Rushdie-Wushdie: Salman Rushdie’s Hobson-Jobson*

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“A poet’s work,” he answers. “To name the un-namable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep.”

–Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses

I. Introduction

In the realm of literary and cultural encounters, India’s relationship with the West has been complex, oscillating between enthusiastic endorsement of the kind seen in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s praise of Kalidasa’s Śakuntalā, the reading of which Goethe said fulfilled everything (und so ist Alles gesagt, “and all at once is said”), to damnation in Thomas Babington Macaulay’s well-known 1835 “Minute on Indian Education.” Both of these responses, in the somewhat inflationary rhetoric of Edward Said, may be collapsed under the sign of “Orientalism,” for, regardless of radical differences in them, when it comes to understanding the Orient (here India), they both arise out of positions of power and are no more than instances of reductive, symbolic readings of the output of a complex and at times frighteningly exasperating civilization.

It is here that Thomas R. Trautmann’s work Aryans and British India presents us with a useful corrective. Trautmann distinguished between two orders of Orientalism which he referred to, with the use of superscripts, as Orientalism¹ (“knowledge produced by Orientalists, scholars who know Asian languages”) and Orientalism² (“European representations of the Orient, whether by Orientalists or others”). The distinction is important because it allows us to frame India and the West not in simple oppositional terms but in more productive dialogic terms, a mode of reading that persuades us to problematize and rethink the history of this particular intercultural engagement. The latter engagement eschews an

* This paper is for my late parents Hari K. and Lila W. Mishra to whom I am forever indebted for giving me the rare gift of a mother tongue, Fiji Hindi.
erstwhile binarism (the kind implicit even in Said’s magisterial work) and replaces it “by a more segmentary sense of the subject and the subject-object relation.” This method, as Trautmann goes on to suggest, would “stress continuities with the deeper past in the formation of modernity and downplays discontinuities.”

Salman Rushdie, knight bachelor, winner of the Booker of Bookers, Muslim apostate, reviled in the Islamic world, ambiguously appropriated in his Indian homeland, but vigorously defended by most diaspora, multicultural, and postcolonial theorists in the West, provides us with an extraordinary literary archive with which to address, in Trautmann’s “segmentary sense,” another kind of encounter with the West. At one level this encounter may well be seen, in Saidian rhetoric, as being stupefyingly orientalist. On this point consider a passage from Rushdie’s essay on Indian writing in English published in The New Yorker: “The prose writing . . . by Indian writers working in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the fifteen ‘recognized’ languages of India, the so-called ‘vernacular languages,’ . . . and, indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, ‘Indo-Anglian’ literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books. The true Indian literature of the first postcolonial half century has been made in the language the British left behind.” Rushdie is no doubt aware of the irony in as much as his reading of vernacular languages in translation and, more immediately, the phrase “more important body of work than most of what has been produced” echoes Macaulay’s own “Minute”: “I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic . . . [but I have never found an orientalist] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.” But then again this ironic self-correction or, better still, ironic self-reflection, is at the heart of Rushdie’s own engagement with the West. It is an engagement which requires an understanding of continuities as much as the location of epistemic shifts. The latter has been the entry point of postcolonial readers of Rushdie who have nevertheless located “the politics of knowledge” within power relations. In other words, they have read Rushdie’s triumph as the triumph of the “slave” who finally inverts the master-slave power relation. It is a reading which this paper proposes to interrogate with reference to Rushdie’s own linkages to a colonial past even as he engages with an Indian literary (post)modernity.

The dominant critical discourse of Rushdie criticism is one which essentializes difference by suggesting Rushdie’s radical otherness on matters of language use. It is, therefore, not uncommon to find in Rushdie criticism comments such as the following: “[Rushdie’s works are] a paper labyrinth of crosscultural references;” “[his novels] make the English
language express the needs of Indians;” “[Rushdie] deploys English audaciously, along with Indian intertextualities . . . to communicate a distinctively non-Western experience;” “[Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses melds] linguistic and cultural mayhem with the problematic excesses of sentimental resolution;” “[the flexibility of English] allows him to convey both the rhythm and sense of the many different Indian dialects without needing to employ any or all of them;” “[Rushdie’s writings indicate] those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it;” “the inventive impurity of Rushdie’s heteroglot style provides a challenge to the idea of proper English, the King’s English, and therefore to British colonialism;” “The brief interpolation of another language into the fabric of the novel’s English narrative alerts us to the multilingual nature of Rushdie’s world;” “Rushdie translates the exilic mode into the diasporic idioms of postcoloniality and postmodernism;” “To be translated is, as Rushdie informs us in Midnight’s Children, to be borne across.” But then we also find: “[references to the Western literary tradition are part] of the assumed compact that makes it ‘easy’ to include Rushdie in English Department offerings on postcolonialism” or Aijaz Ahmad’s observation that the “digressive self-reflexivity (‘Indianness’?) of [Rushdie’s] narrative technique [obscures] . . . his ideological moorings in the High Culture of the modern metropolitan bourgeoisie.” The Indian literary critic Harish Trivedi goes even further, “Rushdie’s claim to conquer English by writing in it, however innovatively or subversively, is not as self-evident as he would like to believe. To use the master’s language is immitigably to speak in the master’s voice, and to be complicit and compliant.” The question that remains unanswered by most scholars, but which is raised by Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ahmad, and Trivedi in the last three of these quotations, is, “what exactly is Rushdie able to achieve through his crosscultural references?” Other questions follow. Is Rushdie’s India constructed essentially through a colonial discourse? Is there really a sense in which Rushdie’s inventive heteroglossic semantics signifies the kinds of linguistic competencies an ethnographer would attribute to a native informant? Or is there indeed a play with residues, the contaminated leftovers, the penumbral fields, that which “falls outside the power relation,” those discourses, notably of Orientalism, which were not necessarily the products of power? And indeed, the crux of this paper—what is there in Rushdie which may not be readily incorporated into Colonel Henry Yule’s Hobson-Jobson?

In 1886, Colonel Henry Yule, with some help from the amateur Sanskritist and comparative philologist (but really a very mandarin civil servant) A. C. Burnell, published his vocabulary of Anglo-Indian words. The title given to the dictionary—Hobson-Jobson—by Henry Yule is, we are informed, “a typical and delightful example of that class of Anglo-Indian argot which
consists of Oriental words highly assimilated, perhaps by vulgar lips, to the English vernacular.” 23 The example, which is also the book’s title, apart from being quaint and delightful, it is suggested, is the prototype of the processes by which Indian words, largely from the Hindustani, were absorbed into the English language. The prototype goes back to the wailings of Muslims—“Ya Hasan! Ya Hosain” (419)—during Muharram, the first month of the Muslim lunar year, as they carry the papier-mâché tombs of these early imams, brothers Hasan and Hosain (d. 669 and 680 respectively). The gloss given by Yule is revealing, but the linguistic process by which the assimilation of the wailing into “Hobson-Jobson” takes place remains unexplained. Although Burnell read Sanskrit, we are not told that this process may go back to that Sanskrit class of verbs (class 3) where the root is reduplicated: hence from hu (“sacrifice”), juhoti (“he sacrifices”), from dā (“give”), dadāti (“he gives”), from hā (“abandon”), jahāti (“he abandons”), and so on. Reduplication is carried over into the perfect tense too, which is formed either by reduplication (kr, “do,” cakāra “it was done”) or periphrastically (budh, “awake,” bodhayāmāsa, “he awakened” where the verb to be as reduplicated to āś is added before the final termination “a”). In the Indian vernaculars reduplication is legion: ātā-jātā (going-coming), ronā-pitnā (crying-wailing), hīlat-dolat (moving-shaking), rahan-sahan (age-old way of life), rovat-gavat (crying-singing) among many others. Hence in Rushdie we find, “writing-shiting” (MC 25), “pumpery-shumpery” (MC 236), “joke-shoke” (MC 374; SV 54), “haggling and piggling” (S 11), “lock-shock” (S 17), “whistling-shistling” (S 61), “pudding-shudding” (MLS 23), “judges-shudges” (MLS 313), “dying-shying” (MLS 410), “gilloping-galloping” (MLS 411), “spouting-shouting” (MLS 412), and so on. 24

