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“The Art of Questioning”
Interrogations of Exceptionalist History and Cultural Mythology
in the Novels of Salman Rushdie and William Faulkner


A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary

by
Hannah Barnhart

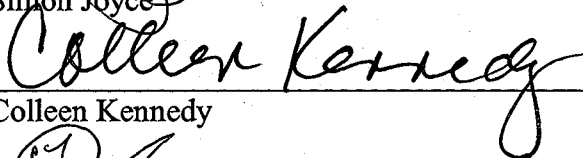
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During a 2008 interview at the University of Mississippi, Salman Rushdie admitted, “I’ve always been a great admirer of the literature of the American South.”¹ According to a report by the Associated Press, Rushdie visited William Faulkner’s Rowan Oak Plantation in 2006. When he noticed the typewriter, Rushdie “fell into a hushed reverence” and “sat down and put his hands, not touching the keys, just sort of hovering over them, the way you would if you were in the vicinity of a holy relic.”² As an avid reader of both Faulkner and Rushdie, I have noticed remarkable similarities between their literary styles, themes, and characters. The connection, I believe, is too significant to ignore. Clearly, Rushdie considers Faulkner an influence, and I venture to suggest that Rushdie actively advances Faulkner’s literary legacy of interrogating official and exceptionalist history, memory, and cultural mythology.

While relating an Indian writer to Faulkner may seem, after initial considerations, to be somewhat of a stretch, I am certainly not the first to examine how Faulkner’s works and legacies have been continued internationally. During the ninth annual Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference in 1982, Doreen Fowler asked the question, “How is it that our William Faulkner, who writes about his own “postage stamp of native soil,” is so universally accessible?”³ Indeed, Faulkner has, for decades after his death, been influential around the world. Jorge Edwards notes how Chileans of the 1950s, much like white southerners, “grew between memories of a brilliant and glorious past, in contrast with a decayed present.”⁴ Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez remarked that reading Faulkner changed his life, and it is no coincidence that his characters are mindful of a mythological past and dissatisfied with the present.⁵ In China, H.R. Stoneback claims, Faulkner has a vast audience of readers who understand the problems of living in

a rural country on the brink of modernization.⁶ Kenzaburo Ohashi contends that Japanese writers during the postwar decade were confronted with a disorder and confusion similar to what Faulkner portrayed in the 1930s.⁷ Many West African authors, such as Algerian Kateb Yacine, Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma, and Malian Yambo Ouologuem, also claim to identify with Faulkner, particularly because he tackles the two most important questions of their young nations: language and the relationship with history.⁸ As Ivorian writer Tierno Monenembo stated simply, “The question, the art of questioning! This is what dazzles us in Faulkner!”⁹

For many writers around the world, it seems, the major appeal of Faulkner is that he interrogates history. Faulkner writes about the universal question of the relationship between history and human beings, or, as he puts it, “the same griefs grieving on universal bones.”¹⁰ As a result, the scholars of the 1982 Yoknapatawpha conference concluded, the “Mississippi author’s voice transcends man-made boundaries and is heard by people all over the world.”¹¹

Clearly, Faulkner’s “postage stamp of native soil” has already been widened to fit a global context, but I think we need to be careful about claiming his human universality. There is a reason why Faulkner is more influential in Africa, South America, and Asia than he is in Canada or Britain. At the 2006 Yoknapatawpha conference, scholars modified the question of Faulkner’s global influence and asked instead how forces of global capitalism, diaspora studies, and cultural hybridity impacted Faulkner and translated into his writing.¹² The New Southern Studies has begun looking at Faulkner in the context of the Global South, which is what I want to do with Faulkner and Rushdie. Rather than being entrenched in the exclusionary myths of Southern historical memory, I

want to argue, Faulkner participated in the vast, peripheral region called the Global South.

The white American South shares the experience of occupation, defeat and reconstruction with many other parts of the world, particularly Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and India. If we consider the South from this perspective, we see that these elements (occupation, defeat, and reconstruction) that make the South exceptional within the narrative of United States history also make it familiar in the context of the postcolonial world. The idea of the South as an exceptional community, when perceived from this angle, seems less convincing. As a result, southern literature and its influences have new boundaries. As Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn argue in their collection of essays *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies*, “We need to redirect our critical gaze of southern studies outward, away from the nativist navel-gazing that has kept mainstream southern studies methodologically so far behind American studies.”¹³ Indeed, it is logical and useful to look at the South in a global context. As Natalie J. Ring points out, “the scholarship on history and mythology of the South remains mired in the traditional North-South binary.... It makes more sense to locate southern history in this era in a complex web of intersecting regional, national, and global issues.”¹⁴ The idea of the Global South, these scholars suggest, moves American Studies forward.

Granted, the concept of the Global South has been criticized for reinforcing white southern notions of history because a third of the nineteenth-century southern population was black and thus excluded from the rhetoric of Confederate defeat. While the idea of the South as a globally accessible region is largely a white southern perspective, it is

relevant for our study of Faulkner. Charles Baker argues that Faulkner was a member of both the imperialist ruling class and the oppressed subaltern group, but he felt himself more subaltern than imperialist.¹⁵ As a white southern artist writing during the first Great Migration (1910-1930) of African-Americans from the rural U.S. South to the urban North, Faulkner confronted issues of modernization and global capitalism that also affected the postcolonial world. John T. Matthews states that southern interwar writers such as Faulkner underwent the experience of “dislocating modernity,” which involved “extreme transformations” such as mechanization of labor, displacement of state and local power, new modes of migration, and the dismantling of colonial historical narratives and identities.¹⁶ The region of the South has been increasingly involved in global forces. According to James Peacock, “The South is shifting its frame of reference from nation to world, causing its oppositional identity to diminish.”¹⁷ The aim of Southern Studies in recent years has been to examine how the American South (and its writers) participates as part of the Global South, and I want to continue that trend in my reading of Faulkner and Rushdie together. As Peacock contends, “Whatever understanding we achieve of this paradigm shift in American Studies can inform other Souths [i.e. India and Pakistan] that undergo similar processes.”¹⁸

My argument is that although Faulkner and Rushdie hail from different generations and different parts of the world, they are authors that should be read together. By virtue of living in the Global South, Faulkner and Rushdie are both troubled by some of the same issues and employ the same strategies to combat them. In particular, they both approach issues of postcoloniality, exceptionalism, historical memory, and cultural mythology with postmodern interrogation. Examining how these writers question

exceptional historical narratives should inform us of the relationship between India and the American South and ways that both regions participate as part of the same global space.

In order to see how Rushdie continues the legacy of Faulkner's "art of questioning" that so dazzled other Global South writers, we need to first examine how Faulkner himself came to espouse questioning as part of his art. Specifically, we need to examine how Faulkner came to question his past. Faulkner has been, nearly universally, considered a man obsessed with his heritage. Even his language, to readers and scholars, conveys a presence of the past. As William Van O'Connor wrote in 1959, "Reading Faulkner, one feels involved in a long history, of torment, suffering, and anguish but also of endurance, dedication, and love."¹⁹ For decades, scholars have been examining Faulkner's relationship with the southern past. Older and more traditional interpretations have defined Faulkner's works as collections of "legends" and "mythologies" of the Old South. George Marion O'Donnell, for example, wrote in 1939 that Faulkner was a "traditional moralist" and possessed naturally "the principle of the southern social-economic-ethical tradition."²⁰ These morals and traditions, O'Donnell argues, are allegorized in Faulkner's works into codes and myths that represent a conflict between Faulkner's inherent traditional values and the modern world. In O'Donnell's interpretation, Faulkner seems to struggle to sustain regional traditions, and he "fails" when the forces of anti-traditionalism prevail. Malcolm Cowley, in the introduction to *The Portable Faulkner* (1946), aims to integrate all of Faulkner's works into "one connected story"²¹ that together illustrates the "tragic fable of southern history."²² Cowley suggests that because Faulkner has a "brooding love for the land where he was

born,”²³ he is unable to divorce himself from the South and look at it objectively. He is a passive member of history rather than an active inquisitor. As Cowley writes, “Faulkner himself writes not what he wants to, but what he just has to write whether we want to or not.”²⁴ Faulkner, in these earlier interpretations, is resigned to fatalism. Cowley and George Marion O’Donnell present Faulkner as a man with an inescapable past who must necessarily weave myths and legends of the South into his writing.

These older readings have been heavily contested. Faulkner himself objected to Cowley’s attempts to unify his stories into a clean narrative. Responding to Cowley’s introduction, Faulkner remarked, “I don’t see too much Southern legend in it.”²⁵ While early critics were quick to name Faulkner the father of southern myth and legend, unable to separate himself from his region’s past, Faulkner seemed to see himself quite differently. As he put it himself, “I’m inclined to think that my material, the South, is not very important to me. I just happen to know it.”²⁶ Cheryl Lester argues that Faulkner’s publication of the “Compson Appendix” to *The Sound and the Fury* was partly a response to Cowley’s tidy reading of the Yoknapatawpha Saga. She writes that the Appendix was Faulkner’s “critique, before the fact, of what has since become, in the United States, the canonical representation of this author’s writing.”²⁷ Faulkner called the Appendix the “key” to *The Sound and the Fury*. Lester suggests that the mobility of the Appendix and its ability to be read anywhere in the story is counter-chronological and disrupts Cowley’s attempts to unify the Yoknapatawpha Saga. She writes, “The Appendix reminds us that these works are not for that matter celebrations of continuity and tradition. They are better understood as memorials to the folly and injustice that an illusory unity masks in its pious remembrance of the past.”²⁸ The Appendix is just one

example of the ways in which Faulkner questions the totalizing narrative of southern history in which traditional scholars such as Cowley tried to place him. He shows, with the publication of the Appendix, that he can escape the inescapable past by diverting his gaze outwards-looking in and critiquing the South from a distance.

If we reinterpret Faulkner using a postmodern approach, then we can see how his novels can be read usefully with Rushdie. In postmodern literature, Linda Hutcheon argues, there is a “presence of the past”²⁹ that is constantly being revisited, reworked, questioned, and parodied. Postmodern writers tend to make fun of themselves and their subject matter in a way that paradoxically incorporates while challenging the issues they parody. For example, Faulkner’s Quentin Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!* and Rushdie’s Saleem Sinai in *Midnight’s Children*, both of whom will later be discussed in detail, both self-consciously and skeptically revisit their pasts.

Michel Foucault’s explanation of the difference between genealogy and traditional history is particularly foundational for this postmodern literary method. In his essay, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” Foucault argues that Nietzsche’s historical sense “introduces discontinuity into our very being.”³⁰ Traditional history gives coherence, authority, and control to our lives. It selectively glorifies certain events and expels the other, unimportant details. It concerns itself with peaks, epochs, and totalities that offer an overarching narrative. On the other hand, Nietzsche’s genealogical approach “leaves things undisturbed in their own dimensions,” and “studies what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossession.”³¹ Foucault calls this kind of analysis “disruption,” because rather than totalizing events into an all-encompassing narrative that aims at discovering a single truth, origin, and identity, genealogy severs its connection to

memory and makes no unifying claims. Memory, in the Nietzschean sense, is the metaphysical and anthropological model that gives history its shape. To dismantle that shape, Nietzsche's genealogy constructs what Foucault calls countermemory, or the transformation of history into a different form of time.³² Countermemory achieves this transformation in three modalities: the parodic, directed against reality; dissociative, directed against identity; and sacrificial, directed against truth. Through this trifecta approach, Foucault's history opposes recognition, continuity, and knowledge. It effectively fractures the traditional sense of history that had previously been an essential aspect of Western thought.

