

## **Inscribing the Palimpsest: Politics of Hybridity in *The Moor's Last Sigh***

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### **Abstract**

The employment of the politics of hybridity in *The Moor's Last Sigh* envisions Salman Rushdie's enthusiastic anticipation of cultural eclecticism. Using palimpsest as a metaphor, Rushdie inscribes intersecting trajectories of variegated cultural legacies and their imbrications in the course of cultural formation and historical mutation.

This politics of hybridity is manifested in three dimensions: (1) The metaphor of the palimpsest visualizes the nature of hybridity and dominates the book's cultural vision, featuring the germ of the novel; (2) Hybrid characters in the novel interrogate and destabilize the fixity of "the Other" and decouple the homogeneous definition of "the Other" in the logic of Manichean division of "Self and Other"; (3) Cultural legacies left by the British Empire are inevitably intertwined with local cultures, which illustrate that cultural hybridity is the predictable product of cultural formation.

Aurora's death in the very end alludes to the dim prospect of cultural eclecticism. The closing lament for a commodified Alhambra, likewise, implies a false multiculturalism. In parodying Martin Luther's persistence in his religious ideal in exile, Rushdie indicates that exile can never shatter a writer's literary conviction, which rescues the novel from turning into a melodrama, thereby allowing it to emit the positive glow of exile.

### **Keywords**

palimpsest, hybridity, Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, cultural eclecticism, multiculturalism

[...] if, as I was saying, the act of cultural translation (both as representation and as reproduction) denies the essentialism of a prior given originary culture, then we see that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the "third space" which enables other positions to emerge.

—Homi K. Bhabha ("The Third Space" 211)

To arrive at the “purity” of the gaze is not difficult, it is impossible.  
—Walter Benjamin (*Parigi* 609)

Rushdie’s first major postfatwa novel, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, completed during his six-year period of hiding, echoes *Midnight’s Children* with a more complicated ekphrastic elaboration of a palimpsest vision that celebrates cultural eclecticism with the politics of hybridity. Palimpsest, the dominant metaphor in *Shame*, not only hints at the idea of “narration as a process,”<sup>1</sup> but also visualizes the woman painter Aurora Zo-goiby’s palimpsest art, a symbol of Rushdie’s eclectic conception of cultural formation.

Above all, this palimpsestic vision encapsulates Rushdie’s view of cultural hybridity, which sees culture as an eclectic amalgamation, the sum total of diverse social groups’ activities.<sup>2</sup> In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, this celebration of cultural eclecticism serves as the novel’s most important agenda and is reinforced by the politics of hybridity that transgresses the confines of race, language, religion, culture, and genre. In relating the Moraes’s family saga, a history of intermarriage among different races, Rushdie turns his deformed, gargantuan narrator—Moraes—into an embodiment of India’s plurality and the anarchistic artist—Aurora—the incarnation of the nation’s glorious eclectic tradition. To decouple the essentialist nationalist’s construction of a “pure,” “homogeneous” India,<sup>3</sup> Rushdie exaggerates Moraes’s hybrid pedigree by

<sup>1</sup> The concept derives from Calvino, a novelist Rushdie greatly admires. To further illustrate the idea, Rushdie even cites *The Baron* in *Imaginary Homelands* to show how Calvino sees narration as a process:

Ombrosa no longer exists [...] perhaps it was [...] embroidered on nothing, like this thread of ink which I have let run on for page after page, swarming with cancellations, corrections, doodles, blots and gaps, bursting at times into clear big berries, coagulating at others into piles of tiny starry seeds, then twisting away, forking off, surrounding buds of phrases with frameworks of leaves and clouds, then interweaving again, and so running on and on and on until it splutters and bursts into a last senseless cluster of words, ideas, dreams, and so ends. (256)

<sup>2</sup> Alexandra W. Schultheis informatively contextualizes the idea of palimpsest by relating it to Nehru’s prospect of the nation:

Rushdie may have borrowed the trope of the palimpsest from Nehru, who pictured Indian history as a palimpsest of successful intercultural exchanges that the new nation would constitutionally extend and guarantee. (570)

However, she does not identify the exact occasion on which Nehru mentioned this trope.

<sup>3</sup> What Rushdie tries to refute in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is an essentializing Hindu nationalist discourse that sees India as a Hindu country. Early in 1987, Rushdie expressed his disapproval of this tendency in “The Riddle of Midnight: India, August 1987”:

[T]he linkage between Hindu fundamentalism and the idea of the nation shows no signs of weakening. India is increasingly defined as Hindu India, and Sikh and Muslim fundamentalism grows ever fiercer and entrenched in response. (IH 33)

positioning him in the complicated context of miscegenation—his mother comes from a Portuguese line descended “on the wrong side of the sheet” from Vasco da Gama, while his father comes from one of the ancient community of Cochin Jews and is a possible illegitimate descendant of Boabdil, the last Moorish Sultan of Granada, expelled from Spain in 1492 by Catholic Ferdinand and Isabella. In addition to this dramatization of a hybridized “minority within minority,” Rushdie fabricates a cricket-mad fascist politician named Raman Fielding,<sup>4</sup> who deliberately cleanses “foreign influences” to build a more Hinduized India but fails to rid himself of a cricket mania. In doing so, Rushdie piquantly indicates, as he did in *Midnight’s Children*, the impossibility of erasing imperial legacies from the living reality of contemporary India. For him, to cleanse these “foreign influences”—both British and Islamic legacies—in the name of nativism or religious fundamentalism seems not unlike the exclusive rhetoric of colonial discourse. The textual champions of hybridity, therefore, aim to reject an essentialist distinction between “imperial legacies” and the indigenous culture, which reproduces the colonial Manichean division that reifies a homogeneous Other from the perspective of a self-important Self. In projecting such a hybrid vision, Rushdie elaborates many important agendas posed in his prior three novels.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, he reemphasizes, by implication, the notion that cultural formation, like the book’s multi-layered plot, is itself palimpsestual in nature and resembles Aurora’s eclectic palimpsest art, which takes whatever is needed to shape a pluralistic, kaleidoscopic composite, inclusive of the realistic tradition of the narrative painting in the South, surrealism, the élite and the popular, the high and the low, and the profane and the

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Such a combination of religious absolutism and nationalism became more evident when the Hindu nationalist group, Shiv Sena, won the Mar 1995 elections in Bombay (Burns, “A Violent” A6). For further reference to the developments of India’s religious groups, see John F. Burns, “A Violent Goal: Hindustan for Hindus.” *New York Times* 3 Nov. 1995, late ed.: A6. *New York Times Ondisc*. CD-ROM. UMI-ProQuest Dec. 1996.

