

**Menippean Satire or Counter-realism?
Questions of Genre in Postcolonial Indian Fiction in English
by Menen, Desani, Rushdie, and Sealy**

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I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely
my own, and represents original, unpublished scholarship.

Amy L. Friedman

Abstract**Amy L. Friedman**

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The focus of my argument is that much of the counter-realist elements in postcolonial writing can be better understood in the more traditional terms of Menippean satire. I explore this premise in works by a cohort of four South Asian authors of satire who have never previously been examined in concert as such: Aubrey Menen, G.V. Desani, Salman Rushdie, and I. Allan Sealy. My investigations have uncovered connections of influence and resonance which make an assiduous case for considering their work as Menippean satire, running counter to extant critical discussions of experimentalism in postcolonial fiction which tend to describe counter-realism in terms of anti-realism, post-realism, and magic realism. In examining Menippean satire I will also be addressing the current wide use of the term, and suggesting that an over-emphasis on its counter-realist and hybrid elements has led to an unfortunate disregard of its roots in satire. Respective chapters on Menen and Desani look at their use of intertextual juxtapositions which begin to shape a postcolonial emphasis on revision and renewal of novelistic language and form. This emphasis is borne out in my examination of Rushdie's Menippean experiments with language and the rhetorical device of *ekphrasis* to break down boundaries between cultures, histories, and even art forms to depict a hybrid model of global society. I interpret Sealy's perpetual reformatting of the novel in each new work as a series of Menippean challenges to form which assert alternative narrative perspectives and relocate literary traditions. My conclusion looks at the implications of expanding the current limited critical links between satire and postcolonial literature in general, based on my examination of a body of work that connects to and updates the longstanding tradition of Menippean satire.

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This work is dedicated to the memory of those

I lost along the way:

Alison Hutchens (1964-1996)

Amy Chessler Fredette (1964-1997)

Jilline Ringle (1965-2005)

Cmdr. Gwen Elliott (1942-2007)

and

Sally Friedman (1930-1998)

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Introduction

... hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotch-potch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*.

Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*

The authoritative, compelling image of the empire, which crept into and overtook so many procedures of intellectual mastery that are central in modern culture, finds its opposite in the renewable, almost sporty discontinuities of intellectual and secular impurities – mixed genres, unexpected combinations of tradition and novelty....

Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

The original Latin word *satura* means ‘medley,’ ‘hotch-potch,’ and the best satirists have either known this or divined it.

Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*

The affinity of satire and the postcolonial is borne out both in the spirit of the novel mixtures described in these epigraphs, and in the sheer number of postcolonial writers who have worked and continue to work in the satiric mode. My aim is to highlight and explore some aspects of the relationship between counter-realist postcolonial literature and Menippean satire, but the overall spirit of this inquiry is captured by Helen Tiffin’s comment that the category of ‘the counter-discursive’ extends to ‘the re/placing of carnivalesque European genres like the picaresque in post-colonial contexts, where they are carried to a higher subversive

power' (19). It is impossible to examine even a few postcolonial satires and not be impressed with the ways a broad spectrum of concerns gets raked over the coals with unequalled intensity, achieving widely-angled disparagement of, for example, both indigenous and imposed racisms in G.V. Desani, or century-spanning colonial and neo-colonial impulses in I. Allan Sealy.

While satire criticism and theory is a somewhat under-active area in literary studies at present,¹ any who might discount the focus of this investigation for its potential marginality would be strongly rebuffed by even a partial list of the practitioners of satire in postcolonial literature. A list might include the Ethiopian Hama Tuma, the Nigerians Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, the South African Ann Harries, the Kenyan Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the Trinidadians Samuel Selvon and V.S. Naipaul, the Bajan George Lamming, the Canadians Mordechai Richler and Margaret Atwood, as well as the writers who are the main focus of this text, who all share a connection to the Indian sub-continent: Aubrey Menen, G.V. Desani, Salman Rushdie, and I. Allan Sealy.

To look at satire's currency in another way, it appears as a significant feature in several regional postcolonial literary histories spanning the colonial period to contemporary writing.

¹ Noted particularly by John Clement Ball in *Satire and the Post-Colonial Novel: V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie*. NY: Routledge, 2003.

Australian writing provides a particularly strong example of this; an historical survey of writers in Australia inevitably demonstrates the pairing of satire with each stage in the overall development of Australian writing, from an initial state of colonialism towards the open-ended questions and exchanges which characterise postcolonial literature's concerns with globalisation, hybrid forms, and the transgression of borders in the context of multiculturalism. One could begin with Australian writing from mid-nineteenth-century colonial journals which contain detailed satiric parodies of London-based journals (such as *Punch*), continue to the 1890s satiric bush ballads of A.B. ('Banjo') Paterson and others which impacted subsequent home-grown Australian poetry, move on to the influential mid-20th-century satiric verse of Alec Hope, and see a culmination in the late 20th-century novels of Mudrooroo, Michael Wilding, Peter Carey, who employ satire to revise and renew picaresque, surrealism, and fable respectively. As the literature of Australia has moved from realism and reportage into works which privilege non-realist presentation, satire has been a consistent feature, and it is even particularly notable in the work of current writers such as Patrick White and David Foster, who attract a global audience.

There are affinities other than a penchant for satire which link writers from across the postcolonial map. These writers all

contribute to a literary history of form and mode which is mapped in its most general form as moving from realism to counterrealism in the development towards a literary production which is independent of imperial, colonial or neo-colonial influences. This is a trajectory which has been identified and theorised by critics, and also recognised as somewhat artificially imposed, (these areas will be examined in subsequent chapters). Nonetheless, there are arcs of development in regional postcolonial literatures which make it possible to identify trends towards new ideologies, identifications, modes, and degrees of self-determination. And, though unacknowledged, satire is present as an aspect or mode throughout.

I am using postcolonial in the sense of literature and its contingent criticism that has materialized out of locations affected by an imperialising force. I am proposing literature of South Asian origin as a category composed of postcolonial writing which shares a common set of problems, as articulated by Kwame Anthony Appiah with specific regard to African literatures. Appiah's list covers the experiences of colonialism, issues of race and European-centred prejudices, the preservation of culture in the face of the transition to modernism, and the growth of literacy and a modern economy (81). My definition of Menippean satire, discussed in much greater detail in Chapter One, leans on Jonathan Greenberg's definition of satire as a

mode which may rely on certain techniques and themes, but which might occur in any variety of literary and cultural forms (23). This study explores Menippean satire's impact on genre in several contexts, since the range of authors covered depicts both diffidence and embrace of the terms satire and satirist, and the concept of the Menippean is referenced in different ways.² In proposing a line of connection and even progression in this cohort of writers, my aim is to avoid overly general or essential conclusions, while attempting to make a significant contribution to scholarship regarding two literary directions which I see as having a striking degree of overlap: the poly-vocal, fragmented, parodic, paradoxically reinterpreting, reality-challenging, and multi-toned energies of both postcolonial narrative fiction and Menippean satire.

My investigations have uncovered connections of influence and resonance which make an assiduous case for considering the work of the authors discussed here as Menippean satire, running counter to the dominant extant critical discussions of experimentalism in postcolonial fictions which tend to describe counter-realism in terms of anti-realism, post-realism, and magic realism. Each single-author chapter has extensive reviews of critical assessments which interpret these authors in these veins.

² Aubrey Menen is the only one to have actually designated a work a 'satire'. An excellent treatment of the challenges of distinction between genre and mode in satire occurs in Leon Guilhamet, *Satire and the Transformation of Genre*, Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1987.

Where critics have noted satirical elements, these have tended generally to be read as subsumed into the counter-realist workings which are interpreted as having qualified the text as anti-realist or magic realist in the first place. Or, when satire is detected, it is read as enhancing the political indictments of the text's magic realism.

My discussions of Menippean satire draw on critical work which largely focuses on writing from earlier centuries outside of colonial and postcolonial contexts, and this does point to a paucity of reassessments of the Menippean in contemporary literatures. Edward J. Milowicki and Robert Rawdon Wilson, for example, discuss *Troilus and Cressida* in 'A Measure for Menippean Discourse: The Example of Shakespeare' (2002), examining how the classical tradition of the Menippean satire was adapted in writing of the English Renaissance. Their excellent study delves into the problems of defining 'and even discussing' (291) genre, pointing out that fixed definitions are intensely problematic, calling into consideration as they do the roles of authorial intention and readerly assumptions and expectations. But Milowicki and Wilson achieve a useful model of explication nonetheless, examining textual evidence of Shakespeare's awareness of the Menippean tradition, and scrutinising convincingly the significant motifs and juxtapositions that would characterise an examined text as

Menippean. It is this model which informs my own study.

Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957)

provides the most standard version of a definition of Menippean writing, and it certainly illuminates central characteristics of the Menippean, although it must be noted that his examples draw on a body of literature which demarcates the canon in fairly conservative terms. Also, while his adherence to an empirical model of investigation affords the benefits of a balanced and pragmatic approach, there is a tendency in his discussions to circumscribe paradigms more by what they are not, or do not do, in relation to his model's other parallel definitions, than on what they do manifestly. Nonetheless, the manner in which Frye distils aspects of the Menippean has provided the most useful basic representation from which to work. By examining each writer's articulated and implicit relationship to the satiric and the Menippean, I have mapped out how they have adhered to and augmented the Menippean tradition, pointing ultimately to ways in which assumptions about novelistic form are challenged, and how this merges with the wider, on-going discussions of genre in a postcolonial context.

The authors considered here can be considered as a cohort in several contexts. They are all South-Asian postcolonial writers of narrative fiction in English. As a group they represent the multiplicity of the Indian-subcontinent: in their range of

religious identities (Muslim Rushdie, Hindu Desani, and Christian convert Menen); in origins both native-born (Sealy, Rushdie) and expatriot-born (Desani, Menen); in long-term residence in India (Sealy; Desani and Menen to a lesser degree) and in exile (Rushdie by default, Menen by self-definition); in leanings Anglophile (Desani) and nationalist (Sealy); in racial mixture (self-defined Indian-Irish Menen, and Anglo-Indian Sealy). Each is also self-defined as askew from the mainstream by circumstance or by choice, affording access to the sort of slant view that arguably tends to promote satire's castigations and provocations (Desani's asceticism; Menen's biculturalism and homosexuality; Rushdie's exuberant celebrations of hybridity and fatwa-mandated seclusion; Sealy's staunch assertion of minority Anglo-Indianism). Desani and Menen are near contemporaries, as are Rushdie and Sealy, and in each pair one author demonstrates dynamic reshaping of novelistic form (Desani and Sealy) while the other mounts as significant a challenge through significant manipulations of language (Menen and Rushdie).

Chapter One establishes the context for examining these authors in depth, looking at the prevalence of assessments of postcolonial fiction which feature anti-realism, post-realism, and magic realism. Against this I am placing Menippean satire as a mode which accounts for some of the trends in postcolonial

counter-realist writing. In examining Menippean satire I will also be addressing the current wide use of the term, and suggesting that an over-emphasis on its counter-realist and hybrid elements has led to an unfortunate disregard of its roots in satire.

Respective chapters on Menen and Desani look at their use of intertextual juxtapositions which begin to shape this postcolonial emphasis on revision and renewal of novelistic language and form. Chapter Two considers Desani's sole full-length work, *All About H. Hatterr*, first published in 1948, as a Menippean satire which casts nearly every available satiric device as a Menippean strategy to depict the unresolved formal tensions between East and West. These Eastern and Western influences course through the text in wide intertextual references, in the depicted cultural conflicts of colonial India, and in the contradictory attentions of the mixed-race eponymous and picaresque hero. Chapter Three examines a range of the prolific Menen's satirical novels, starting with his first, *The Prevalance of Witches* (1949) and including his memoirs, which cover many of the same questions he raises in his novels about the construction of identity. Rather than Desani's avalanche of dramatic incursions which reshape and redefine form, Menen establishes Menippean satire through an emphasis on wit and refined erudition. Menen's extremely clever and parodic juxtapositions of Eastern and Western sources impact upon the level of discourse and ultimately its shape and form.

Chapter Four focuses on how Salman Rushdie foregrounds the construction of Menippean elements through dialogic descriptions of various art forms within his novels, starting with *Midnight's Children* (1981), and its interwoven references to cinema. Rushdie consistently embeds a focus in each novel on another art form, and in the reading presented here, these art forms exist in a dialogic, juxtaposed, and often parodic relationship. Thus his inflection of this classic rhetorical device of comparison, *ekphrasis*, arguably has a bearing on the boundaries of the novel. His Menippean approach presents various modes of artistic and cultural expression as inter-related and connected, and as a result his Menippean approach to the novel tends to undercut fallacies of uncorrupted or essential artistic or cultural traditions. With the work of I. Allan Sealy, the subject of Chapter Five, one confronts a series of novels, starting with *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988), which incorporates a striking range of formal innovations. Sealy's novels each have a subtitle which indicates a generic form, yet in true Menippean manner what emerges is a philosophical discourse on the aptness of such generic constraints, as in the ironic paradoxes of his vast 'all'-encompassing historical chronicle, *The Trotter-Nama*, and the subjectivities which endlessly elude its narrative borders. Sealy uses Menippean strategies and structures to expand and reshape the novelistic genre to new levels and registers, while at

the same time confronting how difficult it remains to create space for marginalised voices.

In the Menippean fragmentations and reformations of all of these texts, each of these authors foregrounds an undeniable drive towards the untested and the new. The material presented here also makes a powerful argument for the significant imaginative and constituent role comprised by satire in the way these texts challenge, destabilise, and correct. The Conclusion addresses how one may construe the observations contained in these chapters as a forward-directed reimagining of the novel, a trying and testing of generic boundaries which directs its energies around the instabilities of form and towards a distinct notion of conceptual diversity.

Chapter One: Menippean satire and Counter-realism in Postcolonial Literature of South Asia

Lucian tells an amusing parable of how Dionysus, Pan, Silenus, the satyrs, and the maenads invaded India. The Hindus with their massive armies, their elephants, their towers on top of the elephants, thought the invasion absurd. Scouts brought word that the enemy army consisted largely of young clodhoppers with tails and horns, given to dancing about naked, and crazy women who rushed around shouting “Evoe!”....It was impossible not to laugh at them. But when the Indians were finally forced to do battle with the invaders and encountered the whirling, shrieking frenzy of Dionysus’ troops, their ponderous array of elephants broke and fled in terror. Lucian makes his point: “most people are in the same state of mind as the Hindoos when they encounter literary novelties....Thinking that what they hear from me will smack of Satyrs and of jokes, in short, of comedy...some of them do not come at all,...while others apparently come for something of that kind, and when they find steel instead of ivy, are even then slow to applaud, confused by the unexpectedness of the thing.”

.... These works [Northrop] Frye calls Menippean satires.

Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art*.¹

Introduction

In the vision of the Menippean satirist, Lucian, Menippean satire invaded India triumphantly under the banner of Dionysus and

¹ Robert C. Elliott in *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art*, 185-6, refers to A.M. Harmon’s translation of Lucian (*Lucian*, London: Heinemann and NY: Macmillan, 1913-1967, 8 Vols; ‘Dionysus’ appears in Vol. I, 49-55). In my reading I have used Lucian, ‘Dionysus’, Fowler, H.W. and F. G. Fowler, trans., *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1905, Vol. III, 253-6. The Greek satirist, Lucian, is not to be confused with either the Roman satirist, Lucius Apuleius, author of *The Golden Ass*, or the character Lucian, who is the protagonist of Lucius’s *The Golden Ass*. Just to complicate matters, Lucian of Samosata, the aforementioned Greek satirist, wrote a work called, *Lucius, or The Ass*. I believe this is why classical scholars tend to refer to just ‘Apuleius’ when discussing the author of *The Golden Ass*. There is no confusion that both were influenced by Menippus. Lucian was an imitator of Menippus, and included a character called Menippus in several of his satires.

Silenus, bringing its ‘frenzy’ of forms and references, and its sharply cutting mockery. Though an imagined event, it is arguable that evidence is indeed apparent in contemporary postcolonial narrative fictions of South Asia. Postcolonial literature’s general trend towards hybridity, transformations, and the crossing or transgression of borders and boundaries has been described profusely, but the relationship of satire and the postcolonial has not been examined widely.² Satire has long embodied the fluidity of form capable of accommodating the shifts towards experimentation and syncretism, the ‘new and unexpected combinations’ Salman Rushdie describes which characterise postcolonial literature (*Imaginary* 394). However, when critics discuss the modes in which postcolonial literature achieves its extensively celebrated transformations and subversions, the general trend has been to place the dominant manner of postcolonial writing within the counter-realist modes of magic realism, post-realism, and anti-realism. There is critical agreement, for example, that Indian literature has transcended depictions of ‘the realism of life in Malgudi’ and elsewhere, and that Indian novels now almost routinely ‘explore and explode the boundaries that fragment human concern’ (Dutta 62). But there is a clear argument to be made that what is considered counter-realist in postcolonial literature can sometimes be better

² Most comprehensive is Ball (2003) on Achebe, Naipaul and Rushdie. There are additionally studies of individual authors wherein satire is noted or tracked; see, for example, Teverson (2004) on Rushdie.

understood in the more traditional terms of satire, specifically Menippean satire.³

I explore this premise in works by a group of South Asian satirists who have never been examined in concert as such: Aubrey Menen (1912-1989), G.V. Desani (1909-2000), Salman Rushdie (1947-), and I. Allan Sealy (1951-).⁴ My study looks specifically at how Menippean satire provides a model which can account for widely noted counter-realist elements in their postcolonial writing. The authors examined in subsequent chapters demonstrate paradigms of Menippean satire which emphasise particularly the subversive powers of language (Menen and Rushdie) and which challenge particularly boundaries and definitions regarding form (Desani and Sealy). But where postcolonial critics have noted generally the fabulous, grotesque, and inexplicable of counter-realism, my readings point out instead ‘the free play of intellectual fancy’, the combination of ‘stylization’ and ‘ridicule’ defined by Northrop Frye as Menippean elements (310; 309), and the ‘unruly’ and ‘fantastic narrative’ and ‘wild and parodic display of learning’ described likewise by Dustin Griffin (9; 33). Aijaz Ahmad may make a claim for the Indian exclusivity of ‘the characteristically Indian penchant for obsessive digressions and the telling of an

³ The genre *menippea* is named after the Cynic, Menippus of Gadara (Rose 84).

⁴ Chelva Kanaganayakam links some of the counter-realist strands of Desani, Rushdie, and Sealy (2002), and Susheila Nasta explores the diasporic aspects of both Desani and Menen (2002).

interminable tale' (126), but Menippean satire's longstanding tendency towards catalogue and digression has been scrupulously documented (Frye 1957, Hightet 1962, Blanchard 1995, Sherbert 1996). Even Patricia Merivale's observation that Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is an 'encyclopedic book' which captures the 'specific Indian urge to encapsulate the whole of reality' (85) can be directed towards a discussion of the Menippean, since Frye convincingly illustrates Menippean satire as 'an encyclopaedic farrago' full of 'great catalogues' and marked by the writer's 'magpie instinct to collect facts' (311). When Salman Rushdie characterises the quintessentially postcolonial, polyvoiced language and multi-layered subjects of his novelistic worlds, he does so in similar terms: 'We were language's magpies by nature, stealing whatever sounded bright and shiny', evincing 'argot...in which a sentence could begin in one language, swoop through a second and even a third and then swing back round to the first' (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 56; 7). Subsequent chapters develop in detail how realism in the postcolonial novels of Desani, Menen, Rushdie, and Sealy is disrupted by Menippean satire's 'wild fantasy...united with noble indignation' (Hodgart 55).

It is a tricky business dealing with a type of writing that spans several thousand years in the European tradition, and which has

only begun to be charted outside of Western writing.⁵ What is generally confirmed is that Menippean satire ‘permits movement up and down the literary scale (high and low, oral and literary, verse and prose) and between genres and forms of speech’ (Branham and Kinney xix). Its characteristic literary allusions may be set out as intertextual play or subversive, boundary-destroying attacks. As Garry Sherbert notes, in Menippean satire the philosophic centre or norm may itself be subject to undercutting: the ostensibly sage narrator might display doubts, or through dense ‘metacommentary’ undermine his or her own rationality or veracity (198). The roots of the classical Menippea in the *symposium* or feast have spawned a tradition of banquet-related themes in later works, combining motifs of physicality and ingestion. All of this delineates a counter-realist mode of writing which features both a vast thematic range engendering ‘a radical demystification from which nothing is exempt’ (Milowicki and Wilson 304) and boundary-challenging ‘polymorphic formal possibilities’ as well (Blanchard 168).

Reflecting on the vast thematic and formal range of Menippean satire, Branham and Kinney remark that it is ‘so paradoxical and strange as to be suspect – like cold fusion’ (xviii).

⁵ Two sources offer a start. There is T.W.Clark, ed., *The Novel in India: Its Birth and Development*, London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1970; See: T.W. Clark on ‘Bengali Prose Fiction up to Bankimcandra’ for descriptions of Menippean-type works by Hutom Pyacar, 47; and R.S. McGregor on ‘The Rise of Standard Hindi and Early Hindi Prose Fiction’ for similar efforts by Gopal Ram Gahmari, 167-9. The second source, Javadi, Hasan. *Satire in Persian Literature*. Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1988, describes quite a few Persian satires which contain Menippean elements, although, like Clark and McGregor, the author does not identify them as such.

With regard to terminology in the face of such variety, this study staunchly supports the use of the phrase ‘Menippean satire’, with an equal emphasis on both the Menippean and the satiric. This runs counter to some dominant trends in discussions of the Menippean mode. Northrop Frye distils a working definition of Menippean satire only to reject the term for ‘anatomy’ (310). John Clement Ball is persuasive in his rationale for discussing mainly the ‘menippean grotesque’ in Rushdie’s work, since he delves largely into exaggerated depictions of the body which vex the way ‘normal’ is referenced. Less persuasive is Peter Porter’s argument for the term ‘Menippeanism’ over Menippean satire, supported by the view that ‘while formal flexibility and social criticism often coincide, neither is essential to the other’ (2). Instead of satire’s witty ridicule and attacks, Porter’s version exhibits a ‘narratorial or authorial posture of observation and collection’ (7) which neither negates nor corrects. What Porter proposes seems a mild and domesticated mode that has been both declawed and detoothed. And even though their explications of the Menippean capture the imaginative verve and corrective drive of satiric writing, and I have drawn enthusiastically upon this throughout this thesis, Milowicki and Wilson eschew satire for the phrase ‘Menippean discourse’. Their premise, an utterly defensible one, is that because the Menippean ‘suggests a vision indifferent to boundaries’ the term

‘satire’ is too ‘delimiting’, and they prefer to reflect this in the designation of ‘Menippean *discourse*, some key part of which is satiric’ (302). I counter this with a basic preference to maintain the centrality of satire in the rubric of mélange and abuse, and because satire’s assumptions of the moral provide the tension that rescues the Menippean from the chaos of its efficient dissolutions.

Critical work on the connections between postcolonial writing and satire in general is quite limited. Ball covers important ground in his inquiries into the relationship of satire and politics in Naipaul, Achebe, and Rushdie. Establishing satire as a mode in some postcolonial writing, he goes on to explore the elements he finds most compelling, namely the ‘serious aspects’, the ‘targets’ and ‘agendas’ which require unpacking and explanations (*Satire* 166). Ball also points out (169) the wholly unfulfilled anticipation by Brian Connery and Kirk Combe that ‘satire theory will be instrumental in continuing investigation of colonial and postcolonial literatures’ (Connery and Combe 11). And Ball identifies a need for more work to ‘rehabilitate and reframe’ the lines of inquiry that tend to be provoked by the study of satire (172). Although there have been more notable forays into the counter-discursive (Tiffin 1987), work on satire and counter-realist postcolonial writing is even more limited. Chelva Kanaganayakam makes an impressive case for reading

work by R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Zulfikar Ghose, and Suniti Namjoshi alongside Desani and Rushdie as part of a counter-realist tradition, although her specific emphasis is on subversive and destabilizing strategies, and she does not perceive much of the writing as satire. In keeping with her view that Rushdie's chief impact has been to focus attention on 'the demotic sensibility', she denotes as 'influence', rather than some degree of parody, the presence of a chapter in Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) called 'Midnight's Parents' (172).

There is no denying that Rushdie's impact has been to overthrow a sense of the imposed diction and restrained registers of English as an imported language, literally peopling his novels in unexpected ways. Kanaganayakam's careful investigations make a clear case for this. But the picture seems unfinished if one has not integrated the impact of Menippean satire into the assertion that Indian fiction is, post-Rushdie, a 'fiction of fragmentation' (Kanaganayakam 171).⁶

In order to demonstrate the potential productivity of approaching such work as Menippean satire, various things are still required in this first chapter. I will indicate that the authors concerned demonstrate an awareness of Menippean satire, though perhaps not any assertion of identity as Menippean satirists. I will then present how Menippean satire and experimental postcolonial

⁶ See also Rukun Advani, 'Novelists in Residence', *Seminar* 384 (1991): 15–18, for a further articulation of Rushdie as the watershed author of Indian postcolonialism.

literature share many thematic and formal features. These overlaps suggest certain affinities which bear out Helen Tiffin's expectation that 'the re/placing of carnivalesque European genres' like Menippean satire 'in post-colonial contexts' engenders a condition where 'they are carried to a higher subversive power' (19). This specific idea of subversive augmentation also allows us to read what limited contemporary theory exists regarding Menippean satiric writing and to apprehend an affinity with modes of postcoloniality. For instance, Edward J. Milowicki and Robert Rawdon Wilson describe how in Menippean satire '[d]ifferent genres flow together...struggling in opposition to each other (rather as characters...behave), affirm their presence, are mocked and reduced, finally dissolving into constituent elements...capable of crossing any and all generic boundaries' (319). As a 'sustained experiment with genre' (319) then, Menippean satire seems acutely well situated to function as a vehicle for the conceptual diversities and the challenges to limitations and boundaries that have come to characterise postcolonial writing. I will also consider the current lack of clarity regarding the term Menippean satire and its misuse/overuse in some critical contexts, suggesting that Menippean satire by postcolonial writers demonstrates with zeal and great imagination the necessary but sometimes overlooked elements of both multiplicity and critique.

Although my argument does not require the writers in question to self-identify specifically as Menippean satirists, I have found a distinct degree of awareness of the Menippean tradition exhibited in at least one work by each author.⁷ Menen is the most overt in identifying his works as satires and himself as a satirist. One might argue that the work of any self-identified satirist is connected in some way to its fundamental traditions, but Menen presents the linkage overtly when he illuminates his Menippean models directly in the course of his deflationary practices. In *The Fig Tree*, a text satirizing both attitudes towards sexuality and the folly of national efforts to control human behaviour, Menen refers to the much-used Menippean model of the symposium. It is significant that this novel features several debates conducted over refreshments, and in the course of one such episode a character relates:

I came across a book called PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM, or The BANQUET. The sub-title naturally attracted me, so I put it beside my bed. I thought it might be interesting to know what the Greeks ate. Well, I read it from time to time. I hadn't got more than a quarter of the way through when I felt in my bones that something was very wrong. I know a good deal about banquets, and one thing I was sure of, Greeks or not, nobody every talked as these

⁷ Noting that satirists often eschew the term, Ball reminds us that '[s]atire makes people laugh and nod their heads and admire its creator; satire also makes people uncomfortable and suspicious and inclined to attack its creator' (167). V. S. Naipaul somewhat famously rejected the term in an interview with Derek Walcott in 1965 (in Jussawalla 8).

characters talked over a table. So I turned to the introduction to find out something more about the book.

Well, I was right. The thing wasn't meant to be real. (98)

It is typical of Menen that he would invoke irony by deflating a classical model while relying on it. Salman Rushdie also cites Menippean classical sources directly. Chapter V of *The Satanic Verses* starts with a paraphrase from Lucius's *The Golden Ass*, and in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* the narrator likens his narrative to that of 'Lucius Apuleius of Madaura', yoking the Menippean and the postcolonial when he begs to be excused for a '(post)colonial clumsiness' which inflects 'the oddness of my tale' (388). Though not directly citing a Menippean source, Sealy includes a chapter entitled 'S for Satyr' in *Red*, in which the narrator ponders the role of culpability in art, touching on judgement, culture, and art that violates the precepts of 'nature' (256-7). The meditation pivots on depictions of satyrs in specific paintings, so there is some foregrounding of the mixture of realistic portrayals and fantastic figures in this context. Sealy's satyrs are considered as combining fertility/creativity, celebration and menace, and the very borders of 'civilisation' (257). Desani also establishes a focus on liminal states through his depictions of Hatterr's humiliations and deprivations, which echo strongly with those of Lucian Apuleius which unfold in *The Golden Ass*. More detail follows in subsequent chapters; although other modes are arguably present these episodes help to

make a strong case for reflection on the role of Menippean satire in these texts.

My investigation is indebted to the influential work of M. M. Bakhtin which places early Menippean satire as ‘authentic predecessors of the novel’ (*Dialogic*, 22). (Though to a lesser degree, the other predecessors in Bakhtin’s scheme are the Socratic dialogue and the Roman satire/satyr play.) Bakhtin emphasises how these genres pave the way for the later novel by their dynamic rejection of the stylistic unities which characterise the elite classical forms, such as epic and tragedy. As described by Bakhtin, one may begin to see that these precursor genres exhibit characteristics that resonate with those of more modern types of literature:

a multi-toned narration, the mixing of high and low, serious and comic; they make wide use of inserted genres – letters, found manuscripts, retold dialogues, parodies on the high genres, paradoxically reinterpreted citations; in some of them we observe a mixing of prosaic and poetic speech, living dialects and jargons (and in the Roman stage, direct bilingualism as well) are introduced, and various authorial masks make their appearance. (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 108)

In Bakhtin’s discussion, Menippean satire is ultimately elevated to a ‘carnivalised genre’ (*Problems* 127). Bakhtin’s summary of

the classic form of Menippean satire has many powerful resonances with general descriptions of some contemporary writing, but most significantly, it reverberates with critical discussions of postcolonial literature. Consider, for example, Elleke Boehmer's description of the role of disruption in postcolonial writing at the level of narrative voice and structure:

[p]ost-imperial narrative constantly negotiates between different registers, between high and low voices, and contrasting realities, past and future, First and Third World, elite and mass....the postcolonial writer flamboyantly crosses, fragments, and parodies different narrative styles and perspectives. Local contexts are reflected in the inclusion of pidgin English, untranslated words, obscure proverbs. The writer introduces a noise of voices that resist easy decoding. A similar effect is created where a work cites cultural information -- jokes, fragments of oral epic...which cannot be deciphered without background knowledge. (206)

Boehmer captures of the tumult of information which can characterise postcolonial writing, and also the potential intellectual gratifications of reading as decoding and interpretation. She is also describing the 'hybridity, impurity, intermingling' which Rushdie ascribes to postcolonial literature as well as its 'unexpected combinations', mentioned (in the Introduction's epigraphs) by both Rushdie and Said. But

Boehmer's description also echoes strongly Menippean satire's overall formal aspects, its mix of register, tone, genre, format, versions of information, and its undeniable 'impulse towards diversity' (Howes 234).

It is useful here to draw upon Milowicki and Wilson's Menippean reading of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, with regard to their articulation of the workings of the Menippean. Their description foregrounds how Menippean satire achieves its mockeries by employing textual elements such as a fragmentary view, grotesqueries, seemingly antagonistic juxtapositions, hybridity, and varied textual sources, all in differing combinations: 'a self-conscious, encyclopaedic array of discursive techniques, both motifs and conventions, any subset of which can be employed for exploratory or subversive purposes' (293).⁸ In my argument, these are many of the literary techniques and approaches which have been widely ascribed to, and construed as the underpinnings of, counter-realism in postcolonial writing, yet they actually fall under the workings of this far older tradition of Menippean satire. Milowicki and Wilson's Menippean reading in the context of Shakespeare's play pinpoints an encompassing of hybridity, linguistic and thematic diversity, erudition, grotesquery, and subversion which

⁸ As the individual texts discussed in this study bear out, in Menippean satire the exploratory *is* subversive, utilizing playful and/or deflationary questioning, as well as sometimes the literal quest.

I wish to consider more generally in the context of postcolonial literature. They explain that:

As a literary mode...[Menippean satire] offers advantages to writers who may wish to cover many disparate themes and whose vision of the world sees many different levels of existence crossing and variously affecting each other. In its specifically satiric mode, Menippean discourse suggests the possibilities of mockery by showing, often in physical and bodily terms, the translation of one level of action or thought into another. It mocks and anatomizes the structure of an idea by playing its conceptual content through a very physical kaleidoscope. (307)

Milowicki and Wilson conclude that by a text's very 'inclusiveness', its presentation of a wide range of 'ideas and possible positions', the groundwork is established for 'satiric mockery' (307). In their argument, 'inclusiveness [through hybridity] collapses boundaries,' and thus Menippean texts combine 'elements of genre', mix 'disparate generic motifs', and they 'radically subvert conceptual boundaries' (308). This framework elides with the challenges to boundary and border evinced by postcolonial writing. From the literal examination of shifting geographical borders and resultant physical dislocations (in the fall-out from Independence in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Sealy's *The Trotter-Nama*, for example) to Homi

Bhabha's more abstract investigations of 'a contingent, borderline experience', an interstitial space which delineates 'the margin of hybridity' (1994 206), postcolonial literatures have striven to focus attention on and often to subvert the very binaries and suppositions that maintain artificial borders and the subjectivities of boundaries. Despite the sense of destructiveness the Menippean version may imply, it is important to stress that the impulse of Menippean satire is not nihilistic; it retains the strong inclination to activate a version of morality that arguably operates in all satiric texts. Its power lies in its methods of interrogation. Menippean satire juxtaposes diverse texts and discourses which allows an alternative version to be 'articulated', but in its challenges to authoritative 'versions', not necessarily 'authenticated' (D'Cruz 118). Menippean satire's challenges to realism stem from its undermining of assumptions and norms, its tendency to question and unbalance, and its celebration of oppositionalities, whether embedded as conflicted characters within a text or inscribed as mocking resistance to generic categorization. As Milowicki and Wilson assert, Menippean satire is in 'the modern sense, experimental', a mode which tests 'every possibility of literary creation', examining problems of 'form, of literary type and genre', and even 'assumptions about literature' by means of its fundamental, 'sustained experiment with genre' (319). I will return to their work in subsequent

chapters because their emphasis so emphatically unites the elements of mélange and abuse.

The Movement Away From Realism

There is general critical consensus that from its initial appearance to the present, Indian fiction written in English exhibits a change of emphasis from realism to experimental forms. Judith Plotz has charted the ‘largely realistic fiction of Indian nationality’ which dominates Indian writing in the first three quarters of the twentieth century (33). The compelling realist narratives of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Kushwant Singh, Bhabani Bhattacharya, R.K. Narayan, Manohar Malgonkar, and Kamila Markandaya adhere to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s theorization of an initial stage of realist, naturalistic, directly referential writing which is followed by the advent of ‘post-realistic’ texts (150). Chelva Kanaganayakam has mapped the evolution of such a counter-realist strand in Indian writing, specifically a tradition that departs, ‘in perception and portrayals of socio-cultural realities, from the mimetic tradition’ of Raj Anand, Rao, Singh, Malgonkar, and Markandaya (80). The overall challenges of experimental form comprise negotiating ‘the mode of narration’ (Dutta 62) and the limitations of an imposed colonial language to convey the complexities of modern Indian society. According to Prema Nandakumar, the progression of non-realist Indian fiction in English begins to

answer back to an initial ‘reformative’ realism which eyed social problems but eschewed any ‘stylistic and linguistic experimentation’ in the arguably ‘alien’ language of English (146). The task ultimately is to achieve what Plotz deems ‘the necessary polyphony’ (33). The arrival of an expanding body of counter-realist literature, Appiah argues, reflects the broad emergence of indigenous postcolonial culture, a culture evolving towards a fully decolonized state, and concurrent modes of expression (150).

Thus postcolonial literature of South Asia and elsewhere has developed and grown into a complex body of writing, but the critical language describing it has paradoxically narrowed. Jean-Pierre Durix is one of a number of critics who have positioned magic realism as the dominant creative element in a large-scale rejection of realist writing within postcolonial literatures (19).⁹ Indeed, the characteristics of magic realism are at times so identified with postcolonial writing as to be, in some quarters, yoked to the very definition of the postcolonial. Louis Menand is typical, albeit somewhat flippant, when he describes a paradigmatic postcolonial narrative fiction which would also happen to exhibit the perceived omnipresence of magic realism (139). According to Menand, the model text ‘should be a hybrid of postmodernist heteroglossia (multiple and high-low discursive

⁹ See Bhabha (1994), Durix (1998), Kanaganayakam (2002), and Thieme (2003).

registers, mixed genres, stories within stories) and pre-modernist narrative' with 'the features of the world-literature prototype: a trauma-and-recovery story, with magic-realist elements' (139).

The most influential assessment is no doubt that of Homi Bhabha, who observed that '[m]agical realism... becomes the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world' (1990, 7).

But that term has approached a degree of alarming ubiquity; magic realism now applies to a global literature which mixes realistic and fantastic themes and subjects, the factual combined and jousting with the counterfactual in work by authors of striking diversity. Elizabeth Morgan notes the aptness of magic realism in general for the African novel, since 'the mythic and magical will always be a part of African storytelling' (26).

