

# INDIAN TIN DRUM

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Since the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*,<sup>1</sup> which was awarded the Booker Prize in November 1981, critics have praised the book for its richness in variety of subject matter and narrative techniques. As to subject matter, the book was said "to cover everything about India: a hundred years of British rule, Independence, Partition, the war with and the carnage in Bangladesh, the existence of various minorities on the Indian subcontinent."<sup>2</sup> As to narrative technique, Rushdie was said to owe a great deal to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: "Rushdie's novel, like Sterne's, is narrated in the first person by a protagonist who lets his mind wander, saying his fate did not begin just from his birth, it began well before his conception."<sup>3</sup> Now if *Midnight's Children* is a great novel dealing with "everything" about the author's home country and achieving this by means of a discursive and varying narrative technique in the tradition of *Tristram Shandy*, it is certainly not the first modern novel to do so. The most obvious forerunner of *Midnight's Children* in these respects must be *Die Blechtrommel* (1959; *The Tin Drum*), by the German novelist Günter Grass.<sup>4</sup> In this book, together with *Katz und Maus* (1961; *Cat and Mouse*) and *Hundejahre* (1963; *Dog Years*) called *Danzig Trilogy*, Grass manages to cover everything about Germany, and he employs a narrative technique which must have been a model for Rushdie.

The aim of this study is to follow up some similarities between *Midnight's Children* and *The Tin Drum*, and to show how many obvious parallels exist between these two novels. Although this is basically a comparative approach, it is meant to focus mainly on Rushdie's novel, since I have been asked to avoid quotations from the German. Nevertheless, it is also meant to remind the reader of several facets of Grass's great work.

*Midnight's Children*, like *The Tin Drum*, attempts to retell the nation's history by linking it to the story of a family and, more particularly, the story of the birth and growth of a child. The effect of this technique is an emerging pattern of history, the author's particular interpretation of the history of his own nation. History is clearly the most important theme of *Midnight's Children*. Saleem Sinai, the young narrator — critical, pedantic, sometimes cynical, sometimes full of irony and wit, often ostentatiously neutral, even apologetic, but at times with tongue in cheek — makes sure that one is constantly aware of the fact that he is a mirror of India's history. Newspapers celebrate his birth, politicians ratify his position, and public announcements punctuate his life. On the occasion of his birth he receives a letter from the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru: "Dear Baby Saleem, My

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<sup>1</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981). All references are to the Avon Books edition (New York: Avon, 1982), and will appear in the text after the abbreviation *MC*.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Nazareth, "Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*," *World Literature Written in English*, 21, No. 1 (Spring 1982), 169.

<sup>3</sup> P. Nazareth, p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel*, first published in 1959. All references are to the English translation of the novel, *The Tin Drum* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) and will appear in the text after the abbreviation *TD*.

belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own" (*MC*, p. 143). And throughout the novel, Saleem reminds us of this close connection. Oskar Matzerath, the narrator in Grass's novel — also critical and pedantic, but mostly cynical — does not get public recognition at the time of his birth, but he grows into the role of his nation's mirror image by his actions and abilities. Thus his refusal to grow up and his decision to remain a dwarf until the end of the Second World War mirror Germany's inability to grow up and take sense, and his destructive powers are the destructive powers of the Nazi system. So both protagonists serve as mirrors for their nations' histories, and they can even grow into the quality and effectiveness of symbols for their countries' problems.