In his “Historical Note” to the Linguasia (1994) edition of Hobson-Jobson, writer, cultural historian, and late centenarian anglophile Nirad C. Chaudhuri points out that hobson-jobsons are really the creations of the “British working bees of the Empire, who worked all over the country, often in small towns where one was the single White man … [who were] forced to create shortcuts in their speech by employing Indian words, mostly of north Indian origin, but anglicized phonetically.” 25 A key writer for Chaudhuri is Rudyard Kipling whose own command of Hindi/Urdu being not above “kitchen-Hindustani” meant that his works are replete with hobson-jobsons: “the Sahib . . . doesn’t samjao your talk,”26 “This devil thing will end in getting me budnamed,”27 and so on. Chaudhuri’s own examples—from Kipling, who in fact had reviewed Yule’s Hobson-Jobson in the Civil and Military Gazette of April 15, 1886,28 from the early translators of Hindu canonical texts, from hobson-jobsons arising out of the English contact primarily in Bengal—go on to show, apart from an obvious admiration for the six-thousand-odd entries in
what he rightly claims is both a dictionary and an encyclopedia, “serious degradation of meaning of the words” from Indian languages once they are “hobson-jobsonized.” In this regard it may be said that built into these hobson-jobsons is a contemptuous attitude, an ironic belittling of the values contained in the original vernacular words. Hence whereas in Indian languages “babu” (bābū, “an educated or distinguished person”) is a term of respect, as a hobson-jobson “baboo” is degrading as it attempts to reduce educated Indians (especially Bengalis) to mimics and harlequins. Similarly whereas the original “Jagannath” is a hallowed word for Lord Krishna, as “Juggernaut” it is, as the Oxford English Dictionary notes, “an institution, practice or notion to which persons blindly devote themselves or are ruthlessly sacrificed.” That one can read Yule’s dictionary in these terms, demonstrates its enduring value for it is at once a compendium of words and phrases used by Anglo-Indians as well as textual evidence, if need be, for an understanding of British rule which was, in Chaudhuri’s words, at once “noble and mean, serious and trivial, pathetic and cruel, comic and tragic.” But also the legacy of hobson-jobsons, their cruel ironies notwithstanding, is embedded in the cultural productions of Indians generally. The Rushdie corpus is no exception.

One of the more delightful (and less earnest) essays in Rushdie’s collection Imaginary Homelands is in fact a review of the reissue of Hobson-Jobson. In spite of the occasionally dismissive prose of the essay (“the Anglo-Indian language whose memorial it is . . . is now dead as a dodo” [81–82]) which ends with a variation on Rhett Butler’s last words to Scarlett O’Hara (“Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a . . . dam” where dam is, according to Hobson-Jobson, “a small copper coin weighing one tolah, eight mashas and seven surkhs, being the fortieth part of a rupee” [83]), Rushdie’s excitement with this volume is evident from Rushdie’s own use of “dam,” meaning small change in The Satanic Verses. The Sarpanch (village head) Muhammad Din uses it as a metaphor in the eighth section of the book: “Life is pain,” he said. ‘Life is pain and loss; it is a coin of no value, worth even less than a kauri or a dam’ (SV 493). As well, we note in Rushdie’s essay on Hobson-Jobson his own investments in its history: “Strange, then, to find certain well-known words missing. No kaffir, no gully, not even a wog . . . I thought, too, that a modern appendix might usefully be commissioned, to include the many English words which have taken on, in independent India, new ‘Hinglish’ meanings” (82–83).

Curiously unbeknown to Rushdie, “Kaffir” is mentioned by Yule but spelled “Caffer, Caffre, Coffree” (“The word is properly the Ar[abic] Kafir, pl. Kofra, ‘an infidel, an unbeliever in Islam’” [140–41]). There is no “gully” in Hobson-Jobson, true, but Rushdie makes amends by using “gully” and the plural “gullies” (from Hindi gālī, a lane, an alley) profusely in his works (MC 35, 49, 50, 62, 69, 72, 75; S 82), and hence
adding to the discourse of *Hobson-Jobson* himself. In using non-English expressions and variations on standard received English in the shadow of *Hobson-Jobson*, it may be argued that Rushdie continues the tradition of “orientalist” language usage which he in this essay had consigned to the life of an extinct species.

So much by way of a preamble and a qualification. I now need to theorize, as best I can in the limited space at my disposal, Rushdie’s own *Hobson-Jobson* as *Rushdie-Wushdie* with a view to defining a nonbinary, a “segmentary,” “poetics” or “grammar” of Rushdie’s language use in which the self-other is constitutive of, and arises out of, continuities and interconnections with the colonial past and is not a simple matter of radical otherness or defiant difference. The archive, however, is vast and requires annotations still in the process of being completed. I will therefore restrict my proof texts to the four monumental novels which constitute, collectively, the high point of the Rushdie canon: *Midnight’s Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*.

II. “Finished, washed-up, or in our own expressive word, funtoosh”

The odd word here, “funtoosh,” is not quite Rushdie’s neologism although Rushdie gives it a different meaning. The origin of this word is in itself revealing and points to a cultural form, namely the Bollywood (Bombay) film, which stands as an overriding discursive as well as narrative influence on his works. The homage to Bombay and its cinema is made plain in his nostalgic account of *The Wizard of Oz* where we read that a child of ten experiencing this classic Hollywood fantasy in Metro Cinema, Bombay, in 1957 may have been ignorant of foreign countries and “about growing up,” but he came with a better understanding of the “cinema of the fantastic than any Western child of the same age.” By then Rushdie had also seen, this time more likely at the primarily Hindi cinema Liberty Theatre in Lamington Road (now Dadasaheb Bhadkanck Marg), two Bollywood films which had a decisive influence on him: *Shree 420* (*Mr. 420*, 1955) and *Funtoosh* (*The Madhatter*, 1956). Of interest to us at this juncture is the film *Funtoosh*. The establishing shots of this film show one Ramlal “Funtoosh,” the latter an attribute rather than a name, in an “International Madhouse” where the inhabitants are from all over the world (poetic license is necessary here for the spectator). The man about to be released, our Funtoosh (played by the debonair, dandyish actor Dev Anand), will now carry this cosmopolitanism. His story too would be written down by an out-of-work writer; his life would be transformed into an item to be insured and from which profit may accrue should he,
in his madness, kill himself. Funtoosh, of course, escapes all attempts at suicide (prompted throughout by a shady industrialist who had insured him and made himself the sole benefactor), manages to win the heart of the industrialist’s daughter Neelu (played by Sheila Ramani), and drives the industrialist himself insane as he ends up in the International Madhouse. If, after Colonel Yule, we were to treat this as an instance of Rushdie’s hobson-jobson (hereafter in regular font and as a common noun), what would its entry in the lexicon look like?

Standard Hindi-Urdu dictionaries have no entry for this word, nor does it appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. If an entry were to be made, its meaning would give Rushdie as its first source indicating that the word’s entry into language took place only after Rushdie’s own usage. It would also indicate that while the word originated as the title of a Bollywood film, Rushdie parts company insofar as its meaning is concerned, which is not derived directly from the film. As a hobson-jobson, though, we can offer the following dictionary entry, tentative in many ways, but at least sure of its origin in a film.