<sup>4</sup> The character is generally regarded as a parody of the Shiv Sena leader, Balasaheb K. Thackeray, who has been accused of provoking riots that killed at least 1,200 Muslims and destroyed a 500-year-old mosque at Ayodhya in 1992 (Burns, “Another Rushdie” 4; “A Violent” A6). The reason for destroying the mosque is that it was built on the site where a holy Hindu temple was once located. The destruction of the mosque, therefore, symbolizes the erasure of “foreign legacies.”

<sup>5</sup> In saying this, I am referring to *Shame*, *Midnight’s Children*, and *The Satanic Verses*. For further discussion of the implied agendas in these three novels, see also Jung Su, “The Palimpsest Vision: Diaspora Aesthetic in Salman Rushdie’s Tetralogy,” diss., National Taiwan Normal U, 1999, “Chapter One: Introduction.”

sacred.

Written in the course of Rushdie's exile,<sup>6</sup> *The Moor's Last Sigh* offers a panoramic but elegiac representation of a pluralistic India. It laments, through Moraes's Scheherazadean storytelling, the slow dying of the ideal of secularism and pluralism upheld by Nehru, which is embodied in the declining golden palace of the Alhambra of Granada. Stylistically, its narratological features are redolent of the "signature style" of Rushdie's storytelling in *Midnight's Children*.<sup>7</sup> Apart from this stylistic repetition and the conspicuous autobiographical allusion,<sup>8</sup> the sporadic intertextual clues<sup>9</sup> in *The Moor's Last Sigh* synthesize Rushdie's sequential representations of "imaginary homelands" in *Shame*, *Midnight's Children*, and *The Satanic Verses* by providing important links among them. Hybridity, the concept that dominates Rushdie's eclectic theory, is transformed into a quixotic textual politics that defies such totalizing ideologies as religious absolutism, factionalism, essentialist nationalism, and cultural chauvinism. Stressing a more intriguing intertwinement of different categories, Rushdie challenges the fundamentalist sanctification of the Absolute and the Pure with the verbal representation of the visual representation of a hybrid vision—Moraes's palimpsestual, ekphrastic inscription of Aurora's palimpsest art. Telling, retelling, re-imagination, distortion, fabrication, and interweaving function as effective linguistic tools that blur the boundaries of history, culture, religion, race, language, genre, and community.

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<sup>6</sup> Rushdie confesses that "[*The Moor's Last Sigh*] is the first book [he has] written about India without going to India" ("I Am Pessimistic" 137-38). He wrote with the help of his notebooks from a trip in the early 1980s and his memories (Jaggi 20+).

<sup>7</sup> Laura Moss enumerates a list of these narratological features, which can be easily identified in *Midnight's Children*:

This style is mutli-layered, combining a punning sense of humour; self-reflexive meta-fiction; fragmented spatio-temporal shifts; a disjointed and non-linear chronology; analepsis and prolepsis; impeding and retarding devices; hyperbolic, twisted, and telescopic language; the exploitation of "real" historical personages beside fictional characters; a picaresque autobiography with a rhetorical narrator; a direct reader address, and a regenerative style of storytelling. (123)

<sup>8</sup> Moraes's exilic life and his deformed right hand obviously parallel Rushdie's own exile and his threatened freedom of expression.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Cundy, for example, discerns that "[t]here are reappearances for Shiva and Parvati's son Aadam, Lord Khusro Khusrovand and Commander Sabarmati from *Midnight's Children* and Zeeny Vakil from *The Satanic Verses*" (115). Additionally, Moss points out that Aadam Sinai/Braganza/Zogoiby, the character symbolic of hope in *Midnight's Children*, becomes the harbinger of doom in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (122). Apparently, Aadam's grotesque downfall strongly implies Rushdie's poignant comment on the rickety growth of post-independence India.

In this sense, Moraes's memoir signifies a Foucauldian reconstruction of "genealogical histories," which not only interrogates the official history but subverts the Absolute and the Pure. Just as Saleem deliberately distorts history to serve his own purpose, Moraes interweaves historical facts into his storytelling to reconstruct his family legends. His declaration of being the last descendant of the Moorish sultan of Granada is the most conspicuous case in point. But different from Saleem's self-centeredness in *Midnight's Children*, Moraes's recount of family histories is full of remorse and the anxiety of being hunted. His exile, additionally, facilitates the shift of textual gravity from India's national history to a wider range of colonial experiences. Spanish history, Portuguese colonial history, and the Jewish diaspora from Spain to southwestern India serve as the backdrop of the Zogoibys' family saga, which is enriched by the intervention of various literary texts. *Don Quixote* and *Le Cid*, for example, hover in the background in the form of parody. History, consequently, is not just contested by personal interpretations; rather, it fragments and splits. Shards of historical facts are hybridized by and intertwined with scraps of parodied literary texts. The Spanish reconquista of Granada and the expulsion of the Moors, the founding of the spice trade between Europe and India, Portuguese colonial expansion, and the political events of twentieth-century India are dexterously interwoven with or overlapped by fairy tales, religious texts, epics, Spanish picaresque, romance, Arabic love poetry, and the Zogoibys' family saga.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the outcome is a vision of palimpsestic imbrications reminiscent of the common skill used in oil painting. Each stroke does not displace or erase prior ones but simply writes over them. The hybrid mixture forms a layered palimpsest, which, in Rushdie's view, resembles the process of cultural formation.

Such a hybrid world, however, is by no means a chaotic disorder. The novel's multifarious plot is, as it is, sustained by an inner awareness of structural movement, which alludes to the author's diasporic (or exilic) itinerary and his ambition to deal with more complicated, variegated human experiences. According to Rushdie's own explanation, "[the gravity of plot] moves from the marginal [Cabral Island] to the

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<sup>10</sup> For further reference to the numerous literary allusions in the novel, see <<http://www.randomhouse.com/site/rushdie/book.html>>.

metropolis [Malabar Hill and then Bombay], from high society into the depths and then steps out of the frame, goes abroad [“Little Alhambra” in Benengeli, Spain]” (“The Book of Exile” 8). This intentional transgression of textual frame, topographical boundaries, and cultural frontiers not only continues and deepens Rushdie’s interrogation of the myth of cultural authenticity<sup>11</sup> and cultural chauvinism but also reveals that the novel’s recurrent employment of palimpsest narration owes a lot to its exilic nature.

