

**At the Banquet:
Images of the Carnavalesque in Salman Rushdie's
The Moor's Last Sigh**

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**by
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Abstract

This thesis examines the carnivalesque nature of The Moor's Last Sigh by Salman Rushdie in relation to Gargantua and Pantagruel by Francois Rabelais. In particular, I focus on the abundant banquet imagery of this novel by borrowing terminology coined by Mikhail Bakhtin in his dissertation Rabelais and His World. Bakhtin believes that the carnivalesque nature of the folk promotes a world that encourages the celebration of material life. Eating and drinking promote laughter, which banishes fear. Rushdie enjoys the portrait of the unregenerate, laughing human, who is unafraid to challenge any orthodoxies, including religious orthodoxies. Rushdie creates a carnivalesque narrator who is morally ambivalent and physically grotesque to tell the tales in The Moor's Last Sigh. In this thesis I explore the carnivalesque portrayal of food, and its effect on love, language and nationality.

Rushdie uses pepper to define the love stories of this novel. Spices serve as a metaphor for the relationship of these characters, who defy social and religious convention to unite. "Pepper love" is passionate, fearless, and volatile. Banquet images champion the organic world. Eating, drinking, copulating, birthing and dying are common human experiences that reveal the bond between individuals. I examine food's role in romantic love, sexual love and the love of family.

Food's effect on language is paramount. Over meals people converse, debate, and share ideas. I examine the links between speech and food, specifically focusing on Moor's storytelling abilities and his role as a chef. Moor uses the techniques of the carnivalesque barker, who uses language to both praise and abuse the audience. Food

influences his abilities to tell tales about his experiences as the descendant of Vasco da Gama.

The tale of India's history as a colony due to the West's search for spices serves as the historical vehicle for this novel. Spices define the volatile relationship of the East and West, although Rushdie represents this relationship as more complex than an Us versus Them dichotomy. Food's role in defining nationalism can be both positive and negative, but Rushdie believes that the banquet serves as a paradigm for improving relations amongst humans - the more varied and numerous the "guests" at the feast the more interesting and successful the party. The carnival banquet reflects future promise for a utopian world.

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Introduction

“Like flavours when you cook”

Yes, it's very flattering to be put at a dinner table with Voltaire. Subsequent to that there's been a brilliant essay written by Milan Kundera in France, in which, so to speak, I get put at a dinner table with Rabelais and Thomas Mann. I've been to some great dinner parties during the last few years . . . But I don't feel like Rabelais, I don't feel like Voltaire, but at the same time there is a problem of schizophrenia.

-Salman Rushdie

In an interview for the book One on One Rushdie stated that: “I'm with the secular profane camp because I believe that on the whole that's where goodness lies, or more of it” (124). Using this statement as a guide, I will be examining The Moor's Last Sigh by Salman Rushdie in relation to Gargantua and Pantagruel by Francois Rabelais. Rabelais was born in France and wrote in the mid 1500's. He was a lawyer, a Franciscan friar, a Benedictine monk and after quitting the church, a doctor. Rushdie writes from a postcolonial perspective and has dual citizenship in India and Britain. The son of middle-class Muslims, he was raised in Bombay and educated at Rugby. While Rushdie may not feel like Rabelais because of their very different cultural backgrounds, there is certainly a similarity in their material. Both authors side with the secular camp by creating worlds that celebrate humankind's earthy nature. While there are many thematic and stylistic similarities between Gargantua and Pantagruel and The Moor's Last Sigh, this thesis will focus on the banquet imagery found in both novels. To assist in understanding the world of Rabelais, and its relevance to Rushdie's novel, I will be relying on Rabelais and His World by Mikhail Bakhtin.

In this book, Bakhtin examines the carnivalesque nature of Rabelais' novel and its relevance for understanding the feasts, festivals, humour, and idioms of folk culture. Bakhtin's interpretation of the carnivalesque has evolved into a lauded form of criticism.

This novel opens in a cemetery, and Moor, near-death, is determined to tell his tale before he dies. The last heir of the da Gama-Zogoiby spice fortune swears that there will be one last "hurrah", a wake, involving "shaggy-dog yarns" and "rowdy tunes" (4). His use of the word "yarns" is a warning for the reader to question the consistency and truth of his tale, and his defiant, yet comical, treatment of death indicates his resolve to make light of the dark (5). Food's role in promoting his lightness of heart is made obvious through his reference to the funeral festival, traditionally involving food and drink, and by the commencement of his narrative with banquet images: "And to begin with, pass the pepper" (4). Obviously, he has no access to a banquet, but he calls on the carnival images of eating, drinking, singing and general festivity to tell his tales of life and death in the hybrid nation of India.

When Salman Rushdie created the Moor, he invited a facsimile of Gargantua to reside in modern India as a symbol of plurality. India's experiences as a nation built on accommodating the invader are an important element in Rushdie's novels. In his book on Salman Rushdie's life and literature, James Harrison states that from the time of the Roman republic to the time of the Renaissance, India was forced to suffer from and absorb the effects of a series of invasions. "India at that time might well have been compared to a perpetual melting pot or cauldron to which fresh ingredients were periodically added but from which little was ever poured. So the brew grew stronger and more complex" (13). The British presence in India was the final volatile

ingredient, and resulted in the eventual partition of India after Independence. In his essay “The Unbearable Lightness of Salman Rushdie” Colin Smith explains that:

To capture the teeming confusion of India – the intermingling of cultures, each rooted in antiquity, which is both the country’s unique wealth and fascination, and simultaneously the well-spring of a host of conflicts – to capture this extraordinary mix, Rushdie implies, literary form itself must draw on the widest range of sources, awaken the most diverse literary and cultural memories. (105)

Moor’s role in this mixed-up place is to remind the reader that India’s beauty is built on absorbing and incorporating “foreign” cultures.

Like Gargantua, Moor is supposed to champion folk culture as expressed during the time of carnival. Bakhtin explains that during carnival the social hierarchies that generally exist are dismantled, and humankind is invited to participate in a celebration that honours the material world. Humanity must eat to survive, and this commonality is of special significance in the carnival realm. This does not mean that Gargantua and Moor reject spirituality or condone gluttony. Both represent the alternative, imaginative world of carnival where strange characters such as fools, giants and clowns reign over kings, queens and priests, and all of the participants celebrate this inversion of social norms at the carnival feast. Eating and drinking takes place while laughing and talking, and the rules that generally apply to mealtimes are suspended.

Reading The Moor’s Last Sigh is like being admitted to a rowdy, unrepentant and comical carnival feast. The host of this particular banquet, Moor, acts as a conduit between the carnival and the real world. Moor, as narrator, or barker, to borrow carnivalesque terminology, is a brilliant and garrulous liar. Moor, as protagonist, is torn between championing the grotesque and

inverted world and trying to fit into society. He encounters many obstacles, most self-made, to reconcile his role as a “unifier of opposites” (Rushdie 303). Despite his mother’s encouragement to celebrate the unique and to resist religious dogma, Moor is unable to do so. He goes into service for a religious fanatic called Raman Fielding, a caricature of Bal Thackeray, a Hindu extremist and one of India’s powerful leaders. Rushdie compares him to Hitler, and it is our hero who creates the “non-veg” (297) meals that Fielding so enjoys.

Fielding’s zeal for the Hindu faith includes using violence to promote his ideology, yet he is not loath to contaminate his “pure” Hindu body with “unclean” foods. Through Moor’s role as a chef and enforcer to Fielding, also called Mainduck, Rushdie exposes the disconcerting notion that a person may consume, admire and accept the Other’s food, yet, reject or even kill the Other. Mainduck applauds non-Hindu cuisine, but desires the extermination of those who create the recipes. Those who support a purity myth often forget that the culture that they wish to protect, sometimes violently, has developed because of some type of cultural amalgamation. For instance, the Hindu God Shiva is believed to be the amalgam of the Aryan God Rudra and the Tamil God Murugan and Buddha was declared the ninth avatar of Krishna (Harrison 18). A culture’s cuisine is also comprised of what were once foreign ingredients and foreign cooking techniques. Reay Tannahill explains that “Indian” food is a combination of Muslim and Hindu diets (Food in History 270-271). The dining philosophy of the novel’s characters becomes the focus for revealing their alignment or opposition to the carnival banquet.

Rushdie’s tendency to create unreliable narrators with fantastic forms who revel in a carnival atmosphere and satirise serious and sacred subjects has caused considerable controversy.

Bal Thackeray's power was sufficient to have the book banned in India, as one of his followers explained in Time: “‘This [The Moor's Last Sigh] is an issue that concerns us,’ said Maharashtra's Information Minister Pramod Navalkar, ‘so we can ban it’” (Spaeth 2). It is obvious that Mr. Thackeray and his group are uneasy with the soul of humour that author Milan Kundera claims “renders ambiguous everything it touches” (Testaments Betrayed 6). Rushdie believes that “. . . a book can be funny not in its event, but in its language” (One on One 120). His use of language to satirise events from the Qur'an in The Satanic Verses resulted in the former Ayatollah of Iran pronouncing a *fatwa*, a death sentence, on Rushdie. The *fatwa* has not been lifted, but Rushdie is now making public appearances. Rushdie wrote The Moor's Last Sigh while still in hiding.

Unfortunately, it is Moor's unease with his mongrel background that sets him to serve those that support the dogma of purity. He erroneously believes that affiliation with a particular group will create a sense of belonging, which he feels he has been denied because of his hybrid background, club fist and giant frame. He does not have his mother's strength to defy convention. He can trace his family back to Spain's Sultan Boabdil, although illegitimately on his father's side, and on his mother's he is the heir of Vasco da Gama. He is Jewish, Christian, Arabic/Spanish and is reared in the bustling city of Bombay. While Moor is unhappy with his hybrid background, it does provide him with a vast knowledge of different cooking styles. This knowledge contributes significantly to his eventual understanding of and alignment with the carnival.

Moor's multiple ties to history are due, in part, to Rushdie's own experience as “history's bastard”: “I was born an Indian, and not only an Indian, but a Bombayite--Bombay, most

cosmopolitan, most hybrid, most hotchpotch of Indian cities. My writing and thought have therefore been as deeply influenced by Hindu myths and attitudes as Muslim ones . . . Nor is the West absent from Bombay” (Imaginary Homelands 404). Understanding the myths and attitudes of different cultures can help avoid tragic confrontations. Tannahill explains that one of the major factors contributing to the Great Mutiny was England’s indifference to the food laws of India’s inhabitants. The British introduced a new cartridge for the Enfield rifle, which was smeared with cow and/or pig grease and needed to be bitten open before being loaded.

In 1857 the British even succeeded in precipitating the Great Mutiny by disregarding the strength of Hindu India’s devotion to the cow and at the same time, with rare genius, ignoring the Muslims’ hatred of the pig. Though a deep social unease had made the Mutiny almost inevitable, it was the matter of the greased cartridges that set it in motion. (108)

Rushdie notes that learning to eat a kipper during his first days at Rugby is one of his most vivid memories, and an incident he used verbatim in The Satanic Verses (Hamilton 94). The British boys were unwilling to explain how to de-bone the little breakfast fish, and he was not permitted to leave the table until he had finished eating. It took him ninety minutes to eat the kipper. Rushdie has stated that: “ it’s one of the very few stories I’ve used in fiction which needed no embellishment at all” (94). Learning to de-bone the fish served as Rushdie’s first step in conquering England.

Moor’s use of material imagery symbolises humans’ active participation in their own destinies. As Bakhtin explains, the banquet is a symbol of humankind’s triumph over the world:

Bread and wine (the world defeated through work and struggle) disperse fear and liberate the world . . . This victory over the world in the act of eating was concrete, tangible, bodily. It gave the very taste of the defeated world which had fed and would feed mankind. In this image there was no trace of mysticism, no abstract idealistic sublimation. (285)

Moor's eventual understanding that fear can be defeated through laughter allows him to give a comic portrayal of the dark events of his life, and of history. Rushdie uses culinary images and comedic episodes to remind the reader that life can be glorious. Reading about food is a source of considerable delight: "Food in literature is the sensual celebration of both the description and the described. To read about pleasure – and few can deny that eating is one of life's greatest pleasures – is not merely a vicarious thrill but a pure and direct source of joy itself" (Golden 3). Moor's portrayal of the banquet and carnival laughter gives a comic and hopeful twist to the tragedies of this tale.

The mixing of comic and serious genres heightens the tension in both The Moor's Last Sigh and Gargantua and Pantagruel. Rushdie explains: "Write about tragedy in the form of comedy, write about comedy in a kind of high serious language. What happens is you intensify both aspects of it. Tragedy doesn't cease to be tragic if you make it funny as well and vice versa" (Rushdie One on One 120). The grotesque descriptions of dismemberment and murder provoke laughter, despite the seriousness of the material. Rushdie forces Moor to cook for a religious fanatic, Mainduck, to expose his dogma of purity, and then has him bash in the brains of his boss with a telephone that is shaped like a frog. Similarly, the violence in Gargantua and Pantagruel is

considerably comic. In one instance, the mare of Gargantua who “pissed to ease her belly” (109) created such a flood that “all the Forces the enemy had there, were with great horroure drowned . . .” (109). Two examples of the amusing, and rather grotesque chapter titles of Gargantua and Pantagruel are: “*How Gymast very souply and cunningly killed Captain Tripet, and others of Picrocholes [sic] men*” (107) and “*How Gargantua did eate up six Pilgrims in a sallet*” (113).

Catherine Cundy, although not particularly impressed with The Moor’s Last Sigh, does comment on the culinary terminology used by critics to describe the novel. She notes: “It is interesting that the ebullience and vivacity of the work invoked by critics is sometimes proposed in culinary terms – as if a list of bland literary fare has been interrupted by the arrival of strong meat and Indian spices” (111). Cundy goes on to state that in this particular novel the message has been sundered from the medium. While critics may revel in the carnival of Rushdie’s prose, she notes that the barker’s call remains less than convincing (115). I disagree with the assessment that the barker’s call is unconvincing, but I mention her comments because of the nod to the banquet and because of her reference to Moor’s feelings about the carnival (227). Critics often praise Rushdie’s agile wordplay. The essays “The Unbearable Lightness of Salman Rushdie” by Colin Smith and “The Empire Writes Back” by Aruna Srivastava focus on Rushdie’s playful use of language and the carnivalisation of history to describe India. Rushdie has been dubbed a magic realist, along with novelists like Gunter Grass and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Smith notes that “. . . almost without exception, reviewers have added Rushdie’s name to a broad list of international writers who combine the fantastic and the grotesque with topical authenticity

in what is becoming known as ‘magic realism’ ” (104). It seems obvious that Rabelais’ work could also fall into this category.

Milan Kundera describes Gargantua and Pantagruel as having: “. . . an astounding richness; it has everything: the plausible and the implausible, allegory, satire, giants and ordinary men, anecdotes, mediations, voyages real and fantastic, scholarly disputes, digressions of pure verbal virtuosity” (3-4). Kundera compares The Satanic Verses to Gargantua and Pantagruel and declares that Rabelais’ spirit is most evident in the work of non-European writers. He also calls Rushdie “one of the most gifted novelists of the day” (23). I am heartened that Kundera makes these comments because of Bakhtin’s accusation that modern parody falls considerably short of the type found in Rabelais (21). While he was not fortunate enough to read Rushdie’s work, I believe that Bakhtin would admire Rushdie’s humour, which is both positive and ambivalent. In his essay comparing Rabelais to Rushdie, Kundera describes humour as a “divine flash that reveals the world in its moral ambiguity . . .” (32). I cannot help but note that this seems ironic in light of Rushdie’s need to hide because of some readers’ responses to his comic portrayal of the divine.