Suzanne Baker posits that magic realism's scope for appropriations of dominant language and discourses makes it an ideal mode for the assertion of the marginalised political agendas of Aboriginal writers of Australia (56). Antonio Benítez-Rojo has articulated a contingent problem of the overuse of the category of magic realism, namely the way specific and significant narratives of violence and deprivation in postcolonial Caribbean writing become detached and generalised, 'heard as homogenous and legitimate signifiers that constitute knowledge itself' rather than as significant and specific narratives of struggle (212). Benítez-Rojo's concern makes clear how far the contemporary critical reliance on magic realism to encapsulate

strange and marvellous depictions has travelled from its roots in Jacques Stephen Aléxis's powerful analysis of Haitian art, presented at the first Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in September 1956, which enunciated the far more particular aims 'To sing the beauties of the Haitian motherland, its greatness as well as its wretchedness... To reject all art which has no real and social content... To find the form of expression proper to its own people...' (269). The problem seems to be the more general explorations of forms of resistance and subversion in postcolonial contexts which cut across the lines of regional, local, and indigenous cultures. Stephen Slemon summarises the specific nature of what critics must navigate with sensitivity:

The critical use of the concept of magic realism can therefore signify resistance to monumental theories of literary practice – a way of suggesting there is something going on in certain forms of literary writing, and in the modalities of cultural experience that underlie those forms, that confounds the capacities of major genre systems to come to terms with them. At the same time, of course, the concept of magic realism itself threatens to become a monumentalizing category for literary practice and to offer to centralizing genre systems a single locus upon which the massive problem of *difference* in literary expression can be managed into recognizable meaning in one swift pass. (408-9)

The central issue is economically voiced by Ilan Stavans: ‘the term has achieved such ubiquity and elasticity as to become meaningless’ (B9). For Laura Moss, magic realism ‘has been so widely employed that it has lost its cachet as an *avant garde* form’ (‘Forget’ 121).¹⁰

But the blossoming of counter-realist measures in postcolonial fictions are hardly formulaic. John Thieme has characterised as magic realist a dynamic, ever-increasing experimentation, describing a range of ‘complicity and subversion’ which focuses attention on destabilization, dissidence, and the undermining of authority, in a style which is often colourful, flamboyant and performative (Thieme 170). I would quibble only with his insistence on limiting these effects to the application of magic realism. There are genuine shifts towards experimentation and syncretisms in postcolonial writing, in line with the ‘new and unexpected combinations’ which Salman Rushdie and Edward Said describe (in the epigraphs to my Introduction), but which

¹⁰ Critics have also attempted to downplay the dominance of magic realism in postcolonial writing by playing ‘up’ the resistance aspects of realist writing. To this end, Laura Moss writes in defense of realism, holding that ‘non-realist writing is frequently privileged by postcolonial critics searching for a form to hold disruptive politics because of the assumption that its various forms are inherently conducive to political subversion due to their capacity for presenting multiplicity’ (2000, np). Moss notes that some critics seem to prefer works of an anti-realist mode because of the widespread perception that realism ‘perpetuates imperialist ideals’, reinforcing notions of superior metropolitan cultures and mandating the social and cultural codes of colonial hierarchies. Certainly Peter Hulme (1986), Timothy Brennan (1993), and Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin (1993) all fall into this category, linking the Euro-centred tradition of realist literature with the power to continue to perpetuate that European centre as a cultural norm, and exploring anti-realist texts as more in line with possessing powers of resistance and opposition.

also echo Gilbert Highet's expression of satire's embodiment of the syncretic impulse and its destabilising energies.¹¹

Perhaps it is the 'unexpected combination' of Menippean satire and postcolonial narrative fiction that has critics so often reaching for lists of genres to describe the works addressed in this thesis. Frye notes a pattern of critics perplexed by the appearance of Menippean satire, and comments that 'Petronius, Apuleius, Rabelais, Swift, and Voltaire all use a loose-jointed narrative form often confused with the romance' (309). It may help to point out briefly some specifically counter-realist Menippean elements. While the texts examined in this thesis sometimes exhibit multiple counter-realist elements, a number of aspects of the chosen literature are best understood by the paradigm of Menippean satire. The texts all assert formal innovations which problematise how the genre of the novel is perceived. Aubrey Menen is perhaps the most subtle in his witty prose fictions, but a Menippean parodic polyphony is nonetheless present in his sustained dialogues between Eastern and Western sources. These are sometimes literal dialogues, as in *Shela: A Satire*. Menen also introduces juxtaposed, parodied

¹¹ With regard to terminology, this study will use 'counter-realism' to sum up the effects variously expressed as anti-realist, post-realist, or magic realist, although I will sometimes be examining magic realism in the context of specific authors. Kwame Anthony Appiah is a useful source on the 'post-realist' text, specifically an experimental, counter-realist, or magic realist category of writing which Appiah theorizes appears after an initial stage of realist writing emerges in a nascent, indigenous, postcolonial literary culture, as that culture evolves towards a fully decolonized state, and concurrent mode of expression (150).

sources when cast his own racially-mixed heritage as actively conflicted. The mixed-race protagonist in *All About H. Hatterr*, Desani's sole full-length work of prose fiction, enacts this conflict more vigorously, via juxtaposed sources which impact and fragment novelistic form more directly. An East-West split arguably energizes the debates of much of Salman Rushdie's work, and this thesis examines how these debates emerge on the level of language. A similar energy emerges in the novels of I. Allan Sealy, a body of work which tends to depict the ruptures within, and slights suffered by, the Anglo-Indian community, but the impact of Menippean content is most directly obvious in each novel's radical engagement of experimental form.

These authors all depict the characteristically Menippean element of philosophical debates. Debates are artfully depicted in Menen's work and dramatically enacted in Desani's. They are represented at times by exploration of various art forms such as oral storytelling in Rushdie's novels. Debates appear as radical challenges to formal expectations in Sealy, such as the complete disappearance of narratorial moderation, replaced with only argument and counter-argument at times in *The Trotter-Nama* and *Red*. The context for such debates is often a version of the symposium, elaborate disquisitions and counter-arguments presented against the backdrop of versions of the banquet. These texts also feature the elaborate digressions and catalogues of

information that Frye notes as ‘the organizing principle of the greatest Menippean satire in English before Swift [’s *Gulliver’s Travels*], Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (311). Sealy’s narrator in *The Trotter-Nama* catalogues the minutiae of Anglo-Indian life over several centuries, while Rushdie surveys expressions of subjective Indian experience in various artistic media in most of his novels. Menen’s characters in *The Prevalence of Witches* offer lengthy, sophisticated dissections of the colonial drive for power, while the overload of information in Desani’s *Hatterr* veers well into the level of rant and tirade. They each offer a version of Frye’s ‘creative treatment of exhaustive erudition’ (311), always foregrounding language which exhibits Menippean satire’s exuberant celebrations and parodic wordplay. Carnival obtains, closure is resisted, and there are newer and more compelling expressions of the possibilities of independence and artistic expression. Subsequent chapters address these Menippean aspects in much greater detail.

The Mirror and The ‘Real’

If one considers counter-realism and Menippean satire as subversive, some overlaps begin to clarify. The basic characteristics of counter-realism, for example, could be generally described as the combination of factual material (settings, situations, and characters) with counterfactual elements (supernatural, fantastic, or miraculous); by presenting the

counterfactual material as factual, the text calls the objective and the factual into question. Menippean satire also mixes similar elements which undermine supposed objectivity and factual perspective. Each vaunts a degree of formal self-consciousness, and each has a specific, notable, and at times vexed, relationship with ‘reality’. Magic realism specifically seeks to upset the category of ‘the real’ within the fiction in order to destabilise impressions of the world external to the text; its subversion rests in unsettling perceptions of the real world. Yet satires also aim at a similar disturbing effect; they are grounded to some degree in an attempt at objective portrayal, even as they subvert, distort, and critique, to draw out what is deemed worthy of attack in order to, again, unsettle perceptions of the real world.

Perhaps the metaphor of the narrative as ‘the mirror held up’, employed by critics examining both magical realism and satire (including the Menippean mode), is most helpful in assessing this relationship. Stephen Slemon, establishing a concept of magic realism in a postcolonial context, explores Gabriel García Márquez’s motif of a ‘speaking mirror’.¹² Initially, this metaphor refers to the way a magic realist text may be read as reflecting actual speech and communicative modes in its realist narrative, so that the text ‘reflects’ what Slemon identifies as ‘the social relations of a postcolonial culture’ (411). But, Slemon continues,

¹² Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. G. Rabassa, NY: Avon, 1971, 383.

the ‘speaking mirror’ functions dually, so that it ‘does not only reflect in an outward direction toward postcolonial social relations. It also sustains an inward reflection into the work’s thematic content’ (411). This enables the magic realist text to distort temporal and historic fixities, so that it relates to the whole of postcolonial culture, to the entirety of a history of colonization, and to the ‘gaps, absences, and silences produced by the colonial encounter’ (411), which may be portrayed in fractured or fragmented language, dissociative or supernatural events, or incongruities and logically inexplicable events. Slemen’s definition places magic realism as a mode linked to, and circumscribed by, the recognition and development of postcolonial writing.

Satire’s metaphor is also the mirror, as stated most notably by Jonathan Swift in the preface to *The Battel of the Books* (1710): ‘Satyr is a sort of *Glass*, wherein Beholders do generally discover everybody’s Face but their Own’.¹³ Leonard Feinberg has noted the striking prevalence of mirrors as a device for satirists (199).¹⁴ Gilbert Highet explores the satirical reflection as specifically a ‘distorting’ mirror, a slippery device which draws

¹³ Swift’s passage continues: ‘which is the chief Reason for that kind Reception it meets in the World, and that so very few are offended with it’. It is easy to agree with Ball (40) that there is an underlying critical need to emphasise satire’s material foci to stir a response should satire’s weapons ever fail to do so.

¹⁴ Patricia Meyer Spacks has remarked that occasionally the satirist strikes a vision so successful that it can defy differentiation from ‘reality’ (360). Her examples of this would have been most welcome.

an audience in, for ‘[a] satirical picture of our world, which shows only human beings as its inhabitants, must pretend to be a photograph, and in fact be a caricature’ (190). This is in keeping with Northrop Frye’s anchoring of satire to an exterior ‘object of attack’ (224) and Leon Guilhamet’s location of satire’s focus in ‘social reality’ (166). Yet Hightet allows for satire’s relationship with a reflected ‘reality’ to result in textual manipulations, exaggerations and unpredictability: ‘In the world of satiric fiction, almost anything may happen at any moment. Satire sometimes looks at reality as a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, deserving nothing but a bitter laugh’ (11). And this is key to my discussion, since it allows the central notion of referentiality, which is clearly a vital element in satire, to reflect postcolonialism’s emphasis on the emergence of a literature which has a basis both in a concrete social and material history, and a creative, constructed, often oppositional response to that history. Satire’s emphases, then, can add elements of destabilisation, and can undermine the supposed neutrality and veracity in literary voices. Hightet continues:

The central problem of satire is its relation to reality.

Satire wishes to expose and criticize and shame human life, but it pretends to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth....it usually does this in one of two ways: either by showing an apparently factual but really ludicrous and debased picture of this world; or by showing a picture of

another world, with which our world is contrasted. (158-9)

Yet even when the particulars of satire's realism, its historical specificities, are unintelligible to a readership for reasons of the passage of time, geographical distance, or linguistic opacity, Highet asserts the relevance of satire's original and energetic attacks and interprets a defect as an asset, stressing that 'We can still enjoy the biting paradoxes....We can still admire the deftly turned phrases....We can laugh....we can...substitute other names....It is in this way that good satire, although essentially topical, becomes general and permanent' (17-8). In this context one may negotiate a balance between one of the pressing challenges for readers/consumers of the burgeoning category of postcolonial literature: the need to read postcolonial material in close proximity to its specific, referential origins and influences, and the possibility of extracting meaning from a looser, more variably-connected body of work which increasingly may be encountered in various contexts as popular or 'world' literature. Satire is clearly part of the subversive, oppositional energy of this writing, an aspect which anchors a text, and a feature which can aid its transcendence, if desired, from the referential to the more accessible and possibly enduring.

The Problematically Widening Category of Menippean Satire

As with the counter-realist terminology of magic realism, there is also an unhelpful tendency towards the critical overuse of Menippean satire, which illuminates an overall lack of clarity regarding genre. Menippean satire can imply such a flexible structure that it has been used as a descriptive term for a surprisingly wide array of works which have in common the rupturing of formal narrative conventions (described in more detail below). But while such works may essay overt challenges to realism via unexpected textual strategies, it is important to remember that Menippean satire has its roots in a form which encompasses both textual polyphony/dialogism *and* satire. Subsequent chapters will address in specific detail examples which combine these both.

Nonetheless, examining the current breadth of this critical category illustrates some key points in how Menippean satire continues to impact upon genre. Menippus wrote parodic treatments of extant texts, mixing styles to incorporate forms and linguistic registers that veered wildly from refined to coarse. Margaret A. Rose notes that there never was a single ‘kind’ of Menippean satire, ‘for Menippus parodied broadly the different ancient forms of learned discourse’ (85). The most ‘characteristic’ innovation of the Menippean form was the novel mixture of verse and prose (Relihan 228). So in one sense the roots of the mode rest in elements of the unsettling or even

unseating of hegemonic discourses, and on satiric commentary from the perceived sidelines or margins which nonetheless attempts to inhabit, and subvert, mainstream forms. The chief structural characteristic of the original *menippea* is its unruly, seemingly incongruous mixture of contrasting literary forms, so that a single satire may contain dialogues, narratives, letters, lists, and lyrics, in an organised medley or an ostensibly haphazard mishmash. Eugene Kirk's description of later Menippean satire lists 'unconventional diction, Neologisms, portmanteau words, macaronics, preciosity, coarse vulgarity, catalogues, bombast, mixed languages, and protracted sentences...sometimes appearing all together in the same work' (xi).

M. M. Bakhtin's influential discussions of the development of the novel are the main contributing factor to the current critical ubiquity of the term Menippean satire. Donald F. Theall comments that 'Menippean satire had become a "hot" topic among literary theorists in the 1970s and remained so into the 1980s', fuelled first by Bakhtin's work (first published in English translation in 1965) and later by that of Julia Kristeva (1969; English transl. 1979) (192). In Bakhtin's analysis these are important forms because each reflects a degree of material social reality and each is connected to the significant category of the carnivalesque (22). These classical 'serio-comic' forms are

also described as a genre classification which recognises the potential for textual engagement with ideology, and this is certainly a major contributing factor to Menippean satire's appeal to postcolonial and other modern critics, for it offers a discursive model for the eliding of content with form, and for the characterisation of embedded literary oppositionalities. As a descriptive and contextualising term it also can be construed as reflecting the way modern texts problematise referentiality and realism, through discordant narrative elements such as multiple voices. Gary S. Morson and Caryl Emerson focus on these dynamic narrative features in their discussion of how 'Dostoevsky also breathed new life into Menippean satire by adapting other traditional features of the genre to polyphony' (465). Their discussion is useful as it illustrates how the model of the Menippean satire has been, depending on point of view, either updated robustly as a continuing feature of literary practice, or appropriated in ways which privilege a discordant multivocality over its satiric roots:

Polyphony also suggested ways to extend traditional menippean techniques about the world: journeys to the underworld or heaven (present in the dreams and fantasies of Dostoevky's characters); dialogues in the other world and in extreme or liminal situations ('threshold dialogues,' as in Ivan Karamazov's conversation with the devil); and circumstances

temporarily free from quotidian consequences and social positions in which people can discover and articulate their most fundamental beliefs and the sense of their lives. (465-6)

These are certainly all challenges to expectations of narrative and textual realism, but they seem notably distinct from the specific oppositionalities of the parodic, satiric elements of Menippus' original work.

And herein lies the problematic complication: because of its modern critical associations with transgressive, politically-engaged and/or intertextual writing, Menippean satire has grown to a category of overly wide application in contemporary assessments of literature. A brief survey supports this. Using Bakhtin's framework to apply it to the evolving novel, Eugene P. Kirk finds the *menippea* in Swift, Fielding, Cervantes, and Sterne (ix). Frank Palmeri confirms its presence in Twain, Borges, Nabokov, and Pynchon and notes its 'renewed prominence and influence in the twentieth century' ('Review', 173). Julia Kristeva, discussing Menippean satire as a form of serious transgressive writing which continues the dialogic, intertextual novelistic progression identified by Bakhtin, locates the *menippea* in Kafka (50). Elsewhere it is applied to the work of John Fowles, Richard Brome, Orson Wells' radio adaptations,



and T.S. Eliot.¹⁵ Northrop Frye's discussion of Menippean satire in *Anatomy of Criticism* was also influential, in which his definition merges the continuum of 'fantasy and morality' with a significant ridiculing attitude and an overall distinctive degree of erudition (310). Eventually Frye chose to apply the term 'anatomy', but the focus on, and terminology of, the *menippea* seems to have been his discussion's main lasting impact (310). His list of Menippean satires which display the characteristic 'piling up' or 'avalanche' (311) of focussed intellect includes: Rousseau's *Emile*, Voltaire's *Candide*, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Butler's *Erewhon*, and Huxley's *Brave New World* (308). F. Anne Payne, writing initially about Menippean aspects of Chaucer, eventually ascribes to the *menippea* features more in keeping with discussions of postmodernism, stating that it underscores mutability and social relativity, and 'requires that we accept as necessary the presentation of simultaneous unresolved points of view' (4). At this point, Menippean satire seems to be a catch-all category for literary works exhibiting dialogism, intertextuality, and erudite playfulness, even though

¹⁵ See, respectively: Park, Byung-joo, 'The French Lieutenant's Woman: A Parody of Victorian Fiction', *The Journal of English Language and Literature*, 38.2 (1992) Summer 1992, 315-39; Chiang, Hsiao-chen. "The Trope of an Upside Down World: Carnival and Menippean Satire in Richard Brome's the Antipodes." *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 30.2 (2004): 55-72; Koppenfels Werner, von. "Of Ants and Aliens: Wells' The War of the Worlds as Menippean Satire." *Telling Stories: Studies in Honour of Ulrich Broich on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday*. Ed. Elmar Lehmann and Bernd Lenz. Amsterdam: Grüner, 1992, 147-162; Nänny, Max. "The Waste Land and Michail Bakhtin's Definition of the *Menippea*." *Anglistentag 1981: Vorträge*. Ed. J. örg Hasler. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1983, 206-218; Nänny, Max, "'The Waste Land': A Menippean Satire?" *Poetry and Epistemology: Turning Points in the History of Poetic Knowledge*. Ed. Roland Hagenbüchle and Laura Skandera. Regensburg: Pustet, 1986. 278-291.

such works may not bear any relationship to the initial subversions and discursive challenges of Menippus.

To add another level of complication here, some critics link the ancient *menippea* directly to contemporary magic realism. Rosemary Jackson emphasises the carnivalesque roots of the *menippea*, specifically as discussed by Bakhtin, as one of the antecedents of modern fantasy, a direct precursor to the ‘contradictions’ which ‘confront’ reason in contemporary fantastic fictions (21); her study draws widely from examples of European literature. Durix expands upon Jackson’s analysis when he draws a direct line from the magic-realist modern to the satiric ancient, observing that ‘[m]agic realism has affinities with the old carnivalesque tradition and the *menippea*’, and he elaborates upon this link to describe how magic realism is a very flexible ‘form of cultural assertion’ in postcolonial writing in the face of tyrannical dogma and discourse (115; 116). So while Bakhtin’s decisive analyses effectively resuscitated the *menippea* from critical and historical obscurity, the category of Menippean satire now seems arguably overdetermined, and also somewhat conflicted. Howard D. Weinbrot has argued, apparently in relative isolation, that in the wake of Frye and particularly of Bakhtin, ‘current theories of Menippean satire...allow too many texts at too many times to be Menippean’, and that the form is too broadly associated with ideas of philosophy expressed in

dialogic voices or languages (296).¹⁶ It is easy to see, however, why scholars of magic realism might see it as influenced by the elements of Menippean satire which veer so vividly from realistic depiction, but this nonetheless problematically divorces the main elements of the term.

Thus there is an element of this study that essays a recuperation of Menippean satire while exploring its emergence in postcolonial literature. John Clement Ball may have initiated direction when he cast Menippean satire as ‘an optimistic

¹⁶ Weinbrot points out that few have read the actual classical sources, either Menippus, or followers Bion, Varro, and Petronius, whose Menippean work in the main survives in mere fragments but which nonetheless constitutes collectively the roots of the early Menippean satire from which such influence and definitions are drawn. Weinbrot also debunks some of Bakhtin’s assertions that early modern writers were directly influenced by these classical sources, since the work was indeed so obscure and unobtainable. His updated definition would preserve the oppositional quality of Menippean satire, as well as its multivocality, while limiting some of its avenues for referentiality:

My notion of Menippean satire is of a kind of satire that uses at least two different languages, genres, tones, or cultural or historical periods to combat a false and threatening orthodoxy. It does so in either a harsher and severe or a softer and muted way.... It is a genre for serious people who see serious trouble and want to do something about it – whether to awake a somnolent nation, define the native in contrast to the foreign, protest the victory of darkness, or correct a careless reader. This multiform genre is what in the *Academics* 1.2.8 Varro tells Atticus and Cicero is ‘multa admixta,’ a term Horace Rackham deftly translates as ‘copious admixtures’. (2)

The inclusion of Petronius in Weinbrot’s list would be contested by some; see Raymond Astbury, ‘Petronius, P. Oxy. 3010, and Menippean Satire’, *Classical Philology* 72.1 (1977) 22-31. Astbury argues that Petronius’s distinct aim was comedy rather than satire, and that his *Satyricon* shares only a formal overlap with Menippean satire, namely the use of the prosimetric, or prose and verse, form. It is provocative though, in light of Bakhtin’s work, that Astbury identifies Petronius’s text as a ‘prosimetric novel’ (30) [my italics]. Further debunking is carried out by Joel C. Relihan, who states that the notion of a menippean genre being recognised in any sense in antiquity is false: ‘That such a genre existed is evident from the lines of influence and tradition that can be traced in Varro, Seneca, Petronius, and others, but antiquity does not acknowledge the genre which modern literary acumen has uncovered and named on its own’ (227). See Relihan, Joel C. ‘On the Origin of “Menippean Satire” as the Name of a Literary Genre’, *Classical Philology*, 79.3 (1984) 226-9.

expression of becoming, renewal, and freedom' (120), echoing Weinbrot's assertion that in the context of 'a threatening false orthodoxy', the Menippean 'form is unsettling virtually by fiat. It reminds us of the danger and difficulty around or within us' (298).

Subsequent chapters will establish the degree to which these Indian satirists negotiate the careful balance between 'appropriation and resistance' which Om P. Juneja associates with the processes of modernising, hybridising literary forms, wherein a text can be both 'an ape and a rebel' (30). I will be examining how Indian-subcontinent postcolonial satirists reimagine the Menippean in postcolonial contexts, and how the term Menippean satire regains its specificity in this line of counter-realist fiction. There is also a strand of progression and influence which links these satiric writers, which helps to clarify why my focus is on this particular body of Indian sub-continent postcolonial writing. Desani and Menen focus on transplanted and/or biracial individuals as tropes of cultural hybridity. Rushdie translates this focus to entire migrant or displaced populations, examining impacts of hybrid inheritances, while Sealy tackles the presentation of an underdetermined

community, the Anglo-Indian struggle to secure a ‘significant identity in the larger Indian context’ (Nandakumar 151).¹⁷

The Postcolonial Menippean

Satire’s protean nature dictates that the thematic concerns of each subsequent, author-oriented chapter will vary, as each author assessed here puts an individual imprint on the mode. I have dealt with multiple works by each author except Desani, for *All About H. Hatterr* is his only full-length, substantial work.¹⁸ My discussions vary somewhat in focus in being directed by each author’s manifestation of counter-realist writing, so attention to specific postcolonial issues, such as representations of colonial literature, identity politics, and the politics of the independent decolonised state, is governed by the outcomes of close reading. If my work veers towards over-generalisation, I can only point to Howard D. Weinbrot’s reminder that satires exist ‘on a spectrum’ (298), and add that my efforts have been to draw unique novels into critical contact while retaining a sense

¹⁷ For more discussion on lines of influence, see Kanaganayakam: ‘[i]n terms of form, it is Rushdie (who admits somewhat belatedly, the influence of Desani) and later Allan Sealy who write in a manner that establishes a line of continuity... Even more than Rushdie’s work, Sealy’s *The Trotter-Nama* is a direct inheritor of the Desani mode and content’ (56). She is referring to Rushdie’s acknowledgement in *The New Yorker*’s 1997 summer fiction edition which featured fictions of India, and which he edited: ‘My own writings, too, learned a trick or two from [Desani]’ (‘Damme’ 58). Kanaganayakam’s critical interest is in the larger evolution of a counter-realist strand in Indian writing, and she clarifies that Rushdie, Desani, and Sealy are ‘in some ways experimental and subversive, and they belong to a tradition that departs, in perception and portrayals of socio-cultural realities, from the mimetic tradition’ (80).

¹⁸ Although it is illuminating to draw a contrast with his serious prose-poem *Hali*. The final version is the one published by McPherson in 1991, which also contains a collection of short stories drawn largely from his contributions to the *Times of India Illustrated Weekly* from 1962-7.

of whatever made them so uniquely compelling to begin with. And I must concede that while the grounds for comparison between Menippean satire and counter-realist postcolonial writing are substantial they are not absolute. But by examining these chosen authors as Menippean satirists my hope is to yield some new insights about the experimental nature of a substantial portion of recent postcolonial fiction. There is also an obvious need to wade carefully in applying a form so embedded in Western literary tradition into the context of the postcolonial, but in my investigations I have striven, if imperfectly, to examine how the Menippean is being actively used to reflect the disputes and dialogues that span conceptions of East and West. Gilbert Highet mentions that Menippus earned the epithet ‘the joker about serious things’ (36), and points out that the early satires by Menippus and later, Varro, ‘were learned and original and witty...[often] narratives of fantastic adventure told in the first person [in] language...so rich in vulgarisms, archaisms, neologisms, and bold imagery...that they even make the straight verse of satires of Horace and Juvenal look rather tame and monotonous’ (37). It is truly not violating the original sense of Menippean satire to apply it to Menen’s erudite mixtures of parody and satire, Desani’s ‘ridicule or caricature of some sham-intellectual or theological fraud’, and the ‘outlandish fictions (*i.e.* fantastic voyages, dreams, visions, talking beasts) and extreme distortions of argument (often “paradoxes”’) of Sealy and

Rushdie (Rose 85). It is hoped that the discussion which follows may collectively deepen our understanding of the portrayal of the postcolonial experience, and shed needed light on a wider textual body of work.

**Chapter Two: G.V. Desani's Postcolonial Menippean Satiric
Subversions
In *All About H. Hatterr***

The AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL OF H. HATTERR
BEING ALSO A MOSAIC-ORGANON OF *Life*:
viz., A MEDICO-PHILOSOPHICAL GRAMMAR
AS TO THIS CONTRAST, THIS HUMAN
HORSEPLAY, THIS DESIGN FOR
DIAMOND-CUT-DIAMOND

...H. HATTERR

BY

H. HATTERR

G.V. Desani, *All About H. Hatterr*

‘Take off your hat,’ the King said to the Hatter.

‘It isn’t mine,’ said the Hatter.

‘Stolen!’ the King exclaimed....

Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in
Wonderland*

Introduction

Govindas Vishnoodas Desani wrote his ‘mosaic-organon of Life’, *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), while waiting out the Second World War in London, against a persistent backdrop of martial ordnance, and it is not too much of a stretch to apply terms relative to explosions to sum up the text’s continuing impact on the critical imagination. This chapter examines how reading Desani’s challenging counter-realist text as Menippean satire accounts for much of its significant experimentation in form, themes and diction. Menippean satire, for example, makes sense of D.M. Burjorjee’s very typical attempt to describe the text by

listing the constituent genres, an attempt which foregrounds mainly the text's elements of fragmentation and contestation of form: 'it is an Everyman allegory, a symbolist novel of quest, a Bildungsroman... and above all, a philosophical dialogue' (216).¹ It is true that, strictly in terms of satire, Desani employs all of the devices which Gilbert Hight has identified as the broadest components of satire: 'irony, paradox, antithesis, parody, colloquialism, anticlimax, topicality, obscenity, violence, vividness, exaggeration' (18), as well as the additional key satiric devices of burlesque, caricature, invective, and self-parody. Desani also combines all four features of John Clement Ball's well-considered examination of the fundamental attitudes of satire: aggression, judgement, referentiality and play (*Satire* 178). Examining Desani's text as Menippean allows one to account for each of these elements, as well as for a studied topicality, a lexicon of originality, and formal innovations that overwhelm the ostensible isolation of Western and Eastern literary forms and influences. Finally, it accounts for some of the method by which *Hatterr* may be read as a counter-realist text of substance which engages, if irresolutely at times, with central issues which emerge in later postcolonial discourses.

¹ Gerhard Stilz observes that Desani inhabits a 'widely divergent mixture of discourses' spanning 'autobiography, philosophical treatise, religious catechism, literary criticism, legal defence' and others. (81). Some catalogues are of descriptive terms. Basavaraj S. Naikar lists 'its thematic peculiarity and ... its technical novelty and linguistic gallimaufrey' (23). For S.C. Harrex it is a 'cavalcade of wit and fantasy, of language-fission and mad Hatterr's adventures' (74). Hadyn M. Williams calls it a 'farce...an enthusiastic melange of language, dialect, slang and mock-heroic metaphor' ('Kinds' 70).

Desani's text does present challenges to critical analysis in terms of articulating its relationship to counter-realism, as well as its relationship to realism. As counter-realism has held greater sway over interpretations and even expectations of postcolonial literature, critics have been quick to establish it as the sole basis for reading *Hatterr*. Naseem Khan states in 1993 that '[i]ts anarchic humour, creative games with language and the reeling road it consciously plots between East and West sets it in a tradition that connects with magic realism' ('All' 12). Khan later situates the text's East-West overlap more emphatically as 'surreal' magic realism (*Voices* 117).

But even much earlier critical readings of Desani's text focus on playful and novel elements which could be construed as magic realist.² Delmore Schwarz identifies the work as sharing Flann

² Bouts of feedback have followed the numerous editions of the text, including an unexpected reprint of *Hatterr* in 1970 by Bodley Head. It was surprising as Desani had been in semi-seclusion studying yoga and meditation in India and Burma from 1952-66. Molly Ramanujan describes some of Desani's devotions and exercises from this period; see *G.V. Desani: Writer and Worldview*, New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1984, 11; 15-6. The republication is part of the text's singular publication history, which deserves mention. It was first published as *All About Mr. Hatterr*, by Aldor in 1948, and then reissued by Saturn Press (as *All About H. Hatterr*, 'for Hindustaaniwalla Hatterr') in 1950. A revised edition appeared in 1951, published by Farrar, Straus & Young in New York. The (unexpected) further revised edition was issued by The Bodley Head (London) and Farrar, Straus & Giroux (NY) in 1970. Additional revisions and a final added chapter appeared in the Lancer Books paperback edition (US) of 1972. In 1972 Penguin issued another revised edition, in paperback. Arnold-Heinemann published the paperback edition in New Delhi in 1985. McPherson & Company Publishers of Kingston, NY, from whose publishing history this information is compiled, issued the definitive edition in 1986 'with final revisions' by Desani comprising the plates of the Penguin version with the addition of the 'Personal Footnotes' to Rambeli's Defense (317-8). *Hali*, Desani's sombre prose-poem, also has a singular publication history. It was originally published in Britain in 1950 (Saturn Press), then revised for publication in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (Bombay 1952), then revised

O'Brien's indebtedness to Joyce, exhibiting the linguistic play and humour which subverts some of the darker tendencies of modernism, all the while stretching and reshaping the boundaries of realism (578). In touting linguistic play, Schwarz points towards the aspect of experimental writing in which language creates its own reality (579). Molly Ramanujan echoes this position, noting the work's allegorical and moral rhythms, and overall stance of subversion: '[t]he verbal peculiarities of the narrator are part of the subversive and countersubversive intent of the book. The situation is not merely a reflection of the political under-tow of empire; it reflects the worldview of the twentieth century which is essentially postdualistic' (29). In Susheila Nasta's perceptive reading, Desani maintains a 'desire to widen the angle of the lens and to open up the essentially dualistic perspective of a Western modernity', and this is key to where Nasta locates the subversion of Desani's text, as a vehicle for the articulation of counter-realism:

...Desani's purpose is less to analyse or argue than to dramatize, to illustrate the process by which Hatterr both remakes and is remade by language, creating a space which is not constrained by time or place so much as by the inherent mutability of language itself.

again in another UK edition (1953). A dramatised version was produced at the Watergate Theatre (London, 1950), and broadcast versions for All India Radio (1950 and '51). (A 1967 text edition was not authorized by the author.) The final version is the one published by McPherson in 1991, which also contains a collection of short stories drawn largely from his contributions to the *Times of India Illustrated Weekly* from 1962-7.

(*Home Truths* 54)

Nasta considers that Desani's text exhibits a prescient sense of awareness of how linguistic shifts problematise cultural perspective, and indeed any sense of veracity, and she emphasises that this 'shifting' focus on language as both striving for interaction yet conveying the innately untranslatable is exactly Desani's point (53-4). It is one which, Nasta notes, has subsequently become central to many analytical discussions of postcolonial texts, and it is also how Desani foregrounds a problematic relationship with referential representation.

Hatterr and Menippean Satire

Nasta's reading of Desani's tendency to 'dramatize' offers a connection to the way Menippean satire draws attention to its parodic comparisons. Desani often describes the remaking of language in physical terms; language is enacted in gesture, and the spoken and written have physical correlations. After some detailed discussion of the function of erudition in Menippean satire, Edward J. Milowicki and Robert Rawdon Wilson mention in a footnote that 'one should not ignore the extreme physicalness of Menippean discourse, its wealth of gesture and pantomime, the other end, as it were, of the spectrum of human communication' (318-9). Desani makes a prominent reference to gesture in the first 'Warning!' of his text, which immediately

invokes elements of drama in drawing on performative acts and scripted dialogue:

‘Melodramatic gestures against public security are a common form of self-expression in the East. For instance, an Indian peasant, whose house has been burgled, will lay a tree across a railway line, hoping to derail a goods train, just to show his opinion of life. And the Magistrates are far more understanding...’

Anglo-Indian writer

(12)

Indian middle-man (to Author): Sir, if you do not identify your composition a novel, how then do we itemise it? Sir, the rank and file is entitled to know.

Author (to Indian middle-man): Sir, I identify it a *gesture*. Sir, the rank and file is entitled to know.

Indian middle-man (to Author): Sir, there is no immediate demand for *gestures*. There is immediate demand for novels. Sir, we are literary agents not free agents.

Author (to Indian middle-man): Sir, I identify it a novel. Sir, itemise it accordingly. (12)

Syd Harrex’s analysis highlights the notion of gesture as performance, of *Hatterr* as an extended exercise in theatricality, which suggests some of the more dramatic elements of magic realism: ‘Desani has virtually turned the novel into a performing

art, just as his characters perpetually make performances of their own lives' (215).³ This becomes central to what Chelva Kanaganayakam later discusses as Desani's 'artifice', in that Desani has combined several modes to achieve an anti-realist text, drawing 'the visual and the dramatic properties of drama' into the framework of a novel (52). She emphasizes that the 'gestural' aspects of the text enable it to veer from linear narrative, and thus 'causality along traditional lines of realism is

³ The 'performance' aspects of the text have been explored a number of times in theatre. The Ridiculusmus Theatre Co. of Derry, N. Ireland, adapted *All About H. Hatterr* for the stage in 1996, after a trip to India in January of that year, and numerous exchanges with Desani and his lawyer. The show, 'All About H. Hatterr', opened in April 1996 at the Battersea Arts Centre (ironically as part of their Irish Festival), and featured company founders David Woods and Jon Hough, along with Armen Gregory. Their production centres on both the performative and gestural aspects of the text. While imposing a degree of linear narrative on the chapters they used (originally chapters 1-3), the company also indulged in some of the showy, plot-stopping, linguistic play of the text. Their programme quoted Rustom Bharucha's text on Peter Brook's 'Mahabharata': 'We Indians are known for our circumlocutions....Always the elaboration is more important than the thrust of the narrative.' 'Hatterr' toured for 96 performances through 21 June 1998, when the final show took place at the Festival Club, Albert Hotel, Kirkwall, Orkney. But the actors were so drawn to the material for its themes and their possibilities of execution, for what David Woods called 'the richness of [its] postcolonial english' and the theatrical potential of Hatterr's 'failure, indefatigability, vulnerability, and naughtiness', that Desani's book became the basis for a subsequent play, entitled 'Yes, Yes, Yes', which ran for 143 performances from August 1999 to June 2002. After a disagreement with Desani and his lawyer over permission to continue performances of the first play, Woods and Hough made another research visit to India ('a disastrous working trip ...that still enlivened the end thing'), and developed the second play which 'has Hatterr as an inspiration rather than source material', and which employs Anglo-Indian characters attempting to explain the meaning of life. (David Woods, email to the author, 6 Jan 2006.)

Kanaganayakam mentions a later performance of a Hatterr-based play, entitled 'Damme This is the Oriental Scene for You', (adapted from Desani's book by the brother and sister team, Rehan and Saniya Ansari, Modest Productions, Toronto, 27 Jan – 13 Feb 2000) which highlighted the text's emphasis on artifice and counterrealism. This adaptation (which used only chapter 1) added a framing device to replicate the complex form of the original, which also shifts the emphasis more on to the main character's unresolved racial hybridity. Rehan Saniya explains that 'My play was a play within a play: H Hatterr is performing a play in London about his adventures in India before an audience of "pucca" sahibs. His point is to entertain and enlighten his gora audience with the idea that though he, Hatterr, is Indian, he is more English than the English. This is how the first act ends, with H. Hatterr making a case for why he should be humored' ('As desi as Desani').

not the objective of this novel' nor is the mode of the work 'causality along empirical lines' (53). But applying Milowicki and Wilson's prompt to the text also promotes consideration of the ways Desani's sham gurus physicalise their ridiculed attributes, and the way Hatterr's trials are all enacted in some way on the body. Desani's 'Warning!' seems to mix reference with mockery, in keeping with the mixture of 'medley and ridicule' which Margaret A. Rose associates with the spirit of classical Menippean satire (81). The depicted gestures in the text, specifically some of Hatterr's physical postures at various stages of humiliation, echo Hadyn M. Williams account of the language of *Hatterr* as 'rich, fantastic, and ...by turns poetic and startlingly vulgar and cloacal' ('Hatterr and Bazza', 209). Prema Nandakumar's metaphor of the 'strange compost' of poetry and prose, with added parody, symbolism and satire (146) nods to Joel C. Relihan's observation that the most 'characteristic' innovation of the Menippean form was the novel mixture of verse and prose (228). The references to gesture meld Eastern and Western formal sources, challenging their ostensible isolation, in the same way Hatterr resolves the disparate elements of his identity only in vaunting his confident assertion that 'I am fifty-fifty of the species' (31), subsequently 'performing' in the role of sahib, and the role of native indigent.⁴ Finally, Molly

⁴ There are unexplored critical areas in Desani's text with regard to subaltern depictions, and the locus of parody and satire within these. The text's relationship with *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland*, noted in this chapter's

Ramanujan has mentioned the way classical Indian forms, in Desani's supposedly instructive Digests, Instructions, and Presumptions, are wholly phoney and contain only ‘pseudoteaching[s]’ (20), which perhaps we may consider a sort of empty textual gesture.

