

The Nabob of Bhanipur comes of age: a study of a fictional icon and its post-colonial after-life

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ABSTRACT

The character Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, from Frank Richards's schoolboy fiction is considered in the broader context of Richards's construction of the ethnic Other and found to be relatively inoffensive. Salman Rushdie's criticism of the Nabob character is shown to owe more to misinterpretations such as George Orwell's in "Boys' Weeklies" than to the original character. The Nabob icon is found to be composed of three attributes: his intelligence, his idiosyncratic English and his cricketing prowess. In imagological terms, the counter-image (Indian) is too close to the self-image (English) for it to be offensive. What is more, Rushdie's attempts to kill off the icon in *The Moor's Last Sigh* were bound to fail as the very attributes of the allegedly offensive Nabob have become part of the Indian's own self image, a self-image Rushdie's own novel celebrates.

I.

In his essay 'Imaginary Homelands' (1982) Salman Rushdie writes:

In common with many Bombay-raised middle-class children of my generation, I grew up with an intimate knowledge of, and even sense of friendship with, a certain kind of England: a dream-England composed of Test Matches at Lord's presided over by the voice of John Arlott, at which Freddie Trueman bowled unceasingly and without success at Polly Umrigar; of Enid Blyton and Billy Bunter, in which we were even prepared to smile indulgently at portraits such as 'Hurree Jamset Ram Singh', 'the dusky nabob of Bhanipur'. [...] Recently, on a live radio programme, a professional humorist asked me, in all seriousness, why I objected to being called a

wog. He said he had always thought it a rather charming word, a term of endearment. 'I was at the zoo the other day', he revealed, 'and a zoo keeper told me that the wogs were best with the animals; they stuck their fingers in their ears and wiggled them about and the animals felt at home.' The ghost of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh walks among us still¹.

The present writer, too, nurtured a dream-image of India, composed of similar elements: Test Match commentaries travelling the airwaves above the continents (Freddie Trueman now a co-commentator of Arlott's), sparking images under bed-clothes of white oxen dragging the roller across the bowling strip; the Nabob of Bhanipur was a constant companion, and *The Jungle Book* made up for Enid Blyton's silence on the matter of India. Thus two middle-class schoolboys, one in India, one in England, both had their visions of an alien, other land filtered largely through the same sources. Except that the present writer, brought up in an area rich in immigrant communities and educated at a primary school where a third of the class wore a different colour of skin, had the dream-image corrected daily by the reality around him, not to mention the periodic news reports of disaster (natural or of man's own devising) that emanated from the subcontinent. In the days of his Bombay childhood Rushdie, too, cannot have been unaware of the English presence in his daily life, which must also surely have acted as a corrective to his dream-image of England. Rushdie admits that it was an image of only "a certain kind of England", and once boarding at Rugby School one imagines the dream soon faded. But for our purposes it is interesting that Rushdie's image of "a certain kind of England" was mediated by precisely the same sources which provided many a middle-class English boy with his image of "a certain kind of India". This raises important questions about the transmission of ideas of alterity, about the literary construction of the Other, and about our own creation of our own self-images and the counter-images of others.

This paper will first take the figure of Frank Richards's Nabob² and expose it to scrutiny in the context of Richards's negotiation of the ethnic Other in his schoolboy fictions, then examine George Orwell's reaction to the Nabob, and finally assess Rushdie's apparent efforts to lay the Nabob's ghost in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. In one sense this will be an exercise in imagology: taking for granted the fact that 'national identity is an image rather than an essential quality' and that 'national identity is no ontological category, but a form of cultural production', imagologists seek to analyse images of ethnicity (among other images) as cultural products. Literary images are deemed especially useful as the writer of fiction is usually less subject to constraints, such as those demanded in a letter to a newspaper, or indeed in a newspaper article. As his aim is not necessarily to reproduce objective reality, the writer of fiction is free to distort, to exaggerate, to 'silhouette', and the English writer of fiction is thus

able, in short, ‘to highlight Englishness by constructing types of antagonist-foreignness which best serve his purpose’³. Preferring the term ‘icon’ to ‘image’, and adopting the practice of iconographers, the Nabob will be seen to be an icon recognisable by his several attributes, in other words, this image of Indianness is an amalgam of several accidental (not essential) qualities. By studying not only the icon itself, but also the extra-literary significance of its attributes, it will be seen that the Nabob is not a monovalent signifier, but rather an ambivalent counter pushed hither and thither across the gaming-board of post-colonial conflict, at once manipulated to serve, but also finally transcending, the interests of post-colonial political or racial claim-making.

II.

Hurree Janset Ram Singh is a character from Frank Richards’s series of schoolboy fictions set in the ivy-clad public school Greyfriars, whose most celebrated intern is Billy Bunter, omnivore and inveterate fibber, fat owl, cormorant, footling and frabjous ass, but nonetheless always somehow vital to the working out of the plot. Richards is certainly one of this century’s most prolific English writers. From 1908, week after week he churned out 20,000 word stories of capers and high jinks at Greyfriars for the magazine *The Magnet*. Paper shortages led to the comic’s demise in 1940, but Greyfriars returned triumphantly after the Second World War in a series of thirty-eight longer hardback novels that kept Richards occupied until his death on Christmas Eve 1961. The stories have been reprinted—there is even a series of facsimile editions—up to the nineties, and although one suspects readership is falling off, it is not improbable that the men of the Greyfriars Remove will, in the not too distant future, notch up a century of unbroken publication. More remarkable is the fact that ‘Frank Richards’ was only one of the pen-names adopted by writer Charles Hamilton. As ‘Martin Clifford’ he wrote, week by week, year after year, of events at St Jims’ for *The Gem*. George Orwell, in the first edition of his well-known essay ‘Boys’ Weeklies’ (1940) doubted that even the Greyfriars series could be the work of just one author; in a note to the 1945 revision he admits, “These stories [of Greyfriars and St Jims’] have been written throughout the whole period by ‘Frank Richards’ and ‘Martin Clifford’, who are one and the same person!” (177-8). Orwell’s incredulous exclamation mark gives some idea of the sheer size of Hamilton’s output. After the Second World War, a series of book-length St Jims’ stories also appeared, not to mention a new series of 20,000 worders set at Sparshott School, nor the appearance of Billy Bunter’s sister Bessie in her own series of adventures (author ‘Hilda Richards’), or some sorties into the Wild West (author ‘Rex Dixon’).

Such an extraordinary output does not make for great literature, and Orwell quite rightly berates the “extraordinary, artificial, repetitive style, quite different from anything else now existing in English literature” (179); so many pages could only be filled over so many years by dint of a style that is formulaic and a content that is endlessly self-plagiarising. But Richards’s prolific scribaciousness does indicate the existence of a market for such stories, above all the stories of public-school life. And as Orwell notes (183-4, 187), the market was incredibly diverse with readers of all ages, classes and both sexes feasting avidly on these tales of privileged adolescents’ exploits. The Captain of the Remove, Harry Wharton, even found himself obliged to answer readers’ queries in a letters page at the end of each issue of the *Magnet* on such matters as the brand of cigarette smoked by one of the more disreputable characters (user of cigarettes=’smoky bounder’=’bad egg’) or which character most resembled the correspondent in terms of physical stature: pre-war comic comes close to post-modern fanzine. To account for the stories’ success, Orwell speaks of the “glamour”, the “snob-appeal” and, more politically, the opportunity for the less-privileged to escape into “that mystic world of quadrangle and house-colours” which is in the real world forever out of bounds (182).

