

Changing the Game: A 21st-Century Perspective on the Use of the Supernatural in Multicultural Literatures

by

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In this thesis, I attempt to present a new more modern perspective on the purpose of the literary supernatural. The use of the supernatural in literature has always been construed as a means of emphasizing forces outside of the self, a concept stemming from a westernized interpretation. For a more modern, non-westernized perspective, I assert that the supernatural is used as a tool to indict the individuals and emphasize their responsibilities to society and themselves. This shift represents a change in social awareness in which the concept of the preternatural scapegoat is deconstructed and the possibility of social change rests solely in the hands of the individual. Furthermore, this shift within multicultural literatures in particular may also work as an activist technique for the minority group. These authors are suggesting that the only way that minority groups can be lifted in society is through their own individual powers and acknowledgement of their responsibility to their cultural community. The multicultural literatures utilizing this technique are therefore attempting to break from the established constraints that outside cultures have forced upon them. I will present a new interpretation of the purpose of the literary supernatural while also challenging the western colonial control over the genres within multicultural literatures.

Changing the Game: A 21st-Century Perspective on the Use of the Supernatural in Multicultural
Literatures

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Chapter One: Introduction: The Evolution of a Misconception

The approaches to the genre of the supernatural have been ever-changing. Scholars continue to argue what exactly constitutes the supernatural genre, whether or not the cultural concept of the supernatural is reflected within the literary genre. My focus here, however, will be on how the perspectives on the genre have shifted across the generations as well as to present a 21st-century perspective of the use of the supernatural particularly in multicultural literature. For the purposes of this paper, the “supernatural” acts as an all-inclusive umbrella term that covers the subgenres of horror, the fantastic, science fiction, and magical realism. I will not argue that the supernatural is one thing instead of the other; nor will I fight for or against the cross-pollination of concept and genre. I will demonstrate that the academic generation of 21st-century minds should alter its gaze on the supernatural (especially in the context of multicultural literatures). I will present a new perspective in which we may analyze the purpose of the supernatural in multicultural literature. I am particularly interested in what this purpose within multicultural literature may represent for society as a whole.

I will begin this analysis with a survey of the evolution of scholarly (and occasionally not so scholarly) perspectives on the use of the supernatural in literature, how these perspectives may or may not shift when these scholars analyze multicultural literatures, the consequential generic groupings that formed during the examination of these texts, and the parallels of suggested purposes, themes, and motifs. The purpose of this introduction is to demonstrate the evolution of the conceptualizations of the genre as it relates to Naguib Mahfouz and Salman Rushdie which both suggests a rather static line of purpose and an isolation of multicultural texts. Chapter Two and Three will then go into my reading of the novels from each of the authors, *Arabian Nights*

and Days and Fury, respectively, along with a general literature review of the representative criticism regarding their other works. In my interpretation of the novels, I would like to show how the supernatural seemingly negates its own elements and indict the individual concerning responsibility to the society and to the self (as well as the relation between the two). This apparent negation demonstrates how the supernatural has turned away from emphasizing the forces outside of the individual (perhaps even destroys those forces). Since the uncontrollable forces are deemphasized, the novels can further highlight the individual's ability to change personal and societal circumstances. In the conclusion, I will suggest the activist implications that are inherent in this perspective of the supernatural within multicultural literatures in particular. I am not suggesting that this analysis is only possible in multicultural literatures but that it characterizes a different subtext within the minority literatures than with the others.

I have specifically decided to take on the genre of the supernatural because it is unquestionably shown through various media (literature, television shows, movies, video games) that minds, not even necessarily scholarly ones, have shifted uniquely towards this genre. While the adoration of the supernatural is not a new phenomenon, this 21st-century generation has seen the largest supernatural shift yet. Diane E. Goldstein, Sylvia Ann Grider, and Jeannie Banks Thomas, the authors of *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore*, observe in their conclusion, “Spectral Turn,” that the 21st-century has been characterized by the idolization of the supernatural in various media, literature, and folklore. This obsession can be clearly seen in the very large fan-bases of literatures such as *Twilight* and *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (which have both been turned into feature films), television shows such as *Supernatural* and *Ghost Hunters*, as well as the long-running film series of *Paranormal Activity*. Current scholars have turned their gaze toward the supernatural as well. Goldstein, Grider, and Thomas observe

the shift in which scholars have begun to examine the supernatural in folklore in order to evaluate how that then informs contemporary cultures within society. They, therefore, have taken an indirect approach towards studying the literary supernatural.

There have been numerous publications solely dedicated to analyzing the literary supernatural; most of the earlier works leaning towards the purpose of showing the general structure of a typical “ghost story” (plot lines, purposes, representations). Peter Penzoldt (*The Supernatural in Fiction*) and Julia Briggs (*Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*), in particular, are well-known critics who serve as meaningful examples of Western thinking in regards to the literary supernatural as they offer similar demonstrations of how to assess the English ghost story. Their perspectives on the genre of the supernatural clearly represent the established Westernized perspective adopted by scholars before (and after) their own generations. Although they are looking specifically at the short story, their standing claims on the structure and purpose speak towards the genre as a whole. Considering the parallel claims proposed by the two authors, I will delve into the more specific conventions in Peter Penzoldt’s book since he was the driving influence behind Briggs’s own writing. Penzoldt starts with a brief history of the development of the ghost story but I would like to focus primarily on his list of the common motifs in the short ghost story within Part One of the work. Penzoldt claims that the motifs seen throughout the common ghost story naturally came into existence because of the beliefs that had been passed down through generations. Penzoldt also asserts that the ghost story helps to combat superstitious beliefs in the supernatural because the readers are able to discern that the supernatural elements are imbedded within fiction and are therefore not a part of their reality. I will not challenge Penzoldt’s wholly westernized ideas but will simply concentrate on highlighting his concepts of the recurring images within the English short story. Penzoldt’s Table

of Contents clearly presents the major motifs that Penzoldt dwells on: the ghost, the wraith, the vampire, the werewolf, witches and witchcraft, the invisible haunter, the animal spook, the supernatural in science fiction, and finally the psychological ghost story. He posits that the motifs constitute whether or not the story will be successful with readers. Obviously, I will not go into each of his motifs but will instead point out important claims made within the work.

First and foremost, the considerably more important revealing reflection that Penzoldt mentions is the reason behind the creation of supernatural creatures, especially the vengeful specters. He states in his introduction that “the desire for justice and retribution is deeply rooted in men. Yet not only human incapacity but also circumstances always prevent an ideal form of justice” (30). This statement confirms the fact that Penzoldt subscribes to the purpose of focusing on the forces outside of the individual in society, the forces that inevitably avenge the wrongs that cannot be set right by the general population. He even goes so far as to say that the supernatural beings that are not quite connected to the allegorical theme of right versus wrong stem from a collective subconscious that is passed down through generations via “the spirits of dead persons” (32). The majority of critics analyzing supernatural works emphasize the representations of the uncontrollable, the outside forces that interfere with the life of an individual that cannot be stopped or understood. The individual must simply submit to the things that they cannot control. The purpose of the literary supernatural for most critics (even today) is to stress to readers the many things that are out of their control, the irrepressible powers that are always at play, and the futility in trying to change that cycle. As Penzoldt moves through an explanation of each motif he acknowledges the perspectives held by other critics (comparing them with his own) concerning that motif. He begins to hone in a bit more on the individual as he speculates that most of the motifs within supernatural tales represent the “symbols of the

subconscious” but still dwell on the significance of the uncontrollable; the mental illnesses, the animalistic impulses, the natural world (57). Finally, Penzoldt holds a very strong personal criticism of the “ghost story with a moral” (as does many critics of the supernatural tale). He animatedly states that “the ghost story with a moral is thus *by definition* a failure, and even the greatest authors cannot write a successful story in the genre” (93). He comes to this conclusion by discerning that these stories put the moral as priority, the supernatural elements must then bend to accommodate the moral which in turn screws up the very delicate structure of the good ghost story. This example of how Peter Penzoldt, a major critic within the field of the supernatural, viewed the purpose of the literary supernatural represents the front end of a long line of paralleled thinking. He, his predecessors, as well as his successors continuously claim that the supernatural represents forces outside of the self without taking into account the possibility of deviation.

Another critical example of this westernized interpretation of the supernatural genre, is an essay written by Howard Phillips Lovecraft assessing the “supernatural horror in literature,” which demonstrates his own perspective on the genre as well as recounting how other critics have perceived the literary supernatural genre before and during his time (all of which conforms to Penzoldt’s interpretation). His essay illustrates the domination of the ethnically homogenous literary canon within the analyses of the genre as well as the perspectives of literary purpose of the supernatural. H.P. Lovecraft begins his own survey and critique of the supernatural genre with an acknowledgement that “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear,” particularly fear of the unknown (12). He uses this information as the basis for his observation of the development and survival of supernatural literature, basically society’s affinity towards fear. Although his essay on supernatural horror in literature was first written and published in 1927,

Lovecraft's observation and explanation of the affinity towards fear is especially telling for the 21st century in that we have turned back to our roots of adoring the invocation of fear. The development of supernatural literature was a natural phenomenon that inherently parallels the human psyche. Although the supernatural tale has existed far longer through oral tradition and poetry, the custom made its more developed literary appearance through the Gothic novel in the 18th century. Horace Walpole fashioned the standardized supernatural tale that would steadily make its way across the globe. Meanwhile, "Oriental" literature had made its way to the western part of the globe with the translation and distribution of *Arabian Nights* (Lovecraft 36).

