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Garbage Picking with Salman Rushdie

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Garbage Picking with Salman Rushdie

(TITLE)

BY

Tara Hubschmitt

THESIS

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie's voice is one of the most powerful in postmodern and post-colonial literature. He stands as a primary spokesman for the displaced personality of those caught between the conflicting influences of traditional cultures and the contemporary west. In *Midnight's Children* (1980), *The Satanic Verses* (1989), and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), Rushdie appears to reveal himself as a proponent of a garbage aesthetic. The garbage metaphor, as explained by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in *Unthinking Eurocentricism* (1994), develops from Brazilian filmmakers of the 1960s and is generally used to highlight the omnipresent influence of western culture upon postcolonial society. Rushdie's works focus on modern Indian characters who are faced with the necessity of confronting the powerful influence of western culture.

Set against the immense landscape of postcolonial India, Rushdie's fictional characters are constantly confronted with the necessity of forging a coherent identity in the face of change and the powerful influence of western culture. Rushdie's novels demonstrate the necessity for rescuing what is valuable in western influence so as to invest it with native vitality and create something new and strong. Through *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the reader can trace a clear progression in both the development of the garbage metaphor and strategies for survival within postcolonial conditions. The garbage metaphor involves recognition of

the relationship between western and native cultures, and having an aggressive attitude towards recycling all available useful resources, forming powerful new combinations of first-world and third-world cultures.

The cultural components available to societies engaged in postcolonial redefinition may be intangible as well as tangible. In his novels, Rushdie seems to adopt and manipulate western models of philosophical, psychological, spiritual, and scientific thought, such as those created by Georg Hegel, Carl Jung, Soren Kierkegaard, and Charles Darwin. A key to understanding the garbage metaphor in Rushdie's work is recognizing how these western models of thought illustrate the conflict faced by Rushdie's Indian protagonists.

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Introduction

...the garbage metaphor proposed an aggressive sense of marginality, of surviving within scarcity, of being condemned to recycle the materials of dominant culture. A garbage style was seen as appropriate to a Third World country picking through the leavings of an international system dominated by First World capitalism.

- Shohat and Stam

Salman Rushdie's voice is one of the most powerful in postmodern and postcolonial literatures. He stands as a primary spokesman for the displaced personality of those caught between the conflicting influences of traditional cultures and the contemporary west. In *Midnight's Children* (1980), *The Satanic Verses* (1989), and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), Rushdie appears to reveal himself as a proponent of a garbage aesthetic. The garbage metaphor, as explained by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in *Unthinking Eurocentricism* (1994), develops from Brazilian filmmakers of the 1960s and is generally used to highlight the omnipresent influence of western culture upon postcolonial society. Rushdie's works focus on modern Indian characters who are faced with the necessity of confronting the powerful influence of western culture.

As colonial powers have withdrawn from third-world countries, former subject peoples have been (and continue to be) forced to sift through the cultural influences of dominant societies and select elements to incorporate into their postcolonial culture. The resulting eclectic constructs embody the

essence of the garbage metaphor. In this context, the word “garbage” does not operate pejoratively. The metaphor is ironic: the remnants of even an occupying power’s culture are not always without value. Rushdie’s novels demonstrate the necessity for rescuing what is valuable in western influence so as to invest it with native vitality and create something new and strong. Such productive sifting requires extraordinary intelligence. Successful garbage-picking depends upon perceptions keen enough to recognize that which has lasting value. The garbage-picking metaphor becomes a convenient rubric by which Rushdie’s works can be examined.

The idea that postcolonial subjects must come to grips with western cultural influence is developed in Rushdie’s works. The reader recognizes the impossibility of returning to the comfort of a precolonized state. Once experienced, the influence of the colonizing country cannot be removed. The cultural components available to societies engaged in postcolonial redefinition may be intangible as well as tangible. In his novels, Rushdie seems to adopt and manipulate western models of philosophical, psychological, spiritual, and scientific thought, such as those created by Georg Hegel, Carl Jung, Soren Kierkegaard, and Charles Darwin. Clearly, the traditional approach to analyzing Rushdie’s work is through the application of postcolonial criticism. Another key to understanding Rushdie’s work, however, is to recognize how these western models of thought illustrate the conflict faced by Rushdie’s Indian protagonists.

The experience of searching for the secure past of precolonized India

through the remains of a colonized nation highlights two sides of the same coin: facing western influence and suffering the loss of ties to traditional culture. Rushdie's characters all face the inevitable challenge of forging an acceptable identity in the wake of devastating loss. Rushdie appears to believe in the necessity of adapting to the dominant cultural influence in order to survive. Rushdie's main characters either thrive or are crushed, depending upon the degree to which they successfully assimilate western culture into their own lives.

Chapter 1 - *Midnight's Children*: Identification and Acceptance of Garbage Heritage

Midnight's Children (1980) is a ground-breaking work in which Salman Rushdie introduces all the major themes that comprise the garbage-picking metaphor. A western reader brings a number of expectations to a contemporary novel set in India. One expects to find an Indian author dealing directly with political turmoil, class issues, and a conflict of ideas associated with the independence of India. However, in the case of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, these expectations are not realized as anticipated. Rather, Rushdie opts for a very different approach that serves his novel well. Instead of dealing with issues on a national level, Rushdie develops characters who, in their daily lives, embody the conflicting forces at work before, during, and after the birth of postcolonial India.

Rushdie presents *Midnight's Children* as the narrated autobiography of a highly imaginative pickle merchant from Bombay. The first paragraph of *Midnight's Children* serves as an introduction to both the main character, Saleem Sinai, and a major theme of the novel:

I was born in the city of Bombay...on August 15th,
1947...On the stroke of midnight...at the precise instant of
India's arrival at independence...thanks to the occult
tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been

mysteriously handcuffed to history, by destinies
indissolubly chained to those of my country. (*MC* 3)

From the beginning of the book, Saleem establishes that a link exists between his fate and that of the new, independent India.

For Saleem, having his destiny linked to India has its drastic consequences, however, and Rushdie presents Saleem as a character profoundly troubled by his fragmented persona:

Please believe that I am falling apart.

I am not speaking metaphorically; nor is this the opening gambit of some melodramatic, riddling, grubby appeal for pity. I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug -- that my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons, has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I am literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of an acceleration. I ask you only to accept (as I have accepted) that I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust. This is why I have resolved to confide in paper, before I forget. (We are a nation of forgetters.) (*MC* 37)

Saleem finds himself in a desperate race to complete his autobiography before he disintegrates. As Keith Wilson explains in "*Midnight's Children and Reader Responsibility*" (1984), "Rushdie creates in Saleem a chronicler who provokes much of the history he records and who, born at the moment of Indian independence, encapsulates in his equivocal personal heritage the ambiguous identity of India itself" (28-29).

By presenting Saleem as a character seeking to successfully complete his own historical identity before he is literally torn apart by the forces of inner conflict, Rushdie seems profoundly indebted to western models of thought. The nature of the internal conflicts faced by Rushdie's Indian characters can be examined in light of western theories of conflict, such as those formulated by Georg Hegel, Carl Jung, and Soren Kierkegaard.

