective pushes us towards neither religious entrenchment nor Homi Bhabha's liberatory redemption[25]. We let the so-called

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[22] "Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate".

[23] If Descartes is modern, then I would reperiodize and claim "Postmodern doubt is…" Descartes begins with pervasive doubt. He regains a first principle when he makes the supposition epitomized by his famous phrase: there is at least something certain amidst doubt, and that is the doubter. I think (doubt) therefore I am.

[24] See for instance Jacques Lacan's constant criticism of Descartes's supposition. The Lacanian subject is that which believes it refers to itself with the phrase "*cogito ergo sum*", and the Symbolic Order is that which assures it the certitude that it exists to be referenced.

[25] He who reacts to indeterminacy as Bhabha does, studying it, valuing it, and getting others to value it. See for instance "Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate".

problems slide and get on with our respective mundane businesses. We can leave one story for another, instead of having to act *the* Story out to the end. Moderns do not need *deus-ex-machina* and so do not readily submit to the authority which had empowered religious teachers and which Rushdie would bestow upon story-tellers. As such, a great many "things", particularly those dear to another, and those some authors would use to move us, do not exist. They would not exist simply because someone believes they do, and think we should. Ghosts do not exist, and therefore, the invented property titles and political claims represented by ghosts and published in ghost-stories do not exist in any authoritative way[26]. This is not to say that we live in a world without politics, property, or sociality; we are not paralyzed by absolute uncertainty and indetermination. Only, because fundamentalist assertions are questionable and righteous authority may be rejected without great loss, there are limits to how a person may exercise politics, claim property, and leverage human connections against others.

Against this modernity, some of us—the producers of *ethos*—have overshot doubt and its provisional solutions in order to try to reclaim the kind of certainty that acts in the name of the Good against any other consideration. There is an urgency that analysis, even philosophy, seems to hinder, but literature can convey. No matter their veracity or value, the signs of the post-colonial and the connections they foment are to be treated as real, and truthful, and universally imperative. There is no argument. Suffering and indignation *are* real and really a part of our story, and to confine them to feelings or

[26]Amitav Ghosh. *In An Antique Land*. The claims have to be submitted to a more rigorous system for adjudication.

fantasy or philosophy—to that story over there, which may not matter—is to fail to abide by the highly mediated interconnectivity Rushdie has "discovered".

Today, it is thought that key interpretative concepts like "lived-experience", especially as they mediate the experience of encountering other subjects, stabilize what had been destabilized, and point discourse and knowledge in the right—that is, ethical—direction. Although literary critics use it, the concept really belongs to ontology. "Lived-experience" confirms that a story references something "out there" to be experienced, even if it can only do so obliquely as a metaphorical expression. In one moment, a story is textual, reproducible, contrived by humans, an instrument of their desire. Perhaps, even, the mind may be said to think in narratives, contriving them to deal with the world. In the next, story references reality, however approximate, as though there were genuine stories to be told and genuine stories to be heard and genuine stories on which to act; furthermore, as though the stories complete what had been lacking. "Lived-experience" facilitates this modulation from the subjective to the objective, and the return of that authority which had been weakened in modernity; think of what happens when a literary work is not interpreted as such, when it is, to Rushdie's consternation, the fiction it is now.

In Rushdie's condensation, the story can never be completed. Each story is part of another story, which is part of another story, which is part of another in turn, so that totality is always out of reach by at least one more case. "Story" is like the sign "∞" used in mathematics to represent something that cannot be reached if one were to have to count all the parts: Story is akin to an infinite series. Yet, each story also seems to have a certain degree of autonomy and wholeness and can inform the others *if* or *once* they were

all understood under the universal category of "Story". We have seen these rules of reading before: for example, in religious allegories that supposedly reveal sacred truths even as it is said that the truth of the sacred is incomprehensibly vast. In other words, claims are being made about the Infinite as a Whole. Literary connectedness is closer to religion than to scientific objectivity or market relations. The next leap, of course, is a concept of ownership tied to that which would be connected. Stories belong to everyone *and* everyone else. Considered as *the* story, it is incomplete. Nevertheless, considered as a *partial* idea, it can adequately represent the monadic lived-experience of a particular people or person. The story is simultaneously its own thing, part of the Whole, and suggestive of truths about the Whole. The concept of "lived-experience" projects these rules for reading on to being as an order of things; simultaneously, the rules of reading (the attributes of Story) enable the writing of "lived-experience".

While "lived-experience" preserves distinctions among individuals who in effect own stories unique unto them, the truth told in story is not limited by those distinctions. Experiences are not simply left to themselves, like scarred bodies that perish soon enough. Instead, they are always alive through stories, because subjects connected as Rushdie feel they are will depend on them. The story that does connect them is privileged. Even as different tellers tell different, oft-conflicting experiences, in terms of ghosts, community, and/or capitalist economic development, at some point there emerges a story that must refer to the oppression or colonialism connecting them all inextricably. Ghosts are not left to exercise their inherent power, but magically figure into the field of ethics where they are valued as acts of subversion or expression of grievance in criticism of modernity. Through the connections, the "things" experienced by others, by strangers,

like specters and loss of humanity and reclaimed history, “things” that cannot be proven to exist, but hard to disprove, suddenly determine what comes next. The angels and demons of *The Satanic Verses* are not merely effects—e.g. magical embodiment of cultural and religious discrimination, and part of this world in which we live. The story of “lived-experience” concerns an individual part *of* the whole that has authority to *signify* the (new) whole. The story-that-is-Story (s|Story) now causes new *and wanted* transformations. We cannot regard them as fiction, for we are a part of the story, too, that contains us and them. The publication of experience empowers particular “parts” of the “whole”, which effectively means the selected has power over other would-be “parts”.

It is understandable why Postcolonialist writers like Rushdie would insist on modulating to the oddly familiar field mediated by stories of “lived-experience” and the promise of the Whole: the effect is powerful. The rhetorical strategy is certainly more powerful than philosophizing on connectedness, because it connects. The stories of Civilization—Western stories—have “connected” the many subjects of empire heretofore. They have made them into objects rightful of a civilized world. Postcolonialism needs to maintain the bond in order to “connect” back, but of course with the *caveat* that connectivity favors the production of unfinished business, not Western neocolonialism. This means it will have to struggle with an age of “disconnect”. We need to look at the “wrong” interpretation of Rushdie’s self-described experience, one that is neither Imperialist nor Postcolonial, in order to understand how stories offer an opportunity to “connect”.

If one story were *like* another, then the only story I would need to know is my own, even as I make it the story of the world; this can put us back in a regime of

"Orientalism", where knowledge reinforces the knower's idealized self-image. Saladin *is* a monster. Look how easily he turns into one, acts like one: he *is* the bitter post-colonial in the former metropole. On the other hand, if our experiences differ to the degree that they are not publicly knowable, then by the corollary you cannot possibly be in a position to tell me how we relate. It is presumptuous, to say the least, to skirt your own rule. This means, again, that your images, competing against other images and against those images I already hold to be truthful, have little effect on me. Neither possibility favors the agency of the post-colonial, the purpose for precipitating the intersubjective experience in the first place. So a claim is made on the incommensurability of discrete lived-experiences[27] and another to superior knowledge in which lived-experience has already been comprehended. As a teller of intersubjectivity, you would take my signs and reorganize them to change me. I am more disposed to accept signs that appear to be mine, though they may have been configured by you; more so when Story tells me my story is lacking; and more so when lived-experience assures that meaning is "out there" to be apprehended. You shore my fragments (now ours) against your ruin (now ours). In changing my mind, and the mind of others, you might change the world. You enlist others to change who you are. The acceptance of literary modes for representing intersubjective experiences of the world and for precipitating them enfolds us in this network of relationships that has been organized around "Story". Through the Story, which may be expressed as everyone's story is part of everyone else's, a story of colonizer/colonized can hold meaning for everyone. With the kind of authority of which Rushdie speaks fondly, a story-teller can stage collisions, can persuade others to collide,

[27] to protect the particular version and its author from assimilation

represent *that* story as part of everyone else's, and make new subjects feel as though they had lived what they have just been told. In other words, you and I are responsible for the life-story of ones like Saladin and Gabreel.

To signify under the authority that valorizes "lived-experience", to promote it, producers of *ethos* have to use what we might call, after Paul De Man, the allegorical mode of signification[28]. Allegories can reorganize "failed" concepts to signify an idea without exposing the idea to the same test for "failure". The complaint that experience of nature falls far short of nature itself—of Nature—appear to reaffirm what would otherwise be an act of imagination, a fictive projection. By confining failure to a location, say a doubter, or an unreliable narrator, his memory and his desires, an author can recover a cosmos "out there" to be discovered. This signifying strategy suggests, in a way, a latter-day neoplatonism: where we cannot seem to experience nature unmediated by "nature"—by the binary nature/civilization—and the lack of our experience leads us to doubt there is Nature, Nature is actually evidenced by the experience of our failure to represent it, and expressed as a configuration of inadequate representations that had been mistakenly attributed as things in themselves. In short, there is Nature beyond attribution, as there are "things" beyond our philosophy. Likewise, there is Good beyond the complications of reason and discursive analysis, and a Whole beyond irreconcilable cultural, political, and philosophical differences. In this mode, feelings, especially of lack, can become "argument" for the truth of an idea, and then the thing itself—however faulty the logic is under skeptical analysis. For our cases, given that the concept of lived-experience presumes the "failure" of representation, that for example the cry of "pain" is

not pain itself, the rules of reading turn expressions of "lived-experience" into allegories; reciprocally, they let allegories signify the truth from lived-experience. Failure is a sign of its antithesis—this is how allegories redeem. The ideal pathway seems to be that, regardless of whatever makes representation problematic, when the other experiences an ethical problem and broadcasts them in a story, there *is* an ethical problem.

Believing figurative over literal interpretations is required to make a story an allegory. To a non-believer allegory is just a reading of a text. Figurative language signifies strongly allegorically where there already exists desire to salvage ideas like Nature, or the Good. This also means the allegory is especially good for regaining moral certitude, since it bypasses the rigors of proof. It is also good for changing some minds, since the appeal to the transcendental bypasses the necessity of having to make logical arguments and appeal to values the interventionist already wants to dismiss. Allow me to demonstrate using polarized examples. Energy equals mass. Skeptical of this, we test "e = mc^2", and what we test is its literal interpretation. However, if for the sake of argument, this equivalence were said to confirm an orderly universe, furthermore that an orderly universe had to have been created intelligently, then what we would want to test is the hypothesis of intelligent design as signified in an allegory using the initial equation. Of course, Einstein's famous equation does not lend itself easily to allegory, but "energy" does. So does the idea of complexity: complexity must mean this or that. Although it cannot be directly signified, nor produced to be tested, the "fullness" of the human is expressible through the negation of unwanted realities: the subject convinced of this "fullness" will fight—have fought—against that which is accused of separating a man, a

[28] *Allegories of Reading.*

laborer, from all that he is and could be. A story of ultra-nationalist and sectarian violence can signify as allegory of peace without conceptualizing and referring to peace-itself. And a story about the partition of India and Pakistan, and about the many subsequent conflicts, the proxy wars over Kashmir, can tell the appropriate agents here and now what to do. Rushdie's novels are expressions of partition and disconnect. With the authority of allegorical history, the un-disconnect Rushdie imagines would be as persuasive as if it were true and real. There is no need to conceptualize the core ideas (that will govern ethics) so that they can be tested, and argue for their merits over other ideas.

Because at present the truth function we use require logic and "proof of concept", writers who want to reestablish commitment to ideals required for setting up ethical problems must bring us to a point where we understand allegorical signification and accept it as an authoritative mode. We would then abide by the allegorical readings of stories and visions, which forbid us from taking the meaning of compositional elements, like character, plot, tone, labor, goods, services, symbols, etc. as independent and testable things, and from comparing across elements to determine individual value; both of which we already do[29]. We would not say, provide me with literal descriptions of utopia, and prove to me the peace that passes all understanding, before I allow you to transform me. The mode is especially useful for exporting the demand for change expressed in reports of *specific* "lived-experiences" as historical truth by which *we* must abide. The story protects its ideas from assimilation by claiming to be monadic: lived-experience and the

[29] This is Benjamin's critique of the academics of his time: they had evaluated the *Trauerspiel* a failure because they did not know how to read them.

likes are singular, after all, and cannot be invalidated. Especially, they cannot be invalidated by present standards, and definitely not modernity and its core ideals. Yet the story claims to reveal knowledge of things beyond the limits of its unity twice: it also and paradoxically claims to be "part" of another story, yours, for instance; and it has assigned parts in its imagined Whole to those whom it addresses. We have seen similar sophistry before, in how Amitav Ghosh uses the problematic of translation: the story that refers to the untranslatable other incorporates it and its rivals into a new translation that must not be translated. If we wanted to resist the network Rushdie imagines already exist, but which he is really building, if we wanted to know what really happens if such and such discourse were granted authority, then we would examine the network as criticism reads allegory; that is, we do not believe in them. We do not question the idea expressed through allegory, since it is only figurative; and sometimes, like peace, or goodness, set up to be unquestionable. We question the authority that makes the mode truthful, its logic, its effects, and *the specific demands* made in the name of the Idea being allegorized. And we question those who would increase what is basically the unexamined agency of the storyteller. The "wrong" interpretation of allegory just happens to be the *modern* study of literature and *modernist* reaction to the kind of authority producers of *ethos* want.

To understand the transformative potential of allegory, we have to go back to one of De Man's predecessors. De Man was reading figurative language in Proust, Rousseau, and Nietzsche; the ambition he had for his readings, in particular his relation to the promises made through allegories of reading, I dare say were less than Walter Benjamin had for his readings of contemporary Nazi and Fascist cultural productions. According to

Benjamin, allegory does not reproduce extant concepts but explodes consciousness for the side of Good. Allegory is the form of emergency, Benjamin proclaims in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, and revolution is its consequence. For him, the truth and justice of allegory are never in question. Allegory is the revolutionary consciousness of the oppressed; oppression is metaphysical, for it is true now and at all times, and guarantees morality of its final defeat *in history*. A part of the world in which it is made, and composed of finite, worldly material, the allegory nevertheless speaks with the superseding authority of an image of the whole revealed. Scholars can add to historical knowledge, but the additional evidence would be, in Benjamin's terms, "symbolic" rather than "allegorical"[30], because it does not fundamentally transform. Part stays part; examples confirm concepts; there is no crisis. For example, the symbols for America already exist: to reproduce America, they need only be rehashed. And Americans rehash them every Independence Day, maybe every morning in elementary school before the taking of attendance. The symbols of India exist already: ultra-nationalists continue to reproduce them in their conflicts. Tomorrow's papers will provide more examples of the same India, the same America. With allegory, a writer can take something finite from the past and present and claim to represent the Story. The story that is Story, that is History, is monadic[31]. We ruin the ruse when we cite the allegory as a human product and

[30] In his first major work, *The Origins of Tragic German Drama*, Benjamin uses the dichotomy to explain how contemporary philologists misread the meaning of German tragedy. Such plays were not failed tragedies but trying to redeem the failure of inherited tragic forms that no longer signified.

[31] First posited by the Greeks to mean God or the Totality of things, this idea of the monad was developed by Leibniz. Leibniz had his God arrange for the monad's strange but useful behavior. Theoretically autonomous substances do not interact. Yet empirical phenomena evidence interaction, which Leibniz needed to explain. The Deistic God, the blind watchmaker, sets all of the autonomous monads, the fundamental, infinite substances of the universe, to the same time to produce the kinds of interactions we observe. Leibniz introduced this God-function to reconcile the complete independence of substances posited by his philosophy

scrutinize it conceptually, for instance when we call the *telos* yet another "utopia", or see in the promise what a Lacanian would call the function of "plenitude". We put the new to ruin when we call out the dwarf in the machine of theology (from Benjamin's Thesis 1) or otherwise undermine the authority of revolutionary rhetoric. These turns have happened before: they are responsible for the changes recorded in history and the ruins we inherit. Whether symbols and allegories take sides so clearly is a theoretical issue we need to bracket[32]. For my purpose, the analysis of the function of story in the production of *ethos* must always be aware of how the makers of monads position themselves fairly consistently relative to the *status quo* and to its dominant symbols. The stories are meant to create the next if not final order of things. From Benjamin's call to enlist theology, one can easily guess the nature of the Story, the network that it holds, and the *deus-ex-machina* that resolves the plot.

In a way, De Man predicted the turn producers of *ethos* would take, for he interpreted the history of literary criticism as vacillations in emphasis between

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with the empirical observations of interacting matter. Interaction is the appearance of what is really divine synchronicity. Benjamin applies the characteristics of monads first to ideas in *The Origins of Tragic German Drama* then to images made by writers in *The Theses on the Philosophy of History*. He needed a concept which would explain how allegories can speak to truths *outside* of their own historical moment. By the time this *deus-ex-machina* reaches Rushdie's stage, it has been internalized as the authority to claim "everyone's story is part of everyone else's". This authority guarantees that stories interact while maintaining their separateness. It guarantees that the inadequacies of a story which is everyone's and still everyone else's can be transcended. And like Benjamin's, the authority of Rushdie's *deus-ex-machina* is justified by the self-evident righteousness of the cause for which it is being used.

[32] It could be that the allegorized human life, that fullness of existence beyond the travails and pleasures of this world, is truth to some, and dangerous fantasy to others, concurrently. I am a skeptic, and tend to err with a third side which understands such ideals are socially useful though they need to be controlled by critical intellection. Yet I also know to call it either one or the other makes us party to the conflict, and we ought to for the moment avoid discounting the plenitude of allegories so that we can understand the interaction between believers of different ideals and between them and non-believers.

Furthermore, change need not mean going forward, though human existence as far as we know is temporally unidirectional. Cha

deconstructionism and constructionism[33]. We are now dealing with constructs that have since become the new determinants. The concept of "lived-experience" and the mode of allegory are necessary for the production of *ethos* because of the intellectual work done just before the (re)turn to ethics. For us, this means that contending with the stories and especially with the criticism that cite the stories is very difficult, as believers have already decided against the doubt that sustains modern criticism. Structuralism tells us about various societies by reading their peculiar patterns linguistically. For the purpose of knowledge, society is a system of signs. In a sense, how a particular society develops the structure of kinship is more important than how related individuals really, really *feel* about each other within the social structure[34]. The structuralist does not reproduce that feeling: he studies it. The structuralist may not think patterns are inherently bad: she studies them. Poststructuralism established further limits on knowledge by reapplying the critical functions of Structuralism to Structuralism. The foundation for knowledge of structure, itself a structure, is suspect; just as historiography is falsely secure about the history in which historians wrote their histories. Knowledge is not of structures but of structural limits, contingent, and changes that which it would presume to know. To be good and to know what it means "to be good" in this place and time and to these people are never the same.

The writer who begins to read the world in categories and as structures, or gets us to do so, creates an argument that is in the end fatal to the production of *ethos*. Of all the

[33] See especially the first chapter of *Allegories of Reading*, in which De Man places his interpretive framework in that history by consciously meditating on the tension (not contradiction) between grammar and rhetoric.

[34] See Hegel's idea of mutual recognition inherent in Rushdie's comment mentioned above.

worlds and all the collisions, why should certain ones become anchors in the ethical field? If knowledge only emerges at the limits of textuality as inadequacy or failure, then we cannot confirm that everyone's story is now a part of everyone else's unless we relocate *within* the limits of *that* thesis and extending the limits to the point where we no longer recognize limitation (of unimaginable disconnect, for example, or utter meaninglessness); at which point we not so much confirm a thesis as affirm a belief. Or, to generalize, how can a writer make claims about what is real, what is really *out there*, when he has done everything to define the Real as that which lies at the point of structural failure? Even Poststructuralism is Structuralist whenever it makes any claim (which is to say all the time). This is the contradiction, and one example of a more general problematic. How, then, do theorists, novelists, dramatists, and poets reconcile the contradiction between the conclusion of their critical functions and the commitment they ask for their new signs—except by *deus-ex-machina*?

Again, if an "answer" were needed, it would be the authority to signify allegorically. There has to be a universe where liberation is not mere fantasy of wording and insatiable desire, especially in places where one has to be liberated from liberators yet once more. Moreover, there has to be ways of recovering that which allows some of us to issue and all of us to be motivated by "liberatory signs". As the concept liberation once securely referred to liberation, so too can an allegory of loss and achievement, conflict and resolution, signify liberation. Allegory actually counts on the problematics of structuralism to provide complications that in the end reaffirm what should also be invalid, as a Hegelian counts on recurring conflicts and multiplicity to provide material (all pun intended) to redeem Spirit. We can bracket whether or not history is teleological,

and take the allegorical form as a rhetorical solution to difficulties confronting a writer at the moment he needs a transcendental idea—or at least the promise of one. The form allows a writer to signify the Not—no more conflict, no more alienation, no more differentiation—which, when unfolded in time, is read as the consummation at the end of history (*telos*). In an indeterminate market of circulating signifiers, allegory "saves" the Sign, the Idea[35]. The leap of faith is that the end of differentiation is not annihilation, the possibility of which remains, threatening the drama, and which can only be ruled out by *deus-ex-machina*. The trick is then to slide subtly a (once inadequate) idea into the place of the Not, like equality, or dignity, or connectedness, after which *ethos* may be issued: the trick is to change modes. Neither memory nor desire is…. Neither master nor slave is…. While in nearly all of his novels, Rushdie slides signifiers to the point where it seems utterly naïve to use words to reliably reference anything real anymore, he would destabilize cultural knowledge only to the extent that he can still offer hope that if only everyone could feel that their story is part of everyone else's, then…: He is trying to do just enough to stimulate commitment to a network of relations mediated by story-telling.

The occident/orient relationship is one of many conflicts that have already been allegorized. In this case, the allegory links subjects of imperial enterprises and tries to broker links that are not just different from the "original" (which would obviously reproduce imperialism) but dictated by problematics from colonized and decolonized places. There are other allegories, too, like those that would use fragments of disparate cultures, gender, sexual practices, ethnic violence, nation-building, and class struggle, to organize the world into systems of fundamental relations. Each of these ideas need not

[35] which can be counteracted by staying in postmodernism and modulating back to its analytical modes.

be treated allegorically. Most of the time they are conceptual and referential. The word "U.S." refers to a real thing: the U.S. The word "gender" refers to a real thing: gender, whether essence or norm. The references are thought to have independent existence because there are names for them. On the other hand, an allegorical representation of an idea can produce the feeling that everyone's story is everyone else's. In this way it is a powerful rhetorical mode. It can emphasize certain valuable interpretations like partialness and incomparability necessary for exerting monadic authority. Partialness makes the idea of thing inadequate for talking about the world, since in an allegory a thing is only in-itself for another. Incomparability prevents the exchange of a part for another, or metonymically for the whole. An allegory of gender, for example, defines men and women in a necessary dependent relationship; a story of a transvestite may signify the idea that is beyond the attitudes of the respective characters[36]. Each gender does not have meaning in-and-of-itself; rather, the relationship is mediated by the linguistic operation that ironically gives "man" and "woman" the false appearance of independent categories and developmental plots. There cannot be a story of "man" that is not a story of "woman", and vice versa. The allegory, then, serves as a text that binds things according to the linguistic operations needed to define them. It operates effectively through a third term, gender in this case, that is more fundamental than either "man" or "woman" alone (as the determination that genders man and woman) but one

[36] Cf. Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

that need not be referenced as such. The promise of such an allegory is a perfect state-of-affairs characterized as Not-gender(ed)[37].

Allegories value the opposite of that about which they speak the most; this is their redemptive function. Allegories in which conflict take up a lot of the text are meaningful because they look forward to the resolution of conflict. Modernist allegories of fragmentation and disconnect are used to signify unity—even if that unity is in the weak form of relatable melancholia instead of genuine belief in grand narratives. O center that cannot hold. Modern Postcolonial allegories of the production of political boundaries and cultural differences, of partition and animosity, can use the possibility of a unifying function to write *ethos*. To manage the conflict and resolution, an allegory may posit critical moments that mark "before", "during", and "after". The story projects the real possibility of a state-of-affairs prelapsarian to the present; the present is effectively reorganized around this "before-difference". Regional strife can be redefined as the consequence of Balkanization or the creation of the native subaltern-classes. People are objectified, gendered, alienated, etc. The end of strife, of conflict, of division would be told as a sort of recovery of that which had been undifferentiated. In the end is the beginning, to steal Eliot's line[38]. The Ideal beginning/end would have to be signified allegorically because the expression, being made in the time after-difference, is composed of already differentiated material. How beautiful Before Difference must have been—pleasant soile and spring eternal.

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[37] Or, as academics tend to do, it may be called "post-gender". To question what life is like "post-gender", and to take stock of whether we should be post-gender, *or not*, is to resist the monadic authority of the allegory of gender.

[38] Which he stole, of course.

This supposedly better state-of-affairs is implied by Amitav Ghosh's idea of "shadow lines" in the book by the same title; the line that divides a house into separate halves, with one side characterizing the other as up-side-down, is shadowy only because drawn on a house once-undivided and governed by a patriarch authoritative enough to prevent contests of power and succession. Rushdie's metaphors of promise are not so straightforward. The important difference is not marked temporally and with points of historical origin, but implied by the intervention of stories of connect/disconnect—not lost age but lost connectedness[39]. If the moment after is characterized by the work of finding—*recovering*—connections, and of preventing disconnect, then the moment before is always already connectedness fully lived. Its exact nature is never told. I do not dispute causal explanations like Balkanization, or othering, or the rise of different religions; I am focusing on the redemptive idea in each telling, which is hidden, and I would say protected, from scrutiny by the logic of allegory. Using the idea of past, present, and future (i.e. history), the allegorist can organize the present in terms of what it is not, and promise the return of the paradisal organization. I do not claim that an allegorist thinks there are origins as they depict them. But they do use the idea of an original—a state-of-affairs related-to-the-present, yet exceptional-to-present-realities—to project an idyllic unity more fundamental than present differences. The allegorist of the production of difference shifts between past and present (and sometimes future), and between modes[40], to produce conditions in which individuals connected by those differences important here and now are still connected but differently. The differences do

[39] Which Rushdie, in the interview first cited, cannot help but also place in time, as Ghosh does.
[40] As discussed in Chapter 2, Ghosh shifts between history and historiography.

not unjustly determine their values. In other words, individuals are partial and incomparable. Yet, how can we speak of the relation of things not as they exist, except by signifying a point of "preexistence". Somehow, a few writers are gifted and transcend this epistemologically limit which holds the rest of us in place. We who are "different" suddenly find ourselves incorporated under eyes that can see through those differences. The origin of differences serves as that point beyond which the writer can project those ideals the world is lacking. This is the *deus-ex-machina* of allegorical historiography, in fiction and in criticism. The allegory of un-difference is one of the structures that enable the production of *ethos* in Homi Bhabha's cultural criticism, and the allegorized idea is apprehensible by deconstructing "the contest for political and social authority within *the modern world order*"[41] to which Postcolonial criticism ostensibly bears witness.

Because the limits to meaning discovered by Poststructuralism (and independently by other schools and other disciplines) are the same that, in the middle of the twentieth century, enabled the conceptualization of modern existential freedom, Postcolonial structures of interconnectedness may also be interpreted as negative responses to that freedom. I do not speak of freedom in the absolute, but the Modern-Postmodern kind that scrutinizes what is promised by meta-narratives, distrusts the exceptionalist promiser, and frees us from the "responsibility" of having to serve as the appropriate signs in any universalist vision. We do not have to play the right characters in the s|Story. Intellectually, this freedom manifests as steadfast but tolerant disagreement: as the turning away from synthesis—from *aufheben*—that promises to complete the connections and finish the stories. Produced or otherwise, antagonism is

[41] "Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate." emphasis mine.

antagonism, nothing "more". It cannot be turned into an allegorical sign of revolutionary dialecticism. Neither is consciousness of antagonism the last, or next to last, scene in that particular teleology. Rushdie's concept of s|Story is simply an attempt to establish a structure of rhetorical authority. In his network, the agency of the storyteller, both as enacted by the novels and self-reflexively represented in the novels, is allegory. Where the nodes of the network, its subjects, are connected by historiography, their sense of history will be allegorical. They "see" the other through allegories that already place self/others as parts of a (new) Whole. Nevertheless, whenever a story addresses us, to use Bhabha's characterization of discourse, we are still free to subvert or rewrite.

between you and me

To enable comparison, the next order of business is to figure out what networks that use allegory would *specifically* make of its addressee. The perfect subject would not hesitate to act when addressed by the latest allegory of liberation featuring this disappeared-character or that subaltern class. Both *ethos* and subject serve convincingly as concepts around which to explain observable patterns of behavior. Aristotle described *ethos* as the universal characteristic tendency to increase happiness[42], and it is not totally incorrect to correlate it with the character of a person. The subject would be the character actor. After Descartes, the subject was equated with that consciousness arising from uncertainty, unsure of everything except itself as conscious of uncertainty. If everything were put to doubt, there would remain the doubter, the one reasonable thing. Lacan

[42] *Nicomachean Ethics*

objected to this inference and first principle of Cartesian logic[43]. Lacanian psychoanalysis considers the Cartesian subject as an instance of language-use: a Symbolic Order produces subjects that for example consistently use subjective pronouns to represent themselves. Only after subjectivization can there be a "thinker" of "je pense donc je suis". Descartes erroneously conflated "je" with the subject. The subject manifests itself during moments of inconsistency, when the empty signifier sinks beneath the "barr" distinguishing signifier from signified, and a host of now-inadequate signs begin to slide; when the thought I am a man ceases to refer to anything meaningful and becomes the phrase, the signifier, "I am a man" (it has always been). Once again, the critical method hinges on the distinction between text and truth. By "textualizing" I think to "I think", Lacan discovers the subject—not I but that which is capable of using (and I would add rejecting) the thought. To find the *ethos* of a person or group, we also look for the same kind of traceable inconsistencies. And we would do well to remember Lacan's critique as we read Rushdie, and as we read any book that endeavors to produce *ethos* of connectedness, for the difference between what is and that which is supposed to be, is telling.

Often when Poststructuralists criticize subjectivity for being a strategy forcefully "present" across all contexts, as standards of civilization had been[44], as econometrics of development currently are, the objects of critique are identities, not necessarily subjects[45].

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[43] The ontological argument for the existence of god follows similar logic. Lacan's objection will play an important role when we begin to analyze the "resurrection" of the idea of God in contemporary criticism.

[44] and still are, under the charge of neo-colonialism.

[45] To use a well-known example, when Judith Butler forwards the idea of performativity to cast doubt as to whether it can be said that a "man" does this or that for whatever reason, her dispute is really with whomever has already identified—even self-identified—the doer of this or that to be a man. Then there are the cultural critiques. Subjectivity is a "Western" idea, *and* not the universal structure of human societies. In these case,

Identity and the subject as demonstrated by Lacan are not the same. The subject emerges where an identity appears inadequate and the process of identification becomes abruptly apprehensible. Identities are restrictive, disadvantageous, oppressive[46]. Think of how, despite having contemplated otherwise, we still see that the "Indian" subject in London does not just act out his "Indian" subjectivity but somehow *is* Indian. "Indian" refers to his unalterable constitution. Change becomes difficult, for him, for us who conceive him as such, for any subject of nationalism. He enters into any room, comes to a place, *already* identified as such, and carrying his Indian things. *Ethos* is meant to be linked to context in ways that promote identity-shifting or transference; and the thing to note here is that ethics, being "external", does not seem to consign the human agent to presumed roles as oppressingly strictly as nationalism or other kinds of identification. Ethics seems to work at the level of context and performance, and does not make the absolute incontextual and atemporal demands that identification does. This is not to say that ethics dispenses with identity and subjectivity. It interposes between the two. It is a function of them, and a relation to them. That which adopts *ethos* □ during context A can switch to *ethos* □ during context □ *and without having to justify the new identity*. So he who assumes the posture of one made by cultural fragmentation in one moment can in another stand up as something to be recognized as is and as whole. The ability, the very

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again, the dispute, if read carefully, is with certain "subjects"; and when it comes time for cultural critics to send a message to the dominant culture, what is called "subjectivity" returns in the form of defiant examples. It does not return as a concept of criticism, but the enabling mechanism and agent of change. Cf. Helle Rytkonen. "The Mohammed Cartoons - Drawing the Cultural Boundaries Around a Muslim Diaspora in Europe." *Conference Papers -- International Studies Association*. (2007): 1-; or Ilias Papagiannopoulos. "Re-appraising the Subject and the Social in *Western* Philosophy and in Contemporary Orthodox thought." *Studies in Eastern Thought*. 58.4 (2006): 299 – 330. Both want their subjects (which happen to be constituted by their respective subjects of study) to rewrite Western subjectivity.

[46] They may be the opposite, too, but that is rarely discussed.

necessity of "switching" systems of identification, implies a subject, albeit one that seems "more free" even though it is subjected to the determination of context. The subject is that which feels lack from the old and chases plenitude in the next. It desires that which change is supposed to fulfill.

Of course, criticism has already begun to think (again) of stabilizing right and wrong and fixing the world; and with this (re)new(ed) imperative, the distinction between *ethos* and subjectivity becomes less and less distinct. Perhaps the modern relation to subjectivity is a logical conclusion to the revolt against the Cartesian subject, or more specifically against the only certainty in Descartes's skeptical subjectivism. The inadequated observer must give way to new first principles, new *ethos* and new agency. Be that as it may, we had better at this point speak of *ethos* in terms of intersubjectivity, the intersubjectivity that allows an object-subject to shift because he can shift others, if we want to apprehend those realities Modernists and Postcolonialists characterize as their proper conditions and those they want to create. Intersubjectivity preserves the uncertainty (therefore anti-dogmatism) that came to fore with the rise of the Subject and Modernism, but makes the "subject" less self-centered and frees it from the pressure of cultural transparency. The speaking subject is not what he had been made out to be. Yet he does not have to *be* whatever he is ahead of demanding that he be acknowledged (ethically, political, lovingly) as that. When being can be projected ahead of any object but as already there (perhaps in history, the continuation of an unfinished business), change becomes more persuasive. Indeed, change becomes all but necessary, since to stay the same means to stay with a culture, a body of knowledge, a point of view, that has failed. This is revisionary authority; it is how "overseas" can seem not only truthful

beside English history, but also recast the former subjects of English history and of "overseas" in a new Story. Still, we are not in a free-for-all, and an ethics with seemingly changeable subjects requires the more dependable idea of intersubjectivity, or things. Ironically, producers of *ethos* are certain of more things than Descartes was.

There is also something odd in the call to commit to revisions and spectral "things". Responses to the Cartesian subject like Lacan's manage to hide the relentless doubt with which Descartes began his reasoning. I feel there are unexplored complications caused by this philosophical effacement. Critiques of the Western ego actually benefit from the certitude that comes only *after* Descartes's initial logical leap—the certainty of "sum" after much skeptical "cogito". These critiques may actually replace the "I" they attack with another subject, perhaps a non-rational ghost-speaking Human, a subject most certain of itself, when that, too, had been, before the logical leap, like all ideas, doubtful. Indeed, criticism of Descartes should be persuasive only if it reiterates its method each time there emerges a foundational certainty amidst relentless doubt. Let all those who ask for commitment *begin* with relentless doubt, and see what their first step would be. Lacan is actually most like himself when he does so, for that is how he characterizes the restless nature of desire. Unfortunately, the relation between Cartesian doubt and Lacanian desire is not within the scope of my work here. I only broach the issue because I want to set precedence for future analysis related to the function of desire in the production of *ethos*. Something retards the relentless critique of the Cartesian universe. Something retards the relentless critiques of identity, representation, values, and the ethical universe, too. Aadam feels neither Kashmiri nor Indian. Perhaps he is neither one nor the other. Perhaps *that* is all. No new "sum" to add

from old fragments. One of the reasons Rushdie has trouble saving him, and his descendents, from simply being that which is neither Kashimiri nor Indian, is that the author has to think of ways to forestall the disintegration started by his critique of the formation of identities on the colonial and post-colonial Indian Subcontinent. Rushdie cannot afford to lose Aadam to the indifference of either the unceasingly changeable or the doubtful, because there would be no story ready to be part of another.

If the failures that emerge from encounters with other individuals deny objective knowledge, then a world of inter-personal communication comes too near the relativistic conclusions of some of the disciplines that first studied it, and leaves open the idea that the oppressed person whose struggles the postcolonial writer "witnesses" may simply be a figment of the writer's imagination and the expression of his own problems made public. There: another sign, no better than the present. There: another system, no better than the present. The call of ethics goes unanswered. The ethicist cannot have this. Ethics administers action, and subjectivity, though it describes how writer and reader can understand each other, does not compel the latter to act like "real things" do. We understand the characters of Singh, Gabriel, Amitab, Dedalus (that is, the quality that makes them inter-subjective), but we accord them no real status and do nothing except enjoy the works that portray them[47]. The production of *ethos* must therefore transform the matrix of subject-relations by signifying that which is more fundamental than unreliable subjective experience.

[47] The worry over the reality of that which is perceived by subjects in common is overblown. Science is intersubjective: intersubjectivity is a foundational requirement of scientific study. A hypothesis of science has to be testable and the test results have to be reproducible—meaning I see that which you see through the microscope.

The idea of intersubjectivity had been posited in response to the problems raised by modeling consciousness in terms of subjects. Husserl's concept explains our experiences, including our subjective-identification, and to explain how intercultural understanding is possible[48]. Encountering the world (or Ghosh's field of othering), one finds that there are objects that treat one like an object. The empathetic person will liken these intentional objects to himself, and then ascribe to them the same subjective qualities. He steps in their shoes and imagines them in his. (Today in the sciences the construction of others who think just as one does, who lie, cheat, steal, love, mean well, just as one does, is called a theory of mind; autistic children are slow to develop this cognitive function). To be in the shoes of others, one must regard objects that coincide with concepts and experiences as independent of them. Intersubjectivity presupposes objective reality, according to Husserl. It explains why we are not completely solipsistic, why there might actually be a wall that we cooperate to build, fight to secure, and cooperate to demolish, even if we can never be sure that the wall is a transcendental object. Maybe it even saves us from nihilism, the outcome, Nietzsche feared, of the deconstructive aspect of that perspective we have come to know as Modernity. Note how Husserl revises Descartes's famous conclusion by keeping the predicate "sum" as a function of uncertain thought. Just because I think, does not mean I am. I am I only because I think others think I am: *cogitamus ergo sum*, we might say. For Husserl, perceptual objects constituted by the intersubjective experience are "transcendental"; the existentialist Sartre calls them phenomenological reduction. Lacan, for his part,

[48] Cf. *Cartesian Mediations*: *An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Trans. Dorion Cairns. The Hague, The Netherlands: M. Nijhoff. 1960.

conceives that both subject and object are constituted by the Symbolic Order. The step that brings to mind the difference between cogito and cogitamus happens *after* the formation of a specular subject. Theories that deconstruct the "gaze" tend to also make much of an "intersubjective" experience. The experience is defined by tensions between the gazer and the return of the gaze, like the mirroring of intentionality in Husserl. From Husserl, to Joyce, to Lacan, to Mulvy, to Rushdie, the nature of the intersubjective experience correlates to the kind of ethics one arrives at, or starts from and wants to arrive at.