But history, in both novels, starts before the protagonist's birth. Both narratives start with the story of the narrator's grandparents. Whereas the political and social conditions at the time of the grandparents' marriage gradually drip into the reader's understanding, the narrative focus is first on the strange and rather unusual personal encounters between grandfather and grandmother. Oskar's Polish grandmother, Anna Bronski, is sitting in a potato field in autumn when some Polish soldiers chase poor Joseph Koljaiczek across the field. To save his life, Anna hides Joseph under her voluminous skirts, where he starts making love to her, and so in due course he becomes her husband. The child conceived under those skirts in the potato field is Oskar's mother. Saleem Sinai, on the other hand, tells of his Kashmiri grandfather Aadam Aziz, a medical doctor with a German degree. One day, Aadam is called to the house of the landowner Ghani, who wants him to treat his daughter Naseem. But Aadam is not allowed to see the whole body of his charming patient; a bedsheet with a small hole in its center is held up so that he can only see the part of Naseem's body that needs treatment. Thus he falls in love with her piece by piece and eventually asked for her hand in marriage. In both novels, the grotesque circumstances of the grandparents' mutual sexual attraction signal the absurdity of many of the events to follow in the course of the narrative. And this in turn foreshadows the grotesque and absurd situations that the history of the nation produces, situations that can only be adequately expressed through surrealism.

Saleem feels himself bound to the important and decisive events in India (and also in Pakistan) from the time of his birth, which coincides with the birth of modern India on August 15, 1947, to the moment when he tells his story in the late 1970s; he thinks he has a claim to a place at the center of things. At one point he tries to analyze the prime minister's letter and comes to the crucial question: "How, in what terms, may the career of a single individual be said to impinge on the fate of a nation? I must answer in adverbs and hyphens: I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively . . ." (*MC*, p. 285). And after having experienced many difficulties, wars, atrocities and grotesque situations, Saleem acquires a particular sympathy for his own country: "I had already decided to save the country" (*MC*, p. 461). His ultimate motive is to save the present through the preservation of the past. He achieves this through the metaphor of the pickle jars. As the narrative draws towards the end he often describes his chapters as pickle jars, in which he hopes to preserve his concept of the past, which in turn finds expression through the metaphor of chutnification. He speaks of "the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time" (*MC*, p. 548), and explains: "To pickle is to give immortality, after all" (*MC*, p. 549). And what does he hope to achieve with the preservation of his interpretation of history? "One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be overpowering, tears may rise to eyes; I hope nevertheless that it will be possible to say of them that they possess the authentic taste of truth . . . that they are, despite everything, acts of love" (*MC*, p. 550). Dieter

Riemenschneider has shown<sup>5</sup> how Saleem offers both a Western and an Indian concept of history. The Western concept takes history and reality for granted, for factual truth; the Indian concept sees correspondences in seemingly unrelated events that Saleem likes to juxtapose in his narrative, the most glaring example being the link drawn between individual, family and nation.

Looking at *The Tin Drum*, we find that Grass employs similar metaphors for slightly different purposes. The two most obvious metaphors that serve to digest history in the sense of Saleem's chutnification of raw materials are achieved through acts that assume symbolic dimensions: the eating of fish and the peeling, cutting and eating of onions. After witnessing a fisherman catching eels out of the Baltic Sea on Good Friday, Oskar Matzerath's mother first refuses to eat any fish, then, after having been reminded of her unhappy marriage by her friend Jan Bronski, she starts to devour all sorts of fish (*TD*, p. 154) and she dies of fish poisoning. The religious undertones are obvious: The fish as a symbol of early Christianity signals defiance; Good Friday, evoking Christ's role as the Redeemer, signals a kind of martyrdom on the part of Agnes Matzerath. Christianity was indeed the only hope for many people in those troubled years in the late 1930s, especially in a city like Danzig. After the war, Oskar draws our attention to a strange nightclub in Düsseldorf, the Onion Cellar, where the guests perform a ritual preparation and consumption of onions in order to weep and then be free to talk more openly with each other. Thus they manage to live with their own horrible past: "At last they were able to cry again. . . . After this cataclysm at twelve marks eighty, human beings who have had a good cry open their mouths to speak. Still hesitant, startled by the nakedness of their own words, the weepers poured out their hearts to their neighbours on the uncomfortable, burlap-covered crates, submitted to questioning, let themselves be turned inside-out like overcoats" (*TD*, p. 517). The recent past is not pickled, but turned into an onion, and so there can be a new beginning, especially if people have learned their lesson and let themselves be turned inside-out. In a way, this nightclub finds a corresponding establishment in *Midnight's Children*, when Saleem returns to Bombay after the destruction of the magicians' ghetto in Delhi and some time in captivity. Where his parents' flat used to be, there is now a nightclub, the Midnite-Confidential Club, "that place outside time, that negation of history" (*MC*, p. 541), where all events are turned into a farce, and where a sort of Russian roulette is played with a roving spotlight in the dark.

