

*Paradise Lost* and the Narration of Nation in Salman Rushdie's  
*Midnight's Children*

by

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## Abstract

This thesis proposes a study of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as a re-reading of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Milton's epic has been read in terms of British imperialism and linked to a tradition of affirmation of nation. Taking up *Paradise Lost*, *Midnight's Children* dialogues with the epic's stature of upholder of nationality and suggests that the perception of nation-ness associated to it informs also the independent post-colonial Indian national identity. But as the nation's explosive heterogeneity surfaces *Midnight's Children* characterizes it more as an imagined community instead of the stable homogeneity its narrator first believes it to be. This leads to a questioning of the nation as the privileged space in which to negotiate meanings and identification. At this point *Midnight's Children* highlights and adapts Milton's concept of the "paradise within" as a better positioning before these difficulties. In its proposed reading of *Paradise Lost*, in which the "paradise within" is the central theme rather than national legitimization, *Midnight's Children* also proposes new ways of viewing the former imperial national self-representation and its constituting texts.

## RESUMO

Esta dissertação propõe uma análise do romance *Midnight's Children*, de Salman Rushdie, como uma re-leitura de *Paradise Lost*, poema épico de John Milton. O épico de Milton foi ligado ao imperialismo Britânico e a uma tradição de afirmação da nação. Apropriando *Paradise Lost*, *Midnight's Children* dialoga com estas leituras do poema e sugere que o conceito de nação associado a ele informa também a identidade nacional Indiana. Mas a medida em que as diferenças explosivas dentro desta nação se tornam mais pronunciadas, *Midnight's Children* a caracteriza como uma comunidade imaginada. A nação como espaço privilegiado para negociar identificações e significados é então questionada. *Midnight's Children* então adapta o conceito de “paradise within” de Milton como um melhor posicionamento perante as dificuldades no projeto nacional. Em sua leitura de *Paradise Lost*, em que *Midnight's Children* enfatiza esse paraíso interior sobre a legitimação da nação, o romance propõe novas perspectivas sobre a representação da nação imperial e os textos que a constituem.

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## 1 Introduction

In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson affirms that the nation is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our times (3). But even so it is still a concept that is hard to grasp and to define. And in the aftermath of the breakup of the European empires and the rise of post-colonial national movements, the nation has become the site of new problems and questions: how to define these nations that, although consolidated as the expression of ancient cultures, are in themselves new concepts that emerged as a challenge to Empire but that also draw on the history of European national struggles? On what terms can they be represented? How do literary texts relate to them? The nation, although as important as Anderson proposes, inevitably poses such challenges to the texts that have tried to deal with it.

This thesis proposes a reading of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in light of these issues and difficulties of representing the nation. What is proposed is that, writing the beginnings of Indian national consolidation, the novel establishes points of contact with John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a text associated with British national identity and imperialism. *Midnight's Children* parallels the epic's structure, reworks many of its characters and themes and juxtaposes the Christian myth with the other religious traditions, such as Hinduism and Islam, that constitute India. Taking up *Paradise Lost*, and its association to British national self-representation, *Midnight's Children* suggests that British cultural forms remain conforming elements in the affirmation of Indian national identity. But at

the same time the novel questions this national project in light of the many diverse fragments struggling for expression inside it. In face of this explosive heterogeneity, *Midnight's Children* then proposes a version of Milton's "paradise within" as a better way of negotiating the meaning and form to life the novel's narrator desperately seeks. By focusing on the "paradise within", Rushdie downplays *Paradise Lost*'s standing as a national text and, in this move, proposes a different reading of the epic and a reflection on the former imperial nation and its mechanisms of representation.

Taking up *Paradise Lost* to narrate the process of national consolidation of a former British colony, *Midnight's Children* negotiates the complex set of cultural influences and representations that inform nationality. This idea of negotiation is very different from simply attributing post-colonial national movements to Empire. Linking the life of the novel's narrator to the nation, Rushdie's appropriations of Milton's epic are tied to his representation of the Indian nation, refuting essentialisms in its construction. As the nation is increasingly represented as a myth or, in Anderson's terms, an imagination, *Midnight's Children* re-works Milton's proposition of the "paradise within". Through its representation of nation and its reading of a national text outside nationalism, the novel suggests a reflection on national projects and on the texts that have contributed to shaping them and how these texts can be brought into dialogue with each other.

The narrator of *Midnight's Children*, in writing his own life, also narrates that of the nation, appropriating in this process the structure of *Paradise Lost*.

Saleem Sinai is born on the precise stroke of midnight of India's independence and the consequence of this double birth is that the fate of the nation is inextricably linked to the events of his life, his destiny is "...indissolubly linked to those of my country" (*Midnight's Children* 3). But Saleem's story does not begin with his birth but with his grandfather, Aadam Aziz. Opening his narrative with his grandfather, Saleem begins "the business of remaking [his] life from the point at which it really began, some thirty-two years before anything as obvious, as *present*, as [his] clock-ridden, crime-stained birth" (4). This beginning is reminiscent of *Paradise Lost*, in which the justification of God's ways to Man and the narration of Man's Fall, the epic's main themes, actually begin with a prior Fall, Satan's rebellion and expulsion from Heaven. In both *Paradise Lost* and *Midnight's Children* there is a deferral of origins, as beginnings (the Fall of Man, Saleem's and India's "births") refer back to other beginnings.

Aadam Aziz is the founder of the family dynasty, a character reminiscent of the Miltonic Adam. Both Rushdie's and Milton's characters share the same name and both are the fathers that give origin to history, be it Mankind's or Saleem's (and India's). Aadam's importance is prophesized early on in his life by the boatman Tai, according to whom inside his enormous nose, one of his legacies to future generations, "there are dynasties waiting" (*Midnight's Children* 9). As Milton's Adam disobeys God, Aadam Aziz refuses to bow down and pray. Injuring his nose while performing his daily orisons he vows "never again to kiss earth for any god or man" (5). For Roger Clark Aadam's decision not to bow down to God echoes what Milton calls Man's first disobedience (65). But the

passage also is significant to Aadam's and Saleem's identification with the Indian nation.

From this beginning in Saleem's narrative the kind of certainties afforded by faith in Milton's text are undermined. Turning from them, Aadam creates "a hole in him[self], a vacancy in a vital chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history" (*Midnight's Children* 4). Turning from the religious myth, Aadam replaces it for the nation, participating in the movements for Indian independence. It is this trait, as well as the family nose, that Saleem inherits from Aadam as Mankind inherits sin from Adam. Substituting nationalism for religion, Rushdie places both side by side and suggests that this discourse, into which both Aadam and Saleem buy, is just as much a myth as religion.

The sense of vacancy Aadam feels is further impressed on him by his alienation from his native land. After receiving a European education, he is seen as an alien and must leave. As Adam is tainted by sin, Aadam Aziz is tainted with "Abroad". Tainted in this way, both characters are expelled from paradise, the garden of Eden in *Paradise Lost* which, in *Midnight's Children*, is represented as Kashmir.

As Aadam Aziz suggests a parallel to Milton's Adam, his native country takes on the characteristics of Eden before the Fall. Aadam, the European schooled doctor, returns home trying to "recall his childhood springs in Paradise" (*Midnight's Children* 5). Kashmir then becomes the paradisiacal garden associated with innocence that is Eden before sin. This image of Kashmir as paradise is reinforced when it is contrasted to the city of Amritsar, where Aadam

moves after his marriage. While Kashmir has strong ties to both Eastern and Western imaginations of Eden (Clark 63), prominent among which is Milton's description, "the holy city of Amritsar smelled (gloriously, Padma, celestially) of excrement" (*Midnight's Children* 29). The city smells of and is built out of filth. And this also echoes Milton's description of the corrupt world after sin in which Adam and Eve are forced to live.

This suggestion of Kashmir as a lost paradise is reinforced by Aadam Aziz's sensation, after his marriage, of falling. For Clark, as *Paradise Lost*, *Midnight's Children* is structured on a mythical cycle of a Fall from Eden and a possibility of returning to it (61). In the novel this cycle begins with Aadam Aziz's marrying Naseem Aziz and feeling "in the pit of his stomach a sensation akin to weightlessness. Or *falling*." (*Midnight's Children* 28). Aadam Aziz falls completely as he falls in love with his wife and falls again when he leaves the valley, the paradise of his childhood innocence. This passage echoes Adam's choosing to eat the forbidden fruit after Eve has tasted it so as not to be separated from her. In both texts the same choice signifies a Fall.

After the Fall, as Adam leaves sin to his descendents, Saleem inherits from Aadam Aziz not only a gigantic nose, the dynastic mark, but also a fragmented identity. Schooled in the scientific tradition of European universities, Aadam Aziz cannot embrace the religious mythologies of his native land again and feels trapped in a middle ground. This sensation of being in-between worlds is Aadam's greatest legacy to Saleem. And Aadam's grandson tries to give meaning

and coherence to his fragmented identity by linking it to the national project, the certainty-giving myth to stand in the absence of faith.

This in-betweenness informs the representation of the nation in *Midnight's Children*. Linking his private life and national events, Saleem suggests that the in-betweenness Aadam passes on to him is also necessarily passed onto the nation and cannot be escaped or wiped out. Drawing a parallel between Aadam and Adam, *Midnight's Children* draws also on this idea of the legacy to future generations. In the novel what this means is that both Saleem and India must negotiate identity from the fragments inherited from Aadam after his Fall, that is, in the overlap of European and Eastern cultural forms.

In this negotiation of identity, both individual and national, language becomes significant; and this echoes the importance of signs in *Paradise Lost*. In Milton's epic language and the process of naming are significant in establishing identities. After the creation of the world, God assigns to Adam the naming of all the other beings, including Eve. Adam names and so identifies her through language, becoming in this process a sort of father as well as husband to his wife. In *Midnight's Children* Aadam Aziz's daughter (Saleem's mother) repeats the same process. Born Mumtaz, her second husband renames her Amina Sinai

And now Aadam Aziz lifted his daughter, passing her up after the dowry into the care of this man who had *renamed* and so *reinvented* her, thus becoming in a sense her father as well as her new husband (*Midnight's Children* 71).

Mumtaz Aziz, in being named Amina Sinai, is not only identified but created by her husband, just as Eve is made from Adam and is identified by Adam in *Paradise Lost*. Repeating the establishment of identity through language, *Midnight's Children* suggests again its appropriation of the epic.

As in the case of Aadam's loss of faith, this link to *Paradise Lost* in *Midnight's Children* is reworked. Unlike Eve, Amina returns her husband's conforming gaze and, in time, she too begins to reinvent him in the image of her former husband

And Ahmed, without knowing or suspecting, found himself and his life worked upon by his wife, until little by little, he came to resemble-and to live in a place that resembled-a man he had never known and an underground chamber he had never seen (*Midnight's Children* 74).

The process of (re) naming and of inventing the other found in *Paradise Lost* is paralleled in *Midnight's Children* and reversed, as Amina returns her husband's gaze and conforms him to her own imagination.

The significance of this process of identity-establishment through names, that is signs or language, becomes significant also in the broader national context. Saleem describes the conflicts that threaten to tear the nation's unity between groups who imagine their national identity based on the languages they speak. The nation's boundaries are no longer "formed by rivers, or mountains, or any natural features of the terrain; they were instead walls of words. Language divided us" (*Midnight's Children* 216). Language becomes such a strong instrument of

imagining national identity that it takes on political significance as, in Bombay, “the language marches grew longer and noisier and finally metamorphosed into political parties” (216). In this way, the place of signs and language in constructing identity in *Paradise Lost* is repeated in *Midnight’s Children* in Saleem’s family. And as he binds his story to the nation’s, it finds a parallel also in the imagining of nationality.

This imagining of India in terms of language is one of the many conflicting imaginings of the national identity portrayed in *Midnight’s Children*. As the novel progresses, the writing of the nation becomes in fact the writing of its heterogeneity. And as the novel takes up *Paradise Lost*, in light of the problems inside the national project of unification, *Midnight’s Children* focuses on Milton’s ideal of the “paradise within” as a better positioning before them. Problematizing nation-ness in this way, and then suggesting a reading of the epic outside the concern with it, the novel opens Milton’s text to different perspectives and possibilities of dialogue.

*Midnight’s Children* reworks not only the themes of *Paradise Lost* but also its characters. When Saleem’s narrative of his life finally comes to his birth, he presents it as Christ’s prophesized birth in human form in *Paradise Lost*. Before Man’s Fall Christ offers himself as a redeemer, a prophecy Michael later reveals to fallen Adam and Eve. But unlike Christ, Saleem is not announced by angels in Heaven but by soothsayers in a Delhi slum. For Saleem, this announcement of his coming makes him public property. Still unborn, he is seen as the awaited redeemer of India also by a priest who comes to witness his birth. Arriving at the

Sinai residence, the old man announces “I have come to await the coming of the One [...] He who is blessed. It will happen very soon” (*Midnight’s Children* 126). But unlike the Miltonic Christ who is the true son of God, Saleem discovers he is not his parents’ child or Aadam Aziz’s blood descendant. He then spends his life creating fathers for himself in an act contrary to the act of creation in *Paradise Lost*, in which God is the legitimate father of Christ

[...] all my life, consciously or unconsciously, I have sought out fathers. Ahmed Sinai, Hanif Aziz, Sharpsticker Sahib, General Zulfikar have all been pressed into service in the absence of William Methwold (*Midnight’s Children* 490).

Although Saleem sees himself as a sort of Christ throughout the novel, engaging finally in a Messianic mission to save India from ruin, he actually reverses the act of creation of the Christian myth. He becomes the son who creates fathers in opposition to Christ as the true son of God.

A reversal of Milton’s Christ, Saleem elaborates an ambitious project of nation-saving but embarks on this mission in the wrong way. His ideas are closer to those of Satan in *Paradise Lost* than to the more collected perspective of the “paradise within”. Saleem seeks out his uncle, a civil employee in Delhi. He reasons

What better patron than he for my *Messianic* ambitions? Under his auspices, I would seek preferment in the Administration, and, as I studied the realities of government, would certainly find the keys of national salvation; and I would have the ears of Ministers, I

would perhaps be on first-name terms with the great (*Midnight's Children* 447).

Saleem embarks on his Messianic mission of salvation on the wrong premises. His ambition to save India implies an imagining of the nation in terms of homogeneity and cohesion, a vision which Saleem himself finds increasingly difficult to sustain in face of the internal divisions inside it.