The following discussion, therefore, will focus on four interrelated agendas, which center on how palimpsest serves as an underlying concept that signifies the novel’s intent to deconstruct the official history with its ekphrastic narration, its celebration of cultural hybridity, and its utopian vision of an eclectic India. First, I intend to illustrate how Moraes’s narration forms a palimpsest that hybridizes the official history. I will argue how Rushdie delineates his palimpsest vision with ekphrasis, which embodies the concept of cultural hybridity. To further illustrate the point, I will use the book’s title, itself a palimpsest, as a paradigm of my analysis. Secondly, I am interested in how Rushdie decouples the concept of “the Other” in his depiction of the hybrid community in Cochin, the site of the first contact between India and the West, thereby representing reciprocal cultural imbrications and the community’s secular acceptance of different religions—the results of the meeting and mingling of Portuguese colonial culture, Moorish-Spanish-Jewish culture, Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, and other indigenous cultures. In other words, Rushdie adopts politics of hybridity to interrogate the concept of “the Other” from within—a hybrid minority that inherits Portuguese, South Indian, Spanish, Jewish, and Moorish cultural legacies—to deconstruct the essentialist discourse. Thirdly, I am interested in the role the imperial presence plays in the text and how nativist discourse sanctifies an essentialist purification of “the indigenous culture” by appropriating the rhetoric of colonial discourse to suppress other heterogeneous presences. The final section concludes that Aurora’s death symbolizes the disillusion of Nehru’s secular ideal. Moreover, this failure is parallel to another crisis. Namely, the deterioration of Al-hambra

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<sup>11</sup> This interrogation is in fact implied by the doctor/art-critic, Zeenat Vakil’s critical appreciation of Aurora’s painting—*Imperso-Nation and Dis/Semi-Nation: Dialogics of Eclecticism and Interrogations of Authenticity in A.Z.* (MLS 329), which is apparently a mock-up of Homi K. Bhabha’s prominent essay, “DissemiNation: Time, Narration and the Margins of the Modern Nation.”

presages the result of an over-expanding commercialism and a counterfeit multiculturalism. In doing so, I hope to summarize Rushdie's elaboration of his palimpsest vision, which seems a utopian ideal and a difficult middle path amid the tumult of resuscitating racist discourse and essentializing nationalist discourse in post-colonial times.

## I. Representing the Lost Portrait via Ekphrasis

Centering on the vision of a hybrid, palimpsest cultural utopia, *The Moor's Last Sigh* owes its narrative flexibility and deconstructive interrogation of the historical truth to the exuberant employment of the palimpsest art and ekphrasis, both of which connote an ever-changing, mutable mode of representation. A brief glance at the two terms' etymology may well elucidate this nature. To begin with, let us re-examine the Greek etymon of the term "palimpsest"—*palímpestos*, which is composed of *pálin*, again, and *psestós*, scrapped or rubbed (*OED* 393).<sup>12</sup> The two affixes indicate the overlapping, erasing nature of a palimpsest art. Due to its imbricative, osmotic nature, palimpsest becomes a metaphor that implies narrative process, the overlapping nature of culture, cultural hybridity, and a concept that defies the Authentic, the Absolute, and the Pure. It is worth noticing here that the concept of palimpsest radiates its energy with the assistance of ekphrasis. Just as its Greek etymon implies, ekphrasis ( ), the verbal representation of visual representation, is made up of two affixes: "Ek," which means "out of," and "phrase," whose verb form is "phrasis," "to tell" (Krieger, "Foreword" xiv). Ekphrasis, accordingly, is the art of verbal painting. It is a mode of expression that knows no idea of "authenticity" and a way of representation that creates "a mirage" (Krieger, "Foreword" xvii) or deferred images because the imagined objects depicted by words are those which do not exist independently of that depiction. Ekphrasis, hence, is an illusionary representation of *the unrepresentable* (Krieger, "Foreword" xv).

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<sup>12</sup> For the definition of the term and its theorization by post-colonial theorists, see also Su 36.

This device, along with palimpsest art, becomes the effective modes of representation that help reconstruct genealogical histories. Moraes's description and re-description of Aurora's paintings, in this sense, echo the retelling of his family saga, both of which are directed to a destabilization of a historical truth that has been sanctified by cultural or national essentialists. This anti-authentic subversion of the representational and historical transparency exemplifies Foucault's analysis of the three anti-Platonic purposes of genealogical histories:

The first [historical sense] is parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition; the third is sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge. They imply a use of history that severs its connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and constructs a counter-memory—a transformation of history into a totally different form of time. (*Language* 160)

This observation elucidates the purpose of Moraes's palimpsestual narration and his weaving into the official history his own imagination and interpretations. More significantly, it points out the kernel of Rushdie's attempt to represent the *unrepresentable* through palimpsest and ekphrasis, which may be understood in the sense of the *objet petit a*, an absence that exists in the process of representation and a negation of the authenticity of *essence*.

In the autumn of 1995, Rushdie talked to *The Observer's* Kate Kellaway about his new novel and mentioned that the "germ of an idea" for *The Moor's Last Sigh* "arrived by post, ten years ago, when a distinguished Indian artist wrote to Rushdie claiming to have painted a portrait of Rushdie's mother" ("The Book of Exile" 7). Rushdie's father had disliked the painting so much that he sent it back. At the time, the painter was not well off, so he painted over the portrait to make use of the canvas ("The Book of Exile" 7). The thought of the lost image has haunted Rushdie since then:

Nobody has ever found this painting but it is somewhere in India—a lost

portrait of my mother. My father did not like the painting because it was too sensual. My mother was very gorgeous when she was young. And she would have been just pregnant with me when it was painted, so in a funny way I would have been in the picture too. (“The Book of Exile” 7)

One can easily find an obvious parallel between this family anecdote and the novel. However, what is revealed in this confession consists not so much in its autobiographical note as in its marking out “the lost portrait” as the “germ of the novel,” which is in fact an obscure form of announcing the author’s literary conviction. In other words, reality is unretrievable, and so are historical facts. What one acquires in the course of representation is nothing but interpretations. Each representation, therefore, signifies a new form of interpretation. In using Aurora’s palimpsest art to depict contemporary India and the ancient Alhambra, Rushdie radically interrogates the concept of Origin, cultural authenticity and homogeneity, racial purity, religious orthodoxy, the fixity and continuity of history, and the transparency of historical Truth. These interrogations are reinforced by Moraes’s Scheherazadean narration, which mimics Aurora’s palimpsest art, fusing his digressions, fabrications, distortions, re-imaginings, and conjectures into the “monumental histories” of contemporary India. Take Aurora’s affair with Prime Minister Nehru for example. This family anecdote even makes Moraes suspicious of his lineage. While checking in the cook Ezekiel’s copybook, Moraes found that Aurora did not return to Bombay for three nights after her reception of the State Award bestowed by Nehru in Delhi. This convinced Moraes that he was the illegitimate descendant of the Prime Minister (*MLS* 177). This constant blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction reflects Rushdie’s intent to destabilize a dominant way of reading the phenomenal world, which is earlier expressed in “‘Errata’: Or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight’s Children*”:

History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge. The reading of Saleem’s unreliable narration might be, I believe, a useful analogy for the way in which we all, every day, attempt to “read” the world. (*IH* 25)

The verbal representation of Aurora's palimpsest painting, viewed in this light, may be regarded as Rushdie's attempt to visualize different ways of reading contemporary India.

