Finding Displacement through Incest in Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath her Feet* and *Fury*

by

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Incest is a widespread theme in literature that continues to grow in frequency (Barnes 3). It is rarely addressed amongst scholars due to being a taboo topic, but in this thesis I aim to address it and analyze it thoroughly in two novels. Though at times subtle, it is a reoccurring theme in Indian literature, and more specifically, in works by Salman Rushdie. I argue that Rushdie intentionally includes instances of incest in his works to illustrate displacement felt by postcolonial India. This thesis analyzes two of his texts, *The Ground Beneath her Feet* and *Fury*, and identifies the instances of this particular taboo.

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"…we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles." ("Imaginary Homelands" 15)

Incest, in literature or actuality, is a difficult subject to research, because it is a globally taboo topic. In *The Anatomy of Disgust*, William Miller states, "Anything that reminds us that we are animals elicits disgust…Insofar as humans behave like animals, the distinction between humans and animals is blurred, and we see ourselves as lowered, debased and (perhaps most critically) mortal" (15). However, all readers familiar with Salman Rushdie know that he gravitates towards unpopular topics and can be extremely offensive and controversial. Noting the author's references to other taboos such as religion and politics, one could argue that the forbiddance of incest is precisely what drives Rushdie to write about it.

Incest can also be a difficult subject to approach because everyone seems to have a different opinion on it. How close is too close? One would get very different answers depending on whom he or she asked. However, two famous psychologists, Sigmund Freud and Edward Westermarck, attempted to answer what creates these intimate emotions amongst relatives. Freud proposed two theories, first of which was the seduction theory. In 1896, he stated, "At the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experiences, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood" (Meigs and Barlow 40). A couple of years later, Freud retracted this claim and replaced it with the Oedipus complex, which says that although the feelings are suppressed, all sons want to murder their fathers and have sex with their mothers. He believed the opposite was true for women.

Westermarck argued:

> Generally speaking, there is a remarkable absence of erotic feelings between persons living very closely together from childhood. Nay more, in this, as in many other cases, sexual indifference is combined with the positive feeling of aversion when the act is thought of. This I take to be the fundamental cause of the exogamous prohibitions. People who have been living closely together from childhood are as a rule near relatives. Hence their aversion to sexual relations with one another displays itself in custom and in law as a prohibition of intercourse between near kin. (Patterson 97)

Westermarck reasoned that the taboo is natural, while Freud, along with other scholars such as Morgan, Bachofen, and McLennon, maintained that the incest is natural (Meigs and Barlow 39). Freud ultimately disagreed with Westermarck's claim, arguing that it did not explain why the incest taboo exists in various cultures around the world (Patterson 97). Many studies have been completed since the two by Freud and Westermarck, but their findings seem to be the foundation for current research.

Anne Meigs and Kathleen Barlow, anthropologists that have focused on incest in their research, reveal that different fields have adopted opposing ideas in regards to the subject. Psychology, for example, has "returned to Freud's initial seduction theory," while "anthropology has stayed with its long-standing focus on the taboo and on the cross-cultural validity of Oedipal theory" (Meigs and Barlow 40). One certainty of the completed research is that scholars do not agree on several aspects. Questions such as "How closely related do people need to be in order for a relationship to be considered incestuous?" will never be fully agreed upon. Meigs and Barlow point out that textbook discussions on incest come to similar conclusions from edition to edition (Meigs and Barlow 38), signifying a standstill on our understanding of the subject. Writers and researchers have focused on the taboo instead of the topic itself. Relationships amongst relatives were discussed so frequently in the late 1900s that directors created parodies on the subject. Joan D. Lynch raised an interesting point, "Is it merely coincidence that parodies such as Oliver Stone's appear at the same time? Parody signals the exhaustion of a genre, the

'decline of the underlying mythology' on which the genre is based" (Lynch 49). There is still much to be learned about incest. As anthropologist Gregory C. Leavitt noted:

> As a result of cultural variation, 'incest' as sexual activity is ambiguous and depends on what a culture means by 'sexual' and 'incest' behavior. Clearly, relatives in many cases do not avoid (all) sexual or incestuous contact, nor do they avoid the same kind of sexual contact from one culture to the next, nor is all sexual activity between relatives necessarily considered incestuous. Furthermore, sexual behavior (and incest) can certainly occur without intercourse or procreation. (Silk 128)

Because of the uncertainties concerning the topic, several versions of incest will be addressed in this thesis, including relationships and actions that may be considered incestuous to some, but not to others.

Attributable to the incest taboo, "most of the anthropological discussion around 'incest' relates not to 'incest' itself…but to the prohibition and/or avoidance of them" (Patterson 101-102). Views on the topic vary depending on the time and culture. Christianity's involvement with incest, for example, has been a point of controversy for centuries. The religious followers take incest seriously, and in medieval texts, it is even taken to represent original sin (Archibald 27). A book in the Old Testament of the Bible forbids incest in a number of verses, starting with "No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations" (*Holy Bible NIV*, Lev. 18:6). Only "close relatives" are mentioned here, but by the twelfth century, the Church stated that marriages could not exist between blood relatives to the seventh degree, nor to the fourth degree between those related by spiritual affinity (Archibald 28). The Church's concern with spiritual incest came to include godparents. If a godparent married or slept with his or her godchild, or even with close relatives of the godchild, spiritual incest was committed (Archibald 226). On the other hand, Pagans were quick to attack early Christianity in terms of incest. It was odd to them that Christians would be adamantly against incest, yet call fellow Christians their 'brothers' and

‘sisters’ in Christ (Archibald 20). In fact, according to Genesis, incest would have been an essential building block to mankind.

In 1992, the anthropologist Mary Patterson visited the Ambrym people of Vanuatu to research incest in their society. She came across one case in which a man of the highest rank was widely known in the community to be having sexual relations with his young daughter. When asked about this, the man responded, “I am quite capable of giving her the ‘trouble’ that men give women---why should I give her to another man?” He continued by saying that he was “doing things the European way” and “having sex with one’s daughter was ‘white man’s custom’.” The man saw nothing wrong with his actions and referenced the Bible, defending, “As all Christians know, Adam and Eve were an incestuous couple” (Patterson 102-104). Indeed, according to Genesis, Eve was created from Adam’s body, and they are the ancestors to all of mankind. Lines are undeniably blurred in reference to incest defined by Christianity, but Christianity isn’t alone in this confusing debate.

Elizabeth Archibald describes views on incest in the Middle Ages in her book *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*. Archibald notes that during this period, intercourse with extended family members was just as frowned upon as intercourse with the nuclear family. Extended family members included cousins, in-laws, and individuals linked by a *copula carnalis* (Archibald 221). A *copula carnalis* is a “bond of flesh between the partners, regardless of their marital status.” This meant that people were prohibited from marrying relatives of previous sexual partners (Archibald 225). Although non-nuclear incest was strictly forbidden during the Middle Ages, it rarely occurred in literature from this time period (Archibald 221).

This taboo constantly changes depending on time and culture. Unlike the two previous examples, certain societies openly practiced incest, especially those of royal descent. Although

the lower classes were disgusted by incest, it was frequently practiced in royal families of England, the Hapsburg dominions, and Egypt (Barnes 1). Practicing incest in this way allowed royals to maintain power in their societies and exclude outsiders from accessing it. Perhaps the most common example of this is from European royalty in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the passing of hemophilia. This is particularly interesting because accusations of incest have typically been aimed at lower classes as a way of demonizing them. Incest is powerful, in this sense, because it can empower some while permanently tarnishing the reputations of others. It all depends on the views of society at that place and time. Egyptians, as previously noted, had royal families that practiced incest in the seventeenth century. It was recently discovered, however, that marriage amongst commoner siblings was surprisingly frequent during the Roman period in Egypt. This lasted for approximately three centuries (Patterson 98). As more is revealed on this topic, it only seems to make it more difficult to understand. What makes societies change their views on incest and decide what is and is not acceptable?

One way to grasp a better understanding of people's thoughts is to read their literature. It is not just a coincidence that some themes continue to reappear in the literature of given societies. Jonathan Silk builds on this argument:

> One thing that folklorist investigations by the Grimms and others revealed was the vast extent of common stories, told and retold across national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Succeeding generations of folklore investigations and other studies have confirmed that stories, tales, legends, and myths preserve and can present and represent the ideology and the spirit of a culture in such a way that an investigation of such materials can indeed open a window into the 'subconscious' of that culture. (Silk 9)

Although studies have come to a standstill, incest is extremely common in literature from numerous cultures. Researchers almost always refer to the Oedipus complex, based on the play *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles. In the play, dated back to 429 BC, Oedipus was destined to kill his father and marry his mother. This became a common formula for Indian and Greek authors. In

the Greek model, the son expresses sexual interest in his mother, or the daughter expresses it for her father. The son shows aggression toward his father, or the daughter shows aggression toward her mother. The Indian model is slightly different and reverses these roles. The father expresses a sexual interest in the daughter, while showing aggression toward the son. The mother expresses a sexual interest in the son, while showing aggression toward the daughter. The direction of interest switches from parent to child (Silk 166-7). Another major difference in the two models is that the Greek typically includes a prophecy, while the Indian does not (Silk 165). When the ancient Buddhist texts refer to women, it becomes quite puzzling. In the Sanskrit text of the *Abhidharmakośabhā□ya*, it states that sexual relations with one's mother is only a serious crime if she is a saint. In the *Yogācārabhūmi*, however, incest with one's mother is listed as the first sin of immediate retribution (Silk 25-6), meaning that "upon the death in this life of an individual who has committed one of these crimes, his or her fate will necessarily, directly, and immediately be that of hell" (Silk 21). Based on these passages, it would seem that men were expected to have a great deal of respect for women and mothers in their society. Oddly, maternal figures are generally the culprits in these Indian legends. More often than not, it is the woman that is seducing the child. In the Pāli canon, the scripture warns how men may be seduced by a woman's sensuality (Silk 126). The text preaches, "One speaking truly should say of womankind, 'they are the all-encompassing snare of Māra" (the Buddhist incarnation of desire and evil)" (Silk 127). Misogynistic passages such as this are common in Buddhist literature.

Maureen Quilligan studies incest in British literature. She emphasizes a well-known play, *King Lear*, and its surprising incestuous undertone. Quilligan argues that King Lear has romantic feelings for his favorite daughter, Cordelia. Lear asks his daughters, "Which of you shall we say doth love us most?" (Shakespeare 1.1.53). The response is especially fascinating, because the

oldest two sisters agree that they love their father more than they love their husbands. Cordelia, however, is unwilling to make the same claim. Lear complains, "I loved her most and thought to set my rest/ On her kind nursery" (Shakespeare 1.1.124-5). Quilligan explains that Lear's reliance on Cordelia's "kind nursery" makes her into a caregiving mother (Quilligan 3). Richard McCabe, Associate Artist of the Royal Shakespearean Company, clarifies, "Once she appears to love [Lear] 'all,' his vision of future bliss excludes all thought of [her husband] France." Quilligan adds, "Lear dreams of a paradise for two even in prison, 'we two alone,' singing like birds in a cage. His boast, 'Have I caught you now?' reminds us of his desire for his daughter's nursery at the play's opening" (Quilligan 5). When Cordelia finally submits to her father's incestuous desires and loves him as he wishes to be loved, she is punished and ultimately dies by hanging. This returns me to my point about fiction providing information about a culture through its subconscious. Perhaps Shakespeare believed, as many others have, that incest is dangerous and that feelings for relatives can be difficult to avoid. The problem, the playwright is expressing, is when individuals give in to this desire. He is sending the message that when people submit to their incestuous feelings, it can only bring harm to those involved.