But the novel’s problematic relationship to realism has come into play for a number of critics. N. Radhakrishnan sees the ‘pure comedy’ of *All About H. Hatterr* as limiting the novel’s relationship with the referential: ‘[t]he novelist is only criticising the sham of hypocrisy that shrouds many sanyasis. It must be noted that the novelist at no point criticises the real sanyasis’ (127). A.L. McLeod examines Desani’s political opinions to search for possible influences on *Hatterr*, but concludes that the work seems to be detached from political bias or naturalistic representation, and exists rather as an exercise in the comic absurd; in particular the lack of ‘verisimilitude’ in the dialogue marks it as non-realist (96; 98). K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar denotes it a ‘Joycean exercise in seeming incoherence’(68), while Perry Westbrook echoes McLeod in citing *Hatterr* as ‘one of our century’s major contributions to the literature of the absurd’ (236). For Ron Blaber the text fails at realism because it is too destabilised a narrative (179), while for Hadyn M. Williams the narrative lacks the substance to support any serious issues and

epigraph, suggests disenfranchisement in the symbol of the hat, which if not owned must be ‘stolen!’

the characters are all comic stereotypes (*Indo-Anglian*, 68):

‘What is Desani up to in this strange novel? Certainly his purpose is primarily to entertain. He avoids all political questions, has no moral to make and his picture of India is frankly surrealistic’ (69). In a later piece of criticism, Williams, though still stressing the comic foundations of the text, does concede a more complex focus ('Hatterr' 206). Williams notes, for example, that *Hatterr* presents themes such as systematic racial inequality under colonialism. Nonetheless, Williams strives to emphasise that the text’s organising principle is comedy, placing Desani’s work in the specific literary context of English comic novels. Dieter Riemenschneider calls Desani’s work ‘fantasy fiction’ although he does so in the context of establishing such writing at the nexus of local and global concerns which could transcend ‘postcolonial binaries’ (16). Bruce King emphasises a level of comedy which removes it from realism, noting particularly ‘Desani’s comic mangling of cultures and languages’ (141).

There are also a few readings which oppose assessing the text as non-realist. Ramanujan primarily places *Hatterr* in a Western literary and philosophical context which is issue-oriented and serious; her ‘precedents and parallels’ for Desani are Forster, Dostoevsky, Sartre, Camus, Beckett, Bellow, and modern writers of absurd tragedy (68). Also going against the grain of the

comedic and non-realist interpretation, Amitav Ghosh's analysis places the text in specific opposition to magic realism, as a text which is primarily subversive in form rather than style or content, citing 'the opaqueness of *Hatterr*' as an attempt to assert a claim on the novelistic form, wrenching it from its Western origins (1). For Ghosh the novel is 'a profoundly resourceful defence of certain non-Western spiritual and metaphysical ideas' (1). M. K. Naik removes the text even further from a stance of subversion and anti-realism, reading it as a serious investigation of the psychology of colonialism which works solely in the vein of 'realism and symbolism' (37). My argument proceeds, then, from the position that reading *Hatterr* as Menippean satire restores a more coherent overview of the many levels on which Desani works in this text, and also addresses the challenge of elevating satire from being merely a contingent factor in this text.

One can see the way Menippean satire offers a more adequate way to read Desani by examining some metaphors which have been applied to the text as a whole. Anthony Burgess describes Desani's work 'a sort of creative chaos that grumbles at the restraining banks' (10). It's a vivid image, albeit not such a useful or precise one, until one recalls how it is strikingly reminiscent of Howard D. Weinbrot's pondering of a definition of Menippean satirical form and satirical practice. Weinbrot

resorts to a metaphor from Samuel Johnson: ‘One needs to accept the oxymoron of rigorous fluidity or borderless borders. Samuel Johnson’s concept...of regular literary enclosures regularly burst by the unruly imagination offers a guide to such a practice’ (2). Suddenly, within this context of satire, the paradoxical model of incipient chaos and a counterpoint of order does not seem so alien or problematic. Prema Nandakumar’s description of *Hatterr* registers mainly perplexity at what to make of Desani’s multiplicity: ‘Here we have a strange compost of prose, poetry, parody, symbolism and satire. The hero is tragic, sane and clownish by turns with an occasional nod towards sheer poetry’ (146). Nonetheless, what Nandakumar highlights are the contrapuntal elements of Menippean satire, the ‘strange compost’ which can encompass both hybridities and ambivalence.

When critics do construe Desani within any paradigm of satire the text is immediately seen as more issue-based. S.C. Harrex cites *Hatterr* as employing ‘comic satire’ to ‘analyse’ the ‘irrationality of life’ (81). He concludes that when the text registers ‘serious’ issues they are (broadly) philosophical rather than (specifically) postcolonial. For him the satiric elements joust with absurdist comedy and the author’s ‘bizarre imagination’ as the text circles around ‘the question of the cultural relevance of the English literary tradition to modern

India' (73); overall he concludes that the text is most concerned with experimentation with language, form and 'cultural themes based on the mixed-race, divided-self viewpoint' (74). Most often, critics identify a single satiric thematic strand within the wide range of emphases in the text, with no attention paid an overarching strategy of satiric methods and devices. Hadyn M.Williams focuses on the ridicule of Anglophilia through the character of Banerrji; Williams refers to the satire of 'nationalistic platitudes', and to Banerrji's clichéd language (compared with Hatterr's language of creativity) ('Kinds' 76).

Nasta notes Desani's 'satirizing of the ancient classics of traditional Indian religious doctrine' (54). Ramanujan observes that *Hatterr* attacks the sacred in India as well as gurus of the Anglo-Saxon world (70). Elsewhere Williams observes that Desani 'makes great comic and satiric play out of the prejudice and racial misunderstanding ('Hatterr and Bazza' 207). So while specific issues are recognised as being the focus of satirical treatment, there is a reluctance to view the text as one which navigates with any degree of strategy its plethora of issues ranging through colonialism, nationalism, identity politics, colonial literature, Anglophilia, and sham systems of belief.

Desani on Satire in *Hatterr*

There is little published material to refer to in establishing Desani's perspective on his own work. Desani published

modestly during his life, although at specific times he was extremely prolific as a lecturer. From 1936, when he emigrated to Britain as an adult, and until the end of WWII, he was London-based as a lecturer and broadcaster for the Imperial Institute, Ministry of Information, British Broadcasting Corporation, and elsewhere.⁵ Later, he was a philosophy lecturer at the University of Texas in Austin (1968-79), and upon his retirement in 1979, he taught for several summers at Boston University (1979-81). The period between, from 1952 to 1966, Desani studied meditation and yoga in Hindu ashrams and Buddhist monasteries in India and Burma, often in seclusion. The main commentary he did provide on his own work comes from an essay, initially presented as a talk in the late 1970s. It may be significant to his perspective that his period of Eastern seclusion and study had occurred in the intervening years since the book's initial publication.

Desani explains that in 1951 he first considered *Hatterr* as 'a portrait of a man, the common vulgar species, found everywhere, both in the East and the West. His fears, desires, appetites, aspirations -- not his experiences -- are the same as those of any man, east, west, north, or south.'(1978, 403). The article contains Desani's only reference to satire in *Hatterr*, and it

⁵ A.L. McLeod in 'G.V. Desani' (1993) lists the many institutions for which Desani lectured, as well as the various media outlets and agencies on whose behalf he worked as a reporter and correspondent (95). Desani first arrived in Britain in 1926 at age 17.

implies the Juvenalian view of satire's innate inevitability: 'Ask me, why should one write about H. Hatterr? Because, as man [sic], he is a legitimate topic in literature and his singularity is justification enough for his appearance. I happen also not to be an admirer of H. Hatterr although I am sympathetic to H. Hatterr. He is to me a comic character, and my treatment of him is bound to be satirical' (404). Desani continues by way of an explanation to add: 'I have tried, you see, *per pro* H. Hatterr, to minimise man somewhat' (404). He emphasises that the scene of Hatterr at the Ganges (in Chapter III) is one of 'direct realisation of God' (403) and that the search for spiritual truth is universal, rather than either an occidental or oriental trait. In what is essentially an existentialist reading, he states that the major thematic bent of the novel is towards philosophical and spiritual issues. The emphasis on a central Everyman-type character and narrative of spiritual quest supports reading the text from the perspective of realism. However, he introduces a postcolonial context in raising the issue of imitative cultural expression, and this context lends support for opening the text to counter-realist readings, and establishes quite a lot of the content which is dealt with satirically throughout the book:

My man H. Hatterr, moreover, hasn't much to do with the problems of an Anglo-Indian individual, if any such problems exist, or with the alleged problems of an Indian in search for a theory or a way or a philosophy of life.

Parrots imitate and what passes for an alleged sickness among some Anglo-Indians or Indians as a struggle to choose a way of life, the British way, or the Indian, is no sickness. This kind of searching is no conflict in the soul of the victim, but a desire to imitate, to be led, and so strive for status. Whether one would imitate the once successful British thoughtlessly, or the not so successful Indians, equally thoughtlessly, might be appearing to some as a sickness or spiritual struggle or search. (403)

Desani embeds the questions, then, of assessing whether the quality of imitation is literal or satiric, and whether his text portrays a resolve for realistic, validating representation, or a wily need to challenge, subvert, and to celebrate the sheer, audacious power of that subversion.

A.L. McLeod locates themes in *Hatterr* which appear in earlier material from Desani's infrequent pamphlets and rare published lecture texts; for example, the prospectus for *Hatterr* states that Desani was often critical of British government policy regarding India. But McLeod also says that there is 'no evidence of where the author stood on the vital matters of Indian-British relations during the tumultuous pre-independence era' (96). Nonetheless, excerpts McLeod cites from a speech given by Desani do indicate a stance of opposition to the impact of colonialism. Desani offers support for the notion of the interdependency of

West and East, while underscoring specific philosophical divergences, West privileging experiential knowledge, East opposing this. In a phrase which echoes Salman Rushdie's later comment on the 'right' of diaspora artists to draw influences from their pre-colonial and pre-diaspora cultures (1992, 15),⁶ Desani refers to Indian ideas and cultural concepts as 'my property, my racial inheritance, my national right' (qtd. in McLeod, 97).

However, his presentation of Indian culture is one of the prime areas of satire in his novel, and in castigating its sham gurus, its manifestations of Anglophilia, its questionable education systems, and some of its iconic sacred texts, he hits at the whole of India's methods and assumptions of self-representation, attacking cultural patterns of corruption and pretext.

Kanaganayakam notes that '[i]t is hardly surprising that a novel which self-consciously draws attention to its language should also explore the relation between language and reality. Since the novel constantly highlights the deceptiveness of reality, the language, too, becomes an instrument of deception' (58). But the language of *Hatterr* also represents a singular achievement for

⁶Salman Rushdie's reference to *Hatterr* emphasises that 'the migrations of the fifties and sixties' which brought Indians to England 'happened', placing Desani in a grouping of post-diaspora writers who have been influential in a discourse of post-diaspora cultural roots and impacts. Although his inclusion in this category is useful, Desani first arrived in Britain in 1926 and returned to India after WWII, so in strict temporal terms it can be argued that he doesn't really 'fit' the grouping of writers Rushdie is making; however it is clear Rushdie wishes to accord Desani a significant degree of influence.

Desani, in obtaining a level of fluency which enabled him to use language as a vehicle for protest and subversion. When Desani first reached London from Kenya in 1926 he was just 17, and spoke only the Sindi of his parents' native region and some Kikuyu from his Kenyan *ayah/nurse*, having been born in Nairobi.⁷ As a teen he'd returned to Kenya with his father's brother to examine a family property, and managed to 'scarper' and obtain a 'British Empire passport', fleeing his father's insistent plans that he agree to marry a child bride in Karachi (Khan 'All' 12). His autodidactic efforts in London to conquer the English language were nothing short of astounding, and his text's fluency and multivocality stand in tribute to Desani's drive; he 'reinvented English' in Khan's summary (*Voices* 117). Desani explains in a 1993 interview with Khan that he wrote *Hatterr* in the face of an increasing awareness of class differences both in England and in India. A 'terrible tension' and fury at 'hypocrisy and liars' fuelled his engrossed library reading at that time and his numerous drafts of *Hatterr*: 'By that time my range was such that I could speak with authority. I gave this spacious mind to this fellow Hatterr. He has all the disadvantages, like no parents. He is everyone' (Khan 'All' 12). The paradoxical Hatterr is thus orphaned and singular, and yet universal, unique as a literary creation but also the product of an

⁷ From interviews Naseem Khan conducted with G.V. Desani, published as 'Liars, Hypocrites, Imperialists and Sages' in Dennis, Ferdinand and Naseem Khan, eds. *Voices of the Crossing: The Impact of Britain on Writers from Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa*. London: Serpent's Tail, 2000, 118-131.

apparent multitude of literary influences. He clearly is intended to embody the elements of judgement, referentiality, aggression, and play. If one can summarize Desani's somewhat shifting attitude towards this central character, or even alter ego, he veers from respect to sympathy to lack of admiration, which fits the 'pattern' of the reluctant satirist who registers overall ambivalence towards his creation.

There is tension even in the balance between individual formal satiric devices, which adds to the Menippean quality of variation in the text. The embedded textual mockery of the author focuses attention on issues of authorship and suggests the dominance of the satirist over the text. However the thematic focus of the text vaunts context, with Hatterr's repeated exclamation that 'Damme, this is the Oriental scene for you !' (41), echoing Alvin B. Kernan's distinction that 'in Menippean satire the scene is stressed and absorbs the satirist, to some degree or altogether' (70). Desani seems determined to accomplish the entire list of goals which Weinbrot indicates as necessary for Menippean satire within his refined critical definition: Menippean satire 'is a genre for serious people who see serious trouble and want to do something about it – whether to awake a somnolent nation, define the native in contrast to the foreign, protest the victory of darkness, or correct a careless reader' (2). Desani's range of satiric targets seem designed to vex both an Eastern and Western

readership, to challenge stringent boundaries of identity and notions of ‘native’, perhaps to rout charlatans; and most centrally, to test his readership with an ‘avalanche’ of intellect and a *mélange* of sources, formal models, and influences.

One way to explain the discordant, multivocal elements of Desani’s work would be to focus solely on how as a whole the text problematises categorisation in Western literary terms. This would suggest a connection with postcolonial ‘resistance literature’, as discussed by Barbara Harlow, in this case as an example of resistance to the acculturation of (novelistic) literary form, raising paradigms of Western influence meeting non-Western revision (xix). But this explanation only privileges the text’s obvious elements of oppositionality, while ignoring its significant component of related referentiality, and the way these two work to create a satiric whole.

Desani shows no sign of being uncomfortable by the presentation of unresolved incongruities and inconsistencies, and indeed, he is celebratory about them. In the introduction Desani distances himself from ‘Ganesha’ (20), rejecting the orthodox Indian authorial stance as scribe of the elephant-headed god Ganesh, but then he states that he is Hatterr’s scribe, an ironic refutation coupled with his addition that ‘though, by Ganesha, oft-times it’s prudent, aye, to lie’ (21). Hatterr’s rebellion has an element of

the extreme to it, when he decides to go ‘completely Indian to *an extent few pure non-Indian blood sahib fellers have done*’ (33).

Yet the text ultimately celebrates hybridity over purity; in keeping with Salman Rushdie’s qualification ‘It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the Pure’. The final section, Rambeli’s ‘Defense’, ‘With Iron Hand, I Defend You, Mr. H. Hatterr, Gentleman!’ comprises an 80-paragraph treatise in honour of Rambeli’s Guru, and the theme of the Defense is the hybridity of Indian-English literary discourse, although, paradoxically, Rambeli at one point irons out the core binary of Hatterr’s hybridity, commenting, almost dismissively, that he sees ‘The East or the West all being the same’ (306). Rambeli concludes with a reference to his own son and heir, named in hybrid fashion ‘Ch. Hamnet Yati Rambeli’ in honour of Hamlet, whom Rambeli assumes to be ‘the male child of the bard’, Shakespeare (316). Rambeli ends his treatise, and Desani his text, with an open-ended point which celebrates hybridity and the crossing and eliding of boundaries, while showcasing the ever-present possibility that literature will continue to mock traditions and create legacies in its own ways.

The Focus of the Satire in *Hatterr*

The text may be said to focus generally on identity politics in a colonial milieu, engaging with issues of nationalism, identity politics, colonial literature, Anglophilic, and belief systems.

Desani traces many of the binaries which tend to characterise representations of colonial power structures: metropolitan-rural, centre-margin, West-East, church-temple, master-servant, modern-parochial, Occidental-Oriental, familiar-exotic. It is also significant that he uses a narrator of mixed race but indeterminate ethnicity, who himself constitutes the binary of Anglo-Indian, or perhaps European-Asian, since critics can't decide how to define or view Hatterr, who is born to a 'European' father and 'Malay-peninsula-resident' mother (31).⁸ To Blaber and Gilman he is the eternally hopeful picaro (25), while Naik casts him as a victim in perpetuity (49). But if Desani is consistent in one element of his unpredictable text, it is in his pattern of targeting both segments of these binaries, utilising a destabilising, multi-directional satiric attack. Through satire, Desani creates a paradigm for the postcolonial Indian sub-continent, irrevocably bifurcated, searching for wholeness. This pursuit is mirrored in his central character, whose narrative also problematises establishing a stable postcolonial identity, recognising the limitations of essentialist, or simply imposed,

⁸ What is Hatterr? He states in his introduction 'One of my parents was a European, Christian-by-faith merchant merman (seaman). From which part of the Continent? Wish I could tell you. The other was an Oriental, a Malay Peninsula-resident lady, a steady, non-voyaging, non-Christian human (no mermaid). From which part of the Peninsula? Couldn't tell you either' (31). But he claims subsequently, 'I went completely Indian to *an extent few pure non-Indian blood sahib fellers have done* (33; Desani's italics). Kanaganayakam interprets him as specifically Anglo-Indian, and says that the novel 'needs to be seen' in the context of the visually-syncretic, culturally disinherited body of Anglo-Indian experience (63-4). For Kanaganayakam this gives the text historical specificity, context, and 'a particular valency' (64). Naik queries whether Hatterr's 'Malay Peninsula resident' mother could have been Indian. For Blaber he is not identifiable in historical (and therefore mimetic) terms. Williams (1976) insists Hatterr was Eurasian and *not* Indian.

definitions. The narrative also explores and at times celebrates the self-constructed or syncretic self, and this arguably acts as a precursor towards later postcolonial literary models of celebratory hybridity, constructive migrant identity, and atypical modes of cultural self-definition.⁹ However, to paraphrase Susheila Nasta, heralding subsequent ‘academic orthodoxies’ regarding identity construction, and adumbrating later multivocal, hybrid texts, is not all that this text does (53-4). Desani’s text is a multifaceted, postcolonial satire which issues its multi-directional attacks on deception and fraudulence, whether these arise in imperial or native culture. As is to be anticipated in such a text, these targets are somewhat intermingled, and sometimes presented in unexpected combinations, as when issues of identity politics are linked to depictions of identity construction in colonial-era literature, or when Anglophilia overlaps with issues of nationalism.

Colonialism is the most apparent of satiric objects in Desani’s text. In formal terms, the satire works consistently through allegories of colonialism. In philosophical terms, the colonial allegories all stress divisions, irreconcilabilities, and ‘contrast’, in the text’s shorthand for the Hindu model of eternal cycles of conflict -- the ‘diamond-cut-diamond’ or ‘big fish eat little fish’

⁹ I am thinking of Salman Rushdie’s literary celebrations of migrant experiences, and of the attacks he has sometimes been subject to in his own much-hyphenated catalogues of self-definition. Bharati Mukherjee could also fit into this meditation.

theme which appears on the title page and which is repeated throughout the text (and which links to Desani's overall configuration of embedded multicultural textual satires, discussed below). Desani via Hatterr emphasises the shifting ambivalence which allows him to both satirise and to disavow: 'What do you expect of a damme *writer* of words, anyway? *Truth?* Hell, you will get *contrast*, and no mistake! (*Hatterr*, 275).

Desani attacks a number of central imperial discourses: the narrative of empire as bringing modernisation and progress; the narrative of Macauley *et al.*, in which the production of Anglicised 'interpreters' would reinforce imperial rule; the narrative that individual identification with imperial culture (via education, for example) would promote its more widespread acceptance. Hatterr debunks each of these in turn, often through the character of Banerrji, whose rampant and unquestioning Anglophilia satirises the emptiness of imperial 'progress', and the futility of stamping a culture with an imposed, rigid system of education and notions of 'knowledge'. But Banerrji also problematises the imposition and absorption of culture. In his love of British icons, Banerrji at times suggests Macauley's actual 'mimic man':

a class of interpreters between us and the millions
whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood

and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in
morals and in intellect....¹⁰

While at the same time, Banerji's staunch defense of his homeland and its cultural icons implies the resilience of Indian culture and consciousness, and a level of resistance or indifference to forces of hybridity. Hatterr's comic encounters also depict the conflicts of colonial and indigenous influences. His adventures illustrate the split focus of his colonial-era 'higher education' (33), since, in an oblique echo of *Kim*, he has fled a colonial school and sought a succession of Hindu sages (*Kim* appears later in the text). His ultimate understanding is a single lesson which he calls 'the highest Hindu postulate': "Abscond from charlatans and deceivers as thou wouldest from venomous snakes!" (252). In Menippean multi-directionality, the 'charlatans' can be associated with both indigenous and imperial culture.

Hatterr's central adventures (identified as the 'Life Encounters' in each of the seven chapters) may be read as a series of allegories of colonialism. Blaber and Gilman have mentioned the sense of colonial allegory in the geographical referents of the seven, city-based chapters, each mentioning a specific urban Sage in the initial 'Instructions' section (89). Hatterr encounters, in turn, 'the illustrious grey-beards, the Sages of *Calcutta*,

¹⁰ T.B. Macaulay, 'Minute on Education', in W. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol II, NY: Colombia Univ. Press 1958, 49.

Rangoon (now resident in India), *Madras, Bombay*, and the right Honourable the Sage of *Delhi*, the wholly Worshipful of *Mogalsarai-Varanasi*, and his naked Holiness Number One, the Sage of *All India* himself! (33). The repeated trope of each of the Instructions shows that ‘[w]ithin H. Hatterr’s story is etched a micro-narrative of colonialism, in the form of a dialogue between a supposed naïf and a supposed master’ (Blaber and Gilman 89). It is also key to note the parodic treatment of classic dialogous instructive texts.

The first Chapter, entitled ‘The Sage, He Spake’, explores the disruption, threats, and violence instilled by a colonial regime and echoed in a colonised culture. Hatterr’s narrative mirrors these elements in his systemic exploitation by first the (colonial) Sahib Club and then by the (indigenous) Sage of the Wilderness. Hatterr expects morality of both the Sahibs and the Sage, yet each is exposed as corrupt. The Sahibs ‘black-ball’ him after his amorous washerwoman/*dhabin* publicly accuses him of owing her money (*Hatterr* 46). The ‘Sage’ stages a sham religious operation which divests seekers of their ‘worldly’ possessions to stock a lucrative ‘second-hand goods and clothes’ business (57). Humiliated by both sides of his encounter, stripped first of his membership and then his clothes, Hatterr could justifiably be attacking either adversary in his diatribe at the Sage: ‘I shall expose thee and thy crafty brother! Son of a merciless cheetah!

Tyrant! Pathos-promoter! Unspeakable materialist! Shame...!

Refund! I bid thee, refund! Be forthright, and refund!' (58).

Hatterr concludes with an analogy of the desire for violent retribution which ensues when one is systematically exploited:

I assess the world is made up of the two contrasting kinds: the Hitters (fellers who hit others without scruple or reserve), and the ruddy crabs, at the other end of the line. And, there are two sorts of contrasting ruddy crabs. The first sort, after being hit below the belt... turning Hitter, *never* allows the same to happen again. The second-class ruddy crab *bears up*, does not hit back, and having gotten a kick on the bottom, hangs about, cadging, complaining, quoting fate, tradition, scripture, invoking divine aid: just expecting compensation -- sympathy, money, tit bits, *anything*! (60)

Hatterr registers fury and aggravation at these systems which are neither what they seem nor what they advertise themselves to be.

The Club should be 'an assembly of ...kindred spirits' (60). The Sage, instead of being 'godly'(52) is a 'dirty chiselling Svengali' (60). Hatterr's frustration is palpable: 'damme, I had an irresistible desire to hit the Sage on the head with a handy brick' (57). These exploits leave Hatterr in an unfulfilled and ambivalent state, 'bearing up', driven toward actions 'retributive! compensatory!' (61) but ineluctably stalled in his victimhood.

The satire, though, is not stalled, and exposes the potential for systematic corruption in both imperial and (colonised) indigenous culture.

Chapter II, ‘...Versus the Impresario’, condemns economic exploitation under colonial rule, with the British imperial endeavour likened to a circus which manages to do all of the following simultaneously: eroticise its representatives (the ruddy-cheeked Rosie); slavishly maintain English provincial habits while outside England (nightly ‘roland-marj, quantities of stout, and *kippers*’ (71)); and blithely debase local culture (‘Bill Smythe was at it again...amusing himself by teaching his parrot, Sid, the foulest stray bits of the Anglo-Hindustani’ (71-72)).

Hatterr is seduced by the robust English circus woman who wants him to work in her circus act, in which a lion eats a steak from a man’s chest. Molly Ramanujan has referred to *Hatterr* as ‘a twist to the tail of the departing British lion on the eve of Independence’ (31); here Hatterr encounters a real, menacing lion which is no less a symbol of Britain:

She placed the meat on my chest and invited Charles to stomach it!

That, briefly, was ‘The world-renowned Braganza Act in Bill Smythe’s celebrated London Lion Circus!

The king of beasts eats from a living human plate!’

(Hatterr 79)

The celebrated circus act functions as a satiric allegory of the colonial reduction of individuals to objects of service. Hatterr is again stripped of his dignity and his clothes (which the Smythes exchange for a ‘lemon-coloured...half of a discarded bathing costume’ (77) for his lion cage debut) ostensibly in the aid of a system of values which ultimately objectifies and degrades him.

Chapters I and II contain the most focused critique of imposed colonial systems. In subsequent chapters, Hatterr faces additional humiliations as he is exploited, duped, beaten, and robbed by a series of fraudulent religious men, in successive episodes of failure to secure acceptance and a stable identity by ‘going Indian’. Against this narrative of Hatterr’s unsuccessful rejection of his own hybridity, one could locate a satiric allegory of colonial history and the urge towards nationalism in the actual order of the chapters and the themes contained in each: the colonial confrontations and rejections of the first two Chapters; the transitional Ganges passage in Chapter III which gives Hatterr a Hindu spiritual context and an epiphanic insight which attempts to valorise a nationalistic context; the subsequent Life-Encounters which all deal with Indian characters and Hindu rituals; and the postcolonial historical context of Rambeli’s Defense, which mentions (albeit comically and satirically) Nehru and Gandhi. The structure of colonial allegory works with the hierarchy of colonial types which Naik, Blaber and Gilman

identify: Hatterr is the would-be native; Banerrji is the Shakespeare-quoting Anglophile; Beliram is deferential, exploitative and opportunistic; and the dog Jenkins is the cowering, disenfranchised subaltern. In Menippean fashion, these characters never develop or progress, and remain throughout an array of postcolonial stereotypes. Naik reads them through the filter of anti-realist ‘crazy surrealism’ and finds that ‘all three characters are only variants of the archetype of the colonial (39). But this flattens and reduces the text significantly, and one loses a sense of any nuance to these satiric creations. There is more depth and variation to the text if one interprets more modulated variations of counter-realist opposition to the exploitations of colonialism through satiric depictions.

The text’s satire of nationalism is linked to its treatment of colonial-inflected Anglophilia, since each manifests primarily through the character of Hatterr’s sole friend, Banerrji. Banerrji’s typical greeting upon Hatterr’s return from an adventure, ‘I thank you! India thanks you!’ (272), is part of the continued mockery of the material emptiness of patriotic slogans. But Banerrji tends to fuse a vision of a unified India with advancements which are the direct result of colonial influence:

We are all human-brothers. One for all and all for one.

Excuse me, I do not belong to the backward India.

Arise, awake, advance! I already believe in the

European sanitation and the water-closet. Mrs. Banerji and I are also using forks and knives....Mr. H. Hatterr, mankind is one. The culture of mankind is for all. India confirms same. (233)

Williams refers to the satire of ‘nationalistic platitudes’, and to Banerji’s desperately clichéd language (*Indo-Anglian* 76). Naik discusses how Banerji is ‘hopelessly colonised’ and aspires to ape ‘his master’s culture’ but only manages to distort it (44). But the repeated pattern of distortion is, significantly, satiric distortion, featuring exaggeration, topicality, colloquialism, irony, parody, as well as the distinctly satiric components of judgement, referentiality, and play.

The satiric treatment of Banerji’s nationalism thus intersects with the way he construes his constructed identity. Banerji often selects heroic fragments but they are used in ironic and parodic ways. He anglicises Indian cultural material and literary sources. On one visit to Hatterr he explains his particularly cheery garb which draws from India and England: ‘it is spring in India. Being poetically-inclined, I wear saffron-dyed clothes to honour the festive occasion. Also, as you perceive, I wear a twig of the basil in my country cap...It is vanity. It is, as the Bard says, Imogen speaking, Senseless linen!’ (65) In a single conversation with a distraught Hatterr, he quotes Whitman, the *Talmud*, Greek myth, Kukkoka’s *The Ratirahasya, or The secrets of love* (a Sanskrit

source on erotic love), and the *Bible*, but with little context: ‘Well might I exclaim with 2 Samuel XVIII, 33, Absalom, my son, my son!’ (44). As Rambeli also does in the final chapter (with his references to ‘Sri Falstaff’ and ‘Sri Prince Henry’ (317)), Banerji also Indianises English material, as when he mingles sources: ‘The *Lotus-woman* is Al vintage. She has a face as pleasing as the Moon. She is lovely as a lily. She launches a thousand ships, as Mr. Marlowe says’ (42).¹¹ He applies his range of sources to Hatterr’s dilemmas with native spiritual guides and gurus, such as Hatterr’s disastrous financial debt to Chety-Chety. Banerji advises with celerity, but with questionable utility:

The Bard has said, Who steals my purse, steals trash!

Nevertheless, Mr. H. Hatterr, ahead of us is Double,
double, toil and trouble; fire burn and cauldron bubble!

I am not a sob-sister, but first, excuse me, the situation
reminds me of Hamlet. To be! But firstly, let us be
calm, honest Iago. (112)

The plethora of European literary source material references with which his speech is laden renders him ultimately a destabilising force in the narrative. His fragmented verbal mimicry, coupled with his obsequious attitudes, satirises and destabilises the notion

¹¹ Naik essays the most complete list of Banerji’s sources, in addition to the *Talmud*, *Bible* and Greek myths: ‘Goethe, Victor Hugo, Bunyan, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Jeremy Taylor, Dryden, Pope, Halifax, Burns, Blake, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Jane Austen, Carlyle, Arnold, Tennyson, Hardy, Shaw, Conan-Doyle, and Walt Whitman; but his favourite author is, of course, Shakespeare’ (42-3).

of the intact transmission of culture, and of cultural authority. His patent Anglophilic produces parody and exaggeration which undermines the high-minded concept of exportation of ‘culture’ and ‘education’ in the imperial mission. Homi Bhabha’s discussion of the ambivalence of colonial mimicry is useful here, with its emphasis on the ‘flawed’ nature of imitation, and its tendency to ‘rupture’ a discourse (1994, 86). Banerji presents pieces of the original *but not quite* the original. If one follows Blaber and Gilman’s explanation of such speech, Banerji’s ‘interpretation of literary sources’ points ‘to the dialogised space that is colonialism’ (*Roguery* 89). But it is clearly a satiric space as well, for Banerji’s is blithely unaware of the import of his juxtapositions and his importations, and he does not register the fact that in his absorption of ‘Britishness’ he has lost anything in the process. When Banerji’s greets Hatterr upon the latter’s escape from the unbalanced Naga he demonstrates the satiric irony of his mixed hotch-potch combination of sources. When Hatterr rejects Banerji’s offer (made in dialect) to touch his feet in supplication ‘as a devoted [Hindu] disciple and admirer’, Banerji switches to English and instead buys him a meal and a beer and recites ‘the Christian Grace’ (*Hatterr*, 220). What Banerji lacks here is not faith or generosity, but any sense of cultural fixity.

The wholesale quoting from English and other literary sources which characterises Banerji's language first appears in the 'Mutual Introduction' as a feature of Hatterr's speech, and this embeds the text's consistent and extended satiric interaction with texts. Harrex notes the constant parodies of Vedantic and Christian texts (76), and also how the book's structural pattern of 'Digest', 'Instruction', 'Presumption', and 'Life-Encounter' in each chapter parodies the classic Hindu treatise format, which is supposed to express a progression from 'illusion through defeat to enlightenment' (80). Yet Hatterr 'derives a lesson at ironic odds with the prevailing moral code' (80) and instead ends each chapter perplexed and alienated, and reflecting the more satirical notes, which Hight cites, of anticlimax, irony, paradox, and especially antithesis. There are obvious overall parodic textual relationships suggested, such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with its Mad Hatter, Voltaire's picaresque *Candide*, and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Naikar cites echoes of comic literary figures of 'Falstaff, Ben Jonsonian Bobadil, Cervantes' Don Quixote, Browning's Fra Lippo Lippi, and the *viduska* or court-jester of Sanskrit Drama' (34). Hadyn M. Williams has noted of Desani's parody that: '[t]he mock-*Upanishadic* dialogues of Hatterr and Banerji provide some of the richest comedy, in the contrast of pessimist and optimist, pragmatist and dreamer' (*Indo-Anglian* 68).

In Section 1 Desani addresses a Shakespearean-type watchman who protects the graves and reputations of the literary ‘Greats’, and their exchange foregrounds Hatterr’s ultimately overt mission to ‘disquiet’ the literary pantheon (29). Having presented the story of his past, Hatterr offers an *apologia* to the reader for his ‘folio’, the whole of which is written in the strung-together quotations and demotic language which are later found in Banerrji’s speech. It is important to note that Hatterr is at this stage of the narrative a former colonial who has reached the metropolitan centre, London. But instead of Banerrji’s heroic fragments, Hatterr addresses the reader through anti-heroic quotations from Shakespeare, first as a dying man, then as a woman (although he alters the original’s ‘most poor woman’ to ‘most poor man’). First he utters the death speech of John of Gaunt, which begins in the original with the statement ‘Methinks I am a prophet new-inspired/ And thus expiring do foretell of him/ His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last’ (*King Richard The Second*, II.i.ll.31-33). In typical paradoxical fashion, Desani suggests that Hatterr could be either the inspired prophet or just acting out a reckless impulse. Although Hatterr quotes from this speech’s famous catalogue of the qualities which constitute England’s greatness, the satiric undercutting lies in the speech’s (original, unquoted) closing: ‘That England, that was wont to conquer others,/ Hath made a shameful conquest of itself’ (ll.65-66). The reference underscores the notion of England’s decline

as a colonial power and the degree of its complicity in its self-ruination. In the next quoted text, Katharine, Queen of England, pleads against the unfairness of her imminent divorce; she points out (in Shakespeare's original) that she is 'a stranger,/Born out of your dominions' (*Henry VIII*, II. iv. ll.15-16). Both speeches, as used by Desani, underscore a sense of the moment of India's division from the disintegrating Empire: a divorce, Britain's wane, India's isolation. The effect of the author's plea to be read, filtered through this barrage of quotations representing literary 'greatness', raises the question of just what, and whom, one *is* reading. Partly through the fragmented nature of the quotations, and partly by the 'outsider' author's apparent facility with English literature, the author plays with a notion of destabilised literary authority, both as literary pastiche, and expressing satirically some postcolonial concerns. This is the same 'author' who, in the preceding paragraph, stressed the inferiority of his autodidact credentials compared to those of the supposedly 'educated' reader. Desani is deftly undermining canonical interpretations of Shakespeare's texts while submitting that familiarity with the British literary canon, and with canonical literary interpretations of 'great' works, represents colonial 'education' and 'knowledge'. While introducing the theme of the importance of education, Desani is satirising assumptions about its fixity and homogeneity. He presents the struggle of the former

colonial subject to find a voice, while subversively fragmenting and even undermining canonical texts and sources for ‘voice’.

This thread of the satirical treatment of literary sources connects to the theme of identity construction. Partly this is due to the manner in which familiarity with literary sources reflects, and creates modes of expression for, Hatterr’s self-knowledge. But his self-comprehension always returns to his hybrid identity, as when a Sage says approvingly ‘Thou art persistent, O non-Indian,’ (56), or when Desani begins to sputter in fury and contemplates ‘giving him a bit of my fifty-fifty Oriental mind’ (58). The prevalence of the theme of fragmented or shattered identity in the literature of British India has been cited elsewhere; Bart Moore-Gilbert discusses the surprising ‘thematic frequency’ of its extreme version of ‘psychic breakdown’ in narratives of the colonial period, mentioning the examples of Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* and Paul Scott’s *The Day of the Scorpion* (1996, 7). But rather than the irretrievable psychic disintegration which points towards the mode of tragedy, identity questions in Desani’s work suggest the resolute optimism of the unchastened satiric persona. In *Hatterr* this optimism is linked to the doubled resourcefulness of the hybrid. Hatterr himself emphasises the importance of the on-going process of self-discovery when he relates his own interpretation of *Kim*:

This is romance for you!

The Orient, damme!

Once, in India, paying a call to a crooked lending-library... I happen to pick up R. Kipling's autobiographical Kim.

Therein, this self-appointed whiteman's burden-bearing sherpa feller's stated how, in the Orient, blokes hit the road and think nothing of walking a thousand miles in search of something.

Could be!

Dam' true to *Life*, if anything is!

I used to hate walks out East. But I enjoyed this one. The quest was upon me and I was braced to no end. (*Hatterr*, 199).

According to Christopher Porterfield, Desani 'takes up where Kipling left off' (72). For the hybrid individual in *Hatterr*, there is no original or essential identity to resume or to reach. He is always navigating what Harrex terms 'the mixed-race, divided-self viewpoint' (74). Desani's text also echoes Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*, in following a young male seeker who is not wholly Indian. Desani satirises many of the viewpoints Gora presents sincerely, such as Gora's aspirational belief in the wholeness of India:

We must fight against foreign customs, and foreign teaching; and we can only do that by holding firmly to our own customs and our own beliefs. Hold up before

everyone the unbroken image of India, and men will
come to believe in it. (16)

But Hatterr's adventures and rebuffs foreground insecurity in his own beliefs, and the image which is ultimately held up through satire is hardly the unbroken India. The satiric textual parodies throughout *Hatterr* tend to reflect the themes of Menippean bifurcation and irresolution. Thus Hatterr's singular, opportunistic grasp of literary sources is as significant as his overall highly individual, hybridised patterns of language. Both raise questions of the degree to which Desani's depiction of a hybrid India is as much a satirically-inflected colonial fiction as it is a satirically-inflected spiritual one. And this could be posed about the character of Hatterr as well, for whom identity politics play out in apparently irresolvable ways, but which nonetheless fit the model of the Sisyphean rhythm of satiric picaresque and the overall tendency of satire towards 'militant disunity' (Connery and Combe 6).