The exposure to this middle-eastern work influenced the Westernized creation of the supernatural tale as we know it today. The tendency of this early gothic era, however, was what Lovecraft explained as, "injur[ing]...creations by natural explanations..." (29). Writers, by the end of their tales, would fashion an ending that would give a logical (natural) explanation of the supernatural events throughout the tale. The purpose of these authors, therefore, was to propose that logical thinking (via logical explanatory endings) would always trump the idea of the supernatural. In other words, the rational mind is superior to the senses. It is important to note, however, that the "natural world explanations" given in these tales still fell in line with acknowledging the uncontrollable state of nature (the natural world), the force outside of the individual and yet slightly more understandable than the supernatural circumstances. For example, instead of letting the reader believe that the door closing on its own was caused by a ghost, the authors would explain that it was in fact the wind that made the door move. Lovecraft deemed this trend of natural explanations as a pitfall, an offense to the concept of the supernatural as a whole. Ultimately, as Lovecraft observes, this practice dimmed as the gothic era came to its climax. Lovecraft then moved into a kind of condemnation of the practice that

followed natural explanations, the incorporation of morals. Authors, such as Lefanu, Doyle and H.G. Wells, had begun to insert “the moral of the story” into their writings and Lovecraft was clearly against this, calling it the “semi-gothic, quasi-moral tradition” (43). He suggested that the tradition proved to hold a weak connection with the readers of the genre. Those who partook in this practice focused more on particular events in a story instead of worrying themselves about the ominous atmosphere. They wrote more “intellectual” supernatural tales that highlighted the condition of humanity’s interaction with the supernatural world (Lovecraft 43). The suggested purpose for this school within the post-gothic era was to illustrate humanity’s response to the unknown. This trend quickly led into the tradition of the psychological horror in the 19th century (Lovecraft’s “modern time”). Writers, as Lovecraft observed, concerned themselves with the workings of the human mind which allows for a more intense, if not more genuine, kind of terror. Outside of the movement of fantastical horror, the psychological horror writers began to make way into the genre as a whole.

After dedicating a few pages to outliers of the psychological movement, Lovecraft moves into an entire chapter dedicated to the master of the psychological tale, Edgar Allan Poe. The existence of this chapter makes obvious Lovecraft’s admiration of the man and his work within the genre of the supernatural. Lovecraft emphasized Poe’s function as interpreter instead of the omnipotent narrator/teacher. Poe studied the horror of the mind as it were and not what it should represent for the individual or the society as a whole (Lovecraft 53). In other words, Poe was devoted to the supernatural in and of itself, not the sympathies of the individual encountering it or the societal logic behind the happenings. This suggests that the center of Poe’s concerns was that which was outside the individual, the supernatural itself. Before finalizing his essay with the proclamation of the inevitable survival of the literary supernatural, Lovecraft acknowledges

several more modern writers such as Kipling, Stoker, and Wells (now solidly in our literary canon) who contributed to the genre a sense of alternative supernatural spheres. Lovecraft gives a wonderful overview of the development of the genre up to his time which inarguably shows the ethnic origins of the texts studied (all purely of the dominant ethnicity) and the major consensus of the purposes being situated outside of the individual.

As illustrated with the works above, the genre of the supernatural has been utilized as a tool of reinforcing the idea of the forces outside of the self, whether they be supernatural beings or simply the rules of the natural world. Penzoldt and Lovecraft demonstrate attitudes about the genre that fall in line with the majority of critics. As demonstrated in their works, the examples given by these critics have been primarily writers of the dominant ethnicity and gender with very few essential white females (Radcliffe, Shelley, and Wollstonecraft) included. We have had more leeway in terms of the studying the supernatural outside of canon literatures but they all come down to references to the uncontrollable, the non-human powers that make the world go round, or the irrepressible subconscious feelings and desires that float around the human mind. The approach to the genre of the supernatural within multicultural or postcolonial works may not be completely different from the investigation given by Penzoldt and Lovecraft. For a large amount of time, analyses of the literary supernatural, such as Penzoldt and Lovecraft's, have concentrated on the literary canon.

This study, however, will focus on the supernatural in multicultural literatures (and not merely in terms of the subgenres such as magical realism) in order to uncover meanings that have not been previously considered. The study of magical realism, for example, was dominated by Latin American texts mainly because this is where it originated. Although the roots of the term "magical realism" stemmed from Roh describing a shift in German painting away from the

era of realism, it made its way to Latin America with Carpentier describing the now well-known literary technique (Reeds). The ethnic origins of magical realism coupled with the formation of the postcolonial theory and the renegotiation of power within the Third World in the late 1960s resulted in the studying of multicultural texts in a non-western light (Durix). The detrimental component, however, is that multicultural texts have ultimately been positioned as literature conveyed solely through what has commonly been considered the “ethnic literary mode” of magical realism. While the term is rarely used to describe native English-speaking works, it is almost inseparable from ethnic works. So then they (multicultural texts) are either simply seen as an assemblage of works that are only capable of using this particular literary tool (magical realism) or overlooked, perhaps buried beneath a “canonical novel,” when they attempt to use any other form that is considered western (such as the fantastic or mystery). The multicultural texts that utilize the “westernized” literary tools have been overlooked as mere copy-cats having nothing to add to the genre or grouped together with the major canon instead of being analyzed in and of themselves in order to see where and how their purposes may branch off or simply how they may use those tools differently (Durix).

I would like not only to widen the conceptual possibilities of minority literatures but to also examine a newer paradigm through which ethnic literatures may express more than the material within the box of “magical realism” that was placed around them. The use of the supernatural within minority works has shifted in terms of perspectives across generations as well as across ethnic groups but it has also begun to make clear its shift away from what scholars have believed to be mere mimetic styles of more dominant works. The mere expression of the “supernatural” encompasses more literary interpretations, acting as an umbrella term for many subgenres. This broader literary term widens the scope of analytic possibilities for multicultural

literatures on a grander scale than limiting those multicultural literatures to the narrow box of magical realism. In this analysis, I refer to and internalize the novels as supernatural novels, not magical realist, so that the literary purpose of the novels may be extended outside of the established ethnic mode.

The examination of multicultural works through the lens of the “supernatural” as opposed to the restrictive “magical realism” suggests even more literary and ethnic implications. The use of magical realism in minority literatures has been interpreted as a tool for speaking to the center, a way to decenter the colonial metropolis and reconstruct the past/environment that was taken from them. I propose that, through the broader lens of the supernatural, it is clear that the use is now directed inwards (towards their minority peers) instead of outward (towards the center). The problem with the Western interpretations is the misconceptions that are placed on the minority literatures in relation to dominant works. Jean-Pierre Durix, while obviously attempting to allow for a more explicit look at postcolonial literature, exemplifies some of these misconceptions. He asserts that the literatures will always be merely mimetic in terms of the hybrid culture that manifests during and after colonization although the native cultures may twist the original literary form to suit their needs. The mere assertion of this idea suggests that minority literatures using “Western” literary tools such as the supernatural inhibit the acknowledgement (from scholarly critics) of the innovative concepts that the literatures are contributing to the utilized genre.

Although the more modern scholarly interpretations of the use of the supernatural within multicultural literatures have demonstrated that the minority literatures suggests different implications, these interpretations still fall in line with the euro-centric purpose of supernatural in the dominant literatures. The scholars are, therefore, offering a merely superficial purpose to the

literary supernatural within postcolonial literatures because they never suggest that the purpose is anything other than the forces outside of the self (which is the already established “western” purpose). So then, even the critics belonging to an ethnic minority are blind-sighted by the customary Westernized purpose so much that a more foundationally different interpretation for the use of the supernatural in multicultural works cannot be explored. This suggests that although the critics are moving beyond the Westernized view of multicultural literatures, they are not moving beyond the Western understanding of the supernatural.

For example, critics may investigate what it means for minority works to refer to forces outside of the self instead of looking at whether or not the minority works are actually emphasizing those forces at all. Mariam Konate Deme, Joann Furlow Allen, and Thrity N. Umrigar are guilty of doing just that. Deme focuses most of her article, “Heroism and the Supernatural in the African Epic,” on criticizing scholars for asserting that the African epic is not a true epic based purely on Western conceptualizations of what an epic should entail. These euro-centric scholars have dismissed the African epic purely on the fact that the main character depends too largely on supernatural means in order to prevail over his enemies (Deme). Deme asserts in this article that scholars must firstly realize that there should not be universal standards to which literatures of various cultures must conform and also consider the cultural context of the literatures while analyzing the literary tools used within the text. The non-western use of the supernatural in African epics is clearly exemplified in the article. The supernatural represents the realization of the weaknesses of human beings and acts as the tool to overcome such weakness; “It is clear that the person who resorts to magic does so because he acknowledges the fact that he needs divine intervention to cope with his weaknesses and limitations as a human” (413). These claims, however, are still dependent upon the westernize notion of referring to powers outside of

the self as the purpose. The connection between the supernatural and self-empowerment (as opposed to empowerment through the supernatural) is wholly overlooked even while there is an attempt to break from original westernized designs.

