“Numbers, too, have significance”: Annotating Salman Rushdie

Vijay Mishra

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Abstract

Strictly speaking, annotations do not belong to the discipline of bibliography, that is, if we follow its reading by three of the masters of the discipline: Ronald B. McKerrow, W. W. Greg and Fredson Bowers. Bibliography, in their definitions, is a scientific activity aimed at the construction of text as a “material” object. It has guiding principles that govern the quest for the “definitive” text where words are primarily iconic or indexical signs. To gloss words and sentences in support of a variant reading is a necessary evil, not something which is part of its formal principles. If textual bibliography were to accommodate some notion of annotations, as “bibliographie de l’érudit”, then we need to make a case for annotation as an essential feature of the bibliographer’s exercise. This essay declares the legitimacy of annotation because it establishes the value of words well beyond the iconic or the indexical (the hitherto definition of the bibliographer’s object of reading). To explore this the article examines the use, in particular, of “numerology” in Salman Rushdie, annotates at length four numbers, and makes a case for their value in the organizational and thematic patterns of his novels. It is argued that numbers are also part of Rushdie’s interest in “affects” insofar as for Rushdie numbers are prior to cognition, they pre-exist consciousness and are not so much created as discovered. They also enter into the affective domain of being and are signs of the body’s visceral intensities as well as an index of its nonvolitional proclivities. In making the annotations the essay also explores the importance of intercultural annotations by giving the example of pre-colonial Indian scholarship.

Keywords affect theory, annotations, numerology, postcolonial, Salman Rushdie, textual bibliography

Not all texts are equally “annotatable” or are legitimate objects of scholarly annotation. Often canonical texts or those whose history pushes them to the forefront in any given moment (a document which is being subjected to revisionist historiography such as the Treaty of Waitangi, or a text like the 1818 version of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, which is prized out of its erstwhile Gothic nomenclature and is subjected to radical feminist critique) are the ones which are more readily candidates for annotation. As a textual procedure, annotations have had a bad press largely because the three great masters of textual bibliography — Ronald B. McKerrow (1939), W. W. Greg (1954), and Fredson Bowers (1949) — felt that annotations did not help the textual or analytical bibliographer whose scholarly work, undertaken very much along empirical lines, was aimed at producing an edition which “should approach as closely as the extant material allows to a fair copy, made by the author himself, ... in the form which he intended finally to give [it]” (McKerrow, 1939: 6). Annotations, if any, were limited to establishing, as the Shakespeare scholar Alice Walker observed in her criticism of the bibliographical procedure, the correct reading by looking at the transmission of the text. In the procedure, she added, “palaeography would serve as the main tool in emendation” (1957: 96).
In recent decades the practice of including annotations as part of textual bibliography have been strongly defended by Atkinson (1980), Battestin (1981), Wall (1982), Jack (1982), Small (1986), McKenzie (1999), and by contributors to the Barney edited volume (1991). In the absence of the kind of definitional finality for textual bibliography found in “Greg’s rationale of the copy-text” (Battestin, 1981: 4), these textual critics, drawing upon Friedman’s early essay (1942) and echoing the unease shown by Alice Walker, raise “annotative” paradigms with their own principles of “bibliographie de l’érudit” (the bibliography of the scholar) (Atkinson, 1980: 73) above the “bibliographie du bibliographe” (the bibliography of the bibliographer). The “bibliographie de l’érudit” definition of textual scholarship would find space for “notes of recovery” (knowledge available to an author’s contemporaries, reading texts as the “original audience read it” [Jack, 1982: 323] or annotations which would provide the reader with information that would make her both her own contemporary and that of the author [Small]), “explanatory notes” (knowledge derived from an author’s complete works), as well as notes concerning text-ideology against author-ideology (Wall gives the example of a passage in Chapter 6 of Dombey and Son which dealt with the effects of railway development on Staggs’s Gardens).

When an annotator takes up the task of annotating the texts of Salman Rushdie, where “recovery”, “explanatory”, and “ideological” notes would all be essential, the first question is “Why Rushdie?” Two types of defence may be presented. The first defence is clearly on grounds of aesthetic value in as much as Rushdie is the postcolonial writer par excellence, who after the “Booker of Bookers” accolade may well be the grand candidate for any rethinking of a would-be postcolonial canon. Here “canon”/“canonical” is not meant to imply absolute artistic value along some morally defined cultural principle; rather it is a notation for circulation and dissemination in as much as Rushdie now occupies an important place in both postcolonial and postmodernist literary syllabi. The second defence is a matter of cultural and political capital. In the wake especially of the fatwa against him, Rushdie has become more than just a writer, since around this figure have congealed larger debates well beyond the question of the place of the writer in the modern world. If we add to these Rushdie’s formal contribution to the genre of fiction itself — combining the popular with the canonical and thereby rethinking the old “ancients versus moderns” battle of the books (we return to the satirist Jonathan Swift here) — we begin to grasp the manner in which, in a sense, culture “authorizes” us to annotate Rushdie. And so does Rushdie himself, because his corpus is a synopsis of annotations that require the reader to expand on the author’s own annotations as well as provide annotations for those items which, given the current postcolonial unease with glossary, it is for readers themselves to selectively annotate. Here we may want to deploy Traugott Lawler’s observation on medieval annotations in respect of commentaries on Walter Map’s Dissuasio Valerii: “When they [the writers] follow the impulse to say, they annotate themselves; when they follow the impulse to leave unsaid, they give others the opportunity to annotate them”. Using Lawler’s words further, we may add, “Thus [Rushdie] on the one hand constructs his text as self-annotation, and on the other fills it with unexplained allusions. And both impulses validate annotation, the first directly by actually annotating, the second by leaving a void that must be filled” (Lawler, quoted in Barney, 1991: 97–8). In the case of Rushdie the writer himself invites annotations by undertaking self-annotation in a number of places. These instances of self-annotation often function as a commentary on the narrative at that point in time. The annotations, however, require cross-cultural and multilingual referencing and necessitate a quick look at what Indian culture itself has had to say about textual bibliography and annotations.
In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (the *OED*) the agential form of the word “annotation” — “annotator” — is given an interesting defining quote from the early Orientalist Henry Thomas Colebrooke’s observation on Sanskrit textual annotators (1808): “A crowd of annotators whose works expound every passage in the original gloss”. Colebrooke’s reference to “a crowd of annotators” points to an annotating principle which was the dominant form of textual criticism in pre-colonial India. The annotator in this reading of his craft was an interpreter if not a co-author of the text, written or oral. The defining feature here, as is clear from the transmission of the great Hindu epics, was a different, anti-auratic reading of text and author, both of which were seen as collective products of culture. The commentary on two verses of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, the sixth book of the *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa*, may be given as an instance of the role of annotations (and the annotator) in Indian culture. In the critical edition of the text (1971) there are two references to *kṛṣṇa* [Krishna]: the first is in *sarga* (canto) 105, verse 14, the second in *sarga* 105, verse 25. In both these instances Rāma is referred to as Krishna (*devaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ*) which is clearly an anachronism since Krishna is a later avatar of Lord Vishnu and therefore came after Rāma. To correct this anomaly most commentators (Govindarāja, Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa, Mādhava Yogīndra, for instance) read *kṛṣṇa* not as a proper noun but as an adjective (“of immense strength”) suggesting that upon Rāma’s victory over Rāvaṇa, the gods commended him on his immense power because he “had the ability to uphold the entire universe” (*Vālmiki*, 2009: 1448). Clearly these commentators, in attempting to defend sanctified religious chronology, discount textual transmission and contamination, the fact that the final version of the *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa* was composed after the stories of Krishna had become part of culture. In this reading annotations constitute a crucial component of Sanskrit textual criticism because without them the text itself is incomplete.