Even the brief oasis of the Ganges passage (Chapter III) shows the striking antagonism of passive and aggressive forces in Hatterr's search for identity, and the way the satirical treatment of other texts echoes these divergences and oppositions. Hatterr has a brief idyllic spiritual reverie at the Ganges, in which life seems equal to death and '[n]ot a thing is separated from another. Everything is in a universal embrace: a slumber of love!' (129).

This is shattered by the order of ‘Always-Happy, Satan’s young alter ego’ to ‘Strip!’ as they prepare to launch an assault on a sleeping holy recluse/*sanyasi* with whom they have a quarrel. The momentary attainment of spiritual peace is set between episodes of comic humiliations and misunderstandings, culminating in a court-order which declares the still-living Hatterr the fatal victim of a tiger attack. In a brief span, Desani endures twice a false expiration, experiencing the paradox that ‘I was dying, and having, into the bargain, the most alive experience of my life’ (132). In this single chapter, the text presents satirical versions of (to return to D.M. Burjorjee’s catalogue of *Hatterr*’s array of formal parallels (216)) an Everyman allegory, a quest narrative, a Bildungsroman, and a philosophical dialogue. Initially Hatterr decides to try being a holy beggar when he realises he needs to hide from a debt collector. His allegory of spiritual gain falters when Always-Happy insists he must submit to castration; his quest leads to his penniless return home; he fails in his attempt to transcend his origins as ‘a half-heathen brother of man’ (118); and his philosophical dialogue with Banerrji concludes with the refrain ‘Balderdash! Balderdash!’ when Banerrji tries to point out the spiritual benefits of undergoing castration (149). One could argue that this heterogeneous text, to apply the words of Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe, is governed by ‘satire’s own frequent formlessness’ and brings to bear the characteristics of ‘entropy’,

‘irresolution’, ‘bifurcation’, and a sense of ‘chaos’ (5;6). These are central to satire but if misread might lead to the misapprehension that *Hatterr* is an unsuccessful attempt at another literary approach: absurd comedy, absurd tragedy, or anti-realism. Connery and Combe note that satire will tend to ‘inhabit the forms of other genres’ (5), which lends a clarity to the manner in which *Hatterr* is, in turns, a satirical version of the Everyman allegory, a symbolist novel of quest, a Bildungsroman, and a philosophical dialogue. And thus it makes sense that the ‘entropic’ conclusion of the book only adds to the list of satirised forms, as Rambeli, in the rambling final chapter, satirises the mode and discourse of literary criticism. Rambeli observes that ‘Life is full of *opposite circumstances*. I have therefore the pleasure in seconding Mr. H. Hatterr’s Statement-in-chief’ about Life being Contrast (293).

Desani’s Satirical Styles, Modes and Tropes

It is difficult to think of a satiric tactic which Desani does not employ, and one might wish to borrow Burjorjee’s choice of the catalogue to account for them all: allegory, burlesque, exaggeration, caricature, invective, as well as irony, paradox, antithesis, parody, colloquialism, anticlimax, topicality, obscenity, and violence. Sometimes they are combined to effect simultaneous direct and indirect satire, as in the episode where

Hatterr employs obscene invective ‘in the celebrated vernacular’ towards the Sage of the Wilderness:

‘Son of a thug,’ I said to the feller, giving him a bit of my fifty-fifty Oriental mind. ‘Monstrosity! Disgrace to *mahatmas!* Thy uncouth mother the defiled daughter of a vendor of the forbidden meat! Thy grandfather a wasp!

Dog-sired!’ (58).

Invective is classical direct satire, but here Hatterr’s diatribe also edges into the satiric treatment of identity politics, using indirect satiric methods of irony and paradox. He is fifty-percent Oriental, but paradoxically, unsure if this will lessen or intensify his venomous attack. The episode escalates into aggression (‘this culpable friar hovered towards me like a rogue elephant’s trunk, with the intent to pounce on me, and mete out violence’) but then switches abruptly to anticlimax when Hatterr retreats (‘I acted quick, threw up the spongeI gave in’), citing the extreme and irritating hot weather and eschewing any more colloquial or physical antagonisms (58-9). The ultimate irony is that this all contributes towards the Sage seeing Hatterr as a potential co-charlatan, and he invites Hatterr to join his lucrative but wholly fraudulent business.

There is allegory in the satiric treatment of the overarching narrative of colonialism, as well as mini-allegories embedded in

disparate episodes, which tend to pivot on the binary of independence/dependence. Desani employs burlesque in most of his characterisations, condemning through careful exaggerations and pointed mockery. The members of the Sahib Club, for example, all practice the stiffest of upper lips in the face of the dhobin's extravagant protests: 'Right through the curry-courses, not a feller could cough up a single word, except such sundry expressions of pain as, "The feller is a cad, sir!" "Gad, the man wants a birching!'" (45).

There is exaggeration in Banerji's platitudes, and in Hatterr's initial profuse expressions when, joyously debarking in Liverpool, he 'had arrived!' (36):

I took off my tropical-lid, the *sola-topi*, in sincere salutation, and next, without a waterproof, in my white drill shorts, I knelt on the mid-beds of the old country, the soft depths of its textilopolis County Palatine, aye, Keeper, luv, the blessed wet earth of Liverpool, Lancs., in a thousand salaams! (36)

Sri Y. Beliram, the grasping lawyer, in the course of the text becomes Yati Rambeli, extravagant holyman, and in the final chapter he volunteers his written 'Defense' of Hatterr's text. When the publishers do not respond ('Owing to the terrible pace of Western life, dedicated to material pursuits, they were unable to do so') Rambeli calls on them and the results suggest his

presence has an exaggerated effect: ‘after my unexpected startling visit to their office, and causing some sensation with my ochre robe...they agreed to consider my contribution’ (281). In his effusive prose he represents the satiric device of a caricature of a literary scholar, frustratingly inexact and damning with parsimonious praise: ‘Mr H. Hatterr has faced all misfortune from these pukka muggers, trying hard to drive snails to Rome. There is no doubt to his sincerity’ (285). Hatterr’s shifting, polyglot, and fragmented language is another form of exaggeration by Desani, one which embeds elements of burlesque regarding how a reader might view ‘knowledge’ in the face of Desani’s cavalcade of languages and references. The constant avalanche is bound to have an effect on any reading. Many critics have cited Hatterr’s closing apology to the reader in his lengthy ‘Mutual Introduction’: ‘I write rigamarole English, staining your goodly, godly tongue’, but none has quoted the remaining two words of the clause: ‘you maybe’ (37). It is typical of burlesque’s method of subtly ‘letting the condemnation come home to roost’ (Worcester 40), sneakily implicating the reader in the ‘entropy’ and ‘chaos’.

The episode of Major Appadine-Sinclair in Chapter VI, ‘...Salute the “*Kismet*”’, presents another example of the overlap of satiric method and trope. Desani uses burlesque, exaggeration, caricature, invective, as well as irony and anticlimax. Before an

audience in his home, Hatterr is due to receive an honour he recognises as undeserved, but he is disrupted by the return of his acid wife and the overbearing Major. Hatterr's silent internal tirade at the Major viciously parodies and ridicules the typical bluster which masks the racism of the upper-class colonial 'lexicon', but the fact of it being uttered silently robs the text of climax (248). Hatterr's near-nudity at the moment of comedic apex adds elements of comic burlesque, and as the ceremony is abruptly disbanded before Hatterr can receive his tribute (more anticlimax), the ironic annoyance of the wife and the Major appears to be both cynical and deeply prejudicial.

Desani also employs a considerable degree of self-parody, in the form of parodic and satiric authorial intrusions into the text. These add paradox and topicality, as they also undermine authority. They are direct satirical attacks on 'the author' but they also hide in the indirection of burlesque, caricature, and paradox, degrading the author's seriousness, while demonstrating irony in parading the author's deftness with Menippean juxtapositions. Desani (as 'G.V.D.') appears as the anonymous 'biographer' Hatterr refers to as 'the no-scruples feller' who will mock him even 'in death', who replies in a signed footnote 'Don't be *ridick!*...G'wan, do some *deed* and die deserving an undeserved death! That's *manly*, and good luck to us (me, you, and Socrates)!', G. V. D.' (85). Desani intrudes into

the text most directly as an author ridiculed by Hatterr, called ‘the Pharisee G. V. Desani’, who is attacked as the promoter of devious intellectual obfuscation and deliberate dissembling. Hatterr at this stage himself confesses to being one of ‘the counterfeit chaps’ profiting commercially from feigned religious belief, but he reserves his most extreme castigation for Desani. Hatterr parodies Desani’s own paradoxical introductory statement, in which the author asserts a challenge to the philosophical dialectic of veracity and falsehood: ‘Mimic me truth successfully (that’s to say, lie to me and achieve belief) and I’d credit you, with Art, Skill, Imagination, and intimate Intelligence of Truth’ (13). Hatterr attacks Desani directly as a self-righteous hypocrite, of a similar ilk to himself, but worse for practising pious deception in the guise of an author:

The trump card of us Balaamite fellers is the mumbo-jumbo talk: the priestcraft of obscurantisms and subtlety: (... *Wherefore, pious brethren, by confessing I lie, yoiks! I tell the truth*, sort of topholy trumpeting-it, by the Pharisee G. V. Desani: see the feller’s tract *All About...*, publisher, the same publishing company)....

(120)

But Hatterr is taunting here, playing with irony’s jest of ideas, because while this ‘obscurantism’ makes Desani a dissembler, he names himself as one of the ‘masters of perplexing parable-speech’ (120). This is a barbed form of communication which is:

a language deliberately designed to mystify the majority, tempt’em to start guessing, and interpreting our real drift, and allegory, what the hell we mean: pursue our meaning on their *sthula* (gross), the *sukshama* (subtle) and *para* (supreme) planes, and levels, and still miss the issue and dash their heads against the crazy-paved rock of confusion.... (120)

The in-text satiric parodies of ‘Desani’ by Hatterr also introduce satiric targets like the binary of art versus commerce, and commerce versus exploitation. Hatterr likens an author’s manipulation of readers to a priest’s corruption of spiritual adherents, suggesting truly devious intentions presented as earnest ones; this takes on an additional level of irony in the context of Desani’s subsequent serious spiritual quests, during the period when he revised *Hatterr*.¹² These intrusions all add to the active satire by blurring a sense of authorial distance, sabotaging a notion of stable authority, and arguably focussing a

¹² One of the most fantastic details of Desani’s intriguing life must be the fact that by the time he reached late middle-age he had attracted his own spiritual followers, and in his middle seventies his disciples founded an ashram in Austin, Texas, where he held his teaching post in the philosophy department of the University of Texas. The ironies of the author of *All About H.Hatterr* attracting his own cult of spiritual followers are profound indeed. The publisher of the definitive versions of Desani’s works, Bruce McPherson, characterises Desani as ‘a very complex man’: ‘For all of the anti-guruism of Hatterr, he really did play the guru in person,’ McPherson recalls of a visit to Desani in Austin. ‘He was also quite a mystic in many respects. When he came back to India after studying Mahayana Buddhism in Burma, he felt he had discovered, in the prophetic scriptures written on banana leaves [the slokas] a prefiguration of his own life. He had a trunk full of these papyri-like documents, and tended to speak to visitors at length about them’ (Personal Interview, 5 January 2006).

great deal of attention on the subjects of credibility and authorship. Desani's extensive use of self-parody allows us to expand upon Alvin B. Kernan's distinction that 'in formal [direct] satire the satirist is stressed and dominates the scene' (70), but the particular manner of embedding this strand of author-centred satiric discourse also overlaps with satire in which 'the scene is stressed and absorbs the satirist, to some degree or altogether', which Kernan identifies as Menippean satire.

Conclusion

G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* may exhibit techniques which overlap with those of magic realist and anti-realist texts, but Menippean satire is nonetheless a better way to read and apprehend this author's work. One could argue that Desani's text boldly co-mingles factual material such as settings and situations with counterfactual elements, but the counterfactual material is destabilised by satiric as well as ludic factors. The tools of satire are apparent; the sheer hyperbole of *Hatterr* is constructed in a flood of satiric devices, rather than those of magic realism. Even when the novelistic genre is interrupted by another genre, a classic trait of magic realism, the intruder is usually satirised in some way, rather than employed solely to call what has been established as factual into question. The incongruities of the text tend to be satirical paradoxes rather than the dissociative 'gaps,

absences, and silences produced by the colonial encounter' (Slemon 411) which magic realism approaches so well via fragmented language and supernatural events. And the polyphony of themes and sources in *Hatterr* reflects Menippean satire's formal drive towards diversity, and exhibits the text's refusal to grant hegemony to either its Eastern or Western roots.

Desani's contribution to postcolonial literature then is a Menippean satire of diverse themes and subjects, with the necessary polyphony and sense of multitude to depict modern Indian society as complicated, multivocal, and progressing in syncretic ways. The use of the Menippean genre encompasses competing energies and complexities by affording a panoramic range of sources and by injecting these energies into the very notion of carnival. The boldness of Desani's text lies not in its juxtapositions of the natural and the unnatural, but rather in its high-spirited linguistic experimentation and multidirectional satire. And Desani illustrates how well the ancient form and spirit of satire can stretch in new and dynamic ways.

The majority of critics who approach *All About H. Hatterr* end by citing Desani's distinctly open-ended conclusion to the book, a closing which scampers from any sense of finality: Hatterr's narrative ends with the exhortation 'Carry on, boys, and continue like hell!' (278). This ending can be used to point out neatly the

sense of irresolution and sustained conflict which permeates the narrative and also Hatterr's sense of unabated quest. The later-added 'Defense' by Rambeli finishes even more overtly ajar, with no final stop but instead an ellipsis:

‘Lastly, I thank the ladies and gentlemen who will read this *Critique*. To them I say, in the words of the bard T. Moore, ‘*Goodbye, my paper is out nearly, I have only room for, yours sincerely...*’ (316)

These examples of a lack of finality certainly add force to the argument that *Hatterr* is best read as satire, for, as Frank Palmieri has commented, one of satire's defining qualities is as a 'provocative, exploratory form that resists closure' (173), and Brian Connery and Kirk Combe refer to satire's pull towards entropy and chaos. But the Menippean mode seems to obtain, providing the formal, thematic and tonal means to navigate the milieu Desani establishes with the initial paragraph of the Introduction, entitled 'All About...' in which he confides that 'Life seemed so many clashes and contests, sorry! and, well, Invention helps' (13). Desani's assertion of satiric invention paves the way for subsequent postcolonial Menippean satires. The Menippean mode structures the on-going nature of Hatterr's quest to establish truth, particularly with regard to the 'competing political and religious creeds' discussed by Bart Moore-Gilbert ('I am', 43). Even the 'Defense' anticipates more conflict, launching its parodic pre-emptory strikes against

postulated literary critical responses, taking on the would-be pigeon-holers and delimiters of experimental, rule-breaking hybrid texts. Desani's work fuses the oppositional forces which comprise the *multa admixta* or 'copious admixtures' (Weinbrot 2) of the Menippean, and the dynamic hybridity and novelty of postcolonial literary fiction.

Chapter Three: Aubrey Menen and Menippean Wit

The English were then masters of three-quarters of the earth, and in this three-quarters were both the Irish and the Indians. Had I been brought up as either of these I would have thought of the English as my equals but I would have been forced to treat them as my masters. As an Englishman I was able to treat both the Irish and the Indians as my inferiors so long as I was careful to speak of them to their faces as my equals. This formula was the basis of an astonishing organisation called the British empire and remained so until the formula was finally understood by the subject races, when the British Empire somewhat hurriedly became the Commonwealth.

Aubrey Menen, “How I was Initiated into the Best Tribe”,
Dead Man in the Silver Market

At fifty most satirists start to mellow. I don't believe this has happened to meAs a satirist my desire is to amuse, rather than reform. Many of the world's tragedies have stemmed from people who have thought that human nature could be improved....The message of at least one kind of satirist is that human nature is corrupt, but that this is not necessarily either a disastrous or a melancholy thing....

Aubrey Menen, ‘About the Author’, *SheLa*

The Indian-Irish writer Aubrey Menen (1912- 1989) wrote a series of satiric fictions and two essay collections, from 1947 to 1970, which were each praised at their time of publication as ironic and amusing. Few critics assessed his work as having much import beyond the level of droll but superficial social commentary, and fewer since have recognised his in-depth engagement with postcolonial issues. This chapter argues that Menen demonstrates a consistent satirical stance in a counter-realist manner, and that one may find in his work the seeds of themes and perspectives which come to a more full-blown

intensity in later postcolonial writing. In content his satires critique duplicitous principles of Empire and their enduring pejorative effects. A contemporary of G.V. Desani, his writing reflects the move towards counter-realism in postcolonial fiction, but these efforts may be characterised as more subtle, and inflected more by Menippean uses of language rather than Desani's dramatic formal transformations. Menen employs Menippean mixtures of high and low verbal registers, historical settings, and versions of the symposium in which characters discuss and debate in deflationary terms. The most truly Menippean characteristic may be his 'learned mockery' of characters (Milowicki and Wilson 293); in Menen's work, postcoloniality is an epistemological state, and to be deficient in 'learning' implies lacking comprehension of postcoloniality's slant towards hybrid perspectives. His informed characters are knowing about issues both parochial and global, and witty with the high modernist asperity of the Bright Young Things of Evelyn Waugh, who was Menen's contemporary.¹ But where Waugh expresses many of the racial stereotypes that were, though inexcusable, characteristic of his class in its time, Menen tends to attack those who lack a balanced or encompassing view. In terms of textual innovations, Menen's incorporation of varied philosophical source material in his work, particularly in his

¹ There is at least an echo of Waugh's world, where he and his same-named wife were known as He-Evelyn and She-Evelyn, in the names of He-La and She-La in Menen's *Shela: a satire*. Waugh (1903-66) became Catholics as adults, Waugh at 27.

essays, creates a fusion of Eastern and Western underpinnings, as well as a particularly dialogic and satiric quality. As the subsequent discussion illustrates, Menen wrote ‘highly intellectual’ satires, ‘using learned wit to combat learned wit’ with a high degree of self-consciousness (Sherbert 4). Menen thus develops a series of significant postcolonial discourses using Menippean diction, style and structure.

Pursuing questions of authorial identity, critics have tended to impose readings which reflect conflicted reactions to a writer who is both baldly autobiographical and, as one often sees with satirists, artfully indistinct. The factual elements of Menen’s background are perceived to be noteworthy both in their singularity and their contribution to the overall tenor of his work. Menen’s parents were an Irish Roman Catholic mother and Indian Hindu father from the elite Nayar caste. He relates in his work that he grew up with a discordant sense of national identity which straddled being Indian in Great Britain and English in India; from middle age, he chose an exilic residence as a foreign national in Italy. He discusses his homosexual identity in his memoirs with a frankness that is unusual for his time period, and he underscores it in the repeated dedications of his novels to his companion, ‘My Dear Philip Dallas’.² Most assessments of

² Menen dedicated *The Stumbling Stone* (1949), for example, as follows: ‘My Dear Philip Dallas, This is the story of Colley Burton’s Return which you asked for and which you helped me write, day by day, chapter by chapter, and in every part of it save this letter. Thank you. A.M.’

Menen's work operate along some aspect of the linkage of his identity to literary content, pointing towards Menen's perceived hybridities as his writing's determining focus. By contrast, introducing the Menippean as a mode of assessing Menen's texts allows critical recognition of a vision which foregrounds and manipulates divergent but interconnected themes and topics, which allows personal identity to be a significant but not sole factor, and which can contain multiple levels and expressions of existence simultaneously.

Contemporaneous reviews often do identify Menen as a satirist, but they tend to focus on the disposition and attitude of the writer as the main prompt of satiric literary form. Critics rarely identify in any depth what Menen satirises or how. In *The Yale Review*, *The Prevalence of Witches* is 'a merry and malicious satirical comedy about ethics and religion' ('Outstanding' 65). John Woodburn, in *The New Republic*, notes *Prevalence*'s 'adroit and exhilarating, not to say adrenaline, satirical writing' (24). In *Newsweek*, *The Fig Tree* is celebrated as 'a gay piece of blue-nose thumbing' ('Sex' 115). Much of the critical material on Aubrey Menen follows exclusively the thread that his satire is rooted solely in his individual psychology. Bruce King's comment on Menen is typical: 'Perhaps because he experienced and embodied many incongruities he was a wry satirist in a mannered, elegant prose' (*Internationalization*, 37). Margaret

Wimsatt emphasizes that Menen's background affords him a specific acuity as a writer, with the description of him as 'son of an Indian father and an Irish mother, who charmed so many people with his double insight into the Anglo-Indian world' (138). Critics also identify Menen's perspective as stemming from his position as an outsider. Wimsatt, for example, articulates that in his characteristic sardonic and barbed tone, Menen chose 'a lonely freedom' (142). A *Time* magazine review of *Dead Man In The Silver Market* from 1953 was entitled 'Man Without A Country', and depicts ruptures and oppositions in Menen's writing as having an inevitability set in motion by the factors of his bi-cultural birth:

[T]rouble fairly brims over when a man is born, as was Aubrey Menen, of an Irishwoman and a Hindu, is registered as a native Briton and educated like a true-born Englishman. Beset by so many distorting mirrors, such a man is bound to see the baffling jigsaw puzzle of his identity with either tears or laughter.... (Lalley 83)

Wimsatt even extends this critical puzzlement over defining Menen's identity to an imagined perplexed readership, querying 'What indeed was he? To the Western eye, his pictures seem to be of an Indian. To the teachers who trained him in the British public school system, he was an Englishman' (139). The sole clarifying observation comes from Lalley, who eventually asserts that Menen himself actually governs this line of scrutiny: 'This is

Author Menen's insistence that his hybrid self is a purely satirical and intellectual matter' ('Man' 84). In manipulating rather than subscribing to mimeticism, Menen at times presents a sense of identity which reflects Susheila Nasta's discussion of 'the triangular nature' of his identity components, allowing him a 'conceptual vision' which, rather than merely reflecting cultural divisions, affords him the ability to 'straddl[e] several worlds' (*Home*, 44). Menen also uses satire to scrutinise and to achieve distance from aspects of his constructed identity, and he often returns to a level of satirical commentary which allows him to interrogate assumptions of essentialism, racial superiority, and patriotic nationalism as 'absurd' (a favourite term of abuse).

In Mohammed Elias's monograph on Menen, one begins to see some degree of conscious agenda on the part of Menen. Elias cites Menen's denial that his rewriting of the *Ramayana* exhibits 'any interest in parodying the Aryan myths' (*Aubrey* 6). When Elias questions Menen directly about the motivations for this work, Menen cites a literary one, a need to 'rewrite the inconsistencies and lack of verisimilitude in the portrayal of Sita, which bedevil the orthodox version' (6). But Menen's further statements in his interview with Elias point instead to a fairly clear-cut satirical stance, as Elias explains that Menen is 'moreover, indignant at the way the Sita image is being exploited to subject women to insidious forms of oppression in most parts

of India' (*Aubrey* 6). Menen's indignation continues as a spur which powers more of his work, notably an episode in which Menen rejected as racist the efforts of Time-Life Books editors to expunge all descriptions of modernity from his manuscript for a *Great Cities* series volume on Bombay, in favour of lurid descriptions of slums (2).³ The volume was never published.

Elias states that:

One can therefore understand the vehemence with which Menen rebelled against Time-Life Books for attempting to coerce him into writing things that pander to the market for racism. It is in this perspective that Menen's revolt against Aryan myths appears in its proper hue as an attempt to do justice to the oppressed and the dispossessed. (7)

Some attention thus needs to be paid to the way Menen embeds serious topics in satirical works, balancing issues and indignation with both sombre and lighthearted satire. Menen's work delves into the issues of hybridity and identity politics which have become central to later postcolonial critical debates, and increasingly common to the literature which examines the enduring effects of Empire. Examining his work as Menippean satire brings these issues into clearer focus, as it tends to refocus attention away from issues of personal experience and psychology, and towards the mixed voices, influences, and

³ This ensued after the publication by Time-Life of Menen's successful volumes entitled *London* (1976) and *Venice* (1977). Menen was asked to submit a manuscript about a city of his own choice (Elias 2).

registers of satire which reflect the complex contrasts of a contemporary, postcolonial society.

Mary Jane Hurst, in an essay examining some of the reasons for Menen's relative obscurity, focuses on a critical uncertainty of how to interpret manifestations of racial and cultural hybridity and how this overlaps with the puzzlement often set in motion by misapprehensions of satiric material. Hurst finds that these all contribute in tandem to the critical neglect of Menen's body of work: 'Menen undoubtedly chose humor or satire as his primary medium in order to distance himself from the pain of "otherness", and unfortunately for him, material that is funny may not be taken seriously' (132). While this may oversimplify a sense of the psychology which may (or may not) underlie Menen's writing, it does underscore the problems and resistances the presence of satire can set in motion. As singled out by Hurst, these characteristics blend the resistances of satire with the inclinations of 'postcoloniality': 'the move away from realist representation, the refusal of closure, the exposure of the politics of metaphor, the interrogation of forms, the rehabilitation of allegory, and the attack on binary structuration of concept and language' (Tiffin 172, qtd in Hurst 140). Menen does indeed exhibit each of these characteristics. He moves away from realism and closure in *Prevalence of Witches* (1949), arguably exposes the politics of metaphor in the context of world religions

in *SheLa* (1962), rehabilitates allegory in his rewritten *Ramayana* (1954), and interrogates form in his mixed-form memoir of sexual and spiritual awakenings, *The Space Within the Heart* (1970). Each of his works contains some challenge to the divide of concept from language, often with a concurrent objectification of language through the elevation of wit and erudition. Garry Sherbert's study of Menippean satire, though using much earlier European texts, is a useful reference in its articulation that wit may emerge in both linguistic and narrative levels (17-8).

Susheila Nasta is one of the few current critics to write about Menen, and she examines the role of experimentation as it relates to the writer's lack of visibility. She discusses how the marginalisation of Menen and some of his contemporary Indian authors of English-language literature illustrates an unwillingness to register the on-going influence of such writers, and also points towards an inherent rigidity in established categories in literary studies. She points out a perceived divide between the founding writers of Indo-Anglian literature, such as Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, and later postwar authors identified as “immigrant”, “expatriate” or “diasporic”:

This kind of critical labelling has served both the interests of some Indian critics, keen to preserve an uncomplicated nationalist narrative of resistance, as well as those metropolitan Western reviewers who were unable to read

the innovative cross-cultural experimentations of such writers from outside the narrow confines of a Eurocentric gaze (22).

This dominant ambiguity over how to position and interpret writers such as Menen led to his being fairly unknown and thus unread; this would be amplified by the additional factors of his purposefully triangulated⁴ (Irish-Indian-English) heritage and identity, his a-typical frankness about his life as a homosexual, and his exploitation of the textual manipulations, exaggerations and unpredictability of satiric fictions. It is significant that Menen was aware of, and exploited, his perceived marginality, though. Nasta contends that Menen, along with contemporaries Krishna Menon, and Mulk Raj Anand, had a sense of purpose about the specific position of the writer, and ‘were deeply committed to the need to question and to revision the West’s image of itself’ (29). Hurst identifies this stance as a part of Menen’s ‘semi-alienated perspective as both an insider and an outsider to the societies he describes’, noting that his work contains a ‘radical subtext’ which offers ‘a challenge to both Eastern and Western institutions and ideologies’ (129; 132-3).

Menen as a Satirist

Menen’s autobiographical essays are the best source for his own attitudes towards his writing, as he addresses directly many of

⁴ I am borrowing Nasta’s term here (*Home* 44).

the issues and experiences which shaped his identity as a writer.

Dead Man in the Silver Market features essays on identity, race and culture, while *The Space Within The Heart* is a book-length meditation on identity construction. Susheila Nasta has examined how some of these essays ‘present a sharp critique of the blinkered arrogance that feeds notions of cultural superiority, whether engendered by East or West’ (*Home* 45). In ‘How I was Initiated into the Best Tribe’ Menen revisits some of the painful racist incidents of his English upbringing. In his essay ‘My Grandmother and the Dirty English’ Menen chronicles some of the prejudices and arrogance of his paternal, Nayar Indian heritage. Nasta examines how in these two essays Menen ‘ridicules’ the hypocrisies and racism of English society, but then: ‘Menen provides a reverse mirror of the absurdities of this kind of blinkered vision’ (*Home* 46). Menen’s tactics afford an opportunity to examine if his writing is more the ‘speaking mirror’ of Gabriel García Márquez and magic realism, or the ‘distorting’ mirror discussed by Gilbert Highet in relation to satire. Certainly in his essays and fiction Menen strives to reflect actual speech and communicative modes, reflecting the social relations, parochial inflections, and power dichotomies which Stephen Slemon places in the context of ‘a postcolonial culture’ (411). But there are also lengthy disquisitions and debates in each memoir and fictional text, as well as recollected incidents which privilege the author’s wit throughout the memoirs. There

are indeed examples in Menen's work of the significant 'gaps, absences, and silences produced by the colonial encounter' (411), but these are usually dealt with in a satiric way: a Chief who decides to 'go deaf' to conclude an encounter with colonial authorities (*Prevalence*); the Buddha's tree glowing red with anger in Nirvana, after a stunning taunt from the Western Deity (*SheLa*); Sita opting to keep her mouth shut in an updated *Ramayana*. And there is little sense of magic realism's 'inward reflection'; Menen is consistently chatty and instructive, providing a detailed, self-help section for the spiritual seeker at the end of *Space Within The Heart*, for example. Part of the satiric comedy of *Prevalence* rests in the revelation of the duplicity of most of the characters: the tribesmen, the Swami, and the colonial officers of Limbo all conspire separately to free the jailed man and rid the enclave of Winifred, the white wife who is the epitome of disruptive colonial assumptions of power. The workings of witchery which might have been mysterious or even supernatural are laid quite bare in *Prevalence*. The mystical personal journeys of the memoirs are made exterior, observation and experience mixed matter-of-factly with the author's encounter with the sublime.

So Menen's mirror is arguably the 'sort of *Glass*' wielded by Swift, deliberately caricaturing and exaggerating (Hight 190). For although Menen's texts tend to focus on issues which can be

central to the workings of magic realism, his overall approach is always satirical, ironical, and mocking. *Prevalance of Witches*, for example, centres on definitions of good and evil, precisely the material which tends to fuel the deceptive moral turns and pivots in magic realist texts. But Menen is more invested in caricaturing the insufficiencies of those who would set themselves up as moral arbiters. As Nasta notes, Menen delves into ‘the perpetuation of superstitions and false “mysticisms” as they are lived out in Limbo’ (*Home* 48), but rather than portraying the reality or possibility of the supernatural, Menen instead mocks those who would countenance irrational beliefs, view any belief system as unquestionable, or who would deny the validity of the curious mind. His castigation covers native animists as well as imported clerics, and his plot is more centred on satiric exposé than an unrefined celebration of pluralism.

Satirical Topics

Generally Menen’s deflationary techniques attack the bluster of colonial endeavour, the pomposity of authority, and the sense of an unassailably superior mission. An interrogation of identity politics runs throughout his work, a sustained critique of some of the absurd juxtapositions that constrain formations of identity. Many of Menen’s specific observations stem from his colonial posting, at age 30, to an Indian jungle among the Dangi tribe to establish village schools and public health systems. When he

departed, as he recounts in *The Space Within The Heart*, he felt that it was the Dangi who had educated him: ‘I saw as never before that what I was doing was false. The Dangis believed in their witches and here was I to put them right about the world, believing as I did – in *what?*I was there to bring civilization to them. Had they ever dropped bombs on my parents?’ (128). His satiric approach is to undermine the binaries of power and otherness that underscore colonial ideologies. His counter-realism stems from the attempt to replicate the sensations and atmosphere which accompany this experience of doubling in the face of a recognised absurdity. His earlier education, for example, brings him to the conclusion that ‘[t]he principle on which the English founded their liberty was that it was unthinkable that every Englishman should share it (*Dead Man* 55). He is prompted to conclude that ‘there was not one England but two’ (56), and left to ponder how this split then impacts him. Like Desani, he is fixed on the paradoxical, exploring the illusory while revealing in *Dead Man in the Silver Market* that ‘all illusions are very dangerous’ (100).

Even in work that is not overtly postcolonial in subject, Menen manages to undermine perceived colonial binaries. *The Backward Bride: A Sicilian Scherzo* (1950) concerns the comic honeymoon adventures of a traditional Sicilian village girl and her ‘progressive’ educated Italian husband, with a concluding

triumph of her traditional values over his more progressive ones. Menen inserts a brief chapter close to the end of the book, entitled ‘The Wisdom of the East’, in which the young, pedantic husband, seeing a Muslim and a Hindu on a boat deck momentarily at prayers, is moved to champion briefly the intrinsic sagacity of the Orient.

‘Fool that I am to seek wisdom in the West!’ he said. ‘I should have gone to India. I should have sat at the feet of sages and gurus and learned the secrets of the Infinite. One has but to look at the tranquillity that rests upon the faces of these two men, the resignation, the peaceableness, the utter contentment to know that truth is still to be found where mankind found it first – in the East.’

He immediately resolved that the very next morning he would...make friends with the two men. (239)

But Menen is writing in the exact year following Partition, and has inserted a narrative that mirrors events unfolding in the newly-established modern states of India and Pakistan. His satire presents both historical realities and an attack on some of the Orientalist notions and Western naiveté responsible for that history. Unbeknownst to the husband, the two men, upon completion of prayers, quibble over ‘the merits of eating or not eating cow’s flesh as a means to attaining Paradise’ (240). One (which one is not explained) dispatches the other by knife, and

rapidly dies of his own wounds; the bodies are disposed of at sea. An ideological dispute and lethal violence undermine the notion of peaceable tranquillity, and although this episode inserts an arguably mimetic scene into the comic narrative, it serves to satirize the husband's naïveté and the unquestioning acceptance of the paradigm that locates ineffable wisdom irrefutably in the western academy or just as irrefutably in the eastern temple. In this short episode Menen is able to draw 'the contests' of the world into his overall narrative. But this is just a minor episode in *The Backwards Bride*, and Menen tackles postcolonial themes more broadly elsewhere.

Menen's *SheLa: A Satire* (1962) presents a specific exploration of issues of otherness, specifically the divisions spurred by misperceptions of identity, divisions which are variously presented as cultural, political, and spiritual. It is worthwhile to examine this text in some depth, as it contains a plethora of satirical topics. Against a backdrop of postcolonial, Cold War global politics, the central premise is that two ostensibly legitimate Dalai Lamas have been found simultaneously, a young man chosen by the Communist Chinese, and a young woman identified by a refugee group of Tibetans in Europe. The scope of Menen's mocking satire is vast, though achieved with a characteristic economy in short chapters and scenes. His juxtaposed 'texts' often represent various forms of modern

communication, reflecting the apparatus of officialdom and satirizing its unwitting opacity and ironies. The opening and closing scenes are Menippean dialogues between the Buddha, (who will be represented on earth ultimately by one of the sparring Dalai Lamas), the Archangel Michael, and the Devil, in which Menen lampoons the notion of sacred utterance by imposing a casual tone. The Buddha subtly manipulates his Christian visitor with a show of hospitality: ‘The Buddha took a bag of dates and a bottle from behind the tree, which now glowed a tranquil blue. “Have something to each and drink.”’

(6). A version of a symposium ensues, as Menen portrays conflicting spiritual views in a surprisingly satiric manner; dialogue between spiritual avatars seems to mirror the testy ebb and flow of earthly diplomatic negotiating forums like the United Nations (which features in subsequent chapters) rather than a realm of omniscient, enlightened authority. Sometimes the Buddha and the Devil appear to be surprisingly chummy, exchanging confidences. This undermining of who is ‘other’ is a satirical theme throughout the comic narrative. The Devil, though a ‘he’ in his conversations with the Buddha, discloses that ‘I incline rather to the feminine side’ (*SheLa* 16), making him more a figure of flickering ambiguities than fixed immoralities.

The Devil is also a model of the gender fluidity that reaches a crux when the two main characters take centre stage, because there are two competing Lamas: a female lama, SheLa, short for ‘She Lama’, chosen by the refugee Free Tibetans; her male counterpart, HeLa, was selected by the Soviets.⁵ They debate the Gautama Buddha when he appears before each to gauge their respective qualifications. When the Lamas fall inevitably in love, or in teen lust at any rate, the Devil is delighted to note the fall of elevated Buddhist ‘austerities’ (19). Confusion escalates over gender roles with SheLa’s admission that she hid her identity and wore boy’s clothing in order to study with the refugee Tibetan priests: ‘I’ve been both a boy and a girl. Most women spend their lives seeing nothing beyond the ends of their noses reflected in the dressing-table mirror. I can see all round the question’ (69).

As the Lama debate encompasses the globe, various female political leaders thwart traditionalist expectations, to the discomfit of their male counterparts: ‘It was well known that the East was rapidly adopting Western ways. It was also well known that Western ways often did not seem the same when they had been adopted’ (92). There is the suggestion that gender roles are both fluid and self-determined, and importantly, all equally productive of intellectual perspectives and insights. The notion of a merged East-West, female-male Lama disintegrates, but not

⁵ Life may follow art if current political predictions are correct; as the current Dalai Lama contemplates finding his successor amongst global Tibetans, the Chinese government has intimated that the next reincarnation will have to come from within China. There could be two official Lamas.

before it briefly reflects an optimistic, unifying hybridity. Resolution is paradoxical and ironic, as when SheLa goes from being an Eastern commodity to one who trades in the exotic, working in a New York City shop ‘just off Fifth Avenue, where she designs and sells Oriental trinkets’ (159).

From jostling sacred figures of major world religions, Menen moves to the inadequacies and comic absurdities of nationalism, and its attendant officialdom. One target is the way that sanctioned communication between world leaders often rests upon the vicissitudes of translation. The encounter between the Russian Ambassador to the US and the American President reveals the degree to which they share a dependence on the successful ‘spin’ of such a meeting in their home press and home offices; ‘official’ communication is more about appearance than what is actually conveyed. A scene in the United Patriotic Independent Fan Republic in West Africa introduces a critique of African self-determinism, and satirises a system that embeds expectations of corruption. President Mpongwe counsels M’bo, his new representative to the United Nations, where nations will discuss the dual Dalai Lamas and their politically-conflicting axes of support.

‘What do you know about Tibetan Religious Affairs, M’bo?’

‘Absolutely nothing, sir.’

