Wa ant wunne i this world al nis bute peintunge. al nis bute schadewe (AW 124)

(Pain and joy in this world are the merest painting, shadows simply.) (Salu 107)

NOTES

1. Hereafter (in parenthetical references) *AW = Ancrene Wisse; SW = Sawles Warde.*

2. This is an extension of the *De Anima*, a work attributed to Hugh of St. Victor which is considered as one of the sources of *Ancrene Wisse* .

3. Two kinds of temptations are presented: inner and outer. All must be overcome and turned into a source of new strength. An account of the Seven Deadly Sins helps illustrate the quality and variety of the inner temptations. A remedy for each of them is accordingly suggested, but the general and best remedy against sin is Confession, the main theme of Book V, immediately following the present one.

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REFUNCTIONALISING THE PAST: SALMAN RUSHDIE'S RE-WRITING OF THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NOVELISTIC CONVENTIONS IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

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Of the five types of transtextuality which Genette's study provides (1982), two seem to stand out above the rest: *hypertextuality* and *archtextuality*. The former, which is defined as the relation between a text B (hypertext) and a text A (hypotext), established through transformation or imitation (1982: 11-12), has characterised most of the transtextual analyses carried out on *Midnight's Children* (Bader 1984; Reimenschneider 1984; Batty 1987; Cronin 1987; Alexander 1990). It is the intention of this paper to carry out an archtextual analysis, that is, one which takes into account the generic status of a text (1982: 11). It seems only right that *Midnight's Children* be the subject of a wide variety of intertextual approaches, a fact fully endorsed by its inclusion within the postmodern movement: a true postmodern novel "keeps one foot always in the narrative past" (Barth, 1984: 204), it "confronts the past of literature" (Hutcheon, 1989: 118). Hutch≠eon, closely following Barthes and Eco, reinforces the essential role of past texts (both historical and fictional) in contemporary fiction, which she defines as the "parodically doubled discourse of postmodernist intertextuality" (1989: 128). Thus, parody becomes from the very beginning a fundamental feature when analysing postmodern fiction:

> When we speak of parody, we do not just mean two texts that interrelate in a certain way. We also imply an intention to parody another work (or set of conventions) and both a recognition of that intent and an ability to find and interpret the backgrounded text in its relation to the parody. (Hutcheon 1985: 22)

It is according to this quotation that Defoe's novels offer themselves as one of the main textual referents for an intertextual study of Rushdie's novel. As I will presently try to show, *Midnight's Children* consciously "works" with the conventions used by Defoe, thereby giving new life to them: by means of this parodic use, "a new form develops out of the old, without really destroying it; only the function is altered" (Hutcheon 1985: 36).

By only exerting a subtle censorship on the initial paragraph of *Midnight's Children*, we may realise its familiarity. Thus, the following "censored" quotation:

> I was born in the city of Bombay . . . in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947 . . . On the stroke of midnight. (MC 9)

is very similar to the beginning of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which runs:

> I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, thou' not of that country, my father being a foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull. (1987: 27)

In fact, this kind of opening paragraph turns out to be a commonplace formula in Defoe's novels, both in *Roxana*

> I Was Born, as my Friends told me, at the City of Poictiers, in the Province, or County of Poictou, in France, from whence I was brought to England by my Parents . . . (1987: 37)

and in *A Journal of the Plague Year*

> It was about the beginning of September, 1664, that I, among the rest of my neighbours, heard in ordinary discourse that the plague was returned again in Holland . . . (1987: 23)

Only a few lines below, Saleem continues with his narration:

> Now, however, time (having no further use for me) is running out. I will soon be thirty-one years old. Perhaps. If my crumbling, over-used body permits. But I have no hope of saving my life, nor can I count on having even a thousand nights and a night. I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning —yes, meaning— something. (MC 9)

By means of this metafictional paragraph, the mood initially imposed by the eighteenth-century beginning is brought to an abrupt end. The effect caused by this rupture is to make the reader aware of the fictionality of an apparently realist mode of narration. *Midnight's Children* plays with the reader's expectations: the initial paragraph opens the novel with a clear reference to a specific type of novel, but no sooner do we realize this than we are offered a paragraph that seems to subvert all our expectations.

