

Geist in Mumbai: Hegel with Rushdie

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This article demonstrates that Hegel and Rushdie are contemporaries, and that the Phenomenology of Spirit and Midnight's Children are each others counterpart—philosophical and literary, respectively. It shows that the narrative structures of the Phenomenology of Spirit and Midnight's Children are identical, and both texts culminate in the remembrance of their narrative journeys. It argues that authenticity is constituted by the inauthentic. Recognizing that both texts remain open to the future, this article concludes by urging that India is now the land of the future and that Midnight's Children is the continuation of the Phenomenology of Spirit.

Rising from my pages comes the unmistakable whiff of chutney. So let me obfuscate no further. I, Saleem Sinai, possessor of the most delicately gifted olfactory organ in history have dedicated my latter days to the large-scale preparation of condiments. But now, “A cook?” you gasp in horror, “A khansama merely?” How is it possible?” And I grant, such mastery of the multitude gifts of cookery and language is rare indeed; yet I possess it. You are amazed; but then I am not, you see, one of your 200-rupees-a-month cookery johnnies, but my own master.... And my chutneys and kasaundies are, after all, connected to my nocturnal scribblings—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 clocks.

—Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 38

Here is the preview, suitable for all audiences. This article demonstrates that Hegel and Rushdie are contemporaries, and that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Midnight's Children* are each the counterpart—philosophical and literary, respectively—of the other. It shows that the narrative structures of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Midnight's Children* are identical, and that both texts culminate in the recollection and recapitulation of the sojourn of their principle characters (the phenomenological observer and *Geist* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Saleem Sinai and India in *Midnight's Children*). It argues that authenticity is not opposed to the inauthentic but rather is constituted by it. Recognizing that both texts remain open to the future, this article concludes by urging that India is now the land of the future and that *Midnight's Children* is the continuation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Austen in Amritsar

Probably, the [Indian] culture itself demands that a certain permeability of boundaries be maintained in one's self-image and that the self be not defined too tightly or separated mechanically from the not-self.

—Nandy, *Intimate Enemy* 107

That Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* has a natural affinity for India is demonstrated by the 2004 adaptation *Bride and Prejudice*, directed by Gurinder Chadha. Austen's Elizabeth Bennet becomes Chadha's Lalitha Bakshi, Fitzwilliam Darcy becomes William Darcy, and Hertfordshire is transposed to Amritsar.¹ It might be thought that this would refute Slavoj Žižek's claim that "it is Jane Austen who is perhaps the only counterpart to Hegel in literature: *Pride and Prejudice* is the literary *Phenomenology of the Spirit*; *Mansfield Park* the *Science of Logic* and *Emma* the *Encyclopaedia*" (62). If Austen adapts so easily to India, how could she be Hegel's literary counterpart? Surely, Hegel's alleged eurocentrism would preclude him adapting to India?

Not only is Žižek correct to identify Austen as Hegel's literary counterpart, Hegel has *another* literary counterpart: Salman Rushdie. *Midnight's Children* is a literary *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

Theory, anyone?

Authors centuries and thousands of miles apart can turn out to be inseparable. Their adjacency stems from a linguistic bond and has little to do with the metrical structure articulated by numbers, whether these numbers take the form of latitudes and longitudes or whether they take the form of dates. For the remoteness or proximity of linguistic events does not lend itself to uniform calibration. It cannot be expressed as a numerical constant: as one hundred years or one thousand miles. Literary space and time are conditional and elastic; their distances can vary, can lengthen or contract, depending on who is reading and what is being read. No mileage can tell us how far one author is from another; no dates can tell us who is close to whom.

—Dimock, "Literature for the Planet" 174

Numerous studies have coupled *Midnight's Children* with other texts. Here are just a few examples. Robert Alter and Clement Hawes discern parallels with Laurence Sterne's *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentle-*

man, John Clement Ball and Philip Engblom discover the relevance of Bakhtin's analyses, Nancy E. Batty finds correspondences with *The Arabian Nights*, Dubravka Juraga observes similarities with several *Bildungsroman* from the previous century, C. Kanaganayakam perceives connections with such epics as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, Merivale recognizes linkages with Günter Grass' *Tin Drum*, and Mujeebuddin Syed sees relations with such texts as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Vishnu Purana*. Unlike these comparisons, the claim that *Midnight's Children* is a literary *Phenomenology of the Spirit* might seem too fanciful to be taken seriously. Skeptics might urge that, after all, there is no evidence that Rushdie has been influenced by Hegel's philosophy. This article will show that not only is *Midnight's Children* a literary *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but that the former text can be read as a continuation of the latter. As readers of Hegel and Rushdie may already have anticipated, the connections between these two texts cannot be demonstrated directly or immediately. That task will first require a trek into the Himalayas of literary theory.

