

Use of the Family Romances by Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*

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Abstract:

This research work focuses on the family Romance in the novels of Salman Rushdie. He present the Family Romance by different characters in which he find character that brings all that is good to life. The main purpose behind the research provides information students to get ideas of Family Romance in their study.

Key words:

Family romance, postcolonial, culture, relationship, protagonist.

Introduction:

The novel's sprawling depiction of the subcontinent may give some credence to this claim, even though its self-awarely unreliable narrator Saleem Sinai keeps insisting that his tale is representative only in its multiplicity, its idiosyncrasy and individuality. Middle-class Saleem is no Indian Everyman, and neither is his creator; arguably the expatriate author and his cosmopolitan concerns may be more accurately linked to migrant writing than seen in terms of more traditionally postcolonial fiction, as he has been living away from his native country in England and America for years. Nevertheless, the postcolonial project that is independent India has been at the heart of much of Rushdie's writing, even if his emphasis arguably lies on the *post* rather than the *colonial*. First and foremost, *Midnight's Children* provides a fairly ambivalent perspective on the subcontinent after Independence, yet it also expresses a tentative hope rooted in the multiplicity of cultures and talents India has to offer.

Yet the similarities also serve to highlight the considerable differences in tone and especially outlook – the tentative optimism

of *Midnight's Children* that is reinforced by its lack of closure, emphasising that the story (both of Saleem and of postcolonial India) will go on, is countered by the more pronounced hopelessness of *The Moor's Last Sigh* and its protagonist's death wish. Both novels play on the Scheherazade topos, yet the Moor's tale strives towards his death and must be finished to that end, whereas Saleem's narrative resists coming to the point where story and protagonist must end.

Family Romance of Characters:

Saleem, a man of several amazing talents, writes at one point in his fantastic tale: "My inheritance includes this gift, the gift of inventing new parents for myself whenever necessary. The power of giving birth to fathers and mothers". Moraes Zogoiby, Saleem's textual descendant and the protagonist/narrator of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, however, makes the following implicit comments on his forebear's tale: "Children make fictions of their fathers, re-inventing them according to their childish needs. The reality of a father is a weight few sons can bear", and later: "No point trying to rewrite one's parents' lives. It's hard enough to try and set them down; to say nothing of my own". Apart from numerous other parallels, the protagonists of both works have problematic relationships with their parents – not to mention a problematic parentage to begin with –, and they are both in a position to rewrite their own lives, not least by rewriting their progenitors. Nevertheless, the two characters address the issue very differently. From the beginning of his tale, Saleem Sinai defines himself through family, even if he later redefines "family." Early in his narrative he writes: "I must commence the business of

remaking my life from the point at which it really began”, which he follows with the story of how Aadam Aziz, his purported grandfather, lost his faith. This claim of origin, combined with the insistent emphasis on ancestors and precursors throughout the novel, would seem to suggest that for Saleem, identity is a matter of blood, meaning that it is inherited, communicated uni-directionally from ancestors to progeny. However, this impression soon proves to be mistaken. *Midnight's Children* undermines the notion of identity as (genetic) heritage, and it does so most emphatically by presenting a multitude of parents and parent figures, resulting in a scenario where firstly, the son “giv[es] birth to fathers and mothers” by means of choosing and narrating them, and secondly, Saleem’s biological parents are not necessarily seen as his “real” parents, neither by Saleem nor by his audience. On the whole, Saleem’s fiction is given priority over narrowly determined filiation. As Baker writes: “The telling of stories are tied inextricably in Rushdie’s novels to the construction of a self”, which means that the latter in effect is at everyone’s disposal. Constructing oneself becomes a democratic endeavour, as authorship is not restricted to figures of (quasi-)parental authority. To illustrate this, we need to examine the multiple parentage Saleem invokes. In the first eight chapters of the novel, the reader is presented with a guessing game as to who the narrator’s actual father and mother are, and all of the possible candidates in some form “leak” into the protagonist, to use Saleem’s recurring metaphor; he incorporates elements of these potential parents into his own identity. Before Saleem’s biological father is revealed, he suggests five other potential fathers and four possible mothers, not to mention the numerous symbolic or surrogate parents populating the novel as well as the narrator’s literary, cultural and religious forebears. The result of this is that his actual parents do not have absolute creative

authority over him; this authority is spread over more than a dozen characters. Even more, it is therefore not so much the parents who author their child, giving him an identity and meaning as one might (try to) impose on a text, but the son who co-authors his parents as well as vice versa. The relationship is more intertextual, so to speak, in that there is no clear-cut hierarchy of who has authority (or authorship) over whom, as characters and texts leak into one another. In a sense, Saleem’s notion of family is thus more affiliative than filiative, as it is based on choice rather than on the problematic concept of biological determinism. Belonging and identity are active, ongoing processes the individual participates in, not attributes imposed from above.