Building on this, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss stated in his work *Elementary Structures of Kinship*:

> The total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman where each owes and receives something, but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners between whom the exchange takes place. (Lévi-Strauss 115-6)

In describing what constitutes society, Lévi-Strauss proposes the alliance theory, which is based on the incest taboo. This taboo pushes people toward exogamy, marrying outside of their social groups. Without it, people would not feel the need to search for partners outside of their inner

kinship circles. The anthropologist teaches that marriage works as a sign and that "women themselves are treated as signs" and "like words, should be things that were exchanged" (Lévi-Strauss 495-6). Here, women are seen as objects; they are simply signs that communicate a properly functioning society. Quilligan emphasizes that Lévi-Strauss "presents this problem in terms of a woman's relationship to *language*" (Quilligan 10). She builds on her own argument for the incest in *King Lear* by analyzing lines by Cordelia. Cordelia chose silence at the beginning of the play. Also, along with Lévi-Strauss's argument, Quilligan points out the significance of Cordelia's marriage: "She is the only daughter with marriage proposals from outside the kingdom – France and Burgundy – as if these foreign marriage partners were there to underscore the exogamy she prefers" (Quilligan 4). The accusations for incest in Shakespeare's work may have seemed absurd, but at this point they seem less unlikely and more probable.

Shakespeare isn't the only well-known author to include incest in his fictional works. *The Faerie Queene*, by Edmund Spenser, also incorporates incest into the story. Argante committed incest with her twin brother, Ollyphant, in the womb. In John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Sin was Satan's incestuous daughter. She became an incestuous mother when she was raped by her son, Death. In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the Parson adds, "This synne maketh hem lyk to houndes, that taken no kep to kynrede" (*CT* 10.907). Elizabeth Barnes, author of *Incest and Literary Imagination*, adds:

> As late as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Anglo-American literature was presenting incest as a 'natural' attraction rather than a natural repulsion. In novels ranging from Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) to Melville's *Pierre* (1852), brothers and sisters fall in love as a result of the irresistible 'voice of blood' that calls like to like. (Barnes 1)

The popularity of this topic was popular, though at times discrete, in previous centuries. The popularity has continued in more recent literature. Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Maya

Angelou's works referencing incest include *The Color Purple*, *The Bluest Eye*, and "Born That Way." Barnes notes:

> The number of publications on incest before the 1980s is small and sporadic: for example, according to records of the British Library and Library of Congress, there are roughly thirty works on the subject (dating back to the seventeenth-century sermons) prior to 1975. From 1975 to 1998, by contrast, approximately eighty books on the subject—from sociological studies to memoirs—were published. Of critical works written specifically on incest in English and American literatures, two were published in the 1970s, six in the 1980s, and eleven in the 1990s…This is in large measure due to the attention feminist scholars have given the subject… (Barnes 3)

We cannot forget that film is also a form of fiction. Joan D. Lynch, former Film Studies professor and author of *Women of the Passion*, provided several film titles and analyzed the incestuous events in each. Examples include *Lolita*, *Murmur of the Heart*, *Moth*, and *The Locusts*. Most of the films portrayed the "incested woman as sexually seductive, angry, dangerous, controlling, and manipulative" and "fit well with traditional negative female stereotypes such as the femme fatale and the phallic mother." This representation became so common that Oliver Stone could parody them by the mid-1990s (Lynch 54). Fictional instances of incest are far from rare, and once people make an effort to think of examples, they realize that it is easier to recognize than they may have previously thought.

Incest is not only portrayed in fiction to illustrate cautionary tales. It has become a metaphor in certain societies for various reasons. Silk writes, "In world literatures, incest themes are well known and have been accorded considerable attention by scholars…The meaning and significance of these themes is not only occasionally unclear, but without exception always dependent on context" (Silk 202). Other scholars have built on the various contexts that contain incest. Meigs and Barlow wonder if this theme that is so common in Indian literature is a reflection of the reality of sexual abuse (Meigs and Barlow 45). Madeline Phillips and Jim

Champlin, co-authors of "The Incest Metaphor in Latin American Literature," explain that incest is used in literature to represent severe political and social issues (Phillips and Champlin). Barnes similarly believes that incest "signal[s] personal and political struggles and anxieties in relation to the development of cultural and ethnic identities" (Barnes 1-2). This argument is extremely fitting for Indian authors. Perhaps the two most well-known examples of current day Indian fiction involving incest are *The God of Small Things*, by Arundhati Roy, and *Midnight's Children*, by Salman Rushdie, both of which tell of sibling incest. Although both of these cases involve siblings, this is by no means the only type of incest that Indian authors focus on.

Salman Rushdie writes the majority of his novels with at least a subtle subplot on this major theme. In addition to *Midnight's Children*, *The Moor's Last Sigh* displays incest, though of a different kind. The Oedipus complex, an incestuous relationship between mother and son, is obvious between Aurora and Moraes. In *The Ground Beneath her Feet*, sibling incest arises again between Umeed and Vina, although at first glance they don't seem to be related by blood. In *Fury*, Professor Solanka has flashbacks of sexual exchanges from childhood with his stepfather. He also has a relationship in which he acts as a father figure and his significant other as his daughter. Although the incest in some of these novels is subtle, Rushdie takes a completely different approach to *The Enchantress of Florence*. Incest is a major theme in this novel and it is the final explanation as to how characters are kin. It cannot be a coincidence that incest exists in all of these novels. Although researchers argue that stories show what hides in the subconscious, incest was clearly an intentional aspect of Rushdie's novels.

Why would Salman Rushdie make a point of including incest in so many of his novels? I earlier mentioned that incest can be used in stories to represent personal and political struggle. India has had no shortage of political struggles. The country didn't gain independence from

British rule until August 15, 1947. In 1498, Vasco de Gama voyaged by sea to India, bringing imperialists and missionaries. The initial motives for profit from trading and mere adventure were overtaken by the Portuguese's desire to convert the Indian population (Griffiths 78). The British came in the early seventeenth century. Their bureaucracy thrived in India, especially from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. In the early 1900s, "the Government of India was essentially British and completely subordinate to London" (Griffiths 194). In 1946, P J Griffiths wrote a book unbiasedly analyzing the pros and cons to the British in India. He cleverly spoke from each group's point of view. The British, he said, argue, "When we went to India the country was in a state of anarchy and chaos; Western science had not reached India and the people were backward…But for Britain, India would still have been in the dark ages" (Griffiths 17). The Indians respond:

> It is nonsense to talk of progress and put it all to the credit of Britain. Of course, there has been progress in two hundred years…If the British had not been there, if the 'soul of the people' had been free, progress would have been far more rapid…English education has in the main been a failure in India and the average Indian graduate has neither breadth of interest, nor the capacity to think…But for Britain, India today would have been politically, economically and intellectually more advanced. (Griffiths 18)

Benefits and drawbacks came from the outsiders, but Britain's stay ultimately formed a marriage of the east and west in Indian society. This brings us back to Lévi-Strauss's theory of marriage being a sign, a form of communication, to its society. The forced relationship formed by the British was unappreciated by India. It brought exogamous relations that they did not want nor ask for. Incest could be India's way of rejecting Britain's assistance in their country. It is an indirect attempt at saying they could have improved their society (and done a better job of it) by themselves—nation building by keeping in a limit. They are rejecting exogamy and inviting endogamy, which is reflected in their literature by the incest metaphor.

Griffith believes that the British rule helped to create the idea of India as a whole (Griffiths 212), but Silk argues, "There is not now, nor has there ever been, only one 'India'" (Silk 7). In Rushdie's essays, he seems to agree with Silk's outlook. In "The Riddle of Midnight: India, August 1987," Rushdie explains, "To my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once" ("Riddle" 32). He explains in "Imaginary Homelands" that Indian citizens each created his or her own India. "His" India was his and his alone. By incorporating incest in his works, Rushdie is romanticizing India and what it would have been without British rule. He paints a picture that elicits disgust in order to emphasize the beauty of his homeland without the assistance of outsiders.

Although the British rule in India undeniably contributed to the reasoning for incest metaphors in literature based on political struggles, other aspects contributed on a more personal basis. It is easily concluded that the author provides his personal opinions through his literature. Rushdie has written a number of essay collections, including *The Jaguar Smile*, *Imaginary Homelands*, and *Step Across this Line*. He has also written a memoir, entitled *Joseph Anton,* and transparently bases the protagonist in *Fury*, Professor Malik Solanka, on himself. In Rushdie's memoir, he reveals that he initially left home for England in 1965 due to the "pointless" India-Pakistan conflict (*Joseph Anton* 35). Rushdie writes, "…our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" ("Imaginary Homelands" 10). Rushdie especially relates to physical alienation because of a fatwa that was issued against him by the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, for *The Satanic Verses* in February 1989. Because

of these events and leaving their homeland, individuals feel a sense of displacement. Rushdie, for example, became an Indian author living in Britain (and later moved to the United States). How to identify oneself inevitably becomes challenging. The author asks, "To be an Indian writer in this society is to face, every day, problems of definition. What does it mean to be 'Indian' outside India?" ("Imaginary Homelands" 17). Rushdie defines himself by both cultures. He is Indian, but he also embraces the British culture and history as his own.