Saleem errs also when he wants to align himself with those in power, the "Administration", believing this is the way to salvation. And it is by aligning himself with power that Saleem's intentions are suggestive of Milton's Satan. He is the one who talks of power, control, and establishment of Empire (his own, in opposition to God's) as erroneous ways to freedom. A failed Christ, Saleem reverses the possibility of salvation presented in *Paradise Lost*, showing its impossibility not only when performed by a man but also when linked to an imagining of nation as homogeneity and in terms of the grand spheres of power. In *Midnight's Children* Saleem's projects are doomed to failure because they rest on false premises. The novel then proposes, through his son, a better positioning before these failures and a better form of political participation than Saleem envisions, more in line with Milton's "paradise within".

Saleem's ideal of salvation fails, and with it his idea of giving meaning to his life through an identification with the nation. He finally realizes the mistake he has repeatedly made of "forsak[ing] privacy and be[ing] sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes" (*Midnight's Children* 533). With this perception, Saleem is replaced in his narrative by his son as the representative of

the future generation of members of the nation. In this way, *Midnight's Children*, as *Paradise Lost*, also ends with an A[a]dam marching into the future. Tired of the annihilation that comes with identifying oneself with the grand project of the nation, Saleem finally sees in his son the kind of changed perspective that is more in line with the “paradise within” proposed by Michael in *Paradise Lost*.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* appropriates Milton's epic poem to represent the establishment of an independent Indian national identity. In this move, the novel takes up also the tradition that links *Paradise Lost* to British imperialism and national self-representation. In this way, *Midnight's Children* points to the permanence of British forms in the post-colonial nation, refuting its imagining in terms of essentialisms and fixed origins. However, through the reworking of themes and characters and the focus on the “paradise within”, Rushdie re-reads this foundational text of Empire against the type of nationalist discourse *Paradise Lost* has been seen to uphold. Taking up a text that has been read as the British national epic in a story in which nation is presented as imagination (and conflicting imaginings at that), Rushdie brings reflection on all national imaginings, not just Indian. Downplaying the nationalist concern in *Paradise Lost*, *Midnight's Children* suggests then a re-reading or re-appropriation of the epic.

The negotiations established by *Midnight's Children* with *Paradise Lost* will be discussed in the following chapters. Chapter Three will discuss how Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* characterizes the nation as a type of imagined community and questions the linking of the meaning and form of life to it.

Chapter Four will discuss the meaning and the role of the concept of “paradise within” in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Chapter Five will discuss the search for meaning and form to life in *Midnight’s Children* and how the concept of Milton’s “paradise within” is appropriated as a better way of negotiating this meaning and form.

## 2 Critical Appropriations of *Paradise Lost*

Before discussing the appropriation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and the implications of this appropriation, it is important to locate *Paradise Lost* in terms of its criticism and reception. Such a critical survey is necessary not only due to the massive critical production on *Paradise Lost*, but also because such criticism has been influential in placing Milton at the centre of the British literary canon. As such, *Paradise Lost* has been associated to imperialism and to a process of British national self-representation. These associations must be taken into concern to fully understand the implications of the epic's use in a post-colonial text like *Midnight's Children* and the kind of reading of the poem the novel proposes.

Of course, given the entire industry that has emerged around *Paradise Lost*, it is very difficult to give a comprehensive view of it all. And this is not the focus here. Rather the idea is to analyze how, in taking up *Paradise Lost*, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* takes up but also, and most importantly, takes a step beyond readings that focus on the epic as a re-enactment of British colonialism and national self-representation. Re-reading what has been seen as one of its grounding texts, *Midnight's Children* presents back to the former colonial power a kind of challenge to its imagined national community. In this way, the novel aligns itself with more recent views of the epic that are less concerned with reading it simply in terms of colonialism and nationalism. Therefore, although my point is to show how *Midnight's Children* complicates

these latter assumptions, as they are implicit in my starting point, they must be discussed here.

The first associations of *Paradise Lost* to British imperialism and to a British national self-representation were perhaps carried out in the way the epic was exported to the colonies. As Sá points out, of Milton's texts, *Paradise Lost* was the most likely to be exported as a model of a noble discourse of glorious actions and liberal politics (3). Milton's text becomes not only an example of an essentially British cultural greatness but also a justification or vindication of its colonial politics. Exported in this way, *Paradise Lost* becomes a symbol of the imperial nation, whose sense of nation-ness is based on the same shared values and reiterated in a body of texts, prominent among which is *Paradise Lost*. For Through this process of appropriation, alongside Shakespeare, *Paradise Lost* becomes an example of the tradition of British national literature. As such, the epic becomes a means of representing the national community, of which Empire is an expression, to its outer domains.

In taking up *Paradise Lost* to narrate the process of Indian national consolidation, *Midnight's Children* inevitably takes up also its profound association to a British national self-representation. Indeed, narrating precisely the problems surrounding India's project of national unification in the aftermath of imperialism, Rushdie points to how British forms are also part of the new nation, even if it defines itself in defiance to British presence. But *Midnight's Children* also proposes a step beyond a reading of *Paradise Lost* as simply a national or imperialistic text. Focusing on Milton's proposal of a "paradise within", the novel

proposes a revision of these readings or uses of Milton's text, downplaying its function as a symbol of the nation.

Through the establishment of this tradition of national literature *Paradise Lost* is incorporated into a nationalist discourse. And this position has been solidified by criticism that has read *Paradise Lost* in terms of the complex interplay of colonialism, imperialism and the political struggles inside the nation during Milton's time. Following this train of Milton criticism, Sá highlights two seminal texts: Martin Evans' *Milton's Imperial Epic* and David Quint's *Epic and Empire*.

Evans' reading of *Paradise Lost* focuses on how the poem inserts itself into a body of texts surrounding the colonies, articulating one of the main concerns of British society at the time. According to Evans, the foundation of empires had occupied a significant fraction of Milton's attention during the years of the Protectorate. However, its re-enactment in *Paradise Lost* springs from broader, more complex sources than simply the author's individual experience

[...] my concern is not so much with the question of direct influence as with the much more complicated and elusive process of cultural mimesis whereby a literary text articulates the complex of beliefs, values, anxieties, hopes and prejudices, in a word the ideology, of the society that generated it (Evans, qtd. in Sá 15).

Although Evans affirms he is not concerned with pinning Milton as pro or against imperialism and nationalism, still his reading of the epic is conformed in terms of these concerns. Imperial expansion and national consolidation, which for him are

the main concerns of 17<sup>th</sup> century Britain, are also, inevitably, the driving forces behind the poem.

Echoing the discovery of new continents, Evans sees the characters in *Paradise Lost*, as well as its spaces and its actions, as re-enactments of the conquest of the New World. For Evans, texts related to colonialism are centered around recurring themes and share a common set of linguistic practices, descriptive tropes, narrative organization and categories. In this way, Eden is described as similar to the New Worlds recently discovered. Adam and Eve, although occupying ambivalent positions, now resembling the colonizers arriving in the New World and taking possession of it, now the natives towards whom Satan is traveling in order to conquer and build his own empire, re-enact the beginnings of colonialism. For Evans, these passages in *Paradise Lost* are all reminiscent of the texts, circulating at the time, which described to European audiences the territories under exploration. Inserting himself in this body of texts, “Milton seems to have conceived the principal sites and characters in the poem in essentially colonial terms” (Evans, qtd. in Sá 14), repeating the main concerns of his time.

Not only are colonialism and British expansion the grounds for imagining the characters and sites in the epic, their language is also appropriated. Evans highlights how the word “empire” reverberates in the entire text. It is used alternately by Satan and by God to describe both their dominions and the Earth which, like the New World, functions as a territory into which both powers struggle to expand their power. This constant repetition of “empire”, for Evans, is

a suggestion that Milton might not only be writing in terms of imperialism but would also go so far as to corroborate it (Sá 14).

Reading the spaces in *Paradise Lost* in terms of colonialism, Evans makes analogies with the types of colonies established during Milton's time. Eden, Heaven and Hell would correspond to the penal and expansionist colonies of the Empire. And furthermore, presenting Eden and Hell as empty spaces before the arrival of Satan and Man, Milton avoids having to deal with the issue of colonial violence and reinforces the colonial paradigm of the New World as an empty space (or empty of truly human presence), waiting to be peopled by an external agency (Sá 19).

Continuing the analogy of the peopling of Eden with colonialism, Evans describes Satan's voyage to Eden as a re-enactment of British imperial expansion

The Devil's voyage to the New World has been accompanied throughout by similes drawn from the familiar 17<sup>th</sup> century world of merchant adventurers seeking the riches of the Indies across "the Trading Flood" (Evans, qtd. in Sá 20).

Satan repeats the motives that justified British colonial expansion; he is at once the victim of religious persecution, having been expelled from Heaven by God, he is the separatist looking for a new home, the imperial agent and the merchant looking for trade.

But identifying Satan with the practices of British imperialism poses a problem. Evans does not identify Satan with British explorers throughout the entire epic. Rather the passage that describes his arrival in Eden is read as one

permutation of the colonial experience. But even so, placing colonial expansion in his hands could be construed as a criticism of it. This is an instance of the text's ambiguity that Evans seems to be aware of but does not carry outside the perspective of colonialism. The analogy becomes complicated and difficult to sustain, as are all strict analogies made between the epic and 17<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

Trying to accommodate this ambiguity in the epic, and as part of his initial objective of reading in a broader sense the influence of society in the text, Evans concludes that

Milton's 'organ voice' is not a single euphonious instrument but a chorus of individual and sometimes discordant voices which echo the complex acoustics of Renaissance colonial discourse (Evans, qtd. in Sá 23).

For Evans, imperialism and colonial discourse, in all its permutations, are at the centre of *Paradise Lost*. Attempting to show this, and at the same time to cope with the difficulties of the text, Evans presents a series of analogies that are difficult to sustain. What could also be argued is that this piling of analogies seems to point to a mimesis of what, for Evans, is the ideology of the time without a point of view or an argument.

The other problem with readings of *Paradise Lost* such as Evans' is that, by focusing solely on Empire, they run the risk of being reductionist. As Lydia Schulman has argued

Those readers who have looked for resemblances between personages and events in the epic and in history have flirted with

reductionism and, occasionally, have succumbed to it; in pressing analogies too far they have over-particularized Milton's vision and lost sight of its transcendent significance (52).

Pressing analogies too far and reading *Paradise Lost* too readily in terms of 17<sup>th</sup> century British affairs, such readings impose a closure around one subject that the epic does not necessarily suggest. The text becomes period-limited and loses what Schulman terms its transcendent significance, a significance that is a function of its suggestion of a "paradise within", that is, a way to the kind of freedom, redemption and godliness the poem prescribes to all its readers.

In this train of readings of *Paradise Lost* in terms of imperialism, the issue of its genre also becomes significant. For Evans every epic poem treats the foundation or destruction of empires. It would, therefore, not be impossible to imagine that an epic like *Paradise Lost* would be inserted in this tradition and would narrate British imperial conquest. For him, Milton's chosen genre is more evidence of the colonial and imperial concerns of the text.

Taking up the issue of genre in *Paradise Lost*, David Quint's *Epic and Empire* focuses on the text's imperialist orientation according to its use of the epic genre. For Quint, *Paradise Lost* in fact performs a revision of the epic, whose triumphant tone is satirized in Satan's "colonial epic". Upsetting the epic genre, *Paradise Lost* would then be a poem against the imperial effort.

Focusing on genre revision as a way of questioning Empire, Quint highlights the writing of other genres into *Paradise Lost*. In this way, Satan's voyage to Eden, with all his petty concerns and ultimate failure given the Son's

sacrifice for Man, is turned into bad romance. And Adam and Eve's narrative of Fall and redemption is turned into good romance. This division in narrative allows the poem to subvert epic conventions and so criticize, due to genre associations, British imperialism.

An anti-imperialistic text, for Quint *Paradise Lost* is also an elaboration of Milton's views on 17<sup>th</sup> century home politics. While some criticism sees *Paradise Lost* as a testimonial of Milton's disappointment with the Commonwealth, identifying Satan as a caricature of Cromwell, Quint sees it as an exploration of anti-monarchical sentiments. In this way, the Fall emphasizes the contingency of Christian freedom and republican liberty. With Satan's arrival in Eden and the corruption of Man, the world is once more submerged into monarchy and popery

The Satanic plot of *Paradise Lost*-the Devil's conquest of the earth for Sin and Death-of course functions in the poem only secondarily as an allusion to the Stuart Restoration: even at the level of such topical reference it points equally [...] to the building of European colonial empires in the "new world" of America and along the trade routes to the Far East (Quint, qtd. in Sá 31).

For Quint, *Paradise Lost* is a text that discusses and critiques the main political events, both inside and outside Britain, in Milton's time. At the level of literary genre, the poem subverts the epic conventions in which it places itself, critiquing British imperialism. On a second level, the restoration of the monarchy for Milton signifies a return of corruption, perhaps the reason why the Empire, presided by a king, is problematized.

Another aspect of the text's genre revision is its theme. Refusing to elaborate on the themes of war and the nation's exploits in battle, the traditional subjects of the epic

*Paradise Lost* mov[es] away from the public engagement of martial and political epic; and Milton famously bids farewell to the traditional epic of war in the *recusatio* at the beginning of Book 9. Instead, he moves the story to a private realm that is at once the figure of the inner, spiritual heroism of Christian fortitude and of a domestic sphere that would newly become the subject of the novel (Quint, qtd. in Sá 33).

Milton moves away from the traditional sites of the epic and, in doing so, distances his text from the values associated to the genre. Taking up Quint's idea of the spheres in *Paradise Lost* what is proposed here is that the new sphere he identifies, the domestic, is aligned with the idea of the "paradise within" since it is here, in the private sphere of experience, that the "paradise within" is constructed. This does not mean that *Paradise Lost* ceases to have political significance, rather political action has a different meaning or functions in a different site from the greater politics of national and imperial consolidation. And *Midnight's Children*, taking up the idea of the "paradise within" and its associated arena of political action in the figure of Aadam Sinai, recognizes this shift in politics in *Paradise Lost* and uses it as a better positioning before the promises and problems in the process of national unification.

The move away from war in *Paradise Lost*, the traditional theme of the epic, is also identified by Richard Helgerson. For Helgerson, this refusal to sing war, proposing instead what he calls an anti-militaristic humanism as the poem's focus, represents a turning of the genre against itself (61). But whereas this refusal and this anti-militaristic humanism could be read as a function of the constitution of a "paradise within" by Man in light of the Fall, Helgerson argues that, although Milton redefines genre conventions, he does not abandon the absolutist ambition of the neoclassic epic. Milton's idea of freedom

[...] is rather an example to the English nation of an inner freedom from which political freedom can arise [...] In Milton, epic form and heroic meter are as much the vehicles of a statist ideology as they were for any Aristotelian theorist or neoclassical poet of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Helgerson 61).