Allen and Umrigar also fall into this misconception as they analyze the use of the supernatural as tools of empowerment within Latina and African-American literatures respectively. These articles focus on empowerment as a minority group through the connection with ancestral supernatural beliefs. They assert that these beliefs not only provide a sense of identity within an individual but also act as a common ground to bring a whole community together. They (both community and self) achieve a sense of power in relation to their society when they connect with their ancestral roots once again. However, we are once again seeing an assertion that the source of empowerment is through forces outside of the self. The power is through the myths, religions, and ancestors of a culture instead of within the self. One may claim that ancestry is a part of the self but, as I will demonstrate in the next two chapters, the supernatural used within the texts examined in this thesis emphasizes the power of the individual's agency by essentially negating the supernatural forces and bringing the possibilities of the sole individual to the forefront of the stories at hand. The use of the supernatural in multicultural texts is, therefore, being misinterpreted by a majority of scholars, no matter their ethnic background or focus.

Chapter Two: Of Men and Djinn: A Shift in the Use of the Supernatural in Naguib Mahfouz's
Arabian Nights and Days

In the preface of his book, *The Supernatural and English Fiction*, Glen Cavaliero asserts that the theme of the supernatural acts as a commentary on nature in 19th-century English fiction. To Cavaliero, the supernatural represents the metaphysical and its connection to the human experience thus questioning "to what extent the concept of the supernatural corresponds to a reality that we can know" (244). On another point, Katherine J. Weese connects the supernatural with the creation of the feminist narrative in *Feminist Narrative and the Supernatural*. She asserts that the supernatural "devices call attention to social constructions of gender" so that they may begin to break down said constructions (8). Cavaliero and Weese observe the use of this device in popular novels such as Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and Morrison's *Beloved*. The use of the supernatural has gone through several surface transformations as we see that perspectives concerning the purpose of the supernatural have been shifting superficially from a representation of God, to a representation of the feminist agenda, but these shifts never steer away from the fundamental basis of representing forces outside of the self. For the purpose of this essay, I will observe a more foundational shift in the use of the supernatural in a less common work of fiction. I will demonstrate how Naguib Mahfouz uses the supernatural as a tool for endorsing societal responsibility and human agency in his novel, *Arabian Nights and Days*. Mahfouz uses the cultural tradition of djinn to comment on the true possibilities of the individual.

Naguib Mahfouz is a prime example of authors who focuses on the varied incorporation of the supernatural in their works. This Nobel-prize winning author has various contributions to the literary field of the supernatural. The major criticisms of his works, much like with other

minority literatures, have highlighted the social and political connotations within his works but never realize the possibilities of his use of the supernatural breaking from the universally accepted purpose of the genre. In order to fully understand how this thesis offers a theoretical break from the established academic consensus concerning the authors as well as the genre, familiarity with the criticism behind the author as well as the works examined in this thesis is essential.

Within his autobiography as well as throughout his creative works, major critics believe that Mahfouz predominantly highlights the psychological/political/social causes and possible effects of a man who exercises his agency. Having witnessed several revolutions and wars, Mahfouz has seen several defeats and the results of the human condition. This personal experience has been translated by critics into his later works as a pessimistic attitude toward society stating that “the buoyant humor and color of the earlier realist novels have now been replaced by a cynicism and world-weariness” (“Literary criticism” 5). Mahfouz’s most famous work is the *Cairo Trilogy* of which critics have observed a running existentialist theme which falls in line with the analyses of many of his other works. It has been noted that the Revolution of 1919 against the British had a lasting effect on Mahfouz and his writings in which he incorporates nationalist themes into his novels in which every citizen of the state held a responsibility to the betterment society (“Literary criticism”). The individual is responsible for creating his own meaning, his meaning within the context of his society, and the beauty in his life. Mahfouz even moves beyond this to say that the individual is also responsible for the whole of society and any possible changes that may need to happen for the improvement of the general public.

Ali Saleh Ali Al Hossini has also noted representations of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in *The Cairo Trilogy*. He notes that “the issue is no longer just political freedom, but also social justice. People are prepared to pay out of their individual time for the public cause” (Hossini 13). Similarly, several critics have called the social realistic trilogy a “national allegory” through which Mahfouz has characterized contemporary Egypt’s political underdogs as lower social citizens that will inevitably become the “candidate for the salvation of humanity” (Mondal 203). Thus the political is intertwined with the social of which both realms are molded by the portrayed agency of the individual. Or as R. El-Enany writes:

In fact, in Mahfouz’s world individual morality and social morality are indivisible; they are the two sides of the one coin. Thus, an individual who is solely concerned with his own personal salvation, showing no regard for other individuals in his immediate environment and society at large, is an accursed self-seeker. (El-Enany 21)

This issue of political and social realms is also seen throughout his autobiography which, in and of itself, is a very creative form that refuses to adhere to the rules of time or structure. The work consists of allegorical excerpts that seem to represent (most times in a more metaphorical sense) various times in the writer’s life conjuring up his attitudes toward life, death, the condition of man, and society. The excerpt, “When,” demonstrates this idea of personal responsibility, “I asked Sheikh Abd-Rabbih al-Ta’ih: ‘When will the state of the country be sound?’ He replied, ‘when its people believe that the end result of cowardice is more disastrous than that of behaving with integrity.’” (Mahfouz 88). This motif of individual responsibility is also seen in “The Question” which criticizes the unwarranted hyper-sensitivity of citizens toward the questioning of authority (69); “On the Point of Escape” which condemns (both personally and religiously) “those who flee” (87); and “Freedom” which praises those who “exercise his freedom correctly” (103).

Religion has always held a large role in the majority of Mahfouz's works as he "alludes to significant episodes of Islamic traditions and parallels them" (Mondal 206). In his autobiography 'The Coincidence' illustrates his thoughts on the possibility of forgetting God in terms of religious practices and influences while one depends upon oneself:

Under the statue we met we met by chance. I came to a stop: he was smiling and I was thrown into confusion. I shook his hand with the deference he deserved, and he asked me, "How are you?" I answered politely, shyly. "Thanks be to God-your kindness is not forgotten." He said, in a voice that was not devoid of a gentle rebuke, "It's good to depend on yourself, but it seems to me that you have forgotten me." I said shyly, "I don't wish to be a burden to you, but you are wholly indispensable." We parted, my apprehensions aroused. I remembered the long time I had been in contact with him, when he was everything in my life; I also remembered his kindness and his favors. I remembered, too, his other traits, such as his avoidance of me, his sternness, and his lack of concern without giving any explanation that might reassure one's heart. Despite everything, I regarded the meeting as a happy coincidence. (Mahfouz 46)

This excerpt is evidence of the fact that while Mahfouz may have an active faith in God he is adamant about the hierarchy in which human agency must come above the belief of setting things in the hands of God or sometimes to let the religious ideas of peace and social equality be the guiding force behind actions. Throughout his novels science and social ideals are placed above religion which suggests Mahfouz's social philosophy in which the foundation for morality is instilled in the social possibilities that result from the good in human nature (El-Enany). C. Nijland relates similar observations, however with a slightly different interpretation, in several of Mahfouz's novels, saying that the tension between the belief in science and the belief in Islam in the works represents the capability that science has in creating a new religion but has not reached said formation because the Islamic view always outshines (in the sense of drawing the readers' attention) the scientific outlook. Either way Mahfouz highlights the way in which citizens must wrestle between their devotion to a higher being and devotion to their social environment.

Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days* has surprisingly little scholarly criticism (in English). The few things that have been said about the work include an analysis of the different representations of the character of Scheherazade with multiple literatures and film adaptation of *A Thousand and One Nights*. Wen-Chin Ouyang asserts that within Mahfouz's novel "realism displaces and replaces [the] fantasy" that is seen in the original version through which he manifests a political allegory that combines the ancient environment of Egypt with its contemporary political situation (408). In a later article Ouyang extends his theory when he calls Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days* "both a symptom and symbol of postcolonial identity politics" which invokes his previous assertion that the novel portrayed contemporary politics both within the country itself as well as with outside nations (125). In this article, Ouyang takes a genre-theoretical approach to the novel while his previous article focused more on the theory of adaptation and its consequences and implications. On a slightly alternative note (yet more parallel to my own pursuits), Orchida Ishmail (in conjunction with Lamya Ramadan) explores the use of djinn in Mahfouz's novel and ultimately observes that the djinn have no control over the actions of the characters within the novel which in turn suggests that the evil that is represented is purely through the men themselves. Meanwhile, others focus on the representation of evil within the novel, the general concept along with the portrayed distinction between justice and revenge (and perhaps the blurring of the two).

Originally written in 1979, Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days* was translated into English by Denys Johnson-Davies in 1995. This novel serves as a sequel to, or perhaps more of a reimagining of, the legendary *One Thousand and One Nights*, best known in English as the *Arabian Nights*. Mahfouz begins his story where the original ends, intertwining the stories of various familiar characters such as Aladdin and Nur al-Din. Much like the original, characters in

the novel come into contact with djinn and are consequently placed into a series of unfortunate events. With an astounding mix of aristocracy, corruption, and the supernatural, Mahfouz creates a world in which reality and the supernatural are constantly clashing. A major underlying theme in the novel is the tension between human agency and fate: the interaction between humans and djinn that subsequently influences the destiny of the humans. Mahfouz, however, fashions the interactions so that it is wholly clear that human agency is the only substantial function of these exchanges which means that the interchanges are produced in order to highlight the fact that man has more control (than he believes) to change the societal environment around him.

