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Rushdie's Secret Source: Does the "Magic" in *Midnight's Children* come from Western Comics rather than Indian Myth?

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Abstract

Midnight's Children (1981) is a novel linking India's transition from British colonialism to independence to its protagonist, Saleem Sinai – a boy with telepathic powers who is able to organize the 1001 other children of special abilities born within an hour of Indian independence (which took place at midnight on the 15th of August, 1947, hence the title). It is considered a seminal example of both postcolonial literature and magical realism. In fact, it was used early on in postcolonial studies as a definitive piece of postcolonial literature – that is, Midnight's Childrenhelped postcolonial theorists create a definition of postcolonialism. Consequently, Midnight's Children – at least the postcolonial interpretation of it – has long been seen as deliberately focused on the postcolonial project. However, this reading focuses mainly on the style and literary technique of the author while ignoring other essential aspects of the book, such as the plot. Theorists are quick to point out Rushdie's blending of traditional Indian elements with themes popular in Western culture, but no one has so far investigated whether Rushdie's fiction is in fact drawing more heavily on Western sources. In particular, one link I feel has been overlooked, and yet is vitally important for a full understanding of Midnight's Children, is the similarity between Rushdie's story and Marvel Comics' X-Men series. In an effort to fill this gap in the literature, this paper will explore the postcolonial claims that have been made on Midnight's Children and attempt to demonstrate convincingly that Rushdie (a self-professed comic book obsessive and expert) not only based key aspects of Midnight's Children on Marvel's Professor X, but also left clues within the text of Midnight's Children clearly revealing this fact to readers. This revelation – that Midnight's Children may have involved quite a different project than the one

championed by postcolonial theorists – may have significant consequences for future readings of the text.

Keywords: orientalism, Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, postcolonialism

Midnight's Children (1981) is a novel linking India's transition from British colonialism to independence to its protagonist, Saleem Sinai – a boy with telepathic powers who is able to organize the 1001 other children of special abilities born within an hour of Indian independence (which took place at midnight on the 15th of August, 1947, hence the title). It is considered a seminal example of both postcolonial literature and magical realism. In fact, it was used early on in postcolonial studies as a definitive piece of postcolonial literature – that is, *Midnight's Children* helped postcolonial theorists create a definition of postcolonialism. Consequently, *Midnight's Children* – at least the postcolonial interpretation of it – has long been seen as deliberately focused on the postcolonial project. However, this reading focuses mainly on the style and literary technique of the author while ignoring other essential aspects of the book, such as the plot. Theorists are quick to point out Rushdie's blending of traditional Indian elements with themes popular in Western culture, but no one has so far investigated whether Rushdie's fiction is in fact drawing more heavily on Western sources. In particular, one link I feel has been overlooked, and yet is vitally important for a full understanding of *Midnight's Children*, is the similarity between Rushdie's story and Marvel Comics' X-Men series. In an effort to fill this gap in the literature, this paper will explore the postcolonial claims that have been made on *Midnight's Children* and attempt to demonstrate convincingly that Rushdie (a self-professed comic book obsessive and expert) not only based key aspects of *Midnight's Children* on Marvel's Professor X, but also left clues within the text of *Midnight's Children* clearly revealing this fact to readers. This revelation – that *Midnight's Children* may have involved quite a different project than the one championed by postcolonial theorists – may have significant consequences for future readings of the text.

Postcolonial Claims

It seems Salman Rushdie was immediately aware of the potential of his book's relevance in literary theory. His celebrated article "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance" – published in the London Times on 3 July 1982 – coincided with central themes that were beginning to emerge in literary studies. *Midnight's Children* has been cited by several heavyweights in postcolonial studies, who have found in it substantiation for their own theories. For Edward Said (according to a 2007 biography of Rushdie by Andrew Teverson) Rushdie is one of the postcolonial writers who "write back 'to the metropolitan cultures' in order to disrupt the 'European narratives of the Orient'" (Teverson 22). Teverson points out that Rushdie's authorial stance was further validated through Bhabha's conception, as advanced in his 1994 volume *The Location of Culture*, of "newness as a form of cultural impurity" (23), entailing the privileging of hybridisation as a key determinant of the postcolonial (and Rushdiean) world-view (qtd. in Rollason).