So although Milton rejects epic conventions, his concern is still aligned with the nation, with instilling the proper views and political organization among its members. For Helgerson, this orientation towards a proper national conscience is due, in large part, to Milton's being the poet that followed the generation responsible for the first conscious efforts at building a British national self-representation, the Elizabethan writers.

Elizabethan writing sought to articulate a national community, to move away from a dynastic conception of communal identity to a kind of post-dynastic nationalism. Helgerson argues that even then the problem of the nation was that nationalist discourse presupposed a stable, unified national self when, in truth, this

“self” was inherently unstable; and doubt also remained regarding what the nation should be identified with. But however problematic, Elizabethan writing continued to function as a focal point of English national self-understanding for the period just after it, that is, Milton’s. It is with this writing and its underlying project that Helgerson proposes Milton aligned his poem, a lesson to his fellow citizens on how politics should be conducted to achieve greatness on a national scale.

What makes this body of texts relevant to post-colonial ones such as *Midnight’s Children* is that they are taken up again in the second great British imperial period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At this point imperial self-assertion looks back to this period of constitution of the nation. And as the Empire stretched its domains, imperial expansion and nationalist ideology were articulated into the European discourse of nationhood. And for Helgerson it is inside this discourse that the post-colonial independence movements, which *Midnight’s Children* describes, wrote themselves.

Taking up this idea, I propose that, in appropriating *Paradise Lost*, *Midnight’s Children* points to this process of inscription and to how the British discourse of nationhood remained a conforming element of an Indian independent national identity. In this move, Rushdie refutes the essentialisms surrounding the Indian national project. But *Midnight’s Children* complicates this apparently straightforward reference. As the novel progresses, the writing of the nation becomes a writing in fact of its explosive heterogeneity. Focusing on the idea of the “paradise within” as a better positioning in face of the problems in the nation, *Midnight’s Children* can propose a reading of *Paradise Lost* outside its assigned

role as upholder of the nation, opening the text to other possibilities of reading. Questioning all projects of national consolidation based on wholeness and stability, *Midnight's Children* complicates not only post-colonial but also British national self-representation using one of its key texts.

Moving away from this earlier kind of criticism represented by Evans and Quint, Lydia Schulman proposes another theme for *Paradise Lost*, a much more encompassing one, that of human corruptibility and the possibility of human improvement. However, as for Schulman Milton's political theory runs parallel to the moral and theological concerns of *Paradise Lost*, she ultimately links this theme to Milton's republicanism. Linking moral concerns with political ones, rather than being merely a protest against or a vindication of British imperialism, *Paradise Lost* deals with the "urgent moral concerns of citizens struggling to establish a stable republic and facing the dangers of tyranny and corruption at every turn" (Schulman 4). This republican subtext would be evidenced by *Paradise Lost*'s central role in the American Revolution and its establishment as a republic. But although for Schulman the theme of *Paradise Lost* is ultimately linked to its author's political agenda, her identification of the dynamics of corruptibility/redemption signal a move away from simple associations. Instead of closing the text around one concern, Schulman's reading represents an opening up to broader issues.

I pick up on Schulman's proposed theme but associate it rather with the proposition of the "paradise within", wherein lies the possibility of human redemption that Schulman points out, rather than with the establishment of a

republic. The idea is that the politics in *Paradise Lost* consists not in a lesson on national affairs but in a more local politics, a politics that considers more how individuals position themselves and carry out their lives in the smaller, private sphere of experience. Here is the site of the “paradise within” and here Man finds redemption. And this redemption is contingent with struggle and choice, rather than an idyllic state of mind. It is in this way that the “paradise within” gains political significance.

Quint also arrives at this consideration of the political spheres in *Paradise Lost*, although for him it is part of Milton’s project of revision of the epic. Reworking the epic genre

[...] just as Milton reverses epic tradition by giving the private world of Eden prominence over a public arena of military-political exploits—a reversal so remarkable that it almost seems to create a new genre— he also disputes the conventional epic wisdom that separates them [...] Private life thus is continuous with the public, political world (Quint, qtd. in Sá 33).

Milton reworks the epic not only by abandoning its site, the site of war, but by placing before it the smaller site of private experience. What I propose is that this private sphere is continuous with the construction of a “paradise within”. But I would argue that the private sphere, as a space of struggle and choice, is not only continuous with the public, identified by Quint as the site of political action. I would argue that it is in itself political and that by giving this private space this full significance, instead of placing it all in the space of the nation, Milton to a

degree redefines political participation. And this is the reading of the poem proposed by *Midnight's Children*, as the novel takes up this view of political participation as a valid positioning in light of the problems faced in the process of Indian national unification.

The challenges to genre conventions in *Paradise Lost* are also discussed by Sá as part of a reading strategy that focuses on the text's multiplicity of voices and meanings, instead of reading into it the imperatives of colonialism and nationalism. For Sá the poem is tragic in its depiction of Hell, including here Satan and Man's Fall, Heaven is depicted in the glorious narrative of epic, and Adam and Eve's life in Eden is described in terms of pastoral. These genres intermix, without definite separations, inside the body of the text, destabilizing its standing as an epic and, as such, an instrument of imperial consolidation. For Sá the consequence is a text permanently at difference with itself that is open to multiple readings, among them the possibility of a dialogue with a post-colonial text such as *Midnight's Children*.

The result of this strategy of reading *Paradise Lost* is a reversal of its former associations. Read in terms of its different narrative strategies, the text explores rather an imperious indetermination than an imperial determination. In this reading *Paradise Lost* becomes open, un-totalizing and non-totalitarian (Sá 60). Focusing on the "paradise within" and reading *Paradise Lost* in such a non-totalitarian light, that is, outside the issues of British imperialism, I propose the same kind of reading performed by Sá.

Moving away from the concern with British imperialism and a focus on the nation, Sá explores other possibilities of reading and connections in *Paradise Lost*, demystifying a canonical British text in the same way Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* does. For Sá, in its narrative choices, *Paradise Lost* escapes circumscription in a colonial/nationalist apparatus and opens space for a plurality of voices. Ultimately this means placing, instead of the great narratives of knowledge and power (of which the Nation, Empire and the epic genre are examples), small accounts that destabilize this same power and knowledge. And this is carried out through the proposition of the "paradise within" and its inscription, first in the body itself, and its locality, small actions in local spaces.

It is this kind of politics described by Sá that *Midnight's Children* explores. Contrasting Saleem's identification with the larger sphere of the nation with Aadam Sinai's more collected positioning, reminiscent of the lesson of the "paradise within", Rushdie challenges both the nationalist discourse and *Paradise Lost's* standing as a nationalist text.

### 3 The writing of the nation in *Midnight's Children*

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, a novel published in the aftermath of Indian independence, proposes a reflection on the struggles behind the project of Indian national consolidation. To write the nation, the novel's narrator Saleem Sinai draws on John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Through its points of contact with Milton's epic, Rushdie's text explores the complex continuity/conflict between colonial and post-colonial constructions of India. In *Midnight's Children*, the nation is shaped by different forces. Taking up *Paradise Lost* Rushdie's novel suggests that the influence of Empire is still felt in the imagining of an independent Indian national identity, even if this identity is affirmed in opposition to European domination.

This continuity between colonial and post-colonial India in *Midnight's Children* informs the very concept of nation on which independence is affirmed. And this suggestion is made in the novel given *Paradise Lost*'s standing in the British literary canon. *Paradise Lost* has been read in terms of British national self-representation, a representation that was exported to its colonies along with its literature. Placing what has been read as the imperial national text in a narrative of a former colony's national struggles, *Midnight's Children* suggests how the idea of nation-ness, imported and adapted from Empire through its texts, also plays a part in shaping the new nation, alongside its many other heterogeneous elements.

*Midnight's Children* presents the yearning for a national form and the difficulty to negotiate this national project in face of the many heterogeneous groups in India. By making allusions to *Paradise Lost*, the novel refuses to write nationality in terms of essentialisms or as the expression of a natural homogeneity originated in an unseable past, an imagining of nation-ness *Paradise Lost* has been associated with. Focusing instead on the epic's proposition of the "paradise within", *Midnight's Children* can question the concept of nation and the way it is perceived by its members.

Although *Midnight's Children* focuses on the period of Indian history after colonization, the negotiation of an independent national identity is, inevitably, marked by Empire. The novel describes the struggles for independence and the conflicts and inequalities behind the construction of an Indian national identity through the events in the life of its narrator, Saleem Sinai. As Saleem describes the British presence in his own personal history, intermingled with the many other religious and cultural aspects of India, this influence leaks into the national sphere.

The influence of "Abroad" that finds its way into Saleem's family, leaking later into the national project, is inherited from the family founder, Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz. After receiving a European education, Aadam Aziz returns to his native country tainted by "Abroad". Unable to fully reconcile his secular European education to the customs and beliefs of his childhood he finds himself

Caught in a strange middle ground, trapped between belief and disbelief [...] And was knocked forever into that middle place, unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve. Permanent alteration (*Midnight's Children* 6).

The Eastern born and European educated doctor Aadam Aziz finds himself caught in a space in-between two cultures from where he has to negotiate his own identity. This sensation of in-betweenness is passed on to Saleem. And as all aspects of Saleem's life and ancestry are paralleled in the nation from their simultaneous births, Aadam's legacy is, therefore, inevitably also inherited by India. Tying ancestry to history, and beginning his narrative with the figure of the "in-between man"<sup>1</sup>, Saleem suggests how Empire and its cultural forms become another element not only in the establishment of individual identities but also in the shaping of a national one on which to assert independence.

As in-betweenness is Aadam's legacy to Saleem, its experience soon visibly spreads also throughout the whole nation. Throughout India, Aadam recognizes that after Empire many have been tainted with "Abroad" and returning to the memory of a pure, essential Indian heritage has become impossible. An example of the inescapability of "Abroad", the Rani of Cooch Naheen, a political figure in the independence movement, gradually turns white

The Rani of Cooch Naheen was going white in blotches, a disease which leaked into history and erupted on an enormous scale shortly after Independence [...] "I am the victim," the Rani

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Homi Bhabha's collection of essays *The Location of Culture* for his full definition of the concept of "in-betweenness".

whispers, through photographed lips that never move, “the hapless victim of my cross-cultural concerns” (*Midnight’s Children* 45).

The cross-cultural concerns shared by Aadam and the Rani and an ever increasing number of the population are intrinsic elements in the imagination of the national community. The Rani’s case is even more noteworthy since her in-between identity is manifested visibly on her skin, traditionally the first site on which a distinction between colonizer and colonized was established. *Midnight’s Children* suggests that it is from the in-between sites of domains of difference, as the Rani exemplifies, that an Indian national identity must be negotiated.

These in-between men in *Midnight’s Children* point to a process identified by Homi Bhabha of redefinition of the concept of homogeneous national cultures. In the introduction to his collection of essays Bhabha stresses the need, in light of the break-up of the European Empires and the constitution of independent post-colonial nations, to think beyond originary and initial subjectivities to “focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (1). For Bhabha, the interstices or the overlap of the different domains that inhabit identity, in other words the in-between spaces, provide the terrain for negotiating strategies of selfhood and the collective experience of nation-ness. The move away from fixed organizational categories of identification results in a perception of the subject positions, such as race, class, gender, etc, that inform identity. This process of redefinition of subjectivity ultimately encompasses human communities and the identifications produced in them.

For Bhabha this process is true of all human communities, but especially true in post-colonial nations, in which a return to an essential, pure national past on which to assert a true, untainted and natural national identity, is impossible. Interstitiality or in-betweenness challenges the idea of monolithic, homogeneous identity. And the in-between subjects in *Midnight's Children*, Aadam Aziz, the Rani and Saleem Sinai, informing the national project with their interstitial identities, challenge the idea of a monolithic, homogeneous Indian national one.

*Midnight's Children* poses in-betweenness or interstitiality as a way of highlighting the explosive differences in India, among which, inescapably, are the cultural remnants of British presence. The novel suggests that, due to this presence, European cultural forms also inform the independent national culture, just as *Paradise Lost* informs its writing. Interstitiality becomes a way of undermining essentialist views of the nation. And this challenge to monolithic national representations, through *Midnight's Children* allusions to *Paradise Lost*, ultimately is also posed to the imperial national self-representation.

In-betweenness as a mark of individual, as well as of a national, identity is exemplified by Saleem's and other middle class families. Saleem's father buys a house from William Methwold, a retreating colonial. In a parallel of national events on a smaller scale, the property, like India, would only be transferred on midnight of August 15<sup>th</sup>. As an additional condition, the entire contents of the house must be retained by the new owners, nothing must change. The effect of this on Saleem's family, and on the other families that buy the other houses on the estate, is that it anglicizes them.

Every evening at six they are out in their gardens, celebrating the cocktail hour, and when William Methwold comes they slip effortlessly into their imitation Oxford drawls; and they are learning about ceiling-fans and gas cookers and the correct diet for budgerigars, and Methwold, supervising their transformation, is mumbling under his breath (*Midnight's Children* 109).

The influence of Empire remains, even after Methwold and Britain are gone, in the lingering cultural forms that were introduced by the British and that become a part of the lives of the colonized peoples.

This continuity of cultural forms Rushdie points to was part of Empire's system of subject formation. According to Bhabha, the enlightenment of the "native" population was one of the justifications for British dominion in India. The government's policy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century then required a reform of Indian manners to give the "natives" a sense of personal identity recognizable, as far as possible, by European standards. And this reform was carried out through the introduction of British texts, such as *Paradise Lost*, and the establishment of British educational systems.

But the Methwold passage, highlighting the continuity of British cultural forms in India after independence, also allows for a deeper critique of the imagination of the nation. The episode functions as a parallel of national events, the rights of ownership of the houses being passed on at the precise moment in which independence is officially recognized. The suggestion here is that, as Saleem's family mimics British cultural forms, so the nation that is taking shape

is still imagined based on forms or concepts of nation-ness introduced by Empire, forms that do not necessarily reflect the Indian situation. And as internal divisions grow, the novel suggests that it is this view of nation-ness that must be revised.

As ancestry and history continually clash in Saleem's narrative of the nation, he discovers that the legacy of in-betweenness informs all aspects of his life. In a twist of events, Saleem discovers he is not really his parents' child or Aadam Aziz's blood descendent. He has been switched at the hospital. Raised in a rich Muslim family, Saleem is in truth the bastard son of the retreating Englishman Methwold and a Hindu slum-dweller. The consequence of this permanent, inescapable hole left by a British father, according to Saleem, is that

all my life, consciously or unconsciously, I have sought out fathers.

Ahmed Sinai, Hanif Aziz, Sharpsticker Sahib, General Zulfikar have all been pressed into service in the absence of William Methwold (*Midnight's Children* 490).

