MEMORIALS TO MODERNITY: POSTCOLONIAL PILGRIMAGE IN NAIPaul AND RUSHDIE

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When invited to meet in close syntactic quarters, the terms “modernity” and “postcoloniality” have usually suggested a vast but keen incommensurateness. Gesturing massively, pointing vaguely, they have nevertheless signified philosophies, ideologies, and historical epochs that are sharply “discontinuous or in contention.”¹ Recently, however, this sense of hopeless opposition has begun to lose its grip.² Not long ago (1989) S. P. Mohanty wondered whether we sadder and wiser inheritors of a modern and postcolonial world, we jaded, globalized descendants of colonizing and colonized peoples, could not begin to explore “the imbrication of our various pasts and presents”: “How would it be possible for us to recover our commonality . . . ?”³ Soon thereafter (1992) Sara Suleri called for “studies . . . [in] the commonality of loss,” studies that would “generate a new idiom of cultural compassion.”⁴ Two years later (1994) Homi Bhabha was encouraging us “to reinscribe our human, historic commonality.”⁵ And yet more recently (1997) Michael Gorra eschewed the old idiom or “tired vocabulary” of cultural conflict in order to explore “a body of concerns held in common by writers from different countries.”⁶ Clearly, “common” is a new key word in postcolonial studies; it is also clear that this is no accident.⁷ With this new interest in historic commonality we may now be moving beyond fascination with, for instance, imperial criminality—a fascination that used to be, unavoidably, as divisive as it was illuminating but that is now, some would argue, more divisive than illuminating. That is why polarizing revelations of what happened during empire may be starting to give way to a new focus on “what comes after empire”—perhaps our future commonality.⁸ Yet our past commonality (largely of mutual loss, as Suleri indicates) is also a new topic of interest, especially as attention to this past itself discloses unknown avenues to the future.

Among the remarkable consequences of this new interest in past commonality is the discovery, as I shall argue, that important postcolonial novelists have already anticipated it. Fairness bids us newly-expansive postcolonial critics and theorists to admit that, adapting Freud, the
novelists were there before us. But fairness to the novel is not the only reason why we should reread postcolonial fiction. Another is commitment to the postcolonial: these fictions may provide elements of the new idiom of commonality that we postcolonial critics and theorists now seek. These same fictions are not lacking in the old idiom. Harshly attentive to thoroughly modernized and Westernized selves, the so-called mimic men and women who have inherited the postcolonial earth, postcolonial novelists have not foregone all necessary indictments. But their attention has also been generous; faced with the spectacle of the mimic’s often cataclysmic loss, they have allowed themselves gestures of compassion, honoring that loss as their own. A new idiom of commonality emerges in these novels’ own language of mimicry. Here mimicry is not regarded simply as “our loss, their—the colonizers’—gain.” Rather, what may seem simple figures of inauthenticity turn out to possess piquant habits and values capable of casting their appeal across the cultural divide. These selves turn out to be occupying, amidst so much conquered psychological space, pockets of a common enough affective ground.

This common ground lies outside India’s many old colonial attics, those havens of “Raj nostalgia” whose curious cultural refuse often fascinates the postcolonial novelist. Nor, on the other hand, is this ground Bhabha’s utopian “Third Space of enunciation” lying, far from the attic, somewhere beyond the two cultures’ trench-lines—an everyday man’s land where, as Rushdie might say, a hybrid newness may come into the world. Neither “mimicry” nor “hybridity” designates this kind of commonality. Closer is the word “sympathy.” The claim is that some postcolonial novelists finally look past both nostalgic reveries and utopian dreams, reaching across recognized cultural differences. In some postcolonial novels one is startled to note an eleventh-hour, impulsive embrace of a few of the more attractive among the many modern Western habits and values long ago exported by the colonizers and too readily adopted by the mimes and mimics. Following on the heels of these novels’ unmistakable attacks on modernity are episodes in which the postcolonial, far from laboring to obliterate modernity’s every vestige, instead memorializes it—episodes of commemoration, sublimation, even exaltation.

Of course, this claim arises from a certain definition of “modernity,” a particular demarcation of a complex cultural phenomenon. But no literary historian can grasp modernity in its totality and essence; each must choose between its various synecdoches. The synecdoche to be discussed here, nevertheless, is one that many would regard as a central
The novels in question—two definitive texts (but also synecdoches) of the postcolonial—are Naipaul’s *Area of Darkness* (1968) and Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1992), both of which depict contemporary pilgrimages that bring the issue of individuality into sharp relief. Both Naipaul and Rushdie depict traditional religious pilgrimages in which the pilgrim of concern is a doubting exile who refuses the “sight of the god” to which traditional pilgrimage is consecrated. Reluctant, rationalist, *individualist*, he finds himself at the climax staring, not at miracle, but at mud. This is curious mud, being postcolonial matter in its most atomized, irreducible form, and it provokes good questions about the postcolonial (for instance, what is the postcolonial, once reduced to its basics? fertilizer or sheer dead formlessness?). Yet rather than explore the postcolonial conception of the material, I explore the fate of what its heat and dust so often claim: the Westernized, modernized self. As we will see, in both Naipaul and Rushdie the death of matter signifies that self’s own death; it cannot even half-create what it half-perceives. But the extinction of the modernized self in both cases is succeeded, quite unexpectedly, by closing episodes of distinction. The same modern notion of personal honor whose exhaustion Naipaul has just explored he chooses to celebrate in the end. Just as surprisingly Rushdie ends by exalting a notion of personal responsibility that he has already defined, and disdained, as modern. These novelists, rather than efface the modern, reinscribe it in cultural memory.

The more surprising claims at hand should be delineated. To regard Naipaul’s text as anything other than reflexively pro-West is to go against a tough grain in recent postcolonial criticism; many see Naipaul as essentially a sheepish modernist who failed to “cut . . . out” a suit of postcolonial wolf’s clothes (*A*, 266). Rushdie, on the other hand, who created the sharpest-toothed wolf in postcolonial literature, has often satisfied even the most ideologically committed postcolonial critics. The surprise in Rushdie’s case is not that he indicted modernity but that he memorializes it. Of course, in theoretical moments most would agree that surprise should not surprise, since postcolonial texts, like other texts, do not always foreground their most unusual ideological investments. Yet when these novels answer so keenly to the affective, to what Suleri calls “cultural compassion,” something truly unexpected has taken place. The most surprising claim, accordingly, is the assertion that Naipaul and Rushdie write of postcolonial hearts too capacious to celebrate the spectacle of modernity’s negation. Rather than “one more theoretical celebration of the other,” they offer an atheoretical, impul-
sive commemoration of the West. One can be uninterested in the West itself, untroubled by its putative decline, for example, and still find this commemoration crucial, for it signifies a kind of postcolonial openness that is itself rarely commemorated or even recognized. Nor is it often felt, as if in our own affective registers. *The Satanic Verses* has been characterized as a novel that “gestures hopefully toward the future”; yet it, like Naipaul’s novel, offers a touching invitation to regret. Both end by asking us to cherish the very entity to whose demise they have signaled their commitment. And recognizing the affective and elegiac dimension of these novels may help us to refine our larger conception of the postcolonial, whose future shape depends on the shape modernity now assumes within it.