Characters Reality: Saleem’s likely biological parents, the Englishman William Methwold (one of the last departing colonial officials in India), and Vanita, the wife of the poor entertainer Wee Willie Winkie. They have been given much attention especially in early critical writing on *Midnight's Children*, as they support the reading of the novel as an obvious postcolonial allegory, yet they account for very little of the actual narrative. In the end they are the least important, least “true” parents the protagonist has and leave least of a trace on him – added to which in the end we only have his word that they are his real parents; the word of a confessed liar and unreliable narrator. Not only do his adoptive parents (who for most of the novel believe him to be their child) have a much stronger influence on him, Saleem indeed insists on claiming them throughout as his true mother and father and himself as their true son. At one point he writes about Amina, his (step) mother: “[T]he baby she was carrying did not turn out to be her son”, indicating that ties other than the biological or genetic will prove important. Likewise, the (probably fraudulent) seer Ramram Seth’s prophecy for Amina’s child foresees

not her biological offspring Shiva, although it also alludes to him, but first and foremost Saleem.

However, we need to distinguish between Saleem's different functions within the novel. As the protagonist he is mostly at the mercy of his tale and of others – including his step-parents Amina and Ahmed Sinai – and thus his retroactive rewriting of his life and family could be seen as the postcolonial fantasy of the subaltern and disenfranchised providing the illusion of empowerment only. In his function as character, Saleem is determined by others from the very beginning, when his future nurse Mary Pereira, working at the hospital where he is born, in a misguided act of social rebellion switches the two babies – one born to a poor mother, the other to a well-off, bourgeois family – and thereby determines the vastly different worlds the symbolic twins are brought up in. Saleem is the perennial victim, the one to whom things are done. He is kept in the (actual and metaphorical) position of child, by parent figures and historical events, unable as a character to transcend his role as exclusively offspring and text. As Wilson writes: “The image of the writer as both master and victim of public and private material, which he has been formed by in the past and is himself attempting to form in the present, dominates *Midnight's Children*”. Saleem as protagonist remains largely victim.

This is underlined by a number of symbolic and finally actual castrations that take from him (at least in biological terms) the ability to become a parent himself and thus transcend his role as child. The most important metaphorical castration is forced on him by the Sinais, his chosen parents, when they have his continually leaking nose drained at the hospital. Not only is the nose a common (indeed stereotypical) phallic symbol, it also appears to be the seat of Saleem's fantastic talent. Being one of a thousand and one children born on the midnight that brought Indian independence, he is endowed with a magical gift, in his

case the ability to read minds and emotions as well as transmit them. A Nehruvian forum for all of the magical children, which his “twin” Shiva, Amina and Ahmed's biological son raised by Willie Winkie, is also a part of. Saleem's gift prefigures his talent of authorship in that it opens up to him the voices of thousands of characters, which in his retelling he effectively creates for the reader; yet the nasal drainage he is subjected to strips him of this power. It also anticipates the forced sterilisation all the Children undergo at the orders of the Widow, Indira Gandhi's fictional counterpart. As a result of the sterilisation they all lose their fantastic talents in addition to their generative abilities.

The Moor's Last Sigh in many ways parallels the earlier novel in terms of characters, plot, motifs and structure. Indeed, critics have referred to it as *Midnight's Children's* “sequel” (Goonetilleke) and “parody” (Moss). Its narrator, Moraes “Moor” Zogoiby, at first appears to be a spiritual descendant of Saleem. However, the Moor's attitude to his family is remarkably different in many ways. Whereas Saleem both subverts and claims his (step-) parents, progressing beyond adolescent rebellion, Moraes fails to do so. Accordingly his relationship to his father and especially his mother remains neurotic, not least because they both die before the rift between them and himself can be bridged. Moraes' family story is rife with antagonism and murder, and he appears to bring its curse, pronounced against his mother Aurora by her grandmother Epifania (“may your house be forever partitioned, may its foundations turn to dust, may your children rise up against you, and may your fall be hard” to an end only by dying, his siblings having died before him. There lies little hope with offspring characters in the novel, and there is no insistent affiliative counter discourse to disrupt filiative hierarchies.