'Excellent. Try to stay that way. It's the great secret of being a successful neutral. (112)

Meanwhile the nascent country is struggling to survive: 'Um,' said the President. 'And just between you and me and the gatepost, if some colonialism doesn't come our way pretty damn quick, I won't be able to pay the army – and both of us will be out of a job' (112). Fan's national 'higher policy' apparently welcomes conflicting binaries that destabilise logic as well as actual economy. In addition to the simultaneous welcome and rejection of colonial interferences, the President maintains cannibalistic 'shock troops' to protect himself from his main Fan rival (a defense referred to as the dread 'gastronomic shield') while rejecting any mention of such measures in official statements as undermining precepts of African civilisation.

Meanwhile a rogue Colonel O'Shaugnessy is allowed to roam the state shooting at Protestant ex-colonials for sport. The excesses then brim over. The Devil reports to the Buddha that the Colonel 'went on to shoot Mpongwe. Then he took over the Fan Republic and is now setting up a black Empire in Africa.

M'bo is his Minister of State for African Unity. So many Irishmen are emigrating there that it is being called the first Irish empire' (160). The Devil's summary serves to demolish simultaneously certitudes of race, politics and geography in the Fan Republic, as white Catholic colonials establish a titular black

domain under a political banner that surely misapplies any conventional notion of ‘African unity.’

Once again Menen destabilises the basis for viewing ‘the other’, this time through a satiric conflation of colonial roles. His context, though, is arguably one that is tainted with racist stereotyping, with the negative depiction of naïve, cannibalistic Africans unable to steer justly towards nationhood, and the drunken, out-of-control Catholic Irishman motivated purely by violent religious antipathy for Protestants. One must weigh carefully if Joan Acocella’s defense of Evelyn Waugh’s racist stereotyping obtains here as well: ‘In *Black Mischief* the Europeans, the would-be bringers of civilization, are satirized much more wickedly – and much more pointedly, in moral terms – than the Africans’ (69). In Menen’s scheme, it may be arguable that there is equivalence in satiric attack established by a Menippean structure of juxtaposition, and that an ultimately dehumanising colonial system is his most central target.

In *The Prevalence of Witches* (1948), Menen plays with the celebration of primitivism and the mythological purities of nativism, within the setting of Limbo, a mythical aboriginal state in India during British colonial rule, in an unspoilt jungle of picturesque bamboo. As Frank Palmeri has noted, ‘satirists discover in the past an image of pristine integrity, in relation to

which their contemporary situation signifies a falling off into ambiguity and doubleness' (1). The apparent integrity of the past does go somewhat unchallenged as Menen suggests shifting binaries of civilisation and savagery, of order and disorder, in the colonial present:

Once a year one Englishman visits Limbo, surrounded by clouds of insecticide through which can just be discovered the Union Jack. During this visit, Limbo is a part of the British Empire in India. When the Englishman has gone, various Chiefs of Limbo, sighing with relief, take off their trousers and go hunting again with their bows and arrows, [and] the mosquitoes come cautiously out to bury their dead....' (9).

The unnamed narrator's ironic tone punctures some of the gravity of his colonial mission when he states, 'I always wanted to possess a country of my own' (9), and Menen maintains this mischievous stance towards colonial hegemony throughout. Limbo is also a microcosm for corruption on a larger scale, and this notion prompts a comparison of two belief and value systems, one colonial and one native, viewed as competing and, surprisingly to the novel's colonial representatives, worthy of comparison. Mohammed Elias has emphasised that the novel's plot highlights a sort of bridge to commonality of belief systems, borne out of humanistic sympathy; the main characters are 'three westerners who sympathize with a tribesman in his superstition

that witches were responsible for making him murder his wife's lover' (Elias 4). But there are also shades of Desani's excoriation of religious frauds. Menen has noted elsewhere, pondering the sheer irony of a nation possessing a spiritual export, that '[a]ll countries have their religious absurdities, but India has had more than most – so many, in fact, that she has consistently exported them in the shape of swamis.' ('The Way' 45). There are also hints of nascent subaltern themes in the space the text gives to narratives from the native's religion, as when the tribal Headman explains their practice of witchcraft. As a prisoner, he is briefly in literal subjugation to imperial rule, but he quickly absorbs a lesson in the power of narrative in colonial discourse, specifically in how to structure a story to manipulate an audience:

The story he had come to tell would have been quickly understood by his villagers, thick-skinned, rough and naked as they were.... He made up his mind to soften it. Not to tell lies (which he could not do, for the Limbodians do not tell lies as everyone knows), but to make it something that might have happened to these dressed and sensitive people, an act that one of their friends might well have done. (51-2)

The Headman alters his story for the perceived weaknesses of his audience, subsequently enacting 'an active, aggressive imitation' (Fuchs 5) of his colonial captors when they repeatedly query his

tale: ‘This time the question was so exactly that of a child that the headman smiled down at Catullus, waggled his finger and said: “You must not ask so many questions”’ (*Prevalence*, 55). His simple gesture suggests both the subversions of satiric mockery and the mirroring, ‘deliberate imitation’ (Fuchs 6) which vex several colonial binaries simultaneously with regard to active-passive, parent-child, speaker-listener, primitive-metropolitan. As we shall note in I. Allen Sealy’s work as well, the position of the subaltern is memorably acknowledged but utterly unresolved. But the textual disruptions that are achieved via conflicting Menippean juxtapositions nonetheless, it may be argued, work on a thematic level to deflect totalizing premises, so that what dominates the text are the ironies and absurdities of these apparently fixed binaries.

Elias has noted Menen’s repeated emphasis that ‘the next step from religious perversion’ is a rapid procession to the ‘social exploitation’ of those deemed inferior, outcast or extraneous (Elias 8). Faced with the expectation of imposing an imperial justice system, Menen’s colonial emissaries eventually wish to validate the beliefs of the aboriginal population. The central philosophical focus of *Prevalence* rests upon some of the points raised by Abdul JanMohamed’s investigations into the processes by which colonial discourse polarises the cultures of the

colonised and the colonisers into opposed categories. Catullus's friend, Bay, another comically valuable Englishman, declares:

‘I am a Manichee....’

‘What do Manichees believe?’ I asked him.

‘That there is an equal amount of good and an equal amount of evil in the world,’ he answered, ‘and that the forces of one are as strong as the forces of the other.’ (78-9)

Abdul JanMohamed has drawn out some of the ways in which

[w]hile the surface of each colonialist text purports to represent specific encounters with specific varieties of the racial Other, the subtext valorizes the superiority of European cultures, of the collective process that has mediated that representationinstead of seeing the native as a bridge toward syncretic possibility, it uses him as a mirror that reflects the colonialist’s self-image.

(‘Manichean allegory’ 60)

We see this to a degree in various exchanges in Limbo between colonial officers and colonial subjects, but with hints of future syncretisms, as when Catullus hosts a formal reception, and the uninvited villagers play a role.

After dinner we moved out into the compound that surrounded the bungalow. It appeared to be an enormous, unlit ballroom, with a circle of black walls that in the daytime was the edge of the jungle, and a

domed roof of translucent slate grey, pierced here and there, in the manner of ballrooms, with imitation stars.

(*Prevalence*, 71)

The yard could be read as a pool of civility, edged by unruliness and chaos. However, Menen emphasizes instead the ironic gestural and performative aspects of imposing imperial hegemony:

The ceremonial of the English dinner was none of our choosing. One observes it, in the jungle, to please the inhabitants, with whom it takes the place of the cinema. Or rather of the ballet, because they stand outside in the compound, invisible in the shadows, watching every move; and any omission of the classic steps in the performance will be widely discussed and generally disapproved. (69)

A strange binary is enacted, hinging how civility is valorised and apprehended, as Menen tests literal notions of boundaries, while at the same time restricting the level of exchange to an observed performance. The same hopeful possibility of exchange is enacted when Catullus's wife, Winifred, is exiled from India as a malign witch by instigation of the native population. In the context of postcolonial Manichean allegory, Winifred's disdain for native beliefs marks her as an agent of evil, and the Limbodians observe her disregard for their culture with

mounting horror. Catullus explains some of their charges to the narrator:

...she had pulled to pieces a garland so as to dissipate the good magic of a kindly gift; item the last: she had used for domestic purposes a jar dedicated to holding food for the tiger-god, and clearly marked on the outside with tigers to show what it was used for. The witch-doctor said he could hold the Limbodians back just so far, but he couldn't say what they would do if provoked. (249)

Against Winifred's expectation of colonial power as the enactment of unchallenged authority, Limbodian terms of social 'good' overrule that power. The Headman's success and Winifred's abject departure underscore an insight by Kristin Carter-Sanborn about the subject position of the colonial. Carter-Sanborn points out that sometimes, empowered by making a significant intervention, the colonial 'discriminated subject, incompletely contained by the power and paranoid knowledge invested in its constitution, participates in, confronts, and unsettles that very power' (581).

The resolution of some of these conflicts and ambiguities becomes the central element of Menen's retelling of the Vedic myth in *The Ramayana 'as told by Aubrey Menen'* (1954; published as *Ramayana Retold* in England). In many ways it provides a space for the author to construct an unexpected satiric

persona in the overt placing of his own voice in the creation of the text and revision of the narrative. This is set against the backdrop of a reformulated or updated narrative that challenges the sacredness of a source, the sense of reality invested in the sacrosanct. The central characters are all present, but Menen weaves into the story of Rama, Luxman, Sita, and Ravan a critique of widespread social and economic inequalities as entrenched in present-day Indian society. The introduction contains strong parallels with depictions of postcolonial literary projects, as Menen explains his drive to reclaim a miswritten past (*Ramayana* 5). The most striking feature may be his explication of the role of the writer as an outlaw genius, as Menen draws parallels between his own motivations to reclaim the *Ramayana* narrative, and the loss of the voice of the original scribe, Valmiki, through successions of inadequate or agenda-driven translations of the original work. The entire enterprise may be said to be Menippean, as his rewriting so overtly juxtaposes the original and the new versions.

Menen embeds a modern proto-feminist agenda, siding with Sita as the undoubted ‘heroine’ (69), and empathising with other Hindu wives in the text. Although the text’s proto-feminist stance towards the oppressions of Hindu women contributed to

its notoriety upon publication,⁶ Sita is described only as ‘unremarkable’ and ‘a simple soul’ (69-70). She is central to the plot but not the centre of the narrative energy of the tale. The principal figure is clearly Rama, who is presented as loving and devoted towards Sita and towards his duty, but by contrast is provocatively introduced in a paragraph that fairly throbs with homoerotic detail.

His skin was golden brown and gleamed with the movements to the muscles beneath. His torso, naked save for the strap that bore his quiver, was heavily-shouldered and greatly narrowed at the waist, in the manner most admired among Indians. The pleated cloth around his hips curved over buttocks that were something womanish, a sign in his race of high breeding. It fell halfway down his thighs, which were strong and spare. His feet were now shod with country sandals, made of the hide of a deer. He wore no ornaments, so that nothing beguiled the eye from the astonishing beauty of his face.

(83)

The most important relationships in the retold *Ramayana* are between men: the brothers Rama and Luxmun, and Rama with the poet, Valmiki. The parting of the latter pair concludes the narrative, with Rama asserting his affection for the saintly scribe, and posing the question, ‘[I]n your way of looking at the world

⁶ It was Menen’s approach to repositioning Sita in the narrative that earned the banning of the text in India by Nehru in 1956.

is there anything you believe is real?' (275). Valmiki responds with a fitting summary for a satirical work: 'Certainly, Rama. There are three things which are real: God, human folly, and laughter. Since the first two pass our comprehension, we must do what we can with the third' (276). The laughter that is the final 'real' thing can be construed as satirical laughter, as the retelling of this foundational narrative ends with a paradoxical affirmation of the illusory quality of the world. For either a Western or Eastern audience there is irony in Menen's satirical undercutting of the values the narrative is meant to enshrine, and as with most of his writing, one is left with a sense of its constructedness, as the secret that has been finally revealed comprises the constituent elements of satire: human belief and folly registered in satire's attacks.

Menippean Methods

This section examines how Menen makes use of Menippean elements in his works to establish counter-realism. Milowicki and Wilson note that Menippean satire often refers to classical figures and uses them to mock heroic pretensions (295). Menen often indicates his Menippean models in the course of his deflationary practices. In *The Fig Tree*, a text satirizing priggish attitudes towards modern sexuality, Menen mentions his Menippean model directly:

I came across a book called PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM, or The BANQUET. The sub-title naturally attracted me, so I put it beside my bed. I thought it might be interesting to know what the Greeks ate. Well, I read it from time to time. I hadn't got more than a quarter of the way through when I felt in my bones that something was very wrong. I know a good deal about banquets, and one thing I was sure of, Greeks or not, nobody every talked as these characters talked over a table. So I turned to the introduction to find out something more about the book.

Well, I was right. The thing wasn't meant to be real. (98)

In *Prevalence* one might read 'colonial' for the mocking of 'heroic' pretensions, and look to Catullus, a loquacious version of the Roman poet by the same name.⁷ The Roman Catullus is a symposium figure who mocks hollow rhetoric; he 'ferrets out, highlights, and exaggerates as a fun-house mirror might, the ugliness in others' (Milowicki and Wilson 295). He consistently is the instrument for metaphors that pinpoint the colonial mentality, and he is likewise the channel for discussions of bodies and consumption.

⁷ Gaius Valerius Catullus (87-?54 BCE) has a few notable similarities with Menen's character, Catullus: at about age 30 he accompanied a friend who had an administrative position in Bithynia, Asia, and, suggestive of Menen's satirical context, in death left behind 'a host of stinging epigraphmatic attacks on his personal enemies' 177. He seems to have managed a lifestyle of Epicurean luxuries despite some governmental work. It is probably just coincidence, but Thornton Wilder's novel about the historical Catullus, *Ides of March*, was published in 1948, a year prior to *Prevalence*.

Menen's Catullus, the British Civil Service Administrator of Limbo and thus its highest local colonial official, is a vehicle for the critique of some of the ironies of empire's authority. Menen has already established colonialism's exercise of control via the written word. The narrator observes that:

Nothing could be done properly in government unless one took notes, made a file, and passed it on for others to make notes: nothing was real, not even the man who stood now in front of the desk with sweat on his bare body, licking his lips, unless it was described in one of the dirty, crumpled bundles of paper that lay in confusion to the right and left of the desk like midden heaps. (50)

Colonial 'order' apparently creates its own reality, one which by mere description is absurd, and thus readily satirised. The business of empire is obscured in the exercise of busy-ness, and the text makes apparent the constructedness of the imperial exercise. This is further borne out in the endless bureaucracy which binds and limits the narrator. But real power, Catullus voices, is established through control of language:

I often wonder what sort of meanly wicked men made these treaties for England with their quibbles and tricks.
We got an uncomfortably large slice of our Empire not by being good soldiers but by being quick at languages.
First we sent the missionaries to make grammars and

translations of the Bible, then we sent the Civil Servant to use the grammars to write out treaties. The Americans got the Red Indians drunk on gin; we got *our* Indians fuddled with words. (36)

But Menen also reveals rupture in the dominance of language. Catullus is a comic model of prolixity who is possessed by language; his speech spews in a torrent of uncontrolled verbosity. His utterance overwhelms both him and his audience: ‘even at the age of fifty, as he was now, his conversation, though of surpassing interest, was still dictated, as it were, to an invisible stenographer who had set herself to break the world’s record in her profession’ (11). The narrator details the intercession necessary to render Catullus intelligible: ‘One listened to Catullus with both hands full of commas and full-stops, and one scattered them into the flood as it poured over you’ (12). It’s an image of comic intervention that also describes language as an unstoppable and uncontrollable force, and serves to cast Catullus as a version of a Menippean grotesque. Indeed, Catullus’s subject position as somehow a victim of language’s essential controlling power undermines his very agency.

Other destabilisations emanate from manipulations of linguistic power. The narrator is the newly-installed Colonial Administration Education Officer of Limbo, who promises immediately to build schools for the native children, and he

explains this goal to the aboriginal Chief. The Chief already has specific expectations of the proposed schools, though, which demonstrates his understanding of the relationship of language and power in Empire. The Chief asserts that he does not need to have his children educated in finance or the use of tools. The narrator is perplexed, and Catullus intervenes.

‘Then what do you want them taught?’ Catullus shouted.

The old man continued to grin for a while, nodding his head to show that he had heard and did not need the question repeated.

‘English,’ he said, ‘to be able to deal with you.’

(39)

The Chief obviously comprehends this particular binary of colonial control, but his reply also indicates the potential for an aggressive mimesis that suggests the ‘deliberate performance of sameness that...threatens, or...modifies, the original’ (Fuchs 5). All it would take are the promised colonial schools as devices to achieve this: power delivered through language, only in a context aimed at undermining ‘both hierarchies and differences’ (5). It may be a bit of fantasy regarding the colonial subject’s manipulation and usurpation of imperial authority, but it is squarely a Menippean example of carnivalesque transgression. But Menen has one more sally to render regarding the power of language. At the conclusion of his conversation with the narrator

and Catullus, the Chief calmly returns to the circle of his courtiers.

The Chief turned his head from side to side, looking straight into each courtier's face to see if they were laughing at his wit. Then, satisfied that he was properly appreciated, he went stone deaf again, and would hear nothing that was said to him. This way he brought the audience to an end, and when Catullus and I turned to go it was quite clear that we had been dismissed from his presence. (39-40)

The Chief's final assault is to counter linguistic supremacy with the implicit power of silence. Menen achieves a shifting juxtaposition of high and low here which upsets certain assumptions about the locus of power and control.

Elsewhere the Menippean destabilisation occurs through textual juxtaposition. In *Shela* Menen inserts two footnotes into the text which appear to establish actual historical context for his novel, a Menippean tactic in that it alters textual register. In one note he identifies the name of an individual mentioned in passing as an actual historical figure. As Mpongwe waxes nostalgic about his days at the London School of Economics, the footnote gives brief biographical information about a popular, and apparently credible, 'Professor Harold J. Laski (1880-1948)', who instructed Mpongwe in political theory (108). The other footnote

gives explanatory background about the two main American political parties, and mentions President J.F. Kennedy, as background to a fictional ‘special election’ in New Jersey which is distracting the attention of the fictional American President in Menen’s work when the Dalai Lama ‘crisis’ erupts (29). In a work of exaggerations and mockery, with fictional accounts of the activities of identifiable, but generic, historical figures (the US President, the Foreign Minister of Communist China, etc.), the references to credible, verifiable history jar with Menen’s manufactured world, foregrounding the conflicting binary of artifice and history. It is a strategy that is implemented on a much larger scale in the satiric work of G.V. Desani; here it operates on the more minor but still effective level of introducing confusion about the intended register of the author’s assault on mimetic reality.

The central narrative of the two Dalai Lamas serves to ground another textual disruption. We learn that the Buddha’s criterion for backing one of the Lamas hinges on which one supports his intense moral distaste for scientific research into unlocking the codes of DNA and RNA. In an Afterword to the book, Menen includes an entire *N.Y. Times* article with a distinctly alarmist tone regarding the state of current genetic research (dated 15 Jan 1962). The quoted scientists warn that research will shortly afford the means to manipulate lives, diseases, and minds (171).

Aside from the disjointedness of realism abruptly used to counter the fantastic, the serious article following Menen's light-hearted narrative further establishes the Menippean mix of high and low. It highlights elements of philosophical debate embodied in individual characters, the (more stylised) fictional scientists and political leaders lacking the humanity and vulnerabilities of the teen Lamas. And it allows fiction to resolve as debate, issues taking precedence over narrative closure.

Prevalence resolves with Limbo's aboriginal-based order reasserted, and with it an unfulfilled sense of the primacy of Limbodian narrative. The removal of the imperious Winifred concludes satisfactorily the episodes of the garland and the unappeased tiger-god. But a final twist sets in motion again the conflict over language as the locus of local power. Bay plots to augment the extant Limbodian communal, historical narrative.

I heard the Swami say to Bay, 'Well, we've made history in Limbo.'

'Contemporary history,' answered Bay in a dissatisfied voice. 'Now what is needed is for us to give a past history to Limbo. ... I have been making some notes...of the first and rather eccentric King of the Limbodians that I have invented...' (250)

The text ends with the discourse still underway: 'He went on talking,' the narrator relates to Catullus, 'but he was too far away

for me to hear what he said' (250). The narrative's refusal of closure embeds ambiguities about the ethos of imposing an originary narrative on an extant culture, about the fictionality of colonial accounts, and about the elusiveness of realist discourse. The conclusion asserts a Menippean sense of heuristic play about the way a narrative, even one intended as historical, may be constructed.

There is also the significant element of wit used to deflect the idealism or realism that would counter the efficacy of Menen's epistemological concerns, specifically his devotion to exhibiting the construction and inevitability of hybrid identity. Wit becomes the decisive method of discursive exposure and of self-exposure. Menen allows his own recollected physical body to become the site of Menippean discourse, as in an episode he recalls from school: 'I was set to read aloud to the class the adventures of Kim, my colouring adding drama to the recital' (*Dead Man*, 15). Wit provides a method for navigating some of the ironies of racial and ethnic identifications and stereotypes. In 'My Grandmother and the Dirty English' his Nayar grandmother exhibits distaste for English domestic habits which she finds inferior to her own, specifically because 'she felt she was borne of a superior race and she had all the marks of it. [...] she would laugh to herself, while my uncle translated; not an unkind laugh, but a pitying one, as she thought of the backwardness of the

white man's bathroom' (*Dead Man* 33). In *The Space Within the Heart* Menen records a spiritual retreat undertaken in his barren Roman rooms, where he lives on sparse meals, meditates and reads for a month, surveying the elements which make up his sense of self. To probe his inner being is 'like peeling an onion of all its layers' (10-11). When he gets to his centre, what he terms 'the Tranquil Eye', he again marks his observations in terms of witty assessment which also affords a distance from his subject:

The Tranquil Eye has seen an unforgettable sight. It has seen the whole of my life lying around it: and it was most comical. For it saw that my life had been the laborious construct of other people, some well-intentioned, some malign, some just interfering. It has been a life of emotion invented for me to feel. (12)

The series of subjects Menen has to address to achieve the experience of actual disembodiment requires him to offer a catalogue that only makes his physical self more apparent and present. He recounts the experiences that have shaped his awareness of race, ethnicity, and sexuality, referencing both influential individuals and texts.

I persuaded my English master to lend me more books on psychoanalysis which I devoured because I could identify myself so excitingly with some of the central characters. I did, at times, feel rather callow. I could not, for instance,

remember being envious of my father's penis. I could not recall ever having seen it. But my self-esteem was greatly restored when I discovered that, like as not, I would be a homosexual. This put me immediately in the company of Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and less encouragingly, Oscar Wilde. (66)

He peoples his account – with lovers both male and female, with a young man who seeks his advice and sexual counsel, with a mother who made inappropriately amorous gestures towards him as a teen – only to attempt to assert a boundary of isolation via withering, sardonic language. He refers to texts which shore up his stance, though there is irony in his choice of classics (Martial, Shakespeare, the *Arabian Nights*) to support the notion of the cross-cultural normality of sexual experimentations, homosexuality and bisexuality: ‘other times, other customs, you may say, but if you do you will be missing a most striking corollary’ (20).

Conclusion

Foregrounding the satiric constructedness of his life and its textual interconnections ironically provides the necessary prompt for Menen’s elected isolation:

I have only to remember this, and I am the Tranquil Eye
again, looking out like some objectively-minded goldfish
from its bowl. But there is no goldfish and no

bowl....There is, let me hasten to add, no ethereal blue light. There is, indeed, some sort of feeling, and it is much deeper than “I think, therefore I am.” Sometimes I described it to myself as a sort of disembodied laughter, but in doing so I was merely a writer making a phrase about something which no phrase can describe. (Space 12)

The Menippean motif of text and satire cast here as literariness and laughter may serve best to sum up the register of Menen’s work and its postcolonial contexts. Where Desani revamps form and stamps language with ferocious originality, Menen sets up erudite textual discussions of literary juxtaposition and influence. The constructed authorial identity which emerges from his highly narrated fictions and essays is predicated on wit as a mode of qualification and explication, and Menen’s work is no less Menippean for this.

Chapter Four: Salman Rushdie's Menippean Strategies of Language, from *Midnight's Children* to *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

There is a genuine need for political fiction, for books that draw new and better maps of reality, and make new languages with which we can understand the world.

Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*

Hazl [satire] is education; take it seriously,
And do not be deceived by its outward form.

Jalal-al-Din Rumi, *Mathnawi*, qtd. in
Hasan Javadi, *Satire in Persian Literature*

Introduction

In this chapter I will be examining Salman Rushdie's novels as Menippean satires, in accordance with my basic premise that this mode best describes some of the counter-realist elements in Rushdie's novels. Although Rushdie's work has been widely noted as satirical, and some of his experiments with formal features of Menippean satire in individual works have been acknowledged in passing,¹ I would like to focus on a wide range of Rushdie's work, and on how Menippean satire is rooted in Rushdie's use of language and diction. As Robert C. Elliot notes of the Menippean Petronius, '[he] manages brilliantly to capture

¹ See M.D. Fletcher, ed., *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994. Ib Johansen identifies *Grimus* as Menippean satire in his essay 'The Flight from the Enchanter: reflections on Salman Rushdie's *Grimus*', 23-34; Philip Engblom notes Menippean features in *Satanic Verses* in 'A Multitude of Voices: Carnivalization and Dialogicality in the Novels of Salman Rushdie', 293-304. See also D.S. Mishra, 'Narrative Techniques of Salman Rushdie's *Shame*', *Punjab University Research Bulletin (Arts)*, Chandigarh, 18.1 (April 1987): 37-44; Mishra identifies *Shame* as a Menippean discourse which comprises both comedy and tragedy.

the accent and intonation of the speaker himself. The rhythm of the speech, the syntax, the vocabulary – all bespeak the amiable vulgarian who is part of what he describes' (196). Related to this is Rushdie's central use of *ekphrasis*, the dramatic description of one medium of art using another, as in a poet describing a Grecian urn, or a novelist describing the creation and subject matter of a painting, the latter a frequent occurrence in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, for example.² This rhetorical device encompasses literary descriptions of the mental processes of artistic creation, and even the description of wholly imaginary works of art as if they were real (sometimes called 'notional *ekphrasis*'). In Rushdie's inventive novelistic schema, and with his characteristic linguistic originality, he tends to focus on a specific art form (or two) with each novel. His depictions of artistic media as ekphrastic rhetorical elements have included cinema (*Midnight's Children* 1981), epic and folk narrative (*Shame* 1983), religious literature and scripture³ (*The Satanic Verses* 1988), painting (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 1995), and popular music and photography (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 1999).

His often satiric and parodic pairings of literary narrative (his descriptions and evocations) employed to depict the potential or

² I am indebted to Neil Ten Kortenaar's illuminating examination of Rushdie's description of a single painting by Sir John Everett Millais which appears in chapter 2 of *Midnight's Children*. In Kortenaar's example the textual experimentation with the subject of the painting 'offers not so much a disobedient reading as a reading that makes nonsense of obedience' (258); see 'Postcolonial Ekphrasis: Salman Rushdie Gives the Finger Back to the Empire', *Contemporary Literature*, 38.2 (1997): 232-259.

³ In my discussion I am considering scripture as human-authored narrative and thus on some level 'art', admittedly sidestepping the potent question of the role of divine inspiration and origin.

the content of another art form achieves some of the unsettling textual juxtapositions and dissonances characteristic of Menippean satire, and with it the consonant Menippean testing of boundaries, assumptions, and possibilities about artistic creation and even the role of the artist. In Rushdie's novels, 'different genres' quite literally 'flow together ... struggling in opposition to each other' (Milowicki and Wilson 319).

But this Menippean aspect of Rushdie's counter-realism and experimentalism is rarely registered as such. Instead, to a unique degree, Rushdie has sometimes been condemned for his inventive use of language, with erudite experiment misread as distracting intellectual play. James Bowman is one of the castigators, writing of *The Moor's Last Sigh* that 'it is hard not to come away with the sense that all this storytelling and linguistic invention is only for showing off and that Rushdie has written the book in order to demonstrate that he can write it' (17). C. J. S. Wallia's condemnation begins with *The Satanic Verses* and erupts again with *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*: in both texts Rushdie apparently 'assails the reader with massive verbiage straining to be comic' ('The Ground' 1). He objects to 'pontifical soliloquies on ...art'. Wallia's main complaint appears to be satire's tendency to undermine sensitive characterisation through extravagant wit, for he narrows in on 'the pervasive use of contrived, overly clever language and the lack of empathy-

evoking characters' as 'the besetting faults of much of Rushdie's fiction' ('Ground' 2). But a central emphasis on a variety of subject matter and on the targeting of ideas are precisely the elements which Northrop Frye, for example, cites as central to the Menippean model, where often one finds 'characterization, which is stylized rather than naturalistic, and [which] presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent' (*Anatomy* 309). In the political realm of postcolonial writing, satiric engagement through language (specifically the idea-laden, encyclopaedic Menippean mode) is necessarily going to introduce problems of collusion versus more-detached interpretation in a readership, and of the perceived curatorial implications in the wielding of knowledge and information, which may transcend assumptions about novelistic elements such as 'empathy'.

This chapter supports a reading of Rushdie in which Menippean juxtapositions assert and redefine the constituents of conceptual diversity while undercutting the very assumptions that support such generic and thus cultural boundaries. Rushdie's language and the worlds he shapes with it provide tools towards redefinition and positive modes of liberation and cultural inclusion, for otherwise, as Saladin Chamcha learns from the manticore, the dominant narrative will continue to casts its rejects to the margins: 'They describe us...They have the power

of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct' (*Satanic* 168). If this makes for 'violent dislocations in the customary logic of narrative', as Frye sums up the impact of the Menippean mode, so be it (*Anatomy* 310). (The brutality and anguish represented at times in Rushdie's fiction makes clear the need for 'violent dislocations'.) Literature which is overtly political, historically-oriented, and heavily structured by modes which feature exaggeration and extremes can be challenging to interpret; added to this is what Michael Wood lauds in Rushdie's work as the counter-realist manner in which 'Rushdie is demonstrating not the fictionality of fiction (or of reality) but the difficulty of telling where fiction begins and ends' (2). As Rushdie's narrator, Rai, muses on the most ancient roots of storytelling in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, these are 'tales told not in plain language but adorned with every kind of extravagant embellishment and curlicue, flamboyant, filled with the love of pyrotechnics and display' and comprising 'descriptions of contemporary morals and manners, punctuated by philosophical asides' (387). But while an ancient bard may have 'admit[ted] to the fictionality of his fiction', Rai's take is more problematic: 'I continue to insist that what I tell you is true' (388). The play with the boundaries of fictionality remains a central focus for Rushdie as he carefully mediates between method and intention: 'Quite often surrealism or whatever one would call it is used just as a piece of acrobatics, and then that's

all it is. And you think, “Oh shut the fuck up and tell me a story.” But the reason I do it is not fancy footwork. It’s because it seems to me to be a way of saying something that I hope is truthful’ (‘Salon Interview’ 5). Part of the perceived ‘fancy footwork’ in his novels involves this integration of various other art forms into the narrative. The classical roots of *ekphrasis* dwell in artistic interests in ultimately augmenting one form via another; in describing other artworks and methods the artist aims to enlarge the scope of vision and comprehension, and also raises inevitable questions regarding how and what one sees and appreciates, and in what ways this is related to specific media. My suggestion in this chapter is that Rushdie reconstrues his subjects through these specific juxtapositions because he is able to introduce the perspective of the postcolonial artist assessing the roots, methods, and (sometimes vexing) implications of various art forms, their cultural and political connotations, and their impact on the boundaries of fictionality and representation.

Magic Realism in Salman Rushdie's Work

In presenting readings of Salman Rushdie's work in which counter-realism is attributed to a mode other than magic realism, one is rocking a huge boat. Rushdie's work *is* hugely magic realist, and he is himself a significant icon in the world of magic

realist art.⁴ He is a perceived instigator of magic realist literature, uniting strands from Gabriel García Márquez and Günter Grass, acknowledging them magnanimously as sources of inspiration. He is sometimes credited with founding anti-realism in modern South Asian literature and latterly, expanding it in postcolonial literature. There is an almost standard critical expectation that in each new novel, Rushdie will flaunt what Michiko Kakutani deems ‘his magician’s ability to fuse the mythic and the mundane, the surreal and the authentic, into a seamless whole’ (4). Giving credence to this line of expectation, Rushdie has placed his own work firmly in the realm of ‘the non-realistic in literature – it comes down from *Tristram Shandy*, and through Rabelais, Cervantes, and Gogol. And this is a more questioning tradition, a tradition that does not take the world for granted. It says, we will make the world up in a certain way, in order to have a certain meaning’ (‘A Writer by Partition’ 3).

The specific politics of magic realism, the contingent critical discussions regarding its roots and the aptness of its various

⁴ The related bibliography is huge. The debates start with Rushdie's magic realism as assumed, and centre on its lines of inheritance and influence. See Neil ten Kortenaar's excellent 'Salman Rushdie's Magic Realism and the Return of Inescapable Romance', *U of Toronto Quarterly* 71.3 (2002) 765-785; he finds Rushdie's magic realism an apt reflection of conflicted postcolonial identities. Patricia Merivale places *Midnight's Children* as the magic realist offspring of Günter Grass rather than Gabriel García Márquez, in 'Saleem Fathered by Oskar: *Midnight's Children*, Magic Realism, and *The Tin Drum*', in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*. Ed. M.D. Fletcher. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994, 329-345. A *Companion to Magical Realism* would probably shrink to 'A Pamphlet on Magical Realism' without material devoted to Rushdie and his influence (Eds. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Tamesis, 2005), as would other major texts on magic realism as well.

perceived uses and/or appropriations, surface in the many extant discussions of Rushdie's work⁵. No matter how his work is regarded, his writing is often placed somewhat automatically into the context of Western 'high culture' which, according to Shailja Sharma, comprises 'surrealism, magic realism, and European modernism' (596).⁶ More than any other aspect of his work, it is the magic realist element that seems to split critics about how complicitous Rushdie is regarding the discourses and subjectivities he seeks to challenge and critique. When Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris declare that *The Satanic Verses* is '[t]he most controversial magical realist text of all'(9), they are highlighting a conflict between the East-vs-West, post-fatwa controversies of the novel, and its original subversive content. But their comment also encompasses the apparently unresolvable split between, to borrow from Andrew Teverson, the degree to which Rushdie is a reworker and re-construer of Western imperial systems and approaches, or stuck with 'postcolonialism as a political form that can only even reply to, and revalidate, a colonialist center' ('Rushdie's Metaphorical'

⁵ One might start with Aijaz Ahmad's discussion in 'Salman Rushdie's *Shame*: Postmodern Migrancy and the Representation of Women' wherein he registers a tad of disdain for Rushdie's apparent participation in the commodification of cultures as centrally practiced by Western artists. In *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, London: Verso, 1994, 123-158.

⁶ See Edward Said's description of Rushdie as someone who writes 'both in and for the West' (in Appignanesi, 165), and also Shailja Sharma's appraisal that 'Rushdie writes primarily for a metropolitan readership from a relatively secure position within the metropolitan intellectual Left' (588-9). For Sharma, Rushdie's 'raiding' of the global storehouse for cultural references and narratives for his work and his claim to cultural empowerment by doing so runs too close to the colonial 'raiding' of native cultures (605).

1).⁷ Hence Stephanie Jones' work to re-establish *The Satanic Verses* on its 'organic local' levels of engagement (259), although she does so strictly in terms of the clashes of cultures which Evelyn Fishburn identifies as definitive of magic realism (155). An examination of Menippean satire seems to open a path towards an alternative model which might move beyond the expectations of resolution that these dissonances demand, stemming directly from Desani's profoundly Menippean *All About H. Hatterr*: 'What do you expect of a damme writer of words, anyway? Truth? Hell, you will get *contrast*, and no mistake!' (275). Ronald Blaber and Marvin Gilman's observations on Desani in *Roguery* ring equally true of Rushdie: 'Whereas other writers are unable to use or contain the forces and potentialities of mixed-mode narratives...Desani achieves something rare in fiction. He maintains a dialogue between normative principles and structural openness to produce what might be termed a philosophical dialectic. Aware of the processes of production of new "language", new ways of constructing the world, Desani shows a confidence to continue those processes, whereas other writers insist, for whatever reason, on arriving at a resolution' (94). Thus I am looking at the

⁷ Om P. Juneja would fall into the first camp, as when he states that '[b]y dis/mantling the historical through the counterculture of imagination, Rushdie promotes polyphony and redefines the past' (101). Vinay Dharwadker is a particularly forceful example of the latter. Dharwadker locates a 'subversive hybridity' in Rushdie's work which places his fiction in a larger political scheme, 'into the combative postcolonialism' which 'powerfully satirizes the colonial and neo-colonial West, seeking to overturn the existing (im)balance of power in order to enact a postcolonial revenge against the metropolis from its interstices and margins' (259).

way Rushdie's Menippean juxtapositions, and specifically ekphrastic textual representations of other art forms, initiate a reimaging of the limitations of representation that are bound up in demarcations between margin and centre, and between ownership and appropriation. The implications of the counter-realist subversions which I will be examining in subsequent sections point to the possibility of disobedient, undermining, ribald, ridiculing, and imaginative re-readings which skew quoted texts by relocating them. In *Ground*, for example, Rushdie staffs a pirate radio ship off the coast of England with the postcolonial migrant and would-be pop singer-songwriter, Ormus Cama, who is making the 'journey from periphery to centre' (271). Armed with only their music in their arsenal of political and cultural weaponry, 'the pirates aim their sounds at Britain and the country surrenders' (264).⁸ It's a scene resonant with history, satirizing the three-minute 'pop-ditty' as weaponry, but also nodding to postcoloniality and the workings of arts to reshape culture and perspective. Menippean satire is a specific way for a range of texts to be re-viewed through relocations, and Rushdie emphasises the postcolonial in how these new combinations reflect the conflicts of complex global relationships.⁹

⁸ Rushdie names his pirate enterprise 'Radio Freddie', in tribute to the Parsi singer, Freddie Mercury, who fronted the quintessential British rock outfit, Queen. Mercury is partly the model for the protagonist, Ormus Cama.