To better elucidate how Rushdie uses palimpsest to hint at the multi-layered reality of his ideal India, we must look into the book's title, itself a palimpsest and the kernel of the novel, which has four connotations.

First of all, "The Moor's Last Sigh" is the title of a painting by Vasco Miranda, an etiolated mediocre artist coming from Goa, a former Portuguese colony (*MLS* 147). Remaining silent about his origin, the young painter is patronized by Aurora and becomes her pet and secret adorer. In 1947, Moraes's father, Abraham Zogoiby, asked him to make a portrait of the pregnant Aurora and her first daughter, Ina. Unfortunately, when Vasco finished his portrait, Abraham was too jealous to admire that artistic work because instead of representing his wife as a woman with motherly love, the painter depicted her in a sexual manner (*MLS* 158). Having been humiliated by Abraham, Vasco painted over Aurora's image, hiding it beneath a new work—an equestrian portrait of the artist himself in Arab attire, weeping on a great white horse (*MLS* 159). C. J. Bhabha, a steel billionaire with questionable taste, soon bought the painting, but a few years later Vasco stole it (*MLS* 159).<sup>13</sup> This newly painted portrait, with an Aurora buried beneath, was entitled "The Artist as Boabdil, the Unlucky (el-Zogoybi), Last Sultan of Granada, Seen Departing from the Alhambra," or, in a simplified form, "The Moor's Last Sigh" (*MLS* 160). Although Vasco is very proud of this new work, Aurora considers it commercial.

Secondly, ten years later, Aurora, following Vasco's footsteps, also made a picture with the same title. The painting is her last, unfinished work. It was lost, but later reappeared in a mock-up of the Alhambra Palace built in a remote village in Spain called Benegeli—"the Little Alhambra," which was built by Vasco, who went mad after Aurora deserted him (*MLS* 419-20). Amazingly, beneath the painting there is another image, which, according to declarations by Aurora in her secret letters to Vasco,

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<sup>13</sup> This is probably an inside joke on Homi K. Bhabha, the cultural critic who elaborates the concept of hybridity. However, there is an inconsistency about the crorepati's name, which first appears as C. J. Bhabha (*MLS* 159-60) and then is carelessly spelt as C. P. Bhabha (*MLS* 294, 325, 419).

is the image of her murderer. Having been penetrated by the X-rays, the image proved to be Abraham's (MLS 416-17).

Thirdly, both of the above two paintings deal with the history of Moraes's legendary ancestor, the Moorish Sultan, Boabdil. The history is inserted into both Moraes's recount of his family legends and his ekphrastic depiction of Vasco and Aurora's paintings. In this way, Moraes retells the history of Moorish Spain as follows:

In January 1492, while Christopher Columbus watched in wonderment and contempt, the Sultan Boabdil of Granada had surrendered the keys to the fortress-palace of the Alhambra, last and greatest of all the Moors' fortifications, to the all-conquering Catholic Kings Fernando and Isabella, giving up his principality without so much as a battle. He departed into exile with his mother and retainers, bringing to a close the centuries of Moorish Spain; and reining in his horse upon the Hill of Tears he turned to look for one last time upon his loss, upon the palace and the fertile plains and all the concluded glory of al-Andalus [...] at which sight the Sultan sighed and hotly wept [...]. (MLS 79-80)

Apart from this representation, Moraes also re-describes the same historical scene with a different ekphrasis, which turns the history of Moorish Spain into the expression of Aurora's inner distress. Through Moraes's ekphrasis, "The Moor's Last Sigh," Aurora's final work, is represented as follows:

It was a picture which, for all its great size, had been stripped to the harsh essentials, all its elements converging on the face at its heart, the Sultan's face, from which horror, weakness, loss and pain poured like darkness itself, a face in a condition of existential torment reminiscent of Edvard Munch. (MLS 218)

This expressionist work naturally reminds us of Munch's painting, *The Scream*, "the canonical expression of the great modernist thematics of alienation, anomie, solitude, social fragmentation, and isolation" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 11). Just as Fredric Jameson has pointed out, "*The Scream* subtly but elaborately disconnects its own

aesthetic of expression” because “the realm of the sonorous, the cry, the raw vibrations of the human throat, are incompatible with its medium” (*Postmodernism* 14). What is even more interesting is that “the absent scream returns [...] in a dialectic of loops and spirals, circling ever more closely toward that even more absent experience of atrocious solitude and anxiety which the scream was itself to ‘express’” (*Postmodernism* 14). There is in fact a subtle aesthetic resemblance between ekphrasis and Munch’s expression of the voiceless cry. In describing the invisible with the verbal representation of the visual representation, Moraes’s ekphrasis creates loopholes and ruptures that make possible the interventions of personal imaginations and interpretations into his palimpsestual narration. This is exactly how ekphrasis helps concretize and multiply the ever-changing representation of Aurora’s (and Rushdie’s) palimpsest vision.

Finally, the title also foreshadows Moraes’s unfortunate destiny—he follows his ancestor, Boabdil the Unlucky,<sup>14</sup> to lead an exilic life. “The Moor’s Last Sigh,” therefore, refers to Moraes’s last sigh near the end of his exilic life. Playing the Derridean game of difference, Rushdie uses “sigh” to signify “lament,” “breathing,” and “a sigh of relief.” This fourth implication, accordingly, indicates a narrative desire that aims to write against the threat of death. Moraes’s Scheherazadean narration is, in this light, a narrative desire that tries to transcend the limit of death and outlive the limited time of human life in the act of narrating, which reminds us of what Foucault has analyzed in his discussion of the infinity of language:

Writing so as not to die, as Blanchot said, or perhaps even speaking so as not to die is a task undoubtedly as old as the word [...]. We know that discourse has the power to arrest the flight of an arrow in a recess of time, in the space proper to it [...]. Before the imminence of death, language rushes forth, but it also starts again, tells of itself, discovers the story of the story and the possibility that this interpretation might never end [...]. [I]t is the song of the bard who had already sung of Ulysses before the *Odyssey* and before Ulysses himself [...] but who will also sing of him endlessly after his death [...]. (Foucault, *Language* 53-55)

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<sup>14</sup> Moraes’s family name, Zogoiby, is a deteriorating form of the last sultan’s sobriquet, el-Zogoybi, which means “the unfortunate.” Symbolically, the name implies an eternal curse on the family.

This celebration of the infinity of language effectively helps elucidate Moraes's joking elaboration of his "last sigh":

I am what breathes [...]. It is not thinking makes us so, but air. *Suspiro ergo sum*. I sigh, therefore I am. The Latin as usual tells the truth: *suspirare* = *sub*, below, + *spirare*, verb, to breathe.

*Suspiro*: I under-breathe.

In the beginning and unto the end was and is the lung: divine afflatus, baby's first yowl, shaped air of speech, staccato gusts of laughter, exalted air of song, happy lover's groan, unhappy lover's lament, miser's whine, crone's croak, illness's stench, dying whisper, and beyond and beyond the airless, silent void.