Although the djinn are constantly interrupting the lives of the men, it is apparent that they can never control their choices. However, while most of the characters inevitably make decisions that lead to their own demise, they choose to blame the djinn for the results of those choices. The men fail to realize their own free will and ability to stand against the requests of the djinn (or the corruption in their districts). In this chapter, I would like to show that human agency and true character are always the sole factors of the characters' destinies. The djinn are simply there to incite those dark natures into action so that the men are forced to recognize their own faults. In most cases throughout the novel, the men take advantage of the powers that the djinn bestow upon them and, in the end, blame the mystical beings for their own negative judgments. The interaction between the supernatural and the humans in the novel inevitably play out as a kind of call to action for societal improvements. Instead of realizing their responsibilities toward society and themselves as culpable human beings, the men act on their whims and ultimately thrust the blame on the supernatural.

To begin, it is important to recognize that with the incorporation of the djinni is the myth of supernatural manipulation. Readers observe the relationship between the djinn and human

characters and irrationally conclude that any negative decision of the human was caused by the djinni. This belief is shown in the reviews of Mahfouz's novel; Giles Coren assumes that the men in the novel had "become the pawns of [djinn]" (1) while Alan Davis deduces that one of the characters was "under the influence of his genie" (331). The traditional powers of the djinni, however, do not include mind control. A close analysis of the novel, in fact, shows that the djinn act simply as tempters and not controllers. It is, therefore, important to debunk the assumption of supernatural manipulation in order to observe the true purpose of the inclusion of the djinn in the novel. It may be said that the djinn act as an externalization of faults and, in some cases, the subconscious of a character. I would claim, however, that Mahfouz's purpose in incorporating the supernatural being moves beyond the simple representation of the subconscious and more into a realm of nearly negating itself (as supernatural) by wholly emphasizing practicality, the power of the agency of the individual, and criticizing traditions of blaming outside forces for personal faults or societal pitfalls.

This myth of manipulation may be further discredited by differentiating between the original Middle Eastern djinn and the Westernized genie of which can establish a basic knowledge of the traditional powers and limitations of the djinn in the novel. The djinni was transformed into the genie when the *One Thousand and One Nights* was translated into several languages and distributed around the world. The original has been significantly altered from a free-willed djinni to the Westernized wish-granting genie. Disney's formation of the genie is the most common version in Western society. The djinn, however, are far more complex than the depictions created through Disney (and other) adaptations. Although scholars such as René Bravmann believe that the idea of the djinn predated Islamic culture, they do emphasize that the Koran defines its existence and characteristics. Bravmann explains that the djinn are considered

types of nature spirits existing before the establishment of Islam. The majority of these spirits were said to have been tamed by Allah. The Koran describes the supernatural beings as “suprahuman beings composed of fire and flames, not perceivable by man, and capable of emerging in a variety of forms” (Bravmann 46). They, like humans, have the free-will to do as they please without being restricted to the commands of God. Bravmann goes on to explain that unlike human beings, the djinn are believed to be located in a space between the unseen world (where angels are found) and the seen world (where humans reside). In this in-between, they can interact with humans as well as angels even though humans cannot always hear or see them (Sheikh). Unlike the Westernized genie, djinn are not bound to an object (usually a lamp for the Westerners); they roam freely between the seen and unseen worlds. They can, however, be placed under the control of a human being like that of the Western genie. People of great power are believed to have possession of a djinni. Humans and djinn are then able to “influence each other towards both positive and negative ends” (Sheikh 339).

Djinn are also known to be just as varied in character as human beings. References in Muslim literature describes djinn “that are either inimical to mankind or that may serve individuals through positive and enlightened guidance” (Bravmann 46). Djinn can be good-natured and act as a guide toward salvation in one moment and quickly afterwards act as tricksters and hold ill-natured temperaments. Consequently, individual djinn can fall along the entire disposition spectrum, from those who are devoutly religious to those who are purely evil. Each djinni has its own natural temperament. As Bravmann stated, djinn can change their character quite easily but usually have an attachment to Allah for better or for worse. The djinni is usually not dangerous unless it is angered and holds a grudge against a human. If it is annoyed, the djinni may exact revenge through pure misfortune of the actual individual or cause

deformities of the children. The personality of a djinni, much like humans, can be assessed through its actions, the motives behind said actions, and its belief system. With that said, while djinn are well-known tempters they cannot force others to make decisions. Satan is known as a very powerful djinni according to the Koran and as most religions believe, he can only entice but never control (Sheikh).

While there are several versions of how the djinn were created, usually based on geography and religion, all versions agree that there is a definite intermingling of humans and djinn but only to an extent of temptation. The djinn are tricksters and tempters but do not have the ability to force an individual into a certain decision. The issue with the religious merging of the reality of the human world and supernaturalism of the djinni world is that people tend to equate the abilities of tempting and controlling. Based on the belief of interacting with a world outside of their understanding, a world in which the impossibilities of reality is quite possible (such as invisibility and metamorphosis), they think that these somewhat “higher beings” (because of their depicted immense power) can easily take control of them. This misconception is also characterized in Mahfouz’s novel. I will show, however, that the extent to which djinn interfere in characters’ lives, while being a nuisance, is never a mind-controlling force but instead a representation of the authority of the character. For the purpose of the argument, I will analyze each major interaction by breaking the experiences into isolated events; the experience of the djinni and the experience of the human. I break it down for two reasons, to further debunk the myth of manipulation and to show the weight of human agency on the situations at hand. These interactions further demonstrate the apparent existential purposes of the djinn in the novel.

The first djinni that is presented in the novel is Qumqam. Qumqam intrudes on the life of Sanaan al-Gamali the merchant. Sanaan woke up in the middle of the night and was unlucky

enough to step on his head. There is no telling whether it was by mere coincidence or by the clever working of the djinni himself. Qumqam threatens to put a curse on Sanaan's head (and it must be noted that the curse is threatened to fall only on Sanaan and not his family). When Sanaan offers to do anything within his power for a pardon from the offense Qumqam states his request; "Kill Ali al-Salouli" (12). The djinni says that the governor, Ali al-Salouli, used black magic to control him and that he could only be freed if the governor died. After a few hesitations from Sanaan, Qumqam clearly tells him on page 13 "you must either accept or refuse" which alone shows that there is more than one option in the arrangement. Qumqam clearly gives him a chance to refuse the request. When Sanaan finally agrees, Qumqam disappears and reappears only after the merchant has committed a murder (though not the one requested). Qumqam transports him from the dark alley with a bit of irritation; "I never asked you to do something evil!" (19). The djinni saved Sanaan merely because his request had yet to be fulfilled. The obvious motivation behind his saving the man is the freedom that could only be experienced with the murder of the governor. The djinni declares his disappointment in Sanaan the night before the governor's murder and the last point that Qumqam interacts with Sanaan is after the deed is finally done. But this time around, Qumqam refuses to save Sanaan as he had done before and leaves the man to the consequences of his actions (the very first beheading of the novel, soon to be followed by many others). By the end of this chapter we learn that Qumqam is actually devoutly religious; "My faith prevents me from interfering now that I have taken possession of my free will" (27). The only major step that the djinni took in this situation was to save Sanaan from the dark alley. He also expressed disappointment and anger toward Sanaan for his actions.

Shifting toward a focus on Sanaan, I will detail the circumstances outside of the djinni's influence. First of all, I would like to reiterate that Sanaan is presented with a choice whether or

not he will yield to the djinni's request. Sanaan agrees to kill someone in order to avoid the djinni's curse. After the initial meeting with Qumqam in the middle of the night, the merchant begins to change and commits what readers consider the most shocking crime in the novel. He began to acknowledge and act upon a sense of moral darkness within himself; yelling at his family, ignoring his friends, and succumbing to his deepest desires. The djinni had left him to his own devices and the man decided to use said devices for evil and, on a perverted whim, raped and killed a young schoolgirl. Now, most readers connect his moral deterioration with the influence of the djinni but the puzzles pieces simply do not fit together. Qumqam did not put a spell on the merchant. In fact, the djinni was shocked and furious when Sanaan killed the innocent child and told the man "You alone are responsible for your crime" (23). Sanaan eventually did finish the requested deed but he was not magically saved as he was when he killed the girl. The audience can only assume that Qumqam abandoned Sanaan as a punishment for the previous crime. The moral of this situation is that the djinni gave the merchant a choice in the matter, he did not ask the merchant to turn on his friends and family, he did not request that the merchant to kill the child, and he did not look on gleefully while these horrid events took place. These actions were outside of the djinni's control which speaks toward the other interactions in the novel.