**Funtoosh** ([fʊntuʃ], sb. colloq. [prob. either from English fun + modified form of Sanskrit tust (satisfied, contented) as in santust (satisfied, contented with), adjective, hence noun santos from santusti / santustatā or from Urdu (via Persian) fun (a crafty trick, wile) + tūs (habit, manner, knack)]. But see also Trivedi (2003: 92) for alternative reading: “the first half of the word ‘fun,’ [to which is added] ‘toosh’ . . . a nonsensical suffix.”

2. Finished, washed-up, blown-up. See quotes. 1981 S. Rushdie *MC* 65 “Finished, washed-up, or in our own expressive word, funtoosh”; *MC* 81 “godown funtoosh!”; *MC* 82 “They’re funtoosh! All finished!”; *MC* 271 “It’s finished; funtoosh!”; *MC* 293 “Begum Sahiba, this country is finished. Bankrupt. Funtoosh.” 1995 S. Rushdie *MLS* 255 “if she was not finished off, and I mean completely funtooshed.”

The instance of “funtoosh” may be read as being paradigmatic of a very specific Rushdie usage where language is used not so much as a reinvention as a return to an earlier Anglo-India where, especially, Hindustani words were inflected to make them consonant with English syntax. The “reinvention” may be read either as a nostalgia for the Raj or a radical reappropriation by the native of an erstwhile imperial hobson-jobson. The latter, in some ways a finer explanatory model, connects more directly with notions of semantic intervention so as to blast open a hitherto closed imperial linguistic field while at the same time acknowledging
historical continuities. In *The Moor’s Last Sigh* this field is often linked to Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay’s notorious 1835 “Minute on Indian Education,” sections of which are quoted verbatim by Rushdie: “To form a class, Macaulay wrote in the 1835 Minute on Education, . . . of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. . . . For in India the dialects were poor and rude, and a single shelf of good European library was worth the whole native literature” (376). In spite of the ironic references to Macaulay in his works—in *The Satanic Verses*, Rosa Diamond’s doctor friend is named Dr. Babington—Rushdie’s own discourse echoes, albeit self-consciously and as parody, precisely the kinds of English education endorsed by Macaulay and taught him at Cathedral School and John Connon Boys’ High School in the Old Fort district Bombay. The School Song runs:

- Primus in Indis
- Gateway to India
- Star of the East
- With her face to the West
- Here in Bombay we are living and learning
- With India and England to give us their best

The sentiments of the song are pure Macaulay—Indian in blood and color with a terribly English sensibility—but the point is that in a peculiar double-take Rushdie is conscious of this; his complicity suggesting the enduring legacy of hobson-jobson (and of English cultural norms and values) while at the same time insinuating a kind of critical postcolonial departure from it, the kind also so effectively deployed by Amitav Ghosh in his tale of indentured coolies, *Sea of Poppies*.38

The deference or complicity noted above finds remarkable proof in a passage from *The Moor’s Last Sigh* where the eldest of “three English mem-sahibs, the sisters Aspinwall,” affronted by the Catholic Aurora da Gama’s show of sexuality (her body fragrance is unnervingly seductive), tells the young Anglican Reverend Oliver D’Aeth (himself in love with Aurora), “You samjhao that baysharram pair . . . that this sort of tamasha is simply not the cheese” (96–97). Four words stick out, and none of these gets a gloss in the text by way of a parenthesis in the text or an endnote. To get to the grammar of Miss Aspinwall, we need to begin by providing dictionary entries of the key words.

**Samjhao** from Hindi v.t. samjhāṇā [via Sanskrit sambudhyate, sam+ budh, bud-hyate, passive], to cause to understand, to advise, to perceive, to understand, to correct. Here in the imperative mood, as a directive; used in its polite form as samjhāire.

**Baysharram** sb. from Urdu [via Persian] bēsarm, without shame, immodest, beshame.
Tamasha sb. Urdu [via Arabic \(\text{tamāʃ}i\), sixth conjugation of \(\text{maʃa}(y)\) “a short walk, an outing”; Persian \(\text{tamāʃ}a\)] amusement, spectacle, fun, trivial matter; Yule, Hobson-Jobson, 941: tumasha, “going about to look at anything entertaining.”

Cheese sb. Urdu/Hindi [via Persian] \(\text{ch}i\z\) [\(\text{c}i\z\)], “thing,” and not the coagulated curd of milk and the delicacy.

The definitions would then give us the following “translation”: “You tell that shameless pair . . . that this sort of spectacle is simply not the [right] thing to do.” As a social semiotic, all four glossed words demonstrate aspects of how hobson-jobson works its way into Rushdie’s creative lexicon. The first word, “samjhao,” demonstrates the preponderance of the imperative in this discourse. Colonial masters (and mistresses too) learned vernaculars so as to direct and command servants, which meant that other forms—the passive, the desiderative, the subjunctive, all common in Hindustani—were seen to be beneath the use of people in power. At the Bridge Party in E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India, Mrs. Turton, the Collector’s wife, “shook hands with the group [of Indian ladies] and said a few words of welcome in Urdu. She had learned the lingo, but only to speak to her servants, so she knew none of the politer forms, and of the verbs only the imperative mood.”39 It is very likely that Mrs. Turton would have used the imperative form of the verb \(\text{samjh¯an¯a}, \text{samjh¯ao}\): “I \text{samjhao} the ladies that this is a Bridge Party not a tamasha!”

The second word, “baysharram,” indicates the usual anglicization of Hindustani words where often crisp vowels are diphthongized and consonants doubled. Selecting at random from Yule’s entries, some hobson-jobsons of this kind making their way into the Rushdie corpus are: bobbery-bob (\(\text{b}ə\text{p}\ \text{r}e\ \text{b}ə\text{p}\), “father, my father!” 101; “baap-re-baap” MC 125, 238, 441; SV 21), bustee (\(\text{b}ə\text{s}t}\), “an inhabited quarter, a makeshift settlement” 133; “No bustees there, no sirree, only servants’ quarters,” SV 55), bilayut (\(\text{v}i\text{l}\text{a}y\text{t}\), “a foreign kingdom, a country, England,” 93–94; “in this Vilayet of her exile,” SV 248; “Vilayeti,” SV 44), bhoot (\(\text{b}h\text{u}\text{t}\), “spirit, ghost” 93; “many bhoots of the Under World,” MLS 285), mulligatawny (“the name of this well known soup is simply a corruption of the Tamil \(\text{milagu-tann}\text{Ir}\), ‘pepper-water,’” 595; “the air inside the house became thicker and lumpier, until he [Omar] felt as if he were inhaling mulligatawny soup,” S 272), and banchoot (56; “Hey, bhaenchud! Hey, little sister-sleeper,” MC 310; “bhaenchud nightmare,” SV 109).40 We pause to take in Colonel Yule’s entry for the last of these words.

Banchoot, Betecchoot, ss. Terms of abuse, which we should hesitate to print if their odious meaning were not obscure “to the general.” If it were known to the Englishmen who sometimes use the words, we believe there are few who would not shrink from such brutality.
Yule remains coy, and desists from giving us the word’s well-known etymology: ban (bahan, sister) / betee (beti, daughter) + choot (cod, fuck). Rushdie on the other hand accepts its common usage in the sociolect and indeed in the first usage (“bhaenchud,” quoted from Midnight’s Children) does not even italicize the word. When he does, he uses it to mark out Gibreel Farishta’s own feverish, and at this stage demented, imaginings about Mahound coming to him (as the Angel Gabriel) for revelation in The Satanic Verses. The word has remarkable currency in the language; the tenacity with which it is found in Indian quotidian life is known to Rushdie, and he uses it often enough in his works.