The story of Saleem's life begins with his report of events that occurred generations before his own birth. Saleem presumably begins with these recollections because they best define the origins of his conflicted persona. Saleem introduces his story by describing the life of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz. An Indian doctor, Aadam spends years studying medicine in Europe and is fundamentally influenced by the west. Upon return to India, he suffers a symbolic blow to the nose while bowing during prayer, and from that point forward is permanently altered and unable to maintain his traditional belief in God. As a result of his western scientific training, Aziz comes into direct conflict with an older, more traditional character, the ferryman Tai. The conflict between these two characters is developed as a Hegelian dialog.

Hegel's model states that a thesis plus an antithesis equals a synthesis (Edwards 3: 436). In other words, two conflicting forces come together to produce a combination of those forces. If a Hegelian model is applied to modern India, for example, traditional India represents the thesis, colonial India represents the antithesis, and the new, independent India represents the synthesis.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie can be seen as developing individual characters that symbolically represent the opposing forces involved in this cultural conflict. Applying this Hegelian model to *Midnight's Children* means that the ferryman, Tai, represents traditional India and Aziz represents colonial India: "To the ferryman, the bag [Aziz's western medical bag] represents Abroad; it is the alien thing, the invader, progress. And yes, it has indeed taken possession of the young Doctor's mind" (MC 16). In other words, Aziz, with his western medical bag, becomes a threat to both traditional India and Tai. In "The Novels of Salman Rushdie: Mediated Reality as Fantasy" (1989), Syed Amanuddin suggests "Tai the Kashmiri boatman rejects Aadam Aziz because he brings Western concepts of medicine and the technology of the stethoscope to the misty (and pure) world of lakes, valleys, and mountains" (43). The conflict between traditional India and colonial India occurs throughout the novel, but is particularly evident as Rushdie writes:

‘Ask that nakkoo, that German Aziz.’ Tai had branded him as an alien, and therefore a person not completely to

be trusted. They [the valley inhabitants] didn't like the boatman, but they found the transformation which the Doctor had evidently worked upon him even more disturbing. Aziz found himself suspected, even ostracized, by the poor; and it hurt him badly. Now he understood what Tai was up to: the man was trying to chase him out of the valley. (MC 26)

Both sides of the conflict acknowledge that a battle of ideologies is taking place. Tai is alerting the community to the alien presence in the form of Aziz, and Aziz suspects that Tai wishes to remove the western influence from his traditional valley.

As the Hegelian model suggests, these two opposing forces (traditional and colonial India) come together to produce a synthesis, which is the new, independent India. Once again, Rushdie creates a character in *Midnight's Children* whose persona exemplifies a component of this cultural conflict. The reader can see that Saleem represents the new, independent India from a letter Jawaharlal Nehru writes to Saleem:

Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own.' (MC 143)

Nehru voices a Hegelian view as he suggests Saleem is the living embodiment of the new India. He expresses the hope that the face in the “mirror” will prove a synthesis of both ancient (traditional) and young (postcolonial) India.

Although Saleem is viewed by fellow characters in, and readers of, *Midnight's Children* as a synthesis between traditional and colonial India, he is not a unified synthesis; instead, he is the embodiment of conflict. As such, he is being torn apart. In the Hegelian model, the synthesis should represent a resolution of the conflicting forces. However, Saleem's fractured persona provides no such resolution.

In his presentation of Saleem's deeply conflicted character, Rushdie appears to turn sharply away from a Hegelian model. The mere fact that Saleem is disintegrating shows that he does not represent a true Hegelian synthesis. Rather, in dealing with Saleem's individual search for personal and collective identity, *Midnight's Children* seems to explore a Jungian approach.

Although both the Hegelian and Jungian approaches share an ultimate goal of arriving at a unified resolution of conflict, the Jungian model is more concerned with the individual's process of self acceptance. According to Carl Jung, as outlined in *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (1990), in order for Saleem to resolve his conflicted nature, he must go through the process of individuation, which strives not so much for a synthesis but for an understanding and conscious acceptance of himself (288). As the process of

individuation necessitates, Saleem must grapple with his conflicted nature. Jung explains that conscious acceptance can occur only after resolving opposing inner forces (*MC* 200).

Relatively early in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie provides a bit of foreshadowing as he describes the effects of inner conflict in reference to Aziz: "His body had become a battlefield and each day a piece of it was blasted away. He told Alia, his eldest, the wise child: 'In any war, the field of battle suffers worse devastation than either army'" (44). The reference speaks directly to the later description Saleem provides of himself: "my mind, no longer a parliament chamber, became the battleground on which they annihilated me" (*MC* 357). As both passages suggest, the battleground, or the body, suffers from a conflict between opposing ideas.

As Saleem undertakes the process of individuation, he seeks to understand the nature of his existence and his link to the collective unconscious. The notion of connecting to his ancestors is extremely important to Saleem. He appears to be somewhat consumed with this idea, as seen throughout the novel. For example, early in *Midnight's Children*, Saleem tells Padma, "'Things -- even people -- have a way of leaking into each other,' I explain, 'like flavors when you cook'" (38). Saleem generally looks for aspects of his family that may have leaked into him, possibly as a means of understanding his own identity. Saleem's search for a family connection includes an obvious and repeated reference to the family nose, which Saleem believes he possesses. In a more conscious effort to connect with the collective

unconscious, Saleem talks about his memory: "And memory -- my new, all-knowing memory, which encompasses most of the lives of mother father grandfather grandmother and everyone else..." (100). Saleem believes that his memories exist as part of a some universal connection to the past, what Jung describes as an archetypal link to the collective unconscious (*ACU* 22).

The alleged ancestral connection that Saleem feels is highly significant because Rushdie later reveals that Saleem is not genetically related to this family. Saleem informs us that he has been switched at birth. How can Saleem experience individuation through an ancestral connection to the collective unconscious and memories of a family that is not actually his? In "The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" (1996), Jean M. Kane points out, "The genealogy that Saleem has exhaustively related is his own through adoption and experience, but not through heredity" (94-95).

After Rushdie establishes that Saleem is not related to the family that he longs to be related to, the majority of the family dies. These events leave Saleem with a family whose bonds are killed first figuratively and then literally. The full impact of this loss on Saleem's search for himself is left unclear. Saleem does say, however, "Family: an overrated idea" (*MC* 473). Saleem's sentiment may mean that he is becoming aware that he will have to find his identity without reliance on any ancestral connections.

Since Saleem spends quite a bit of time questioning the purpose of his existence and trying to understand exactly who he is, the reader is led to

conclude that Saleem is experiencing a classic existential crisis. On several occasions, Saleem wonders specifically about the purpose of his life. His anxiety is particularly clear in his dialog with Shiva: "The thing is, we must be here for a *purpose*, don't you think? I mean, there has to be a *reason*, you must agree? So what I thought, we should try and work out what it is, and then, you know, sort of dedicate our lives to . . .' (MC 263). Again, such searching for an understanding of purpose and reason in life is existential.

When contemplating existentialism, one cannot help but think of Soren Kierkegaard, who is considered the father of existentialism. Kierkegaard outlines the three stages of life as aesthetic, ethical, and the leap of faith. The first stage occurs when all desires and wishes are granted, much like the self-indulgent life of a child. The ethical stage involves becoming more responsible and settling down. The leap of faith involves turning one's life over to God (or some other construct) and living accordingly (Edwards 3: 338).

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie presents Saleem's experiences through phases corresponding to Kierkegaard's first two stages of life. The novel traces Saleem's life from the circumstances of his birth through the evolution of his childhood. An example of how Saleem gratifies his wishes in the aesthetic stage is seen through his intrusion into other peoples' minds in order to answer his questions of what they might be thinking: ". . . soon I was able to 'tune' my inner ear to those voices which I could understand; nor was it long before I picked out, from the throng, the voices of my own family; and of Mary Pereira; and of friends, classmates, teachers" (MC 200).