⁹ An extension of this argument would be to 'read' the fatwa as yet another text added to the Menippean succession of Rushdie's work, disregarding for a moment the irreverence of the sheer privileging of literary concerns inherent

The focus of this study is not on evaluating the relationship between Rushdie's work and its 'organic local' points of engagement via satire,¹⁰ but it is useful to note how the specific modes of his writing come into focus when critical attention is paid to *for whom* Rushdie may be employing magic realism and/or satire. Shailja Sharma discerns a split in intended readership running throughout all of Rushdie's work, based on the inclusion of these specific literary modes and techniques: 'For his readers in the West, his dizzy stylistics, his use of myth, his pace of narration, and his magic realism are presumably more captivating. For his subcontinental readers, however, the text's appeal lies not so much in the complex relationship between fantasy and history...but rather in its extended verbal and political satire' (606). But to counter that stance regarding a divided audience for his work, Sadik J. Al-Azm finds instead a united, rather than divided, textual synthesis, marked mainly by a style of 'brilliantly crafted surplus' which can comprise even 'hostile' components in a model of 'constitutive' relationality: 'This is why we can safely say that *The Satanic Verses* remains the leading novel not written with an exclusively European

in that statement. The satire in *Satanic* seems only continued by dead-serious critics of the text who refuse to countenance actually reading it. Rushdie seems to adopt a Menippean approach himself when he is asked about the 'story' of the fatwa, and he replies that 'I think it's a bad Salman Rushdie novel. And, believe me, it's a very dreadful thing to be stuck in a bad novel' (Salon Interview, 2).

¹⁰ Several internet sites offer documents which discuss the specific historical events Rushdie's novels refer to in 'organic local' detail. See *The Postcolonial Web* (www.postcolonialweb.org) and *Postcolonial Studies at Emory* (www.english.emory.edu).

and/or American and/or Arab and/or Indian and/or African readership in mind' (*Satanic* 50). In the terms of my discussion thus far, all of Rushdie's techniques contribute to that sense of 'surplus', the overload characteristic of the Menippean as well as the magic realist 'innovative artistic practices' Al-Azm describes (*Satanic* 51) that obscure the limits of realism. Nonetheless, the breadth of Rushdie's Menippean textual dialogues arguably comprises a range of sources that will afford familiarity and accessibility for a large swathe of audience, since he consistently draws from sources that embody central Menippean / carnivalesque contrasts of high and low, popular and classical, liberal and conservative, local and global, etc.

An important step in this discussion is to begin to differentiate between the ways magic realism and Menippean satire function in Rushdie's texts. Each of his novels contains magic realist elements, like the blue-and-white synagogue tiles that depict changing images from the lives of the characters in *Moor* (76), or Ormus Cama's interior voice which projects lyrics of famous pop songs before they have been released, the voice coming from his dead twin, eerily like the one who expired when Elvis Presley was born (*Ground* 182). These elements, along with the more celebrated mythic animal transformations in *The Satanic Verses* and the psychic radio system of *Midnight's Children*, exhibit magic realism's emphasis on the potential veracity of the

supernatural, folkloric, and mythic, but they don't foster attention on, or critique, the specific highlighted art forms themselves (visual arts, music, myth/folktale, electronic media). They direct attention towards the magic and unexpected.

Laura Moss notably has predicted an imminent death for magic realism from overexposure and overuse, its conventions having ‘becom[e] predictable through repetition (‘Forget’ 121). Moss’s critical reading of intertextual parody by Rushdie, how Rushdie juxtaposes material from his own novels, is useful for the Menippean aspects which unintentionally surface in her comparisons. She finds that Rushdie’s ‘disintegrating patience’ with the magic realist mode is answered by his tactics in a later work: ‘*The Moor’s Last Sigh* parodies both magic realism and its celebrated magic realist predecessor, *Midnight’s Children*, as it points to the inadequacies of the literary convention Rushdie himself helped to pioneer in an “english language” context. The early novel is a primary intertext for the later one’ (122). Moss reads the intertextual relationship specifically in the context of parody as ‘a repetition with a critical difference’, corresponding to Linda Hutcheon’s definition of the term in her discussion of postmodernism (qtd. in Moss, 122). But I would argue that Rushdie’s intertextual relationship with his own earlier work allows him to reference it in the manner of Menippean satire,

tending towards a more carnivalesque type of juxtaposition.¹¹ What Moss is describing as a ‘self-conscious self-referentiality’ (122) I would read as a firmly established Menippean approach of embedding other sources and kinds of discourse to aid in creating a fragmentary and distorted Menippean world. In the words of M. Keith Booker, discussing the intrinsic dualities to Rushdie's fictions, ‘we are given an account of events, then that account is retracted, and we are given an alternative, contradictory account’ (985), and often the alternative version centres on satire rather than postmodern parody. Moss astutely points out an array of overlapping characters and motifs between the two books, and there are indeed many intertextual references. For instance, *Moor* reintroduces Saleem Sinai’s adopted son, Aadam Sinai/Adam Braganza, and supplies some details of the outcome for Saleem, the Braganza Pickle firm, and its founders, the aged former ayah, Mary Pereira and her sister, Alice. Adam’s increasing malevolence in the *Moor* narrative deflates the hope surrounding him in *Midnight* where his first word is the magical incantation, ‘cadabba’, a toddler’s version of ‘abracadabra’ (*Midnight* 459). But such ‘quoting’ runs throughout Rushdie’s work; this is not the first time he has resuscitated characters or

¹¹ Moss does concede at one point that ‘parody is eclipsed by Juvenalian [serious, topical] satire’ in the section of *Moor* where Moraes becomes a hitman for his family’s enemies (132). But that section is also packed with Menippean satire, in Moraes’s Jeeves-like adherence to his new master’s whims, and in his description of his new ‘surreal stratum, with a tin man, a toothsome scarecrow, and a cowardly frog for company’ (*Moor* 304). Frye reminds us that the ‘occupational approach to life’ is distinctive in the Menippean, and contributes to the way characters are depicted in terms of mental attitudes rather than personalities (*Anatomy* 309).

suggested dialogue between texts, as his work overall is powerfully metatextual. Rosa Diamond, of *The Satanic Verses*, elusive in her deep reveries of a colonial past, and allusive to the thoughts of Gibreel, seems to be the mystifying ‘rose stone’ of *Grimus*. Other examples come from subsequent works in which Rushdie's magic realist techniques are by no means on the wane; as Booker argues convincingly, Rushdie's continued presentation of duality, and unstable selves and histories, ‘suggests that the authority of all of our representations of the past may be somewhat questionable’ (Booker 983). But there is also an argument to be made that Rushdie's Menippean satire continues unabated, expanding to include his own previous work to satiric effect in later efforts. For instance, Aurora Zogoiby, who dies in *Moor*, turns up with her stinging tongue to ridicule a character at a party in *Ground* (50). The details reveal the degree of carnivalesque complication. The party in *Ground* is hosted by the Parsee, Homi Catrack, of *Midnight*. William Methwold (*Midnight* and *Ground*) attends and mentions the sale of a villa to Catrack, an event which also takes place in *Midnight*. Aurora (*Moor*) memorably ridicules Ormus Cama's father, Darius Cama, at the party. A separate example comes from *Ground*, when the mothers of Pimple Billimoria of *Satanic* and Nadia Wadia of *Moor* (named Tipple Billimoria and Fadia Wadia) appear as young, New York City starlets who infamously reject the amorous advances of Ormus Cama (191); with the added

knowledge of their future voluptuous daughters, the sexual rejection of Cama becomes even more acidly humiliating.¹²

Rushdie's pattern of juxtaposing his own earlier texts, sometimes discordantly, sometimes parodically, could be read as constituent of the literary project of 'revisioning history' and presenting 'alternative narrative perspectives' which Fischer and Abedi identify as a general approach of optimism and 'renewal' in his work (148;149).¹³ The nature of the intertextuality certainly undermines some traditional notions regarding the discrete nature of novelistic form, as it promotes a Menippean vision of the world in pieces taken from Rushdie's own literary works.

Beyond simply rewarding close readers of Rushdie's texts with the pleasures of recognition and the promising possibilities of reconstruction, Menippean intertextuality creates satiric dissonance by problematising the boundaries of a novel's limits, its 'world'. Rushdie is revealing a 'pattern of mixture and mélange' which runs 'throughout' his novels', ultimately 'shifting history' (Milowicki and Wilson 298). He is also reinforcing Bakhtin's assessment that 'the menippea – and this

¹² Or it demonstrates that Ormus Cama could have been their putative father, were a slightly different plot line in effect, all under the aegis of the parent of all the characters, the author himself. Likewise, if William Methwold is Saleem Sinai's real father in *Midnight*, Methwold's later union with Ormus Cama's mother in *Ground* renders Saleem and Ormus bizarrely as (intertextual) step-brothers.

¹³ In stronger terms there is Andrew Teverson's statement that Rushdie's satiric attitude emits both 'scorn' for observed excesses and oversights, and a less reserved 'refus[al] to be passive subjects in the face of power, and as such, it is a mechanism of human dignity and human resistance' ('Salman Rushdie and Aijaz Ahmad' 53).

includes also its oldest antique forms – to some extent always parodies itself...that is one of the generic characteristics...this element of self-parody is one of the reasons for the extraordinary vitality of the genre' (*Problems* 141-2).

Moss fails to mention the re-emergence of Zeenat Vakil, a heroine of *The Satanic Verses*, as a significant character in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi find that Zeenat Vakil presents a significant counter-note to the apocalyptic conclusion of *The Satanic Verses*, and they imaginatively project her into a future Rushdie work: 'Perhaps a stronger ending might be found, stuff for another novel, in which maybe a Zeeny Vakil-like figure in the West might star, not as a chamcha, but as a multicultural pioneer, with other issues than repression and resentment, with movies and the media thematized not just as dreams and displacements and fantasy work, but as creative/positive political forces' (147-8). And there she is in *Moor*, 'a brilliant young art theorist and devotee of Aurora's oeuvre', hired to oversee the Zogoiby Bequest, to catalogue, preserve, and provide critical background to the body of Aurora's work (*Moor* 329). 'Clever leftish Zeeny', though admittedly not in the West, represents the critical voice of multiculturalism and the ability to contribute to global discourses, and Rushdie's integration of painting into this discourse does point towards the creative and positive potential

of art to articulate ‘political forces’. Zeeny comments in *Moor* on the growing Hindu fundamentalism threatening Bombay and elsewhere, in a statement which could function as one of Rushdie's apparent precepts for what art needs to stand against: the fundamentalism dictated to the masses severely undermines the valid right of the individual to act and to absorb, in *Moor* threatening the ‘many headed beauty’ and incipient ‘peace’ of the Hindu system originally founded on models of multiplicity (338). What is at stake is access to multiple available interpretations, meanings, and relative contexts (338). But Zeeny is also lampooned by Rushdie, apparently guilty of criminally opaque jargon, or how else to interpret Zeeny's fictional ‘critical appreciation’ of Aurora entitled *Imperso-Nation and Dis/Semi/Nation: Dialogics of Electicism and Interrogations of Authenticity in A.Z.*¹⁴ Her perspective is paradoxically both deflated and reinstated, as Rushdie satirises the excesses of academia and its constant assumption of ideological hegemony in all manner of debates.

Satire in Rushdie: Exploring Menippean Strategies

I am hardly the first to read Rushdie's work as satire. Some previous critical assessments are basic and blunt; Norman Rush simply describes the entire *The Satanic Verses* as a satire (1).

¹⁴ High jargon apparently condemned by Rushdie as utter Bhabha-le. And perhaps this is why Dr. Zeenat Vakil ultimately perishes in the ‘fireball’ that demolishes the gallery during the apocalyptic explosions that devastate Bombay at the novel's conclusion (373). Although the title of Zeeny's work could stand as a parodic subtitle for *Moor* itself.

John Clement Ball notes that the word ‘satire’ appears ‘from jacket copy to critical articles and books’ on Rushdie (Ball ‘Acid’ 1).¹⁵ Some discussions of satire are in defense of Rushdie’s work; Sadik J. Al-Azm supports Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* as the pro-Islam work of a lone ‘serious dissident’, with the satire working in aid of his specific revisionism (‘Importance’ 2). ‘No wonder, then’, Al-Azm comments, ‘if a Muslim’s exercise in satirical courage and laughter should pass mostly unsung for what it is’ (2). Al-Azm celebrates the spirit of Rushdie’s work overall as ‘fabulous satire of contemporary life meant to shock, bewilder and awaken, while at the same time formulating beneath its exaggerations, ironies, parodies, and criticisms very important truths about [his] age and society’ (4-5). Fischer and Abedi note that the ‘trilogy’ of *Midnight, Shame* and *Satanic* all ‘contain considerable satire about (mis)uses of Islam’ (110). For Shailja Sharma, satire is Rushdie’s way of revealing the ‘breadth’ of his ‘familiarity’ with the subcontinent, revealing ‘incestuous knowledges of cultural quirks’ (600; 601). Satire has patently been acknowledged in Rushdie’s works, only there is little agreement regarding his use of it, and so it becomes a feature which is seen at times to unsettle readings of his texts, or even to unmoor expectations of Rushdie as a writer in a specific context of location, geography and time. Om P. Juneja

¹⁵ Or there is the element of official rejection by which to judge a work a satire. In addition to the well-documented burnings of *Satanic* and its fatwa-led bannings, the Indian government banned import of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* after only 4000 copies had entered that country.

credits Rushdie for his allegories of history which ‘open up the past to imaginative revision’ (103). Yet at the same time Juneja is critical of Rushdie’s satirical method, because:

[b]y reducing a cultural concept like “shame” to a farce, Rushdie indulges in black humour and is in good company of modern-day satirists, but has lost his place among the historical novelists with ethical or mythical consciousness. His historical vision does not project an insider’s view as it is more satirical and less sympathetic. Since he cannot belong either to India or Pakistan, he remains a suspended human being. (104)

However, one could situate the figure of the ‘suspended’ Trishanku of Hindu mythology specifically in the context of Menippean texts. Such texts often pose juxtapositions that suggest the Trishanku myth’s metaphor of the world as we experience it and a heaven, or better version, which we seek.¹⁶ In *Shame* we seem to encounter dual versions of history and geography which don’t quite overlap: ‘[t]here are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space’ (29). In *Ground*, we are told that JFK served two terms and that Watergate never happened, a reverberation of two versions of history, one familiar and one not; we are challenged to discern if one is actually an improvement on the other, and in which direction heaven may lie (185). In this way the Menippean

¹⁶ My understanding of the Trishanku myth is deepened by Uma Parameswaran’s memorable poem by the same name. *Trishanku and Other Poems*, Toronto: South Asian Review, 1988.

bard draws from multiple traditions or versions, and Frye reminds us that the theme of the utopian and its pursuit is common throughout Menippean writing (*Anatomy* 311).

Another way to consider this pattern of doubling is to return to Bakhtin's discussions of carnival, in which the pattern of 'crowning/decrowning' asserts the 'dualistic' character of the carnival in general (*Problems* 124). Bakhtin asserts that '[a]ll the images of the carnival are dualistic; they unite within themselves both poles of change and crisis....Very characteristic for carnival thinking is paired images, chosen for their contrast (high/low, fat/thin etc.) or for their similarity (doubles/twins)...[and] the utilization of things in reverse' (*Problems* 126). In addition to the acknowledged focus on thematic and narrative dualities,¹⁷ the implications of doubling in a Menippean context allow this 'carnival thinking' to extend to additional elements in Rushdie's work. There are the parodic pairings of Rushdie's own texts with each other, with implications of reading Rushdie's own works as intertextual. There are also playful suggestions of metafiction, which we can relate to the specifically Menippean tactic of 'laying bare the device' of narrative (Rose 175). By cleverly revealing authorial method through digression or interruption, the text becomes the medium whereby the writer is reflecting on writing itself. '[S]uppose this were a realistic novel!' the narrator

¹⁷ See Booker, 'Beauty and the Beast', 977.

muses in *Shame*, ‘How much real-life material might become compulsory!’ (69). (There is a persuasive echo here of Leela Gandhi’s assertion that postcolonial fiction produces not nation, but truth about the fictionality of nationhood (163)). And there is Rushdie’s ekphrastic strategy of pairing the writing of literature with creation through other artistic forms, a strategy which often achieves a Bakhtinian critique of genre when satire is involved. In the context of paired versions of artistic representations of the world which reflect a colligatory relationship of high and low, Rushdie launches ‘the permanent corrective of laughter …a critique of the one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word, the corrective of reality that is always richer, more fundamental and most importantly, too contradictory and heteroglot to be fitted into a high and straightforward genre’ (*Dialogic* 55). Rushdie’s ‘corrections’ focus on ontological and epistemological questions which arise from juxtapositions of narrative fiction with visual representations of cinema, painting or photography, or with myths or popular music. Thus Aurora’s first mural on her bedroom walls and ceiling, full of spoof and fantasy and history and myth, is to her overwhelmed father ‘the great swarm of being itself’ (*Moor* 59). Pop music lyrics become revelatory because ‘Ameer was always convinced of the deep meanings hidden in [their] euphony and rhyme’ (*Ground* 125). And Saleem dreams of achieving the ‘chutnification of history’ with his ‘pickled chapters’, lowly condiments mixed with ingredients

from elaborate history, the truest hetero-glop, a jarred and jarring product (*Midnight's* 459).

Sometimes satire and its composition is the overt focus of Rushdie's fictional work. The 'minstrels singing vicious satires' in *The Satanic Verses* imply a sense of the satirical pervading the entire text:

‘A poet’s work,’ [Baal] answers. ‘To name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep.’ And if rivers of blood flow from the cuts his verses inflict, then they will nourish him. He is the satirist, Baal. (97)

Other references to the satiric are more subtle, but they nonetheless establish satire as a central strategy. Saladin's description of London at one point echoes the voice of Juvenal listing emblems of urban ugliness and decay: 'its gargoyles, the ghostly footfalls in its streets of Roman feet, the honks of its departing migrant geese' (*Satanic* 398). But Rushdie also invokes directly one of the classic bards of Menippean satire in two of his works.¹⁸ Chapter V of *The Satanic Verses* starts with a paraphrase from Lucius's *The Golden Ass* and certainly heralds an onslaught of Menippean juxtapositions and transformations to come. Muhammad Sufyan, one of three versions of Muhammad

¹⁸ See also Rushdie's essay on Lucius, 'Travels with A Golden Ass', *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, London: Granta, 1991.

in the text, this one significantly ‘self-taught in classical texts of many cultures’, is awakened from deep sleep by Jumpy Joshi seeking refuge for an alarmingly caprine Saladin, and immediately he paraphrases the text that enshrines the Menippean motif of animal transformations: ‘Once I’m an owl, what is the spell or antidote for turning me back into myself?’ (243). The narrator then lauds Muhammad for thus responding with the above impromptu quip, stolen, with commendable mental alacrity for one aroused from slumbers, from Lucius Apuleius of Madaura, Moroccan priest, AD 120-180 approx., colonial of an earlier Empire, a person who denied the accusation of having bewitched a rich widow yet confessed, somewhat perversely, that at an early stage in his career he had been transformed, by witchcraft, into (not an owl, but) an ass. (243).

It is the conclusion to the tour-de-force, 26-line sentence that begins the chapter, ending emphatically on the satire-evocative ‘ass’. The bedraggled, goat-transformed Saladin at this moment resembles ‘the most limp and passive of – what? let us say: satyrs’ (244).¹⁹ His host delivers ‘further Apuleian sympathy. “In the case of the ass, reverse metamorphosis required personal intervention of goddess Isis”’ (244). But since ‘old times are for old fogies’, Muhammad offers instead the intervention of a bowl

¹⁹ Satyrs being major players at the Bacchanalian revels that are the source of satyr plays, Comedy, and all manner of subsequent ludic artistic delights. Without satyrs, Frye’s *Anatomy* would be almost wholly Autumnal.

of hot chicken soup (244). The icons of satire's classic roots, the satyr and the golden ass, have been duly presented but in the logic of the text they need to be updated, relocated, modernised. To this motif of humans transformed to beasts in *The Satanic Verses*, noted by M. Keith Booker as a distinctly Menippean characteristic in that text (980), one could add Sufiya turning to a monster in *Shame*, or horn-templed, bow-legged, castrated, cucumber-nosed Saleem in the final chapters of *Midnight*. There is also Aurora Zogoiby living in a house called *Elephanta* in a neighbourhood called Elephanta, disparaged as 'crazy as a monkey in a monkey-puzzle tree' by her husband, chauffeured by her monkey-god driver, Hanuman, to urban sites where she records the raw, despairing lives of workers in 'subversive' sketches that are 'a challenge to British authority'; these she signs with a tiny drawing of an 'unblinking' lizard (*Moor* 130; 131). Booker comments that via such beast transformations 'the very idea of a stable unified self is revealed by Rushdie to be a fiction' (983). But in Rushdie's view, the hybrid, even a monstrous one, as long as it is 'a chimera with roots' can nonetheless 'survive' even tragedy (*Satanic* 406). Menippean satiric metamorphoses serve to emphasize dual and multiple selves, misreadings and mistaken identities, as well as the transformative powers of language and storytelling in these charged transformations.

Rushdie returns to *The Golden Ass* subsequently to add perspectives about the perceived veracity and power of storytelling. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Vina and Ormus achieve dizzying musical fame as pop artists but suffer through their extended, postponed love affair. Their stage performances become a public venue for their increasingly troubled private lives. The narrator, Rai, notes this imbalance, and shares an observation by Robert Graves that writers gradually apprehended how ‘the popular tale gave them a wider field for their descriptions of contemporary morals and manners, punctuated by philosophical asides, than any more respectable literary form’ (*Ground* 387). Rai’s musings frame his struggle to invest his own photography with a wider, more current vision. Somewhere in this layered meditation on art and life is also the author’s implicit emphasis on a dynamic, transforming narrative language that reflects conflicts in the nature of contemporary postcolonial storytelling. Rai articulates finally the problem:

What hope can I, a mere journeyman shutterbug, a harvester of quotidian images from the abundance of what is, have of literary respectability? Like Lucius Apuleius of Madaura, a Moroccan colonial of Greek ancestry aspiring to the ranks of the Latin colossi of Rome, I should (belatedly) excuse my (post)colonial clumsiness and hope that you are not put off by the oddness of my tale. Just as Apuleius did not fully

“Romanize” his language and style, thinking it better to find an idiolect that permitted him to express himself in the fashion of his Greek ancestors, so also I.... (388)

The threads which Rai struggles to unite comprise the postcolonial, the Menippean, the ekphrastic, and the potentially transformative powers of created language. The main thrust of his narrative refocuses on Ormus as a musician who challenges boundaries of fact and fiction, and in doing so Rai also articulates Blaber and Gilman’s observations on Desani about creative ‘dialogue between normative principles and structural openness to produce what might be termed a philosophical dialectic’ (94). The ‘new language’ Ormus/Rushdie produces is inflected by postcolonial multiplicities, and in general Rushdie’s narratives reflect the struggles of postcolonial artists to navigate the ‘philosophical dialectic’ their stories create in a variety of art forms. Rushdie confirms his ‘confidence to continue those processes’ (94) in defiance of neat resolutions, in Rai’s description of Ormus as ‘a man who saw, long before the rest of us, the artificiality of such a separation [of fact and fiction]; who witnessed the demolition of that iron curtain with his own eyes and courageously went forth to dance on its remains’ (*Ground* 388).

Language, Ekphrasis, Menippea

Rushdie has characterised his use of language repeatedly as ‘playful’, describing it at one point as ‘typical of Bombay, and maybe of India, that there is a sense of play in the way people use language’ (*‘Salon’ 1*). When questioned about his techniques, he clarifies a stage in its development:

When I was writing *Midnight’s Children*, I was really trying to say that the way in which English is used in India has diverged significantly from standard English....But even though this is the way everybody speaks in India, nobody had the confidence, when I started writing, to use it as a literary language. When they settled down to write, they would do it in a kind of classical Forsterian English that had nothing to do with the way they were speaking. (*Salon 1*)

The development of Rushdie's language incorporates an ability to reflect hybridities. It reflects P.K. Dutta's observation that words are ‘positioned at the intersection of the different narratives of power, culture and history. What is produced, then, is a thick syncretism of diverse significations, through which [the text] creates itself’ (64). Rushdie's language also reflects Gilles Deleuze's remark that great writers ‘carve out a non-pre-existent foreign language *within* [their] own language. They make the language take flight, they send it racing along a witch’s line, ceaselessly placing it in a state of disequilibrium, making it bifurcate and vary in each of its terms, following an incessant

modulation...much as in music, where the minor mode refers to dynamic combinations in perpetual disequilibrium' (110, 109).

By *Moor* and *Ground*, certainly, Rushdie is reflecting on the complex struggles of the postcolonial artist, and on more than one artistic medium. He positions the writer as a creative visionary, 'polymathic, a master of anatomy, philosophy, mythography, the laws of seeing and perception; an adept in the arcane of deep sight, able to penetrate the very essence of things' (*Ground* 386). In ekphrastic fashion he incorporates the artistic visions and endeavours of his characters, so that in *Ground*, Rai sets out 'to show that a camera can see beyond the surface, beyond the trappings of the actual, and penetrate to its bloody flesh and heart' (80). In a similarly elevated vein, Ormus Cama's pop music compositions make him a 'sorcerer', the 'singer and songwriter as shaman and spokesman', the 'age's unholy unfool', 'the secret originator, the prime innovator, of the music that courses in our blood...the music that speaks the secret language of all humanity, our common heritage, whatever mother tongue we speak' (89). These goals pitch Ormus both back into origins and 'ahead of his time' (89), and relate to Rushdie's on-going reformulation of the novel that also reaches back to the traditions of the classical age: 'The novel is an exploration. It is not a lecture. The novel is a discovery' ('A Writer by Partition' 2). Aurora's paintings span a complex artistic and philosophical dialectic. She has great success when

she heeds Vasco Miranda's urgings to 'Forget those damnfool realists! The real is always hidden – isn't it? – inside a miraculously burning bush! Life is fantastic! Paint that' (*Moor* 174). But she unleashes real power in this (apparently magic realist, 'epic-fabulist') work, and eventually must recognise that 'the ideas of impurity, cultural admixture and mélange which had been, for most of her creative life, the closest things she had found to a notion of the Good, were in fact capable of distortion, and contained a potential for darkness as well as for light' (303).

A distinct potential lies in Rushdie's language as well as in the subversions which take place in depicted, 'quoted' modes of artistic expression where conflicts continue to unfold. Fischer and Abedi have read into *The Satanic Verses* that 'the novel is about immigrants and the struggle in their internal psychological discourses between influences that come from the movies and those that come from traditional religion' (126). Certainly cinema provides iconic images and a paradigm of conflicted modes of vision in several of the novels. Drugged by her husband, Sufiya 'lay on a carpet, like a girl in a fantasy who can only be awoken by the blue-blooded kiss of a prince' but eventually she rises up by herself in a frenzy of incipient violence (*Shame* 242). She unites myths of Disney princesses with the horrors only hinted at by their absence in anodyne cartoon worlds; in her drugged oppression she is more mad

Bertha of *Jane Eyre* than Sleeping Beauty or Snow White. ‘Few mythologies survive close examination’, Rushdie has noted (*Shame* 251). Cinema interacts and clashes with belief system as Gibreel’s perspective merges with that of a camera in *Satanic*. Deep in observation, his

point of view is sometimes that of the camera and at other moments, spectator. When he’s a camera the pee oh vee is always on the move, he hates static shots, so he’s floating upon a high crane looking down at the foreshortened figures of the actors, or he’s swooping down to stand invisibly between them, turning slowly on his heel to achieve a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree pan, or maybe he’ll try a dolly shot, tacking along beside Baal and Abu Simbel as they walk....But mostly he sits up on Mount Cone like a paying customer in the dress circle, and Jahilia is his silver screen. He watches and weighs up the action like any movie fan, enjoys the fights infidelities moral crises, but there aren’t enough young girls for a real hit, man and where are the goddamn songs? (108)

And when Hamza tells Mahound to ask Gibreel whether to admit the three goddesses (and thus the ‘satanic’ verses) to the scripture of the Qu’ran, Gibreel responds in full acknowledgement of the way his world is being mediated by cinema: ‘who asks the bloody audience of a ‘theological’ to

solve the bloody plot?’ (108). The vocabulary of the cinema makes the passage stilted: the ‘pee oh vee’, the spelled-out numbers of the ‘pan’, a ‘dolly shot’. The somewhat laboured text heightens the contrast as one medium is elaborated in another, an unexpected jolt as we move between the visual and the textual, the serious and the ironic. In *Midnight* Saleem narrates the 1919 massacre at Amritsar as if he is filming it: ‘No close-up is necessary’, he notes of the excruciating tensions before violence erupts (35). In a way, history is transformed into visual art in his filmic description, and like Gibreel’s filmic observations, there is a mixture of endearing narratorial irony, detached documentary, and jolting moral aberrations.

There is also a degree of Menippean contrast that is worth noting in the relationship of *The Satanic Verses* to a long-standing tradition of satiric literatures in Islam. According to Hasan Javadi, ‘Persian literature abounds’ with ‘religious satires’, especially where ‘coreligionists of the satirist become his targets’, attacked for ‘sanctimony and pretension’, and the ‘superstitions and hypocrisy’ that undermine Islam’s image as ‘a benign and tolerant’ faith (71;72; 80). Fischer and Abedi point to a tradition of ‘Persian nationalist satirical accounts’ that celebrate Salman Farsi as the ghost-writer of the Qu’ran for the illiterate Muhammad (150); it is not a leap to consider the overlapping roles of satirist Salman Rushdie and this version of

Salman Farsi (150). Also in Islamic tradition, as M. Keith Booker explains, is the specific nature of the retraction Muhammad makes to withdraw the revealed-as-satanic verses: ‘Therefore he is forced to issue a palinode retracting those first *Satanic* verses. But this retraction, like all palinodes, cannot fully erase the earlier verses, though it may place them “under erasure”. In a sense, the retraction merely re-activates the carnivalesque energies of those earlier verses’ (986).²⁰ This structure of repetition and reverberation would seem to augment the dialogic powers of Menippean satire, to expand its potential to promote older/marginalised sources speaking anew through modern/popular ones, and to juxtapose material in defiance of unitary notions of linear and (*pace* Walia’s criticisms) ‘more truthful’ narrative. It is apparently also the source of Aijaz Ahmad’s singular irritation with Rushdie’s ‘quality of linguistic quicksand...as if the truth of each utterance were conditioned by the existence of its opposite, and Rushdie seems forever to be taking back with one hand what he has given with the other’ (135).

Linguistic Hybridity and Menippean Multiplicity

I am reading the overwhelming volume of intertextuality in Rushdie as suggestive of his commitment to showcase ‘the existence of alternative dimensions within the same space’

²⁰ Although ‘palinode’ comes specifically from the Greek tradition, Booker’s description is consistent with the way Muhammad’s concerns are portrayed in Rushdie’s text that the verses will not be convincingly erased.

(Booker 990). The contrasting and dialogic texts, sources, and art forms which clash in Menippean juxtaposition, jarred by degrees of disparity and parody, can be read as challenges to fixed notions of identity, history, and culture. ‘O, the conflicting selves jostling and joggling within these bags of skin’, marvels Saladin (*Satanic* 519). With his ‘proper pride of the successful storyteller’ Saleem explains that ‘things – even people – have a way of leaking into each other...like flavours when you cook’ (*Midnight’s* 38). Elsewhere Saleem reveals that ‘all kinds of everywhichthing are jumbled up inside him and he is one person one minute and another the next’ (270). Much has been written regarding Rushdie’s stance on the positive energies of postcolonial hybridity and mélange; it seems appropriate to examine how the intertextual references that constitute part of his mixtures, and his adherence to challenging monoculturalism, are also inflected by Menippean satire.

In *Moor*, for example, Rushdie uses the multiplicities of Menippean satire to project an (ideal perhaps) sense of Indian cultural plurality. Rushdie is both depicting and adding to the palimpsest that is India, even using this as a theme in *Moor’s Last Sigh*. The character Raman Fielding, the Hindu fundamentalist in *Moor*,²¹ rails against the enduring imprint of

²¹ As Jennifer Takhar points out, Raman Fielding seems inspired by the real life figure of the Hindu fundamentalist leader, Bal Thackeray (2). Fielding’s party, the Mumbai Axis, and his championing of the Hindu god, Rama, as the symbol of a pure Hindu history, all point to the ‘exact model’ (2) of the Shiv

Portuguese, Mogul and British colonisers when he urges, ‘The true nation is what we must reclaim from beneath the layers of alien empires’ (299). Aurora Zagoiby, explaining the fantastic, layered ‘palimpsest-art’ through which she attempts to make her iconoclastic visions real, tells her son to ‘Call it Mooristan.... Places where worlds collide, flow in and out of one another, and washofy away...One universe, one dimension, one country, one dream, bumbo-ing into another, or being under, or on top of. Call it Palimpstine’ (226). In a nation where history is physically layered, (as in the destroyed Ayodhya Mosque set over the presumed site of the birthplace of Rama, described in *Moor* 363) modes of multiplicity can appears to be accurate, even factual, methods of representation. As Rocio G. Davis remarks, ‘the creation of palimpsests, of cultural and generic constructs that constantly cancel each other out to reveal new versions of the same, permits entrance into an alternative universe where the boundaries between East and West, fiction and the reality, the true and the false, disintegrate (91). Rushdie presents the events at Ayodhya as the actions of either ‘fanatics’, or alternatively ‘devout liberators’, with the caveat to ‘delete according to taste’ (363), setting up two discordant versions which undermine each other, but which are both necessary. This is the same impulse

Sena, the right-wing, race-conscious militant ‘army’ of the right-wing Hindu BJP (somewhat analogous to the IRA and Sinn Fein during the heights of the Irish ‘troubles’). For more historical details, see Jennifer Takhar, ‘Raman Fielding/Bal Thackeray: Historical Rama-i-fication “Ram nam satya hai /The name Rama is truth”’, 23 July 2007, <<http://www.thecore.nus.edu.sg/post/Pakistan/literature/Rushdie/takhar14.htm>>.

that fuels the binary reality of *Shame*: “There are two countries. Real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality” (*Shame* 29). For Michael Wood, ‘[t]here is a speculative or satirical edge’ to these ‘divergences; the country at an angle is a quizzical commentary on our own’ (2). Later the narrator elucidates a textual conflict in a way which makes explicit the postcolonial drive, articulated as the truth-seeking artist versus the impositions of empire:

It is possible to see the subsequent history of Pakistan as a duel between two layers of time, the obscured world forcing its way back through what-had-been-imposed. It is the true desire of every artist to impose his or her vision on the world; and Pakistan, the peeling, fragmenting palimpsest, increasingly at war with itself, may be described as a failure of the dreaming mind...*perhaps the place was just insufficiently imagined*, a picture full of irreconcilable elements.... (*Shame* 87)

[Rushdie's italics]

In Rushdie's case the artist's arsenal to convey the shifting palimpsestic distortions of culture and narrative is comprised of, and inflects, language, although even this, too, is compromised by empire: ‘Who commandeered the job of rewriting history? – The immigrants, the *mohajirs*. In what languages? – Urdu and English, both imported tongues, although one travelled less

distance than the other' (87). But in the cosmopolitan postcolonial world, a singular narrative in a native language might not garner the attention required to address global historical inaccuracies and injuries, and displaced ideologies. One artist's language, however hybrid, may fall short of the intended 'challenge to authority' Shailja Sharma discusses, the need for a language which can span 'class, region, or community' to be widely representative, inclusive, and revisionist (605). And so Rushdie's Menippean satires are larded with diverse references which make them more representative and more dissonant, an intertextual overload as encyclopaedic as Desani's eruptions in *Hatterr* or Sealy's digressions in *The Trotter-Nama*. As Om P. Juneja comments on *Midnights'* *Children*, Rushdie parodies *Arabian Nights*, recent Indian scandals, Eliot, Joyce, and the Buddhist discourse, the *Jatakas* (100); there is also *Tristram Shandy*, *Kim*, the Bombay talkie, John Wayne (147), *Lost Horizon* and the myth of Shangra-la (306). *Shame* ridicules Benazir Bhutto as the resentful, embittered Arjumand 'the Virgin Ironpants' Harappa. *Moor* parodically references American literature, European film, world mythologies, and the narrative of Ganesh.²² *Ground* is an ironic, rock-and-roll update of the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, overlayed with the Indian myth of Kama and Rati. It would be extremely diverting to track down all the examples of

²² Relating to, among other parodic references, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* (296), Werner Herzog's *Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (241), the Wandjina of aboriginal Australia (433), and Adam Sinai/Adam Braganza (359).

multicultural intertextual references essayed by Rushdie, but what is clear with even this economical sample is that they contribute to what Rushdie sees as an ‘understand[ing] that the very essence of Indian culture is that we possess a mixed tradition, a *mélange* of elements as disparate as ancient Mughal and contemporary Coca-Cola American’ (*Imaginary* 67). In the context of parodic intertext as Menippean counter-realist strategy, one may take a small but critical step away from Aijaz Ahmad’s arguments that Rushdie only seeks to exploit Western culture’s appropriations of Eastern culture, that he is ‘the elite artist’ who ‘could now draw upon a whole range of cultural artefacts from around the globe’ (129). (One takes this step acknowledging the powerful significance of Ahmad’s overall critique of metropolitan commodifications of the Third World.) Rushdie’s playful intertextuality gives voice to the modern and, to paraphrase Rai in *Moor*, the ancestral as well, always in a convincingly inclusive manner. In *Ground* Rushdie invokes a powerful model from the Italian *Rinascimento*, which survives in his own commitment to openness, newness, and creativity: ‘By crossing boundaries, uniting many kinds of knowledge, technical and intellectual, high and low, the modern artist legitimizes the whole project of society’ (386).

Conclusion

It is arguable that the strategies of Rushdie's Menippean satire overlap somewhat with those of magic realism/post-realism/anti-realism. For example, Nicholas Stewart convincingly describes Rushdie's use of cinema as a magic realist 'device binding Indian culture of the past to a contemporary multicultural interface' to signify the 'composite nature of Indian culture and society' (2; 3). In this paradigm, Rushdie achieves 'a simultaneous undercurrent of doubt in his text that criticises the adherence to magical, fantastic fictions' which reveal the decay in 'a culture whose desire for fantasy marks the nature of its post-colonial identity' (4). Thus the magic of cinema may be culturally and representationally insufficient. In contrast, one might argue that the Menippean elements, the diverse, parodic intertextual juxtapositions, conspire to undermine the problematic impulse of magic realism that there is something actually magical or other-worldly about Eastern sources and milieus. Rushdie's use of Menippean strategies is, if anything, more consistent with his vision of multiplicity, hybridity, and polyphony, and the fallacy of 'a pure, unalloyed tradition' (*Imaginary* 67). His overloaded multi-lingual vocabulary conveys a sense of current global cultural complexities, and his ekphrastic references infuse the novel with elements that challenge and expand upon the confines of conventional genre. The sheer volume of satire upsets a reading which privileges comedy, tragedy or history, though each is convincingly present,

and the unbridled authorial enthusiasm for artistic production in any number of media would seem to counter readings which foreground postmodernism's more extreme acceptance of states of meaninglessness and dislocation.