And yet, as we proceed, the linguistic verve and experimentation we detect in Rushdie (and which are taken as a sign of postcolonial linguistic celebration, if not a straightforward challenge to metropolitan English) have to be tempered by their prior incidence in a very colonial English. Miss Aspinwall’s third Hindustani word is both a definition of “hobson-jobson” itself (“hobson-jobson, s. A native festal excitement; a tamasha”41) and one that comes back to Indian English having already made its way into the canonical lexicon, that is the Oxford English Dictionary:

Tamasha. East Ind. [a. Ara., Pers., Urdu . . . walking about for recreation or amusement, an entertainment . . . ] An entertainment, show, display, public function. [1687 A. Lovell tr. . . . They stop at the meanest thing, to do that which they call Tamacha, (that’s to say,) to consider and admire it.] 1872 Mrs. Valentine . . . The usual tamashas went on. 1889 Pall Mall G. 9 May 7/1 The people say to the Christian missionaries: ‘Yours is a very dull religion; there is not enough tamasha (that is, show or function) about it’. 1892 Sat. Rev. 18 June 700/1 That very funny tamasha which is called a Convention in American politics.

In the instances cited in the OED, “tamasha” has both a satirical as well as an ironic meaning: satirical in its reference to native practices and ironic in its take on Christian Evangelists and American politics. In the quotation from the Pall Mall Gazette, which has points in common with Homi Bhabha’s reference to discussions about the Bible with a group of excited Indians recounted by an early Indian catechist, one Anund Messeh, in 1815,42 we get a form of “sly mimicry” which may even be reformulated as Rushdie’s answer to the realist colonial (but essentially sentimental) antecedent of the Indian novel form: “The European bourgeois novel is very dull . . . there is not enough tamasha about it!” is how Rushdie may wish to theorize it for “realism can break a writer’s heart” (S 70).43

It is the fourth word, “cheese,” which is the most interesting and shows the extraordinary skill with which Rushdie works as well as the manner in which colonial discourses were so thoroughly internalized by him. On the face of it, “cheese” would have been read metaphorically to mean “a rebuff to an appeal for sympathy,” an otherwise perfectly
legitimate reading of Miss Aspinwall’s derisory remark. Rushdie’s own knowledge and conscious use of hobson-jobson emerges once we gloss the word further.

Cheese sb. see quotes. Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*, 187: “the most probable source of the term is P.[ersian] and H.[indi] chīz, ‘thing.’ For the expression used to be common among Anglo-Indians, e.g., ‘My new Arab is the real chīz; ‘These cheroots are the real chīz,’ i.e. the real thing. The word may have been an Anglo-Indian importation, and it is difficult otherwise to account for it.” *OED*, after citing Yule, “The right or correct thing: applied to anything good, first-rate in quality, genuine, pleasant, or advantageous.” c.1850 Thackeray *Codlingsby* iii, “You look like a Prince in it, Mr. Lint. ‘It is the cheese,’ replied Mr. Lint.”

Rushdie, of course, could have used the vernacular chīz (which in fact Kipling did—“Settled the whole sabchīz in three hours”44) since the sentence already carries three Indian words. He doesn’t, and this I suggest is done consciously so as to work on a secondary modeling principle: “cheese” hides chīz (the eye does not catch it) and explodes it (the mind pauses to rethink its usage). If there is an assumed compact between the writer and the (Western) reader, then the compact is an uneasy one since it presupposes mastery of cultural capital which is a matter of social and cultural acquisition and not simply of birth. The preeminent status given to the native informant in matters of field linguistics takes a different, uneasy, and indeed postcolonial form. For if the latter is in fact a sign of the incomplete project of modernity,15 then what Rushdie’s play with hobson-jobson shows is a critique of precisely the mistaken “politics of knowledge” embedded in the post-Macaulay colonial presumption about linguistic transmission as being a one way relay from master to slave, where the slave’s language was comically mimicked. In Rushdie’s use, it seems, the genealogy of transmission is subverted and the power relations which inhered in the colonial hobson-jobson are leveled out. Language-as-ideology, in a postmodern rereading of it, is now located in a flat, neutral social semiotics that transcends the question of ownership and power, as the compact between reader and writer-as-lexicographer is transformed into a dynamic dialectic which considers as well the residues, the leftovers, of the colonial transaction.

Having listened to Miss Aspinwall’s hobson-jobson, Oliver D’Aeth over dinner with his other silent passion, the twenty-one-year-old widow Emily Elphinstone (his other silent passion, that is, after Aurora da Gama), suffers through Emily’s remarks about Indian Christians: “They were outcasts, she shouted, these peculiar Christians with their unrecognizable hobson-jobson services” (*MLS* 98). They were unimportant people, a canker in the body of India, soon to be no more than a nasty memory. The location of hobson-jobson in a new kind of “Anglo-Indians” (the
original meaning referred to the British in India) insinuates a suggestive slip in that the discourse, which again reinforces an essentially cultural materialist understanding of how language is energized, will survive in the sociality of the minority. This takes us to a very interesting link between Rushdie’s own hobson-jobson and his characters, the vast majority of whom never belong to mainstream culture even when they are Muslims in either India or Pakistan. What must be avoided is the “tragedy of multiplicity destroyed by singularity, the defeat of Many by One” (MLS 408). Minorities being transitional figures are also sites of translation, conduits through whom critical, even if often minor, narratives of the nation-state are played out. This is Rushdie’s overriding mantra which explains both the roles of “water-carrier Khalid . . . and some sort of a bum from Persia by the outlandish name of Salman, and to complete this trinity of scum . . . the slave Bilal” (SV 101) in his reading of the rise of Mahound’s “terrifying singularity “ (SV 102) as well as the location of the linguistic register of hobson-jobson (once the property of a minority with power, namely, Anglo-Indians) in the social imaginaries of transitional figures in multicultural nation-states. This new “postmodern” intervention into language is subtle but pervasive; more importantly, though, it needs to be theorized in a discourse conscious of continuities between the colonial and the postcolonial, between the historical presence of the West in India (difficult and traumatic as that presence may have been) and the latter’s own presence in the global now.

Enthusiastic, but often unscholarly, commentaries on Rushdie (celebrating his English expressionism, his use of English to display “Indianness” or even claims that he gives voice to a specifically Indian sensibility) must now take a more sophisticated form so that a crucial ambiguity at the center of his discourse may be thoroughly examined. This ambiguity warns us neither to damn Rushdie for engaging in a traitorous compact with his post-Macaulay readers nor to hold him up as the great postcolonial guru who turned the tables on his English masters through an act of linguistic defiance. As I have indicated, my sense is that Rushdie’s project is a little different, a matter of both and neither. To do this—the “it was so and it wasn’t so” premise—he must deploy hobson-jobson (in itself based by and large on demotic, low cultural expressions) to reinforce an essentially “diasporic” (that is marginal, nomadic, unlocated, unfixed, nonabsolutist) concept of the subject as translated “men,” those who have “performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds” (S 85). If we wish to typify the archive we have selectively used as categories, we may say that there is a “colonial substantive” hobson-jobson in Rushdie as well as a “reformist vernacular” hobson-jobson. Let me make this clear before we move on.
III. “Sabkuch ticktock hai”

To make the “colonial substantive” case two examples may be sufficient and both appear in *Midnight’s Children*. The first is “sabkuch ticktock hai,” William Methwold’s hobson-jobson (MC 97, 98). This is, in many ways, an exemplary, substantive hobson-jobson replicated with a little variation. We may, therefore, create a composite entry for the phrase by inserting, as a preamble, the entry for “ticky-tock” as it appears in Yule’s *Hobson-Jobson* (919).