The main burden of Orwell’s attack on the fantasy world peddled by the *Magnet* and the *Gem* has to do with lack of realism. First of all, the schools seem to exist in a time capsule where nothing has changed since their first appearance more than thirty years before, neither the language —“the boys are now using slang which is at least thirty years out of date” (179), nor “the atmosphere”:

The mental world of the *Gem* and *Magnet*, therefore, is something like this: The year is 1910 - or 1949, but it is all the same. [...] Everything is safe, solid and unquestionable. Everything will be the same for ever and ever and ever. That, approximately, is the atmosphere. (188-9)

However, in the light of Orwell’s comments elsewhere on “the immobility of the public schools, which have barely altered since the eighties of the last century”, it is hardly fair of him to level the charge that in Greyfriars and St Jims’ nothing changes at the stories’ author: Orwell seems guilty of shooting the messenger⁴. Secondly, Orwell is suspicious of the almost total absence of any external reality —no sex, for example, no references to Hitler: “The working classes only enter into the *Gem* and *Magnet* as comics or semi-villains (race-course touts, etc). As for class-friction, trade unionism, strikes, slumps, unemployment, Fascism and civil war - not a mention.” (188) To which one might add, no school food, no bullying, no homesickness (in fact a complete absence of family, except for uncles who are either sinister or good sports), no homoeroticism (despite a whiff of its presence in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*,

one of the more illustrious predecessors of Greyfriars and St Jim's, and set at the school which Rushdie was to attend a century later). In fact if one combs the stories, occasional flotsam and jetsam may be found washed up from the outside world: cricketers Grace, Hobbs and Bradman; Montgomery, hero of North Africa; post-Second World War restrictions on taking money out of the country; and so on. But on the whole, this is escapist fiction, and potential readers will hardly be tempted to run away to school if what they get once safely ensconced within those hallowed precincts is precisely what they were running from in the first place.

Orwell is right to signal the variety of "carefully graded characters" (185) as the means by which the reader is lured into the fiction. Richards creates a host of types, with at least one of whom virtually any reader will be happy to identify. More or less aristocratic, more or less athletic, more or less studious, more or less rowdy...; and from all parts —Wales, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Yorkshire, Lancashire, the United States, Australia, India... Even if it is true that Billy Bunter is "one of the best-known figures in English fiction", Orwell is perhaps a little generous when he writes that "by a debasement of the Dickens technique a series of stereotyped 'characters' has been built up, in several cases very successfully" (179). (By some happy coincidence, Rushdie acknowledges a debt to Dickens with respect to the technique whereby "he places entirely surrealistic, exaggerated characters against completely naturalistic, very closely observed backgrounds. So he makes his characters look like animated cartoons against the documentary..."⁵) For obvious reasons, character (if the term may be used) is static, and each character has his defining attributes so that the regular reader may immerse himself instantly into the story, and the new reader will immediately acquire complete knowledge of the fellows whose acquaintance he is making for the first time. Here the analogy with the technique of Renaissance painting is useful. "See that guy with the fish in his hand? —That's Tobias." Or, "See that guy accompanied by that other guy with the fish in his hand? —That's Saint Raphael." The figure in the painting is identified by the motifs that accompany it, or by its attributes⁶. For the attributes to function, they must be widely recognised and their significance must be generally accepted and understood. So it is with characterisation in serial novels, or series of schoolboy fiction. Such a technique is inoffensive when the character is one of us, when it constitutes a composite self-image of a self that for political or economic reasons enjoys a large degree of self-confidence and security (Bob Cherry is hearty and has big feet, Johnny Bull is a pig-headed member of the bulldog breed, Byronic Vernon-Smith is reckless, smokes but is noble at heart, Bunter is fat and a liar), but it becomes problematic when the character is one of them, 'other', when the technique is deployed to construct a counter-image of a counter-self which is at an economic, political or (perceived) racial disadvantage.

After observing that “naturally the politics of the *Gem* and *Magnet* are Conservative” and that “in reality their basic political assumptions are two: nothing ever changes, and foreigners are funny” (187), Orwell provides his well-known guide for the identification of Richards’s foreign character-types:

In papers of this kind it occasionally happens that when the setting of a story is in a foreign country some attempt is made to describe the natives as individual human beings, but as a rule it is assumed that foreigners of any one race are all alike and will conform more or less exactly to the following patterns:

Frenchman: Excitable. Wears beard, gesticulates wildly.

Spaniard, Mexican, etc.: Sinister, treacherous.

Arab, Afghan, etc.: Sinister, treacherous.

Chinese: Sinister, treacherous. Wears pigtail.

Italian: Excitable. Grinds barrel-organ or carries stiletto.

Swede, Dane, etc.: Kind-hearted, stupid.

Negro: Comic, very faithful. (188)

As far as the Greyfriars characters are concerned, two are notably absent from Orwell’s inventory: Fisher T. Fish, the Remove’s American loan-shark and pawnbroker, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur. To mention this absence is no mere quibble, but rather to point to Orwell’s manipulation of the evidence. Quite possibly, after Billy Bunter himself, Fisher T. Fish and the Nabob are Richards’s two most fully individuated and memorable characters — and they are foreign. Fisher T. Fish may well, as Orwell suggests, speak the language of “the old-style stage Yankee” (187), guessing and reckoning and calculating his way to financial success in the unpromising market of pocket-money, postal orders, cricket bats and watches, and he may well represent English misgivings about the business acumen of their transatlantic rivals; but he also receives some of Richards’s purplest prose:

How even Billy Bunter, with all his well-known skill as a borrower, had ever succeeded in borrowing a shilling from Fisher T. Fish, was rather a mystery. Fishy was not the man to lend anybody anything, if he could help it. Orpheus, with his lute, drew iron tears down Pluto’s face: but with the aid of a complete orchestra, he could hardly have drawn a loan [an unsecured loan, one understands] from Fisher Tarleton Fish. (*Billy Bunter’s Postal Order* 29-30)

When, in his remarks quoted above, Rushdie juxtaposes the reference to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and the wog-calling anecdote, one infers that he takes both to be offensive, even if not necessarily equally offensive. Before considering the character of the Nabob in some detail, it might be productive first to analyse Richards’s treatment of the Negro to permit comparison with his treatment of the Indian. The Negro does figure in Orwell’s list, and it is true that to our eyes Richards has a pretty sorry record on the matter, although his

stance does admit of gradation. *Billy Bunter in Brazil* (1949) finds the Famous Five (Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh), together with their rich and aristocratic chum Lord Mauleverer and Billy Bunter, who has somehow wangled a free ride, in Brazil, where a cousin of Mauleverer's manages a plantation. Despite the family connection, Mauleverer is effortlessly ignorant about South American geography (though his chums fill him in on such specific points as the names of rivers); but Richards's own knowledge is hardly much deeper, relying on vague generalization and cliché:

The mere idea of speeding over the rolling Atlantic in a fast plane, of landing in the fabulous city of Rio, of a run up-country in the strange wild land of Brazil, of canoeing on a South American river, roaming in the vast primeval forests, riding on the boundless plains, was not only attractive -it was just gorgeous! (*Brazil* 15).