Let us call Postcolonialism's new ethics a new instance of intersubjectivity, then, one that tries hard to elevate things that would not ordinarily be intersubjective, or would be limited to a small and/or powerless group of believers, things like specters and hybrids, superstition and indignation, and everything that has been put forth as "liminal", to a stature rivaling objective reality, so that authors can freely speak "with" them and "through" them. Intersubjectivity provides an entryway for (always already) new authors, as demonstrated by the business of writing history from "overseas"; inter-subjectivity, the movement from subjective experience to "things", strengthens the hold of the new texts so that moral imperatives are once again followed at face-value. The ghosts, possessions, mysteries, imaginaries, suffering, dignity, that are presupposed to exist do not exist as blind faith, unrequited desires, senses of entitlement unmerited, or the expression of people scared that they are not as significant as they feel, but ineluctable modalities of being that shape the field of ethics. The new subjects are coordinated by these oh-so-valuable things. The coordination happens under the authority of allegorical signification, as *some* things and not others dictate the (new) order

of things. If Rushdie has his way, the unacknowledged will have monadic authority, a power superior to legislation since it would circumvent mechanisms like doubt, constitutional limits, etc. placed to retard the latter.

Connection by way of story goes beyond mutual understanding. This is another reason to recall the phenomenological concept. Mutual understanding leaves open the possibility that people remain unchanged *by each other*, that even as you allow me to show you who I am in the language that is particular to my situation, you remain unimpressed and unmoved. The stories are inert. The ties do not bind. People come and leave as they are. Or more damagingly, mutual understanding might force you to make yourself understandable to me in a way that puts you at disadvantage. For instance, a woman representing herself as part of an historically oppressed class might also unsuspectingly implicate herself in a structure of desire for development that, given the history she is purposefully taking on, marks her culture and society as undeveloped[49]. We may come to mutual understanding as such, but what if she wants to also redefine the terms of our agreement? Although peoples' stories have always been connected (always in the time with which we are concerned), this time, under Rushdie's watchful eye, people are convinced of their connectivity, respect the connections (as written by one end of the connection), and change accordingly. The compulsion to act, moreover the radical changes possible under the authority of ethics, like the reconstitution of identities, indicates that this new intersubjectivity—Rushdie's theory of connected stories—is more intimate than the understanding that passes between independent consciousnesses. Suffering is not, or should not be, the dinner table, though both are our invention. The

two would be different; the question is, are they? Or, to factor time into the problem, does new ethics, unfixed and unmoored, strive to make new subjects, self-believing subjects, of the kind that is no different than that which psychoanalysis described before the Poststructuralist and Postcolonial response? Is it yet another "system of address"[50] wherein each acts on behalf and as instrument of a superior intelligence?

So there is yet one last advantage to be said for talking about new ethics using the *concept* of intersubjectivity, and for recalling earlier conceptions in order to understand the motives and strategies of the latest producers of *ethos*. Examining intersubjective relations, we note how dependent Postcolonial ethics is on convincing or coercing an audience/readership to participate fully in the speaking subject's act: to accept the new way of talking about the world; to feel that the connections are undeniable; to receive him as that which he wants to be; to do what needs to be done. This modulation towards objectivity is subtle but hardly unbelievable. If we may be accused of sustaining censurable prejudices and discriminations in our literature and in our philosophies, then we are also responsible for sustaining the corrective ideas of the day such as equality and dignity. Both the bad for which we are faulted and the good to which we are responsible are effects of the same agency. Call it our moral capacity. It just so happens that, if we look at one action in a "program" of intersubjectivity[51], we will note that *ethos* "works"

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[49] Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe*.

[50] *Location of Culture*. 155. Bhabha faults Derrida because his method of deconstruction is missing another set of patterns—the discursive. As corrective, Bhabha enlists the aid of Foucault. But the upshot of Bhabha's synthesis is not a deconstructive anthropology; for that we already have Foucault. Bhabha begins to open a gap between the Real of Poststructuralism and the real-effects of Postcolonialism. This gap frees the cause from causality as described by Poststructuralist theory, and allows a Postcolonialist to give shapes and names to the wonder of newfound agents.

[51] I say "program" to maintain the distinction that Rushdie implies when he says we do not feel what is really there, a distinction between the status quo and any future social dynamic. Perhaps a better word might be

only when a host of people subject themselves to the producer and his objects. In order for an image, a story, of unskilled laborers left out of the economy to be the sign of oppression, a significant number of people must come to believe the accuracy of the representation and the reality behind it, and act on that belief. In order to think that representing society in terms of progress puts undeveloped societies unfairly in the "waiting room" of history, a significant number of people must suppress comparing cultures and economies, and treat each other as though everyone were uniquely and undeniably invaluable and there were a whole which must necessarily contain everyone as such.

Let us suppose, then, that the producer of *ethos* is empowered to transform subjectivity by manipulating the intersubjective with respect to which new subjects are defined. The new subjects respond "ethically" to such "things" as ghosts and to allegories of unfinished business, to migrants and their stories. Bhabha himself acknowledges as much[52]. The producer of *ethos* arranges encounters, making sure the experience defamiliarizes and reconstitutes the "right" things. He is Rushdie's actor. He is the Postcolonial interventionist. Perhaps he will turn out to be a kind of author, too, like Rushdie himself, who discovers to us how we are linked (with the issuer of *fatwas* as his adversary). Or an author whose dust jacket biographical blurb might include the

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consciousness, since the metaphysics of consciousness—consciousness is only of things that exist apart from consciousness—grants to Rushdie his connectivity. But then, program will refer to the need to make everyone conscious of the metaphysical connections. So the term "program" is still useful to indicate that something still has to be put into wide practice.

[52] "It is in the emergence of the interstices that the *intersubjective* and collective experience of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated". *The Location of Culture* 2. First emphasis mine, second in original.

proud appellation "scholar-activist"[53]. The question on new ethics becomes, what world is this that helps him become whatever author he wants to be? Our responsibility is to analyze *how* this method to power is intended to work, how it actually will work, and what it will do and *not* do. We find ample occasions in the literature, which we need to examine as though they were examples of a new intersubjective power. Then we might begin to truthfully characterize this brave new world that has such things in it.

power & Authority

Rushdie proposes what is ostensibly a program of intersubjectivity that works in concert with new ethics. The one supports and enables the other; connecting them are the modal shifts and other writing strategies indicative of the ethical turn. The production of *ethos* reinforces the reality of connectedness, and connectivity justifies—necessitates—particular ethical positions. Rushdie's fiction may be read as different ways to modulate between the two to produce this cooperation, and of course evidence of how this cooperation may be undermined. The program begins with the observation—no, with submission—that everyone's stories are part of everybody else's. Ethics moderates the connections, supports what is done with them. The resulting ethical field, which locates the "reader" and "object" on to the same matrix (discussed in the previous chapter), when implemented as widespread if not necessarily universal social practice, allows people *qua* writers to make claims on each other *qua* audience that is likewise located. The claim

[53] There are compelling reasons for maintain the autonomy of the several human functions. Their hyphenation evidences the ethical turn that puts analysis in the realm of morality, resisting which is the "corrective" intervention of my present work.

and its claimant are redeemed when the writing transforms the field. Oppression and the oppressed are redeemed; the world is radically remade[54].

New discourse can persuade change. Some writings do alter the world. They have power. But the world does not seem to work quite as imagined: it has not always been systematic; it follows no intelligence; the production of discourse does not lead to a satisfying outcome; the ethical crises fail to find *le juste denouement*. Unless one puts on blinders, there is enough evidence to cast doubt on the verity of any received idea of what amounts to a moral universe—we might call it the trouble of "mere complexities".[55] In their ethical moments, Postcolonialist writers are trying to overcome this dissatisfying unpredictability. Faith in inhuman forces (e.g. History, Language, Discourse, Consciousness, the Good), on which could be counted for our moral improvement once upon a time, must now accompanied (again) by deliberate human action. Under new ethics, if *Elle* feels oppressed, she speaks up. Oppression will not take care of itself. By speaking, she can rectify the problem of her condition. Ethics prepares the way. It has made those around her highly receptive, highly suggestible; made her into the dispenser of something *lacking* in and by the peoples of the world. Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, the field does not interpret, evaluate; absorb her story of oppression like a muddy field absorbs water splashed from a bucket. Instead, her story transforms the field, overwhelms it like a deluge revitalizing floodplains. In consequence to her action, those who think themselves a part of that field change their way of thinking. They

[54] This is, after all, the revolutionary mantra that opens and recurs throughout *The Satanic Verses.*
[55] W.B. Yeats. "Byzantium".

change their desires. They are transformed. And as their desires change, so is the world changed.

The very mention of power tends to prompt immediate adverse reactions, especially as we confront the issues of colonization and its aftermath. Given the centuries of subjugation, understandable is the distaste for ceding power. Yet, my traces of the function of power in the establishment of ethical bonds and production of *ethos* should in no way be read as condemnation of ethics as inherently unfair. Leaders, governing ethical boards, decision makers, or *ethos* writer, may be truly benevolent. Given a truly benevolent producer of *ethos*, the question of power is answered by the idea of the Good. In that exceptional case, power is always Good; Good always in power. The case should be familiar to theology and philosophy. Even without such singular figures, there may be ways to structure power such that the production of *ethos* appears fair. Rushdie's idea suggests that everyone has stories to tell, can tell his story, and that that story will play a not insignificant role in the interconnected world—a vision of a very democratic world indeed. In the case where power is justly distributed, the Good can be approached as various interests check each other's bad impulses. So as we trace the link between power and ethics, I am in no way committing to any particular moral critique. Actually, I could be saying: let us keep other analyses and other *ethos* in mind.

If *ethos* is an intersubjective phenomenon based on listening and reacting to things (perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, or words) held in common, then a producer of a text necessarily exercises authority over subjects when the text has successfully raised an ethical problem. And that exercise is power, to whatever extent. Indeed, power redistribution justifies the production of *ethos*, in Chakrabarty, in Ghosh, in Bhabha, in

Spivak, etc. If you utter the word "oppression" and everyone runs around trying to do something, you have power. If reading a text you find moments of resistance to confirm a Plot with which to motivate the present, you have power. It is a power given *a priori*, assumed by producers and enacted by adherents. We will have to examine whether the power of ethics is pretense to producers (assumed as wearers of uniforms assume), and something like self-fulfilling prophecy to followers. The authority to *produce ethos*, to dictate the ethical, empowers insofar as the producer has ethical persons to carry out the given *ethos*. Ethics empowers the producers of *ethos* and subjugates followers to their authority and power. In a sense, the (new) ethicist aims to rewrite reality by instructing instruments for change.

I should qualify the alignment of power and authority. Critics including Postcolonialists have pushed for recognition of the difference between authority and power. Homi Bhabha, for instance, questions the perceived power of policing agents of the state: resisting the authority of a sign (e.g. a badge, a uniform) can actually disrupt power relations. The balance of power is weighed after the fact. Authority is the presupposition of power that tends to lead to power, but not always and not when authority is resisted. Power is the capacity to change, and (following from Marx's observation) to reproduce the same. It is what we give *to authority* when we can just as well try to take. Authority is the assignment of power, which may not always be true, and is often self-fulfilling.

Shakespeare knew this. In the eponymous play, King Lear tries to exercise power by virtue of paternal and kingly authority, only to find that having foolishly used power to divest himself of it, he could no longer maintain the authority to command. Only

Cordelia observes the authority of King and Father while Lear is powerless. So Lear is powerless King and dethroned power, alternately and simultaneously; this is one of the play's dramatic tensions. It is the same tension that once more drives the scene in which Henry V wanders unlike himself among his soldiers before battle. The difference is clearer when we consider "power" that is meaningless; so change that is meaningless. Wind has power, but no authority. It is not "killer", as sensationalist reporters make it out to be, or fortuitous, unless you were to live in a culture that obeys, or change ours to recognize, the "spirit" of the wind. It does not endorse a nation, unless a public believes some greater intelligence had thwarted the invading Chinese fleet, or the Spanish Armada. But if you could divine what the wind says, then you have authority, the authority of the idea of wind; and if you could use it to produce change in time, then you and the authority of the wind-spirit would figure in our subsequent calculations of power. And if you can balance authority and power rightly, your retirement ought to be less like Lear's and more like Prospero's. Why can we not apply this conceptual difference, which Homi Bhabha emphasizes in his study of culture produced by colonization, to other signs of authority and strategies to manage power?

The difference can turn ethics on its head. The power of revolution, as measured by actual changes and against the persistence of history which is supposed to have ended, and the authority of revolutionary propaganda, what is promised, what is recited, are not the same. If peasants in Marxist states could, they might discover what was said elsewhere: "No likely end could bring them loss / Or leave them happier than before".[56] The better society is not that in the least. The simple truth is that authority keeps getting

misplaced, and reality—Lacan calls it the Real—does not seem to care how we construct ethics and define *ethos*. We may; It may or may not. So the authority of Postcolonialism to finish business and rewrite subjectivity may mask the reality of its attempt to transform, the power it is trying to amass.

Postcolonial *ethos* such as the demand to deal with unfinished business[57] depend on a working presumption that the promise of transformations, and the ultimate Transformation, are already apparent, and the connections that empower the claimant are necessarily real. To shore up this gap between reality and desire are patterns we have encountered already, things like ghosts and *di-ex-machinae*. Here is a clarifying example from Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*. At the beginning of the novel about independence on the Indian subcontinent and its aftermath, one of the main themes is sounded in a conflict between an old boatman Tai and a western trained doctor Aadam [*sic*]. Tai objects to Aadam's training and methods, but he does not object because they fail to do what they are promised to. He objects on nativist grounds: the doctor's medicine is not Indian. The drama between Tai and Aadam represents the irrevocable transformations of English rule and its effects which lingered strongly and well after the moment of decolonization. Before Aadam's training, the two existed in a pseudo familial relation; after which, Tai became the old man who lived in myths while Aadam became the doubly-conscious Kashmiri trying to negotiate inconsistencies between his professional training and its values and what has turned from "myth"—Tai's myth—to

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[56] W.B. Yeats. "An Irish Airman foresees his Death".

[57] Bearing in mind that Postcolonial *ethos* is not the character of a person determined by postcolonial conditions, but that set of behaviors which are approved as ethical in writings with common ambition using similar strategies I have been calling Postcolonialism.

cultural tradition. Subsequent encounters are intersubjective: struggles between object-subjects to control what binds them. Rushdie uses Tai and Aadam to create ethical crisis, and he uses the ethical crises to develop the ethical problematic of *Midnight's Children*. For instance, Aadam helps Tai, even as Tai deliberately harms himself so he could refuse treatment. Tai eventually dies, and continues to haunt as a ghost that resurrects the problematic of colonial transformation. Unfortunately, the ethical consciousness produced from this deliberate haunting does not fix the problems from colonial rule and from zealous optimism brought on by independence, as the rest of Rushdie's novel shows. Indeed, Rushdie has to let Tai's power to linger past death precisely because Aadam and his medicine, and that which they represent, succeed. Tai's spirit is made for Aadam, and Aadam for Tai. And the role of Tai is important because the structure of his persistence constitutes the novel's ethical dimension. He is Aadam's unfinished business[58]. That is his *authority* as xenophobic anti-modern spirit. His *power* is the penetration of Aadam's psyche. By treating "ghosts" as real, and other intersubjective phenomena as things, Rushdie reinforces the authority of his ethics so that, at some point, those who control "ghosts" can exercise dialectical power. We will seep into the difference between the two, and coldly split that which uses them like ice splits rock. For now, let us say that ethics in *Midnight's Children* depends on "life" beyond certain limits—forgetfulness, denial, rejection, death, or nothingness[59].

Analysis of the dialectic between authority and power frustrates any attempt to change the world through the establishment of new ethics, just as it did the formation of

[58] to use an idea from the novel that follows.
[59] Which are the same that limitations overcome by the human figures of Ghosh's historiography.

subjects of colonial discourse. It may cast doubt on Rushdie's characterization of our human connections, connections that are supposed to facilitate the production of *ethos*. Bhabha argues that authority does not always imply having power, and *vice versa*[60]. Intervening complexities like the degree and scope of that authority, and especially the decisions that have to be made between the publication of the word of authority and its execution as an exercise of power, frustrate many attempts to translate authority to power. In fact, changes in what we believe to be authoritative, and changes to whole structures of authority, evidence this skewed and unpredictable correlation between power and authority, for how else historically would anyone have gained the power to dispose of the previous authority and become the new? Power can oppose or confirm authority; authority can produce or thwart power. If power and authority connect us, whether in struggle, solidarity, or indifference, then discontinuities might suggest something about the nature of our human connections, and that of what the connections can and cannot do. Like people, texts can have authority. They can be powerful (as long as they have instruments to carry out their instructions). They can be said to have caused changes.

An ethics of connectedness such as suggested by Rushdie is a form of cultural authority—soft power, it may be called—that allows authors (who fit the proper description) to produce *ethos*. The new ethical subject is much more amenable to interventionist story-telling. Under such authority, words can be as powerful as magical incantation.

[60] Olson, Gary and Lynn Worsham. "Staging the Politics of Difference: Homi Bhabha's Critical Literacy". *JAC*. 18.3 (1998): 361 – 91.

magic

Because Rushdie often uses a surrogate for himself as writer in his novels, he ends up demonstrating—wishfully, one might say—the story-teller's authority and power. In Rushdie, one trope for power is magic. Frequently, artistic creations are much more powerful than they are in empirical reality. They magically reveal otherwise unknowable realities; convey otherwise inexpressible truths; connect people across space and time at a level deeper than, say, the contractual relations of modernity; and change reality. They are agents. Chutney from *Midnight's Children* does all of the above. Yet we have learned that the power of tropes really depends on their authority, and the problem for Rushdie is that he has also demonstrated as much. As with the critical methods of historiography and discursive analysis, the function of magic used to undermine the contemporary authority that determines what is real can also undermine the authority to determine what is ethical, and thereby disempower ethics. Here is another way of putting it: the magic *in* the novel undermines the "magic" of the novel. The problem of magic should be familiar; and after all, magical chutney-making is metaphor for story-telling. It is a problem of discourse that wants to both analyze and synthesize when each task take power away from the other. Magic undermines the rules that normalizes present relations, yet presently normalize (new) relations. There are many sections of his novels, such as when the artist becomes famous, where the artist-character and the author restively deal with the problematic of authority/power, and in the end, Rushdie's magic simply increases the authority of the New. Believe, don't believe,

the narrative declares[61], these things mean something (in the narrative). Or "I am obliged to offer no more than this stubborn sentence: it happened that way because that's the way it happened"[62]. Criticism recognizes the same problematic, too, and has built magical structures, such as the concept of "lived-experience", its intersubjective mode, even the problem of translation and the idea of Custom[63], to protect something that can very easily be undermined by rival magic-users. Consider me one of those rivals, the one who is incredulous of magic because he doubts the authority of the ethical word.

Rushdie's novels are not just magic realist. They are many things: anthropological artifact; entertainment; trophy of a dangerous anti-religious-establishmentarianism; the musings of a mind caught in-between, as Bhabha might say. And they are literary novels: we must not forget that Rushdie, whatever his politics, philosophy or *ethos*, and however much he experiments with ways to make meaning, chose to write novels, instead of newspaper articles, essay collections, non-fiction, stump speeches or some new form of writing he could have invented; instead of making documentaries, playing pundit on television, or becoming a professional critic[64]; instead of blogging. Nevertheless, the novels are magic realist. The things that happen in them, things like falling from an airplane and surviving, or being transformed into an angel or devil, or clairvoyant bathroom tiles, premonitions of bad luck coming true, telepathy are not observed empirically outside of them. The magic is not reproducible. Or, to put it another way, the propositions are insupportable if one were scientifically skeptical and

[61] *The Satanic Verses*.
[62] *Midnight's Children*. 433
[63] See my Chapter 2

decided that they have to be tested. In a Rushdie novel, of course, bodily transformations and transcendental beings are nothing out of the ordinary. Indeed, they are endorsed at the highest level of legitimacy, because "real" characters take them to be as "real" as other objects and events that *we* take for granted as real—the cloven-hoofed Saludin is as real as the terrorists around him. Look: the perspicacity of the tapestry is confirmed fifty pages later. And listen: the voice-over of the Bollywood musicals is shown to be "less real" than the communion of the Gabreel, sometimes angel sometimes human, and Mahoun, founder of Islam. I have even come to expect the unusual from Rushdie, that when I bought Shalimar the clown, I would have been disappointed had I found no conceit of the strange ordinary in the first few pages, no uncanny relation between East and West. And I expect that because "magic" is important to the text, it might play a significant role in showing the way of ethics, if not substantiating it.

Some critics are uncomfortable with the category "magic" because the connotations of "magic", they feel, diminishes the writing's social messages (which does not refer only to magical i.e. unreal worlds). This objection is part of a broader critique of cultural judgment: "magic", like irrationality, and other signs of barbarism, is part of a discourse designed to devalue certain peoples and societies. Pay no attention to the barbarian: he speaks nonsense. Pay no attention to the Indian: he believes in magic[65].

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[64] The same way that, when V.S. Naipaul claims non-fiction is the mode the world needs most, he continues to write novels for which he is known—as he should be—in addition to nonfiction travelogues and opinion pieces. The novel must enable something unique if proponents of other modes keep coming back to it.

[65] Within the scope of our primary investigation there are reasons for making this analogy. Rushdie criticizes the binary. In Midnight's Children, there is the example of Zagallo, "crazy Zagallo", the cause of Saleem's "first mutilation", who denounces his Indian students as "savages" (224), draws a map of India on Saleem's face, and calls Pakistan a stain. In a bit of masterful irony, Rushdie leads from this section about the legitimacy of India's place in modernity to the first discovery of Saleem's illegitimacy. At birth the nurse had switch him and another of the midnight's children.

Gods are also magical, a modern might say, and the invocation of God is magical thinking. Such "things" have no place beyond the imaginary. If their handlers want to use them, they have to prove them. Yet to critics like Ashis Nandy, the proclamation constitutes an aggressive and direct attack on believing cultures. Nandy writes: "Dieties in everyday Hinduism, from the heavily Brahminic to the aggressively non-Brahminic, are not entities outside of everyday life, nor do they preside over life from the outside; they constitute a significant part of it. […] Gods are beyond and above humans but they are, paradoxically, not outside the human fraternity".[66] According to Nandy, Indian cultural life has been subjected to centuries-long attempts at rationalization and secularization. Programmatic of this subjugation is the condescending consignment of magic to the antiquated world, when "magic" actually constitutes lived-experience.

At the same time, the series of relations Nandy forms with respect to the everyday gods extends beyond scholarly self-correction. One cannot be indifferent. One cannot be indifferent to the death of these gods, and by extension to the people belonging to the fraternity of humans and gods. "You can adore or love them, you can disown or attack them, you can make them butts of wit and sarcasm"[67]; yet never does Nandy talk of reasons to contest them in any way that superannuates their power, to diminish them to the present status of zephyrs, that is, fiction, and to ignore them: the reasons are already illegitimate, if not Western. Nandy characterizes the authority of magical discourse by offering himself as example.

[66] "A Report on the Present State of Health of the Gods and Goddesses in South Asia". *Bonfire of Creeds: the essential Ashis Nandy*. Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2004. 131
[67] Ibid 131

> The literary theorist D.R. Jagaraj accused me of writing on these things as an outsider. 'You come to the gods and goddesses as an intellectual, academically,' he said. I often felt like telling him that though I did not want to come to them, they forced me. There is an inevitable logic through which these obstreperous deities infect our lives, pervade it, even invade and take it over, independently of our likes and dislikes. Like most other South Asians, belonging to a whole range of faiths, I have no choice in the matter.[68]

While on the surface Nandy seems to have surrendered agency to these everyday deities, the possibility of secularization, moreover its reality as the lived-experience of modernity or the West, suggests that Nandy's inversion of the knower and the objects of knowledge is rhetorical and ethical. He not only serves as an advocate for the satirist whose humiliation at the hands of Hindu nationalists opened the article, but also stands as a producer of *ethos*. Nandy begins the article by denouncing the killing of the everyday gods as cultural imperialism; then he sets up the aforementioned culturally relevant fraternity—a society where gods are as much political agents as human politicians—which he populates with those gods and goddesses he thinks right. The key concept is not gods but "belonging". Why not propose the renunciation of faith, and euthanize belief? Why not? Because life for these deities, for all deities, depends on cultivating, sustaining, and expanding the category of the "belonged", to whom gods and demons are not culturally produced fantasies inculcated in good boys and girls, but "real" and must be dealt with. As such, the life and times of these "human" gods belong to another

[68] Ibid 134

story[69]. Where Nandy has to, others do not; we do not. Nandy's arguments parallel the thinking of other Postcolonial writers, and his advocacy speaks of the production of *ethos* in which texts like *The Satanic Verses* gain a kind of agency against which we would have no choice. This, in fact, is how Nandy positions Rushdie's satire[70].

While "magic" connotes and possibly devalues believers of magic unfairly, the objection to the label also speaks of a desire for power, specifically for *this* kind of novel to do something that *other* kinds, also relegated to their categories in the literary marketplace, cannot or do not do. In addition to whatever magic that may or may not exist, there is a "magic" symptomatic of a desire for authority and power. The difference in capability is implied by the attention paid to novels that are to be "magic realist" in one frame of reference and "history" in another, as though other modes, like Naipaul's realism, or the dry report of relief agencies, prove inadequate. It would be easy to ignore the either-or logic where it rules, when writers maintain the rhetoric of a great pluralism and do not seem to denounce each other for falsehood. Certainly a bookshelf can contain many kinds of books. To understand the power meant for magic by magic-users, we have to look to where particular ideas would not be denied, where so much is at stake that the question of "what's at stake" seems out-of-place, because at some point an argument will be made why this book, or these words, and not those, should be, have to be,

[69] To use the problematic formulated in Plato's *Phaedra*: good is not what these gods love but what they serve.

[70] The society of everyday gods threatens monotheism as much as it threatens secular rationalism, according to Nandy. "Even in starkly monotheistic religions, gods and goddesses are waiting just outside the doors of consciousness. Most of the anger against *The Satanic Verses* was inspired by the gratuitous insults that Rushdie heaped on some of Islam's revered figures, but part of it might also have been a response to the latent fear that the banished might return. The non-Islamic or pre-Islamic forms of consciousness that the book unwittingly invokes may or may not threaten 'mainstream' Islam, but they perhaps haunt the many Islamic

circulated. The ideas of barbarian and magic-believer prevent a wanted agency. The (new) signs should make a difference. It seems to me, that whatever their antagonism, the categorizer and his critic share a difference: they differ in their interpretations of the relationship between Rushdie and literature. Whether Rushdie's novels enlighten or entertain, or both, they do so because the author made them to be different. And if they are to do anything, they can only do so after alerting readers to that difference. Rushdie deliberately departs from his predecessors. He desires to be read as such. The difference is the same, then, even when the critic promoting it calls it by a different name, and hopes that under a different name it causes changes that are more dramatic than those caused by "the magic realism of Rushdie". It is the difference that enables the critical debate on its meaning, its consequence. Rushdie is breaking our sense of reality by normalizing the fantastic on purpose; let us admit *that* even as we debate how to categorize *The Satanic Verses* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*. There is something deliberately odd in these books, the oddity of what they treat as ordinary[71]. This difference, composed by Rushdie, which establishes the common starting point for the categorizer and the anti-categorizer, is also our starting point. However, rather than moving immediately into a debate about the subversive, transformative, or enlightenment power of the generic differentiation, and asking that difference to subvert, transform, enlighten, I am simply asking: why magically violate our extant skeptical and demystifying *ethos*?

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communities in those parts of the world where such forms are, as I remarked, no longer one's distant, superseded past". (134)

[71] This sense of the ordinary is, I think, what separates "magic realism" from surrealism, for the latter aims to defeat any sense of consistency and regularity.

The answer is easy. Rushdie knows his audience. He needs to excite the feeling that we are less, and more, than we think we are; and to connect us in ways that we do not ordinarily feel we connect. Magic realist novels are not written by people who believe in the "magic" that distinguishes their books from others. Listen to Rushdie or Morrison or Marquez. Not one is a skeptical empiricist by any means. Empiricists tend not to admit an idea unless it were provable and has been subjected to rigorous public vetting. Yet neither are those authors unaware that they are using metaphors and allegories[72]. To respect magic as much as scientific explanations may be to follow what the writer wants, but it means also forgetting the critical study of what the writers are trying to do, the circumstance of their writing, the particularities of their lives. In fact, it means erasing what the producers of *ethos* know about how to use stories to advantage. "Corrections" to the *status quo* on behalf of the disadvantaged overreaches because it obscures a real difference used by the "corrective". I challenge anyone to find enough people who having read *The Satanic Verses* jump from a plane—it does not even have to explode—with the purpose of jump starting apocalyptic revolution, enough for us to suppress our suspicion of the author's rhetorical trick. That will be when I believe magic in literature is true belief. Short of the genuine, we are forced to conclude that Rushdie is using a tactic.

[72] When criticism legitimizes the "magic" of "other" people, it has already changed the context of production of the novels. Rushdie's magic is meant for the Booker Prize; it is not that untranslatable experience of Kashmir. To insist on using "magic" for the politics of cultural dignity is to miss Rushdie's purpose. In "Cosmopolitanism and Objectivity" from his book *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's* Midnight's Children, Neil Kortenaar recognizes that the function of Rushdie's magic is to first enter into the "Western" context, where magic is unexpected, before moving everything to another one: the truth of the outsider. The truth of the outsider is, of course, not the truth of the native; Kortenaar is interpreting the difference that, for me, also produces the intersubjective experience. The *ethos* that calls for organizing culture around magic that is not our magic is produced under an authority that bars certain kinds of literary analysis.

Viktor Shklovsky conceived defamiliarization to describe the literary technique wherein common expectations of reality are deliberately alienated[73]. The concept explains the difference between everyday language and the works of Tolstoy, who has a horse narrate a story. Metaphors, too, are critical to this function, as evident by the famous one that opens *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*[74]. Formalists and their Western counterparts the Structuralists thought that defamiliarization might be a force to convince the reader what he takes as natural is actually structured by rules of which he is unaware. The hope would be extended by some to literary modes in general; it is Rushdie's hope. The technique has a wide vocabulary. It can be as simple as Spivak changing the name for wet nurses from "wet-nurse" to "breast-giver"; or as elaborate as the juxtaposition and anachronism of Bertol Brecht's epic-theatrical production of the familiar story of Galileo, his *Verfremdungseffekt*. Amitav Ghosh defamiliarizes the idea of circumcision by incorporating into his narrative several narrations of its meaning[75]; each narrator makes circumcision "speak" in a way unfamiliar to his audience. In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* the working life in the village might be a Marxist allegory of our alienation from our own tools, an alienation which we workers have "naturalized". The village and idea of the allegory certainly are *not* confirmable, although in that particular universe it is taken to be "real" *prima facie*. When we decide that something is metaphorical, we have already decided that the talking hammer is not real. In other words, we are familiar with it now. Unlike specific metaphors, magic realist conceits are supposed to force us to reconsider our rules for the

[73] *Art as Technique.*
[74] Not cited by Shklovsky.

whole of reality and the system(s) that decide what is real and what is not[76]. Marginalizing someone does not turn him into a monster; except that in *The Satanic Verses* it does. We have naturalized our discriminatory markers (like the indicators for race or nationality). By substituting an element in how that rule is applied, while maintaining consistency everywhere else, the defamiliarizing story questions why we do not consider our own rules as unnatural as the odd ones in the magic realist's universe. After all, is not discrimination by skin color or religious attire as absurd as discrimination by cloven hooves? For Rushdie, every exchange is opportunity to defaniliarize; every encounter brings us to the field of othering. The objection to the categorization of Rushdie's novels and those like them as magic realism is arguable on the point that the designation prevents the necessary contrast and comparison. It is feared that readers will simply naturalize the rules that are being criticize in a particular novel, and what should be odd becomes ordinary. Or, by relegating the novels to a new category, we can dismiss those substitutions that give us anxiety as metaphors and nothing to do with us. In other words, in this particular debate we find another instance of the structuralist/post-structuralist "double edge".

Structuralism was optimistic when it was new. It could penetrate dogma and superstition: god is not that which sent you to hell (or reward you with heaven) but a pattern of human belief and a discourse used by some to manipulate others. When structuralism grew old, and relatively popular, and lost its critical force, it was, in the eyes of its poststructuralist critics, another hegemonic, colonizing discourse—in the same

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[75] *In An Antique Land*. See my Chapter 2.
[76] One might be able to use this intention to edify to differentiate between "magic realism" and "fantasy".

insidious way that humanist discourse promoting man's development colonized the colonies. The attempt to decode is not "better": it is a turn to another code, under the (supposedly false) assumptions that others code, and other codes can be codified, can be mastered.

Russian formalists and structuralists like Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson and Mikhail Bhaktin hoped that the discovery of the specific rules of signification would lead to freedom of thought and newfound agency. Defamiliarization is one way to uncover the rules. Across the continent, in Europe, the playwright Bertol Brecht founded a new dramaturgy based in part of the *Verfremdungeffekt*. The V-effect is achieved by deliberately "transgressing" the rules of theatrical representation (Brecht followed Ibsen's realism and was able to break through the "fourth wall" the erection of which characterizes the dramaturgy of the latter), for the playwright thought that an audience which gapes at a scene unconscious of the rules of representation is, in the theatre and elsewhere, a passive consumer of what passes for "reality". Brecht's dramaturgy would be developed in English theatres after WWII, after George Devine brought it to the Royal Court.

But it was the promotion and use of Structuralism in France and later on in American Universities that showed Structuralism's power. And ambitions like those of the anthropologist Roland Barthes and historians of the historians of the Annales School pointed to the power and limitation of thinking about the world in terms of repeating patterns and the rules that govern them. Further politicization of literary modes led to the conclusion that sometimes, what is mistaken for defamiliarization, is actually its own language (which we have not yet learned to read); the formalist concept relates texts to

the dominant or normal dialect. Magic is not defamiliarization; it is the reality for many people, so goes the argument. I disagree, but only insofar as I think, and have argued here, that there are two different "magics". And there is the same difference, whether interpreted as between stories or between identities, the difference that is addressed to us who are supposed to recognize, in one school of thought, a type of language-use, and in another school, the neo-colonization of a people. Rushdie does not extend into the political field as far as critics like Nandy and Chakrabarty, and again it is more accurate to understand the magic of his novels as wishful efforts to connect rather than assertion of identities.

There is a line of criticism against Structuralist analysis that focuses on its lack of affect; or, its affectation of disinterest. Like the critiques against Structuralism in various academic disciplines, it belongs to a class that makes much of the difference between structure and lived-experience. I do not think that any Structuralist would ever think of his work in the way his critics would, but there is a sense that the patterns do not have meaning for the scholar as they do for those whom they are not patterns but something produced to represent the experiences of life. Patterning language and culture into structures of meaning does not reproduce what a living person experiences. The anthropologist can conclude, I have found the repeated image of pain particular to such and such tribe[77]. The literary critic can read racism in the incredulously beautified brow of Egypt. The revolutionary can rationalize murder as another battle in the war among classes. But none of these interpretations, neither the expression of pain in legal briefs on

[77] The popular book to cite when one needs to move pain beyond its expression and representation is Elaine Scary's book *The Body in Pain*. Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1987.

torture methods, nor Hamlet's line, nor the death of Arundati Roy's untouchable hero, tell—really tell!—the pain of oppression, or mutilation, or torture. Structuralism is inadequate because it fails to communicate reality in its analysis. What is often *not* acknowledged is that such knowledge never pretended to *be more* than what we know, never pretends to put the knower on Pluto, make him feel Pluto, be Pluto; specious is it, then, to blame scientific knowledge based on the example of a person who clearly does not understand from the discussion about Pluto that "planet" is a human concept and not the transcendental order of the universe. I agree with the distinction that is the basis for the critique. I agree that having a dictionary of post-colonial Trinidad pejoratives is not the same as understanding of the racial tension among peoples there; nor is understanding racial tension among peoples the same as being disciplined to conceive oneself in racial categories, especially a persecuted one. At the same time, I disagree with the alternative supposition—the legitimization of the "new" idea of lived-experience—because it does not solve the problem that justifies revising how we currently produce knowledge. It does not fix the mistake of confusing our discursive tools for things themselves, and confuses the separate tasks of knowing and reproducing affect. Discovering the gap between knowledge and reality is fair; chasing after ungraspable lived-experience controlled by another is another *ethos* altogether.

Indeed, lived-experience is paradoxical. Or at least it is conceptually suspect, like the problem of translation to which it is similar in formulation and function. The concept refers to something that can never be referenced, and does something that has been complicated, as it were, when done by others. Experience, lived or however else constructed, is an always already determined idea. Experience tells you that you must list

to the ghost of your father, and do as you shall hear, rather than try to analyze what is felt as the return of the repressed—or just the wind under the door. Now, discovering this limitation should lead us to conclude that someone's narrated experience (of their "lived-experience") is as much a discursive exercise as someone speaking about the moral improvement of man, especially if we use structural or formal analysis to make sense of the words as "experience". But this is not the conclusion of reform-minded post-structuralists. The determinacy of narrative does not invalidate the notion of true experience. The discourse of "lived-experience" is set up to always show this inadequacy *and* to let people nevertheless speak about experience. It prescribes how to treat "story". Stories of intersubjective experiences are constructionist "corrections" of Structuralist and Poststructuralist thinking, or more accurately of critical knowledge in the time of theory; the corrections also manage to erase the *ethos* that reacts skeptically to discursive authority and challenges those constructs in which humans have heavily invested.

The authority of experience makes everyone at least an authority on something. Moreover, this authority is exclusive: how dare you tell me what I am, you who have never lived my life. Of course there is what you call magic: how else is thunder made? Lived-experience holds some secret "thing" that defies knowledge—or is defined as such—yet, overcoming the skepticism that had led to the development of knowledge by structural analysis, greatly directs understanding. The lived-experience of the post-colonial holds something ungraspable, indominable by the epistemes of the modern. So, in a way, lived-experience and similar concepts represent attempts to return to authority those mechanisms that have lead to dogma and superstition, commitment to right and wrong and the fear and shame to "enforce" it. This authority is especially useful to

writers like Ghosh, because it means that the person who "experienced" history—and everyone experiences at the very least the history of his present—can write history as well (to be considered as seriously) as the institutionally endorsed historian: in fact, more so because lived and not constructed. Analytical representation, like the structure of oppression, will be less adequate than experience. "Lived-experience", then, saves experience from being treated as always already mediated (after deconstruction). When Rushdie says not enough attention is paid to the "realism" of the genre[78], he is right. It is realism that leads from the invention of words to truth claims. The idea of experience is still useful, and must be kept. Supporters of the idea of lived-experience are simply trying to legitimate writing that imagine strategic ideas; writing, for example, that reflects preferred emotional states like fear of development and love for useless people, and provokes similar ones in the reader (who is necessarily exclude from the actual experience). A humbling "lived-experience" can then be the basis for an *ethos* of humility. This should be clear when we note that the "lived-experience" of the slave from *In An Antique Land* is what Ghosh imagines *he* might have experienced: the human we all could be (if we wanted).

The language of sadness is not sadness, the cry of pain is not pain. Nor can a piece of writing fully convey to the reader a state, an experience, an existence, and force him to deal with it *as though* he lived it, as though it meant to him the same as to those of the true experience. In other words, reading how the oppressed are oppressed does not always force the reader to deal with oppression; reading Walcott's *Another Life* does not force us to change our fundamental relation to peoples of the Antilles, or (to be even

[78] Interview with Charlie Rose. *Charlie Rose*. WPBS. 30 June 2008.

more liberal) to help them change our systems of interrelation. The language of sadness does not prompt you to end the cause of sadness; the cry of pain does not prompt me to end the source of pain.