The Colebrooke citation is especially productive and indeed salutary in any serious exercise in cross-cultural annotation, especially with respect to Rushdie, whose own narrative form invariably suggests some understanding of Indian commentarial traditions and interest in comparative lexicography. In *The Satanic Verses* (1988; SV 459) he silently corrects the erroneous connection between “babble” (chatter, confusion of languages) and “Babel” (the Biblical tower) by giving the latter its correct etymology: “a contraction of the Assyrian ‘babilu’. ‘The gate of God’”. Rushdie, the “author of the main text, the God of the footnoted text”, thus enslaves the annotator and drags him into “a sort of ethics or politics of interpretation” (Derrida, quoted in *Barney*, 1991: 196), where some familiarity with cross-cultural annotative practices is required. What the ethics and politics of interpretation are and how an annotator works with the Rushdie corpus may be addressed, in this brief introductory essay, with a challenging reference to something which on the face of it would require no annotation: the use of numbers in Rushdie and his interest in numerology.

“*Numbers, too, have significance*” (*MC* 212)

Any reader would be struck by the profusion of numbers in Rushdie. What could these numbers mean? It seems traps are put in place for the reader. Is Rushdie paying homage to the great Latin American magic realist Jorge Luis Borges? Is he a nut who is into esoteric numerology? As an Indian from a Muslim background, is he consciously investing himself with the persona of the great Persian-Afghan scholar-traveller Alberuni (al-Bīrūnī) who had in fact written, “the Hindus were excellent philosophers, good mathematicians and astronomers” (*Sachau*, 1888/1964: xvii)? Or is he what literary critics love to hear most: being ironic? My reading is that he is all four (though
Salman Rushdie’s turn to numerology insinuates a cultural investment in numbers and their place in an affective understanding of meaning, especially when numbers are intentionally placed in Rushdie. In the Rushdie aesthetic numbers create, through their recurrence, symbolic, narrative, and epistemological configurations. With this kind of profusion of numbers and with a quite explicit directive to the reader to engage in an interpretative exercise, the mystery of numbers deepens and numbers begin to acquire pre-cognitive function that suggests, after Carl Jung (1972), that numbers pre-exist consciousness and are not so much created (as mathematics) but discovered (as numerology). As we read the unpublished “The Book of the Peer”, we note that Rushdie was thoroughly familiar with Richard Cavendish’s *The Black Arts* (1967), a lengthy paragraph from which is quoted in the novel (199). Although the passage quoted by Rushdie refers to “the belief that you can absorb a man’s qualities by drinking his blood or eating part of his body” (Cavendish, 1984: 25) and is found in the first chapter of Cavendish’s book, it is very likely that what interested Rushdie most was the next chapter (“Chapter Two Names and Numbers”) where alphabet as well as numbers are given values.

The magic of numbers had interested a favourite writer of Rushdie, James Joyce. As the Emory Salman Rushdie Archive tells us, Rushdie is a great fan of Joyce, in whose works too numbers have an unusual proliferation and synchronicity. In his essay “The Dialectics of Bibliography Now”, D. F. McKenzie (1999: 55–76) points to Joyce’s fascination with numerology: his mother died on 13 August 1903, a poem about her called “Tilly” is placed 13th in *Pomes Penyeach* (1967; “twelve and a tilly” is a baker’s dozen) and the poem itself, inclusive of title, has 13 lines; *Ulysses*, which is set in a leap year (1904), has 366 leaves or 732 pages in its first 1922 edition. The medium of a book may be an “expressive” form with symbolic meaning requiring bibliographical annotation and attention. Numbers, then, are “*a priori* in relation to human consciousness and apparently exist[es] outside of man” (Jung, 1972: 118). Numbers behave in a certain way, and like Joyce but also, and more immediately, like Jorge Luis Borges, for Rushdie too they hold the key to the design of his works: “Numbers, too, have significance” (*MC* 212). In a direct homage to the pagination of the first edition of *Ulysses*, one of Rushdie’s favourite numbers, 420 (see entry below), occurs on page 420 of the first edition of *Midnight’s Children* (“I ask my nose; it replies, four hundred and twenty, the number of trickery and fraud”).