These postcolonial treatments of Rushdie's writing, however, center on the technique rather than the plot; in other words, the rather conspicuous plot elements are ignored in favor of Rushdie's postcolonial or postmodern writing techniques. Thus, for example, in the 1989 *The Empire Writes Back*, which can be seen as an intervention in postcolonial studies, Rushdie's technique is viewed as a characteristic of postcolonial "loss and desolation" and the authors focus on Rushdie's non-linear story telling:

> To a western reader, used to the tradition of linear progression, character development, and novel form, this lament could seem tedious, repeating as it does the writer's sense of loss and desolation in a book of circular structure. But such a reaction alerts us immediately to the Eurocentric nature of such an evaluation and the need to incorporate cultural context into any assessment of literary worth. Ideas of narrative structure are also altered. (181)

The writers are careful to point out that this literary style has its roots in Indian Orature: "Salman Rushdie has made it quite clear that the techniques of the novel *Midnight's Children* reproduce the traditional techniques of the Indian oral narrative tradition. […] This technique of circling back from present to the past, of building tale within tale, and persistently delaying

climaxes are all features of traditional narration and orature." (181). The sense that Rushdie's novel can be said to be a "writing back" is based on the authors' definition of postcolonial literature, which is that the perspective of the narrative changes to that of the 'Other'. Works such as Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

> all deliberately set out to disrupt European notions of 'history' and the ordering of time. […] Received history is tampered with, rewritten, and realigned from the point of view of the victims of its destructive progress. […] In all these texts the perspective changes to that of the 'Other' (*The Empire Writes Back* 33).

Edward Said refers to (and confirms) this interpretation of *Midnight's Children* in his 1994 book *Culture and Imperialism*. In it he treats Rushdie's novel as resistance literature:

> Certainly, as the title of a fascinating book has it, *writing back* to the metropolitan cultures, disrupting the European narratives of the Orient and Africa, replacing them with either a more playful or a more powerful new narrative style is a major component in the process. Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* is a brilliant work based on the liberating imagination of independence itself, with all its anomalies and contradictions working themselves out. The conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories is of particular interest in Rushdie's work, and in an earlier generation of resistance writing. (216)

And yet in the same texts there are hints of doubt and insecurity. Is Rushdie really writing "revolutionary" literature, countering and disrupting the western hegemony? According to Said's earlier work *Orientalism*, the orient has been mis-represented by theorists, and needs to be reinscribed through a reclamation of territory – but in regards to *Midnight's Children* this is based on Rushdie's ability to "speak for" the subaltern, colonized voice of India. Is Rushdie really the "Other"? The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* seem especially aware of the importance (and sensitivity) of this point:

> Rushdie assures us that such techniques from orature are consciously part of his writing. Also, of course, there are many literary sources in traditional Indian written narrative we could look to as unconscious influences which are far older than Sterne;

> for example the fourth century Brhatkatha of Gunadhya (Krishnamoorthy 1986). In fact, to anyone familiar with traditional Indian writing and orature it is clear that Rushdie's text is profoundly intertextual with the whole of the Indian narrative tradition. (182)

Why, one might ask, do the authors need to be "assured" by Rushdie that the book includes elements of Indian writing and orature? Why is it important that *Midnight's Children* is interpreted in just this way – and what does this emphasis reveal? On the one hand, this is likely in response to criticism that Rushdie is not representing India at all, because of his use of the English language or his assimilation into western culture. This issue, which troubled Rushdie as well, continues to receive sensitive treatment. In Teverson's biography of Rushdie (according to Christopher Rollason's review in the Atlantis Journal):