Kundera is particularly incensed that no patrons have stepped forward to protect Rushdie, as they did for Rabelais. He argues that “like Rabelais, Rushdie knows that the contract between the novelist and the reader must be established from the outset; it must be clear: the story being told here is not serious, even though it is about the most dreadful things” (4). Rabelais had a host of patrons that protected him from the Sorbonne theologians, including Cardinal du Bellay and Cardinal Odet, as well as Francois I, the King of France (28). “Were they seeking to defend principles? Freedom of expression? Human rights? They had a better motive: they loved

literature and the arts” (Kundera 28). In his collection of essays titled Imaginary Homelands Rushdie echoes Kundera’s frustration by asking:

What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist. Without the freedom to challenge, even to satirize all orthodoxies, including religious orthodoxies, it ceases to exist. Language and the imagination cannot be imprisoned, or art will die, and with it, a little of what makes us human. (396)

Unfortunately, the use of comedy and exaggeration to reveal an alternative world does not please all readers. While on the Internet, searching for Rushdie commentary, I came across an “essay” containing the number of swear words and blasphemous comments in The Satanic Verses (Deedat 3). “Mired in misery, may all his [Rushdie’s] filthy lucre choke in his throat and may he die a coward’s death, a hundred times a day. . .” (Deedat 13). This one-sided portrait of Rushdie that merely comments on his coarse nature ignores his genuine gift for writing. There are aspects to Rushdie’s prose other than those which might shock religious people, just as Holquist notes that there are aspects to Rabelais’ novel other than those highlighting his fondness for alcohol, bodily functions, and sexual and scatological humour (Rabelais and His World xxvi).

As their writings indicate, Rabelais, Bakhtin, and Rushdie show that the more odd the matrix and combination of disparaging ideas, the more interesting the world. The carnival, which advocates the morality of ambiguity, coarse language and a rowdy marketplace atmosphere, is the setting for these authors. At the carnival all participants, including the strange, cavort and feast. The feasting, tearing mouth becomes the symbol of mankind’s participation in the birth/death cycle. The king becomes the fool and the fool the king. The top to bottom inversion promotes change and teaches wisdom. In Moor’s particular case, he is a prince, becomes the chef, and once

again regains his crown after acknowledging his foolishness. Moor is, in his own words, a Bastard (104). It is essential to his role as a unifier of opposites that Moor comes from a mixed lineage to address society's fear of the mongrel. Rushdie believes that through the process of mingling, a more creative and interesting people emerge:

Throughout human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings. Like many millions of people, I am a bastard child of history. Perhaps we all are, black and brown and white, leaking into one another, as a character of mine once said, *like flavours when you cook*. (Imaginary Homelands 394)

Rushdie uses cooking, repeatedly, in The Moor's Last Sigh as a metaphor to describe the positive nature of intermingling.

Food's role in revealing this alternate world is made evident as Moor describes, with evident pleasure, past supper tales and his own memories of cooking and eating. Moor uses food imagery to describe love, sex, religion, and history. He tells stories using phrases, epithets and recipes from both the East and West. Rushdie demands that Moor remember daily delights, like memorable meals, good conversation and trips to the marketplace, which dispel the gloomy images of this novel and reveal a better, more tolerant world. Moor ultimately learns to celebrate his life, despite the bloody backdrop of his own history, and the history of Mother India.

Rabelais, too, celebrated plurality and abundance by creating a world of exaggeration that highlights eating and drinking. Gargantua and subsequently his son Pantagruel charge about the earth eating, drinking, talking, laughing, wenching, belching, and farting. Although coarse, they are honouring the powerful life-death force that promotes change.

The old, refusing to die, uses propaganda and violence to maintain its supremacy. This inability to change renders revolutions impotent, and it is what Rushdie often addresses when discussing the failure of India's independence from colonial rule. He refuses to lament pre-colonialisation, or glorify the new nations created after Independence. He has actually described the new Pakistan in his novel Shame as a "failure of the dreaming mind" (87). India, once founded on hundreds of Gods and Goddesses, is in the midst of a religious purification, due to those like Bal Thackeray who campaign violently to promote the supremacy of their respective groups. Rushdie writes that to "respect the sacred is to be paralyzed by it" (Imaginary Homelands 416). Rushdie is opposed to the sacred as it is defined by "The True Believer." This individual believes in using force to protect and promote religious dogma (416).

Moor not only serves the religious fanatic, but also his crime-lord father who peddles drugs and prostitutes. When Moor's parents unite, Abraham vows to look after the part of Aurora that needs to eat, enjoy, and rest (91). Abraham is not satisfied running the family spice business, but diversifies into cocaine, pornography and weaponry. He personifies the power of the filthy rich and morally corrupt – he even promises his first-born son to his mother in exchange for cash. Both Abraham and Mainduck are portrayed as evil, but it should be obvious that Rushdie does not think that all Jews are swindling criminals or that all Hindus are fanatical killers. Moor's service to both forces reveals that an alternative world of imagination and plurality may be possible once the battle between the Mainducks and the Abrahams is over.

Food's ability to unite and divide people has not been overlooked by those in support of a pure lineage. "Pollution has always meant matter out of place, and rules broken. The threat of pollution has therefore been a powerful sanction for the rules and the categories by which a

society organizes its life” (Visser 301). Fear of the mongrel may be the basis for many of the Kosher food laws that developed, according to the Jewish Book of Why: "If we cannot eat with them, our sons will not marry their daughters and Judaism will be preserved" (Kolatch 85). Many religions have some notion of “clean” and “unclean” food, although Christianity does not. This is not to imply that food rules are absent from the Christian faith. Christians may eat whatever is available, but not to excess, because gluttony is considered one of the seven deadly sins. Until quite recently, Catholics were not to eat meat on Friday. Brewer notes that “. . . humorous friars who wished to avoid the Friday fast so eased their conscience by changing the name of the fish and calling a chicken a *fish out of the coop*” (193). The ritual of mass, the symbolic ingestion of bread and wine that represent the body and blood of Christ, is based on the Eucharist. The Last Supper is a popular subject of parody during carnival time.

Dining rules not only keep different races separate, but also keep the social strata intact. For instance, the Hindu caste system supports hereditary classes. The untouchables, the lowest caste in Hinduism, are socially reviled. Since Hinduism supports the notion of karma, or reliving life on earth based on past lives, being defiled by those on a lower karmic level is taken very seriously. Interestingly, reincarnation was not part of the Vedic worldview – the basis of the Hindu model and brought to India by the Aryans – and was probably incorporated into Hinduism from an earlier Indian source. Initially, there were only three class distinctions based on the Aryan Vedic model - warriors or aristocracy, priests and the common man – but a fourth group was included to encompass the darker skinned conquered people (Harrison 20). This fourth group became known as the untouchables and their touch was believed to sully the higher castes (Brewer 1138). Contamination of food also results in losing caste status. Fear of being polluted

by unclean individuals is so powerful that the higher castes ritually use *ghi*, clarified butter, to purify contaminated food, plates, and utensils (Tannahill 110). Although Gandhi preached against untouchability, and the practice legally ended in 1949, Rushdie notes that those in support of Mainduck's philosophies use force to keep the untouchables in their "proper" place (299).

The carnival, in contrast, does not respect convention. Its purpose is to invert the standards of the social system and disregard the rules of society. It is obvious how the notion of carnival may provoke some uneasiness amongst those in favour of purity. The carnival setting has no boundaries. It exists without the rules that generally separate the rich and the poor, the high and the low, and the clean and the unclean. While those in support of the caste system may adhere to extremes in regard to being sullied, most hierarchies have customs that define the social strata and these rules are taken rather seriously. As Mary Douglas explains in her book Purity and Danger: "In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications" (36). The jostling, open-mouthed crowd, chewing food and laughing, as described in the pages of Rabelais and Rushdie, is unafraid of contradictions, or confusion. The carnival, and by extension, the carnival banquet, does not acknowledge the rules that keep people separate, apart and afraid.

I will examine the novel's treatment of food, and more generally its carnivalesque nature. Chapter One, "Bakhtin's Carnival", will examine the terminology that Bakhtin uses to describe the carnival, and will detail the characteristics of carnival and folk humour that I see linking Rushdie to Rabelais. Characters from the carnival (the barker, the fool, the king, and the agelast) will be defined. Banquet images, the language of billingsgate, the marketplace and other carnivalesque terms will also be explained. Bakhtin's views on folk culture and the carnival, and its relation to

literary criticism will also be examined. I will outline some of Bakhtin's views on the nature of the novel and define some of his literary terms, which are essential for understanding his notion of carnival.

Chapter Two, "Pepper Love", will examine food's role in influencing the heart and the body. This examination will include sexual love and familial love. In The Moor's Last Sigh, spices cause a type of love that defies social and religious convention. Moor is the product of a union that transcends class, age and race differences because his parents fall in "pepper love." Pepper is rumoured to be a powerful aphrodisiac. "If a man, after anointing his lingam with a mixture of the powders of the white thorn apple, the long pepper and, the black pepper, and honey, engages in sexual union with a woman, he makes her subject to his will" (The Kama Sutra 283). Eating implies love and life, but subsequently death, and this relationship will also be examined in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three, "*Coq-à-l'âne* - From Rooster to Ass", examines Moor's narrative style. He resembles the narrator from Gargantua and Pantagruel, who uses the techniques of the carnival barker. The barker uses abuse and praise to address the audience, a familiar and informal mode of communicating that is sanctioned by the carnival or the marketplace atmosphere. Food's role in developing his loquacious stories and his eventual understanding of the link between the banquet and man's narrative power will also be examined.

Chapter Four, "A War Over Cakes", focuses on food's role in defining nationalism and religion. This chapter examines how recipes can affect an individual's sense of belonging, whether through dining rules or as links to the past. This need to identify with what came before, however, can often result in conflict and violence. Rabelais, Bakhtin and Rushdie are particularly

concerned with the past's hold over the present. The past represents the formal world of hierarchies, whereas the carnival banquet represents the triumph of the present and utopian visions of the future. The time of carnival has no rules, and will not tolerate worship of a past that is fixed or final. However, as we see in The Moor's Last Sigh and Gargantua and Pantagruel, a considerable number of humans invoke the past to justify their behaviour.

Chapter One Bakhtin's Carnival

In the whole of the world and of the people there is no room for fear. For fear can only enter a part that has been separated from the whole, the dying link torn from the link that is born. The whole of the people and of the world is triumphantly gay and fearless. This whole speaks in all carnival images; it reigns in the very atmosphere of this feast, making everyone participate in this awareness.

-Mikhail Bakhtin

The carnival, Bakhtin's term for the type of social exchange he examines in the pages of Rabelais, promotes laughter, which, Bakhtin argues, is the most powerful force to promote change and banish fear. Laughter thrives in the world of folk culture, where humankind's material existence is celebrated. This celebration includes highlighting the baser aspects of human experience: eating, drinking, belching, defecating, copulating and dying. The world of the carnival is continually in the process of becoming, which forces the old, dying world to make way for the new. According to Linda Hutcheon, Bakhtin's notion of carnivalesque language, and its emphasis on sexual and scatological imagery, is not designed to be merely abusive, but a sign of linguistic freedom and vitality (31). Rabelaisian images, which many find distasteful, actually promote social renewal and should be viewed as ambivalent.

Although Bakhtin's writing seems merely to describe the writing of Rabelais, it is in itself a subversive piece of literature. In the Prologue to Rabelais and His World, Michael Holquist maintains that Bakhtin's doctoral thesis actually satirises the Stalinist government after the Russian

Revolution. Much like Rabelais and Rushdie, who mock the dark events of history, Bakhtin believes in laughter's power to fight the fear of the past. During the time he wrote his thesis on Rabelais, the government was in the process of legislating artistic expression. Bakhtin's work was censored and he was also exiled. Eventually, his supporters helped to get his doctoral thesis published, and he is now experiencing posthumous fame. Unfortunately, writers continue to be punished for writing what they see and envision: an imagined world that does not promote or protect hierarchies.

Bakhtin insists that the carnival operates under the protection of the real world. By the real world, however, Holquist maintains that Bakhtin does not mean the world run by officials. "The sanction for carnival derives ultimately not from a calendar prescribed by church or state, but from a force that preexists priests and kings and to whose superior powers they are actually deferring when they appear to be licensing carnival" (Holquist *Rabelais and His World* xviii). The "force" that Holquist describes has its origins in the spirit of folk culture and does not acknowledge the hierarchical distinctions that kings, priests or governments create. The official feast supports stasis and the existing religious, political and moral values. The carnival banquet, in contrast, marks the suspension of these norms. The time of carnival revitalises the real world and becomes a source of inspiration and a place of freedom.

In his essay "Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel", Bakhtin states that the novel form best represents the carnival world, which is open and dynamic, while other major genres, such as the epic, represent the formal world, which is closed and fixed. "We encounter the epic as a genre that has not only long since completed its development, but one that is already antiquated. With certain reservations we can say the same for the other major

genres, even for tragedy” (Bakhtin qtd. in Adams 839). The novel, in contrast, continues to develop and renew, in part, because the novel parodies itself. Bakhtin states: “This ability of the novel to criticize itself is a remarkable feature of this ever-developing genre” (qtd. in Adams 840). “In the epic world view, ‘beginning,’ ‘first,’ ‘founder,’ ‘ancestor,’ ‘that which occurred earlier’ and so forth are not merely temporal categories but *valorized* temporal categories, and valorized to an extreme degree” (Bakhtin qtd. in Adams 844). Rushdie, too, is sceptical of these types of terms, hence his carnivalisation of history. Rushdie refuses to let the past exist unchallenged in his literature, but instead gives the characters in opposition to his views a voice.

In A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature, the editors describe Bakhtin’s theories on dialogue as giving characters free speech (301).

Bakhtin’s major principles of the novel include the freedom of the hero, special placement of the idea in the polyphonic design, and the principles of linkage that shape the novel into a whole – including multiple voices, ambiguity, multiple genres, stylization, parody, the use of negatives, and the function of the double address of the word both to another word and to another speaker of words. (306)

Bakhtin argues that the novel can represent a multitude of voices, not merely the author’s singular view. His thesis on Rabelais highlights the myriad that is represented at the carnival and that the novel-form can express. Krystyna Pomorska, in the Foreword to Rabelais and His World, explains that “. . . the carnival principle corresponds to and is indeed a part of the novelistic principle itself” (x). “The Problems of Dostoevsky’s Art”, Bakhtin’s first signed essay expressing his delight in the many, resulted in his exile for challenging the authoritarian voice of Communism. The novel represents the “. . . inherent dialogism of language and culture by means of its

discursive polyphony, its subtle and complex interweaving of various types of speech – direct, indirect and doubly-oriented (e.g. parody) – and its carnivalesque irreverence towards all authoritarian, repressive, monologic ideologies” (Lodge 21). The novel form champions the many voices of the present, not the single, fixed voice of the past. “Bakhtin repeatedly points to the Socratic dialogue as a prototype of the discursive mechanism for revealing the truth. Dialogue so conceived is opposed to the ‘authoritarian world’ . . . in the same way as carnival is opposed to official culture” (Pomorska x). The carnival not only represents free speech, but also the baser functions of the human body.

Bakhtin believes that carnivalesque novels like Gargantua and Pantagruel are more likely to promote literary and philosophical evolution because the carnival represents the arena where subversive literary formulas, including laughter, parody, and comedy, break down hierarchies. It is important to note, however, that the above comic techniques should never be negative. The laughter of the folk revives as it denies (Bakhtin Rabelais and His World 11). Michael Holquist observes in the Prologue to Rabelais and His World that both Rabelais and Bakhtin explore, in their respective work, the “...interface between a stasis imposed from above and a desire for change from below, between old and new, official and unofficial” (xvi). Rabelais’, Bakhtin’s, and Rushdie’s portrayals of the clamorous, rowdy folk challenge stasis with ambivalent and positive images.