I.

Why should the pilgrimages depicted by Naipaul and Rushdie be termed postcolonial pilgrimages? Generally speaking, the most definitive feature of “the postcolonial condition” (as Linda Hutcheon recently phrased it), especially the condition of the postcolonial artist, writer, or intellectual, is that of a religious and broadly cultural alienation or dislocation brought about by Westernization (colonization of some sort, including cultural imperialism). The actual pilgrimages depicted in Rushdie and Naipaul, by contrast, are not chiefly pilgrimages of the alienated (if such a thing is possible), but traditional exercises in Haj and Himalayan ascent, respectively; as we will see, the impulse towards the traditional manifest in both is so strong that it creates phenomena that border on the caricatural, the absurd, and even the magically real. Nevertheless, both accounts pay most of their narrative attention not to one or more of the devout but to a particular, individualized participant who is indeed alienated, who chooses not to participate in the nativist devotions he witnesses. One should note, further, that these anti-pilgrims are alienated not by skepticism native-bred but by Western and modern influences. Indeed, both are “modern men” (S, 476).

In the best modern way, these anti-pilgrims attempt to stand outside of experience and make sense of it linguistically and narratively. Like all moderns, they “assume[...some commented exterior whose existence as a knowable reality is taken as prior to that of discourse (the discourse of analysis and reference, of historicism, of experimentalism).” Even that mere assumption signifies that these anti-pilgrims have survived “the epistemic change” from the pre-modern to the modern. Yet that same simple assumption also signifies that they have not undergone the epistemic change from the modern to the postmodern. Such “discu-
“sive” practices as theirs, “in the strict sense unthinkable” in premodern times, are losing sway in the postmodern. According to such historians of knowledge as Jean-Francois Lyotard, for example, the “hermeneutics of meaning,” what Timothy Reiss would call the “analytico-referential” enterprise, whether religious or secular, is now decaying (“its great hero, its great voyages, its goal”); the quests and questors of modernity are growing obsolete. But in both Naipaul and Rushdie epic modernity persists. Neither author depicts the postmodern condition in which the modern intellectual’s “metanarrative apparatus[es] of legitimation” have grown rusty, the various ambitions of modernity having withered away. Withered they have: both Naipaul’s “I” and Rushdie’s Mirza Saeed are too skeptical to be described as voyagers, whether religious or merely “hermeneutical.” Equally “without belief or interest in belief” (A, 41)—until the beliefs of others turn shockingly substantial—they are avowedly secular men, and “a secular man lives in the world of things” (S, 478), not ghosts, ideals, abstractions. Nevertheless, these materialists are not themselves mere things-in-the-world, soul-less, dumb as posts; they are men of ideas, “Hamlet[s]” haunted by bad dreams and self-doubts, melancholiacs thoughtfully liable to “bouts of self-reproach” (S, 228). As squeamish and stand-offish as they have grown on the outside, they do not turn out to be “sentimentalists and soft-heads”; indeed, both end up “tough-minded.” Seeking hard facts and solid grounds, they do not wish to dwell amidst images, gesturing toward essences and abstractions, but to pursue ideas to their referents, master them, and then move on to fresh facts, new truths.

These characters’ capacity to think tough is brilliantly evident in their own narrative exploits. Neither character allows narrative to have its way with meaning; neither allows the story to consume the idea, the fabul fox to get out of hand and gobble up those morally edifying, if sour, grapes. Which is to say, both characters accept the traditional opposition between narrative and meaning: “Just as fiction can be opposed to fact and truth, narrative is opposed to atemporal laws that depict what is, whether past or future.” One need not be Socrates (or Alasdair MacIntyre, for that matter) to think that narrative and reason (ideas, general principles, rules, and so on) are always at odds. The meaning we attach to a narrative “we extract or create”; it does not rise naturally, effortlessly to the surface of the narrative and present itself as the narrative’s true face. Thus to move from a narrative proper, whether conceived as plot or story or their amalgam, to an abstract truth that the narrative occasions, is always to leave narrative behind or to put narrative in its place. Whether one should want to put it in its place is
another question. To do so requires not just the power of abstract reasoning but also a certain orientation to “the course of human affairs,” what Richard Rorty casually terms “the philosopher’s essentialistic approach,” and what Lyotard would decry as a legacy of modernity. This approach is the one typically taken by both “Naipaul” (the pilgrim) and Mirza, both of whom try to put narrative in its place. The story of “Naipaul’s” pilgrimage is Naipaul’s own story; it is narrated, confidently enough, by Naipaul himself, who is no slave to narrative but who demonstrates again and again a willingness to interrupt “Naipaul’s” ongoing story, draw back from it, and turn essayist (sometimes for an entire chapter, as in “The Colonial” [A, 68-82]). Rushdie’s Mirza, on the other hand, tries to win “converts” to his secular cause (S, 481)—stopping the Titlipurian pilgrimage to the Arabian Sea—by telling stories (“about lemmings, and how the enchantress Circe turned men into pigs [and] the story of the pipe-player who lured a town’s children” [S, 484]). Yet Mirza, like “Naipaul,” recognizes “mumbo-jumbo” when he hears it (S, 476). Both are full of fables and old stories (S, 484), but the fables are edifying, the stories instructive, the local legends no more than charming (A, 155); they can hear and communicate “the music of the poetry” even in foreign tales (S, 484), but they are also capable of submitting narrative to interpretation that (putatively) does not supplement it with a new narrative but takes us beyond narrative altogether, closer to naked truth, essence, pith.

Rather than allegories of the postmodern, then, Naipaul and Rushdie write allegories of modernity. That they write allegories of modernism, more specifically, remains to be seen. To be sure, there is nothing in the passages in Nietzsche preoccupying Mirza that distinguishes Mirza’s intellectual concerns as definitively modernist ones. Mirza’s “choice of bedside reading matter” contains some of Nietzsche’s most Zarathustrian utterances, apocalyptic evocations of “the pitiless end of that small, overextended species called Man” (S, 216). The Nietzsche of these passages is the one who seems to belong to the large company of “modernist apocalyptists” (starting with Matthew Arnold, James Longenbach argues) who believe that God is dead, culture is defunct, apocalypse is now. But this is also the Nietzsche who has so often preoccupied the many philosophers—modernist and other—who have addressed the so-called “end of man” question. These philosophers include not only such relatively modernist participants as Heidegger and Sartre, whose relation to Nietzsche is relatively serious, anxious, even agonistic and contestatory, but also definitively postmodernist writers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, whose innovations upon the
famous oracular voice and prophetic sentiment reveal a relation to Nietzsche that is, if not less contestatory, less anxious. Foucault, for instance, is urbane, collected, and remote, even as he contemplates “the perilous imminence whose promise we fear today, whose danger we welcome . . . the end of man.”