Arguably, Faulkner in the late 1930s can be read as a Foucauldian historian, one who introduces countermemory and disruption into his conception of his Southern past. Not only did he object in the late 1940s to his novels being read as part of Cowley's "one connected story," but he also deliberately undermined, rather than reinforced, the myths and legends that make up the official history of the white South. Moral codes, such as honor, redemptive violence, and the preservation of family clan, are some of the myths that offer structure to the southern historical narrative. The culture of the Deep South, which includes Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Western Tennessee, was made up of frontiersmen from Piedmont and Appalachia who purchased Indian land in order to build an aristocratic plantation society.³³ In this society, people practiced a personal and superstitious kind of religion that outlined the tradition of honor not in graciousness of manner but in a code of violence. For his characters living in what C. Hugh Holman calls a "harsh, violent, and exaggerated world,"³⁴ Faulkner creates a kind of moral code that is characterized by both the "fierce integrity and the selfish cruelty of the southern

plantation culture.”³⁵ The great families, most notably the Sartorises, Compsons, and the parvenu Sutpens, establish themselves in Yoknapatawpha by moving from the coastal plantation tradition of Carolina and Virginia into the wilderness to carve out their own orders.³⁶ Each of the major families comes to espouse a distinct kind of conduct that is based on the moral code of the clan. Faulkner eventually breaks these clans up and thereby underscores the decay in their codes and the decay of the traditional South.

These myths and codes are varied and complicated, but all of them work together to form the historical memory of an exceptional past. In the context of the American historical narrative, the South has been remembered as a distinct, static entity by which the rest of the nation can be compared. The writings of William Archibald Dunning and his followers, which came to be known as the Dunning School of Reconstruction during the early twentieth century, promoted and helped to foster the Cult of the Lost Cause, an ideology that saw the Confederacy as noble and Reconstruction as oppressive. The professors of the Dunning School, such as Ellis Merton Coulter and Walter Lynwood Fleming, maintained that black suffrage was “monstrous” because “black skin means membership in a race of men which has never of itself succeeded in subjecting passion to reason.”³⁷ White southerners, according to this historical interpretation, opposed “Negro rule” because they believed that blacks were unfit to participate in government. Furthermore, Republican state governments, which granted black suffrage and stayed in power because of black votes, were considered corrupt and oppressive by this perspective.³⁸ As a result, white southerners resisted Congressional Reconstruction and used violence to oust the Republicans. According to the Dunning school, these responses

were acceptable because white southerners were the victims of Reconstruction and had a valid reason to desire and implement violent “redemption” of their traditions.

Nicolas Lemann calls the violent “redemption” of state and local governments by white supremacists the “last battle of the Civil War.”³⁹ During Reconstruction, white southerners came to hate the Freedman’s Bureau, which was the government body that taxed them and controlled their land for the sake of freed slaves. Throughout the South, white supremacist groups launched armed conflicts against the Freedman’s Bureau and Republican governments. In 1873, in Colfax, Louisiana, a group of white Democrats took up arms against the Republicans at the Parish church, where hundreds of blacks were killed.⁴⁰ According to Lemann, this kind of violence offered white southerners a chance at redemption. After years of defeat and a loss of control over their homeland, it looked as if by fighting the federal government, they could win again. The glory and drama that came from redeeming the defeat of the Confederacy justified mass killings. In fact, violence was part of high principle. Redemption became another facet of the moral code through which southerners preserved and protected their identities. “For many former Confederates,” Lemann writes, “this was a glorious time.”⁴¹

The views of the Dunning School, the Cult of the Lost Cause, and the “necessity” of violent “redemption” shaped historical writing and popular opinion for generations. The official history cultivated by these views achieved widespread popularity through D.W. Griffith’s film *Birth of a Nation* (1915), which glorified the Klu Klux Klan and portrayed black characters as unintelligent and sexually aggressive. This way of thinking, popularized in part by the film industry, helped preserve the idea that the South

was and continues to be an distinct region within the United States that needs to fight to maintain its autonomous identity and preserve its exceptional past.

The Dunning School and its legacy have been contested by subsequent historians, such as the Revisionists in the 1960s. C. Vann Woodward, a Revisionist and highly influential Southern historian, has laid much of the groundwork for defining the myth of exceptionalism. In his 1960 essay, “The Search for Southern Identity,” Woodward argues that the South has preserved its cultural distinctiveness by resisting conformity in ways that other minority groups have not. Northern immigrants retain their ethnicities, religions, and family heritages as important facets of their identities yet still keep them subordinate to their American nationalities.⁴² The South, on the other hand, remembers regionalism over nationalism. It actively fights to preserve its exceptional identity. Even during the 1950s “Bulldozer Revolution,” in which the South experienced rapid economic growth and urban expansion that made its demographic increasingly uniform with the rest of America, its historical consciousness remained distinct. The South, according to Woodward, still separates itself from the American legacies of abundance, success, and innocence by remembering the southern legacies of poverty, defeat, and guilt.⁴³

Contemporary scholars have continued to approach the views of the Dunning school with skepticism. Joseph Crespino writes that Americans in the latter half of the twentieth century still remember the South as a metaphor for everything the rest of America is not.⁴⁴ The South has been deemed the single setting of America’s racial extremism and political authoritarianism. It has also been labeled a scapegoat for America’s race problem. In reality, slavery, segregation, and racism have long been

national issues, but our memories of the South have made them a regional concern. America can forget slavery and segregation because the South has taken that historical burden of remembering. Crespino writes, “The notion of the exceptional South has served as a myth, one that has persistently distorted our understanding of American history.”⁴⁵ The problem with the exceptional South is that regions are not real places but imagined constructs. Edward Ayers asserts that southern culture is a fiction. He argues that during the Civil War, when southerners found themselves on the defensive, they had to do something that Ayers argues they would not have done otherwise: assemble a distinct, regional identity with a separate history, culture, and destiny.⁴⁶ They were forced by external pressures to make political differentiation out of trivial, even non-existent, cultural differences. As Ayers writes, “There is no essence to be denied, no central theme to violate, no role in the national drama to be betrayed. The South is continually coming into being, continually being remade, continually struggling with its pasts.”⁴⁷ Ayers persuasively argues that the South’s reputed differences are largely cultural constructs. By reinforcing the imagined South as a distinct region, we continue selectively to forget certain elements about the American past and create, in Foucault’s terms, an official historical narrative.

In his second novel, *Sartoris* (1929), Faulkner began writing about the subject of the southern past and its relationship with the present. *Sartoris* is Faulkner’s first novel to take place in Yoknapatawpha County. It chronicles the legacy of the Sartorises, a respectable southern white family that lives by the codes of honor, glory, and endurance. According to Matthews, as a young and burgeoning artist Faulkner was “seduced” into trying to tell his story to an audience “expert in spinning its own self-protective

fictions.”⁴⁸ As a result, the language of *Sartoris* is rooted in the cultural mythology of the South, and in the end, Faulkner neither promotes nor questions the Sartoris code. Matthews calls it a “vast exercise in equivocation” and “nothing, however foolish, hurtful, self-destructive, mistaken, or violent—manages to discredit the awe-inspiring project that was the plantation South.”⁴⁹ Daniel Joseph Singal calls Faulkner’s stance in *Sartoris* “bifocalism” and argues, “In Bayard Sartoris he was attempting to portray how the weight of such a perplexing, violence-ridden heritage pressed down on southerners of his class and generation, leading to self-destruction.... at the same time, in John Sartoris, Faulkner was trying to keep the romantic tradition alive.”⁵⁰ With a sort of cautious ambivalence, Faulkner is unwilling to condemn the dream. He insists upon honoring his crumbling past while also recognizing its shortcomings. Initially, Faulkner was decidedly ambiguous about what approach to take to the cultural mythologies that he had inherited as a white southerner.

In *The Unvanquished* (1938), however, Faulkner is decidedly more critical of the South’s moral codes that concur with its official history. Notably, he published this novel two years after the production of *Gone with the Wind* (1936), which served as a sort of sequel to *Birth of a Nation* and continued the perpetuation of the Dunning School’s version of official history in popular culture. In the beginning of *The Unvanquished*, the values of the Sartoris family are clearly products of the myths cultivated by the Dunning school. For example, John Sartoris kills carpetbaggers in the name of white supremacy, Granny Millard abandons her gentility to deceive the Yankees, and Drusilla seduces Bayard with the prospect of revenge. As such, the general consensus among critics is that this novel is uncritical and does little to contest cultural myths. Walter Akin writes

that the novel “suffers in cohesion and balance.”⁵¹ This argument does ring true, mostly owing to the fact that Faulkner published the first six chapters of *The Unvanquished* as a series of stories for the *Saturday Evening Post* to make money while he was working on *Absalom*. Understandably, the stories were indeed complicit with southern mythology because they were written for mass audiences. However, when Faulkner decided to publish *The Unvanquished* as a novel, he undertook some significant editing and added a transformative final chapter, “An Odor of Verbena.” If we read *The Unvanquished* as a whole, we see how Faulkner’s conceptions of the past have undergone a transformation from his representations of the past in *Sartoris*. Faulkner’s 1929 voice is hesitant and uncritical, but his 1938 voice interrogates popular responses to the Dunning School and the official history of the South by gradually developing Bayard as a character who eventually breaks away from the code of his heritage and “blood, raising, and background” in favor of courage and moral conscience.

Bayard’s heritage is difficult for him to betray because the values of his family have been ingrained in him since childhood. The code for him is a conditioned reflex. It is “something communicated by touch straight to the simple code by which he lived, without going through the brain at all.”⁵² This code, which comes as a second nature to Bayard, is characterized by the romance of vengeance and the preservation of honor. According to historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown, honor in the South is inseparable from defense of family blood and community needs. Honor is protecting reputation by seeking revenge against familial enemies. Wyatt-Brown writes, “To die in defense of kinsmen or to humiliate in vengeance an enemy was to win eternal glory.”⁵³ John Sartoris, a colonel in the Confederate army, is the epitome of southern honor and the Sartoris code. Since

boyhood, Bayard has associated him with greatness. In the first chapter, “Ambuscade,” Bayard feels proud at the sight of his father. As a first-person narrator Bayard declares, “I began to smell it again, like each time he returned—that odor in his clothes and beard and flesh too which I believed was the smell of powder and glory.”⁵⁴ In this initial reading, it seems as though Bayard valorizes his father and the Sartoris code. However, Faulkner added to the previous sentence when he published “Ambuscade” as part of the novel: “but know better now: know now to have been only the will to endure, a sardonic and even humorous declining of self-delusion” (UV 10). Faulkner seems to suggest that older Bayard reflecting back on his childhood “knows better.” As an adult he knows that the ideals he once believed in are simply “willed” into endurance, perpetuated by active remembering and forgetting, and are thus unreal, humorous, and self-deluding myths.

Another aspect of “Ambuscade” that seems to contradict the views of the Dunning School is the agency of Faulkner’s black characters. One of the major platforms of the Revisionist historians such as Howard K. Beale, who wrote during the 1940s and 1950s, was that freedmen were active heroes of Reconstruction. Eric Foner writes that slavery had been disintegrating gradually during the Civil War because the drain of white men into military service left plantations under the control of planters’ wives and elderly men. According to Foner, “the arrival of federal soldiers in the South completely destroyed the coercive power of the slaveholding community.”⁵⁵ Southern blacks had been gradually realizing that freedom was inevitable and Emancipation would transform their world. Freedom meant that they could leave the South and their masters. They could join the Union army; they could actively participate in change. Faulkner creates characters that exercise these freedoms. For example, in the first scene of the novel,

Loosh destroys Bayard and Ringo's living map of Vicksburg. Later, when the Union soldiers arrive, Loosh joins them. He tells them where Granny's silver is buried and then leaves with them. Ominously, he tells the Sarotris: "I going. I done been freed. I dont belong to John Sartoris now; I belongs to me and God" (UV 75). Loosh's desertion confirms Ringo's and Bayard's earlier suspicions that "He knowed it. Yestiddy. Vicksburg. When he knocked it over" (UV 20). Loosh's actions seem to align with Foner's observation that southern blacks knew for some time that freedom was coming and that the South would be defeated. Not only did Loosh know, but he acted on that knowledge. He joined the Union cause and left with the Union army. In this way, Faulkner challenges the Dunning School's notions of black incompetence and anticipates the Revisionist ideas of black heroism and involvement.