For our present purposes it is important to realise that *Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719, and that Defoe's other novels appeared in the span of five years, which places Defoe's fictional writing entirely within the first half of the eighteenth century. When we think in a wider sense, Defoe immediately brings to mind two other novelists: Richardson and Fielding, who are traditionally considered the founders of the English novel, but are in no way the sole representatives of this emerging genre. The eighteenth century witnessed a rich variety of fictions competing for preeminence; among the subgenres, the eighteenth century saw the emergence of the epistolary novel, the gothic romance, the autobiographical novel, the romantic tales of exotic pilgrimages following the pattern of the newly translated *Arabian Nights*, the imitations of *Don Quixote* and the sentimental novel. Of these, the autobiographical novel, stemming out of the picaresque and closely related to the birth of journalism, goes back to the pioneering work of Daniel Defoe in the early decades of the eighteenth century. And this is the generic relationship linking Defoe's and Rushdie's novels, as it must be clear that *Midnight's Children* relates more strongly to the "eighteenth-century autobiographical novel" than to any other eighteenth-century competing subgenre. Thus, my archtextual analysis is not so much a study of the relatioship with the eighteenth-century novel as a whole as with a very specific trend within the genre.

Ian Watt, in his classic study on the rise of the novel, characterised the eighteenth-century novel as a

> new tendency in fiction: [where the] total subordination of the plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir is as defiant an assertion of the primacy of individual experience in the novel as Descartes's cogito ergo sum was in philosophy. (Watt 1987: 15)

This assertion of the primacy of individual experience has no other aim than the search and final definition of the individual's identity. The way in which the novel begins its life is significant enough: the real autobiography yields its form to the "fictional" autobiography. This, of course, is not the product of randomness. The narrator's concern lies with defining her/himself, with what s/he is in the present; and nothing seems more appropriate than a recollection of past events in order to understand the present. This is precisely what autobiographies attempt to do: "Autobiographies affirm identity. The autobiographer, attesting his existence by the fact of writing, lives through his explanations, tacit or explicit, of how he came to be the person he is" (Spacks 1976: 1).

In his analysis of the eighteenth-century novel —and of the concept of realistic particularity on which it is based— Watt (1987: 17) proposes two aspects as

fundamental for our understanding of its nature: *characterisation,* and *presentation of background.*

The first of these terms becomes of extreme importance for it is implicitly related to the idea of definition of the individual. The more precise the characterisation is carried out, the more exact the idea we will have of the character in question, the more defined his identity will appear. One way of achieving more precision in the characterisation of the individual is to concentrate on the *question of names* (Watt 1987: 18). Quite a few eighteenth-century novels were entitled after their hero: Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders* and *Roxana;* Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones;* Richardson's *Pamela, Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison;* Fanny Burney's *Evelina, Cecilia* and *Camilla;* a tendency that still goes well into the nineteenth century, as some of Dickens' novels show: *Oliver Twist, Little Dorrit, Dombey and Son* or *David Copperfield,* for example. The implication of this is clear: the whole meaning of the novel is condensed in one single name. The author's concern, that of defining the identity of the main character, is first accomplished by means of naming. Rushdie's novel could very well have been named after the main character, and narrator, of the story. The fact of preferring the title "Midnight's Children" to "Saleem Sinai" is significant in the sense that it seeks to hint at the contrary aim, not the definition of individual identity, but rather the loss of identity. Identity is traditionally embodied in a name; Rushdie not only proposes to change this name for a title that would already imply a deeper ambiguity —Midnight's Child— but widens this ambiguity by adding to it a sense of plurality, of variety, of multiplicity. Identity has become too complicated a matter in the twentieth century to be defined simply by a name; in this way, the proposition that proper names "are the verbal expression of the particular identity of each individual person" (Watt 1987: 18) is here seriously questioned. Identity seems to have lost the seriousness with which it was treated in the past: thus, proper names are replaced by collective names. In fact, the question of names becomes almost a game in *Midnight's Children:* a game that enhances the fragility of the concept of identity. Names are given, or changed, or added, for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways: Mumtaz, the narrator's mother, changes her name when she marries Ahmed Sinai, and becomes Amina; a change whose importance the narrator himself is well aware of:

> And now Aadam Aziz lifted his daughter (with his own arms), passing her up after the dowry into the care of this man who had re-named her and so re-invented her, thus becoming in a sense her father as well as her new husband. (MC 66; my emphasis)

Indira Gandhi, who, we are told, changed her initial name from Priyadarshini to Gandhi, is usually referred to as "The Widow"; Picture Singh is mainly known as "The Most Charming Man in the World," or sometimes referred to as "Captain," or as "Pictureji"; Mian Abdullah, was spoken to as "The Hummingbird"; Laylah, Saleems's

wife, is known as "Parvati-the-witch"; while Saleem's sister, Jamila, also known as "The Brass Monkey," when she becomes a singer, is Jamila Singer, as well as "Pakistan's Angel," "The Voice of the Nation," the "Bulbul-e-Din," and "nightingale-of-the-faith" — where each name means an appropiation on behalf of the one who re-names.

Saleem himself realises the impartance of names; he knows that they are related to one's identity, and that as such they are an important part in defining one's self. This is the reason why, when he is unable to remember his name (one of them), he feels somewhat lost:

> You see Padma: I have told this story before. But what refused to return? What, despite the liberating venene of a colourless serpent, failed to emerge from my lips? Padma: the buddha had forgotten his name (To be precise: his first name). (MC 365)

He hasn't lost his identity, but he has lost some part of it; Saleem is confused "and is trying to recall his name. And can summon up only nicknames: Snotnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, Piece-of-the-Moon" (MC 370).

The uneasiness, the strangeness, the void he feels within is embodied in his name, Saleem, rather, in its absence. The same would have happened if he had lost any of the multiplicity of other names he had: some part of his self would be lost, because Rushdie, taking nominalism to playful literal extremes, equates naming with being, so that each name represents a *fragment* of his life. In keeping with this equation Saleem, somewhat naively, tries to hold on to the notion that, should he recover his name, he would finally know who he is, he would succeed in defining his identity. And the truth is that by the time the narration takes place Saleem has already remembered his lost name, and finds himself, still, trying to achieve the impossible: to define his identity, which is the whole process of his narration, of his story-telling.

The feeling of a solid and coherent character was conveyed by the eighteenth-century narrator in several ways: firstly, by means of the apparent psychological evolution undergone by the character as the story progresses; secondly, by the narrator's attitude at the moment of the narration with respect to the narrated events; and thirdly, by the psychological soundness and stability of the character throughout his adventures:

> Eighteenth-century novelistic characters, although a great deal happens to them, testify their stability far more eloquently than their flexibility. Fixed in their moral natures, uncorruptible by their experience . . . , identity . . . remains solid against all external pressure, the substantiality of their being in itself suggesting their virtue. (Spacks 1976: 8)

In practice, the identity of the eighteenth-century hero is often established at the very beginning of the novel. Defoe, for example, usually begins his novels with "an act of self-assertion, of rebellion, or exclusion" (Probyn 1987: 30). This act of self-assertion

normally involves the affirmation of the hero's singlemindedness. Robinson Crusoe leaves his parental house with a single aim in mind, that of increasing the economic status of his parents. In this sense we can say that the whole novel fictionalises the accomplishment of this desire. The island and the isolation to which he is there confined is in no way an obstacle to his development; on the contrary, as Watt has pointed out, "Crusoe's island gives him the complete *laissez-faire* which economic man needs to realise his aims" (1987: 86). In this light, Crusoe's "forced" retirement onto his island like his other "misfortunes" turn out to be the necessary means for the fulfilment of his Puritan aspirations (Watt 1987: 77).