A sigh isn't just a sigh. We inhale the world and breathe out meaning. While we can. While we can. (MLS 53-54)

A sigh, through Rushdie's Derridean metonymic transference, becomes the metaphor that indicates both linguistic interpretations and sensory/sensational experiences, which mocks the Cartesian emphasis of subjectivity and the biblical creation of "the Word," or *logos*—the metaphysical Origin that goes prior to any worldly interpretations—to re-interrogate the transparency of language, the concept of cultural authenticity, and a transcendental Origin.

Hybridity, under Rushdie's elaboration via such an ekphrastic art is hence not just the colonized other's resistant, mimic simulation of the colonizer, as is proposed by Bhabha.<sup>15</sup> It becomes a syncretic composite of multi-layered palimpsest intersected by different cultural trajectories. In an imbricative process of cultural syncretization, the dominant colonial culture may become remnants or minorities, as is manifested in

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<sup>15</sup> Just as Yu-cheng Lee has discerned, Bhabha's polemical celebration of the meaning of hybridity, which is manifested in the essay entitled "Signs Taken for Wonders" in *The Location of Culture*, has been exhausted in recent cultural criticism and postcolonial discourses ("Expropriating" 3n1). Lee goes further to point out that Bhabha's position has been challenged by Aijaz Ahmad and re-examined by Robert J. C. Young ("Expropriating" 3n1). However, it is useful to examine Rushdie's appropriation of Bhabha's concept here because Rushdie's proposition of cultural eclecticism, which is mainly based on a hybrid, syncretic mixture of different cultural elements, is not unaware of Bhabha's theorization of hybridity.

the case of the high tradition of Indian Muslim culture, whereas the colonized is likely to rise as the new dominant power in the course of decolonization, as the emerging Hindu middle class does.

## II. Decoupling “the Other”

The conception of hybridity, therefore, serves as a double-blade critique in *The Moor's Last Sigh* to interrogate colonial power and re-examine the essentialist nationalist's appropriation of the rhetoric of colonial discourse in some Third World nations. Strategically, it is, as Bhabha has argued, “the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” and “displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination” (*Location* 112). But in Rushdie's appropriation it does not aim to “[unsettle] the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power” by “turn[ing] the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power,” as is indicated in *The Satanic Verses* (*Location* 112). Rather, hybridity in the novel becomes a politics that “terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery” (*Location* 115). For Rushdie, “authority” seems to indicate not only the colonial discourse but also the essentialist nationalist discourse exemplified by Hindu fundamentalist nationalism. Rushdie's textual politics, which appropriates Bhabha's elaboration of hybridity, consequently, helps create a “separate” space “which has been systematically denied by colonialists and nationalists [in this case the essentialist nationalist] who have sought authority in the authenticity of ‘origins’” and reify culture as essences (*Location* 120). But different from Bhabha, Rushdie takes an eclectic stand. He tries to “atomize” the homogeneous “Other”—a concept that has long been stereotyped in the post-colonial discourse—by *decoupling* it and exposing its inner heterogeneity.

With respect to the conceptualization of the homogeneous “Other,” Robert J. C. Young acutely observes in his re-examination of the relation between hybridity and diaspora and states that

Since Sartre, Fanon and Memmi, postcolonial criticism has constructed two antithetical groups, the colonizer and colonized, self and Other, with the second only knowable through a necessarily false representation, a Manichean division that threatens to reproduce the static, essentialist categories it seeks to undo. (5)

This remark perceptively inquires into the kernel of the question—a re-consideration of the necessary procedural “false construction” of the two antithetical concepts in the course of decolonization. How does the post-colonial “Other” look at “itself” and its inner heterogeneity? How would “the Other” treat its inner hybridity after the homogeneity of colonial culture is destabilized by the politics of hybridity? Such questioning haunts the novel, which unequivocally expresses Rushdie’s anxiety about Hindu fundamentalist’s attempt to homogenize post-independence India as a pure ensemble. Moreover, this cultural essentialism brings forth another problem—the nation’s ambivalent conflict with the West—its need for political and military alliance with the West on the one hand and its antagonism on the other.

The nickname of the protagonist, “Moor,” and his multi-racial lineage obviously implies Rushdie’s reaction to the previous questions. The thematic recurrence of the image of the “Moor,”<sup>16</sup> the hybrid people of mixed Barber and Arab race in northwestern Africa (*OED* 645), reveals that Rushdie intends towards a complicated genealogy to represent the post-colonial subject as a hybrid composite, which is a mixture of multi-layered cultural, historical trajectories.

A more picturesque metaphor is no doubt the transgressive artist Aurora Zogoiby. An illegitimate offspring of the fifteenth-century Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama,<sup>17</sup> Aurora, which means the reflected spectrum of polar lights, embodies

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<sup>16</sup> This recurrence includes the mention of *Othello* (*MLS* 224) and the Moorish Spain, the play of puns, and many other historical allusions.

<sup>17</sup> Vasco da Gama (c1469-1524) is the navigator whose discovery of a new sea-route around the Cape of Good Hope and destruction of the Muslim trade monopoly made possible large-scale European trade with the East (*New Encyclopedia Britannica* 860). In his first voyage, Muslim merchants thwarted his trade negotiations in India (*New Encyclopedia Britannica* 861). However, in his second voyage, his fleet established Portuguese supremacy in the area by a ruthless destruction of the Malabar Muslim fleet, and as a result he was later appointed viceroy to India (*New Encyclopedia Britannica* 861). Born on the Malabar Hill, Aurora is the hybrid descendant of the Portuguese colonizer. Her family legend represents the novelist’s intent to insert into the interstices of “monumental histories” his personal “critical

Rushdie's celebration of cultural hybridity. Being a metropolitan secular artist with a complicated cultural, racial background and the transgressive desire to cross over boundaries of language, religion, race, and culture, Aurora's hybrid background and eclectic art not only incarnate the multiplicity of India but challenge the concept that sees India as a homogenized former colonized "Other." On the other hand, as the name also connotes "goddess of dawn," Aurora, daughter of Camoëns da Gama and Isabella Ximena da Gama, née Souza,<sup>18</sup> symbolizes the older generation's dream of an independent, secular India, which Camoëns whispered to Belle by her death-bed:

[...] *the dawning of a new world, Belle, a free country, Belle, above religion because secular, above class because socialist, above caste because enlightened, above hatred because loving, above vengeance because forgiving, above tribe because unifying, above language because many-tongued, above colour because multi-coloured, above poverty because victorious over it, above ignorance because literate, above stupidity because brilliant, freedom, Belle, the freedom express, soon soon we will stand upon that platform and cheer the coming of the train [...].* (MLS 51; [sic])

Although Belle does not live to see her dream fulfilled, dying of tuberculosis and lung cancer, the birth of Aurora provides compensation.