We may want to look at Rushdie’s fascination with numerology to theorize the use of numbers further. Numbers proliferate in the Rushdie corpus; sometimes they seem to suggest a culture’s obsession with numbers, which is often linked to its interest in the predictive powers of astrology, at other times they impart a surreal precision about historical events. Often, though, they enter into a dual coding: the narrator as the “Divine Clown” for whom any number of zeros may be added to explain a cosmic age, and the narrator as the cultural insider who simply leaves false clues. In both instances we need to remember Ian Small’s warning that a writer’s use of numerology (and other devices) may be no more than a ploy to create “textual obscurity and ambiguity” (1986: 292). In interviews at Emory University Rushdie has spoken about the use of non-English phrases and local slang as “flavouring”, adding that it is “fun to read things where you don’t know all the words”.

mercifully not a nut) and in these roles numbers are both a Rushdie discursive marker as well as nodal points that possess critical value and require annotating.
Additionally, he has also referred to James Joyce’s well-known remark that he had made Ulysses deliberately obscure so as to keep professors employed for years. In recalling Joyce’s remark Rushdie came closest to admitting consciously playing mind games on his readers (Brians, 1999: 4–5 and 2013). To extend my case that numbers in Rushdie have meaning and effects (and therefore require annotating), I turn to four numbers which have a special place in the Rushdie corpus: 101, 1,001, 420, and 30.

I begin with 101, a number that has both structural and thematic value in the Rushdie corpus. Since numbers carry a priori significance, the additional “one” extends the value towards a “good infinity” of 1, 2, 3, 4,... n... against the “bad infinity” of 1, ½, ¼,... n... Among Indians a monetary gift with an additional rupee beyond two zeros is “good infinity” and is considered auspicious. This is truer of both 101 and 1,001. 101 may be found in a number of places: “one hundred and one of the finest entertainers and conjurers India could provide” (MC365); Changez could “smell money from a hundred and one miles away” (S36); “around his neck was a garland whose one hundred and one fresh-cut flowers gave off an aroma which quite obliterated the memory-stink of the necklace of shoes which had once so narrowly missed his neck” (S54); Talvar Ulhaq remained on the critical list for 101 hours (after being attacked by Sufiya at his wedding) (S171), and so on. As we note more fully later, 101 is the dyadic or binary equivalent of the decimal 5 and functions as an “infinite number” because adding one to 100 (or indeed to any multiple of ten) in Islamic and Hindu cultures has that value. When 101 recurs of its own accord, then a pattern emerges and value (symbolic, aesthetic, thematic, ideological) may be attached to it.

A qualification is in order. Occasionally numbers are given which invite mathematical wizardry on the part of the reader. One such instance is the numbers given to Raza Hyder’s family members in Shame (S75), which although no more than an extended conceit nevertheless seduces the “ideal” reader into engaging in mathematical combinations. In the case of the numbers given to Raza Hyder’s family, it is possible through addition and subtraction to arrive at those numbers, such as 101, that recur, intentionally, in the Rushdie corpus. This is a pitfall that one should avoid except in those instances where it is clear that Rushdie is actually inviting readers to engage in mathematical combinations themselves. The point is that when a number such as 101 or 1,001 or 420 recurs, independently of a reader’s unsolicited mathematical skills, in the Rushdie corpus, then it acquires critical value and becomes an item in need of annotation.

The immediate reference to our next number, 1,001, is to The Thousand Nights and a Night/One Thousand and One Nights (or The Arabian Nights) where numbers abound (Ghazoul, 1996: 37). Changez Chamchawala’s study in fact carries “a ten-volume set of the Richard Burton translation of the Arabian Nights” (SV36). As already noted with reference to the number 101, the numbering system can be either decimal or binary (dyadic). In the dyadic or binary system of counting, only zero and one are used. In this binary system the decimal system the decimal 1 is 1 but 2 is 10, 3 is 11, 4 is 100, 5 is 101, six is 110, seven is 111, 8 is 1,000, 9 is 1,001, and so on (Ghazoul, 1996: 40). In examining the “materiality” of The Satanic Verses (the medium of the book), of special note to an annotator is the correspondence between the numbers nine (the number of cantos of the book) and 1,001. Ferial J. Ghazoul points out that the number nine figures in one of the riddles solved by Solomon, it is connected to the magical amulet with nine boxes where all the numbers in the boxes add up to 15
regardless of how they are added up (vertically, horizontally, or diagonally), and it is, according to Imam Ja’far, the number of “modalities” for interpreting the Qur’ān (Ghazoul, 1996: 40–1).

The correspondence between nine (binary or dyadic) and 1,001 (decimal) and the nine squares in the magical amulet adding up to 15 takes us to the structure of *The Satanic Verses*. There are nine cantos (or large chapters) in this book, with cantos 1, 3, 5, and 7 carrying 4, 5, 2, and 3 “inner” chapters respectively. Canto 9 though carries a single marked chapter “1” (which is not the case with cantos 2, 4, 6, and 8, which do not carry chapters within them). If we then add the designated chapters within cantos (4 + 5 + 2 + 3 + 1) they come to 15, precisely the sum of the numbers in the magical amulet. We also note that only the odd numbered cantos carry chapters, the even do not. The exception is canto 9 (titled “A Wonderful Lamp”), which only has an incongruously marked chapter one within. Nine, we have noted, is the binary equivalent of the decimal 1,001; nine are the ways in which, we are told, the Qur’ān may be read; nine were the number of officials who “checked out” Saladin Chamcha (*SV* 163, 167). *The Thousand Nights and a Night* has a virtual ending; *The Satanic Verses* ends with an allusion to one of the tales in *The Arabian Nights* (“Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp”), in itself not part of the original but an Orientalist addition. Like *The Arabian Nights* the final canto gives the illusion of further chapters by indicating a chapter within as “1” but then there is no chapter “2”. In other words, it implies there is no end to the stories for, after all, through analogy the dyadic nine [cantos] of *The Satanic Verses* are in fact the decimal 1,001 [stories] of the *Arabian Nights.*