> Mention is made of Rushdie's well-known and controversial statement in his introduction to the 1997 volume The Vintage Book of Modern Indian Writing 1947-1997 (co-edited by himself and his then partner Elizabeth West) expressing a preference in qualitative terms for IWE over writing in Indian languages as far as post-Independence prose writing is concerned (though, like most commentators, Teverson fails to add that two paragraphs down Rushdie qualifies that statement by stating he believes the reverse is true for poetry). It is concluded that Rushdie's use of English (anyway the only language he knows well enough to be a writer in) is, hybridised as it is, postcolonially legitimate, constituting him as one of those who engage in the "reclamation of English for counter-hegemonic purposes" (37), and allowing him to "undermine rather than confirm the oversimplistic binary opposition that pits vernacular languages against English" (40). (Rollason)

The link to Indian Orature is also important to establish in order to avoid the criticisms that Rushdie cannot speak for "actual" Indians. Aparna Mahanta (2001), for example, castigates Rushdie for writing only for westerners and for "a tiny stratum of India's and Pakistan's elite, ... deracinated, speaking English, thinking English" (Teverson 7).

Teverson also examines the charge leveled by Aijaz Ahmad (1992) that Rushdie "is compromised with the poststructuralist obsession with discourse to a degree that estranges

him from real political engagement" (qtd. Rollason). Similar criticisms are recognized (but dismissed) in *The Empire Writes Back*:

> Post-colonial texts like *Midnight's Children* (or Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* three decades earlier) have been subjected to a schizophrenic form of critical dismissal. On the one hand contemporary nationalist critics dismissed these texts because in their view they only reproduced in a translated or 'plagiarized' form the traditional techniques of narration and so failed the test of 'authenticity'; on the other hand, European critics, out of ignorance, failed entirely to record the debt of these texts to African and Indian traditional forms. What neither position did was to engage with the text as an extreme example of that hybridity which is the primary characteristic of all post-colonial texts, whatever their source. (182).

Although I agree that *Midnight's Children* can be considered a product of cultural hybridity, I aim to undermine the idea that the central elements of Rushdie's novel came from traditional African or Indian forms of writing or orature – which, consequently, may significantly weaken *Midnight's Children* relevance in postcolonial representation.

Magical Realism

Postcolonial theorists have found it necessary to anchor *Midnight's Children* in some way with a real, perhaps pre-colonial, or authentic Indian texts to justify its contribution to postcolonial studies. When the plot is dealt with, it is assumed to be rooted in traditional forms of Indian narrative, while the style of writing is generally considered to be more Western (although as *The Empire Writes Back* pointed out, Rushdie claims he got his style from traditional Indian story-telling). One of the common methods for separating cultural influences in *Midnight's Children* lies in attributing qualities of reason and logic (realism) to European powers, while claiming that superstition and mystery (magic) come from less developed, colonized countries (Lopez 172) – a division that in fact perpetuates the condescending violence of colonialism, and ignores the fact that Western cultures have their own, no less magical, mythologies.

According to one online reviewer, the magical realism in *Midnight's Children* can be seen as "a device binding Indian culture of the past to the contemporary multicultural interface" (Stewart). In other words, the plot of the story is Indian while the writing or narrative style is western. The reviewer continues by defining the central aspects of this technique:

> Rushdie's principle use of magic realism in the text involves the telepathic abilities of Saleem and the other thousand and one children born at the stroke of midnight on August 15th 1947 (the date of Indian independence), abilities that enable them to communicate with each other and in Saleem's case, to read the minds of those around him. (Stewart)