This distinction between relatively modernist and postmodernist responses to Nietzschean apocalyptism matters because Mirza’s own use and abuse of Nietzsche, though complex, finally distinguishes him along the same lines. At first one notes the postmodern attitude I have associated with Foucault, but taken irresponsibly and ominously to the extreme. Nietzsche is Mirza’s conscious “choice” when consciousness itself has grown as “soft, soft, soft” as his body (S, 229); to Nietzsche’s sublime revelations of human finitude this modern man is sleepily receptive, almost outdoing Foucault in tranquil affirmation (the Nietzsche to whom Mirza faces up is one whose book-face is “resting . . . downwards on his chest” [S, 216]). Yet Mirza cannot achieve Foucault’s evocation of “serene non-existence,” let alone Nietzsche’s gleeful millenarianism. Indeed, Mirza evokes an ethic of individual responsibility often eschewed entirely by a postmodern culture of disappearing selves and subjects and dead authors and novels. Instead of pitilessness, playfulness, and indifference Mirza exhibits humanistic, even humane pity and self-pity; like Nietzsche’s man, “it is he himself who must answer for his own finitude . . . since he has killed God.” For the often self-reproachful Mirza makes a “bad dream” out of Nietzsche, “a recurring dream of the end of the world, in which the catastrophe was invariably his fault” (S, 216). When that bad dream turns real (“he found it hard to believe that all this was really happening; but it was” [S, 490]), Mirza will try to “answer” for it; he will try to save his world, relying on the “unquestionable fact” whenever he can find one (S, 501).

If Mirza is thus Rushdie’s saving avatar of modernism and modernity alike, “Naipaul” may seem too uninvolved in events to be Naipaul’s avatar of anything. By the end, however, “Naipaul” will also betray ambitions and attitudes distinctively modern. Indeed, his experience subsequent to the failed Amarnath pilgrimage will yield a virtual catalogue of modernist topoi, the most patently modernist of which is the “inward turn” then taken. This plunge into seeming emptiness eventually discloses antipodes of hatred and love, of racial aversion and communal sympathy. The battle of essential passions it occasions—not just love and hate, but also light and darkness, complete with episodes of atavism and secret sharing—is Conradian, recalling not only the infamous Mr. Kurtz’s reversion to the primitive in Heart of Darkness but
also the sailor/narrator Marlow’s meditations on the story and identification with its central figure.

At first “Naipaul”’s experience yields, not the usual modernist insight into concealed human depravity, but the (equally modernist) sight of nothing inside; he discovers that nothing in the self’s interior waits to be discovered (like Kurtz, “he [is] hollow at the core”). To be sure, “Naipaul”’s own cultural displacement is the culprit; the West Indian “culture of my childhood,” Naipaul writes, “fed only on memories and its completeness was only apparent” (A, 35). Soon after leaving Trinidad for London he becomes a proper, if postcolonial, hollow man—“no more than the inhabitant of a big city, robbed of loyalties” (A, 43). Yet, having left London for India, he spends only a few months before vagrant loyalties (and vicious ones) arise to claim him. Like Kurtz, the now doubly-displaced “Naipaul” finds at the bottom of his hollow self the stuff of atrocities. His railway “romance” (A, 230) with the racist Sikh (Dravidians are “South Indian swine” that “the Sikh,” in Naipaul’s phrase, looks forward to fighting in a war over north/south partition [A, 230]) begins in a mistaken atmosphere of whimsy and irony (“I saw humour where none was intended” [A, 126]) that soon unfolds in anger and hatred of his own, a “self-lacerating hysteria” (A, 230) that builds to a pitch, stopping just short of the senseless violence in which the Sikh finally indulges. Thus a strong sign of “Naipaul”’s modernism emerges when, having discarded his old rational self as a mere shell, he recognizes an authentic and “irrational self” (A, 226) in the hateful Sikh. Of course, he deliberately attempts to oppose him/it: “I tried to transmit compensating love to every starved man and woman I saw on the road” (A, 230). But the attempt ends in a “private failure” succeeded by the realization that henceforth he “would carry the taint of that moment” (A, 230). That is, the culmination does not sharply distinguish “Naipaul” from Kurtz and, thus, dissociate Naipaul’s text from Conrad’s; rather, it urges us to assort “Naipaul” not just with Kurtz, but also with Kurtz’s secret sharer, Marlow, who carries “the memory of what [he] had heard [Kurtz] say afar there” into the sepulchral Western city and beyond.36

II.

Given the modernism and modernity of both anti-pilgrims, it should not be surprising that the postcolonial pilgrimage is undertaken on behalf of purely secular motives: curiosity, refined and dispassionate, about this cultural and religious phenomenon (“Naipaul”); a sense of personal responsibility for the family and for the community of true pilgrims, the faithful, whom he regards as emotionally unstable (Mirza).
Of course, “Many of the [South Asian Hajj] accounts in recent decades” are the work of “self-described secularists” who have undertaken the trip “to test themselves, to experience faith vicariously, perhaps in some sense to participate in that faith themselves.” But neither “Naipaul” nor Mirza falls squarely within this group. By observing the routines of the Amarnath pilgrimage “Naipaul” hopes merely to recover childhood enthusiasm for his own heritage, at least for its spectacles and symbols (and he encounters only “the symbol of a symbol” [A, 170]). Rushdie’s Mirza, on the other hand, finds himself not blankly witnessing pilgrim faithfulness but abjuring and opposing it. He is confronted, not with the “extraordinary sights and sounds and sentiments” perennially attendant upon the traditional Muslim Haj, but with an iron (and more dangerous) whim, and he encounters not mere symbols but a literalization. I am talking, of course, about the suicidal “Ayesha Haj” resented by “[c]ertain religious extremist groupings” as an “ISLAMIC PADDYTRA” (S, 488, 488, 489) or foot-pilgrimage, one intended to proceed to the edge of the sea and beyond, into the drink, thereby taking seriously indeed the Haj’s traditional injunction of “ritual sacrifice” (if not also its attendant feast). Mirza’s extremist opposition (“with every step” [S, 240]) symptomatizes his secret lust for the “young girl” the “visionary” Ayesha never ceases to be (S, 482). Yet it does not betray some equally secret reservoir of religious sentiment that would distinguish him from the thoroughly irreligious “Naipaul.”

With such irreligiousness at its very heart, the postcolonial pilgrimage is unsurprisingly anti-climactic. Neither anti-pilgrim takes steps to procure for himself the “profoundly elevating experience” reserved for the faithful. Neither seeks even that truncated, abstract, or otherwise partial experience usually reserved for the virtuous alien or “self-described secularist,” one tending toward (in Mirza’s case) a mere “reidentification with Islamic symbols.” The willfully “closed” Mirza, “the only survivor of the Ayesha Haj not to have witnessed the parting of the waves” (S, 515), at the crucial moment barely gets his feet wet. As the equally closed Naipaul notes, contemplating the swelling crowd of pilgrims thronging dangerously on the ramp entering the cave, “No sight of the god, then, for me; I would sit it out” (A, 169). Sitting out, standing off: it is fatal to any proper experience of the Haj, which requires that one not “explore a unique and self-conscious self” but indeed surrender to “the community of faithful people.” Only by surrendering one’s body to other bodies, both human and natural (these crowds of human bodies push forward into huge natural presences, sea and cave), may these anti-pilgrims become pilgrims.