It is easy to understand why Rushdie and other Indian authors may feel displaced, but how does that tie in with incest? These personal struggles give their victims a loss of self. They are unsure of how to identify themselves and inevitably feel a sense of displacement. Rushdie focuses on incest in a psychological sense rather than a physical one. It isn't the physical act of being incestuous, but the mental repercussions of incest that parallel the displacement of postcolonial authors. Incest has severe consequences for its victims. Meigs and Barlow discussed some of these ramifications when they mentioned a Mohave man who had intercourse with his daughter. He seemed fine, but she began to act neurotic and no longer seemed 'herself.' Her mother and older sister acquired the same symptoms and all of the women died within a few years. These individuals allowed the incest to define them, and ironically in the process, they lost who they were. The researchers communicate:

> This dissociated self may contain the split-off rage and hatred associated with the abuse; may seek to self-mutilate to relieve the associated high tension; and may feel crazy or out of control and exhibit odd motor behavior, hallucinate, hear voices, and so forth. (Meigs and Barlow 44)

Not coincidentally, these are some of the exact emotions we see from Professor Solanka, a man dealing with incestuous memories from his childhood, in *Fury*. These victims were defined by a

negative event and lost their sense of self. The same feelings may have been formed by those who left their homeland. Rushdie claims that this is especially true for Indians:

> Land, home, belonging: to Indians these words have always felt more than ordinarily potent. India is a continent of deeply rooted peoples. Indians don't just own the ground beneath their feet; it owns them, too. An orthodox Hindu tradition goes so far as to warn that anyone who crosses the 'black water'—the ocean—instantly loses caste. ("June 2000" 299-300)

Indian authors never seem to deny their displacement. It, like India, is part of who they are. Discussing the issue may make it easier to accept, but it will always be part of their history and an issue they will be forced to overcome. One step in overcoming this identity crisis is to express their feelings. Rushdie and other Indian authors choose writing as their therapy. Writing is their way of conquering and fighting back. Rushdie admits, "…description is itself a political act" ("Imaginary Homelands" 13). They include incestuous relationships in their works to let the world know that they remember and continue to deal with their past. The incest is symbolic of the pain they have encountered throughout the years due to outsiders inviting themselves to overtake their home, being forced to leave India, and the process of finding their new identities once they can no longer accept a purely Indian history. These individuals were transformed into a hybrid: a mixture of east and west. Perhaps they are still trying to discover what it means to be both.

Professional storytellers are extremely particular about their work. They intentionally choose each word to portray a very specific meaning for the characters in their stories. Because of this, it is unlikely that Indian authors are unaware of the use of incest in their writing, despite it often being exceedingly subtle. However, it is reasonable to conclude that the authors don't realize the extent of their usage of this metaphor. The writers' subconscious leads them to write about the incest which haunts the pages of their fictitious tales.

Chapter Two: Forbidden Love Representing Displacement in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

> "…there is also this mighty conflict between the fantasy of Home and the fantasy of Away, the dream of roots and the mirage of the journey. And if you are Ormus Cama, if you are Vina Apsara, whose songs could cross all frontiers, even the frontiers of people's hearts, then perhaps you believed all ground could be skipped over, all frontiers would crumble before the sorcery of the tune." (*Ground Beneath* 55)

The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Rushdie's sixth novel, was published in 1999. The story is a variation of the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, to which there are several references throughout the novel, including an opening poem by R. M. Rilke. There are several themes in this novel, but one of the most notable is disorientation. Several characters feel a loss of self throughout the book. One way to illustrate this disorientation and alienation is through incest. Although it is very subtle in this novel, it is undoubtedly present. Along with incest is love amongst characters that aren't related; however, it is love that remains forbidden. Rushdie uses these multiple love complications in his novel to illustrate an overwhelming amount of displacement. Individuals such as Rai and Vina are constantly questioning his or her belonging. This directly relates to the author because it reflects his own question of identity. In fact, there are references in which Rushdie is undoubtedly referencing his own personal life experiences.

Rushdie starts this novel not at the beginning of events, but several years down the road, when Rai and Vina are in Guadalajara, Mexico. Vina is on a solo tour to promote her music outside of the band VTO. By doing this, Rushdie introduces the characters and presents their primary issues immediately. Both struggle to identify with their Indian culture. The idea of two Indians in Mexico during an earthquake screams to the readers that these two are completely out of place. Opening at this point in the story is also symbolic in another sense. This event does not take place until about half way through the novel. For Rai and Vina, beginning their story in the

middle of events represents actually being in the middle, being pulled in two directions. They are seeking a sense of belonging, but at this point, they remain lost.

Throughout the novel, readers will find that Rai continuously defines himself based on Vina. Even though Rai is the narrator, the story revolves around the life of Vina Apsara. To illustrate this point, the first sentence of the first chapter and the last sentence of the last chapter are both about Vina. Defining himself in this way becomes troublesome for Rai, because Vina encounters some personal struggles with her own identity. Rushdie writes, "Disorientation: loss of the East. And of Ormus Cama, her sun" (5). If Ormus is *her* son, then the disorientation that Rushdie is referencing must be Vina. In turn, India is represented by Vina's character (for reasons to be provided later in this essay). Therefore, the author is saying that India *is* disorientation.

When Vina's childhood character is introduced, she is twelve or thirteen and walking along a beach in India in a "stars and Stripes swimsuit" (67). The girl openly disapproves of India and admitted to hating it, ranting, "I hate the languages because they're not plain English and I hate the English because it's not plain English either. I hate the cars except the American cars and I hate those too because they're all ten years out of date" (72). She was rejecting everything about the country in which she resided. Vina was trying to hold on to her life in America, but the readers can tell that she may not have actually believed everything she was claiming. She admitted to hating the apples, but Rai noticed that she had eaten his. The only thing she said she loved was the sea. Rai earlier noted that he also loved the sea, fantasizing, "Touch the sea and at once you're joined to its farthest shore, to Araby (it was the Arabian Sea), Suez…, and Europa and beyond. Perhaps even—I remember the thrill of the whispered word on my young lips—America. America, the open-sesame. America, which got rid of the British long

before we did" (59). Here, Rai is voicing the general opinion of Indian society. After Britain came to India and combined the eastern culture with the western, it left a bitter aftertaste for many of India's natives. Vina's complaints mirror India's reaction to the British. She hated everything about the country in which she now resided. She had lived in America for her entire life and was now in a new, foreign land. Like the British, she thought everything about it needed to be changed. Even American characteristics were unacceptable, because they were outdated. She was unfamiliar with the country, and therefore wanted to mold it into what she was used to seeing and experiencing. This is India's opinion of what the British did when they overtook their homeland.

More displacement is discovered when Rushdie describes Rai's parents. V.V. Merchant, his father, "dreamed of the past. That was his promised land" (59). He was an architect and a historian, but his mother contrastingly dreamt of the future, which ultimately led to their unsuccessful marriage. Similar to the opening scene (the middle of the story), Rai was in "the middle" during his childhood. His father obsessed over the past, while his mother looked to the future. Rai was their only child, stuck in the present but always reminded of both the past and future, not fully belonging to any particular time. This is another way in which the author exemplifies displacement for his characters. Vina and V.V. Merchant are focusing on their past while at the beach. Umeed and Ameer are focusing on their future. However, when recounting these memories, Rai states, "Once, I belonged to the future. The beloved future of my beloved mother, that was what counted; the present was a means, and the past no more than a dull shard of pottery, a bottle dug up by my father on the beach. Now, however, I belong to yesterday" (65). Rai went from belonging to the future to claiming the past, never claiming to live in the present. Even during his earliest memories, Rai feels a great deal of displacement.

Incest is clearly tied into this event in Rai's memory. Certain characters claim and deny the existence of kinships. Rai's parents, for example, reminisce over their first meeting. V.V. and Ameer discover that they have the same surname. Ameer decides that they have the same last name, "but not related." V.V. adds, "Misfortunately not" (33). Can the characters be trusted here? Are they really not related, even though they reside in the same city and have the same last name? Perhaps, but it still leads readers to be suspicious. This is an example of Rushdie's subtlety when dealing with the incest theme in his fictions. Furthermore, more incest occurs on the beach when the merchants see Vina and her adoptive family. We discover that Mr. Piloo Doodhwala's real surname is Shetty. This was also the Merchant's surname "until it got Englished years ago" (65). At the time, Vina's name was Nissa Doodhwala, but she was born Nissa Shetty from a Greek-American mother and an Indian father. She was passed from relative to relative due to unsuitable living situations. After being born Nissa Shetty, she became Nissy Poe, step-daughter to John Poe. Once Nissy was out of the house, her mother, Helen, murdered all of her family members. At this point, Vina agreed to live with Helen's distant relatives, the Egiptus family. Mr. Egiptus renamed her Diana Egiptus. Living here, "…members of the Egiptus household saw the same dark skin as an invitation to sexual relations. The young Nissy-Diana-Vina had to fight her cousins off" (110). At this point, her birth-father begged his relatives, the Doodhwalas, to care for her. Rushdie writes that the Doodhwalas were "seduced by the glamorous prospect of acquiring an America-returned niece" (111). Not only are Vina's cousins incestuous, but the fact that the Doodhwalas were *seduced* by Vina also represents incest.

During this time in her childhood, it is possible, although not directly stated, that Vina was sexually abused by a relative. A former film studies professor describes the typical cinematic woman that was a victim of incest as "a seductress and a tease" and a "femme

fatale…who lures men and leads them astray" (Lynch 46). This accurately describes Vina on several occasions. She is undoubtedly a seductress, and even teases Rai when she is only twelve years old. For her behavior at such a young age, it can be concluded that events in her past have led her to act in this inappropriate manner. Furthermore, as long as Rai and Ormus are involved with or pursuing a relationship with Vina, they are not happy. They are constantly let down because of her untamable ways and refusal to belong to any one individual other than herself.

Arriving at Rai's house in the middle of the night, Nissa renames herself Vina Apsara. Nissa has several meanings, but one in particular is "beginning." Vina means "beloved" in America and is a stringed instrument (a veena) in India. Rushdie strategically selected these names for Vina's character. Not only is her name used in several cultures, but they fit her character perfectly. She is beloved by all and makes music a primary passion in her life. Along with these positive characteristics, readers should recognize that Vina, along with other characters, has several different names throughout the novel. Almost every character has a nickname or name change. Vina gives Umeed the name Rai. Additionally, his family surname was Shetty until it got "Englished." The Cama twins, Khusro and Ardaviraf, become known as Cyrus and Virus, respectively. The author also relates to these name changes. Due to his growing fame, he noted making a difficult transition from the familiar "Salman" to the "'Rushdie' [he] often barely recognize[s]" ("A Dream" 204). Furthermore, Rushdie's surname was his father's creation, created due to "his admiration for Ibn Rushd" (*Joseph Anton* 22). To take it one step further, Rushdie always refers to Mumbai, in his essays and novels, as Bombay. The name of the city was officially changed in the mid-1990s, because it was argued that 'Bombay' was too English. After the country's independence in 1947, Indians no longer wanted a lingering reminder of British rule, and the name was changed to Mumbai. Although this is the most

famous name change, the city has been renamed several times throughout the centuries (Sorabjee). All of these represent a search for self. Bombay may have become Mumbai, but that doesn't change its history. The British came to India and drastically changed it, leaving a great deal of western influence in its culture. Bombay would never be the same. Just as India tried to hide its past, Ormus and Vina took the same approach. The two of them "chose to conceal their origins" for most of their lives (92). People debated over Ormus's origins, mistaking him "for an Italian, a Spaniard, a Romany, a Frenchman, a Latin American, a 'Red' Indian, a Greek" (291), but he never denies any of them. His psychotic and serial killing brother, Cyrus, wrote a letter saying that he was disgusted by his brother because he "bec[a]me a man who hates his own kind" (556). They don't identify with just one name. This parallels the displacement felt by the characters. Just as none of them identify with just one name, none of them identify with just one country; they don't belong to one place or one culture.