The constituent nature of Menippean satire that situates jolting comparisons, and therefore implies connections, also seems particularly apt for Rushdie's overall affectionate presentation of the multifaceted culture that is both beloved and bothersome, the complex heritage which is both valued and problematic, the embattled objective and subjective view. In this concluding section of Menippean intertext, my final example points to the polyglot inheritance that he must mediate, and it clearly has travelled through the voluble world of Desani's *Hatterr*. I close with the belief that this quotation demonstrates the high level of esteem with which Rushdie values the 'whole range of cultural artefacts' apparently at his disposal. It comes from the section of *Moor* where, in metaphor for the writer himself, the young Aurora is rebelliously opening windows. The entire house, as a result, is in riotous disarray come morning.

'This low-class country, Jesus Christ,' Aires-uncle swore at breakfast in his best gaitered and hattered manner.
 'Outside world isn't dirtyfilthy enough, eh, eh? Then what frightful bumbolina, what dash-it-all bugger-boy let

it in here again? Is this a decent residence, by Jove, or a shithouse excuse-my-French in the bazaar?" (9).

In true Menippean manner, one can answer delightedly that, if it is Rushdie, it is probably, strategically, both.

**Chapter Five: I. Allan Sealy's Menippean Strategies of
Form,
From *The Trotter-Nama* to *Red***

[T]he Anglo-Indian remnant....They fantasize about the past. They improvise grand pedigrees. It's like a Raj novel gone wrong.

I. Allan Sealy, *The Trotter-Nama*

History books! We shall know what to do with them then.
Now a chronicle – there's something.

The Trotter-Nama

I. Allan Sealy writes bold Menippean satires which energetically juxtapose a vast array of influences and sources. His satires follow on from the work of Aubrey Menen and G.V. Desani in their thematic focus on philosophical debates, manifestations of the symposium, grotesque bodies, and the exposure of shams and frauds. He is both a contemporary and counterpart of Salman Rushdie in his imaginative contributions to the English-language literature of South Asia. But where Rushdie's contribution is a creatively forceful use of Menippean satire via inventive language to reshape the lines of literary categorizations, Sealy uses Menippean satire's vexing of formal and generic boundaries to reshape assumptions about literary form. Sealy consciously seeks to reshape extant literary forms in novel ways that represent the forward movement of multicultural development.

This chapter makes the original contribution of examining Sealy's body of work as Menippean satire, emphasising his range of experimental use of form. And while Sealy also foregrounds the artistic interests of his characters, he does so in ways that emphasize the creative energies of formal innovation, rather than in parodic juxtaposition that foreground rhetorical content.

Sealy's first work, *The Trotter-Nama* (1988), fits directly into the line of postcolonial satire written with the broad pastiche intrinsic to the Menippean form. The 575-page narrative is a textual mélange, interrupted by lyrics, advertisements, recipes, newspaper headlines, letters, diary entries, exams, poetry, memoirs, dictionary entries, parliamentary edicts, mock panegyrics, spoof essays, biographies, and erudite cultural and historical disquisitions. The sheer range and preponderance of scholarly and pseudo-scholarly material challenges received notions of the novelistic genre; vastly 'different kinds of writing have been juxtaposed to make a tenuous whole' (Milowicki and Wilson 299). In his subsequent works of fiction, Sealy continues to employ Menippean satire to reshape specific literary forms in experimental ways. The subsequent novels, *Hero: A Fable* (1990), *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar* (1998), *The Brainfever Bird: An Illusion* (2001), and *Red: An Abecediar* (2006) incorporate additional elements of counter-realism, reshaping

elements of genre in ways which at times dissolve their very boundaries. *Hero*'s tone is as raucously satiric as that of *Trotter-Nama*, while *Everest* and *Brainfever* are less abrasive. What Mishi Saran has described in *Brainfever* as 'classic Sealy, with characters that flutter at the edge of reality and speak tangential views in unorthodox ways' (53), an apparent suggestion of magic realism, could also be the Menippean characterization in which individuals appear trapped between subjective and objective views, where 'characters variously occupy both sides of [an] opposition', reflecting their 'experience [of] a division of values or a conflict between "worlds" that cannot be resolved rationally' (Milowicki and Wilson 315). With the publication of *Red: An Abecedary*, Sealy returns to more overt satire, and reshapes even more forcefully the very notion of the novel, with chapters focussing on themes and topics introduced by individual letters in the alphabet, the novel cast as 26-part primer.¹ With its mocking and transgressive tone, and entries in the form of narrative prose, lyric poetry, academic digressions, email messages, and occasionally an empty page, *Red* invokes the Menippean satiric form's particular strengths of inclusiveness in

¹ I have listed the full titles for Sealy's works, as they are listed in *Red*. *The Trotter-Nama*, *Hero*, and *The Everest Hotel* were originally published with their compound titles. *The Brainfever Bird* was not, but in the list of works in *Red* it has been changed (the phrase *An Illusion* has been added). Sealy also published a non-fiction work, originally *From Yukon to Yucatán: A Western Journey*. It was then shortened to *From Yukon to Yucatan: A Journey* in the listing of works in *Red*. It may also be worth noting that from *Trotter* to *Brainfever* Sealy published as I. Allan Sealy, and with *Red* he appears as Irwin Allan Sealy, (in large embossed dark red lettering on the back panel of the blazing red cover). For the sake of my discussion it is important to mention the fullest version of the titles, as they appear listed in *Red*, before shortening them for the sake of economy in subsequent references.

bridging diverse cultural sources to build a novel whole. Sealy's work also tends to display Menippean satire's 'use of conspicuous, flagrant and self-conscious digression' (Rose 106) as a way of underscoring 'themes of life's and language's discontinuity and ineffability' (Kirk qtd. in Rose 106), and these digressions also impact the physical structure and narrative progression of each novel. Sealy's Menippean satire presents history as innately hybrid, sprung from mélange, juxtaposition, and fragmentary mixture. To adapt from Milowicki and Wilson, Sealy 'mocks and anatomizes' the very 'idea' of a history by distorting its 'conceptual content' through the 'very physical kaleidoscope' of his postcolonial Menippean texts (307).

Sealy's Magic Realism

Despite a nomination for the Booker Prize for *Everest Hotel*, most of the critical attention Sealy has received has been for his comic epic, *The Trotter-Nama*, the saga of the Anglo-Indian Trotters on their vast estate, San Souci, in Nakhla (Lucknow), India.² The *nama*, or chronicle, spans seven generations. Critics have tendered the view that with its mixture of historical realism and dazzlingly embellished counter-realism, Allan Sealy's *The Trotter-Nama* fits into the trend of extravagant Indian writing marked by magic realism.³ Indeed, *The Trotter-Nama* might

² Or in Sealy's words: 'which the vulgar and rough-tongued call Lakhnau, or One Hundred Thousand Boats' (Trotter 24). *Trotter-Nama* won a Commonwealth Writers' Prize for best first book in 1989.

³ See Mijares and Ganapathy-Dore in particular.

even have precipitated it, had Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* not reached publication first. Sealy completed his final manuscript in 1984 while living in Lucknow, after publication of Rushdie's book, and his pursuit of publication for the manuscript was lengthy. But in his earliest draft he had written a narrative with a 'hero born at midnight at India's Independence' ('Writing A Novel' 30).⁴ As Sealy recounts the path of convergence with Rushdie's novel, one gets a sense of an author both exerting control over his medium, and overwhelmed at the tide of information his medium has to contain:

Then Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* appeared and this bit of magic realism was one of many I had to change – and still some critics saw Rushdie's 'influence'. At first flush here is a case of two writers reading the same popular book (*Freedom at Midnight*) but a little deeper down you see two writers responding to the same historical

⁴ Rushdie includes a villa called Sans Souci in the already-published *Midnight's Children*; it is one of the four built by William Methwold, and the Ibrahims move into it when he decamps at Partition (97; Methwold's tale concludes in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*). Saleem Sinai's parents take an apartment in the nearby Escorial Villa. Rushdie (perhaps) pays back the intertextuality in *Ground*, when his narrator muses on Indian names and fixes on 'Sodawaterbatliopenerwala' (10, sic), while Sealy has already introduced in *Trotter-Nama* a taxidermist whose work is displayed at Sans Souci and he is named Sodawaterbottleopenerwallah (418). Sealy beats Rushdie to the punch in one notable example, quoting in *Trotter-Nama* the same popular song verse from the film *Sri 440* that is much-noted in *Satanic Verses*: 'My shoes they are Japani/ These pants are Englischani/My red hat is Russi/But my heart is Hindustani' (*Trotter* 496; Rushdie's Gibreel translates it fully to English (5)). In Rushdie Chamcha counters the vulgar film song with a pious 18th-century sermon, a Menippean paradigm of the textual contrasts to come. In Sealy the song is sung by hopeful Hindus and Muslims united on a peace march in the early days of Partition, but the lyric 'Hindustani' prompts violence among some Muslims in the march, and a full-scale murderous riot erupts (497). In Sealy, the song satirizes how communal knowledge ('Every Indian knew the song') both unites and disrupts, defining but isolating and alienating communities (496).

moment. They have read the same book, but the book is India. India is doing the ‘thinking’. We do not write but are written. (30)

With its position post-*Midnight’s Children*, even though Sealy was composing contemporaneously, critics have tended to view Sealy as strongly influenced by Rushdie’s styles and modes. So overall it is not surprising when Loretta Mijares reads *The Trotter-Nama* as a ‘revision of *Midnight’s Children*’ (‘Fetishism’ 8), or Glenn D’Cruz assesses Sealy in the context of Rushdie and finds these strong echoes: ‘In addition to the customary eclectic intertexts, linguistic exuberance and magical realism, Sealy’s sprawling chronicle of the Trotter family certainly displays a Rushdie-like predilection for problematizing the truth-claims of official historiography’ (114).⁵ But the Anglo-Indian Sealy presents in his novel a community often wholly excluded from official records and denied legal standing, so his apparent task is the truly ambitious one of creation and inscription, of undermining authority in a manner which somewhat exceeds the idea of problematizing. The Menippean interjection of ‘formal’ texts – ‘A note on the crocodile of Hindoostan’, ‘How the gypsonometer is made’, ‘A meditation on Indo-Greek sculpture’ – lends a certain weight to the history he is articulating. The parodic structures and tones, the Menippean counter-narratives, then undermine the very notion of a centralised authority. Sealy

⁵ The use of ‘customary’ beings to mind Louis Menand’s Chapter 1 comment on magic realism as seeming rote or ubiquitous in world literature.

incorporates a series of detailed excerpts from historic and counterfeit Anglo-Indian sources; the fictional ones include ‘Extract from *The Military Memoirs of General Mik Trotter*’, ‘Extract from *Gipsy General: the Life and Adventures of Michael Trotter, Irregular Soldier*’, ‘Extract from *My Path to the Victoria Cross*, by Thomas Henry Trotter’. In these excerpts fictional characters achieve glorified roles in the fraught history of British India. In the historical references, Sealy veils already marginalised Anglo-Indian individuals who inhabit history’s outskirts: Loretta Mijares has identified the French businessman Claude Martin and the biracial military officer James Skinner from the 18th century; Parliamentary petitioner John Ricketts and poet Henry Derozio from the 19th century; and 20th century authors Cedric Dover and Herbert Stark (‘Fetishism’ 10).

Readings of *The Trotter-Nama* which characterize it in the counter-realist manner of magic realism, post-realism, or anti-realism have also accounted for Sealy’s perceived stylistic choices by pointing to his sprawling subject matter: the sheer challenge of containing a vast narrative of seven generations of this voluble Anglo-Indian family. Judith Plotz admires *The Trotter-Nama* as ‘a form of performative nation building’, and notes that since that nation is India, the task demands a high degree of ornateness and elaboration (29). For Plotz, *The Trotter-Nama* is an amalgam of irony, parody, and inventiveness

which is ‘extravagant, exigent, and hybrid’ (29). The challenge for Sealy’s text then is to capture ‘an India that is simultaneously empty (because unshapeable), replete (because chaotic), and threatening (because uncontrolled, unfixed, multiple)’, a nation of multiplicity which defies ‘unitary metaphors’ and ‘single narratives’ (Plotz 32). For Plotz the anti-realist elements are part of an imaginative projection towards an unknown, perhaps illusory future. But anti-realist elements also encapsulate longstanding Indian literary traditions, as Prema Nandakumar points out, since ‘[t]he judicious mingling of realist fiction and fizzy fantasy by Indian authors is as old as the *Panchtantra*’ (145), the 5th-century collection of fables in Sanskrit. For Rukmini Bhaya Nair the text’s major imaginative counter-realist element is a referential intertextuality directed towards Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* and Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gora* (162). These are texts, she states, ‘that insist on talking to each other, with or without the cooperation of their authors’ (162), which prompts Nair to sums up *Trotter* as ‘rumbustious[ly] post-*Kim*’ (160). Nair locates the tension in Sealy’s text at the juncture of its playfulness and its serious interest in effecting ‘history’ for Sealy ‘uses every trick in the book of the nineties – bricolage, parody, pastiche, oodles of serious historical research – on his quest for the lost tribe of the “Anglo-Indians”’ (179). But the sincerity of need for actual historical recognition counters the play; Nair finds that ‘[h]ere *The Trotter-Nama* ceases to be a huge

intertextual spoof and becomes a record of the collective anguish that must interest subalternist historiographers' (180). Nair concludes that Sealy's work 'succeeds better than many fictions in rendering the blind spots, the lacunae in the colonial annals' (181). Loretta M. Mijares echoes this focus on the culture of anguish, defining the narrative trajectory of the *Trotter-Nama* as specifically anti-realist because she sees it as opposing an extant 'long-lived realist tradition of the tragic Eurasian' (7). Sealy's work is thus 'the first major attempt to re-imagine the history of Anglo-Indians outside the conventions of tragic realism' (7), using elements of anti-realism to recast an adverse past.

Chelva Kanganayakan seems to be the sole critic to see the colligatory relationship of Sealy's methods and his aims, describing them in her study of counter-realism in ways which resonate with Menippean satire, although she does not use the term. She identifies Sealy's goal as establishing a 'history of Anglo-Indians who are all too easily labelled, like the Burghers in Sri Lanka, as pseudo-British and dismissed as insignificant. That their story is equally valid and representative is confirmed by contemporary writing' (185). Thus Sealy's text displays a strategy of subversion, wherein '[c]onsciousness about the limitations of linearity coexists with the desire to record the history of those whose roles have been sidelined by political or cultural circumstance. Hence the experiment, the self-mockery,

the constant punning, and wordplay' (185). Her argument is that Sealy's 'narrative would sacrifice the seamlessness in favour of a ruggedness that insists on its provisionality' (185). It is not a huge leap to point towards the unruly, boundary-unsettling and self-conscious qualities of Menippean satire as analogous to the forging of Anglo-Indian history itself, and played out in a mode of writing that strives to exhibit inclusiveness as it simultaneously tests and undermines. As Mijares has noted, '[i]n the parodic writing of the genealogy of the Trotters, *The Trotter-Nama* can rebuke literature and supplement and challenge history, and in so doing reveal the silences and injustices of both' (19).

Reading Sealy's Satire

Reading Sealy's work as Menippean satire provides a wholly more adequate way to appreciate and access his texts. Sealy's texts reverberate with Menippean characteristics, but these have remained largely unidentified. Judith Plotz's careful observation regarding narratorial stance in *The Trotter-Nama* is actually a description of Menippean form:

[i]n documenting the history of the archetypal Anglo-Indian family, the Trotters, Eugene draws on every kind of historical document and historical genre only to parody it: notes on natural history, notes on trade and manufacturing,...diaries, memoirs, extracts from radio

programs, definitions of foreign terms for the English-speaking reader.... (43-4)

Sealy's texts utilize the broadest range of Menippean motifs and structures. He exploits Menippean satire's undermining of generic boundaries and he creates deliberate but artful hybrids via intertext, cross-cultural references, and the expansive vision of the encyclopaedic. Once his formal strategies are identified, the subversiveness of his texts becomes more apparent. Sealy's narrators in *Trotter* and *Red* bring a brightly modern sensibility to the text, in their zeal for technology, and the appreciation of modernist literature (*Trotter*) and modern art (*Red*). But Sealy is also spanning and unsettling differing traditions in the fragments he enshrines, and satirizing assumptions about inherent literary significance, the way advancement implies improvement, and the investment of cultural authority. There is a significant aside by Eugene Trotter in *Trotter-Nama* when Independence is approaching and the Anglo-Indian community is beginning to disperse overseas. He records that they unearth their 'steel trunks' from storage with 'a plangent booming (484). Then he makes a textual digression:

In which I introduce literary echoes

I wish to introduce literary echoes. For a long time I have wished to introduce literary echoes. I have yearned and yearned to introduce literary echoes, but have held back for fear of ridicule or misunderstanding.

Now I have found courage, but I will do it quickly and
limit myself to three. They follow:

DA!

DA!

DA!

—*The Waste-Land*

BOUM

BOU-OUM

OU-BOUM

—*A Passage to India*

SUNYA !

-NYA !

-NYA !

—*The Titar-Nama*⁶

This is what I wished to do. Now it is done and
my heart is eased. The echoes swell my chronicle and
immensely increase its prestige. Praise Him. Praise Him.
Praise Him.

(CHRONICLE RESUMED)

(484)

To the plangent reverberations of imminent diaspora Sealy pairs iconic texts pared to mere phonemes, and his narratorial voice shifts for this digression to a mock-modernist register. And he then inserts these distilled syllables throughout the remaining text, a chorus which reminds the reader that all ‘great’ literature can be thus reduced to sounds and ostensibly meaningless

⁶ The *Titar-Nama* is not included in Eugene’s list of extant namas: The *Akbar-Nama* in tribute to the great Mughal, the *Shah-Nama* in praise of Persian Kings, the *Babar-Nama* of the first Mughal, the *Sikandar-Nama* of Alexander the Great, the *Ni’mat-Nama* of medieval recipes, and ‘the *Tota-Nama*, the Book of the Parrot, a Hindu epic told by a talking bird that goes on and on’ (7). The term, ‘Sunya’, comes from the Vedic numbering system’s concept of zero; see A.K. Bag and S.R. Sarma, eds., *The Concept of Sunya*, New Delhi: Aryan Books, 2003.

syllables. This deflation is arguably rather counter to Rushdie's florid expansionist take on language. In Eugene's final scene, Reuben Trotter, who has treacherously sold off Sans Souci, is smote by a thunderbolt, to the sound effect of an Eliot-Forster 'DA! – boum!' (562). In Reuben's place there is now a bottomless hole, and the smooth sides make a 'NYA NYA' sound if rapped upon (562). Sealy's hybrid texts have roots as much in the Western canon and its satiric tradition, as in the varied multicultural literary traditions that form the foundations of modern Indian literature, even as his satiric juxtapositions model reductions and obliterations of influences.

Sealy and Genre

Sealy's comments regarding his work affirm the notion that he works in pastiche and magic realism. Om P. Juneja has commented that Sealy is 'participating in an ancient Indian tradition of re-writing the epics' (18). Sealy affirms this perspective on returning to and re-writing epics, but in a more general sense, when he articulates his own view of the status of his novels as re-shapers of a wider range of literary models: 'There are countless indigenous forms that can be revived and intelligently reworked. For my first novel – it needed to be a chronicle – I chanced on the *nama* form; for the second, *Hero* – it needed to be a masque – I turned to the less hallowed Indian

form, the *masala* movie' ('Writing A Novel' 29).⁷ Hence the pattern of subtitles: a fable, a calendar, a journey, an illusion, and *Red* has at times been listed as *An Alphabet* as well as *An Abecedary*. The predilection for subtitles underscores Sealy's tendency to reformulate genres as much as reference them. It points to the perceived inadequacies of generic categories, to a sense of genre expectations as something to regard playfully, in keeping with Milowicki and Wilson's persuasive observation that to those of a poststructuralist inclination, 'a genre is something invented, an artefact produced by routine reading habits' (298). Sealy's use of the Menippean as an overarching strategy means he subverts and parodies form in all of his narratives, in busy counter-realistic satirical play that admittedly can sometimes distract from underlying narratorial aims.

The resultant overload is an apparent factor in Jose Borghino's description of *The Everest Hotel* from a single review. Borghino's attempt to catalogue the clashing structures of the novel echoes the variety of forms which critics once drew upon to list attributes of Desani's *Hatterr*: 'a gorgeous sprawling tangle of a book', 'a postcolonial social commentary', 'a

⁷ Sealy has a tendency to mention his targeted 'indigenous forms' for planned future works before they necessarily come to fruition. In this same essay he reveals that: 'For my new book I found a model in 17th Century Japan' (29). This would have been the early stages of *The Everest Hotel*, which is grounded firmly in Indian literary roots. One critic registered gratitude that the compelling narrative of *Red* had distracted Sealy from a previous project, gleefully announced as based on the form of a 'gazetteer of the Sivaliks' [sic]. There is a long footnote in *Red* explaining the history of snake-worship in 'the Shivalik hills above Rishikesh' and its depictions in scrolls, cave paintings, and popular urban murals (200-1).

melodrama of blighted love', 'a thriller', 'a political novel about the dangers of unbridled development' (9). Sealy's novel also veers between 'two independent narrative strains' according to Ramlal Agarwal, each propelled by different classical Indian sources used to structure the book (738). In his 'Afterword' Sealy notes that he follows Kalidasa's ancient *Ritusamhara (The Garland of Seasons)* for the division of his 'calendar' by seasons, but uses 'the old *baramasih* (twelvemonth) tradition of folksong, where the lamenting voice is always that of a woman' for his story of thwarted love (333). For Agarwal the strains clash fiercely, leading to a confusing, overloaded text. But this noticeable degree of textual oppositionalities and conflicts return us to Menippean satire. Contrast is everywhere in the *Hotel*. The narrative pits garrulous individuals against the silent nuns and a mute child. Tibetan Catholics live with strict Hindus; there are able bodies and the grossly disabled; grandiose gestures overshadow genuine unsung heroics; the dead apparently visit the living. A character who refuses to die is writing a local version of *The Book of The Dead*. After a discursive passage comes a terse reading list. *The Everest Hotel* offers a version of the cultural hybridity of India in microcosm, and in the clash of cultures and represented texts satirizes the very notion of the unitary view. The resistance to category also points to discursive defiance of genre classification, coincident with textual playfulness with form.

If at times Sealy's prose experiments demonstrate an edging towards the anarchic he tends to resolve this by defining new novelistic borders. *Trotter-Nama*, for instance, presents a huge challenge in terms of achieving closure, but Sealy manages it by Menippean strategies of reduction and slowing down symbolic time. (In *Trotter*-esque fashion, it will take a bit of chronicling to elucidate these strategies.) The text begins with a reference to Indian art: 'A good miniature is a sugarplum', Eugene confides to the stranger in the next airplane seat on his return flight to India; the stranger is travelling to a wedding (3).⁸ We then learn in this monologue that Eugene is a forger of miniatures, and Eugene suggests giving his manuscript to the stranger to read. At the close of the central 'Chronicle' section, Eugene is on an initial flight away from India, filching jam from a neighbour's food tray (more sugarplums), and watching the 'earth of India flatten and fall away into a miniature painting bordered with blue and indigo and dusted with gold' (559). The ironic motif of (forged) miniatures in a massive mock-epic is hard to miss.⁹ In the 'Nama' epilogue, a monologue which concludes the entire

⁸ This is in the Prologue, entitled 'Trotter' (pp 1-10). The actual Chronicle of the Trotters, apparently Eugene's manuscript, unfolds in the second section, 'Trotter-Nama' (11-563). Eugene returns in the Epilogue, 'Nama' (563-575).

⁹ There is a miniature on the cover of *Trotter-Nama* that manages to incorporate the entire narrative: Sans Souci, all the main characters, couriers, servants, indigo vats, mango trees, river, and town. The origin of the 'Jacket Painting' is presented as similar to the ones the text gives for Eugene's forgeries: '*Fall of the Great Trotter* by an unknown artist of the Kirani School, circa 1800. Coll. I. Allan Sealy'. 'Kirani' is a version of 'cranny', a pejorative word for Anglo-Indians, which Sealy parodies throughout the text. He identifies himself as the artist of the miniature in a statement in the introductory chapter of *Hero* (14).

text, Eugene encounters the stranger from the ‘Trotter’ prologue again; the wedding guest has apparently missed the wedding, because he was raptly reading the *Trotter* manuscript, but he has lost it. Eugene is unruffled:

So. Reading what? What bloody chronicle-fonicle?

Trotter-Nama? Oh that.

Liked it? So what you did with it? Lost it? Which storm – oh that. Ya we had it here too – worse even.

So it's all gone, hé? Never mind. Bit late inventing the paperweight, hé? Not that it matters now. (565)

The silent stranger who has read the absorbing manuscript apparently stands in for the reader who has just completed Sealy’s vast novel. But Sealy embeds in the final monologue a paradoxically reinterpreting, reality-challenging revelation that the *Trotter-Nama* manuscript was an apparent sham, as artificial as Eugene’s counterfeit miniatures:

Tell you the truth I made up the whole line—I mean joining up all those Trotters like that. Funny bloody story, more holes than a cheese in it. In fact, there's a hole right in the middle. You remember the Middle Trotter? Well he wasn't even an Anglo like I thought, I mean one of us. Some people said he was, so I used him, but afterwards I looked it up. British. So what to do? Change the whole bloody story? No thanks. All finished anyway. (572)

Eugene invites the stranger for a drink and takes him on a tour of his favourite Lucknow locales before taking him home for tea.

We learn that Eugene rents rooms from a woman and her daughter who provide cakes for weddings. Eugene's confession of fakery has thrown the veracity of the entire narrative into question, and to that uncertainty he adds a reference to his four current girlfriends, each of whom resembles exactly one of the Great Trotter's four wives, the supposed core of the (perhaps fictional) Anglo Trotter clan. But then a wedding begins; a band arrives, then a photographer, and the daughter is wearing a wedding veil. Eugene is under the impression that the absent groom is 'a bird-catcher' (574). But if one applies Geetha Gunapathy-Dore's perceptive comment that '[i]f Joyce is remembered for his interior monologues, Sealy will be remembered for his narrative arabesque formed by a postmodern appropriation of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam's figures of time (bird) and life (drink)' (75), then Eugene is the 'birdcatcher', snared in matrimony, and narrative time is trapped, at least till the end of the novel. But future Anglo-Indian history will perhaps flow anew in the forthcoming issue of Eugene's impending union. It is a scene of festivity and implied fertility (wedding), exuberant trickery (a faked narrative? an unwitting groom?), and inclusivity (reader as wedding guest), and therefore pure Carnival. 'The inconclusive present begins to feel closer to the future than to the past' Bakhtin writes of Menippean attitudes

towards closure (*Dialogic* 26), echoing the way textual mockeries have repositioned the text with regard to tradition and resolution.

Chelva Kanaganayakam is the sole critic to date to outline how the topic and focus of *Trotter* may be read as a progression from that of Desani: ‘While Desani’s novel is about a representative individual, Sealy’s novel [*Trotter*] is about a whole community. But both are concerned with the predicament of Anglo-Indians, and Sealy’s ambitious work is as self-conscious, parodic, and digressive as *Hatterr*’ (192). Sealy has also acknowledged being aware of the tradition of Desani, specifically when he began the manuscript of *Trotter* in the late 1970s and sensed he needed to connect to tradition while forging his own, idiosyncratic path:

At the time the only Indian models were the gray trinity of R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand – and the maverick G.V. Desani. I thought only *The Serpent and the Rope* worthy of consideration (I had not yet read *The English Teacher*) and Mr Hatterr’s zany discourses.

The trouble was Rao was too solemn and Hatterr too mad. Not too mad for my liking; too mad for my purposes, the writing of a certain sort of serious history, an Anglo-Indian comic epic in prose. (And Hatterr was about as Anglo-Indian as my *lungi*.) (“Writing A Novel”

Although Sealy does not mention satire or the *menippea*, he registers that his writing takes on ‘indigenous forms that can be revived and intelligently reworked’ (‘Writing’ 29). The motivation Sealy explains for this attention to reworking tends to sound like Highet’s mix and Rushdie’s newness. Sealy describes how: ‘One returns to old forms not for solace...but for the friction they generate in new circumstances. Out of that conflict comes something new, a kind of energy – and that is the extent of any country’s gift to the world civilization now rising’ (29-30).

But Sealy is not aiming to write a piece of successful *world* literature; his stated aim in searching for apt form was so he could fit his work specifically into an evolving English literary culture in India; he ‘needed to discover a form that belonged here’ (‘Writing’ 29). Sealy’s satire sets in motion an expansive and complicated (pseudo) history, but it is not provisional; his choices about genre focus strategically on undermining assumptions about race, nationality, allegiances, and identity. By examining some of the conventional topoi of Menippean satire it becomes evident that Sealy embeds a postcolonial focus through Menippean means.

Satirical Topics in Sealy’s Work

Sealy uses specific thematic conventions of Menippean satire to address these broad issues of identity. This section will examine how these topics emerge in *Trotter-Nama*, in recognition of the magnitude of the work and the paucity of critical readings it has received in this context. My examination of the text looks at how Sealy uses Menippean motifs of food and feast, and the grotesque and mutilated body, to establish debate on colonialism and postcolonial identity politics.

The Trotter-Nama could be read as a modern Anglo-Indian Symposium, so dominant is the mixture of ingestion and discourse throughout. The chronicler of the Trotter clan is Eugene Aloysius Trotter, Seventh Trotter, and his initials follow his frequent addenda and footnotes to the text: E.A.T. He is both authoritative and unstable, driven by a need to record and an urge to embellish and indulge. The chronicle contains over a dozen commanding interruptions for food-related material: on mangoes; on curry powder; on the making of ice cream; a ‘thesis’ on the dessert *gulab jamuns* (made with flour, *ghi*, sugar syrup, and rosewater); instructions for proper *ghi*. But foods hold sway over both text and individual characters. An Anglo-Indian character grows fat while cooking both European and Indian sweets compulsively, because ‘the milk and honey of two continents flowed in her veins’ (314). Justin Aloysius Trotter is the Great and First Trotter, born Trottoire to a French Catholic

father and Egyptian Coptic mother, and founder of the Anglo Indian clan through his four wives. He is described as becoming more Indian as, once settled in Sans Souci, he ingests a wider range of Indian dishes, which Sealy presents, characteristically, as a vast inventory:

as his appetite for curries deepened, his tastes widened to take in mint chutneys, cauliflower pickles, cucumber salads, green mango achars, tomato kasaundis, lotus-root, tamarind, pepper-water, pastes, purees, preserves, curds, raitas, and a thousand accompaniments of rich and satisfying food. (127)

While the Great Trotter absorbs culture through food, the narrator of Eugene's manuscript imbibes constantly, assisted by his Cup-Bearer, who comments bluntly and condescendingly on the work-in-progress. The 'Narrator and Cup-Bearer' device grounds the text immediately in both Western and Eastern traditions. The duo calls up the myth of Hebe, devoted cupbearer to the Grecian Gods, and also the loyal retinue of the Biblical King Solomon which helped to dazzle the Queen of Sheba. Sealy's trenchant servant is a bit closer to the version which sometimes arises in the Persian poetry of Rumi,¹⁰ where the cupbearer is at times of intoxication the trusted confidant:

The cupbearer brought me the bill.

¹⁰ According to Ibrahim Gamard, Rumi scholar and translator, 'the cupbearer [saqî], literally "water-carrier" or "water server", is a frequent term in Persian literature. It means the dispenser of pure water, or wine, which are symbols of spiritual blessings in *sufi* poetry. *Masnavi*, <<<http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org/about-dar-al-masnavi.html>>>.

I said: Here, take the turban from my head.

No, no, take my whole head, but right now

Help me sober up just a little (Rumi, D 1679 *Man agar* ll.

19-22)

Sealy skewers this particular master-servant convention and any incipient spirituality it may represent in Persian tradition with caustic verbal repartee between his two players.

Excuse me, Narrator. But could we have a little less speculation and a little more story?

Impertinent Cup-Bearer! Could I have a little more patience? And a little more of that Mexican blend [liqueur]. In a little while you shall have more story than you could wish for.

I take it on faith, Narrator. (Trotter 35)

The Narrator imbibes his way through Japanese rice wine (39), mead from Germany (184), cloudberry liquer from Quebec (190), ‘water-white’ maraschino from Dalmatia (227), Lichi cordial (241), an Irish coffee (308), eau-de-vie of raisins (479), wormwood (490), and Rooh-Afza headache remedy (501), ending with the remaining bottle, a dark, satisfying Mexican *Kahlua* (547). He drinks in the entire world, and evokes again Khayyam’s metaphorical relationship of ‘drink’ to ‘life’. The inebriated narrator may be increasingly less reliable, or more willing to delve into untoward details of his subjects; his servant always defers in the interests of hearing more of the story.

Eugene Trotter is also introduced in the context of his gargantuan appetites. He initially appears ordering a second meal aboard a flight for the empty seat between him and his audience/fellow traveller, the wedding guest heading to India. Eugene politely introduces himself to his airline seat-mate as ‘Lenten Trotter...corpu-lent, flatu-lent, indo-lent’ (3), apparently driven by keen hungers, at all times both garrulous and insatiable.¹¹

The text is formally encyclopaedic with regard to food, managing a feast of references in its character sketches, footnotes, asides, and quoted and juxtaposed texts. Various versions of an actual symposium also appear, the most full-blown taking place on Christmas day amongst the three middle-most generations of Trotters: Thomas Henry, Middle Trotter; his daughter, Victoria; her husband, Theobald Horatius Montague; their son, Peter Augustine, Fifth Trotter, and their seven other children. The entire section, ‘Table Talk’, is written as dialogue from unidentified sources, a clash of voices at table, a verbal cacophony and microcosm of the mélange of British-Indian tradition as the family says grace and eats *biryani* (422-27). ‘We’re not English’ someone asserts. ‘What are we?’ someone else at table fires back (424).

¹¹ Eugene’s punning comment on the ‘indo-lent’ is ‘I’m half *Anglo*, you know’ (3).

Sealy arguably deals with this question throughout the text, and certainly in his exaggerations to do with the body. Rebellious bodies in the *Trotter-Nama* swell and shrink, turn colour and transform. Instead of the trope of magic realism wherein grotesquery challenges nature by suggesting that the supernatural is palpable, Sealy's tactics are wholly Menippean. He tests truths and assumptions about physical differences and racial boundaries by 'the translation of the conceptual into bodily terms' (Milowicki and Wilson 320), reinforcing Sherbert's emphatic conclusion that the most distinguishing element of Menippean satire is 'its mixture of satire and philosophy' (32). Rather than reifying the supernatural, Sealy follows the path Northrop Frye describes of satire's demystification and demolition of the means of oppression, an attack on 'the lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs, superstitious terrors, crank theories, pedantic dogmatisms, oppressive fashions' (233). Sealy's bodily exaggerations and monstrosities centre on the oppressive nature of racial assumptions and the politics of colonial and neo-colonial identity.

The grotesqueries and transformations start at the indigo baths which produce huge income for the estate. They also generate a motif of transferring satire to the body, physicalising the supposedly immutable imprints of race, caste, and identity. The Great Trotter's defiant son, Mik (Kim spelled backwards), has

been frolicking at nighttimes in the indigo vats with the 12 daughters of the Greek sculptor who has been ornamenting the estate. To the consternation of Justin, Mik's blue colouring won't wash off. 'Do something,' Justin pleads with Mik's Tibetan tutor, 'If he grows any darker he will be invisible' (154). In the face of Justin's increasing tyranny, Mik runs away, shepherded by his Tibetan mentor, while Justin tortures from his official floor-polisher-and-night-watchman the secret ingredient which has made the dye so permanent: 'I piss in the tanks' he confesses, and immediately 'every able-bodied male in Sans Souci' is awarded an extra daily task, which ensures the profitability of Trotter's renowned and enduring indigo dye (155). It is only later that he remembers his missing son, but then the problem and embarrassment of how to advertise a lost blue boy prevents him from action.¹²

Mik's discolouration serves as a metaphor for the uncategorisable status of the mixed-race individual in India at that time (roughly the 1760s-90s at this stage of Sealy's narrative), and subsequently. Mik/Kim will go on to demonstrate military valour, and also the key attributes that would render him a spy

¹² In his dark blueness Mik also conjured Krishna, sprung from the black hair of Vishnu and often represented in sacred images as blue or blue-black. Like Krishna, the god of fire, the young Mik plays with pyrotechnics and manages to blow up a building at Sans Souci. Later he aids the Tibetan in his 'Little Game' (172) of non-lethal fires which torch various urban public offices of the East India Company all over India, and he is given the status of Fireworker when he completes his cadet course at the Military Academy. Krishna-like, he also has no difficulty summoning shepherd girls (like the sculptor's daughters) for nighttime frolics.

nonpareil in the service of the British: linguistic versatility; an extraordinary photographic memory for details, blueprints, and layouts; an aptitude for ‘covert activities’; and ‘the irrefrangible necessity of a khaki skin for British military espionage in India’, the blue tint having faded by his young adulthood (201). But after training at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich, Mik’s prospects are shattered by an edict issued by the Directors of the East India Company in 1791 that bars any ‘son of a Native Indian’ from ‘employment in the Civil, Military or Marine services of the Company’ (201). The Company relents in his case and Mik ships to India, but a subsequent edict from the Governor-General of Calcutta blocks him again.

No person the son of an European by a Native mother shall serve in the Company’s army as an officer. Such persons may be admitted as fifers, drummers, or farriers...

(April the 21st, 1795)....