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For such de-individuating immersion both “Naipaul” and Mirza substitute observation; for ecstatic release, an aesthetic of individuation. In the face of the crowd’s surrender to the elements they confirm their original sense of the paradoxical nature of pilgrimage—it is a spiritual exercise undertaken at considerable physical cost. Indeed, they arrive at a new sense of its physicality. But the motive is not sympathy so much as self-definition. As we have seen, these observers consistently refuse to surrender their selves to humanity in the collective. Now we must note that, to the contrary, they use the collective as a means of individuation. As Barbara Metcalf notes, “One characteristic of the self-conscious intellectual [undertaking Hajj], playing off connection and lack of connection, is to find ways to assert his difference from those around him.” Here, accordingly, both “Naipaul” and Mirza distinguish a spectacle of gross physicality in which they will take no part. Instead, both take conspicuously hard looks, looks that stylize the scene, distance them from it, and satisfy any desire for aesthetic mastery. Sympathy for particular individuals gives way to a willful, elaborate exploration of the antipodes of physical beauty. Scrutinizing the physical degradation to which the Ayesha Haj has submitted its pilgrims, Rushdie’s Mirza gazes upon the “lame, tottering, rheumy, feverish, red-eyed bunch” (S, 501) approaching the Arabian sea; but he also notes the bodybuilders exercising in unison nearby “like a murderous army of ballet dancers,” their “muscles . . . so well-honed that they looked like deformities” (S, 500). “Naipaul” also stylizes the “purified, frenzied crowd fighting to get a view of the god” contrapuntally (A, 168). He notes not just “the delicate play of muscles down [the] back and abdomen” of the “unnatural[ly]” beautiful sadhu who “lent his nobility to all the pilgrims” (A, 168) but also the “bewildered but determined face” of the major-domo Aziz, whose progress is evident only from the “fur cap” that projects bestially above the crowd now and then rejecting him “like a pip out of an orange” (A, 169).

Yet for all the mastery of self and other these anti-pilgrims display in their climactic stylizations of the crowds, neither extracts significance from the event. Absent any spiritual presence, neither anti-pilgrim enjoys the usual secular compensations of richly symbolic and philosophical apprehension. Indeed, inspired irreligiosity gives way, not to self-edifying art and thought, but to insipidity, dissipation, flatness. These anti-pilgrims turn from the spectacle to find themselves confronting, not some timeless miraculous presence, nor a profound absence equally miraculous (as in Forster’s A Passage to India), but a present now doubly insignificant, bereft of spiritual and worldly significance.
The many little things that now come to occupy these contemplatives are profane things that usher them beyond both style and selfhood: “Naipaul” finds himself amidst a “litter of paper and wrappings and cigarette packets” (A, 169); Mirza, in a “thick mulch of rotting coconuts abandoned cigarette packets pony turds non-degradable bottles fruit peelings jellyfish and paper” (S, 500). All that is left in the sand or mud are the peels, the shells, the casing and packaging, the plastic that is forever; even Rushdie’s rotting coconuts are but “non-degradable” tokens of a degraded earthly fruition that can only be listed or catalogued. The same anti-pilgrims denied the apocalyptic miracle witnessed by the devout are also denied the merest compensations, since even the splendor in the grass has fled.

Thus neither Naipaul’s litter nor Rushdie’s “thick mulch” fertilizes these anti-pilgrims’ hearts, minds, or souls. Neither medium provides a vehicle beyond defunct collective devotionalism back to a fructiveness in which the self might flourish. If either inert mess signifies anything, one finds, it is something doubly dispiriting: in failing to transcend the material, moderns also fail to transcend the basely commercial; these encroaching messes are the precipitate of everyday contemporary consumer culture. As Naipaul reveals, the commercial virtually destroys enthusiasm even by its mere presence at the climax: “a busy Indian bazaar. A bazaar: at this moment of climax there came the flatness I had all along feared” (A, 169). The angry Mirza likewise offers his flattest and most detached assessment of his own pilgrimage only once he notices how it is culminating by mixing up the pilgrims with those who “scavenge a living from the sand” or who use the beach to “make business contacts” (S, 500); he wonders idly how many of the pilgrims now “simply walking behind . . . rather than following” Ayesha through the mess will be strong enough to take those last few steps into the sea (S, 501). If the commercial inspires anything rounder in Mirza, it is the frightening sense of creeping ignominy, a milder form of which Naipaul discovers as he “squat[s] on the wet ground . . . beside a grimy skull-capped Kashmiri Muslim who was guarding the shoes of the Hindu devout at four annas a pair” (A, 169). Mirza recovers his responsiveness to the events of pilgrimage only when he becomes “filled with the horrible notion” that one of those tottering pilgrims, his own “beloved wife,” might also “die here . . . under the hoofs of ponies for rent and beneath the eyes of sugarcane-juice vendors” (S, 501).

Indeed, in Rushdie the commercial does not neutrally usurp the grounds outside pilgrimage sought by the flattened mind; it serves as the pilgrimage’s very foundation. As the mad Haj pauses in “the mid-brown
sand” between the thick mulch and the Arabian Sea, the flatly sensible commercial alternative is suddenly conscripted, its apparatus suddenly commandeered, by the pilgrimage’s more or less official agency. Naipaul’s and Rushdie’s vendors should be contrasted. Naipaul’s serve a simple irony; they profit from the sale of materials that will help pilgrims questing for the immaterial to make themselves more comfortable. In Rushdie, however, the vendor who claims our attention at the climax is not one of the skull-capped Kashmiris or sugarcane-juice vendors—non-pilgrims delightedly and profanely profiting from the pilgrimage; it is the very leader of the pilgrimage, the young visionary, Ayeshia, whose audiences with the archangel, Gibreel, culminate in her speaking from atop “an unused thela lying next to a soft-drink stall” (S, 501). One suggestion is that the spiritual has subsumed the commercial, swallowed it up, purified it (commerce is no longer base when the product peddled is bottled spirits). But it is also suggested that Ayeshia is just another huckster, and the pilgrimage just sugar-coated exploitation (the prophet-ess Ayeshia hears Gibreel singing “to the tunes of popular hit songs” [S, 497]). In Rushdie, then, the fate of the modern is to witness—quite helplessly and passively—the ambiguous rapprochement of the commercial and the religious. Not that Rushdie hates the commercial; his own mind is full of the hurly-burly of popular culture, and few contemporary novelists have devoted more pages to chronicling the raw hustle and bustle of the merchant class. During the height of the Fatwa Rushdie reported missing, more than he missed anything else, the time he used to spend dickering with hawkers and vendors in London’s open-air markets. But Rushdie is also well aware of the ways popular and populist media might be made to serve as a kind of “a sword for purity.” In *Midnight’s Children*, for example, the pop star Jamila Singer helps to incite the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war by singing “patriotic songs” over the radio.