Vina now lives with the Merchants. Entertaining that they are possibly an incestuous married couple, she is also living with her cousin, Rai, who is beginning to fall in love with her. Rai's longing for Vina is similar to Saleem Sinai's feelings for his "sister," Jamila Singer, in *Midnight's Children*. Rai admits that his new adopted sister of sorts is the daughter his parents never had. He begins to make many comparisons between his mother and Vina, realizing that they were "linguistically at least, two of a kind" and that "Vina was already much the same size and build as [his] mother" (124-5). Rai earlier stated that his parents were passionate about the city in which they lived, Bombay, and that it was "the daughter they never had" (78-9). Since Bombay and Vina are both the daughter that his parents never had, it can be assumed that Vina is representative of India. Even when Vina fabricates her heritage, saying "her true ancestors had been godlike entities who arrived in silver chariots from outer space, tall, lucent, androgynous

beings one of whom had extruded her painlessly from 'her' navel," she isn't completely escaping the possibility of incest. Elizabeth Archibald, Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Bristol, explains, "In classical myth and literature, incest is a frequent theme in stories of gods, heroes, and mortals," and that "In the Greek creation myth, as in so many others, incest is central" (Archibald 54). Rushdie intentionally continues to make connections between Vina and incest in order to illustrate the gravity of the issue of identity loss in India.

Ormus and Vina quickly fell for one another at young ages. Ormus was nineteen years old when he fell in love with twelve year old Vina. Although sexual relations and forbidden love can be identified between many characters, it cannot be found between Ormus and Vina. Not only are they not related, but Ormus vows not to so much as touch Vina until the day after her sixteenth birthday. All the while, Vina flirts with Rai, saying, "You know how it is. I'm just killing time with Ormie, waiting for you to grow up and be my man" (128) while stroking his cheek and kissing him. I find it peculiar that the one relationship that is referenced from beginning to end is the one that is the most innocent. This could be interpreted in many ways, but my argument is that Rushdie uses this love to further the idea of displacement. Isn't it odd that the central love story in this novel is the only relationship in which the two characters are not involved on a physical level? While Vina is waiting for Ormus, she teases Rai, her adoptive sibling. Rai explains:

> I was forbidden fruit too, oppositely vetoed on account of my youth rather than hers. But although there wasn't anybody chaperoning us, because my parents were just too innocent to think of the possibility of my becoming Ormus's surrogate, his body double, I would have been prepared to settle for that lesser role, to be his shadow, his echo; in fact I was longing for it. (128)

Rai is not claiming to be off limits because he is related to Vina; he is off limits because he is younger than her. It is as if to say that having relations with his sister is perfectly acceptable.

Why, then, is Ormus refusing to be intimate with Vina? The first reasons would be because of her age and his respect for her. The deeper reason is Rushdie's desire to highlight Rai's relationship with her. Even when Ormus and Vina seem to be together and happy, things aren't as they seem. Vina continues to return to Rai. He remains the anonymous party in Vina's lifelong love triangle.

Vina and Ormus's relationship constantly contradicts itself. They waited until she was sixteen to so much as touch, but she touched and kissed Rai. Vina bragged that Ormus waited for her. Rai observed, "It made her proud: of him, but also of herself. To be worth so serious a love. (I waited for her too, but she did not boast about me)" (147). Vina boasted of her serious love, but wasn't monogamous. Vina turns down Ormus's proposal, but accepts the ring. Just as India doesn't belong to one culture, Vina doesn't belong to one person. When Vina left for London and then the United States, Ormus didn't go after her. Rai recounts, "By day and by night he would rove the streets, looking for her, the woman who was nowhere, trying to draw her out of the women who were everywhere" (180). He wasn't faithful to Vina's absent self, just as she was never faithful to him. Ormus and Vina were only together once before she left. This is Rushdie's way of ripping away the idea that the two found their belonging—that they found each other and were satisfied forevermore. The two were still lost and confused about their true identity. As Vina leaves India, the author restates, "Disorientation is loss of the East" (176). Rushdie is emphasizing that the two aren't meant to settle and belong anywhere. These Indian characters emphasize disorientation because, to Rushdie, India is a metaphor for disorientation and loss of self. The narrator notes that Vina's departure "badly damaged Ormus's sense of himself" (190). Anthropologists Meigs and Barlow explain that those who have been sexually abused may "exhibit odd motor behavior, hallucinate, hear voices, and so forth" (Meigs and Barlow 44).

Once Vina leaves Ormus, he begins to have severe reactions, part of which includes encounters with Maria, who may or may not exist. Although we have no reason to believe that Ormus was sexually abused in any way, he unarguably has symptoms of someone that has been. By doing this, Rushdie illustrates the direct link between displacement (represented by incest) and India. Since Vina represents India in *The Ground Beneath her Feet*, it makes sense that their separation would leave him lost and confused. Rushdie writes, "Lose the east and you will lose your bearings, your certainties, your knowledge of what is and what may be, perhaps even your life" (176). Like Rai, he experiences a downward spiral once he is no longer with Vina. Ormus used his love with Vina to define himself. Once she was gone, he was left in a state of confusion. He declared, "I'll follow her to the ends of the earth," but as Rai points out, "he wouldn't even go as far as the airport" (190).

The point is that Ormus's actions didn't make any sense. Ormus needed Vina in order to understand himself. Why, then, does Vina need Ormus or Rai? She admits to having no interest in settling down with Ormus, but perhaps she needs Rai. He feels like he is only Ormus's shadow, but certain conversations lead the reader to believe otherwise. Vina gave Umeed the nickname Rai, which means "hope." Vina needs hope, just as India needed hope during and after British rule. In fact, as a child, Vina's mother said, "It is a hard thing…for a child to live without hope" (106). When Vina met and began to live with Rai's family, she was finally able to hope for a sense of belonging. It wasn't just Rai's family anymore; it was her family, too. Vina saw it this way until V.V. and Ameer could no longer see eye to eye. Her dreams of the future and his grasp on the past never could reach a compromise and ultimately led to an unsuccessful marriage. Ameer took the anger toward her husband out on Vina, which led to her no longer

trusting in love. This event was what made Vina decide to leave India. It wasn't until she felt hate from Ameer that she decided to go.

Vina was content in India and even grew to love it until her falling out with Ameer, her mother figure. On the other hand, she also made love to Ormus only once before leaving the country. Vina felt a strong sense of love and a strong sense of hate immediately before her departure, so what does this say about her feelings and sense of belonging? Perhaps her love for Ameer, though not the same type of love, was stronger than her love for Ormus. Knowing that she belonged somewhere and was part of a family was more important to her than her relationship with Ormus. Ormus saw Vina as his "only family" (148), but readers discovered that she didn't feel the same way when she was intimate with other men and when she didn't accept his proposal. In the end, Vina left India due to lost love and Ormus left due to a blossoming relationship between his mother and Lord Methwold. Eastern and western cultures continue to clash.

Even though Spenta has remarried and become Lady Methwold, she is not completely satisfied. She was always opposed to visiting England when her late husband made the suggestion, but she eventually married an Englishman. Although she was opposed to leaving for a long time, she eventually felt that India was "a labyrinth without an exit" (163). So when the time came to leave, she had a new outlook on venturing to English land; she was excited and joyous. She, along with others, is excited at the prospect of possibly finding her new, true place of belonging. She left her home to find out where she truly belonged, only to realize that India may not have been it, but England wasn't either. The problem for these characters is that they are in search of a place that no longer exists. India is no longer completely "Indian." It was overcome with British ruling, and therefore it changed. It became a blending of eastern and

western culture. Rushdie continues to romanticize India before colonialism through his characters' search for home and belonging. Lady Methwold is found conversing with her deceased husband, confessing, "I resisted it all your life, Darius, so you never had it, and now I've got in instead. If I walk these fields with you, if I tell you the stories of the house and make them yours as well as mine, will you forgive me, my true husband, my love. You see what a poor woman I have been. Everyone must forgive me. You and my sons" (330). Stuck in a state of depression, Lady Spenta now feels trapped in England, just as she did in India. She finally gave in to the temptation of England, her forbidden love, but was severely disappointed afterward. She was more lost than ever and trying to rekindle her love with her sons and her deceased husband while living a completely different life without any of them. She was trying to combine her two worlds, but at this point her old life was gone, and all she had left was in England.

After Vina left for America and Ormus left for England with his mother, Rai remained in India. He came to befriend Persis, the girl Ormus's mother wanted him to marry. Persis was deeply in love with Ormus and even sacrificed her own love for him in order for him to be happy pursuing a relationship with Vina. Although Rai states that the two had a platonic relationship, a "brother and sister friendship" (216), it seems that Persis tries to use Rai to fill her void left by Ormus. Debate arises in the novel as to just how different Ormus and Rai are. Vina was closest to both of the men, but told one they were nothing alike, while telling the other they were extremely similar. During the friendship between Rai and Persis, Rai was living in the old Cama household in which Ormus resided. Maybe Rai didn't realize it, but Persis saw the similarities between Rai and Ormus. She eventually displayed aggression toward Rai, and he believed it was the "crime of not being another man; of living in his home and not being he." She complained that she was "always second in line" (220). These are the subtle hints of incest that make it into a

major theme in the novel. Although they were never intimate, Persis desired a more intimate relationship with Rai. She was like a sister to him, but she wanted more out of the relationship. In the novel, Persis never finds love. As I was reading the novel, I always felt sorry for the character. Why include someone with such a depressing life? Is it even necessary to the story? The girl who helped Vina escape from India could never do so herself. She never seemed happy; she never found love. It is possible that Persis's life is a cautionary tale. In his speeches and interviews, Rushdie has been exceedingly vocal about his belief in the importance of asking questions. Persis Kalamanja accepts everything as it is given to her. Ormus wants to be with another girl and Persis helps him to do so. She wants intimacy with Rai, but she never lets him see her as anything but a sister figure. She never looks for her belonging, but isn't happy with things the way they are. By including her character, the author emphasizes the importance of the others leaving India and finding a place to call home. Searching and asking questions is an important part of resolving displacement and disorientation.

While Rai is still living in the Cama residence, he is surprised by a visit from Vina. It is ten years later, and he is no longer too young for her. He discusses what has occurred in Vina's life in the past decade. Her love life seems extremely chaotic. She hinted at being bisexual, but her long list of lovers was exclusively male. She was also married for a brief period. If her love life follows the theme of forbidden love in Rushdie's novel, readers can speculate that she doesn't settle down because no one is meant to find his belonging through her. Even if she did love the husband that she casually married, the forbiddance of her belonging to anyone destroys all hope for the marriage. Rai admits that the two of them made love during the unexpected visit, but afterward she wept because she wanted to be with Ormus. Again, Vina shows that she is never completely satisfied. It is also revealed that she is unable to have children after several

instances of using abortion as a substitute for birth control. Vina's barrenness is essential to the idea of lost identities in Indian culture. If she was capable of having children, then the child would be able to claim her: "That is *my* mother." Rai noted that even when she was a child, however, that "Vina belonged to no man" (121). This point is stressed when Vina leaves India, yet again, after her night with Rai. Vina left after one night with Ormus, one night with Rai, and divorced her husband after a brief marriage. Clearly, she belongs to no one. Vina is unattainable.