According to Bakhtin, India has often been the setting for carnivalesque stories. The “Indian Wonders” series chronicles the fantastic creatures, humans and places of India, and this collection of works greatly influenced the writing of Rabelais (Rabelais and His World 344-347). In Book Four, Pantagruel descends into the underworld searching for the holy bottle, and this

entrance is located in India. Although this description of India as a strange, fantastic place may seem to engage in what Edward Said calls Orientalism, I disagree that delighting in the strange somehow implies an East/West schism. Said states that many writers “. . . have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient. . .” (5). While some authors may make this distinction, I do not think that Rabelais’ imaginary descriptions of India or Bakhtin’s exposition of the carnival is particularly concerned with an Us versus Them dichotomy. I believe that Rushdie’s India more accurately represents the heteroglossia that defines Bakhtin’s theories than the dichotomy of the coloniser/colonised. Of course, there are people from both cultures who use an East versus West form of discourse and Rushdie addresses this schism. As a descendent of a colonised people – he was born two months prior to India’s independence – Rushdie is particularly interested in the relationship of the East and West, but he presents this relationship as complex and intricate.

Timothy Brennan, author of Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of a Nation, argues that Rushdie’s literature does not represent the nationalistic anti-colonial stance of writers like Frantz Fanon, author of Black Skin, White Masks (166). The perceived relationship of the East/West is unable to adequately define racist language or the violent history of humankind. Rushdie points out, for instance, that the Islamic world is divided: “Whereas Saudi Arabia hates Iran, Iran hates Syria, Syria hates Saudi Arabia, everybody collectively hates the Libyans. There is no such thing as an Islamic International. Look at who they fight when they go to war, they fight each other” (One on One 127). In the essay “Being God’s Postman is No Fun, Yaar” Srinivas Aravamudan discusses the relationship between history, postcolonialism and postmodernism in Rushdie’s novels, and complains that the multiple generic, discursive, literary,

historical, and cultural protocols of The Satanic Verses was reduced by the media into an Us versus Them dichotomy – Western democracy versus Oriental tyranny (3). This is a very brief argument for a vast and sensitive subject, however it must be noted that defining Salman Rushdie's literature as carnivalesque is in no way an ideology of containment.

The complexities of the carnival require considerable explication. While the images of food in The Moor's Last Sigh sparked my inquiry into banquet imagery, I have deviated from merely discussing the carnivalesque banquet because it is impossible to do so without confronting Bakhtin's views on other aspects of folk culture that he states are divided into "three distinct forms":

1. *Ritual spectacles*: carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace.
2. *Comic verbal compositions*: parodies both oral and written, in Latin and in the vernacular.
3. *Various genres of billingsgate*: curses, oaths, popular blazons. (5)

These three forms often overlap in the pages of Rabelais, as they do in my thesis on Rushdie. While I have tried to focus on the banquet, which would fall under the category of ritual spectacles, The Moor's Last Sigh contains all the elements described above; in fact, the banquet images in this novel often contain all three forms.

Bakhtin describes ritual spectacles as carnivals, feasts and fairs, which contain clowns, giants, dwarves and monsters to celebrate the harvest or to parody official events. Giants, dwarves and monsters represent the odd and grotesque. Their oddities, however, are not reviled, but celebrated. Clowns and fools "mimic" the serious rituals such as tributes to tournament victors and the initiation of a knight. In The Moor's Last Sigh, beauty queens, models and actors, replace the knight or tournament victor, and Rushdie makes fun of their "reign." Bakhtin explains

that mock kings and queens are elected to preside at banquets, for the sheer pleasure of laughter and participation in these rituals is universal (5):

In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators... During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. (7)

Moor is not only the main actor, but the narrator and spectator. He is not only interested in his own renewal as an individual, but also in the renewal of the human race.

Moor is the recipient of several exceptional physical qualities, which not only represent his own individuality, but also indicate his alignment with the carnival. He is seven feet tall, has a club fist, and ages at twice the speed of the average mortal. His affliction of ageing "double-quick" adds a sense of urgency to this novel that is not apparent in the languid descriptions of Rabelais. Whereas Gargantua spent over eleven months in the womb, Moor emerged after only four-and-a-half months. Moor's affliction recalls the myth of Tithonus, lover of Aurora, goddess of the dawn. Tithonus prays for immortality, but fails to request that he retain his youth. The goddess turns him into a grasshopper when he becomes feeble and old (Brewer 1106). In her paintings, Aurora transforms Moor, once a "standard-bearer of pluralism" into "a semi-allegorical figure of decay" (303), for rejecting his role as a modern-day Gargantua. She punishes Moor for abandoning the world of the carnival and promoting religious fanaticism.

One of the most interesting aspects of Rushdie's writing is his delight in a comic portrayal of dark subjects, heralded by a narrator who defies the role of the traditional storyteller. Rushdie's

protagonists are often physically deformed, carnivalesque characters having, as Smith notes, a “curious moral neutrality” (106). The deformities not only reflect their alienation in a postcolonial society, but also their difficulty reconciling their contradictions. In Midnight's Children Saleem Sinai has an elephant nose and moon face. He experiences memory loss, deafness and blindness. Omar Khayam from Shame is “[d]izzy, peripheral, inverted, infatuated, insomniac, stargazing, fat” (25), and Saladin Chamcha from The Satanic Verses, originally “normal,” transforms into a devil complete with horns, hooves, tail and halitosis. These characters, like Moor, tend to exist in a world where reality and fantasy are blurred, but do not enjoy or understand the importance of this type of existence. As Bakhtin notes, the positive images associated with the odd and grotesque characters found at the carnival have diminished. “In the new official culture there prevails a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness. The ambivalence of the grotesque can no longer be admitted” (101). Rushdie’s characters are uncomfortable because the world is uncomfortable with the carnival. By inviting the carnival characters back into the modern novel, Rushdie is attempting to rekindle humankind’s pleasure in the strange.

Rabelais also addresses society’s fear of the grotesque. The Author’s Prologue in the Third Book is a commentary on mankind’s negative reaction to the strange, and the persecution that writers, who portray the strange, may face. Rabelais relates the story of how *Ptolemee* presented the Egyptians with two gifts: a black *Bactrian* camel and a half-black and half-white human slave, booty from the spoils of war.

At the production of the *Camel* they were all affrighted, and offended at the sight of the party-coloured Man: Some scoffed at him, as a detestible Monster brought

forth by the Errour of Nature... they took more pleasure and delight in things that were proper, handsom and perfect, than in mishapen, monstrous and ridiculous Creatures. (297)

Rabelais fears that his attempts to amuse and delight his audience may “vex” and “offend” his readers (297) and may even result in his death. However, Rabelais swears, by Hercules, that this will not occur (297). He concludes this somewhat sombre prologue by chasing the Bribe-mongers, Pettifoggers, *Garbellers*, Masters of *Chicanery* and *Hypocrites* away from his wine barrel (298-299). Rabelais will continue celebrating grotesque heroes like Gargantua and Pantagruel, despite opposition.

Clowns and fools are major characters at the feasts and fairs, and their role, like Moor's, is to represent both a “real” and “ideal” world simultaneously. Bakhtin explains that clowns represented a middle ground in the medieval carnival: “They [clowns] stood on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar midzone as it were; they were neither eccentrics nor dolts, neither were they comic actors” (8). As I mentioned in the introduction, Moor serves as a conduit for the two disparaging forces in The Moor's Last Sigh, yet unlike the clowns described above, Moor is uncomfortable existing on the borderline. Rushdie uses Moor to encourage the modern world to re-embrace the fool and his role to represent both a real and ideal world.

The second category, “Comic Verbal Compositions”, generally encompasses satires of any serious literature. Scriptures, sermons, prayers, debates, dialogues, chronicles, and biblical narratives are all mocked to provoke carnival laughter. Interestingly, monks or other religious figures were often the authors of these comic writings, and their work was tolerated, “to a certain extent”, by the church (Bakhtin 14). Under the protection of carnival, monks, clerks and other officials can participate in

carnival laughter. Bakhtin notes that, in the middle ages, approximately three months per year were reserved for carnival time and authors could safely mock sacred texts. Prior to the ending of *Ijtihad* -- the right to individual reasoning in religious matters, Muslims could publicly debate the issues that have caused Rushdie to be branded an apostate of Islam (Simawe 186). In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie does not mock sacred texts, per se, but includes his own reworking of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana - two great Indian epic poems, "draws" on a letter from Jawaharlal Nehru to Indira Gandhi and borrows from a variety of other sources to create his stories (437).

Marketplace speech involves the freedom to use curses, oaths and familiar forms of address. "Carnival with all its images, indecencies, and curses affirms the people's immortal, indestructible character. In the world of carnival the awareness of the people's immortality is combined with the realization that established authority and truth are relative" (Bakhtin 256). Rushdie notes that the "cool" portrayal of India, as expressed by authors like E. M. Forrester, contrasts with his version of India: "I thought I needed to try and find a way of writing a kind of hot, smelly, noisy, crowded, messy prose because that would, it seemed to me, would be a way of echoing a reality that was there" (KCRW Bookworm Interview 2). Rushdie's alignment with marketplace speech is evident, and his portrayal of the scenes and people of India stresses the laughing, informal crowd. Bakhtin believes that the freedom to engage in dialogue without formalities creates a new way to communicate. "A new type of communication always creates new forms of speech or a new meaning given to old forms" (16). Bakhtin notes, repeatedly, that the modern world falls considerably short of the utopian world of medieval humans that he sees represented in the pages of Rabelais. He argues that the medieval folk had a type of communication that contained a special significance not seen today. "But obviously such familiar

intercourse in our days is far from the free familiar communication of the people in carnival time. It lacks the essentials: the all-human character, the festivity, utopian meaning, and philosophical depth” (16).

Holquist admits that Bakhtin sometimes exaggerates for the folk and that sometimes they are portrayed ideally (Rabelais and His World xxxviii-xix). However, Holquist argues that Bakhtin’s folk are opposed to the official version of the folk encouraged by Russian propaganda. The “Stalinization” of Russian folklore involved creating films starring tractor drivers, Arctic pilots, and peasants who triumph over slick Western citizens. “In the prim world of Stalinist Biedermeier, that world of lace curtains, showily displayed water carafes, and militant propriety, Bakhtin’s claim that the folk not only picked their noses and farted, but enjoyed doing so, seemed particularly unregenerate” (xix). Moor caricatures the notion of the peasant heroism portrayed by “cynical urbanites” in India’s films and calls it “glutinous” and “super-slushy” (The Moor’s Last Sigh 137-38), and Aurora brands socially motivated artists as those promoting “tractor art” (234). Rabelais, Bakhtin and Rushdie mock the propaganda of the hierarchy that tries to promote the quaint, homogeneous peasant. The folk, in reality, represent a spirit of individuality. The common good is acknowledged in the pages of all three writers, but the goodness springs from a source that represents many voices, not the uniform face of one.

One of the most important figures at the carnival and in The Moor’s Last Sigh is the barker. The barker is the figure standing outside the freak show booth or behind the panacea wagon that lures the audience to “see the show” or “buy the product.” In truth, his modern counterpart could be the television evangelists, who claim to save and cure, although this form of the barker is a corruption of the ambivalent figure found at the medieval carnival. The evangelists

seem to have taken the barker's techniques, but not his philosophy, which is to mock and praise both the audience and himself. Moor and Alcrofibas use the techniques of the barker as expressed at the medieval marketplace. Barkers use lies, flattery and abuse and combine sacred and secular images to "soften up" the audience. Lies and truth are skilfully woven and exaggerated resulting in "...that special marketplace atmosphere in which the exalted and the lowly, the sacred and the profane are leveled and are all drawn into the same dance" (Bakhtin Rabelais and His World 160). Terence Cave sums up the two-faced tone of Rabelais in his introduction to Gargantua and Pantagruel, and this description could also apply to Rushdie:

His tone is by turns cheerful and aggressive: he advises, warns, pleads, attacks and curses, and in the process he softens the reader up. Either one is a reader of goodwill, a true Pantagruelist, who will understand him and take everything he says in good part, or one belongs to the reviled gang of hypocrites, bigots, censors whom he chases from the scene at the end of the prologue to the Third Book with curses and growling. (xiv)

Bakhtin describes Master Alcrofibas as building the prologues like "the announcement of a barker speaking to the crowd gathered in front of his booth" (168). The praise and abuse that Master Alcrofibas uses on the audience and on an unknown "third-person" are designed to address all people:

At close range, this many-faced person is the crowd which surrounds the barker's booth, and also the many-faced reader. Praise and abuse are showered on this person, for some in the audience may be the representatives of the old, dying world and ideology—agelasts, that is, men who do not know how to laugh, hypocrites,

slanderers who live in darkness; others are the representatives of a new world, a world of light, laughter, and truth. Together they form one people, dying and renewed, and this people is abused and praised simultaneously. (165)

Moor, as barker, also woos and derides the reader simultaneously. Moor inflicts similar judgement on the characters, the audience and himself in The Moor's Last Sigh. His dual role as narrator and protagonist makes his use of abuse and praise interesting to explore, since he also levels his insights at himself. Bakhtin notes that the barker is often a participant at the spectacles and festivals and often plays a "leading stylistic role" (153). Moor is brilliant at using the language of billingsgate and the barker's tone, a tone, which, Bakhtin argues, justifies the crudest of jokes (171).

The language of billingsgate, or coarse language, that the barker employs represents the lower half of the human body, where the regenerative and destructive forces are located. "The images of feces and urine are ambivalent, as are all the images of the material bodily lower stratum; they debase; destroy, regenerate, and renew simultaneously. They are blessing and humiliating at the same time" (Bakhtin 151). In Midnight's Children, Saleem Sinai describes dung using a combination of sacred and secular, positive and negative images to create an ambivalent, and carnivalesque portrayal of the marketplace. He describes the holy city of Amristar as smelling of glorious, celestial excrement. Sacred cows, mules, dogs and men defecate on the street, flies buzz from "turd to steaming turd" and the spicy, sweet smells from a vendor's food wagon mingle with the odour of faeces to create a sickening, but vital melange. Sinai explains that dung, when dry, is useful and can be used as fertiliser, plaster or dung-cakes, but when fresh, it is smelly and redundant (32). Having to expel waste, like eating, is a common human experience. As Saleem

notes, there is a brotherhood of shit (32). There is not one human exempt from the humbling and essential function of going to the bathroom. In The Moor's Last Sigh, there is no ode to dung that can equal the one cited above, but there are a number of scatological references. Epifania observes that the only advantage of having a home styled after a Japanese dwelling is because “... knowledge of stomach health of household members is no problem in a house with toilet-paper instead of bathroom walls’ ” (16). Aires derisively calls the help after cartoons, food or faeces: “And the houseboys were *Tweedlydum* and *Tweedlydee* as he slapped them once each on the face, and the gardeners were nuts and spices as he poked them in the chest, *Cashew*, *Pista*, *Big and Little Cardamom*, and the latrine-cleaners whom of course he would not touch were *Number One and Number Two*” (58). While I admit to laughing at this passage, it is a type of comedy that has lost the value of carnival laughter for Aires does not include himself in the “brotherhood of shit.” Bakhtin states that the oaths and epithets must retain their ambivalent image (Bakhtin 153).

Banquet images represent the universal spirit and triumph of humankind. Thus, eating and drinking are transformed from daily necessities into a ritual designed to promote a world that is unafraid of the past, present, or future. The banquet becomes a forum for satisfying both the body and the mind. Eating is not only required to sustain the human corpus, but also provokes mental agility. A Spartan meal, taken hastily and in silence, will feed the body, but it will not serve to feed the mind, or spirit...Brillat Savarin believes that eating is an art: “Gasterea is the tenth muse: she presides over all the pleasure of taste. She could claim to rule the world itself, which is nothing without the life in it, and that life in turn dependent upon what it eats” (Savarin 333). Brillat Savarin highlights the pleasures of eating, not merely the necessity of eating.

Bakhtin contrasts the carnival banquet, which is free from rules of decency and piety, with meals consumed under religious auspices. Although Rabelais and Bakhtin were both religious, they did not believe that art should be sacrificed on the altar of religious whim. Both staunchly defend the individual's right to free expression. It is important to remember that delighting in this life does not necessitate a hatred, or disbelief of the next. Lodge includes the amusing anecdote that Bakhtin's main difficulty with Communist Russia was that it did not worry enough about the dead (2). Rushdie, who ate a "tasteless" ham sandwich to mark his rejection of Islam (Imaginary Homelands 377), supports spirituality, but not the unimaginative, repetitive portrayal of the angry Gods.