Saleem reverses the order of nature and forges himself his ancestry, placing different figures in the space left by his absent father. As Saleem's life prefigures that of the nation, *Midnight's Children* disturbingly places Englishness at the origin of Indian nationality.

Saleem, raised a Muslim, is exchanged for the child Shiva, who is raised in the impoverished Hindu family into which the novel's narrator was really born. Saleem's identity is poised on the fissures between three group identifications, Hindu, Muslim and British, as is India's. As the narrator negotiates his own in-

betweenness, these heterogeneous groups struggle against each other for expression in the national sphere.

Saleem's narrative undermines origins, his own and the nation's. Part of the legitimacy of nations comes from the sense shared by their members that they are the expressions of a timeless communion that is based on a common origin. In this way, nationality is perceived as an unproblematic, natural given (Anderson 11). Through Saleem's personal history, *Midnight's Children* undermines the idea of nation-ness based on a pure origin. And most importantly, it questions the very concept of nation-as-natural-homogeneity that is the product of this constructed genealogy. Undermining this concept of nationality, *Midnight's Children* suggests that the Indian nation in construction is more an imagined community than the concrete, homogeneous one that Saleem, and all its members, believe in and buy into.

This undermining of national origins in *Midnight's Children* is close to Bhabha's analysis of narratives of the nation. Bhabha looks at nation-ness as a form of social and textual affiliation, focusing on the temporal dimension of the strategies of discursive address that function in the name of "the people" or "the nation", making them the subjects of different types of narrative. For Bhabha, this approach to the writing of the nation displaces the historicist view of it as a holistic entity that harks back to a true national past.

One of the problems Bhabha poses to this historicist view of nation-ness is what he terms the ambivalent temporalities of the nation space, the fact that the language of community is posed on the fissures of the present becoming the

rhetorical figure of a national past. Bhabha identifies this process as the difference between the pedagogical and the performative time of the people where

The nation's people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity (145).

This means that daily life must be turned into a sign of a coherent national culture, authorized by and identified in a national past constituted by the "people" itself. In this tension between the pedagogical and the performative, the people inhabit the cutting edge between "the totalizing powers of the social as homogeneous, consensual community" and the specific contentious interests and identities within the population (Bhabha 146).

Bhabha's analysis of narratives of nations and the temporal tension created in their discursive address complicates totalities and the authority of the discourse that defines nationality as homogeneity. *Midnight's Children* suggests these tensions by constantly placing together the daily life of its narrator and national history. Although Saleem's life is a parallel of the nation's, his personal history, instead of iterating a unitary nation, highlights in fact its heterogeneity. And Saleem's mixed origin undermines what Bhabha terms the pedagogical temporality of nation-ness. By undermining the totalities of the nation, totalities

which *Paradise Lost* has been seen to legitimate in readings and practices that have associated it to nationalism and imperialism, Rushdie's novel can discuss not only the Indian national struggles but it can refer back to or participate in imperial culture. In this way, *Midnight's Children* can make the former power look back on itself as it questions also its national self-representation.

The perception of nationality-as-homogeneity, implicit in the independence movements, is constantly referred to and undermined in *Midnight's Children* as its symbols, used by official government propaganda, also crumble. On his birth, Saleem is celebrated as the symbol of the nation. His baby photographs are spread throughout India, reassuring the population of their common nationality through this type of mass reproduced image. Saleem's life, in the letter sent him by the government, shall be closely watched by "us" and taken as a measure of "our" own success. In this discourse, the nation is referred to as an unproblematic, cohesive given, an image cemented in its members' minds through the shared national symbol, in this case Saleem himself. But contrary to these expectations, Saleem's failures in life only mirror the crumbling impossibility of this image of nationality. Saleem's shortcomings finally highlight the inescapable heterogeneity of India.

*Midnight's Children* contrasts the official government discourses on India's brilliant future to the popular riots, the poverty, the struggle for self-determination of minority groups and the many heterogeneous and irreconcilable fragments of India, precariously sewn together. For Saleem India becomes

A dream we all agreed to dream; it was a mass fantasy shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat, and would periodically need the sanctification and renewal which can only be provided by rituals of blood. India, the new myth- a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a fable rivalled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God (*Midnight's Children* 124-25).

Instead of the naturally binding communion spread by official nationalism, of which Saleem himself is a symbol, the nation is represented as a myth, the product of a collective imagination whose inherent heterogeneity becomes explosive.

As the representation of the nation becomes more problematic, *Midnight's Children* suggests violence is also born with independence. Saleem gradually realizes, in face of the threatening heterogeneity of India, that violence is used to maintain the cohesion and unity on which independence was asserted. The national unity is maintained through bloodshed and killing of dissent. Minority separatist groups, such as the communist party that begins to form itself in Delhi slums, are silenced. And violence becomes another element of the emerging national form. As it escalates, Saleem senses “the ghosts of ancient empires in the air” (*Midnight's Children* 488) repeated in the government practices used to uphold the project of national unity that was the foundation of independence.

And violence is represented by another magical child. Shiva, like Saleem, is also born on the stroke of midnight of independence. He is Saleem's double and, like Saleem, becomes a symbol of the Indian nation. Shiva is born with

monstrous strength in his knees and from his childhood becomes a murderer. If Saleem represents the success of national unity, Shiva represents the violence used by those in power to hold it together. And in light of this violence Saleem is forced to conclude that, in many different ways, “Shiva... has made us [the nation] who we are” (*Midnight’s Children* 342). Shiva, and all he represents, also plays a decisive role in the construction of this “we”. And this is *Midnight’s Children* greatest critique of the Indian national project. As in-betweenness and heterogeneity are continually suppressed under an ideal of nation-as-homogeneity, Shiva becomes an ever more menacing figure in the novel. And with him, the violence of Empire is repeated in the reiteration of its imported model of nationality.

Represented in this way, the nation is denaturalized in *Midnight’s Children*. Saleem initially writes the nation as something that is born. This treatment of nationality as something organic implies that it is natural, given and fixed. This sense of fatality in nationality, for Benedict Anderson, is responsible for the nation’s legitimacy and for the strong attachment it arouses in its members. But Saleem’s mixed ancestry, evidenced even by his physical features, points instead to the fragmented and constructed nature of the nation. He has “eyes as blue as Kashmiri sky-which were also eyes as blue as Methwold’s-and a nose as dramatic as a Kashmiri grandfather’s-which was also the nose of a grandmother from France” (*Midnight’s Children* 130). Saleem’s features are a mixture of Eastern and European heritage. Saleem, as a symbol of the nation, highlights not its natural wholeness, but its inherent heterogeneity and tendency to

fragmentation. Saleem's own uncertain origin points to that of the nation itself. Devoid of its seeming natural aspect and identifiable, fixed origin, and in light of the violence allied to power that Shiva represents, Saleem denaturalizes the nation, writing it instead as a form of imagined community, as defined by Anderson.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* analyzes the concept of nation, trying to arrive at a better understanding of the complex set of processes that shape it. Anderson defines nation not in terms of common language, history, territory, etc, but as a social construct, as a product of a collective imagination. He theorizes the nation as "an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). Anderson defines the nation in terms of imagination (a term not to be confused with a fabrication or a lie) because its members will never know, see or even hear of their fellow citizens, yet in the mind of each is the image of their communion. The nation is limited because each one has a frontier, beyond which are other nations. The nation is imagined as sovereign because the concept was born out of 18<sup>th</sup> century European Enlightenment and its Revolutions, which undermined the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained monarchies of the preceding period with its banner of freedom and equality, whose emblem is a sovereign state ordained by the "people". Finally, the nation is imagined as a community because, despite the inequalities and eventual exploitation of certain segments, it is conceived as a horizontal brotherhood, a deep comradeship, and as such produces profound attachments among its members.

Anderson places the dawn of the modern nation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century due to the great change in the perception of the world this period consolidated. By the end of the century, the medieval religious apprehension of time and of the world, mediated by religion, was replaced by a rationalist secularism. However, assurances that before were provided by religion were still needed before fatalities such as death, human suffering, etc. What was required was a “secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning [...] few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation” (Anderson 11). The imagining of a secular community replaces the imagining of a religious one. This change in mode of thought set the scene or made it possible for the type of imagined community that is the nation to arise. However, this change is not in itself directly responsible for the rise of national affiliations which, according to Anderson, would only be possible due to the coming together of three specific elements.

Imagining the nation was possible due to the fortuitous but explosive interaction between a system of production and productive relations, capitalism, a technology of communications, print, and the fatality of human linguistic diversity. The way the modern nation is imagined is due to the association between capitalism and its first true commodity, mass (re)produced item, the book, and their impact on peoples’ imagination and relations.

For Anderson, print language created unified fields of exchange and communication among the readers and speakers of different languages, the nations’ future members. In this process, these members become aware of the

millions of others in their particular language field and, most importantly, “that *only* those hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged” forming “in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community” (Anderson 44). Print capitalism, in its infinite reproducibility, by placing within reach of all the members of the nationally imagined community the same books, newspapers, grammars, etc, provided the assurance of a specific, homogeneous community repeating the same actions, reading the same language, even if anonymously. And this sense of communion with millions of other unknown people is the basis for nationality. As this sense of communion was gradually reinforced, first in the Americas, where it exploded in independence struggles, and later in Europe, by geographic, economic and political factors, the nationally imagined community gradually took shape.

Language and print capitalism not only helped to shape nationally imagined communities but, through their setting down and narrating of events, helped also to endow the nation with an apparent concreteness. Events and political movements, once they occur, enter the memory of print. Their experience becomes a “thing”, which is given a name and is shaped in a particular way by narrative, both in the minds of those who actually participated in them and in the minds of future generations. Details may remain polemic, but of the “it-ness” of events such as the “French Revolution” little doubt remains. And so, in the accumulating memory of print, British history, French history, Dutch history, etc, began to take shape, as did their respective nations. And with nations, other signs such as “nation-states, republican institutions, common citizenships, popular

sovereignty, national flags and anthems, etc” (Anderson 81) consolidate the fixity and concreteness of the nationally imagined community in the minds of its members.

Writing the history of India, Saleem proposes to enter into this accumulating tradition, helping to fix the “it-ness” of the nation. Indeed, Saleem is himself an emblem of it. Selected as the symbol of the nation, his baby picture is mass reproduced and distributed to all its citizens. But as conflicting imaginings, communal solidarities and violence inevitably leak into his narrative, Saleem unavoidably undermines precisely this “it-ness”, concluding finally that, in the end, “there are as many versions of India as Indians” (*Midnight’s Children* 308). Saleem initially engages in the same project of giving fixity to the nation by writing it and by placing himself at the centre of national events. But his narrative only discovers the process by which this sense of “it-ness” or of “Indian-ness” is constructed, is imagined. Saleem ends up undermining the national concreteness he initially set out to confirm.

For Anderson, the newly imagined national community of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was spread by the European imperial powers to their colonies in Africa and Asia, influencing their construction of a national conscience when these colonies became independent. The imperial powers adopted a policy that Anderson terms “official nationalism”, an attempt to “stretch the tight skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire” (86). To prevent the wave of independence struggles begun in the Americas, powers such as Britain implemented their education systems in the remaining colonies. The idea was to anglicize the native

population. If all the subjects of the Empire are “British”, imperialism is legitimated and the contradictions between the idea of nation (a horizontal brotherhood) and imperialism, the effective domination of the “native” populations, becomes less apparent. As European histories became more and more nationally defined, fixed in print, their concrete “it-ness” was firmly established and exported to the colonies through the new education systems.

Through these systems, the colonized peoples would have access not only to history books but also to literature, including works such as *Paradise Lost*. And with the epic came its history of readership association to this view of nation-ness Anderson describes. Alluding to *Paradise Lost*, Rushdie’s novel alludes also to this process of transmission of its associated ideal of nationality, an ideal that helped shape the post-colonial national identity, but that *Midnight’s Children* finds so problematic.

For Anderson, through its attempts at homogenizing native populations under European control, official European nationalisms opened the doors for the imagination of sovereign independent nationalities in the colonies. The new nations that constituted themselves in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, educated in these new systems, inevitably drew on the national experience exported by the imperial powers. Tying history to ancestry, *Midnight’s Children’s* exposure of the mimicking of British cultural forms in Saleem’s family suggests this process of influence in imagining the national community. And it is this imagining of nation-ness as concrete, fixed and natural, as described by Anderson, that the novel critiques.

The new post-colonial nations inherited the institutions, such as the State and government organization, the laws, etc, of the former Empire. For Anderson, three of these colonial institutions, used first to agglomerate the “native” populations in one mass, comprehensible to the European eye, helped later to shape the image of their nationality: the census, the map and the museum. The census lay the basis for the social, political and administrative institutions in the colonies. It created artificial identification categories and divided the native populations into groups. The census lay such deep roots that its categorizing procedures were taken up after independence, condensed into broader, more artificial groups, but now placed under national headings, such as “Indian”.

Any writing of the nation, such as *Midnight's Children* proposes, necessarily implies these fixed group identities, condensed into the national category. But Saleem's narrative, posing in-betweeness against these fixed identifications, disrupts easy categorizations. From its origin the national category presents problems. Reversing the order of ancestry in creating fathers for himself, Saleem draws on the different groups inside this all-encompassing category, highlighting the proliferation of minor communal identifications that refuse to be easily included in flattening categorizations.

According to Anderson, maps played a complementary role to the census. During the colonization period maps were drawn to distinguish one European possession from another. In other words, maps were drawn not as representations of a prior reality but to shape Africa, Asia and the Americas to Europe's interests. But, for the populations of these territories, they were the first and only

representations of their land, deeply influencing their view of it. So when these populations asserted their right to independence, this was the way the national borders were imagined. Each new nation was separated from the surrounding others according to the various colours which previously informed European powers who controlled which territories. And the census, through its grouping and condensing of previously elaborated categories, filled in politically the formal topography of the map. These combined factors would account for the continuity between the imperial possessions and the new post-colonial nations.

Finally memory, and its symbol, the museum, also have a part to play in shaping the nationally imagined community. Since the modern nation is always imagined as the expression of a primordial and ancient communion, it is necessarily linked to a national memory and to the narration of a common national history. Entering the domains of language and history, events and experiences are appropriated and, once turned into narratives, their internal divisions and conflicts are (necessarily) forgotten and retold as national conflicts, as “our history”. And this common history is displayed in museums, copied in postcards and sold in gift shops. According to Anderson, the imagined national community relies on a strategic forgetting of its internal contradictions and its differences.

This necessary forgetting, which enables historicism to place such antagonistic figures as William the Conqueror and Harold on the same battlefield as participants of a *British* history, is also true of India. Saleem’s comment that “we are a nation of forgetters”, in light of popular riots that protest the right to different identifications from inside the nation after independence, highlights the

necessary forgetting of internal divisions. These divisions between Hindus and Muslims, Madrasi, Gujarati and Jat are all swept under the established national “we”, subjects of an Indian history, made concrete in language and print. In *Midnight's Children* the national “we” is, in fact, Saleem suggests, a forgetting of its “un-weness”.