Vina's return to India sets her apart from other characters, such as Rai, Ormus, and his mother and brothers. Unlike Vina, the others were never able to return when they left. What is the difference between these characters? The ones that were unable to return were originally from India. It can be assumed that they were all born there and lived in India until they left to experience western culture. Vina, however, was from the United States. She had a Greek-American mother and an Indian father. The others have difficulty finding their place of belonging, because they are looking for an India that no longer exists. Vina can claim India, Greece, and the Melting Pot of cultures as her cultural heritage. She has no issue claiming India, because it had already been affected by the British when she arrived. Rai realizes that Vina "had learned to treat the whole world as her possession" (224). In an essay, Rushdie wrote, "To my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once" ("The Riddle" 32). The British came to India and influenced their culture; they westernized it. Like India, Vina is many things at once. She contradicts herself throughout the novel because she is never just one thing; she is many.

While Ormus is on the plane traveling to England, he encounters Maria. At first, the character seems to only be a figment of Ormus's imagination. The narrator explains, "she says [he] wants to marry her but she wants to be free of ties, even though she is bound to [him] in far

deeper ways than any ordinary married persons can comprehend" (257). Readers are able to believe that she is someone that Ormus has created in his mind to replace Vina's absence. Even Maria's speech seems peculiar, often ending thoughts with "and so on" or "et cetera." Rushdie encourages Maria's imaginary self when he notes that "doctors have found dangerously high levels of the hallucinogen lysergic acid diethylamide 25" in Ormus when he is in a coma (309). This hypothesis becomes muddled when others begin to see Maria. Spenta and Mull witness her visiting Ormus when he is in the hospital. She later reveals herself to Rai when she tries to give a message to "HELP ORMUS." One key significance is that Maria doesn't appear to Ormus until he has left India. Joanne P. Sharp, geography professor at Glasgow University, explains that Rushdie's works have both realism and magic realism, and the two are not always separate. She states, "Rushdie's novels…are self-consciously spatial texts in that one of the central themes of each is territorial forms of identification, the meaning of post-colonial national identity, and the ambiguities which arise from the hybridized subjectivity of migration" (Sharp 124). The key to this metaphor through Maria's existence is her repetitive references to earthquakes: "*What she wants to talk about most is earthquakes. There are going to be more of these, she prophesies…these are different. Two worlds in collision. Only one can survive and so on. In the end this world will crumble and fall et cetera and we will be together at home for ever…*" (326). The "two worlds in collision" that she is referencing are not just realism and magic realism; they are two cultures—the east and the west.

Another interesting detail about Ormus and Maria's relationship is that it is far from platonic. Maria wants to be everything Ormus has ever wanted, sexually and otherwise, and constantly tries to seduce him. He, however, has sworn to celibacy until Vina agrees to marry him. Ormus simply has to close his left eye in order to stop Maria from visiting him, but for

some reason he continues to allow her appearances. Maria's love for Ormus is an entirely different type of forbidden love. Not only is it forbidden; it is impossible. As Sharp suggested, the realism and magic realism represent a search for lost identity—being somewhere in the middle of two places, not fully belonging to either. Since Maria didn't appear until the plane ride to England, it is clear that she represents this "middle." She has similarities to Vina, but unlike her, she focuses on a different place entirely. Gayomart whispers to Ormus, "The obsessed young woman's name is not an irrelevance. She's not from the past. She's the future" (258). The relevance of the name is its origin. "Maria" has a Latin root. It isn't merely coincidental that she is the one interested in the earthquakes. The earthquake that opens beneath Vina's feet is the one in Guadalajara, Mexico. Maria's actions seem at times identical to those of Vina, but she continues to reference the event that will cause her counterpart's death. Vina is always, in one way or another, involved in Ormus's life. While she symbolizes India, she also represents the confusion felt by Indian culture that Rushdie often references in his novels and essays. So even when Ormus isn't communicating with Vina or there is no immediate drama between the two of them, Rushdie forms character doubles for her. The doubles are constant reminders of the displacement felt by his characters.

Mull Standish is the other vital character that Ormus encounters on his journey to England. He requests for Ormus to become a DJ on Radio Freddie. Standish wants to help him realize his dream of becoming a rock star. Standish said he specifically wanted to help Ormus because he was inspired by him, but the truth was, he had fallen for Ormus. However, Ormus isn't the only one that does not return Mull's sentiments. Still skeptical, Ormus asks what Standish wants from him. Standish requests, "Put in a good word for me with my sons" (285). Although there is a hint of rekindled love from his sons when one accidentally calls him "Dad"

(298), the other is unattainable. While Standish falls deeper in love with Ormus, Ormus is on Radio Freddie calling out for Vina. When Vina finds out about Standish's love for Ormus, she grows jealous. She no longer wants him to be a part of the VTO band and it is her idea to put distance between the two of them. Vina eventually admitted, "At first, to be honest…I was a little jealous?, because he's so in love with you?, pretty pathetic, huh" (397). When Standish rejoined the team, a bond formed between him and Vina, since Ormus was denying any intimacy to either of them. This complicated love triangle emphasizes the confusion felt by all three characters. Logically, Vina has nothing to worry about between Ormus and Mull. In fact, Ormus feels for Vina what Standish feels for Ormus. The simple solution would be for Vina to marry Ormus and to keep Standish as part of the management of VTO, but of course, Rushdie doesn't intend to make anything about love simple in this story. When people love each other, they know that they belong with their significant others. The point of *The Ground Beneath her Feet* is for characters not to know what to do, who to love, or where to turn.

After decades of longing, Vina finally agreeds to marry Ormus, but her conditions were telling. She said, "I'll marry you, I'll spend the rest of my life with you, and you know I will love you. But don't ask me for high fidelity. I'm a lo-fi kind of girl" (412). Ormus was disappointed but accepting of the response, knowing that he would get her no other way. By doing this, Rushdie shows that Ormus and Vina are on the verge of belonging, but even with marriage, they are not quite there. Vina has a strong personality and cannot be changed. As promised, Vina does not remain faithful in the marriage and becomes intimate with Rai immediately after the one year anniversary. Of all the men she could have had, Rai is a peculiar choice. She continues to tell him that he is "more like Ormus than [he] know[s]" (427). Why would she pick the man most like her husband if she was going to be unfaithful? This expresses to the readers that, although

happiness and finding their place would have been so easy, Ormus, Rai, and Vina are unable to acquire this ideal state. It once again subtly highlights incest and represents the displacement felt by the Indian culture. As long as Rai and Ormus are holding on to Vina and trying to claim her, to have her for themselves, they are bound to fail.

After Vina falls to her death during the earthquake, Ormus searches for Vina impersonators. He discovers Mira Celano, who "has plenty in common with her idol: the mixed-race family, the early orphaning, the loveless childhood years, the outcast's deep seated sense of rejection and exile" (522). They are so similar that Ormus genuinely believes that Mira *is* Vina. Just as Rai is a double for Ormus, Mira is a double for Vina. However, there are two main differences. First of all, there is not a love triangle this time. Mira shows interest in Rai and isn't intimately involved with Ormus. Once he realizes that she is not Vina, he no longer wants her to impersonate his lifetime love. Secondly, and most importantly, Mira has stability. Unlike the barren Vina, Mira is able to have children, and had a daughter named Tara. Mira allowed herself to belong. Similarly, she wasn't afraid of commitment. From the very beginning, she made a point to state, that "she is interested only in that rarest of all emotional contracts between men and women: total engagement, total fidelity, instantly. All or nothing right away, the whole heart or else forget it" (531). For years, Rai obsessed over Vina. Even when she died in Guadalajara, he had followed unknowingly to her because he couldn't give up on the idea of being with her. He was optimistic about their future. Her last words to Rai were "fuck you," but he interpreted them as "…I love you I do love you fuck you Rai I love you fuck you. I do" (468). It wasn't until Rai parted from India—from Vina—that he could be happy and find his place of belonging. He could finally admit that maybe he was meant to be with someone else. The parallel is that natives of India move away and, as Rushdie confessed, realize they do not have one place of belonging.

India, though a huge part of his life, is not his only place of belonging. Mira knew where she belonged. She saw what she wanted and went for it. Rai quickly observed that she knew where she was from (528). Having met her, he also found where he was meant to be.

It is no secret that Salman Rushdie has struggled with displacement. Before his autobiographical novel, *Joseph Anton*, the author relied on his characters to explore the question of what it means to be Indian. Although the most notable similarities in a piece of fiction by Rushdie are in Professor Solanka's character in *Fury*, *The Ground Beneath her Feet* does not fail to present a few, as well. For example, this story begins during the earthquake, which takes place on Valentine's Day. *Joseph Anton* also begins on Valentine's Day, when Rushdie, or "Joseph" realizes a fatwa has been issued against him. This was a separation from India that deeply affected the author, while the death of Vina—a symbolic separation from India—had a similar effect on Rai. When Ormus was in a coma, the narrator observed, "The longer he stays invisible, the greater grows his fame" (309). This is a reference to Rushdie's time in hiding. The fatwa increased his fame significantly. There are also likenesses between Rai and Rushdie's upbringings. Rai recounts, "My parents give me the gift of irreligion, of growing up without bothering to ask people what gods they held dear, assuming that in fact, like my parents, they weren't interested in gods, and that this uninterest was 'normal" (70). In addition, Ormus's father, Darius Xerxes Cama, enjoyed studying other religions, although he wasn't religious. Rushdie's father was a godless man, and he found it "curious that so avowedly godless a person should keep trying to write about faith. Belief had left him but the subject remained…" (*Joseph Anton* 50). Most importantly, the displacement felt by the characters in *The Ground Beneath her Feet* is very real for Rushdie. In his autobiography, Rushdie writes, "[I] often felt meaningless, even absurd. [I] was a Bombay boy who had made [my] life in London among the English, but

often [I] felt cursed by a double unbelonging" (*Joseph Anton* 54). Rushdie confessed that he had an identity crisis after he left Bombay and that it "had a harmful effect on his personality" (*Joseph Anton* 47).

In *The Ground Beneath her Feet*, Salman Rushdie has illustrated displacement time and time again. He specifically defines disorientation as a loss of the East on three separate occasions in the novel (5, 176, 313). Forbidden love comes in various forms, such as Rai's love for Vina, his older, 'adoptive' sister, Standish's homosexual love for a heterosexual man, and Maria's impossible love for Ormus. The main creator and destroyer of love in the novel was Vina. As a representation of India, Vina created love with many characters. Rai's entire family came to love her and she reminded Rai of his mother, even on her deathbed. Ormus immediately fell for Vina and was obsessed with her until after her death, trying to find the world's best Vina impersonators. Ultimately, Rai was able to let go of Vina. He realized that she was not his sole possession after her death and was able to move on. Ormus, however, was never able to let go of Vina. He believed he was connected to her and her alone. In all actuality, Indian authors have long struggled with what it means to be "Indian." Rushdie explains, "Migrant peoples do not remain visitors forever. In the end, their new land owns them as once their old land did, and they have a right to own it in their turn" ("June 2000" 301). The displacement and disorientation amongst the characters is abundant, but Rushdie shines a light at the end of the tunnel, expressing that one can have multiple roots. The author himself claims these roots in India, Britain, and the United States. The characters he created will never find what they have lost, because their home country will never return to what it once was, but through literature they can create new Indias and rediscover their cultural identities.