*Midnight's Children* is not the only recent novel to be compared to *The Tin Drum*. The picaresque genre seems to have attracted more contemporary novelists, and the juxtaposition of history and individual through the medium of surrealism appears to be particularly adequate to the serious writer in his attempts to come to terms with the world of today.<sup>6</sup>

The discussion of Rushdie's novel as a mirror of history alone would fill a whole book. Let me just touch upon some further parallels between the two novels under consideration, in the context of history. However different from each other the two books may seem to some readers, they are similar in their setting in a region which is being claimed by several ethnic or religious groups, and at a time when great changes are about to take place. Whereas the Danzig area and parts of northern Poland in the

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<sup>5</sup> Dieter Riemenschneider, "History and the Individual in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*," paper presented to the Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) in Guelph (Ontario), August 1983.

<sup>6</sup> One recent example can be found in Franco-Canadian literature: Jacques Godbout's *Les Têtes à Papineau* (1982). Eva-Marie Kröller's statement in "Two Heads," *Canadian Literature*, No. 96 (Spring 1983), 112, on the suffering of the narrator, can be extended to *Midnight's Children*.

1930s were subject to disputes and animosities between Germans, Poles, and Kashubians, the Indian subcontinent of the time before Partition was characterized by power struggles between the English, the Hindus, and the Muslims, with the figure of the Mahatma attempting to pacify the two religious parties. Also the language situation in the two areas at the time of the setting of the two novels can be compared: in both cases there are several languages in rivalry with all shades of feelings between various language groups. At the time of the rise of the Nazis in Danzig, Polish is considered an inferior tongue by many Germans. Oskar's mother is married to a true German from the Rhineland and her lover is a Pole. Oskar himself witnesses the siege of the Polish post office in Danzig by the Germans as a German boy, but from the perspective of the Poles. Saleem Sinai is no less affected by rivalries between language groups. His father's friend Dr. Narlikar is killed by language marchers in their fight over Bombay in 1956 (*MC*, p. 210); Saleem and his playmates are endangered by the language riots near-by, when they play in their courtyard. Some of these rivalries between conflicting factions, religious, political, or linguistic, are suited to Saleem's tendency towards the presentation of implicit dichotomies in history: "Indo-British, Hindu-Muslim, rural-urban, non-violence-brutality."

Both novels under discussion here are also novels about the phenomenon of war. *The Tin Drum* — together with *Ansichten eines Clowns* (1963; *The Clown*) by Heinrich Böll, and *Deutschstunde* (1968; *The German Lesson*) by Siegfried Lenz — is known as the most famous attempt of German postwar literature to come to terms with the Second World War. "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" ("to overcome one's past") is the German catchword for these attempts in literature. It is, among other things, an effort to digest oppressive guilt feelings of a whole generation. The novel tries to achieve this through alienation of the historical facts by means of a distorted and distorting perspective. Oskar writes his whole story in a mental hospital after the war, and although he never draws a moral conclusion from the events, he reports them from the perspective of a child. At the age of three he refuses to grow any further and decides to remain a dwarf. On the other hand he has acquired extraordinary powers of insight from the time when he was still an embryo, and this power of insight grows into proper telepathy.