As an avant-garde advocate, Aurora embraces both surrealism and narrative-painting traditions of the South. This mixed aesthetic mode finds its best manifestation in her bohemian, promiscuous, and bourgeois life. The potpourri of her cross-bred cultural background and the hodgepodge of her eclectic aesthetic, when taken together with her minority status, signifies Rushdie's deliberate attempt to *decouple* the homogeneous conceptualization of India as a former colonized Other with an emphasis on the representation of a peripheral community.

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histories."

<sup>18</sup> Camoëns was named after the great sixteen-century Portuguese epic poet and national hero, Luis Vaz de Camões. Isabella's middle name, Ximena, is a variant spelling of Chimène, the lover of Cid in the great Spanish epic, *Le Cid*. The middle name suggests that she is in fact a Cid-like heroine (MLS 52). Apparently these names are cautiously chosen to correspond with the lovers' idealism (MLS 10, 24).

Behind this inner deconstruction is a very subtle inversion—the inversion of the colonial Manichean division inherent in the ambivalent relation between the Goan artist, Vasco Miranda, and Aurora. The metaphoric combination of “Vasco” and “Miranda,” a first name reminiscent of the Portuguese colonizer Vasco da Gama and a surname one associates with the daughter of Prospero in *The Tempest*, was apparently not made at random. As a patron of Vasco, Aurora treats him like a “pet” and appropriates the palimpsest art of his first oil painting to make her own, but she never takes his adoration or his art seriously. This ambivalent relation tortures Vasco a great deal, which finally drives him mad, turning him into a Dracula-like homicidal maniac. Later, after leaving the Zogoibys, Vasco becomes Aurora’s confidante and corresponds with her. Such an ambivalent relation, which vacillates between the axes of desire and aversion, seems to invert what [Dominique] O. Mannoni calls the “Prospero Complex,” which is critiqued by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (107). Fanon sees the complex as “the sum of those unconscious neurotic tendencies that delineate at the same time the ‘picture’ of the paternalist colonial and the portrait of ‘the racist whose daughter has suffered an [imaginary] attempted rape at the hands of an inferior being’” (107).<sup>19</sup> The colonial desire and repulsion for the unknown Other is cunningly distorted in this grotesque parody of the Miranda-Caliban relationship, which projects the colonial desire and anxiety upon the colonized slave aborigine and reduces it to an abstraction of monstrosity. The mimic Aurora-Vasco (Miranda) relation, however, does not simply reverse the Miranda-Caliban paradigm. Instead, it distorts and complicates the colonizer/colonized, Self/Other, and master/slave binary opposition. Furthermore, it introduces, in addition to the above mongrelization of antithetical categories, a more complicated deconstruction in gender, race, class, and culture. By making Vasco an adorer of Aurora, he makes explicit the colonial desire by highlighting his jealousy, adoration, desire, hatred, terror, and anxiety, which are contrasted by Aurora’s pride, ruthlessness, willfulness, fear, despair, and sadness. This parody replaces the coarse homogenization of the Self/Other division between the colonizer and the colonized with a more humane representation of the dialogical relation among

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<sup>19</sup> For the concept of “Dependence Complex,” see [Dominique] O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (New York: Praeger, 1964) 70.

different social groups in the decolonized Third World nation. It indicates, through the textual practice of the politics of hybridity, that the development of culture is dialectical. If the construction of the “Other” is a colonial guilt, then the “purification” of a post-independence decolonized nation likewise risks the danger of repeating that mistake.

Hybridity, therefore, offers “a particularly significant dialectical model for cultural interaction” (Young 22). What Rushdie proposes through this decoupling of the Other is probably closer to the “organic hybridity” mentioned by Young, “which will tend towards fusion, in conflict with intentional hybridity, which enables a contestatory activity, a politicized setting of cultural differences against each other dialogically” (22). It “involves an antithetical movement of coalescence and antagonism, with the unconscious set against the intentional, the organic against the divisive, the generative against the undermining” (Young 22). More significantly, it “works simultaneously in two ways: ‘organically,’ hegemonizing, creating new spaces, structures, scenes, and ‘intentionally,’ diasporizing, intervening as a form of subversion, translation, transformation” (Young 25). Therefore, when Moraes makes a Rabelaisian declaration of his lineage, he is in fact subverting the dominant Hindu fundamentalist discourse with a word game that emphasizes cultural hybridity:

I, however, was raised neither as Catholic nor as Jew. I was both, and nothing: a jewholic-anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was—what’s the word these days?—*atomised*. Yessir: a real Bombay mix.

*Bastard*: I like the sound of the word. *Baas*, a smell, a stinky-poo. *Turd*, no translation required. Ergo, *Bastard*, a smelly shit; like, for example, me. (MLS 104)

Hybridity, therefore, for Rushdie, serves as “a key term in that wherever it emerges it suggests the impossibility of essentialism” (Young 27).

### III. The Specter of Empire

If the politics of hybridity is, as is mentioned above, a politics that unravels the parochialism of essentialism, then it operates in a Janus-faced way in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. On the one hand, it makes explicit the inner diversity of Indian culture by highlighting a peripheral hybrid community; on the other, it severely criticizes how Hindu nationalist groups attempt to clear up the country's ineradicable imperial trajectories, which ironically contradicts the country's mimic reality. Although such a reiteration of imperial presence seems to repeat what he has already done in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie, however, more explicitly comments in *The Moor's Last Sigh* on the rise of Hindu communalism and religious extremism by referring to a fictional cartoonish politician, Raman Fielding, a former cartoonist and the leader of "Mumbai's Axis"—a party named after the mother-goddess of Bombay. Nicknamed "Main-duck," which means "frog," Raman Fielding is a Hindu nationalist who tries to re-establish a "Hindu Bombay" by removing British and other colonial influences. Ironically, his name reflects the underlying hybridity of Indian culture. His first name is Indian—Raman, a typical Hindu name that is named in honor of Rama, while his surname is very British—Fielding, a name reminiscent of the canonical eighteenth-century British novelist, Henry Fielding, and "deriv[ing], according to legend, from a cricket-mad father" (*MLS* 230). Such a satiric portrayal is reinforced by an ensuing depiction of his self-contradictory nationalist theory:

In his bizarre conception of cricket as a fundamentally communalist game, essentially Hindu but with its Hindu-ness constantly under threat from the country's other, treacherous communities, lay the origins of his political philosophy, and of "Mumbai's Axis" itself. There was even a moment when Raman Fielding considered naming his new political movement after a great Hindu cricketer—Ranji's Army, Mankad's Martinets—but in the end he went for the goddess—a.k.a Mumba-Ai, Mumbadevi, Mumbabai—thus uniting regional and religious nationalism in his potent, explosive new group. (*MLS* 231)

Cricket, the British national sport, exists as a cultural legacy in Britain's colonies, which include Pakistan, India, and many other members of the Commonwealth of Nations. Its deeply rooted existence as the indispensable part of everyday-life materialities in the post-colonial nations no doubt expounds that the imperial presence always oscillates in the interstices of the nationalist's purification of national culture. Interestingly, the impossibility of eliminating the imperial presence seems to indicate the palimpsest nature of post-colonial nations, which is in particular manifested in the metropolitan culture.