Of course, this psychological stability of the eighteenth-century character is pinpointed by the attitude with which the narrator-characters present themselves to the reader. That no characterological traansformation is suffered by the eighteenth-century character, that "to remain essentially the same, in many eighteenth-century novels, constitutes the central character's triumph" (Spacks 1976: 8) is thoroughly endorsed by the position from which the narrator speaks. The narrator-character of the eighteenth-century novel —not only Robinson Crusoe, but also Moll Flanders, Pamela, Clarissa— tells us his/her stories from a pedestal, that has apparently been earned by remaining faithful to his/her initial view of life. Thus, Pamela, the heroine of Richardson's novel, reaches her final position by holding strongly to her virtue; for she does very little, apart from stubbornly withstanding the sexual approaches of her master.

It is true that not all our narrators end high up on their pedestal; Roxana, the protagonist of Defoe's last novel, seems to be far away from it:

> Here, after some few Years of flourishing, and outwardly happy Circumstances, I fell into a dreadful Course of Calamities, and Amy also; the very Reverse of our former Good Days; the Blast of Heaven seem'd to follow the Injury done to the poor Girl, by us both; and I was brought so low again, that my Repentance seem'd to be only the Consequence of my Misery, as my Misery was of my Crime. (1982: 379)

But her final position as narrator, her strength and solidity, the full awareness, acknowledgement and acceptance of her position seems to contradict the final "dreadful Course of Calamities" into which she is led. The truth is that her final position —the stance from which she narrates— seems to differ little from the one in which Robinson utters his almost last words:

> In the mean time I in part settled my self here; for first of all I marry'd, and that not either to my disadvantage or dissatisfaction [...and] my inclination to go abroad, and his importunity, prevailed and engaged me to go in this ship, as a private trader to the East Indies. This was in the year 1694. (1987: 298)

Although both seem to find themselves in opposite positions at the end of their respective stories —Robinson at the height of his luck and good fortune and ready to make more profit, whereas Roxana seems to have reached the utmost deterioration,

with little hope awaiting her— they both seem to share a common feature: they know who they are, where they stand, and why they are there; their final position is the direct consequence of a process of which they have been conscious throughout; they are merely the product of their own choices. If there ever was an inner development within these narrator-characters, it has definitely come to an end. Their attitude while narrating, and especially at the very end of it, clearly shows that there is no place for further evolution. When Robinson, at the end of his narration, offers to tell us more about his coming adventures, the reader is little excited: conceivably, Robinson will continue to overcome any difficulty and will continue to increase his wealth; little else can be expected: now, more than ever, we realise that these "people are rewarded . . . for being themselves" (Spacks 1976: 8).

By contrast, Saleem's attitude at the end of his narration shows a totally different disposition, and this is seen in two different ways: firstly, by the picture he offers of himself at the very end of his narrative, which breaks, shatters, and smashes to pieces any possibility of defining his own identity:

> I hear lies being spoken in the night, anything you want to be you kin be, the greatest lie of all, cracking now, fission of breaking beneath the awful pressure of the crowd, bag of bones falling down down down, just as once at Jallianwala, but Dyer seems not to be present today, no Mercurochrome, only a broken creature spilling pieces of itself into the street, because I have been so-many too-many persons. (MC 463; my emphasis)

The "greatest lie of all," that which is accepted by every single character of the eighteenth-century novel, that man can actually know who he is, and which becomes Saleem's main concern throughout his narrative ("I no longer want to be anything except what who I am. What who I am?" [*MC* 383]), is finally exposed to the light by Saleem himself. Secondly, Saleem attempts to respond to a question whose answer seems almost to have been taken for granted by the eighteenth-century "heroes." Saleem may either dismiss the question ("Don't try to fill my head with that history. I am who I am, that's all there is." [*MC* 351]), or attempt an "honest" reply:

> I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens. . . . . (MC 383)