Chapter Three: Expressing Personal Displacement in Rushdie's *Fury*

"We live in ideas. Through images we seek to comprehend our world. And through images we sometimes seek to subjugate and dominate others. But picture-making, imagining, can also be a process of celebration, even of liberation. New images can chase out the old." ("Home Front" 146-7)

Unlike the several subtle instances of incest in *The Ground Beneath her Feet*, Rushdie provides detailed descriptions of incest in *Fury*. Rushdie's seventh novel, set in New York City and released on September 11, 2001, is based on the Furies of classical mythology:

> "Furies" were the daughters of Earth (Gaea) and sprang from the blood of her mutilated spouse Uranus. They are three in number- Alecto (unceasing in anger), Tisiphone (avenger of murder), and Magaera (jealous). They lived in the underworld and ascended to Earth to pursue the wicked. They were personified as pangs of conscience with a power to kill a man who had broken a taboo. They hound the culprits relentlessly, without rest or pause, from city to city and from country to country. (Chakkaravarthy 172)

Unlike in *The Ground Beneath her Feet*, which has a few parallels between the author and his characters, many argue that the protagonist in *Fury*, Professor Malik Solanka, is directly based on Salman Rushdie. In fact, one scholar notes, "…a complaint about the novel that appears repeatedly in the literary press is that it is merely a memoir, a calculated effort at self-construction and defense designed to deflect the public criticism of his private life" (Brouillette 139). Rushdie uses the theme of incest in a variety of character relationships to mirror his personal struggles with displacement.

Solanka, like Rushdie at the time *Fury* was written, is a man in his mid-fifties. Solanka is living in New York City "and these days losing himself was just about Professor Solanka's only purpose in life" (7). The protagonist fled to the United States after he had "murder on the brain" and "brought a carving knife upstairs and stood for a terrible, dumb minute over the body of his sleeping wife." At this point he realized that "he needed to put an ocean…between himself and what he had almost done" (39). Solanka left his wife, Eleanor, and their son, Asmaan, to escape

to America. Eleanor is his second wife, but he was previously married to Sara Lear. It can be assumed that the two had issues with intimacy when Sara diagnoses, "Your trouble is…that you're really only in love with those fucking dolls. The world in inanimate miniature is just about all you can handle. The world you can make, unmake, and manipulate, filled with women who don't answer back, women you don't have to fuck" (30). Both of his wives have a very important aspect in common; they were both English women and scholars of English literature. Early in the novel, readers can clearly see that Malik Solanka has issues with commitment and his identity and is constantly trying to escape.

Solanka comes to America to search for peace. He believes he will find this in America because he considers it a "land of self-creation...the country whose paradigmatic modern fiction was the story of a man who remade himself—his past, his present, his shirts, even his name…" He says that he has come to the country to write his story, but then corrects that he wants "to *unwrite* it" (79). The problem that arises with this particular objective is Solanka's belief in the need for a "back-story." He was the famous creator of *The Adventures of Little Brain*, "a series of 'Great Minds' dolls" featuring Little Brain, a "female time-traveling doll" (16) that was "smart, sassy, unafraid, genuinely interested in the deep information, in the getting of good-quality wisdom" (17). The "sleep-deprived" narrator hears his dolls talking:

> …each telling the other his or her 'back-story,' the tale of how she or he came to be. The imaginary tale, which he, Solanka, had made up for each of them. If a doll had no back-story, its market value was low. And as with dolls so with human beings. This was what we brought with us on our journey across oceans, beyond frontiers, through life: our little storehouse of anecdote and what-happened-next, our private once-upon-a-time. We were our stories. (51)

Solanka's personal back-story is deeply disturbing to him. Short hints are given to his past throughout the story, but toward the end he reveals what he experienced as a child. To begin:

> Malik's own father had disappeared when he was less than a year old; his pretty young mother, Mallika, had burned all the photographs and remarried within the year, gratefully taking her second husband's name and giving it to Malik as well, cheating Malik of history as well as feeling. His father had gone and he didn't even know his name, which was also his own. (221)

Young Malik was then told that his "true father" was his step-father, the new provider for their home (221). His step-father insisted, "*Bring clothes and let his hair grown long and he will be our daughter as well as our son*" (222). Malik's step-father insisted on being alone with him and at this time would take sexual advantage over the young child. Malik's mother denied the child's accusations at first, but once she found out the truth she was inconsolable and left the boy feeling "alienated." Because of Malik's inner turmoil, he sought comfort in not people, but "the dolls who crowded around him in bed, like guardian angels, like blood kin: the only family he could bring himself to trust" (223). From this point on, Solanka attempted to escape his past instead of facing it and dealing with his deep-rooted issues.

Due to his troubled childhood, he could not move past his problems in order to live a fulfilling life in the present; he was constantly haunted by prior experiences. As a result of this, he made the habit of contradicting his thoughts and actions. As a child, he witnessed a family friend abandon everything to become a *sanyasi*. Mr. Balasubramanyam Venkataraghavan was a wealthy banker that left his work, possessions, and family to become closer to the Divine. When asked where he was going, the man stated, "I am going in search of knowledge and if possible of peace." At this response, Malik retorted, "I hate knowledge! And peace, too. I really hate peace *a lot*" (81). Men continued to walk out of young Malik's life and he was understandably bitter, but he continues the cycle when he leaves his own family and heads for America. While there, Solanka is approached by a young woman who observes that he walks a lot. When she asks what he is searching for, he snapped, "…to be left in peace." A bystander countered, "for an apostle of

peace you sure are filled up with war" (5). Solanka falsely interpreted America as a place to rewrite history. "For a greater deity was all around him: America, in the highest hour of its hybrid, omnivorous power. America, to which he had come to erase himself. To be free of attachment and so also of anger, fear, and pain. Eat me, Professor Solanka silently prayed. Eat me, America, and give me peace" (44). Solanka's past burdened him with a great deal of fury and he was struggling to escape from it. A professor of literature at National Cheng Kung University explains, "Far from advocating the benefits of cultural dislocation, it can be seen…that Rushdie is just as concerned with its social or psychological dangers" (Cook 24). A former Film Studies professor adds to this point, "The male incest victim…internalizes his rage, directing it at himself" (Lynch 50). Although he said he hated peace especially and the actions of his family friend, after moving to America, Solanka added, "A s*anyasi* in New York, a *sanyasi* with a duplex and credit card, was a contradiction in terms. Very well. He would be that contradiction and, in spite of his oxymoronic nature, pursue his goal. He too was in search of a quietus, of peace. So, his old self must somehow be canceled, put away for good" (82). This contradiction illustrates Solanka's lost self. Like his friend, Solanka has left everything he knows in order to escape to a new land and search for peace. However, Solanka is unable to find this peace until he addresses the thing he is trying to forget—his past. This search for self resonates with many readers in postcolonial societies. Troubled pasts and issues with claiming land as their own—as a home—has brought about equally troubling issues in the present and led to confusion with identity.

Several instances throughout the novel highlight Solanka's problems. Perry Pincus finds Solanka to let him know that her lover and his friend, Krysztof Waterford-Wadja, is in the hospital for cutting his wrists. While talking to Solanka and discussing sexual confusion, she

added, “Talking of sexually confused, Professor, *great dolls*” (26). After a failed attempt at seducing him, she left in a taxi. She sent annual reminders of their encounter:

> Her season’s greetings were invariably accompanied, incomprehensibly, by the gift of a soft toy—a platypus, a walrus, a polar bear. Eleanor had always been much amused by the annual parcels from California. “Because you wouldn’t fuck her,” Professor Solanka was informed by his wife, “she can’t think of you as a lover. So she’s trying to become your mother instead. How does it feel to be Perry Pinch-ass’s little boy?” (28)

This is the last sentence in Chapter Two because it is meant to make a lasting impression. Asking how it feels to be a little boy reflects Solanka’s alienation. As a boy, he was treated as a little girl. It tells the readers that even at this time, when he was with Eleanor, Professor Solanka was troubled. Her intended lighthearted question and ability to joke around about such matters shows that she is unaware of her husband’s past. He kept issues from this time period to himself and allowed the damage to build within him. Sue Stuart-Smith, in her article “Time in Literature,” points out, “In 1805, Wordsworth…develops the idea that there are crucial moments of experience, often in childhood, which remain in our memories as potential sources of future mental growth and understanding” (221). Keeping this in mind, readers are able to understand what a major impact Solanka’s past has on his present. Through this, Rushdie is explaining that our past affects our present, which affects our future. Solanka acts like a child, but at other times he acts his age, like a fifty-five year old man. Rushdie illustrates the importance of this by making continuous references to time and relationships between people of all ages. Several chapters later, Perry Pincus is on Howard Stern and poked fun at Solanka for his dolls. She undoubtedly has repressed her feelings about being rejected by him. This pattern seems to repeat itself, because her need for male attention and approval suggests a painful and abusive childhood. Solanka’s rejection resurfaces these feelings, which she cannot let go easily.