Anderson's analysis of nations, as it treats the 20<sup>th</sup> century post-colonial national projects, has been critiqued. Leela Gandhi argues that Anderson's theory of nationality, especially when applied to former colonies of European Empires, simply supposes that the nationalist movements used to legitimize these colonies' struggles for independence are merely copies of the European model, divesting these movements of any creativity. For Gandhi, Anderson credits all nationalisms to Europe. This reading of *Imagined Communities* is perhaps too narrow. Anderson argues that nations, as they are perceived today in most parts of the world, are part of a complex set of processes that began in Europe and were later spread to European imperial domains. Post-colonial nationalisms are creative in their different interpretations and uses of this heritage, and it would be a step backwards (to say the least) to affirm that these nations owe their identity to Europe. But the fact that this identity must be negotiated also with their colonial pasts cannot be overlooked. And this is what *Midnight's Children* points to in its representation of post-colonial India.

Gandhi's critique is taken up also by Partha Chatterjee, who argues that, although Anderson's analysis is fundamentally correct, its argument touching post-colonial nations presents one major problem. Chatterjee asks the question, if

the nationally imagined communities in former colonies are dependent on European models of nation-ness, what is left to imagine? (5). For Chatterjee, Anderson's argument, as it is posed, submits these populations to an eternal position of colonized subjects.

Chatterjee proposes that post-colonial nationality, and his examples are drawn from India, is posited not on identity with European models but on difference. One of the main problems he identifies in studies of nations is their treatment as, first and foremost, political movements. For Chatterjee, the national projects in former European colonies began while they were still under foreign dominion and only acquired political significance much later. Anti-colonial nationalism, he argues, separates two domains in communal life: the inner or spiritual domain and the external, material one. The nation declares its sovereignty over the first, the domain of religion, language, etc, which bears the essential marks of a national cultural identity. In this domain, communal identifications are imagined into existence. From this first sphere of nation-ness the colonizer is excluded, and a sense that national culture must be preserved from outside influences arises. In the material, political sphere, however, the West had proven its superiority and its accomplishments, its institutional organizations, were carefully copied.

But this spiritual domain was not left untouched. Although asserted on difference from the West, anti-colonial nationalism appropriates its forms in the project of forging a modern nation. To this end, the bilingual middle-class, usually the class associated to national movements worldwide, used three important

cultural tools: language, print-capitalism and the education system. To make the mother tongue an adequate language for a modern nation, printing presses, publishing houses and newspapers were established, standardizing and shaping the new modernized language. With print capitalism, a parallel network of secondary schools outside colonial state control was established. This provided the space where the national language and literature were generalized and normalized.

What calls attention in this analysis is that, although the anti-colonial or post-colonial nationally imagined community asserted itself on difference from Empire, the mechanisms for imagining this community, as proposed by Chatterjee, were the same as those outlined by Anderson. And as the national project moves towards the outer material domain, a strict differentiation becomes impossible. And this is what *Midnight's Children* tries to point out. Although independent nationality in former colonies is asserted on a difference from Empire, the way or the terms on which it is imagined owe a great deal to it.

But for Chatterjee there is still one element that sets aside anti-colonial nation-ness from Empire, and that is the fact that it had to be imagined from a subject position, under foreign control. The establishment of the inner sphere of nationality opens a possibility for anti-colonial nation-ness to claim for itself an identity outside the gallery of models offered by European forms of national community, even if the underlying mechanisms of national imagination are the same.

But in the move from this inner to the outer sphere remains the problem facing post-colonial nations. The nation must also find its expression in a form of government organization. But in anti-colonial national movements, the form chosen was the European liberal-democratic State. This form of statehood is based on a separation between public and private and on individual rights, which means that the government cannot interfere in the private, inner sphere of the population's lives. The problem is that, if nationality is based on this inner, spiritual sphere, how can the state, which is the expression of this nation, be separated from it or be devoid of religious orientation? This is the main reason why post-colonial nations remain influenced by Empire's cultural forms and why "autonomous forms of imagination of the community were, and continue to be, overwhelmed and swamped by the history of the postcolonial state" (Chatterjee 11). The post-colonial nations' misery lies not in an inability to think out new forms of the modern community, but in the surrender to these old forms. And it is this surrender and these old forms that are depicted and critiqued in *Midnight's Children*.

Chatterjee also recognizes the importance of history in imagining the national community. In this way, the narration of the Indian national past was modelled on European historiography which, as Anderson and Bhabha point out, relies on a process of construction of a unitary "we" or "people" and a forgetting of internal disparities. In India, Ancient India became the national classical age

Ancient glory, present misery: the subject of this entire story is "us". The mighty heroes of ancient India were "our" ancestors and

the feeble inhabitants of India today are “ourselves”. That ancient Indians conquered other countries or traded across the seas or treated other “people” with contempt is a matter of pride for “us” (Chatterjee 97).

Chatterjee argues, in line with Anderson, that in the European and the post-colonial national histories, no matter how many conflicts arise among the population, the “people”, as the expression of the nation, are always described as “we”. “We”, the (Indian) people, who share the same origin and are the constituents of a (Indian) national history.

This complex continuity/conflict with their colonial past in post-colonial nations discussed by Chatterjee is central to *Midnight's Children's* writing of the nation. The novel points out that, although many times asserted on difference from Europe, post-colonial nations in fact pick up on European cultural forms in imagining independent national identities. But what *Midnight's Children* rejects in Chatterjee's analysis of nation-ness is its perception in terms of essentialisms, origins and homogeneity, what Chatterjee calls the inner sphere of life.

*Midnight's Children* sets out to write the process of constitution of an independent Indian nation through the events of the life of its narrator, Saleem Sinai. As the novel progresses, however, the representation of the nation becomes difficult. As Saleem and his family inscribe the nation with their interstitiality and their fragmented identities, the divisions inside the national project become explosive. Instead of writing the process of national unification, Saleem writes instead its inherent heterogeneity.

The heterogeneity that informs Saleem's identity and leaks into the nation, despite his efforts to contain it, points to the critique *Midnight's Children* makes of the way the nation is perceived among its members. As Saleem must negotiate his identity from Eastern and British influences, *Midnight's Children* suggests this is also true of India. In this way, the novel refutes the essentialisms on which the national project was first conceived, essentialisms which Saleem, initially, also buys into.

And this perception of nation-ness, the novel suggests, is due in large part to the cultural influence of imperialism. As Empire informs Saleem's identity and that of his family, the novel suggests that, writing itself in the aftermath of the European national struggles, India has taken up the same perspective of nationality. A perspective based on homogeneity that is due to a common origin and that sees nation-ness as a concrete, stable entity, fixed in the minds of its members through the mechanisms described by Anderson. Writing the nation as an imagined community, a construct poised on difference and not on natural unity, *Midnight's Children* rejects this latter representation of nation-ness. And using *Paradise Lost*, *Midnight's Children* extends this criticism to the imperial national community.

#### 4 **Re-appropriating *Paradise Lost*: the centrality of the “paradise within”.**

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has been read as a foundational text of British imperialism and aligned to a tradition of affirmation of the English nation. However, this reading of *Paradise Lost* places misleading emphasis on Milton's choice of genre as fixing the poem's concerns on English imperialism and nationalism, leaving unexplained the proposition, at the end of Book 12, of a “paradise within”.

*Paradise Lost* is an epic about the Fall of Man and the loss of Paradise. Before the Fall, Man's internal purity was reflected externally, in the purity of Eden. After Adam and Eve's temptation, this relationship is broken. However, Michael promises that, even in this fallen state, Man can still enjoy Heaven, but now internally, by creating in himself another paradise. In this state, the archangel's promise is that

...then wilt thou not be loath

To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess

A paradise within thee, happier far (*Paradise Lost* 12. 585-87)

This promise calls attention not to the broad, national issues with which the epic has been identified, but to interiority and to the possibility of constant improvement of human nature after sin.

Although an epic, *Paradise Lost* opens itself to readings outside that of the epic tradition of highlighting the nation. And this is due to the poem's suggestion

of a “paradise within”. Through this concept, implicit throughout the whole text, *Paradise Lost* can be read as a re-working of epic conventions, turning the genre against itself.

For Richard Helgerson, the Restoration’s return to classical forms, especially the epic, illustrates the victory of the Modern nation-state, which stood for unity and homogeneity, over the feudal heterogeneity and decentralization of power. For him, the classical epic represents the wholeness, the unity and “the effective incorporation of the individual into the body of the realm” (52) that are fundamental to the nation-state that began to consolidate itself in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Milton takes up this epic tradition, but redefines epic heroism, singing “a better fortitude”, that of moral choice grounded on inner freedom that, in turn, springs from right use of reason. As Michael tells fallen Adam

Since thy original lapse, true Libertie  
Is lost, which always with right Reason dwells  
Twin’d, and from her hath no diuidual being:  
Reason in man obscur’d, or not obeyd,  
Immediately inordinate desires  
And upstart Passions catch the Government  
From Reason, and to seruitude reduce  
Man till then free (*Paradise Lost* 12. 83-90)

In *Paradise Lost* the epic heroism, the great deeds in battle and the affirmation of nation are replaced by an “antimilitaristic humanism” (Helgerson 61), by an inner resolve to choose rationally and rightly. Adding action to this new perspective of

the world, Man creates a “paradise within”, as opposed to the corrupt empires, built through violence and subjugation of others, that Michael demonstrates in Book 12 and that Adam condemns as contrary to God’s will.

In a closer reading of the “paradise within”, other issues besides nationalism are brought to the front. And although it is only proposed at the end of Book 12 of *Paradise Lost*, its centrality to the epic’s message is suggested throughout the whole work. The perspective of the world that the “paradise within” entails is linked to the theme of *Paradise Lost*, it is implied in Man’s unfallen state and it is also a condition for the redemption made possible to Mankind after sin.

Fundamental to the working of *Paradise Lost*, the concept of a “paradise within” is associated, first and foremost, to the idea of free will and liberty, both of which are only fully realized when the individual, collected in himself, chooses according to right reason. These concepts Satan interprets erroneously, a mistake which ultimately leads to his fall. The “paradise within” also implies faith in God and the Christian values of charity and love. But most importantly, the “paradise within” involves also a material practice, from where it acquires political significance.

A reading of *Paradise Lost* in light of the “paradise within” is one among the many varying waves of Milton criticism, which have moved from controversy over the poet’s work and politics to an elevation of Milton and *Paradise Lost* to the position of symbols of English culture, and ultimately of the nation. Dustin

Griffin traces these views along the century after Milton's time, from the rejection of his politics after the Restoration to what he terms an assimilationist view.

According to Griffin, throughout his lifetime and along the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Milton remained a controversial figure, both due to his public political views and to his attitudes in private life. After Cromwell's Protectorate came to an end, Milton was initially charged with treason, as he supported the execution of Charles I, and his name even appeared among those of other republicans under the heading "Hellish Saints"<sup>1</sup> in sensationalist monarchical publications. By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, a tolerant view of his work was established. Milton was no longer seen as a threat to the national institutions, and many of his supporters even argued that, if he were alive after the Revolution of 1688, he would support the monarchy. In the century succeeding Milton, in a few years, there is a considerable change in the public view on his work. This change is so great that, by Mid-Century, Milton is respectable enough that an edition of *Paradise Lost* may be dedicated to the king, a figure the poet had so actively campaigned to abolish from English political life.

For Griffin, this re-evaluation and appropriation of Milton's work marks the beginning of his assimilation into a process of construction of an English national identity that had already begun in the century preceding him. And it was possible due to the association of the Restoration and Milton's guiding political principle, Liberty. In 18<sup>th</sup> century British politics, as the Revolution became an event of the past, the term liberty became less menacing and more acceptable to

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Griffin (11-21) for information on this text and a survey of other period texts on the same subject.

the prevailing order. Although previously associated to radicalism and rebellion, liberty now was seen more and more as the foundation of the English constitution. In this way, Milton's defense of liberty became consistent with the government in mid 18<sup>th</sup> century England and Milton himself "was no less than a political ancestor and ally of the reigning government" (Griffin 15). At this period Milton is appropriated as both a champion of the government and a spokesman of the people, in other words, of the nation, and the values on which this nation is founded.

In this way, Milton is gradually elevated to the post of great English poet. For Griffin, this process culminates with the erection of the Milton monument in Westminster Abbey, the English national shrine. Although controversial, Milton remained nonetheless the favourite poet of his nation, the English Homer. In this position, he

served to focus 18<sup>th</sup> century England's literary self-consciousness, its sense of its relation to the literary past, its own achievements, and its ambitions. No matter how one mapped the literary landscape, Milton was a central figure (Griffin 33).

The readings and appropriations of Milton's work, and especially of *Paradise Lost*, place him at the centre of British literary and cultural production. In this position, Milton's epic functions as a symbol of the concreteness of the nation for all its members, the values (such as Liberty and free will) portrayed in it become the values the nation stands on. And as British imperialism gained force, Milton

was exported as a symbol of the nation and its cultural greatness to the outer domains.

The assimilation of Milton to British nationalism can also be seen in poetry directly succeeding him. As Griffin goes on to examine the literary production inspired by him, Milton's ideal of Eden persisted in the imagination of poets in various forms. One of these forms was an idyllic rural England. These successors, by equating his ideal of paradise with the England of the Restoration, which was made to stand for order after the upheavals of the Revolution, put his verse and language to "unMiltonic ends: the celebration of a secular political order presided over by the granddaughter of Charles I" (Griffin 119). Griffin goes on to show how the British navy, an instrument of imperial power, was likewise praised in works succeeding *Paradise Lost* which took the poem as their model. In this body of works Milton's idea of paradise is redirected into a representation of a Golden Age in England, Satanic rebellion is aligned to the Civil War and the divine restoration of order to the reigning monarch.

Although this association of 18<sup>th</sup> century politics to *Paradise Lost* seems today rather reductionist, it nevertheless served to fix Milton's place in British national self-representation. But the problem with these "unMiltonic" uses of *Paradise Lost* is that, in the epic itself, the discourse of power and national consolidation are more aligned to fallen reason, closer to Satan than to God. What is advocated in the epic as the better way to uprightness is the perspective of the "paradise within" and its associated values.

The centrality of the “paradise within” to the theme of *Paradise Lost* is suggested, before the concept is fully proposed, in the opening lines of Book 9.