**Ticky-Tock.** This is an unmeaning refrain used in some French songs, and by foreign singing masters in their scales. It would appear from the following quotation(s) to be of Indian origin.

c.1755.—“These gentry (the band with nautch girls) are called **Tickytaw** boys, from the two words **Ticky** and **Taw**, which they continually repeat, and which they chant with great vehemence.”

**Subkuch ticktock hai.** Hindi/Urdu *sab-kuch thīkh thākh hai*, “every thing is alright.”

See quot. 1981 S. Rushdie *MC* 98 “‘Sabkuch ticktock hai,’ mumbles William Methold. All is well.”

It could well be that the origin of Yule’s hobson-jobson is not the same as Salman Rushdie’s, but it stands to reason that ticky-tock/ticktock are anglicized variants of *thīkh thākh*. Interestingly though, what Rushdie does is use the expression ironically as well as creatively for the original Hindi/Urdu *thīkh thākh* (excellent, superb, splendid, all is well) has the sense of clockwork perfection which “ticktock” captures rather well. For William Methwold, the transfer of power and the sale of his considerable assets are working like clockwork, without a hitch, and of course he leaves behind the new genealogist, the “pickler-in-chief” (MC 320) of India, Saleem Sinai, who is his son. But “ticktock,” although unhyphenated, carries the implicit connective of the dash, and it is within the narrative space of the dash that history gets enacted. For in spite of Rushdie’s postmodern leanings and unease with realism, it is precisely the time contained within tick-tock which is utilized to such devastating effect in the design of the novel. One need not go any further than Frank Kermode’s impeccable essay on the sense of an ending to make this point clear. In that wonderful study Kermode had asked “whether, when *tick-tock* seems altogether too easily fictional, we do not produce plots containing a good deal of *tock-tick*; such a plot is that of *Ulysses*.” From our historical vantage point we could add *Midnight’s Children* to Kermode’s example. To rephrase Kermode, William Methwold’s hobson-jobson “ticktock” (against the original Hindi *thīkh thākh*) suggests a “humble genesis” (tick) followed by a “feeble apocalypse” (tock) which in any case
is “not much of a plot.” Rushdie, of course, needs something more than just “ticktock”; he needs to ironize the hobson-jobson, true, but he has to rethink the hobson-jobson variant through its original in thīkh thākh, which carries the social dynamism of the complete vernacular. He needs to pickle it.

Our second example is no more than an honorific, a title. The “Rani of Cooch Naheen” (MC 40) is an enlightened, liberated character in Midnight’s Children. Her name, though, is a hobson-jobson of the “Rann of Kutch,” “that chameleon area which was land for half the year and sea for the other half” (MC 276) as well as one of the theaters of the 1965 Indo-Pakistan border clash (MC 323), plus the Hindi negative nahim, which then produces the Rani (queen) of Cooch (kuch, something, anything) Naheen (nahim, no, not). Apart from indicating the desolate salt marsh of Kutch (which has no real value), the title “Rani” alludes to the legendary Rani of Jhansi, the heroic queen of one of the rebel groups in the Indian Mutiny (1857–58) whose death on her horse on June 17, 1858, effectively ended the Indian rebellion. The addition of the postmodifier “Cooch Naheen” (of nothing) though has the effect of suggesting that in fact the sacrifice of the rebel queen in the end came to nothing. I have referred to these two examples, “sabkuch ticktock hai” and “Rani of Cooch Naheen,” as substantive instances of hobson-jobson because they are built upon the principle of linguistic assimilation into the master code of the English language. To get to the heart of Rushdie’s use we need to look at his reformist vernacular, the second type of his hobson-jobson.

In Shame, Biliquis is faced with the law of the something untranslatable when she receives a letter from her husband Raza Hyder. “This law is called takallouf. To unlock a society, look at its untranslatable words. Takallouf is a member of that opaque, world-wide sect of concepts which refuse to travel across linguistic frontiers: it refers to a form of tongue-typing formality, a social restraint so extreme as to make it impossible for the victim to express what he or she really means, a species of compulsory irony which insists, for the sake of good form, on being taken literally. When takallouf gets between a husband and a wife, look out” (104). Yule’s Hobson-Jobson, in its post-Macaulay linguistic presumption, assumes that everything is really translatable, or at least repatterned/repatented, and capable of being relexicalized into English syntax. In the examples of reformist vernacular hobson-jobson this is only partly true, as the passage quoted above indicates. The word takallouf/takalluf is found in a number of places apart from the page from Shame cited already: in Midnight’s Children (280: “Why such formality, such takalluf?”) and again in Shame (105, 270). The untranslatable, this takallouf, is, of course, at the heart of the novel for the title itself—Shame—is given a full gloss.
This word: shame. No, I must write it in its original form, not in this peculiar language tainted by wrong concepts and the accumulated detritus of its owners’ unrepented past, this Angrezi in which I am forced to write, and so for ever alter what is written . . .

Sharam, that’s the word. For which this paltry “shame” is a wholly inadequate translation. Three letters, shin vè mim (written, naturally, from right to left); plus zabar accents indicating the short vowel sounds. A short word, but one containing encyclopaedias of nuance. (S 38–39, original ellipsis)

In this instance of the reformist vernacular—a vernacular that gets to the heart of its own native sociolect—we get a conscious departure from the erstwhile substantive hobson-jobsons where the absorbed word carried quite immediate functional meanings and, if a verb, was conjugated in the imperative mood. The entry for shame (contained in the law of takallouf, in itself a mode of verbal enunciation constrained by social decorum) insinuates the paradox that Rushdie’s own hobson-jobson must straddle: at once recognizable within the Yule code but at the same time not subservient to it; in other words, at once colonial Macaulay and post-colonial. In respect of the entry for “shame” itself we are quickly made aware of its highly nuanced usage in Indian culture: “embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world, and other dialects of emotion for which English has no counterparts . . . What’s the opposite of shame? . . . That’s obvious: shamelessness” (S 39).

There are then words which are untranslatable, and these again complicate the kinds of enthusiastic assertions of linguistic experimentation on the one hand and of conscious complicity with the Western reader on the other found in the Rushdie critical bibliography. Although the distinction between the substantive and reformist vernacular hobson-jobson can never be absolute (the syntax of the substantive creeps into the reformist vernacular) a number of instances may be quickly cataloged here to indicate how the second, reformist type operates. So in expressions such as “haramzada female” (“a scoundrel, literally ‘misbegotten’ from Arabic harāmzāḏa,”50 SV 250), “rakshasa type of demon” (a fearsome type of demon, a term found in the Indian epics, SV 434), “bilkul cold” (absolutely cold, SV 434), “ek dum, fut-a-fut, pronto” (at once, immediately, S 50, 155), “teen batti” (three lights, collective name of the three daughters of Adam Aziz—Alia, Mumtaz and Emerald—borrowed by Rushdie from the 1953 V. Shantaram Bollywood film Teen Batti Chaar Rasta [Three Lights and Four Roads], MC 53); “piece-of-the-moon” (a literal translation of cãnd kã tukrã, a motherly expression in Hindi-Urdu for a child and applied here to Saleem Sinai; in its literal translation it is meaningless as an English idiom where the corresponding expression is “apple of one’s eye,” MC 101), and “O moon of my delight” (Rekha
Merchant’s words echoing the popular Bollywood singer Mohammad Rafi’s song caudavām kā cānd [“The Moon that Knows No Wane”] but in fact a direct quote from The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, quatrains 74, “Ah, Moon of my delight who know’st no wane,” SV 7) we find a compact not so much with the Western outsider as with the Indian insider upon whom too jokes are being played out. In some obvious instances such as the names of Dr. Sharabi (“Dr. Pisshead”), who certifies alcoholics so that they can purchase alcohol in dry Bombay (MC 131), and the chosen generals of Raza Hyder (Raddi, Bekar, and Phisaddi, “unwanted waste,” “without value,” and “worthless,” respectively, S 250) the nudge and a wink to the implied Indian reader is obvious. This kind of complicity occasionally takes the form of a complete phrase in Hindi/Urdu followed by an explanation of its effects (“I wanted . . . that aslī mīrech masala, the thing that made you sweat beads of coriander juice and breathe hot-chilli flames,” MLS 221) or a longing, on the part of the diasporic Indian reader, for a return to the corporeality of a gendered language. A valuable example of the latter is the following: “The exile cannot forget, and must therefore simulate . . . O that longed-for part of the world where the sun and moon are male but their hot sweet light is named with female names” (SV 208).