While Saleem's tale is one of emancipation through narration, the Moor's only

reinforces his role as offspring/text, as he does not even choose to write his life of his own volition, as Saleem did, but is forced at gunpoint to do so by his erstwhile ersatz-father figure Vasco Miranda. Almost without exception he remains determined by others, which suggests that the tentative optimism of *Midnight's Children* is a native illusion – the offspring cannot assume authorship. Most of all Moraes presents himself as authored by his parents Aurora and Abraham. Even though his mother dies at roughly two thirds into the novel, arguably she rather than her author son is its dominant character. Aurora is a highly ambivalent figure, and she celebrates her own ambivalence. This is apparent not only in her art, but especially in her relationship to her family, and she appears to her children at times as an ogress – “Her children were shown no mercy. No special privileges for flesh-and-blood relations! Darlings, we munch on flesh, and blood is our tipples of choice’ – and as the scorpion of fable, stinging the frog that is carrying it across the river: “I couldn’t help it, It’s in my nature”. She unapologetically puts her own personality and needs before her family’s. This is already apparent in her sly naming of her children – Ina, Minnie, Mynah and Moor, in a variation on the nursery rhyme – where any thoughts of her offspring come second to her need to be witty and frivolous. However, her egocentrism becomes even more evident in the way she uses her family, and especially Moraes, in her creations. As a painter she incorporates her son into her often erotically charged art, thus interpreting and rewriting him as she sees fit. She dies while he is in exile, having been banished by his parents after a disastrous affair with a rival of Aurora’s, which for him means that she remains the monolithical, overbearing mother figure, and indeed he calls her “my immortal mother, my Nemesis, my foe beyond the grave”.

Abraham, the protagonist’s father, likewise bears monolithical qualities, although they

only emerge fully after Aurora’s death. As was the case in *Midnight's Children*, the Moor like Saleem throws doubt over his parentage, yet his hinting at a possible affair between Aurora and Prime Minister Nehru nine months before his birth seems half-hearted compared to the earlier novel’s sustained multiple family romances, and it has little influence on the narrative. Later in the Moor’s life, Abraham (a parent willing to sacrifice his son to his ambitions) is revealed to be the godfather figure of the Bombay underworld, a figure both godlike and satanic: “Recalcitrant, unregenerate, paramount: the Over World’s cackling overlord in his hanging garden in the sky”, reads one description. He too dies before Moraes can perceive him as a human-sized figure rather than the larger-than-life movie villain, and when the protagonist is later told that his father was culpable of Aurora’s death, Abraham remains forever fixed in his unhuman, satanic role in his son’s eyes. Like Aurora, he cannot be rewritten and humanised by a son who proves unequal to the task of authorship.

However, the novel does more than merely suggest that the Moor fails where Saleem succeeded. In fact, it retroactively undoes Saleem’s tentative hope, represented by his impossible affiliative son Aadam Sinai, reintroducing an adult Aadam into the plot. Whereas Saleem suggested that the generation after the Children of Midnight embodied a renewed pluralist promise for India, the rechristened Adam Braganza does not stand for pluralism or democracy but for capitalism and corruption. He is in some ways a parody of his father, turning Saleem’s emancipation through self-invention into a hollow postmodern sham. Adam has fashioned himself anew, but while his father did so by bringing narrative continuity to the discontinuities of self, he lacks this coherence with the past and the world he inhabits. While his big ears in *Midnight's Children* made him an avatar of Ganesh, the patron deity of scribes and letters, in the later novel he is compared to

the cartoonish Dumbo, ridiculing the earlier novel as well. He is presented as a simulacrum, a copy of a copy of a copy, and as such he presents a bitter comment on the end of *Midnight's Children*. The pluralism the earlier novel invoked is falling apart into corruption and communalism in the Moor's Bombay, which is underlined when Abraham adopts young Adam, making him his business heir. Thus, whereas Saleem claims a family as his own by means of his narrative, Moraes is disinherited by his own family without having the ability to create something new for himself. Even though he does choose a number of surrogate parents throughout the tale (though not to the extent that Saleem does), this is always in reaction to perceived parental injustice and force, and thus still inscribed in a filiative system, determined by parents. It does not have the effect of destabilising Aurora or Abraham as authority figures. The Moor does not bring about a dialogue between his parents, parent figures and himself; he alternates instead between binary positions, such as for instance Abraham and his fundamentalist, racist opponent Raman "Mainduck" Fielding. He seems effectively unable (and perhaps unwilling) to negotiate between them, and neither filiation nor affiliation seem viable options to provide cohesion for him or the nation. He does not endeavour to represent a productive third position as the one Saleem claims for himself and his M.C.C. or as the position that Homi Bhabha theorises in *The Location of Culture* (1994). Bhabha's "Third Space" straddles the two apparent binary opposites to form a hybridised third option, yet Moraes opts out of such an active role. As a result, he remains in the position of offspring, and of text, exclusively.