Modernity’s postcolonial fate in Naipaul grows distinct when “Naipaul”’s “flatness” rounds itself off, depositing him at the very climax of this anti-climactic experience. For here, where the commercial suddenly turns into the material, the physical, the real, “Naipaul”’s last alternative to empty religiosity proves defunct. He has been squatting for hours on the wet floor of the cave watching the (to him) absurd spectacle when he finds himself suddenly unable to continue. Glimpses of “the ever ascending crowd whose numbers [‘Naipaul’] could less easily grasp than [he] could the sizes of the mountains and the valleys” (A, 170) are enough to stagger the mind; the conundrum of the missing lingam, wherein the absence of this miraculous “physical growth”
signifies to the faithful not the failure of the spiritual but the irrelevance of the physical, drives the mind under (“In this spiraling, deliquescing logic I felt I might drown”) (A, 170). Here as elsewhere in An Area of Darkness, the postcolonial sublime promises not the Kantian exaltation of the understanding (“the mind . . . busy[ing] itself with ideas that involve higher purposiveness”) but sheer hysteria. Accordingly, “Naipaul”’s reaction to sublimity is to turn away and seek the solid ground, “concentrat[ing] on the bazaar litter on the wet floor” (A, 169). This is the same litter amidst which he has been gazing upon tokens of the commercial (“the Kashmiri’s shoes [and] the coins on his scrap of newspaper” [A, 169]), but now suddenly it offers access to a medium beyond commercial forms, the realm of the irreducibly material, substantial, actual—the real. The suggestion is that it may provide a resting place for “Naipaul”’s mind. But like the cold coin and tough leather of the commercial, the material provides nothing at all, and “Naipaul” is soon moved to scramble from the cave. The self is so diminished that even raw materiality itself lacks the substance needed to uphold him.

In Rushdie and Naipaul, then, postcolonial pilgrimage occasions the triumph of mass faithfulness of the most traditional—not to say reactionary—kinds. Both Rushdie’s and Naipaul’s pilgrimages testify to the power of faith to swallow whole everything extraneous to it, even its most indigestibly alien and basic alternatives. But at the same time, and more to the present point, they testify to a significant incapacity of the modern, Westernized mind occupying postcolonial space. It cannot share the glorious inspirations of the faithful; nor can it find footing to stand up to the inspired, even when they take a turn for the outlandish, the absurd, the dangerous, or the atrocious (as in Ayesha’s inciting the crowd outside the mosque to stone the foundling to death). Pressured by great faithfulness it virtually dissolves, losing shape, purpose, and agency. Both Naipaul and Rushdie thus indict modernity on postcolonial grounds—literally. They depict a mind unable to discover there any usable alternative to a religious experience it cannot share. We could try to blame the failure on the postcolonial mud in which they are mired, but the modernized mind is the focus of both accounts.

III.

These accounts of pilgrimage betoken a kind of narrative whose motto could be, Truth is not always great, and it will not always prevail. The more typical account of this kind has focused not on the modernized mind of the postcolonial era, but on the pre-modern mind of the
West. A famous example of such a mind is of course that belonging to Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, who prior to April 1611 commissioned “four Jesuit mathematicians of the Roman College” to peer through Galileo’s latest version of that “convex objective and concave eyepiece fixed in a metal tube.” Bellarmine’s fame lies in his refusal to credit what his trusted mathematicians confirmed—“Galileo’s discovery of new stars previously unseen, four heavenly bodies that moved around Jupiter,” “the phases of Venus,” the “oval form of Saturn,” and, perhaps most remarkably, “the mountains of the moon.”

Five years later, five years of mounting evidence and assertion, he called Galileo to his home to warn him “that he should abandon his position with regard to Copernicanism” until such time as he could prove that the earth was in motion. The consequence was the “Galilean myth,” which “has been nurtured by implicit assumptions about the nature of science and the nature of religion . . . rooted in modern beliefs” and in “modern culture.” This story serves modernity as one of its classic tales of self-blinding traditionalism, and, as we have seen, Naipaul and Rushdie simply invert its plot. “Naipaul” and Mirza are blinded, and even immobilized, not by the epiphenomena of the Enlightenment, but by the equally powerful—indeed, equally radical and disruptive in our modern world—visions of tradition and orthodoxy.

Triumphant orthodoxy, nevertheless, claims these narratives only incompletely. Though both Naipaul and Rushdie critique the modern myth of individual authority and rationality, neither sustains a postcolonial myth of resurgent tradition. Rather than solidifying a postcolonial myth fatal to modernity and individuality, each author supplements his account of the pilgrimage with writing that works to undermine the postcolonial mythic power just conjured. Yet the more significant achievement of this writing, as we will see, is constructive. It betokens generosity where we do not expect it. Both Naipaul and Rushdie end their narratives of failed pilgrimage with sudden gestures of sympathy, and the recipients are these same inert modern pilgrims.

In Naipaul’s case this generous writing is not to be found in his famous tour of literary English India. Naipaul does turn busy essayist just after the failed pilgrimage. In the succeeding chapter, “Fantasy and Ruins,” the literature of English India is submitted to a scrutiny that is sustained, rigorous, and evaluative. But this turn scarcely signifies Naipaul’s escape from the inertia of de-individuation. Indeed, having broken the mindless stasis, he submits to kinesis, which is, of course, the other of inertia’s two forms. “Naipaul”s—that is, the pilgrim’s—relieved delight in “Indian Railways!” (A, 220; also see 193-95) will bear him
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away from his months of residence amongst sunflowers (now wilted) in the
doll’s house by the Dal lake. Naipaul, on the other hand—the
implied author, in Wayne Booth’s still useful designation—is borne
beyond any fixed place and any certain abode, and not just discursively,
but also ontologically. Once he has ceased investigating two opposed
cultural logics, that lying behind British books about India, and that
lying behind Indian conceptions of history, he is largely done with the
essay form. But he has already submitted to a discursive unsettledness
marked by “swerve[s] of pace and preoccupation” that reflects “Naipaul”s
busy travel and that will end only with the latter’s turning in for the night
in “The Garland on my Pillow”—only with, that is, a final stasis,
Naipaul’s own farewell to Western(ized) individuality. 54

It is in the writing of this crucial retirement that we witness Naipaul’s
sudden and simple generosity. Yet, to be sure, at first the episode will
seem to offer just the final, and most grievous, failure. Having taken up
with that most conventional of exotic Indian figures, the Sikh, “Naipaul”
appears to be nearing “the end” (A, 230): the end of, among other
things, “Naipaul”s persona as detached Westernized tourist, observer,
and commentator. Abandoning the aesthetic and reportorial distance of
the Western intellectual, “Naipaul” adopts the Sikh’s rage and contempt,
thereby allowing the Sikh to become his own “irrational self” (A, 226).
“Naipaul” wanders central India “longing” to witness “the limits of
human degradation”—images of “greater and greater decay, more rags
and filth, more bones, men more starved and grotesque, more spectacu-
larly deformed” (A, 226). Thus “Naipaul” fails to fit into native culture
even when he goes native; the anti-self he chooses from among India’s
many native-types hates all other native-types. But this episode of
“private failure” does not end until “Naipaul”s public success as an
internationally known writer elicits an honor that is extravagant, absurd,
and revealing. He returns to his hotel room one night to find that an
admiring Indian reader (encountered, like the Sikh, by chance) has
snuck into this private space, lit “great clumps of incense sticks,” strewn
flowers on his bed, and placed “a garland on [his] pillow” (A, 233).