Saleem Sinai's story reports several wars, the most effective description being from the Bangladesh War in 1965. Saleem's position in relation to the atrocities of the war remains as detached in its way as Oskar's. It becomes clear when eleven-year-old Saleem stays with his Uncle Zulfikar in Rawalpindi. Zulfikar is a general in the army of Pakistan, and on the night of October 7, 1958, a whole number of other army generals come to dinner at his house. "What did eleven-year-olds hear at dinner?" And the crucial question: "How do eleven-year-olds react to the announcement of a coup?" (*MC*, p. 347) Saleem gives the answers himself: "An eleven-year-old boy cannot judge whether a president is truly corrupt, even if gongs-and-pips say he is; it is not for eleven-year-olds to say whether Mirza's association with the feeble Republican Party should have disqualified him from high office under the new régime. Saleem Sinai made no political judgments; but when, inevitably at midnight, on November 1st, my uncle shook me awake and whispered, 'Come on, sonny, it's time you got a taste of the real thing!' I leaped out of bed smartly . . ." (*MC*, p. 349). Saleem, the innocent witness of political decisions that breed wars, does not condemn the machinations of power and political ambition, but the contrast between his aloofness and his uncle's involvement shows up the problematical nature of such decisions more clearly. A child's innocence reports national history and war episodes in *The Tin Drum* and in *Midnight's Children*. The effect, in both cases, is one of criticism

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<sup>7</sup> Maria Couto, "Midnight's Children and Parents: The Search for Indo-British Identity," *Encounter*, 58, No. 2 (February 1982), 62.

directed against the adult world. Criticism of our world's civilization, particularly of Western civilization.

Neither Oskar Matzerath nor Saleem Sinai are ordinary children. They both have serious defects. Oskar's refusal to grow after the age of three has already been mentioned. On the whole, Oskar is a most difficult child for his parents. Saleem has even more physical defects: an oversize nose that often causes sinus problems, a banged forehead, part of a finger missing, and a patch of hair torn off, the two latter defects resulting from school experiences. So, in a way, Oskar and Saleem are both anti-heroes. As if to balance these defects, however, they both have a number of extraordinary abilities. While Oskar is a master drummer and manages to destroy glass with his shrill voice, Saleem also has telepathic powers, his large nose can detect the smells of abstract ideas or of human behavior; for instance, unfairness, to him, smells like onions (*MC*, p. 442), and he mentions the scent of quarrel (*MC*, p. 57) and the smell of silence (*MC*, p. 58). His nose finds a rival in his sister's voice: "What I could smell, Jamila could sing. Truth beauty happiness pain: each had its separate fragrance, and could be distinguished by my nose; each, in Jamila's performances, could find its ideal voice. My nose, her voice: they were exactly complementary gifts; but they were growing apart" (*MC*, p. 377). Later in the novel, Saleem can detect any scent like a dog, so that he is used as a track-dog in Dacca during the Bangladesh War.<sup>8</sup>

Oskar Matzerath and Saleem Sinai are both very powerful in their immediate environments. Oskar is not completely innocent in the deaths of his mother and father. Saleem develops his power through knowledge in much the same way and can also be blamed, to a certain extent, for at least two deaths: He dreams that his classmate Jimmy Kapadia is murdered, and on the next day he learns that Jimmy has died of a heart seizure (*MC*, p. 298); when he discovers an affair between Homi Catrack and Lila Sabarmati, he informs Lila's husband, who shoots the adulterers (*MC*, p. 313). Even Uncle Hanif's suicide (*MC*, p. 326) can be connected with Saleem's destructive power.

This brings us to another obvious parallel between the two novels under consideration. Just as national evils are reported in a detached manner, so are private affairs. In this context the position of adultery deserves particular attention. Both critical narrators spy on their own mothers. Oskar's mother has a constant lover, Jan Bronski, and Oskar calls him "Jan Bronski, who lived by my mother's flesh, who, as to this day I believe and doubt, begot me in Matzerath's name" (*TD*, p. 127). This uncertainty, or rather confusion, about the narrator's parentage is more complicated in the case of Saleem Sinai, who was exchanged for another baby who was born simultaneously at midnight. The other baby, called Shiva, turns into an alter ego of Saleem, and also into his worst rival, Saleem as Doctor Jekyll being in constant fear of Shiva as Mr. Hyde. Again, the question of parentage in *Midnight's Children* would fill a whole book. But let us consider Saleem's reaction when he finds out about his mother's attachment to her former husband, Nadir Khan. Hidden among dirty laundry in the washing chest, Saleem spies on his mother and detects her secret passion (*MC*, p. 190). He also spies on her when she meets Nadir at the Pioneer Café. He chooses to betray Homi Catrack's affair in order to scare his mother. And to good effect: after the murder of Homi Catrack, Saleem's mother never commits adultery again. This episode lets the reader feel that the child Saleem is longing for some order and stability. When he punishes his mother in this fashion, he seems to do so