“1,001” is a number with considerable significance for Rushdie. For example, his forthcoming (2015) novel, recalling the Parsi Indian boy Ormus Gama’s ability to hear songs in advance “two years, eight months and twenty-eight days before anyone else” (*GBHF* 96), has the title *Two Years Eight Months and 28 Days* (= 1,001 nights, provided that the period does not fall in a leap year). What would an annotated entry for the number in Salman Rushdie look like? Let me offer one version:

One Thousand and One: title of the *Arabian Nights*, pre-Islamic in origin, made popular through the French and English translations (*Les Mille et Une Nuits*, 1704–17, by Antoine Galland; first Calcutta edition 1814–18 with only the first 200 nights plus Sindbad translated; 2nd Calcutta edition in 4 volumes edited by W. H. Macnaghten 1839–42; best known as *The Book of the Thousand Nights and A Night* [Alf Laylah Wa Laylah] translated and annotated by Richard F. Burton, 1885–88, subsequent editions privately printed by the Burton Club, n.d.). The collection itself received its final form rather late with its eponymous number of 1,001 stories. In its translated form it is very much an Orientalist compilation with some of the classic tales — of Aladdin, Alibaba and Sindbad — added later. Rushdie was aware of its use by Edgar Allan Poe, Marcel Proust and Luis Borges among others. As a number in Rushdie it functions as both “magical” and as a sign of the “infinite.” Citation A from *Midnight’s Children*: “during the first hour of August 15th, 1947 ... no less than one thousand and one children were born” (192); “Only when I was sure of my mastery of physical scents did I move on to those other aromas which only I could smell: the perfumes of emotions and all the thousand and one drives which make us human: love and death, greed and humility, have and have-not were labeled and placed in neat compartments of my mind” (308); jugglers who managed to keep one thousand and one balls in the air (375); “Sometimes I feel a thousand years old: or (because I cannot, even now, abandon form), to be exact, a thousand and one” (424); “until the thousand and first
generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died” (446). Citation B from *Shame*: “the national leaders … perfected no fewer than a thousand and one ways of salvaging honour from defeat” (78); “because amidst its miniscule arabesques a thousand and one stories had been portrayed in threads of gold” (105); “a masterpiece amidst whose miniscule arabesques a thousand and one stories had been portrayed” (111). Citation C from *The Satanic Verses*: “the glass … began to shake … fell down on its side, and … into a thousand and one pieces, smashed. Believe don’t believe” (21); “he [Saladin] the Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice” (60); “they laughed when told of the size of her wardrobe, of the five hundred and eighty-one nightgowns made of gold leaf and the four hundred and twenty pairs of ruby slippers” [581 + 420 = 1,001] (361). Citation D from *The Moor’s Last Sigh*: “during these thousand days and a day” (190). Citation E from *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*: Umeed Merchant was the “only shutterbug within one thousand and one miles” (5); “One thousand and one percent bad egg,” Umeed’s mother Ameer says about Vina (82); “Two years, eight months and twenty-eight days, by the way, adds up (except in a leap year) to one thousand and one nights. Nineteen fifty-six, however, was a leap year” (96).

The entry is not exhaustive but it indicates the range of uses for the number. After the GBHF (96) citation, Rushdie adds, cryptically, “Go figure. This kind of spooky parallel doesn’t always exactly work out”. One can assume that the eight months referred to are from July to February and the extra 28 days take us to March 28. Hence, 2 years (365 + 365) + 8 months (243) + 28 = 1,001. However, since 1956 was a leap year, the maths does not quite add up. But then when we turn to the SV (21) citation given in the entry above, the reference to 1,001 is followed by “Believe don’t believe”, which is the recurring interdiction throughout the *Arabian Nights* and quoted in SV (143): “Kan ma kan/Fi qadim azzaman … It was so, it was not, in a time long forgot”, the first part repeated in SV (35, 37, 275). Earlier in SV (35) we read “Once upon a time — it was and it was not so, as the old stories used to say, it happened and it never did”. The Arabic phrase is variously translated as “It was and it was not/locked in time a long ago”, “There was and there wasn’t in the ancient of days”, and so on. Rushdie gives the first part as “Believe don’t believe”. Numerology in this instance has an intertextual function as it connects Rushdie’s own art of narration to an Arabic tradition where the narrator intervened to say that this is part truth, part fantasy, the magic of numbers adding to the fantasy, to, in fact, magic realism. In the Hindi translation of *Midnight’s Children* (Priyadarśan, 1997) one thousand and one (ek hazār ek) doesn’t seem to trigger the same associations.

The *Midnight’s Children* citation (MC 308) for the entry given above carries the statement “the perfumes of emotions and all the thousand and one drives which make us human: love and death, greed and humility”. Does the reference to “the thousand and one drives” allude to Silvan Tomkins’ “basic emotions paradigm” (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995) where emotions being precognitive and anti-intentionalist draw our attention to the body itself as a meaning making system? As every reader of *Midnight’s Children* knows, Saleem’s nose is a distinctive feature not only of his body but also of the way in which he thinks. In so many instances it is the smell of the spices, of cardamom, fenugreek, coriander, cinnamon, peppercorns, asafoetida, aniseed, cumin, fennel, nutmeg, saffron, turmeric, varieties of chillies, and so on, that jolt Saleem’s memory. Without a sense of spices and their role in the olfactory imaginary of India — the smell of India as one gets off a plane, for instance — it is hard to make sense of the manner in which Saleem’s nose participates in this corporeal experience that foregrounds the body as an instrument of meaning creation.
In *Midnight’s Children* we note that the 16-year-old Saleem, more than a little bored, works on “a general theory of smell” (307–9). The theory is given a more capacious (but less tight) rendition in the first draft of the novel (1978) where, at this juncture, Rushdie also gives the marginalia note, “ethics of smell”:

I was now engaged in something more than a mere olfactory drug-trip: I was working towards a great work of my own, a General Theory of Smell ... At first, primitively, I expressed the similarity of different smells as colours, perceiving that boiling underwear and printing ink shared a quality of Blueness ... I also attempted classification by weights, dividing the world into flyweight smells (paper) ... Then I went for a language of shapes ... Roundsmells and Square smells ... I was, at this stage, a lexicographer of the Nose ... I knew now that some smells were “sacred”, others “profane”. I had invented the science of Nasal Ethics ... Western records and movie-stars and pigflesh and booze all smelt like inventions of the devil. Now that I could tell the difference between sacred and profane, I was not surprised that Imams (sacred) refused to enter aeroplanes (profane) on the night before Id, not even to make sure of seeing the New Moon when the weather was cloudy ... I saw that even abstract ideas had smells, many of which were incompatible ... I learned of the fumic incompatibility of Hinduism and Islam ... the politics of Olfactory Envy, because people who smell bad (poor) hate others who smell nice (rich). My nose was like Occam’s Razor ... I had only to follow my nose, to choose the pure “colours”, to balance the “weights”, and to eschew profane smells for sacred. The trouble was I was a Muslim from India, corrupted by years of proximity to bad-smelling people and ideas; and the profane had, for me, a fatally irresistible attraction. (395−7)

Although the above passage is composed as an extended “metaphysical” conceit, Rushdie’s own marginalia note — “ethics of smell” — anticipates the kind of account of affect theory best summed up by Ruth Leys:

the body not only “senses” and performs a kind of “thinking” below the threshold of conscious recognition and meaning but ... because of the speed with which the autonomic, affective processes are said to occur, it does all this before the mind has time to intervene. (Leys, 2011: 450)

Where affects and cognition were once indissociable, they are now two separate systems.

The crux of the debate and the differing positions in affect theory hinges on whether emotions, as argued by appraisal theorists, are “intentional states directed towards objects and dependent on our beliefs and desires” or are non-volitional (that is outside of the domain of will and understanding) “discharges” without regard to the objects that elicit them (Leys, 2011: 435), an example of which — as this essay argues — is in fact Rushdie’s use of numerology. Does the usage correct an error about phenomenology along the lines of Brian Massumi who has argued that phenomenological acts of consciousness as intentional acts simply repeat objects already pre-embedded in the world and never constitute an involuntary act: “prefigured or ‘prereflected’ in the world, in a closed loop of ‘intentionality’” (191; see also 287–8, note 14). Subcortical or subliminal perceptions (for these are what an immanent realism or naturalism signifies) would require a different language, a language of “visceral intensities ... over intentional consciousness, reason, propositional knowledge, and explicit argument in political life” (Leys, 2011: 459). Numbers are both part of the body’s “visceral intensities” as well as an index of its nonvolitional proclivities; their usage is not necessarily
cognitive; and in this way they are deployed by Rushdie to unsettle the primacy of the Cartesian mind over body paradigm, and generally phenomenological intentional acts of consciousness.

Beyond the iconic (standing for something else) and the indexical (connecting with all other instances), as a sign “1,001” has a recognizable origin and cultural associations. Annotative bibliography is therefore never narrowly “enumerative”, “analytical”, or “pure”; that is, concerned only with signs as iconic and indexical, but “sociological” and “historical” in that signs have symbolic and interpretational significance as well (McKenzie, 1999: 126). This is true of the next two numbers, “420”, and “30” (and its contiguous sisters “29” and “31”), which are also highly culturally specific. I begin with the following entry for “420”:

Four-twenty: “since time immemorial, the number associated with fraud, deception and trickery” (MC 193, 212, 420). In a number of Indian languages 420 is used as a descriptive term to talk about someone who is a “creative” cheat. The descriptive force comes from the fact that the Indian Penal Code 420 (a very colonial code) was one of the more common laws invoked by the courts in sentencing petty criminals. The relevant section reads: “420. Cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property. — Whoever cheats and thereby dishonestly induces the person deceived to deliver any property or any person, or to make, alter or destroy the whole or any part of a valuable security, or anything which is signed or sealed, and which is capable of being converted into a valuable security, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to seven years, and shall also be liable to fine”. It is one of Rushdie’s favourite numbers which, in all likelihood, enters his consciousness with Raj Kapoor’s 1955 Bollywood film Shree 420 (Mr 420) which he saw in Bombay at the age of 8 and is mentioned in MC 381. The SV (S) song of Farishta (“My shoes are Japanese”) is from this film. The number 420, in many guises, proliferates in the Rushdie corpus: there are 8,420 pie dogs in Agra (MC 48); 420 of the 1,001 children died, 581 survived (MC 193); in the northern princedom of Kif there were 420 Basic Democrats (Pakistan had been divided into 120,000 parts and each part (as an electorate) was represented by one basic democrat) (MC 311); “How many arrests — ten, four-hundred-and-twenty, one-thousand-and-one? —” (MC 346); “keeping four hundred and twenty [toy grenades] in the air at a time” (MC 366); Saleem stays at his uncle Mustapha’s house in Delhi for 420 days (MC 381); “420 of us; a mere 0.00007 percent of the 600-million strong population of India or as a percentage of those arrested during the Emergency 30,000 (or 250,000) a mere 1.4 (or 0.168) percent!” (MC 422); 420 midnight’s children hysterectomized over 18 days at 23.33 per day (MC 422–4); on the day Gibreel is discharged from the hospital he gives the pursuing vehicles the slip “seven hours and fifty-one minutes” (7 hours = 7x60 = 420 minutes + 51 = 471 minutes) (SV 29); Raza Hyder did not sleep for 420 hours after the Muslims were gathered in the red fortress (S 66); as a result of the fierce Loos winds cases of “fever and madness increased by four hundred and twenty percent” (S 135); the army team lost the cricket match by an innings and 420 runs (S 201); “four hundred and twenty Havana cigars all smoking away at the same time” (S 225). The flight number of the doomed plane is 420 (SV 3–4, 73, 77) and in Breach Candy Hospital Gibreel Farishta’s blood count had fallen from “fifteen to a murderous four point two,” the latter may be re-written as 4. 20 (SV 28); “He, Columbus, is merely her four hundred and twentieth idiot” (EW 111). Its citation on page 420 of the first edition of MC underlines the mystique of the number for Rushdie.
The entry given for “420” is exemplary because without some such annotation a “common” reader (after Dr Johnson) will be at a considerable loss even if she is conscious of the number 420’s conspicuous currency in the Rushdie corpus and in popular Indian usage.