The end of the merchant's story introduces us to Qumqam's equally religious companion, Singam. Singam is freed from the bounds of a metal ball by Gamasa al-Bulti, the chief of police, during one of his routine fishing trips. Although it is Gamasa who frees Singam, the djinni does not offer to grant any wishes but instead threatens to take his revenge and anger for humans out on the chief. But, fortunately for Gamasa, Qumqam appears and convinces his friend otherwise and the two djinn fly off together only after telling the chief that they would meet again. Singam

appears to Gamasa for the second time after the quarter had been afflicted with robberies. Singam admits that he is the cause of these robberies, letting his anger out on those who take advantage of other human beings. During the short conversation, Singam gives Gamasa several reasons why he, too, is just as corrupt as the criminals he's putting into prison; "You too are of the corrupt group of people" (41). Singam disappears once again after informing Gamasa that since he did, in fact, free him from his bonds he plans on returning the favor. Singam did not appear in front of Gamasa again until after Gamasa took it upon himself to kill the Governor. After the chief of police had been sentenced to a beheading for the murder, the djinni transferred his soul into another body stating, "Now we're all square" (50). By the end of the entire endeavor, it seems as if Singam's motive was to convince Gamasa of his own corruption and remind the man of the empowerment that comes with the choice of making decisions according to the will of God and not to the will of your boss. Gamasa's story was therefore one of the very few happy endings (as morbid as it may initially seem). Overall, Singam's objectives seemed to be a helpful, guidance toward salvation. It is necessary, however, to consider Gamasa's side of the story.

The chief of police, Gamasa al-Bulti, comes into contact with the djinni while he is out on a relaxing fishing trip on the lake. After accidentally freeing Singam from the bottle, we learn that Gamasa continuously makes excuses for the times when his job demanded corruption. When he tells the djinni that his job is to follow orders, Singam replies, "A slogan suitable for covering up all sorts of evils" (34). The djinni has several short conversations with Gamasa and inevitably argues that the man is just as corrupt (perhaps even more so) than the criminals that he throws in jail. Gamasa constantly tries to compensate for the wrongs he's done in the name of his job, stating "My mind is solely in the service of my duty" after Singam calls him a "mindless

instrument” (42). The extent of the spirit’s influence comes within the bounds of a discussion between man and djinni. There is no request to kill, there is no threat of a curse, there is only a djinni confronting the corrupt mindset of a man. While left to his own devices, Gamasa does take Singam’s words to heart and decides on his own to kill the governor. In the end, he puts God and community responsibility as his top priority which is why he doesn’t beg for his life when he is put on trial. The chief of police eludes death, thanks to Singam, and inevitably becomes a wise man for the town. With the spiritual guidance from Singam, Gamasa was able to realize his faults and take responsibility for what he has done. This situation shows the strength and importance of human agency.

The last two djinn that we come into contact with, Sakhrabout and Zarmabaha, are of the more mischievous sort. The situation that they are involved with is also of a more unique sort. This couple tends to enjoy throwing rocks at glass houses but the effects of their interventions are not as direct as readers would like to believe. Although these two wickedly playful spirits are involved in quite a few intrusions, for time’s sake I will cover the very first (and coincidentally the most interesting) jest. The djinn’s creative ploy involves Dunyazad, the sister of the queen, and Nur al-Din, the perfume seller. Through the guise of a dream, the djinn bring the two together for a night of passion. After this initial stunt of making the dream a reality, the spirits step aside and simply watch the event take on a life of its own, agreeing to “just let things take their course” (91). Everything else that follows this ruse lies outside of the djinn’s control. The various characters in the story are the sole cause of the ending which parallels the circumstances in every other story recounted with the djinn in the novel. The agency of the characters creates the very essence of the stories at hand which is why it is imperative that we consider the human side of the conflict as well.

The circumstances with the forlorn dream-lovers are parallel to the previous demonstration of the actions of men. Dunyazad and Nur al-Din fall in love because of the trick played out by the two mischievous djinn. The two lovers were brought together in a dream but when they woke up they could not remember each other's names or faces. This was the only miracle performed by the djinn; the rest of the story was fueled by the actions of the people of the town. A rich merchant named Karam al-Aseel was promised Dunyazad's hand which made her so miserable that she attempted to run away. When the sultan heard the story of the two ill-fated lovers being apart he made sure that the story was spread around town and promised that the couple would have his full support. The word of the villagers brought the two lovers together and they were backed by the sultan (much to the chagrin of the djinn). So in the end, it was the actions of the people that led to the happy ending. The ploy of the djinn was foiled by human agency. This situation acts as a, although parallel, slightly different interaction between humans and djinn. Although women were used to being married off to anyone that the men of the family desires, Dunyazad rebelled against the tradition by running away. Through her interaction with the djinn, her desire for true love was realized and she acted upon that realization.

The detailed events in the novel demonstrate that the faculty of the djinn is not as manipulative as characters (as well as the readers) would like to believe. Each situation presented allows individual characters, first and foremost, to resist the requests and/or influences of the djinn. I only covered three instances of djinn interferences but there are plenty more circumstances with both fortunate and unfortunate endings throughout the novel. There are also a few characters that openly refused to bend to the whims of the djinn which shows that rejection was not impossible. The strength and wisdom of the characters' actions carried the bulk of the story into the appropriate finales. Sanaan the merchant led himself into an unfortunate

conclusion because his actions were cowardly and self-centered. Gamasa received a more fortunate ending because he finally accepted responsibility for himself and his community. At the end of Sanaan story he still did not realize his faults and responsibilities, yelling to Qumqam, “Who said I was responsible for the quarter?” The distinction between the Sanaan and Gamasa reveals that the ability to overcome faults and morally support the community acts as the dividing line between the good and the wicked. It is the wicked people who blame the supernatural for their own mistakes and moves about society as if the public suffering has nothing to do with them. The djinn, then, appear in the novel simply as catalysts for these realizations. The supernatural forces in the novel externalize the inherent natures of the characters so that they are forced to see what they truly are as well as how they may become an activist about righting numerous wrongs on both personal and societal issues.

The struggle between good and evil serves as a basis for Mahfouz’s own ethics. In *The Pursuit of Meaning*, a biography of Mahfouz, author Rasheed El-Enany states that “...Mahfouz believes...in human volition and responsibility for action” (162). This belief is reflected in the characters’ stories; some would fall while others would be morally lifted depending on individual choices. Mahfouz incorporated the djinn to represent the controllability of reality and the possibilities of the agency of men, not as a controlling device. El-Enany reveals that Mahfouz was once a civil servant which acts as the basis of the corruption he illustrated in his novel. Those who gave in to the harshness and corruption of reality would fall while those who heeded the wise signs of reality and rejected the corruption would be morally and emotionally elevated. One cannot resort to blaming reality for taking the wrongs turns in life (which is exactly what some characters opted to do). According to El-Enany, the djinn in *Arabian Nights and Days* “are only used to externalize human impulses of good and evil” (160). At the end of the day, the

characters are incited to make their own decisions so that they can fully accept the consequences. Mahfouz creates a world in which evil does not exist outside of man (El-Enany). According to Mahfouz, when men step up to correct the corrupt then perhaps we can move towards a more peaceful society.

Evil is not a supernatural phenomenon, according to Mahfouz; people must take responsibility for their faults and decisions (El-Enany). The supernatural element is used by Mahfouz in order to reiterate this culpability. Although this lesson of responsibility is rarely recognized by critics, there are a few that catch on to fragments of the purpose of the supernatural in the novel. Outside of El-Enany, a book review written by David Pinault recognizes the djinn in the novel as “reifications of the basest human impulses” (312). The supernatural is used as a device to “unleash appetites their possessors scarcely knew existed” and not as forces of manipulation that guides the characters toward negative decisions (312). Just as Cavaliero describes the utilization of the supernatural as basic metaphors for a god and Weese places the supernatural as a representation of the feminist disruption of gendered structures, Mahfouz creates a unique purpose for the incorporation of the supernatural into his novel. He shifts the use of the supernatural once again by engaging it as an emphasis toward demonstrating the possibilities of agency. I believe that this shift symbolizes the level of which man must acknowledge and admonish his own corruption as well as corruption surrounding him. Men make many excuses for the violence and corruption in the world and fail to take responsibility for his participation in the corrupt society. The externalization of the faults of man forces them to see what they have done to contribute to the violence in society and encourages them to do something about it.

Chapter Three: Anger Management: Control and the Use of the Supernatural in Salman Rushdie's *Fury*

Salman Rushdie, a writer that Durix refers to as “a Master of story-telling,” has also exemplified and redefined the genre of the supernatural in his collection of works (117). One of the major subject matters noted within Rushdie’s works is a sense of biography. Goonetilleke acknowledges the characters in certain novels that parallel Rushdie’s own family members as well as his own personal situations. For instance, his father (understood to be an alcoholic) is seen in the father figure in *Midnight’s Children*; his older sister seems to be mimicked in *Midnight’s Children* as the “Brass Monkey” as well as in *Grimus* as “Bird-Dog”; his childhood city, Bombay, is recalled in *Midnight’s Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*; his own light-skinned appearance along with the issues attached to such is seen in the majority of his works; along with plenty other instances of characterizations. Although Rushdie denies the connection of his sister within his novel characterizations, he does state in an interview that:

You see, probably the most autobiographical things in the book [referring to *Midnight’s Children*] are the places. Saleem’s house is the house that I grew up in and have a photograph on my wall here. The school that he goes to is my school. Those things are certainly based on my childhood. And in the area where he lived there were a large number of European families as well as Indian families, and three or four very tomboyish girls. The one who probably was most Evie Burns wasn’t in fact American; she was Australian. But then there were a couple of English girls and a couple of American girls, and Evie Burns is a mixture and an exaggeration of the worst features of all of them. (Rushdie 3)

Rushdie’s sense of replicating important places in his life has presented itself in the majority of his works. As an author who spent a large chunk of his childhood in a foreign country, Rushdie’s translation of his own connections to places as well as his experiences of

migrancy brings to his novels the very implications that are inherent in any postcolonial work: the discussion of identity; the struggle for power between the self, the homeland, and the center; as well as the fight against different varieties of oppression (direct or hegemonic). Rushdie, however, allows himself to explore the possibility of the multiplicity of homelands, the fractured roots of the self. Within several novels, he even gives the history (as well as the possible realities) of his homeland, India. Nicole Weickgenannt Thiara constructs an entire book around the concept of Rushdie's writing giving post-independent India a sense of itself, its power, its fault, its possibilities by concentrating for the most part on various characters and situations in his novels (*Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* in particular) that represents the thriving yet struggling nation.