Loosh's "betrayal" and black agency peak in a haunting scene that features the exodus of runaway slaves marching north at night. Faulkner writes:

It was as if Ringo felt it too and that the railroad, the rushing locomotive which he hoped to see symbolized it—the motion, the impulse to move which had already seethed to a head among his people, darker than themselves, reasonless, following and seeking a delusion, a dream, a bright shape which they could not know since there was nothing in their heritage, nothing in the memory... one of those impulses inexplicable yet invincible which appear among races of people at intervals and drive them to pick up and leave all securing and familiarity of earth and home and start out, they don't know where, empty handed, blind to everything but a hope and a doom. (UV 81)

In this moment, Faulkner's black characters are far from the ineffective and incompetent beings portrayed in the Dunning School, *Birth of a Nation*, and *Gone with the Wind*. Rather, they are changing their own histories—leaving behind their memories, their heritages, and their pasts and creating a new future for themselves. These actions seem to directly contradict the white cultural myths about Reconstruction.

From observing Loosh, Bayard gets an early indication of how southern myths are being slowly dismantled. However, he still valorizes his father and supports the Confederate cause. In "Ambuscade," he and Ringo shoot at the Yankees and proclaim, "We shot the bastud!" (UV 27). While they are initially exhilarated at the thought that they killed a Yankee, they are later chastised by Granny and then feel relief at the realization that they didn't kill anyone, only a horse. Again, early on Faulkner indicates that Bayard faces a conflict between morality and his cultural beliefs. He wants to shoot the Yankees, support the Confederacy, and emulate his father, but he is also increasingly conscious that his family code is founded on the willed endurance of myths. Later, Ringo and Bayard get even more violent when they avenge the death of Granny by murdering her assassin, the deserter Grumby, and nailing his body on her grave. After the murder, young Bayard is showered in praise. Uncle Buck tells him, "Aint I told you he is John Sartoris' boy? Hey? Aint I told you?" (UV 186). Bayard's murder of Grumby, motivated by his compliance with cultural prescriptions and the Sartoris code, is glorified by his community, so he feels as if he did the right thing.

Yet Bayard is haunted for the rest of his life by this murder, and he eventually realizes that the Sartoris values are merely "the will to endure" (UV 10). In "Skirmish at Sartoris," the Radical Republicans are administering elections and Bayard's father resolves to stop a carpetbagger victory. He believes, like the majority of southern whites according to the Dunning School, that Republican elections are corrupt and catered to an agenda of Negro rule. He tells George Wyatt, "Don't you see we are working for peace through law and order?" (UV 208). John Sartoris's idea of peace, law, and order is "redeeming" the South. His desires and actions can be read as an unconscious impulse to

preserve the South as an exceptional place with an exceptional past in the face of imposed change. As a result, he takes law and order into his own hands. With the aid of Drusilla, John Sartoris murders the two carpetbaggers, and then holds the election at the Sartoris plantation, where the black Republican candidate loses. John Sartoris literally fights to keep the South free from the influence of Northern invaders.

Akin writes that Sartoris's attitude of command and use of violence came primarily from his dream.⁵⁶ Drusilla, in explaining the dream to Bayard, compares it to Thomas Sutpen's "design." After the war, Sartoris rebuilds his house on the same spot where it has been burned down. Drusilla tells Bayard that "the house was the aura of Father's dream" (UV 220) and that although Sartoris is like Sutpen in his ruthlessness and will to endure, he is less selfish. She says that John is "thinking of this whole country when he is trying to raise it by its bootstraps" (UV 223). During this conversation, Bayard appears to resist the central aims of his father's dream. He tells Drusilla that murder cannot be good for the whole country because the people he killed were human beings. Drusilla, consumed with the dream herself, disagrees with Bayard. She tells him, "A dream is not a very safe thing to be near... but if it's a good dream, it's worth it" (UV 223). Dreams are like myths: they are wishes that distort reality. They have to be willed into existence and perpetuated by continual imaginings. In this conversation between Drusilla and Bayard, Faulkner shows how Sartoris's dream is a product of notions of honor and tradition. In his quest to "raise the country by its bootstraps" by sabotaging elections and murdering carpetbaggers, what Sartoris is really doing is trying to preserve the culture of the South and maintain the legacy of its past. However, the Sartoris dream, like mythology and memory, can and should be contested

and changed, as Faulkner demonstrates through Bayard's ultimate actions at the end of the novel.

John Sartoris, in pursuit of this dream, get himself killed by Ben Redmond, his ex-business partner and rival. In the last chapter, "An Odor of Verbena," Bayard is faced with the duty to avenge his father's death. However, Bayard appeals to conscience in lieu of his father's dream, which he sees now as a myth created out of the illusion of an exceptional heritage. As Robert Witt writes, the odor of verbena represents both courage and violence.⁵⁷ When Drusilla tries to seduce Bayard, "the scent of the verbena in her hair seemed to have increased a hundred times" (UV 227). Witt argues that rather than tempting Bayard sexually, Drusilla is actually tempting him with the lure of violence. She wants to convince him to kill Redmond in his father's name and continue the dream of redeeming the past, so she gives him the sprig of verbena to wear on his coat. As Bayard goes to town to seek Redmond, the odor of verbena becomes fiercer, representing the increasing intensity of the lure of violence that affects Bayard's judgment. Fighting it is difficult, but in the end, Bayard faces Redmond unarmed. He does not kill. He goes against "blood and raising and background" (UV 249), the pervasive odor of verbena, and his father's dream.

In *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner creates characters that willingly and consciously defy the cultural prescriptions of the Dunning School and popular American history. Loosh and the runaway slaves show agency, which discredits the notion of black incompetence. Moreover, Bayard breaks his family's cycle of redemptive violence and his father's dream by opting not to shoot Redmond out of vengeance. The actions of Faulkner's characters imply the author's larger critique of southern historical memory.

Faulkner disrupts the official history of the South as an exceptional place by subverting the very codes and cultural myths that enforce that history.

The official history of the Reconstruction South as espoused by the Dunning School required a selective evaluation of the past. As we have seen, the ideas of the Dunning School called for the formation of a distinct, exceptional white southern identity that came to be codified in mythologies, such as redemption and honor. In India and Pakistan, after the colonial period, the official history championed by nationalist movements in both countries achieved a similar end. Nationalists construed singular, exceptionalist narratives that remembered the histories of India and Pakistan as separate and oppositional, much like the North and the South in the United States.

By 1938 Faulkner had nearly dismantled the Sartoris code that defined the memory of his exceptional history in *The Unvanquished* and *Absalom, Absalom!* He reevaluated the past in a way to fit the needs of the present. Fifty years later, Rushdie expressed a similar interrogation of the Indian past. In his 1982 essay, "Imaginary Homelands," Rushdie writes, "my present is foreign, and the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time.... We will not be able to reclaim precisely the thing that was lost; we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias-of-the-mind."⁵⁸ Like Faulkner, Rushdie believes that the past is accessible to him only through fiction and memory. It is a constant process built on imagination.

In *Midnight's Children* (1980), Rushdie's protagonist, Saleem Sinai, calls India a "new myth" and a "collective fiction."⁵⁹ On the eve of August 15, 1947, the nation of

India came into being, ousted the British Raj, and gained independence. In describing the scene, Rushdie writes,

There was an extra festival on the calendar, a new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will (MC 124).

The concept of India as a “new” place must necessarily be fictitious because India itself has existed for centuries. In order for the “new” nation to exist, Indians must collectively forget and remember selective elements of their long, multitudinous past. Benedict Anderson’s theoretical approach to nationalism argues that nationhood requires an exceptional history, an “imagined community”⁶⁰ with a narrative that homogenizes the story of India and makes it unique from the rest of the world. “New” India was founded on the same kind of cultural imaginings that built the American South, most significantly, the idea of exceptionalism. Although this term is usually used in the context of American history, I want to suggest that the same idea can be applied to Indian and Pakistani history, which is partly why Rushdie is interested in Faulkner. The South imagined itself as a region culturally and historically distinct within the American narrative, and in a similar fashion, the “new” nations of India and Pakistan imagined themselves as culturally and historically separate from each other and their pre-colonial pasts.

Indian exceptionalism became a cultural myth during the anti-colonial nationalist movement. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, on the cusp of Mahatma Gandhi’s nonviolent noncooperation movement and his call for mass action, Indian politicians began to emphasize a sense of national identity to distinguish India from its colonizers. In 1888, the British colonial official John Stratchey famously

proclaimed, “there is not, and never was an India, nor ever any country of India, possessing according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious; no nation, no “people of India” of which we hear so much.”⁶¹ The Western tradition of disciplinary historiography, in which India was cultured, requires a certain degree of singularity. As nationalist thinkers encountered this intellectual sense of history imported from the West, they were compelled to conceptualize India in terms of eras. Nationalist discourse thus divided Indian history into three chronological periods: the Hindu, classical age; the Muslim, medieval age; and the Christian, modern age. As the Bengali intellectual Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay insisted, “We must have a history.”⁶² In a response to British demands that Indians create a singular historical narrative in order to be considered a legitimate national entity, Indian intellectuals began the process of selectively evaluating their convoluted, multitudinous past in an attempt to assemble, in Foucault’s terms, an official history that achieved that linear, singular objective.

Dipesh Chakrabarty maintains that the problem with South Asia is Homi Bhabha’s mimicry. Particularly, South Asians have been forced to represent themselves in terms of modern, national history.⁶³ Robert Young credits this assimilation to the phenomenon of Eurocentrism. Young writes that Eurocentrism is an “arrogant narrative” that not only asserts the self, but also creates, subjects, and finally appropriates the “other.”⁶⁴ This “ontological imperialism” aims to possess the other ideologically through the imposition of various “white mythologies,” such as metaphysics, enlightenment, and importantly, historicity.⁶⁵ As a result of ontological imperialism, the colonized mimicked the discourse of historicity, or concern with actual events and recorded history, which

defines people solely in terms of nation and citizenship. History and identity, in modern terms, then becomes valid only in the context of nationalism and invalidates all forms of pre-colonial history.

According to historian Partha Chatterjee, the Indian nationalist movement was indeed a move to generate a collective consciousness and cultural legitimacy.⁶⁶ Creating Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" required a conceptualized Indian identity distinct from and superior to the West. This process of imagination involved a classicist revival of Hindu traditions. Chatterjee calls this selective revival the "nationalist paradox." He writes, "In its essential aspects, nationalism represents the attempt to actualize in political terms the universal urge for liberty and progress. And yet the evidence was undeniable that it could also give rise to mindless chauvinism and xenophobia."⁶⁷ Despite claims of mass representation, the Indian nationalist movement was majoritarian. It defined classical Hindu civilization as essentially Indian, which inherently alienated those "other" groups of foreign invaders, such as Mughal-Muslims and Anglo-Indians. It created an exceptional historical narrative, which, as in southern history, defined India as a place with a singular identity. This narrative stipulated that those descended from the Hindus belonged to the Indian nation, while others did not. Muslims, Christians, and 'tribals' came to occupy secondary positions in the new nation.