So the critiques leveled *against* structural analysis as an inadequate mode of understanding imply that there are texts able to pass for the thing itself. These texts are magical, to say the least. They penetrate through untruths like Salem's telepathy penetrates. Words are burdened with the desire for the thing itself, again. If the writings of the OHCHR[79] do not do enough, there must be texts that can. There must be other instruments of the progressive history that sees value in OHCHR. Rushdie's comments imply that "story" acts discursively very much like "lived-experience": in the referential mode, story is lived-experience. Stories not only connect us at a fundamental level, but they also belong to a structure of effects endorsed directly by their producers and tacitly by those who circulate them. The fantasy may not be that words and texts can do things, but that, contrary to the idea that texts can do nothing and anything, textual agency, or the actions of storytelling, can be brought into confluence with a specific moral order. "Sometimes legends make reality," writes Rushdie, "and become more useful than the facts"[80].

The politics that invests lived-experience with inviolable significance is also that kind which objects to any disinterested use of the label "magic". The critique is, again, broadly of the same class as that leveled against Structuralism, and that which desires the production of certain kinds of knowledge to establish and reinforce structures of effects.

[79] Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
[80] *Midnight's Children* 47

Postcolonial critics like Ashis Nandy see such labels as a cross-cultural condescension, if not worse[81]: one culture labels the practices of another as "magical" in order to subject the "magical" culture to the labeling culture's norms. This is especially demeaning because magic is associated with being primitive and living "magically" makes one in need of modernization. The logic that preserves a culture's right to experience what another culture might call "magic" is the same that preserves a person's "lived-experience" from the judgment of those centers of authority that legitimize "experiences". And by this same argument, the act of categorizing the cultural lives of people into patterns of "magic", like people worshiping totems, is charged with the same imperialistic impulse as structuralist anthropology is charged with. The stakes have been raised from simple satire and repetition with difference.

When studying literature, the label of fantasy, I admit, can lead to discounting insights a novelist may bring. Such categorization fails to understand the reality of a stereotype because it can easily presume to have already understood it. In a 1981 review, David Pritchard calls *Midnight's Children* "a remarkable comic novel", ending with a caveat that "the best of fiction today is to be found in the grotesque fantasy of the comic novel".[82] He is still right, although we who are nearly three decades removed from the initial publication of the novel better understand what makes it remarkable. Yet why should Rushdie's remarkable work hold more authority than is currently allotted to our best novelists? What justifies adding to "best of fiction" the status of "best of ideas" or

[81] And not just Postcolonial critics, to be sure. The valorization of anything dismissed by moderns happens across various schools. I have already mentioned Wasserman's view when I discussed the construction of the anthropological archive and the judgment of the archivist. "The Magical Texts in the Cairo Genizah."

"best expression of truth"? Pritchard's may be an incomplete valuation, but why should we respond by overvaluing the novel and granting its producer the same power that chutney has *in* the story?

More importantly, the possibility of a charge of cross-cultural imperialism proves my point. And my point is that the writers of "magic" do not simply want to stay within realms (or communities, if you like) where their magic is not "magic", where flying is not a structure of effects requiring the suspension of disbelief but an ordinary action like walking; where the difference between walking/flying does not signify "magic". "Magic", the discourse on "magic" that addresses Modernity, is targeted at specific extant concepts and ideas, and intended to install other concepts and ideas in the ethical field. Ashis Nandy is not worried that people cannot expurgate gods from their way of thinking; he actually wants greater authority from what are essentially theological statements. Of greater importance is the power to make claims under the authority of anti-modern gods *in* Modernity such that signs can magically transform the world. While the move to label something as "magical realism", we might imagine, comes from the audience and is directed towards the text/writer, there is a corresponding move from the other direction, which evidence a difference, marked here by the particular issue of how ethics determines one's "knowledge" of magic. It is this difference on which intercultural understanding, and intersubjectivity, are based.

This means that there is more at work than the untranslatable cultural difference of "magic". There is more at work in that which uses the concept of magic and lived-

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Genizah research after ninety years: The Case of Judaeo-Arabic Studies. Eds. Blau, Joshua. Stefan C. Reif. Cambridge:Cambridge U.P. 1992. 160.

experience to influence interpretation. "Lived-experiences" are cultural products, and the way to begin to analyze the new cultural products that introduce ghosts and magic is to treat them as Bhabha treats the cultural productions he declaims: resist cultural differentiation and question the reality of the discourse. Magic may defamiliarize our sense of reality, but it may install other things, other "realities", that will have to be demystified. So much more is required of the "magic" that tries to act beyond the field of the literary, which if the very scrutiny Rushdie tries to circumvent in his lament that story-tellers do not have authority anymore. There is new magic, to which writers modulate after defamilization and deconstruction; that magic is familiar to us as the discursive authority of claiming "lived-experience", citing the problem of translation, and plotting unfinished business. In her ambition to intervene, the story-teller who reconfigures the old and the new strives to be as powerful as the revelation produced when Gabreel and the Prophet merged in *The Satanic Verses.* The intersubjective experience must transform. Such magic is obviously produced for us, and if Postcolonialism gains authority, or where Postcolonialist discourse *is* already authoritative, those concepts and things under the protection of "magic" become inaccessible to further testing and contestation. In that case, we will have been magically transported to another story, or it will have been telepathically—magically—planted in our minds. We have become its subjects.

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[82] Pritchard, David. Rev. of *Midnight's Children*, by Salman Rushdie. *Library Journal*. 106.4 (1981): 472

the ties that bind Midnight's Children

The idea that the signs important to one subject can infiltrate another and change it appears very early in Rushdie's *oeuvre,* and telepathy of this sort continues to underlie his work. Think of telepathy as an easy way to not only modulate from the subjective to intersubjective, but also to distribute the new signs directly. To want telepathy is to want power. Magic and telepathy represent power to rewrite signs where discursive authority is missing. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie's reputation-making novel, Aadam Aziz, a medicine man after the modern model, is haunted by Tai's nativist condemnation of the "new" Kashmiri societies. Tai claims to be older than the mountains: he witnessed them being born. Most of us, of course, are not convinced, neither of his longevity nor his authority to judge, unless we were to naively accept whatever is said at face value. Rushdie does not present evidence refuting Tai's claim. Instead he makes Aadam a captive auditor, skeptical but compelled—to a greater extent than many of us—to process, to work through, what Tai says. Tai represents that other way of life before modernization; Aadam the possibilities after. Their dialogue serves as allegory for India's post-partition struggles to conceive itself. Their dialogue also connects them (as Tai's story becomes part of Aadam's story) in an ongoing conversation that structures Rushdie's intersubjectivity and the foundation upon which to produce *ethos* for modern India. The resulting new appreciation of modern medicine superimposes differences in medical practice with differences in cultural identity formation, such that what might have been a comparison between methods, i.e. surgeon : bonesetter, becomes the antagonist identity formation, or surgeon-West : bonesetter-Kashmiri.

Furthermore, the struggle to modernize takes on the language of nativism and xenophobia. "Sistersleeping pigskin bag from Abroad full of foreigners's tricks," Tai curses (in Aadam's head). "Big-shot bag. Now if a man breaks an arm that bag will not let the bonesetter bind it in leaves. Now a man must let his wife lie beside that bag and watch knives come and cut her open. A fine business, what these foreigners put in our young men's heads. I swear: it is a too-bad thing. That bag should fry in Hell with the testicles of the ungodly.'" (22) Fear of the modern medicine is also, according to this representation, fear of the West; and in this struggle Tai (in Aadam's head) vilifies Adam as collaborator in the violation of the natural order.

The infiltration and ethical crisis is one-sided (and this might give us clues about Rushdie's presentiments). Tai's way of life *is* threatened. The culture that he practices is receding under the tide of Modernity. He has little power to preserve it. Yet it would hardly be proper to assert that people like Tai threaten social reform and should be ignored or, if they become militant, be suppressed. Hardly proper is it to think that modernity can infiltrate Tai, or ignore him. Tai represents the counter-values, and Rushdie provides him with effective countermeasures: the power to haunt. Tai's story of being as old as the mountains—a story anthropologically explainable yet clearly false by any test—*is* part of Aadam's story now. Though written early in his career, *Midnight's Children* demonstrates some of the feelings its author expresses in interviews lately. The novel does not hedge its bet against the profound agency of interconnected (and here infiltrating) narratives by explaining how words sometimes fail to motivate—how words sometimes fail and die with their speaker. While there will be occasions which, we know through analysis, betray the

intelligence of such powers, the narrator operates with and the narrative takes seriously the creative capacity of producing language and the correspondence of that act to changes in material reality. It does so as a book Rushdie (or his publisher) circulates throughout the world, and it does so in the world of the novel.

This optimism is natural to some degree. An author must feel that his action is efficacious in some way, however so little or so great, for him to make the effort to put pen to paper. The effect could be that he is paid. For Sinai, writing is a way of changing the terms of his social "inheritance".

> Years ticking away—and my inheritance grows, because now I have the mythical golden teeth of the boatman Tai, and his brandy bottle which foretold my father's alcoholic djinns; I have Ilse Lubin for suicide and pickled snakes for virility; I have Tai-for-changelessness opposed to Aadam-for-progress; and I have, too, the odours of the unwashed boatman which drove my grandparents south, and made Bombay a possibility.
>
> …And now, driven by Padma and ticktock, I move on, acquiring Mahatma Gandhi and his hartal, ingesting thumb-and-forefinger, swallowing the moment at which Aadam Aziz did not know whether he was Kashmiri or India; now I'm drinking Mercurochrome and stains the shape of hands which will recur in spilt betel-juice, and I'm gulping down Dyer, moustache and all; my grandfather is saved by his nose and a bruise appears on his chest, never to fade, so that he and I find in its ceaseless throbbing the answer to the question, Indian or Kashmiri? Stained by the bruise of a Heidelberg bag's clasp, we throw our lot in with India; but the

> alienness of blue eyes remains. Tai dies, but his magic hangs over us still, and makes us men apart. (107)

To understand Rushdie's conceit, we have to first recognize that the narrator positions what he produces as an inheritance, as something bequeathed to him by another. We have to appreciate this postmodern move—postmodern because it values the agency of the narrator to choose and even dictate his being by his narrative—to "throw" something of the present backwards in time so that it comes back as something of the past, as history. Yet after appreciation, we need to recognize, that the "inheritance" is represented as a thing apart from and forgetful of the condition of its production. For the moment, the moment we believe the words of Sinai the narrator, the moment we buy into the conceit, Tai and Lubin and Aziz are no longer post-independence inventions, but come to us, are inherited by us, as a past reality; and the ideas they exemplify, for instance Tai-for-changelessness versus Aadam-for-progress, become patterns that link past and present; in other words the patterns we understand as history. Is there a difference between invention and inheritance? To understand this historiographical conceit, we have to be aware that Rushdie wants both the present of narrative production and the narrative as inherited past to be meaningful. The former does not invalidate the latter. For Rushdie, the question of how much of history is made-up and how much true, naturally raised when we become aware of contemporary claims about the determinacy of the writing of history, is less important than the fact that, if the conceit *is* convincing, history and historiography constitute two simultaneously available modes of understanding. They are used in service to the truth. Doubts about the truth of meaningful temporal patterns have weakened history only slightly. The narrator may be

throwing his present into the past, but his invention has the authority of the reality of the past.

The last sentence of the excerpt, which speaks about Tai's residual hold on the imagination, demonstrates how social critique might hold authority. It "hangs over us". Tai criticizes Aadam Aziz's modern medicine. The boatman reacts violently and belligerently to foreign presence, and his target embodies the foreign in his manner and dress (the leather handbag, for instance). In response to the threat, he projects an indefinitely elongated existence in the past (Rushdie lets him claim to have seen the mountains being created; the claim is made *after* Aadam's return), and so can be said to also represent the conservative revaluation of the old, now valuable as old, when it comes into contact with the new.

But if the conflict were to have been just between the men Tai and Aadam, then we might not think much of the passing of the former. Tai's critique needs to linger hauntingly beyond its utterance so that it can alienate Aziz from his newly acquired modernity, to place the western-trained medicine man in the in-between space. The thoughts of another are part of our thinking. Without Tai, or the pressures of his antagonism, Aadam might have lived less problematically as a modern subject—an effective generational break. The doctor could have turned up his nose at the primitive. He could have let the boatman die and be done with the crazy man's magic. But, of course, that would not serve Rushdie at all. It would not serve the novelist: there is no novel to be found in easily resolved differences. And it would not serve Rushdie the Postcolonial thinker. This is why examples of what Aadam might have been like without Tai, or anything like him, are found in the works of other writers—Naipaul's narrators,

for instance, who deal with the transition differently—and not part of the intersubjective experience. I am not speaking about the truth of ethical crisis produced in the transition, by the transition, from colony to self-government. Yes there are difficulties to confront, but not everyone confronting them will suffer crisis. So I speak of cultural management, or management that produces culture, which can attenuate, marginalize, discount, has done so, the power of that which Tai here represents. Such a possibility would mean no medium in which the voice of Tai are reproduced, spreads, and continues to haunt Modernity. Let Aadam live, Tai die, and Modernity in its "bad" form triumph over the Primitive. The conceit of basic consumption—eating, smelling, drinking, etc.—indicates the desired extent and degree of infiltration by Tai and the other ideas that comprise Sinai's "inheritance", and, to return to the time of composition, to post-partition, and the rise of modern India, the extent and degree Rushdie's narrator wants to internalize that self-administered "inheritance", which includes Tai, as conscience. Undoubtedly there are struggles in post-colonial societies, and in many other ones, possibly in Western ones, too, represented by the conflict between Tai and Aadam. Its pathology, however, is not set, or not as prevalent, pervasive, and deep-rooted, as Rushdie's tropes suggest. And we are healthy, not sick, because we are in position to decide whether or not the allegory of tradition versus modern is critical to us. No exorcism would be needed, for some of us, for you who read this, can reason ourselves out of such problems, if not now, then soon. By fictionalizing the magical principle of haunting, the producer of *ethos* establishes an intersubjectivity that increases the authority and effectiveness of the idea that (this) one story has to be a part of everyone else's.

Genealogy is another form of haunting—that is, another way to rewrite historical legacy. Instead of an apparition, the past continues to haunt the present as a sign. Magic is the power to revise geneaology. By taking advantage of the ties that bind generations, the writer can change the present by rewriting past connections. He can claim heritage. He cannot do so *ex nihilo,* of course, and Rushdie is very careful to show the inescapable legacy of colonization, but the family tree can be manipulated just enough to understand old relations anew and create *new* relations. This is Rushdie's magical addition. Therefore, geneaology may be considered one of those moments where Rushdie superimposes the magical mode with the writing of history by giving some historians power beyond their authority. Saleem from *Midnight's Children* is such a figure. The past and its configuration the tree is intersubjective.

There is no reason to doubt that a human being is the biological offspring of two progenitors (not yet anyway); under this assumption, we can create a family tree that traces the contributors of genetic material. Social practice complicates the task of identifying "father", as people of great influence may also qualify and that influence is hardly definitively measurable. A "father" may not be he who contributed one half of an individual's genes, for we use "father" to refer to those who raised us, or who otherwise have an intimate relationship we see merits the honor. In *Midnight's Children,* fathers determine some aspect of Saleem, and the narrative, as Saleem puts it, tells stories of the different parents he has had and the determinacy of those contacts. But it is not a chart (or it is not supposed to be taken as such). It is not a transparent charting of various determinations: that Aadam (with Tai in his head) made his grandson a synthesis between old-Indian and new-Western ideas that is not alien but original; and that Aadam made his

son into a uxorious man; and that Methwold the last of the English lords of India divided himself and the land as he divided his hair. The narrator-writer Saleem Sinai *at times* refuses to disclose his exact lineage as he tells the story, and this refusal is supposed to suggest that, although the reality of the present cannot be denied, nor the connectedness between present and past, things did not have to turn out the way they did. The people who met and became his parents did not have to meet; at the same time, he does not have to have descended from the union of this man with that woman. Genealogy is not providential. It is, according to the model set up by *Midnight's Children*, constituted from episodes of contingent relations into which different parties invest so much that they are no longer contingent.

Maintaining both the belief in determinacy of genealogy and the efficacy of genealogical reconfiguration, the tracing of past and present becomes palimpsestic. It is in this way that genealogy may be alternately determinate and indeterminate. The palimpsest is that upon which we trace, or, in our analogy, it is the family tree. The tree does not have to exist at all. But it does, and a tree of this variety can be fixed. Father is not just defamiliarized—look at all your metaphorical "fathers"!—but immediately placed back into authority. Just think: you can change descent to your advantage[83]. The *authority* to use genealogy, to erase and *rewrite* on the palimpsest, maintains that it may be both, that both ways of thinking about the relations between the present and the past must be open and available for use; while the *instances* in which it is being deployed,

[83] which should make us suspect why the branch that is Tai cannot be cut. Indeed, Rushdie rarely cut ties, since he means to show there is a plenitude of connections already in the world. The ties-that-bind can be transformed, but to sever them—even to sever them while knowing the consequences—to say "I have heard your story and I really want nothing to do with it going forward", verges on the unethical.

especially if it presumes to teach us the ethical from the unethical, is governed by the logic of either/or. In these two qualities, the newness of the latest instance of use and the continuing authority of the palimpsest—that is, the Idea of "father"—a writer, a revisionist of history like Saleem, has told us tell us how we should take his text.

The structure of *Midnight's Children's* genealogy becomes clear if we erase the so-called tracing *before* it has worked its wonders, or if we resist Saleem's feelings on the matter and decide that the new father is new, the claim of fatherhood to be a claim, and never confuse one for the other. In other words, it shows itself for what it is when we refuse to abide by the rules that constitute the palimpsest. The nature of the authority *to palimpsest* (if after Lewis Carol we verb our noun), to double, to negotiate, to revise, is clear when we evaluate the privilege of the person who gets to hold the parchment and write on it. Who gets to hold it? Can you or I hold it, too? Can we do to it what we do to rocks, and get no grief? Who gets to pick his father, and more importantly who has to recognize the relationship? Can we go back, so to speak? An attachment has already been formed, mediated by the authority of the Palimpsest. The palimpsest writer has modulated. It is in the moralizing mode, based on the binary either good or bad, that someone—like me—with rival if not conflicting motives is prevented from immediately taking the palimpsest and rewriting, again, and again. The difference between the authority of representing past-present and the instances when that authority is exercised has been a major emphasis of the dissertation. Hijacking the concept—in the same way that Rushdie "hijacks" genealogy from the social order that uses it to establish necessary relations—constitutes one of the dissertation's critical methods. Supposing Rushdie's

framework, scrutiny of the objective reality being established allows us to take each other's words for what they are.

The concept of "father" expands the list of possible causal agents available to the writer who uses genealogy. And it determines one's relationship to the cause. Rushdie lets Saleem use it whenever he needs to establish a strong causal relation between past and present, and conveys a persistent attachment, a bond, an authority, resulting from that causal relationship. At the same time, the author avoids using "father" frankly as a term of endearment because that use would have slid the connection between past and present too close to the subjectiveness or relativity of sentiments, which it may yet be; and he avoids using the term during crises because that use would discover the problem of the agency of the son who can invent his fathers. One can try to rewrite the past but sometimes one is just fooling oneself; this can be a test. If the ties-that-bind be filial, then name the father, and detail the reason, and let us check before we yield. The magic of genealogy is its hold on us, the seriousness with which we have to take paternity claims under new precedence, and the difficulty of trying to exit a culture where we may be forced to deny the father and refuse the name. Actually, freedom may be gained by diminishing the continuing influence of fathers, of the Father, by coping, growing up and moving on, instead of substituting figure after figure, but then this would take away the discursive instrument of palimpsestic geneaology.

Specter-to-modernity is also on the list of available causal agents[84] in the ethical field—things we have to take seriously, react to, fetishize. The *use* of specters, like the

[84] I would never say that "a specter caused _____", the same way that I would never say "God wrote *Paradise Lost*", howsoever inspired Milton might have been. I will say that a man, believing he was answering such

use of "father", is that magic which allows a writer to create a relation normally rejected with easy indifference, such as that between Tai and Aadam. Historical relations become present again, only with very different demands. In particular, spectral causality is not valueless like science: valueless in the sense that the spin from twin particles created from the same event will turn out to be opposite even when light-years apart, but the oppositionality of spin does not try to persuade us in the same way that an ethical narrative on the opposite fortune of the rich and the poor is meant to[85]. The ties-that-bind are supposed to command value also, especially when we are interpellated[86] in it—when we are convinced that we belong to the network of ties. A family tree—the representation of relations—tells us little about how each knob and branch relates to the other, and can be used to convince us about how we should feel by appealing to a matrix of ready responses and responsibilities. The new family is supposed to empower whoever can use it. And if we put ourselves in the position of him upon whom a claim is made, the effect of the specter of "family", it seems as though "family" come out of the woodwork the way they do whenever there is inheritance to be distributed. If one like Rushdie can use the tree as though it undeniably exists, we too should deny it or use it to our respective advantage. Let us not suppress the usefulness of the distinctions among

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and such specter, caused ____. I would only agree to the previous statement, if we can actually test for specters, as we can attest to the effects of humans. As such, I am always uncomfortable making with some of the statements I make here, and take care never to imply that things animate the world without our cooperation.

[85] This is to be distinguished from the values of Science (i.e. that value system it enables); furthermore, both are to be distinguished from the reasons to value science.

[86] Taken from Louis Althusser, but used to criticize all kinds of discursive authority, not just the superstructure that supports the capitalist state. As such, I submit to all the complications arise from the change I have made. For instance, how can one be interpellated into something which, lacking power, has not become discourse yet? I would rejoin that members of a cult are interpellated into the superstructure that supports that particular "community"; group size and type should not confine our powers to use an idea.

family, ally, friend, stranger, enemy, etc. The ideas are not mutually exclusive, but just like human and ghost, useful in turn. We would not have to deny our "father"; after critical assessment, we simply ignore that which would demand we listen if we ever did it love.

There is something odd here. If we were to keep true to the logic of self-invention implied by the narrative conceit, then we should find that there is no need to invent a mechanism for the persistence of Tai's part in the story, or for the cavalcade of fathers. Saleem should learn to cut loose. He can just let Tai live—who would know otherwise? Or find another person to voice those ideas. Antiquate those ideas. Or leave them out of the story. That is, a writer writing for himself about himself should be free to do anything he wants. Why invent an idea that escapes the great powers of (re)invention—specifically the power of another to reinvent? It would seem the mechanism of Tai's infiltration and longevity constrains the writer's power. In fact, it is the limits of invention. Yet it is also a strategy *to* power for the interventionist Rushdie. To see that, all we have to do is realize that the intersubjective power of Tai makes a new Aadam; and that the dialogue of old and new, and the ethical crisis allegorized by it, constitutes what we know of Saleem's subjectivity; and lastly that Tai, in his various functions, as *Midnight's Children* circulate, may yet alter the relationship between a reader and Postcolonial India.

Instead of writing an idea-in-Aadam's-mind, Saleem uses the sense of Tai-in-Aadam's-mind to construct the intersubjective world. The former suggests independent contemplation, accords more with the model of consciousness evaluating information about an objective reality, and most importantly establishes a border—a psychological

reality—capable of managing new ideas, wondrous new signs, to whatever ends. The latter binds the two in an inextricably intimate (and invasive, depending on the point-of-view) relationship, such that, for instance, to ignore someone's anxiety (Tai's here) is tantamount to repressing one's own real concern—or *a* real concern if my phrasing sounds individualistic. It demonstrates that we live in an historical moment that understands (after Lacan) subject formation. Yet it goes further, and stabilizes the experiences of the other as real. Like revisionary history|ography[87], it sets up one way of looking at the world to fail, and in signifying failure it sets up another world. We can claim this creation of a "new" intersubjectivity because all the characters in *Midnight's Children*, not just Tai, are in each other's head in this very "real" way. The narrator of *Midnight's Children* is privileged. He is a telepath. He is master of intersubjectivity.

resisting idealism, or my own private Shiva

In analyzing Rushdie, it is clear that (modified) spectral relations, genealogical relations, magical effects, constitute different, overlapping aspects of Postcolonial intersubjectivism. Subjects relate through the things produce therein: ghosts; fathers; chutney you never intended to take, that overwhelms your feelings and change you. Yet the *truth* of the new intersubjectivism is discoverable at junctures where the fantastic (revisionary) interconnections utterly fail, where the ontical[88], the "things" between you

[87] See my Chapter Two

[88] I am using Heidegger's distinction between ontical and ontological. Ontical is being; ontology is the study of being. For Heidegger, authority gives "things" their ontical reality. When we ask after the thingness of those things, we are asking after their ontological status. Ontology follows the ontical, and represents the endpoint of our consciousness bout the particular "thing". Heidegger establishes the distinction at the beginning of *Being and Time.* Once accepted as a "thing", Rushdie's ghosts of unfinished business become "ontical". I am hastening the plot that Heidegger would have for such a thing, by questioning the ontology of

and me, fail to maintain the ruse of objective reality. These failures are entirely different from the ones for which Postcolonialism has already planned. They do not come from problems of translation. They are not losses waiting to be redeemed. They are failures where stakes are so high producers cannot afford their texts to be understood as works of fiction and imagination. Such moments of inadequacy diminishes the authority to use the intersubjective experience to deposit incontestable "things" into the ethical field as if they belonged to objective reality. The cry of the west wind is imagined. The promise of answering the ties-that-bind is a fiction. There is *nothing* to finish. In the free and clear, we start to check all propositions, formulate a skeptical calculus, and judge why some "things" have been or are put there, out there, as real, as true, in the first place.

Some things are intended to breakdown: Saleem's family life, for instance. These broken things must not be taken at face value, but interpreted. We should analyze the success of failure. Then, there are those breakdowns that the author has not managed to put away, the ones that threaten the whole enterprise: the complications to claims of objective reality posed by the Poststructuralist function of the Real. And we should look to these because they evidence the structure of the system being erected. Where does telepathy go awry, I ask, and at what point does the network of stories and storytellers begin to take the defensive posture religion takes in the face of skepticism and feats of secular modernity? For it is to protect his own position that Saleem, the idealist who repeatedly insists on peoples' ability to revise history, withdraws from the telepathic network that was to be the basis for the new society. The accidental past—the switch at

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it before it has gained authority. This is why I grant Rushdie his world—the world of his heart, and the world that brings him to despair—before all else.

birth—responsible for present circumstances in which a well-educated middle-class Saleem contemplates Indian history, and his midnight-double the slum-bounded Shiva struggles to secure his own future, must be kept from the network, because knowledge of it may explode the structure, inadequating its fervent promises. The irony of Saleem's ultimate dissolution, using a plot as old as Greek tragedy, maybe even older, that old plot of avoiding an action only to bring it about, unsympathetically, and probably inadvertently, reinforces the disjunction between the revolutionary congress and the ideals of its hopeful creator. Such disjunctions are cues for understanding the rhetoric and the fiction of these types of congregation. Saleem criticizes Shiva for his individualist and antagonistic world-view, while he enacts the same *ethos* to protect the network. Ironically, magic has nothing to do with it.

> I was obliged to come to the conclusion that Shiva, my rival, my changeling brother, could no longer be admitted into the forum of my mind; for reasons which were, I admit, ignoble. I was afraid he would discover what I was sure I could not conceal from him – the secrets of our birth. Shiva, for whom the world was things, for whom history could only be explained as the continuing struggle of oneself-against-the-crowd, would certainly insist on claiming his birthright; and, aghast at the very notion of my knock-kneed antagonist replacing me in the blue room of my childhood while I, perforce, walked morosely off the two-storey hillock to enter the northern slums; refusing to accept that the prophecy of Ramram Seth had been intended for Winkie's boy, that it was Shiva that Prime Ministers had written, and for Shiva that fishermen pointed out to sea…

> placing, in short, a far higher value on my eleven-year-old sonship than on mere blood, I resolved that my destructive, violent alter ego should never again enter the increasingly fractious councils of the Midnight Children's Conference; that I would guard my secret – which had once been Mary's – with my very life.[89]

My criticism is not based on any moral evaluation of Saleem's motives. Instead I think we should look at why Saleem hides from others what he already admits to Padma, the immediate reader of his conceit, and to his hypothetical readers; besides which, Rushdie already parries that attack by having Saleem characterize his own subterfuge. We should take the continual and necessary defense of the network's integrity as evidence that there are other centers of concern and other loci of desires which need to be regulated to keep that network intact; or more menacingly to prevent its "cooptation", its radical change to what might seem like other networks, and here its slipping into Shiva's world of things. Jonathan Culler explains the kind of deduction we will be using best when he explains the methods of Structuralism *after* the Poststructuralist intervention.[90] As a foul in sports, the violation of a rule shows the rule that makes possible meaningful interaction. This understanding of structuralism admits that the patterns are contingent (not eternal and universal) and places the determining origin of significant patterns in the subjects being studied. The inconsistency is internally enforced—the observer did not make up the rule. In the case of *Midnight's Children*, discontinuities in the network show the network's regularities. The network has to be equal to, or surpass, the power that

[89] *Midnight's Children*. 339

threatens to disrupt it. One such threat is the power of Shiva, another of Midnight's Children, for Shiva, in Saleem's mind, can obliterate the congress Saleem desires to build and disrupt those circles of history, genealogy, paternity, etc. that Saleem uses. If Shiva is "oneself-against-the-crowd", then Saleem has positioned himself as the crowd-against-the-one(s). Shiva answers to no one and anyone. The Midnight's Children Congress held authority (which was Saleem's authority to give purpose to "gifted" people) over its members so long as it kept Shiva and what he represents at bay

If indeed the struggle is Shiva against the crowd, then the crowd can check the individualist's powers. And attenuating Shiva's potency is what Saleem has been able to move the crowd to do. Shiva's logic cannot take over. His restless character cannot be our common, individual *ethos*, because that would disrupt the instrument of good—the Congress. Shiva is manageable so long as Saleem can repudiate his double for thinking "oneself-against-the-crowd" or "the world was things". Discursively, the characterization isolates Shiva's attitude as an extreme form of individualism that, according to Saleem, is less than fulfilling. It is, according to Saleem, the attitude of the selfish poor that should be acting in concert. Shiva has been incorporated into a story in which he plays only a part. The Midnight's Children Congress begins to fragment under pressure from the children's respective desires which, when manifested by Shiva, Saleem calls "oneself-against-the-crowd". The fragmentation reveals that the "crowd", which always already exists in that worldview that gives Saleem the terms to characterize individualism, is a construct that cannot sustain itself, at least not without some foreign

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[90] *On Deconstruction: theory and criticism after Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1982. See also *The Pursuit of Signs: semiotics, literature, deconstruction*. Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1981.

authority. Shiva is strong enough to do so, by discounting those other things that are not thing—that are nothing. Still, the crowd, for the moment organized by Saleem into the Midnight's Children Congress, does not break because Shiva has reprogrammed all the Midnight Children, or because he has used his powers to force them to follow his individualist *ethos*. It breaks as it confronts the non-conformist reality of multiple world-views, of which "oneself-against-the-crowd" is but one, and diverse interests, perhaps as many as there are children—more, even, if we consider that every child can have various, sometimes conflicting desires.

Saleem does not understand the reason for the revolt against him and the nature of the ethical body he convenes. He understands neither the nature of what he wants, nor what he has made. He does not understand the critical difference between the two. The other children have turned against him without knowing the secret and without making the substitution that Saleem makes in contemplating his own legitimacy—or illegitimacy. They revolt against the power that held them together, that connected their stories, because the center, i.e. Saleem, begins to question the legitimacy of its authority. Even "revolt" here misrepresents the dynamic, for Saleem's Congress was legitimated by nothing except Saleem. The children simply did not want to meet in his mind anymore. They did not take to the *ethos* he has been trying to produce. They drifted away, as friends do who no longer have reasons to do things together. The secret of babies switched at birth and the subsequent anxiety over potential repercussions should the secret be discovered, including what Shiva might be able to do if he found out the truth, are only the expressions of this deeper doubt. There is a "lie" much bigger than bloodline. Saleem's legitimate anxiety about the loss of his own position and what he

thinks it allows him to do shows us that his Congress is held together under an undisclosed authority. His authority has to be protected from knowledge that can undo its achievements, or inadequate its promises. Ironically, the children turned against Saleem's ambition to establish a structure for collective transformation when they discovered the barriers he sets up to hide the secret of his origins. They doubted without knowing the secret. They doubted because Saleem acts like he has something to hide, which he did of course. He had to hide the arbitrariness of the authority he assumes; which means he had to hide the illusionary authority of that which would bar the separate pursuits which would disintegrate the interconnected world he dreams of. And they, conscripts of the Midnight's Children Congress, abandoned his dream without being told to by the antagonist Shiva.

The failure of the Midnight's Children Congress, with its *ethos* of bettering the betterer, comes in the middle of the book.

> Adrift in a sea of optimism, we—the nation, my parents, I—floated blindly towards the reefs. As a people, we are obsessed with correspondences. Similarities between this and that, between apparently unconnected things, make us clap our hands delightedly when we find them out. It is a sort of national longing for form—or perhaps simply an expression of our deep belief that forms lie hidden within reality; that meaning reveals itself only in flashes. Hence our vulnerability to omens… when the Indian flag was first raised, for instance, a rainbow appeared above that Delhi field, a rainbow of saffron and green; and we felt blessed. Born amidst correspondence, I have found it continuing to hound me…

> while Indians headed blindly towards a military débâcle, I, too, was nearing (and entirely without knowing it) a catastrophe of my own.[91]

Never is Saleem willing to admit that the headlong enthusiastic march to the latest national catastrophe (the confrontation between Indian and Chinese troops in the Himalayas) has been spurred by the same sentiment as that which sustained, for a while at least, his reformist enthusiasm. Even as he observes the problem of determination in names—that your name makes you who you are—Saleem does not *invalidate* their authority. "Our names contain our fates; living as we do in a place where names have not acquired the meaninglessness of the West, and are still more than mere sounds, we are also the victims of our titles" (295). Now, it may be that Saleem avoids talk of emigrating to or building a place where names hold little or no authority for that would lead to the Postcolonial problem of desiring the West—and it must be stated that this is an imagined West, since subjects of the "real" West also face the same problem of determination. If you are a fateful victim of names, then why not eliminate names, turn them to "mere sounds", deauthenticate and deauthorize them using Saussurean logic? Furthermore, why not point the accusatory finger at the agents that facilitate the "determinacy", namely the "we" who live in this "place", and those who conspire to control those desired forms?

Because Saleem (and Rushdie) needs this "place where names have not acquired the meaninglessness of the West". Rushdie needs that which at times is cause for the failure of societies or worse violent, even fanatical, human determination. At times, he

[91] *Midnight's Children*. 291

needs the opposite cause. The national longing for form is turned, with the example of the Midnight's Children Congress, into a form of longing for a collective. The deep belief in hidden forms is also the belief that reality can be reformed by accessing its deeper structures. And if meaning is revealed in flashes, then a writer that exploits the conceit of sudden illumination can market his text as meaningful. Ah, magic words indeed. The worst that happens to Saleem is neither revolt nor misdirection, not the revolt of his political body, because its constituting members had their own agendas, their own values, and not the nationalist energy misdirected at the Kashmiri border, but disintegration and abject *silence*.

> Silence outside me. A dark room (blinds down). Can't see anything (nothing there to see).
>
> Silence inside me. A connection broken (for ever). Can't hear anything (nothing there to hear).
>
> Silence, like a desert. And a clear, free nose (nasal passages full of air). Air, like a vandal, invading my private places.
>
> Drained. I have been drained. The parahamsa, grounded.
>
> (For good).

The syntax at this traumatic moment owes much to Modernism, in particular to Joyce's novelistic strategies for signaling Bloom's distress in *Ulysses*. Isolated sentences mirror the group leader's isolation. (English) fragments without subjects emphasize his fears of self-annihilation; the only phrase with a subject, used in the passive voice, crystallizes the psychological grip. The disappearance of the grammatical subject stands in even sharper

relief against the egocentrism of earlier chutney-making moments. Yet even here Saleem tries to console himself about the possibility of silence—about possibility *after* silence. Beside bracketing the nihilistic statements, and thereby restoring a sense of control, he also reinstates another dialectic authority. He corrals the threat of the moment by reinstating the discourse of snakes and ladders. For every "evil", there is a "good" (and the double intonation of the last parenthetical cited in the excerpt above). Having lost telepathy, Saleem gains a sense of smell, and the ability to make magical chutney.

The powers of chutney and smell replaces the power of telepathy. That which smell magically sniffs out compensates for that which telepathy had promised and failed to deliver. Telepathy had promised collective reform. Smell tells the truth, which is delivered as chutney. A passive power replaces an active power. The capacity for discovery truth (enabled by a magic device) is understandably to be wished after the failure of idealism. Not only can it explain the failure, but it also demonstrates the possibility of a reformation that escapes the inadequacies of reformist political movements[92]. Like a sublime moral sensibility, nothing can assail it. Then food replaces smell, or is developed as its active power. Redemption of failed collective response to post-colonial conditions, including the ultranationalism and sectarian violence that devastated the Kashmir border region from which Saleem comes, is packaged as chutney. Collectivization gives way to network, affirmation of identity to transformative "lived-experience". Chutney is the means by which Saleem does his work. Chutney connects

[92] See page 307, for instance. The truth sniffed out and pickled is almost as good as hope.

the peoples of the subcontinent after decolonization. Chutney history connects them[93]. Shiva the destroyer is manageable as long as there is a way to establish new connections.

Shiva's "thingness" is not just materialism and its goods. His perspective counteracts the intersubjectivity of his opponent. It stalls the creative energies of the narrative, and spoils the production of desire for change by demanding tangible rewards and by questioning the un-thingness of ideals being used like things. It makes objects, situations, people, comparable among each other. In other words, Shiva's frame of reference, not his exact thoughts but the semblance of a method in how he approaches others, discounts the connections and disrupts the intersubjective authority that is based on our feelings toward them. He is necessary, insofar as there needs to be a move toward objectivity, but he needs to be quieted at those points where the politics of Midnight's Children have found a potentially productive path. His cynical impulse threatens the ties-that-bind because it resists the binding authority that collects independent peoples.

Though I am not of Shiva's party, neither am I of Saleem's, and so my analyses of magic and intersubjectivity, of the use of textuality and the business of the unfinished, follow critical methods that also disrespects allegorized ideals as much as Shiva's cynicism does. *Midnight's Children* is yet another thing: a text that can be any number of things. Just because the story sounds truthful, does not mean it is. Just because it sounds like unfinished business, does not mean its business should concern us. If I need to create a Shiva, my Shiva will not be the blind adversary of one like Saleem; the clear-cut antagonism structured by the embodiment of resistance and disintegration leads to easy

[93] Mita Banerjee forgets this ability of chutney/history in *The Chutneyfication of History*. In *Midnight's Children*, to "chutneyfy" means to be able to do something with history, as well as to history.

erasure, purgation, even redemption. From the reality that inadequates the magical ties-that-bind, relentlessly and unpredictably, emerges my Shiva. And my Saleem would not be yours. My Saleem is the scrutinizing mind which has learned to manage various characters *for my purposes*. My Saleem, nearly like Rushdie's, hijacks the cycles of destruction and rebirth (Shiva) and frustrates the capacity of writers to use the idea of regeneration to produce *ethos*. Thus my Shiva and Saleem are *like* Rushdie's, and like similar antagonisms in Postcolonialism. I am not advocating that we use the function of Shiva. Besides, the representation "Shiva", originally and now, is an attempt to control what may not be controllable: to redeem death and destruction as opportunity for transformation. The dramatic antagonism between Shiva and Saleem has already made dualist functions out of what may be truly unsignifiable[94].