The symbolic transition between the aesthetic and ethical stage for Saleem takes place when he has the surgery that severs his telepathic connection to the Midnight's Children Conference. The surgery provides Saleem with an enhanced sense of smell, which ultimately launches him into his vocation with spices. As Kierkegaard predicts, the ethical stage leads to a secure life, but fails to provide a sense of purpose and meaning. This lack of meaning begins to cause Saleem's carefully constructed world to crack. Kierkegaard's model points to the necessity of a leap of faith when someone is confronted with the existential abyss. However, because of the fractured nature of his background and identity, Saleem is unable to make a leap of faith.

Throughout the novel, Saleem is searching for his identity. Unable to arrive at a satisfactory resolution of his conflicted state, he is led to a process of self-invention. Not only does Saleem invent himself, he also creates his own history: "My inheritance includes this gift, the gift of inventing new parents for myself whenever necessary. The power of giving birth to fathers and mothers" (MC 125). Because he does not take the crucial leap of faith at the critical point in which he experiences an existential crisis, Rushdie's Saleem deviates from the model set forth by Kierkegaard.

The use of three western models of thought in *Midnight's Children* can perhaps best be understood by the application of the garbage metaphor. The garbage metaphor applies to situations where some third-world citizens adopt a strategy where they selectively pick through the remnants of first-

world capitalism and culture in order to improve their postcolonial condition (Shohat 310). The dominant cultural components available to third-world societies may be either tangible or intangible.

The garbage metaphor is an appropriate rubric to apply to *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie appears to make selective use of western models of thought in relation to his characters, but only as it suits his purpose. In *Midnight's Children*, none of the three applications of western models of thought is carried to its theoretical conclusion. Specifically, in the case of Hegel's model, Saleem does not adequately represent a synthesis. In Jung's model, Saleem is unable to complete the individuation process. Additionally, Saleem is unable to take Kierkegaard's leap of faith. Although each of these western models of thought initially appears to apply to Saleem's situation, all three ultimately fail adequately to define his character.

By the end of the book, the acts that define Saleem's existence are not western models of thought but the basic acts of invention and preservation. Saleem's activities, pickling by day and writing by night, require that he accept the role of garbage picker. No single model of thought exists that Saleem can adopt to unify his identity or that will offer him hope of conflict resolution. Instead, he must assemble his own persona. He must choose which stories and spices to select as ingredients in his unique recipes.

Saleem is productive as he is constructing his own reality by writing his autobiography and working with spices. He explains, "... by day amongst the pickle-vats, by night within these sheets, I spend my time at the great

work of preserving. Memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks" (*MC* 38). Saleem recognizes the value in carefully selecting things that must be preserved. Saleem's nose is presented as the key to preservation, be it through pickling or autobiography, as his nose can determine what is worthy to be saved from the ravages of time.

. . . I snared whiffs like butterflies in the net of my nasal hairs. O wondrous voyages before the firth of philosophy! . . . Because soon I understood that my work must, if it was to have any value, acquire a moral dimension; that the only important divisions were the infinitely subtle gradations of good and evil smells. Having realized the crucial nature of morality, having sniffed out that smells could be sacred or profane, I invented in the isolation of my scooter-trips, the science of nasal ethics. (*MC* 380)

Saleem explains that his nose alone can determine good and evil, which determines for him what ingredients he will select for his various recipes.

Pickling and garbage-picking are both processes of creative transformation whereby selected aspects of the old are placed in new combinations and through their synergistic interrelationships, transformed into new and distinct personalities and tastes. Saleem, the autobiographer, master pickler, and garbage picker of his own identity, assumes the identity of artist/creator:

I reconcile myself to the inevitable distortions of the

pickling process. To pickle is to give immortality, after all: fish, vegetables, fruit hang embalmed in spice-and-vinegar; a certain alteration, a slight intensification of taste, is a small matter, surely? The art is to change the flavour in degree, but not in kind; and above all (in my thirty jars and a jar) to give it shape and form -- that is to say, meaning. (*MC* 550)

Saleem clearly believes the art of pickling, as well as the art of writing, not only preserves the past but provides meaning for the present.

Saleem not only invents himself, but he also creates his own history. When Saleem records the death of Mahatma Gandhi, he gives the wrong dates. The error is brought to the reader's attention later in the novel as Saleem explains, "The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date. But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time" (*MC* 198).

Saleem's garbage-picked history is deliberately fictional and begs a determination of importance of objective reality versus subjective reality. For Saleem, subjective reality is what matters: "reality is a question of perspective . . . it becomes clear that the illusion itself *is* reality" (*MC* 197). As Wilson suggests, Saleem becomes an arbiter of reality by embracing the garbage-picked illusion:

This acknowledgement symbolically of the inevitable

subjectivity of the creative process -- the person who shapes experience into art is one with the person who has himself been shaped by experience, perhaps disastrously - means that basic to the conception of *Midnight's Children* is acceptance of the imperfection and partialness of the end product. (24)

Saleem's model of the world is flawed, as is Saleem's history, and therefore, by extension, as illusory as is the fiction of "the new India."

Perhaps the clearest example of the garbage-picking metaphor in *Midnight's Children* applies to the events surrounding William Methwold's estate. Methwold's character, an Englishman living in Bombay, is a representative of colonial power. His character actually lays out an argument for the good things that the English have done for India: "You'll admit we weren't all bad: built your roads. Schools, railway trains, parliamentary system, all worthwhile things. Taj Mahal was falling down until an Englishman bothered to see to it. And now, suddenly, independence" (MC 110). This colonial viewpoint displays an aspect of the conflict between the two opposing sides. Colonial India does not understand why traditional India is not grateful for all the English have done. There is confusion as to why traditional India would seek to rid itself of such a positive and productive force.

In the face of the upcoming independence of India, Methwold develops a plan to leave behind a legacy of British influence:

‘My notion,’ Mr. Methwold explains, staring at the setting sun, ‘is to stage my own transfer of assets. Leave behind everything you see? Select suitable persons -- such as yourself, Mr. Sinai! -- hand everything over absolutely intact: in tiptop working order. Look around you: everything in fine fettle, don’t you agree? Tickety-boo, we used to say. Or, as you say in Hindustani: Sabkuch ticktock hai. Everything’s just fine.’ (MC 111)

Methwold intends to sell his estate at bargain prices with the stipulation that the hand-picked Indian owners-to-be must keep everything from the estate intact: “Methwold’s Estate was sold on two conditions: that the houses be bought complete with every last thing in them, that the entire contents be retained by the new owners; and that the actual transfer should not take place until midnight on August 15th” (MC 109). The date that Methwold has selected for the transfer of property coincides with that of India’s birth of independence from England. Methwold’s stipulations as to the transfer of his property represent an attempt to maintain British control over India. Methwold expects the new owners to be grateful for the opportunity to preserve British culture as found intact in his estate.

While Mr. Sinai can see the potential value in Methwold’s estate, his wife expresses concern over the necessity to maintain the estate in its entirety:

‘Everything?’ Amina Sinai asked. ‘I can’t even throw

away a spoon? Allah, that lampshade. . . I can't get rid of one *comb*?