The vastness of Brazil is, it seems, perfectly tameable by a handful of high-spirited English fourteen year-olds, presenting no more of a challenge than would 'a run-up country' beyond the leafy lanes of England's suburban south-east or an afternoon's 'roaming' in the Kentish Downs. The landscape of the Other, thus controllable, is instantly domesticated, and Richards's language inadvertently legitimises European exploitation of, in this case, a former Portuguese colony. One might compare Richards's description of Africa ("the Dark Continent", *Brazil* 38) as the chums fly over it, as another instance of an alterity mediated and assimilated, rendered fit for consumption, by piling up comfortable and comforting clichés:

Looking down, they could see nothing but darkness, but they knew that Africa was below -old Moorish cities, sandy deserts, stony ranges of mountains, shadowy jungles where the lion stalked and leopard crept, were buried in the night more than a mile below. (*Brazil* 37)

Once in Brazil, several types of foreigner are met: Martinho Funcho, smoker of "decidedly strong" black tobacco (and therefore a decidedly bad character) is also given to outbursts of "savage" temper: "'They have hot tempers in these hot countries' said Lord Mauleverer, tolerantly. 'But Funcho's seems a spot over the limit'" (*Brazil* 85). Occasionally he is called "Dago", though not universally —the term only escapes the lips of Bunter who knows no better, and bullish Johnny Bull with the bit between his teeth. Then there are the native Indian paddlers who row the chums up their river and about whom only Bunter, from a position of shaded ease, has a bad word to say:

The Indian paddlers were not hurrying themselves. Nobody in Brazil ever hurried. It was not a climate for hurry. But they had been paddling for hours, steadily

driving the large, heavy dug-out against the sluggish current. They were in the sun-blaze, protected only by big grass-hats, while the passengers sat under the shade of the awning. Nobody but Bunter was disposed to tell them to drive harder at the paddles.

‘Never saw such a lazy lot,’ went on Bunter. (*Brazil* 64)

Finally, there is the “steward, butler, and major-domo” Tio Jose, “a portly black man, black as the ace of spades, with an expansive smile that revealed flashing white teeth” (*Brazil* 73) and an inveterate bower:

Like other inhabitants of Brazil whom they had encountered, the dark gentleman seemed to have a spring in his back. Portly as he was, he bowed, and bowed, and bowed, as if wound up. (*Brazil* 73)

So a slightly comic figure whose blackness and servility is constantly rubbed in: “his jet black countenance wreathed in respectful smiles”, “his dutiful sable hands” (*Brazil* 74). It is only Bunter, once more, who addresses Tio Jose in language that is openly offensive:

‘Tell the nigger to bring some honey, Mauly.’

Lord Mauleverer fixed his eyes on a sticky fat face.

‘I wouldn’t use that word here, Bunter,’ he said, quietly. ‘It’s offensive to coloured people.’

Bunter blinked at him.

‘Oh, really, Mauly! Niggers are niggers, I suppose.’

‘Will you shut up, Bunter?’ asked Bob.

‘No, I won’t! Look here, Mauly, you jolly well tell that nigger to bring some honey,’ said Bunter, irritably. (*Brazil* 79)

We are informed that on hearing the word ‘nigger’ Tio Jose’s “beaming smile was wiped from his black face as if by a duster”, and then Lord Mauleverer, as host to the party, comments on the awkwardness of his position. On the one hand he’d like to kick Bunter for offending Tio Jose, but to do so would be to contravene the standards of good behaviour regarding the correct treatment of guests: “Bunter’s my guest here, and I can’t kick him.” The defence of etiquette (civilised conduct between equals) makes a stronger claim upon the young aristocrat than the need for any exemplary punishment for a racist insult (luckily Bob Cherry’s big feet weigh in and save the day). With the exception of Bunter,

The Greyfriars juniors [...] liked the plump, obliging, smiling black gentleman, and they liked, too, the total absence of anything like a ‘colour bar’ in Brazil. Most of the servants at the quinta were coloured, but some of them were white, or half-white; all, however, treated Tio Jose with the greatest respect, and evidently did not

even know that in other countries the colour of his skin would have made a difference. (*Brazil* 74)

So far, then, so enlightened: Tio Jose is a loveable sort, especially as he is so obliging and respectful; and he should count his blessings that the whimsical tides of colonialism and slaving have washed him up in Brazil and not in some other land.

A land like England, for example. Let us recall, for a moment, the sentence with which Orwell prefaced his list of racial stereotypes: “In papers of this kind it occasionally happens that when the setting of a story is in a foreign country some attempt is made to describe the natives as individual human beings”. Tio Jose is more or less recognisably human in far-off (out of sight, out of mind) Brazil. But when the Negro sets foot on English soil, his fate takes a turn for the worse. Passing for a moment from Greyfriars to St. Jim’s, there is a chapter in *D’Arcy on the Warpath* (1952) entitled ‘Black Man!’ Ralph Reckness Cardew has had the contents of a study chimney raked down upon him by two members of the rival house and, with his face “blacker than that of an inhabitant of Central Africa” (*Warpath* 48), he runs through the school in frantic search of a bath to wallow in. The whole of St. Jim’s is mobilised to apprehend the supposed intruder (“Stop! Do you hear? Who are you? What are you doing here?”); the ‘black figure’, disruptive of the serenity, the order that normally prevails in the august quadrangles, is variously called ‘nigger’, ‘wild nigger’ and is described by Arthur Augustus D’Arcy, the swell of St. Jim’s (and one of the leading recipients of fan-mail in the *Gem*, as Orwell notes), as “Black as the ace of spades, deah boy—the blackest niggah I have evah seen” (*Warpath* 54). What is significant is that on this occasion, back in England, the ‘colour bar’ does seem to be in position, and the name-calling is indulged in not only by Bunter-types, but by all types. The whole chapter is a sorry chorus of raucous racial abuse. The negro, it seems, is a fine fellow, but at arm’s length and in a position of imposed abasement.

Before turning our attention at last to the Nabob, it might be interesting to pause and consider what constitutes the nature of racially offensive language. In the episode quoted above, Mauleverer adopts the term ‘coloured’ as preferable to ‘nigger’. In the late forties, it undoubtedly was, but now it is deemed almost as offensive as ‘nigger’, and ‘black’ is generally preferred as being, precisely, a marker of difference, a difference to be proud of (one thinks of the Black Pride movement, with its more recent analogue, Gay Pride). But why should ‘nigger’ or ‘coon’ as applied to people of African origin seem somehow more offensive than other offensive terms such as ‘Pakkie’ or ‘Smellie’, used for Pakistanis. Apart from any culturally nuanced associations blackness might have in Christian societies with evil, ‘nigger’ is a term that refers directly to an essential attribute: blackness, the colour of one’s skin, is