Without a careful look at the way in which the reformist vernacular hobson-jobson works, the passage quoted is meaningless. And this would apply to the native reader too if she has no formal training in comparative linguistics. In Hindi the sun (sūraṇ, sūrya) and the moon (candā, candramā) are masculine in gender while their rays, rośnī/dhūp (sunlight) and candnī (moonlight), are feminine. Rośnī (Roshni) and candnī (Chandni) are also popular names for Indian women. Without gender, the exile experiences only “an alien moonlight” (SV 208) which can no longer caress his body with its comforting, feminine rays. Of course, only a gendered language creates wonderful inversions so that, as in the well-known song by C. H. Atma, it is the female night (rāṭ, “night,” is feminine) which seeks out the masculine moon: odh cunariyā tārom ki candā ko lene rāṭ calī (“veiled in stars, the [female] night seeks out the [male] moon”).

IV. “Kan ma kan / Fi qadim azzaman”

“It was so, it was not, in a time long forgot” (SV143) is Rushdie’s translation of a not uncommon opening sentence found in Arabic folktales as well as in the Qur’ān where its appearance has sparked a theological debate. A literal translation is, “It was (and) it was not in an ancient time.” Kan is the past perfect of the verb “to be”—thus, “it was”; the particle ma
is a relative pronoun that compares what is in one clause with what is in another like “as (much as)” or “as (soon as)” or “as (far as)” — depending on the linguistic context. The phrase after the caesura is a preposition (the preposition fi “in” + the adjective qadiim “old, ancient” and the definite noun al-zamaan, which because of assimilation becomes az-zamaan/azzaman, “time”). “Kan ma kan” is often used in Arabic literature (The Thousand Nights and One Night is the classic example51) to introduce a tale, like in English, “Once upon a time” and if one puts that together with the prepositional phrase “Fi qadim azzaman” one gets what is often found in English folktales, “once upon a time, a long time ago.”52

The use of the phrase at the beginning of chapter two of Book III (“El-lowen Deeowen”) of The Satanic Verses may be symptomatic of Rushdie’s abiding interest in what Carl Jung had referred to as the synchronicity principle. “It is only the ingrained belief in the sovereign power of causality,” wrote Jung “that creates intellectual difficulties and makes it appear unthinkable that causeless events exist or could ever occur.”53 And since for Jung synchronicity was an intellectually necessary principle which could not “be called either materialism or metaphysics” (133), it had the kind of attraction to Rushdie (who is a cultural materialist) that the old “magical causality” notion did not because the latter simply indicated a nonmeaningful coincidence within a transcendentally defined world order. In insisting upon the fact “that the connection between cause and effect is a necessary one,” the synchronicity principle “asserts that the terms of a meaningful coincidence are connected by simultaneity and meaning” (95). “Believe don’t believe,” as Rushdie says often enough (MC 345, 368, 393, 443; SV 21, for instance) there is an “acausal orderedness” (139) that permeates human life. “Kan ma kan” signifies repetition or coincidence as “meaningful arrangements” (143) which are then deployed by Rushdie toward aesthetic ends. “It was so, it was not,” depending upon how you look at it—meaningless coincidences or a replay of archetypes. When for instance “420,” “since time immemorial . . . associated with fraud, deception and trickery” (MC 193), are the same number of days that Saleem stays at uncle Mustapha’s house in Delhi (MC 381), are the number of hours that Raza Hyder did not sleep after the Muslims were gathered in the red fortress (S 66) and when cricket scores (S 201), Havana cigars (S 225), flight numbers (SV 73, 77), the number of dead and “hysterectomized” midnight’s children (MC 193, 422), and even Gibreel Farishta’s song (SV 5), which is from a film with the title Shree 420, repeat that number, then, following Jung, a causal connection between them would seem to be “improbable in the extreme.”54 In other words, we may want to now think through these “acausal” connections as a new form of hobson-jobson, one which takes the form of citations, in themselves quite meaningless but which, collectively, take us to readings
of culture differently. In this usage, “hobson-jobson” signifies not simply a particular type of sociolect or culturally conditioned linguistic form, but a metatext, a way of reconfiguring things, a mode of cultural transfer. The deployment of numbers may be taken up here as an instance of “kan ma kan . . .” insofar as Rushdie uses numbers to create the logic of numerology which, given its nonrational “Orientalist” orientation, may be seen as Rushdie’s own hobson-jobson beyond the substantive and the reformist vernacular already discussed: a knowledge-based Orientalism.

We have already acknowledged Jung’s contribution to synchronicity (which I suspect Rushdie knows well) as an intellectually necessary principle beyond the “recognized triad of space, time, and causality” (132). More specifically on the question of numbers, Jung argued that against the positivist assumption that numbers “were invented or thought out by man, and are therefore nothing but concepts of quantities . . . it is equally possible that numbers were found or discovered. In that case they are not only concepts but something more—autonomous entities which somehow contain more than just quantities” (58–59).

Numbers, then, are “a priori in relation to human consciousness and apparently exist[s] outside of man” (118). Their “meaningful arrangements” in culture again are a matter of synchronicity and not of pure chance occurrence. Numbers behave in a certain way because they come, like archetypes, preformed, and are then rediscovered by the mind. The reading of numbers as an archetype, via Jung, points to an interactive, dynamic relationship between the West and India. In both Friedrich von Schlegel’s understanding of the “[Hindu] absorption of all thought and all consciousness in God” as a prior reading of European mysticism, or Arthur Schopenhauer’s claim that he owed what is best in his development to “the impression made by Kant’s works, the sacred writings of the Hindus, and Plato,” the relay between India and the West is two way. In Rushdie, this unraveling, through a comparative India and the West interconnectedness, is intrinsic to the design of his art, as in his use numbers (as Borges had done before him) have an organizational or structural as well as a discursive (that is, related to tone and style) function: “Numbers, too, have significance,” writes Rushdie (MC 212).