Rejecting the historicism of semantic synchronism when interpreting texts, Wai Chee Dimock instead advocates diachronic historicism and relativity of simultaneity. Semantic synchronism asserts that "the meaning of a text is assumed to be the property of the historical period in which it originated; coextensive with that period, it remains undisturbed by anything beyond" ("A Theory of Resonance" 1060-1061). The meaning of a text does not change or develop over time; on this view, its meaning always remains whatever it was when the text was written. As Dimock observes, "this synchronic model hardly acknowledges that the hermeneutical horizon of the text might extend beyond the moment of composition, that future circumstances might bring other possibilities of meaning" (1061). Semantic synchronism might concede that how readers appropriate a text can alter—that is, what E. D. Hirsch refers to as the "significance" of a text can change. Nevertheless, semantic synchronism asserts that a text's meaning is intrinsic and that this does not change.

Unlike semantic synchronism's historicism, diachronic historicism acknowledges that a text's meaning does change over time. Recognizing that texts "do a lot of traveling," Dimock explains: "As they travel they run into new semantic networks, new ways of imputing meaning. Such changes in the registers of reception, making a text continually interpretable, also mean that any particular reading is no more than a passing episode in a history of readings. Diachronic historicism ... intimates that a reading is topical,

circumstantial, and bound to appear obtuse to future readers who, living among other circumstances and sensitized by other concerns, bring to the same words a different web of meanings” (1061). Dimock’s diachronic historicism would be a species of semantic synchronism were she to maintain that, although the meaning of a text changes, the text itself remains the same. According to her, however, the text also alters: “Semantically elastic, stretched by a growing web of cross-references, often to the point of unrecognizability, a text cannot and will not remain forever the same object” (1062). Since a text becomes a new object when it is read differently at different times, it would follow that it also becomes a new object when it is read differently at the same time. This point undermines semantic synchronism’s historicism. Even at the time when a text is produced, it may have multiple meanings—and so it can actually be multiple objects. The project of recovering a text’s original meaning—which semantic synchronism claims is its only meaning—is misguided.

At this point, friends of semantic synchronism might raise an objection. If a text’s meaning changes over time, if a text can have multiple meanings at the same time, if the text becomes new objects as its meanings change, then what authorizes any reference to a text? If there are as many *Paradise Losts* as there are interpretations, then why are these interpretations each regarded as readings of *Paradise Lost*? Diachronic historicism has a response, of course, one that is quite Hegelian (and, as will be seen, quite Rushdie-esque). It is the history of a text’s interpretation which authorizes reference to *a* text. It is the narrative that is told about how a text has been read that legitimizes the claim that there are multiple meanings of a text, rather than merely multiple texts, each with a distinct meaning. As a consequence, the history of the interpretation of a text does not remain external to that text. Rather, this history is an aspect of the text’s identity.

Dimock invokes Einstein’s notion of the relativity of simultaneity to argue further that texts that might have appeared to belong to different eras can be, or become, contemporaries. Events are not absolutely simultaneous, or consecutive, but are so only from a particular frame of reference. Just so, whether texts share a context is a function of how they are read. Recognizing that “context is not a fixture or a given, for since the world is a continuum, no object can stand by itself or be exhausted by the relations it entertains at a particular moment,” Dimock also perceives that “a text is finite, but its contexts are countless” (1065). As Dimock recognizes, the relativity of simultaneity applies, not only to texts, but also to authors.

Although Dimock cites Dante and Osip Mandelstam as two authors who are inseparable, this is equally true of the Hegel of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and the Rushdie of *Midnight's Children*.