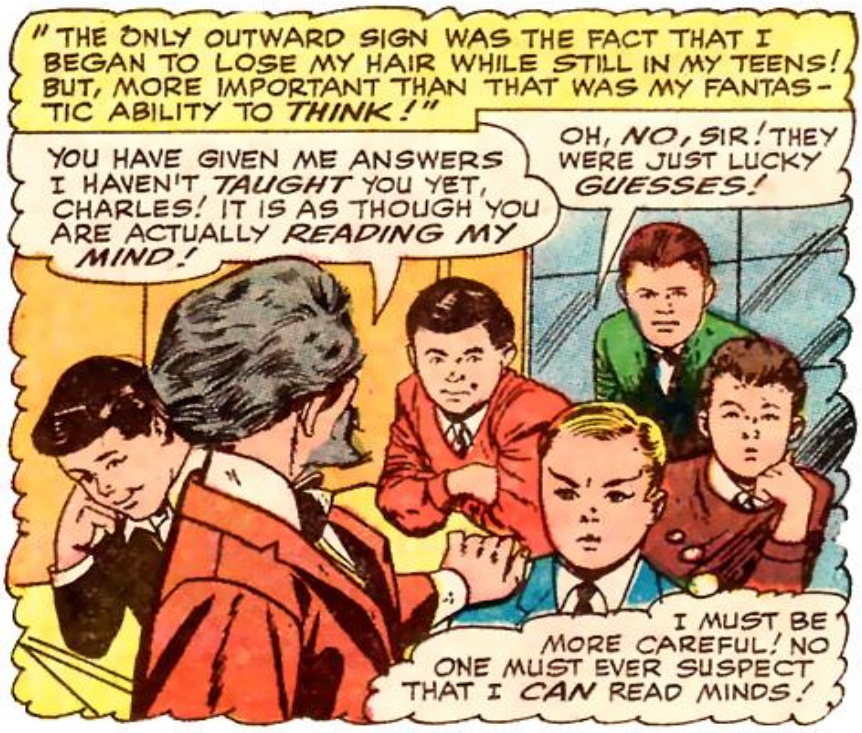
Other scholars, such as Neil Ten Kortenaar, have argued for a more equitable hybridity, without, however, relinquishing the assumption that magic came either from India or western stereotypes of India:

> It is easy to tell English from India in *Midnight's Children*, but difficult to distinguish where India stops and Orientalism begins. How can one separate what in the novel finds its inspiration in Hinduism and folk religion from that which either caters to or parodies Western notions of Indian magic or superstition? (767)

In my view, Kortenaar makes a crucial error in distinguishing only between India's authentic religious traditions and Orientalism (western notions regarding Indian magic or superstition). What is not recognized – and continues to be ignored in academic responses – is the possibility that the magical elements of *Midnight's Children* do not reflect Indian superstition or mythology at all, but were instead borrowed from western sources.

Certainly there are a great many Indian aspects assimilated into Rushdie's story; but the main, core of the novel is the narrator's telepathic ability which allows him to find and organize the midnight's children – a group of individuals with various magical powers – in meetings held inside his head. Without this key feature and binding element, the plot of *Midnight's Children* is inconceivable. Interestingly, while these elements cannot be found in Indian mythology or literature, they are identical to the features of Marvel Comic's Professor X and his team of super-powered mutants.

Although all of the X-Men mutants have incredible powers, it is Professor X who leads them. He uses his psychic powers to reach out and find the mutants, appeal to them and form them into a team of do-gooders. Like Saleem, he is the connection between them – the forum which brings them together. When we explore Professor X's biographical history, which was printed in 1965, (Marvel Issue #12: "The Origin of Professor X"), we find even more similarities. Both Saleem Sinai and Charles Francis Xavier use their psychic powers to cheat in school, and both are bald at an early age.



Some commentators have pointed out the uniqueness of Rushdie's failed or reversed romance, in which Saleem seems more like a passive pawn of circumstance than an active hero. According to Kortenaar:

> As a boy Saleem imagined that his Clark Kent persona was but a mask for the Superman identity he had to hide from others. But at the meetings behind his eyebrows of the midnight's children conference, where Saleem does not have to hide and can legitimately claim leadership, he continues to abjure the strongman tactics favored by

> Shiva and to maintain the persona of the conciliator. Saleem's hero is not the man of steel but Clark Kent himself, the mild-mannered reporter who cannot get the girl. (780)