something irreversible, something perdurable –as Bunter says, “Niggers are niggers”. The tautology of Bunter’s formulation strikes to the heart of the problem of offensive language: when there is no possibility for the link between signifier and signified to be broken, when black is undeniably black, and a black person is abused precisely for being what he/she inescapably is, the offense is most powerful, because the term is irrefutable. By comparison, a Pakistani is only a ‘Pakkie’ by an accident of history; a ‘Pakkie’ may become British, may be born British, and thus the offense is only against the accidental attribute of having one’s origins in some politically constructed other space called Pakistan. Even the term ‘smellie’ only refers to accidental attributes, the combination of oils and spices that are not native to British practices of personal hygiene or gastronomy. While one is inured to one’s own odour, and the odour of one’s own people, the odour of another people is instantly noticeable: an Englishman strap-hanging on a bus in Rome will be aware of the smell of garlic, while an Italian sardine-packed on the Tube may well detect an aroma of fried breakfasts. The racial stereotype depends on the identification of the accidental with the essential: accidents of history have sold blacks into slavery, therefore blacks are servile. Pakistanis flavour their food with aromatic spices which are then exuded by the pores in the skin; therefore Pakistanis are ‘smellies’. But the offense of ‘nigger’ is greater than that of ‘smellie’ because the stereotypes forged of accidentals are located in the essential attribute of black skin, whereas the stereotypes of the Pakistani are still at one remove from being located in the essential attribute of brown skin. Remove his accidental attributes and the Pakistani is a Pakistani, different only for belonging to a differently named political region; remove a black’s accidentals and he is still black. Why the commonest terms of abuse for Pakistanis or Indians make no reference to any essential attribute such as skin colour is not clear, but the consequences are plain: ‘Nigger’, by attacking an essential, is more offensive than accidental-oriented ‘pakkie’ or ‘smelly’.

III.

This brings us to Hurree Janset Ram Singh: Was Rushdie right to take offence at Richards’s portrayal of the Nabob of Bhanipur? How offensive really is Richards’s characterisation? Orwell provides us with two clues: first, as we have seen, the Indian is missing from his list of racial stereotypes; secondly, at one point Orwell remarks upon Richards’s virtual pensioning-off of the Chinese boy, Wun Lung, suggesting that “he has rather faded of late, no doubt because some of the *Magnet’s* readers are Straits Chinese” (187-8). In other words, an offensive Chinese stereotype would lead to a fall-off in Far Eastern sales. But, presumably, the *Magnet* was also being read in India when

Orwell was writing his essay; certainly, a few years later, Rushdie claims to have been reading it in his Bombay childhood. Either Orwell's surmising as to Wun Lung's demise is incorrect, or Richards's Nabob is not in fact offensive.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh is the Nabob of Bhanipur⁷, "a rajah, and therefore possessing snob-appeal", Orwell tells us (187). Orwell adds that he is "the comic babu of the *Punch* tradition", before citing some examples of his idiosyncratic speech. Certainly, Hurree's speech is his most salient defining attribute. The Greyfriars stories are in great part composed of dialogue, and it is often the case that a character may instantly be identified by his speech mannerisms (Mauly's drawl, Bunter's constant "I say you fellows", D'Arcy's lazy 'r'). Hurree's speech is peculiarly his own on two accounts: first, he is creatively heedless of rules governing the combination of stems and affixes, typically attaching two noun affixes to a concrete noun-stem to make that noun abstract, instead of adding one affix to the adjectivised noun ('jamfulness' instead of 'jamminess') or forming adverbs from his own misconceived adjectives ("Scalp him baldheadfully" instead of 'baldheadedly'); secondly, he has a metaphysical way with English proverbs, either rephrasing the original in his own affix-ridden way ("the lateness is superior to the neverfulness"=better late than never; "if the if-fulness and the andfulness were the potfulness and the panfulness"=if ifs and ands were pots and pans...) or violently and haphazardly yoking together elements from different sayings and adages to improvise his own baroque variations: "A nod is as good as a wink to the pitcher that goes longest to the well" (*Secret Enemy* 36), "It is the early bird that goes longest to the well and saves a stitch in time, as the English proverb remarks" (*Greyfriars* 70), "Speech is silvery, my esteemed Johnny, but silence is the bird in the bush that makes Jack a dull boy [...]. A still tongue is an Englishman's castle, as another English proverb remarkably observes" (*Blue Mauritius* 63). The effect is, of course, comic, but endearing rather than ridiculing. The Nabob may indeed mangle his proverbs (like many an advanced student of English), but he also possesses a more sophisticated vocabulary than the rest of his English chums, using words such as 'execrable', 'veracity', 'foregone conclusion', '*sine qua non*', 'procrastination' (as in "Punctuality is the procrastination of princes"), 'ludicrous'; and so on.

In a standard dialogue, Hurree's contribution will come last, capping as it were the sequence of exchanges, most often with his catchphrase "the ~ness is terrific". The effect of this is to lend his words a finality, which, together with the weight lent to them by his polysyllabic verbal inventiveness and concatenated idioms, bestows upon them a certain air of authority. In fact, it is often left to Hurree to have the final say when his chums are in doubt as to the best way to proceed; he is regarded as a source of wisdom, whose counsel is the sagest. One of many such instances is to be found in *Billy Bunter and the Blue Mauritius* (1952), when the Famous Five are in danger of being caught

out of bounds by their form-master Quelch, and are unsure whether the best course of action is to run for it or lay low in the bushes:

‘Cut!’ suggested Bob Cherry.

‘Rot!’ said Johnny Bull.

‘Um!’ said Frank Nugent.

‘What do you think, Inky?’ asked Harry Wharton.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shook his dusky head.

‘The cutfulness is not the proper caper, my esteemed chum! The worthy and ludicrous Quelch would be infuriated.’ (62)

The Nabob’s wisdom is not, however, limited to questions of schoolboy strategy. He is also morally wise, alert to deeper questions of right and wrong which his chums may overlook. Thus, when Bunter, threatened with expulsion unless he mends his ways, asks around for advice on how to secure a good report from Mr Quelch, it is Hurree who suggests Bunter attend to the ethical flaw that lies beneath the more superficial faults to which the other members of the Famous Five allude:

‘I’m for it!’ [Bunter] said, ‘unless I can get round Quelch. I’m done for unless he gives me a good report this term. What can a fellow do?’

‘That’s an easy one,’ said Johnny Bull. ‘A fellow could chuck up being a fat, lazy, footling frowster!’

‘Oh, really, Bull—.’

‘You could chuck up dodging games,’ suggested Bob Cherry.

‘Oh, really, Cherry—.’

‘You could do your prep, instead of frowsting in the armchair in No. 7 while Toddy and Dutton do theirs!’ suggested Frank Nugent.

‘Oh, really, Nugent—.’

‘You could chuck up snooping tuck in other fellows’ studies!’ suggested Wharton.

‘You could chuck up the execrable fibfulness, and try your hand at esteemed veracity!’ suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. (*Greyfriars* 54)

This sagacity is linked to a perceptiveness and intelligence which none of Hurree’s companions can boast. On the flight to Brazil, it is the Nabob who produces a pocket chessboard: we are told that “Harry Wharton strove to keep his end up at that game with the dusky nabob of Bhanipur”, the implication being that he was not quite able to (*Brazil* 37-8). Hurree is possessed of a ‘keenness’, of powers of ‘penetration’ that set him apart from his chums and fit him out for the role of schoolboy detective when it is his turn to be “foregrounded” (Orwell’s term) in the stories. It is Hurree who, in *Billy Bunter in Brazil*, solves the mystery of Mauly’s missing cousin, interpreting clues and making deductions that escape the rest; it is Hurree who, in *Billy Bunter and*

the Secret Enemy, is able to interpret the actions of Arthur Da Costa in his efforts to engineer Wharton's expulsion: "Always [Da Costa] had feared the nabob, the only fellow at Greyfriars whose penetration he dreaded. [...] ...the one fellow at Greyfriars who was able to read him like an open book, the fellow whose careless, smiling face had hidden, unsleeping vigilance..." (36-7). We might notice in passing that in assigning the detective-role to the Nabob, Richards is orientalisising the quintessential figure British fiction has bestowed upon the world: the Sherlock Holmes of the Greyfriars Remove who, like Conan Doyle's character, is able to use a letter written on a faulty typewriter to pin down the villain Martinho Funcho, is an Indian; a literary self-image is temporarily rendered other.