The idea of Hinduism during this period had to be redefined not as a religious identity but as an all-encompassing cultural label. While influential leaders of the Indian National Congress, such as Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, constantly fought against this rhetoric and tried to promote religious, cultural, and historical pluralism ("a nation is happy that has no history," Gandhi once said), many intellectuals and politicians outside

of Congress supported the Hindu nationalist movement.⁶⁸ The ideology behind Hindu exclusivity also came to serve as a foundation for contemporary political groups. During the 1980s, under Rajiv Gandhi's increasingly corrupt government, the political unity of Congress unraveled into religious communalism.⁶⁹ General discontent with Congress leadership, namely the dictatorship of Indira Gandhi and the incompetence of her son Rajiv, allowed marginal political groups to gain considerable support, particularly among Hindus.⁷⁰ The Rashtriya Swayamasevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gained respect and popularity in the 1990s as Congress continued to falter. Both of these political groups operated on the platform that Congress's secular agenda directly caused a declension in Indian society and culture.⁷¹ They demand that "the past, present, and future of the Indian nation be constituted around a notion of *hindutva*, Hinduness."⁷² These contemporary Hindu extremists continue the revivalist ideologies conceived during the nationalist movement.

The issue of *hindutva* as the "new" Indian nation is further complicated by the emergence of Pakistan. After the Partition of 1947, Pakistan also had to evaluate its past selectively and create an exceptional historical narrative in order to justify itself as a legitimate nation. It is generally agreed that the idea of Pakistan was conceived as an ideology, not a nation. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, President of the Muslim League and the first Governor General of Pakistan, rhetorically claimed that Hindus and Muslims represented two separate nations in India based on religion, yet scholars agree that he never wanted the "Muslim Nation" to become a demarcated reality.⁷³ According to Ayesha Jalal, Jinnah's "two-nation theory" which was "more non-territorial than territorial in its imaginings" came to be appropriated by a nation-state."⁷⁴ This

discrepancy between the idea of Pakistan and the nation of Pakistan makes its historiography uniquely problematic.

According to David Gilmartin, “For most Muslims, the meaning of Pakistan did not hinge on its association with a specific territory.”⁷⁵ The modern idea of the nation-state was never associated with Pakistan; on the contrary, Pakistan was conceived as an acronym to represent an ideological, metaphorical place where Indian Muslims could unite. Yet as Indian Muslims and Muslim leaders felt increasingly marginalized by the exclusionary rhetoric of the nationalist movement and the *hindutva* extremists, Jinnah advocated for more and more autonomy for Muslim-majority populations. Seemingly as a result of the Muslim League’s political strategy rather than the wants and needs of the people, the Partition of India happened in 1947, and the idea of Pakistan abruptly transformed from an ideology into a nation. Partition marked a discontinuity in South Asian history. It formed a rift between the ‘place’ of Pakistan—the ideological space intended to provide a moral framework for Muslims—and the ‘territory’ or modern nation-state of Pakistan. Gilmartin’s argument persuasively demonstrates how Pakistan was supposed to be a mythical, holy place, and the territorialization of nationhood completely disrupted that notion.

The resulting violence that ensued was baffling. As Muslim families migrated west while Hindu families migrated east, usually on foot, countless massacres happened out of frustration and desperation. Scholars such as Gilmartin suggest that such massacres occurred perhaps as an attempt to “lay claim to the new territories carved out by Partition.”⁷⁶ In other words, the violence served as a means to rewrite the past. Pakistanis redeemed their new historical identities through violent antagonism in a

manner reminiscent of white terror in the South during Reconstruction. Chakrabarty's and Chatterjee's problem of national history then becomes especially pertinent in the Pakistani context because in order to historicize itself, Pakistan had to justify itself as a territorial space separate from India. It had to prove itself as a nation by forgetting the past and starting anew. Pakistan, much as India and the American South, became an imagined community with an exceptional past.

One million people died during the Partition violence. Because such a massive sacrifice was made in order for the country to exist, Pakistanis had a patriotic duty to defend their nation in the name of those whose lives were lost and carry out the mission of creating an Islamic state. According to Jalal, "Pakistan had to move toward becoming an Islamic state because that was the sole purpose of demanding a separate homeland for the Muslims."⁷⁷ A non-Islamic government and a multi-faceted identity would discredit the very foundations of Pakistan; therefore, in constructing itself as a nation, the primary goal had to be building a homogenous, Islamic identity to solidify the land of the pure. Otherwise, Jinnah's two-nation theory would be a failure and the tragedies of Partition would have been in vain.

Pakistani politicians have continued enforcing the notion of an exceptional past publicly, like the politicians of the RSS and BJP in India have continued the notion of the *hindutva* nation. In 1977, General Zia-al-Haq took over as Prime Minister in Pakistan. He operated on a platform of "Islamic socialism," and in terms of manipulating Pakistan's history, Zia's most significant institutional reform was his curriculum changes in public schools. He made *Islamiyat*, the study of Islamic tenants and memorization of *Qu'ranic* verses, compulsory in all levels of education.⁷⁸ Moreover, Zia organized

committees to edit school textbooks comprehensively to fit his political philosophy. The University Grants Commission issued a directive in 1983 that textbook writers were “To guide students towards the ultimate goal of Pakistan—the creation of a completely Islamized State.”⁷⁹ Yvette Clair Rosser argues that these textbooks were prone to “omissions, embellishments, and elisions.”⁸⁰ They sought to achieve the very explicit political agenda laid out by Zia’s Islamization campaign, so they contained an amalgamation of patriotic discourses, such as justification of the two-nation theory, hagiographies of Muslim heroes, and diatribes about the inferiority of Hinduism. The textbooks were organized into themes that glorified Islamism, such as the ideology of Pakistan, a depiction of Jinnah as an orthodox religious man, and the establishment of the *ulamah*, or Islamic legal scholars, as genuine heroes of the Pakistan movement.⁸¹ Clearly, these textbooks were far from objective.

“With the help of state-controlled media,” Jalal argues, “the lessons learned in school and college serve as the alphabet and the grammar that makes psyches literate in the idioms of national ideology.”⁸² These idioms, Jalal goes on to define, are the forces of bigotry and Indophobia. In order to enforce the Pakistan ideology of Islamic hegemony, Zia’s textbooks needed to deracinate Pakistan from its Indian roots. Jalal mentions a particular history textbook that claims that the coming of Islam into India was a blessing because Hinduism was based on an unethical caste system. Other textbooks state that the origins of Pakistan began with the orthodox Mughal leader Aurangzeb and his resistance to the religiously tolerant Akbar, the ruler who preceded him, implying that even during the Mughal period, a very distinct population of orthodox Sunni Muslims lived within India. Textbooks also cite evidence of Hindu majoritarianism and cultural genocide.⁸³

Drawing from these examples, Jalal calls “reactive bigotry” one of the main pillars of Pakistani nationalism. She writes, “The history of the Subcontinent is transformed into a battle of the spiritual and the profane, of the righteous Muslim and the idolatrous Hindu.”⁸⁴ Like the ways in which Indian nationalist discourse cultivated cultural superiority in order to contest the British, Zia’s Islamization agenda aimed to show how Pakistanis held cultural superiority over the Hindus.

Incidentally, the “nationalist paradox” that excluded Muslims from the discourse of belonging in India also excluded dissenters in Pakistan from their own national narrative. In addition to bashing Indians, the enemies from outside, textbooks also warn against those “intellectuals who do not believe in Pakistan ideology.”⁸⁵ The textbooks vehemently target those internal “others” who do not conform to the all-encompassing system of Islamism that Zia considered foundational to the nation itself. More dangerous than the Indians were the misguided Pakistanis who talked of secularism and democracy. As such, the textbooks portray Zulfikar Bhutto, founder of the Pakistan People’s Party and the champion of democracy in Pakistan, as an un-Islamic villain and Zia as a pious, archetypical leader. The textbooks also denounce regionalism. They promote the Urdu language as the only one that can unite all Pakistanis and discourage the use of regional language and cultural symbols. For example, Ranjit Singh, who is credited with the Punjabi language and culture, is decried as the greatest enemy of Muslims.⁸⁶ Jalal writes that in this way, textbooks “educate the future generations to reject anything in their regional culture that fails to qualify as Islamic.”⁸⁷ Not only do Zia’s history textbooks promote Indophobia, but they also condemn internal enemies such as secularists and regionalists as threats to Islamic hegemony. According to Zia’s Islamization campaign,

such regional, linguistic, and ideological counter-narratives represent the failure of Pakistan's goal to create a coherent imagining of a national community and must be either omitted or derided in public school textbooks.

The "Pakistan ideology" of an exceptional past separate from India is reinforced in Pakistani historical memory today, and Hindu extremist groups such as the RSS and BJP also continue the majoritarian rhetoric of *hindutva* nationalism in India. These instances of narrative exclusivity, according to Chatterjee, are products of the idea of history itself. Exposure to Western historiography led nationalist leaders to construct Indian history around the exceptional and monolithic narrative of Hindu classicism, a problematic ideology that has reemerged with recent political groups such as the RSS and BJP. Pakistani politics and Islamic socialism have created an equally problematic historical narrative in Pakistan. In short, colonial objectives of ontological imperialism compelled both "new" nations to reimagine their pasts to fit the mold of linear history, which obscures the reality of their shared and varied heritage.

Chatterjee's idea that nationalisms are Western constructions supports the postmodern theory of cultural hybridity. According to Ania Loomba, postcolonial and postmodern studies have been occupied with in-betweenness, diasporas, mobility, and cross-overs of ideas and identities.⁸⁸ Postcolonialism, unlike nationalist discourse, defines Indian identity as a combination of multiple histories rather than a single, exceptional past. Drawing from ideas put forth by Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon, Loomba asserts that both the colonizer and the colonized wrongly accepted the premise of cultural distinction.⁸⁹ Colonizers assumed they could civilize people while simultaneously perpetuating their otherness, while the colonized believed they could

achieve autonomy and maintain cultural purity independent of Western influence. Both sides were mistaken. The reality of colonialism implies an inevitable mixing of ideas and traditions. Loomba writes, “Neither the colonizer nor colonized is independent of the other. Colonial identities, on both side of the divide, are unstable, agonized, and in constant flux.”⁹⁰ Furthermore, the flux “undercuts both colonialist and nationalist claims to a unified self.”⁹¹ By the logic of Loomba and other postcolonial theorists, Hindu nationalist agendas and Pakistani Islamization campaigns of cultural revival and exceptional histories are nearly impossible to achieve because hybridity and multiplicity are inevitable results of colonialism.

Rushdie, born in the summer of 1947, was raised in the “new” republic of India and its culture of nationalist reimaginings. However, as a child of postcolonialism, he was also a product of Loomba’s “inevitable mixing.” In his literature, Rushdie portrays India as the postmodern theorists do rather than the nationalists. He states, “My view is that the Indian tradition has always been, and still is, a mixed tradition. The idea that there is such a thing as a pure Indian tradition is a kind of fallacy, the nature of Indian tradition has always been multiplicity and plurality and mingling.”⁹² In his response to India’s official nationalist history, Rushdie seems to continue Faulkner’s legacy of “the art of questioning.” In his first novel, *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie, by telling the story of India through Saleem, challenges the notion of Hindu exceptionalism. Much as Bayard Sartoris breaks away from his inheritance and redefines the Sartoris code for himself, Saleem defies the exclusionary mythology of New India and defines himself on the basis of multiple lines of history.