However, Rushdie's Saleem is not alone in this respect. Professor X is crippled and, except for his mental powers, helpless. Professor X is recognized as the leader of the mutants, not only because he is the oldest, but also because he seeks out and discovers the mutants when they are young and gives them encouragement and purpose. Saleem argues that he should be given authority on the same grounds:

> Because I had found that I was not immune to the lure of leadership. Who found the Children, anyway? Who formed the Conference? Who gave them their meeting-place? Was I not the joint-eldest, and should I not receive the respect and obeisances merited by my seniority? And didn't the one who provided the club-house run the club? (260)

There are also similarities between their complicated parental circumstances. Saleem is switched at birth with Shiva, which creates a powerful, jealous nemesis who will eventually be his undoing. When the young Charles Francis Xavier's father dies in an accident, his mother re-marries his father's friend Dr. Marko, an evil scientist who is only after the family fortune. Dr. Marko soon brings Cain, his son from a former marriage, to live in the family's mansion. Xavier is successful at everything due to his psychic powers, and Cain gets jealous. "His jealous heart filled with almost uncontrollable envy!" (10). Later, during the Korean War, Cain and Xavier find a sacred lost temple and a giant ruby that turns Cain into a human juggernaut, "a gigantic, inexorable force that moves onward irresistibly, crushing anything it finds in its path" (16). In *Midnight's Children*, Shiva is described as "Shiva, the god of destruction, who is also most potent of deities; Shiva, greatest of dancers; who rides on a bull; whom no force can resist..." (253). Both Shiva and Cain are powerful antagonists who, fueled by rage and jealousy, relentlessly pursue Saleem and Charles, respectively. The choice of the name "Cain" referring to the first biblical transgressor and "Shiva" linking to the destroyer in Indian mythology may also be a point of similarity.

It is interesting to remember that *Midnight's Children* is in many respects autobiographical – that is, Saleem Sinai and Salman Rushdie share many features – including an early love for comic books. Saleem was born on the 15th of August, 1947, the same day as India's Independence. Salman Rushdie was born just two months earlier, also in Bombay, on June 19th, 1947. Towards the end of the novel when Saleem returns to Bombay, comic books form a memorable part of his childhood (which is likely a genuine reflection from Rushdie's own experiences): "And there, look, the shops... but the names had changed: where was Reader's Paradise with its stacks of Superman Comics?" (520). Both Saleem and Salman would have been 17 years old when Marvel Comics published Issue #12 in 1965, during what was Rushdie's first year in England at Kings College, Cambridge.

Rushdie's passion for comic books continued all his life. At the New York Public Library's Library Lions benefit in 2009, where he was among the honorees, Rushdie claimed "I'm a world expert on superhero comics, I think maybe only Michael Chabon knows more than me" (*New York Magazine*). On the Late Late Show With Craig Ferguson, Rushdie announced that he was a "real comic book nut" and "could tell you a lot about superheroes" (Edelson). He also collected comic books as a kid, including Marvel Comics: "They'd be worth so much money now... You know, 1950s and sixties Dell Comics, and Marvel; it would be worth a fortune" (*New York Magazine*). He even owns oil paintings of Spider-Man and Wolverine, signed by Stan Lee.

As someone with not only an interest, but a life-long obsession with comic books, why is the connection between Salman Rushdie and Marvel comics not more frequently acknowledged in articles researching the sources for *Midnight's Children*? Shouldn't we already expect to see references to them in his work? And in fact we find them – not hidden or secret, but spelled out quite plainly. Not only is Rushdie's narrator Saleem a comic book fan, but he also thought of himself as a superhero figure. When he realizes that his friend Cyrus-the-great had become Lord Khusro Khusrovani Bhagwan, he is resentful. "'It should have been me,' I even thought, 'I am the magic child; not only my primacy at home, but even my true innermost nature, has now been purloined'" (309).