This thematic thread of place and nation spills quite neatly into his notions of hybridity that is seen in several of his works as well. The binary between the East and the West holds a strong position throughout his works. It is not simply the tensions between the two sides of civilization but the possible hybridity of the two and perhaps even a global hybridity that induces a more peaceful environment. This possible hybrid is seen in several characters and situations in his works, such as Saladin Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses* (which is also said to mimic Rushdie himself), the philosophical clashes within *Grimus*, and the occult binaries within "Harmony of the Spheres" in *East, West*. Nasser Hussain asserts that the "Rushdie Affair" along with the general aversion towards his works was not so much against the content of the works but that his home nation (Pakistan) felt betrayed by someone hailing from their own cultural group. The cultural/national identity of Rushdie motivated the nation's measures against his works that questioned the foundation of the entire nation in and of itself (namely religion and dirty politics). As Shailja Sharma asserts, however, these dire consequences of dislike has not prevented

Rushdie from questioning the system and celebrating the idea of his hyphenated identity which would include not only Pakistan but the nations of which he feels that he belongs. As several other scholars have noted, Rushdie's works explores the pathways through which hybridity and the reconciliation of displacement may flourish.

Rushdie's *Fury* has a nice handful of scholarly attention perhaps because of the fact that the novel was published on the day of the attack on the Twin Towers. Rushdie thought that the event would make readers lose interest in the novel but in fact it sparked even more attention (both positive and negative) perhaps mainly because of the nostalgia attached to the novel that represents the time before the world-changing event. The place of this novel in particular had obviously shifted. The U.S. reviewers, however, did not take kindly to the novel exemplifying a "super-powerful, super-famous, and super-rich" main character (Brouillette 139). They basically cringed at the "obvious" parallels between the pretentious Malik Solanka and Rushdie himself. This backlash, however, did not hinder its popularity as well as the scholarly attention. Sarah Brouillette claims that the novel represents the relations of the struggling author and the now more global literary market because of which the author loses control over his own creative work. She goes on to say that Rushdie was likely invoking the racial/political unrest in Fiji (that he was very familiar with) while he was composing the novel so that the novel actually holds an "interest in the relationship between liberationist political movements" (149). Several other critics have also touched on the cosmopolitanism within the novel, a few saying that the novel focuses more on the deconstruction of the concept of cosmopolitanism and nationalism while others claim that Rushdie is actually embracing the idea of cosmopolitanism in the novel as he places himself as the center as opposed to the marginalized. The criticisms, however diverse,

demonstrate a pattern that implies a modernized reflection of the relation between the individual and the perpetual placement of the individual.

Salman Rushdie's *Fury* is about Malik Solanka, a man of Indian descent although living most of his life in London, who ran off to America to deal with his rising level of excessive anger toward his family, himself, and general society. After surprising even himself by standing over his sleeping wife and son with a knife in his hand, he decided to leave before he could make a mistake that he would never be able to take back. While in America, his interactions with Mila, Neela, and other more minor characters force him to come to terms with the numerous issues in his life. As stated in chapter one, reviews of this novel have not been particularly positive. Interpreting the novel as a bit shallow, reviewers such as Troy Patterson and Karen Valby has attacked it, stating that "...Rushdie's instantly obsolete eighth novel is written on the level of a gossip page. A howling tsunami of name-dropping and strained hipness, signifying nothing" (135). Even the reviewers who enjoyed the story behind the frills and laces of Rushdie's style of writing condemned the incorporated conventions that seemingly overpowered the "honest" story at the heart of the novel:

But Rushdie can never resist trying to enoble his fiction with mythic pretensions, and here what might have been a strong story—even a rather honest one, given the surface similarities between Rushdie and his hero—is altered to fit his chosen myth: the story of the Eumenides, the Furies...In the end Fury is not so much a literary exploration of the forms and varieties of *furia* as it is a pandering to contemporary mores disguised as a critique of them, and a graceless rant against incipient old age. (Allen 138-9)

Contrary to Allen's interpretation, however, these "mythic pretensions" obviously add to the infrastructure of the story at hand. If we consider Brad Hooper's conclusive summary of the point of the novel, "The novel, then, is about Solanka's conquest of his fury, and his path towards that goal..." (1798), then we can clearly see that the furies are intertwined with the plot

because of this goal. In order for Solanka to “conquer his fury” he must realize that he does have the power to take control of himself as well as his surroundings. The purpose of the furies is to encourage an individual’s sense of control, to force the main character to realize that he can exert this control over his situations instead of standing by and claiming to be the victim of a ruthless fate. The furies are, therefore, essential to the point of the novel as a whole.

Utilizing the element of the furies, a supernatural theme popularized in Greek works, later incorporated into Shakespeare’s plays as well as many other writings, Rushdie assigns the beings a purpose in the novel that is an apparent alternative to previous assignations. The supernatural beings are predominantly portrayed as usually three “female spirits of justice and vengeance [who] personify very ancient retributive ideas” (“Furies” 1). These spirits (Alecto, Megaera, and Tisiphone) attacked those who committed crimes but they are more specifically understood to attack those who murdered family members. The Furies infected their victims with madness because the beings would consistently pursue the men until it felt more like unrelenting torture hence their descriptions of appearing with “whips and torches...wreathed with snakes” (“Furies” 1). The incorporation of furies in ancient plays was a very explicit cause of fear for the audiences of the Greek plays. It is said that these beings were given more flattering names, such as “the kindly ones,” by the ancient societies in hopes to pacify the merciless spirits. The element of furies has been adapted into modern literary criticism as well as many creative works, both fiction and non-fiction. The supernatural theme of the furies in these different kinds of works has been interpreted in various ways. Yopie Prins examines the theme of “speech as action” or “performative utterance” within Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* (190). Prins asserts that the words spoken by the Furies within the ancient play were actually seen as physical movements even if the actors were not acting out those particular actions. This theme eventually led to their failure

at the end of the tragic story because everything that they would say would be held as an active physical truth: "...by describing Orestes as a bloodless sacrifice (302) not slaughtered at the alter (305), the Furies unwittingly prevent themselves from taking him as a true sacrifice..." (Prins 191). The Furies are therefore interpreted as being bound by language.

Another particularly interesting article is one in which Daniel Shea examines undertones of "Furies" in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Shea asserts that the novel is more like a Greek tragedy in which Victor is inevitably pursued by Furies because of his ultimate connection to the monster's violent crimes. By means of his psychic association with his creation (the monster representing his dark psychological self), Victor is also guilty of killing the mother figure in the novel (which Shea claims is in fact Elizabeth). The apparent pursuit by the furies is interpreted by Shea as Victor's unrelenting, mad pursuit of the monster. Victor basically drives himself into the grave by chasing the monster all over the globe. Shea asserts that scholars tend to fully focus on the subtitle, *The Modern Prometheus*, and its possibilities instead of "explor[ing]...other mythic explanations of Victor's destruction," and that destruction possibly being brought about by the traditional Greek Furies (42). The Furies in Shelley's *Frankenstein* are, interestingly enough, interpreted by Shea as a consequence of a "stunted social character," beginning from when Victor isolated himself from society and created the monster at hand (Shea 49). On a wholly different (more historical) example, Cineflix Productions created a documentary, *The Furies: Mussolini in Power*, which talks about the rise and inevitable destruction of Mussolini during WWII, connecting it with Furies which represent his betrayal of his own Italian brethren in exchange for connections with Germany.

The inclusion of the Furies in Rushdie's novel represents individual responsibility and control (or the willing forfeit of such). Throughout the novel, Malik Solanka experiences these

Furies at varying degrees and times (they would “scream” louder or linger longer at certain times according to the situation) which are equated to his own acknowledgement of control. I believe that the major incidents in the novel that requires a recovery of control are connected with his dolls, his family or love for others (which I would combine into one categorical incident), and his abusive past. His detachment from his dolls, his family (or prospects of love), and his past all contribute to the existence and hounding of the Furies. These incidents through which he experiences Furies all suggest that the individual’s responsibility to others is perhaps secondary to the self. The mere acknowledgement of having control must come before acting on that control in an attempt to assist others (otherwise, it is simply chaos). The Furies represent Solanka’s need to take control of himself as well as his consequent surroundings instead of simply succumbing to the thought that he can do nothing to change his particular situations. In order to demonstrate this purpose, I will go through each of the “Fury incidents” that directly connect with these three major categories (dolls, family/love, and past). I will demonstrate how the level of experiences with these Furies is directly related to the level of acknowledged control by the main character, Solanka, and therefore wholly represent the control of an individual over himself, his past, and his actions. As we go through each category, we will be able to see how the supernatural beings exist solely for the purpose of encouraging active control by Solanka over these categories as well as himself. Solanka eventually “conquers” all of the 3 major categories which consequently releases him from torment of the Furies.