It was so, it wasn’t so, believe don’t believe, a numerical code underpins *The Thousand Nights and a Night /One Thousand and One Nights* (or *The Arabian Nights*): “20 years, ½ of the night (midnight), 2 adulterers, 20 slave girls, 20 slave men, 570 rings, 7 locks, 3 years, 1000 books, 1 day, 2 days, 3 days, 120 years, 50 hens, 50 wives, 1 wife, 3 sons, 1001 nights, 3 sons, 3 sons.” In India an extra rupee is added to monetary gifts so that a cheque of a thousand rupees is invariably a thousand and one rupees. Since numbers carry a priori significance, without the extra rupee the gift is inauspicious. “A Thousand and One,” as a number, is for us a
decimal system of counting, but there is also a binary or dyadic system of counting where only zero and one are used. In this binary system the decimal 1 is 1 but 2 is 10, 3 is 11, 4 is 100, 5 is 101, 6 is 110, 7 is 111, 8 is 1000, 9 is 1001 and so on. Of special note to us is the correspondence between the numbers 9 and 1001. Ferial J. Ghazoul, from whose work the previous two citations are taken, 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’an.

The correspondence between 9 (decimal) and 1001 (binary or dyadic) 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 1 within. Nine, we have noted, is the decimal equivalent of the binary 1001; nine are the ways in which, we are told, the Qur’an may be read.

For Ghazoul, these numbers are part of a numerical code, an organized system that holds the text together, their repetition a mnemonic characteristic of the form. For Rushdie, these numbers, in the artistic design of
the text characterize an “acausal orderedness” where numbers insinuate a splitting of reason, a critique of Western rationalistic attitudes, proffering an alternate, postcolonial reason that underpins, from the writer’s point of view, Indian culture. Numbers, being found or discovered, have an a priori relationship to consciousness; their arrangements are always already meaningful. It does not follow that Rushdie believes in synchronicity (I suspect that the Freudian theory of the “Uncanny” is more to his liking), but rather that the aesthetic design of his works resonates with the Indian logic of numbers which Alberuni (973–1048) had discovered long before Rushdie.\(^6^0\) It is as an aesthetic that synchronicity is attractive because within the narrative structure of the novels themselves numbers have the function of “meaningful arrangements” and are not simply instances of a magical causality. Reformulated in terms of the argument of this essay, numerology enters into an other, alternative mode of hobson-jobson, neither substantive nor reformist vernacular but outlandishly Rushdie, another instance of what Nico Israel has called “Rushdie’s tropologies of displacement.”\(^6^1\)

“. . . believe don’t believe but it’s true. Thirty jars stand upon a shelf, waiting to be unleashed upon the amnesiac nation” (\textit{MC} 443). These thirty jars, “waiting to be unleashed upon the amnesiac nation,” are summarized very quickly and presented with the dismissive “believe don’t believe” take it or leave it attitude. But there remains an empty jar, the thirty-first, the chapter that is not written, the chapter that may never be written or the chapter that gets deferred to the end of time because the curious Prince Shahrayar must never be told by Shahrazad (Scheherazade) that the book ever comes to an end. Or again is this the chapter of the grand epic tradition, encyclopedic like no other, to which any number of narratives may be written? The Mahabharata was continuously expanded; its end came not because the plot comes to an end but because writers exhausted themselves: \textit{yad na iha asti na tat kvacit} (“what is not here is nowhere to be found”), says the grand epic.\(^6^2\) Or then again there is the \textit{Simurg} story that haunts Rushdie (his first novel \textit{Grimus} is an anagram of \textit{Simurg}). Rushdie himself has explained the story of Simurg (from Farid al-Din Attar’s \textit{The Conference of the Birds}, a Persian fable) as follows: “twenty-nine birds are persuaded by hoopoe [hoopoo], a messenger of a bird god to make pilgrimage to the god. They set off and go through allegorical valleys and eventually climb the mountain [Qaf] to meet the god at the top, but at the top they find that there is no god there. The god is called Simurg, and they accuse the hoopoe of bringing them on—oh dear—a wild goose chase. The whole poem rests on a Persian pun: if you break Simurg into parts—‘Si’ and ‘murg’—it can be translated to mean ‘thirty birds,’ so that, having gone through the processes of purification and reached the top of the mountain, the
birds have become the god.” In Islamic mysticism it may be called the condition of annihilation, of fanā.

Thirty birds in search of God, of truth, of Sufi self-annihilation, just as thirty chapters of three books make up Midnight’s Children. Numerology stares us in our face: book two has 15 chapters, book one 8 and book three 7. Books one and three combined come to 15, which is the number of chapters in book two. The chapters in books one and three combined and book two alone are the sum of the numbers in the nine squares in the magical amulet. As we have gathered already there is a thirty-first unwritten chapter that would have given book three the same number of chapters as book one but then the combined number of chapters in books one and three would not have equaled the 15 of book two, which is half the total number of chapters in the novel. And, furthermore, the 7 of book three goes so neatly into 1001, Scheherazade’s magical number of narratives and the total number of midnight’s children (MC 192). 1001 divided by the 7 of book three gives us 143, which when added as separate digits (1 + 4 + 3) gives us 8 which is the number of chapters in book one. The 7 (chapters) of book three and the total number of chapters (30) go into 420 which, as we have seen, is used in common parlance for an absconder or a cheat and is the number of the Indian Penal Code which deals with such cheats. Believe don’t believe, there is some kind of numerology at work here; 8, 15, 7, total 30, numbers are of the essence of the text, numbers take over history, which is a history designated not by dates but through numbers. Thirty is of this world, thirty-one is unattainable as the birds upon reaching the highest heaven only find themselves: the Absolute is only the self, self-realization is the condition of godhead. But “thirty,” in a very real materialist sense is all that there is; 30 discovers us and exists as an a priori intellectual principle charged with meaning. “Thirty different species of birds visited” the witless father of Dr. Aadam Aziz (MC 17); Chairman Iskander Harappa developed a toothache for thirty seconds before he was arrested (S 221); and on her thirtieth birthday, Good News “would have given birth to no fewer than seventy-seven children” (S 226). Thirty-one is unattainable, as Saleem Sinai without the thirty-first jar cannot turn thirty-one in the text. Numerology triumphs over dates and history; numerology—with its basis in synchronicity, in an acausal orderedness connected to simultaneity and meaning—does not link up with time in the historical sense of the word, and yet it functions as “quantums” of time/energy through which a civilization remembers/writes its own history. And so with the title, not midnight the descriptive hour but midnight the number twelve, clock hands clasping together in the Indian salutation of namaste, namas te, I bow to you, the eternal salutation of men to gods, of gods to gods, and now of men to men (and women).
V. Conclusion

Claims made on Rushdie’s behalf about his use of language are commonplace, and often occur as variations on a standard refrain: Rushdie gives a new voice to India; he creates a language which captures in a dramatic fashion the semiotic complexities of Indian vernaculars; his “bilingualism is different from that of all his predecessors”64; his use of texts ranging from the Qur’an, The Thousand Nights and A Night, and Attar’s The Conference of the Birds to the Mahabharata and The Ocean of the Rivers of Story,65 creates an insider’s worldview not available, say, to a Forster or a Kipling, and so on. What has not been discussed at all seriously are the links between Rushdie and colonial discourses as well as his use of numerology. In locating one of the sources of Rushdie’s linguistic creativity in a colonial hobson-jobson, this essay suggests ways in which what has been referred to as Rushdie’s compact with the Western reader may be critically examined. In doing so, though, the essay makes a case, beyond grammatical analogy, for Rushdie’s use of primarily Hindi-Urdu (Hindustani) expressions as an extension of the Anglo-Indian Hindustani compiled by Yule and Burnell. While in the Rushdie corpus the specters of a colonial discourse may well be very much alive, it is argued that a different kind of hobson-jobson is also underway. The source of the latter may be located in the narrative of numbers, lies, and coincidences where the “acausal” logic of synchronicity operates. There is then a flattening out of discourse so that the implied readers are at once given false comforts as well as an ironic commentary on their own reading practices. The new hobson-jobson of “believe don’t believe” varied to “it was and it was not so” and “it happened and it never did” (SV 35, 37) embedded in the Rushdie corpus (whose lexicon is yet to be written) intervenes into one of the foundations of the post-Enlightenment Western conception of truth. For Kant, a lie is a “radical evil and the sign of the originary corruption of human existence” since it is grounded in intentional, conscious, and deliberate deception and stands in direct opposition to truth.66 And when Jacques Derrida writes, reflecting on the history of the lie, “[i]n order to lie, in the strict and classical sense of this concept, one must know what the truth is and distort it intentionally,”67 do we agree and say that Rushdie hides behind his hobson-jobson to escape intentionality?