“Naipaul” is now breathing a comic atmosphere—those clouds of
honorary incense almost stifle him. Yet Naipaul’s serious work, it quickly
seems, is to characterize his own achieved Western identity as mortal
and profane. Standing before that most traditional token of Western
heroic achievement, the garland in repose, are funereal “dying brands”
and ash on the floor resembling “bird droppings” (A, 233). Thus Naipaul
gazes, first, not upon an inspiring and portable token of esteem but
upon a wan and perhaps final resting place for the reputation, a
dispirited memorial. Like many public memorials, especially those exposed to the elements (and the pigeons), this droopy display emits neither heat nor light; rather, it foregrounds death and defilement, even as it should be sponsoring “incorruptibility,” honor in the leaf, “the eternal greenness of the laurel.” Moreover, it lacks one of the usual compensations for such shameful exposure, which is public visibility. Proper memorials are works of “public art”; that this is but a private citizen’s private tribute also erodes any sense of its empowering force. According to Fawzia Mustafa, the question of Naipaul’s “status as a recognized Writer” is addressed in that much-discussed “digression into the textual space of English India” that we found in “Fantasy and Ruins.” Naipaul raises the question again here, and seems, at first, to provide a somber answer. For beyond the foreground occupied by incense and flowers, Naipaul places the pillow destined to receive his own exhausted Westernized head. And, given the string of failures we have just witnessed, we might expect him to punch that pillow, fluff it, and retire.

Instead, Naipaul lays a garland upon it, thereby transforming modernity’s deathbed into a terminal emblem of youthful promise. Of course, it is the admiring reader who has placed the actual garland on the actual pillow, and not “Naipaul” the pilgrim. Yet Naipaul the author imitates the gesture, placing the pillowed garland—as image—atop the entire episode. Thus the image, once doubled, provides both terminus and title. The episode closes and opens only by its grace. And that is how Naipaul honors the very desire that gave that image rise, a desire rooted in respect for a distinctly Western honorific tradition. For all the smoke and ashes that surround it, the garland on Naipaul’s pillow emblematizes a traditional, even archetypal mode of Western reputation. In seeking that original Western garland, the laurel, Petrarch became virtually the first literary heavyweight of the West, modernity’s first world-champion of culture. But the laurel was not reserved for bookmen. Petrarch’s goal, “the fragrance of good repute,” was “a goal sought by both emperor and poet.” Thus the honor intended by Naipaul’s admiring reader, and then honored by Naipaul, extends to modern Western individuality in general. Naipaul honors Western honor itself.

It would be easy to imagine that honor’s fate in Naipaul indicates the persistence of a desideratum—the individual self, distinguished, luxuriously solitary, autonomous. The claim, which I want to oppose, is that Naipaul here illustrates the contemporary postcolonial subject’s incapacity to surrender an individual sense of self, no matter how truncated, to the group. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has written recently of the
“devotion to the authority of individual consciousness that still exercises a seductive and tenacious hold upon the Western mind.” The question here is whether that devotion does not hold the Westernized mind yet more tenaciously. Is it harder to surrender one’s individuality, even when it is partial and tentative, when you know what it is like to live without it?

Naipaul knows what that is like. His identity has not been merely tentative; as Mustafa argues, it has also been merely “textual.” Gorra agrees: Naipaul’s “individuality” has always been precarious and has always been near the center of his writing; the “long line of books” shows how Naipaul has been “desperately trying to write into being the self that [he] knows [he] can never fully achieve.” What stands in his way? The “devastating knowledge” that “he remains always ‘one of the crowd’” because there is no way for a “Trinidadian Hindu” to become “a great British novelist.” One cannot “escape one’s origins” and, thus, one’s awareness that one is but “half-made.” Hence what Mustafa terms “the process of identity formation” is doomed from the start. That is why “Naipaul,” the pilgrim in Darkness, will never arrive at a confident sense of self. Yet that is also why Naipaul the implied author will never abandon the quest. The anxiety shadowing the pilgrim’s sense of identity only stirs the author’s interest in identity; indeed, the compelling interest in identity is as inescapable as its postcolonial fate.

Yet three aspects of the tribute suggest surrender, not to the compulsions of an eternally threatened self, but to a wistfulness that transcends it: its impersonality, its deliberateness, and its tentativeness. What is finally honored is not Naipaul’s own personal reputation, though that is its occasion, but rather reputation itself (“good repute”). We should also note, again, that the largesse is performed by Naipaul rather than “Naipaul”; the impulse to honor springs out only after the stimulating event has receded into aesthetic distance. Finally, the laying on of the garland is but a performance, a thing of the moment. The memorial it creates, or the mere memory, hardly stands in monumental repudiation of the traditional communal values these authors have already recognized as powerful forces in our contemporary postcolonial world. The suggestion, rather, is of a mere gesture. Yet that gesture has its proleptic value. For it provides a means by which the faithful may purchase honor for themselves and their communities. All they have to do is detach from community long enough to pay the tribute. Of course, this claim depends on our rooting one kind of postcolonial honor in cultural openness. In honoring Western honor, on this view, the Eastern self wins honor for any community flexible enough to encourage the
indeed. Such, at least, is one step towards “commonality” available to a postcolonialism that chooses to defy the dictates of the colonizer/colonized opposition.

iv.

Rushdie’s own complex community is yet more difficult to define than the virtual non-community of that famous loner Naipaul, who seems to have found detachment inevitable, and I shall not attempt to define either of them here. Instead, I will simply delineate Rushdie’s own particular gesture towards commonality, which suggests an unwillingness to celebrate the postcolonial failure of modern individuality that is as distinct as Naipaul’s—and much more spectacular. Indeed, Rushdie goes beyond Naipaul’s garlanding of modernity into a rhetoric of exaltation. Mirza, the modern man who has refused to credit the miracle, is at first denied any vision; he is “the only survivor of the Ayesha Haj not to witness the parting of the waves” (S, 505). Yet finally Mirza, lying in “the withered dust” as he waits for a wildfire to consume him, is “set . . . free” from self and history and enters the vision originally closed to him:

Then the sea poured over him, and he was in the water beside Ayesha, who had stepped miraculously out of his wife’s body . . . ‘Open,’ she was crying . . . at the instant that his heart broke, he opened . . . and at the moment of their opening the waters parted, and they walked to Mecca across the bed of the Arabian Sea. (S, 506-7)