Here the narrator informs the reader that

Since first this subject for heroic song  
 Pleased me long choosing, and beginning late;  
 Not sedulous by nature to indite  
 Wars, hitherto the only argument  
 Heroic deemed, chief mast’ry to dissect  
 With long and tedious havoc fabled knights  
 In battles feigned; *the better fortitude*  
*Of patience and heroic martyrdom*  
*Unsung (Paradise Lost 9. 25-33 italics mine).*

The narrator clearly states here that *Paradise Lost* will not deal with heroes in the sense of performers of great deeds in battle. In other words, it will not sing the nation’s exploits. For Malcolm Ross, this choice signals an abandonment of the nationalist concern that was so prominent in the period preceding Milton’s and an attempt by the author to extricate himself from royalist and nationalist ideals. *Paradise Lost*, the narrator is careful to point out to the reader, although an epic, does not identify itself with the traditional nation-forming values associated to the genre, but with the internal fortitude of the “paradise within”.

Rather than the nation, *Paradise Lost* addresses the moral concerns of individuals under conditions of liberty and temptation, a situation in which internal fortitude against corruption must be continually chosen and exercised.

Adam and Eve, both in Eden and in the post-lapsarian world, must freely choose to obey God or to fall under temptation. As God points out to the Son

I made him [Man] just and right  
 Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.  
 Such I created all th'e ethereal Powers  
 And Spirits, both them who stood and them who failed;  
 Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell. (*Paradise Lost* 3.  
 98-102).

The issue of corruptibility, first Satan's and then Man's, and the necessity of guarding oneself against it, are announced in the epic even before the latter's corruption and fall actually take place. But that human actions are not bound by necessity, as the text in this passage makes explicit, but are dictated by free will makes human improvement possible. This improvement, through which man can achieve the redemption promised by Michael, is made possible in the construction of a "paradise within", through which Man brings himself again close to God.

The dynamic of human corruptibility and human improvement as the theme of *Paradise Lost* have also been identified by Milton scholars. Lydia Schulman brings it up in her analysis of the poem, even if she does not link it to the proposition of the "paradise within". Schulman's analysis of *Paradise Lost* is focused on the epic's influence on American republican thought during this nation's formative years. Schulman reads *Paradise Lost* from a political perspective and in light of Milton's political prose writing. In this approach to the poem, she replaces the idea of human agency for that of citizenship. Instead of the

broader idea of “paradise within” as a means of human improvement, she emphasizes the political role of the citizen towards the moral elevation of the nation. But even so, by highlighting the importance of human improvement and possibility in the text, Schulman picks up on the relevance of the “paradise within”.

The “paradise within” is presented in the epic through the lessons learned by Adam and Eve. And perhaps its most defining feature is struggle, both against corruption in the world and against evil within. Through the couple’s mistakes, the lessons taught them by the angels that are sent to enlighten them and the comments of the epic voice, *Paradise Lost* gives the reader suggestions throughout the text of how the “paradise within” may be achieved. Adam’s first humbling lesson on his new state of life after the Fall, as he addresses Michael, is

Ascend, I follow thee, safe guide, the path  
 Thou lead’st me, and to the hand of Heav’n submit,  
 However chast’ning, to the evil turn  
 My obvious breast, arming to overcome  
 By suffering, and earn rest from labour won,  
 If so I may attain (*Paradise Lost* 11. 371-76).

Adam accepts that, in a corrupt world made so by his own corruption, struggle is introduced. His work is no longer the pleasurable gardening of Eden but the laboriousness of toil. And from this toil, itself a kind of evil, comes his suffering. And this struggle with evil outside must be accompanied by a struggle to overcome the evil in himself. Adam submits to struggle and to the suffering it

may entail, realizing that they are fundamental to the “paradise within” after his Fall. Once evil, in all its forms, has been introduced in the world, the godly must necessarily struggle to overcome it.

This struggle to overcome the evil that is spread in the world means also a struggle against what the epic voice calls “excess”. As a consequence of the Fall, Adam and Eve have vilified themselves by giving way to “ungoverned appetite” (sexual appetite, appetite for power, etc). As punishment, they are now subject to sickness, decay of the flesh and death. To be restored to their former state, Michael tells them, they must exercise to rule of “Not too much” (*Paradise Lost* 11. 531) and guard against committing again the same sins that lost them Eden. Regulation and moderation of internal desires and passions is, therefore, a function of the “paradise within” and requires constant self-vigilance. The fact that Death, in other words Man’s destruction, the son of Satan with his own daughter Sin, is represented as a shadow with an eternally unsatisfied appetite for prey which he gorges on every possible occasion suggests the danger of excess for Man. It is the way to perdition and its governing must then be a condition for redemption.

This curbing of desire and the evil tendency to excesses in *Paradise Lost* means, ultimately, a greater consciousness of how base are the attractions of the material world when compared to what may be enjoyed in Heaven. Adam is cautioned twice against giving too much value to earthly life, for this is the path to excess. Michael cautions him against excessive love or hate for life. What is lived

must be well lived, leaving the rest to God. Adam must also guard against valuing what is less to be valued in Eve, her beauty

For what admir'st thou, what transports thee so,

An outside? Fair no doubt, and worthy well

Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love,

Not thy subjection [...]

What higher in her society thou find'st

Attractive, human, rational, love still;

In loving thou dost well, in passion not (*Paradise Lost* 8. 567-88).

Adam at first gives higher value to Eve's beauty, which only serves to excite his passion. And passion finally leads to the subjection of his mind and his body. This is an important point in *Paradise Lost* since, for Milton, when he cultivates his passions and desires, Man becomes enslaved by them. Enslaved by passion, Man distances himself from God. The archangel's warning to Adam in this passage is intended to instill in him the clear sightedness not to be deceived by the appearances of the material world and the wisdom to properly guide his actions, not disconnected from it, but in a better informed way.

This struggle Man must engage in to overcome corruption in a post-lapsarian world must be guided by faith. This union of struggle and toil with faith is an important aspect of the perspective of the "paradise within". For God, Man must be tried by tribulation and "refined by faith and faithful works, to second life" (*Paradise Lost* 11. 64). This means accepting and submitting to God's will and justice while trusting in His goodness. This kind of faith advocated in

*Paradise Lost* is not that faith displayed at mass and mediated by a representative, for example the Catholic Church. It is an individual, internal faith that leads to internal fortitude in God. Faith, allied to struggle, is fundamental to the achievement of the “paradise within”, in which lies the possibility of uprightness and godliness for Man.

This uprightness, however, must also be translated into action or the “paradise within” has no real meaning. All the indications that the epic gives the reader of the construction of a “paradise within”, the elevation of Man through struggle against evil through an internal fortitude grounded on true faith in God, might lead to the interpretation that it is merely a state of mind. But for the “paradise within” to have any significance and be coherent, it must also be inserted in a *material practice*. Although faith is essential, Man can only really redeem himself “By faith not void of works” (*Paradise Lost* 12. 427). The “paradise within” is necessarily expressed in good actions. If not, it would be mere hypocrisy, something Milton himself openly abhorred. Adding action to faith and godliness, the internal uprightness of the “paradise within” becomes significant and the individual becomes coherent, his actions mirror his thoughts and vice-versa, as it was in Eden before the Fall.

As the “paradise within” becomes meaningful when it comprises action, it is likewise meaningful only if it is based on free will. In *Paradise Lost*, freedom to choose rightly is a condition of Man’s existence. God creates free will because obedience, if not given but enforced, has no true meaning. If faith, obedience and love towards God do not spring from liberty and from *choice*, they are not sincere

and can have no value. Only if man is free to choose, to Fall and to redeem himself, can the concept of the “paradise within” work.

The importance of free will to the idea of the “paradise within” becomes clearer in light of Milton’s specific concept of freedom. For Milton, and this is an idea also present in *Paradise Lost*, Man is only truly free when he chooses rightly, that is, when he chooses according to reason and not as a slave to his passions and base, evil desires. The right choice is faith, obedience and love of God, in short, to live in God and to allow this perspective to guide actions. Steven Jablonski calls this idea of freedom in *Paradise Lost* “positive liberty”, a notion that “implies the *freedom to* develop one’s capacities or fulfil one’s own nature. It emphasizes active self-direction and self-realization rather than the mere absence of constraint” (109). Freedom then is not only liberty from constraint and necessity or Fate, it is also correct choice. When Man chooses rightly, not only is he necessarily free from exterior coercive forces, he is also free from his internal passions, his internal propensity to evil, his internal corruption. Then are all his capacities and his nature fulfilled. This is the state of the “paradise within”, the only truly free, correct choice available.

This concept of freedom in the poem that is achieved in the “paradise within” is further highlighted when it is compared with the fallen view of liberty represented by Satan. Satan can conceive of freedom only as a release from all constraint or in terms of an opposition, freedom being defined as the reverse of servility. This is why he and the other fallen angels cannot accept the Son’s higher position in Heaven and profess their preference for “hard liberty before the easy

yoke of servile pomp” (*Paradise Lost* 2. 256). For Satan, obedience to God means servility.

But the epic shows how wrong this idea of freedom is in contrast to the freedom of the “paradise within”. Satan is not free because he is a slave to his passions. Even on returning to Eden to tempt Adam and Eve, he cannot feel pleasure in the paradisiacal garden because internally he is dominated by hate. He has not chosen to control his excesses but has indulged them and now he is a slave to them. In his erroneous interpretation of what true freedom is, Satan has moved away from God, something contrary to true liberty as defined in *Paradise Lost*. True freedom comes from the free choice of living in God, of constructing and enjoying an internal paradise. Those who choose the way of the “paradise within” are released from internal slavery and the way to perfectability and redemption is opened to them. In serving God, the epic suggests, is really no subjugation.

Although the concept of “paradise within”, and the notion of positive liberty associated to it, is not strictly a political notion, it does encompass political participation. As the “paradise within” includes a material practice, it has a meaning and function in the world and in society. As the notion of true freedom as active self-improvement and self-direction is also spread to the individual’s actions in the world, it leads to a stress on “...public duty and civic virtue over the freedom to be left alone” (Jablonski 115). Such values as public virtue and sense of duty, for Milton, were fundamental to political life and are a function of the kind of perspective of the “paradise within”. Governing all aspects of an individual’s life, the “paradise within” can also be seen to have political

implications or to encompass the political participation and action of those who choose it.

The concept of “paradise within”, therefore, is not apolitical or antithetical to politics. According to Blair Worden, for 17<sup>th</sup> century Republicans like Milton the aim of both religion and politics was freedom and tolerance. The relationship between civic duty and religious virtue was a close one for “politics alone had no moral autonomy” (229). In this way, if the political participation and political positioning of the godly are not detached from their guiding principle in other areas of life, the proposition of the “paradise within” is also a political position.

This idea of the all-encompassing perspective of the “paradise within” has a parallel to Stanley Fish’s discussion of *Paradise Lost*. For Fish, Milton’s epic functions as an illustration to its readers of how they came to be the way they are, that is fallen. The text repeatedly provokes in its readers fallen responses and then corrects them through the teachings of God, the archangels and the comments of the epic voice. The reader, in falling into the “traps” laid out by the text and then being corrected by it, is made to see how limited and fallen his reasoning, his perspective of the world is. In this way, he is brought to a better understanding of his sinful nature and shown where lies the possibility for reformation.

For Fish, the key to the poem lies in recognizing this dynamic of perspectives, or what he calls prior orientation. What this means is that events are not shaped by themselves and do not determine the characters’ responses. Both the characters and the reader of *Paradise Lost* in fact build their worlds, by assimilating or reading the events that present themselves according to a prior

understanding. Leading the reader into fallen responses, the text presents to him how fallen is his apprehension of the world, the prior orientation with which he looks at events.

Ultimately this means that both Man and Satan do not Fall due to external causes but from internal ones. Satan chooses to see the Son's exaltation through pride and envy and to see himself diminished, and finally does become so by falling. His prior orientation or perspective is contrasted to that of the other angels, like Abdiel, whose immediate response is to read, not only this episode but everything in creation, as a manifestation of God's glory, no matter what the outcome is or how the world may present itself.

In God's universe, the faithful interact with the world not on its own terms but according to the prior orientation exemplified by Abdiel. This means looking at events and phenomena not as having a value of their own, but in light of God's will and wisdom; it begins with a general conclusion of what the world is like and sees everything that emerges as a confirmation of this conviction. Taking responsibility for determining meaning and actions according to this prior orientation, the faithful live in God and transcend the fallen perspective of Satan.

This choosing of a godly perspective that transcends fallen orientation leads to a positioning in the world that Fish call the "politics of being"; and this politics is aligned to the significance and the practices of the "paradise within". It means a commitment to seeing past surface meanings and remaining unaffected by the fluctuations of the world, making instead these fluctuations signify in one direction. This is the lesson Adam learns from Raphael, the collected self that *acts*

with confidence not of outcomes but of its own correctness. The “politics of being”, although based on interiority, is not inertism but an active positioning before the world. And this transcendence of fallen perspective is what the “paradise within” proposes. Mirroring Fish’s analysis of the “politics of being”, the “paradise within” abridges all areas of life, including the political, without making it a strictly political idea, which would be a reduction of its scope and meaning.

It is this idea of a changed perspective of the world, grounded on an inner firmness, that *Midnight’s Children* takes up as an alternative to the search for identity and meaning in the large spheres of nationality and power. Through Aadam Sinai, the novel takes up this idea of the collected self that acts according to free will and inner guidance, proposing, in contrast to Saleem’s “fallen” perspective, a version of the “paradise within”.

The political aspect of the “paradise within” should not be identified with power and with the larger sphere of nationality and Empire. The correctness that is a result of the construction of a “paradise within” is closer to the private sphere of life. At the end of *Paradise Lost*, when all the ideas and values associated to the “paradise within” have been taught to Adam, he achieves the sum of knowledge open to him. He learns to distinguish the misconceptions behind the discourses of great actions and power (Satan’s discourse), and advocates the small, daily actions, located in the private sphere of life, as better ways to uprightness. This inner, private sphere is the privileged space in which Man exercises (rightly) his free choice and where “paradise within” is constructed and enjoyed. This message

is conveyed to Adam again by a higher power, the archangel Raphael. Adam interprets it saying

That to know at large of things remote  
From use, obscure and subtle, but to know  
That which before us lies in daily life,  
Is the prime wisdom (*Paradise Lost* 8. 191-94).

This passage is not a reactionary response to what was happening in Milton's time. Rather it is a suggestion to men and women on how they might better conduct their lives and affairs in the world in which we are all doomed to live after sin.

For Schulman this idea is consistent with the kind of public administration Milton defended, an administration based on local governments to act as a balance to the concentration of power in a central one. In this arena, individual citizens can exercise their capacity to make choices on issues inside their sphere of experience, in other words, inside the scope of their daily lives.