Telepathy and chutney may now be read as symptomatic of desire: different solutions for the same problems of post-colonial social organization. If I had to pun the discovery, I might say: here's where it gets *real*. Telepathy "overcomes" one of the realities of the exchange of signifiers. In past and present criticism, exchange has been opportunity for resistance, appropriation, and other power maneuvers. That I cannot simply deposit my thoughts, my characters, my plots, my values, in your psyche, is your hard-won freedom. That Christian rituals cannot be replicated perfectly in tropical agrarians and their year-round cycles is Homi Bhabha's idea of freedom[95]. The telepath is different. Not only does the telepath know transparently the signs of the minds he reads, but he also can transmit those signs from his own structure into them without

[94] This will be examined more in next chapter.
[95] *The Location of Culture*. 151

hindrance, without that which bars[96]. In normalizing such direct contact, Rushdie seeks to gratify the desire to overcome the indeterminacy of exchange and, in ethical terms, the inadequacy of the responses of an audience to our moral propositions. How so? One of the most important ideas Saleem tries to force the others to adopt is purposefulness in life[97]. He is pressing behavioral tendencies which we call ethics. If his audience is already ethical, that is, if their lives show a pattern from which can be abstracted consistent motivation, then Saleem would *not* need to organize the group around Purpose as he does. He would simply present a purpose so persuasive it cannot be denied, and each child will go out and do as he is needed to make the brave new world. Saleem might verbalize, or write: look, you have a responsibility to each other and to the rest of humanity to form a society that controls all violence and messages the dignity of the indignant. Yet in these types of exchange, something goes awry. We might deduce this something by analyzing the frustration between thought and action, between the Word and the world. Saleem cannot slide his "purpose" into his peers (who it must be remembered lived in various situations and were raised by parents of different value systems), the slide being "cut off" once the Congress loses its Purpose. Ethical purpose and telepathy are necessary to Saleem's project: ethics to cohere the ethical body and telepathy to direct it unerringly. But reality intervenes.

The direct penetration of Saleem's powers suggests something about the ethical body (that which enacts the *ethos*). Taking on the specific symptoms of the protagonist, concerned with his well-being, it exercises the will of the producer of *ethos*. The

[96] In other words, without the Lacanian phallus.

Midnight's Children Congress is meant to be the agent that will eventually remake the world to "fit" the vague ideas of good Saleem implies in his ethics of living purposefully. To be sure, this ambition is not Saleem's "fault", insofar as almost everyone has a sense of right and wrong that is more universal than we, unless we were fundamentalist, might be willing to openly admit. Yet, Saleem's ambitions both for society—*his* society—and for the world are more pronouncedly dangerous because the telepath has been given (by Rushdie) direct access to a powerful body that would attempt to fulfill his *ethos*. Only when reality intervenes in the creation of a collective *ethos* from his own ethical desires, do we appreciate the difference between them and the extent of the producer's ambition. How often does Saleem insist, that his fate and the fate of the nation are coextensive? How often does he insist this link when everyone ignores him? The difference is not in kind. The failure of the Congress does not come from a faulty exchange of one *ethos* for another—Saleem's for the collective. Rather, there is no ethical collective, and so no economy in which Saleem's *ethos* has currency. Body does not obey will because there had been no organism (of body and will) all along. In acting as if it has always already existed, Saleem reproduces the national(ist) myth.

All along Saleem had been trying to collect the children of midnight, to instill in them Purpose (or purposefulness, if you will) out of which he can write his particular goals. But the children he wanted to collect had minds of their own, drives of their own, desires of their own. The presence of other powerful and perhaps justified ambitions thwarted Saleem's project. From this we cannot draw the conclusion that Saleem's

[97] Ironically, it takes the form of belonging, to bring back Nandy's words, against which a child of Independence has no choice.

dream was inherently problematic; just as we cannot be sure that it was right and the others were foolish. We might go so far as to say there were structural problems with Saleem's idea of a Midnight's Children Congress, but we can only characterize it as an "internal" problem if we admit that there *was* a collective. We know that in Saleem's mind it was. Shiva and Parvati and he and hundreds of others *were* all children of midnight. They all faced the condition of having to fulfill the previous generations' dream of collectivity. They were accidents of birth that became the point of a new origin, of a new nation[98]. Saleem operated as though he had merely given consciousness to an ideological-material condition, the way that a Maoist thinks he has only revealed to a group of peasants their purpose in a history to which they had always belonged. There was no need to justify *being* by any method which requires *being* to exist prior to and in spite of the intervening human act of hypothesizing: it was. The "fact" was of course contradicted when it had to produce results. We see an undisturbed belief in this "fact" still in Saleem's representation of its failure. It was broken by the waywardness of Shiva, and ruthlessly terminated by the Indira Ghandi government: it failed because of some coherent malevolence—an enemy that might be identified and kept at bay (or accused of atrocity): an Other. In the revision of his failure, the producer of *ethos* continues to feel entitled to a "body" which unerringly administers whatever he says, a social body which, from the vantage of the ethicist, exists prior to the production mechanism and which is inert, waiting for the revelation of an *ethos* it must then fulfill. Though the "organism" fails, the ambition remains: as we will see, it becomes the discourse of dialectical

[98] It must be noted that this was not always a collective dream. For instance, Saleem often points to Nehru's letter as the cause of his destiny.

revisionist historiography. For now, resistance against Saleem's hopeful social acts returns us to the subject as that which reveals itself in structural inadequacies.

The Shiva-like test and contest of the cultural network that enables the writing of *ethos* is familiar. Once there emerges a small failure in the promise of allegorical consciousness, the authority to issue imperatives under a redemptive Idea is diminished, and the pursuit of a promise much deferred can be dropped in favor of other pursuits. Stakes in that which cannot be redeemed may be evaluated at their real values. Once it has been identified that "lived-experience" is made for us, knows what is good for us, the concept that exempts the interventionist text from adverse scrutiny can be debunked; arguments made from stories of lived-experience can be checked and contested, with the genuine possibility of rejection. Propositions can be analyzed philosophically, rhetorically, and dialectically (i.e. letting it "explode" and assessing the wreckage as the analysis that comes after failed revolution). Once connectivity and affinity have deconstructed, decisions can be made about whether or not to compete or cooperate, or do nothing, as is merited. Stalement and steady disagreement can be reached, which may be called peace. These responses are familiar because they have been made previously: moderns use them to argue against the kind of discursive authority Postcolonialism is looking to (re)establish.

Rushdie should be lauded for dramatizing how complicated conflicts between individualism and collectivism, and other rival ideas, and conflicts among various collectives, are integral to post-colonial conditions and how they inform autochthonous and Postcolonial attempts to write ethics. In fact, the types of antithesis (e.g. Eastern vs.

Western medicine) and contradictions (e.g. value that is sometimes culturally relative, sometimes universal), and of course beautiful hybrid juxtapositions like a self-interested god of destruction, found in Rushdie's novels indirectly evidence Postcolonialism's place in the history of cultural production, a conclusion which the critical theories of Bhabha should predict. The antagonism of Shiva complicates the kind of collectivization that Saleem as telepath tries to establish. The complication presented by Shiva demonstrates that, to an extent, Rushdie is still ambivalent about the establishment and maintenance of collectives in response to some great historical promise represented by Nehru's letter to Midnight's Children, then by Saleem's execution of the spirit of that letter. Although the children were made by Independence and partition, they do not necessarily act as one self-conscious class. Indeed, the Midnight's Children Congress, like the nation, is subjected to the forces that we understand as dialectical history: it can create the conditions for its own failure/transformation.

Midnight's Children ends with the possibility of a thousand-year long recurrence of the history just narrated. The last *deus-ex-machina* (last in the novel) is only a suggestion, but relevant because the trope recurs throughout Postcolonialism. In fact, it can be argued that the trope is fundamental to the production of *ethos* and one more thing criticism takes from literature. *Midnight's Children* very subtly locates the force of oppression, that which cracks Saleem the narrator and will do the same to others like him for a very long time to come, "outside" of the humanity against which it acts, suggesting the possibility of counteraction that finally ends oppression while preserving what is human. Cultural production or the production of cultural differences functions similarly as antagonist in Bhabha's underlying story. This dramaturgy of discrete antagonists

implies a sort of metaphysics (of oppression and victimhood) which makes promise against both the possibility of sublation with no clear end and the possibility of annihilation. The promise is apprehensible when the first principles inferred from the ending are juxtaposed against, say, the hypotheses that oppression/liberation, like life/death, is inherent to human existence; that historical consciousness, dialectically both effect and cause, is self-perpetuating; that history is ironic. To say allegory serves this cause, or symbolism that, only means one has turned a blind eye to the inconvenient truths of one's theory/belief. Be that as it may, Rushdie's ending is to be distinguished from revolutionary utopianism. His hope approaches Poststructuralism—Derridean almost[99]. The network of story-telling, mediated by Story, accelerates and increases the efficacy of historical transformation (sublation), achieving thereby a sort of imagined discursive democracy that spends most of its time looking for the other, speaking as the other, and correcting itself. This is the hope by which Saleem, under duress, continues to make chutney, to try to tell history anew.

To tell history anew, Rushdie produces the ties-that-bind: lived-experience, allegories of post-colonial struggle, metaphorical fathers, specters and unfinished business. Critics like Jaina C. Sanga then circulate the metaphors, expandingand reinforcing the network[100]. Rushdie's revisionist history is Modernist in the sense that it

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[99] The problematic I observe several sentences prior, and in general throughout, is derived from the basic problematic he identifies in how philosophy advances its propositions. To philosophy I would add literature, citing the function of metaphor as analyzed by Derrida in *White Mythology*. The problem *for* Derrida is the same for Rushdie: now that commitment to ideas has been problematized, how does one go on to justify commitment without, of course, reproducing the problem that required intervention in the first place? If previous attempts to write ethics were problematic, what exempts *Ethics, Institutions, and The Right to Philosophy* and *The Satanic Verses*?

[100] Jaina C Sanga. *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Blasphemy, and Globalization*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. 2001.

undermines the authority of metanarrative *while it tries to uphold the unity those narratives had once signified*. Thus the lament over social disintegration, pointed out by Jaina Sanga specifically as a desire of Saleem from *Midnight's Children* but readily discernable as an *ethos* promoted at various moments in *The Satanic Verses* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, may discount the dominant version of what society is or should be yet keep society: in particular the triangulation of strangers into relationships that allow them to make a range of demands on each other, as an idea, a method, for achieving the same progress.

Like Modernists, Rushdie tries to hold his social network together by nostalgia and the promise of meaning, imagining a once-upon-a-time when the ties-that-bind *were* the kind of intimacy or confluence only dreamt of in this world. There was a time, to return to Rushdie's comments I had initially quoted, when those ties allowed a writer to really write for his time. Rushdie tries to hold his center by magic, unlike Modernists, who use the major elements of the Western tradition[101]. There is quite a bit of nostalgia, too (nostalgia is all that is left of Aadam's Kashmir by the end of *Midnight*), and there is the trope of fragmentation. Still, in *Midnight's Children*, magic gives the worlds its supposed regularity, and suggests that another world, ours no doubt, might cohere the same way. Of course, this is the magic of words; but would you be convinced that the "world" is stitched together grammatically, if you already believe in magic—if for you there is no difference between magic and reality? Rushdie asks us to consider the

[101] Of course, Eliot had the magic of Christian faith, and Joyce the optimism of eternal recurrence that most likely came from the same impulse as Eliot's. And the modernists did miss "magic". Both Yeats and Wallace Stevens did: Yeats every time the gyre could not hold, or Fergus disappears; and Stevens on Sunday

problematic tension between the real and the magical, which I suppose distinguishes him from ideologue and propagandist, but which necessitates the coherence of "magic".

> I supervise the production of Mary's legendary recipes; but there are also my special blends, in which, thanks to the powers of my drained nasal passages, I am able to include memories, dreams, ideas, so that once they enter mass-production all who consume them will know what pepperpots achieved in Pakistan, or how it felt to be in the Sundarbans… believe don't believe but it's true. Thirty jars stand upon a shelf, waiting to be unleashed upon the amnesiac nation.
>
> (And beside them, one jar stands empty.)
>
> The process of revision should be constant and endless; don't think I'm satisfied with what I've done! Among my unhappiness: an overly-harsh taste from those jars containing memories of my father; a certain ambiguity in the love-flavour of 'Jamila Singer' (Special Formula No. 22), which might lead the unperceptive to conclude that I've invented the whole story of the baby-swap to justify an incestuous love… --the pickle raises questions which are not fully answered, such as: … would Mary's confession have come as a shock to a true telepath? Sometimes, in the pickles' version of history, Saleem appears to have know too little; at other times, too much… yes, I should revise and revise, improve and improve; but there is neither the time nor the energy. I am obliged to offer

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mornings. But rationality or the turn to the Real was necessary, too, to discredit the magic of monoliths, and

> no more than this stubborn sentence: it happened that way because that's how it happened.[102]

The gap between producer and consumer of pickles is the gap between magic and the Real that resists the authority of words. It is a gap that says there is no great truth beyond the catered taste of pickles, or that we need not buy into them to any great extent. Yet, however much the narrative allows us to consider discontinuities, it tries to steer us away from concluding that the world is arbitrary and magic the fantasy of a wounded psyche. The insistent last sentences clearly express this desire to seal possible rupture. To arrest questioning, it begs the question: the narrative creates the category "pickles' version of history", which is self-evidently factual, true, real—and not determined by "believe don't believe". Like certain anthropologists, psychologists, religious historians, it begs the truth of the "stubborn sentence" because someone else somewhere else believes in it: the ontic of the particular set of beliefs, if you will. The conceit is repeated at the opening to *The Satanic Verses*. The effect epitomizes the "new" intersubjectivity. To call this a theological order, a positive end to scrutiny by turning to axiom, is not especially enlightening, except that by observing the traditional way of answering skepticism with faith, we can see the structure of Rushdie's intersubjective, revisionist history. This history, like religious explanations of things, turn to a central tautology to "prove" its case. Listen to what I shall unfold, History demands, because it is true. And how is it true? Because I have unfolded it thus. Of course, this would be true of any history. This

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therefore the modernists could not be the kinds of magicians late-twentieth century writers could be.

[102] *Midnight's Children.* 443

version here—the kind of history which endorses the privileged[103] revisionist prerogative—needs magic.

Like a rain dance, or burials of the dead, the Postcolonial ethical moment, whether it be new realities or new chutney, is repeated at given junctures, and understood to be effective beyond the limits of the physical act. The authority to produce such histories, and to project *ethos* from those histories as inescapable ties-that-bind, is ritualistic: Acting reaffirms the meaning of the act. The story imagines ties, from colonialism to global capitalism, from material causality to "specters"; the story forges ties among reader-participants, among faithfuls and converts, suggesting everybody's story is a part of everyone else's. The *ethos* produced from imagining intersubjectivity, from speaking intersubjectively of an imaginary, *is* the ties-that-bind. The strength of the ties-that-bind depends on the authority of the ritual, and authority depends on the strength of the ties-that-bind. It is a positive feedback loop, or self-reaffirming cycle. Naipaul has his reasons for wanting to leave fiction for the authority of non-fiction, which will be explored in the next chapter. For his part, Rushdie wants to elevate the status of the literary, because he needs its devices. He recognizes that he needs to structure rituals in which one can effectively write new *ethos*, and that, in a secular societies, only literature can set up a monadic "system" which not only assimilates new chutney and unfinished business, but also always readies the reading culture to be magically transformed by them.

[103] Privileged because (1) it fetishizes change as the only good thing, and (2) only certain people can claim to be revisionary. I, for one, fall in neither category, though it would be untrue to charge me with wanting to keep the world as it is at this very instance, or being insensitive for how we got the past wrong.

The question for modern criticism is: should writers with aspirations like Rushdie's be made into what they wish to be. Correlatively, if as Rushdie says there was once in history societies wherein story-tellers had great influence, how much of what is achieved with modernity are we willing to surrender. And whether or not such societies existed, can we compare between the *status quo*, and that world which would result from (not promised by) installing those new "things" in the field of ethics. I intervene so that we may ask the question without hindrance from the mysticism that has been built up by some post-colonial writers and by an industry of Postcolonialists, mysticism that is based on convening an audience for allegories of emerging "things" and unfinished business and incorporating peoples into the economy of signs produced by whomever can present credentials as the "other". There is a crucial reason why we sound unfriendly to Saleem and his cause, insensitive to Gabreel and his plight. You and I and Aadam (the younger) cannot "resist" the magic of Saleem's telepathy, or Gabreel's transformations, not until we can imagine a point from which the ritual is what scholars of religion might call the sacred[104]. The fortunate part is that we can: in modernity. In modernity, there are many many rituals in which to take part, from which to leave, and with which are met other concerns that limit the government of ethics. Why should engagement with Postcolonial allegories constructed from post-colonial "lived-experience" be binding? To believers, such thoughts are profane. To modernity, the story which is supposed to be also yours and also mine is but merely another textual artifact in a long history of artifacts produced by humans to use and abuse one another, again. We can always come back and help

[104] See for instance Marceau Eliade's work on the religious mind and the meaning of rituals to believers. *The Sacred and the Profane* is in plain style and considered seminal. Trans. William Trask. London: Harcourt

Saleem with his cause, or Gabreel in his plight; but we would do so conditionally, separately, and without the charged emotions and zealous commitment of a transformer of men. I have tried to give an analysis with which one can both write well the ties-that-bind and deauthorize the party that tries to do so.

Brace Jovanovich, 1987. Originally published in 1959.

4. The Error of Comedy

If you've got a plan

If you got the master plan

Well I gotta vote for you

Cause you're the Man![1]

Amitav Ghosh criticizes V.S. Naipaul for perpetuating unfavorable comparisons between postcolonial places and an already dominant West. In an essay published on his website, Ghosh reproduces the long-standing critique leveled against Naipaul[2]. The basic charge is that Naipaul has abandoned the Postcolonial project to reaffirm and transform, and the arguments used in the charge have been extended well beyond the study of the particular novelist.

Ghosh sees two Naipauls. The first, the author of those novels on Trinidad, was also one from among the local people. He observed their comic travails and was (somewhat) sympathetic to them. Even when he failed to show as much sympathy as he should have, the patterns about which he wrote were theirs uniquely. The second, the traveling author of the latter novels and non-fiction, was too ready to compare. Instead of rich comedy, the novelist now depended on judgmental stereotypes, often using categories that criticize the subjects of his writing for what they lacked. What they lacked was political stability, rationalism, tolerance, irony, technical expertise, understanding of

[1] Marvin Gaye. "You're the man". *The Master* 1961 – 1984. Motown, 1995.
[2] "Naipaul and the Nobel". 15 Mar 2009 <http://www.amitavghosh.com/essays/essayfull.php?essayNo=55>.. Ghosh's disagreement with Naipaul is ongoing. He repeats the arguments in interviews.

global markets; what they lacked were Western features. Hadar Eid mounts this attack directly against Naipaul, accusing him of representing Africa in ways that not only invite but justifies neocolonial intervention[3]. And it is the same argument, first in another context, then generalized, that Dipesh Chakrabarty uses to call for a self-reflexive, authentically Indian historiography[4]. By using Western historiography to write the subject of India, a writer—it could even be one from the subaltern group—implicitly characterizes an India that is out of time with Western modernity. The chosen terms of historiography, no matter who writes them, are already comparative, and discount every subject but one. What undermines Ghosh's argument is the possibility that social stability is valued commonly across ethnicity and culture, or that in postcolonial places, well before Colonialism could be blamed, there were desires, felt by the slave of MS H.6[5], for instance, that found satisfaction in things now resembling "the West". Postcolonial places, it seems, must house at their core some secret joy, untranslatable truth, and undeniable promise, such that any discourse on them must implicitly and/or explicitly prove the West, and Capitalism, and rationalism, inadequate. As such, Postcolonialist ethics may be understood as attempts to not only solve post-colonial problems but also politically correct Naipaul. Comparative literary, historical and risk analysis of Naipaul and his critics allow us to gather information and make the best decisions about post-colonial places and Postcolonialist interventions.

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[3] "Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and Neo-Colonialism as a Comparative Context". *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture: A WWWeb Journal (CLCWeb).* 2.3 (2000). 1 April 2008 <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss3/6>

[4] *Provincializing Europe* deconstructs the categories of "Western" historiography. *Habitations of Modernity*, the contructionist follow-up, tries to create a "modernity" that not only accommodates spectral categories and time but allows them to be points of access to the machination of power.

[5] *In An Antique Land.*

modes, forms, and the unities of Postcolonialism

There is Naipaul, and then there are his critics. The critics usually prefer one Naipaul over another. What might be the specific reasons for Ghosh's preference? The comedic novel uses varied personalities that, however stock each may be, if done well, cohere into a complex society of characters. Its plot is driven by traits often in excess *but otherwise good*: the comedic flaw, shall we say, correlative to that other one mentioned in what remains of Aristotle's literary criticism. Biswas wants to leave the former colonial world behind, even if he is self-deluding[6]. Singh is self-inventing though his inventions, his passings, his mimicry, are problematic[7]. Then, the conflicts are resolved and resolved welcomingly[8]. After all, the comedic mode incorporates[9]. Expertly done, as *A House for Mr. Biswas* is, comedy can suggest rich cultural life, so rich, in fact, that any characterization of deficiency seems entirely untrue because insufficient. Each unflattering characterization, the extended family ignorant of the greater world and the great changes in their little one, the poor decisions of neighbors, the unreliable transportation, the unpredictable commerce, is too small an aspect to be *the* indicator of the culture; and in fact, they all add to the "richness" of the culture by showing, at the very least, the variety with which humans respond to each other and their environment. In contrast, the seeming caricatures from Naipaul's latter novels are steadfast images of deviation from a norm—western norms at that, so goes the charge. Instead of Biswas and

[6] *A House for Mr. Biswas*
[7] *The Mimic Men.*

his inlaws the Tulsi making life miserable for each other, the flawed Africans make life miserable for themselves and for non-Africans (who are also flawed). They are not excessively lively, but lacking. More than that, they seem mired in personas and mimicry, and continue to act out parts absent the colonial apparati that made the acts meaningful by exploiting the actor or deemed it resistance. Still, neither comedy nor derisive caricature is controversial *per se*. The targets matter. Instead of Africans, turn the subject of "lack" to the ostentatiously rich, to any haughty lord of the lord-servant dialectic, and see if the response is not strikingly different. Or let the society of a comedy dwindle a woman into a wife. So the anxieties of Naipaul's critics, then, must be caused by something *subtler* that makes much of the perceived changes in his tone and form.

The two related forms seem to demand different resolution, and it is the political and ethical utility of the different possible endings that precipitates disagreement over the values of the two straw-man Naipauls, disagreement that correlates in interesting ways to two impulses of Postcolonialism. A comedy resolves by restoring cohesion to the particular society, and since the subjects of Naipaul's comedies are post-colonials, it is an easy leap to make sure the resolution is resolutely Postcolonial, too. Trinidadians simply need to cohere the fragments of their cultural legacy into something functional and positive, and one of the most distinguished novels written in English in the twentieth century itself exemplifies just that creative act. Follow *Biswas*'s lead. In contrast, the reform of caricatures and figures of lack usually calls for "importing" goods from elsewhere, most worrisomely from a superior culture, *since the present mélange and the*

[8] Except perhaps for *The Mimic Men*, the tone of which ending is part of the steady movement toward pathetic exile.

individual "fragments" of culture lack what is necessary. The representations can too easily justify Westernization, because they do not in the end faithfully confirm what postcolonials and Postcolonialists are trying to build. Whatever is supposed to have been "out there" is not.

Take, for instance, an idea that often appears in Naipaul's novels, the idea of primitive belief, or superstition. What is belief? What is a way of life, other than *a* way of life? For many, the dialogue of spirits is not only part of lived-experience but a *legitimate* paradigm for understanding the world[10]. On the other hand, belief could just be the irrational demands of a dumb or incurious[11] people—be so *even to him who would qualify as native* if he were free to question his own culture. From one perspective, the pundit prophecies of Indians in the Caribbean, and superstition of African tribesmen in Africa, are fragments that (always already) cohere into nascent but no less legitimate cultures; from the other, the situation is less ideal. Ethical evaluation of representations of post-colonial places presumes coherence and legitimacy, which are expressed through formal differences, and which are to be valued as the ethicists have already valued them. Superstition must be represented in ways that allow others to use the "things" of superstition such as ghosts to not only integrate into present society but also advance their claims. In fact, how well a text enable the abstraction and circulation of ideals *may define* ethical evaluation (centered on those ideals). Naipaul is criticized for failing to preserve the idea that there are special secrets, there is great worth, there is something

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[9] As explained by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*.
[10] With the ethical corollary—which I have been contesting—that we conceive our actions in relation to the known things of superstition.
[11] Which is overreaching and certainly hypocritical when the observer holds beliefs herself.

incomparable, there is promise, in postcolonial peoples and cultures, and for thereby allowing the values and entitlements that his critics are trying to redeem *across culture* to be discounted. The ethical project to redeem is much more ambitious than, say, the centrist correction to cultural understanding that tolerates spirits and reason, and simply lets them develop independently so long as they return the favor. Since *Biswas* does not redeem, the ethical critic feels ethically bound to redeem it.

Mr. Biswas (1961) is fated to a tragicomic kind of life because those around him readily and steadily believe in the pronouncements of pundits. Pundits see "things" rational moderns do not. Ironically, believing the pundits' statements make them "true", just like believing storytellers. Believing that Biswas will overreach, those around him wind up obstructing his house-building endeavors. His desire for his own house is also a response to the culture, and in pursuit of a house he makes the cultural predictions self-fulfilling. Now I myself would have questioned how to account for the veracity of predictions, as oppose to conjuring some intelligence behind the coincidence of phenomena observed by unreliable observers. But I suspect such questions would be to no avail. I can raise my empiricist objection, my skeptical objections, my logical objections, and pundits and the cultural beliefs they steward would still remain in authority. Success in this early novel seems to depend on the ability to negotiate these rigid beliefs. Since one has to deal other people who believe them (and one may be disposed to believe them, too), signs like the timing of birth or the shape of the head now constitute a kind of facticity, phenomenal reductions that have to be surmounted for

greater control of what happens in life[12]. If it is announced that one has had an unfortunate birth, and therefore is destined to have an unfortunate life, then it is all that one can do to try to *not* have an unfortunate life.

The later novel *A Bend in the River* (1979) deals (in part) with the African belief structures synthesized with western ideas which enable "Big Men" dictators to rule their nations, and favorite sons to be rewarded. Even Ghosh and Rushdie agree that the power structures which replaced the vacuum left by decolonization are harmful. Everyone living in Africa, the Greek and Italian and Indian merchants who have settled on the continent's eastern coast for many centuries, the old missionaries who resettled the "bends in the rivers", the tribes that are just being militarized and nationalized, seem "stuck", subjected to the volatile power struggles that build and break ceaselessly. The constricting patterns of Africa may only be broken by the kind of revolution that would rid the Africans of their "bush" ways. In Naipaul's Trinidad, although beliefs are linked to the traditions from which they come, how they are practiced can be used to "prove" that the "culture" there is unique, and suggest uniqueness affords particular political interpretations credibility as they establish Culture that redeems the "failed" practices of post-colonials.

The disagreement between Naipaul and his critics, which is also the more diplomatic disagreement between Chakrabarty and some historians, over the "truth" of representation stem from divergent interests, each with its own matrix of comparative

[12] More precisely, if we are to use the Sartrean existentialist vocabulary, they are not like the facticity of height, or intelligence, but the resistance of others and part of the subject-object struggle. To become X, one need other subjects to recognize one as X, and so are in a struggle for recognition; the struggle besets everyone.

values and inscrutable (i.e. essential, non-fungible) values that the truth *should* support. Indeed, one side may argue that ghosts are legitimate explicitly because opponents deem them illegitimate. These are Postcolonial ghosts, and the system of values that has decided on the cultural significance of specters has already decided on the value of that rival system which discounts or dismisses them. To some, the truth is we are equal, and all things and all people must never discredit the "theory"; that is the commandment. So do "theories" of the spectral work the same way. The key distinction here is that one, *A House For Mr. Biswas*, can more fluently support aboriginal responses to problems with society[13] while the other, *A Bend in the River*, calls for reforms that would turn the postcolonial place into nations resembling Western ones. In *Mr. Biswas*, Trinidadians, just as good as anyone else, having come or been brought here from various places, are simply trying to find a way to cohere a native culture that supports everyone. The fragments of culture that beset Biswas are not really "primitive", as they are not working right. It becomes clear that the particular configurations of cultural fragments found at that time were inadequate for dealing with conditions on the islands and impotent for dealing with the larger world[14]. Still, that the peoples of Trinidad can found a workable society remains a grace-saving possibility; failure pertains only to specific fragments like Biswas's contrarian personality, the Tulsis' fading business sense, or the lingering resentment of Blacks.

[13] To be distinguished from "social problems". Social problems are *for* society to solve. Problems with society deal with inadequacies of organization and structure; as such, too broad a definition of "social problems" could be a problem with the way a particular society is constituted.

[14] *Mr.Biswas* (1961) was published slightly before Trinidad elected to become independence (1962), and wealth before it achieved some measure of independence (1976) as a republic of the commonwealth.

In contrast, the suggestion that Western cultural intervention being the *only* recourse is strong in the second novel mentioned here; which means Postcolonialist redemption (of Naipaul) is even more necessaryAll the various strategies developed under colonial power has not helped decolonized/Independent peoples to manage themselves. The mimic that resisted colonial culture while using the colonial economy finds that mimicry, his pretense to be great for instance, cannot in itself sustain an alternative economy. So-called fragments are not fragments but unrelated or incompatible practices. And because it is the very kind of stability needed by small business entrepreneurs that cycles of police-state tyranny followed by the return of the lawless bush destroy, *A Bend in the River* can suggest that capitalistic rationality must come to save Africa from itself, or else those who can had better leave before civilization goes to "bush" again[15]. Mr. Biswas's dream house can be many things, and the fact that he is thwarted in part by the class/caste conservatism of his extended relations means the house can even stand for liberal progressive socialist aspirations[16]. Actually, when he forgets about building his house, Biswas spends his energy trying to help the impoverished around him by telling their stories in the series of newspaper articles he is commissioned to write. The character who thinks words can lead to action is actually not that far from Niapaul *or* his critics, in this respect. The West can help by acknowledging that Trinidadians *are* dealing with the fragmentation produced by colonialism, and *that* very struggle is the new cultural formation. Perhaps it can help by believing that the new

[15] Except, of course, that the kind of merchant trading here had gone on for years before anything resembling Capitalism emerged in history. Cf. Ghosh's *In An Antique Land*.

[16] C.f. K.D. Verma. "Basically, *A House for Mr. Biswas* is about human destitution and the ability of common men like Mohun Biswas to wage strong willed and uncompromising struggles for progress." "V.S. Naipaul's

is already here. On the other hand, the dichotomy is not as sharp as drawn here for the sake of argument, nor as sharp as Ghosh draws it, I do not think. Which Naipaul you take depends on what you want to do with the places about which he writes, your allies and your enemies[17], but can he really be so far from himself?

Ghosh is frustrated by Naipaul. The frustration with writers (and thinkers) who "betray" their cause, or the cause chosen for them, is keenly felt; and the charge is widely brought. When the cause is as transparently good as liberation, or equal wealth distribution, how could anyone stand apart, much less present obstacle by complicating matters? If we may be allowed to pin it down, we might say that Postcolonialism is the value system that underwrites such a charge while asserting authority to represent peoples and places that historically had been colonized. There is a desire to change the balance of economic and cultural power, and to accomplish such a goal requires devaluing the current system. This would be true whether the writers from various locations choose a form that valorizes the collectivization of villagers, or connote the *pathos* of Maori ceremonies, or conjure the "native" spirits of postcolonial in exile. The critical discourse makes demands. The values have been decided (that is, certain ones are non-negotiable). The demands confront any writer who works with material or on subjects out of which is created the *ethos* of Postcolonialism. Naipaul is certainly a writer from a region that was colonized—Trinidad and Tobago became independent and part of the commonwealth

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A House for Mr. Biswas: Poetics of History, Biography, Modernity and Culture". *South Asian Review*. 26.1 (2005): 34

after A House for Mr. Biswas was published—writing in English about peoples and conditions that were produced by colonialism. His place as a Postcolonial writer is ambivalent at best if Postcolonialism is defined thusly. At worst, if the charges leveled against him are convincing, of which Ghosh's is representative, the novelist may be read as rather anti-Postcolonial, as his reports from post-colonial places seem to hinder the work of developing self-determined representation and self-directed reforms by which we all must abide.

The charge of failing to rally the cause leveled against Naipaul is widely applied, and what drives it in another context may tell us much about the controversies in this one. It exists in African-American discourse, where betrayal is felt keenly enough that a black person will use the pejorative "house slave" (or "Uncle Tom") against another black person who does not subscribe to and act out the part already programmed in the cause of liberation. To do those things that might lead to upward class mobility, for instance, and leave behind those who do not or cannot follow, may be tantamount to turning White (when one is already black). What is so galling, I think, about the "house slave" is not so much that she espouses unreasonable ideas, but that she exemplifies a contradiction in and evidences the inadequacies of the revolutionary discourse under which the character to be noted is her access to "house" rather than her status as "slave". The criticizing discourse requires its subjects to already *be* certain things, to be "Negro", to be "Postcolonial", because its power depends on the authenticity of essential being. One cannot be issued a card; one already is _____. To seek membership elsewhere is to

[17] One can always focus on generic differences among the V.S. Naipauls, too. William Pritchard, for instance, notes how Naipaul, then on his twenty-first book, leaves the form of the novel for sketches and sequences

betray. The bertrayer (who may, in fact, agree that change is needed), by merely being, can precipitate *aporia*, and introduce the problem of representation upon which others will seize. How dare one serve the master, love his house, when one's rightful place is with one's suffering brothers! Exiling such an example to the camp of the antagonists, that is, putting one like former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell in the "house"[18], solves the problematic of radical discourse, by reducing the contestation of the Real—of that great demystifying Public—to party dispute: do you serve the master, or are you a free man (which means you are with us)? Party lines are redrawn from master/slave to house/field, and not surprisingly the party that thinks it is in the right wants to protect against the dilution of its brand. The pejorative reaffirms the threatened identity by identifying authentic threats to being—one of those tautological logic of identity formation that many of us have criticized. The charge of betrayal is programmatic of and integral to discourses that, arguing their way to power, need to maintain conformity among extensions of key categories such that the argument can draw on the authority of being. A dollop of "white" taints the whole.

The very act of redrawing political value, of redefining what serves the cause, what sets it back, introduces the logic of invalidation that I continue to redeploy and test. I cannot emphasize this point enough. Whether the argument is empirical (Africans are

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with looser thematic ties. "Naipaul's Written Word". *Hudson Review*. 47.4 (1995): 587 – 597.

[18] In 2002 Harry Belafonte used this metaphor to condemn Powell. As cited in "Belafonte won't back down from Powell slave reference." CNN.com 16 October 2002. 3 February 2009 <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/US/10/15/belafonte.powell/> I was also taken by Cornel West's answers to Tavis Smiley's questions on Clarence Thomas's memoir *My Grandfather's Son*, not by his critiques, but by the insistent, almost irresistible way in which West easily made Thomas his brother. Thomas is of course an easy target for the repudiation that reinforces group identity: he is a conservative textualist on the Supreme Court and he is black. He does not often find juridical justification for decisions his critics have already made.

X, X disproves Y, therefore the statement "Africans are Y" is false), or utilitarian (the representation Y serves the wrong side), *or both in turn*, the logic of invalidation is deployed by the Postcolonialist intervention, most emphatically in directed outrage. I am using the logic, save that I am capable of using it against the prescription and practice of the discourse I am studying. There are ideas of being Black in the U.S., in the Caribbean, in Africa; of being Indian in the Caribbean, in London, in India; of being African in America, in Africa. Different people can write them, revise them. Some of these stereotypes are weaker than others. Some constitute culture so intimately that changing representation is very difficult. Would inhabitants of a small community in Zimbabwe recognize what it means to be "black", or "negre"? Yes and no. Be that as it may, the *authenticity* of particular ideas hinges on the discourse's mastery of the kernel of identity, without which no *single* idea of being black or Indian or African dominates the others. Identities, as such, are unimpeachable and nontransferable. A comparison defies the plenitude structured by the kernel because it subjects being to other categories (e.g. civilized, superstitious, violent). To keep the desired identities *fundamental*, all comparisons are disabled.

Curiously, the exclusionary logic that creates the disabling and enabling functions come and go rather conveniently. No category, e.g. "black woman" or "Caribbean Indian" or "primitive African", is metaphysical as long as we understand it to be a category: each utterance is a categorical statement that makes sense because of an extant signifying system and may be accepted, rejected, or revised. No predication is ever

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A transcript of the show is available at <http://www.pbs.org/kcet/tavissmiley/archive/200710/20071001_marcmorialcornel.html>

adequate. No representation is representative. *Except* for the one useful in privileged calculations—the (new) line. It was for the purpose of fixing this new line that Malcolm X deployed the allegory of field versus house slave, and Black versus Negro[19]. The ~~false~~ plenitude of the kernel "refilled" by the allegory is used in turn to gain authority over specific, historical representations. The authentic black man *qua* himself must overthrow by revolution. He must not be distracted by the momentary achievement of bourgeois ambitions, which only serve to distract him from true freedom. Any anomaly that has a chance of "being black", too, is too much a threat. And any instance that might lead to the conclusion of lack, that there is no core to "blackness", is entirely dangerous, because consciousness of lack precipitates systematic failure: the plenitude that revolutionary politics and rhetoric claim as basis would be false, or lacking. Although dangerous to a movement is the realization that it can never deliver what it promises, there are structures it can use to forestall that failure. More dangerous is the sudden disappearance of the unassailable basis (e.g. Being and Being in history) absolutely necessary not only to promote action but also to signify what actions to take.

Sometimes, it may be said that superstitious peoples and societies are *not* lacking in rationality but full of kernels of the sublime—call them "being", "spirit", "culture", or "live experience", or if one goes by U.N. rhetoric[20] "inherent dignity"—which

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[19] "Message to the Grassroots". *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*. Ed. George Breitman. New York: Grove Press. 1990. 3 – 17. The famous speech was delivered November 1964.

[20] See the U.N.'s *Declaration of Human Rights.* <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>. The argument for the usefulness of such overly broad rhetoric from a transnational authority is made by Partha Chatterjee in "Beyond the Nation? Or Within?" *Social Texts.* 16.3 (1998): 57-69. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/466770> 6 August 2008; by others from the Subaltern Studies Collective, and of course other critics perhaps without the same benefit of authenticity. Chatterjee sees ideas from these other entities as important determinants of the idea of modernity, pushing and pulling it away from the nationalist-capitalist concept. See also Chatterjee. *Our Modernity*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History

chauvinistic rationalism can never understand. Those things are sublime because they can bend under oppression, and still return to their essential shapes, like a cartoon character[21]. To purge a person of "superstitions" and turn him into a "rational" subject of a nation of capitalist small enterprises is to reproduce the cultural violence that will only cause more violence. Yet what separates the two camps, what makes the one incomprehensible to the other, is a readily understood dichotomy—no, a binary, about which we feel very strongly. After Poststructural exile, the monoliths return. The illusionary categories are back. Race, ethnicity, people, and nation, are back. The divides used by interventionists have also taken the form of culture, and/or East vs.West, the latter being inherent to the charges against Naipaul. So sometimes, identification is needed in the calculation of power, and a concept like being (or substance) is called forth in full regalia to dramatize threats to it. I cannot begin to characterize you, for you are already what you are. Or you are yet to be, yet already full of, what you will become. Thus on the one hand, identification cannot be trusted because that which would be identified is structured to be full of meaning and therefore incomparable, indescribable, immeasurable, unchanging; on the other, the fullness that assures the reality of the new identity-kernels is needed not only to show the oppression of one regime by another now and in times past but also to change "their" relations. For Partha Chatterjee, the goal is no less than to spiritualize modernity[22]; for Dipesh Chakrabarty, to provincialize

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of Development (SEPHIS) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), 1996. <http://www.sephis.org/pdf/partha1.pdf> 6 August 2008.