At this point, it is necessary to ask two seemingly naive questions. What is it that permits texts written at different places and times nevertheless to share a context? What allows their authors to become inseparable? Mandelstam reads Dante, in the case that Dimock examines, and so it would be easily to conclude that one author reading another is a necessary condition for their becoming inseparable, and for their texts to occupy the same context. Such a conclusion contains an element of the truth, but it remains one-sided. One author reading another is a sufficient condition for their becoming inseparable, but it is the *act* of their being read simultaneously that is the necessary condition. In other words, authors become contemporaries, and texts are inserted into a shared contexts, by their being read together. For Einstein, events are simultaneous, only relative to an observer's perspective. Just so, authors are contemporaries, and texts share contexts, when read juxtapositionally. This is why Mandelstam reading Dante is a derivative example that risks missing the central point. Mandelstam reads Dante, and so they become contemporaries. They also become contemporaries, and this would be a paradigmatic instance, when Dimock reads them together. What is crucial, then, is not that one author reads another, but their being read together. Hegel and Rushdie become contemporaries, and the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and *Midnight's Children* occupy the same context, when read simultaneously—even if Rushdie has never read Hegel.

Pickle-jars and a gallery of images

Physicist E. C. G. Sudarshan tells me that, in some versions of the Mahabharata, Arjuna requests Krishna towards the end of the epic to repeat the Gita, for he has forgotten some of the teachings over the years. Krishna replies that, even for him, there is a right moment for everything; he himself can no longer recite the whole of the Gita. Even gods do not individually *possess* or *create* their wisdom or knowledge.

—Nandy, *Time Warps* 227

Saleem Sinai, the narrator and protagonist of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, seeks to preserve the memory of events that would otherwise be forgotten. Living in a pickle-factory, he compares each chapter in his autobiography to a pickle-jar, with each jar preserving the past: "Every pickle-jar

(you will forgive me if I become florid for a moment) contains, therefore, the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time!" (Rushdie *Midnight's Children* 548). It is impossible to read this without recalling Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the last chapter, "Absolute Knowing," Hegel compares his book to a gallery of images.

Critics might object. What could be more different than a series of jars of pickles and chutneys, on the one hand, and a gallery of paintings, on the other? Despite the difference in metaphors, however, what connects the two analogies is the hope of comprehending the past, and completing it. The metaphors may be different, but they express the same concept.

What Hegel and Rushdie provide in their texts, expressed through their respective metaphors of a gallery of images and a series of pickle and chutney jars, are memory palaces or theaters. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines a "memory theater" as "an imaginary building thought of as comprising various rooms and areas, each containing mnemonic objects and features that symbolize particular ideas, which can be visualized mentally as a systematic method of remembering those ideas."² Such theaters can take many forms. While Hegel's theater is a gallery of images and Rushdie's is a series of jars of chutneys and pickles, Marshall McLuhan notes: "Dante's *Commedia* was recognized as a 'memory theatre' in its time and later, as were the Summas of the philosophers. Vico was the first to spot language itself as a memory theatre. *Finnegans Wake* is such a memory theatre for the entire contents of human consciousness and unconsciousness.... The medieval cathedrals were memory theatres. *The Golden Bough* is a memory theatre of the corporate rather than the private consciousness" (339).

Connecting the metaphors of a gallery and a series of jars of pickles and chutneys makes visible that the concluding chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "Absolute Knowing," is not another stage of consciousness, but instead the gathering together of the previous stages. Absolute knowing, as Michael Vater recognizes, "can provide no new content, nothing surpassing the substance of previous stages, taken either as parts or as a whole. But it can gather together the previous stages in inwardizing repetition in order to show that these shapes or 'spirits' do in fact all arise as the ferment of one spirit" (162). This becomes obvious when applied to pickles and chutneys. A jar of mango pickle contains mango, of course, as well as cottonseed oil, fenugreek, hing, mustard, red chili powder, salt, and turmeric. Although these ingredients can be listed separately, the jar of mango pickle is not itself

another ingredient. Rather, the new content of the jar lies in its bringing these ingredients together. Analogously, a gallery may contain many paintings. This gallery is itself not a painting—that is to say, the series is not one of its members—but the new content rests in bringing together these paintings to constitute a gallery. To see this point, imagine how an exhibit of “Expressionism in *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna” might differ from “Resistance to the Modern in *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna.” Even if, *per impossible*, both exhibits had exactly the same paintings, the frames in which those painting are viewed would be significantly different. The moment of absolute knowing is not itself another stage, but rather the linking together of previous stages, thereby showing, as Vater writes, how “all arise as the ferment of one spirit.” It is only as a result of this linking that these stages can be recognized, retrospectively, *as* stages. Indeed, it is only as a consequence of this linking that these stages become stages. This also provides the key to understanding those passages in the chapter on “Absolute Knowing” where Hegel suggests that the moment of recollection—in which all of the previous shapes of consciousness are seen together and their relations to each other discerned—is not in time. Hegel is not maintaining that this recollecting moment occurs in a timeless eternity, but rather that it is not itself a further shape, and so it does not occur in the same time frame as those shapes.

Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* presents a chronological narrative of (mostly Western) history (see Forster).³ Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* has a more restricted focus, India from roughly the late nineteenth century through the later half of the twentieth. It might seem that this is not a sufficient basis to compare these two texts.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Midnight’s Children* both employ the narrative device of distinguishing between what Hegel refers to as the natural consciousness and the scientific or phenomenological observer. That is to say, each natural consciousness is embedded within a specific shape of consciousness, such that that shape provides the horizon of that natural consciousness’ world. Natural consciousness may be aware, dimly, that the shape of consciousness in which it is embedded had a predecessor, but it would not comprehend how the present shape emerged as an attempt to resolve contradictions within the previous shape, contradictions which rendered that shape untenable. The phenomenological observer, by contrast, does understand the relations between the shapes. The phenomenological observer watches, as it were, as natural consciousness is kicked from one shape of consciousness to another. This observer is Hegel, naturally, as well

as his readers (at least those readers who make a second go-through, and so know where the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is bound). *Midnight's Children* uses exactly this distinction between natural consciousness and phenomenological observer. Saleem narrates *Midnight's Children* and, as the narrator, he understands the significance of his story. In this respect, he is the phenomenological observer of *Midnight's Children*. He is also a character in the story he tells, however, and that character does not understand the story's significance (or even that he will have been a character in a story). As character, he plays the role of natural consciousness, moving from one scene to the next without understanding how the latter emerges from the former.

It is necessary at this point to complicate this discussion. It might be thought that the phenomenological observer—Hegel and Saleem-as-narrator—merely describes a series of events, and only reports on their relations. This would be a mistake. Rather, the phenomenological observer is what in India would be known as a *sutradhar*—one who holds the threads, and so narrates the story (in theater, a *sutradhar* links together audience, performance, and performers). That is to say, the relations between the shapes of consciousness, as well as their being identified as specific shapes, are the result of the phenomenological observer's narrative. Hegel writes that “this way of looking at the matter is something contributed by *us*, by means of which the succession of experiences through which consciousness passes is raised into a scientific progression—but it is not known to the consciousness that we are observing” (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* 55-56). Natural consciousness may be aware that there have been a succession of shapes of consciousnesses, what Hegel refers to as “experiences” in this passage, but it does not perceive that each successive shape arose in an attempt to resolve the contradictions in the previous shape. Natural consciousness believes that these shapes occur independently of each other. The phenomenological observer comprehends that their succession constitutes a progression, where each successor shape overcomes contradictions in its predecessor. This progression is not a fact of the matter, which would occur regardless of whether the phenomenological observer were watching. Instead, it is the phenomenological observer's seeing-as, by which natural consciousness' successive experiences are organized into a progression. Put otherwise, the successive shapes of consciousness occur in a progression as a consequence of the phenomenological observer so arranging them (see Clark and Fritzman).

Just as Hegel's phenomenological observer organizes the shapes of consciousness into a progression, so Rushdie's Saleem-as-narrator arranges

events. Whereas historians of philosophy generally agree that skepticism precedes stoicism, this is reversed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where skepticism emerges as a response to contradictions within stoicism. Linda Hutcheon recognizes that “*Midnight’s Children’s* narrator notices an error in chronology in his narrative, but then decides, ‘in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time’ ... he also inverts the order of his own tenth birthday and the 1957 election, and keeps that order because his memory stubbornly refuses to alter the sequence of events” (68). It might be thought that Saleem’s assertion that “it happened that way because that’s how it happened” would undermine this analysis. The context in which Saleem announces this, however, instead confirms it:

The process of revision should be constant and endless; don’t think I’m satisfied with what I’ve done! Among my unhappinesses: an overly-harsh taste from those jars containing memories of my father; a certain ambiguity in the love-flavour of “Jamila Singer” (Special Formula No. 22), which might lead the unperceptive to conclude that I’ve invented the whole story of the baby-swap to justify an incestuous love; vague implausibilities in the jar labelled “Accident in a Washing-chest”—the pickle raises questions which are not fully answered, such as: Why did Saleem need an accident to acquire his powers? Most of the other children didn’t.... Or again, in “All-India Radio” and others, a discordant note in the orchestrated flavors: would Mary’s confession have come as a shock to a true telepath? Sometimes, in the pickles’ version of history, Saleem appears to have known too little; at other times, too much ... yes, I should revise and revise, improve and improve; but there is neither the time nor the energy. I am obliged to offer no more than this stubborn sentence: It happened that way because that’s how it happened.

—Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children* 549

Hutcheon asks “but does that opening ‘It’ of the last sentence refer to the events of the past or to the writing and preserving of them?,” and she answers that “in a novel about a man writing his own and his country’s history, a man ‘desperate’ for meaning, as he insists he is from the first paragraph, the answer cannot be clear” (66). Not only is there no clear answer, but Saleem’s stubborn sentence is true only *futur antérieur*. That is to say, a more accurate sentence would be “it happened that way because that’s how it *will have*

happened” where its happening that way is precisely the result of Saleem’s narrating it that way. The stubborn sentence is not a description of how events happened independently of his narrative, but how they happened as a *consequence* of that narrative. The stubborn sentence functions, then, as a strategy to keep readers engaged in Saleem’s story.

Resonances between Hegel and Rushdie abound. In addition to sharing the structure of the memory theater and the presence of the phenomenological observer, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Midnight’s Children* are both polyphonic. What Bakhtin writes about Dostoevsky is also true of Hegel and Rushdie:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky’s novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combined but not merged in the unity of the event. Dostoevsky’s major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse. 6-7

Although Saleem would have his readers believe that all other voices are subject to his own authorial discourse, he is not able to maintain this fiction. This is seen most clearly in the case of Padma and Shiva. Not only do both characters come to play constitutive roles in the creation of Saleem’s narrative, but Saleem also struggles—not always successfully—with them to maintain control of the story. Padma and Shiva are objects of Saleem’s authorial discourse, but in contending with him they also become subjects of their own signifying discourses.⁴

Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* also contains a polyphony of voices, and it is no less allusive than Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. In addition to its engagement with many philosophical texts, it incorporates such literary works as Diderot’s *Rameau’s Nephew*, Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* and *Faust*, Jacobi’s *Woldemar*, Novalis’ *Henry von Ofterdingen*, Schiller’s *Robbers*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, Sophocles’ *Antigone*, and Tieck’s *Land of Upside Down* (see DeMarte and Fritzman).

It might be objected that this is irrelevant. As discussed above, Hegel’s phenomenological observer organizes the succession of the various shapes

of consciousness into a progression. Even if these shapes are frequently exemplified by literary or philosophical work in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the objection would continue, they remain only objects of a single authorial discourse, and so never are allowed to become subjects of their own signifying discourses.

This objection moves too quickly. It is a one-sided truth which mistakes itself for the whole truth. To see why, it is necessary to discuss briefly the phenomenological observer's role. In showing how the various shapes of consciousness fail, Hegel does not impose some external criterion or standard which they are unable to meet. Rather, he shows that these shapes fail by their own standards. The phenomenological observer arranges these shapes in such a way that each shape can be seen as an attempt to overcome the limitations which caused the failure of its predecessor.⁵ Hence, these shapes are objects of an authorial discourse insofar as they are organized into a progression. This is the objection's insight. Nevertheless, it does not recognize that by failing according to their own standards, these shapes are also subjects of their own signifying discourses. (The shapes of consciousness are subjects of their discourses in two distinct senses: They are the subjects *from which* the discourses proceed and they are *subjected by* those discourses).

What's cooking? The authenticity of the inauthentic

We are born, so to speak, provisionally, it doesn't matter where; it is only gradually that we compose, within ourselves, our true place of origin, so that we may be born there retrospectively.