But this currency is limited and contextualized and does not enter into other, non-Indian associations. Of special note is the American and Western cultural association of 420 with marijuana. In this subcultural usage 420 (or 4.20 or 4/20) is a code-term for the consumption of cannabis, a sense of subcultural group identification, and the day on which cannabis is celebrated (April 20 or 4/20 in the American form) and smoked at 4.20 pm. According to a news blog, the origin of 420 in this subculture goes back to 1971 when a group of teenagers from San Rafael High School who called themselves “the Waldos” went out on a treasure hunt at 4.20 pm for a marijuana crop supposedly located at Point Reyes, northwest of San Francisco. They never found the weed, but it seems a legend was born. Rushdie would have been familiar with the American connotation of the number but, as far as I can see, there is no evidence in Rushdie’s works that his use of “420” alludes to association with cannabis.

Since these days a postcolonial text rarely comes with an explanatory apparatus by way of a glossary, a critical edition should supply it even when the act takes us to post-scholia (Reynolds and Wilson, 1991) arguments, seen notably in Alexander Pope’s satirical self-annotations in The Dunciad Variorum, about the degree to which annotations challenge the primacy of the source text. For Rushdie, annotations are part of the design of his creative impulse as he self-consciously annotates (fully or in part) when he wants to and leaves readers themselves to annotate where he does not. The 420 reference is an instance of partial annotation since its given definition, “a number associated with fraud, deception and trickery”, does not explain its full currency in the Rushdie corpus. Its usage by Rushdie in fact belongs to a larger principle of numerology that governs the text, a principle, as we have noted, that leads to an excessive proliferation of numbers in the corpus, a proliferation which is at once a game (and therefore part of comic narrative discourse such as the hysterectomy of 420 midnight’s children over 18 days at 23.33 per day [MC 423] where 0.6 remains unexplained) as well as a metaphysical statement (which is part of authorial ideology) about the primacy of synchronicity and the affective precognitive power of numbers in our lives.

I turn to the third number — “30” — which has a more structural function, not unlike 1,001. Suffering from dementia Dr Aadam Aziz’s father sat “in a wooden chair, in a darkened room” making bird-noises. “Thirty different species of birds visited him and sat on the sill outside his shuttered window conversing about this and that” (MC 14). One may be forgiven for thinking that Rushdie, a film buff, has Hitchcock’s The Birds (1963) in mind here, but an annotation along this line will not be particularly helpful because the number 30 has a larger, and rather special, numerological function. After all, Midnight’s Children itself has 30 chapters; the 31st (like the final jar of chutney) cannot be filled: “The future cannot be preserved in a jar; one jar must remain empty” (MC 444). Like James Joyce’s works, the medium of the book has expressive form with symbolic meaning. What hasn’t taken place cannot be pickled. Behind “30” (and “31”) lie a story and a mystique which takes us directly to the tale of the Simurg.
Thirty: Simurg: “the master of them all, Simurg” (G 54). “The Simurg, he told us eagerly, is the Great Bird. It is vast, all-powerful and singular. It is the sum of all other birds. There is a Sufi poem in which thirty birds set out to find the Simurg on the mountain where he lives. When they reach the peak, they find that they themselves are, or rather have become, the Simurg. The name, you see, means Thirty Birds, Si, thirty. Murg, birds. Fascinating. Fascinating. The myth of the Mountain of Kâf” (G 261–2). Simurg is the magical bird in Farid al-Din Attar’s most widely known and influential work *The Conference of the Birds*, a philosophical religious poem that draws its inspiration from the monistic strand of Persian Islam known as Sufism. Attar’s masterpiece is an allegory of the seeker’s journey to God framed as a journey undertaken by the Hoopoe and 29 other birds to seek Simurg, the great King and Overlord. Unsure of the value of the journey, the other birds remain unconvinced. The Hoopoe admonishes them and narrates a number of well-targeted parables. These parables make their way into the 4,500-line poem with questions such as “What is your excuse for not seeking God?” “Your life is fine already?” “You prefer material pleasure?” “You are holy enough?” “You have pride, lack courage, or are burdened with responsibility?” The birds’ journey is an allegory of the soul’s search for unity with the divine. In Sufism the relationship between the seeker and God is similar to that between a lover and the beloved. In this all-consuming love, the dualistic distinction between self and God falls away. Given this metaphysical basis of the poem, it is not surprising that when they reach the Promised Land, the Hoopoe and his companions discover only their own selves, hence the play on the word “Simurg.” The number 30 (and 29 and 31 too) has this sense of futility because in the end one only discovers oneself. Extended to a larger metaphysical principle, thirty gestures towards Rushdie’s own investment in belief, and especially his critique of Islam’s austere religious monotheism which, in its uncompromising dualism, has no place for demonic sacrificial or polytheistic monism. The story is referenced also in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990).