[21] This is Slavoj Zizek's definition and simile in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

[22] *Our Modernity*.

Europe[23]. Partisan will see them as necessary instruments, not the least as anchors in the ethical field meant to relocate power to different centers. Skeptics see the same, but are capable of analyzing the use and appraising the utility of the new binaries, more importantly the new "world" that is supposed to be built, and *rejecting* them. My purpose is not to find errors with neither the deconstruction of categories nor the categorization of (new) "things" (and the Master Plan to which they belong) *alone*. Let us provisionally accept the methods of each critical impulse. Deconstruction of extant structures and the production of *ethos* each use the same logic of invalidation that would make the strategic simultaneous deployment of both contradictory. Each method is meant to undermine the authority of the conclusions drawn by the other. Each is deployed to thwart the other. Even if the logic is used at a moment of intellectual convenience (or absolute necessity), it remains if that moment figures importantly in the greater scheme of things. The figures created from the apparent conflict remain, for they comprise the ethical field. By the methods' respective rules, the writer is in violation, unless there is hidden a Rule of rules that basically says he has authority to modulate.

Perhaps Naipaul differs from his detractors on questions of value, and all sides should basically agree that they evaluate the world to substantiate their prejudices. In other words, there is no conflict with reality, only conflicts about which future to make, and so which signs should circulate at the expense of other signs. Naipaul may view the world as deviations from norms that are, according to some, Western. If he is wrong, the real world will correct his miscalculations, just as a man who overpays the carpenter to build his house from the ground up will find he has run out of money for the roofer as

[23] *Provincializing Europe.*

soon as the seasonal rain comes. And the secrets of (Postcolonial representations of) post-colonial places? We may not be privy to them, but we can take stock of any effect, especially any consequential to us. Refutation of Naipaul's Africa will come in the form of strong African or Caribbean societies built specifically on that which Naipaul mistakes for irrationality—that is, if his representations are predictive, if he says Africa fifty years from now will look like the one depicted in *A Bend in the River*, or Trinidad like *A House for Mr. Biswas*[24]. Meanwhile, those who believe that native cultures have within them the wherewithal to right themselves, and compete in the world, should trust in the very world which has been propped up and used to inadequate Naipaul's reporting, a world which is absolutely real, contra either rationalism or superstition; or admit that the purpose of the project is to build value for the identity "African" which is then circulated outside of Africa. The latter admission brings everyone back to the same level. The analysis of value is now accessible to all where it had not been to colonial subjects. Such a leveled truce will not do, of course, not when critiques against using categories that allow unfavorable comparisons to the West deploy either/or logic on certain subjects at crucial moments. Because the logic often manifests in the field of ethics, it is within the purview of this investigation. Subjectively enacted value, or what is valued by this person or that culture, must claim *being* so that, after all is said and done, there is *no* further question of value.

Again, what if Naipaul is almost right? The things he observes require better explanation, but the observations are accurate. Furthermore, he is right to not introduce saving graces as he observes. Naipaul sees violence; there is admittedly violence. He

[24] Built on anything else, there would be no case against him.

sees repetition; there is admittedly repetition. He sees a population that worships and fears the Big Man; the Big Man has been charged with sustaining power through widespread fear, selective benevolence, and a cult of personality. Naipaul the novelist is not unlike Naipaul the traveling reporter. Coeval to sentiments and *pathos* are observations of the social dynamics not wholly incorrect. Obviously he needs to be read critically. Yet again, interpretation is not enough for those anxious about *A Bend In The River*, because among other factors, confirming partial validity to Naipaul's characterizations leaves open too many ways of relating to and acting on the problems that beset these locations. Too many of those strategies are not social, in the sense that they do not entail, or conscript, participation in the struggle to remake the dysfunctional society, assuming there had been anything that might have passed for society. They may not call for participation from here, which in the first place had been estranged from "there" by the problem of cultural translation. And even if the explanation were "right", one may end up with an *ethos* of emigration from locations of problematic repetition—the best minds and most able have to leave—which means, in the end, troubled places are abandoned to troubled people and their victims. After all, flight is the last and only recourse for the narrators of *A House for Mr. Biswas*, *The Mimic Men*, and *A Bend in the River*, and was so for Naipaul himself.

The wide application of such a charge indicates just how ubiquitous is the desire to establish a language and culture for the production of *ethos*. The strategy of new ethical productions is to promise plenitude such that the present feels so inadequate that it has to be reorganized. What is promised is plenitude no less grandiose than that which stirred and still stirs anti-colonial fervor. Essentialism (after Spivak) is only a part of it—

the advance party. We insist that such and such is. Just *is*. At the same time, that which is "full" of meaning is *not* named. Instead, the convocation of adherents produces *ethos* as allegories of the unnamed center. Uplifting stories about an untouchable Trinidad do not have to prove what would be uplifted. The charges leveled against the representation of others as lacking Western qualities; the concurrent elevation of "spirits" and other untranslatable experiences; the modulation between constructing and deconstructing history; the repeated process of filling kernels like the "human" or "history" with meaning, fragmenting meaning, emptying them, and refilling them again; the promise of a final meeting when that center will manifest, are done because of belief in that center, to widen distribution and increase support for it.

what is and what should be

There is nothing in *A Bend in the River* and in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, in Naipaul's work generally, which says that Africa and Trinidad cannot tomorrow become what others claim it to have been or is at heart. Perhaps it will do so spontaneously. Or, as local stories suggest, some great Ancestor comes and fixes everything. Perhaps it will take the years and luck and effort it took the U.S. to become more powerful than the commonwealth it could very well been part of. Then again, perhaps it will fail. Whether the places in which you or I or someone else are interested does so by breaking with its essential characterization, or by establishing a new *ethos*, or both, only makes a difference when the method to power has to take a particular course, and profit particular individuals or collective. Perhaps what troubles his critics about Naipaul is that we can go to Africa and find truth in his dramas *and* in theirs, if anything because they come

from the same conditions and adopt similar modes. There is nothing that prevents the peoples of Africa from working towards that end of which a critic like Haidar Eid would approve, except that they and we must understand the postcolonial conditions that give rise to Postcolonialism, Big Man Presidents, Liberation Armies, *and* V.S. Naipaul. We learn the truth *of* his dramas and theirs.

Haidar Eid argues that *A Bend in the River*'s representations of independent Africa justify neocolonialism.[25] Neocolonialism, in this case, can be as vague as "western influence", as sharp as "Western domination", and when used to condemn, it becomes a way to project the other against which is defined an unformed but nascent (post-colonial) identity. That identity is often idealized. As I have tried to show, the situation is more complicated than calling someone "primitive" at the height of British colonial power. Not an especially good piece, Eid's still can serve as a representative example of the criticism of Naipaul. Actually, it serves this purpose well because the writer does not hide the contradictions as skillfully, nor shift modes as dexterously, as others who make the same charge and construct like kernels. Eid looks at the world from a perspective where Africa already exists with all those virtues that specifically disqualify Naipaul's representations. From that perspective, Africa and the African societies now can *be* and *do* things, despite any empirical evidence to the contrary. And from there, Eid reads the novel's opening lines with a different founding first principle in mind. Naipaul's opening statement to *A Bend in the River*[26], Eid essentially claims, denies the fundamental truth that all men *are* something; it is therefore false. Moreover, it leads to

[25] "Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and Neo-Colonialism as a Comparative Context".

an image of Africa that serves to justify Western intervention, in the forms of aid and cultural values.[27] Eid does not have to address whether *his* truth is subjected to the true/false contestation as the truth that "some men are nothing" is, for he writes from a perspective in which the plenitude of humans *in the way that he uses it* is, if not self-evident, then absolutely morally necessary. Without getting into an irresolvable debate on the good, I would forward the question left unasked—the same question skeptics ask of all arguments from the Good: if the something of men that is falsified by direct statements like Naipaul's is there, simply there, then what business is it of ours to state acknowledgements? Or, to change agency, why not let that unquestionable plenitude inadequate all representations of the thing itself? In either version, the question is important to the interpretation of Naipaul's phrase and the rest of the novel: it reveals the projector of some greater Agency to redeem the mess that cannot be denied.

And this leads us back to history. If the "being" of Africa is there, it should falsify all fallacies through vigorous empirical tests, like gravity falsifies grand illusions of flying off of cliffs. In fact, to facilitate this falsification, let us go verify its properties, or whatever claims are made of the thing, using proper tests that can legitimately yield the result that a proposition about or that Postcolonialist representation of Africa is false. If it is said that Africa is great, let us see if Africa *is* great; give us the standards and we will measure. But if the point is that we cannot say certain things, or that we have to *make* them, to essentially make this brave new Africa, then why does it matter if "being" is there or not? Why not overtly instruct: you cannot say that! Here, then, is another

[26] "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it."

moment where the two impulses that ought to be antagonistic seem to need each other: (ahistorical) Africa *in* history allows one like Eid to say that historical phenomena, including colonialism and neocolonialist characterizations, to miss the mark; Africa *of* history is that which was colonized and that which must fight against neocolonialism. The mystery of their alliance comes from the same critic's prescriptive program: that we have to work (against Naipaul and neocolonialism) to make Africa in history real makes it an Africa of history—the consequence of our ethical/unethical actions; and in working for this Africa of history, we are looking at an image of, because we believe in, an Africa that is forced to suffer in history, assailed but not despoiled by it. In other words, if we believe that something is real, our action will eventually (magically) make it so. For this discourse of self-fulfillment to work (or seem to), the skeptics and their empirical examination of the proposition "something is real" and their rationalist, self-interest function that refuses to "make it so", must be cordon off. For this reason has it been crucial that writers like Ghosh and Rushdie and Walcott, and critics like Chakrabarty and Bhabha, establish the authority to modulate.

Specifically, Eid's tautology allows him to presume that there is an "African society" that Naipaul has gotten wrong, and allows him to do so by making the negation imply the positive attribution. Indeed, though both seem to portray "fragmentation", the post-colonial histories of Eid and Naipaul are *not* the same; I was wrong. One of them serves the production of *ethos*, and Eid's critique of Naipaul is not really that the New Domain misrepresents Africans as inept but that Naipaul's world does not readily lend

[27] "Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and Neo-Colonialism as a Comparative Context". 3

itself to the allegorization of the history to be wished—one in which all of us must help Africa to make history, and are open to ethics charges if we do not.

It is not a history without comparatives, just favorable ones[28]. Eid's retelling of *A Bend in the River* invokes vague Third World successes and uses these unities to undermine Salim's reports of dysfunction. To be sure, this is fair. Since Naipaul, in refusing to specify a location, means his novel to be representative, counter-examples represent a useful critique. But counter-examples do not another world make[29]. Where does Eid get *his* world, the one that is complete because it already includes everything, and humanistic because it moves ethically to a state-of-affairs when humans fulfill their moral potential (the kernels shall be filled)? Eid is unhappy with Naipaul's ending, and the strength of the critique depends on projecting the affects the ending *should* produce. "What we are left with by the end of the novel amounts to a nihilistic ideology with insoluble problems. Salim—the astute observer—has nothing positive or optimistic to offer to us". But that is the point. Eid cannot deny that in Africa foreigners have been the target of retaliation, and farms and businesses expropriated for native owners (or cronies of those in power). Nor should Salim be allowed to stay, if as Eid implies, the cliquey Indian does not merit Africa. And if as Eid says, "*A Bend in the River* never opens up new possibilities for the future"[30], then is not the future that can close the covers

[28] But then, is that not all historiography?

[29] just as the descendants of peoples forced together on a island do not at the strike of Independence a society make (i.e. Trinidad)

[30] "Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and Neo-Colonialism as a Comparative Context". 11. Is it not uncanny that where there is talk of possibility, there is usually also investment in some possibilities over others? For example, the idea that the development of human potential does not require the participation of all humans never is discussed in the language of possibility, even if it is a possibility to consider. It is not Eid's "possibility" for the future, from all indication. Finally, just as "possibility" is never radically open-ended, it is never conservative (as indicated by the keyword "new").

of the book, that interprets what is truthful and what is not from the novel, not the most open of all?

The other philosophies of history, from Father Huismans's faith in his civilization and Raymond's nationalist myth for natives, make people work, and Americans and Europeans have already done that too well[31]. Some people work, some work against having to work, and those who do not work have no place in the world; these cannot be historical reality. Though Eid's piece has the faults of a novice critic, its path is well-worn. The writer, for instance, concludes from Naipaul's characterization of dysfunctional African self-government that the novelist advocates the intervention of foreign aid and neocolonial intervention. The leap is much, though not unexpected. In the first place, a nihilist would not call for intervention, since any action would be meaningless. But more practically, any foreign aid would go directly to the Big Man or the Liberation Army, as a lot of aid now does, and it can hardly be said that *A Bend in the River* is propaganda for either of those. Nor do the depictions of Raymond and Father Huismans, and of other westerners, and of Western Colonialism towards its end, credit any of those projects. The *lycée* is a neocolonial institution, according to *A Bend in the River*, and so is the new Domain (the prison that Raymond builds for himself); both structures create the human instruments for the Big Man[32]. Clearly the battle in the criticism is not so much against Naipaul's "activism", but against that monolith "Western Culture" itself, a battle in which the services of proud but unconscionably devalued

[31] Ibid. 9

[32] If Eid had read the autobiographical writings, he would know that Naipaul often makes fun of the postcolonial coming for aid, and playing up a role expected of him by neocolonial bleeding heart liberals, and that more seriously he takes care to show how Westerners enable people who cause problems for postcolonial

Africa serves a special role. Eid's article has already positioned itself as such before he starts to insist that Africa holds values that the West cannot understand and potential which only It—whatever "It" is—can dictate. (To use Derrida's dramaturgy from *Specters of Marx*, Eid is only prepping the audience before "It" comes on stage). Naipaul ruins such a project because he shows how those in the world who are free can freely reject It by assessing how humans use "It". He is historicizing. I am using Eid at this point because his non-fiction may be subjected to more rigor than, say, the stories of Ghosh or Rushdie; I am trying to subvert the reason why Rushdie wants to push political discourse away from non-fiction and towards story-telling.

The desire for an ethical world leads Eid to apocalyptic revolution, at least in the article. He ends by invoking Benjamin's angel of history, an angel whose purpose in history is to explode the present. Yet even here Eid greenly strays from the path. He invokes Benjamin's angel because it gives him that ending which theology promises, just as I might invoke Godot to spoil it. And yes it gives him the ending to be desired by those already of his party. But the invocation complicates Eid's program for producing *ethos* in two ways. In the first place, he now has to promise an end to history, and according to Benjamin's story, the only agency that can stop the destroying/transforming angel is (what Milton called) that greater man. In so doing, Eid gives to men, specifically Africans, a structure of agency from which they will eventually need saving, a patriarchy that looks to a deliverer, another Big Man. Eid also misreads Benjamin: "There will always be peoples who will not trample on the past; rather they will do what Benjamin's

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places, if they do not do it themselves. *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and *A Way in the World* (1994) would have explained to Eid that Naipaul would never stoop to the role the critics casts for him.

angel does, and walk straight ahead and turn their faces sometimes to the past".[33] Benjamin's angel has no such reverence for the past; it does not walk mutedly through what it sees in ruins. It has a very different sense of time. And it *always* faces what we consider to be the past. It is the Other which reveals the lack of our historicism[34]. Tradition and a reassuring future are the devices of the kind of historicism that gives to oppressors and the oppressed their subjectivities. Africa emerging at the end of Colonialism and neocolonialism is such an historicist tale. In Benjamin's prophetic archaeology, Africa offers ruins for revelation, and there is not the same kind of imperative[35] that says the angel which uses fragments of Africa to make war *has* to be African. Eid removes himself from the stream of earthly space-time to a place where he sees the angel *and* the timeline because he is invested in a specific kind of history and where it is supposed to lead—a brave new world that is new to you. In fact, against Eid's figure, the angel that inspired Benjamin faces us, such that it can understand history only by re-imagining each time the fragmented past as a "single catastrophe". To the angel there is no future but that which is out of earthly historical time, for its purpose is, again, to usher in the final explosion. And we the viewer face it, such that we apprehend against linear time, against what tomorrow is supposed to bring, the explosive monadic image of

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[33] Ibid 12

[34] Here is the relevant Thesis IX.

There is a painting by Klee called Angelus Novus. An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where *we* see the appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair [verweilen: a reference to Goethe's Faust], to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is *this* storm.

[35] found in identity politics

history. The point is not to look ahead, past the now in which we act, but to rupture time and *end* history. The only reason one still needs history, to forecast, to make promises, as Eid does, is to continue to set norms—to produce *ethos*. The philosophy of history served by Eid's historiography sets up a dependency much as theology had (and does): one continues to need history if the final promise is still undelivered, but that promise is a function of history on which one relies. Subjectivities organized by allegories of Africa promote this same dependency, and any criticism based on Benjamin's kind of history that go on to make promises about the future is guilty of promoting the same. The attraction to the philosophy of history Benjamin theorizes is of course understandable. It is amusingly ironic that in Benjamin's history, those who do not participate in the explosive project have no place: they are neither bad nor good. Perhaps their ghosts will be useful, but they themselves have done nothing to explode time. Equally amusing is Eid's invocation of a Western critic of Western Historicism using Judeo-Christian Theology to represent what can be done by "these people"[36].

Be that as it may, I am not faulting Eid in the capacity of a Benjaminian critic. The presence of Benjamin clues us to the ambition of these correctives on representations of Africa that actually construct an Africa-for-the world. It is an intolerant revolutionary logic. Not only can it not spare precious resources, like educated post-colonials, many of

[36] Although I may not agree with Zizek's political values, I think he is right in his critique of charges of neocolonialism, especially when they are made in academic journals. "I think one should also problematize the main points of reference of today's "radical" theoretical discourse. The postcolonial critique of Eurocentrism is, in its intellectual background and the tools it mobilizes, a Eurocentric endeavor *par excellence.* Perhaps nowhere does this hidden Eurocentric bias emerge more forcefully than with regard to the opposition between essentialism and contingency; all the usual bashing of Eurocentric essentialism should not blind us to the key fact that, ultimately, the opposition of essentialism and contingency is a new name for the old opposition between the traditional fixity of social roles and modern *European)* social dynamics. In short,

whom have already figured it is better to flee than to fight, but it also has to create a *specific, almost nativist* hegemony. It means to govern representations produced everywhere before the explosion, in order to create the agents for it. And so it does not allow each place to arrive at its own version of the world either: the battle is lost when another Third World place becomes a capitalistic power. Let us suppose that the West is technologically superior, certainly as a war machine. In this supposition, the opposition may say: science and technology (or means of production) must not only be resisted, but denounced. Do not just refrain from buying the western diesel pump, but become conscious of the commodity fetish (basically Ghosh's thesis in *In An Antique Land*). Resisting and *coexisting* with technology would simply put those who resist at further disadvantage, not just in terms weapons, but also in health care, civic engineering, land and waste management, birth control and the consequent liberation of women. Therefore, it is the technocrats who must be made into luddites. So is it with other Western advantages, like Father Huismans's sense of history. If the West has what I would call an historiographical advantage, that is, if the production of history benefits the West more than other competitors, the advantage deriving from both discourse and production capacity[37], than adversaries must not only refrain from writing history, but also advance the directive that historiography be subsumed under a (new) discourse that the opposition can more easily produce. For Dipesh Chakrabarty, it means elevating the authority of "a-history"[38], under which certain ideas would *not* be subjected to that

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essentialism is the latest name for premodern social logic." (490) "A Symptom – of What?" *Critical Inquiry*. 29.3 (2003): 486 – 503.

[37] More universities, more intellectual institutions, more publishers and presses, etc.

[38] Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Habitations of Modernity*.

deconstructive force to which other ideas are: ahistoricity is therefore not—or not just—the lived-experience of those in brave postcolonial places, but an (ethical) function operating in historicist cultures available only for use to advance disadvantaged peoples. The stuff of a-history tends to be experiential, and oral, and thus, when writers pay attention, a host of people are now given[39] access to discursive power. Chakrabarty's attempts to nullify competitive advantage actually speak more about being "behind" than the categories of Western history, for they represent the turn in the philosophy of "criticism" to create value where technological, economic, and civic development cannot (yet). For Eid, the power move is to reaffirm the authority of the idea of a self-creating "Africa". This "Africa" must be so centered in the minds of non-Africans that it becomes the unquestionable Africa against which all others are measured, including Naipaul's.

Yet it must remain unnamed and unproven. Unproven, it cannot suffer disproof. The moment Eid makes trouble for his work (with those not already of the same party, of course) is when he starts to write "African society", or whenever he feels slight need to describe that which his allegorical structure conceives to be indescribable, for it is in those moments that we have grounds to test and contest the idealist assertion. We can say, ah, these are the conclusions I ought to find if I go to Africa and try it and learn about it according to the method you have laid out for reading the world. So Eid avoids presenting any sociological or anthropological or political facts about Africa, nor any psychological reading of Naipaul's idiosyncracies. In fact, he ends up confirming *A Bend in the River* by naming several African Big Men Presidents. Nor does he go to Africa

[39] And yes, they are given those powers, since I doubt even the most caring academic is willing to dissolve that which puts her in the position of author and teacher.

and build a society that would disprove all propositions made by Naipaul. Representations are disseminated, and traces change context, so the corrective is not aimed at the subjects of Zimbawe or Kenya or West Africa. It is aimed at readers of Naipaul (who read criticism). And if its accomplishment is limited, its purpose is no less than to elevate the allegory of glorious Africa to the authority of the Word. We are not asked to understand the idea of multiple-fragmented competing unities and moments of stability and dysfunction as hypothetical, and go and test it empirically, for any empirical test, according to the implications of the charge, would actually confirm the terms in which they are conducted. No longer would that wayward public able to calculate for our different advantages. We are supposed to accept the Postcolonial vision at its word, and denounce all others. Benjamin was trying to re-establish the authority of radical prophets. Calling on him suggests ambition no less grandiose.

struggling against history, making it

Could it be that V.S. Naipaul, in describing what is, and "reducing" some people to nothing, misrepresents post-colonials and post-colonial conditions because he does not understand history?

But he knows history. He knows that history does not support any one philosophy, so that he refuses to let any philosophy determine the "Africa" or "Trinidad" that is to be projected ahead of its time or in spite of evidence to the contrary. And he knows the power of history. He knows as much as Ghosh, without the impulse that drives Ghosh to use his metaphors for social development; knows as much as Rushdie, without the magic that lets the writer (or his metaphorical surrogate the chutney-maker)

change the world with a word. Naipaul knows how history and histories can determine the life of a person and a community. Events of the past and writing that make sense of them all conspire against us, as we would use them to conspire against others. To the list of burdens, I think he would include superstitious stories that tell how a person's life is suppose to play out and cause that person to react such that he actually plays out the life prophesized for him. Naipaul knows about cultural fragmentation. He knows about attempts to create anew. He also knows failure. He knows Eid's "Africa" is history, too, not as a thing in time, but as representation, as a sign of desire that produces unforeseen, unintended historical consequences. His novels tell us that he knows.

And in the final analysis, even the orderliness of the art form, of comedy and tragedy, and history, is not enough to deal with the world, which is why I think Naipaul is caught in the tension between the modes of art and non-fiction. Naipaul cannot forget enough of history and post-colonial realities to have faith in the Intervention that Ghosh and Rushdie have. The self-policing, self-reflexive historian is not exempted from the errors of the predecessors he would repudiate. Social demands after Independence work the same way that social demands have. Criticism of Naipaul react to him in ways that would allow Postcolonial writers to also write about some of the same problems *and then* shift modes to conclusively, or at least with serious commitment, plot—to Plot—History. To Naipaul, the contraption that would exempt Postcolonial plotters, that would redeem their history, is only a *deus-ex-machina*.

The structure that makes tragicomedy of *A House for Mr. Biswas* is quite elegant, and never since has Naipaul achieved the same crafted grace. Perhaps there are reasons

why not[40]. He begins the novel announcing his title character would die ten weeks hence. Mohun Biswas was forty-six, broke, with four children, and just fired from his job as a reporter. Sacked, he worried about his house, on which he still owed three thousand dollars. The house had been built by a solicitor in his spare time as a hobby. Cobbled together mainly with material salvaged from decamped American Army bases, it was spectacularly mismatched. It was large, too large for the neighborhood, visible from two or three streets away, and famous all over St. James. This house would be Biswas's last effort. There had been many previous attempts and just as many failures by Mr. Biswas to establish a house of his own.

Naipaul follows the last house quickly with the first, and another death. When Biswas was a child, his father drowned. Raghu, a robust diver, drowned diving in waters near the family's hut in search of Biswas. The son had lost a cow in his charge, and was hiding out under a bed at home. But because a pundit had forbidden Biswas to go near "water in its natural form", father and mother and gathering neighbors immediately thought of the pond when the child was missed. The drowning of a father searching for a son feared drowned would be the first of many ironies in Biswas's life, accidentally caused by him, and facilitated by the circumstances and culture in which he acts.

One night sometime after the funeral, a neighbor and some other villagers went through the family's plot of land looking for the money they believed the dead man had stashed away during his lifetime. The neighbor had some claim; it was his cow Biswas had lost. The others had no cause. Biswas's experience of the night the villagers ransacked the yard is dominated by images of fire and cutlasses, of shadowy trespassers

[40] The man himself would say he is not looking to repeat his most lauded accomplishment.

singing songs as they tore up the dirt. The family cowered in a corner of the hut, weapons in hand. At the height of her courage, his mother barked at the neighbor, "Savage! Get out!". "'Willingly.' He spat out the hibiscus leaf on to a flower-bed. 'I just wanted to tell you that these wicked men will come again. Why don't you help them, *maharajin*?'"[41] In the end, she sold him the hut and the land.

> And so Mr Biswas came to leave the only house to which he had some right. For the next thirty-five years he was to be a wanderer with no place he could call his own, with no family except that which he was to attempt to create out of the engulfing world of the Tulsis. For with his mother's parents dead, his father dead, his brothers on the estate at Felicity, [his sister] Dehuti as a servant in [his aunt] Tara's house, and himself rapidly growing away from [his mother] Bipti who, broken, became increasingly useless and impenetrable, it seemed to him that he was really quite alone.[42]

Such a beginning lends a sense of inevitability to Biswas's life. Though individual battles would be against domineering inlaws, cheating builders, and exploitative employers; against lawless societies like his father's village, against the feudal caste-bound Hindu conservatism of the Tulsis and other Indians, and against the new economy under American influence; and against the promise of newness, too; his was to be a life spent struggling against itself. Naipaul has composed *A House for Mr. Biswas* with two co-dependent senses of history: moments of slight gains that make it seem possible to break from all that had gone on before, and thirty-five years of

[41] *Mr. Biswas*. 37
[42] Ibid. 39

wandering that turn all things new and good into another recurrence of the same. The repetitiveness of Biswas's life makes the end of him alternately too late and too soon. During moments of crisis, death promises relief from despair and release from ceaseless struggle. During moments of peace, even contentment, death cuts off what has been too hard earned. It is this very tension that makes tragicomedy an enjoyable mode; deft management of it makes a work of art beautiful.

The form of *A House for Mr. Biswas* is also its sense of history. If anything, criticism of Naipaul may have to deal with the idea that his representations and "things" are inescapably historical. In the historical mode, the novel gives us two temporalities, correlatively two ideas of order, two ways to take things, and two meanings for change: history is the tension between them. One order is futile, endless; the other developmental, hopeful. Any "order" of events, bright or dark, is deterministic. Avec l'ordre futile, plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. Time passes, events recur. Biswas goes to live with his aunt Tara. He revolts, sets out on his own. Having failed, Biswas goes to live with the Tulsis in Hanuman House. He revolts, sets out on his own. Having failed, Biswas returns to live with the Tulsis in Shorthills. He revolts, sets out on his own. And so on. And so forth. For Biswas's forty-six years. For however old the Colony was to be. Antithetically, the developmental order valorizes the new, not as welcomed return of so many other occurrences, but as sign of a much wanted difference, of change and the chance of never returning. The new may signify progress that promises a better life next year, and even better the year after; or it may signify revolution that promises an unprecedented kind of life beyond. Such investment in the future is not limited to Biswas's house-building. There are hints the island is abuzz with

the promise of Independence and economic freedom. Especially charged are former slaves and some of their descendents[43]. In the mind of men starting their own business, the days ahead are better, too, although the gains they expect are less than utopian. Each "order" subsumes the other. Indefatigable optimism treats meaningless recurrence as something inferior and soon broken by humans or some higher power. Recurrence looks at meaningless optimism as old feelings for new causes leading to the familiar effects. So one depressed moment:

> In all Mr Biswas lived for six years at The Chase, years so squashed by their own boredom and futility that at the end they could be comprehended in one glance. But he had aged.

is followed (in the next paragraph) by:

> … he never ceased to feel that some nobler purpose awaited him, even in this limiting society. [44]

Neither outlook is able to completely eradicate the other. Naipaul shows how one sense comes back just as the other is about to settle. The comedy that unfolds depends very much on knowing the logic of both and the ways they interact, and since the comedy is well contrived, we must conclude that the author knows much about the competing senses of history and how to beautifully manage the tension between them. It is a comedy of errors; the errors are caused by mishandling history, and philosophies of history.

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[43] The fanatical optimism is clearer in Naipaul's works that are closer to memoirs and that revisit the same period in the history of the place. Cf. *A Way In The World.*

[44] *Mr. Biswas* 174

Sense of recurrence and sense of progress are kept alive because people are forgetful, self-deluding, or stupid, or cunning and manipulative; *and* because each order is responsive to certain personalities in the particular contexts that call for it. Because the logic of use are patterns exhibited subjects that do not usually use logic. History is social. History is human interaction. The actions of Biswas alone do not create repetition. Nor is he alone in acting on a desire to, as the book describes it, acquire wealth and free himself from the land[45]. If anything is clear in *A House for Mr Biswas*, it is that people frustrate each other. They help and they hurt. How they keep tripping up each other makes for comedy. It is only because they suffer worse than being tripped, and probably because the stakes grow large and weighty when we imagine ourselves in the society described by such a "comedy", or that such a society may be ours, that the novel takes on darker tones; this is why I have used "tragicomedy" to describe it. It might be useful to have both senses in history, in the end. Shama, for one, finds during trying times a kind of consolation in steady repetition, even if what repeats, taken by itself, is dull or depressing. But of course the repetitiveness of crisis and consolation exasperates her husband Biswas. In the end, it may turn out that the particular configuration of these aspects of history, and the material and social conditions that necessitate using both, in a particular place, namely Trinidad, a configuration that fits Walcott's definition of culture in the Caribbean, turns out to be deleterious. Deleterious to those societies, and/or deleterious to the cultures in which the representations circulate. And the repeated

[45] The description is first given to Tara's husband: "Tara was a person of standing. It was her fate to be childless, but it was also her fate to have married a man who had, at one bound, freed himself from the land and acquired wealth…" Ibid. 30

forgetfulness of either one sense or the other in a space that requires both bears the onus of being the cause.

Biswas's first assertion of his independence exemplifies the complexities of history in a postcolonial location. The shop keeper Bhandat accused Biswas of stealing a dollar from him. Bhandat did not particularly like Biswas, who was hired to work in the shop because his aunt Tara's husband owned it. Biswas denied the charge. Bhandat beat him bloody. The boy scurried home. He cursed Bhandat to his mother and declared that he would never go back to the shop. Though he had expected her to sympathize, his mother was practical. She warned that quitting the shop was economically imprudent, and worried about how the episode would strain the family's relationship with Tara, on whom they were at this point dependent. His mother did go to Tara. Tara sympathized, in her way, but she was not going to change anything. She certainly was not going to be the agent of revenge Biswas was seeking, even when the truth was known. "The dollar wasn't missing", she said, "It was at the bottom of his trouser pocket and he didn't notice it".[46] Biswas, still angry, hastily attacked Tara by suggesting that her servant his sister Dehuti had been right to run away from her. Without further word Tara left.

> 'Oh Mohun,' [his mother] Bipti said […] 'you will reduce us all to pauperdom. You will see me spending the rest of my days in the Poor House.'

[46] Ibid. 64

> 'I am going to get a job on my own. And I am going to get my own house too. I am finished with this.' He waved his aching arm about the mud walls and the low, sooty thatch.[47]

The moment when autonomy seems possible, when it seems possible to go out and make history of one's own, is a moment produced by a social order that does not protect people from violence at each other's hands, and by a proud boy's stupid miscalculations. Hint of a changeless society and his own unfettered pride lead Biswas to overestimate his ability to create a place of his own, to exist autonomously amid the particular "order" into which he was born. On his own, Biswas gets a job painting signs for stores owned by the Tulsis. He marries one of them and becomes incorporated into their society, on which he comes to depend, and from which he will try many escapes.

At this point we face a decision that leads to which kind of history we find in *A House for Mr Biswas*. If the desire for autonomy espoused by Biswas had been generated by the condition he faced (even as a child, perhaps especially as a child, when the image of immature self-policing lets us in on the unconscious rules of the society), then culture would not be just the static togetherness of the cracked vase but how its supposed fragments interact at any given moment. Furthermore, the "vase" is as much cause for its own conditions and the future as that which had produced the "fragments" in the first place; it, too, is historical. If the desire for autonomy comes from elsewhere, is identified as having come from elsewhere—if perhaps it is a fragment discarded in the making of the vase—then the integrity of the existing culture can be protected. Protected, it can then serve in the latest struggles among cultures for power, and in the struggle that is

[47] Ibid. 64

history. The latter allows Marxist and similarly teleological-dialectical historiography asserting authority globally to use the postcolonial space as the vessel of past and nascent future. The cause for Biswas's motive determines the status of the presumed units of history.

But, in writing, the causality of cultural formation can be reversed. What is discovered is actually made. The stakes in the configuration of "culture" and "history" determines the order to which the unruly fragment Biswas supposedly belongs. Fragments derive their ahistorical value from the "whole"; the "whole" is *not* formed haphazardly—meaninglessly—from arbitrary combination of "fragments" in time. In "The Return of the Subaltern: the Politics of the Autonomous Self in *A House for Mr. Biswas*", William L. Watson reads *A House for Mr. Biswas* as a realist historical novel in the sense laid out by the Marxist critic Georg Lukács[48]. Naipaul's novel marks the transition of Trinidad from feudal society into a unit of global capitalism. Watson deduces his specific conclusion on *A House for Mr. Biswas* from the first principle that the desire for individualist autonomy is structured by capitalism. His theoretical apparatus is Marxist structuralism, specifically Louis Althusser's. Watson believes the book marks the interpellation of the author into the same system, too. Naipaul rewrites his father as Mr. Biswas, Watson claims, in order to repudiate the father's collectivist subjectivity. But Naipaul's rewriting is incomplete, as he cannot fully bring Biswas to be what he wants him to be. Naipaul fails, and Biswas fails, because the writer and character, severally, bear the burden of Caliban, of what W.E.B Dubois called double-

[48] *Works and Days 22*. 11.2 (1993): 61 - 78

consciousness[49], of seeing himself as others see him. Actually, Watson's Naipaul nears consciousness of his own dialectical constitution, but misguidedly gives up the cause. By its structure, the article suggests Naipaul could have been the Aimee Cesaire, Franz Fanon, or Ngugi wa'Thiongo of his milieu but failed to. Watson follows the section on double-consciousness, in which these writers are cited not only to show the diverse origins of the same concept but also to exemplify what real resistant consciousness should have looked like, with Biswas's breakdown and entrance into "the metropolitan symbolic order". Interpellation is marked by failed sexual gratification with virginal girls, a job as a newspaper writer and part of the metropolitan literary machine, and the ever present fear that the collective will return to collect what has escaped. The reason Watson does not read Naipaul like Lukács read Scot is because he has been very much affected by Postcolonialism's disdain for instrumentalism. He tries to use the concepts of hybridity and double-consciousness to re-endow what are described as anti-capitalist instruments of history with the kind of freedom from history. Between the old collectivity and the new capitalism there was a moment when Naipaul could have been so much more: it is as if the subaltern returns so he can take the right path.

Watson begins the article with a quote from Said that lays out the party of resistance and their betrayers, like Naipaul, whom Said has identified as a native against natives. Said's basic antagonism Watson keeps, the term "native" he avoids, and the categorical agents he expands. Here they are collective subjectivity and capitalism

[49] Although Watson does not use the term from the Americanist tradition. Dubois's concept, published at beginning of the twentieth century, assumes a position of strength: it is the spirit of "black folk" that allow them to negotiate the conflicts in maintaining the double-consciousness of being American and Black. Here

(which produces autonomy as one of its desires). The critic creates plenitude for an anti-Capitalist collectivism, which is posited as constitutive of the previous age, belonging to "other" peoples, and bearing the full authority of historical being. The monolith is Capitalism, for which Watson sometimes substitutes the older center of Empire the "metropole", characterized as Capitalism's superstructure[50]. Lines are redrawn in this text and context to contain it *and create for it a viable antithesis*. Meanwhile, he also needs the sublime. For Watson, that which gets interpellated into systems (and resists them) serves as the essential substance full-of-itself, while two orders of existence, "collective subjectivity" and "individualist autonomy", become the antagonistic forms representative of the great historical struggle. Each order of being bears the burden of housing not only correspondent cultural identities but also, given Watson's paradigms, of being actors in the dialectic of history. Humans are free, except that freedom is part of a struggle in which humans are only acting out the "right" plot. Humans can choose between capitalism and its other, except that the only "free" choice is collectivism.

Having discerned Watson's pattern, we can push the logic of his reading to the brink. Missing from Watson's reading is fair characterization of "collective subjectivity" as discursive, constructed, and disciplinary: that, however disorganized, and whether it is coeval to Capitalism or lost to it in one of history's many syntheses, in the here and now of *A House for Mr. Biswas* "collective subjectivity" cannot afford to let one like Biswas become the something else that it drives him to seek. That something else does not have to be individualism, or the desiring subject of autonomy, or anything attributable to the

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spirit "fills" what would otherwise be lacking in divided psyches. From *The Souls of Black Folks*. New York: Modern Library, 2003. First edition published Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903.

Adversary of pre-capital collectivity, an adversary already given to us by Watson's history. It may stem from the individual subjects of collectivity, from that which the discourse on collectivity addresses. Two centers are necessary to put Biswas in the in-between space, and Watson's concentration on the metropole allows the other discursive center to grow "full" and (as part of the same structure) escape the purview of historicism. Collectivity has to be obscured in the late stages of the article because it serves double duty. It serves as an age of history and an indelible characteristic of an oppressed people, for which it had to be named, and it serves as coherent potentiality, for which a name would have been counterproductive. So its historicity disappears. If I could, I would arrange for the beginning of Watson's article to "return", that I might show from Said's statement of betrayal "by a native against other natives" the very reason why some writers of history have to erase the possibility of Naipauls emerging from the in-between space, and why they cannot. Calling to action are essentially native causes, but according to the reverse construction, somebody is not with the program. Postcolonialism, in its valorization of hybridity, cannot allow hybridity to lead to, among its possibilities, libertarian capitalism wherein the authority and power of stories are diminished. Where Naipaul has only exit strategies, or how to escape the "comedy" of post-colonial power struggle, Postcolonialism makes promises of happier endings. No doubt, to some, history should always lead to Cesaire, Fanon, and wa'Thiongo.