—Rainer Maria Rilke; Ray 137

Joseph Butler asserts that “everything is what it is, and not another thing” (2). G. E. Moore is so enamored with this that he adopts it as the epigraph for *Principia Ethica*, the Bloomsbury set's sacred text (see Banfield; Regan). Far from it being trivially true that a thing is identical to itself, as logicians frequently claim, this is actually false. Instead, a thing only becomes itself through its constitutive failures to be identical with itself. This is what Hegel refers to as the identity of identity and difference, and Rushdie calls hybridity. It is for this reason that what is most authentically Indian is not indigenous to India. Take the example of cuisine—an appropriate one, given the prominent role played by chutney in Rushdie's text. Many of the fruits, spices, and vegetables associated with Indian cooking originated somewhere

else. Allspice, apples, avocados, bay leaves, beets, bell peppers, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cashews, cauliflower, celery, cherries, chili peppers, cinnamon, cloves, cocoa, coriander, corn, cumin, fennel, fenugreek, grapefruit, green zucchini, guavas, hing, kohlrabi, lima beans, litchi, mangos, missionary figs, nutmeg, okra, papayas, paprika, passion fruit, peanuts, pineapples, pistachios, poppies, potatoes, pumpkins, sage, star anise, strawberries, sunflowers, sweet potatoes, tamarind, tea, tomatoes, and vanilla.⁶ Not just ingredients, but styles of cooking too. Arriving in Goa—only to discover that St. Thomas had got there ahead of them—the Portuguese add vinegar to a mixture of spices (masala) and garlic, resulting in vindaloo. In her book on *Curry*, Lizzie Collingham shows that many Indian dishes are the result of the interaction between Indians and the British, French, Mughals, and Portuguese—who frequently become Indians, or are at least Indianized.⁷ She writes: “The fact that Indian restaurant curries would be unrecognizable to many inhabitants of the subcontinent as Indian food has begun to stimulate interest in authenticity, despite the fact that British restaurant food is simply another variation within a food world characterized by variety. The focus on authenticity fails to acknowledge that the mixture of different culinary styles is the prime characteristic of Indian cookery and that this fusion has produced a plethora of versions of Indian food from Mughlai to Anglo-Indian, from Goan to British Indian” (241).

Put otherwise, what is most authentic about Indian cuisine is inauthentic. This should not be seen as a failing, as though what passes for Indian cooking really is not authentic after all. What is instead required is a dialectical reversal: Authenticity is revealed to consist in the inauthentic. Krishnenda Ray recognizes that “much of what is considered authentic is defined in opposition to ‘others’” (11). Not only is defining the authentic this way wholly compatible with incorporating much from “others,” but this is usually the case. Ray further perceives that “there is no Bengali cuisine but multiple variations along class, regional, and sectarian lines.” As he explains: “‘Bengali food,’ ‘Bengali-American cuisine,’ and ‘American food’ are relational categories that exist in a matrix of cross-cutting relationships. One cannot exist without the other. ‘Bengali cuisine’ makes sense only as a contrast to ‘American cuisine’ or ‘Bengali-American cuisine;’ they make sense only in relation to each other, and that is as analytic abstractions” (158). Does it need to be added that this is not only true of cuisines, but of everything whatsoever? Far from it being true that things are what they are and not something else, as Butler claims, things are only what they are by

reference to other things. Change something, and the other things that are what they are by being referred to it alter too. Magic? No, semiotics.

It might seem that a thing becomes itself in only when it assimilates and internalizes that which had been other to it. This is correct, but one-sided. What needs to be added is that in order to fully become itself, a thing must also externalize itself. Hegel refers to this as diremption and Rushdie calls it diaspora and exile. Indeed, when Amanda Anderson writes of “Hegel, whose entire project is underwritten, arguably, by the dialectic of estrangement and refamiliarization” (27), this could be equally said of Rushdie. That a thing requires a moment of externalization, in addition to assimilation, in order to become itself is seen when Indian cuisine is exported to America and the United Kingdom. Because he has lived in England, it has been suggested that Rushdie is not sufficiently Indian, not really an Indian author (see Trivedi). The exact opposite is true. It is because of his distance from India that Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is Indian. Just as a building’s architecture can only be fully appreciated by looking at it from the outside, as well as from inside, so India can only be comprehended from such a bifocaled perspective.

Never ending stories

... at the same time a nightclub, a temple, a circus, a concert, a meeting plaza, and a poetic encounter.
—Indian critic’s description of Bollywood films; Thoraval 63

In recognizing that a putatively single text becomes different objects as the consequence of differing interpretations, Dimock breaks with a realist metaphysics which would assert that a text is, mind-independently, self-identical. However, Hegel expands this insight to apply to objects in general. When what was taken as knowledge about an object changes, the object changes too.⁸ As a result, his *Phenomenology of Spirit* cannot be regarded as a description of facts which would be true, mind-independently; this is perhaps most clearly seen when he inverts historical chronology and describes skepticism as resulting from stoicism’s failure. Rather, Hegel’s text constitutes an intervention. By arranging a series of moments into a scientific progression, his text aims to intervene within that series. The hope is that recognizing that this series has had a trajectory will influence how it continues.