In his compelling essay, “Rewriting History and Identity: The Reinvention of Myth, Epic, and Allegory in *Midnight’s Children*,” Michael Reder argues that Rushdie’s Saleem writes his own version of Indian history. Reder writes:

Saleem creates a radically individual type of historical discourse that challenges the powerful but potentially oppressive notions of national mythology, a version of official history that often overshadows the lives of individuals who populate a nation. Rushdie’s novel explodes traditional notions of myth and epic, offering us a type of historical discourse that focuses on individual, personalized mythology.⁹³

By personalizing history, Saleem fragments it. His narrative is disjointed and individualized rather than continuous and monolithic. Reder argues that Rushdie, by reinventing Indian history through the narrow, idiosyncratic perspective of Saleem, exposes the myth that is modern India. Furthermore, I would argue, Rushdie exposes and criticizes the idea of Indian exceptionalism. He challenges the Hindu revivalists who exclude from the national memory all other lines of history outside of *hindutva*.

Rushdie alludes to the myth of Indian exceptionalism repeatedly throughout the novel. The most obvious is the “Midnight’s Children Conference,” or the gaggle of kids born on August 15, 1947. These children mark the sudden transformation from old India into new India; they are the first generation of the nation. Rushdie writes, “It was as though history, arriving at a point of the highest significance and promise, had chosen to sow, in that instant, the seeds of a future which would genuinely differ from anything the world had seen” (MC 224). Indeed, the children of midnight are exceptional. Rushdie gives them all special powers, as if to suggest that they are the start of something entirely novel. There are other instances, notably the Hindu antagonism toward Pakistanis and Muslims, and vice versa, which suggest that Hindu-Muslim separatism still persists for Rushdie’s characters. Saleem’s schoolteacher reminds him and his classmates, “Pakistan ees a stain on the face of India!” (MC 265), while Saleem’s neighbors, the Sindhi and the

Bengali, who do not speak the same language or cook the same food, are nevertheless both Muslim and thus share a mutual hatred for Hindus (MC 79).

Saleem breaks away from these myths in three significant ways. He contests his own memory and interrogates the idea of official history. He emphasizes his mongrel, hybrid identity. Lastly, he shows that although he is a child of midnight, a son of “new” India, he is in no way divorced from what came before. His inheritance, which can be seen as an allegory for all aspects of the Indian past that have been left out of nationalist, exclusionary discourse, is essential to Saleem’s life and Indian history as a whole.

Throughout the novel, Saleem tells the story of his life to a one-woman audience, Padma. He stops every so often to admit to Padma that he has forgotten certain details or that he has chosen not to remember certain parts. Yet the parts he remembers, he insists, are more important than reality itself. He tells her, “Memory’s truth, because memory has its own special mind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also, but in the end it creates its own reality” (MC 242). As Rushdie explains in his essay, “Errata, or Unreliable Narration in *Midnight’s Children*,” Saleem simply gets things wrong. Some mistakes are purposeful and some are accidental, but in all cases, Rushdie admits, “I favor the remembered rather than the literal truth.”⁹⁴ Saleem deliberately discredits himself. He makes it clear that his story has holes. For example, he claims that Ganesha transcribed the *Ramayana* from the poet Valmaki, when according to the old legend, Ganesha heard the *Mahabharata* from the poet Vyasa. He writes that there is no Mumbadevi day, when in fact there is. However, Saleem’s mistakes, Rushdie insists, are “a useful analogy for the way in which we all, every day, attempt to ‘read’ the world.”⁹⁵

Despite his inaccuracies, Saleem is still “hand-cuffed to history.” He explains that he is linked to history “actively-literally, passively-metaphorically, actively-metaphorically and passively-literally” (MC 272-3). Saleem is related to history through these various “modes of connection,” which have him both literally altering history and passively being-affected-by-history. This connection implies that even though Saleem’s story is personalized and erratic, it also relates to the Indian narrative as a whole. Keith Booker writes that “self-conscious fictionality of narratives is directly linked to the artificiality of our constructions of history.”⁹⁶ By first discrediting himself as a narrator and deliberately establishing the limits of his memory, and then linking his fragmented story to the overarching narrative of history, Saleem implies that history itself, much like his personal story, is artificial. In short, Saleem’s self-critique and skepticism of his own story represent Rushdie’s criticism of Indian historical memory as a whole.

In addition to illuminating the holes in his narrative, Saleem is also aware of his hybrid identity. His memory may be selective to an extent, but his identity is multitudinous. Born on the stroke of midnight on the eve of India’s independence, Saleem is, quite plainly, the son of India; he is Rushdie’s national image. His extensive story, which begins generations before his birth, describes his half-British ancestry, his family’s roots in Kashmir, and his childhood in cosmopolitan Bombay. It recounts his Muslim upbringing and later marriage to a Hindu goddess in the slums of Old Delhi. He also spends a large portion of the novel migrating between Pakistan and Bangladesh, traversing India-beyond-borders. In short, Saleem is a mongrel; he is a product of multiple histories. He is not just Indian, but also British, Kashmiri, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi; he is Hindu and Muslim and Christian. He is an entire world and cannot be

categorized by any one aspect of history. Rushdie's Saleem, and by implication his version of the Indian nation, cannot be defined by oneness.

In many respects, history does not even matter to Saleem. For example, he spends roughly a quarter of the story explaining his family background—his grandfather's life in Kashmir, his parents' courtship in Agra, the early days of their marriage in Delhi and Bombay. Then he reveals that these people are not even his relatives at all because he was switched with another child at birth. Moreover, he reveals that "*it made no difference*" and that "in a kind of collective failure of imagination, we learned that we simply could not think our way out of our pasts" (MC 131). The reality of Saleem's family history is far less important to his identity than his *memory* of his past. His factual family and his singular bloodline are not all that he inherits; rather, Saleem reinvents his inheritance as an all-encompassing past made up of an entire world of people who have both affected him and have been affected by him.

Saleem is, literally and metaphorically, the product of "new" India; he is the son of the nation. If we analyze Saleem's many fathers, we see how Rushdie suggests that India's inheritance is much more extensive than the one depicted by the nationalist movement. As Saleem says, "To understand me, you'll have to swallow a world" (MC 121). Saleem's present self is characterized by the rich totality of his past, which is why he spends so much of his story dwelling on his ancestry. Rushdie writes, "Most of what happens in our lives takes place in our absence" (MC 14). "Things—even people—have a way of leaking into each other.... The past has dripped into me... so we can't ignore it" (MC 37). Remember, however, that Saleem's ancestry is in no way related to his blood.

His past and present are not limited by family but characterized by many fathers who represent an entire nation with a broad, multitudinous history.

Saleem's first father is Tai the Boatman, an enduring presence who haunts Saleem's memory and significantly directs his life. According to Saleem, Tai has been old forever. He has manned the same boat on the same lake as far as anyone can remember. Like the Kashmiri valley, which has "hardly changed since the Mughal Empire, for all its springtime renewals" (MC 5), Tai also transcends the natural forces of change. Acting as an antithesis to the "new" nation of India, Tai represents the unchanging antiquity of the Subcontinent. No one knows his age, and he often suggests that he is as old as time itself. As he tells young Aadam Aziz, Saleem's grandfather, "I have watched the mountains being born; I have seen Emperors die. Listen. Listen, nakkoo... I saw that Isa, the Christ, when he came to Kashmir. Smile, smile, it is your history I am keeping in my head" (MC 11). Tai's memories, which begin as early as Christ, are the beginnings of Saleem's history. In this way, Rushdie suggests, Saleem has inherited a kind of India that is much older than the "new" nation of contemporary historical memory. Old India has been forgotten and left out of the historical narrative, but Saleem chooses to remember it. Significantly, Tai dies in 1947, when India and Pakistan become nations and fight over the Kashmiri valley. Rushdie writes, "he walked to Chhamb with the express purpose of standing between the opposing forces and giving them a piece of his mind" (MC 35). In terms of Saleem's inheritance, Tai represents an ancient India that died, or was forgotten, in 1947 with the birth of a two new nations.

Aadam Aziz, Saleem's maternal grandfather who was partly raised by Tai the boatman, represents Saleem's inheritance of colonial India. As a child during the time of

the British raj, Aadam grows up in a climate of Young's ontological imperialism. He is compelled to assimilate to "white mythologies," particularly secularism and Western science. Aadam goes to Germany to become a doctor, and when he returns to Kashmir, he hits his nose on a prayer mat. After this incident, "he resolved never to kiss earth for any god or man.... This decision made a hole in him, a vacancy in a vital inner chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history" (MC 4). The metaphor of the hole and the "perforated sheet," which first appears as the barrier through which Aadam gradually meets his wife, is significant for what Rushdie wants to suggest about Saleem's inheritance. The colonial Indian, represented by Aadam, is prone to seeing the past in fragments. Because he feels pressured both to preserve tradition and embrace modernity, he can no longer conceive of a homeland. As Rushdie's narrator writes, Aadam was "caught in a strange middle ground, trapped between belief and disbelief...knocked forever into that middle place, unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve" (MC 6). Aadam faces a lifelong problem of modernity that he is never able to reconcile. He suffers a "death by cracking," when the hole caused by his failure to believe or disbelieve in God collapses and his body disintegrates. After Aziz's death, Saleem notes, "On that day, my inheritance began to form... above all the ghostly essence of that perforated sheet, which condemned me to see my own life—its meanings, its structures—in fragments" (MC 119). As a child of the colonial period, Aziz represents Saleem's inheritance of white mythologies and confused memory.

Saleem has a great-grandfather, Tai the boatman, and a grandfather, Aadam Aziz, and then he has two fathers, who together represent his inheritance of "new" India, re-imagined to fit a certain history. William Methwold, a Bombay estate owner and

Saleem's biological father, brings the legacy of British India into Saleem's life. Before he leaves Bombay, he insists that Saleem's family leave their house unaltered and participate in cocktail hour every evening. "My notion," Methwold explains, "is to stage my own transfer of assets" (MC 107). The Sinais find Methwold's request ridiculous at first, but eventually they acquiesce and even begin enjoying British customs. Ahmed Sinai, Saleem's presumed father, drunkenly asks, "Can we not humor him? With our ancient civilization, can we not be as civilized as he?" (MC 109). Methwold instigates a gradual cultural mixing. He illustrates the inevitability of postcolonial hybridity by leaving behind a legacy of British influence that Saleem will inherit.

Saleem's second father, Ahmed Sinai, who did not conceive him but raised him throughout his childhood, represents Saleem's inheritance of nationalist India. Indian nationalists revised their history to comply with John Stratchey's nation "possessing according to European ideas." Likewise, Ahmed Sinai, in a conversation with Methwold, invents a Mughal ancestry to impress him. As Saleem observes, "My father demonstrated that he, too, longed for fictional ancestors... how he came to invent a family pedigree.... He introduced into our lives the idea of the family curse" (MC 122). Saleem's father also has a dream of one day rearranging the Quran in accurately chronological order. Ahmed Sinai seems to possess the same ambitions that characterized (and cursed) the Indian nationalists: he wants to reimagine history in a linear, singular, expressly non-Indian manner in order to reclaim a singular past.

Saleem's awareness of the artificiality of historical memory, the reality of hybridity, and the vast expanse of his inheritance is Rushdie's challenge to Indian exceptionalism. The myth of "new" India involved the construction of a single, totalizing

narrative comprised of selective memories, mostly from the Hindu classical period. In the process of imagining a nation, “new” India willingly forgot certain elements of its past. It made itself exceptional by ignoring the parts of its history that connected it to the rest of the world. Saleem, on the other hand, is not exceptional. He is defined by his self-conscious interrogation of his own memories, his expansive ancestry, and his multifaceted identity. These features are in fact *unexceptional* because they make Saleem, Rushdie’s metaphor for India, into a complex character of intersecting lines of identity and history.