Two present-day friends of Solanka are encountered in *Fury*, Jack Rhinehart and Dubdub, whose real name was Krysztof Waterford-Wajda. Dubdub was a half-English, half-Polish friend that Solanka met at King's College. He was also seeking an escape "from the privileged world into which he had been born" (21). Solanka tried to invent a horrible back-story for Dubdub, but once he met his family, they seemed like wonderful people. Dubdub dreamt of becoming a novelist or film director, but once he received his doctorate and was offered a fellowship, he "snapped it up with the grateful look of a man who has just settled forever the whole question of the rest of his life" (21). Dubdub accepted what was given to him and never fought for more (which is very similar to Persis Kalamanja in *The Ground Beneath her Feet*). Rushdie is once again stressing the importance of asking questions and the search for one's belonging. Dubdub moved to America when he was given a job at Princeton. Solanka eventually followed in his footsteps. Dubdub took what was handed to him, but he remained unhappy. Like Solanka, Dubdub's character also had contradictions to emphasize his lost self. The "Dubdub Conundrum" was created by his peers because often he would seem like a foolish boy, but at other times, when presenting lectures, he appeared to be an extremely intellectual scholar. Also, he seemed to have a great life. Readers are unsure of why he is trying to escape at first, but Dubdub is gradually given more reasons to need an escape. Once he moved to America, he became somewhat famous and "The more he became a Personality, the less like a person he felt" (27). He never faced the issues from his past that brought him so much grief. He was great at his trade, but the growing amount of success he had was equivalent to the growing amount of depression that accumulated within. Dubdub had four failed suicide attempts. Because he never faced his issues, he didn't escape his past until his death. Rushdie treats this as a cautionary tale and as an extension of his own personal struggles. Solanka "realized that he had followed

Dubdub in so many things: in some of his thinking yes, but also…into America, into crisis" (28). Rushdie hints that America is symbolic to many outsiders as a place of success and starting over, but reveals that America itself is a contradiction:

> …Solanka marveled, once again, at the human capacity for automorphosis, the transformation of the self, which Americans claimed as their own special, defining characteristic. It wasn't. Americans were always labeling things with the America logo: American Dream, American Buffalo, American Graffiti, American Psycho, American Tune. But everyone else had such things too, and in the rest of the world the addition of a nationalist prefix didn't seem to add much meaning. English Psycho, Indian Graffiti, Australian Buffalo, Egyptian Dream, Chilean Tune. America's need to make things American, to own them, thought Solanka, was the mark of an odd insecurity. (55-6)

With this statement, readers can assume that America being represented as a contradiction signifies displacement and is not the answer to Solanka's (or Dubdub's) journey toward an inner peace. In fact, every character living in America that is mentioned in the novel has an easily identifiable issue dealing with displacement and a loss of self. Author of "Masks in 'Fury': A Study of Indian Authors' Destination" notes, "The irony is that people do go to America to acquire a global identity" (Bhattacharyya 157). He argues that *Fury*'s author has "become famous for not 'belonging' to any community, for wearing a mask" (Bhattacharyya 155).

Solanka's other friend, Jack Rhinehart, experiences a different dilemma in America. Rhinehart is a journalist turned novelist. He writes about "the unreal world that ruled the real one." When discussing his subjects, the first of three descriptions he uses is "They sleep with their sisters" (56). Rushdie, like Rhinehart, uses fiction to write about an unreal world that identifies issues he believes to exist in the real one. Both individuals, the real Rushdie and the fictional Rhinehart, include incest in their texts when describing these worlds. Rhinehart, like Dubdub, is another extension of Salman Rushdie's personal struggles. The mention of incest is also significant for another reason. Rhinehart desperately wants to be part of the American

society. He wants to be considered simply an American instead of the African-American title he has been given. Rhinehart had his own identity issues and wasn't necessarily proud of his heritage because "his desire to be accepted into this white man's club was the dark secret he could not confess to anyone, perhaps not even himself." He wanted to be considered an American, even though Americans were precisely the ones that brought his ancestors into slavery. He now wanted to be addressed and acknowledged as one of them, but perhaps the fact that he is considered an "African-American" illustrates that inequality exists in the present. He once claimed that "being black's just not the issue anymore," but "rediscovered, the hard way, that it still was" (151). Rhinehart wanted to exist in the fictitious America that he wrote about. In this country, he noted primarily that incest took place. Since this was the first description he gave, it can be assumed that America represents displacement for the characters in *Fury*. The immigrants are all troubled with their past. Rhinehart, specifically, is still dealing with historical events of his ancestors that occurred years before his birth. He confuses being American with being Caucasian. He wants to be accepted by a white society. Solanka even mentions that Jack "married a white woman, and moved in *bien-pensant* circles in which race was 'not an issue': that is, almost everyone was white" (57). He had since been trying to get a divorce, which suggests that finding peace by identifying with someone he was not, by continuing to ignore one's past, is ultimately unsuccessful. Solanka finally realized "that Jack's suppressed fury was the mirror of his own" (58). He, too, wanted a sense of belonging that he couldn't have. He, too, was an immigrant in search of peace, but was looking in the wrong place.

Jack's problems continue in his search for belonging. He sank into depression while continuing his search for identity. He desperately wanted to join a club called "S&M," short for "Single and Male." It is much later discovered that the three members were young white males

that were collectively the Concrete Killer that had been going around New York killing young, beautiful women. Rhinehart wanted so desperately to join this group that he covered for the young men. He hid the costumes associated with the murders, Goofy, Robin Hood, and Buzz Lightyear outfits. He was eventually found dead with a suicide note, but detectives agreed, "this so-called suicide smells strongly of fish" (198). The note helped establish that Jack was innocent because "Rhinehart was famous for the polished precision of his prose. He rarely made an error of syntax, and never, never made a spelling mistake," but the suicide note had several errors (199). Seeking belonging in the wrong place, like Dubdub, led to Rhinehart's failure and death.

When Solanka is on his journey to peace and belonging, he encounters a young woman named Mila Milo. Mila strongly resembled Solanka's creation, Little Brain, and began to look and act more like her. Mila also had issues with her father, leading to a personal identity loss. Her name had been changed from Milosevic to Milo because her father hated another man with the same last name (113). Because of issues with her father, she made people her projects and tried to repair previous damage (117). She alternated from being a child to being an adult in their relationship. She dressed like Little Brain, Solanka's "child," but acted like a mother. For example, she would visit him "early, to force him to eat breakfast" and bent over and "took his face in her hands" to talk to him. Solanka even admits to "feeling as if she were his parent and he a boy of Asmaan's age" (116). This was an especially dangerous relationship for Solanka because he had numerous issues associated with Little Brain.

Solanka's relationship with Little Brain is extremely complex. As a child, he sought comfort in his dolls after incestuous encounters with his step-father. She was "the only one of his creations with whom he fell in love—the only one he didn't want anyone else to handle" (96). The wording in the previous statement once again delivers a subtle hint of incest. Solanka

created the doll and considers her to be his child. He admits that he "fell in love" with her. The doll acquired appeal from all audiences and "had outgrown her creator…and was making her own way in the world" (97). Solanka admits, "She had become the Maya Angelou of the doll world, as relentless an autobiographer as that other caged bird" (97). This line is significant because Rushdie is referring to Angelou's autobiographical book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which describes the author's arguably incestuous past, one which Solanka can identify with. Angelou was raped by her mother's boyfriend, just as Solanka was sexually abused by his mother's husband. Now Little Brain has been directly linked to incest in multiple ways. The comfort that Solanka once received from his doll was no longer attainable. His creation had outgrown him and changed as a result. Solanka admits, "This L.B. was an impostor, with the wrong history, the wrong dialogue, the wrong personality, the wrong wardrobe, the wrong *brain*" (98). From this statement, we can conclude that the doll is symbolic of Solanka's (and Rushdie's) past. She is a representation of the India that exists today. The country's inhabitants have had similar feelings about postcolonial India. Many believe that their country and culture were ruined by the British. It was the wrong history because British rule never should have existed in India. It was the wrong dialogue because now several forms of English are spoken in the country, and Indians writing in English has been a greatly discussed topic regarding lost identity. Before India's independence, P. J. Griffiths analyzed Britain's rule in the country and tried to answer the question of whether or not it was beneficial. He non-biasedly admitted, "…education must be accepted as one of the weak spots of British rule in India" (Griffiths 209). Due to the educational failure at the time, India, like Little Brain, has "the wrong brain." Solanka confides in Mila and admits that the fury associated with Little Brain is to blame for the evening he held a knife over his family while contemplating murder. He turned the knife on the doll

instead, “its garments were slashed and torn and you could see where the knife had made deep incisions in its body,” but couldn’t let her go. He brought the doll with him to America. Solanka’s is unable to disconnect from his past, from Little Brain. He journeyed to start over, yet he was unable to start over without having his creation by his side. He is rooted to the doll, as Rushdie is rooted to India.

Solanka couldn’t resist seeing “Mila as Little Brain come alive:”

> Shyly, then, Solanka began to allow himself to see her as his creation, given life by some unlooked-for miracle and caring for him, now, as might the daughter he’d never had. Then a slip of the tongue let out his secret, but Mila seemed not at all put out. Instead she smiled a private little smile—a smile that, Solanka was obliged to concede, was full of a strange erotic pleasure, in which there was something of the patient angler’s satisfaction at the bait being finally taken…and, instead of correcting him, she replied as if he had used her right name and not the doll’s. Malik Solanka flushed hotly, overcome by an almost incestuous shame, and stammeringly tried to apologize; whereupon she came up close, until her breats moved against his shirt and he could feel the breath from her lips brushing against his, and murmured, “Professor, call me whatever you like. If it makes you feel good, please know that it’s good with me.” (124)

Mila continued to play out scenarios from the early episodes of *The Adventures of Little Brain* and to act like the doll Solanka had created. Solanka had now taken on the role of the father and Mila was the daughter figure. They falsely believed that this was a helpful medication for both of them. However, neither Mila nor Solanka had fully admitted to the issues in their past. Mila, thus far, claimed the issue was her father’s death (114), and Solanka has been putting all of the blame on his doll. He cannot yet admit to the damage from his childhood, but admitted to “an almost incestuous shame” in the aforementioned quote. The memory of incest continues to haunt his present. Solanka later disclosed, “He fucked her every day like a goat—like a man—and then he left her. And because she loved him as well as loathing him, she has looked ever since for cover versions, imitations of life” (232). Mila left the failed relationship with Solanka and returned to

Eddie. She continued to try to "fix" him from his traumatic past and was now repeating the cycle and treating him as a child by making comments such as "Wrong, Eddie…W-r-o-n-g" (231). The duo reminds one another of their scars, but they don't help to heal them.

Solanka leaves his relationship with Mila in order to start one with Neela Mahendra, "the most beautiful Indian woman—the most beautiful *woman*—he had ever seen" (61). Neela is obviously based on Rushdie's at-the-time significant other, Padma Lakshmi. Neela was linked to Rhinehart at the time and the first description of her is based on her heritage:

> "She's one of yours," Rhinehart said over his shoulder as he got up to open the door. "Indian diaspora. One hundred years of servitude. In the eighteen nineties her ancestors went as indentured laborers to work in what's its-name. Lilliput-Blefuscu. Now they run the sugarcane production and the economy would fall apart without them, but you know how it is wherever Indians go. People don't like them. (61)

Unlike Mila, Neela appeared much more honest. She lived in America but "was still connected to her origins" (63). When Neela described people from her own generation as "kids," Solanka thought it seemed honest. He considered Neela to be "an adult woman," whereas Mila had "roots in a childlike wantonness" (152-3). Neela was born in Lilliput-Blefuscu's capital and her family members were "descendants of one of the original migrants" (156). She is an extremely political individual and has strong feelings about her belonging, voicing, "I hate that word, 'indigenous,'…I'm fourth-generation Indo-Lilly. So I'm indigenous too" (158). Neela admits to having a "drunkard of a father" (157), but accepted her past and embraced her ancestry, allowing Solanka to do the same. Permitting herself to acknowledge her past allows her to heal from its scars and experience the present.

Mirroring current events in Neela's homeland, Solanka creates a new set of toys, *The Puppet Kings*, via the PlanetGalileo.com website. Unlike Neela, he is still running away from his

past. He left his life in India, England, and America, and is now "inhabiting a world he greatly preferred to the one outside his window…Here, inside the electricity" (188). Even though he was starting over again, "a rogue puppet was still a doll" (189). Still, he did not address the incest from his childhood. Solanka bases this new creation on the current events in Lilliput-Blefuscu, which is a transparent representation of Fiji at the time the book was written.