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<sup>8</sup> One is immediately reminded of *Dog Years* (the third novel of Grass's *Danzig Trilogy*), where a dog not only serves as a leitmotif and connecting narrative element throughout the book, but it also shows some doglike qualities in human beings.

not from a moral motive, but rather for some invisible drive towards law and order, which both seem so threatened in the whole Indian subcontinent at the time.

Both narrators present atrocities and terrible events that take place either on the national level or on the level of the immediate surroundings, among acquaintances, or even in the family. And both narrators have a variety of humorous aspects to present. The juxtaposition of horrors and humor is quite frequent. In Grass's novel, the most striking example is the funny way in which Oskar spends the night at the Polish post office, sleeping in a laundry basket and ruminating in a humorous way on the various letters in the basket; and in the morning he is awakened by the sounds of approaching German aggression: "Consequently I was not awakened by the letter which a certain Lech Milewczyk in Warsaw had written his niece in Danzig-Schidlitz, a letter alarming enough to have awakened a millenarian turtle; what woke me up was either the nearby machine-gun fire or the distant roar of the salvos from the double turrets of the battle ships in the Free Port" (*TD*, p. 216). Grass is not the first German novelist to employ this juxtaposition of humor and horror,<sup>9</sup> it can be said to go back to the tradition of the picaresque novel. As critics have pointed out,<sup>10</sup> Rushdie employs further elements of the picaresque genre in *Midnight's Children*.

One good example of the juxtaposition of humor and horror in *Midnight's Children* can be found quite early in the book. Saleem's grandfather pays regular visits to his patient, who is veiled by the perforated bedsheet: "Far away the Great War moved from crisis to crisis, while in the cobwebbed house Doctor Aziz was also engaged in a total war against his sectioned patient's inexhaustible complaints. And, in all those war years, Naseem never repeated an illness . . ." (*MC*, p. 23). Or a more direct example occurs when Doctor Aziz is rescued from almost certain death in the great massacre of Amritsar just because of his bad sneeze, which appears to be caused by the enormous size of his Kashmiri nose (*MC*, p. 35).

The numerous characters and figures that populate the two novels under consideration present quite a colorful lot. In both books there is a fascination with strange and exotic people. These are reviewed again and again by the narrators, like pictures in a photo album. Both narrators talk of photos when they recall scenes or people from the past. And the extraordinary characters to be found in Oskar Matzerath's album include: Herbert Truczinski, a young waiter on whose back the whole world is represented symbolically in scars; Bebra, the dwarfish circus clown who becomes Oskar's friend for a long period, especially during the war; Roswitha, a gnomish somnambulist with whom Oskar falls in love; and other extraordinary people. Saleem Sinai's narrative also teems with exotic characters, although, at the beginning, he tells his readers: ". . . above all things, I fear absurdity" (*MC*, p. 4). The most miraculous people with preternatural powers, features, talents, or faculties are among the one thousand and one children who were born between midnight and one a.m. on August 15, 1947. The ones who survive — by 1957 there are only five hundred and eighty-one left — are united by Saleem to the Midnight Children Conference (M. C. C.) through his telepathic powers. They assemble regularly in his mind. Not all of them possess the same extraordinary characteristics: "One remarkable fact: the closer to midnight our birth-times were, the greater were our gifts. Those children born in the last seconds of the hour were (to be frank) little more than circus freaks . . ." (*MC*, p. 238). Saleem takes great pleasure and pride in

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<sup>9</sup> In German literature, we can go back to the seventeenth century, to the baroque picaresque novel *Abenteuerlicher Simplicius Simplicissimus* (1671), by Hans Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen, where humorous situations are mixed with the horrors of the Thirty Years' War.