Not only does Rushdie’s interrogation of official history through Saleem’s convoluted inheritance evoke the “art of questioning” that we see in Faulkner, but Rushdie’s method of telling Saleem’s story—the structure, form, and narrative style—is also reminiscent of Faulkner. Saleem’s self-conscious narration, his skepticism of memory, and his collaboration with his audience (Padma), resemble the form and content of *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). In this novel, Faulkner experiments with metafiction by employing self-conscious, multitudinous, and fragmentary narration as his method of telling the story of the American South. In addition, his protagonist, Quentin Compson, parallels the path of Bayard Sartoris when Quentin becomes disillusioned with southern myth of white patriarchy. Thirdly, Faulkner presents Sutpen’s plantation and “design”—a symbol of the Old South—as something mythic, contrived, and doomed to fail.

The structure of *Absalom* is Foucauldian in and of itself, because the historical events occur and recur in the immediate present, rather than in a distant, linear past. It operates like a postmodern text by relying on contradictory stories to transform what François Lyotard calls “the totalizing master narratives of our culture.”⁹⁷ *Absalom*, in

short, does not give a single story, but multiple versions of the same story, which work to achieve Foucault's genealogical method that "discovers a complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis."⁹⁸ Like *Midnight's Children*, which characterizes the history of India as a vast inheritance, Faulkner's *Absalom* tells the story of the South from multiple perspectives. To apply Rushdie's terminology: in order to understand the South, you have to swallow a world.

Absalom is a novel of disparate pieces. Its central story, the history of Thomas Sutpen, is told from the perspective of people who can only give incomplete versions of what happened. Rosa Coldfield's account is distorted by her bitterness, and Mr. Compson knows only retellings from his father. The Sutpens themselves are never present characters in Faulkner's books; they never have voices of their own. Everything we know about them, we know through the memories of other characters. It is up to the listener, Quentin, and the readers to put together the pieces, which makes the narrative automatically skewed by idiosyncrasies. As C. Hugh Holman writes, "Sutpen, Judith, Henry, Charles Bon, the "grand design," the vast mansion molded from the mud of Sutpen's Hundred, the Civil War, and the impact which it has upon those who are caught in it—all become dramatically represented not through their own actions but through the impressions which they create on later generations."⁹⁹ The Sutpen history is a reconstruction, a critical re-working of the past told through biased narrators. Just as Saleem tells the story of his ancestry through a perforated sheet—in fragments, imaginary homelands, and Indias of the mind—so too do Quentin and Shreve understand the story of Thomas Sutpen through the partial retellings of Rosa Coldfield and Mr. Compson. *Absalom*, in this sense, is itself a genealogical history because it "reveal[s] the

heterogeneous systems that, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity.”¹⁰⁰ It relies on reimaginings and reconstructions, which work together to transform the official history of the Sutpens into an assorted narrative that contests reality, identity, and truth.

During a 1957 interview at the University of Virginia, Faulkner remarked, “No one individual can look at truth. Nobody [in *Absalom*] saw the truth intact.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, the characters in *Absalom* are all approaching the “truth” of the Sutpen story from different memories and perspectives. Donald Kartiganer argues that there is only one known fact in the Sutpen story: Henry Sutpen killed Charles Bon. This fact is what makes imagination necessary, and because imagination is limitless, there is no one conclusion at which we ever arrive.¹⁰² Instead, what we get is a multiplicity of truths. Truth is not fact, but a creative construction of the narrators and readers. It is dynamic and multitudinous, as is the “truth” of Saleem’s inheritance. As Hyatt Waggoner writes, “The whole meaning of Sutpen’s history hangs on the leap of the imagination.”¹⁰³

By virtue of being a novel of intersecting stories, disparate elements, and multiple truths, the language of *Absalom* is metafictional. It is a story about telling stories—a narrative concerned with tellers and listeners. Joseph Urgo claims that the structure of *Absalom* reads like a screenplay. Rather than narrators telling a story to an audience, the narrators are telling the story to each other. The story, like a film, becomes a production and a collaborative process.¹⁰⁴ As the third-person narrator comments during a lapse in Quentin and Shreve’s conversation, “it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voices which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal; the two of them creating between them, out of the

rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere”¹⁰⁵ (AA 243). Faulkner’s narrator continually interrogates the stories that Quentin and Shreve tell because as they work together to imagine the Sutpen story, they create, as one mind, the voices and lives of characters that do not necessarily exist. In addition we as readers, no less than Quentin and Shreve, are also imaginative beings who must respond to the “one fact” of the Sutpen story with critical judgments. Faulkner compels us to reimagine the Sutpen story as his narrators do. He obliges us to question *how* we come to know what we know about history and re-examine what we take to be fact. As François Pitavy points out, Quentin and Shreve end up “abolishing the gap between narration and story.”¹⁰⁶ This gap can be characterized as Foucault’s discrepancy that official history creates between historical and personal memory. Quentin and Shreve’s narrative becomes, in the Foucauldian sense, an immediate vision of the past that “examines what is closest in abrupt dispossession”¹⁰⁷ and disrupts the singular narrative of official history.

In addition to writing *Absalom* in a postmodern, metafictional fashion, Faulkner also creates characters who skeptically regard the myths that enforce official southern history. For example, Quentin’s personal transformation echoes that of Bayard Sartoris. In the ten years between *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner demonstrated a clear shift in his portrayal of southern history and memory. In particular, he became decidedly more confident in his challenge to the Sartoris code. Doreen Fowler points out that this shift was also exemplified in part by Quentin Compson’s evolution from *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) to *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). In *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin remembers the past with nostalgia and considers his grandfather the epitome of southern

white patriarchy. For Quentin, his grandfather is what Fowler calls the transcendental signifier,¹⁰⁸ the prototype of perfection through which he can beat time and reclaim lost ideals. Quentin strives to emulate his grandfather by perpetuating patriarchal myths, specifically through his fierce battle to preserve his sister's purity. He fails consistently at this objective, which could be read as Faulkner's early references to the South's crumbling orders; in any case, Quentin regards the ideals of the South with nostalgia and esteem. However, in *Absalom*, Quentin takes a more critical approach to the past. Fowler writes that *Absalom* "interrogates the South's master narrative—the patriarchal order—in a way that *The Sound and the Fury* does not."¹⁰⁹ By undermining the notion of white patriarchy in *Absalom*, which Quentin idealizes in *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner also, by implication, interrogates southern historical memory.

"*Tell about the South,*" Shreve says. "*What's it like there. What do they do there*" (AA 142). As Quentin prepares to respond to Shreve's commands, he initially relies on southern mythology to imagine Sutpen's story. When Faulkner's omniscient third-person narrator interjects into the story, we learn that "it would not matter here that the time had been winter in that garden.... It did not matter to them (Quentin and Shreve) anyway... what faces and what names they called themselves and were called by so long as the blood coursed—the blood, the immortal brief recent intransient blood which could hold honor above sloth unregret and love above fat and easy shame" (AA 236-37). This narrator seems critical of Quentin and Shreve's projections. Quentin and Shreve construct the story of Sutpen based on the same southern myths that Bayard Sartoris inherited—myths of honor, redemption, patriarchy and blood. The narrator frequently describes Quentin and Shreve "becoming" Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon, "two of them,

then four, then two again” (AA 275) and in their vicarious imaginings, they remember the “mounting tide of the names of lost battles” and the generals who “gallantly set fire to and destroy a million dollar garrison of enemy supplies” (AA 276). Rather than approaching the past critically, Quentin and Shreve seem to build their conceptions of the Sutpen story based on the southern cultural myths of endurance, perseverance, and violence because to them, that is all that mattered. Faulkner’s narrator also draws attention to the ways in which Quentin’s personal memories come into the story. Interrupting his father’s monologue, Quentin thinks, “*you were not listening, because you knew it all already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it... so that what your father was saying did not tell you anything so much as it struck, word by word, the resonant strings of remembering*” (AA 172). Again, Quentin’s automatic and inherited conceptions of mythology influence the way he tells his story. Much like Faulkner himself according to traditional critics, Quentin is at first unable to divorce himself from cultural prescriptions of the South—those stories he “knew already” from simply “having been born.” However, by the end of the novel, Quentin shows a moment of doubt and defiance that undermines the myths that order the South.

As Faulkner’s narrator persistently reminds us, Quentin and Shreve’s reconstruction of the Sutpen story relies heavily on cultural traditions of honor, glory, and patriarchy. Once the boys arrive at the end of their story, in which Jim Bond is the “one nigger left” running around the burned Sutpen’s Hundred, Shreve makes a prediction: “I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere” (AA 302). Shreve envisages a South that loses its relentless and futile battle to preserve its

traditions. After Shreve's prediction, Quentin does not disagree. Instead, he reacts in a sort of frantic denial and exclaims, "*I don't hate it! I don't hate it!*" (AA 303). Quentin seems to suspect, after Shreve's look into the South's future, that the myths that govern his memories of the past and understanding of the present may be compromised by the "Jim Bonds of the world," which is why he defends the South in a panic. When he and Shreve imagine the fate of Thomas Sutpen, which involves the eminent failure of the white patriarchal design in a world ruled by Jim Bonds, Quentin appears to acknowledge the necessity reevaluating his notions of the past. In a manner reminiscent of Bayard's renunciation of the Sartoris code, Quentin demonstrates what Fowler sees as a transformation from his earlier espousal of white patriarchy and female purity in *The Sound and the Fury* to this moment of doubt regarding the stability of the southern white patriarchal order.

Faulkner further undercuts the notion of white patriarchy by creating an extended metaphor for southern mythology that he destroys in the end: Thomas Sutpen. At the University of Virginia, Faulkner remarked, "the curse is slavery, which is an intolerable condition."¹¹⁰ He admits that the South is cursed, and importantly, the curse was not a condition imposed by the North but a moral flaw of the South's own making. The curse of the South in *Absalom* is represented by Sutpen's plantation and his "design." As Faulkner said, "Sutpen is to be pitied. He was not depraved—he was amoral, he was ruthless, completely self-centered. To me he is to be pitied, as anyone who ignores man is to be pitied, who does not believe that he belongs as a member of a human family, is to be pitied."¹¹¹ The curse of the South, which is represented in Sutpen's ruthless commitment to his design and his eventual downfall at the hands of Wash Jones, is the

essence of Faulkner's critique of southern official history. Like Rushdie's "new India" contrived in terms of national history, Faulkner's Sutpen plantation is founded on the myths of white patriarchy and family dynasty.

Sutpen's plantation, like the nations of India and Pakistan, emerges suddenly and as a result of an ideology or "design." Most scholars agree that Sutpen's design is essentially his plan to build a plantation and have a legitimate son, thus acquiring both an estate and a dynasty. Fowler writes, "Sutpen's innocence is precisely his childish, naïve belief in the cultural fiction that the patriarch in the big white house is autonomous and incomplete."¹¹² After being sent to use the back door as a child, Sutpen resolves to prove himself by becoming someone with enough power and status never to be turned away again. Committed to achieving the design and redeeming the humiliation he felt as a child, Sutpen arrives in Jefferson unannounced, and by the force of sheer will, a "band of wild niggers" (AA 4), and the conquest of virgin land, he conjures a plantation out of the earth. Rosa Coldfield, Faulkner's first narrator, describes Sutpen's arrival with bitterness. She says, "*He came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band of strange niggers and built a plantation*" (AA 5). It seems as if the suddenness of Sutpen's arrival is what upsets her, much like the way the abrupt delineation of Pakistan disrupted and displaced the people who lived there. She also expresses anger and incredulity at the insubstantiality of his plantation and the ambiguity of his past. As Quentin learns, "He rode into town out of no discernible past and acquired his land no one knew how and built his house, his mansion, apparently out of nothing" (AA 7). Sutpen works tirelessly, without question, to achieve "respectability": the all-encompassing value system that includes the plantation, house, and wife. According to

Rosa, “he did want, not the anonymous wife and the anonymous children, but the two names, the stainless wife and the unimpeachable father-in-law, on the license, the patent” (AA 39). The ideal of having Ellen and her children—specifically, her sons—is simply the means used to achieve his elusive “design.”