The name Bombay is itself a perfect example of this palimpsestual re-inscription of cultural transformation. The controversial sayings about the origin of the name elucidates that it is a hybrid product of colonial as well as indigenous cultures:

It has been alleged [...] that this name is an English corruption from the Portuguese *Bombahia*, "good bay." The grammar of the alleged etymon is bad, and the history is no better; for the name can be traced long before the arrival of the Portuguese in India. C. 1430, we find the islands of Mahim and *Mumba-Devi*, which united form the existing island of Bombay, held, along Salsette, by a Hindu Rai, who was tributary to the Moham-medan King of Guzerat [...]. The shrine of the goddess *Mumba-Devi* from whom the name is supposed to have been taken, stood on the Esplanade till the middle of the 17th century, when it was removed to its present site in the middle of what is now the most frequented part of the native town. (Yule & Burnell 102)

For Rushdie, to rename "Bombay" as "Mumbai" is a symbolic act of cultural essentialism, which not only neglects the imperial presence and its integration into the indigenous culture but repeats the rhetoric of the empire to form another self/other division. The metaphor of the destruction of Moorish Spain, viewed in this light, mirrors the dying of a secular Bombay. Moreover, this image is superimposed on Moraes's vision of a decaying Bombay, which smacks of a requiem for a Bombay that once was:

Bombay was central; had always been. Just as the fanatical "Catholic Kings" had besieged Granada and awaited the Alhambra's fall, so now

barbarism was standing at our gates. O Bombay! *Prima in Indis! Gateway to India! Star of the East with her face to the West!* Like Granada—al-Gharnatah of the Arabs—you were the glory of your time. But a darker time came upon you, and just a Boabdil, the last Nasrid Sultan, was too weak to defend his great treasure, so we, too, were proved wanting. For the barbarians were not only at our gates but within our skins [...]. Maybe Abraham Zogoiby lit the fuse, or Scar [...]. The explosions were our own evil—no need to look for foreign explanations, though there was and is evil beyond our frontiers as well as within. (MLS 372)

This lament is almost Rushdie's own, which, written under the state of exile, futilely expresses his disappointment at the rise of an essentializing nationalism, which emerges as the specter of empire and appropriates the rhetoric of imperialism and nationalism to exclude its cultural others.

Both the complexity of the minority group within the country, as is exemplified by the Zogoiby's clan, and the indelible presence of imperial legacies, as is illustrated in the cases of cricket and the naming of Bombay, reveal the fact that the retreat of the British Empire does not guarantee a satisfactory resolution to the inherent problems of post-colonial nations. Just as Michael Gorra has asked in *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie*, "what comes after empire?" (6). Does "assuming a new identity [require] the repudiation of an old one [?]" Why not both? Is it possible—and yet how can it not be?" asked Gorra perceptively (14). This interrogation clearly points out the inner problems of post-colonial nations.

#### **IV. Aurora Zogoiby: The Fading Spectrum**

The palimpsestual overlapping of the Moorish Spain and India in the main symbolizes Rushdie's utopian vision, an ideal based upon Nehru's vision of a secular, democratic India.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Rushdie reiterates this ideal on different occasions. The following two passages may serve as

Such a palimpsest vision is best represented in Moraes's ekphrastic description of a series of so-called Moor paintings by Aurora, which signifies an eclectic incorporation of different cultural elements to shape a rainbow-like cultural spectrum:

[I]n her vision of the opposition and intermingling of land and water there was something of the Cochin of her youth, where the land pretended to be a part of England, but was washed by an Indian sea [...]. Around and about the Moor in his hybrid fortress she wove her vision, which in fact was a vision of *weaving*, or more accurately interweaving [...]. [I]n a way they were an attempt to create a romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation; she was using Arab Spain to re-imagine India, and this land-sea-cape in which the land could be fluid and the sea stone-dry was her metaphor [...]. [A] miraculous composite of all the colours in the world. (*MLS* 227)

This vision suggests not only a cultural eclecticism but a secularism, which Moraes tells the reader: "Aurora Zogoiby was seeking to paint a golden age. Jews, Christians, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains crowded into her paint-Boabdil's fancy-dress balls" (*MLS* 227). Moreover, this hybrid cultural utopia finds its most powerful visual metaphor in Aurora's palimpsest vision, in which two symbolic architectural styles mix—"a superhybrid of Moorish Spain and Mughal India":<sup>21</sup>

The Alhambra quickly became a not-quite-Alhambra; elements of India's own red forts, the Mughal palace-fortresses in Delhi and Agra, blended Mughal splendours with the Spanish building's Moorish grace. (*MLS* 226)

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additional illustrations:

"My" India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity: ideas to which the ideologies of the communalists are diametrically opposed. To my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once. (*IH* 32)

The India that came into being in 1947 was an India of which the three planks, broadly speaking, were secularism, democracy and socialism. (Rushdie, "I Am Pessimistic" 137)

<sup>21</sup> For further reference to the illustrative photos of the two palaces, see Marc Porée & Alexis Massery, *Salman Rushdie* (Paris, France: Seuil, 1996) 71, 187.

This fusion of the palace of Alhambra and the Mughal palace-fortress in Delhi and Agra, like the ekphrastic depiction of Rani Harappa's embroidered shawl in *Shame*, functions as the keystone of the entire novel. Aurora's death and the destruction of her paintings, consequently, symbolize the disillusion of Rushdie's ideal vision of such an eclectic cultural tradition. Abraham Zogoiby's corruption, Raman Fielding and Uma Sarasvati's Hindu fundamentalist oppression, and Moraes's betrayal in the novel therefore symbolically represent the social corruption and religious fanaticism in the post-independence society, which frustrate Aurora's vision and slowly kill her. This lament on the fading spectrum of the nation's cultural diversity is later followed by the despair at the vulgar multiculturalism in Benegali, a village of Spain,<sup>22</sup> which tends to reify cultural specificities and turns them into commodities. The depiction of a "fake Alhambra" indicates that for all his celebration of cultural hybridity, Rushdie is not unaware of the crisis of a capitalized multiculturalism that degenerates into "empty forms of amalgamation" (Cantor 334). At the last moment of his life, Moraes redescribes the fading vision of Aurora's ideal world, Mooristan, which can be seen as an epitome of Rushdie's lament for the disappearance of an eclectic India:

*The Alhambra, Europe's red fort, sister to Delhi's and Agra's—the palace of interlocking forms and secret wisdom, of pleasure-courts and water-gardens, that monument to a last possibility that nevertheless has gone on standing, long after its conquerors have fallen; like a testament to [...] that most profound of our needs, to our needs for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self. Yes, I have seen it across an oceanic plain, though it has not been given to me to walk in its noble courts. I watch it vanish in the twilight, and in its fading it brings tears to my eyes. (MLS 433, [sic])*

Yet, this is not absolute pessimism. Hoping to awake from his sleep like Rip Van Winkle, Rushdie, however, awaits "a better time" (MLS 434).