This vision of triumphant miraculous pilgrimage exalts the modern secularist, who ends a martyr to principles that have little to do with miracles. Far from forsaking individualism by converting at the last second, Mirza remains committed to its ethos of autonomy and authority even to the end. If he began his martyrdom by choosing to try to save the lives of his community, his last action is also an act of personal “choice”: “[Ayesha] was drowning, too. He saw the water fill her mouth, heard it begin to gurgle in her lungs. Then something in him refused that, made a different choice” (S, 507). Significantly, Mirza is exalted only once he has “refused” a dictated choice, “made a different choice” from the one facing him. Exalted here, then, is the individual will, which is so often capricious, at odds with power and with itself (very well, we contradict ourselves), the possession of which largely distinguishes humans from angels: “To will is to disagree; not to submit; to dissent” (S, 93). But one should also note that the choice Mirza makes, the last as
well as the first, is to try to save another's life. To the end, then, responsibility for another is a burden he chooses, even when the other in question is his nemesis. He should welcome Ayesha's drowning as a sign of his vindication by "the real world," things-as-they-are. Ayesha, of course, is the incubus who has consumed the spirit of his wife, Mishal, her influence growing as the cancer invades Mishal's body. That it is the loved and hated Ayesha who is the recipient of his generosity reveals its fundamental basis in a deliberate, sustained, and self-aware selflessness. Standing behind Mirza's sense of responsibility for the community is a sense of collective membership, and this community spirit extends even to that community-wrecker, Ayesha. This commitment to responsibility outweighs personal love and personal hatred alike, the two of which come together eerily in Ayesha (she seems to have stepped out of his wife's body). That Mirza is exalted only once he has chosen to transcend it should be no surprise. Saladin's envious destruction of Gibreel's sanity earlier in the novel (in "The Angel Azrael") makes Rushdie's antipathy to personal grudges conspicuous.

Mirza's ending, which is fantastic and fabular, garlands an episode that has already in moments assumed the shape of a fable, both in the action and in the telling ("Mirza Saeed broke down and wept for a week and a day" [S, 505]). Nevertheless, the questions it has invited us to explore, questions about the nature and fate of postcolonial individuality, are not peripheral. The more central and less fantastic story that Mirza's story illuminates, that of Gibreel and Saladin's friendship, also deals with these questions, and nowhere more directly than in its own ending. Saladin Chamcha's final return to Bombay occasions his own "opening": his almost magical rapprochements with both his dying father, Changez, and his estranged lover, Zeeny Vakil, and his acceptance of the original, unanglicized form of his name ("Salahuddin"), which he once rejected. For many, this congeries of loving reconciliations signals either the triumph of that great postcolonial ideal, "hybridity"—"Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that"—or the emergence of "a new postmodernism" that is not downbeat and Alexandrian but exuberant, capacious (being celebratory of difference), and no less satisfying ideologically. Indeed, we have been so ready to see Rushdie celebrate melange and mixed-ness that we have usually failed to note Rushdie's own mixed feelings in the fiction. For instance, nothing in Rushdie's well-known comments on hybridity's central place in The Satanic Verses suggests that the novel also testifies to the erotic power of the "uncompromising; absolute; pure" (S, 500), that it may even offer Rushdie's own "love letter to Islam," as Feroza Jussawalla

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Nor do Rushdie’s comments suggest any authorial sense of doubt or loss consequent upon Saladin’s ultimate achievement of happy unity with the Indian culture of his early youth, a unity that comes about only with his severance from the Western culture of his adulthood.

Yet Rushdie’s ending explores just this sense of loss. Saladin’s celebrated “opening” entails fatal closure, being built upon the ruins of the desires, ambitions, devotions, and even the particular persons constituting his “foreignness” (S, 541), his Westernized self—his entire adolescent and adult history. To begin with, the end of the novel does not make it clear that Saladin is contemplating doing anything other than making the same mistake he made when he originally rejected the East—this time, by rejecting the West. “Try and embrace this city, as it is...,” Zeeny lectures him, “Become its creature; belong” (S, 541); standing next to him as he stands “at the window of his childhood” staring—westerly—at “the far horizon,” Zeeny exclaims, “Let’s get the hell out of here” (S, 546-47). In this dramatic moment Salahuddin is invited to reject all puerile adventurism, that very “silver pathway” shining over his childhood view of the Arabian Sea “like a road to miraculous lands” (“To the devil with it!” [S, 546]). But why, the reader wonders, should all further contact with the West be associated with childish romance? Moreover, if the romance of the West (the future) must be abjured, a Western realism rooted in the past must also drop away. Salahuddin’s rejection of future Western horizons is complemented by his rejection of his own past history, and especially his sense of his own personal accountability. Like Mirza, whose bid for freedom is abetted by a fire that consumes “histories, memories, genealogies, purifying the earth” (S, 506), Salahuddin can achieve purity only by surrendering the perishable contents of a self. He cannot become Bombay’s creature until he lays to rest the ghosts of Allie Cone and Gibreel, a more disturbing, even heartrending task than the mere “[u]nfinished business” he ironically terms it (S, 540). He must shed a self now constituted in significant part by the Mirza-like “overwhelming feeling of guilt” that breeds in him an acute sense of (again, Mirza-like) “responsibility” (S, 542); it requires that he reject precisely what was most heroic in Mirza, who begins by accepting that same responsibility when he chooses to oppose the Ayesha Haj and whose heart must break before he can open himself to its vision in the end.

The end of Rushdie’s novel thus resists closure: the unambiguous, clean parting with the West expected by many postcolonial critics. Indeed, neither of these two postcolonial novels bears out in precise detail the patterns blueprinted by the large body of established
postcolonial theorists, at least where questions of modern individuality are involved. Rather, they offer literary critics the chance to explore these novels as structures erected in a spirit of cheeky indifference to our more purely theorized expectations. The question that arises for such critics is that of what to make of the indifference. Should it be suspected, read as a sign of these authors’ indifference to “the nationalist struggles of Third World peoples”? Should it, on the other hand, be celebrated as testimony to a freedom not usually recognized in politically charged texts like Rushdie’s: the freedom to indulge a stranger nostalgia, a pang for what was but wasn’t always—even for what was, but wasn’t ever, their own? An openness to discrepant possibility, even when it is put forth by the enemy? On the other hand, the issue of Rushdie’s (and Naipaul’s, for that matter) indifference to extant theory could turn into the issue of their anticipation of new theory. (Such a transformation is available especially to those who resist this opportunity to explore literature and theory as inimical kinds of writing, each living the other’s death.)

By memorializing modernity both Naipaul and Rushdie have already crossed into the “beyond” recently theorized by Bhabha. They have entered an “intervening space,” an absence or emptiness stretching between the indigenous, on the one hand, and the modern and Western, on the other. They have also entered an intervening time; to inhabit that space is “to dwell [in] a revisionary time,” a time stretching between the traditional native (pre)history and “the colonized present.” The virtue of such a crossing, then, is that it allows us to envisage anew past and present alike. As Bhabha phrases it—in distinctly humanistic and pragmatic terms—the “beyond” allows us the freedom “to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality.” Faced with a shared history of grievous error, even one with faults far more grievous on the one side than the other, sons and daughters of colonizers and colonized folks and their more complexly pedigreed descendants may give it new meanings, thereby clearing space not for a resurgent traditionalism or decaying modernity but for a real (if still mysterious) future. To be sure, Bhabha is theorizing about the best of postcolonial futures, the fairest and the most human; but he may also be talking about the only authentic future possible. In either case, it is a future upon which neither Naipaul nor Rushdie can put his hands as if to determine its complete shape in global apprehension. As Bhabha puts it, to dwell in the postcolonial “beyond” is “to touch the future on its hither side.” Yet, given the history of contest and opposition that continues to determine the course of the postcolonial
intellectual and cultural era, for now even the mere proximate feel of the future may be feeling enough.