'Lock, stock and barrel,' Methwold said, 'Those are my terms. A whim, Mr. Sinai . . . you'll permit a departing colonial his little game? We don't have much left to do, we British, except to play our games.' (MC 109)

Methwold is attempting to leave *everything* behind in India when he returns to England. Clearly, Methwold values the items he will leave, as he believes they represent a value system that has served India so well. However, it is not necessarily a given that he will be able to impose his values on the Sinais or that the Sinais will cherish and find use for all that Methwold is leaving behind, as Methwold assumes. The colonizers typically believe that their culture is superior, and consequently, that every single colonial belonging, even the discard, will be found valuable by the colonized country.

Once out of Methwold's earshot, Mr. Sinai tells his wife how he views the transfer of property: "'Listen now, listen, Amina,' Ahmed is saying later on, 'You want to stay in this hotel room for ever? It's a fantastic price; fantastic, absolutely. And what can he do after he's transferred the deeds? Then you can throw out any lampshade you like'" (MC 109). Mr. Sinai explains that once they take possession of Methwold's estate, at the moment of India's independence, they can sift through the leavings and choose what to preserve and what to discard. Once Methwold is gone and the deal is complete, Methwold no longer has any influence over the Sinais, except

indirectly through any possessions they choose to make their own.

The Sinais are confronted with the necessity of making productive use of the powerful influence of western culture. In order to avoid being overwhelmed by western values, they must physically sift through the leavings of western culture, in the form of Methwold's estate, and selectively incorporate those items which they determine have valuable application in their postcolonial lives. The key to understanding the operation of the garbage metaphor is to recognize that by accepting the discards of western culture, the Sinais have not necessarily accepted western values intact. Instead, the Sinais will recycle materials from the dominant culture to enhance their own system of values.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie's characters must come to an understanding of those postcolonial conditions that are covered under the garbage metaphor. When dominated by the omnipresent western culture within a postcolonial society, characters are forced to choose how much of the western influence they will integrate into their own lives. Rushdie advocates identifying and accepting one's eclectic heritage as the first step in the strategy for survival in the postcolonial world.

Chapter 2 - *The Satanic Verses*: The Necessity of Adaptation

Salman Rushdie touches upon many powerful issues in *The Satanic Verses* (1989). As a postmodern writer, Rushdie skillfully creates a dizzying collage of overlapping stories and dreams that are woven together by more than the seemingly blasphemous references for which the book is well known. Within all the hoopla of the Rushdie affair, scholars may have overlooked a significant aspect of the work in question. Rushdie makes repeated references to Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection in *The Satanic Verses*. Careful reading of the text reveals that Rushdie uses the scientific theory of evolution and natural selection as a conceptual framework that he returns to again and again, ultimately culminating in a commentary on the state of the postcolonial world. Once again, as in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie draws upon a western model of thought to make his point. While Rushdie advocates identifying and accepting one's garbage heritage in *Midnight's Children*, he goes a step further in *The Satanic Verses*, suggesting that adaptation to the garbage heritage is necessary for survival.

With cultural adversity in mind, Rushdie responds to much of the criticism received over *The Satanic Verses* in "In Good Faith" (1991):

Those who oppose [*The Satanic Verses*] most vociferously today
are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will

inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. (394)

Rushdie is clear about his views regarding the intermingling of different cultures. He explicitly states that his approach is aggressively multicultural and leaves little doubt about the appropriateness of applying the metaphor “garbage-picking” to his methodology.

Although there are many stories and subplots within *The Satanic Verses*, they are all related to the two main characters, Saladin Chamcha, whose last name is a derogatory term meaning sycophant or toady, and Gibreel Farishta, whose last name means God-like. *The Satanic Verses* opens with these two forty-year-old entertainment stars falling from a plane explosion that occurs 29,002 feet above London. Both men miraculously survive the fall, and the evolutionary events that alter their lives begin to unfold.

In his paper on the *Origin of Species*, presented at a Linnean Society meeting in England (1859), Charles Darwin explains that natural selection,

or survival of the fittest, is the “preservation of favourable individual differences and variations, and the destruction of those which are injurious” (Darwin 164). Darwin goes on to explain “that changes in the conditions of life give a tendency to increased variability; . . . and this would manifestly be favourable to natural selection, by affording a better chance of the occurrence of profitable variations” (166). The fall of Saladin and Gibreel can be seen as one such change in the condition of life that will likely lead to variability and mutation: “. . . for whatever reason, the two men, Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha, condemned to this endless but also ending angelicdevilish fall, did not become aware of the moment at which the processes of their transmutation began” (SV 5).

Rushdie introduces and develops the theme of Darwinism from the very beginning of the book. He describes the fall of Saladin and Gibreel in evolutionary terms:

How does newness come into the world? How is it born?
Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?
How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? What
compromises, what deals, what betrayals of its secret nature
must it make to stave off the wrecking crew, the exterminating
angel, the guillotine? (SV 8)

Such references to Darwin serve as clues that Saladin and Gibreel will ultimately be fighting for the survival of the fittest. Their struggle forms the foundation of the story.

In "A Multitude of Voices: Carnivalization and Dialogicality in the Novels of Salman Rushdie" (1994), Philip Engblom describes the relationship between Saladin and Gibreel and the central role it plays in the thematic development of *The Satanic Verses*:

They not only express, but come actually to embody, fundamentally different worlds of value -- a difference that is underscored by the one temporarily metamorphosing into an angel and the other into a satan. Yet they are forced together by their common immigrant status and thus juxtaposed as each other's dialogic other. The confrontation, indeed the collision, of their ill-matched worlds provides the armature of the novel.

(302)

Engblom describes the significance of the tension between Saladin and Gibreel as a classic battle between good and evil, as suggested by their last names. However, the reader will later see that this clash is not so simple. This clash is not between good and evil, but rather between competing strategies for survival. Although Saladin and Gibreel are both from India, Rushdie creates characters that represent opposing attitudes towards the colonizing and colonized countries of England and India. Such opposition is considered typical in the Darwinian scientific world.

While sycophantically embracing England, Saladin simultaneously rejects India. Saladin returns to India after spending many years living in England: "He should have known it was a mistake to *go home*, after so long,

how could it be other than a regression; it was an unnatural journey; a denial of time; a revolt against history; the whole thing was bound to be a disaster" (SV 34). Rushdie suggests that the return to India after living in metropolitan England for so long is an obvious backward journey. To Saladin, England represents civilization and India represents an earlier evolutionary state.

In his passion to escape India, Saladin has suffered a significant loss of faith:

Thirteen-year-old Salahuddin, setting aside recent doubts and grievances, entered once again his childish adoration of his father, because he had, had, had worshipped him he was a great father until you started growing a mind of your own, and then to argue with him was called a betrayal of his love, but never mind that now, *I accuse him of becoming my supreme being, so that what happened was like a loss of faith . . . My father, Chamcha would think, years later, in the midst of his bitterness. I accuse him of inverting Time.* (SV 41)

Saladin and his father disagree on attitudes towards England and India. While Saladin embraces the English influences and initially rejects his Indian heritage, his father is vehemently opposed to the English. Saladin's conviction that his father inverts time reflects the idea that his father represents another level on the evolutionary scale. Rushdie explains:

Chicken-breasted beneath the gaze of dowagers and liftwallahs

he felt the birth of that implacable rage which would burn within him, undiminished, for over a quarter of a century; which would boil away his childhood father-worship and make him a secular man, who would do his best, thereafter, to live without a god of any type; which would fuel, perhaps, his determination to become the thing his father was-not-could-never-be, that is, a good and proper Englishman. (SV 43)

Saladin's attitudes are initially as much a rejection of his father as an adoption of England.