<sup>10</sup> K. B. Rao, in his review of *Midnight's Children*, in *World Literature Today*, 56 (Winter 1982), 181, writes of "a Rabelaisian rambunctiousness."

describing to the reader the various feats performed by midnight's children from all over India (*MC*, p. 237), among them infants with powers of transmutation, flight, prophecy, or wizardry. But two of them were born on the stroke of midnight, and so they combine most magic powers: Saleem and Shiva. And one of the children assumes greater importance relatively late in the novel: Parvati-the-witch. Saleem manages to leave Bangladesh through her witchcraft, and he marries her to be a father to the child that she expects from Shiva (*MC*, p. 483). Incidentally, the child of Parvati and Shiva looks like the god Ganesh, who plays an important part in the novel. Even outside the circle of midnight's children, there are many grotesque and exotic characters, like old whores, fortune-tellers, a fairylike boatman, and an impotent poet. And many of the objects that these characters occupy themselves with and which can even assume a role of a leitmotif, are just as unusual. Saleem himself has a very strong attachment to an old silver spittoon; this reminds the reader of Oskar Matzerath's attachment to his tin drum.

So far one could have said that some of the apparent similarities between the two novels can be found in many other books, too. When it comes to the narrative mode, the atmosphere conveyed by the language used in these two novels, however, the close connection between them is obvious. Any reader who is perfectly familiar with both languages will have to agree that both novels entertain and instruct the reader in the same way, through the same means. They offer an analogous experience to the reader. The first characteristic is the mode of digression in the manner of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. There are digressions within digressions which interrupt the main thread. There are flashbacks, reminders of past and future events. Characters' names may be introduced hundreds of pages before they appear themselves and remembered hundreds of pages after their deaths. Very often the effect is one of simultaneity of past, present, and future. There are constant changes between straightforward narrative, fairy-tale style, newspaper report, court evidence, school essay, public speech, and other variations of the narrative mode. The narrator addresses the reader personally — Saleem is even interrupted by a woman called Padma — the narrator asks himself how to go on, he can be reluctant to tell certain things, he can try to mystify his narrative or to puzzle the reader on purpose, he can make sure after irregular intervals that the reader keeps some memorable events in mind, he can warn the reader, move through space and time, repeat himself endlessly, produce special effects and conjuror's tricks, and he can play the wildest variations on syntactical structures. His prose can actually create language. All these qualities are common to Günter Grass and Salman Rushdie (or their narrators, respectively). Rushdie's prose has been said to suggest the chant of Indian traditional texts.<sup>11</sup> This may very well be the case, but it also suggests his indebtedness to Grass. In this respect Rushdie appears as the true mediator between Indian tradition and Western experience.

The particular atmosphere created by the narrative mode in both novels does not only allow for epic dimensions and thus for the serious subjects treated, but it is also highly entertaining. The atmosphere is worthy of a narrative dealing with national history as well as individual biography. The variation in syntax and style does not channel the reader or critic into one particular interpretation of history, but it leaves ample room for conflicting views. Nevertheless, the individual characters and events do not lose anything of their accuracy. Both writers, Grass and Rushdie, are such supreme masters of their language as to have complete control of the whole narrative down to the smallest details.