In *Paradise Lost*, this kind of "local" politics is less prone to corruption. The poem makes this clear by comparing it to the perspective of conquest and power, Satan's view of political administration that is repeated in the fallen empires made by men. The discourse of power and great actions, the text suggests, are ways to violence, corruption and subjugation of others, all contrary to God's will. Satan, with his erroneous understanding of true freedom, can only conceive of challenging God's omnipotence by building an other empire under his own command. The same corruption happens among men when they turn from

this more centred political concern to the affirmation of one nation over others. As

Michael shows Adam

Those whom last thou saw'st  
 In triumph and luxurious wealth, are they  
 First seen in acts of prowess eminent  
 And great exploits, but of true virtue void;  
 Who having spilt much blood, and done much waste  
 Subduing nations, and achieved thereby  
 Fame in the world, high title, and rich prey  
 Shall change their course to pleasure, ease and sloth (*Paradise Lost*  
 11. 787-94).

This passage hints at the processes of national consolidation and expansion that began a century before Milton and continued to be enforced in his lifetime, England's sea expansion and exploits to new continents, the riches found, the prominent place England was assuming before the other European powers in trade. What *Paradise Lost* suggests, however, is that this outward orientation to greatness, expansion and wealth of a nation is a way to perdition and evil, aligning this kind of human action and concern with Satan's discourse.

The "paradise within" that is the epic's main message is not found in this way, but in an attitude more aligned with the kind of wisdom earlier imparted to Adam by Raphael. At the end of Book 12, Adam is guided as to how he should position himself in the world and how to measure his actions and concerns in it. Adam realizes that he should conduct himself and act in a way as to

[...] by small

Accomplishing great things, by things deemed weak

Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise

By simply meek (*Paradise Lost* 12. 566-69).

The internal uprightness of the “paradise within” can only be maintained through small actions and local practices. For Adam, this is the sum of knowledge he can achieve. He has been instructed on how to create a “paradise within”. But as it also implies a material practice, his actions must also be coherent and free from corruption. In *Paradise Lost* this can only be achieved by moving away from the grand narratives of power and the larger sphere of national concerns to concentrated actions in the sphere of daily life. Exercising good there, Man assures good to all, his nature is fully realized and he can make himself worthy of God’s promised redemption.

Given all its meanings and associations, the “paradise within” can be thought of in terms of an oxymoron. Although the term “paradise” evokes the idea of a kind of idyllic bliss, this is not the point of Milton’s concept. As it involves struggle, toil, suffering and positive action, the “paradise within” must not be confused with some kind of fantasy island or utopia. It is a site of constant negotiation and active participation. And due to its encompassing of political participation, it can be relevant to *Midnight’s Children* and its perspectives on the construction of a post-colonial nationally imagined community.

The construction of a “paradise within” in a post-lapsarian world as a way for Man to redeem himself before God pervades the whole text of *Paradise Lost*.

It is not the nation that is Milton's main concern, but how fallen Man should live in the world. In *Paradise Lost*, by overcoming evil through struggle and suffering, by building an inner fortitude through faith in God, by freely choosing the way of the "paradise within" and by acting according to these principles, Man is again worthy of God's favour.

This reading of *Paradise Lost* becomes a way out of the grand narratives of nationality that it has been linked with, but that are today so problematic. The corruption of Man, and consequently of government, was a major concern for republicans like Milton. Emphasizing freedom, right choice and faith in God to guide good actions, Milton removes the threat of corruption and of subjugation of others, something the epic repeatedly affirms as contrary to God's will and that violates all its notions of true liberty. This entails a political perspective outside nationalism and imperialism. And in this space opened up in *Paradise Lost* other writings in English, post-colonial writings, can enter into other negotiations with this text of Empire and with the culture that produced it.

## 5 “Paradise within” and the re-direction of perspectives on the nation in *Midnight’s Children*

In the field of literary studies today strict distinctions between literary texts and historical documents have become somewhat blurred. Scholars in different fields have broadened their notions on the role of certain narratives in the way cultures perceive and evaluate their experience. For Lydia Schulman, Milton’s narrative of the Fall of Man in *Paradise Lost* is one such “experience-shaping tale”, a narrative framework which, in the aftermath of British imperial expansion, has been used as both an instrument of colonial cultural domination and, in some instances, a text which post-colonial writings have drawn on to reflect on the processes of colonization and independence. These post-colonial responses to *Paradise Lost*, such as Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, can clarify the epic’s theme and its political subtexts and so contribute, from the post-colonial position, to the cultural production of the former metropolis.

Although Schulman’s proposition of *Paradise Lost* as an “experience-shaping tale” is applied to her analysis of 18<sup>th</sup> century American national consolidation, it is also relevant to the process of national self-representation or imagination in other British colonies, in the case of *Midnight’s Children*, India. Here *Paradise Lost* becomes a significant text in large part due to the disciplinary study of English literature. For Michael Gorra, this literature was perceived as a repository of wisdom and values that were presented in the shape of a narrowly defined Great Tradition. Milton and Shakespeare were held to have a civilizing

mission and became the representative figures from which this Tradition sprang.

The consequence of this is that

For post-Independence India, the English language and its literature stand as one of the structuring institutions- like the army, the civil service, and the capital in New-Delhi- that the British left behind and that the current nation-state can never quite discard (Gorra 134).

Literary texts, as much as historical documents and official administration institutions, are a means of shaping culture and of analyzing experience. What *Midnight's Children* suggests is that English texts, and prominent among them is *Paradise Lost*, and the set of political and social values associated with them, were inevitably drawn into the imagining of an independent Indian nation.

But the appropriation of *Paradise Lost* by *Midnight's Children* has another, broader function than pointing out India's mixed heritage. The reading of Milton's epic that the novel suggests brings reflection back on British national self-representation, one that destabilises it by emphasizing the importance of the "paradise within" in the epic over the affirmation of national greatness. By focusing attention on the "paradise within", *Midnight's Children* suggests a reading of the epic outside nationalism, a move that displaces it from its assigned centrality to British national identity. Stripped of one of its apparently legitimating texts, this national identity itself then is opened to questioning and revision.

Borrowing from *Paradise Lost* to write the history of India in the years following its independence, the narrator in *Midnight's Children* uses a mixture of

styles and references, ranging from autobiography, history and religious texts, to piece together his view of the emerging nation; and as he writes, Saleem Sinai links his identity and the meaning of his life to it. As the years go by, however, Saleem is faced with the explosive internal heterogeneity that challenges national unity. As a solution to the problem of negotiating meaning and identity inside a nation which, due to its inherent diversity, does not afford the certainties that were the promise of independence, *Midnight's Children* suggests a version of Milton's "paradise within", represented by Saleem's son Aadam. This new Aadam, a reference to the character in Milton's epic, introduces in the novel a perspective that echoes the "paradise within" as a better positioning before the difficulties of the national project, in contrast to Saleem's view of it.

For Bhabha, post-colonial fiction such as *Midnight's Children* represents a condition in which the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's invasions. Such unhomely fiction, as Bhabha calls it, relates "the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (11). The border condition of the migrant, the refugee and the (post) colonial all represent a new kind of world literature in which social and cultural displacements have become the main focus, in place of the transmission of national traditions. In this borderline condition, strict divisions between the private and the public spheres of life break down and the violence and the arbitrariness of history are brought to bear on the details of life. The unhomely "takes the measure of dwelling at home while producing an image of the world of history" (Bhabha 13). *Midnight's Children* represents this moment of eruption of

history into private life that, for Bhabha, is the condition of post-colonial peoples. And as private and public overlap, the novel questions how to position oneself in this space through the contrasting views on nation-ness and political participation represented by Saleem and Aadam.

Bhabha's unhomely fiction stresses the complex interstitiality of world politics and everyday life. It highlights how, for hybrid peoples, the personal *is* the political, the world in the home. In *Midnight's Children* Aadam's attitude, echoing that of Milton's "paradise within" in which the political is concentrated in everyday life because everyday life actions have political meaning, turns this unhomely site into something positive. Aadam's perspective picks up on the idea of the collected self of Milton's epic. Unlike his father he is not swallowed up in this unhomely moment, but reverses it into the possibility for positive political participation. Contrasting Saleem's and Aadam's perspectives, *Midnight's Children* suggests that, instead of the nation giving meaning to the home, the local space of the home as a site for responsible political action becomes a way of participating in history without being crushed by it, as happens to Saleem.

*Midnight's Children* presents the construction of the national form in the years following India's independence. This form, however, is pressed on by the many different imaginings of India that must be contained within one broad sense of Indian-ness, but which continually overlap and spill outside it. In this context, *Midnight's Children* presents two approaches to independence and to the nation.

Saleem Sinai and his son Aadam Sinai represent two positionings before this emerging national form. Born on the stroke of midnight of independence,

Saleem places his identity alongside the nation's. As he proposes to the other children in the Midnight Children's Conference, his and their meaning and purpose in life must be defined on national terms, their talents and abilities placed at the service of the administration. But Saleem's downfall and the crumbling of the Conference suggest that this choice of looking to the nation as the grounds for the certainties and meaning to life that he seeks is problematic because the nation itself is a problematic concept. *Midnight's Children* then proposes another perspective on the nation, the next generation of magical children represented by Saleem's son Aadam. Although, like his father, Aadam is also tied to the nation, his approach to it is different. Unlike Saleem, who concentrates his life and all his efforts into the "grand narrative" of nationality, Aadam's attitude is more in line with the idea of the "paradise within" in *Paradise Lost*. This attitude makes him better adapted to deal with the challenges, problems and necessities Saleem was faced with but, as the end of *Midnight's Children* suggests, could not meet.

Saleem's identification with the nation springs from his need to find a meaning to his life. From infancy, he is faced with the problem of defining himself, of making meaning of himself. And this search for self-definition is his earliest memory. For

Even a baby is faced with the problem of defining itself; and I'm bound to say that my early popularity had its problematic aspects, because I was bombarded with a confusing multiplicity of views on the subject... But what, after all, can a baby do except swallow all

of it and hope to make sense of it later? (*Midnight's Children* 147-48).

Meaning and coherence for Saleem are essential. And the idea of nation that is the basis for independence suggests precisely these certainties, a solid community in which every member can see him/herself represented and that is founded on an essential origin common to all. To counter the internal hole inherited from Aadam Aziz, his grandfather, Saleem's search for meaning and identity leads him to the association with the nation.

Saleem insists so far in defining himself as a catalyser of national events as to examine his ties to India in as scientific a manner as possible. His fate is linked to the nation's "both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, in what our (admirably modern) scientists might term 'modes of connection'" (*Midnight's Children* 272). These modes correspond to the kind of influence Saleem exercises on national history, such as his providing the language marchers of Bombay with their battle cry. His early efforts at growth and self-representation he sees as a metaphor for the political and social trends in India, as the child-nation also rushed towards full-sized adulthood. And finally, Saleem describes all those moments in which national events had a direct bearing on his life and on the lives of the other members of his family, those occasions "on which things done by or to me were mirrored in the macrocosm of public affairs and my private existence was shown to be symbolically at one with history" (*Midnight's Children* 273). Saleem focuses all his life, its importance and its consequences, in the

nation; the imagined national community becomes the measure of his life and what gives it the coherence and certainty of meaning he seeks.

Writing his autobiography, Saleem Sinai is caught up in history and cannot see beyond the sphere of the nation. But the problem that *Midnight's Children* poses to the reader, and that Saleem must eventually recognize himself, is that, although he identifies himself with the nationally imagined community, the difficulties in shaping it continually burst upon his narrative. In writing the nation Saleem cannot help but write what a complicated concept it is, how slippery and antagonistic. Instead of a naturally binding unity that one is born into, as Saleem at first believes the nation to be by associating its birth to his own, it is in fact constructed, imagined. Saleem searches for certainty and centrality of meaning but finds instead the inescapable hybridity, the constant state of negotiation and struggle that characterizes nationality.

Identifying himself with the nation, Saleem grounds in it also the purpose of all the children of midnight. His wish that the Midnight Children's Conference mirror national events is, in fact, realized, but not in the manner Saleem at first dreams of. Saleem wants the Conference to act politically in the world, to propose its own Five Year Plans and to present its unity and harmony as a symbol of India. Ironically, however, what happens is the reverse. As the apparently irreconcilable disparities of India sink into the Conference, it too begins to crumble. And Saleem is forced to realize rather bitterly that "the Midnight Children's Conference fulfilled the promise of the Prime Minister and became, in truth, a mirror of the nation" (*Midnight's Children* 292). The children of midnight fulfil Saleem's hope

of being symbols of the nation, but not in the way he expects. Instead of mirroring national unity, a unity which in turn would give coherence to their lives, they mirror instead all its internal differences.

To counter the internal divisions in the Conference, Saleem proposes a kind of third principle. For Saleem, this principle, although not fully explained by him, would guarantee unity among the members of the Conference and, consequently, among the members of the nation. For him

[...] if we come together, if we love each other, if we show that this, just this, this people-together, this Conference, this children-sticking-together-through-thick-and-thin, can be that third way (*Midnight's Children* 293).

For Saleem, this third principle is based on the values his alter-ego Shiva despises, such as the importance of the individual, the possibility of mankind, free will, hope. But above all Saleem's proposal of a third principle is the innocence and purity of childhood before the prejudices of the world have impinged upon it. For him, this initial untainted state is what is needed to keep the children and the nation together.

Saleem's insistence on innocence suggests Man's state in Eden before the Fall in *Paradise Lost*. But as his proposal is scorned and the Conference fails to come together, *Midnight's Children* suggests that this state of perfect harmony in national unity is impossible. As in *Paradise Lost*, Man must inevitably struggle against sin in the post-lapsarian world, in *Midnight's Children* the certainty-

giving myth of the nation, which promises to provide its members with certainties of belonging, identity and coherence, is undermined.

If Saleem takes up Milton's views in his third principle, the novel suggests that the reason for his shortcomings is that his perspective is contrary to the lessons in *Paradise Lost*. The error Saleem commits, the novel suggests, is buying into the ideal of nation-ness and thinking that political action belongs only to the greater national sphere and to great actions. This is contrary to the idea of the "paradise within" which, although also political, can only really work outside the view to power. Saleem does not see that the kind of local space implied in the politics of the "paradise within" is also a political space, and that an individual's positioning here is also a political stance. Placing the kind of values implied in the "paradise within" in the wrong way, *Midnight's Children* suggests, divests them of their true meaning.

Saleem's inadequate appropriation of the principles of *Paradise Lost* is again taken up in his nation-saving ambition. As the Midnight Children's Conference crumbles under the disparate forces inside the nation, Saleem decides to save India. After the death of his parents, he seeks out his uncle, a Civil Servant for

What better patron than he for my *Messianic* ambitions? Under his roof, I could acquire contacts as well as new clothes; under his auspices, I would seek preferment in the Administration, and, as I studied the realities of government, would certainly find the keys of national salvation; and I would have the ears of Ministers, I

would perhaps be on first-name terms with the great (*Midnight's Children* 447).