Since Saladin represents pro-colonial ideals, and since it has been established that Saladin and Gibreel stand in opposition to one another, Gibreel, then, necessarily represents traditional India. Rushdie illustrates the connection between Gibreel and India as he describes what transpires following Gibreel's illness:

The whole of India was at Gibreel's bedside. His condition was the lead item on every radio bulletin, it was the subject of hourly news-flashes on the national television network. . . A mood of apprehension settled over the nation, because if God had unleashed such an act of retribution against his most celebrated incarnation, what did he have in store for the rest of the country? If Gibreel died, could India be far behind? In the mosques and temples of the nation, packed congregations prayed, not only for the life of the dying actor, but for the future, for themselves. (SV

The concern of the citizens of India for Gibreel and his apparent impending doom transcends the thought that the condition only affects Gibreel; they are aware of the connection between Gibreel and India and are convinced that the same fate that claims Gibreel will also claim themselves.

While Gibreel does not die from this illness, it does result in a profound loss of faith. As a result of the illness that he cannot explain, Gibreel lashes out at God. Rushdie writes, “when Gibreel regained his strength, it became clear that he had changed, and to a startling degree, because he had lost his faith” (SV 29). In fact, the way that Rushdie describes it, Gibreel recovers from the mysterious illness because he rejects God. After spending every day of the illness praying to God, Gibreel one day “felt nothing, nothing nothing, and then one day he found that he no longer needed there to be anything to feel. On that day of metamorphosis the illness changed and his recovery began” (SV 30).

Like Saladin, Gibreel has suffered a loss of faith which precedes the fall that occurs at the beginning of the story. The significant changes in the lives of both Saladin and Gibreel take place as a consequence of a loss of faith and are merely compounded by their fall. These changes represent “a tendency to increased variability,” which, as explained previously, means that they are both in a better position to experience what Darwin describes as variation (Darwin 166). Saladin and Gibreel are ripe for mutation.

According to Darwin’s thought, both Saladin and Gibreel can be

described as having already experienced natural selection:

It may metaphorically be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing, throughout the world, the slightest variations; rejecting those that are bad, preserving and adding up all that are good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life. (168)

Rushdie establishes Saladin and Gibreel as each striving to preserve the good and reject the bad aspects of postcolonial society. Each man stands in opposition to the other. Rushdie describes, "For are they not conjoined opposites, these two, each man the other's shadow? -- One seeking to be transformed into the foreignness he admires, the other preferring, contemptuously, to transform" (SV 426). Gibreel "has wished to remain, to a large degree, *continuous* -- that is, joined to and arising from his past," while Saladin "is a creature of *selected* discontinuities, a *willing* re-invention; his *preferred* revolt against history what makes him" (SV 427). Gibreel wishes to maintain the traditional purity of India, while Saladin chooses to adapt to the dominant western influence.

Following the fall, Saladin and Gibreel begin to transform. Saladin mutates into a devil, while Gibreel becomes the archangel Gabriel. Although Rushdie appears to establish the traditional conflict between good (archangel Gabriel) and evil (Shaitan, or Saladin) through these mutations, the

Darwinian field leaves the outcome of such a struggle far from predictable.

The reference to Saladin and Gibreel raises the possibility that the outcome of the battle is not a foregone conclusion:

Falling like that out of the sky: did they imagine there would be no side-effects? Higher Powers had taken an interest, it should have been obvious to them both, and such Powers (I am, of course, speaking of myself) have a mischievous, almost a wanton attitude to tumbling flies. And another thing, let's be clear: great falls change people. You think *they* fell a long way? In the matter of tumbles, I yield pride of place to no personage, whether mortal or im-. From clouds to ashes, down the chimney you might say, from heaven light to hellfire . . . under the stress of a long plunge, I was saying, mutations are to be expected, not all of them random. Unnatural selections. Not much of a price to pay for survival, for being reborn, for becoming *new*, and at their age at that. (SV 133)

The ironic usage of "unnatural selection" is an acknowledgment of the author's debt to the English naturalist. It also underscores Rushdie's realization that the process of mutation responds to evolutionary, rather than moral, imperatives.

In one of his more blatant references to Darwin, Rushdie has Sufyan, a former scholar and now London restaurateur, address the issue of survival of the fittest:

Sufyan, sucking teeth, made reference to the last edition of *The Origin of Species*. 'In which even great Charles accepted the notion of mutation in extremis, to ensure survival of species; so what if his followers -- always more Darwinian than man himself! -- repudiated, posthumously, such Lamarckian heresy, insisting on natural selection and nothing but, -- however, I am bound to admit, such theory is not extended to survival of individual specimen but only to species as a whole; -- in addition, regarding nature of mutation, problem is to comprehend actual utility of the change.' (SV 251)

In the contest between good and evil, between angel and devil, a mutation is taking place which will ensure the survival of one: the fittest. As Sufyan suggests, however, the trick is to comprehend the actual utility of the mutation. Although the value of the mutations of Saladin and Gibreel may seem obvious at first glance, Rushdie makes it necessary to further examine the situation from a Darwinian perspective, taking into account the utilitarian, rather than the moral, value of the transformations. As Sufyan also suggests, this struggle for survival of the fittest goes beyond the two individuals involved. The reader is aware that Saladin and Gibreel appear as opposing representatives of postcolonial India, and the utility of their personal mutations will have application to the condition of postcolonial India.

As the story of the double metamorphosis unfolds, the reader begins to

understand that the forces driving the change are cultural in origin. After undergoing a dehumanizing ordeal at the hands of the English police, Saladin awakens to find himself in a hospital with other immigrants who have also experienced a transformation into animal form. Saladin asks a lion-headed creature how he ended up in the physical state in which they now find themselves:

‘But how do they do it?’ Chamcha wanted to know.

‘They describe us,’ the other whispered solemnly. ‘That’s all.

They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct.’ (SV 168)

Rushdie observes that creation is accomplished by description. The animal-people are transformed by the dehumanizing act of the colonizers viewing the colonized as sub-human animals.

Through the act of literally becoming the foreign devil, Saladin finds himself rejected by the very society he has spent a lifetime worshiping. The English view Saladin as distinctly non-English. He begins to realize that he can never become purely English. He can only select aspects of Englishness that are appropriate to adopt: “We strive for the heights but our natures betray us, Chamcha thought; clowns in search of crowns. The bitterness overcame him. *Once I was lighter, happier, warm. Now the black water is in my veins*” (SV 170). Saladin comes to realize that he is Indian by nature and that is the inescapable fact of his existence:

What Saladin Chamcha understood that day was that he had

been living in a state of phony peace, that the change in him was irreversible. A new, dark world had opened up for him (or: within him) when he fell from the sky; no matter how assiduously he attempted to re-create his old existence, this was, he now saw, a fact that could not be unmade. (SV 418-419)

The choice for Saladin is not whether or not to become English, but whether to accept or reject selected aspects of the colonial culture to make part of his own identity. Ironically, Saladin's realization of the immutability of his immigrant status in England and his anger towards the English sets him free from his mutated state and returns him to his former human body. As a result of his new outlook, Saladin becomes more realistic when viewing both the English and Indian cultures.