Sutpen’s flaw is his unwillingness to quit, his steadfastness to his design, and his inability to admit that his design is flawed. Rosa characterizes him as “a man with valor and strength but without pity or honor” (AA 13). Sutpen lacks all of the southern qualities Faulkner values, such as fidelity, devotion, rectitude, and honor, while possessing the ones he hates, particularly cruelty, selfishness, and innocence. Worst of all, Sutpen is “completely the slave of his secret and furious impatience...that fever mental or physical, of a need for haste, of time fleeing beneath him” (AA 25). In addition to impatience, Sutpen also has “that quality of gaunt and tireless driving” (AA 27). According to Mr. Compson, “Anyone could look at him and say, *given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything*” (AA 35). Sutpen’s will, ruthlessness, and need for haste are so destructive because they delude him and prevented him from questioning his design. As Quentin’s grandfather recalls, Sutpen declares, “I set out to acquire these, asking no favor of any man” (AA 212). Sutpen resolves to achieve, by any means necessary, the elements required to establish a white patriarchal order, and he never for a moment realizes the faults of that order. This failure is the essence, in Faulkner’s words, of the “curse of the South.”

As a result of his failure to yield, to admit defeat, and realize that the myths of patriarchy and dynasty he held as truth needed to be criticized, Sutpen continues to make the same mistakes after the war. When his plantation is destroyed, he tries to build it up

again. Rosa recalls that “*he would begin at once to salvage what was left of Sutpen’s Hundred and restore it*” (AA 124). Indeed, after the war, Sutpen “*brought with him the desire to restore the place to what it had been that he had sacrificed pity and gentleness and love and all the soft virtues for*” (AA 124). Even when the South is ravaged by the war, Sutpen continues to pursue his ideal plantation. Rosa notes that unlike many southerners, Sutpen does not admit defeat after the war. Instead, he continues to pursue his design and ignores its apparent faults, most obviously the realities of emancipation and miscegenation. He still refuses to question his design or admit that it is impossible in the postbellum South. Instead, he does the opposite. He insists that “*if every man in the South would do as he himself was doing, would see to the restoration of his own land*” (AA 130). Sutpen’s expectations echo the rhetoric of the Lost Cause. He believes that a commitment to white traditionalism will redeem the defeat of the Confederacy. His old tirelessness does not leave him after the war. Sutpen continues to pursue his design and the ideals of white patriarchy and dynasty. Even when they fail, he clings to them. “*No matter what happened to him now, he would at least retain that shell of Sutpen’s Hundred even though a better name for it would now be Sutpen’s One*” (AA 136).

Quentin and Shreve later speculate that Sutpen’s innocence was the reason for his insatiable will and unrelenting desire to build and rebuild his plantation despite the inevitability of its destruction and its lost cause. By innocence, Faulkner means susceptibility to cultural mythology and the patriarchal order. As a child growing up in West Virginia, Sutpen is at first unaware of the orders of plantation life, such as slave holding, white patriarchy, and racial hierarchies. As Quentin and Shreve speculate, “He had never even heard of, never imagined, a place, a land divided neatly up and actually

owned by men.... Where he lived the land belonged to anybody and everybody” (AA 179). In his youth, Sutpen is unaware of southern mythology. He doesn’t understand the importance of ownership or respectability or public reputation. Yet when his family moves to Tidewater Virginia, he learns the difference between white people who have and white people who don’t have (AA 183). He learns the necessity of having a history and having roots. Many scholars have noted that Hegel’s master-slave dialectic is discernible in the novel, particularly because Sutpen pursues slave domination in order to achieve recognition.¹¹³ Yet these values are acquired, not innate. His obsession with “designing” a plantation is entirely the result of his encounter with southern ideas of social hierarchy and slave holding. As Faulkner writes, “He had hardly heard of such a world until he fell into it” (AA 180). Like the citizens of India and Pakistan, Sutpen fell into his design as they fell into their new nations: by chance. And like the subsequent politicians and citizens of India and Pakistan who had to justify their new nation with relentless commitment to achieving the two-nation theory, Sutpen too must fulfill his design with fierce and calculating determination. Sutpen’s design, like the nations of India and Pakistan, seems to happen accidentally, and his ruthlessness is his effort to carry out the accident and justify its happening.

Achieving the design, however, is ultimately unsuccessful. When Sutpen loses his sons, his dynastic hopes are shattered, and his innocence quickly turns into despair. After his futile attempts to restore Sutpen’s Hundred, his tirelessness and shrewdness suddenly stop. Faulkner writes:

The shrewdness acquired in excruciating driblets through the fifty years suddenly capitulant and retroactive or suddenly sprouting and flowing like a seed lain fallow in a vacuum.... And then the shrewdness failed him again. It broke down, it vanished into that old impotent logic and morality which had betrayed him before.... And he realized that there was more in his problem than just lack of time, that the problem contained

some super-distillation of this lack. (AA 223)

Sutpen finally realizes that rebuilding the plantation is impossible. It is not that he fails to make haste or fails to reach his design—it is the design itself that is flawed because it relies on a patriarchal order “cursed” by slavery and the realities of racial mixing. As a result, Sutpen launches into abject despair. He becomes self-destructive and desperate, surrendering to alcoholism with Wash Jones. Fowler calls Jones the counterpoint to Sutpen’s innocence.¹¹⁴ While Sutpen refuses to question the myths that compose his design, Jones dismantles the southern myth of white patriarchy—literally, with a rusted scythe. Sutpen’s death at the hands of Wash Jones is the iconic image of *Absalom* and serves as Faulkner’s metaphor for the futility of ‘reconstructing’ the history of the old South and his implication that the myths and ideals that make up that history must necessarily be destroyed.

By examining two iconic images in Faulkner’s works—Bayard’s renunciation of his family’s code and Sutpen’s death at the hands of Wash Jones—we see how Faulkner breaks down the cultural mythologies that make up the historical memory of the South. While older critics such as Cowley have interpreted Faulkner’s works as one uniform story of southern myths and legends, recent critics have taken a more postmodern, Foucauldian perspective that conceives Faulkner as a skeptic. In *The Unvanquished*, Bayard chooses to go against the codes of violent redemption, which were enshrined by the Dunning School and popular culture at the time. In *Absalom*, Faulkner experiments with metafiction and makes the presence of the immediate past and narrative imagination the vehicles through which we receive the history of Sutpen and the South. He ends the novel with Quentin’s moment of doubt about previous cultural myths he espoused in *The Sound and the Fury*. Finally, he creates a character, Thomas Sutpen, who fails to achieve

his “design,” itself erroneously reliant on the structuring orders of white patriarchy and dynasty. By interrogating these southern cultural myths in his novels, Faulkner compels us, as critical readers, to reimagine the southern past in a dynamic way that is constantly being reworked to fit the present.

We have so far considered the ways in which Rushdie may have emulated Faulkner’s narrative styles in *Midnight’s Children*. Saleem’s self-interrogation, faulty memories, collaboration with his audience, and intersections of multiple retellings from the past are all instances that echo the story-telling methods of Quentin Compson. Importantly, these metafictional techniques serve, for both authors, as strategies to illuminate and interrogate the exceptionalist official histories of the Global South. In *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie, through his protagonist Saleem, exposes the problem of selective memory and a singular past in Indian political discourse. In *Shame* (1983), Rushdie addresses the same issue in Pakistan.

Shame chronicles life in “Q,” a border town in what Rushdie calls “not quite Pakistan.”¹¹⁵ Like the Indian nationalists, Pakistani politicians such as Zia al-Haq reimagined the history of their nation to fit the singular narrative of “Pakistan Ideology.” In postmodern reimaginings, however, Pakistan, like India, is part of a long, multitudinous past. Rushdie writes, “The place was insufficiently imagined, a picture full of irreconcilable elements, midriffbaring immigrant saris versus demure, indigenous Sindhi salwar kurtas, Urdu versus Punjabi, now versus then” (*Shame* 86). The problem of history, as we have seen, is not one of reconciling these elements but of selecting some and erasing the rest. As Rushdie writes, “To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani

Standard Time” (*Shame* 86). Forced to create itself in terms of national history, Pakistan had to be entirely reconceived as separate from India. What was originally supposed to be a place within India turned into a territory distinct from India. In Foucauldian terms, Pakistan’s “emergence” designated a “place of confrontation—a non-place, a pure distance, which indicates that the adversaries do not belong to a common space.”¹¹⁶

Pakistan, though in reality culturally synonymous with India, suddenly had to be an *opposing* national culture. Such a transformation was bounded to the white mythology of historicity. In order to illustrate the mythological nature of Pakistan’s history, Rushdie presents his version of the nation as limited and artificial. Moreover, two of Rushdie’s main characters are migrants who abandon memories of their pasts and seek to redefine themselves. Two others are political leaders whom Rushdie exposes through peripheral stories that contradict the official histories of their lives. Thus, in *Shame*, Rushdie uses his personal narrative voice, the rootless characters Omar Khayyam and Bilquis Hyder, and the disruptive secrets of Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa to present history—specifically, the national history of Pakistan—as something fantastical and contrived.

Much as Saleem interrupts his story to give disclaimers about what he knows and remembers, Rushdie himself, who narrates the story in *Shame*, admits that he has a limited ability to state facts. As an Indian-born man who spent most of his life in England, Rushdie narrates his Pakistan story from a distance, giving it multiple degrees of separation from factual accuracy. He makes no claim to truth as a narrator. Early on, he gives this postmodern, non-authoritative disclaimer: “The present author, who has already been obliged to leave many questions in a state of unanswered ambiguity, is capable of giving clear replies when absolutely necessary” (*Shame* 11). By taking

personal responsibility for the narrative rather than presenting the façade of third-person omniscience, Rushdie distances himself from actual events. He demonstrates Foucault's idea of the multiplicity of truths. According to Aamir Mufti, "This sudden appearance between the reader and the plot of the novel, aside from insisting on the right to critique, *personalizes* the novel's critical intention, adding a confrontational tone."¹¹⁷ This personal distance is especially important for Rushdie's portrayal of Pakistan as an impossible place. Rushdie, in a manner reminiscent of his perforated sheet metaphor, admits, "I have learned Pakistan in slices.... I must reconcile myself to the inevitability of the missing bits" (*Shame* 66). As a removed artist, Rushdie can give no authority on the actuality of Pakistan. *Shame* is rife with disclaimers, suggesting that like most people, the author cannot accurately depict Pakistan as a real place.

Using his personal voice, Rushdie also seems to evoke Gilmer's theories of migration and Partition violence. He explicitly states that migrants, because they have to leave their homes and start new lives, must reconceive their pasts in order to create new nations. Rushdie tells his audience, "We [migrants] have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from time....I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I too, face the problem to history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change" (*Shame* 85-86). In the modern historical discourses dominated by national heritage, crossing borders means leaving history behind. It means relinquishing heritage and creating 'imaginary' countries out of nowhere. Rushdie further supports this point by creating two migrant

characters, Omar Khayyam and Bilquis, who both leave their pasts behind and seek newness, much as most Pakistanis did after Partition.