While reading The Moor's Last Sigh, one must temper the need to associate the story with the real world. Rushdie's novel only reflects a distorted, inverted mirror image of our world, as does the carnival. This is not to imply that Rushdie is not making social commentary, only that the story supersedes the social content. Rushdie's story is designed to combat his own fear and the fear he witnesses in the world. To do this, he invokes the carnival, which is founded on laughter and is completely removed from "...all religious and ecclesiastic dogmatism, from all mysticism and piety" (7). All three writers have the connection of defying and mocking their respective times through irreverent laughter, which encourages a material existence. These writers are not denying a spiritual world, or mocking a better world if it exists, but they defy and mock people who use violence to support their vision of heaven. Rushdie amusingly points out that: "Consumer disappointment greatly reduces the likelihood of brand loyalty. In this respect religions have the great advantage of not having their most important promise tested until after the consumer is dead" (Imaginary Homelands 379). Religious figures like Mahatma Gandhi or

Mother Theresa are not exempt from humour or above criticism, but they are exempt from derision because they do not kill others to support their beliefs. Rushdie, in one instance, calls Gandhi “Little Man Loincloth” (26). Rushdie uses humour to poke fun at Gandhi’s ascetic existence, but does not desire his extermination because his belief system is not entirely compatible with Rushdie’s own.

In Chapter Two, “Pepper Love”, the carnivalesque portrayal of the many types of relationships in this novel show ways to combat religious dogma, social expectations and fear. Almost all the characters in this novel defy some type of repressive ideology to experience love, and often the courage to fight the negative force can be found amongst banquet images. Moor’s parents come down from a tryst in spice sacks, and declare their love despite considerable opposition. “The Bishop of Cochin refused to countenance the idea of Abraham’s conversion, and Moshe Cohen the leader of the Cochin Jews declared that under no circumstances could any Jewish marriage be performed” (104). Pepper-love becomes the metaphor for living this life in a hot, passionate and fearless way.

Chapter Two Pepper Love

Pepper love: that's how I think of it. Abraham and Aurora fell in pepper love, up there on the Malabar Gold. They came down from those high stacks with more than their clothes smelling of spice.

- Salman Rushdie

Although Moor was metaphorically “dealt a bad hand” (153), he decides to challenge fate. He manages to foster and keep a sense of humour despite ill fortune, the horrors of history, and the hypocrisy of religious dogma. While he promises tales of destruction, he first reminds the audience of life’s pleasures: “Until then [his sharing of the apocalyptic story], I continue to guzzle this last supper; to exhale, albeit wheezily, this aforementioned *dernier soupir*. To hell with high affairs of state! I have a love story to tell” (87). Although The Moor’s Last Sigh is not a traditional love story, it is the first Rushdie novel that uses love as the main theme. He explains:

I would describe it not as a love story but as a story about love, all sorts of love. Sexual love, romantic love, mother love, the love of children for their parents, the love of God, the love of money, the love of nation and how these things work upon us and when they work when they do us good, and when they don’t work how they do us ill. (KCRW Bookworm Interview 3)

I am going to add that this is a story about the love of food, and food’s role in contributing to love. Running parallel to the ingestion of food and its role in promoting life is the expulsion of food and its relationship to death. As mentioned, there are considerable scatological references in

The Moor's Last Sigh, but faeces play an ambivalent role in the world of carnival. Faeces represent not only the destructive force of death, but also the force that is required to renew and regenerate life.

Without the quest for spices to flavour food, da Gama would not have set sail and our hero would have no history: "Pepper it was that brought Vasco da Gama's tall ships across the ocean, from Lisbon's Tower of Belem to the Malabar Coast: first to Calicut and later, for its lagoony harbour, to Cochin" (Rushdie 4). As the bastard heir to the most famous spice icon, Moor, not surprisingly, learns to cook. From the aphrodisiacal effects of condiments, to the comfort that the kitchen affords those bereft of love, food imagery is portrayed in the carnivalesque style of Rabelais. Both Rushdie and Rabelais use the carnival and its reliance on material imagery to describe the abstract concept of love. Love is heightened by its relationship with material, sensual pleasures. The banquet images are not as bountiful in Rushdie; however, "nowhere else today does the old Rabelaisian sap run so joyfully as in the work of these non-European writers" (Kundera 31). In this chapter, I will be examining food's affect on sexual love, romantic love, mother love, and the love of children for their parents, referring to Gargantua and Pantagruel for similarities.

The relationship of Moor's parents is defined by their association with spices. A pile of condiments was enough to transcend the class, age and religious differences between Aurora and Abraham. Moor's parents fell in "pepper love" (90) on the stacks of Aurora's inheritance:

So passionately had they fed upon one another, so profoundly had sweat and blood and the secretions of their bodies mingled, in that foetid atmosphere heavy with the odours of cardamom and cumin, so intimately had they conjoined, not only with

each other but with what-hung-on-the-air, yes, and with the spice-sacks themselves — some of which, it must be said, were torn, so that peppercorns and *elaichees* poured out and were crushed between legs and bellies and thighs — that, for ever after, they sweated pepper'n'spices sweat, and their bodily fluids, too, smelled and even tasted of what had been crushed into their skins, what had mingled with their love-waters, what had been breathed in from the air during that transcendent fuck. (90)

The imagery of this passage is distinctly Rabelaisian in tone and in its use of exaggeration. Aurora and Abraham feed on one another so savagely that they bleed; yet Moor then uses the rather romantic phrase “love-waters” to describe their coupling. This is what Kundera would call “the marriage of the not serious and the dreadful” (4). However, as I noted in the introduction, the “bloody details” (Rushdie 89) found in Rushdie and Rabelais are not distasteful. In the Rabelaisian system of images life and death are conjoined. The term “transcendent fuck,” similarly, is a delightful way to describe two concepts not usually associated. By uniting the organic images of peppers, sweat and blood with transcendent love, Rushdie allows the mundane and smelly world of condiments and body odour to influence romance.

As Bakhtin notes: “The grotesque symposium, does not have to respect hierarchical distinctions; it freely blends the profane and the sacred, the lower and the higher, the spiritual and the material” (Bakhtin 285-286). Rushdie seems particularly interested in forcing Moor to use the language of billingsgate, to describe and combine the sacred and the sexual:

. . . no, men, I can't do this stuff. This is my mother and father I'm talking about . . .

Did you ever see your father's cock, your mother's cunt? Yes, or not, doesn't matter,

the point is these are mythical locations, surrounded by taboo, put off thy shoes for it is holy ground, as the Voice said on Mount Sinai, and if Abraham Zogoiby was playing the part of Moses then Aurora my mother sure as eggs was the Burning Bush. (88)

Moor lures the audience, first with coy hesitation, then, with information so detailed that the reader may be shocked. What makes this passage amusing, too, however, is not just the use of rude language, but also the incorporation of biblical imagery. The burning bush, sure as eggs, is not a bit of Old Testament foliage, but Moor's way of describing his mother's genitals. "The Voice," presumably God, proclaims that contemplating one's parent's having sex is "mythical," "taboo" and "holy." Rushdie finds it odd that dialogue about human's reproductive nature has evolved into something mystical. Rushdie forces Moor to contemplate the event with the naivety of a child. He uses a narrative style that is at first shy and then explicit to create a composition that both responds to and acts against the barriers of language established by official culture. Bakhtin explains that this method of narration destroys ordinary ties - the "habitual matrices of things and ideas" and creates ". . . unexpected matrices, unexpected connections, including the most surprising logical links" (Bakhtin The Dialogic Imagination 169). Forcing the spiritual and secular together is Rushdie's way of reuniting the spirit with the body that has been sundered by official culture.

Long regarded as an aphrodisiac, spices have been the lover's weapon to improve performance. After their conjoining, "Abie" was not allowed in the kitchen, because the smell of grinding spices would make him "paw the ground" (Rushdie 90). The role of herbs and spices in inspiring love and sexual intimacy has made for countless books and recipes, in almost every major culture (Hendrickson Lewd Food 275). "Traditionally associated with love, herbs and spices were included throughout history, and often excessively, in everything from the preparation

of stimulants to magic potions. They were used as offerings to the fertility gods, amulets to wear or bedeck the bridal bed, and in ointments said to heaten and enlarge the sex organs” (Hendrickson 274). The similar needs experienced by all the cultures to improve sexual performance are a splendid place to find an overlooked commonality.

Food and spices not only promote sexual potency, but may also bolster that potency as one gets older. Hendrickson remarks that: “Maybe it’s just that a man is as old as he feels and a woman as old as she’s felt, but it’s a matter of record that most of the world’s great lovers were great eaters” (8). Abraham, at eighty-four, “tasted food as if eating it for the first time . . .” He was “fit,” “mentally agile” and “sexually active” (317). Hendrickson states that “The berry of the *Piper nigrum*, the tropical vinelike pepper plant, has certainly made many a Peter potent over the years” (281). It appears, however, that spices made Aurora and Abraham too hot and hungry. Abraham, as well as being a spice seller and adulterer, was also a pimp. Taking advantage of his background as a spice merchant, he would record the girls in his ledgers as “Garam Masala Super Quality and “Extra Hot Chilli Peppers: Green” (183). Moor, believing that his mother had extramarital affairs, asks “. . . what spicy dish kept Aurora Zogoiby away from home? What, to put it bluntly, was cooking?” (177). It seems that a good, hearty appetite, and plenty of spices seem to affect the quantity and quality of sexual love, even as one ages.

Grangousier and Gargamelle, also big eaters, “often times do the two-backed beast together, joyfully rubbing & frothing their Bacon ‘gainst one another . . .” (30). Grangousier’s virility, as well as his goodness and his comic nature, is highlighted after his fondness for drink and salt meats is noted in minute detail. The placement of the material leads the reader to draw the conclusions that the eating of salt meats will create an extraordinary lover. “Sausage” is a

euphemistic term for the penis, and it appears that Grangousier was “ordinarily well furnished” (30). Meats are considered mighty among aphrodisiac worshippers, although I am certain that most vegetarians would disagree. Hendrickson devotes a chapter to the cow’s ability to enhance love and quotes Rabelais as stating that salted beef “helped one find love at midnight without a candle” (128). Those unable to eat the flesh of the cow, like the Hindu, need not fret, because most food products seem to enhance performance.

While one does not normally associate Rabelais with romantic love, amongst the colourful passages describing codpieces and frotting there is sentiment. When Badebec dies giving birth to Pantagruel, whom Gargantua sired at four hundred fourscore and fourty-four years, Gargantua grieves for his lost love:

Ah *Badebec*, *Badebec*, my minion, my dear heart, my sugar, my sweeting, my honey, my little C. . . . (yet it had in circumference full six acres, three rods, five poles, foure yards, two foot, one inche and a half of good woodland measure) my tender peggie, my Codpiece darling, my bob and hit, my slipshoelovie, never shall I see thee! Ah poor *Pantagruel*, thou has lost thy good mother, thy sweet nurse, thy well-beloved Lady! (177)

Gargantua combines both fair and crude speech to remember his darling and uses the formula, described earlier, to create unexpected connections. While Gargantua reminisces and grieves he does not forget the present, and the birth of his delightful new son, “so faire, so spriteful, so lively, so smiling, so pleasant, and so gentle” (178). This combination of acknowledging grief, but also remaining hopeful, provides Gargantua with a means to remain unafraid of life’s obstacles. The death of Badebec implies the life of Pantagruel.

Gargantua has not forgotten the material world and its pleasures, and his dialogue invoking the banquet gives hope for the future:

Let us drink, *ho*, and put away melancholy: bring of the best; rene [sic] the glasses, lay the cloth, drive out these dogs, blow this fire, light candles, shut that door there, cut this bread in sippets for brewis, send away these poore folks in giving them what they ask, hold my gown, I will strip my self into my doublet, to make the Gossips merry, and keep them company. (178)

Food not only sparks love in the sexual sense, but also comforts one bereft of love. Brillat-Savarin notes that eating and drinking remain the principal highlights at major events, such as wakes, despite efforts to curb the more rowdy gods and goddesses: “The austerity of our new sects has destroyed all those personages; Bacchus, Venus, Comus and Diana are nothing more than poetic memories, but the fact remains, and no matter how strict our religion may be, we still enjoy ourselves at marriages, baptisms and even funerals” (181). Food remains a paramount feature at our most spiritual moments and provides comfort and hope.

Food serves as an anodyne during Moor’s separation from Uma Sarasvati, who, as his mother predicts, “fryofy[s]” him like a “stupid fish” in “ghee with ginger-garlic, mirch-masala, cumin seed, and maybe some potato chips on the side” (246). She is unsympathetic to Moor’s desire, fostered when Dilly Hormuz taught him to “ruttofy” at age eight, for the love that his parents shared: “O I wanted, wanted that *asli mirch masala*, the thing that made you sweat beads of coriander juice and breathe hot-chilli flames through your stinging lips. I wanted their pepper love. And when I found it, I thought my mother would understand” (221). Ezekiel, the family cook, tries cheering Moor up with gastronomic delights “combining nostalgia with invention and

stirring in a generous sprinkling of hope” (273). Ezekiel understands, as Moor learns to, that food can contribute to genius.

A full stomach not only is comforting, but also is a source for inspiration. As Brillat-Savarin notes, food is the catalyst for many of man’s activities (148). Aurora paints a mural, encompassing her entire room, after being banished for a week for throwing out Epifania’s Ganesha artefacts. During her supposed rice-and-water internment, her Ayah smuggles food that includes “mince-and-potato ‘cutlets’, pomfrets fried in breadcrumbs, spicy prawn plates, banana jelly, creme caramel, soda-pop” (58). The smuggled goods come from both Eastern and Western menus, and Rushdie is obviously making a correlation between genius and pluralism. It is doubtful that Aurora’s artistic debut could have manifested on the prescribed rice-and-water diet. Brillat-Savarin believes that feasting at the table of Gasterea, the tenth muse, who presides over the pleasures of taste, refreshes imaginations and renews the heart’s capacity for gaiety (337). Aurora is comforted and inspired by her eclectic feast as she struggles to accept her mother’s death, her father’s betrayal in allowing her banishment, and her decision to share her love of art.

One of the key features of the mural is a parody of the Last Supper. John L. McKenzie, editor of The Dictionary of the Bible, notes that the Eucharist is believed to have taken place on the Jewish festival of Passover, and has become a symbol for ingesting the body and blood of Christ (250). McKenzie makes no mention of the cannibalistic tones of the Last Supper, but does note that “He [Christ] dwells in the person who eats and drinks, and raises him up” (252). The solemnity of the event becomes an excellent opportunity for humour. The Last Supper is one of the more popular parody subjects in folk culture. Bakhtin notes that:

The banquet speech is universal and materialistic at the same time. This is why the

grotesque symposium travesties and debases the purely idealistic, mystic, and ascetic victory over the world (that is, the victory of the abstract spirit). In the comic banquet there are nearly always elements parodying and travestyng the Last Supper. (296)

The religious supper is used as the setting to invert standards: the low replaces the high and the secular replaces the sacred, which I discussed in Chapter One. In this particular painting:

the family servants caroused wildly at the dining-table while their raggedy ancestors stared down from the portraits on the wall and the da Gamas served as waiters, bringing food and pouring wine and being treated badly, Carmen having her bottom pinched, Epifania's rump being kicked by a drunken gardener . . . (60)

This painting establishes Aurora's genius, proclaims her defiance to official culture, and also documents the fall of her family. Moor becomes like his raggedy ancestors, forced to serve others. In his particular case, he does not become a waiter, but a chef for a very bad man.