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<sup>22</sup> Paul A. Cantor points out that "the name of the village [...] alludes to the fictional Arabic narrator of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Cide Hamete Benegeli" (323).

Above all, it is evident that Rushdie's politics of hybridity operates upon a transgressive mode. In using Aurora—the many-coloured—as the symbol of transgression, multiplicity, diversity, and multi-origins, Rushdie testifies to the richness of cultural heterogeneity by representing a transmogrifying palimpsest vision. Although it is undeniable that the novel begins with a lyric but ends with a melodrama,<sup>23</sup> it no doubt proposes an ideal vision of culture that celebrates its organism. The palimpsest vision functions as an ongoing, ever-changing, ever renewing vision that obtains its vitality and power through regeneration in transgression, which is reminiscent of a similar spirit in Foucault:<sup>24</sup>

Transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being—affirms the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens this zone to existence for the first time [...]. Perhaps it is simply an affirmation of division; but only insofar as division is not understood to mean a cutting gesture, or the establishment of a separation or the measuring of a distance, only retaining that in it which may designate the existence of *difference*. (*Language* 36; emphasis added)

This transgressive act is probably what precipitates the growth and transformation of a culture.

In his description of cultural transformation, Raymond Williams once defines what he calls as the “structure of feeling” as follows:

In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization [...]. But I think it is a very deep and very wide possession, in all actual communities, precisely because it is on it that communication depends [...]. [T]he changing organization is enacted in the organism: the new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities [...] and reproducing many aspects of the organization,

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<sup>23</sup> In saying this, I am referring to Moraes's escape from Vasco's sadistic imprisonment.

<sup>24</sup> But of course Foucault never laid any stress on the question of colonialism, which is apparently a loophole in his discussion of the conception of power.

which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling. (*The Long Revolution* 48-49)

He goes further to relate this underlying structure to a historical consciousness that is able to discern the relations of cultural formations with a critical view:

[T]he cultural tradition is not only a selection but also an interpretation [...]. What analysis can do is not so much to reverse this, returning a work to its period, as to make the interpretation conscious, by showing historical alternatives; to relate the interpretation to the particular contemporary values on which it rests; and, by exploring the real patterns of the work, confront us with the real nature of the choices we are making [...]. Thus “documentary” analysis will lead us out to “social” analysis, whether in a lived culture, a past period, or in the selective tradition which is itself a social organization. And the discovery of permanent contributions will lead to the same kind of general analysis, if we accept the process at this level, not as human perfection (a movement toward determined values), but as a part of man’s general evolution, to which many individuals and groups contribute. Every element that we analyse will be in this sense active: that it will be seen in certain real *relations*, at many different levels. *In describing these relations, the real cultural process will emerge.* (*The Long Revolution* 53; emphases added)

Williams’s analysis offers an explanatory note to the role that hybridity plays in the symposium of post-colonial discourse. In the course of making visible the different, the incompatible, and the undefinable, hybridity disturbs a monoglossia that suppresses other alternatives. It provides, to borrow Adorno’s term, a possibility of not being “at home in one’s home” so as “to stand away from ‘home’ in order to look at it with the exile’s detachment” (qtd. in Said, “Reflections” 170).

The palimpsest vision depicted in Moraes’s ekphrasis represents, therefore, Rushdie’s vision of culture. Moreover, the novel’s palimpsest vision is also an exilic one that celebrates “other contrapuntal juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgment and

elevate appreciative sympathy” (Said, “Reflections” 172). Finally, A quote from Said may well summarize Rushdie’s celebration of an exilic spirit and his transgressive, tragic defiance against the essentialist discourses that see any transgressive acts as something “impure” and “unorthodox”:

Exile, in the words of Wallace Stevens, is “a mind of winter” in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable [...]. Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew. (“Reflections” 172)

If anything rescues this postfatwa novel from its melodramatic *kitsch*, it is no doubt this *unsettling force* that erupts anew.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> There is an unequivocal implication of Rushdie’s refusal to surrender to the threat of the fatwa. Near the end of the story, Moraes freed himself from the prison tower and nailed his “story to the landscape in [his] wake” (*MLS* 433). Moss discerned that

The novel also unambiguously refers to Martin Luther’s nailing of the *Ninety-Five Theses* to the doors of Castle Church in Wittenberg and to Luther’s “Here I Stand” speech at the second hearing at Worms when asked whether he defended his books or repudiated their “errors.” Echoing Luther, Moraes states “Here I stand, I couldn’t have done it differently” (*MLS* 3). It is clear that Moraes’s refusal to repudiate his earlier writing has its parallel in the stands taken by Luther and by Rushdie himself in reference to his reaction to the *fatwa* placed on him because of *The Satanic Verses*. (138 n12)

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Hybridity is the third space which constantly rehearses and consumes its constituent parts as well as its own possibility, the principle whereby both cultural producer and cultural critic may evade the Hegelian dialectic in which traditional oppositions are resolved. Functioning perhaps as "discourse" did in the 1980s and "ideology" in the 1970s, hybridity is all things to everyone and anyone " anyone who, either by desire or by fate, finds herself on the margins of institutionally organized power. Keywords. Political Strategy Cultural Resistance Authentic Mode Colonialist Discourse Dialectica The Moor's Last Sigh (Spanish). A ferociously witty family saga with a surreally imagined and sometimes blasphemous chronicle of modern India with peppery soliloquies on art, ethnicity, religious fanaticism, and the terrifying power of love. Moraes "Moor" Zogoiby, the last surviving scion of a dynasty of Cochinese spice merchants and crime lords, is also a compulsive storyteller and an exile. "The most complete and gratifying work to emerge from Salman Rushdie's imagination"; The Moor's Last Sigh is an exotic story, in its setting, in its characters, in its punning extravagance, and in its deeply human core. It is an extraordinary family saga; full of wonderful characters, and the insight born of genuine reflection; A remarkable spell of creativity. "Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh and the Limits of Hybridity. missioned him to draw of Aurora, who is pregnant with her second child. Originally, the "Aurora Portrait" displays the beautiful mother sitting cross-legged on a gigantic lizard with an invisible child suckling at her exposed breast. " is city itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World beneath Over World, black market beneath white; when the whole life was like this, when an invisible reality moved phantomwise beneath a visible "ction, subverting all its meanings, how then could Abraham's career have been any different?