The opposition between truth and lie is contained within the laws of pure and applied reason and is part of a determined not reflective judgment. In Rushdie’s poetics, lies are not to be defined determinately; they arise out of reflective judgment as, in art, there is no originary, stable, or definitive opposition between truth and lie, as there is no real binary between the colonial heritage and the postcolonial histories of India.
While it is conceded—and the Rushdie corpus is exemplary here—that the politics of knowledge was played out unevenly in colonial India, and that power was central to its distribution, there are, in the domain of art and culture (be it high literary culture or popular Bollywood), no real epistemic breaks. Indeed, what is obvious is a critical engagement with “fractured” continuities and a delight with those dark, indefinable, residual elements (such as hobson-jobsons) which existed in the peripheries of the colonizer/colonized transaction as a kind of “imperial subaltern” language. Believe, don’t believe, there is in the Rushdie corpus no simple opposition between categories, no “writing back,” agonistically, to the King’s English which is not also an homage, a celebration, and a critique. There is instead simply the use of literature to hold “a conversation with the world.” Rushdie’s linguistic experimentation is at once a compulsive return to a hobson-jobson, a recognition of a colonial inheritance, as well as a transcendence over it. It is precisely this paradox that energizes his writing; and he is at his best when he works through the paradox.

NOTES

5 Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, 223.
6 Rushdie, “Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You,” *New Yorker*, June 23 and 30, 1997, 50.
8 Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, 228.
24 English, of course, has “topsy-turvy,” “hip-hop,” “humpty-dumpty,” “higgledy-piggledy,” and many more. These, however, enter into a fixed semantic system as the examples do not imply that reduplication is a universal feature of the language. For ease of citation, references to Rushdie’s novels will be to the following editions, using the following references: *Rushdie, Midnight’s Children* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981) (hereafter cited in text as *MC*); *Shame* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983) (hereafter cited in text as *S*); *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking, 1988) (hereafter cited in text as *SV*); *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995) (hereafter cited in text as *MLS*).
27 Kipling, *Plain Tales*, 250. *Badnamed* from *badnain* (infamous, disgraced) but as *hobson-jobson* with a play on “bad-named.”
32 Nigel B. Hankin has attempted his own *Hobson-Jobson as Hanklyn-Janklin or A Stranger’s Rumble-Tumble Guide to Some Words, Customs and Quiddities Indian and Indo-British* (New Delhi: Bunyan Books, 1992). Of the three “Hinglish” words noted by Rushdie in his essay (*undertrial*, *incharge*, and *encounter* [83]) only “undertrial” gets a gloss in *Hanklyn-Janklin* (216). Rushdie’s own use of “misfortunate” (“so tragically misfortunate,” [*SV* 56]), “hair-pullery” (*S* 137), “peeping-tommery” (*S* 283) are some of his many contributions to Hinglish.


36 Trivedi suggests that Rushdie confuses “funtoosh” with the Bombay-Hindi colloquial word *khalâs* which “does mean empty, finished.” Trivedi, “Salman the Funtoosh,” 92.

37 Partly quoted in Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children*, 93. In 1959, Rushdie was in Class VIII-A of the school. A limerick by him appears in the December 1959 *The Borderer* (the School’s annual magazine named after Wordsworth’s play *The Borderers* [1842]), 72:

To a wise man was once said,
“I bet you can’t stand on your head.”
When he said, “Yes I can!”
They said, “Prove it, man!”
So he did and promptly fell dead!

38 Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* (London: John Murray, 2008). From this novel I cite Mr. James Doughty’s piece of “garrulous reminiscence,” cross-referenced, in square brackets, to Yule’s *Hobson-Jobson*. “Best kind of native—kept himself busy with his shrub and his nautch-girls [620] and his tumashers [941]. Wasn’t a man in town who could put on a burra khana [132] like he did . . . In the old days the Rascally bobachee-connah [101] was the best in the city. No fear of pishpash [715] and cobbily-mash [223] at the Rascally table. The dumbspokes and pillaus [710] were good enough, but we old hands, we’d wait for the curry of cockup [228] and the chitchky [203] of Pollock-saug [720] . . . Now there was another chuckmuck [217] sight for you! Rows of cursies [252] for the sahibs [781–82] and mems [567] to sit on. Sittergies [843] and tuckiers [941] for the natives. The baboons [44] puffing at their hubble-bubbles [428] and the sahibs lighting their Sumatra buncuses [126]. Cunchunees [280] whirling and ticky taw [919] boys beating their tobblers. Oh, that old loocher [519] knew how to put on a nautch all right! He was a sly little shaytan [818] too, this Rascally-Roger [754]: if he saw you eyeing one of the pootlies [724] . . . off you’d go to a little hidden cumra [280], there to puckrow [735] your dashy . . . And the way this one jaws on, you’d think he’s the Padshaw [652] of Persia. Wait till you hear the barnshoot [56] bucking in English . . . From what I hear, the Rascal’s going to be in for a samjaoing [cf. Rushdie, *MLS*, 96] soon enough” (43–45).


40 The first page reference is to Yule, *Hobson-Jobson* followed by citations from Rushdie.


43 There is, of course, the London-based Tamasha Theatre Company. See Vijay Mishra, *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2007), 207.


45 For a fuller statement see Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, “What was Postcolonialism?” *New Literary History* 36, no. 3 (2005): 375–402.


50 Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*, 411

The information given in this paragraph has been provided very generously and at short notice by Professor Steven C. Caton, Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University. Shakespeare uses the phrase in *Much Ado About Nothing* where Benedick tells Claudio, “Like the old tale, my lord: ‘It is not so, nor ’twas not so: but indeed, God forbid it should be so!’” (1.1.200–1). The editor of the Arden Shakespeare (second series, 1981), A. R. Humphreys, glosses “old tale” from this line in a lengthy Appendix (Appendix V “Old Tales”). Humphreys points out, after a Mr. Blakeway’s contribution “to the Boswell-Malone Variorum edition in 1821, VII. 164–5,” that the phrase is not uncommon in the “Robber-Bridegroom” type of story. Humphreys gives Blakeway’s version of the story in which Mary repeats to her lover, the serial killer Mr. Fox, upon discovering the latter’s secret, “It is not so, nor it was not so,” which is then completed by Mr. Fox, “It is not so, nor it was not so, and God forbid it should be so.” Humphreys does not connect the phrase itself to *The Arabian Nights*. A. R. Humphreys, ed., *Much Ado About Nothing*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1981).


Jung, *Synchronicity*, 12 adds, “it is obvious that each event must have its own causality.” And when in Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 28, we find that in the Breach Candy Hospital Gibreel Farishta’s blood count had fallen from “fifteen to a murderous four point two” do we not sense a link between the sum of the numbers in the nine magical amulets (15) and the number 420 which recur in both *The Satanic Verses* and *Midnight’s Children*?


The caesuras are marked by spaces in Rushdie’s translation.


Trivedi, “Salman the Funtoosh,” 75.


Rushdie, “Damme, this is the oriental scene for you,” 54.