This painting has many carnivalesque features; however, the one to stress is the image of Mother India "...who loved and betrayed and ate and destroyed and again loved her children . . ." (61). This particular image of the goddess who both loves yet eats her children is a recurrent theme. Aurora, Epifania, Uma and Flory Zogoiby all describe eating humans, metaphorically. However, Uma, Epifania and Flory represent a purely negative hunger that is opposed to the regenerative forces also implied with devouring or swallowing in the Rabelaisian sense. They have forgotten that "woman is organically hostile to all that is old" (Bakhtin 242). Moor describing Uma states: "Peace, serenity, joy were deserts to her – for if her noisome crops failed, she would starve. She ate our divisions, and grew strong upon our rows" (320). Epifania

and Flory also grow fat on despair. After her husband died Epifania “ate his death as she had eaten his life; and grew” (24). Flory, incensed by Abraham’s marriage to a “Roman whore” (114), demands flesh for fronting him a loan. “You need my stones? Give me your eldest boy; his flesh’n’skin’n’bones” (111). The agelast women of this novel use eating as a metaphor for satisfying their own greed, which, as noted, is contrary to the ambivalent nature of carnival.

Aurora is different. Her lines about eating her brood indicate ambivalence and also provide an opportunity to make fun of the Christian faith: “No special privileges for flesh-and-blood relations! Darlings, we munch on flesh, and blood is our tippie of choice” (5). Aurora is acknowledging that the ritual of mass, which condones the metaphorical allusion to eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood, demonstrates the violent nature of clan. The family will eat its own members. Aurora uses the term “we” and acknowledges her own bloodthirsty nature. However, she does not expect special privileges, clearly indicating her alliance with the ambivalent spirit of carnival. She fiercely defends her pluralistic views and lawless existence. She will defy both those who oppose and those who worship her, in keeping with the dynamic image of Mother India. She had four children, “a four-course meal with magic properties, because no matter how often and how heartily she tucked in, the food never seemed to run out” (126). As Aurora notes in reference to the poem “The Walrus and the Carpenter”: “‘We all eat children,’ . . . ‘If not other people’s, then our own’” (125). While this may seem like a disturbing image, it is, in fact, compatible with a facet of the Goddess, and also with the Rabelaisian system of images that Bakhtin describes as ambivalent.

The image of Mother India as both lover and gluttonous avenger allows for the constant shifting and transformation of life. Life is not static, but an active and messy process. It is:

. . . never finished, never completed: it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body...Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body -- all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all events, the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven. (Bakhtin 317)

Aurora, then, personifies Mother India, a woman who provides life but also munches on flesh and drinks blood. Her dual role as mother and destroyer is essential for the process of life. Despite Moor's repeated descriptions of his mother's insatiable hunger, and venomous tongue, she is still "irresistible" (172):

Listen: she was the light of our lives, the excitement of our imaginations, the beloved of our dreams. We loved her even as she destroyed us. She called out of us a love that felt too big for our bodies, as if she had made the feeling and then given it to us to feel – as if it were a work. (172)

Moor continues to adore her, even after she kicks him out of the house for loving Uma.

Romantic love supersedes filial love, as Aurora should remember, but Uma is a bad mate. She plans for Moor to ingest cyanide and for her to watch him die while on a tablet of LSD.

Fortunately, a bump-of-heads alters their fate. Moor takes the tablet intended for Uma, and vice-versa. He is subsequently arrested for murder and sent to prison.

Rushdie presents an obvious forum for the Rabelaisian grotesque body in the Bombay cells. Prison and the underbelly represent Moor's descent into hell. However, hell, as noted, is

also the location of the holy bottle, or salvation. During Moor's stay in prison, his entire world shifts. When the comforts of privilege are removed, he becomes debased and craven. It is in the "stomach, the intestines of the city" (287) that Moor experiences his death and he experiences the wonders found in Bombay's belly. Banquet imagery and the grotesque body overlap at the carnival. Since images of bounty and eating represent life, conversely, scatological images represent death – but in the cycle of carnival, death also implies life. While death is not considered evil in the carnivalesque realm of Rabelais, refuse is used to indicate a state of foolishness.

The influence of the LSD may explain Moor's hallucinations while in prison; however, it seems obvious that Rushdie uses the "Indian Wonders" motif, referred to in Chapter One, to describe the underworld:

I was led down dim corridors stinking of excrement and torment, of desolations and violations, by whip-cracking men with, as it seemed to me, the heads of beasts and poisonous snakes for tongues. Either the Inspector had left or else he had metamorphosed into one of these hybrid monsters. I tried to ask the monsters questions but their communications did not extend beyond the physical. Blows, pushes, even the tip of a whip burning fiercely across my ankle. (286)

Moor learns of the city's darker side: "A city does not show itself to every bastard, sister-fucker, mother-fucker,' the elephant man shouted before slamming the window shut. 'You were blind, but now wait and see'" (287). Moor's blindness and folly require the Rabelaisian remedy of physical and verbal abuse, and a stint as debased fool. Mainduck, "the frog", fetches Moor from prison, but not from the intestines of Bombay. He continues to serve the underworld and a man who falls under the title of an agelast. Ultimately, Moor must serve this force to expose it

and to prove that he can regain his crown. Aurora, watching him from afar, begins painting his debauchery in “The Moor in exile series” (301). While his life in exile is marked by his service to violence, it does provide his mother with excellent material for her canvases (301).

To qualify as carnivalesque, imagery of the body undergoing a rebirth must be comic and ambivalent. In the introduction to Gargantua and Pantagruel, Terence Cave explains this phenomenon:

if humankind is comic, that is primarily because the human body seems grotesque, incomprehensible, uncontrollable. Furthermore, all of mankind’s aspirations to spiritual and moral values, to high intellectual seriousness, have to pass through this comic body. Not only are they subject to basic human needs -- eating, drinking, urinating, defecating, sex -- but they are also inextricably mixed up with, even produced by, those needs. (xxxii)

Moor’s comic narrative describing his life as Mainduck’s chef and enforcer is presented against this type of backdrop of spiritual and moral values. In search of spiritual purity, the Mainduck squad succumbs to base human needs -- eating, drinking, and loving that Moor describes in detail, highlighting their grotesque nature. Moor’s description of his time living with the Tin Man and Five-in-a-Bite is amusing, not because of the description of their violent acts, but because his comic portrayal more obviously demonstrates their humanity and the stupidity of pursuing the myth of “*Hindu-stan*” (295). Moor tells of Five-in-a-Bite’s love for a neat kitchen and of the Tin-man, half-man, half-can (311), who falling for Nadia Wadia, India’s beauty queen, composes love ditties and kisses her poster. These human, silly anecdotes contrast with the brutality of these characters, who participate in beating any opposition into submission. Moor detachedly notes that a man beaten on the soles of the feet will never laugh again

(307). If the opposition is unable to laugh it is probable that they will also be malleable. The gloomy seriousness of their right-wing Hindu pursuits, which Moor describes as pure and magnificent (305), is revealed as feeble when contrasted with their humanness. As Moor admits later, they are all really fools (352).

In his essay “There’ll always be an India”, Christopher Hitchens describes the man on whom Mainduck is based as “Bombay’s leading Hindu nationalist politician, an un-gorgeous man with the gorgeous name of Bal Thackeray.” He goes on to note, with obvious relish, that the political leader was also “the impresario for Michael Jackson’s Bombay smash last year” (Vanity Fair 56). Mainduck, the caricature of Thackeray, is also a contradictory character. Moor describes Mainduck as “a man who liked food” (296), including taboo Hindu foods, and he is delighted by Moor’s vast repertoire as a chef:

‘Anglo-Indian mulligatawny, South Indian meat with coconut milk, Mughlai kormas, Kashmiri shirmal, reshmi kababs; Goan fish, Hyderabadi brinjal, dum rice, Bombay club-style, all. Even if it is to your taste then pink, salty numkeen chai.’

Fielding’s delight knew no bounds. (296)

Mainduck’s political agenda to promote a Hindu India contrasts with the demands of his palate and his gluttonous nature.

Brillat-Savarin states that gourmandism is the “enemy of overindulgence; any man who eats too much or grows drunk risks being expelled from its army of disciples” (148). When describing Silenus, Rabelais remarks that he is “. . . a low-built, old, effeminate, sottish Fellow, continually raddled” (789). Mainduck is a drunk, a glutton, and is also described as having a “power-drive rather than a sex-drive” (299). Rushdie’s suggestion that Mainduck is homosexual

demonstrates another of Mainduck's deviations from traditional Hindu practices, another contradiction of that "fierce, illogical man" (297):

He preferred male company. . . . Lubricated by beer and rum, the assembled company would arrive at a point of sweaty, brawling, raucous, and finally exhausted nakedness Shedding his flower patterned lungi he would loll among his cadres, itching, scratching, belching, farting, slapping buttocks and patting thighs 'Now nobody can stand against us!' he would bellow as he passed out in a state of Dionysiac bliss. 'Bloody hell! Now we are one.' (300)

Although this may seem a rather Rabelaisian image, it is contrary to the spirit of carnival and ultimately reveals Mainduck's impotence. Moor's description of the wrestling matches of the "oiled", "perspiring" and "naked" Youth Wingers (300) seems to contrast the pure India that Mainduck professes to love. Mainduck has corrupted the spirit of the carnival, and his gluttonous fondness for food and drink merely represents greed. Mainduck merely uses his Hindu stance as a way to gain power and wealth.

While Moor delivers many beatings to assist Mainduck to gain his power and wealth, the beatings are also a corruption of those described by Rabelais. Beatings are used in the Rabelaisian system of images to force the old world to make way for the new, not to support homogeneous supremacy. In Gargantua and Pantagruel, Rabelais condemns the agelast to terrible torments: "May you never shit till you be soundly lash'd with *Stirrup-Leather*, never piss but by the *Strapado*, nor be otherways warmed, than by the *Bastinado*" (299). Bakhtin notes that there is a vital link between beatings and uncrowning the agelast. "They [agelasts] are all subject to mockery and punishment as individual incarnations of the dying truth and authority of prevailing thought, law, and virtues" (212).

Moor eventually clubs Mainduck to death with a telephone after learning that he killed Aurora. This beating is compatible with the system of images that Bakhtin describes as necessary to force the old world to die.

Bakhtin explains that in the carnivalesque cycle an individual may not remain “the eternal king” (242). Abraham is unwilling to die and is jealous of the new, vibrant world. He believes, like Mainduck, that power and wealth can somehow provide escape from humankind’s mortal doom. After Aurora’s demise, Abraham had “decided to refuse death altogether” (317). Bakhtin believes that “. . . woman is naturally opposed to eternity and unmask[s] it as senile presumptuousness” (242-243). Abraham has forgotten this tenet and that the material world he so enjoys has rules surrounding the organic. Bakhtin argues that the body’s lower stratum contains both the reproductive organs and the bowels, both life and death. However, like all the “kings” Abraham, too, is dethroned and the old world makes way for the new.

Despite the ultimate failure of Aurora and Abraham’s relationship, what inspired their love-union cannot be dismissed: “Nevertheless, he [Abraham] thought, even if the world’s beauty and love were on the edge of destruction, theirs would still be the only side to be on; defeated love would still be love, hate’s victory would not make it other than it was’ (101). Abraham even keeps stacks of spices and herbs at work to invoke the memory of their union on the spice sacks. On the day he dies after his office is bombed, a “perfumed hail” rains on the city: “Fenugreek and nigella, coriander seeds and asafoetida fell upon Bombay; but black pepper most of all, the Black Gold of Malabar, upon which, an eternity and a day ago, a young duty manager and a fifteen-year-old girl had fallen in pepper love” (375). Pepper love, while obviously not synonymous with compatibility, is a rather wonderful metaphor to describe passionate, human love. It may not suggest Cupid or other such insipid love-figures, but it

does suggest that love is attainable on earth, and grounded in the basic pleasures of eating, drinking, and having sex.

Linking love with spices, aubergines, and other organic images creates a vital conduit to the spirit of carnival, and more importantly to the spirit of humankind. Love is not clean and aloof, but messy, mixed-up. Moor eventually views love as:

. . . the blending of spirits, as melange, as the triumph of the impure, mongrel, conjoining best of us over what there is in us of the solitary, the isolated, the austere, the dogmatic, the pure; of love as democracy, as the victory of the no-man-is-an-island, two's company Many over the clean, mean, apartheiding Ones.

(289)

Moor battles “the clean, mean, apartheiding Ones” with his substantial gift for storytelling and by using language that mimics the barker’s style in Gargantua and Pantagruel. Chapter Two: *Coq-à-l’âne*-From Rooster to Ass, will detail the connection between speech at the banquet and at the marketplace. The link between the two is fascinating, and it seems that our narrator has a tremendous gift for both cooking and telling tales.

Chapter Three
***Coq-à-l'âne* “from Rooster to Ass”**

*Obeah, jadoo, fo, fum,
chicken entrails, kingdom come.
Ju-ju, voodoo, fee, fi,
Piddle cocktails, time to die.
-Salman Rushdie*

*At first the diet is light, a kind of pap of little jingles, of rhymes easy to sing and to remember. Gradually the taste-buds grow more demanding, and without realizing it a reader is deep in intrigue and fustian, just as in his adolescence he finds himself craving heavy sweetmeats and the high clash of pepper and spice.
-MFK Fisher*

The exploration of food continues in this chapter, focusing on Rushdie’s love of words and the link between speech and food. Brillat-Savarin states that: “It is during meals that language must have been born and perfected, whether it was because they were a constantly recurring necessity or because the relaxation which accompanies and follows a feast leads naturally to confidence and loquacity” (183). In this chapter, the exploration of food and language will take place not only at the table, but also in the marketplace, where a “special” type of communication exists that is “frank and free” and seems to disregard the “norms of etiquette and decency” (Bakhtin 10). Understanding the market-like atmosphere of this novel is essential because Moor uses the narrative techniques of the barker, and what Bakhtin calls “familiar, friendly abuse and direct cursing” (168). Moor believes that “the hottest tales, the juiciest-bitchiest yarns, the most garish and lurid not-penny-but-paisa-dreadfuls, are the ones walking

our streets” (128). The frankness of the marketplace is extended to the table in both The Moor’s Last Sigh and in Gargantua and Pantagruel.

Both Moor and Master Alcrofibas use an abundance of food imagery to tell their tales, and stories about eating and drinking take up a considerable portion of both novels. Bakhtin even describes Rabelais’ epithets and comparisons to spiritual things as having an “edible character” (171). In Rushdie’s novel, food is used to curse, praise and deride individuals. Uma is described as a “bad egg” (281), Nehru’s mistress is referred to as a “chicken-breasted mame” (176) and Moor’s paternal grandmother is “stark raving nuts” (111). Toes bitten off by one of Moor’s fellow enforcers are described as “little kofta balls” (297), and Vasco’s “cock” is described as a “pale pepperoni sausage” (245). “Spicy dish” and “too much sizzle, too much chilli, bring water” (137) are but two of the many examples used to describe the physical assets of the characters of this novel. In Gargantua and Pantagruel, the food phrases are countless but a small sampling includes: “bacon picker” (21), “cheese-like brain” (22), “Mooting Duck” (707), “By the fig” (708), and “Od’s Fish” (602). References to food provide amusing descriptions of characters, their attributes and their activities.

Bakhtin describes *coq-à-l’âne* as a type of word inversion that allows for unusual grammatical compositions resulting in a form of speech that sanctions nonsense. *Coq-à-l’âne*, which means from rooster to ass, is a popular form of comic speech. “This is a genre of intentionally absurd verbal combinations, a form of completely liberated speech that ignores all norms, even those of elementary logic” (423). Bakhtin explains that this type of speech has “no direct visible connection with ambivalent praise-abuse” (422) but can create “a verbal carnival” (426). Rushdie combines fact and fiction, a variety of languages, myths, news reports, popular culture, slang, poetry, puns, songs and recipes to create his “nonsensical” composition. He lies about “history” to incorporate Moor and his family,

provides no linear narrative, often misspells words, and uses grammatically incorrect sentence structure. His tone is chatty and he creates words that are not found in any dictionary. In short, he ignores “goodandproper English” (Hamilton The New Yorker 95).