As *Midnight's Children* is the dominant intertext for *The Moor's Last Sigh*, it is easy to be disappointed in the latter, as it can be read as a bitter, resigned reread of the earlier work. Saleem's tale celebrates the power of storytelling; the Moor seems

disillusioned about it. Where Saleem, starting with his parents, freely interprets and reinvents, albeit always showing the strings of his puppetry, the Moor never revels in his storytelling. Saleem leaves a last pickle jar empty so his story can continue; Moraes sits down after his captor's death, although there no longer is any existential necessity to write, in order to bring his tale – and his life – to an end. The Moor at least seems to mistrust the imagination, or perhaps more aptly, he evades the responsibility of the storyteller and creator. In this especially he remains a child – his tale is an accusation of his parents who in his version have determined his life and identity throughout. Only very rarely does he acknowledge that he has been anything else than at the mercy of others. Most of all, he suggests that everything is his mother's fault, as Aurora remains his nemesis and (apparent) author throughout. Saleem's polyphonic tale offered the opposite, in that its narrator at times claimed responsibility over everything, taking the author's power to an ironic extreme, yet the Moor rejects all culpability, as is perhaps illustrated best when he is led to believe that his mother was murdered at Abraham's behest: "How, when the past is gone, when all's exploded and in rags, may one apportion blame? How to find meanings in the ruins of a life? – One thing was certain; I was fortune's, and my parents', fool". For Moraes, finding meaning is closely linked to apportioning blame. As author he tries to avoid his own responsibility by resisting his power over the tale. However, it is the contradiction between the narrator's function and his self-presentation that may render a productive dynamic of meaning in the text similar to the dialogue evoked by the narrator of *Midnight's Children*. The Moor is at the mercy of his tale, yet his tale exists in its form grace to him only. Similarly, he is determined by his parents – yet he creates them for his audience by narrating them. Most of all, his mother may be his

“Nemesis, [his] foe beyond the grave”, yet he resurrects her in his story to the extent that she becomes the central, if covert, author figure of the novel. She, more than her son, is an ambivalent but finally positive figure in the novel, as she suggests an alternative to the Moor’s resignation. Differently from Moraes’ story, his mother’s paintings (described and thus recreated by him) provide more space for interpretation. They offer more ambivalence than her son’s tale suggests; even though she authors him, it would be wrong to see her painterly discourse as fully determining the Moor’s identity. In fact, what her paintings provide him with is the promise of potential and of meaning, rather than meaning itself, and thus he may be her text but as such still needs to be read, to be interpreted. As he writes, Aurora “present[ed] me to myself as well as to the world as someone special, someone with a meaning”. More specifically, she evokes an utopia of multicultural, multireligious coexistence rooted in the past reminiscent of Saleem’s dream that has as its central representative the Moor: Jews, Christians, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains crowded into her paint-Boabdil’s fancy-dress balls, and the Sultan himself was represented [...] as a masked, particoloured harlequin, a patchwork quilt of a man; or, as his old skin dropped from him chrysalis-fashion, standing revealed as a glorious butterfly, whose wings were a miraculous composite of all the colours in the world. In Aurora’s paintings (as in Saleem’s tale), it is polyphony, not homogeneity, that has the potential to provide social cohesion; unity must be found in multiplicity, not in ossified myths of purity which foster fundamentalism and communalist violence. Yet such unity is not a state so much as a process; it is ongoing and dynamic – and thus difficult to achieve. Like the Children before him, and like Saleem’s son Aadam at the end of *Midnight’s Children*, Moraes embodies a promise in his mother’s art. However, this pluralist promise was

actualised only in the ideal past of the original Moor’s Granada and becomes increasingly fictional, finally expressed solely through art in the novel’s modern-day Bombay. Thus, arguably, the novel represents a swansong to post-Independence India and its democratic potential, where affiliation lacks the power to act as a cohesive social and cultural force, and where democracy always proves weaker than corruption and communalism. Nonetheless, the Moor’s tale implicitly returns the favour inherent in Aurora’s art, presenting his mother as someone who can also have meaning: “I made a kind of portrait of her, too”, he writes, and like her “last, unfinished, unsigned masterpiece”, a painting bearing the same title as the novel we are reading, his text too finally resists closure as far as Aurora is concerned. The Moor’s story ends, yet in Aurora’s case we have a number of different narratives of her – her son’s, her husband’s, and most of all her own paintings – and we need to bring meaning to these texts ourselves. As Keith Wilson’s article from 1984 already suggests with regard to *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie’s novels require reader responsibility, *The Moor’s Last Sigh* perhaps even more so than its predecessor. Aurora and Moraes, almost in spite of the latter, enter into a rivalry of meaning that is finally productive. Maes-Jelinek (2002) writes that “[t]he symbiosis and reciprocity between Moor’s writing and his mother’s painting seem at least partly due to his being, in a sense, her creation”, the central word for the present discussion being *reciprocity*. Perhaps the central ambivalence of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is that neither Aurora nor the Moor could exist without the other. In this at least, the novel evokes a parent-child dialogue that may not be as explicit, and as sustained, as in the earlier work, yet is still productive of meaning and makes the Moor’s narrative more than a retread of the parent novel.

Conclusion: Thus it can be concluded that Family romance are closely related among the characters of both the Fiction. Most characters relationship with other characters represents the family romance in different way.

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