Or lead to Derek Walcott, the better messenger. Walcott, who comes from the same conditions as Naipaul, with the significant difference that he is black; who observes

[50] Watson cites Althusser in his first footnote.

the same realities, except not; who writes in a mode—verse lyrics[51]—that seems more suitable for invoking the idea of a sublime better than a modernist novel. Walcott whose beautiful forms may be interpreted as redemptive, and even elevated as truth—the right kind of truth because redemptive. Walcott who imagines rightly and by writing it down gives Postcolonialism the opportunity to make the fallacious ontological argument that: because the text exists its ideas must be respected and to respect the ideas means to grant it authority equivalent to statements of truth or descriptions of reality. Naipaul's reports are less than ideal. Walcott's poetics is much more promising; one can use it to promise much more.

In his Nobel Prize lecture, Walcott observes several cultural acts: festivals and theatrical performances[52]. He describes them in flourish detail and with over-brimming emotions to suggest that each is part of something wholly constituted if not by any objective standards than by the very experiences of the people. The metaphor he uses is the cracked vase. Caribbean people inherit fragments of culture. Most inhabitants have come or been brought such distances, and have come or been forced together, that culture for them has to be constituted of some beliefs here, and some other practices there, for which there is not any precedence and "wholeness" of tradition. There are very few aboriginal Caribs left, but colonization had fragmented their cultures, too. Yet the fragments *have cohered* into a new "whole", a vase composed of bits and pieces, no less functional and no less beautiful than vases from those places with greater cultural continuity. In the lecture's metaphor, the unit reproducible across substance is "vase"; in

[51] Among other, including book-length poems (*Oomeros*) and plays (the cycles on the Haitian Revolution).
[52] *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*.

there and in his works, it is also "culture". Walcott's axiom is that every being confronts their specific conditions by formulating coherence. To give that coherence depth—plentitude—he turns to *pathos*: those beings experience their "fragments" no less feelingly and deeply than you or I or any other who can claim wholeness. The measure of culture is not historical attributes, like dominating or being dominated, but depth of native feeling. The axiom's most valuable corollary is that, while we may not recognize unity as such, *every* society has a culture on par with ours at every level. The *ethos* is that we should[53].

Because Derek Walcott needs to project wholeness-yet-in-fragments so that he can collect disparate peoples and volatile interactions of beliefs, motives, thoughts, into the coherence metaphorically signified as "vase", his poetry often has the sound and structure of Modernism[54], in particular its cracked monoliths. While his politics is entirely different from some of the Modernists, many of Walcott's poems are nostalgic, ambivalent about what has been lost, and insecure about what has been gained. His early poems, especially, incorporate Eliot's structure of disjointed predications; his resolution relies ultimately on feelings about those monoliths supposedly left behind by modernity, like Eliot's.

> Time creeps over the patient who are too long patient,
>
> So I, who have made one choice,
>
> Discover that my boyhood has gone over.

[53] The importance of substantist thinking in tropes of fragmentation is nowhere better illustrated than in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, where the narrator himself, the "fullest" of all beings in the novel, that of which we are given the greatest variety of thoughts and bodily experiences, is being cracked.

…

I go, of course, through all the isolated acts,

Make a holiday of situations,

Straighten my tie and fix important jaws,[55]

Or

Art is profane and pagan,

The most it has revealed

Is what a crippled Vulcan

Beat on Achilles' shield.

By these blue, changing graves

Fanned by the furnace blast

Of heaven, may the mind

Catch fire till it cleaves

Its mould of clay at last.

Now Friday's progeny,

The brood of Crusoe's slave,

Black little girls in pink

Organdy, crinolines,

Walk in their air of glory

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[54] For more detailed comparisons, see: Charles Pollard. *New World Modernisms: T.S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite*. Charlottesville: U. of Virginia P., 2004. My readings are independent of Pollard's.
[55] "Prelude". *Collected Poems 1948 – 1984*. London: Faber and Faber, 1992. p. 3 ll. 10 – 13, 19 – 21. Some leaves of the book have been bounded in the wrong order.

Beside a breaking wave;

Below their feet the surf

Hisses like tambourines.

At dusk, when they return

For vespers, every dress

Touched by the sun will burn

A seraph's, an angel's,

And nothing I can learn

From art or loneliness

Can bless them as the bell's

Transfiguring tongue can bless.[56]

His later poems engage the politics of reform more overtly, but still holds on to complexity as a saving grace:

Any crack in the sidewalk was made by the primal fault

of the first map of the world, its boundaries and powers.

…

One step over the low wall, if you should care to,

recaptures a childhood whose vines fasten your foot.

And this is the lot of all wanderers, this is their fate,

that the more they wander, the more the world grows wide.

So, however far you have traveled, your

steps make more holes and the mesh is multiplied—

or why should you suddenly think of Tomas Venclova,

and why should I care about whatever they did to Heberto

when exiles must make their own maps, when this asphalt

takes you far from the action, past hedges of unaligned flowers?[57]

The second fragment cited, from the poem "Crusoe's island", exemplifies the dexterous construction of a "vase". It is not coincidental that in his Nobel lecture Walcott introduces the very metaphor of "vase" after he spends a few moments appreciating the same kind of joy observing Indians celebrating a festival. The primary conflict in the section from "Crusoe's island" is between paganism and Christianity. One kind of paganism, monolithic and much hallowed, has been enlisted to bolster the authenticity and value of another, less recognized kind. Vulcan's fire is the black little girls' fiery dresses. The pivot is the idea of creative art: the two subjects are brought together by how they each relate to it. Together, both kinds of paganism subvert orthodox Christianity. "The brood of Crusoe's slave" does not combat religion with religion. Nor is Walcott, a believer of God, using them to travestize belief. Instead, the poet uses them as living examples to revise the regime of vespers. "Friday's progeny" transforms the idea of angels and seraphs in their walk and dress and bells. By allegorizing the sublime depths of the lives lived by Christianized black little girls, Walcott deconstructs the symbolic power of the dominant icons of Christian civilization, seraphs and angels, and

[56] "Crusoe's Island". *Collected Poems*. p.71 – 72. section III
[57] "Our houses are one step from the gutter…" *Collected Poems*. 474

implicitly attacks the privilege of looking like those iconic subjects[58]. He wants to extend that power to more than the chosen few. The production of *ethos* here depends on *keeping* faith, the other pivot and universal category beside art. To call art profane gives credence to the correlative that _____ is sacred. The bells *must* transfigure.

The section may also be read as an oblique historical critique. Christianity has marginalized and abandoned the peoples it made in building its Empire, peoples who are left to piece together a new kind of life from the ideas and practices that *are*, by force, their cultural-historical legacy. Shoring the "fragments", Walcott is able to signify plenitude beyond the profane[59]. Indeed, the culture of the girl is positioned to be in some ways superior to the kind of paganism first cited: the first is martial; the second (the one being endorsed) has all the naturalness of waves, surf, and sun. Of course, elevating nature (and the truth of the poet's feelings in contact with it) over technology is a familiar Romantic trope. Here it is a modernized and Modernist kind used by poets like Yeats, Wallace Stevens[60], and T.S. Eliot[61]; but Romantic tropes signify still. The power of allegory is that while it admits that some things fail, it uses the failure to "prove" the triumph of some other (oft greater) thing, or Thing. If there is to be salvation from modern-postmodern uncertainty, it will probably need to change our relation to this type of allegory, and the logical contradictions the allegories overwrite/override. The method is contradictory—art positions itself as incapable of articulating the bells' transfiguration, except that it just did—but only to literary critics, educated skeptics, and knowing

[58] See much of Western art.
[59] Which is allegory to literary criticism, at least to Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man.
[60] See especially "Ideas of Order at Key West".
[61] In particular of the *Four Quartets*.

writers. Here the failure of art leads to the redemption of nature and visions of a cultural "life" beyond[62]. What Walcott leaves out—where the girls have been, what they do, what men do to them, what they do to each other, and to themselves. That missing time, the missing fragments, between the "air of glory" and the "return for vespers", Naipaul would probably have included.

Just because Naipaul's literary form is elegant, does not mean history is graceful, and just because our words have order, does not mean existence is orderly. The beauty of the literary form can give the false impression that analysis despoils something of value, like deconstructing misogynistic jingoism can "ruin" that heart-tugging myth of how a nation emerges as she is and how we are to safeguard her purity against all enemies. Maybe analysis can ruin anything. But if analysis has ruined the reading of a text, then the text was probably not being read as literature. Naipaul's world is messy. Changing sameness and radical change "happen" amid a chaos of conflicting motives and actions produced by ungraspable causes, with unforeseen consequences. They are never above us, these transfigurations of the bells. They are the bells of Cortez. Imagination is not enough to lift them, imagination that produces both sympathetic vision and unforgiving comedy. Writing is not enough. *Exactly* as in Walcott's poem. Incapacity would be what we find if we took Walcott literally, or skeptically. Biswas is a writer. Singh (from *The Mimic Men* and basically the one son of Biswas who stood the best chance of freeing himself from the land) writes. But they do not have the magic that Walcott's "I" thinks his poems has, nor the magic with which Rushdie endows his lot. There is no one, no

[62] Indeed the poem works like a famous poem of the self-described "last of the Romantics": Yeats's "Among School Children".

narrator, who moves through the apparent fragmented world to put it together again. There is no seraph. No angel. There is no greater singularity to redeem the complexities of history, only humans crammed together and struggling on a darkling plain, who must now decide for themselves. No Form stitches the so-called fragments into an agent as powerful as wanted. And no formerly un-tattered garment to make the end seem only the recovery of a previous reality. No lapsarian before. No fortunate after. For Naipaul, there has not been a "first map", only attempts, promises, and consequences!

A Bend in the River is about a map (as much as Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* is about a map). Or, rather, like Ghosh's novel, it is about mapping: the human inscription of values; the construction of new regimes of power[63]. But unlike Ghosh, and very far from Walcott, Naipaul does not start with consoling origin nor arrive at any sort of *telos*. No great Medieval Indian Ocean economy. No bell maker. There is no primal village like the one at the beginning of *Cien Años de Soledad*. *A Bend in the River* best represents the thinking of the "latter Naipaul", which actually is not too different from the thinking of the "early Naipaul". It is a good example insofar as it is a better novel in the later group. Its episodes are less rambling than many after *The Mimic Men*, held together by the theme of history and power, the destruction wrecked by rage and the slow attempt to rebuild. Its plot is unified by the struggle to turn a profit from running a dry goods

[63] Jeremy Black writes an interesting history of mapping. Postcolonialists would agree with Black that "historical atlases had to devote considerable space to the process of imperial growth" (121). I think where they may diverge, if only slightly, is the politics of remapping. Essentially, the act of mapping satisfy desire for order, and whether drawing a political map or remapping, as Ghosh does, one is still appealing to this desire. Again, this desire approaches totalitarianism when there is conflict over how to map. Even the cosmopolitan must map his anti-nationalist world, for how would he know that the slave can travel freely in the trade network? *Maps and History*. New Haven: Yale U.P., 1997.

store in the town at the bend in the river[64], and by the consolidation of power of the President of the newly independent nation.

Those who settle at the bend in the river have gained for themselves the fortune of geography. Out of their "success" will come destructive elements—"fragments" if you will. When some of the elements grow beyond their management—and a fragment will, when it is fully motivated—the elements reduce the settlement to a bend in the river once again. The area becomes "lost", again, unchanged by human activities, overgrown by jungle, its monuments busted. And once more, another group of "spirited" settlers come. The town at the bend in the river grows. For a while the settlers prosper. Then, due to something unforeseen, due to something foreseen but unheeded, or due to their inability to mobilize, perhaps due to the attentions of a Big Man attracted to the wealth they have been creating, due to the rage at having been victims of colonialism, their town falls to ruin. And again, it has to be built up. Successive builders of the town have understood their enterprise in the "spirit" of their particular culture, of their "history": and historic motivations are more than the simple want to live in a bend on the river. The bend is a meeting place of ambitions historical, imperialist, and economic. It was at the bend in the river where Arab imperialists coming from the East met Europeans imperialists coming from the West. The trip there had exhausted the Arabs, but their rivals were armed with other abilities, and so the town in its last development was especially European in style. Then came time for the Europeans to decide whether they would fight the African rage they had made in their colonial conquest, or abandon the place to ruin. In ruin was how

[64] It is not the stitched-together incidentals of a road-trip, like Naipaul's earlier "African" novel *In a Free State*. (Although there are road-trips in it).

Salim first found the town. He and other traders built the town back up, until the Big Man came. The life of this town is Naipaul's dialecticism, his complicated answer, in a way, to all those who would have Africa be the reservoir of anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, anti-western spirit, and example of their respective kind of histories.

It is the same dialecticism that informs the comedy of *Biswas*, played out on a much larger stage, costing more than a house, a family, and a life. Naipaul is obviously *not* the idealist an Africanist would call forth to regale a wistful audience with tales that represent an Africa full of possibility[65]. Neither would he serve the cause of one like Robert Mugabe. Nor Kipling. Dialectical history in general is about the new and the old. The new is the winning synthesis of the old. Teleological dialecticism plots change, that is, the transformation of old, as a function of metaphysics, the logic of the universe, and in many cases morally: the plot develops for the purpose of culminating *telos*. (For instance, the history of a people is the development of national self-consciousness). The historiographer who frames history using dialecticism moves ideas and concepts back and forth across the divide that characterizes the new as radically different from the old, and so much better than it: on one side, that which is to be discarded (sublated); on the other, that which is to be gained (synthesis). To Naipaul, the new, whether really new or not, comes to the "old" in a familiar way.

> The Domain was the President's creation; and in the Domain they were in the presence of the foreigners who had a high idea of the new Africa. Even I, in the Domain, began to feel a little of the romance of that idea.

[65] As much of a Lukacian historical novel as William Watson makes *A Bend in the River* out to be, Naipaul is not writing after the manner of *Waverly*.

> So foreigners and Africans acted and reacted on one another, and everyone became locked in an idea of glory and newness. Everywhere the President's photograph looked down at us. In the town, in our shops and in government buildings, it was just the photograph of the President, the ruler, something that had to be there. In the Domain, the glory of the President brushed off onto all his new Africans.[66]

This passage and others like it in *A Bend in the River* demonstrate something odd about the idea of the new, and a significant "oddity" oddly easily forgotten in criticism. The new would not be able to get rid of the old from which it came, were it not for what is enabled by an authoritative structure of belief. Without belief, newness becomes but another instance of power trying to substantiate itself by building that self-effacing structure, by insisting that its portrait be hung in every space. The ambition of power is to widen the domain where newness functions as it does within the structure of belief. That ambition is seen for what it is only by comparing the zealous with the perfunctory, and by juxtaposing ardor for the cause with irony or mockery. The new, especially the New of teleological dialecticism, new and last, always belongs to some existing system that is apprehensible only when actions and reactions are observed beyond the domain that makes us feel the New *is* what it is supposed to be. In *A Bend in the River*, the Big Man President uses a foreign historian to help him profit from the sense of hope and promise that comes with Independence. He discards the historian when he needs to renew the fervor with another story.

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[66] *A Bend in the River*. 120

Between the old and the new is life that gets by. Zabeth, one of narrator Salim's customers, belongs to a fishing community along the river. A "retailer in a small way", everything month she comes from village to town to pick up groceries. From him she bought

pencils and copybooks, razor blades, syringes, soap and toothpaste and toothbrushes, cloth, plastic toys, iron pots and aluminum pans, enamel plates and basins. These were some of the simple things Zabeth's fisherfolk needed from the outside world, and had been doing without during the troubles [of the last revolution]. Not essentials, not luxuries; but things that made ordinary life easier. The people here had many skills; they could get by on their own. They tanned leather, wove cloth, worked iron; they hollowed out large tree trunks into boats and smaller ones into kitchen mortars. But to people looking for a large vessel that wouldn't taint water and food, and wouldn't leak, imagine what a blessing an enamel basin was![67]

Here, then, is one of those cultural encounters much valued by the Postcolonial imaginary. Being negotiated are different sets of values, different perspectives, different existences. The values, perspectives, and existences belong to respective "cultures". There is the added tension of different levels of technological development, finely crystallized in the exclamation. "Blessing" tells two truths: enamel *is* a superior development in the technology of food-containing water-retaining vessels, and ironically the reification of development comes when the blessing of an enamel basin is no longer imagined but identified, no longer compared by reified. There is even a hybrid. I do not mean a moment of hybridity, when a doubly inflected subjectivity shows how a discourse

has to deal with an addressee that pretends to be its subject, but one of those figures (a kernel) that gets pulled into the critic's business. I mean Zabeth and her tremendous skills negotiating among Indian merchants, foreign boat captains, travelers on steamers, urbanized Africans, and her own fisherfolks.

What is remarkable about Naipaul's passage is that while it leaves Africa to these industrial and resourceful fisherfolk who do their best to *and do* survive turmoil and the dissolution of society, the inheritors of Africa do not exemplify the "full" way of being that is needed by some schools of interpretation to further their politics. The inheritors of Africa, like their brethrens who prey on them, on whom they prey, manage to get by. They do not fight the global fight. They neither depend overly on modern technology nor spurn it on principle. They survive protected by waterways inaccessible to anything more powerful than a dugout, and by natural land barriers that keep mechanized colonizers out. They survive by hiding the entrance to their villages. They survive so long as the steamers to which they latch in order to trade do not plow their dugouts under water. During moments of truce or peace they will venture toward the coast to trade. They retreat when threatened. But with these figures there is no depth of being, no inscrutable essence that might be lost, to transfer to and populate an ethical field in which they would figure as large in the mind as Mister or Monsieur (names for English and French speaking foreigners, respectively) or the Big Man's *citoyens* and *citoyennes*. There seems to be nothing to bring to the great historical struggle where iron is supposed to meet titanium alloy, or plastic polymers, *on equal, if not superior, footing*. Thus it is difficult to take from Naipaul material out of which to construct the kernels by which

[67] *A Bend in the River*. 5

ethos is defined, certainly much harder than it is from Ghosh who wants to send us to the ethical field.

Nor with *A Bend in the River* can a reader make the metonymic substitution of peoples and group for "society", such that society is roughly as coherent as a person or a group. Walcott's "black little girls" have a unity about them that we, perhaps rendered timid by our political conscience, dare not touch. If the girls can stand in for the culture, the culture becomes protected by the same taboo, without having to prove that the symbolic leap is truthful on that trait. The metaphor "vase" functions the same way. Naipaul makes no such assumption of unity, either of society or culture. Rather, in *A Bend in the River*, there are many "unities" vying for power, unities of commerce, of ethnicity, of class, of color, of modes of living, which are unities only insofar as the little moments of coherence and sanity among a group of people among a wider, unbounded population allow them to do something with their lives. The unities overlap, support and detract, build and destroy, to varying degrees. If one history fails, another is used: the new one will redefine relations, including which are to be the antagonistic identities. This is one image of post-colonial reality. As the novel ends, we see the unity of the Big Man, his anti-neo-colonialist nationalist patriarchy, a synthesis of the old colonial ways and new Africa, coming to power. But chances are, if history is truthful, another already waits to topple him.

Responding to such characterizations of presence-absence, or lost-redeemed, it may be posited that the whole that not only escapes predication but is also faultless. There is a whole which my language calls "Africa" and yours a different name. That whole is saved for "Africans". Africa for Africans. The writer may use the challenge of

failure as evidence of something bigger and better and beyond. When I mount such challenges it is only because I come as a Western neocolonialist. There is power in the discourse. Perhaps in defense of a plenitudinous Africa, the critic will assert: "Our political history is well known, yet with time, we feel more challenged to recall it, especially for those who appear ignorant of it or are deliberately engaged in reversing the gains of our liberation struggle."[68] For

> it will be Africa's way. Africa will choose its time, and what looks like a challenge to its authenticity will serve in the end to reaffirm its truth.

For Naipaul, this great vision of Africa always has been and is an idea of men, and like those other great visions of Africa, used by us against each other. It, too, is history, against which men have to contend or else be reduced to nothing. I have made surreptitious substitutions to produce the above sentence; the original comes from *A Bend in the River*. Naipaul's actual passage tells us that he refuses to ignore the historicity of such grand ideas. In an effort to consolidate power, the Big Man had been using his Youth Guard to conduct "Morals Patrol" and incite fear. But the Youth Guard got out of hand, and began to murder people randomly. The people then waited for the President to take action. After a few silent weeks, the President did something unexpected. "The Youth Guard had forgotten their duty to the people; they had broken faith with him, the

[68] Robert Mugabe. *Speech marking the 28th anniversary of independence*. As quoted in at BBC.com. "Mugabe attacks opposition and UK". 4/18/2008 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7353929.stm>. See also NYTimes.com "Mugabe Casts Zimbawe dispute as Colonial Fight". 4/18/2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/19/world/africa/19zimbabwe.html> At both outlet, one has to wonder why Mugabe's inflammatory remarks calling Brown a speck in history were erased in the archived version of the articles, and that the articles became heavy with Western response.

President; they had talked too much",[69] he said. So he disbanded them and sent them into the bush to do hard labor.

> It was the Big Man's way. He chose his time, and what looked like a challenge to his authority served in the end to underline his authority. He showed himself again as the friend of the people, the *petit peuple,* as he liked to call them, and he punished their oppressors.[70]

Naipual suggests that in the end the vase, and all that it represents, particularly the promise of Independence, must establish high value and control dissent. A vase is not the sign of some greater intelligence, some transcendental good that will intervene to set things to right. Rather, it is the reconfiguration of fragments, forcing some to fit, forcing other out. It is the consolidation of power that represents itself to its subjects and to others as the new unity. Conflict and violence *are* its effort. Given the centuries of subjugation, understandable is insupportable pride to make up for abject exploitation, and the desire for power to realize that pride. The problem is that the "vase" is not really what it is supposed to be, and whether patriarchs configure the "vase" through nationalism or nativism, or a synthesis of both, or through ethnic-religious tradition, the pursuit of the plenitude of vaseness turns out to be ironically deleterious, if not fatal. The authority of "vaseness" leads to the consolidation of power by some patriarch who can momentarily fill the kernel with false pride.

I do not imply that the *only* "culture" that works, the only unity, is a pure culture with historical continuity, nearly homogeneous identities, traceable heritage and rich

[69] *A Bend in the River*. 207
[70] Ibid. 208

tradition. That would be a fallacy all the way around. If a culture is working for a people, then it works, just as patois works. Nothing need be signified concerning that culture. In fact, critics of advantages and disadvantages of the category prove the case, since by their evaluations they imply culture's functionality, and lack thereof. Besides, the claim that a culture *is* working even if particular perspectives do not recognize it as such places us in the *empirical* mode, and this means that a rule of invalidation had been applied which may now be applied to new propositions, new claims about culture. There has to be ways to discern that a culture is *not* working, and I would be able to use—I have been using—such a method to test idealist cultural claims. In other words, "work" must be defined, and having to define work exposes the statements and stories, instrument of writers who are already committed to producing particular *ethos*, to counterargument, counterclaim, and invalidation. Walcott uses the metaphor of the vase and his poetics of Postcolonial rewriting for good reasons; likewise Rushdie his stories from experience and his poetics, and Chakrabarty his ahistory and modulations. It is hard to say "a vase is false" even as one is confronted by ethical demands made under the imperative to recognize the "vaseness" of cultures. I have a simile, too. I find those who say every child is special and precious rarely give out the terms by which to verify whether the statement is true (or even testable) in order to protect the discourse which enables more concrete claims that would follow such a statement. I have not even mentioned that, in the empirical mode, cultures can be compared.

Walcott's vase establishes a kernel for the production of *ethos*. Like Eid's Africa, it is a tautology. It is not real. It is not necessary, not in the way dealing with fire is. It does not have to be "real". It depends on a higher authority to assert. It introduces a

dependency on higher authority for meaning, of not necessarily God, but the god-like discourse that tells us it is meaningful to serve the other. It does turn a blind eye to Naipaul and the "lack" about which he writes; it depends on redeeming them. It binds all would-be vases, which means it tries to establish a sort of cultural network like Rushdie's. Naipaul would say that such networks exists and we had better learn to critically assess, control them, and be prepared to sever ties when they grow harmful. I am extending that skepticism by asking: what are the different consequences for accepting Walcott's frames of reference, or Naipaul's; can we assess their variable impact, and decide for ourselves what to do?

If Naipaul's representations of history are invalid, how are they so, and does the invalidating critique introduce ideas and things that will then powerfully impact the ethical field? What are the modes being used; what are the modulations? Not every attempt to cohere social practice like Walcott's vase works to the purpose that its practitioners want. If it does not work, perhaps the practices exists, and little girls in black dress walk as they do along the beach, and Indians try to celebrate traditional festivals, but the presumed "society", the would-be social, political, *and ethical* unities, do not. Or perhaps reality betrays the illusion of "practice", the results of which can entertain like the comic failures of Biswas attempting to recast Tulsi society and himself according to some haphazard comedy, or be much worse. There is, in other words, no practice, only haphazard action and reaction. And if "practice" does "work", it may work to the critic's vision—the critic who makes it work as much as that neocolonialist who thinks it lacking. Biswas's house is his vase. In pursuit of his unity, he fails to see the

dysfunction of that which would stand for his unity: his repeated attempts to resignify poorly constructed houses.

old news in a matter of time

Each attempt by Biswas to resignify his abode is new. And each building is new. The objects are just simply not what the pursuit of them promises to yield. The tragedy of Biswas is not just that he continues to pursue but that he repeats the same mistakes.

Each attempt to resettle the bend in the river is new. And each settlement, from Arab to European to Indian to African, is new. The settlements are just simply not what they promise to be; yet the pursuit of the promise ironically causes the demise of the settlements. The Big Man is only the latest attempt to make History; his is but the latest story to achieve authority of Story. Through moments of peace and moments of violence, the bend in the river remains.

The "new" is an odd thing. Action and reaction are motivated by the sense of newness, but each new is "tainted" by the possibility of being yet another set of ideas, peoples, and things, to which those who come after much react. The new is tomorrow's burden of history, as the Old World's "new" would become the burden of those in the New World. The "new" borne of rage against the old is a dangerous thing. Escaping this vicious cycle of oldnewisoldnewoldisnewoldnew is the problematic of all dialecticism, not just Naipaul's history. It is a problem for adherents and those who are touched by the consequences of their actions. You may say that we need to transform, not escape. But they are the same: either way, you are free of the "old" repetitions. *A Bend in the River* starts with the proclamation that "the world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow

themselves to become nothing, have no place in it". The proclamation epitomizes the struggle of history, with history, for history. It is a struggle where nothing grand is granted and no good preordained. The rest of the novel shows that, though a person can struggle hard, no place for her is guaranteed; certainly she has no place who does not struggle. Change is dialectical. An action in reaction to something before it creates reactions after it, some of which in turn produce the next set of circumstances—next in time—the next action. A reaction, in this case the promise of Independence fixated on the kernels of African nationalism, can appropriate ideas from the past to motivate itself and those around it, or to scare its enemies; it is dialectical in this way, too. And in this, it is no different from actors of previous struggles. Dialectical is the mechanism of history in *A Bend in the River* and Naipaul's other novels, but Naipaul's dialectic is not plotted to offer the *aufheben* and *telos* devoutly to be wished. There is nothing simultaneously "above" and part of conflicts and struggle and the stuff of history to promise, to guide and to guarantee. Waiting after the violence of the new, or sometimes waiting out the new, is survival, not Spirit not Freedom not Utopia; and survivors like the fisherfolk and Indian traders and white missionaries survive only to struggle yet once more against the new men of history. Dialectical is the causality of human events. To plot it using the Walcott's actors: "wholes" beget "fragments" which beget ideas of "wholeness" which are really only "fragments" which beget other "fragments" which beget new "wholes". So the European Empires beget colonial subjects in Africa, some of which revolt against colonizers and against foreign traders; the survivors of revolution and Independence rage against white people and rage against each other, some of whom follow the winning Big Man to rule the new and beget new, postcolonial subjects; under

the rule of the Big Man, postcolonial subjects, idealist, zealots, businessmen, fisherfolks, soldiers, rebels, children ready themselves in different ways for the coming of the next age, if they survive.

In contrast to other interpretations of history, Naipaul's offers little consolation of redemptive sublimity, and no master plan to inspire one set of actions over all others. It can offer no consolation because the very idea that consoles will also seize the imagination and ironically become that master plan against which the next fragments of history struggle. One does not redeem; one *deals* with history. Salim came to the town after rage had laid it to waste. Yet the mutilation of many and destruction of much had not calmed the enslaved[71] and the colonized. This unmanaged destructive energy informed everything people did as an ever-present if incomprehensible alarm. For Salim, new to the area, the danger was crystallized in a rhetorical question posed by Ferdinand, the son of the trader Zabeth, who was even more out-of-place than Zabeth since his greater ambition prevented him from settling for the simple lot his mother had secured for herself: Ferdinand asks one day, "Salim, what do you think of the future of Africa?"[72] The shop keeper charged with keeping an eye out for the boy wonders from whence Ferdinand's idea of Africa comes, that seems so much larger than his mother's. But in response to Salim's probes, Ferdinand was sure only that "the world outside Africa was going down and Africa was rising".

> When I [Salim] asked in what way the world outside was going down, he couldn't say. And when I pushed him past the stage where he could repeat

[71] The rage extends to the slaves of Africans in the bush, too, who see in the upheaval their own opportunity.
[72] *A Bend in the River*. 47

> bits of what he had heard at the lycée, I found that the ideas of the school discussion had in his mind become jumbled and simplified. Ideas of the past were confused with ideas of the present. In his lycée blazer, Ferdinand saw himself as evolved and important, as in the colonial days. At the same time he saw himself as a new man of Africa, and important for that reason. Out of this staggering idea of his own importance, he had reduced Africa to himself; and the future of Africa was nothing more than the job he might do later on….
>
> The thought of a lycée full of Ferdinands made me nervous.[73]

It was after this exchange that Salim saw how he was fitted in the new Africa, as a foreigner to be used for quick cash, and unprotected because he had "no family, no flag, no fetish [like the charms that protected Zabeth]"[74]. The people's paranoia was not unfounded, as a second rebellion soon broke out between the army of the independent nation and those who had once been preyed upon and enslaved by the tribes that composed the army.

A Bend in the River ends with the consolidation of this latest "new". It is this new, and the History to which it belongs, that makes the stakes so much larger here than in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. His rhetoric wearing thin after years of failure and the troubles of Independence, the President turns to police power. Some stay and risk everything. Salim escapes with nothing. Ferdinand helps him. Perhaps out of an old friendship, perhaps because of the common bond to his mother. There is time only for

[73] Ibid. 48
[74] Ibid. 56

short sentences. Salim has managed to secure passage on one of last steamers heading down river towards the coast, in a *cabin de luxe* on the steamer itself. As they depart, "young men with guns" try to take the ship. They fail. In the fight, the passenger barge has been set adrift. The steamer leaves it. History is being made. Neither bleak nor iridescent, history is simply a matter of survival.

The danger is that a master plan had been dreamt up before it could be analyzed and evaluated by skeptical reasoning. A vase had been imagined as a structure of feelings before the would-be fragments came to understand one another. Ferdinand does not know how to organize the history that made him. The pieces are "jumbled" and the resulting idea of Africa is "simplified" to the point that he can picture himself as its agent. He does not historicize that simplified picture, and consequently, allows himself to become an agent to the new Africa. Into such an unknowing vase the Big Man pours his love. And the enemy is but a speck in history. For a people long systematically oppressed—and no one is disputing the reality of slavery and colonialism—the leap from rage to grandiosity is easily understandable, and quick. For a people little valued, the adamant assertion of overwhelming value is not surprising. Yet even this understanding, if enough people had it, might have at least retarded the rise of the Big Man. This is why reason cannot lead us to the Master Plan, and any accounting of historical struggles in any place that is cast widely enough makes us appreciate how difficult and unlikely is the assembly of any vase, much less one that is competitive against other vases, or that subjects fragments to self-limiting *ethos*[75].

[75] This last is any of the liberal democracies with limited government.

Changes that another writer would use to signify *aufheben* constitute for Naipaul no great leap towards transcendence. In fact, there are consequences. Deconstruction is destructive. Violent, catastrophic change marks the end of a moment of peace—the last time people were in any condition to claim some sort of "spirit". And it reduces everything to the overgrown chaos, to the beginning, as the novel repeats, a paradoxical condition to survivors because the openness of unsettlement leaves life very narrow possibilities. If one's head existed in dialectical time—the temporality of dialecticism—"spirit" would seem to quickly renew itself after its vaunted transformation. From village to tribe to alliances to feudal society to Industrial Capitalism to Late-Capitalism to Communism to…; the plot is purposeful, single-minded, in a word: "clean". And only the "clean" survives. The cleanliness of *aufheben* makes the drama of Spirit beautiful and graceful, and is teleological dialecticism's appeal. Teleological dialectical history provides a clarity of direction—any direction—during uncertainty. O Bloodless *Aufheben*! Whatever blood is spilled has already been justified elsewhere.

What if dialecticism is self-delusion on a scale where others are forced to play their part in the conflicts? What if the moments of stability (not stasis but predictable, consistent change) in human history are momentary, and a writer looks back and conceives dialecticism by introducing some sort of otherworldly agency to "explain" these moments in time. The series of historical moments evidence the manifestation of such and such Spirit, he may say. These writers of dialectical history also belong to their respective historical moments, the moment of revision, the moment when one decides to use *aufheben*, or not, moments that vary enough to produce dialectical thinking along the lines of Walter Benjamin, and Francis Fukuyama, and Ghosh and Rushdie. And Naipaul.

Do not these moments have to be accounted for, too? A teleological drama of historical dialecticism ends where it finds good reason to; calls down the *deus-ex-machina* for the promising final scene. Naipaul does not find reasons good enough to ignore that the play is in a playhouse and its machinations will produce intended and unintended, foreseen and unforeseen consequences. To do so, he also uses history; he looks back to the last time such a play was produced. Here is Salim, upon arriving at the bend in the river, surveying what remained of the town after the last colonial uprising:

> Sun and rain and bush had made the site look old, like the site of a dead civilization. The ruins, spreading over so many acres, seemed to speak of a final catastrophe. But the civilization wasn't dead. It was the civilization I existed in and in fact was still working towards. And that could make for an odd feeling: to be among the ruins was to leave your time-sense unsettled. You felt like a ghost, not from the past, but from the future. You felt that your life and ambition had already been lived out for you and you were looking at the relics of that life. You were in a place where the future had come and gone.[76]

Nature here is not the nature of the romantic Walcott. It neither blesses nor condemns. There before us, it is there after us, growing over the remains of what we built and destroyed. The beauty of sun and water in "Crusoe's children" is supposed to be more than aesthetic. A higher authority—namely the Christian God—sanctions Walcott's nature. *A Bend in the River* remembers that "God" was the spirit of colonizing missionaries. The novel is a history of how it has come to pass that the Big Man

President can claim to be the spirit of this African nation. It is also a history of the ahistorical forces that care very little for Latin mottos and granite monuments. These ahistorical forces, however, are not inhuman—certainly they are not the antagonist to the goodness of humans, to be grappled with as such forces grapple in divine struggle. Dialectical is the causality of human events. Dialectical change is caused by us, by the way our minds work, by how we motivate ourselves, by the funny fact and maybe not so funny fact that, for some, for many, words can signify so much meaning instead of serving as a faulty tool to understand reality, so much meaning that reality must be made to become what the meaningful words say it is. To some, to Walter Benjamin for instance, chased by Nazis, and who could count on his Deity and his metaphysics of the oppressed and the righteous, the future is illuminated by the promise of a last intervention. Without God, without some *deus-ex-machina*, that is, when we have only each other alone, or when we must face each other alone, the idea of history as dialecticism actually leads to ruin. And to him for whom that God, that incorruptible figure of interventionist authority, is but another ruin of history, and whatever was new has never been last, the pursuit of dialectical transformation make the ghosts of the future quite familiar, and in desolate places, quite spent. Naipaul's narrators are always trying in various ways to contain, and if that cannot be done, then escape, from the deleterious consequences of fanatical pursuit of newness. Short of destroying all thrones, and all worshipful adherents, there may be little choice and little time to avoid waking up one day to find that we now live in one of those new worlds plotted by "Spirit" and God is only another Big Man.

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[76] Ibid 27

The bend in the river is a meeting place. The town is built by those who converge there. The novel traces a dynamic that seems to also be missing in the construction of a vase of culture: a vase constructed of fragments must be the end of long struggle of many other potential vases coming to form. At a given instance in time, any great number of "fragments" are jockeying for position to be in that next, perhaps final account. Everyone may be looking towards that final catastrophe and the end beyond, except that the catastrophes are not the same. Though Metty and Salim are now defined as employee and employer, respectively, tentatively, they still battle through their former positions as slave and slave owner (Metty had been a slave to Salim's family) in that antiquated world on the coast; at the same time, their experiences of a tenuous world left asunder by the last African revolt also prompts both to be wary of Ferdinand's new assertion of African greatness. The great Hegelian transformation is only the last word (last for a while) of many other "lesser" struggles, many other, perhaps serendipitous, but more often unfortunate, turns of event. The postcolonial conditions out of which the plotters come are unsteady: it is marked by tension between overdetermination and indeterminacy. Where fragments of culture are ready to cohere but achieving coherence requires the destruction of some, or many, such that would-be fragments do not cohere, there is overdeterminacy. And where fragments readily cohere but into such varieties that they all seem substitutable for one another, and so empty, there is indeterminacy. It is not a matter of one over the other. In the meeting place, among the ruins, life is both. This tension in life is Naipaul's sense of history. It is historically significant. But it does not recommend a final solution. And it interferes with the projection of teleology not only because the possibility of struggle continuing, of history continuing, undermines the

promises of *telos*, but because it understands the pursuit of *telos*, moreover the pursuit of that which it promises, forces some "fragments" to compensate by turn zealously to fundamentalist identity, some to abandon the town, some to fight, and some to die. This, and not what Metty says, Eid projects, and Ghosh redeems, is history.

The Promise of ethics, or why Homi Bhabha secretly saves the Philosophy of History

If we looked at the work of Jacques Derrida as a method of historiography *and* an historical phenomenon symptomatic of a moment in time, we might understand the complication posed by the work of Naipaul to a Postcolonialism that uses deconstructionist or analogous strategies to initially define its relationship with the world. That is, historicizing the methods entails re-introducing the second of the two ideas in the title of Heidegger's tome.

In a way, deconstruction tells history *and* evidences history: for in tracing the pivots and metaphorical leaps it plots out what happened and what might have happened in time, and its function at the end of those histories is to ask the ontological questions. A deconstructionist tries to stand *in* history and she is *of* history. Standing in history enables various kinds of deconstructive historicizing, from readings of intertextuality and influence (e.g. Milton's difference of Tasso's difference) to that which Nietszche wrote as genealogy. Derrida himself deconstructs Marxism, and so in his own way traces the history of neoMarxism. The latter aspect Derrida had already anticipated at the inception of his work when he says that *différance* is subjected to the sublation it makes known. A trace is but temporary outcome of many, perhaps innumerable, conflicts—and chance. The *tracer* is among many others, and an ambitious one, whether irresponsible or well-

intentioned, who attempt to pass off his findings as *the* Difference—the intervention that makes all the differences in the world. So the position of deconstructionism in history is insecure, but Derrida counts on this: the more he is criticized and revised, the more he seems right.