In the meantime, Gibreel is beset by a series of disconcerting dreams through which he becomes convinced that he is taking on the persona of the archangel Gabriel. In one such dream, Gibreel is asked:

WHAT KIND OF AN IDEA ARE YOU? Are you the kind that compromises, does deals, accommodates itself to society, aims to find a niche, to survive; or are you the cussed, bloody-minded, ramrod-backed type of damnfool notion that would rather break than sway with the breeze? -- The kind that will almost certainly, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, be smashed to bits; but, the hundredth time, will change the world. (SV 335)

The moral imperative of Gibreel's dreams is being juxtaposed against

accommodations as a process of survival. Through the various dreams, which form many of the subplots of *The Satanic Verses*, Gibreel becomes convinced of the reality of his transformation into the archangel Gabriel. Rushdie describes the mutation of Gibreel and his growing awareness that his mission is to save the world: "He was the self-appointed helpmate of the Lord, the sixth toe on the foot of the Universal Thing" (SV 193). While doing the Lord's work, Gibreel studies the human race. Gibreel explains, "Here it is the human race that is the undertrial, and it is a defendant with a rotten record: a history-sheeter, a bad egg. Careful evaluations must be made" (SV 194).

However, rather than meeting with success in his mission, Gibreel, like Saladin, suffers at the hands of the English:

Punched in the nose, taunted by phantoms, given alms instead of reverence, and in divers ways shown the depths to which the denizens of the city had sunk, the intransigence of the evil manifest there, Gibreel became more determined than ever to commence the doing of good, to initiate the great work of rolling back the frontiers of the adversary's dominion. (SV 326)

Under the spell of his delusion, Gibreel becomes more and more convinced of the evil nature of the English. Rushdie writes:

He [Gibreel] would show them -- yes! -- his *power*. -- These powerless English! -- Did they not think their history would return to haunt them? -- 'The native is an oppressed person

whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor' (Fanon).
English women no longer bound him; the conspiracy stood
exposed! -- Then away with all fogs. He would make this land
anew. He was the Archangel, Gibreel. -- *And I'm back!* (SV 353)

In "Taking a Stand While Lacking a Center: Rushdie's Postmodern Politics" (1995), Kathryn Hume explains that "in *The Satanic Verses*, we find in Gibreel a character whose keynote is a kind of rigidity" (8). Hume goes on to explain that "Gibreel's rigidity shows when his cultural identity as an Indian causes him to scorn everything he sees in England" (8). Gibreel seeks to punish the colonizing culture by transforming the English into the colonized culture. In so doing, Gibreel believes he can make traditional India a dominant culture.

Because of the metamorphoses of Saladin into a devil and Gibreel into an angel, the reader is led to believe that Gibreel will emerge as the survivor. However, such is not the case. In "Let's Get the Hell Out of Here" (1988), Patrick Parrinder summarizes: "In a reversal of the story of *Paradise Lost*, it is Gibreel who gradually degenerates into a bringer of death, while Saladin finds some sort of redemption" (4). Gibreel ultimately snaps under the pressures of trying to maintain his rigid position. He is unable to preserve the traditional state of India. Consequently, he commits suicide. On the other hand, Saladin accepts the changing world and thrives in the garbage culture of the postcolonial environment. By garbage-picking, he learns to adapt to the postcolonial conditions. Perhaps the reader can better understand Gibreel's death by analyzing Darwin:

. . . as new species in the course of time are formed through natural selection, others will become rarer and rarer, and finally extinct. The forms which stand in closest competition with those undergoing modification and improvement will naturally suffer most. . . . varieties of the same species, and species of the same genus or of related genera, -- which, from having nearly the same structure, constitution, and habits, generally come into the severest competition with each other; consequently, each new variety or species, during the progress of its formation, will generally press hardest on its nearest kindred, and tend to exterminate them. (196)

Given all of Rushdie's references to, and reliance upon, Darwinian ideas in *The Satanic Verses*, the reader is reminded to view the book scientifically, so it seems appropriate that the ending brings an inevitable death to the non-adaptive form. The tone set from the very first page is that of a story of natural selection, or survival of the fittest. Cultural conflict between unequal forces once again results in the kind of survival described by the garbage metaphor.

Because Rushdie carefully ties Saladin and Gibreel to England and India respectively, having them represent opposing cultural forces in the postcolonial world, the attitude of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* clearly favors adaptation. Rushdie chooses to exterminate Gibreel, who adheres to the rigid lifestyle and attitude of traditional India, while allowing Saladin, who

accepts western influence, to adapt and thrive. The triumph of the evolved character underscores Rushdie's pragmatic preference for an eclectic culture, which is ripe for garbage-picking, with the clear suggestion being that one must adapt to current conditions in order to survive.

Chapter 3 - *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*: Postcolonial Heritage as a Basis for a Positive Aesthetic

Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) demonstrates that the postcolonial garbage heritage can become the basis of a positive aesthetic. The reader can see a more explicit use of the garbage metaphor in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* than in any of Rushdie's other works. Once again, Rushdie's characters are challenged with the task of forging acceptable identities out of postcolonial conditions. In order to provide a strong foundation for this book, Rushdie carefully outlines the nature of postcolonial culture and society.

The reader gains an understanding of how Rushdie views culture and society by the way that the characters in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* describe and respond to the notion of culture:

What's a 'culture'? Look it up. 'A group of micro-organisms grown in a nutrient substance under controlled conditions.' A squirm of germs on a glass slide is all, a laboratory experiment calling itself a society. Most of us wrigglers make do with life on that slide; we even agree to feel proud of that 'culture.' Like slaves voting for slavery or brains for lobotomy, we kneel down before the god of all moronic micro-organisms and pray to be homogenized or killed or

engineered; we promise to obey. (GBF 95)

The suggestion that Rai, the narrator of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, is making is that cultures are controlled. Cultures, in science, are grown in controlled laboratories. The actual microorganisms that are grown in the culture medium have no control over their environment or destiny. Having explained this, Rai applies the term culture to society, suggesting that members of a given society are bred to be controlled and consequently become homogenized members. Rai clearly does not favor such conditions.

Rai spends a lot of time describing his views of people and how they may or may not fit into their culture:

For a long while I have believed -- this is perhaps my version of Sir Darius Xerxes Cama's belief in a fourth function of *outsideness* -- that in every generation there are a few souls, call them lucky or cursed, who are simply *born not belonging*, who come into the world semi-detached, if you like, without strong affiliation to family or location or nation or race; that there may even be millions, billions of such souls, as many non-belongers as belongers, perhaps; that, in sum, the phenomenon may be as 'natural' a manifestation of human nature as is history, by lack of opportunity. And not only by that: for those who value stability, who fear transience, uncertainty, change, have erected a powerful system of stigmas and taboos against

rootlessness, that disruptive, anti-social force, so that we mostly conform, we pretend to be motivated by loyalties and solidarities we do not really feel, we hide our secret identities beneath the false skins of those identities which bear the belongers' seal of approval. (*GBF* 72-73)

Rai believes that there is an undetermined number of people who do not feel strong affiliation to a single culture. These people keep their attitudes to themselves for fear of how they will be viewed by their society. Rai is also aware that there are many people who do feel strong affiliations to their culture, and that those people can become somehow threatened by those who do not belong. Rai describes the people with strong ties to culture as fearing change and embracing a dream of stability, however false that dream of stability may be. The more the sense of stability is threatened, the more these people blame and attempt to control those that do not embrace their cultural ideals.