> The Fiji Labour Party…came to power in 1999, making Mahendra Pal Chaudhry (a prominent socialist and trade unionist) the first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister. Many welcomed his "Rainbow Coalition" as a positive move toward breaking down the boundaries between so-called "ethnic" Fijians and Indo-Fijians. However, some ethnic Fijians opposed the new government on the grounds that Fiji should always be run for and controlled by other Fijians; in 2000 they actually took control through violent means, encouraging some Indo-Fijians to organize their own countering protests. This coup and countercoup roughly form the set of events that *Fury* references. (Brouillette 147).

A scholar that focuses on English writing from various cultures writes, "…we might find textual references to incest as symptomatic of a wider, extra-textual, and historically framed set of anxieties and fixations" and adds, "many of the texts include historical references" (Sharrad 100). Solanka can relate to the issues occurring in Lilliput-Blefuscu, just as Rushdie relates to the issues that were taking place in Fiji. Identically to Lilliput-Blefuscu, indentured Indian laborers were brought to Fiji during the British rule to work on sugarcane plantations. Rushdie believes that Indian emigrants have worked hard to be able to claim new routes in different nations. He writes, "Migrant peoples do not remain visitors forever. In the end, their new land owns them as once their old land did, and they have a right to own it in their turn" ("June 2000" 301).

Neela leaves for Lilliput-Blefuscu and Solanka follows to let her know that he loves her. Since Solanka based *The Puppet Kings* on events in the country, the FRM "had taken on the identities of his fictions" (234). The characters were based on individuals he had known: friends, lovers, and enemies. Solanka decided to create these characters so that he could fix what went

wrong with Little Brain. He planned to have complete control over the lives of his creations. Rushdie emphasizes that the past needs to be addressed. Realistically, one cannot simply rewrite his history. One must address it in order to find a sense of belonging and move forward in the present. When Solanka encounters Babur, he sees that "the greatest monster of them all wore his own guilty face" (246). Babur was wearing the mask of Akasz Kronos, who Solanka based on himself. Here is a pivotal point in Solanka's transformation, because he is finally beginning to "see himself plainly." He is no longer ignoring issues and masking them with anger. Due to the time spent in Lilliput-Blefuscu, he prepares himself to face his past and finally move forward. On his way to the country, he said, "it felt like a return to the past" (236). When he boarded the helicopter to travel home, it was symbolic of having successfully addressed his past and of his new ability to experience the present.

Rushdie draws a fine line between childhood and adulthood in this novel, and at times it is difficult to define. A man that sometimes acts like a boy makes a career out of creating dolls and puppets. A criminal runs around New York City in Disney costumes. Neela is mistaken for Solanka's daughter (147). Solanka is told that he needs "to learn how to play" (179). He climbed into the "bouncy castle" after being told, "No adults allowed" (259). Furthermore, there are several mentions of "play," "games," and "toys" throughout the story. This blurred line is a representation of the clashing of past and present. Solanka's actions were all based on his childhood trauma and he becomes obsessed with rewriting his history. In fact, Little Brain was created as a time-traveling doll and Akasz Kronos of the Puppet Kings got his name from Kronos, "the Greek, the child-devourer, Time" (170). Solanka's step-father's actions "defined him, had not lost any of its power over him" (146). Paul Sharrad discusses incest in Indian literature. He notes similarities, including that "in nearly every case, there is a distant father,

often abusive" (Sharrad 100), "the plot shifts from the personal past to the political present (Sharrad 103), and it involves what seems like "a timeless place" (Sharrad 105). All of these characteristics appear in *Fury*. Solanka discussed this timelessness when he was creating the *Puppet Kings*, observing, "Everything existed at once. This was…an exact mirror of the divine experience of time. Until the advent of hyperlinks, only God had been able to see simultaneously into past, present, and future alike; human beings were imprisoned in the calendar of their days. Now, however, such omniscience was available to all, at the merest click of a mouse" (187). These references, along with the several hints and blatant occurrences of incest, supply a simple message for its readers: The past affects the present. British rule, India's independence, and fleeing his homeland are all important aspects of Rushdie's past. He addresses his past as well as his personal and political struggles through his literature. Rufus Cook states, "…the reason [Rushdie] turned to writing to begin with was his love of place, his need to 'restore the past to [himself]'" (Cook 25). If this was Rushdie's goal, it was undoubtedly a success in *Fury*.

Chapter Four: Discovering Rushdie's Intentions through Incest

"…Indian writers, in England, writing about India. Can they do no more than describe, from a distance, the world that they have left? Or does the distance open any other doors? These are of course political questions, and must be answered at least partly in political terms. I must say first of all that description is itself a political act." ("Imaginary" 13)

Incest is inarguably a topic that most readers prefer not to discuss. Hearing about this act typically disgusts audiences, but Salman Rushdie intentionally includes it time and time again in his literature. Why would any author feel this strongly about a topic as taboo as incest? Once readers dig a little deeper, they will discover that incest in literature is far from uncommon. Over the years, and especially in the past decade, it is becoming an increasingly recognized topic of discussion (Barnes 3). After analyzing the subject, two scholars concluded, "From the ancient Greek tragedy 'Oedipus Rex' by Sophocles to our days, literature has used incest as a powerful metaphor to convey deeply challenging social and political issues" (Philips and Champlin). Considering incest a "powerful metaphor" is all too accurate, because it demands its audience's attention and readers can easily recall whether or not it took place in a story.

India has encountered a considerable amount of hardships throughout the centuries, events which have impacted these natives for years after initially occurring. Postcolonial literature emphasizing alienation and displacement is by no means exclusively Indian. Incest as a metaphor exists in several cultures, including Latin American and Anglo-American literatures. Stories focusing on characters' lost identities or search for belonging is extremely common and a theme that resonates with most readers.

Although the theme is common, it is intensified in Indian literature and especially important to include. K. S. Narayana states that in Indian novels, authors are "in search of [their] identity, [their] self-definition." One of the questions they always ask themselves when writing is

"Who am I—what is my identity?" (Narayana 4). The seemingly simple act of writing in English has become a topic of controversy. David McCutchion believes, "A compelling and authentic theme is also available here for the Indian writer in English, for his very choice of medium reveals him as a victim of that crisis of identity which afflicts all westernized Asians and Africans—how to be modern without losing native roots, without becoming an imitation Westerner" (McCutchion 305).

The relationship between the east and west is a subject that Salman Rushdie mentions frequently. A professor of English and American Studies suggests, "Literature provides both a means for the displacement of traumatic experience onto myth, stories, and so forth, and, according to Laub, a means for its realization, through the 'witnessing' of trauma by listeners/readers" (Barnes 3). By writing about incest and including it in storylines such as the imitation Fiji in *Fury*, Rushdie allows his readers to "witness" what Indians have endured over the years. He allows people to try and understand his perspective and why his Indian roots are one of his primary defining characteristics.

Fury and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* are both novels by Rushdie that have subtle and obvious examples of incest. Rushdie uses a number of themes to highlight displacement felt by the Indian society. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Rushdie combines the past and present to illustrate characters' lack of belonging. Rai is pulled in two directions when his mother focuses on the future and his father obsesses over the past. Similarly in *Fury*, Professor Solanka is frequently reminded of sexual abuse that occurred during his childhood by his step-father. The event defined his future and was the basis to all of his decisions, including his career. The author also used contradictions by the characters to emphasize their confusion. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Ormus claimed he would follow Vina anywhere, but when she left, he didn't try to

find her. In *Fury*, Professor Solanka said he hated peace, but eventually came to America in search of it.

Incest is especially present in the novels as a theme for displacement. Unlike time and contradictions, incest and forbidden love occur between several characters. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, characters with Indian heritage are searching for belonging throughout the novel; they are overwhelmingly unsuccessful. In *Fury*, the setting changes, but characters remain displaced. An article analyzing Rushdie and his career reads, "Rushdie was drawn to New York also because of the history of migrants that distinguishes the city; the teeming ethnicities reminded him of his childhood in Bombay." The article continues, stating he "described New York as 'a western rewrite of Bombay'" (Idris). Although the location has changed, the underlying themes are the same. Individuals from numerous cultural backgrounds remain displaced and are constantly searching for a place to call their own.

Rushdie is known for borrowing historical events, whether global or personal, and disguising them (sometimes by simply changing a few names) and forming them into storylines for his novels. For example, "Rushdie's family saga finds a parallel in the Sinai family in *Midnight's Children*" and "no other Rushdie protagonist is closer to the author than [Professor Solanka]" in *Fury* (Idris). Rushdie bases his work off of actual events and ties his own experiences into his novels because he directly relates to his characters. He has experienced the displacement that can be found in every chapter of his work. He tries to solve the riddle of his own belonging through the characters in each of his novels.

Salman Rushdie is most famous for *Midnight's Children*, which remains one of his most highly acclaimed works to date. Critics argue about his more recent works and often provide mixed reviews, at best. He is known for "cacophony of voices, plots, opinions, allegory, puns,

magic realism, multicultural mythology, historical clues, and pop-culture references he has never attempted to edit" (Allen 138). One critic wrote, "The first half of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* reads well, and is some of the best writing Rushdie has done. The second half is often Rushdie at his worst, ranting when he thinks he is riffling, stringing together bad puns, forgetting his history, getting facts wrong, reducing his life to a cartoon" (King 161). I argue that contrary to King's beliefs, Rushdie never forgets his history. He is instead constantly reminded of and reminding others of this history, allowing them to experience his search for identity through his literature. The author's solution to this lifelong struggle has been to counter his "double unbelonging" (*Joseph Anton* 54) with a double belonging. He now claims to have multiple roots. Like the Indo-Lillies in *Fury*, Rushdie teaches that immigrants eventually become citizens and earn the "native" title.

The majority of critics claim that Rushdie is becoming worse at his profession, making statements like, "*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* did not involve play with deeply held religious beliefs…Without that distraction, critics focused on the novel and discovered that it was terrible" (Torres 35). Although Rushdie's novelistic style may have changed over the years, my thesis argues that he is no less of a political (or controversial) author than he was when he began writing. Rushdie writes with intention and, though at times subtle, always presents his personal views in his works.

In *Fury*, Rushdie wrote, "Rome did not fall because her armies weakened but because Romans forgot what being a Roman meant" (87). The author "refers to his books as 'novels of memory'" because he understands the importance of his country's history. As in *Fury*, Rushdie is sending the important message that people need to be aware of their past in order to understand and appreciate their present. Rushdie admits, "This word 'Indian' is getting to be a

pretty scattered concept" ("Imaginary" 17). The question "What does it mean to be Indian?" could lead to an endless amount of discussion, but for now Rushdie seems to have found his answer by claiming multiple roots as a collective part of his identity.

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