Deconstruction is useful if one thinks the last place we landed, a place stable enough for people to have settled on a Hegelian story, is *not* where you (or we) want to be. The Hegelian plot can be fragmented and multiplied until the innumerable differentiation-sublation-differentiation-sublations, the traces, put to doubt the promise of *telos*; at least this is one interpretation of the methodology. Stops and starts are abrupt, provisional, and wholly characteristic of the particular trace, not Universal Order. A trace tells us there will be another moment of *différance*, more traces, and no single trace can provide us the judgment that guarantees we will have landed in a better place by performing it; that is, no Trace but traces, time and time again. It is inimitably unhelpful for projecting any kind of stable structure—like a bold, new Africa—as the terminal reward for a long struggle. The writer who uses Deconstructionism or analogous methods cannot make the promise of Independence[77] unless he shifts mode to avoid the logical conclusion that his story and his philosophy are but momentary iterations of endless history. The writer who *faces conditions* like those that enabled Derrida's work, namely Modernity, must also find more secure modes.

We can consider Derrida as a thinker trying to understand his time; the context of his most sophisticated understanding was philosophy. Philosophically, deconstruction complicates metaphysics; historically, Deconstructionism was developed in response to

the conditions of modernity. There were already doubts about the promise of *telos* by the time one understood what Derrida is trying to do. Alterity to deconstruction is not metaphysics, nor Hegelianism, which deconstructionism can handle, but that which may be expressed as those "conditions" which deconstructionists do not want to be real or even remain possible. Think of those conditions as the impotence of deconstructionist texts in the world in which it is produced. Those conditions are part of the world in which Derrida et al. feel necessary to intervene. Moreover, they fall in the gaps between one cogent *différance* and another, one sublation and another, if traces were mapped in time.

A trace, though it be inspired by inversions, reversions, irruptions, does not record or has effaced the meaningless violence that fatigues dogma and discourse to the point where a society, a structure, is destabilized enough to possibly invert good/evil; the meaningless violence that erases all other evils-that-would-be-the-new-good; and where a deconstructionist intervention makes sense/is useful.

Deconstruction may be a theory of history: it is a theory *in* history. There is a history of events leading to the formation we call Deconstruction and more broadly Poststructuralism. There is a history of Poststructuralism's rise in France, in the American academy, in the novels of E.L. Doctorow, Toni Morrison, and J.M. Coetzee; in Amitav Ghosh via the self-reflexive *ethos* of anthropology. There are histories written by Poststructuralists, all of which, I dare say, were meant to no less than supplant extant ones. Thus, because one of the key elements in deconstruction, and the basis to which the theory points for deauthorizing Hegel's Superagent, namely, the makers and users of

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[77] which is the achievement of Spirit in Hegel.

texts, is in history (still), we can apprehend how previous events and conditions in the mid to late 20th century might have lead us to the point where we could both see with Descartes's "I" and understand how we are able to do so. The unrecorded history of a particular trace is all that which did and had to happen for it to be meaningful. In this occlusion is the danger—the true Radical—I am trying to describe. We find this radical reality when the trace refuses to be written into the world, so to speak. This is not to say that reality *is* rage and violence and destruction, and so this is not to say rage and violence and destruction will be meaningless always and everywhere. The Reality inductively reasoned by Poststructuralism from disruption to sense-making is not a thing; not anything. There are moments in time and space, some brief and some extended, some little and some wide, when the world could not or cannot be made to signify "cleanly" whatever those who inherit it will make it signify. To turn these abject moments into something, to redeem them—the spirited history of dispirited ages—is to pretend to be "out" of them, always already as the next in time and implicitly last to know. And so to accept a trace is to implicitly hope for a way out of the mire of human violence that inspired its maker.

In effect, historicizing Derrida is what Homi Bhabha does in the work leading up to and including *The Location of Culture*. He too recognizes the Other, but he humanizes it. He redeems it. Ever present in history is the "historical and ethical right to signify"[78]. He contextualizes "*différance*", "erasure", and "double-voice", the key categories of marginalization by signs. There is a world in which the binaries turn, and the trace

[78] "Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate".

made[79]. Bhabha places the feats of language modeled by deconstruction into the reality of history, except that, for the function of the Real, he inserts only actors that exhibit those qualities we now hold to be virtues—or some do when all should. An "addressee" of any quality could have resisted discourse, in the way that the Lacanian Real resists signification. Whether I guard the charnel houses in some icy hinterland near the Boog, and on some evenings shelter from the stormwrack and desolation by listening to *Tristan und Isolde*, or I stalk drug-runners up and down the Caquetá, recalling to mind as we pass one of the few sizable villages along the river the dolor in her voice as she read to me "el olor de las almendras amargas le recordaba siempre el destino de los amores contrariados"; whether I am rationalist, or beyond head and heart, "love" is never love and love never "love". "Race" is not race and race not "race". "Justice" is not justice and justice not "justice". It is not just the center that cannot hold; even the trace will not. For his work, Bhabha needed a method that would inadequate essential truths, but also re-signify that inadequation in another narrative which would we would hold to be self-evident. The modulation he would adopt is the ethical turn. The underwriting s|Story is allegorical.

I am inferring from both Deconstruction and Postcolonialism, and from Naipaul, an irredeemably complicated and often conflicting reality of humans thinking and living together (or in proximity, I should say) on the same patches of earth, the very reason why we can arrange the stuff of our past and present to signify dialectical history, and the reason some want to, and some have to. I introduce a reality of "addressees" some of which were "good" enough to have a hand in building much vaunted and much vilified

[79] Therefore, erasure is not material annihilation.

Empires. I introduce this reality—not that I really need to—in order to test whether or not the reality of history into which Bhabha places "double-voice" and "erasure" and "*différance*" already has a coherence which Bhabha does not name, a coherence reproduced by the innumerable production of hybridity staged after him, and "discovered" as having been staged before him. The coherence is "*contra-modernity*"[80]. That which tests such coherence is the loveless bend in the river.

Bhabha places linguistic theory in a reality that not only fragments the unities of particular ideas but sets up the dialecticism I had mentioned before. He does this whenever he turns to Foucault, for instance, specifically Foucault's theory on the relation between unities and discursive formations. Foucault finds patterns of disruption across unities and inductively reasons that these patterns are not independent and haphazard effects of individual unities but evidence of discourses that structure the different disciplines with their respective (perceived) unities. But here, too, archeology plots a changing world too "cleanly", because discontinuities and irruptions have been redeemed by the next archae built by those who used them. The inspirations of archaeology are not in their regular "working" order. The archaeology of knowledge apprehends unities as synchronic fragments and tracks history as changes in fragmentation: changes in discursive formations. The point of conducting an archaeology of knowledge is to be able to write new formations, new patterns, to new effects. And since the work is creative, it must also understand the failure to create. What is missing, of course, is the present *incapacity* to form new patterns even as the old ones wear out. Bhabha tries to convince us that the new patterns have already been formed. He relocates Foucault to the

[80] *The Location of Cutlure.* 9

context of Colonialism, where our sense of good and bad is less prone to postmodern vacillation, from which he then excavates his new archae and "recovers" the history of those who were in danger of becoming "a peoples without a history"[81].

Dysfunction. Nothing, where "*contra-modernity*" is desired. The latter writing of Foucault is very much filled with the frustration of discoursing anew, especially when there is an additional (historical) imperative of creating new formations that are radically different from previous creations of former news. The same frustration is evident, too, in the writings of those whose various critical methods all begin with the assumption that unities are disciplinary. I take the self-reflexive *ethos* and the frustration as evidence that history is not simply one discursive formation after another, as is generally plotted by an archaeology, but a dialectic between abject chaos and the kind of stability which Foucauldian archaeology deconstructs (by valorizing the irruptions in the disciplinary structure)—*the kind it needs to succeed as* the *new new*. These are moments of wayward human "societies"—I am willing to accept more conceptually precise terms—which resist attempts to be signified. Yet, in a sense, they are also moments of *dis*organization, since, historically, they bear the burden of formerly authoritative unities, and methodologically, they are meaningful only when incorporated into a plot that promises the possibility of reordering. Memory. And desire. And this the cruelest time of year.

[81] Bhabha does this several times in *The Location of Culture*, in the chapters "Signs are taken for wonder" and "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern". At the conclusion of the latter chapter, he basically concludes that Foucault's archaeology is itself a reaction to traditional history made possible only in relation to peoples without history. Foucault's binary is: that which is self-constituting/that which is not. The latter, the other, is not nothing. Once again, Bhabha is using his kernel, for even as historical value and meaning is reduced to nothing, "people" remain to be redeemed. I wonder what would happen if someone as capable performed the same critique against Bhabha, measuring his anxieties and desire, as he does Foucault, someone who can also create a third category that is not a third category, and initiate dialectic for the fun of it. Truly this would be dysfunctional.

Using discursive analysis, Bhabha sets up antagonistic identities to be the discursive *products* of cultural differentiation, determined by production and, because they could never choose to be themselves, free from fault. Cultural differentiation is the cause of dislike, acrimony, hatred, violence done in the name of identity. But whatever the cause, missing from the story of the production of culture are the in-between moments when *discipline* has been removed without immediate re-discipline, when a power vacuum such as that created by decolonization has not been filled by another authority and another structure[82], other unities that can help deal with postcolonial conditions; or when "fragments" seek to master each other to become the new.

The Postcolonial strategy of blaming Colonialism, explicitly, or implicitly in an allegory of resistance, elides the important fact that since the weakening of colonial authority, it has become useful to reconstitute identity by recalling that which existed before the colony and suppressed by it, or that which was produced by colonization. Nevertheless, at some point, post-colonials *do* make decisions for which post-colonials are responsible. Perhaps decisions are attributable to post-colonials only after Independence. If the reality described by Bhabha is right, then attribution may also be made during Colonialism; though we are not permitted to think in terms of consciousness, "resistance" has been located as having come from there *rather than from the dominating discourse itself*. There must lie the cause of postcolonial conditions, too, and explanations of postcolonial violence that slide quickly from one "external" producer of cultural difference to another (as though there is a great adversary in history [now] called "Cultural Differentiation") absolves, or even authorizes, the people who promote

[82] Which could very well be equitable and socialist, and "African" to please nativists.

the latest discursive formations. How quickly the addressee of discourse that had emerged during the fight for freedom disappears when blame is being assigned. By implication, Walcott's vase is not historically informative—it may not even be historical. That it is and is not is part of the mystery. The mystery is that certain unities escape the clutches of being considered the product of human vices. The point of contention, however, is not whether a Big Man President or Liberation Armies that refuse to return to civic life should be blamed. What is important here is that the feat of reconstituting identity by recalling that which existed before the colony and suppressed by it, or that which was produced by colonization, is a strategy used by both the Big Man and Postcolonialism. It is a similarity certain one side, probably neither, wants to admit. The difference is that everything goes right in "theory". And if identities are being reconstituted, why should the identities of the culprits of history matter more than clearing up the present strategies for reform and anticipating their real repercussions, especially when the former obscures or protects a contentious aspect of the latter?

The erasure of dysfunction and violence by Postcolonial archaeology speaks to my point because it ignores the real effects of too many and little—too many that makes for very little—order. And I mean order of any kind, to which Derrida, Heidegger, Nietzsche, or Hegel can respond; we are not even at a point where we can compare the respective merits of each. The reality that Bhabha introduces by invoking Foucault I have also introduced, except that Bhabha's is anchored by the vices of Colonialism and the implied goodness of colonized people, while mine is extrapolated from the logical conclusion to the critical reasoning of used by Postcolonialism. It is neither a world absent of people nor one peopled by absences, but one that has only people and people of

all kinds. Postcolonial archaeology, the reordering of the colonial past and post-colonial present to support the production of *ethos*, speaks to my point because it ignores the very reality it invokes. It invokes reality to deconstruct authoritative human ideas and to make humans neither the slave nor master of discourse: reality as a dialectical function of producing unity, and that which discourse addresses, the reality exemplified by the subjectivities of and relations among the characters of Naipaul's novels, the same out which they cannot find their way, and the end of which they cannot find. A trace shows the failure of binary thinking in order to _____. It cannot help but try to swerve away from the unity it means to deconstruct: to describe what is and was in order to implicitly foster another unity. This new unity may be of action, instead of just thought. Deconstructionist historiography is always burdened by the desires of those who cannot leave well enough alone, just as historians who claim that History is some greater intelligence cannot leave it to that History to take its intelligent course.

Perhaps the *ethos* of Poststructuralism, its relations to that which it does not account, to that which it accounts as failure (and so that which it accounts as unaccountable), and to that which it consistently turns to mark change, and its relations to its own history, is more readily apprehended than the *telos* of the various tracings. The *ethos* is agonistic. Fragmentation, irruptions, breaks, indeterminate beginnings and ends, all frustrate (mis)generalization, (mis)identification, (mis)characterization. And characterization, identification, generalization suppress or forestall indeterminacy, rupture, irruptions, fragmentation. The functions can be deployed by some to thwart their use by others. Yet the functions seem like difference scnenes in a well orchestrated drama signifying higher meaning. The intervention of the Real tells us that the subjects

of Colonial discourse are only textual and therefore "subjected" to the conditions by which they are made. Yet Real is not Real, or at moments is not itself: reality also has ethical intelligence, implicated by the desire for freedom from oppression: it was this intelligence that fought back, and writes back. This reality is conscious. So the Real, setting to colonization, is also a self-contradictory character—an ethical reality—in another drama set somewhere other than moments of inscriptions: it is a drama because it is sensible to us, and because we can imagine ourselves in it. This textual "Real" is the Postcolonial allegory that directs *ethos*. And its real rival is neither of the adversaries that play out the drama. Big Man Presidents can be explained. They have already been cast. The explanations may not actually remove him from power, but they are not meant to. Document atrocities and call in interventionist troops. Gather like minds, go there yourselves, rile up the masses, and take up arms. Explanations are always intermediate, and where they mediate they serve a discourse that addresses peoples of a different domain. The true rival is one like Naipaul, who represents by example an undesired personal strategy for negotiating the burdens of history, who in his work inadequates the tragic figures of history and prevent them from readily determining the new ethical field, and who with his works complicates the reality and the dialectic, the setting and the plot, respectively, of the great Drama in which we are supposed to play our roles.

In the indetermination of historical "ages" is freedom—to appropriate the title of one of Bhabha's articles—but also sadness, rage, and misdirection, and danger because sadness and rage and freedom tend to fixate on subjectivities that are, by any standard, harmful. The "new Africa" of Ferdinand and the Big Man President, and all the Africas imagined by those who charge Naipaul with not falsehood but representation of "lack",

are different responses to the same problem. Therefore, these Africas belong to a kind of history: the rather disorganized but traumatic kind that includes the day ostensibly marked as decolonization/Independence, and must include the ethnic, sectarian, and nationalist wars thereafter. And that history differs from, say, the history that sees the formation of Vietnam or Israel out of formerly colonized space, if not in the depth of dysfunction, then at least in the duration between unities. (No distinction is implied among the unities: the Big Man is as autocratic, and perhaps as worshiped and feared, as the central board of the communist party.) But to function uniquely in and against the postcolonial conditions, to mark changes as harbinger of *aufheben* and not as Naipaul reports them, the new Africas must establish respective domains wherein hope—and hope for the right thing—is normal, and plenitude—plenitude of the right thing—doubtless.

Walcott's Postcolonial "vase" is apprehensible only if we (or some power) hold up time and crop the image—the unity—so that only "fragments" and only certain "fragments" in the frame; crop them to look like a vase and hold the vase up as something uncompromised by the vicissitudes of time and errors of men. The vase is celebration: watching South Asians in the Caribbean celebrate, everyone celebrates. Naipaul does not stop at the latter, as if it were "whole", but takes it as another "fragment". The conflict of vases and the conflict of fragments are the same thing; the only difference is what you hope the new unity, the new archae, the new age, look like. Not only do certain things have to be excised, but that which remains must be placed in a domain where another authority elevates it to sign. Competition discredits the discourse of "vase" and makes it hard to circulate "vaseness" as the ethical interpretation of post-

colonial culture. To those who find metaphors like Walcott's vase useful, Naipaul (and the modernity from which his perspective derives) subtracts what is needed to produce *ethos*. To those who read both Naipaul and Walcott, metaphors and forms and points-of-view compete, and the competition shows that the vase is a new trope trying to gain the authority of a discovered "thing". In *A Bend in the River*, the "vase" of "new Africa" competes in history, as history, with the lycée that is "still so colonial in spite of everything"[83].

Deconstructionism attempted to redeem the changes that were happening in modernity by turning the grammar it studied into an instrument of ethics. Its procedure still retained aspects of modernism: sublate differences until hard and steadfast truths are undermined by knowledge of how truth is constructed. Its ethics is postmodern: increase the frequency and rapidity of sublation to undermine the formation of monoliths. And Bhahba is partly right: there are such things as not dreamt of in deconstruction. The other of deconstruction would be the modernity in which others have different ideas in mind. Postcolonialism developed over several decades to moralize the idea of change/sublation, which as indicated by Deconstructionist *ethos*, is too open-ended. And if deconstruction is a momentary glimpse of history, then history is too open-ended, too. Deconstruction does not produce commitments. This is why Bhabha historicizes Foucault (and Derrida[84]) by summoning Colonialism, "peoples without history", and the allegory of history in which they are characters. Certain sublation has to happen. Characters like the "subaltern" are created with the idea that their stories would build consciousness and

[83] *A Bend in the River*. 53
[84] See "Signs Are Taken For Wonders". *The Location of Culture.*

destroy the conditions that had necessitated their creation. Cultural identities are reinterpreted in an allegory of the production of culture, so that neither one identity nor the other now has the authority to dictate relations[85]. Which "liberatory sign", as Bhabha calls them, should be circulated, and which sublation stimulated, have already been decided by Postcolonialism. The believing Postcolonialist critic does not let the universal story work itself out, but thinks he has to actively intervene and thinks his specific intervention is the right one. Be it centered on social justice or oppression, the right aufhebung has been revealed, for which a different kind of ethical instrumentalism is needed. Postcolonialism understands grammatology, and the modernity in which it is possible to deconstruct, but feel the need to re-establish the kind of discursive and ethical power/authority which would enable the production of *ethos*. The authority cannot be discovered, values made transparent, propositions arguable, facts checked, because that would initiate a skeptical cascade of questions and lead "back" to that modernity against which both Deconstruction and Postcolonialism are rival responses. So some aspects of Postcolonialism has to be exempted from the sublation, and error, and self-interested valuation, indeed from history. *Deus-ex-machina* is the common name I give for various structures of exemption: the sublime character that is both of history (where it is victimized) and in history; the global network of superimposed stories and unfinished business; the father who would be displeased if we acted unethically; the supposed achievement of freedom from conflict through conflict. Now if only the things out of which Postcolonialism constructs its stories were recognized as historical, perhaps the exemption will be unconvincing. That would be Naipaul.

[85] This is Homi Bhabha's method.

My point has been that Naipaul *can* ruin everything. Naipaul ruins the production of Postcolonial *ethos* because his works do not forestall readers from drawing conclusions that represent the political alternatives to the prevailing concerns of Postcolonialism (e.g. capitalist development). He ruins also because he beautifully undermines the very mechanism by which some producers of text would rise to power. Naipaul ruins the promise of Derridean ethics, the constant anxious asking after "how shall I live?"[86] for the world deduced from Naipaul's novels bears the cost, the unaccounted cost, of *ethos* that tell its subjects to chase fragmentation, ruptures, irruptions, destabilization, hoping to contain them and turn them into historical change; *ethos* that trace, then trace traces, and follow that by tracing the traces of traces; which is to say, it shows the costly effects of rituals of deconstruction. *Ethos* are but motives in time, causing unintended consequences some of which ethics cannot account, and some of which it refuses to admit.

Naipaul impedes the formation of a specific new discourse by ruining its projections. In particular, he complicates Postcolonial categories and the plot of teleogical dialecticism—of cultural differentiation-conflict-resolution-differentiation-conflict-resolution-*telos*. Yet he does so not by introducing uncertainty as a unitary "historical force" while writing on those possibilities unwanted by his detractors: such a characterization would entertain the idea that meaninglessness can be vanguished with some resolute finality. His comedies are "messier" versions of Walcott's "fragments". His "realism" lacks the kind of magic that, in Rushdie, binds subjects to consequences

from the intersubjective experience. The universe is not empty. Certain peoples are not inherently and absolutely lacking. But the would-be "collective" figure, the presumptive vase, the kernel that supports the writing of *ethos*, can be dysfunctional[87] and deleterious. They are dysfunctional in *A House for Mr. Biswas* and they are so in *A Bend in the River*. The impediments are conveyed as functions of Naipaul's style, propositions, mode and plot. His mastery of a style for writing the novel in English suggests an alliance with the "old" perspectives—perspectives that should by now be superannuated. This is especially true in an age of prose and more often than not prosaic experimentation, since experimentation somehow substantiates the fantasy of newness and newness advances the politics of substantive change. Yet he does have a distinctive voice, his best novels an aesthetic unity above would-be rivals, which also indicates the anxiety about Naipaul is also caused by the idea that he is a new we should not want.

Naipaul's propositions are matter-of-fact, and, when compared with "subjective" novelists like Henry James or James Joyce, his propositions can quickly slide from subjective evaluations into objective descriptions. His narrators see more but do less than Conrad's. Any hedges about humanity in light of what humans have done are left to us. There is merit in contending with that part of Naipaul's poetics which takes its cues from non-fiction reporting, I think, but the merit is limited. General statements are usually the ones that get him in the most trouble. Still, there are plenty of additional cues telling the reader that the narrator is by no means omniscient. Salim the narrator of *A Bend in the River* has to constantly learn the limits of his senses and his reasoning. In fact, the book

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[86] *Specters of Marx*.
[87] Which also means that some can work well, for however long conditions remain stable.

is about his most consequential error, the one that finds him escaping in the middle of the night down river from the bend with nothing. Salim is a simple man, simple but perceptive, and when he speaks to other simple men, he reduces complexities to portable characterizations for which strategies may be more easily formulated. When he tries to warn Mahesh of how Ferdinand uses people, he first positions himself as Ferdinand's prey and then tries to construct a sociological model for understanding how Ferdinand might prey on different types of people. The model appears in a separate paragraph, thus giving it the sense of unity and truthfulness it has for Salim.

> Some men were to be feared, and stalked cautiously; it was necessary to be servile with some; others were to be approached the way I was approached. It was in the history of the land: here men had always been prey. You don't feel malice towards your prey. You set a trap for him. It fails ten times; but it is always the same trap you set.[88]

This is Salim's truth, the schema conjured by Salim to deal with Ferdinand and those like Ferdinand, and it works well. Salim is able to stop African boys from coming to him for money. The characterization also tells us that the people there, the culture there, base social relations on virtues other than what we take to be good and evil. There is no malice in using people. Neither is there a social cost, no reputation despoiled, no pariah made, since the same trap can be set repeatedly. No doubt if the behavior were considered malicious, those to whom it is done and more importantly those who see it being done would "correct" it.

[88] *A Bend in the River*. 55

I can see why the stereotype is already objectionable if this way of treating people is just as bad as using them maliciously. If it is decontextualized from the mind of Salim the stereotype is objectionable because it sounds objective. I would agree that, decontextualized, the statements lose the subjectivism of Salim's judgment and skirt the problem of translating African cultural attitudes into Western ethics. But critique of such passages of "lack" in Naipaul can also stem from a reason I find odd. In the first place, Salem's generalizations are the consequences of intersubjective experience, of recognizing that someone else sees us as objects for their gain. It must be that Salem's "things" are not the right ones. These subjects and things are missing from Ghosh, weakly felt in Rushdie, and unauthentic (made by systems) in reemptive critiques. The question is: what other simple ethical axiom has determined the value of complexity, such that it should be used to falsify the generalization? Understanding of the complex causes-and-effects, and chance, of history that lead to confrontations at the bend of the river, would not help Salim, and may end up sacrificing Salim for, or make him instrument of, some cause that is other than that which he knows and to which he would consent. Salim's "truth" is objectionable should it be available to be used in another context, say the ethical field which needs to keep from its faithful subject alternative frameworks that recognize the situation of being used as such. The palavers are coming to Salim obliquely for something—for money. There is no denial of their existence. In fact, Salim's response acknowledges their agency. Their actions are designed to get what they want, without giving up anything: without transparency of motive and exchange. Amid talk of complexity and authenticity and neocolonialism and Postcolonialism, then, is there a danger that people have access to a calculus that recognizes the idea of

becoming instruments in the work of shoring up new Africa? The figures of Ferdinand drawn by Salim do not fit some ethical fields, certainly not ones that structure *ethos* relative to liminal figures making demands. If, in that ethical field or in Africa, we find ourselves *in the position of Salim*, Naipaul becomes even more dangerous. Naipaul is dangerous because he shows a world of users, and what is necessary to survive that world. He is objectionable by any standard that has already redeemed such a world using the figure of the survivor. Objectionable, too, would be the universal from the stereotype, because the idea of a world of users hurts the cause of producers of *ethos* by depriving them of their main characters. Be forewarned as you move through the complexities that invalidate Salim's reductive stereotype, that you may find yourself asking: do I have the thinking and the wherewithal to save me from being used? Then again, it may be I who have found that of which it is good to be an instrument, and the demands made upon you and me are neither amoral nor malicious but just. The question you might need to ask becomes: why should you be used by me to be instrument for my profit, though you would not be the subject of Salim's prejudice, nor prey to Ferdinand's trap?

Indeed, because Naipaul has Salim acknowledge the problem of translation, the novel complicates any politics that acknowledges and evaluates action according to conclusions drawn from the problematic. The politics of the problem of cultural "untranslatability", for instance, has two faults, one logical and one rhetorical. Untranslabitily, or the inability for one frame of reference to understand another because it does not have the conceptual tools and lived-experience to do so, leads logically to cultural relativism. The only way to speak across culture, even if one is privileged with having been authentically in both, is to appeal to a standard, usually moral-ethical, or

concept, usually power, that is claimed to transcend the problematic condition[89]. But, unless one can claim independence from that to which all others are subjected, such an example logically invalidates the initial and enabling claim. The writer using the problem of translation has exempted not the two (or more) cultures separated by the untranslatable, but *his* position. This is the same contradiction that besets any theory that attempts to simultaneously use comparative categories and categories of the incomparable—a vase invaluable yet to be valued no less than equal to all others.

Rhetorically, discourse organized around the problem of translation distracts from taking stock of use, ironically just as the fetish of modernization distracts from understanding the displacement of villagers, and just as arguments about how to understand Ferdinand's motives distract from the skeptical assessment of the reality of actions like his. How Africans feel about Independence we may not be able to reproduce, but this does not preclude knowing how the deep sentiments are being used, and knowing how Independence-to-Africans is being used at the site of address of Postcolonialist rhetoric. That every culture understands use differently, but all have ways for people to recognize when they are being used, should weaken any case against using use that argues from the problem of translating use. But it is the confirmable observation that people *do* use each other, even when they have the best of intentions—best as only they can understand respectively—which really disrupts the politics that is based on problematizing translation: analysis of use rivals translational knowledge where the latter

[89] In Ghosh's *In An Antique Land*, cross-cultural interaction is facilitated by the universal idea of Custom, as the various set of rules that please various fathers. The untranslatable deep belief of a foreign culture is translated through the (universal) respect for fathers: a father would not want his son to disbelieve in their culture. A Hindu father would not want his son to stop burning the dead. A culture that shuns the practice

ostensibly succeeds. Complexity returns to Naipaul when Salim needs Ferdinand to get out of town, and Ferdinand helps him for nothing in return. The Ferdinand who helps Salim is conscious of being used by the system of the Big Man, which had promised him a great Africa. There are users, and there are well-intended people, and they may be the same ones. The either/or essence of goodness is not as discernable as we hope a judgmental God can absolutely discern. Nor is history the teleology a redemptive Go(o)d might make it.

Naipaul's "realist historical novels" ruin the ability to synthesize any kind of upward trend in history in a particular region, because he includes any number of ways of thinking "up", and show that the trend has been "up" and "down": good and evil, nativism and openness, colonialism and nationalism, etc. It has been "up" "down" "up" "down" and "down" as the new "up", "up" for some and "down" for others, "up" for some because "down" for others, and "up" for others that causes "down" for most[90], such that implausible is the conclusion of either Up or Down. In other words, by giving progressive and radical philosophies names and faces, he returns them to the history which each is trying to escape. Bhabha lauds the same strategy when it is used by Rushdie to re-iterate, replay, and reproduce with difference, the self-aggrandizing monoliths of Empire and Religion. (Except that in Rushdie, even the ups and downs of snakes and ladders do not seem to repeat with the difference that ends repetition.[91]) It is a mystery that another writer cannot find recurrence operating coeval to would-be

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must still respect the other, since fathers who want to be buried would not want their sons to stop burying them.

[90] Like the work of the historian Raymond.

[91] *Midnight's Children*.

monoliths, in locations when monoliths have left or been brought low. The inability to signify "up", when "up" means progress or transformation that fulfills some sort of plan for the universe and mankind, reveals another implication.

Change is not in and for itself upward. Change may simply be the condition of not the same or an inability to identify as same. "Fragmentation" *is* change. In fact, is not the inability to identify as the "same" with any of the dominant unities the key characteristic of hybridity? At the bend in the river are met strangers who are neither Indian, nor tribal African, nor colonial African, nor moderns, nor bush, nor Greek, nor Italian, nor American, nor conquerors, nor English, nor soldier, nor trader, nor politician, nor *et cetera*, *et cetera*. They manage to find a kind of equilibrium and that equilibrium, though often tense, allows some of them to prosper, if only in small ways. At the same time, the inability to identify the same, whether by individual identity, or with culture, or historical age--for example characteristic of Ferdinand—causes a lot to happen, because of the solution some seek. Hybridity is not necessarily symptomatic of an impotent lot waiting for our intervention. In many cases—logically, in all historical cases—people *have* acted; and in *A Bend in the River* the "outcome" of various actions lead to the rise of Big Man President. So change also causes change indirectly and often in ways that the difference cannot be signified as upward *aufheben*. More turmoil and more of the same. Naipaul's mode and plot allow for these "outcomes": dysfunction, social equilibrium, and tyranny. The possibility of many vectors of historical causality should make his novels more "realistic" history than Lukacs's historical novels allegorizing History's Teleology.

the Error of Comedy

Dagmar Barnouw sees Naipaul's career as the development of the modern traveler, rather than the diminishment of a modernist novelist[92]. Each encounter is a moment of history. According to Barnouw, Naipaul understands the historicity of the relation between observer and subjects, and carefully details the particularities of a given sketch, but he is also trying to find broader meanings from these varied points of contact.[93] Naipaul and his critics disagree about these broader meanings, and the Promise of Meaning. He observes which configurations work and which do not, and he does not hesitate to assign blame. "Naipaul's view of cultural plurality has been of successes but also profound frustrations, of sharing and divisiveness, of gradual openings and abrupt closures: the emergence of restrictive 'traditionalisms' set against perceived threats of globalization".[94] "Traditionalism" is one of those points of contestation. On the one hand it acknowledges the attempt to create cultural coherence and assertiveness; on the other it stifles certain kinds of concurrent cultural development. Barnouw grants Naipaul the same position that is privileged by Postcolonialists, but the in-between Naipaul that Barnouw sees is able to come up with those calculations (of being used by others, for one) that depart from what would be expected of what I would call the conventional hybrid.

> Naipaul's position is that of the "inquiline" moving between civilizations, bridging the colonial and postcolonial experience. Though it made him

[92] Pritchard. "Naipaul's Written Word".
[93] "Introduction". *Naipaul's Strangers*. Bloomington: Indiana U.P. 2003. x 03/06/2008 < http://site.ebrary.com/lib/gwu/Doc?id=10026399>
[94] Ibid. x

> vulnerable to hostile and on occasion stunningly thoughtless attacks by postcolonialist critics from Said to Homi K. Bhabha and Derek Walcott, there are clearly great advantages to this position. It helped Naipaul to develop a particular kind of mobile social intelligence that allowed him to see with the problems also the benefits of colonial rule, and with the positive also the negative aspects of the "postcolonial condition." In the multiculturalist West he is an eminently contemporary, emblematic figure arguing the fallacies of late-modern cultural co-temporality and co-locality—the Western "moral" illusionary achievement of having done away, once and for all, with the strangeness of difference. But he also understands the easy seductions of this assumption for some groups and its serious, much needed promises for others.[95]

In Barnouw's characterization of—in his defense of—Naipaul lies the reason for the "Postcolonialist" response. That Naipaul himself is an "eminently contemporary, emblematic figure" in the multicultural West means that any and all of his reasoning may be subjected to the cultural relativist critiques against normalization (or neocolonialism). We have to understand, however, that the basic disagreements between Barnouw and the critics to whom he is responding, and between Naipaul and the critics that make use of him, are the primacy of reason, and the inalienable good of those qualities claimed by either side. The disagreement also concerns what representation, what stories, what hypotheses, are to come out of the post-colonial experience. The chapter has been investigating the reason for these fundamental differences. At the very least, since both

[95] Ibid. xiv

sides can agree to what Naipaul is—a product of Colonialism and the postcolonial condition in the Caribbean—the divergence of Naipaul's reasons in fact restores *full* potentiality to the in-between subject as she makes her way in the world. She may be neither Naipaul nor Walcott.

That Naipaul points to people in "postcolonial" locations as partly culpable for the conditions they face also suggests that postcolonial literature is produced by and in response to the uncontested historical fact and looming idea of Independence. Although much is written about ideas of Independence, the moniker and more importantly the patterns of historical causality drawn by a collection of critics tend to position what has happened against that other monolith Colonialism. While Colonialism was culpable of a great many things, it seems to have no advocate in the present to argue against certain declamations and neutralize allegories of belonging and goodness where it serves as the Cause and Source of problems. If as many claim nationalism is responsible for the strife we see today, it was not written on an innocent "substance" by departing colonial powers. Rather, the coincidence of nations to religions, the repetition of how tropes are used, suggests that old and extant adversaries discovered in the idea of nationalism and the fervor of what Independence promised the means to gain and horde power. Salman Rushdie can ridicule all the hateful parties he wants to; ridiculous or not, before or after decolonization, people hurt each other, all the same. Additionally, persistent attempts to create Indian historiography (not just Indian history)[96] or to establish—although represented as to discover—an Indian imagination that produces "authentic Indian

[96] Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe*.

literatures [that] have their origin in the universal Indian temper"[97], suggests the continuing renewal of said promise. To advocate for responsible characterization of historical causes to today's problems does not mean to argue for neocolonialism. It means to be able to say that Independence is as much cause, and as much a result of the decisions of humans, as Colonialism was. Many people had to have picked up the pieces and reanimated them. Independence promised much to motivate the struggle for independence, and that has been partly the cause of problems.

If at this point the argument of temporal priority is made—that Colonialism necessitated Independence and so, as the cause of cause, is "more responsible"—I would simply note that such reasoning implies responsibility lies ultimately with the First. Something necessitated Colonialism, and something necessitated that…. Yet if made, the attempt to outfly the previous cause can also be made to serve us well, for the sake of argument, because it points out something strange—a gap of sort—between Naipaul's stories and, say, Ghosh's. In studying history, and producing *ethos*, it seems much depends on where the historian stops among times past, or in times future, or with certain agents identified in the present. In *A Bend in the River*, for instance, Naipaul decides that some traces stop with the Big Man; some with his predecessor; some with the various tribes; some with Colonists; some with Christian missionaries; some with East Indian traders; and some at some indeterminate point in the past, if they stop—that is, start—at all. He is wrong only if all bad traces must point away from that which his critics are

[97] K.D. Verma. "Preface". *The Indian Imagination: critical essays on Indian Writing in English*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. x

protecting and all good traces to/from it. Bad post-colonial societies are made by neocolonialism; good ones on the mighty efforts of Postcolonials.

The discourse represented by Haidar Eid is dangerous because it forestalls apprehension of the promises of Independence and comparative analysis of the reasons for failure. Its ethical demands are dangerous because they forestall analysis where Postcolonialism confronts its addressee. Independence was born of unsublimated rage and promised too much, and even those goods which were possible have not come because people under the idealist fervor, by standards "neocolonial" or autochthonous, built their "societies" hastily, unthinkingly, badly. Like parents sheltering the returning prodigal child, it makes excuses for failures by always locating the source of ill to the other called "Colonialism" or "neocolonialism"; this is redemption. Eid promises New Africa, only he replaces Ferdinands with ideal (Postcolonial) instruments. The allegories of Colonial Struggle promising a great Africa are also in the propaganda repertoire of Robert Mugabe.

The argument with Naipaul is really an anxious proxy war. The kind of knowledge Naipaul advocates, I would say, comes *after* Huismans, Raymond, Zabeth, Ferdinand, the Big Man, even Salim, and certainly Fanon and Said, though the subject takes place *before* the actual rise of any one of the single-minded anti-capitalist anti-development anti-rationalist histories theorized by the last two and promulgated by their supporters. It can only be said that Naipaul endorses Western domination if and only if some moral authority dictates that the two choices available to all of us is either that or gladly and nobly embracing rage, blind faith, indignation, and change at all cost, and becoming nothing more than instruments of struggle, before death comes. What is ironic

is that Postcolonialism observes some of the same phenomena that Naipaul observes, and begins as reaction to some of the same conditions to which Naipaul reacts—sectarian and ethnic violence during and after decolonization, for instance—but the former needs to repudiate the latter, to doubt the doubter, in order to regain some of the assurance lost in the struggle against ideology and cultural determinism[98].

The broader meaning that Naipaul manages to find is a function of his poetics as much as they are "rationalist". The meaning of forms, not just what the forms mean. Biswas's repeated self-defeats are as "true" to Trinidad as the post-colonial's lack of rationality is "false". He lives amid the fragments that would be Watcott's vase; he is a few of those fragments. The dysfunction of decolonized territories is as "true" as Salim's generalizations about the character of Africa are "false"; whether it should be articulated or kept silent, there is an Africa that can be signified as such, and that Africa is more apparent than the one all representations are supposed to allegorize. If there is some correspondence between the novel and the real world, then we must accept that as much as the form determined the reality thereafter, the reality heretofore determined the forms. What, then, decides whom to favor in the tension between Naipaul and Walcott? The critic who maintains an absolute view of determinacy—that either Naipaul's writing makes Trinidad, India, England and Africa the way they are, or they have made Naipaul the way he is—cannot make the alternative in turn, not without suffering our critical censure. The argument against Naipaul's comparative representations, while it may seem to depend on the agency of representations to determine reality against the subjects'

[98] That an authority can say something is culture to get people to adopt the something, which of course makes it culture. Reading Shakespeare, for instance, or reading stories that revise Western norms.

wishes, because it is deduced from this axiom, actually assumes both, insofar as it also assumes that the fullness of culture or people falsifies the lack characterized by Naipaul. Therefore, we are free to weigh determinacy according different models, and we are right to posit that certain tropes chosen by Naipaul were "already" chosen by the history in which he had to exist *and* were chosen from any number of other tropes by Naipaul to tell the history of that which he observed. If his patterns for society and for history and those used by less controversial writers belong to the same turn to structure, he cannot be less "accurate"; his grasp of postcolonial realities cannot be invalid except by some sort of evaluation which hides Naipaul as one of the possibilities produced by the same. The mere idea of divergent, contingent possibilities from the same does not invalidated the dialectic of cause and effect in human history; it just puts doubt in the superhuman intelligence running the show, and those sublime kernels that compose its final consciousness, used by critics and writers for their questionable human purposes.