Bakhtin defines the language of billingsgate as coarse language. “Abuses, curses, profanities, and improprieties are the unofficial elements of speech. They were and are still conceived as a breach of the established norms of verbal address; they refuse to conform to conventions, to etiquette, civility, respectability” (Bakhtin 188). Moor’s frequent voyages to the marketplace to hear the bawdy music of the vendors selling watermelon and rum and his fondness for the “easy obscenities” that had “peppered’ and “spiced’ the Zogoiby “conversational dishes” (320) all contribute to Moor’s use of colourful language. Rabelais describes the marketplace, which Gargantua visits in Book One, as having, amongst other things Juglers, Tumblers, Mountebanks and Quacksalvers. Gargantua “. . . considered their cunning, their shifts, their summer-saults and smooth tongue, especially of those of *Chauny in Picardie*, who are naturally great praters, and brave givers of fibs in matter of green apes” (82). The lies and exaggerations of marketplace language reflect the relaxed atmosphere of the carnival.

Perhaps Rushdie should copy Rabelais, who adroitly avoided being punished for his satires, and begin by providing a “warning” preface:

Good friends, my Readers, who peruse this Book,

Be not offended, whil’st on it you look:

Denude your selves of all deprav’d affection,

For it contains no badnesse, nor infection:

’Tis true that it brings forth to you no birth

Of any value, but in point of mirth;

Thinking therefore how sorrow might your minde

Consume, I could no apter subject finde;

One inch of joy surmounts of grief a span;

Because to laugh, is proper to the man. (2)

I shall examine the narrative technique of Moor in relation to the barker's style from Rabelais, and Moor's garrulous nature in relation to his penchant for food. Brillat-Savarin states that some lucky men are predestined to gourmandism (156), and it would certainly seem the case for Moor, who was born with chillies in his veins (Rushdie 5). Moor is not only predisposed to become a chef, but develops a fondness for the banquet where "... the physical and the intellectual are ideally mingled: tongue, lips and teeth both take in food and drink and articulate words" (Cave xxxvi). The carnivalesque banquet, in contrast to an authorised meal, provides fare for both the body and mind.

According to Bakhtin, meals are a time for "... wise discourse, for the gay truth. There is an ancient tie between the feast and the spoken word" (283). Unfortunately, not all the characters in The Moor's Last Sigh or Gargantua and Pantagruel share this belief. Epifania is used, repeatedly, as a foil for Rushdie's philosophies. She is like Master Gaster, whom Bakhtin describes as "covetous, greedy, and unjust" (301). Epifania believes that "masses and classes" should remain separate, and that dinner conversation should involve topics not likely to promote the loquacity mentioned by Brillat Savarin: "You want dark or white meat? Speak up. Glass of imported Dao wine, nice cold? You can have. Pudding-shudding? Why not. These are Christmas topics frawline. You want stuffing?" (23). Epifania's views on religion and politics are not to be challenged. "'In this God-fearing Christian house, British still is best, madder-moysele,' she snapped. 'If you have ambitions in our boy's direction, then

please to mindofy your mouth” (23). Epifania tries to sway Belle, but she is not daunted by Epifania’s threats. Belle, like her daughter, Aurora, is unafraid of the authoritarian world.

The abstract, static world of religion and history that Epifania represents is ultimately defeated by the gay truth, which in this instance is represented by a young, menstruating woman. The fact that she is menstruating links her to the organic world, which Bakhtin believes promotes newness. Bakhtin states that in the carnivalesque system “. . . death is followed by regeneration, by the new year, new youth, and a new spring” (198). Epifania keels over on Christmas Eve while praying in her private chapel, and Aurora, out of bed because of period pains, sees her grandmother fall. Although Epifania is “still twitching feebly” (63), her granddaughter does not help, or cry out, but sits down, cross-legged, and watches (64). While one could be shocked by Aurora’s behaviour, it is rather fitting that Epifania should die while her granddaughter looks on. This is a perfect example of the amoral nature of this tale actually being its morality. It is an example of “abuse with uncrowning” (198) that Bakhtin believes is so integral to the organic images found in Rabelais. Aurora is a symbol of the new youthful world.

The juxtaposition of young fertile life revelling in the death of the old in a private chapel on Christmas Eve is a carnivalesque celebration. By layering the image of future life in Aurora with the death of Epifania, who is celebrating the birth of a saviour conceived “unnaturally,” Rushdie creates a carnivalesque sequence. This is not just the death of an isolated individual, but the death of what Rushdie calls “the familiar mustiness of devotion” (26). This combination of images is what Bakhtin would consider a “new matrix of objects, a new picture of the world . . . a world permeated with an internal and authentic necessity” (The Dialogic Imagination 169). After Epifania’s death “brightness

burst out, like a birth” (65). The carnival promises a world that is constantly in the process of becoming and improving, despite the repeated attempts by the agelast to thwart the new, better world.

Mainduck’s table, like Epifania’s, portrays an agelast hosting a false banquet: the speeches he delivers are more important than the food, which is contrary to the spirit of the banquet. Mainduck has severed the essential link between eating and talking, and his words falsely nourish his guests. Moor notes that visitors coming to Mainduck’s house “. . . were hungry, but not for my banquets; they hung on Mainduck’s words and lapped up every syllable” (298). Mainduck does not engage in conversation, but “thunders” about his political and religious views:

It was while serving up my own cooking at Mainduck’s table that I first heard of the existence of a list of sacred sites at which the country’s Muslim conquerors had deliberately built mosques on the birthplaces of various Hindu deities – and not only their birthplaces, but their country residences and love-nests, too, to say nothing of their favourite shops and preferred eateries. (299)

Mainduck’s yearning for a pure Hindu India does not exclude embracing the cuisine of the “invaders”, but he refuses to dine with those that his banquets celebrate and condemn simultaneously. While Mainduck is adamant that the Hindu deities are upset that “onion domes” are polluting their favourite eateries, he continues to eat the “non-veg” cuisine of the invader (297):

Mainduck is like the Catchpoles, King Picrochole and various other agelasts from Gargantua and Pantagruel who bark instead of laugh (Bakhtin 285). Seriousness is the tone that feeble, frightened people and those representing a “doomed authority” adopt (Bakhtin 285). Rules to suppress individuality, espoused by cowards and bullies, are abhorrent to Rushdie. For obvious reasons, Rushdie believes that expression should not be censored or confined by rules, so he mocks those who bark about

heaven's abiding interest in worldly affairs. When Ina dies, Moor's other sister Minnie, a devout and pious nun, begins communicating with her in heaven: "'She says the food is also good.' 'All the ambrosia, nectar and manna you can eat, and you never put on weight'" (239). Rushdie not only parodies the portrayal of wrathful deities deprived of their "love-nests" and "eateries", but also the more mundane versions of heaven's joys.

In carnivalesque imagery, dining is linked to intellectual and bodily health and participation in the birth/death cycle. In contrast, ambrosia, nectar and manna are fabulous foods. Ambrosia and nectar impart immortality, and Brewer describes manna as "miraculous" (700). These types of food are far removed from the carnivalesque arena because they deny death. It is impossible to associate these types of foods with solving the questions that plague Pantagruel's crew, including: ". . .how a man might be ready to bepiss himself with Laughing, when he has no heart to be merry?" "A remedy for a dimness of Eyes", "how one might avoid Dog-sleep" and "A Remedy against Oscitations and Gapings" (668-669). The group is out of sorts, but rallies after eating. Immortality has no place in the carnival theatre of humankind.

The pleasures of dining provoke humankind's spirit, imagination and wit. "But as these needs [hunger] are satisfied, the intellect rouses itself, conversation begins . . ." (Brillat-Savarin 182). Imaginative stories are capable of dispelling the boring, unfriendly and authorised versions sanctioned by the agelast. The noisy, marketplace-atmosphere that Bombay represents is used to contrast the severe, stark worlds of Mainduck and Epifania. "In Bombay you live crushed in this crazy crowd, you are deafened by its blaring horns of plenty, and -- like the figures of family members in Aurora's Cabral Island mural -- your own story has to shove its way through the throngs" (128). The exaggerations and contrasts of the marketplace reveal its alignment with the carnival world. Fortunately, the marketplace

has maintained its carnival atmosphere and remains the setting for the barker and his bag of verbal tricks including *coq-à-l'âne* and coarse language.

Coq-à-l'âne, explains Bakhtin, can manifest in many forms. Proverbs can be turned inside out, or adages and common sayings can be deprived of their meaning. Inverting or ignoring the meaning of common sayings may provoke laughter or put in doubt handed-down lore. Rushdie names the Zogoiby children Ina, Minnie, Mynah and Moor to create a warping of the well-known rhyme. Epifania enjoys singing well-known ditties, although she is unaware that some of her rewording contains amusing sexual imagery, as in the case of “*What shall we do with the shrunken tailor?*” (11). Rabelais also uses clever wordplay to redefine the proverb. He describes Gargantua as repeatedly ignoring sage advice: “Ofentimes did he [Gargantua] spit in the basin and fart for fatnesse; pisse against the Sunne, and hide himself in the water for fear of raine. He would strike out of the cold iron, be often in the dumps, and frig and wriggle it” (49). Although I am not familiar with all the sayings listed here, Gargantua is obviously not afraid to ignore logic and rules, which may lead, at times, to the path of wisdom.

Coq-à-l'âne can also create what Bakhtin calls a “peculiar carnivalesque picture” of history and politics (424). Rushdie uses this method most often, but also enjoys word play that results in such creations as: “Piss-in-Boots” (94), “Big booby shaftoes” (12), and “hit-take, hit-alliance, hit-conception, hit-terious” which is the “Opposite of mis-” (150). Rushdie is not afraid to create his own version of language:

Unaccountable gaps in the language were filled in: if the opposed answer-and-question pairs there/where, then/when, that/what, thither/whither, thence/whence all existed, then Vasco argued, every this must also have its whis, every these its whese, every those its whoase. (151)

Rushdie is obviously obsessed with both the power and limitation of language.

Rushdie's little jingle about chicken entrails, cited at the beginning of this chapter, is not only a perfect example of a *coq-à-l'âne* composition, but also demonstrates the two-faced nature of language. The jingle combines food imagery, voodoo, the Bible and a little of Jack and the Beanstalk to form a "nonsensical" "terrifying" incantation (Rushdie 73). In reality, the phrases are merely gibberish, but this particular incantation is revealed as prophecy in the novel. "Time to die" becomes the mantra for the bloodthirsty da Gama/Zogoiby clan, and reveals the power of language to define the world. However, Rushdie is really mocking this type of prophecy, or the tendency to justify dire action based on language.

Rabelais also mocks the prophetic nature of language. In his introduction to Gargantua and Pantagruel, Terence Cave remarks on Rabelais' terrific ability to use language that reveals both its power and its limitations. Cave describes the language used by Rabelais as:

. . . ambivalent: on the one hand, it is an endlessly rich mode of communication, a vast reservoir of possible meanings, and a kaleidoscopic instrument for playing with the world; on the other, it may prove dangerously deceptive, . . . or be degraded, . . . or simply give out in the face of mysteries too great for it to express. Often, indeed, Rabelais seems to be showing us not only how to use language but also when to recognize that it is superfluous. (xxxv)

It is not surprising that both authors use the *coq-à-l'âne* formula not only to flaunt their linguistic talent, but also to demonstrate that language is fallible.

Coq-à-l'âne is also a fitting title to describe the reversal of fortune of our hero, "fated" to experience a fall. He is the rooster and becomes the ass. He is Boabdil: the prince turned fool (Rushdie

The Moor's Last Sigh 80). While it is words that bring about Moor's downfall, as described in Chapter Two, they also facilitate his freedom and redemption. To make his Scheherazade-like tale interesting, not to mention lengthy, Moor uses the *coq-à-l'âne* formula to discuss religion, history, myth, death and love. While one expects an illogical narrative describing the "*amours fous*" of this novel (289), it is refreshing to see the same illogical narrative applied to "serious" topics. *Coq-à-l'âne* creates not only what Bakhtin calls a "play period" for words, but also reveals a new way to view language:

It is as if words had been released from the shackles of sense, to enjoy a play period of complete freedom and establish unusual relationships among themselves. True, no new consistent links are formed in most cases, but the brief coexistence of these words, expressions, and objects outside the usual logical conditions discloses their inherent ambivalence. Their multiple meanings and the potentialities that would not manifest themselves in normal conditions are revealed. (Rabelais and His World 423)

Sense, in the world of carnival, belongs to the realm of hierarchies and must be supplanted by nonsense.

Moor is ambivalent by nature, and his narrative style and personal history reflect this characteristic. It is no accident that Rushdie chose "Moor" to be our hero's name. It not only establishes his connection with the historical figure of Sultan Boabdil, but, more importantly, it also means "middle-of-the-road" (Webster's 649). Rabelais also understands the connection between names and behaviour, and as Bakhtin notes, his heroes also reflect their ambivalent nature:

Grangousier, Gargamelle, and Gargantua symbolize the gullet, not as a neutral anatomical term but as an abusive-laudatory image: gluttony, swallowing, devouring, banquetting. This is the gaping mouth, the

grave-womb, swallowing and generating. The etymology of Pantagruel has a similar connotation, the “ever-thirsting,” disclosing the traditional ambivalent image. (Bakhtin 459-460)

Names (language again) reflect or create a type of reality for the characters in both novels.

Linda Hutcheon defines ambivalence in the Bakhtinian sense as “. . . another word for the postmodern paradox: the refusal to pick sides, the desire to be on both sides of any border, deriving energy from the continual crossing” (The Canadian Postmodern 162). Indeed, one is never quite sure what side of the border Moor is on, but, as mentioned, this is his role. He is quick to blame, but also quick to forgive in the barker’s patented formula of abuse and praise. In one scene, Moor gleefully describes the punishment inflicted on the Reverend Oliver D’Aeth, Angel Allover Death (103), for trying to sabotage Aurora’s wedding to Abraham:

Soon after this visit by the mosquito of poetic justice, he contracted the malaria of just desserts, and in spite of being nursed night and day by the Widow Elphinstone, who mopped his brow with the cold compresses of dashed hopes, he sweated mightily, and died. Man, but I’m in a compassionate sort of mood today. What do you know? I feel sorry for that poor bugger, too. (105)

However, the string of humorous clichés seems to indicate that Moor did not really hate the man, although he received his “just desserts” in the style of the agelast.

Rushdie is like “kind master Rabelais” who “. . . deals with these dummies pitilessly, cruelly, but merrily” (Bakhtin Rabelais and His World 213). Milan Kundera explains that this type of ambiguity is essential because “there is no place for hatred in the relativistic universe of the novel” (27). Moor’s

judgement of the audience is equally ambivalent, and he likes to both cajole and insult the reader. Whether calling the audience “omnipotent” (145) or deriding its gullible nature, he is charming and amusing: “Abraham's had never been a wealthy family, and if you believe that a boxful of gems would have remained untouched for four centuries, then busters and busterinas, you'll believe anything. Oh, but they were *hair-looms*? Well, roll my eyes and strike my brow! What a blank-blank joke” (85). Moor mocks the reader, who might believe the story of Abraham's ancestry, yet Moor may also be mocked. He is abusing the crowd, yet the crowd may also abuse him, for his version of the gems' origins is equally ridiculous and involves his synagogue-tending, compatriot-with-jewel-thieves grandmother (85): “In what follows you will find stranger tales by far than the one I have just attempted to debunk; and let me assure you, let me say to-whom-it-may-concern, that of the truth of these further stories there can be no doubt whatsoever. So finally it is not for me to judge, but for you” (85). This plea to control then relinquish narrative power echoes the tone of Master Alcrofibas: “I therefore (your humble slave) being very willing to increase your solace and recreation yet a little more, do offer you for a Present another book of the stamp, only that is a little more reasonable and worthy of credit than the other was” (167). He also addresses readers as “noble boozers” and “very esteemed and poxy friends” (3). Alcrofibas makes it seem rather splendid to be considered both poxy and a noble boozer because he is proud to be among the ranks. He is laughing at the audience and at himself.