Importantly, in this passage concerning Lord Khusro Khusrovani Bhagwan, Rushdie is deliberately demonstrating how a story from a western comic book (indicative of colonial influence) could be rewritten into a modern Indian mythology: Saleem claims that Cyrus's mother created the myth of Lord Khusro Khusrovani Bhagwan based on the Superman comic that he himself had given Cyrus as payment for lectures on female anatomy:

> Not free; Cyrus-the-great charged a fee. In exchange for anatomy, he demanded comic-books – and I, in all innocence, gave him a copy of that most precious of *Superman* comics, the one containing the frame story, about the explosion of the planet Krypton and the rocket-ship in which Jor-El his father dispatched him through space, to land on earth and be adopted by the good, mild Kents... did nobody else see it? In all those years, did no person understand that what Mrs. Dubash had done was to rework and reinvent the most potent of all modern myths – the legend of the coming of the superman? (309)

Is this perhaps Rushdie's self-conscious revelation, his hint or clue to the readers, daring them to discover his own secret? Is Rushdie discreetly admitting that all he had done was to rework and reinvent a potent modern myth – the legend of the coming of Professor X and his mutants? If nothing else, we are told that the "magical" supernaturalism in the novel (at least in the case of Lord Khusro Khusrovani Bhagwan) was *not* a recycling of traditional Indian elements, but rather a reworking of *modern western mythologies* and comic book culture.

This reading of *Midnight's Children* is further supported by textual evidence. On the one hand, Rushdie comments on the "whitening" of the rich to suggest that India's ruling classes simply took over what had been colonial positions of power. On the other hand, through the story of Lord Khusro Khusrovani Bhagwan, the most successful holy child in history, Rushdie is narrating how even the spiritual devotions of the lower classes were inadvertently hijacked by an Indian retelling of a western modern myth. By demonstrating how, not only the political organizations but also the religious aspirations of India were simply a mimesis of the removed colonial powers, Rushdie seriously undermines the

traditional lines of division drawn between British and Indian culture (in terms of "magical-realism") and questions whether there is any possibility of a return to the "Real India" that somehow lies beyond the reach of colonial influence.

This unveiling of Indian culture as a mimesis of western influences relates in some sense to the dramatic role of the narrator himself, who we assume to be Indian (based on the drawn-out and elaborate description of his family history) but who later announces that he is white. In his article "The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History," Jean M. Kane comments:

> The genealogy that Saleem has exhaustively related is his own through adoption and experience, but not through heredity. The protagonist's birth thus starkly dramatizes the illusion of coherence upon which postcolonial nationality rests, even as this genesis debunks conceptions of blood and race as the unifying constituents of national identity. (96)

Consequently, Rushdie may really be making a statement, through the not really Indian but British narrator, that all retellings of Indian history from a postcolonial viewpoint will only be British narratives wearing Indian costumes. In a novel where the narrator constantly undermines the objective truth of his story, it is revealing that he never leads us to doubt that he is Anglo. As Loretta Mijares points out, "By and large, it seems that we are not meant to question that Methwold is Saleem's biological father" (133). Although Mijares is making the case that Saleem is a product of hybridity, she nevertheless gives a quote from Aruna Srivastava which highlights the relevance of Saleem's actual genetic heritage: "Saleem needs to know who his father is: is he British or Indian?" (133).

Padma (Saleems caretaker who turns wife at the end of the novel) has thought throughout the narrative that Saleem was Indian, but suddenly learns the truth. "'An Anglo?' Padma exclaims in horror. 'What are you telling me? You are an Anglo-Indian? Your name is not your own?'" (131). The followers of Lord Khusro might be similarly surprised to learn that their Indian guru is really a fraudulent copy of a western comic hero. These two examples may be microcosms for the entire project of *Midnight's Children* – Rushdie never lets us forget, through Saleem, that he is creating the narrative as he goes along and that it

should not be accepted uncritically. He also informs us that he is basing his narrative style on the stories Mary Pereira told him, many of which, due to her faith, were biblical stories. Therefore it should not be overlooked that Saleem's own birth story can be compared to the birth stories of both Jesus Christ and Moses – further supporting the idea that Rushdie is consciously using western mythologies to retell Indian history. Mary, who becomes a kind of surrogate mother to Saleem, almost always seems to connect him with her faith, "O Jesus, sweet Jesus, baba, my son" (545). Mary's name and her role as the baby-switcher also ties her to Miriam of the Old Testament, who is responsible for displacing Moses from a poor Jewish family into the home of the Pharaoh (Kortenaar 783).