Unable to drum or fife, and with only a foggy notion of the farrier’s art, Mik submitted to the latest whim of fate with a curl of the lip. He saluted the commandant, turned in his uniform, and took a tonga to the city. (202)

The question of ‘And what is Mik?’ hangs in the air. Once in the city he discovers a wave of likewise discharged but highly trained, mixed-race soldiers, who *en masse* secure work serving the independent Indian princes, a twist on the mercenary work of

his father for the colonial powers (203). Eventually he will face his father on the opposing side when the Marathas battle their neighbours in Hyderabad, and then begin ‘sporadic attacks’ on the East India Company’s lands in Madras; the British call in the aging military star, Justin Trotter, as part of their reinforcements (220). The Governor-General of Calcutta issues another edict, this time one that encapsulates the irony of Mik’s situation of race-based oppression: any Anglo-Indian former (summarily discharged) officer will be deemed a traitor if found fighting for the opposing side (223). Such injustices, borne out in references to historical documents, are compounded in Sealy’s later account of WWI, when ‘[a]ll over India [Trotter] relatives were enlisting in thousands....Eight out of ten Anglo-Indian men of fighting age...marched with jerky steps...onto the troop ships’ (431). Only when they are casualties is their identity status clarified: ‘in the moment of their death [they] were transformed into Britons. Their records and posthumous awards stated, concisely, “Born in India”’ (432). The mix of references and inversions of *Kim* establish an experimental counter-discourse, then, stemming from parodic conditions such as Kim’s lama being in the employ of the Russians, and thus wishing to sabotage various British outposts. Sealy establishes a sense of homage to Kipling’s established literary influence in the realm of subsequent writing on postcolonialism and race,¹³ while continuing his pattern of

¹³ See Bart Moore-Gilbert’s excellent “‘I am going to rewrite Kipling’s *Kim*’:

satirical demolitions. It is Sealy's underlying sense of outrage that obtains. The Trotters' inchoate status reverberates from the earlier slur chalked on the door of the dark-skinned Fonseca-Trotter: the word UNFAIR (210). A 'devotee' of Alexander Pope, Fonseca insists that the punning, unkind graffiti be left alone (210).

Uncanny physical things continue to occur in the text, mainly around the births and deaths that mark the boundaries of the Anglo-Indian community. Phillipa, the wife of Thomas Henry, Middle Trotter, swells the population of Anglo-Indians, giving birth to a succession of twins with bizarre regularity, at least nine sets according to the Family Tree. Each is named Victor, one black and one white in each pair, and '[o]nce she even fell pregnant while Thomas Henry was away, simply by thinking of England' (360). After Justin dies (and disappears) falling from a balloon ride over Sans Souci, his third wife, Elise, Jarman Begam (she is his *German* wife) marries Yakub Khan, Justin's ambitious staff baker, creator of sweet breads and ruthless plans. Khan is later found dead engulfed in a seething swarm of bees, while Elise simultaneously disappears in the kitchens, leaving behind a 'long narrow puddle of water that...refused to evaporate', with her soaking black burqa atop it (289). The

Kipling and Postcolonialism', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 37.2 (2002), 39–58. With characteristic insight Moore-Gilbert elucidates how Sealy's treatment of *Kim* enacts appreciation of Kipling while subverting key elements of his iconic text.

husband's remains are swathed in black, while the wife's remains (freed from *purdah*) stubbornly refuse to disappear.

In *The Trotter-Nama* events and descriptions undermine a sense of continuous or unified identity for the Anglo-Indian community, even as Eugene strives to present it as a whole and integrated history. The repeated theme of near self-castrations is a pointed example of an abruptly breached expectation of continuity and wholeness for the community. First Justin Trotter attempts self-mutilation at age 14, when his step-mother's singing lessons and encouragement inspire him to do 'a strange thing. In a desperate bid to join a travelling company of Florentine castrati, he severely wounds but does not permanently damage himself. Humiliated by his failure, he waits only for the wound to heal before enlisting in the French force bound for Quebec' (114). Subsequently the teen Eugene, also a hopeful singer, listens to the advice of his 41-year-old lover, Soma, an Alexander-Trotter from the line of the Jarman Begum and Yakub Khan:

'There is a way of keeping your soprano if you really want to. But you'll have to choose between your voice and me.' She whispered the medieval Italian remedy in his ear. Eugene already knew, and had chosen: he loved his voice. He would do what had to be done. (512)

But nerves and the obfuscating dark prohibit his success, and he awakens in hospital.

Before leaving, Soma bent and whispered affectionately in his ear: ‘It’s not all – you know – gone, the doctor said. And anyway, *you* could afford –’

The nurse drew the curtain. Left alone, Eugene tried his voice, but it was neither one thing nor the other, and he saw that he would always linger in between.

(512).

There is an obvious connection to the near-castration scene in Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, and also to some of the themes which Catherine Pesso-Miquel has examined in the context of *Tristram* and Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, wherein effeminacy and bastardy are read as metaphors for hybrid identity.¹⁴ In the context of Sealy’s text, the metaphor examines the role of narrative completeness, as the characters choose to attempt self-mutilation, loss of virility and potency, in order to maintain *voice*, the means to convey artistic material and message. They would opt for the specific hybridity that is the castrated male if it leaves their means of creation, rather than procreation, intact. For Justin, the episode launches his career towards his future as founder of a hybrid dynasty in India. In Eugene’s case, the attempt merely serves to enforce his hybrid

¹⁴ See Catherine Pesso-Miquel, ‘Clock-ridden Births: Creative Bastardy in Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* and Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*’. *Postmodern Studies: Refracting the Canon in Contemporary British Literature and Film* (36). 17-52.

state. He is subject to the variable nature of race-based identity in the context of colonial and independent India. As an Anglo-Indian he is a focus of mistrust and racism by both Indians and British. Abroad his status is also in question, if his mother's experience in England is anything to go by:

A few days after she arrived in England, [Queenie] had found herself turning brown. In fact, the whole process had started in the aeroplane when she went to powder her nose about half-way between Delhi and London. Now she was dark enough that one Sunday when she thought she'd worship in another suburb the verger has said kindly, meaning to clarify, "This is an Anglican church." In short, Queenie was ready to come back home again. She suspected the process would start all over again in reverse until she once again stuck out in India, but what was one to do? There was no ideal solution short of becoming an air-hostess, and it was too late for that. Even they didn't remain forever suspended in the air over Constantinople. (554)

If food and bodies represent cultural intake and communal boundaries, they merge in the way the actual intake of hybrid foodstuffs literally moulds the building of Sans Souci, (literally 'care-free'). The Trotter estate grows under the guidance of

Justin, the Great Trotter, who is given the land west of Nakhlau
as reward for military service to the Nawab.

As Sans Souci took shape around him, Justin grew in to
his château, filling out with gusto, his every surface
advancing symbiotically with his house, a dome
appearing there, a belly here; there a turret, here a fold;
here a palpitating buttock, there a gibbous barbican. (127)

The physical home of the Trotters apparently emerges from Justin's absorption and consumption of his milieu. Using just the hand-drawn maps at the front of Sealy's text, one may pinpoint its exact location today according to a contemporary map of Lucknow. Sans Souci is situated at La Martinière, a vast estate built by General Claude Martin (1735-1800) of the East India Company's army in the late 18th century. A Frenchman like Justin Trotter (1719-1799), he arrived in India in the 1750s as a soldier and later amassed a fortune serving the local Nawab, settling with numerous wives and mistresses although he begot no heirs. An historical rumour has it that the estate was originally named Constantia after a girl Martin left behind in France, but the Martin crest also reads 'Labore et Constantia (Toil and Fidelity)', surely a Trotteresque logo. Martin may have built it to remember a lost love, but it was also his own intended resting place. 'La Martinière was a tomb that became a palace', a

Lucknow historian has commented,¹⁵ while Sealy's Sans Souci is a palace where eventually the bodies of many generations of Trotters reside, some in formal and marked sites, and some unknown. La Martinière is also the model for Rudyard Kipling's St. Xavier's school in *Kim*, the boys' school where the young Kim spends some unenthusiastic time, a feature that becomes significant in terms of the ways Sealy's work rewrites that iconic text.¹⁶

Menippean Strategies to Challenge Form

It is already established that Sealy exploits the Menippean strategies of parodic textual juxtapositions and bold metafiction.¹⁷ In another context these might be seen as purely postmodern strategies, the clever stripping away of artifice, but each has a postcolonial inflection in Sealy's work, and each is

¹⁵ Llewellyn-Jones, Rosie. 'La Martinière .' *Taj Magazine*, June 2001. 10 June 2007. <<http://www.tasleemlucknow.com/laMartiniere_boys.htm>>. For images of La Martinière through the ages, reproduced from numerous forms, see <<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/Pritchett/00routesdata/1700_1799/claudemartin.htm>>. The collected images include an engraving from the *European Magazine*, London, c.1790; a 1794 engraving of Martin where the resemblance to Sealy's descriptions of Justin Trotter is pronounced; a watercolour of the house by Indian painter Seeta Ram, 1814-15; an albumen print by Samuel Bourne from the 1860s; and a photograph taken in the late 19th century.

¹⁶ As per Martin's wishes, the estate became a boys' school after his death, today known as La Martinière College, a private secondary school. By leaving instructions to have himself (a Christian) interred beneath the house, Martin insured that the local Nawab, as a Muslim, would not try to obtain ownership of the property. When the will was disbursed in 1840 three boys' schools were established, in Lucknow, Calcutta, and at Martin's birthplace in Lyon. Each is today called La Martinière. The 1950 MGM film version of *Kim*, starring Errol Flynn, with Dean Stockwell as Kim, was partly filmed at La Martinière. Not insignificantly, Allan Sealy is himself an alumnus of La Martinière.

¹⁷ I am relying heavily on William Gass's definition of metafiction, as specifically writing about writing itself, especially concerned with how meaning occurs or fails, and wherein parody extends to interpolations on the very act of writing. See William Gass, 'Philosophy and the Form of Fiction', *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, NY: Knopf, 1970, 25.

connected to how he undermines notions of form. This section will examine the use of Menippean strategies which constitute Sealy's experiments with form across all of his fictional work, starting with the violent dismantling that sometimes permeates his methods.

Sealy's texts are wondrously rich with parodic juxtapositions, digressions, quotations, and diverse forms. In *Hero*, a story of dramatic manipulations which are eventually carried out on a national stage, he includes diagrams of interwoven character relationships for his cast (15-16), suggesting also that each is represented by an animal, as in an avatar or in an earthy, satiric beast-narrative. In *Trotter*, Sealy fashions his overtly parodic rewriting of *Kim*, inverting some of Kipling's more famous events and motifs as he inverts the eponymous hero's name (170). In Rukhmini Bhaya Nair's absorbing and original scheme, Tagore's optimistic and nationalistic *Gora* shoves aside the iconic *Kim* as *Gora* 'moves, python-like, to *ingest* that novel' (173). She continues: 'What makes *Gora* an intriguing novel is the sophisticated textual strategy it uses both to reduce the potency of and to draw on the *Kim* stereotype', of the parentless/nationless Irish urchin who somehow comes to embody Indian culture (173). In the succession Nair maps, Sealy takes both Kipling and Tagore harshly to task for writing contemptuously of Anglo-Indians:

Trotternama [sic] simply will not allow *Kim* its blissful ignorance; it rips up the colonizer's history as if it were the paper it is written on, interleaving Mik's story with 'other' historical records that reveal the Raj's shabby treatment of the Anglo-Indians (180).

Nair's description aptly sums up the ferocious tenor which Sealy's Menippean juxtapositions sometimes achieve. In *Brainfever*, the spying tailors are 'satyrs' (277). In *Trotter-Nama*, characters who read Pope and Swift seem to use a satiric perspective as armour against insults and attacks (164; 210; 284). In *Red* he considers the incredible mutinous power of ironically toying with the idea of art as just 'a soothing sedative for the brain' (184). But just as Sealy's formal structures 'rip up' conventional notions of genre, there is a level of violence mirrored in the murders and atrocities he records: the murder of Hero, the murder of a *Brainfever* protagonist when Russian neo-Nazis mistake an Anglo-Indian for a Romany, the death in *Everest* of the young political activist who blows up a dam, the torture of the thief by police in *Red*. Since Sealy tends to establish each of his narrators, to a degree, as an alter-ego, one could argue that his formal choices afford an iconoclastic perspective that allows him to modulate between what Elias Canetti construes as 'a psychologically complex authorial voice and the self-regarding anger of a pure satirist' (qtd in Bernstein 52).

Sealy also makes intertextual references to his own writing which seek to solidify his body of writing. Rushdie reintroduces characters from previous novels in ways which achieve a sort of extra-validation of characters, as they are made even more multi-dimensional, more socially connected, more related to events in a hybrid, polyglot world. Rushdie's characters make populations seem generally more fluid and intermingling. But Sealy references his previous works in ways which seek to validate them in terms of their genuineness, their authenticity. His references are also sometimes structured in digressive or interrupting formats; he halts a narrative to reference a previous work. Eugene Trotter, historian *manqué*, appears as E.T. in a footnote in *Red* as the author of a scholarly essay on the history of an obscure cult (9). Sealy references the essay again, this time identifying the author, Eugene Trotter (200). Eugene Trotter also shows up in *Hero* as an apparently competent portrait painter for Hero and his film-star wife (221). Rather than a character in Sealy's subsequent work, Eugene Trotter, and by extension the *Trotter-Nama*, is a credible source for it, a figure of authority, expertise, and apparent ubiquity. Later in *Red*, a pizza delivery boy says his name is Trotter (213), and after the murder of Zach Wilding's girlfriend, Mrs. Wilding muses that her son should have married 'that young Trotter girl' who was 'a picture' (303). Embedded in *Red*, the Trotter history and community created by

Sealy takes on a new degree of legitimacy. But there is a satiric edge to all of these references, for Eugene's text, 'The Annals of the Black Codpiece Society', is mock scholarship in a fictional text, and the Trotter girl is literally a picture, a creation. Sealy even cites *Trotter* within *Trotter*, for on page 85 of *The Trotter-Nama* is a reference to page 85 of *The Trotter-Nama*. The boatmaster, watching a dark stain of spilled indigo follow a boat, 'laugh[s] out loud' and observes that 'The crop must have been a good one if they have enough *nil* to throw away.' A detailed definition of *nil* follows: n. Indigo; the colour blue; the colour between blue and violet...16th c. Hind. *nila*, blue; f. Sansk. *nili*, indigo' (85). The definition concludes with a list of five sentences and sources which illuminate the use of the word through history. The final entry reads: '1799 "The crop must have been a good one if they have enough *nil* to throw away." Boatmaster to himself, *Trotter-Nama*, p. 85' (85). Sealy's vocabulary of parodic self-references here veers to an exaggerated level in the drive to establish credibility.

Sealy is no less forceful in his imposition of formal experimentations driven by specific narrative content. Where Rushdie utilises ekphrasis to introduce divergent discourses on ways of seeing and relating which are specific to other art forms, Sealy incorporates the other art forms directly into his work. So, as we have noted, *Trotter* has all the cacophonous digressions,

letters, recipes, conflicting narratorial voices, and ephemera that would logically make up a history, of a nation or of a community. *Brainfever Bird* features disorienting passages recounting the surreal dreams of the characters, including the heroine, Maya, whose name means ‘illusion’. *Red* is a series of alphabetical dictionary entries; the narrative compounds rather than builds in a conventional linear structure. *Hero*, the tale of a ‘Bombay Talkie’ film actor who becomes a political figure,¹⁸ is structured as an actual film script, with chapters entitled ‘Fight’, ‘Flashback’, ‘Joke’, ‘Chase’, ‘Cliffhanger’, ‘Cliffhanger II’. The narrative literally begins and ends with a ‘Song’ and ‘Dance’. The narrator, Zero, inserts camera directions so the text resembles an actual script. Here Zero drives the popular Hero, now Prime Minister, to make an Independence Day address at Delhi’s Red Fort, and gives accompanying directions on how this pivotal scene will be filmed:

¹⁸ The book is rather clearly based on the life of M.G. Ramachandran, the film actor known for his heroic roles, who became chief minister of Tamilnadu and died in 1987. Fischer and Abedi state that ‘Rushdie models Gibreel [of *Satanic Verses*] on the Indian movie stars M.G.R[amachandran], Rama Rao, Raj Kapoor, and Amitabh Bachchan’ (122). It would appear that once again, as with the narrator born at the stroke of midnight on India’s Independence, Sealy’s literary concept is coincident with and scooped by Rushdie. Sealy, who uses Ramachandran even more centrally than Rushdie, includes information from the year 1986 regarding the chronology of his first two publications in the first chapter of *Hero*. He blurs the role of narrator and author, but the ‘facts’ coincide with the genuine history of his books: the seven-year wait by 1986 to see *Trotter-Nama* published, which will take another two years to be released. So the planned ‘filmi-political novel’ (14) Sealy was working on in 1986 would overlap Rushdie’s work on *Satanic* (1988), but again Rushdie trumped Sealy’s publication date, as *Hero* came out in 1990. For excellent insights into the influences of Ramachandran’s unusual career path, see Sara Ann Dickey, *Going to the Pictures in Madurai: Social, Psychological and Political Aspects of Cinema in Urban Working Class South India*. Ph.D. dissertation, Anthropology, U of California at San Diego, 1988.

STAR camera will pan the fortress wall from north to south from a point in Chandni Chowk, the medieval market opposite. The colours flow in the soft grey light; red sandstone, monsoon green grass, milky sky, in bands which approximate the colours of the national flag. Under a harsh sun they would appear bleached, drained of their natural vitality; today every hue, in nature and on man, leaps out at the spectator. (203)

The ersatz camera directions emphasise the author as director of the features of the narrative, but at the same time, the script-format introduces an unseemly degree of theatrical manipulation into the principles of democratic politics. The metafictional text also suggests manipulations of the reader, as *Hero*'s narrator, Zero, informs us he is writing a script called *Hero*. In *Red* there is more metafiction, as the narrator, N., is writing an extraordinary novel called *Red*; his ex-wife, O., berates him for not writing 'a normal novel for a change?' (320). *Hero* begins with a section entitled 'Entrance' which plays on the shifting border between audience as active and passive spectator:

We are sitting in the Rex Café and Stores in a time warp, you with your book, I with my pen. When I look across the table you are there; if you look up from your book, I am here. We salute one another. There is one cup of tea on the table: yours, mine, the skin already forming on it....

Very shortly we will pay the bill (allow me) and go next door, just up the street really, to the Byculla Talkies.

Your book is entitled *Hero*, the very word I, on the other side of the time warp, have just written with my pen....

Other links will bind us. But you can break the spell by putting down the book, by going away. I will pay the bill.

Since you're still here with me, I will tell you that the film we are about to see, or you are about to see...is also called *Hero*. (11-12)

Hero becomes Zero's amanuensis and scriptwriter, a modern-day servant as Hero's star waxes in the film and political worlds. But Zero guns down Hero on the final page of the text, killing off a hero as only an author can do, making Zero the unknown assassin – there are several puns to be unearthed here on ‘shooting’ a script, and what is real versus ‘reel’. Zero’s nickname conferred by Hero is ‘DOG’, and Zero boasts on the final page that ‘I shall sign the script DOG, which you can read forwards or backwards or any way you like, the Zero is always in the middle’ (248). The text offers an amalgam of author/screenwriter/director who is obviously most centrally a trickster. As Hero moves seamlessly from his filmic world of fantasy to the equally scripted one of politics and history, the

trickster/author reveals the degree of manipulations and orchestrations that control and taint both culture and nation. As Zero reveals, he views his deceptions as culturally sanctioned:

I cannot betray my caste.

My caste. The caste of Bluffers. *Bahuroopiya*, of a thousand faces.

It is our duty to deceive. Not the thuggee way, not that sort of deceiver.... We're honest fakes, and in this country that's saying something. When all is said and done we tell the truth. And you cherish it more for having been hustled through a lie. But now I'm getting moral and that's bad; we're never moral.

Zero Trickster.

(41)

There are similarities in the work of Sealy and Rushdie, and they are overt enough for critics to repeatedly classify Sealy as ‘in the mold of Rushdie’ and having to ‘slough off’ a reputation for imitation (Tejpal ‘New Masters’1). But Sealy really seems to maintain a unique focus on form, even when he shares, for example, Rushdie’s tendency to write about artists. Even though *Hero* examines the lives of actors, *Brainfever Bird* features a puppeteer, *Red* has a composer and several painters, and the *Everest Hotel* features a nun who paints botanical illustrations, these arts are used to provide the forms with which to create Menippean juxtapositions. Individual art forms are not really

individually significant, as they apparently are for Rushdie; for Sealy at times, they stand in more for the idea of creation and creativity. Sealy even inserts a diagram of ‘seeing a painting’ in *Red*, which simply emphasizes the centrality of critical apprehension; it could refer to any painting, rather than those by Matisse which are significant to the narrative (6). So if film provides *Hero* with a shooting script and a way to circumscribe ‘artifice’, Maya’s puppets in *Brainfever* are satiric versions of individuals in the narrative, and Menippean extensions of ideas under attack, as when a puppet general is remade to suggest a current politician, or dishonest characters are punished via their avatars in a puppet show. The botanist’s notes in *Everest* give the text an overall sense of being a notebook of impressions, some more complete than others, even as the text mirrors the seasonal calendar of its subtitle. And *Red*’s Anglo-Indian composer, Zach, brings odd sound poems and the awkward structures of modern music to some of the entries of the *Abecedary*, which focuses attention on the unwieldy or unexpected formal impact of experimental art.

There are some additional types of overlaps in narratives from different novels, which direct us to Sealy’s postcolonial strategies of intertextuality. The overlaps again suggest the solidity and veracity of the sources, particularly the sustained presence of Anglo-Indians, rather than any larger, clashing sense

of frenzied global polyphony. In other words, Sealy's characters don't turn up at flashy parties in cosmopolitan locations in his other novels. But they are also dialogic overlaps in a Bakhtinian sense, suggestive of the repetitions of oral narrative traditions, or the power of local histories constructed of the mundane or diurnal, which are no less significant for being parochial. And these overlaps, though Menippean in being obviously constructed, arguably exhibit none of the characteristics of magic realism. *Everest* and *Brainfever* each begins with a stolen suitcase which is eventually retrieved. The wily Jed in *Everest* mentions a local framer named Zero (*Hero*). *Brainfever*'s central section, set in Delhi, is called Red City, and the colour permeates in a manner which presages the lush descriptions of hue in *Red*. *Brainfever* and *Everest* both conclude with a single mother making a new life with a baby daughter called Masha. But the most powerful echo runs between *Everest* and *Red*, which both take place in a fictional version of Sealy's home at the Himalayan foothills, Dehradun, called Drummondganj in *Everest*, and Dariya Dun in *Red*. Both texts centre on an artsy, flamboyant, red-haired Caucasian woman (Inge; Aline), who seduces and records (photographs; paints) her Indian lover, and in each book she is murdered. And each murder is investigated by the same 'morose' policeman, Inspector Bisht, who sifts through the clues and inconclusively arrives at a semi-plausible version of the case. But we learn from the narration that Inge

bled to death from a knife wound after drinking and ingesting blood-thinning drugs. Aline is also poisoned, when hallucinogenic mushrooms are added to her food by her lover's jealous local girlfriend. Both women have drug-induced visions before Inge exsanguinates, and Aline strolls off her roof. The narrative repetition is fairly overt, but suggests no overt parodic intentions on the part of the author; if anything each reads as a cautionary warning to flame-haired, Orientalist female tourists seeking the spiritual uplift of India. There is, though, the uneasy sense of the subjectivity and narrative subversion of ostensibly objective 'investigations'. Each time the actual crime rests on emotional motivations and punishment for secret exploitations, for Inge has been doing witchy animal sacrifice rites with her lover in the cemetery, and Aline is slumming, secretly cheating on her composer with a lowly and amoral thief. For all their artistic airs they each refuse to 'see' race or caste in an Indian context. These disturbing episodes arguably satirise their ignorance and superficiality, and reflect the vein of counter-realism Kanaganayakam is describing when she comments on recent Indian writers whose approach 'is not about surfaces, but about ruptures and fissures' (186).

Sealy's intertexts align more, then, with the idea of narrative repeated and replayed, rather than updated. Although he recognizes an inherent paradox, Bakhtin writes that 'the

objective memory of the very genre...preserve[s] the peculiar features of the ancient menippea' (Problems 121). The repetition of motifs and events can be read as examples of Sealy's mix of iconoclastic fragmented narrative and self-referentiality (See Mijares 74-76). Sealy's tack also illustrates what Laura O'Connor describes as the way Menippean satire capitalises on 'the topicality of the immediate and unfinalizable present' as a starting point' (16), and it is not unexpected that a Menippean satirist might return to a narrative to rework its ground with varying degrees of mockery and abrasion.

Conclusion

When Sealy's narrators admit to fictionalizing (in *Trotter, Hero, Red*), we are firmly in the territory of postmodernism's knowing acknowledgements of duplicity. But Sealy is also recognising the provisionalities of postcolonial discourses, the constructed-ness of his inevitably hybrid narratives, and the degree to which he is working with and around material handed to him by the incongruities which obtain in the wake of empire. Provisions must be made, because: 'In fact, there's a hole right in the middle' (*Trotter* 572). Sealy's satires may set in motion expansive and complicated pseudo-histories, but they also foreground the need for, as Kanganayakan notes, methods which create distance and the means to 'fictionalize the past' (185). Sealy is also illustrating the way in which 'self-parody in satiric

rhetoric ... prevents even the process of writing itself from becoming an over-simplified convention or ideal' (Frye *Anatomy* 234). In the discord and sheer formal array of his narratives, Sealy undermines the very idea of a relatable history, and reinforces the overarching Menippean conflict of subjectivity versus objectivity. In *Trotter-Nama* this philosophical debate is explicitly mapped over (subjective) chronicle and its corollary, the miniature, versus (objective) history, with its emblem, the photograph. Sealy has a metaphor for the soul-destroying colonial methodologies which gave rise to the stereotype of the Anglo-Indian population as 'Cranny, n. Originally Indo-Portuguese clerk using English; secretary; miserable scribe; mere copyist;...slavish hack; nook; member of caste neither here nor there' (55). The metaphor rests in the type of writing Thomas Henry, Middle Trotter (the 'hole in the middle') takes to as a child: the mindless copying of prose.

With Thomas Henry it was never anything but ink, and black ink. At St.Aloysius's School he filled notebooks with transcription from any source that came to hand, starting anywhere and ending anywhere. He did not seem to care what he copied (once he copied his own work without knowing it), so long as it was prose and continued evenly and regularly to the end of the page. If he could have written a single continuous line on a ribbon

which stretched to infinity he would have done so, for such was the nature of prose. (313)

The conflict of chronicle versus history is repeated in Sealy's narrative, a friction which intensifies. At one point the Narrator administers a mock-catechism to the Cup-Bearer; it is the period of Thomas Henry's son-in-law, Theobald Montagu/Trotter, who takes up the writing of 'speculative' local history (412) and the camera. 'Snake in the grass!' the Narrator has earlier berated him, before moving in with his worst epithet: 'Historian!' (383). Later the Narrator asks, 'who first brought Care to Sans Souci?' The Cup-Bearer replies, 'The Devil did' (375). The catechistic queries continue:

His principal name?
The ANTI-TROTTER.
His other names?
Theobald Horatius Montagu....
What was the state of Sans Souci before he came?
A state of bliss.
And after?
A state of desolation.
Its colour?
The colour of dust.
Which is?
Beige, dun, ivory, or bromidic.
Its smell?
Rank.
Its sound?
Ashen....
Its shape?
Scroll-shaped.
Its taste?
Ashes in the mouth, ashes in the belly.
This foul substance is called what?
This foul substance is called History.
And its opposite?
Is the Chronicle.
Which may be illustrated?
Profusely.
Is colourful?
In the extreme.
Has flavour?
Honey in the mouth, honey in the belly....
Its sound?

*Ethereal.
Specifically?
Soprano....
Not castrato?
Not quite.
Its shape?
Spherical.
Its supreme exponent?
You.
Does it usher in a new age?
It ushers in an age of promise.
Which is the end of what lie?
It is the end of Historie. [sic]* (375-6)

The ‘desolation’ is spread by the ‘[d]ry, literal, joyless, prowling shutterbugs’ who stand in opposition to the ‘character’ and the ‘particularity’ of the miniature, a friction expounded in an ‘Interpolation’ in which Eugene asks ‘Who killed the miniature?’ and answers, ‘the camera’ (394;393). ‘When does an art form come into its own’ and ‘find its true voice?’ queries Eugene, ‘When it learns to distill from the general’ (394). He finds the apex in the miniature portrait. But the camera evolves into the wedding portrait business, and eventually it will mature into the film industry, with its records of ‘crowds’ and far ‘pavilions’ (394). The wait continues, according to Eugene, for ‘the stubborn Object’ to be ‘absorb[ed] into the purest Subjectivity’ (394; 414), but even this perspective is debated, since it arises in an essay published by Montagu which he later disavows.

The tensions between objective and subjective grasps of ‘reality’ manifest again in the brief narrative of Jivan. He is the unfortunate son of the fallen Budhiya, and she is an untouchable from a servant family on the estate. At the illegitimate birth she

is demoted in caste according to religious laws. Jivan disappears from the narrative altogether for a while, but eventually he is discovered still working on the estate but literally *invisible*. As sweeper-and-emptier of chamber pots, he is ‘a man of so degraded a caste that the very untouchables lorded it over him’ (392). Montagu eventually discerns him using a camera, after his wife, Victoria, complains of ghostly episodes of chamberpots floating mid-air and along corridors (391). Setting a tripod in the hall, Montagu captures the image Victoria indicates, although he observes nothing. To his amazement, the photograph reveals the white blur of a chamberpot, and behind it, ‘through the smudge of ghostly waving lines there shone a face which for the first time in its life was made visible’ (392). Javan had ‘been until now, an unseeable’ (392). The episode arguably overlaps with the bodily transformations and inexplicable enhancements of magic realism, but Sealy has embedded a thorny philosophical debate on the relative values of narrative versus purely representational genres, in addition to the attention paid to the silence and invisibility of the subaltern. After developing the image, Montague is prompted to campaign to publicise the ‘evils of caste’, and apparently feels he has the camera to thank for his awakened sense of social consciousness, as he ponders ‘how could he not see what was under his very nose?’ (393). But he is still a recorder of images, and in every sense a lowly copyist. And for Javan, nothing changes; he remains invisible and thus

there is no text or dialogue available that could articulate him in any Menippean context within the *Nama*. But the Menippean satire of Sealy's formally innovative text does manage to contain this unfortunate narrative, adding it to the overload of information, perspective, and influence that overwhelms mere 'history' while recasting and reseeding the genre of narrative fiction. In conclusion, though it is hard to conclude in the face of Sealy's characteristic torrents, Sealy's use of the Menippean to experiment with form gives substance to the debates he embeds and the arguments he pursues, and allows him to recraft narrative models to mount significant historiographic challenges throughout all of his work.

Conclusion: From *Hatterr* to *Trotter*

My discussion has covered, quite literally, a large body of postcolonial Menippean satire in its journey from *Hatterr* to *Trotter*. With this breadth of investigation can come the tendency towards theoretical generalisation, and I am aware I am making some extremely broad claims for reading the selected postcolonial fictions of South Asia as Menippean satire. I have stressed Desani's near-heroic use of numerous Menippean strategies to resist closure and finality, maintaining both Hatterr's noble yet mockable on-going philosophical quest, and the formal tensions between Eastern and Western influences. In Menen's work I have focused on how clever juxtapositions of Eastern and Western sources impact the level of discourse. Rather than Desani's avalanche of dramatic incursions which reshape and redefine form, Menen establishes Menippean satire through emphasis on wit and refined erudition, even as he allows Menippean-inflected discourses to unfold in surprising physical, sexual, and cultural contexts. My focus on Rushdie has been to foreground his construction of Menippean elements through dialogic descriptions of various art forms within his novels. His use of *ekphrasis* arguably has a bearing on the boundaries of the novel, and his Menippean approach tends to undercut fallacies of uncorrupted or essential artistic or cultural traditions. With the work of I. Allan Sealy, one confronts innovative Menippean

satires and a number of ironic paradoxes, the most central being that of the ‘all’-encompassing historical chronicle and the subjectivities which endlessly elude its narrative borders. Sealy uses Menippean strategies and structures to expand and reshape the novelistic genre to new levels and registers, while at the same time confronting how difficult it remains to create space or voice for the subaltern, the marginal, the disenfranchised, and the hybrid. In the Menippean fragmentations and reformations of all of these texts, each of these authors foregrounds an undeniable drive towards the untested and the new. The material presented here also makes a powerful argument for the significant imaginative and constituent role comprised by satire in the way these texts challenge, destabilise, and correct.

I am also inferring from these works a future-oriented focus as they reconstruct and reconstrue genre through the filter of cultural processes and expositions. In this my critical alignment expands somewhat the insights of Andrew Teverson, who supports a reading of Menippean satire’s generic limitations as ‘only intended to be of political use in the present’, in short, ‘a purely responsive form’ (‘Rushdie and Ahmad’ 58). My attention is more focused on the possible outcomes of Menippean satire as experimental writing as it, in Bakhtin’s words, ‘begins to seek some valorized support in the future’ (*Dialogic* 26). As Milowicki and Wilson point out,

‘writing...can scarcely be more experimental than when it strives to express total openness, to shatter all boundaries, and to rebuild continuously (new texts) from the old fragments. Menippean discourse constitutes a textual mode, at once versatile, fluid, and transgeneric, that persistently demonstrates both the openness and the instability of form’ (320). It is my hope that this thesis focuses some attention on how Menippean satire is being used both to reflect and to redirect the disputes and dialogues that span conceptions (and misconceptions) of East and West and that limit the forward-directed processes of identity construction.

Counter-realist texts obviously problematize the authentication of material presented as factual, and satire can undermine notions of fixed reality as well. Part of the playfulness of the Menippean form also extends to its ready subversions of authorial intentionality. In his excellent study of the politics of satiric postcolonial writing by Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, and Chinua Achebe, John Clement Ball addresses some key issues of intentionality by arguing for ‘a critical practice that tries to compensate for satire’s willful blindnesses by bridging gaps and reading broader frames of reference’ into texts (*Satire* 40). The work of the critical reader, then, becomes the effort to provide ‘contextualizing knowledge’ (40) that allows both the specificities of an historically or geographically placed critique, and the expansive cross-cultural associations that allow the

corrective nature of satire's impulses to apply to disparate locations, cultures, and structures (38). This compliments the insights of Loretta M. Mijares, writing specifically about Allan Sealy's *Trotter-Nama* and its subversive stance towards factual material that 'works not so much to question the authority of historiography as to demand the archival work of verification, creating a past more known than previously' (14). Mijares describes following the injunction of Sealy's narrator to look up an actual historical text, ostensibly quoted verbatim in *Trotter-Nama*; when Mijares does so she 'learns that Eugene has not in fact changed a single word' (14). The historical text, an 1853 Parliamentary record of a discussion of the alleged physical inferiorities of the Anglo-Indian 'race', seems in its extremes to be overt and outrageous parody, yet is in fact a faithful excerpt (*Trotter* 308). The result of her research is that, in her newly verified reading, '[t]he juxtaposition of the narrator's own coyly straightforward style and the embarrassing documentary record blurs the lines between history's prose and fiction's parody' (14). Yet, she notes, not many readers would be aware of these historical facts (14). Mijares delineates that in a postmodern context, history, often parodied, is presented as unknowable and unreliable, while Sealy's text in its postcoloniality....is demonstrating that there is in fact a history, albeit textualized, that is available but ignored. In this context, parody becomes a strategy for

historical survival: the unreliability introduced by parody transforms the careful reader of *The Trotter-Nama* into a historian. (12)

Also in this context, Menippean satire can integrate historic specificities that move a readership towards the recouping of lost or ignored material, and away from readings which merely relativise the hybrid into endless pluralities. One must also factor in, though, the trend wherein satirists tend to sidestep the cultural, political, and particularly prescriptive implications of their writing, wherein knowledge of or access to the ‘culturally specific’ may have political connotations. When Salman Rushdie's interviewer asked if he ever worried that ‘using so many culturally specific references will leave many readers unable to understand what you’re trying to say’, Rushdie responded, ‘No, I use them as flavouring. I mean, I can read books from America and I don’t always get the slang...It’s fun to read things when you don’t know all the words’ (Salon 2).

Authorial dodges aside, the Menippean may be said to essay a distinct spirit of inquiry, foregrounding its taxing questions and its relentless surveys of oppositionalities. According to Milowicki and Wilson, Menippean satire ‘examines both historical and moral truths, putting them to a most exacting test’ (319). Its ‘vision of a world in pieces’ (296) defies critical readings which would tend to ‘flat[en] out [its dissonances] in an effort to derive (some) thematic unity from [a text’s] diversity’

(297). Menippean satire is not simply asserting ‘a new pluralism’ with which ‘to undermine the mystifying rhetoric of authority’ (297). It is not only deflecting outwards from the text towards a location where a critical reader may discern greater authority or authenticity. The shifting boundaries of Menippean satire challenge a reader’s very notions of genre classification, asserting ‘a vision indifferent to boundaries’ (302) and I wish to emphasise the significance of this drive to realign issues of genre through the undermining of fixed categories of fiction and history. It is not inappropriate to place postcolonial Menippean satire alongside Edward Said’s articulations of literary resistance, wherein he describes Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* as a ‘work based on the liberating imagination of independence itself’ (*Culture* 216). In Said’s framework, ‘resistance...is an alternative way of conceiving human history’ (216). Jean-Pierre Durix has explored how imperialism’s brutal legacy was the deprivation for colonised peoples not only of territories and wealth, but also of history and imagination (188). Durix concludes that cultural reappropriations are central to postcoloniality, and that ‘[b]y implicitly offering a reshuffling of generic classifications, post-colonial literatures raise questions concerning genres and their relation to reality’ (188). Thus one may discover challenges that extend beyond a focus on versions of an historical past when Wilson and Milowicki acknowledge that ‘the dissolution of all boundaries is at once a powerful

feature of all Menippean discourse and also a primary conceptual challenge' (302). At the same time that Menippean satire may build up and inflate, its drive to 'test unexamined cultural assumptions and philosophical "truths"' (304) and its extreme tendencies to deflate, demystify, and dismantle undermines the very authority of sources as undisparageable. There is always an implicit possibility, as stated by Ferdinand Dennis and Naseem Khan, 'for an alternate postcolonial ...identity to be articulated' (118). P.K. Dutta is perhaps suggesting this in his comments on how Sealy's *Trotter-Nama* productively foregrounds 'the predicament created by a specific social and cultural location' (65); any specific, historically-anchored sense of 'location' or identity in the text is really only established by a plethora of textual sources creating 'an unfolding narrative of 'becoming'' (65) which addresses an uncertain past and an uncertain future equally. Menippean satire's experiments underscore the instabilities of form and genre, and with it perhaps the core assumptions that mandate and defend such fixities. In its bold, stereoscopic juxtapositions texts and sources become unsettled and unsettling, and even suspect. But at the same time, Menippean satire establishes itself as a novel whole within which energy is focused on possible narrative trajectories which are continually hybrid, new, and unexpected. Considered in concert, the texts examined here make a convincing demonstration both that 'reality can be multifarious' (Durix 189), and that

Menippean satire establishes productive interrogations of imposed divisions, exclusivities, polarities, and monologous forms. It is hoped that this study makes it impossible to ignore the important part that satire plays in the Menippean, and that Menippean satire plays in counter-realist postcolonial narrative fiction.

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