This is true for Rushdie's Saleem as well. As discussed above, he alters the chronology of historical events. Saleem plays a part as a character within his narrative, but he also writes and directs that story. As a consequence, his assertion that he has been "handcuffed to history" (Rushdie *Midnight's Children* 3) must be read at two levels. As an actor within his tale, he feels that he has been dragged along by history. As the narrative's author, however, he sometimes pulls history in another direction. Indicating the way he wants history to go, he hopes that it will continued to be pulled there.

Nowhere is this intervention more apparent than in the conclusions of these texts. Both the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Midnight's Children* are hopeful, concluding with a moment of externalization—expressed in the metaphors of a flowing forth in the former, and a dispersion in the latter. The texts conclude, but their narratives continue. In neither case does their conclusion represent a termination or final stop, but rather the continuation beyond the confines of the book. Each text contains spectacles of carnage and destruction from which the new nevertheless arises, and both exhibit how rage and revenge are harnessed and made creative. As readers will have recognized, events do not remain the same after having been embedded within a narrative. Their significance changes, retrospectively; and so the events themselves alter, retroactively.

As is well known, Hegel speculates that "America is ... the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself—perhaps in a contest between North and South America" (Hegel, *Philosophy of History* 86). It is plausible to believe that, during the last century, the USA was that land of the future. Given trends in economics, population growth, depleting oil reserves, and global warming, moreover, it is not far-fetched to wonder if there still will be a contest between North and South America. Nevertheless, thinking with Hegel is not a matter of repeating what he said, but instead it consists in continuing his thought, sometimes along trajectories that he could not envision. Writing *The Philosophy of History* in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Hegel supposes that "the History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia is the beginning" and that "although the Earth forms a sphere, History performs no circle around it." Noting that in the East "rises the outward physical Sun, and in the West it sinks down," he claims that in the West "consentaneously rises the Sun of self-consciousness, which diffuses a nobler brilliance" (103-104). In the twenty-first century, though, a Hegelianism that continues his thought

should boldly assert that history and self-consciousness have circumnavigated the globe and that India is now the land of the future. Ashis Nandy reports that “the sun smiles in the morning, Ernest Gellner once told me, because it knows that it will be in the West by the evening” (Nandy, *Time Warps* 11). The East is west of the West, however, and so the sun also beams in the evening because it knows that it will be in the East by morning. The sun sinks down in the West, but it never settles down.

India is the largest democracy in the world. It has, moreover, a middle-class that is larger than the population of the USA. India’s efforts at building multiculturalism put most other countries to shame. It has eighteen official languages, and hundreds of unofficial languages and dialects. It has significant cultural and religious diversity. As discussed in the previous section, India has absorbed much, but it also is externalizing itself through the so-called Indian diaspora. (These moments of absorption and externalization has been properly dialectical; Henry David Thoreau’s writings on nonviolence influence Mahatma Gandhi, for example, and Gandhi’s example and writings influence Martin Luther King, Jr.). Despite communalism, strife, and violence, India has “not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially,” as Jawaharlal Nehru hopes (234), redeemed the pledge made in its tryst with destiny. This claim is itself not a disinterested recounting of facts, naturally, but an intervention.

It was shown above that the narratives of both Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* continue beyond the pages of their texts. At this point, it should be obvious that the latter is not only the literary counterpart to the former, but its continuation.

Still handcuffed to history: From melancholy to optimism

He was born in Old Delhi ... once upon a time. No, that won’t do, there’s no getting away from the date: Aadam Sinai arrived at a night-shadowed slum on June 25th, 1975. And the time? The time matters, too. As I said: at night. No, it’s important to be more.... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India’s arrival at Emergency, he emerged. There were gasps; and, across the country, silences and fears. And owing to the occult tyrannies of that benighted hour, he was mysteriously handcuffed to history, his destinies indissolubly chained to those of his country. Unprophesied, uncelebrated, he came; no prime ministers wrote him letters; but, just the same, as my time of connection neared its end, his began. He, of course, was left entirely without a

say in the matter; after all, he couldn't even wipe his own nose at the time.
—Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 483