Although Saleem's biography, his psychic ability, his nemesis and the supernatural powers of the children all have much more in common with Marvel's Professor X and his mutant friends, it is DC Comic's Superman who is referred to most directly in the text itself. Interestingly, some scholars have argued that the story of Superman is a modern retelling of Biblical narratives: a modernizing of an ancient mythology. Some motifs of Hinduism, which is considerably older than Christianity, may have even been preserved in the Bible itself, which would make the chain of transmission as follows: from Hinduism to Christianity, from Christianity to Superman, from Superman to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children.*

Conclusion

While most critics have either based their work on the assumption that magical-realism can be divided into clear cultural characteristics, or have argued that Rushdie's novel is a synthesis of Indian and British cultures in the form of cultural hybridity, the parallels between Saleem and Professor X argue for a much more powerful reading of the residual effects of colonial influence. Rather than a dynamic play between two cultures, Rushdie's history of India may only be an Indian mimesis of western mythologies. In this case, does *Midnight's Children* leave room for a return to traditional Indian values? Does a genuinely "Indian culture" remain? Probably not. The rich, ruling classes have turned white, live in large houses built by the British for the British, use their things and drink their liquor. The lower classes are either turning towards mystic gurus like Lord Khusro (a fraud, selling the Superman story

to those desperately seeking a national hero), or embracing communism and social reform – themselves European ideologies. The narrator *is* British, which is significant in his contributive role to the history of the independent India. Saleem, like India, is a forgotten bastard son, abandoned to struggle through life on his own. His story is a vain copy of his comic book heroes, who discover secret mutant powers and hope to use them for positive social change.

But the very act of mimesis, of borrowing or copying foreign traditions rather than seeking out an independent path, is an act of weakness and debt. Saleem's quest to use his powers fails because it is a reproduction of the Western idealism he learned from his upper class upbringing and his genetic heritage. An independent project seeking a true national identity for India, based on a copying of literary texts introduced by British rule, is doomed to failure. One by one, the midnight's children (who represent the new India) are rounded up and sterilized, effectively destroying the powers that so threaten the prime minister. Homi Bhabha's comments on mimicry in *The Location of Culture* are particularly fitting to this interpretation of *Midnight's Children*:

> The discourse of post-Enlightenment English colonialism often speaks in a tongue that is forked, not false. If colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce. For the epic intention of the civilizing mission, 'human and not wholly human' in the famous words of Lord Rosebery, 'writ by the finger of the Divine' often produces a text rich in the traditions of trompe-l'oeil, irony, mimicry and repetition. In this comic turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination to its low mimetic literary effects mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. […] If I may adapt Samuel Weber's formulation of the marginalizing vision of castration, then colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. (122)

Given the similarities between Saleem Sinai and Professor X, Rushdie's vocal claims at comic book expertise, and the textual evidence within *Midnight's Children* associating Saleem's narrative with comic book heroes, it seems that Marvel Comics, and particularly

issue #12, may have been the direct and main inspiration for the core literary motifs in *Midnight's Children*. If this is the case, in view of Bhabha's comments above, *Midnight's Children* may not be a liberating postcolonial writing back, but rather an "elusive and effective strategy of colonial power and knowledge." Like the account of Saleem's friend Cyrus, *Midnight's Children* appears to be a deliberate retelling of *western* mythologies in the guise of Indian story-telling. Rather than merely introducing western motifs into Indian popular culture, *Midnight's Children* may be seen as perpetuating a westernized projection of orientalist culture as recognized and criticized by Said's *Orientalism*. The fact that so little few studies on *Midnight's Children* recognize this central influence, hints at a dangerous and insidious oversight in postcolonial studies.

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