From *Shame*: “Chairman Iskander Harappa developed a toothache thirty seconds before the jeeps surrounded his home in the capital of the unwanted airport terminals” (S 221); on her thirtieth birthday Good News would have given birth to no fewer than seventy-seven children (S 226); around twenty-nine male cousins, and Rani Humayun (S 75). From *The Satanic Verses*: Chamcha gets “thirty-minute sessions, twice a day” from the physiotherapist, Hyacinth Phillips (SV 165).

Thirty-one: Tai asks Aadam Aziz, “Give examination! Ask how many times the leather thongs wound round the handles of the [Emperor Jehangir’s] litter — the answer is thirty-one” (MC 18); Sufia Zinobia’s “parents had chosen for her a man fully thirty-one years her senior” (S 197); the age difference between Omar Khayyam and his retarded wife Sufiya is 31 years (S 197). [In the context of *Midnight’s Children*, note that Saleem himself would have turned 31 on August 15, 1978.]

Thirty are the chapters in *Midnight’s Children*, where the 31st chapter, in analogy with the 31st jar which remains empty, is unwritten. 30 disrupts the absolute duality of monotheism by introducing a sense of monistic oneness in that the absolute is simply a mirror image of the birds themselves. 30 is a leitmotif linking non-foundational and alternative narratives. Like the citations for 101, 1,001 and 420, for 30 as well, Rushdie does not seem to go outside the Indic and Arabic traditions of numerology for the numbers’ larger numerological provenance. There is no reference in the Rushdie corpus to the fact that Moses and Christ began their preaching at 30 (although it could be argued that Saleem re-discovers himself when he turns 30). Nor is 30 associated with the value placed on Christ: 30 pieces of silver. Numbers proliferate (as they should) in the early chapters of the Book of Numbers, to some extent as well in the Qur’ān, and in the Bible generally where in Judges 14.11–12
Samson promises “the thirty friends ... 30 robes and 30 festive garments if they could answer his riddle” (Schimmel, 1993: 240). This reference too is not present in Rushdie.

In annotating numbers one draws attention to the manner in which numbers in Rushdie replicate a primarily Indo−Arabic fetish for numerology as a meaning-making system. Numbers have mystical power and they are always already there. There are many more numbers used in Rushdie which are either numerical facts or red herrings. These may be grouped under the collective title “Numerology” to support the larger theoretical premise about Rushdie’s play with the magic of numbers (as part of an aesthetics of fiction). On Rushdie’s interest in numerology, the following from Midnight’s Children alone may be noted: 1,650 rounds, 1,516 shot and wounded (MC 36); 68 dogs on the backs of Nadir Khan’s would-be assassins (48); an hour and nineteen minutes (79 minutes) (61); 50 white [later “crack”] troops (MC 36); Zulfikar with 15 men (62); Saleem aged exactly one year, two weeks and one day” (on 1 September 1948) (148); of the survivors 315 were girls and 266 boys (194); 12 million votes were coloured red, that is voted Communist in the 1957 election (221); Tai Bibi claims she is 512 years old (309); India occupied less than 500 square miles, Pakistan 340 (during the 1965 war) (332); “sixty-one men and nineteen dogs” in CUTIA (343); “the true daemonic number is not 555, but 666” (212); “111,111 teetars shot in a single day” by the Nawab in the company of Lord Curzon (314); Mustapha Aziz misses out on the headship of a government department 47 times (378); rishi from Hardwar who was reputedly 395 years old (379); 400 days mourning (380); “leaped nineteen inches into the air” (385); 10,000 women were in love with Shiva (395); Shiva sleeps with Parvati-the-witch for four months or “to be precise, for one hundred and seventeen nights”, the latter calculation an impossibility as the lowest number of nights in any four months cannot be less than 120 unless the reference to “four months” is a general calculation only replicating the deeds of their namesake atop Mount Kailasa (397); 581 Midnight’s Children of which 478 plus Saleem imprisoned in the Widows’ Hostel, Benares (Parvati of course is dead and Shiva has gone to the dark side) (418); 27 grains of rice apiece (430); “at the age of three years, one month and two weeks Aadam Sinai uttered a sound ... cadabba” (442); abracadabra with the number 365 (442); “births in India exceeded deaths by 687 an hour” (192), a number which is the reverse of the Islamic magical number 786 based on the value of the opening words of the Qur’an (The Exordium): bismillāhi r-raḥmānī r-raḥīm, “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful”.

Numerological (not mathematical) understanding in the Rushdie aesthetic takes one to the world of magic, to pre-existent archetypes because, and to reprise a quotation already given, numbers are “a priori in relation to human consciousness and apparently exist[s] outside of man” (Jung, 1972: 118). So do we now gloss all occurrences of numbers in Rushdie via Jung’s essay on synchronicity? Not necessarily, because not all numbers would have the kinds of meanings embedded in the four (or five) numbers discussed at some length here. Numbers read us, is Rushdie’s proposition; they are signs of the body’s affective possibilities; they are registers of bodily emotions and non-signifying processes; they are behavioural responses. But numbers have meaning in Rushdie only insofar as they enter into a wider field of understanding. The ones selected for annotation in this essay support the precognitive, affective proposition. In the Hindi translation of Midnight’s Children (Priyadarśan, 1997) the numbers 1,001 (ek hazār ek, 248, 404), 420 (cār sau bīs, 249, 275, 552) and 30 (tīs, 11), except for “four-twenty”, which gained popular circulation primarily through Raj Kapoor’s film, do not elicit from the reader the same sense of uncanny associations. In part this may be because the culture has naturalized 1,001 and 30 so that for the culture they do not have the kinds of iconic or
symbolic values one finds in their incidence in the Anglophone postcolonial Rushdie texts. It may well be that it is only in their English equivalents that the numbers annotated here actually carry these associations, the argument being that these iconic numbers return to the Indian via English through the “monolingualism of the other”, Rushdie’s own language of creativity.