Both authors are obviously making a connection between speech and food. Moor's gift for gab and storytelling is developed in the kitchen and in the marketplace. Moor spends hours learning recipes and hearing tales of India's past and the past of his family from their “ageless cook”:

In his kitchen I was transported back to a long-departed Cochin in which the patriarch Francisco dreamed of Gama rays and Solomon Castile ran off to sea and

reappeared in blue synagogue tile. Between the lines of his emerald-jacketed copybooks I saw Belle's struggle with the books of the family business, and in the scents of his culinary magic I smelled a godown in Ernakulam where a young girl had fallen in love. (273)

The books not only serve as a vehicle for preparing delicious meals, but as a "between the lines" link to the history of India and his family. What Moor describes is not actually written in Ezekiel's books. Places like the kitchen and the marketplace favour a blurred reality and allow Moor to exist comfortably in the borderline, the place between art and life, and the home of clowns and fools. Ezekiel also records the dietary history of Moor and his family, which he keeps, along with his secret recipes, in a padlocked box. Moor can trace the family mood based on "marginotes" recording "spilled" meals and small appetites. "Happy moments were evoked also; by the frill-less references to wine, or cake, or other special requests -- favourite dishes for a child who had done well at school, celebratory banquets marking some triumph in business or in painting" (176-177). When Moor's home is bombed, he bemoans the loss of Ezekiel and his "magic" books.

The tales that he learns, and more importantly envisions, while learning recipes enable Moor to become a master storyteller. He is so adroit at telling tales that it ultimately saves his life. The tale we hear is given from a Spanish cemetery after Moor escapes from Miranda's folly in the Andalusian Mountains. There, he was forced to write his story by the one-time family friend Vasco Miranda. "As long as my tale held his interest he would let me live" (421). A fellow captive advises him to spin the tale out. While the reader is not told about this forced story until the end of the novel, there are immediate, obvious references to indicate that the tale we are reading/hearing is a pack of lies.

It would not be fitting if our lying hero received a formal education. The wiser, serendipitous force of the carnival subjugates the authority that school represents. Moor is tutored at home, and like Gargantua he goes through a string of teachers. At eight, his big bones and penchant for “a fully waxed pointy tipped moustache” (189) distract would-be educators. The informal education he experiences, under Ezekiel, Vasco, Miss Jaya, Dilly Hormus, and Lambajan is the real catalyst for his understanding of the link between food and speech. The aforementioned Vasco, house painter at the Zogoiby mansion and Moor’s first hero, supplies him with stories of Goan history over Goan cuisine. It is with Miss Jaya, the gatekeeper’s wife, that Moor visits the marketplace, and falls in love with its “fabulous turbulence”:

. . . and it was with her that I ate watermelon at Apollo Bunder and chaat on the seafront at Worli and with all these places and their loud inhabitants, with all these commodities and comestibles and their insistent vendors, with my inexhaustible Bombay of excess, I fell deeply and for ever in love, even while Miss Jaya was enjoying herself by giving full vent to her capacity for derision, even while she was firing out judgements from which she would permit no appeal: ‘Too costly!’ (chickens.) ‘Too disgusting!’ (Dark rum.) ‘Too slummy!’ (Chawl.) ‘Too dry!’ (Watermelon.) ‘Too hot!’ (Chaat.) (193)

The marketplace provides a fitting classroom for Moor and his perception of the laughing, fearless crowd.

The classroom is also a source of derision for Rabelais. Master Alcrofibas tells us that when Gargantua was a lad his manners were abominable. “He pissed in his shoes, shit in his shirt and wiped his nose on his sleeve” (49). When older, he was educated by schoolmasters, but through their teachings “grew thereby foolish, simple, doted and blockish . . .” (59). He was finally sent to Paris to

learn manners and wisdom. Under Ponocrates, a private tutor, he learned many things, including the virtues of combining good food with good conversation. Gargantua eventually becomes quite learned in all areas of study, and does not merely spend his time stuffing his stomach. His education is not restricted to one area of study, but encompasses medicine, philosophy, arithmetic, science, art, languages, and various types of armed combat. He even learns to swim while reading a book. His education continues during dinner:

Then, (if they thought good,) they continued reading, or began to discourse merrily together; speaking first of the vertue, propriety, efficacy and nature of all that was served in at the table of bread, of wine, of water, of salt, of fleshes, fishes, fruits, herbs, roots, and of their dressing; by meanes whereof, he learned in a little time all the passages competent for this, that were to be found in *Plinie, Athenoeus, Dioscorides, Julius Pollux, Galen, Porphirie, Oppian, Polybius, Heliodore, Aristotle, Elian*, and others. (76)

Rabelais and Rushdie make a connection between good food, lively discussion, and an education that does not merely reflect the belief system of those in charge.

Moor even notes that food affects an individual's personality, but skips away from making any meaningful conclusions. As in other instances, the narrator is using language to reveal both its limitations and power:

It is true, of course, that in food as in other matters there is much about our personalities that remains opaque. What is one to make of my sisters' united hatred for aubergines, or of my passion for the selfsame brinjal?

What is revealed by my father's preference for mutton or chicken on the bone, and my mother's insistence on nothing but bone-free flesh? (177)

I must confess that I spent considerable time on this passage trying to understand the psychology behind the character's fondness for or dislike of these dishes. What becomes clear is that Rushdie is fond of red herrings. Aubergine derives from Sanskrit and means "*the vegetable that prevents farting* or, more literally, *the vegetable that cures the wind-disorder*" (Morton 136). Moor is, to quote his mother, full of faeces, not theses (3), and his food observations moot. However, "being full of crap" works out to be a carnivalesque compliment.

"Thesis" represents the official, scholastic world, whereas "faeces" represent the unofficial, changing world. The reference to scatological language is an integral dimension of banquet imagery. In grotesque realism, excrement should not be viewed as "trivial" or in the "narrowly physiological connotation of today" (Bakhtin 224). Moor describes himself as a bastard, a shit. "*Baas*, a smell, a stinky poo. *Turd*, no translation required. Ergo, *Bastard*, a smelly shit; like for example, me" (104). Moor invents the etymology of bastard by using formal and slang terms. His self-debasement actually serves to elevate his status. In contrast, the foul-mouthed tirade by his Uncle Aires about the filth of the bazaar reveals Aires' folly: "'This low-class country, Jesus Christ,' Aires-uncle swore at breakfast in his best gaitered and hattered manner. 'Outside world isn't dirtyfilthy enough, eh, eh? Then what frightful bumbolina, what dash-it-all bugger-boy let it in here again? Is this a decent residence, by Jove, or a shithouse excuse-my-French in the bazaar?'" (9). Aires is a "bugger-boy" and frequently visits the marketplace to meet men. Yet, when the noise of that other world enters the sanctity of his Cabral Island home he refuses to acknowledge his alignment with the "shithouse." Rushdie is not making negative commentary about Aires' homosexuality, which he describes as his "capacity for glory" (14),

but about his “real” life as a married, pro-British Christian. Rushdie is disappointed that Aires refuses to unite his “official” and “bazaar” worlds.

The vibrant marketplace of wares and voices is the catalyst for the tale-telling abilities of Moor. The marketplace and the carnival banquet encourage *coq-à-l'âne* speech, and the language of billingsgate and is the perfect setting for telling tales that reflect a distorted, comic picture of the real world. Rushdie’s delivery makes his sombre tale palatable, and to borrow Moor’s lines: “. . . it [is] easy not to feel preached at, to revel in the carnival without listening to the barker, to dance to the music without caring for the message in the song” (227). In Chapter Four, “A War Over Cakes” I will examine the da Gama/Zoigoby history as spice merchants and the manner in which their fantastical tales reflect a shadowy reality of India’s past.

Chapter Four A War Over Cakes

‘The world is a bridge’, said the Mughal emperor Akbar in 1602. ‘Pass over it but build no house upon it.’ Formerly, the peoples of the West had built no theories of racial superiority on the bridge of other people’s worlds. Now they did.

-Reay Tannahill

In this chapter, I will be examining Moor’s family history and the history of India, which intersect because the West decided to colonise the East for spices to flavour food. As Moor states “. . . if it had not been for peppercorns, then what is ending now in East and West might never have begun” (4). Moor’s family benefits from the spice trade that inspired colonialism, but the family splits over political, religious and cultural issues. His ties to history and the spice trade are twisted because of his affiliation with both East and West. From the perspective of the East, Vasco da Gama’s arrival heralded a time of woe. From the perspective of the West, his voyage began an economic, cultural and political golden age. India is a “sub-condiment” not “sub-continent” according to Aurora (5). “‘From the beginning, what the world wanted from bloody mother India was daylight-clear,’ she’d say. ‘They came for the hot stuff just like any man calling on a tart’” (5). Moor inherits a legacy of confusion and hatred as a result of the pepper pot, but fortunately, also a sense of humour. His carnivalesque portrayal of history may be fraudulent, but it is amusing.

Humankind’s search to please the palate, fill the coffer and share religious dogma has resulted in some chaotic world dynamics. Without the lure of peppercorns, the West would not

have built on India's land or defended its theft by claiming racial and religious superiority. In Aurora's aforementioned mural, she paints Vasco da Gama "... setting his first foot on Indian soil, sniffing the air, and seeking out whatever was spicy and hot and made money" (59). When da Gama arrived in the Indies in 1498, he was looking for "Christians and spices" (Tannahill 200). He did not find any Christians, these were imported, but Moor reports that da Gama found spices, cashews, pistachios, coffee beans, and the "mighty tea leaf itself" (Rushdie 5). "Personal fame, the glory of God and a share in the spice trade . . ." (Tannahill 200) are an irresistible combination. The Portuguese maintained their position as spice lords until a group of irate London merchants formed the East India Company in 1599 and "however, unwittingly, the British Indian Empire" (Tannahill 201). While I question the use of the term "unwittingly" to describe India's subjugation, it is important to remember that the British did not invent the concept of the take-over. As mentioned, India has suffered from a variety of invaders, even "Eastern" invaders, greedy for its riches.

The hybridisation of races, language and cookbooks is ancient, and as India shows, with its oddly mixed population speaking many languages and worshipping many Gods and Goddesses, it need not be negative: "CHRISTIANS, PORTUGUESE AND JEWS; Chinese tiles promoting godless views; pushy ladies, skirts-not-saris, Spanish shenanigans, Moorish crowns . . . can this really be India? *Bharat-mata, Hindustan-hamara*, is this the place?" (Rushdie The Moor's Last Sigh 87). In the aforementioned *Vanity Fair* article, Rabbi Ezekiel Isaac Malekar, of the New Delhi synagogue, states that "India is the only country in the world where the Jewish people have never been persecuted" (Hitchens 59). The Indian Constitution recognises thirteen major

languages, approximately three-hundred different languages can be heard daily and for every language there probably exists a version of Indian cuisine (Tannahill 271).

During the decline of the Mughal reign “. . .the traveller from Britain, France, Portugal, Holland or Denmark would have found a number of his compatriots settled comfortably in their trading posts in India, living in semi-Indian style, eating semi-Indian food and begetting semi-Indian children” (Tannahill 272). “A House Divided” begins the story of Moor’s family, and their history illustrates how the eventual picking of sides of the “semi-Indian” children can result in bloody battles. The shame associated with being of mixed race is related to humankind’s belief in the system of purity. According to Douglas, purity is symbolic of a system of classification: “Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity” (35). Moor is ashamed of his lineage and describes himself as a “jewholic-anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was -- what’s the word these days? – *atomised*. Yessir: a real Bombay mix” (104). The exploration of India’s hybrid past is explored through the image of the palimpsest and it is obvious that Rushdie does not support a system of purity.

Often, an individual’s sense of nation or religion is fixed in the past, but the carnivalesque banquet encourages movement away from the closed stories provided by our ancestors. Mainduck does not support this sentiment and is for “the eternal stability of caste” (299). “Shall I speak of our campaign against those out-caste unfortunates, untouchables or Harijans or Dalits, call them what you please, who had in their vanity thought to escape the caste system by

converting to Islam?" (308). Mainduck supports a "religious-nationalist" (337) stance that turns the multifaceted Hindu religion into a "single, martial deity" (338), ignoring the fact that Hinduism is a "many-headed beauty" (338).

The characters that reflect the qualities of the agelast seem to share the inability to acknowledge or recognise the hypocritical, contradictory nature of their claims. Favourable characters like Camoens, Belle, and Aurora manifest a variety of contradictions and unattractive characteristics, but do not presume to impose their world-view on humankind. They recognise that individual preferences should not produce a thesis for global conduct. The yearning for a "pure" India that obviously never existed continues to puzzle Rushdie. Despite available information that proves that India's history is completely mottled, characters continue to see their ancestors as pure, as better than, and separate from the other races.

Flory, Oliver d'Aeth, Epifania and Mainduck all support some type of homogenous club, yet fail to note that many of their preferences contradict their expressed religious or social values. Flory "insists" on the purity of her Jewish ancestors, despite contrary knowledge about her own lineage. Her ancestor apparently fled Spain with the child of Prince Boabdil the Moor in her belly and the crown jewels in her bag (82). Epifania, whose views on Christ's superiority have already been noted, is nonetheless ready to embrace the Hindu religion for cash. Francisco leaves all the money to his sons, but when she discovers that the Hindu faith favours female disposition of family property, she is rumoured to have shouted "*Hai Ram*", called for a "Shiva lingam" and expressed her readiness to jump into the River Ganges "double-quick" (27). Oliver D'Aeth, Reverend of the Church of England, alternately dreams about nude teas or being beaten and

kicked, but still preaches about “continuity” “standards” “the right way” and “God’s road” (94-95). Obviously, the argument of these characters favouring purity is flawed.

The-war-over-cakes episode from Gargantua and Pantagruel is based on what Bakhtin calls “almost a family quarrel” (446) involving Rabelais’ father and some neighbours. The incident prompts the fictional cake-war, but also reflects the political arena of that time (Bakhtin 448). In the novel, King Picrochole uses an isolated incident to justify his campaign to wage war on his surrounding neighbours. When the cake-bakers of King Picrochole are upset that some country shepherds of Grangousier take some cakes, albeit paid for, a war begins. The cake-bakers of Lerne believe their wares too good for Grangousier's people. After being called, amongst other names, “Turdie gut” and “shiten shepherds” by the cake-bakers, one of the shepherds asks:

How long is it since you have got hornes, that you are become so proud? Indeed formerly you were wont to give us some freely, and will you not now let us have any for our money? This is not the part of good neighbours, neither do we serve you thus when you come hither to buy our good corn, whereof you make your cakes and buns. (Rabelais 84)

The war-over-cakes incident is presented with the customary humour of Rabelais, but reflects his unease with the pithy reasons used to wage war. After some fisticuffs, the cake-bakers run home with “their caps all crumpled, their coats torn, their cakes taken away” (87) and complain to their King. Picrochole sets forth to lay waste to the land and to “teach them to eat cakes” (87).

Chapter XXXII is titled *How Grangousier to buy Peace, caused the Cakes to be restored*, but King Picrochole, drunk on the power of his pillaging campaign, refuses peace with Grangousier.

Instead, he fantasises about taking over the world. “*Italy* being thus taken, behold, *Naples*, *Calabria*, *Apulia* and *Sicilie*, all ransacked, and *Malta* too” (102). A greedy desire for more cakes and buns becomes a reason for world domination, but material profit is not acknowledged as the campaign motivator. Instead, history, religion and even class differences are cited as the reason for getting to steal.

The backdrop of carnival imagery highlights the ridiculous claims, fears and violence of agelast characters. Often, in carnival imagery, “the kitchen and the battle meet and cross each other in the image of the rent body” (Bakhtin Rabelais and His World 197). The “battle of the in-laws” (33) from The Moor’s Last Sigh echoes the war-over-cakes episode in Gargantua and Pantagruel. Epifania invites her clan, the Menezes, to help take over the spice business after Francisco’s death, and Aunt Carmen calls in the Lobos to defend her share. The family feud begins with “blows”, “fisticuffs”, “bad language”, pigtail-pulling, bathroom-monopolising and “...bumping and shoving in the queues that formed at mealtimes...” (37). The Lobos and Menezes eventually set fire to the spice fields, and the “unmistakable odour of burning spices, cumin coriander turmeric, red-pepper-black-pepper, red-chilli-green-chilli, a little garlic, a little ginger, some sticks of cinnamon” smelt like “. . . some mountain giant were preparing, in a monstrous pan, the largest, hottest dish of curry ever cooked” (38).