There are many novels in various literatures that attempt to re-create the

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<sup>11</sup> Maria Couto, p. 63.

particular atmosphere of a certain city, but comparatively few of them actually succeed in conveying a true "spiritus loci".<sup>12</sup> Among the very best examples in any language must be counted *The Tin Drum* and *Midnight's Children*. To follow up in detail the "spiritus loci" of prewar Danzig conveyed so beautifully in Grass's novel would provide enough material for another study. The reader of *The Tin Drum* sees the streets and buildings of old Danzig come to life again, the Stockturm, the Max-Halbe-Platz, the Jeschkental Forest, the Kohlenmarkt, the Theatre, the Church of the Sacred Heart, and the Number nine streetcar line past the Saspe Cemetery to Brösen on the Baltic Sea. *Midnight's Children* recreates the "spiritus loci" of Bombay, first, like Oskar, through the eyes of a child, with an honest feeling for this city, and yet with a certain sense of humor. There are also parts of the novel which give a strong impression of Delhi and even of Karachi. But the flavor of Bombay, the sights and smells of that great city as conveyed by Saleem, is definitely the most detailed, the one ingrained through constant repetition of certain names of streets or quarters, the true atmosphere of the place. Several people who spent part of their lives in Bombay have admitted that this book makes them homesick, confirming the fact that the "spiritus loci" of that city as presented in the novel is perfectly accurate. Saleem gives us a history of Bombay before he writes about his parents' move to Methwold's Estate. This estate in many ways represents colonial history and Independence, because the Englishman who had it built, William Methwold, moves out on August 15, 1947, when India gains its independence and Saleem is born. The new owners of Methwold's Estate are Indians, and they are to leave a number of things unchanged, so they are to keep up several customs like the cocktail hour, for example. Methwold's Estate, although divided up into several apartments, assumes the position of a nucleus from which young Saleem starts to explore the marvels and idiosyncrasies of Bombay. More than once, Saleem cries out: "Our Bombay!" Names like Colaba Causeway, Marine Drive, Warden Road, Kemp's Corner, Breach Candy, Mahalaxmi Temple, Chowpatti Beach, and even some of the common advertisement placards of the period, all melt into a compact image of the city of Bombay: "Now, looking back through baby eyes, I can see it all perfectly — it's amazing how much you can remember when you try. What I can see: the city, basking like a bloodsucker lizard in the summer heat. Our Bombay: it looks like a hand but it's really a mouth, always open, always hungry, swallowing food and talent from everywhere else in India. A glamorous leech, producing nothing except films bush-shirts fish . . ." (*MC*, p. 146). In spite of the glamorous greed, Saleem must be in love with this bloodsucker lizard. Even later in the novel, when he tries to describe the atmosphere of Karachi, he is immediately thrown back to Bombay in his thoughts: "I won't deny it: I never forgave Karachi for not being Bombay" (*MC*, p. 368). Thus, the "spiritus loci" of Bombay is one of the supreme features of this book, it is responsible for a great deal of warmth in an otherwise cold world.

It has been attempted to show how many parallels can be drawn between two novels from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* have been found to be similar in many respects. Although both novels are richer in material and in psychological insight than it has been possible to do justice to, this study hopes to have thrown some light on a whole range of facets and aspects that make us see one thing quite clearly: both novels appeal to the same readers. Those who have enjoyed and understood at least some parts of one, are bound to be rewarded in much the same manner by reading the other novel. Both books are genuine masterpieces of the novel in the twentieth

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<sup>12</sup> Among those that succeed in English are James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) about Dublin, Eleanor Dark's *Waterway* (1938) about Sydney, or Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* (1957-1960) about Alexandria.



century.<sup>15</sup> It is hoped that future critics will be able to investigate more thoroughly the interdependence of plot and history in *Midnight's Children*, and, when doing so, remember to consult what has been written about that great German novel about the dwarfish chronicler with his tin drum.

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<sup>15</sup> I definitely disagree with K. B. Rao when he writes: "In trying to be too clever, Rushdie loses control both of himself and of his art." I rather agree with Charles R. Larson's review, in *World Literature Today*, 56 (Winter 1982), 66, where Rushdie is compared to the great Latin-American writers Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez. And Larson justly writes: "With one bold stroke, Salman Rushdie has altered the face of contemporary Indian fiction."