Together with his use of language and his intelligence, Hurree's third attribute is his cricketing prowess, above all in the bowling department. We are not told the manner of his delivery, nor the pace at which he bowls, but one is inclined to think he must be a slow-bowler, left-handed around the wicket, using guile more than brute strength to bamboozle the batsman at the other end, in the manner of many another Indian or Pakistani spin bowler (a Bishan Bedi or Abdul Qadir, say). When Bunter boasts of his own gifts as a cricketer, it is significant that he measures his own ability against that of the Nabob as being the most useful with the ball:

'I say, you fellows, hold on a minute,' said Bunter, hastily. 'I say, I want to put in some cricket practice this afternoon.'

'Come on, then,' said Bob, 'Inky will send you down a few, and you'll stop them -perhaps!'

'The perhapfulness will be terrific in my idiotic opinion!' grinned the dusky nabob of Bhanipur.

'I fancy I could stop anything you sent me, Inky,' said Bunter, disdainfully. 'You can't bowl, old chap! I mean, you don't bowl like I do.'

'Not like you do, certainly!' assented Hurree Janset Ram Singh. 'The difference is preposterous.' (*Greyfriars* 12)⁸

We shall return to the English game later, in connection with Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*. For now, we are, perhaps, in a position to assess the degree of offense the Nabob icon might cause. The answer seems quite simple: if, with respect to other of Richards's racial stereotypes or counter-images, the Englishman is not, say, graspingly businesslike (Fisher T. Fish, American), or cheerfully servile (black, over there), or wild and disruptive (black, over here), he most certainly is, or would like to be, a dab at cricket and perceptive and intelligent in a Holmesian way. It begins to seem that the Nabob, *c'est moi!* It may not even be too fanciful to suggest that the sheer effort in setting him down on paper (his name, always written in full, is by far the longest of any Greyfriars character) and the consequently disproportionate

amount of space the name's possessor occupies on the printed page, in short, that the physical awkwardness of his textual presence reflects the pricking of colonial bad conscience whenever the Nabob imposes himself upon the reader as the voice of wisdom and morality. His language is idiosyncratic, certainly, but also, as we have seen, richer than his companions'. The only possible stigma resides in his nickname, "Inky", and the epithet "dusky" that is often applied to him. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites "Afric's dusky swarms" (from Robert Pollock's *The Course of Time*, 1827) to illustrate the use of "dusky" to mean dark in colour; and then, as an example of its figurative use to mean "gloomy, melancholy", it quotes "Here no dusky frown prevails" (from William Falconer's *The Shipwreck*, 1762). For its poetic connotations, 'dusky' hardly seems as offensive as 'nigger', and its very ambivalence —dark or melancholy— further reduces potential for offense. In fact, when any character is lost in thought or puzzled, 'dusky' may also be applied to his brow —it is not an epithet exclusive to the Nabob; and even when it is used to describe the Nabob, it is not always clear whether its primary reference is to colour or thought. Neither is 'Inky' especially unpleasant (the *OED* sends us back to Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, where Rosalind speaks of Phebe's "inkie brows, your blacke silk haire", Phebe who also has a "cheek of cream"⁹); or no more so than 'chalky', used of whites, an epithet also drawn from the schoolroom and employed on the same level of schoolboy banter.

It is therefore hard to find any real offense in Richards's Nabob icon, certainly none to put it on a par with being called a 'wog'. This is no doubt due to the special relationship that pertained between the imperial nation and its Jewel in the Crown, possessor of an age-old culture and civilization which might be privately admired but had publicly to be denied, as in Macaulay's notorious "Minute" of 1835 which ushered in a programme of tacitly converting the Indian ruling classes into ersatz Englishmen, Rushdie's "Macaulay's Minutemen", the term with which he labels the class of pettifogging native mandarins who are no more than the Mother country's lapdogs. At the end of the third part of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the Moor, about to depart for Spain, muses for a moment on Macaulay's "Minute":

To form a class, Macaulay wrote in the 1835 Minute on Education, ... of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. And why, pray? O, to be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern. How grateful such a class of persons should, and must, be! For in India the dialects were poor and rude, and a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature. History, science, medicine, astronomy, geography, religion were likewise derided. Would disgrace an English farrier ... would move laughter in girls at an English boarding-school.

Thus, a class of "Macaulay's Minutemen" would hate the best of India. (376)

Was, then, the Nabob's privileged education in England destining him for a future as an anglicised puppet governor? Is Richards's icon offensive precisely because the Other has become one of us? One cannot, of course, blame Richards for having a mindset conditioned by the ideologies of his time—one cannot accuse him of deliberately causing offense. More to the point, it would be difficult to reconcile an attack on Rushdie's part against the Englishing of Indians with, first, his own biography, and, second, with the Moor's ensuing comments:

Thus a class of "Macaulay's Minutemen" would hate the best of India. Vasco [Miranda] was wrong. We were not, had never been that class. The best, and worst, were in us, and fought in us, as they fought in the land at large. In some of us, the worst triumphed; but still we could say—and say truthfully—that we had loved the best.

What is more, recent history has shown that bestowing upon the colonised élite the best education (be it at public school or university, or both, in the Old World and the New) the West has to offer is, at times, to do no more than train the desired mongrel to bite the hand that feeds it, as many a post-colonial, anti-metropolitan, hypernationalist, Marxist-Leninist-inspired, pseudo-democratic government demonstrates. It is more likely that Rushdie's unease with Richards's Nabob has to do with the simpler objection to the stereotype of the Indian that he perceives it to perpetuate, not, I think, with any post-colonial political ponderings on the creation of a class of quisling Indians. And in this sense, one suspects that Rushdie's reading of the Nabob has been influenced by Orwell's wilful misrepresentation: Rushdie's Hurree has been viewed through Orwell-tinted spectacles.

IV.