“Numbers, too, have significance”, wrote Rushdie, but does it follow that each number requires individual annotation? In this paper I have chosen four (or five if we include 31) numbers for annotating and the primary reason to choose these is related to their recurrence in the Rushdie corpus and their thematic role in Rushdie’s understanding of the craft of fiction. These numbers bypass intentionality; they suggest autonomic responses prior to cognition; and they link the writer to texts (ancient and modern) that also foreground numbers. These are theoretical statements which, even as they concede ironic or comic intent on the part of the author, apply to the use of numbers in the Rushdie aesthetic.

But in annotating them — and in annotating Rushdie generally — we are also undertaking something larger; we are inserting the principle of annotation into critical bibliography and parting company with the McKerrow/Greg/Bowers understanding of textual bibliography, by connecting with the scholia tradition noted in Souter (1954), Schlunk (1974) and Lewis (2006) among others. McKenzie, quite correctly, had argued for bibliography as a theoretical problematic which required an engagement with the sociology of texts and Nicholson Baker, David Foster Wallace, Juno Diaz and other late modernist writers, in some ways paying homage to Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, have extended annotations’ fictional possibilities by way of the annotated novel.¹⁶ Colebrooke saw this in Sanskrit annotators — for whom the principal “primitive” text was not semantically transcendental or stable — and Rushdie, too is conscious of this fact. To annotate the Rushdie corpus, or any other literary work, requires foregrounding annotation as part of analytic bibliography and moving away from a narrow reading of textual bibliography to a sociological understanding of texts. The procedure would, in the case of Rushdie, also explain how numbers bring a corporeal, affective analytic to his works. This brief exercise in annotating recurring numerological conceits in Rushdie has had this dual aim.

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Notes

1. D. F. McKenzie was the first scholar who used his considerable skills as a textual bibliographer to read an historical document in ways which, to my mind, constitute an extraordinary postcolonial reading. In his essay “The Sociology of a Text: Oral Culture, Literacy, and Print in Early New Zealand”, McKenzie (1999) subjected versions of New Zealand’s foundational colonial document, The Treaty of Waitangi, to careful textual reading. Since the treaty exists in a number of versions, following Greg’s rationale of the
copy-text a bibliographer’s job is to create an “ideal” text from all the available versions. However, because the texts exist in two languages — English and Maori — conflation is never possible. Furthermore, since the texts were received differently and for the Maori chiefs primarily orally, the Treaty’s reception was both as a written and an oral document. So what can a bibliographer do? No alchemy can dissolve the five extant documents into a single text even with parallel Maori and English versions, for the simple reason that the Maori translation has culturally-specific semantic associations different from those in the English text. And since the signing was preceded by an oral reading of it in Maori, the signatories signed a “heard” text and not a “written” text. Writes McKenzie: “In the rarefied world of textual scholarship, it would be commendably scholarly to deny any possibility of conflation, any notion that ‘the text’ of the Treaty of Waitangi is anything other than its distinct historical versions” (1999: 126). In his 1985 Panizzi lectures, McKenzie referred to bibliography as a discipline “[that studied] texts as recorded forms, and the processes of their transmission, including their production and reception” (McKenzie, 1999: 12). Bibliography as the sociology of texts, as McKenzie’s own examples indicate, provides us with principles which are of immense value in any annotation of the postcolonial. One of the most important of these principles is the interpretative function of bibliography where the symbolic becomes important.

2. On the powerful provenance of palaeography, note Oliver Stallybrass’s emendation of “hear” to “learn” on the basis of manuscript evidence in Chapter 16 of A Passage to India: “Did you ever learn that useful Urdu proverb?” (1978: 151). All previous editions kept the reading as “hear” (which Forster himself did not correct in any edition) in the sententia, “Did you ever hear that useful Urdu proverb?”. Stallybrass’s reading of the autograph evidence takes precedence over the fact that earlier in the novel Godbole had asked, “Have you ever heard that useful proverb?” (1978: 67). The textual bibliographer as annotator would keep “hear” not only because of Professor Godbole’s earlier usage but because, and Forster knew better, in an oral tradition proverbs are “heard” and not “learnt”. The analytical bibliographer, one suspects, would have agreed with Stallybrass’s emendation.


4. Annotating Rushdie takes us to a poetics of postcolonial composition that interrogates the role of glossaries which, in the past, always accompanied “texts of cultural difference”. The annotator now evaluates the politics of this erstwhile principle of annotation and replaces it with annotations that respect the text as an artistic object and not as an ethnographic narrative.


8. Section 3 of Chapter Two (Cavendish, 1984: 69) carries an epigraph from E. T. Bell’s *The Magic of Numbers* (1946): “Some mathematicians believe that numbers were invented by human beings, others, equally competent, believe that numbers have an independent existence of their own and are merely observed by sufficiently intelligent mortals”.

9. See Joyce references in *Salman Rushdie Papers*, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library [MARBL], Emory University, Box 48, folder 8, Box 22, folder 7.

10. See Schimmel (1993) for individual entries for and symbolic explanations of many numbers mentioned in Rushdie.

11. This paragraph is indebted to a section in Mishra (2009). My Australian car registration number is CDXX MI.

12. Unsurprisingly Rushdie’s phrase “the chutnification of history” (MC 433) has become the postmodern mantra for his take on the grand narratives of history.


14. In the first draft of “Midnight’s Children” (Box 15, folder 10, p 39) there were 8,312 pie dogs. The change from 312 to 420 reflects Rushdie’s own fascination with the use of numbers as a connecting thread.


16. In Baker’s works (notably in “Lumber” [1997] and *The Mezzanine* [1988]) and in writers such as David Foster Wallace (*Infinite Jest*, 2006) and Junot Diaz (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 2009), annotations have a dialogic and not a subservient or disruptive relationship to the source text. In Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* the commentator/annotator Charles Kinbote constructs a parallel narrative to John Francis Shade’s 999-line poem, “Pale Fire”. 
References