Rushdie makes it obvious in his novel that the Furies represented in the novel are in fact manifested each time Solanka’s anger takes a hold of him. Therefore every time he has an outburst of anger he is “experiencing” what we later come to identify as the Furies that he finally “sees” towards the end of his torment. Throughout the novel, Solanka gradually describes feeling

of being hounded by indescribable anger. As we move more into the story, he describes even more, first with the mere outburst which leads to hearing their screeching until he finally describe the materialization of the beings. The supernatural beings, however, were always there, merely hidden from him (and readers) until he was ready to “see” them. Thus every time he experienced this indescribable anger, he was always experiencing the furies even if he prevented himself from fully acknowledging them until the very end. So then as I continue to explain that the furies represent Solanka’s refusal to recognize his ability of control, it is important to understand that although the furies are not materialized until later in the novel they are in fact an accompanying accessory to Solanka’s anger throughout the entirety of the novel. So, for example, the very first time that Solanka experiences unnecessary anger (when he first talked to Mila, she asked him if he was looking for something in particular whenever he went out walking to which he replied “What I’m looking for...is to be left in peace” [Rushdie 5]), he was also experiencing the Furies. It is important that we establish that his anger is also simultaneously an experience of the Furies.

Concerning the level of control that Solanka has (or gives up) over his dolls, readers understand very early in the novel the process in which Solanka went through with rights to his creation, Little Brain. He has much animosity toward the people who restructured his vision for the doll. The seemingly climatic point with Solanka’s control with the dolls was when Little Brain was censored for a comment that challenged the very process of power in society; “Man, I wouldn’t have taken that stuff lying down. I’d have started a revolution, me,” which was the very line that Solanka always comes back to when questioning his decision to give up direct control (Rushdie 188). His once small creation had grown into a global phenomenon. Investors wanted to control and expand the concept of Little Brain which subsequently led to Solanka losing his

say (perhaps as a consequence of succumbing to the thought of making more money with more exposure) in how the doll would be portrayed in the media. What had begun as a modest highly educational project had been dumbed down in order to gain a wider audience:

After the move to prime time, however, the channel's executives soon weighed in. The original format was deemed much too highbrow. Little Brain was the star, and the new show had to be built around her, it was decreed. Instead of traveling constantly, she needed a location and a cast of recurring characters to play off. She needed a love interest, or better still a series of suitors, which would allow the hottest young male actors of the time to guest-star on the show and wouldn't tie her down. Above all, she needed comedy: smart comedy, brainy comedy, yes, but there must definitely be a great many laughs. Probably even a laugh track. (Rushdie 96)

During this process of making Little Brain "accessible" to a wider audience, Solanka continually agreed to the decision simply because it would simultaneously mean making more money. Finally, Solanka decided to wipe his hands of the doll and allow the executives and others to do what they will with the concept keeping only the "moral rights" (97). He didn't actively refuse the "dumbing down" of his creation, he simply accepted the money and gave up control. Eventually it is even stated that this event (with his connection with the doll) is where his issue with anger actually started. While he was still in Britain with his wife and son, he actually packed up his dolls from his house and sent them away to storage because he couldn't stand looking at the things anymore after he decided to give up dominant control over the doll project (perhaps because they seemed like traitors in his eyes). This packing was actually the prelude to the very night that Solanka stood over his sleeping wife and son with a butcher knife. After snapping back into reality he "murdered" the last remaining doll in his house (literally stabbing the doll multiple times), blaming the doll for his psychotic episode of rage. So the dolls are therefore perhaps the very beginning of the loss of control, the giving up of creative rights with the doll which escalated to the experience of the excessive anger. Instead of realizing his own greed which caused him to lose his creative rights over his creation, he prefers to blame the

dolls (quite literally) as well as the big corporations that took control of everything. If Solanka had refused the extra money and stuck to what he wanted the program to be then would not have lost control over the “the only one of his creations with whom he fell in love” (Rushdie 96).

Solanka gained control again over his creations when he decided to create yet another world via the internet. Mila talked him into furthering the world of Little Brain and he did so by constructing a world and promoting the creation through cyberspace (headed by Mila). His extension of Little Brain’s world took off. For example, when Solanka follows Neela to Lilliput-blefuscu, the militarists involved in the unrest were dressed as characters from the new cyber story, stating that the fictional characters would represent the moral, civil injustice that the citizens had to face up until the current point of revolution. In taking control of his dolls once again, Solanka has the opportunity to correct the mistakes of greed he had committed with the original work. After Solanka started creating his cyber-world, “Puppet Kings: Let the Fittest Survive,” he began to experience less instances of the Furies (although they were still floating about). He experienced “joy and relief” (138), a sense of happiness when he finally “returned with new fire to his old craft” (137). The Furies did not diminish but Solanka was able to put them to work, he redirected the rage towards a new creation. Through actively redirecting the furia, he has placed himself one step closer to recognizing his capabilities of control, not only in terms of the dolls but of other aspects of his life.

Love is also considered a major factor of control for Solanka, love for his family and love for others in his life. His son, his ex-wife, Neela, and Mila all play a role in this category. Solanka involves himself in two very different types of relationships with females while in New York. He is first with Mila, the chic young girl that he first encounters while walking, and later with the overly-stunning beauty, Neela who he meets through Jack Rhinehart. His relation with

Mila is a suppressed, guilt-ridden kind of relationship where the girl dresses up as his beloved doll, Little Brain. The two never actually have sex but Solanka later deems her “as a weakness” while Neela is seen as his “strength,” although both women deeply affected his way of thinking (Rushdie 205). His personal connections with these women are initiated and held together by the women themselves. Solanka is unwilling to assert personal agency and thus become an active participant with his love interests. Solanka doesn’t actively care for these women until he is finally freed from the Furies which is when he follows Neela to Lilliput-blefuscu in order to win her back. On the familial side of this category, Solanka never really comes to terms with his decision to leave his family. His thought processes always move further away from highlighting himself as the sole cause. His decisions to leave his family and denounce female companionship were never acknowledged as his decision alone, it always has something to do with the dolls, always has something to do with the ignorant people that he comes into contact with on the streets, always has something to do with the inherent greed of the American society.

He attributes the origin of his anger to the dolls (which may or may not be true) and his actions hence forth are never centered on what he did himself but how the dolls (or some other outside force) affect him to a point at which he acts. These supposedly uncontrolled actions toward his family and loved ones are therefore thought to be outside of his control. One major incident of an experience with the Furies on account of a loved one is when he was watching a story being reported by CNN about a Cuban boy who had been rescued from an oil ring at sea (his mother had drowned) and how he had become a living representation of multiple movements and religions. The boy (and the uncle who had taken custody of him) was being exploited from various directions, even from his own mother-country. At the backdrop of all of this chaos, the boy’s father had requested that his son be returned to him. The mere thought of that poor child

being told crazy things about his father, being brainwashed into wanting to stay away from the father boiled Solanka's blood until he absent-mindedly began to yell at the actual television. The story was an inevitable connection with his son, Asmaan and Solanka's decision to leave the child back in England with his mother. Solanka's thoughts of not being able to control what is being said to Asmaan, his 'laissez-faire' attitude towards female companionships, as well as his tendency to place blame for his decision on outside forces ultimately leads to most of the hounding from the Furies.

As Solanka took more control over his decisions to leave his family, to leave Mila, to embrace and act upon his love for Neela he began to see less of the furies. I believe that his decision to take control over his Little Brain creation contributed to his realization that he could extend that control over his decision on love and family. After his reclaiming of control over his craft, he began to see how he may assert this control over other elements in his life. He sent Asmaan an elephant as a present when earlier in the novel he simply held slightly one-sided telephone conversations with the boy (just correcting the boy's pronunciation). He tried to apologize to Mila for dropping her at the drop of a hat without any explanation when before he simply went about his days hoping to forget it ever happened. When he first met with Neela and passed Mila on the way to his place, he completely ignored Mila as if she had never existed. Neela, however, affected him the most concerning his own belief of the Furies having a weaker impact on his life: "In Neela's arms Solanka felt himself begin to change, felt the inner demons he feared so much growing weaker by the day, felt unpredictable rage give way to the miraculous predictability of this new love" (Rushdie 206). Solanka's subsequent escalation of control, beginning with the dolls and leading into his family and personal relationships, caused

the Furies to affect him even less. They are slowly fading into the background as each category of fury is conquered.