Two answers, and both very far away from being effective. But who, by now, expects effectiveness? Whereas "the principles of orthodox novelistic structure . . . always demand both that something happen to people in a novel and that the people remain themselves in the face of all happening" (Spacks 1976: 8), Saleem is asked to define his identity. He fails because he tries: *Midnight's Children* demands of his hero that he confront the impossible task. But it is not only the position of the narrator throughout the whole story, as well as his final stance, that signals antagonistic

postures. The way in which the future is regarded also offers a good point of comparison between Defoe's novels and Rushdie's novel. As I have commented above, the eighteenth-century hero finds him/herself at the end of the novel with little more to do, except enjoy and relish the position reached in his/her struggle to assert him/herself throughout the narrative. The eighteenth-century heroes "all face the problem of discovering and defining their proper social positions" (Spacks 1976: 9), and this they do by the time the narration comes to an end. The end of the narration imposes a closed ending on the story. That Crusoe offers to continue his narration in the near future does not change the fact that he has reached a close ending, and so exerts small attraction on the modern reader:

> all these things, with some very surprizing incidents in some new odventures of my own, for ten years more, I may perhaps give a farther account of hereafter (1987: 299)

A reader, who, to a large extent, can take for granted the kind of adventures he/she would encounter, and is certain to know the outcome of them. On the contrary, Saleem's offering seems totally different: the passibility of his rendering further adventures is in no way a free choice, but almost an imposition, an obligation. The future, like the past, is full of uncertainties; however, Saleem already feels that he will have to recount them:

> No, that won't do, I shall have to write the future as I have written the past, to set it down with the absolute certainty of a prophet. (MC 462)

The "absolute certainty," loaded with a high degree of irony, is nothing but a statement of his right, and need, to fictionalise his future, as well as he has done in the past, in the hope of establishing it, thus hinting at the disquieting metafictional possibility that he exists primarily within the written text, that his identity depends on the written version of his life he chooses to select from a limitless range of potential possibilites. In short, that he is capable of writing himself into existence.

So, whereas identity is taken for granted and hardly poses any problems in the eighteenth-century novel, Rushdie's novel shaws that it is nothing but a linguistic construct. As we shall see, other universal truths which are implicitly taken for granted in the eighteenth-century novel, are similarly deconstructed in *Midnight's Children*.

According to Watt, the other fundamental feature which defines the eighteenth-century novel is the presentation of background. This implies a direct relation between the human being and the background in which he moves: that the individual is able to define his own identity involves that he/she has been able to establish a very "special" relationship with the world that surrounds him/her: one that we could name as a one-way relationship, where the individual's aim is to master every element which relates to him, and thus obtain the maximum profit. To do so, he/she thoroughly relies on his/her senses: "Modern realism, of course, begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses" (Watt 1987: 12). Society, except as a means, has little to offer, for "the pursuit of truth is conceived of as a wholly individual matter" (Watt 1987: 13).

Following Locke's "principle of individuation," the eighteenth-century novelists define their heroes' existence by relating them to a particular locus in space and time. The more details the narrator produces about his/her life, the more truthful the narration appears to be: the excess of detail, both, as to space and time, becomes the main key in showing a realist presentation of the background. Watt brilliantly referred to this point when commenting on Defoe's novels:

> he [Defoe] convinces us completely that his narrative is occurring ot o particular place and at a particular time, and our memory of his novels consists largely of these vividly realised moments in the lives of his characters, moments which are loosely strung together to form a convincing biographical perspective. (Watt 1987: 24)

Thus, a continual acknowledgement of temporal details becomes a constant in Crusoe's narrative; his first reference appears in the first sentence of the novel, where he tells the reader about his birth date, which seems to be of extreme importance, for in this way he places himself within history. The reader is spared chranological detailing until his arrival on the island ("It was, by my account, the 30th of Sept. when . . . I first set foot upon this horrid island" [1987: 81]), where he immediately makes clear the importance of knowing the day in which he lives: "and thus I kept my kalendar, or weekly, monthly, and yearly reckoning of time" (1987: 81). In order to help himself in this purpose he decides to keep a journal, in which every day will have its own record:

> September 30, 1659. I, poor miserable Robinson Crusoe, being shipwrecked, during a dreadful storm, in the offing, came on shore on this dismal unfortunate island. (1987: 87)
>
> October 1. In the morning I saw . . . .(1987: 87)
>
> From the first of October to the 24th. All these days entirely spent in many several voyages . . . . (1987: 87)

In this way Defoe continues for a while:

> Nov. 14, 15, 16. These three days I spent in making little squore chests or boxes. (1987: 89)

In Defoe's "Kalendar," as we can see, the temporal references are being complemented by spatial ones. In his diary —that utmost faithful mirror of reality— there is hardly any reference to inner reality, or to any comment revealing psychological depth. Thus, emotionally important dates, such as Christmas, receive small comment:

> Dec. 24. Much rain all night and all day; no stirring out.

> Dec. 25. Rain all day.
> Dec. 26. No rain, and the earth much cooler than before, and pleasanter. (1987: 91)

Apparently, Crusoe "has no time" for feelings of any type: what produces little material benefit must not be taken into consideration, it is only what his senses can perceive that merits to be recorded in his diaries. The predominance of the external world over the internal world is conspicuous here, in accordance with the principle above described: the need to fully control the background: "The body precedes the soul in Defoe's work, just as the first challenge is controlled by the individual of his or her physical environment" (Probyn 1987: 29).

Salman Rushdie takes up this diary-wise technique and also the technique of specific and cumulative detailing, but for his own particular aims, which stand opposite to Crusoe's. What for Crusoe is the natural means of expressing a reality, the obvious way of rendering what his senses apprehend, for Saleem becomes a way out from a position that he feels unable to confront as narrator. Salman Rushdie uses this eighteenth-century convention very consciously, in such a way that he empties it of its previous meaning by showing how it no longer serves its initial aim: the specifity of time, as well as that of place, offers no help in defining the individual's identity.

Saleem begins his narration by establishing the date of his birth; this fact, by means of which Crusoe signals the starting point of his life, allows Saleem to realise that his life, in fact, began a long time ago. Saleem manages to be much more precise than Crusoe, and he pinpoints the exact moment of his birth; but little he gains by this, except establishing the important link with history. The parodic use of the diary form can be realised throughout the whole of *Midnight's Children,* reaching its peak at several moments. In *Book One,* when Saleem does not exist as character, the narrator makes use of a diary-like narrative, not lacking in personal experience (which should be regarded as totally impossible):

> ...On April 6th, 1919, the holy city of Amritsar smelled (gloriously, Padma, celestially!) of excrement. And perhaps the (beauteous!) reek did not offend the Nose on my grandfather's face. (MC 32)
>
> It is April 7th, 1919, and in Amritsar the Mahatma's grand design is being distorted. The shops have shut. the railway station is closed. (MC 34)

However distant these events seem to be from the present, the reader can assume that Saleem, both as narrator and writer within his story, has done some research and is able to tell what happened. But all the efforts on behalf of the reader to give credibility to his narrator are entirely shattered when Saleem, still in a diary-like form, manages to recount the actual dialogue between his grand-parents:

> It is April 13th, and they are still in Amristar. 'This affair isn't finished,' Aadam Aziz told Nasseem. 'We can't go, you see: they may need doctors again.'
>
> 'So we must sit here and wait until the end of the world?'
> He rubbed his nose. 'No, not so long, I am afraid.' (MC 35)

In fact, the exactitude with which the narrator tells about such distant events is nothing new, for he has been doing so throughout his narration; but now, by going one step further, by pointing out the temporal coordinate, he forces the reader to be aware of the excess of detail, and to question the validity of such a mode of narration.