Is it really the case that *Midnight's Children* ends on a hopeful note? And is it the case that in the end, he is still being pulled by history, and that he is also pulling history? At the end of the penultimate chapter of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem describes himself as “no longer connected to history, drained above-and-below” as he makes his way back to Delhi. Perhaps, then, the final chapter can be read as a reconnection to history. However, Nico Israel concludes: “Saleem’s ultimate exile ... is from historicity itself. Condemned to an Ixion’s wheel of temporality, suspended tantalizingly between historical significance and insignificance, he writes himself, as it were, into oblivion, predicated upon a sui generis immolation. Like Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*, Saleem contains multitudes. Unlike Whitman, he imagines himself ultimately consumed by them” (148). The death of the author could be construed as the birth of the collective, but the ending of *Midnight's Children* is melancholy. Yes, the final two paragraphs of the novel end with the words “release” and “peace.” But the prevailing tone is one of irresolution, ambivalence, and tension. The final sentence of *Midnight's Children* is also its final paragraph:

Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one two three, found hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust, just as, in all good time, they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his, and his who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died, because it is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace.
533

To read the ending as hopeful is to insist that in spite of the “dispersion” Saleem, his explosion into “specks of voiceless dust,” is somehow a redemptive “release” from the burdens of individuality and authorship, the obliteration of the observer into the observed. To read the ending this way is to champion the nation of India, and all of its internal contradictions and turmoil, over the novelistic hero. It is an interpretation that goes against the

grain of *Midnight's Children's* initial reception in India, but one that agrees with its subsequent interpretation by none other than Rushdie himself: "I remember that when *Midnight's Children* was first published in 1981, the most common Indian criticism of it was that it was too pessimistic about the future. It's a sad truth that nobody finds the novel's ending pessimistic any more, because what has happened in India since 1981 is so much darker than I had imagined. If anything, the book's last pages, with their suggestion of a new, more pragmatic generation rising up to take over from the midnight's children, now seem absurdly, romantically optimistic" (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 33). The hopefulness of the ending changes over time, in resonance not only with other texts, but with other events; in 1981, with the State of Emergency a past India wished not to be reminded of, it was pessimistic, while in 1987, with an escalation of communal violence, it was optimistic by contrast. In 2007, with India now poised to factor into a variety of globalized cultural and economic scenarios, it becomes newly optimistic: Rushdie's "new, more pragmatic generation" has arrived.⁹

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Endnotes

¹ This affinity is not limited to *Pride and Prejudice*. Austin's *Sense and Sensibility* is the basis for *Kandukondain Kandukondain (I Have Found It)*, directed by Rajiv Menon.

² See Yates for a discussion of such mnemonic devices.

³ Forster demonstrates that Hegel actually provides three such narratives—the "Consciousness" through "Reason" chapters from the viewpoint of individual shapes of consciousness; the "Spirit" chapter from the viewpoint of their social contexts; and the "Reason" and "Absolute Knowing" chapters from the perspectives of art, religion, and philosophy.

⁴ Compare Wilson 60: "By dramatizing the symbolic relationship between narrator and audience, which grows out of that between a personal and

public past on the one hand and a narrative present on the other, Rushdie asserts the inevitably collaborative basis of literary, or any artistic, activity. Saleem's initial pride in easy audience control is undercut. He retains an audience because he is prepared to compromise with one and acknowledge its contribution to his imperfect enterprise."

⁵ Compare Hegel *Science of Logic* 580-581: "The refutation must not come from outside, that is, it must not proceed from assumptions laying outside the system in question and inconsistent with it. The system need only refuse to recognize those assumptions; the *defect* is a defect only for him who starts from the requirements and demands based on those assumptions.... The genuine refutation must penetrate the opponent's stronghold and meet him on his own ground; no advantage is gained by attacking him somewhere else and defeating him where he is not."

⁶ It is tempting to assert that everything achieves its perfection in India. Roy Orbison's song, "Pretty Woman," actualizes its potential only after it is Indianized in the film *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, directed by Nikhil Advani. Indeed, as viewers of Bollywood films will testify, there is no genre of music—classical, blues, disco, folk, jazz, rock—that does not flourish most completely when Indianized. It is almost as if, even when beginning elsewhere, India is home. For Hegel?

⁷ What about the Aryans? Them too!

⁸ Compare Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* 54: "In the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to that knowledge."

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