Rather early in the book, Rai explains how India fits in with the notion of culture:

In India, that place obsessed by place, belonging-to-your-place, knowing-your-place, we are mostly given that territory, and that's that, no arguments, get on with it. But Ormus and Vina and I, we couldn't accept that, we came loose. Among the great struggles of man -- good/evil, reason/unreason, etc. -- there is also this mighty conflict

between the fantasy of Home and the fantasy of Away, the dream of roots and the mirage of the journey. (GBF 55)

Rai evidently views India in the same manner scientists view cultures: controlled and without recourse. However, he describes the unsettled feelings shared by himself, Ormus, and Vina, that cause all of them to dream of leaving India. The reader can see in Rushdie's works that simply rejecting one culture for another is not a healthy strategy.

In order to successfully embrace change, one must be prepared to take a foundation from one culture and select and adapt characteristics of the new culture in order to form a viable amalgam. The process of change comes easily to Rai, Ormus, and Vina, as they all have been raised in a postcolonial environment in which it has already been necessary to incorporate different cultural influences into their own lives. For example, Rai explains the language in Bombay:

Because it was only me, she could prattle on in Bombay's garbage argot, *Mumbai ki kachrapati baat-cheet*, in which a sentence could begin in one language, swoop through a second and even a third and then swing back round to the first. Our acronymic name for it was *Hug-me*. Hindi Urdu Gujarati Marathi English. Bombayites like me were people who spoke five languages badly and no language well. (GBF 7)

Not only is the term "garbage" used early in the novel, but the metaphor is

appropriately applied. The language of Bombay is a combination of five different languages, each of which is attached to a separate culture. Bombayites, whether or not they are cognizant of the fact, are already garbage pickers. They have long been selecting aspects from various other languages and cultures to make their own stronger.

As Rai, Ormus, and Vina prepare to leave India, each must begin to utilize garbage-picking skills. They will all eventually land in America, where Ormus and Vina become rock-and-roll stars. Despite the fact that rock-and-roll is generally identified as a western creation, Ormus and Vina do not recognize it as a foreign influence. As Rai explains:

This is what Ormus and Vina always claimed, never wavering for a moment: that the genius of Ormus Cama did not emerge in response to, or in imitation of, America; that his early music, the music he heard in his head during the unsinging childhood years, was not of the West, except in the sense that the West was in Bombay from the beginning, impure old Bombay where West, East, North and South had always been scrambled, like codes, like eggs, and so Westernness was a legitimate part of Ormus, a Bombay part, inseparable from the rest of him. (*GBF* 95-96)

Rai makes it clear that the notion of a pure Indian Bombay culture is a fiction. Bombay, which has long accepted influence from the East, West,

North, and South, has, for Rai, always been a culture of foreign influences. The postcolonial Bombay culture is already an amalgam, and Bombayites are already garbage pickers who select favorable aspects of the various cultures as their own. As a result of the eclectic nature of Bombay culture, Ormus and Vina believe that they already possess influences for rock-and-roll and they don't have to look to America in order to receive inspiration. In other words, westernness is already part of their Bombay inheritance.

Ormus and Vina leave India separately and pursue careers in music. Eventually, they team up and form a rock band called VTO, which becomes highly successful, through its message of transcending national identity:

Those were the days when the first crossover stars were making their way through the firmament: O.J., Magic, people whose talent made people color-blind, race-blind, history-blind. VTO was a higher member of that elite, which Ormus always took in his stride, as if it were the most natural and proper thing in the world. He had taken to quoting biologist, geneticists. Human beings are just about identical, he'd say. The race difference, even the gender difference, in the eyes of science it's just the teeniest-tiniest fraction of what we are. Percentagewise, it really doesn't signify. (*GBF* 412-413)

While the message of VTO may at first seem positive, Ormus's language is the language of uniform culture. VTO promotes the cultural message of the

microscope slide, which ignores the importance of individual identity.

Interestingly, many Indian citizens in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* have always rejected the music of VTO precisely because rock-and-roll is intrinsically linked with the west and they think they can resist the western influence:

In India it is often said that the music I'm talking about is precisely one of those viruses with which the almighty West has infected the East, one of the great weapons of cultural imperialism, against which all right-minded persons must fight and fight again. Why then offer up paeans to culture traitors like Ormus Cama, who betrayed his roots and spent his pathetic lifetime pouring the trash of America into our children's ears? Why raise low culture so high, and glorify what is base? Why defend impurity, that vice, as if it were a virtue?

Such are the noisome slithers of the enslaved micro-organisms, twisting and hissing as they protect the inviolability of their sacred homeland, the glass laboratory slide. (GBF 95)

Some Indian characters clearly view western culture as offering nothing of value, and believe they have the ability to resist its influence, as if that influence will damage their own culture. The reader can see that those who resist change and attempt to maintain cultural purity are regarded with

disdain by Rushdie.

While much of India has never been receptive to VTO, the western public, which at first responds positively to the message of VTO, begins to understand that VTO is trying to create a universal culture and that becomes oppressive. As a result, VTO begins to lose its following:

Goodbye, VTO, wrote Madonna Sangria. Once you made
the city lights burn brighter, cars go faster, love taste
sweeter. Once you lit the violence of our alleys like a
Vermeer and turned the metropolis into our lyric dream.
Then, guys, you turned into a pile of garbage I wouldn't
throw at a f*cking cat. (*GBF* 439)

VTO is born from the aggressive energy of the garbage-picking aesthetic. Ormus and Vina create a rock-and-roll band that draws from Bombay's eclectic music culture. They carefully select aspects of western rock and roll, which they adapt according to their own musical aesthetic. Although the band is developed from the application of the garbage aesthetic, which celebrates hybridity and selectivity, VTO attempts to transcend individual identity and goes too far. Through the preachiness of their music, Ormus and Vina attempt to impose their cultural value system. Much like the colonizers in third-world countries, VTO is now seen as an oppressive cultural influence.

Early in the book, Rai provides a glimpse of the fate of Ormus and Vina:

And if you are Ormus Cama, if you are Vina Apsara,

whose songs could cross all frontiers, even the frontiers of people's hearts, then perhaps you believed all ground could be skipped over, all frontiers would crumble before the sorcery of the tune. Off you'd go, off your turf, beyond family and clan and nation and race, flying untouchable, over the minefields of taboo, until you stood at last at the last gateway, the most forbidden of all doors. Where your blood sings in your ears, *Don't even think about it*. And you think about it, you cross that final frontier, and perhaps, perhaps -- we'll see how the tale works out -- you have finally gone too far, and are destroyed. (GBF 55)

As Rai describes, Ormus and Vina cross the boundaries that should not be crossed: they forget their heritage and become oppressors. As a result of abandoning their heritage and becoming oppressors, both characters lose their vitality and consequently become expendable by the end of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Although Ormus and Vina begin with successful strategies for dealing with postcolonial conditions, they abandon their garbage-picking tactics to become oppressors, which is not a successful strategy.