The fact that in books Two and Three Saleem exists as a character in his own story changes little as to the mode of narration. His presence in his own story adds little extra knowledge; besides, it would be difficult to surpass the exactitude of the narrative in Book One. Again, in books Two and Three, all temporal references have a very different function from those in the eighteenth-century novel. In a broad sense, these can be said to point at two different aims: *firstly,* by establishing a clear and conspicuous parallelism between the national and international events and those occurring to his family he draws the reader's attention to the artificiality of the narrative, and to the banality of using specific dates as a means of achieving verisimilitude. *Secondly,* by showing that these details are only the last resort which the narrator can make use of to hold his narration together, it completely reverses the function of dates as carried out by the eighteenth-century novelists. That is, when Crusoe places his events in time, his intention is that a precise date will render realism to his narration: the date becomes a complement to any other aspect of his recounting. But when it is Saleem who uses dates, it is done with a very different purpose: for him dates are the only certain thing that can be sometimes told; dates are a substitution, not a complement, for what-actually-happened. Saleem himself realises this when he says:

> There are things which took place on the night of March 25th which must remain permanently in a state of confusion. (MC 357)

It is by being extremely precise with dates that Saleem attempts to overcome that state of confusion which he encounters when trying to tell a series of events. What, in fact, the narrator is trying to do is to apply the old and traditional modes and ways of measuring and understanding to a "reality" —a new reality— that can no longer be measured and understood according to traditional canons. Saleem, in a desperate attempt, struggles to scan a reality which appears to be irrational, fantastic and incomprehensible.

In this same effort to measure this new reality, to carry out a faithful presentation of its background, the detailing of space and what composes that space becomes, yet again, vital. So, Salman Rushdie makes continual use of this eighteenth-century convention, but his intentions are very different. The effect in Defoe's practice offers no doubt, as the critics have continuously acknowledged: "the endless details beget a feeling of confidence" (Ross 1987: 18). But when reading *Midnight's Children* the reader cannot feel the same kind of certainty, for the excess of detail paradoxically offers nothing but confusion, mistrust, suspicion. As we have seen, it is when Saleem finds himself at a loss by the confusion he encounters that he resorts to this eighteenth-

century convention, in a futile attempt to counteract the overwhelming reality. The result seems twofold, and in both ways going against what seemed to be Defoe's aims: firstly, it signals the artificiality and self-reflexivity of the narrative, whereas Defoe apparently "maintained that his novels were not invented but discovered, not fictions but ready-made history" (Probyn 1987: 1). Secondly, and most importantly, Saleem's detailing, which ought to be defined as extraordinary rather than excessive, underlines the inadequacy of language to represent reality, especially this "new reality." But, paradoxically, it is by acknowledging this inadequacy, by becoming conscious of it, and thus making use of it, that Saleem —and language— becomes closer to its purpose. A fantastic and marvellous reality deserves a language in keeping with it.

Thematically; it is mainly when Saleem tells about the most macabre events that he uses this technique —when he recounts the massacre at Amritsar:

> They have fired a total of one thousand six hundred and fifty rounds into the unarmed crowd. Of these, one thousand five hundred and sixteen have found their mark, killing or wounding some person. (MC 36)

When he tells about the assassination of Abdullah, numbers are also important: first, perhaps, as if attempting to portrait faithfully:

> Six new moons came into the room, six crescent knives held by men dressed all in black, with covered faces. (MC 47)

but very soon realising that faithfulness, and so, realism, is an impossible task. The exaggeration and exuberance in language becomes poetic rather than realistic.

> In Agra there are maybe eight thousand four hundred and twenty pie-dogs. On that night, it is certain that some were eating, some . . . . Say about two thousand of these; that left six thousand four hundred and twenty of the curs, and . . . . They went noisily, like an army, and afterwards their trail was littered with bones and dung and bits of hair. (MC 48)

This last sentence by Saleem reminds us of one by Crusoe:

> nor is it possible to express the horror of my mind, at seeing the shore spread with skulls, hands, feet, and other bones of humane bodies . . . . (MC 172)

But in spite of their similarity, the difference between both is clear enough: when Crusoe narrates we see nothing more than what he tells, his words (numbers and depictions) portray what he sees; whereas when Saleem narrates, his words are only part of that reality he is trying to describe, but in no way a mirror or a substitution for it. This difference is reinforced by the importance that is given to the presence of the narrator: Crusoe makes it clear that what he is recounting is true because he was there and saw it with his own eyes ("I observed," he shrewdly pinpoints); Saleem, on the contrary, thinks little of his actually being there at the right moment and place: reality is

far too complex to be validated by the narrator's mere presence, his attempt towards exactitude should be considered as naively presumptuous and boastful.