How, then, does Rushdie set about laying the ghost of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh? The Nabob first surfaces when the Moor is recounting his childhood attempts to decelerate his ageing process (he ages physically twice as fast as chronologically):

Determined to decelerate my evolution by sheer force of personality, I became ever more languid of body, and my words learned how to stretch themselves out in long sensual yawns. For a time I affected the drawling-aristo speech-mannerisms of Billy Bunter's Indian chum, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Dusky Nabob of Bhanipur: I was never merely thirsty in that period, but 'the thirstfulness was terrific'. My sister Mynah the mimic cured me of what she called 'being in a hurree' by becoming my ridiculing echo, but even after I left the Dusky nabob behind she

continued to convulse the family with slow-motion, moon-walking impersonations of my half-paced mannerisms. (*Moor's Last Sigh* 152-3)

Rushdie seizes here on one of the attributes we have identified, the “speech-mannerisms”, although he misidentifies the effect as one of “drawling” (it is characters such as Mauly or D’Arcy who drawl in their languid, aristocratic way); Hurree’s verbosity drags rather than drawls. But the most significant reworking of the icon is to be found later in the novel when the Moor is arrested on a charge of narcotics smuggling, just after Uma has inadvertently killed herself by swallowing the lethal tablet she had intended for the Moor. At the moment of arrest, the arresting officer is given no name and although his speech is mannered, it is not obviously like the Nabob’s: “Banding of words is forbidden,” blared the Inspector, pushing his pistol closer to my face. “Detenu must unquestioning obey instructions of the in-charge. Forward march.” (281-2) Only on arrival at Bombay Central does the Inspector begin to take on the Nabob’s speech, permitting us to begin to identify attributes: he is a police inspector, the Nabob was a schoolboy detective; his last name is Singh, so was the Nabob’s:

‘Give up such delusive esperance, you rotter’, replied the Inspector. ‘Here many bhoots of the Under World, many fearful blighters, are turning into lost shadows. No mistakes, you bally chump! Enter! Within, the rotfulness is terrific!’

The great door opened with many clanks and groans. At once the air was full of hellish wails. ‘Oooh! Hai-hai! groooh! Oi-yoi-yoi! *Yaroo!*’ Inspector Singh gave me an unceremonious shove. (285-6)

The Moor even hears Bunter’s familiar “*Yaroo!*” (italicised by Rushdie) issue from the dungeons. For those readers who have not picked up the signals, a few pages later Rushdie makes the identification explicit:

I heard the Inspector say, ‘The fiend gave the female the lethal dose while indulging self with a sweetie. So it is murder then! The open- and shutfulness is terrific.’ And as the Inspector metamorphosed into Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Bunter’s dusky nabob of Bhanipur, so the men in shorts became a rabble of schoolboys, the terrors of the Remove. (292)

Possibly it occurred to Rushdie to lampoon Richards’s Nabob at this point after he had imagined the Inspector’s men as a group of schoolboys the first time he described them as they crowd around Uma’s door: “the landing was thick with short-trousered blue uniforms, dark skinny legs with knobble knees”. The fact that uniform at Greyfriars was long not short trousers to judge from the illustrations and also references to “bags” (and also Orwell’s suggestion that the uniform was modelled on that of Eton) is beside the point.

What is significant for our purposes is that here Rushdie believes himself to be laying the ghost of the Nabob by means of parody. He has fixed on the Nabob's detective role (enabled by his attribute of intelligence) and his language; the detective role is ironised in Inspector Singh's pedantry and misprision of the true state of affairs, while the language is, if not parodied (Hurree's own language being almost self-parody), at least simulated. Yet the ghost is not fully laid¹⁰. As I said before, it is not Richards's icon that is being parodied, but an Orwellian misreading of that icon. Moreover, only one of the icon's attributes, that of keenness, perceptiveness is actually subverted in the figure of Inspector Singh. The attribute of idiosyncratic language is not so easily ridiculed as its very idiosyncrasy renders it parody-proof; as for cricket, it is not even mentioned.

V.

There is something about the way English is spoken by Indians or Pakistanis. If, to describe it, one were to employ terms such as 'rococo', 'distorted', 'queer', 'funny', as above I have described the Nabob's speech as idiosyncratic, comic and baroque, one might be accused of a smug, superior, colonial condescension. Yet these are precisely the terms in which two Indian poets write of their own English. When Keki Darnwallah writes,

You can make her out the way she speaks:
her consonants bludgeon you;
her argot is rococo, her latest 'slang'
is available in classical dictionaries...

or Kamala Das writes:

The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see?

they are describing a language not so very distant from Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's. A classical dictionary is never far from Richards's writings and their classical allusions, while Das's "queernesses" ('queerness' maybe, but a plural abstract?) could have been coined by the Nabob himself¹¹. Rushdie is unable to erase this attribute of the Nabob icon, his speech, because it is an all-pervasive element of Indian reality, and an element which is nothing to be

ashamed of. If not so manifestly Richardsian, such speech shows its head again and again in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Provoked Bollywood heart-throb Sunil Dutt exclaims, "Not oathery, but new technology is being referred to"; Aurora, at one point, is "not to be outdone in her bright-side-lookery"; Lambajan Chandiwala says "when I catch him [Vasco] let's see on what side of the face is his laugh"; a state award is called the "Esteemed Lotus", the Moor expresses "a certain head-shaking puzzlement"; and so forth¹². The icon's attribute of peculiar English is stronger than Rushdie's attempts to kill it off by lampoon. As Darnwallah and Das tell us, it is an attribute that has become part of the Indians' own self-image. Rather than marking off alterity, the English language is become an agent of hybridity, and many of 'them' (Rushdie, for example) are better at it than most of 'us' (the English). And the good news is that rather than constituting some mongrelised language in which both English- and Indian-English lose their distinctive identities, the hybridity has engendered a bicephalic beast whose twin (but not identical) heads are held equally high. (In fact, taking into account all the other Englishes from all other former colonies, as well as from the different regions of the United Kingdom itself, as well as from the different classes and walks of life, 'English' is a veritable linguistic hydra.) By attempting to lay to rest this attribute of the Nabob, Rushdie actually shoots himself in the foot; his whole literary and linguistic technique undermines his efforts to efface Hurree's mannered speech. When Aurora remarks that "All these different lingos [Marathi, Gujurati, for example] cutt off us from one another" and that "only English brings us together" (179), her own English makes the point that the agent of unity in "the plural, hybrid nation" of India (227) is no longer the coloniser's English, but an English wrought Other.

VI.

What, then, of the Nabob's third attribute, his prowess at the English game, his bowling reputation? Cricket is another constant presence in Rushdie's novel. Of the Moor's great-grandfather, Francisco da Gama, we are told: "He was handsome as sin but twice as virtuous, and on the coir-matting cricket-pitches of the time he proved, when young, a devilish slow left-arm tweaker and elegant number four bat." (17) This is exactly how we had imagined Hurree. The Englishman's efforts to relocate the *locus amoenus* of the village green —England's green and pleasant land writ small— to the unremittingly friable soils of the Subcontinent were destined to be fraught with difficulties. Grass took root with difficulty in the heat-baked dust, and was soon worn away by cricketer's spike. Hence either the pock-marked pitch or the coarse web of coir-matting, both of which the Indian or Pakistani bowler used to his

advantage, learning to pitch the ball where it would spin most deviously. Hence the figure of the guileful Indian or wily Pakistani slow-bowler, getting the ball to turn precisely on those bits of the wicket where India's recalcitrant soil showed through the imposed British grass. To adopt a metaphor favoured by Rushdie throughout the novel, the cricket field is one more palimpsest upon which the original text refuses quite to be erased¹³.