While Vina and Ormus are establishing themselves as rock stars, Rai, who is the third to leave India, chooses photography as his career. Rai explains his view of photography:

A photograph is a moral decision taken in one eighth of a second, or one sixteenth, or one one-hundred-and-twenty-

eighth. Snap your finger; a snapshot's faster. Halfway between voyeur and witness, high artist and low scum, that's where I've made my life, making my eyeblink choices. (*GBF* 13-14)

The decisions of what to capture on film, or what cultural elements to preserve, is made in an instant. Rai has built a career on his ability to select quickly those images worth preserving. Rai goes on to explain:

I've been an event junkie, me. Action has been my stimulant of choice. I always liked to stick my face right up against the hot sweaty broken surface of what was being done, with my eyes open, drinking and the rest of my senses switched off. I never cared if it stank, or if its slimy touch make you want to throw up, or what it might do to your taste buds if you licked it, or even how loud it screamed. Just the way it looked. (*GBF* 14)

Rai's profession does not allow him to make value judgments. He inserts himself, and his camera, in events throughout the world and records them. He does not make any determination about the rightness or wrongness of what he is recording; he only considers the worthiness of the event to be preserved.

Rai is successful as a photographer because he apparently selects appropriate images to capture. He explains that the way he has access to such events is through the process of making himself invisible:

Long ago I developed a knack for invisibility. It allowed me to go right up to the actors in the world's drama, the sick, the dying, the crazed, the mourning, the rich, the greedy, the ecstatic, the bereft, the angry, the murderous, the secretive, the bad, the children, the good, the newsworthy; to shimmy into their charmed space, into the midst of their rage or grief or transcendent arousal, to penetrate the defining instant of their being-in-the-world and get my fucking picture. (*GBF* 14)

Rai's ultimate goal is to get great pictures. He garbage picks with his camera as a means of survival. He becomes so good at doing so that he thrives in the world of photography. However, Rai does not forget his roots. He explains how his heritage assists him in the ability to become invisible, which results in his success:

The closest I can get to it is that I know how to make myself small. Not physically small, for I am a tallish guy, heavy-set, but psychically. I just smile my self-deprecating smile and shrink into insignificance. By my manner I persuade the sniper I do not merit his bullet, my way of carrying myself convinces the warlord to keep his great axe clean. I make them understand that I'm not worthy of their violence. Maybe it works because I'm being sincere, because I truly mean to deprecate myself. There

are experiences I carry around with me, memories I can draw on when I want to remind myself of my low value. Thus a form of acquired modesty, the product of my early life and misdeeds, has succeeded in keeping me alive.
(*GBF* 14-15)

The reader can see that Rai's background as a postcolonial subject remains a part of his personality. He has not been transformed, like Ormus and Vina. Instead, he has formed a strong amalgam between eastern and western influences.

Rai is interesting in his choice of professions. He uses western technology as a means of achieving international identity, while at the same time recording moments of significance and change, and thereby creating history. He explains:

Here was the eternal silence of faces and bodies and animals and even nature itself, caught -- yes -- by my camera, but caught also in the grip of the fear of the unforeseeable and the anguish of loss, in the clutches of this hated metamorphosis, the appalling silence of a way of life at the moment of its annihilation, its transformation into a golden past that could never wholly be rebuilt, because once you have been in an earthquake you know, even if you survive without a scratch, that like a stroke in the heart, it remains in the earth's breast,

horribly potential, always promising to return, to hit you again, with an even more devastating force. (GBF 13)

Rushdie appears to use earthquakes in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* as a metaphor to symbolize the unpredictability of change in our lives and the necessity of coming to grips with the inevitable aftermath of loss. Even when the changes are not harmful, they affect the lives of those involved. The reality of the past can never be recaptured.

Rai emphasizes the point that the past can never be recaptured when he describes another character present during the earthquake that swallows Vina:

The last time I saw Don Angel Cruz, he was scurrying in the tequila-drowning squares with a saucepan in his hand and two kettles on strings slung around his neck, trying pathetically to save what he could.

This is how people behave when their dailiness is destroyed, when for a few moments they see, plain and unadorned, one of the great shaping forces of life.

Calamity fixes them with her mesmeric eye, and they begin to scoop and paw at the rubble of their days, trying to pluck the memory of the quotidian -- a toy, a book, a garment, even a photograph -- from the garbage heaps of the irretrievable, of the overwhelming loss. (GBF 16)

The reader recognizes that Rushdie is likely using the earthquakes in this

book to emphasize the necessity of understanding the nature of the world: it constantly changes. Rushdie writes, "Earthquakes, scientists say, are common phenomena. Globally speaking there are around fifteen thousand tremors a decade. Stability is what's rare. The abnormal, the extreme, the operatic, the unnatural: these rule. There is no such thing as normal life" (*GBF* 500). Changes are common and inevitable, and Rushdie's characters represent separate strategies for dealing with change.

Ormus and Vina, who begin as successful garbage-pickers, developing their own amalgam style of music, seek to use rock-and-roll to change the world. In a sense, they wish to create an earthquake of sorts, tearing down the past and building a new reality according to their proposed cultural model. However, they cross the line by ignoring their heritage, imposing their value system on their audience, and becoming oppressors. Consequently, they are consumed.

Traditional India seeks to blame change on outside forces, such as the west. Traditionalists imagine music and earthquakes as western weapons, as if the process of change is not natural. Additionally, traditionalists attempt to resist all change, perhaps in an effort to preserve what they consider to be traditional India.

The final strategy, and the most successful one, is embodied by the character Rai. Rai recognizes that change is a force of nature, and he goes along with change instead of attempting to control change. He makes use of his polyglot heritage, the finely honed garbage-picking skills that were

developed in Bombay. He becomes an artist who achieves fame by documenting the impact of change in peoples' lives. In the end, Rai describes his unexpected triumph: "I was too stupid to believe it, but at the end of this long sad-luck saga, I was the jackpot boy" (*GBF* 563).

Conclusion

Set against the immense landscape of postcolonial India, Salman Rushdie's fictional characters are constantly confronted with the necessity of forging a coherent identity in the face of change and the powerful influence of western culture. Rushdie's novels demonstrate the necessity for rescuing what is valuable in western influence so as to invest it with native vitality and create something new and strong.

The garbage metaphor involves recognizing the relationship between western and native cultures, and adopting an aggressive attitude towards recycling available useful resources, to form powerful new combinations of first-world and third-world cultures. The metaphor is one of garbage-picking, or sifting through elements for that which has value, as determined by the native culture.

In *Midnight's Children*, which is set in India, Rushdie develops a model of the conflicting cultural forces present in postcolonial society. Rushdie outlines Saleem's struggle for self-definition, which is, in itself, a metaphor for the task of postcolonial redefinition. Rushdie advocates identifying and accepting one's eclectic heritage as the first step in the strategy for survival in the postcolonial world.

In *The Satanic Verses*, the action shifts between India and England, where Saladin and Gibreel engage in a titanic struggle for survival. With the death of Gibreel and the survival of Saladin, Rushdie suggests that

adaptation to the garbage heritage is necessary for survival.

Moving between India, England, and America, Rushdie's characters in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* are once again challenged with the task of forging acceptable identities out of the conflicting cultural influences of the postcolonial world. Vina and Ormus are so successful at embracing their garbage heritage that they evolve to a "higher form," that of western pop-culture superstars. They take their success too far, however, and die, signifying that theirs is not a successful strategy for survival. On the other hand, Rai is very successful because he adapts to existing conditions, forging successful amalgams between his Indian heritage and the dominant cultural influence of the west.

Through *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the reader can trace a clear progression in both the development of the garbage metaphor and strategies for survival within the postcolonial world. The three novels present an evolution of ideas, beginning with the identification and acceptance of garbage heritage through the necessity of adaptation, culminating with a demonstration of how cultural recycling can become the basis for a positive aesthetic.

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