To sum up: Saleem's attitude towards very detailed narration can be seen in the following quotation: there is place for such a narrative, but in no way can it be conceived of as a guarantee for verisimilitude. It is immediately questioned by Saleem himself:

> On Friday, December 27th, a man answering to my grandfather's description was seen, chugha-coated, drooling, in the vicinity of the Hazratbal Mosque. At four forty-five on Saturday morning, Haji Muhammad Khalil Ghanai noticed the theft, from the Mosque's inner sanctum, of the valley's most treasured relic: the holy hair of the Prophet Muhammad.
>
> Did he? Didn't he? If it was him, why did he not enter the Mosque, stick in hand, to belabour the faithful as he had become accustomed to doing? If not him, then why? There were rumours . . . . (MC 277)

There is no doubt that thematically, subversiveness becomes one of the main traits in Rushdie's novel. It could not be otherwise, for, as Kundera has pointd out, "the novel is incompatible with the totalitarian universe" (1990: 14-15). But it is not only thematically that *Midnight's Children* is presented as a subversive novel, it is also subversive in its self-conscious awareness as a work of art that belongs to a literary tradition, and that is based on a series of literary conventions which it cannot avoid: "it is an act of sedition, committed not just against the state, but against a prescribed conception of literature (Batty 1987: 64). The attempt to undermine a coherent, stable view of society is paralleled by the attempt to undermine the conventions which the literary works belonging to that culture are based upon.

In this way, Rushdie has superbly shown how the heavy burden of tradition, which John Barth and Harold Bloom among others referred to, can be used to the writer's own benefit. One of *Midnight's Children'* s concerns is to stress its awareness of the place it occupies in the literary tradition. It is essential to realise that the undermining of this literary tradition does not imply a rejection, but rather a refunctionalisation of the old, worn-out conventions for its own particular aims. The two features by which parody is defined are "repetition with critical distance," whose immediate consequence is that the parodic forms "signal less an acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the definable forms of their predecessors than their own desire to refunction those forms to their own needs" (Hutcheon 1985: 4).

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ESTUDIO EXPERIMENTAL SOBRE EL EFECTO DE TRES COMPONENTES DE CONOCIMIENTO PREVIO EN LA LECTURA DE TEXTOS INGLESES POR ESTUDIANTES DE INGLES COMO LENGUA NO NATIVA[1]

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1. INTRODUCCION

La investigación llevada a cabo sobre la comprensión durante la lectura con hablantes nativos de inglés ha mostrado que la habilidad para entender textos se basa no sólo en el conocimiento lingüístico del lector, sino también en su conocimiento general del mundo y en la medida en que ese conocimiento se activa durante el proceso mental de la lectura. La investigación con nativos adultos ingleses ha mostrado que cuanto más capaz es un lector de acceder al conocimiento previo bien sobre el área de contenido de un texto (Bransford y Johnson 1972, 1973) o sobre la estructura formal de un texto (Kintsch y van Dijk 1975; Kintsch 1977; Rumelhart 1975; Thorndike 1977; Mandler 1978) más capaz será de comprender, almacenar en la memoria a largo plazo (long term memory) y recuperar el texto. Además, esta investigación con hablantes adultos de inglés ha mostrado que la experiencia previa individual del lector influye en las estructuras de conocimiento previo o *esquemas de conocimiento* (Bartlett 1932; Rumelhart 1980) que el lector activará para interpretar un texto.

Mucha menos investigación se ha llevado a cabo para investigar el papel de los esquemas o conocimiento previo en la comprensión de la lectura en una lengua no