Saleem sees himself as Christ in *Paradise Lost*, who offers himself as the redeemer and saviour of Man after the Fall. But Saleem's attitude as a Messiah is quite the opposite from the values of Milton's epic. Saleem can see salvation only through involvement in the "Administration". He wants to do great deeds and live among the powerful. This is contrary to the perspective of political action and engagement that *Paradise Lost* would suggest, one more aligned with the idea of the "paradise within". Saleem fails in his ambitions, the novel suggests, because he identifies his political action and participation with this view of great politics.

Saleem's pretensions to greatness come to nothing as the promise of national greatness born with independence descends into Indira Gandhi's Emergency regime. The heterogeneity of the nation marks it as a site of continual negotiation of differences, sometimes violently. As these underlying problems surface, Saleem's perspective on the nation undergoes a significant change. As Saleem writes India as an imagined community whose hybridity makes it a site of constant struggle, *Midnight's Children* questions the view of nation-ness that sustains the affirmation of independence and Saleem must, consequently, review his identification with it.

Looking back on his life, Saleem regrets the search for meaning, certainty and purpose to life in terms of the nation and its "Administration". After Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's sterilization programme robs the children of midnight of their powers, Saleem is left to conclude that "I am coming to the conclusion that

privacy, the small individual lives of men, are preferable to all this inflated macrocosmic activity” (*Midnight’s Children* 500). Saleem realizes that he has projected the meaning, form and purpose of his life onto a national project that is a site of complicated struggle, instead of the binding community he at first took it for. He has limited his view of political participation to this greater national sphere and has found it to be problematic and simply too broad to handle. And as Saleem’s perspective changes after his ideal of the nation has, in a sense, crumbled, *Midnight’s Children* moves closer to Milton’s proposed space of the “paradise within”.

*Midnight’s Children* suggests that Saleem’s approach to nation-ness is problematic and must be revised. This revision, represented in *Midnight’s Children* as a version of Milton’s “paradise within”, is a better perspective on the difficulties encountered in the nationally imagined community and will be carried out by the generation born after independence. This second generation is represented by Saleem’s son, Aadam Sinai. This new Aadam presents a different way of coping with the difficulties inherited from the first years of independence, a different view of political action and engagement to counter Saleem’s failed projects and ambitions.

The new promise that is born with Saleem’s son relies, as Saleem himself recognizes, on his very different perspective on the national project that was born with the preceding generation. *Midnight’s Children*, like *Paradise Lost*, ends with an A[a]dam, marching into the (hopeful) future. For Saleem, the future, as in Milton’s epic, is not given or predetermined. There is no final reckoning with or

closing of the process of constitution of a people. What is important for Saleem is that the perspective on the nation is changed. For him

Aadam was a member of a second generation of magical children who would grow up far tougher than the first, not looking for their fate in prophecy or the stars, but *forging* it in the implacable furnaces of their *wills* (*Midnight's Children* 515 italics mine).

Saleem contrasts Aadam's view on the national situation into which he is born with his own. He has relied on prophecies, on letters from Prime Ministers telling him he would be a mirror of the nation born with him. Aadam and his generation, on the other hand, reject this view in favour of, in Saleem's own changed state of mind, a much more productive one.

Aadam's attitude suggests a version of Milton's "paradise within" first in the sense of the collected self. Although he is also tied to the nation, his father's inevitable legacy, Aadam Sinai presents a different solution to the process of negotiating meaning within the conflicting, heterogeneous elements of India. He is guided by his own will, by his internal fortitude, instead of looking for the purpose and meaning of his life in the nation, as Saleem erroneously does. And as in the "paradise within", this internal fortitude and the choices made in it are also grounded free will, as Saleem's characterization of his son's personality makes clear.

As in the "paradise within", this attitude cannot be a mere state of mind. Saleem's emphasis on the idea that Aadam will *forge* the future through free will implies not a passive attitude to life, but an active one, involving in this effort

both mind and body. Therefore, although free will is central to this revised view of nation-ness, as Milton's "paradise within" it also involves a material practice.

Contrasting Saleem's and Aadam's approach to the nation, *Midnight's Children* suggests that the possibility of political participation represented by this new generation, like the "paradise within", also means a kind of local politics concentrated in the small, individual sphere of experience. *Midnight's Children* does not specify the grounds and place of this smaller-oriented political positioning. But in Saleem's rejection of what he calls the macrocosmic sphere the novel does propose this revised sense of political participation represented by his son. Aadam's rejection of his father's perspective and action turned outwards to national events means that this lesson has been learned by the generation following independence.

Through Aadam Sinai, *Midnight's Children* presents a renewed sense of national identity. After Saleem's narrative of failures and disappointments, Aadam Sinai presents a regenerative power and an open ending to the novel, signalling the new possibilities born with him. Aadam's regenerative power, for Roger Clark, comes from Rushdie's interweaving of various religious myths. He is the son of Hindu God Shiva but he is also the new A[a]dam of Christian tradition. This new Adam, echoing the end of *Paradise Lost*, suggests the beginning of a new cycle, a cycle that brings hope and possibility after the troubles of Sin and Emergency. For Clark, as Milton's character, Aadam represents a move from dark to light, from Fall to the possibility of redemption, from the perspective (Saleem's) that lead to Emergency to something new. As

Milton's Adam, Aadam Sinai suggests a new state of grace, which in *Paradise Lost* is called the "paradise within" and in *Midnight's Children* is reworked into this new way of dealing with the ongoing process of national negotiation and representation.

*Midnight's Children* then presents two ways of looking at the nation. Saleem Sinai, the novel's narrator, looks for meaning and certainty and believes these to lie in an identification with the national project. He is faced with its hybridity, struggle and uncertainty, as different forces and groups overlap and negotiate their place inside the nation. His son Aadam Sinai, a character reminiscent of Milton's Adam at the end of *Paradise Lost*, represents a different solution, one that echoes Milton's proposition of the "paradise within". Aadam is a forger of his fate, which suggests the active stance in life the "paradise within" requires, contrasted to Saleem's attitude of expecting purpose to arise from the larger sphere of nationality and government. After Saleem's realization that this macrocosmic sphere, or the grand narrative of Nation and power that he has bought into, is not the best place on which to ground identity, meaning and participation, *Midnight's Children* suggests, by aligning Aadam to the perspective of the "paradise within", that smaller actions more oriented to locality are better ways to guide life.

After its narrator's disappointments, *Midnight's Children* concludes with a very different characterization of the nation than that with which it began. At the beginning of Saleem's writings, the novel promises a narrative of national consolidation but takes another route. The writing of the nation undergoes a

significant change, as does the novel's narrator. In his concluding pages, Saleem abandons his dream of India as the coherence-giving project that he needs in order to find meaning in the world. For him, the "nearly-thirty-one-year-old myth of freedom is no longer what it was. New myths are needed" (*Midnight's Children* 527). The promise born with independence has not come to fruition, at least not in the way Saleem and his generation expected.

This failure to write the nation can be read as one of *Midnight's Children's* problems or shortcomings. The novel does not fulfil its initial promise and presents only a pessimistic view of India to the world without offering a solution. But perhaps a better way of reading Rushdie's text is as a critique of nationalism, that of former imperial powers and the post-colonial that arose as a reaction to colonialism. The novel points out that nation-ness, usually perceived and represented as natural, is in fact imagined. This construction of a national identity is many times violent and never ceases to be a site of struggle and contention. In this sense, *Midnight's Children* is not only coherent, but it is a novel that tries to find a way of addressing both Eastern and Western audiences and of becoming relevant in the political, cultural, social context of its times.

The realization of past errors and the new perspective that Aadam brings closes one cycle and opens another. *Midnight's Children* leaves its ending open and uncertain. Saleem finishes his narrative leaving it unclear whether, in writing his death, it is a foreboding, a product of his imagination or if, in fact, he is crushed under the feet of the immense crowd that is India's people, his body

fragmenting into as many pieces as the number of the population. His disintegration, whether actual or imaginary

becomes a metonymy for that of the national collage as a whole, a country that looks whole on the map but that has, in the years since the novel's publication in particular, become increasingly divided from itself (Gorra 114-15).

Saleem's disintegration marks the end of his participation in the national future as Aadam's is just beginning. After the promises of independence and their disappointments, a new cycle begins, represented by a new generation better informed and equipped than the preceding one. And this generation brings with it the renewed perspective that echoes Milton's idea of "paradise within", instead of simply buying into the discourse of Nation.

The renewed cycle begun by Aadam allows *Midnight's Children* to explore another important issue, post-colonial responsibility. Contrasting Saleem's attempts at influencing national events to Aadam's different positioning before nation-ness, the novel explores the responsibility that comes with independence and how the peoples of the new nations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century answer to its challenges. The responsibility of independence is inevitably passed onto succeeding generations, just as Aadam inherits from Saleem the tie to India. All post-colonial subjects, the novel suggests, have a part to play. And the perspective that Aadam Sinai adopts, after his father's shortcomings, is better suited to meet this challenge.

For critics like Timothy Brennan, the final balance on this issue of post-colonial responsibility in *Midnight's Children* is pessimistic, the consequence of independence being nothing more than disappointment. For Brennan, Rushdie's text centres on the irony around a region that starts to think of itself as one but that has actually changed very little after independence. The novel, for him, proves that India can act just as abominably as the British did. The dream of the nationalism of 1947 turns into the demagoguery of an elite (Brennan 63-4). This political elite is represented by the power-thirsty Widow, a portrayal of Indira Gandhi. And at the service of this political class is Shiva, the representation of the violence born with national unification.

The problem with this pessimistic view of *Midnight's Children* is that it attributes a finality to the novel that it does not actually perform. What such criticism fails to notice is the importance of the novel's open ending. A new way of negotiating (national) identity is proposed, this is *Midnight's Children's* lesson. What its final outcome will be, what is India's future, is not determined. Negotiating nation-ness, the novel suggests, is an ongoing process that cannot be closed or finalized with.

For Tim Parnell, Rushdie's attempt at addressing both a western and subcontinental readership by writing in English, the language of the former colonizer, means that the novel is inscribed also with the literary conventions of the West. This means that *Midnight's Children* inevitably evokes some baggage of colonialism. And this would hint at a complicity "in an insidious, ongoing cultural imperialism" (237). Certainly, a reading of *Midnight's Children* with a

reference to *Paradise Lost* does open the novel to criticism of this type. This debate continues decades after the novel's publication. While *Midnight's Children* has been read as a demythification of Third-World nation building, its double-coding and its conformation to western literary style could mean that, in the end, the novel simply confirms western prejudices about India and presents to the West precisely what it wants to see (Gorra 130). A way out of this binarism would be to read *Midnight's Children* as a questioning of all nation-building, not just Indian. *Midnight's Children*, in the end, tries to counter not only the lies of colonial narratives (and I would add, their readings) but also those of post-colonial nationalist propaganda.

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis began with the questions surrounding representations of the nation. Although theorists of nation-ness like Benedict Anderson see it as central to cultures today, its representation, even if it embarks many kinds of texts, remains complicated. The nation remains a concept that eludes simple qualifications. And this difficulty has become more pronounced in the aftermath of European colonialism and the proliferation of different post-colonial national independence movements.

What is proposed in this reading of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a reflection on how literary texts approach national representations. More specifically, the points of contact established here between *Midnight's Children* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* exemplify one way in which post-colonial national fictions can appropriate the texts of former imperial powers.

Drawing on *Paradise Lost*, *Midnight's Children* takes up also its position in a tradition of British national self-representation. This position has been fixed by readings of the epic, many of which see it as a re-enactment of British national struggles and imperial expansion, and also by Milton's assigned place in British cultural production. Exported to the colonies, *Paradise Lost* brings with it all these associations with a sense of British nation-ness.

Rushdie's novel takes up also this association, indicating in this move the permanence of colonial forms in the independent Indian national identity. This signals, in *Midnight's Children*, a contestation of essentialisms, in other words the

sense that the nation is a product of a pure common origin and so expresses the natural unity of a people. Appropriating *Paradise Lost*, the British national epic, *Midnight's Children* suggests that the national community must negotiate its identity in terms also of Empire and its cultural forms.

But although it appropriates Milton's epic, *Midnight's Children* proposes a different characterization of nation-ness from that linked to *Paradise Lost*. Rushdie's novel writes the nation as an imagined community, questioning precisely its perception in terms of unity and common origin. In this way, the nation is presented as a construct and its perception undergoes a significant change.

The novel's narrator initially sees the new nation he is born into in light of the certainties associated to *Paradise Lost* and bases his need for meaning and coherence in life on it. But as the imagined national community's inherent heterogeneity surfaces, this identification must be revised. Nationality must be negotiated on different terms. *Midnight's Children* here introduces its reading of *Paradise Lost* through the changed perspective on the nation represented by Saleem's son Aadam.

Aadam represents a different way of positioning oneself in the world and before the nation, a perspective that echoes Milton's "paradise within". The novel recovers the principles on which to guide actions and establish identifications in *Paradise Lost*, suggesting that its proposal of correct positioning in life, expressed through the "paradise within", is a more productive reading of the epic. Through

Aadam Sinai *Midnight's Children* re-works the values of the "paradise within" and its practices and sites of participation, recovering its political significance.

Given *Paradise Lost's* standing in the tradition of British national literature, in its critique of the imagined national community *Midnight's Children* also refers back to Empire and its national self-representation. Using *Paradise Lost* in a narrative of nation-ness as hybridity brings the questioning of British national self-representation back on itself. And by focusing on the epic's idea of "paradise within" as a better way to deal with the explosive struggles in the nation, instead of on nationalism itself, *Midnight's Children* proposes a different reading of Milton's text, outside its assigned role of national legitimization. Expanding its discussion to the imperial nation, the novel also seems to try to step out of the dangerous ground of attributing too much to Empire in the post-colonial national movements.

In its appropriations of *Paradise Lost* and its representation of nation, *Midnight's Children* establishes other possibilities of negotiation between the former Empire and post-colonial cultures through their texts. Re-reading *Paradise Lost* and, through it, British national self-representation, *Midnight's Children* exemplifies how post-colonial cultures can influence the former Empire and its cultural production.

In a broader context, *Midnight's Children's* demythifying view of *Paradise Lost* makes the epic relevant to the contemporary literary scene in a new way. It allows for a different access to it from the perspective of post-colonial cultures that have written their own processes of national imagination inside that

of Empire. And by pointing out the relevance of *Paradise Lost* to post-colonial fiction, Rushdie's novel points to new possible directions in Milton criticism.

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