The most important factor of control that inhibits Solanka from finally freeing himself from the Furies is his past. Solanka constantly refuses to acknowledge his abusive past. In the first few instances of referencing what had happened to him when he was younger, he stated that the stepfather did not exist, that the weeping mother did not exist. He worked especially hard to mark them out of his consciousness, saying:

This was the great truth against which Malik Solanka had set his face. It was precisely his back-story that he wanted to destroy. Never mind where he came from or who, when little Malik could barely walk, had deserted his mother and so given him permission, years later, to do the same. To the devil with stepfathers and pushes on the top of a young boy's head and dressing up and weak mothers and guilty Desdemona and the whole useless baggage of blood and tribe... Bathe me in amnesia and clothe me in your powerful unknowing... No longer a historian but a man without histories let me be. I'll rip my lying mother tongue out of my throat and speak your broken English instead. (Rushdie 51)

The desperate plea from Solanka, in what seems like a powerful prayer to "America, the deity of forgetting," he wants nothing but to forget everything in his past. He wants to erase where and who he had come from so that he may be capable of dismissing the unfortunate events of his childhood. The repressive pressure therefore builds up in him as excessive anger until he would either finally absent-mindedly kill someone or force himself to acknowledge it. His past is undoubtedly difficult to face, stating that he "couldn't look it in the eye," but it is the most important factor of which he willingly gives up control by pushing the memories toward the very back of his mind until he is no longer forced to look it in the face (Rushdie 220).

Solanka was finally freed from the Furies the night that he almost snapped. When Neela touched the top of his head (mainly because she saw him bursting with anger) Solanka finally realized that his past and his refusal to face it was the major reason behind the Furies' hounding.

Once Solanka acknowledges and comes to terms with this past and tells the horrible story of how he was molested as a child, he is finally freed of the Furies. Some may argue that it was his love for Neela simply because she placed her hand on his head which triggered the realization. However, he had been with Neela for a while before this event (they had even already started having sexual relations). So then why hadn't it happened earlier? It had not happened because his love for her (or anyone else) could not trump his love, respect, and responsibility to himself. He had to bring himself together, take control of himself, before he could be freed of the Furies: "The goddesses of wrath had departed; their hold over him was broken at last. Much poison had been drained from his veins, and much that had been locked away for far too long was being set free" (Rushdie 219). This statement exemplifies that it was in fact his past, the material "that had been locked away for far too long," that was the key that unlocked the chains that bound the Furies to his life. His own self-hatred and self-disgust was the major motif that attracted the Furies which is why his expression of love or his new-found control over his puppet creations was simply not enough to break the Furies of their power over him. In the end, what mattered was his acknowledged control over multiple categories but mostly control over himself.

At a certain point, it is no longer about the screeching Furies that pursue Solanka but more about his perpetual realizations of control. Individual agency is at the heart of this tale. Much like Mahfouz's use of the supernatural, Rushdie uses supernatural elements in his novel as a tool for agency and control, a means of indicting the individual toward acknowledging his level of control over both his surroundings as well as his own actions.

Chapter Four: “It’s just the wind”: Exposing and Debunking the Misconception of Supernaturalism

The points that are important to take away from the previous chapters are, first and foremost, the fact that the West has established that the purpose of the literary supernatural is to emphasize the forces outside of the self, forces that the individual cannot control. As we look through various media (literature, folklore, documentaries), we can clearly see that others (both academic and non-academic) have failed to break from this established interpretation and are thus using this highly Westernized lens to analyze multicultural, non-western works. Since scholars are analyzing the works through a western lens, the true value of ethnic works cannot be uncovered mainly because their cultural expressions can only be translated into the language of the West. The apparent way out of this would be through the ethnic literary mode of magical realism but this again has transformed into an oppressive form. Ethnic literatures that attempt to break from the “ethnic literary tool” are analyzed as merely mimetic and can never be understood as adding something new to another genre. However, one can see how a different purpose can be interpreted from these multicultural novels in which the supernatural is utilized. It is possible that the supernatural is not about forces outside of the individual but about the individual himself, about agency and responsibility. This newly-assigned purpose may be able to be read into a variety of novels but it holds more activist connotations in multicultural texts.

The supernatural is no longer about the uncontrollable but merely a tool for reinforcing the agency of the individual. With the political issues involving gay rights, immigrant rights, transnational movements lead by citizens protesting against their governments, the 21st century mindset is placed in the context of individual rights and what the individual is able to do for the

benefit of society. I believe that the 21st century perspective of the supernatural is concentrating more on references toward the individual mainly because we are seeing more of the power of the individual as we watch full governments being overthrown. As the previous textual examinations have demonstrated, we are able to shift away from the westernized notion of what the supernatural represents. As Rushdie so aptly put it in his novel, *Fury*, “rights are taken, not given” (193) and we are definitely in a time where we are witnessing the lgbt community, the immigrant community, foreign nations, among others taking what they feel is right for the improvement of their society.

Now, I am not suggesting that this perspective can only be seen within multicultural texts. I am suggesting that this interpretation of the power of the individual is much more important in the minority texts because of precisely what we are seeing in today’s news. The minority texts are able to exemplify the need for minorities to stand up and “take” their rights instead of waiting for some outside powers to endorse them. They are trying to “transcend their marginal position” by moving beyond the “them-us” binary in an attempt to bring the minority group together and in doing so they are directing their attention away from the center and more towards themselves as a community (Durix 148). The texts are able to speak directly to the lgbt community and the immigrants and the foreign oppressed nations. At least, this is how we may begin to see these supernatural texts. This may possibly be seen as the decolonization process as we move away from the established hegemonic consensus of the purpose of the literary supernatural and move more towards a purpose that represents the marginal individual’s power to positively affect their circumstances and society. As it was revealed in the examined texts, the supernatural elements are in fact pushed into the background as the characters begin to realize their own agency.

Srdjan Smajic exposes the fact that it is possible to see the supernatural in a different light than what has already been established in his article in which he emphasizes the “supernaturalism of realism” (11). He is a fine example of a 21st century mind (considering that the article was published in 2009) at work as he exemplifies the fact that supernaturalism is not quite the binary set against realism (as most has previously believed) and that, in fact, they are inextricably connected both in form and in concept. As Smajic asserts, a realist fiction novel, both in establishing its own realist form as well as in realistic content, incorporates the concept of the supernatural in the fact that in order to portray a culture one must also portray its superstitious (aka supernatural) beliefs. So that the supernatural in and of itself will always be presented in the novel. It acts as a meta-critical tool in which it analyzes the very forming of a realist novel and its portrayal of a specific culture in a particular historical time period.

The supernatural literary tool, for Smajic, is a cultural, linguistic, and metacognitive element that “contribute[s] to [a] novel’s representation of...’the totality of the life process’ (91)” (5). So then Smajic is referring to more than just a reference to forces outside of the individual or society, he’s referring to the very core of the individual or societal mind and culture. Reality, according to Smajic, should always be “subjected to skeptical interrogation” because of the fact that the facts of reality is always relative to the individual’s own interpretation so then a supernatural experience (such as seeing a ghost) has just as much to question as actual reality for an individual (9). The formation and purpose of the supernatural (no matter what novelistic form it is appearing in) is therefore contingent upon the individual. Smajic diverges from the common conception of the realist novel being set against the supernatural novel in establishing that the two are one in the same. Although Smajic focuses simply on the form and concept of the supernatural versus realism, his same unconventional thinking may be

applied to the establish purpose of the supernatural. As I demonstrate in my reading of the novels Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days* and Salman Rushdie's *Fury*, the supernatural does not have to continue to conform to the Westernize view of its purpose. Especially for the 21st century mind, the supernatural may not be about those outside forces at all but rather wholly represent the power of the individual and perhaps even negates or suspends the belief in those outside powers in order to reinforce the individual's power to change things.

Although what I presenting here is predominantly a 21st century perspective, I believe that the unsettling issue is with the conceptualization of the multicultural text as a whole. Even after the birth of the postcolonial theory, the studying of texts in the light of their own cultural values, we are still framing those literatures against Westernized (ethnically dominant) standards. Although some scholars have stepped towards a decentralized view of the literatures, they seem to incidentally fall back into the habit of western thinking. For example, Theo L. D'Haen focuses on the particular decentralizing techniques of ethnic literatures in his article, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers," presented in Zamora and Faris's collection of essays on the magical realist movement. He asserts that along with the magical realist movement, the purpose of most of the literatures utilizing the technique is to decenter the center by both de-familiarizing the familiar and "avoiding the adoption of views of the hegemonic forces" (Zamora 195). These literatures subvert the traditional world view with their own, thus breaking away from the Westernized conceptualization of their culture and peoples. D'Haen, therefore, does acknowledge the fact that these literatures desire to break free from the westernized literary chains.

It is important to understand, then, that multicultural literatures have moved beyond the mere "magical realism as subversion;" they have extended their purposes through other genres

and techniques, especially the supernatural. The problem is that those extensions are still set inside the restrictive box of magical realism and the “them-us” binary thinking that accompanies that literary mode. I think that the first step towards realizing the potential of these literatures is to break multicultural texts from their oppressive interpretations as solely magical realism and realize that they are more than mere imitations whenever they use other forms of the supernatural. I challenge others to take the magical realist lens off of ethnic texts and read them as they are, uncover what they have to contribute to whatever mode they are actually using (fantastic, science-fiction, horror) and understand how they are using that genre toward their own purposes.

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