Naipaul, too, recognizes the value of comedy, which is the literary mode for social cohesion. He understands that comedy inspires the sense of richness and benignity so important to constituting those vases Walcott likes to export. Moreover, during his writing career, Naipaul has learned that even the little comedy of *Biswas*, not so unlike the comedy of Jane Austen or Charles Dickens, require real sustenance, and is continually under threat not from malevolent forces but dissolution; it has also repeatedly survived, in some places and times even thrived. In *Biswas*, comedy is threatened by the new economy brought by new investment, under American influence; the new politics of Independence, driven by its promises; and old cultures holding too long to their insupportable ways. The later novels contain less comedy because Naipaul finds greater

threats, and because the condtions that support comedy are not always benign. So-called fragments do not cohere. And when they do, they are maintained by great promises or great force, or both, and both of which have consequences. These threats are why his narrators constantly have to figure their positions relative to others, and why many like Singh and Salim find that in the final acts they get expelled (like the comedy of Venice in Shakespeare's famous play). The town at the bend in the river has only begun to support comedies of error, which need stable social life to jokingly destabilized, before the soldiers and rebels wreck havoc again. History! Naipaul is himself "expelled" to make the Postcolonialist dramas end promisingly. This is not to say human comedies have ceased to play out—the novel's sense of human events should reassure us of that. Still, the return of comedy, and its many returns, cannot be made to support and evangelize faith in Comedy.

gather ‘round people wherever you are[99]

Visiting from Dhaka for the first time, the narrator of Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines,* ecountered a London quite different from the London he imagined. At the time, he did not admit he had imagined London from unreliable sourcs. Nor does he, recollecting the discrepencies, conclude that products of the imagination, indeed all representations, need to be verified whenever they claim to be true. Actually, the two Londons, and the many other Londons of the novel, Ila’s, Tridib’s, and Nick’s, “add” up to a truth superior to any London than can be empirically validated. There is a “London” which functions as a reality check, the one that defies the little Bengali kid’s expectations, and the one devastated by German bombing, yet there is also a “London” of imagination that refuses to be checked against reality. “London” has to accommodate both the narrator’s and Ila’s disparate and conflicting versions. In the phenomenological superposition, Ghosh has made an important decision. Effectively, a mechanism for contestation is subverted so that testimonies, especially those from the “imaginary”, cannot be rejected by a rigorous empirical evaluation that would conclude they are made-up, or deceptive. While ambivalence-multivalence may seem to be free “London”, it also “fixes” a less easily apprehended kernel. The kernel allows “London” to be repeatedly revised, without alerting us to the new rules of discourse, and the changes they are suppose to execute. The same trope is used by Rushdie for his Londons.

[99] Bob Dylan. Lyrics. “The Times They Are A-Changin’”. *The Times They Are A-Changin’*. CD. 1964.

Characters are structured like cities, too. The many historical beings in *In An Antique Land*, particularly those that are lost (by history) only to be found (by interventionists), are similarly structured superpositions. The narrators and lost-and-found things I have been scrutinizing serve the Postcolonial production of *ethos*. In *In An Antique Land*, never does there appear a character about whom it might be said "he is nothing, has not made anything of himself, so becomes nothing", although the modernity is criticized for doing just that. It seems the nature of such figures are never allowed to be tested, their value measured. They can be devalued, and recovered, changed by history, and restored to what they have always been. It seems we cannot test if propositions comprised of such kernels are true, since the kernels, the specular partitions that enable the differentiation necessary for language, by the regularity of superposition, can always be emptied, revised, and filled again. We cannot, it seems, truthful reconstruct London during the bombings of WWII, nor evaluate the migrant laborer Nabeel who disappeared into the turmoil of the Iran-Iraq war. The "things" that they are, are protected. They are what Slavoj Zizek calls sublime objects of ideology[100].

Yet it is not as if the truth function has disappeared: it is deployed to invalidate the idea that the history of a people is their development toward national self-consciousness (not true!) and once again to invalidate the idea that Africa requires Western intervention (also not true!). It is deployed against the Londons of xenophobes; for instance, when Rushdie deconstructs "ellowen deeowen" as a metropole that does not know its overseas history[101]. Indeed, the superposition kernels are used to invalidate

[100] *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.
[101] *The Satanic Verses*

erroneous representation, and define ethical problems. Nabeel is evidence against modernity. London demonstrates the inadequacy of unimaginative historical representation. But Postcolonial interventionists have managed to by-pass—to modulate away from—the de-authorizing function in their attempts to fix things.

In fact, the fundamental prompt for critical investigation—what could be amiss when something is not what it seems?—no longer seems important. Questions of veracity can sound out of place in the assembly where knowledge, history, and representation are produced. Questions of purpose seem less purposeful than the establishment of right purpose, as evident by Saleem's *ethos* in *Midnight's Children*, and the narrator's in *In An Antique Land*. Ought we not ask at the moment of intervention: What is the true value, if any, subtracted by modernity in the story of Nabeel? What makes cosmopolitan joy more or less valuable a principle of social organization than the modern *ethos* of live and let live? In Rushdie's global network mediated by story-telling, how can true relations be judged from false ones, and attempts to discover the true or establish the false be evaluated? Of those stories which we cannot somehow refuse or change, why not? Can we refuse, or does the network, the Story, seek dominion over all, like an Empire? Does not Walcott's vase distract from assessment and comparison of different cultural formations, like the mantra everyone's special serve as the final argument against comparing skills, labor, intelligence, work ethic, helpfulness? These are questions of cause and effect, questions of value, questions of motive; in conversations about post-colonial conditions, they may be asked rhetorically, as if already answered. Asking these kinds of questions can be interpreted as impertinent, even unethical, since the criticism that asks them challenges representation of new

responsibilities, conceives limits to what can populate the field of ethics, and therefore renders less effective the production of *ethos*.

In the ethical field where subjects have been gathered, the more fixed "things" are, because they already seem real or truthful or desirable and self-evident, the more authority has already been given to the discourse on those "things". The more authority given, the less opportunity for the kind of evaluation that can measure the real effects of having to answer to those "things", and reject some of the claims made about them or their behalf. What is fixed by ambivalence, by the many imagined Londons, by mimicry, by loss-and-found, is the kernel. How bad might you feel rejecting Ghosh's claims about modernity, because it feels like you have denied the existence of Nabeel; or how bad might you feel rejecting Rushdie's claim about everyone's story being part of everyone else's, because it feels like you have mutilated Salim's hope? *That* is fixity; *that* is pull in the ethical field. So after making much of ambivalence and indetermination, hybridity and uncertainty, power and authority, Postcolonialism also returns to the order of things that satisfy, that complete—to the ontical—to take advantage of the gravity afforded by the mode. A return is necessary to make intersubjective experiences and mysteries productive, such that "things" emerging therefrom might revolutionize cultural perspectives and the new language that they inspire actually be spoken. We might agree: to each his own fantasies. The fellaheens believe in ghosts; you may believe in the Good that says fellaheens should be listened to; and I may understand both phenomena but have other ideas about the community responsive to ghosts and unfinished business. I refuse the community, the ethical body, because I want to hear what the fellaheen, or his ghost, specifically have to say, and critically evaluate those specific propositions. But if the

most intelligent and capable of us move beyond the discourse of "beyond", then short are we of the goal of those who want to use experiences and mysteries to change the world. For an author to direct thought and action, experiences—or stories of experiences—must produce *specific* ideas, categories, representations, in a way that holds authority for longer than the experience and for more than just the people directly involved. The authority of ethics increases when the disappeared and ties-that-bind belong to the order of things.

There are discursive modes where words reference "things, and "things" are fixed by thinking they are so. A novelist can always fix spirits, in the same way that he can always prove the perspicacity of clairvoyants, possess prophets, and call forth witnesses. The critic, too, can fix by invoking unfathomable fullness to forbid certain kinds of evaluation[102]. He can say that the native's Africa is genuine, and anything of which the native disapproves is automatically wrongful representation of lack; this is the charge brought against Rushdie by Ghosh and Haidar Eid and a host of others. The critic's specters want to stop oppressive bulldozers; they never want undeserved entitlements. Hardly ever are they petty, stupid, lecherous, jealous, or bloodthirsty; or if they are they are redeemed by some sort of meta-struggle. In other words, they are not anything that might stimulate skeptical inquiry. Michel Foucault has already explained how "things" become fixed; it just so happens that the kernels to be filled in Postcolonialism are not extant individual unities, like medical pathology, but fragments of allegories and the

[102] especially ones that can value the kernels (think human being) at zero.

epistemes to which they belong[103], vases, to use Walcott's metaphor—different perhaps, and perhaps justifiable, but "things" nonetheless.

The ethical structures of Ghosh and of Rushdie is meant to allow preferred people to rewrite (fixed) values, and centers on the imperative that whatever is of concern to them *must* be revised. From economic development to unfinished history, something compels us to assemble in a field (a congress, to take the metaphor suggested by *Midnight's Children*) that not only includes everyone who seeks admittance but automatically elevates certain languages to privilege and authority. The field is ready-made for persuasion by mystics and other holders of mystery. Mystery differs from unknown in terms of access. The assembly takes certain "things" for granted. These mysterious things, like the central imperative that give purpose to the assembly, brook no contestation. Like the cultural fullness of peasant-life, or unbearable victimhood, they are non-negotiable. They are not to be treated like provisional concepts and commodities, subjected to the errors assignable to those things; a cry for help from a victim is not supposed to be analyzed as rhetoric manufactured to promote undisclosed changes: you are supposed to just help. And, like the documents with which Ghosh builds the disappeared slave, or Rushdie's spittoon in *Midnight's Children*, they are never destroyed. Because the modulations used by Ghosh and Rushdie can prevent direct access to, and use of, those critical ideas and things, approaching them critically requires equal methodological and rhetorical finesse[104].

[103] *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. See especially the chapter "The Formation of Objects".
[104] And equal irreverence.

Being caught in the dialectic of revision by story (Rushdie) or of revision by history (Ghosh) is analogous to something described by Bruno Latour[105]. In "Matters of Concern", Latour attempts to control controversy by pacifying debate. The article begins by invoking the violent, dissociating powers of war, and compares the ruthless propagation of controversies to it; those who benefit by the controversy, Latour points out, have in fact used war as a metaphor. Global warming serves as the main case example of relevant and trifling dispute, and legitimate cause for action. Conservatives interject doubt about both the reality of, and value of responses to, global warming. Science cannot be sure, they say, besides, how do we know the extent of harm, and necessary response? Latour calls upon the etymology of "thing" in some European languages. Citing Heidegger's dichotomy between object (*gegenstand*) and thing (*ding*)[106], Latour argues that, in contradistinction to what we tend to think, "thing" (*ding*) is actually the verdict of an assembly that meets and judges. Thing is not always object, object not always thing. An object like the space shuttle can become a matter of concern, a thing, when it blows up[107]. Latour criticizes Heidegger for dismissing as object that which is not beautiful or sophisticated enough to be part of any discussion. At the same time, he criticizes those who make a mess of "things", like those who foment doubt about global warming and how we should respond to the phenomenon, when in fact, we are dealing with facts and objects. "Matters of facts are only very partial and, I [Latour] would argue, very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern and only a

[105] "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern". *Critical Inquiry.* 30.2 (2004): 225 – 248. <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/421123> Hence referenced as "Matters of Concern". See also "The Promises of constructivism". *Chasing Technology : Matrix of Materiality***.** Ed. Don Ihde. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana U. P., 2003. 27 – 46

subset of what could also be called *states of affairs*"[108]. So Latour keeps the distinction between thing and object but redefines them as matter of facts and matters of concern[109] to emphasize relationship and movement back and forth: where global warming is located depends, of course, on what one—by which I mean Latour—is trying to do. The assemblage of thing (*ding*) is comprised of more inclusive functions than that which determines facts, for they include myths, beliefs, ghosts, those "things" that are to be found in antique lands and alternative modes. The article continues Latour's expansion of some of the thoughts he forwarded in *We Have Never Been Modern*, in which he proposed that objects of science, like a microbe, be considered as what is here called *das ding*: he is now orchestrating the creation of both object and thing.

For Latour, global warming is a fact that demands realist discussion. What concerns him is that certain governments will use uncertainty to withdraw from assembly, or make its decision, its "thing" non-binding: the government which did not sign the Kyoto accord, for instance. I have no quarrel with Latour about the fact of global warming. For me, Latour's attempt to control discussion by calling to assembly that which is supposed to walk away with new "things" in mind may be used to clarify the nature of "things" that populate the ethical field, the power of the thing that calls us to assemble, and the purpose of the project to produce *ethos*. His assembly and the production of *ethos* are analogous. The structure of his constructionism, which he renders transparent because he is giving instructions, reveals why it is necessary when

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[106] Ibid. 232 – 233
[107] Ibid. 235
[108] Ibid. 232 emphasis in original
[109] for Heidegger, the difference is between the ontical and the ontological. *Being and Time*.

criticizing the production of ethos to employ cascade of conditional tests. Latour himself gives us the opening, a gap. The gap is not what pits deconstructionist against constructionist, for like history and historiography in Ghosh, they work hand in hand, but what distinguishes Latour's ethics from actions like those of the U.S. government; in other words, between the assemblies that do what he thinks is right, and that which do not. The gap is the bifurcation of methodology that allows him latitude to decide whether something is a matter of fact or matter of concern. The *deus-ex-machina* is the mysticism of the critic who seems to contradict himself but is always right; it belays the critique of contradiction by promising that there will descend a force, an intervention, which will finally resolve and redeem what seems erroneous. It could be the good. Though I contradict, I contradict for the good of mankind. Though I make things up, I make them up for the good of mankind. The gap emerges in questions of who gets to call assembly when and about what, who gets to start *and stall* those cycles Latour diagrams in the article. Across the gap are the bad guys and bad decisions. Where you would place me depends on your concerns.

Neither do I quarrel with Latour over the dichotomy between things and objects, or concerns and facts. In fact, the contrast between the two concepts of things, and contrast between their main discourses, the scientific and the rhetorical, I have used repeatedly to show how *aporia* and the hypothesis of an unknown do not have to entail a host of "knowns"; how hybridity does not necessitate another (not so morally ambivalent) story starring the hybrid, and of course us. In other words, perhaps I introduce

controversies that might also be considered "artificial" [110], or, since Latour also calls his method "realist", that are "unrealistic". That may be, but here it is only the binding powers of the assembly and the broad authority to dictate "things" *after assembly*, when argument has been closed, that trouble me. I am troubled by the analogous power and authority of the "things" that are supposed to be taken away from the field of othering (e.g. Ghosh's antique land) and intersubjective experience (e.g. Rushdie's encounters).

The ethical assemblies do not debate and then caucus votes of confidence (which can keep things the way they are). Nor do they dissolve when the *ethos* and values of *sovereign* participants diverge. There is no genuine argument from a capable representative of Modernity in the antique land comparing systems, and offering peasant a chance to convert, or suffer competition (which is where I intervene). In fact, there does not seem to be conventions for arguing at all, and everyone seems to be taken at their word: if X is important to them, then X is already a thing. Certainly all the radical groups of current Indian politics appear mainly as perpetrators of violence, because if they speak and speak well they may transform the debate (this is Salim's fear of Shiva). In these assemblies there is no veto power, nor constitutional limitation of assembly authority. No quorum. No checks and balance on even the most well-intended. No distrust—at least no distrust that the historical and ethical right to signify is not good for us. No purse-string to leverage. There are no instances where assembly is unable to take action because the "thing" is nothing (as happened to Saleem's congress in *Midnight's Children*). These assemblies are instruments of decisions already made.

[110] Ibid. 226

More troublesome is the general tendency of the assembly, which always changes "things" and always let new or recovered agents change them. There is never one that meets to reaffirm the *status quo*. There is a pattern to *the use of* assembly-thing, and that pattern correlates to decisions already made—Latour's. The matter of global warming: a closed argument[111]. It would have been interesting to hear if the *value* of damage to littorals done by rising oceanic water levels (i.e. whose real estate gets flooded?) is fact and unarguable, or concern and negotiable. Perhaps the land of the fellaheens would become drier, and their problems, increasingly dire, become "fact". Once the assembly has met, and a vote (always for change) has been cast, Latour is very careful to stop immediate contestation of the (new) things, which he accuses those across the gap of doing every time there is some sort of agreement on global warming. He condemns out-of-assembly redefinition of things and of relationships *to* things, which are spurious or malevolent controversies—artificial and unreal—since they stymie the social power of assembly in the first place, and indirectly establish competing assemblies with powers of their own. Other mystics (bad ones) oppose the power of adding to and transforming our sense of reality.

There is the same pattern of ritualistic assembly, renegotiation, and dissemination, involving the sublime figures allegorized by Postcolonial literature and criticism. There is the same expectation of immanent meaning in the Postcolonial assembly of "things". While it may seem like we gather to discuss problems with modernizing the fellaheens (*In An Antique Land*, peasants in Chakrabarty's Subaltern Studies), or of immigration to London from the commonwealth (*The Satanic Verses*, *The Shadow Lines*), the

[111] "Matters of Concern". 227

assemblies, the reading of the texts, the address by the discourse, are really there to produce other "things", other plots, other stories, other kernels, and newly reconstructed reality, which then populate the ethical field. The stories are set in post-colonial places; the conflicts cause by post-colonial conditions. The point of producing the intersubjective experience is to establish new subject-object complexes[112], one that, for example, "prove" Modernity or nationalism utterly lacking. The ethical subject feels there is something missing from modernity that should not be. Without those "things" there would be no ethical problem. The master-author decides which method, concern to fact or fact to concern, *das ding* to *das sache* or *das sache* to *das ding*, which modulation, which othering, is in play, all in an effort to reach the desired state-of-affairs. It is alright to deconstruct the modern idea of labor as something that has to discount the value of Nabeel, but it is unconscionably irresponsible to retrain the critical apparatus and seek to negotiate "Nabeel". Nabeel matters (*sache*)—he must. Call assembly! *In An Antique Land* speaks. *Midnight's Children* constructs.

The assembly-thing *(das ding*) is the citable idea from the article accepted at the end of fieldwork[113], the real consequence desired of *praxis*. Assembly is storied unfinished interconnections produced by the intersubjective experience. The question for criticism is: does the disappeared, or whatever brings it to mind, make itself available for the kind of scrutiny that can judge it to be nothing, or altogether and completely alien; or does the discourse orchestrate the whole concert of facts and concerns to make questioning difficult? Does it orchestrate some facts and some concerns to be *the* set of

[112] As opposed to the point of conceiving intersubjectivity, Husserl's point, which had been to explain how we can conceive of objects and interact with each other given our phenomenological solipsism.

facts and concerns? If you are a member of the opposition, a Postcolonial assembly can seem to contrive controversy and indetermination just as conservatives seem to, to Latour. Perhaps rather than things that are discussed in assembly, and things that come out of assembly, Latour's *das ding* ought to invoke that which assembles: *das Ding*. Peering into the heart of power might just let us see things for what they really are.

Each of the steps above may be confronted with complications, some of which the authors do not recognize, even the ones they cause, and like slices that compose a CT scan image, each complication betrays more of the *Ding*. Unfortunately, the complications are themselves difficult to raise because *das Ding* does not easily betray itself. What we have, what the interventionist makes available, are only prefabricated matters of fact and matters of concern. Postcolonial discourse says that what we can rightfully access is the fact that something can be neither one thing nor another, i.e. hybridity, and what we have to be concerned with is the allegory that in criticism sounds like an explanation of the production of cultural difference. Post-colonial literature provides the "material". Some of the literature provides the right assemblies, the right modulation from deconstruction to construction, the right promises for a wider readership to take the stories as the interest of our time; some do not. The "right" things include the sublime objects of the ideology of loss-and-redemption, discovered by the anthropologist-novelist, which are collected into our archives (as facts) and then elevated to our field of ethics (as concerns); the unfinished business from overseas which can reconfigure historical facts into new business projected, of course, as historical concerns; metaphors like Walcott's vase which turns the cultural problems concerning specific

[113] or the novel at the end of dissertation research.

locations into a "fact" of culture; and allegories of differentiation, production, and conflict, that imply a (final) consummation, a synthesis, to be wished. When such things are tested, discursively, philosophically, empirically, there is a sort of function (*das Ding*) that saves them from being disprovened, deliberately reduced to one of many other "things" (e.g. speculation, proposition, propaganda), or rejected as surreptitious instruments of unwanted transformations: from being nothing. Actually, there is something that says: no! these things cannot be tested by any method of yours.

Chutney from *Midnight's Children* is one of these wonderful "things". Sometimes it is regular chutney. Humans physically make it. Saleem runs a factory that manufactures the various kinds he sells. It is ingested. But it is also not like regular chutney. It matters. It is meaningful. It carries the dictatorial powers of the maker. It carries emotions. And it carries history—preserves history as more than simply books on a shelf. Rushdie's character Saleem claims it to be the truth of history, and Rushdie, in the copyright page of the American 1st edition of his latest novel, *The Enchantress of Florence*, claims the same accomplishment for his fiction[114]. As symbolic representation, Saleem's chutney is no different from the songs of Jamila singer, Saleem's sister, which become the jingoist expressions of nationalist Pakistan; it can be analyzed as such. But the metaphor of chutney is supposed to transfer the properties of the vehicle to the tenor: history is made and consumed like chutney. Chutney-history is not verifiable explanations for recorded happenings in time, but delivers the truth as a "flavor". The

[114] "This is a work of fiction.
A few liberties have been taken
with the historical records in the interests
of the truth."

mere availability of chutney should be enough: it is made for our time, and there should be none of the fact-checking and certainly none of the scrutiny that makes history, the kind of history suggested by Rushdie, the History of connectedness (and responsibility), doubtful again. Chutney-history is allegorical, insofar as very specific experiences of history (usually its victims) revise historical consciousness and make new history.

In very subtle ways, chutney-history (and allegorical history) exerts authority against which we, in modernity, would rebel and promote ideas, like allegory or personal relationship to the Story, which we would doubt. For example, in Rushdie's universe there are always already though not quite fulfilled connections mediated by Story through which everyone bears responsibility to everyone else. The connections are fulfilled when responsibility is met. Doubt about the reality of this universe or competing interest means less effective production of *ethos*. Claims of connectedness, moreover claims made through connections, like unfinished business between East and West, or the metropole and its other, could be analyzed, scrutinized, and dismissed as untrue—or unwanted. So concerns like the reasonable limit on social claims that would have been brought up in the assembly of chutney-history are by-passed as (the new) history is turned into a matter-of-fact thing (chutney), yet, or so that, acceptance of the fact magically changes prevailing concerns. Certainly chutney-history cannot suffer literary analysis, because there are branches of study developed to subvert centralized cultural authority, read high-minded concerns as texts (objects), and analyze deeply felt truths as structures of effects. If we value all that we have built from doubt, the many falvors of modernity, to mimic the metaphor, then here is cause enough to scrutinize. But if not,

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The Enchantress of Florence. New York: Random House. 2008. copyright page.

then it should be remembered that, in the novel, magic chutney is made unilaterally and never taken voluntarily.

The thing is chutney-history. The missing thing (*das Ding*) is also chutney-history. The thing is the mystery tightly held by the other, the chutney-maker, like the meaning of cremation to those who use the method to dispose the dead and ritual to lament death. Of course, all these "things" are figures of speech. In *In An Antique Land*, the dialogue on "cremation" creates a new matrix of relations based on "things" that are neither Hindu nor Muslim, yet seemingly accommodate both. It is an allegory for the kind of open, non-competitive cultural exchange for which *In An Antique Land* advocates—that which it witnesses in both its encounter with other subjects in the antique land, and its work on the history of the slave. The *Ding* that had expressed itself most vividly against the dangers of colonial rule expresses itself in post-colonial conditions, too: it redeems the loss of meaning, loss of value, loss of assembly powers, loss of things, loss of Nabeel, loss of Tridib, lost history, lost business (Rushdie's kind), lost concern. Truth with capital "t" is lost, if there is no way to manage the function of the Real—managed for the production of *ethos*. The *Ding* says no! there is not loss but history and the greatest gain! And since recovery is a public process, all these "things" all have to be there, *out there*, for us to find, and want to find.

If the changes which Latour codifies as *das sache* to *das ding* and *das ding* to *das sache* were the stuff of history, then *das Ding* would be that which assures him he can harness an historical process for the good. The *machina* would be whatever structure he uses to justify this exceptional power over change, and the *deus* would be that which assures the addressees that the promise of change is not simply the mediation of Latour: it

erases the *machina*. We have to infer the machine in the example above, but it may be thought of as the grave threat of global warming. By analogy, *das Ding* assures the Postcolonialist that there is good served by deconstructing present "things", such as the idea of nation or the philosophy of development, and using colonial and post-colonial history to construct new "things", such as cultural networks and wealth redistribution. Yet this is also cause for concern, for there is the possibility that *das Ding* leads Postcolonialism to synthesize lessons for the present from the wrong starting points, or to achieve very different ends. Hybridity belongs to the plots of post-colonial peoples, one of which leads to the partition of India and Pakistan; another to the petroleum economy of Trinidad; yet another to the allegory of cultural production formulated by Homi Bhabha. The plot of hybridity in modernity may be none of the above. What if the achievement of modernity is the sublimation of desire for *das Ding* to the point where fragmentation requires neither a synthetic whole (that would be sublation or *aufhebung*) nor an always already network connection; and where differences are tolerable? What if the happiness moderns pursue, the trajectories of their ethics, lead to a realism of a great many concerns, and not allegories of wholeness or plenitude? Allegories remain but as literary objects.

Postcolonialism is a way to deal with modernity. It selects from colonialism, resistance, and post-colonial engagements with modernity for its allegories; historically, it is one of those engagements. But Postcolonialism, with its non-negotiable values, its vocabulary, its methods, its ethical demands, is not the only way. Part of the Postcolonial engagement has to be with other perspectives, some of which demand, in reponse to intervention, what are competing concerns and where does responsibility end? On

occasions, just as Latour laments about his own criticism, an intervention will find there is little desire for the promises he offers. The modernity that can formulate and value a theory of evolution by natural selection will tend to select against any excessive demand made in the name of a creator. The theory makes other explanations of the world based on how life developed, certainly other fiction, more easily dismissable, and undermines self-worth when self-worth depends on centrality in creationism. Likewise are the "things" of Postcolonialism, its liberatory signs, skeptically tested by a modernity that can hold competing demands in tension without rushing headlong towards synthesis. The modern ethical field is depopulated of those "spirits" that would serve as instruments for the production of *ethos*.

For the realist V.S. Naipaul, there are only effective and impotent ways of doing things, measurable as historical consequence. History is survival, and if one is lucky one can be in positions to ensure survival, even success; history is not sublime, not teleological, not redemptive. In fact, the *Ding* pursued as Independence does not always create antithesis, but lead to harsh realities that cannot (yet) support anything that may pass for synthesis. History in some post-colonial locations was the consequence of violently binding specific ties among different peoples in misdirected efforts to fulfill that promise which decolonization and nationhood had yet to fulfill. Attempting to synthesize a meaningful model of culture or politics from post-colonial realities in post-colonial places ironically perpetuate the problematic conditions. This is the history of the very things Postcolonialism is trying to export, and Naipaul's representation allows us to argue that post-colonial desires evident in allegories of differentiation/integration—for instance the resolution to the problem of neither one thing nor another—exceed our modern need,

responsibility, and better judgment. Desire for das Ding manifested as the ambition for social transformation must be limited—sublimated, to use the psychoanalytical term. There is no good reason to reproduce conditions and crises that call for the promise of Independence (*das Ding*): we can still understand hybridity as an historical phenomenon, even feel responsible to the hybrid, to the extent that humans have very basic political rights, without suffering the crises that facilitates intervention and transformation.

The danger Naipaul presents is that his representations remain for us to rely on. We can go to those postcolonial places, to Central Africa or Trinidad, and witness the lack/fullness he witnessed before we see any ghosts, and refuse to be caught up in those assemblies, those arguments over "things" like the meaning of an African mask or the accuracy of "bush", that would further political and historical causes we might otherwise protest and refuse. We witness the effects of the promises of revolution and Independence, and conclude that the fervor "to be borne again", with which post-colonial literature still deals, is cause enough for not submitting to the authority of re-assembly. In fact, a post-colonial can do this—has done this. Connectedness causes problems because it establishes a dependency for ideas of self to be continually reflected in and by that world over which it claims dominion as "truth": in *Biswas*, the problems of the feudal Tutsi and the modern Biswas are comical; in *A Bend in the River*, even the idea of Comedy cannot suppress the mortal danger they pose. As for some of us, we better understand the desire for *deus-ex-machina* in us, in other people, and in that which we might other, such that another user of words cannot easily access it: we can double, be doubled, without becoming that which either Rushdie or Naipaul, Bhabha or Chakrabarty, Derrida or Latour describes, a feat that should be familiar as the reading of

literature. If Postcolonial interventions have exceptional powers of translation, as though language can achieve this great thing (*das Ding*), this can be modernity's exception, and what we would lose is fanatical devotion to social causes and uncritical dependency on their handlers who use the literary modes to bestow meaning, value, and truth.

The conservative criticism I propose considers every intervention an occasion for contemplative study. It does not preclude action; only, action is a capacity purposefully different from criticism. An intervention is a proposal to change, but whether it can argue for and deliver what it promises is to be determined. Criticism of it is conservative only in the sense that, in deciding what to do, the possibility of reproducing the present is not automatically discounted by the mere fact that there is felt a need for "intervention". The slogan "change" does not blind critical assessment. At the moment of address, when it seems the other is speaking, the addressee—namely us—does not become the good subject of those who have already decided the moral value of what must be done. We are entirely capable of deciding on the promises of the new, as interventionists are capable of deciding on the inadequacies of the old. If the old is such and such, the new is no exception. In general, criticism recognizes the gap between signification and reality[115]; that the "theory" of civilization and the effects of "civilization" are in dialectic, and the more the discourse tries to erase the effects, the stronger the effect of revolt and retaliation. Conservative criticism specifically does not allow the latest intervention, whether the interventionist instrument is literature, literary criticism, or critical theory, to erase the dialectic from which it comes and from which it makes its case. To do this, it

deconstructs the interventionist's representation of the *status quo*; tests the new categories being introduced to the field of ethics; assesses the full range of possible effects should the discourse, not just the signs, gain authority; and should it fail to deliver, hold the interventionist accountable.

So the measure of Latour's constructionism is not just which speakers in which assembly gets to speak, but also the difference between what comes before and what comes after should *We Have Never Been Modern* turns into a—maybe the—phenomenon. In other words, what happens with the proliferation of quasi-objects or assemblies? Likewise the measure of Homi Bhahba's theory of culture is not just the allegory of cultural differentiation, with its teleological cause of agency, but the full range of consequences of institutionalizing obligations to figures like "the migrant". Conservatism does this before the proposition of change (especially if the rhetoric positions change as already happened) has had a chance to change; these rigorous requirements are based on calculated skepticism that, too, is part of lived-experience, perhaps the experience of previous changes, for which I cannot provide absolutely definitive reason. We are not necessarily cynical: the writers we question can have the best of intentions, and still—or for that very reason—produce realities they fail to realize, and fail to realize that we simply disagree. I can only say that what is conservative in the analysis of Postcolonial ethics, for example, the concept of tolerance, may also be rather radical, under other, less desirable circumstances, and perhaps something to fight for. The capacity to hold incommensurable, antagonistic, even alien phenomena in tension,

[115] And why it is not phenomenology.

without anxiety about securing the End and the Whole, and the prerogative to decide for oneself, are features of modernity I hope you would not want to change, either.

Contesting allegories of "the historical and ethical right to signify" yield the same kind of knowledge that deconstructing colonial discourse does, more or less: "more" because we learn the difference between indetermination as an historical phenomenon, and indetermination as a figure, an idea, a clarion call, a virtue of ethics, in the (his)story that would have us play our parts; and because we also learn *how* and *why* the difference is erased (in the Derridean sense) to produce *ethos*; "less" because we do not "know", as an interventionist would have us know, the "*agony* that makes them [the histories of slavery and colonialism] exemplary texts for our moment"[116]. "Less", too, because we can decide, knowing how *ethos* is produced, that the fetish for shoes can be left to the fetishist but the fetish for the new—new values, new societies, etc—must be watched carefully because it aims to incorporate us in its economy and its society. Fortunately, this particular deconstruction does not have to be violent because that which is being deconstructed does not have the kind of power, except in certain institutions, to use to stay in power. We learn the injunction against conceiving a third category as a third category is as deft a double-voiced strategy as Mark Antony's funeral elegy; we enjoy the expertise of announcing a difference to be inverted later, then erased, as much as we enjoy Rushdie travestizing Islam's Satanic Verses. We learn why there is meagre mention of the "oversea" of the oversea-history that is written, no satanic verses of Postcolonial criticism (which Rushdie, to be consistent, should also want us to learn); no scrutiny of the authority to develop morals in the antique land, which are developed for

the developed cultures; no competing *ethos* that says Chakrabarty is free to give away his house to squatters, but he is not to give away yours or mine, or programmatically configure the kernels of ethics into which he redistributes wealth essentially as owner.

I may disagree but have no quarrel with what these writers think is Good. I only intervene at the moment an implicit claim is made that this phenomenon or that allegorically signifed Good is witnessed as real, immanent, or metaphysical, because the testimonials serve projects that are quite ambitious. Moral-ethical projects usually are. Therefore, the purpose of contestation is not necessarily to produce final statements, but to provide a way of deciding where alternative statements have been made; as such it serves an *ethos* wary of neighbors or strangers who think you or I should live in a certain way, and supports the kind of liberal, secular, free-market politics that frustrate both critics who are trying to establish new values based on the promises of change and those who do so based on nostalgia for special historical periods. It is arguably useful to now and again ask the question "how shall I live", but asking should not mean ceding our capacity to make decisions for what has been promised from the pursuit of hybridity and the beyond; nor giving up the reasons why the answer might just be "I shall live as I am living now, and improve where I can". In any given moment, Bhabha makes his decisions, I mine, and you yours, and our sometimes competing and sometimes cooperating self-interests may be enough to prevent the formation of mobs that exercise the will of charismatic leaders.

And *das Ding*? It is the promise of theory—theory that regulates explanation rather than explain; theory that would "explain" observations by introducing that which

[116] "Freedom's Basis". 57 emphasis mine.

cannot be explained (like ghosts and spirits, and God). It is the promise of ethics—ethics that is fearful of those who may decide differently, of other *ethos*. The promise of the New—new that is old news. The promise from "beyond"—beyond-for-here. The promise of Independence. The promise of Postcolonialism. The Great Superunknown that uses realms like "anonymity of history"[117] or "beyond" to care for what some some people feel is wrongly insignificant, so that their signs may be deployed as such. It has had other names; it still does. But in skeptical criticism It is *das Ding*, and easy to see if one can tolerate disagreeing with witnesses. Borders are bad, says the hybrid, and the hybrid is beyond the vices of production. Bhabha claims "the postcolonial translation of modernity does not… revalue the contents of a cultural tradition or transpose values across cultures through the transcendent spirit of a 'common humanity'"[118], but it does. Or it must do more than conventional translation, at least. The missing word—the word I elided to mislead—is "simply". Bhabha is right: the translation of modernity is not done simply, in particular because the "spirit of common humanity" has to be saved from the problematics of history and representation. It has to be evoked, lowered into history, but then erased (again). The *Ding* makes it all possible; it remains if the histories can "speak of the *reality* of survival and negotiation that constitutes the lived moment of resistance, its sorrow and its salvation"[119]. The *Ding* is there to assure that such a reality, with the conflict already plotted, allegorically extrapolated from conflicts against Colonialism and neocolonialism, is real; real, too, is the humanity written in terms of responsibility to incommensurable qualities of the other, like the kernel "dignity", already written into

[117] which saves Nabeel from annihilation in *In An Antique Land.*
[118] "Freedom's Basis". 49

documents that "prove" its existence[120]. The *Ding* archives Ghosh's disappeared, not MS H.6 but the kernel of disappeared historical being, so that it may be lost and found, and protects the meaning of the anthropological-historical work against abject nothingness. The *Ding* projects sorrow and salvation so that they are not sentiments of the observer but "things" (*das sachen*) of the historical moment and of History. The *Ding* is erased because it cannot remain for you, or me, or someone like Naipaul, to double, to "indetermine", to "inadequate", to slip, to slide, to contest. So Bhabha is also right because the translation does not take us from antagonist languages to a common one but to a language that conceives "common humanity" allegorically, to reassign as-yet-un-common values. This is the worth of disappeared Nabeel, reappeared slave, of cracking chutney-maker and diabolical versifier. Postcolonial criticism can say it does not "revalue the contents of a cultural tradition", but this is precisely the case when the new content it wants to create replaces the old. The *Ding* promises to be there, as confidently as the fight against Colonization promised brave new worlds: it is the History with which began the method that aims to cajole us to make history. The *Ding* enables the author to erase his presence to make his words the Words of the Author. It is dangerous because its users aim to involve us in narratives that are against our better judgment.

I do think Postcolonial writers, because they do care so much, bring certain phenomena to attention, and contribute to our store of knowledge. Where Postcolonialism is transformative, it can also be informative. We should listen to witnesses, but listen wisely and critically. We posit the sun will rise again in a fortnight,

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[119] Ibid. emphasis mine.
[120] like the United Nations's *Declaration of Human Rights.*

and winds may blow from the West, but we still check the weather, and continue to improve the accuracy of our forecast models. The supposition entails no more than expectation of continued existence, and of course, simply that the sun will rise. So, too, in a demystified world may we suppose ethics as something to be modeled and tested. Promisers are required to constantly and continually prove themselves, and we reserve the right to opt out, to enjoy literature as literature. Unfinished business *is* a matter of concern. History is of concern, but not in the way that it would be if we magically ate it up. Let us take Rushdie, Ghosh, and Walcott seriously. Bhabha, too. And Naipaul. Now, let us also ask if we can evaluate if each ghost, each specter, these verses and their authors, are what they have been claimed to be? Calling for the aid of protecting spirits *are* ways of protesting an unfavorable balance of power, and the anxiety over spirit suggests a point of conflict in modernity, or with it; now, can we evaluate the reason for protest, the kind of claims being made, and the consequences if we lose that aspect of modernity which differentiates between protest and prayer[121]? Ought a history that is based on recognizing repetition not refuse the thought that it might just be repeating things? And when a storyteller claims to tell the truth, by what methods are we to determine that the text addressing us is not just one of many but one unlike any other, that he is not like us but always better? What truly binds us to this assembly, and that assembly, but not the one over there? Are we really dissatisfied with our respective things that we need to go seeking others to complete the story? What can unbind us?

[121] A difference, to be sure, that proponents of the prayerful and reforms of modernity had to recognize in order to bound modernity's authority and bound it to "others".

These questions do not demand the institutionalization of *one* body of knowledge, one judgment, one assembly, such that, at intervention, everything achieved heretofore is abandoned; rather, they belong to different functions that more often than not *check* how symbols are used and knowledge produced. It assumes that though we may not think, know, live as another thinks, knows, and lives, the best and worst of us are just as capable as the next. Let us not be transformed. Let us keep what we have learned, and improve ourselves. As a matter of fact, we should have access to that other part which is *not* everyone else's, our respective "thing" that merits as much protection as that of the fellaheens, or the humanity of cloven-hoofed Saladin. We should know our mysteries as they know theirs, and be able to use it just as well, perhaps better. It is by this logic that we can take power back, which in the discourse with which we are dealing, lies in the hands of the mystics. What do we witness when we disagree with Homi Bhabha's tax plan, a plan justified by those figures standing in the field of ethics that had migrated from allegories of the historical and ethical right to signify? Criticism may interfere with the ethical project of producing liberatory signs. Yet it remains for the better since it evidences our own modern capacity to decide for ourselves, irrespective of whether others believe our decisions fulfill their desire for a moral universe.

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