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NOTES

1 Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.
2 Sara Suleri, for example, rejects “any static binarism between colonizer and colonized” (The Rhetoric of English India [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992], 2). Bhabha also “shifts focus from the colonized/colonizer confrontation to a third space beyond the binary structure” (see Shaobo Xie, “Rethinking the Problem of Postcolonialism,” New Literary History 28 [1997]: 7). Yet, as Deepika Bahri notes, the “split between colonizer/colonized . . . continues to be the basis of postcolonial studies . . . the static principle of ‘colonizer bad—colonized good’” (“Once More with Feeling: What is Postcolonialism?” Ariel 26.1 [1995]: 61).
4 Suleri, 15.
5 Bhabha, 7.
8 Gorra, 6. To Kwame Anthony Appiah’s description of the postcolonial as “the space-clearing gesture . . . concerned with going beyond, with transcending coloniality” (In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992], 149), Gorra replies, “a space has been cleared into which something new might come” (6).
9 As Bhabha notes, “many of my ideas on ‘migrant’ and minority space have been sparked off by the novels of Salman Rushdie” (ix).
10 “Western man has irrevocably been cast out—has cast himself out—of a child-like world of enchantment and undividedness” and now bears “the burden of selfhood” (Benjamin Nelson and Charles Trinkaus, “Introduction” to Jacob Burckhardt’s The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy: Volume I [New York: Harper and Row, 1958], 18-19). For Burckhardt, pre-modern “Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation—only through some general category” (143). Timothy Reiss also argues that medieval “views of ‘person’ and ‘self,’ of ‘will’ and ‘intention,’ are utterly different from what will be found by the time of the Renaissance” (The Discourse of Modernism [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982], 72; see also 69-75, 111-12, and 189-90). Also note Michel Foucault’s post-modern conclusion that “individuality, with its forms, limits, and needs, is no more than a precarious moment, doomed to destruction, forming first and last a simple obstacle that must be removed from the path of that annihilation” (The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith [New York: Vintage, 1973], 279).
11 Gorra calls Naipaul and Rushdie “the English language’s two most important writers of Indian descent” (145).

13 Note Edward Said's famous indictment in “The Intellectual in the Post-Colonial World”: Naipaul “has allowed himself quite consciously to be turned into a witness for the Western prosecution” of the Orient (Salman Rushdie 70-71 [1986]: 53). Suleri reviews the case against Naipaul in The Rhetoric of English India (153-55).


19 Reiss, 29-30 (“assume[] . . . some,” “the epistemic change”).

20 Reiss, 72.


22 Lyotard, xxiv.


24 Wallace Martin, Recent Theories of Narrative (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 137.

25 Alasdair MacIntyre is Gerald Bruns’s example of a recent philosopher who writes “in defiance of the narrative turn” taken by Richard Rorty, Martha Nussbaum, and other Anglo-American philosophers who embrace “the antifoundationalist idea that things have histories, not natures or essences” (see “Along the Narrative Turn [Towards an Anarchic Theory of Literary History],” Modern Language Quarterly 57 [1996]: 2).

26 Martin, 137.


29 Rorty also detects anxieties beneath calm philosophical surfaces: “Heidegger cheerfully ignores, or violently reinterprets, lots of Plato and Nietzsche while presenting himself as respectfully listening to the voice of Being as it is heard in their words” (Essays, 49). Yet the “rhetoric of emancipation” omnipresent in Heidegger “is absent from [Foucault’s] work” (Rorty, Essays, 173). The younger Foucault does demonstrate “enthusiasm for answering Nietzsche’s challenge, for crossing the philosophical threshold and moving beyond the end of man” (Richard Begam, Samuel Beckett and the End of the West, 2012).

30 Foucault, 385.
31 Foucault, 386.
32 For instance, in Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1991) Fredric Jameson argues that we postmoderns inhabit “a corporate, collectivized, post-individualistic age” (4).
33 Foucault, 385.
34 Michael Levenson describes a “familiar picture” of modernist “selfhood” as “a central essence, a deep interior, a concealed core that must be penetrated before it will yield its meanings”—before it will yield that “inwardness that gives the truth of personality.” The other kind of modernist spelunker, the “skeptical epistemologist,” “finds an emptiness” where this “introspectivist” finds “an emotional plenitude” (Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991], 6, 7).
36 Conrad, 72.
39 Metcalf, 100.
40 Peters, xiii.
41 Metcalf, 91.
42 Metcalf, 100.
43 For an account of the “tension between physical act and spiritual intent . . . present in the whole tradition of the pilgrimage,” see Donald R. Howard, Writers and Pilgrimage: Medieval Pilgrimage Narratives and Their Posternity (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), 15 and following. Also see Peters, who describes “the total pilgrimage experience [the Muslim pilgrimage or Hajj] [as] often an arduous and frightening and painful one, sometimes enormously profitable and sometimes financially ruinous” (xiii).
44 Metcalf, 91.
47 Rushdie, Midnight’s Children, 377.
For those apt to deconstruct the reason/religion opposition, the episode is “not about the repression of truth by religious authority” but about “an encounter between different types of power-knowledge structures within the framework of a dialogical model” (Feldhay, front matter).  


Michael North, The Final Sculpture: Public Monuments and Modern Poets (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), 18-19. In a discussion of monuments and/in modernity, North challenges the “obvious cliché” that “monuments and modern art, and therefore modernity in general, are diametrically opposed to each other” (19).


Feldhay, front matter.


57 Mustafa, 100.

58 Roche, Jr., 16.


60 Mustafa, 100.

61 Gorra, 95, 96.

62 Gorra, 91.

63 Gorra, 96.

64 Mustafa, 100.


65 See Feroza Jussawalla, “Rushdie’s Dastan-E-Dilruba: The Satanic Verses as Rushdie’s Love Letter to Islam,” Diacritics 26.1 (1996): 50-73. Suleri also recognizes the approach to Islam but argues that “The Parting of the Arabian Sea”—“[f]inally” (204), at any rate—“is less a recuperation of Islam” than a recuperation of “male desire” and concomitant transfiguration of the (equally male?) “body of dubiety” (Mirza’s body). The suggestion is that Mirza is saved from his dubiety by the “feminized prophet” (Suleri, 205). I would argue that he is saved, rather, by the capacity for choice, for self-transcendence, in which his dubiety is rooted, and that Rushdie takes steps to place choice in a position more central (further “within” [S, 507]) than that occupied by Mirza’s “heart.”


67 Bhabha, 7; Xie, 17.

68 Bhabha, 7.