In the days of the Moor's great-grandparents, Francisco and Epifania, cricket was still primarily English ("their cricket"), part of the ex-pats' reconstructed pastoral. Epifania looked forward to a simple life of "invitations to the 'functions' of the British in the Fort district, their Sunday cricket, the seasonal carolling of their plain heat-beaten children..." (26); in the days of the Moor's own childhood, there existed openings for Indian cricketers, even left-handed ones (153), cricket had become a game in which he too partook, and in the course of his reminiscences the English game is transformed into an element of his own private Eden: "How I have dreamed of innocence! – of childhood days playing cricket on the Cross Maidan" (206). By 1960 "cricket had arrived at the heart of the national consciousness" (229). During the third test between India and Australia at Bombay's Brabourne Stadium, a "pretty young woman" rushed out from one of the stands to steal a kiss from batsman Abbas Ali Baig who had just completed a match-saving half-century, thus inspiring Aurora to paint *The Kissing of Abbas Ali Baig*. It was to become "a state-of-India painting", the stands crowded with "pop-eyed movie stars", "slavering politicians", "coolly observant scientists" and "industrialists slapping their thighs and making dirty jokes" (229). The English game's progress within the novel from being the reserve of "the British in the Fort District" to becoming a vital part of Indian social life, reflects the manner in which in the real world cricket has come to represent an opportunity for social and political climbing. Cricketers are celebrities (great all-rounder Kapil Dev was offered a shot at film-stardom), cricketing glory is something to be aspired to, a successful cricketing career may even lead one into big-stakes politics (Oxford-educated Imran Khan, captain of picture-postcard-English Sussex and Pakistan, ran for Pakistan's presidency). Capitalising on its ability to rouse the masses, cricket may even be used by the media to divert attention away from less appealing sides of Indian life: thus, in the wake of the Manihari Ghat ferry disaster in the summer of 1988, in which upwards of four hundred people lost their lives, journalist Ian Jack reports that on the news "there was a lot of cricket"¹⁴.

Of course, to say that cricket is 'the English game' is not merely to indicate the land of its origins, much less to assert that the English are especially good at it. The statement alludes to the fact that the ethos of cricket, as traditionally played in England, is unmistakably English. Possibly the only confrontational team-game in which both teams non-confrontationally wear the same colour,

cricket is somehow egalitarian, ever-respectful of the opponent, a notional realm of 'fair play'. Even its being the "most individualistic of all team sports", as Rushdie writes (231), is a reflection of the Englishman's willingness to play in a team only so long as he may retain every ounce of his own individuality. In Richards, cricket is the crucible in which the basest of elements may for a time be refined into model Englishmen, as is clear from *Billy Bunter and the Secret Enemy*. Crooked Captain Marker has lifted 'Eurasian' Arthur Da Costa (like Rushdie's Moor, another Indian with Portuguese forebears, to judge from his name) from India to find a means to blacken Harry Wharton's name and get him expelled from Greyfriars. As noted above, it is Hurree Jamset Ram Singh who sees to the bottom of his scheming; but it is Harry Wharton himself who recognises the potential for good buried deep inside "the rottenest, trickiest, most unscrupulous rotter" he has "ever come across" (*Secret Enemy* 100):

Knowing what he did of the fellow, [Wharton's] feeling towards him was one of loathing—the feeling he might have had for a snake in the grass. But when he was playing the summer game, Da Costa seemed a totally different fellow; and on the cricket ground it came oddly into Wharton's mind that he could have liked him, and made a friend of him. (*Secret Enemy* 80)

Wharton can trust Da Costa "in cricket, though in nothing else", and eventually Da Costa learns to "play the game, and be a decent chap off the cricket field, as well as on it" (*Secret Enemy* 100). In doing so he is forced to recant his former ways and embrace Englishness in all its noble splendour. When the last of his schemes has failed, Da Costa finds himself obliged to give up and communicates the news to Mr Gedge, the crooked Captain's henchman:

'It is fate!'

'Nonsense!' rasped Mr. Gedge impatiently.

The Eurasian gave him a sullen look.

'It seems so to me!' he muttered. 'How do I know? It may be that cunning and treachery are useless against one who is brave and honourable and straightforward—that such attacks will fall harmless from him, like arrows from a breastplate. After all, that is the teaching of all experience and history.'

'What? What do you mean?'

rasped Mr. Gedge.

The Eurasian smiled bitterly.

'If astuteness and cunning and dissimulation and false dealing could overcome courage and honesty, the English would not be the race they are,' he said. (*Secret Enemy* 104)

Richards's treatment of cricket is not far distant from "the spirit of that great tradition of public school patriotism which identified hand grenades with cricket balls" or from the belief reiterated by Orwell that "probably the Battle of Waterloo

was won on the playing fields of Eton”¹⁵. And not only Waterloo, but Empire too: Da Costa’s reading of history seems to be that playing the game, playing up, playing with a straight bat has permitted England’s rise to world preeminence.

If cricket’s symbolic value is moral or ethical in England, it has become political in India¹⁶. The kissing of batsman Abbas Ali Baig is politicised when attention is drawn to the fact that the kisser was Hindu while the kissed was a Muslim. Raman ‘Mainduck’ Fielding, founder of Mumbai’s Axis, “vilely and falsely accused the honourable and richly gifted Baig of having deliberately thrown away his wicket against Pakistan because he was a Muslim”; and Fielding manipulates the truth when he exclaims, “And this is the fellow who has the nerve to kiss our patriotic Hindu girls.” (*Moor’s Last Sigh* 229-30). Fifteen years later, the painting has become more radically politicised still as “flagrantly displaying a pornographic representation of a sexual assault by a Muslim ‘sportsman’ on an innocent Hindu maiden” (232).

After the third test episode, Raman Fielding, as the leader of the Mumbai Axis, is to become a central character in the novel (Aurora trades sex with him to avert an MA march on the gallery where her painting is to be exhibited in 1975; the Moor himself becomes a star in his gallery of grotesque sidekicks). His whole being is steeped in cricket. If Rushdie’s inspiration for the character’s name lies in that of Bal Thackeray, the leader of the Hindu fundamentalist movement, Shiva Sen (nineteenth-century novelist substituted by eighteenth-century novelist), the name ‘Fielding’ gives rise to an elaborate cricketing aetiology. As “a street-wise Bombay ragamuffin”, Raman’s father, J.O. Fielding, had loitered around the Bombay Gymkhana, pleading to be given a chance to prove his worth as a cricketer: “Please babujis, you give this poor chokra one batting? One bowling only? Okay, okay – then *just one fielding?*” Raman Fielding even considers naming his movement after some famous Hindu cricketer, before finally settling for Bombay’s mother-goddess. Nevertheless, “cricket, most individualistic of all team sports, ironically enough became the basis of the rigidly hierarchic, neo-Stalinist inner structures” of Fielding’s organisation:

Raman Fielding insisted on grouping his dedicated cadres into ‘elevens’, and each of these little platoons had a ‘team captain’ to whom absolute allegiance had to be sworn. The ruling council of the MA is known as the First XI to this day. And Fielding insisted on being addressed as ‘Skipper’ from the start. (*Moor’s Last Sigh* 231)

Fielding wears cricket whites; he welcomes the Moor (pugilist and cook) onto his team as a “true all-rounder” of the same class as R.J. Hadlee, K. D. Walters, Ravi Shastri, Kapil Dev; his “throat-ripping Alsatians” are named after great Indian “cricket stars”¹⁷. Fielding and his whole nationalist movement is imbued with the symbols of cricket.