The amusing carnival and culinary imagery that begins the spice war evolves into something more terrifying. The folly of the Lobos and the Menezes turns into madness:

In a torched cashew orchard the bodies of the (Lobo) overseer, his wife and daughters were found, tied to trees with barbed wire: burned, like heretics, at the stake. And in the smouldering ruins of a fertile cardamom grove, the charred

corpses of three Menezes brothers were also found on fire-eaten trees. Their arms were outstretched, and through the centre of their six palms an iron nail had been driven. (40)

The religious executions juxtaposed with the burnt cashew and cardamom trees make it clear that the guilty parties attempt to transform a fight over money and power into sanctioned violence.

This technique is not unique for those wishing to disguise their materialistic greed. Harrison notes:

In assessing the British role and British rule in India, one must acknowledge at the outset that they were undertaken to make a profit and maintained in order to continue to make a profit. It must also be admitted that the British created a denser-than-average smoke screen of hypocrisy to conceal any such motives from others and from themselves and to many Indians their attitude must have been insufferably patronizing. (16)

Rushdie's stance on rooting for the flagrant money-maker is perhaps better understood when confronted with this type of hypocrisy. While Abraham is not a favourable character, he makes no attempt to disguise his purely mercantile interests. The Menezes and Lobos, like the British, refuse to acknowledge that their actions are motivated by profit and create a staged setting, in this case religious, to disguise their greed.

Rushdie uses the battle of the in-laws as a specific event to comment on the global problem of violence. One does not need to travel East or go West to find an enemy. Moor asks: "My family has been under many clouds. What sort of family is this? Is this *normal*? Is this what we are all like?" (40). Rushdie is suggesting that humans exist under some sort of spell:

... [T]here is a thing that bursts out of us at times, a thing that lives in us, eating our food, breathing our air, looking thorough our eyes, and when it comes out to play nobody is immune; possessed, we turn murderously upon one another, thing-darkness in our eyes and real weapons in our hands, neighbour against thing-ridden neighbour, thing-driven cousin against cousin, brother-thing against brother-thing, thing-child against thing-child. (36)

Violence is obviously not rational, yet considerable effort is made to explain humankind's actions. Rushdie reveals that the "Us versus Them" philosophy is a convenient smoke screen to get away with material rewards.

The agelasts who continue to desire domination, such as Picrochole, D'Aeth, Epifania, Flory, and Mainduck, represent the fixed past that must be discarded:

... hypocritical monks, morose slanderers, gloomy agelasts, are killed, rent, beaten, chased, abused, cursed, derided; they are representatives of the old world but also of that two-bodied world that gives birth in death. By cutting off and discarding the old dying body, the umbilical cord of the new youthful world is simultaneously broken. (Bakhtin 206)

The representative of the old world is always punished. Picrochole is caught stealing an ass to flee with after his defeat and is beaten black and blue. He later becomes a "testie" "common" porter waiting for the time of the *Cocklicranes*, the time prophesied to regain his kingdom (Rabelais 139). Obviously, the time of the *Cocklicranes* will never arrive, yet Picrochole is too stupid to acknowledge his defeat.

Rushdie's carnivalisation of the past reveals history's fallibility, but the past is reclaimed through fictional narrative: Nehru is overheard reciting "The Walrus and The Carpenter", Aurora is portrayed as his lover; and the Sultan Boabdil is reinvented as a modern-day Gargantua. When describing a trip to see Mahatma Gandhi, Camoens highlights the babbling crowd buying cucumbers with lime and salt and the cry of the vendors: "*Cucumber for thirst, the best for thirst.*" (55). When Gandhi arrives to chant and pray, Camoens loses interest: "I had seen India's beauty in that crowd with its soda-water and cucumber but with that God stuff I got scared" (55). Rushdie describes many historical personages and scenes with comic flourishes and lies.

Rushdie uses the Rabelaisian grotesque body to make fun of the solemn figure of history. It is difficult to feel awe or terror when history is presented alongside the "triumphant hilarity of the People" (The Moor's Last Sigh 31). In one very comic scene, Moor's grandfather Camoens has trained a group of Indians to impersonate Lenin in the hope of being allowed to join the Special Lenin Troupe. If approved, the Lenins will be allowed to deliver the communist messages of the great man in a language that all Indians can understand. "In Malayalam, Kannada, Tulu, Konkani, Tamil, Telugu and English they proclaimed the revolution, they demanded the immediate departure of the revanchist poodles of colonialism, the blood-sucking cockroaches of imperialism . . ." (31). This Rabelaisian image of exaggeration and contrasts is not appreciated by Comrade Vladimir Ilyich, who calls them a "satirical caricature" despite the eagerness of the actors. "These persons have blackness of skin and their features are not his. Too tall, too short, too fat, too skinny, too lame, too bald, and that one has no teeth" (30). The "Babeling Lenins" cause the crowd in "a great swelling tide, to guffaw" (31).

The Lenin scene is rich in carnival imagery. It represents the carnival's ability to dissolve the boundaries between actors and spectators through the laughing crowd. The aloof stage of history is presented with fairy tale images -- the grinning Seven Dwarf Lenins. This scene also contains scatological imagery: "'This country of yours,' the interpreter replied, 'Vladimir Ilyich tells frankly that it gives to him the shits'" (31). The convoluted grammar of the interpreter demonstrates the "windy" nature of the communist. Communism is a "serious" "dead" philosophy and belongs in the area of the lower stratum to be regenerated. Vladimir will be remembered as a character of history with diarrhoea, not as a figure of awe. Descriptions of historical personages eating, drinking and getting sick are capable of removing the mystique, and fear of history.

By understanding food's ability to control history, Moor discovers the secret of the banquet: "The encounter of man with the world, which takes place inside the open, biting, rending, chewing mouth, is one of the most ancient, and most important objects of human thought and imagery. Here man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself" (Bakhtin 281). To put it more succinctly, in Moor's words: "With yesterday in my tummy, my prospects felt a lot better" (273). Food's power to comfort and put away melancholy helps humans triumph over the world. "This utopian nature of prandial speeches does not separate men from earth; future triumphs are presented in material bodily images of abundance and rebirth (Bakhtin 286). Moor not only learns to be a divine one-handed chef, but also learns a valuable lesson about his own abilities to control his destiny:

So I learned to cook Meat Cutlass (spicy minced lamb inside a potato patty) and Chicken Country Captain; to me the secrets of prawn padda, ticklegummy, dhope

and ding-ding were revealed. I became a master of balchow and learned to spin a mean kaju ball. I learned the art of Ezekiel's 'Cochin Special', a mouth-wateringly piquant red banana jam. And as I journeyed through the cook's copybooks, deeper and deeper into that private cosmos of papaya and cinnamon and spice, my spirits did indeed pick up; not least because I felt that Ezekiel had succeeded in joining me, after a long interruption, to the story of my past. (273)

Moor's understanding of the past becomes more vital when connected with organic images of eating and drinking.

The past is not kept alive only through heroic deeds. In one of his tales, Moor tells of Vasco Miranda's distress after India's invasion of Goa, which had been under Portuguese colonial rule for 451 years. Miranda, a descendant of Goa, is upset by the takeover. To keep the spirit of Portugal alive, he teaches Ezekeil the secrets of Goan cuisine:

We were obliged to eat Goan chourisso sausage and pig's liver sarpotel and pork curries with coconut milk until Aurora complained that we were all starting to turn into pigs; whereupon Vasco returned grinning from the market bearing immense claw-clacking baskets of shellfish and finny-toothy packets of shark. (156)

Miranda shares glorious historical tales of Portuguese rule, sings Portuguese love ballads and shares illegal cashew and coconut feni liquor:

Our days were full of tales of the heroism of Alfonso de Albuquerque who conquered Goa from the Sultan of Bijapur, one Yusuf Adilshah, on St. Catherine's Day, 1510; and of Vasco da Gama, too. 'A pepper-spice family like yours should

understand how I feel,' . . . Ours is a common history; what do these Indian soldiers know about it?' . . . 'Down with Mother India,' he cried dismissively, striking an attitude, while I giggled under my sheet. 'Viva Mother Portugoose!'"(156).

Forty days into the revolution, Aurora declares that “history will proceedofy” (156). Aurora recognises that tales of glory and heroism are only good to a point. She has a vital connection with the notion of carnivalesque time that Miranda does not understand. He is stuck in the past when the Portuguese ran the show.

The words at the banquet, according to Bakhtin, are linked with the future and the hope for better days. This festive voice is liberated from the “shackles of the past and present” (286). Although Aurora initially admires Vasco Miranda’s appetite for food, sex and drink, she learns that he does not appreciate his bounties. At the feast to celebrate India’s Independence, Vasco drinks large amounts of vinho verde, but mocks the event and calls the diners: “English-medium misfits,” “Minority group members,” and “Useless fucking art-johnny clever-dicks” (165-166). He advises the motley group to leave India: “Get on the boats with the British! Just get on the bleddy boats and *bugger* off. This place has no use for you. It’ll beat you and eat you” (167). Vasco believes he is exempt from having to catch the British boat because he is Portuguese (167). Miranda is disconnected from the rejuvenating power of the banquet.

Events of the past contrast with the notion of time as expressed at the carnival. Moor’s grandmother Flory, of the ancient Cochin Jews, only remembers the good times before the “Christy” da Gamas arrived: “But her gaze was still far away in the past, fixed upon Jewish cashews and areca-nuts and jack-fruit trees, upon the ancient waving fields of Jewish oilseed rape, the gathering of Jewish cardamoms, for had these not been the basis of the community’s

prosperity?" (71). She grumbles that the Christian "come latelies" stole the pepper business that the Jews and Moors legitimately fought over. Abraham, upset that his "Christy" bride is assaulted, retorts that the "come-lately Johnny" was the White Jew and that the Black Jew arrived first (71). Obviously someone must always come before, but the irreparable quarrel between mother and son shows how the belief in the past can divide a family in the present. To Rushdie, history is subjective and unreliable: "History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge" (Imaginary Homelands 25).

Rushdie refuses to glorify India. He does not believe in nationalism, although nationalism can be the catalyst for lovely meals. Sharing recipes and participating in the "banquet for all" is one solution to the chaos that defines the world. Brillat-Savarin describes this utopia: "Tables which seemingly never end are set up in all the streets in every square and before every great building. A man can sit down wherever he may find himself: chance brings differing age and social rank and religion together, and everywhere are seen the cordial handclasp of true friendliness, and its open unsuspecting face" (338). Participants at the carnival banquet are not impressed by rank, ancestry, race, age or wealth. The past has no power at the carnival banquet, which symbolises the hopeful future.

Conclusion “Cooking The Future”

‘Baba sahib, sit only and we will cook up the happy future. We will mash its spices and peel its garlic cloves, we will count out its cardamoms and chop its ginger, we will heat up the ghee of the future and fry it masala to release its flavour. Joy! Success in his enterprises for the Sahib, genius in her pictures for the Madam, and a beautiful bride for you! We will cook the past and present and from it tomorrow will come.

-Salman Rushdie

This recipe for cooking the future defeats the past, revels in the present and looks toward a utopian world. Moor learns that he may control his destiny by envisioning a successful future. Ezekiel’s prediction comes true: Abraham has a successful business, Aurora is hailed as a genius, and Moor’s betrothed, Nadia Wadia, is a beauty queen. While the happy future that Ezekiel and Moor create does not last, this does not negate food’s power to bring joy and hope. Rushdie’s own frightening experience on the stage of history prompts his refusal to allow Moor to be vanquished.

Moor begins his ending by sharing his hope for better days:

See: here is my flask. I’ll drink some wine; and then, like a latter-day Van Winkle, I’ll lay me down upon this graven stone, lay my head beneath these letters RIP, and close my eyes, according to our family’s old practice of falling asleep in times of trouble, and hope to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time.

(433-434)

Hoping to wake, joyful, in a better time is completely compatible with the images of carnival. In contrast, the fixed, final form of the past allows only longing, backward glances to a time that is no longer accessible. It is obvious that Rabelais, Bakhtin and Rushdie are not convinced that the past was a golden age. The past is often used to justify unattractive behaviours, which these authors will not allow to go unchallenged.

The carnival champions the organic. Eating, drinking, copulating, birthing, and dying are not considered mundane topics. Joyous participation in these events, that are common to all of humanity, reveals the bond between individuals. Unfortunately, individuals like Mainduck, Epifania and Flory do not understand this link. They assume that they are separate from, and better than, the rest of humanity. Yet, as revealed by Rushdie, the agelasts are inseparable from the new world. Nothing old may remain and these three characters end their reign unaware of their folly. "They [agelasts] continue to talk with the majestic tone of kings and heralds announcing eternal truths, unaware that time has turned their speeches into ridicule" (Bakhtin 213). The ability to ridicule the speeches of the agelast is connected with the organic and its ability to promote laughter.

The carnival, then, is the ideal place for Rushdie to promote his historical, political and social views. Here, he may challenge orthodoxies, and tell of his ideas about love, language and nation. At the carnival, men and women fall in pepper love, barkers teach through lies, and history is debased. All of humankind, including those amongst us with grotesque features, is welcome at Rushdie's carnival. The king not only rubs elbows with the fool, but also may be supplanted by him. At the carnival, the boundary between art and life is blurred. Truth and fiction weave to create something more beautiful than either.

The new world is often born through love. The pepper love that these characters share, as noted, does not provoke compatibility, but must be applauded because it is fearless. Abraham and Aurora defy social convention and unite. The ultimate failure of their relationship does not negate what inspires their union: a fierce passion that transcends etiquette and is grounded in basic human activities. Pepper does not guarantee a successful union, but it provokes a type of love that refuses to be cowed by nationality, age or religious dogma. Failed love, as Moor notes, is greater than no love at all since it is:

. . .like a testament to lost but sweetest love, to the love that endures beyond defeat, beyond annihilation, beyond despair; to the defeated love that is greater than what defeats it, to the most profound of our needs, to our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self. (433)

Love triumphs in this novel and it heralds future hopes of abundance and rebirth.

The carnivalesque delivery of Moor's story is also inspired by food. His talents as chef are in part because of genetics, but also because Moor learns to love food. By learning to cook, he becomes a master of his destiny, as is made obvious by his tale-telling abilities. The reader must never forget that Moor is telling a story. He is making the whole thing up. This is Moor's tale, and there are a considerable number of lies evident in this novel. *Coq-à-l'âne*, from rooster to ass, becomes a delightful vehicle for inverting truth, reason and history for the benefit of story. Tales are more important than gloomy seriousness; the rooster becomes the ass, and provokes laughter.

As noted, Bakhtin believes that there is an ancient tie between the feast, the spoken word and the future. “The banquet takes place, as it were, in a new epoch. And one might say that the carnival banquet was also held in the utopian future, in the Saturnian age come back to earth. Gay, triumphal time speaks in the language of banquet images” (Bakhtin 301). Rushdie also acknowledges this connection, hence the many references to eating, drinking and telling stories. When dining and drinking, people talk, laugh and share ideas for the future.

Banquet images and the carnivalesque body are also capable of restoring the human element of history. The laughing crowd mocks the aloof stage of history. There is no division between the actors and the spectators. Rushdie reveals the fallibility of historical characters by portraying their humanness: these people also eat, drink and love. The family, cultural and religious squabbles that both Rushdie and Rabelais describe are presented by using the grotesque body and banquet images. As noted, this provokes laughter, which can dispel the gloomy seriousness of history.

It is obvious that Rushdie has been a participant at the carnival for some time. His characters exist in that remarkable realm where the banquet is held for the entire world. The Moor's Last Sigh is a delightful story that uses images of eating to remind the reader that life is, and will continue to be, lovely, despite considerable opposition.

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