Omar Khayyam, Rushdie's protagonist, is born magically of three mothers into a mansion that he is never allowed to leave. Growing up, he wishes only to escape the time vacuum of this house where "despite all the rotting-down of the past, nothing new seemed capable of growth" (*Shame* 24). Seeking to be free, Omar never sleeps, and instead works tirelessly to destroy his own past. While trapped in Nishapur he "explored beyond history" and found "disembodied feelings, the choking fumes of ancient hopes, fears, loves" (*Shame* 25). In his home rife with the ghosts of the past, Omar literally destroys his family's heirlooms. Rushdie writes of Omar's late-night killing-sprees: "'Take that,' he screeched amidst the corpses of his useless, massacred history, 'take that, old stuff!'" (*Shame* 26). Much like the Pakistanis who used violence to eradicate the Indian past in their new nation, Omar seeks revenge on his history. Rushdie illustrates through Omar Khayyam the problem of historical memory that troubles all Pakistanis: a new nation requires a new past, and the past is something that does not just go away—it needs to be destroyed. As Rushdie will later write in *The Satanic Verses* (1988): "To be born again, first you have to die."¹¹⁸

Rushdie's other protagonist, Bilquis, also experiences this metaphorical death and rebirth. She grows up in Delhi, the ancient Indian city founded on layers of intersecting histories. In what Rushdie suggests is the year 1947, young Bilquis watches as terrorists blow up her father's cinema. The blast strips her of her family, clothing, and heritage. Standing naked in the Delhi streets, Bilquis is suddenly like a lost, newborn baby. Like many Muslims during Partition, she is forced by circumstance to be a refugee, to leave

Delhi and find a new home. Rushdie writes of Bilquis's situation, "It is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers upon whom they see the rich clothing, the brocades of continuity, the eyebrows of belonging" (*Shame* 60). Bilquis moves to Pakistan and marries Raza Hyder, Rushdie's fictional representation of General Zia al-Haq. As a strident general enforcing the nationalism of a new country, Raza offers Bilquis permanence. Rushdie writes, "She, rootless Bilquis, who now longed for stability, for no-more explosions, had discerned in Raza a boulder-like quality on which she would build her life" (*Shame* 64). In a new country, Bilquis marries this new man, starts a new history and a new life. Furthermore, her in-laws adopt her into their family for a brief period, and her identity becomes solidified when they give her a story. Her past gets retold, which offers even more stability to her life. Rushdie writes, "'The recounting of histories,' Raza told his wife, 'is for us a rite of blood'" (*Shame* 74). Memory and reimagining, then, serve as ways to rebuild the firmness, identity, and commonality that Bilquis violently loses during Partition.

While Omar Khayyam and Bilquis Hyder are Rushdie's peripheral heroes, Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa are the centerpieces of the story—that is, their stories dominate the discourse of Q's politics. Iskander and Raza represent the Pakistani leaders Zulfikar Bhutto and Zia ul-Haq, respectively. Consistent with official history, these men are seen as the forces that define Pakistan's history by incorporating democracy and Islamism into their politics. As Foucault writes, "Demagoguery must be masked under the cloak of universals."¹¹⁹ Iskander and Raza, as mere demagogues, are defined not by their individual stories but rather by the 'universals' of their politics: democracy and Islamism. Rushdie shows how these political philosophies, like nationhood itself, are

merely myths that obscure the equally important underside of Pakistani politics: evil and corruption. Rushdie sets up the binary between good and evil: “This opposition—the epicure against the puritan—is the true dialect of history. Forget left-right, capitalism-socialism, black-white. Virtue versus vice, ascetic versus bawd, God against the Devil: that’s the game” (*Shame* 255). He then claims that his political giants occupy *both* sides of the binary: “Isky and Raza. They too, were Danpierre and Robeston” (*Shame* 256). These men are both good and evil, but national historiography obscures that reality by providing only one, totalizing narrative. In order to fit into the mythic purity and infallibility of democracy and Islamism, Hyder and Harappa must deliberately hide the evil undersides of their own lives.

When Iskander Harappa assumes power as head of the People’s Party, his reputation flourishes. He goes down in history as “a legend,” (*Shame* 185) and proclaims, “I am hope” (*Shame* 189) and “I am the incarnation of the people’s love” (*Shame* 193). Isky’s self-definition causes a rift between the official, public history defined by nationalist politics and the peripheral, private reality. On the surface, Isky seems to fall into history’s favor. Rushdie personifies history as a woman who favors the powerful by stating, “History is natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance...the weak, the anonymous, the defeated leave few marks. History loves only those who dominate her: it is a relationship of mutual enslavement” (*Shame* 127). As a man in power, Isky’s political identity as legendary, hopeful, and well loved is all that female “History” notices; she turns a blind eye to the so-called mutant versions. And History is not the only deluded one. Arjumand Harappa, Rushdie’s allegorical figure representing Benazir Bhutto, the daughter who would eventually revive the People’s

Party, also sits mesmerized by her father's glory, "watching Isky complete the process of remaking himself" (*Shame* 129). She thinks to herself, "*They could never forgive him for his power of inspiring love.*" Arjumand, like most Pakistanis reflecting on national history, "allows her remembering mind to transmute the preserved fragments of the past into the gold of myth" (*Shame* 189). In this sense, nationalist optimism obscures Foucault's counter-memory; it conceals the peripheral stories that are left out of the official historical narrative.

Unlike Arjumand, Isky's wife Rani is unconvinced by this nationalistic myth and instead exposes what constitutes her husband underneath his democratic shroud. During her house arrest at Mohenjo, Rani knits a series of shawls that depict her memories of Iskander: "Locked in their trunk, they said unspeakable things, which nobody wanted to hear" (*Shame* 201). The various shawls reveal the gaps in Iskander's public history. They bring to light his concubines, violence, torture, corruption, conspiracy, and international shame, culminating in the 'allegorical shawl,' which shows an impersonation of democracy strangling him. Ironically, the man who brings democracy to Pakistan dies in its grips. Far different from Arjumand's idealistic image of hope, Rani characterizes her husband as "The assassin of possibility" (*Shame* 204). She tells Arjumand, "yes, I know, you have made a saint of him, my daughter, you swallowed everything he dished out...how selective, Arjumand, your ears" (*Shame* 203). Rushdie here expresses the dependency that exists between memory and history. Personal memory and public history work together to complete Isky's past. The mythic nationalism that depicts Isky as a political legend offers the official, public history of Isky's life, while his wife's memory fills in the gaps with the 'mutant versions' that no

one wants to hear—the evil that complements the good, the postmodern multiplicity of truths.

While Iskander Harappa obscures his sinister realities beneath the shroud of democracy, Raza Hyder hides behind the official platform of Islamism and moral authority. After staging a coup to oust Harappa as president, Hyder appears on national television. Rushdie writes, “He was kneeling on a prayer mat, holding his ears and reciting Quranic verses, then he rose from his devotions to address the nation. What, leatherbound and wrapped in silk, gave credibility to his oath? The memory of the Holy Book refused to fade” (*Shame* 240). Like Harappa, who offers democracy, Raza Hyder revives the hope of his nation by politicizing religion. He is, in reality, a contradictory moral character, but he creates a façade of spiritual stability, a new myth by which Pakistan can define itself. Rushdie, usurping the role as narrator, inserts his own commentary on the issue by stating that Pakistan was never meant to be a “mullah-dominated society” (*Shame* 266). Consistent with the arguments of Gilmartin, Rushdie claims that even for Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the father of Pakistan, the Muslim state was a cultural ideology, not a political strategy. Rushdie writes, “So-called ‘fundamentalism’ does not spring, in Pakistan, from the people. It is imposed from above” (*Shame* 266). In order to perpetuate nationalist historiography, Pakistan’s Zia, fictionalized as Raza Hyder, needs to offer a new mythology, a new metanarrative, a new authoritative dictatorship. Democracy, Islamism—they served the same purpose. As Foucault writes, “Humanity does not gradually progress until it arrives at universal reciprocity; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination.”¹²⁰

Like Harappa, Raza Hyder has an evil underside, which Rushdie highlights in order to crack the monolith of national history and present a multiplicity of truths. As president, Raza is haunted by “the monologue of the hanged man.” He hears Isky’s incessant voice in his ear, reminding him of his own shame—the coup, the corruption, his own godlessness and hypocrisy. He is also haunted by the exorcism of his own daughter. Sufiya Zinobia, whom Rushdie calls “the embodiment of shame,” becomes possessed by “the Beast” on multiple occasions, particularly when her family members fail to feel shame. Raza tries to subdue Sufiya and thus obscure his own shamelessness by resorting to violence. He drugs her and hides her in the attic, as if forcibly trying to erase his own past, to take control of his reputation and official history by eliminating her. Eventually, she escapes, and Raza becomes aware of the inevitability of his own doom. He thinks, “‘Shame should come to me.’ Now that she was gone his thoughts were plagued by her.... Somehow, sometime, she would drag him down” (*Shame* 259). Indeed, when the secret gets out that Sufiya, the President’s daughter, has embarked on a murderous rampage, Raza is forced to flee the country under a burqa.

Perhaps influenced by Faulkner’s Sutpen plantation, Rushdie’s *Shame* presents Pakistan as a fantasy, an imaginary place removed from reality by the demands of nationalist historiography. Because its original purpose was not national, Pakistan’s accidental birth as a territorial state compelled its citizens to violently destroy all ties to Indian heritage, to rewrite their pasts and forge a new and distinct cultural identity. This identity, however, is a delusion. It is founded on Young’s cultural mythology of ontological imperialism and the resulting specific, exclusionary historical memory. Furthermore, this historical exceptionalism was enforced in Zia’s public school system

under his agenda of “Pakistan Ideology,” which further deepened the disparity between the ideal and the real. Rushdie reveals Pakistan’s incongruities in his novel by self-consciously demystifying his own narrative voice and by showing the death and rebirth of two major characters, and the evil undersides of two others. He illustrates how the territorial, nationalistic boundaries imposed on South Asia by modern historical discourse and the deliberate separation of Pakistan from the Indian historical narrative caused the ensuing Pakistan identity to be founded on imagination and unreality.

Concluding Remarks

In 2006, Rushdie ran his hands over Faulkner’s typewriter at Rowan Oak. What dazzled him? Tierno Monenembo called it the “art of questioning,” and as we have seen, the most striking way in which Rushdie perpetuates Faulkner’s influence is through the interrogation of official history and cultural mythology. Faulkner and Rushdie both adopt postmodern forms of metafiction in their works to evoke a dynamic and multifarious presence of the past. Faulkner employs these strategies in *The Unvanquished* and *Absalom, Absalom!* in order to contest the southern popular myths of family honor, redemptive violence, and the preservation of white patriarchy that enforced the exceptional, official history represented by the Dunning School. Rushdie uses the same techniques in *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame* to dispute the myths of cultural singularity that promote the exclusionary national narratives of *Hindutva* and Pakistan ideology. In short, it is the idea of an exceptional past—of one unified, singular narrative that selectively evaluates memory, homogenizes the historical experience, and totalizes

identity in terms of exclusionary separatism—which Faulkner and Rushdie aim to question.

This parallel, I hope, will advance our understanding of global intertextuality. By reading these two authors together and examining the ways in which they pursue the same objectives, we can further strengthen connections within the Global South. Previous studies have illuminated the ways in which writers from postcolonial societies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa evoke the experiences of occupation, defeat, modernization, and a mythological past that have grieved Faulkner. Through a further comparison of Faulkner with Rushdie, we can see how the American South also shares the experience of exceptional historical memory with South Asia. By widening our historical gaze and looking at the South, India, and Pakistan not as distinct regions, but as places that participate in global trends, we can undermine the idea of exceptionalism itself.

Notes

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⁸Tierno Monenembo, “Faulkner and Me,” in *Global Faulkner: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, 2006 ed. Annette Trefzer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 183.

⁹*Ibid.*

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