But it is cricket transposed to another key. The English moral ethos has disappeared. What is more, now political, it is not used as a weapon to be thrown back in the face of its creator. Rather, in a manner oddly parallel to Margaret Thatcher's lieutenant, Norman Tebbit's, notorious suggestion that a "cricket test" be applied as a barometer of national identity (by means of which, for example, an England-born Pakistani who cheers for Pakistan would be deemed not to be therefore 'English'), the cricket square, this *locus* of an English and imperialist pastoral, becomes the post-colonial site not for shows of anti-imperialist fervour, but for manifestations, more or less violent, of inter-ethnic tension between peoples recently released from the coloniser's yoke. On a visit to India, Amit Chaudhuri (1993) "listened to the various ways, small and big, in which middle-class Hindus had been infuriated by Muslims", one of which is "the way in which Muslims supposedly support Pakistan at cricket matches"¹⁸, just as Abbas Ali Baig was accused by Fielding of throwing away his wicket. When mysterious mole-hills appear overnight, whether at Lord's or Braybourne, the diggers' protest is not directed against the English, but against either the Muslims of Pakistan or the Hindus of India. Thus, far from being laid to eternal rest, the Nabob of Bhanipur's cricketing attribute has acquired a vital presence in post-colonial India and Pakistan, a presence that Rushdie cannot efface¹⁹.

VII.

In charting Rushdie's efforts to lay the ghost of Orwell's misread Nabob, we have seen that the enterprise proved impossible given that the attributes of mannered language and cricket are all-pervasive and intrinsic elements of post-colonial India, in the same way that, say, Indian cuisine is now a staple of British gastronomy, while keen intelligence is not something one would wish to dispense of, however urgent the political reasons. To put it another way, the Nabob icon does not function as a counter-image because its attributes are not exclusive to the Other, but in fact form part of the Englishman's own self-image. What is more, whereas according to post-colonial criticism the Other "is only knowable through a necessarily false representation"²⁰, it is questionable whether the Nabob, as a representation of a certain kind of Indian, is actually false. With respect to the context of Rushdie's novel, hybridity is very much the order of the day as a glance at the genetic farrago of the Moor's Indian-Muslim-Portuguese-Jewish-Christian ancestry demonstrates. There is no Manichean choice to be made; symbols of coloniser and colonised may quite happily sit together, as may divergent values of the same symbol. In the same way that Richards's stories spoke to me of a certain India and to Rushdie of a certain England, so Rushdie's own works will speak different things to different

readers. Neither sacrificing the English nor abandoning the Indian, he writes, as it were, in stereo, his books being bivocal texts, truly beasts of two heads, not some amorphous cross-breed. The more the reader is locked into only one culture (Indian or English), the more he will be aware of alterity in the text; the more the reader is attuned to both cultures, the more he will appreciate the text's hybridity. The Indian and the English are at amicable, non-confrontational play in the text, where the object is not to defeat the opponent, but to let the play continue without end, or until the perfect reader comes along who may complete the text with a truly hybrid reading. He will indeed be the true all-rounder, but the unlikeliness of finding such a reader is terrific, which is why writers like Rushdie will continue to invite us to watch as the game develops, supporters of both teams.

NOTES

¹ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 18-19.

² For the purposes of this essay, I have consulted a sample of those book-length stories by Richards that were immediately to hand — a random sample forced upon me by circumstance. On the other hand, their dates of first publication happily coincide with the first years of India's independence and it is probably the books written after the Second World War rather than the pre-War magazines that Rushdie was familiar with as a boy.

³ Quotations from M. Spiering (1992: 10-19). Spiering compares the "dispassionate" anti-EEC letter Angus Wilson wrote to *Encounter* with the splenetic anti-Europeanism of *The Old Men at the Zoo*.

⁴ George Orwell, 'England your England' (1941), in *Inside the Whale...*, 80.

⁵ J.F. Galván Reula, 'On reality, fantasy and fiction. A conversation with Salman Rushdie', *Atlantis*, vol. VI, nos. 1 and 2, Jun-Nov, 1984, 96.

⁶ The example is taken from Gombrich's (1972: 26-30) study of the iconography of the National Gallery in London's painting 'Tobias and the Angel' (artist unknown). Tobias, in fact the emblem or attribute that assists in the recognition of the work's true subject Raphael, has traditionally been mistaken for the artist's intended subject through an imperfect iconographic reading: Iconography offers a useful method for the analogous study of literary stereotypes; one reason why I adopt the term 'icon' in preference to the imagologists' 'image' is that 'image' already has sufficient work to do in denoting one element of the writer's rhetorical armoury.

⁷ Apparently no such place as Bhanipur exists; '-pur' is a common suffix for Indian place-names, and 'Bhan' is close to (real) Bhaun, Bhanra, etc. According to the *OED*, 'nabob', originally "the title of certain Mohammedan officials, who acted as the governors of provinces or districts in the Mogul Empire" came to be applied generally to governors of towns or districts in India (especially Hindustan?), and finally acquired a less specific application as describing "a person of (high rank or) great wealth". In the stories, we find 'nabob' sometimes with a capital letter, sometimes not; it is not therefore clear whether Richards intends it as a specific title or a merely exotic indicator of wealth and status.

⁸ A similar conversation is to be found at pages 167-8, where the bowling of another colonial junior, Tom Brown of New Zealand, is also unfavourably compared with Bunter's own — by Bunter, naturally.

⁹ Does 'browes' mean "eyebrows", or is 'inkie' figurative?

¹⁰ Inspector Singh—complete with echo of Oscar Wilde—resurfaces for the last time when the Moor, immediately after stoving in Raman Fielding's head with his frog-telephone, drives away wondering “who would get me first: the police, or Chhagga Five-in-a-bite. On the whole I would prefer the police. *A second dead body, Mr Zogoiby. Careless. The slackfulness is terrific.*” (369)

¹¹ Keki Darnwallah (b. 1937), ‘Mistress’, Kamala Das (b. 1934) ‘An Introduction’; both quoted in Dennis Walder, *Post-colonial Literatures in English: History Language Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 49 and 53.

¹² Pages 138, 147, 149, 175, 177.

¹³ Other examples of Rushdie's palimpsests include the cathedral at Cordoba raised upon and above Moorish arches or a Hindu India smothered by a Moslem India, as seen in the construction of monumental edifices such as the Taj Mahal, not to mention Aurora's ‘palimpsest-art’.

¹⁴ He adds that “The mess [...] came from abroad [...] like luxury items, a new spice trade going the other way—which the makers of Indian bulletins slotted in between the hand-shaking and the seminars as if to prove that disaster could overtake the foreign rich as well as the native poor”; Ian Jack, ‘Unsteady People’, *Granta* 28, Autumn 1989, 37-46.

¹⁵ Graham Holderness, “‘What Ish My Nation?’: Shakespeare and National Identities” in Ivo Kamps, ed., *Materialist Shakespeare: A History* (London: Verso, 1995), 230; Orwell, ‘England, your England’, 78.

¹⁶ This is in line with the findings of anthropologists to the effect that while a colonised people may well adopt the outwards trappings of the coloniser, may take on his symbols as their own, the meaning attached to that symbol may well change.

¹⁷ Pages 293, 296, 366.

¹⁸ Amit Chaudhuri, ‘Diary’, *London Review of Books*, 10 June 1993, 29.

¹⁹ Cricket resurfaces in Rushdie's latest novel, *The Ground Beneath Her feet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), in which the reader is given “the full life-story” of male protagonist Ormus Cama's ‘cricket-playing’ father, Sir Darius Xerxes Cama. I quote from Michael Gorra's review of the novel, “It's only rock and roll but I like it”, *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 April 1999, 29.

²⁰ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.

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