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I: Rushdie’s Globality

The development of literary fiction as a popular niche for the publishing industry has been accompanied and encouraged by the increasing presence of writers of non-European origins, often from formerly colonized nations, writing in English for the Anglo-American market. The literature championed by postcolonial scholarship develops largely out of this matrix, and Salman Rushdie is one of its definitive lead authors. Rushdie has built a career on fictions set in locales foreign to many of those who read them, having taken up the task of exploring some of the most topical and contentious political phenomena of the late twentieth century, from anti-capitalist, anti-American revolutions in Central America to religious fundamentalisms in South Asia, from racism in England to the increasing presence of corporate influence in cultural production.

Though his first novel *Grimus* (1979) sold a dismal 800 copies in hardcover, since *Midnight’s Children* was published in 1981 by Jonathan Cape, then the “most prestigious house for literary fiction”, Rushdie has been a lead author. The initial printing of *Midnight’s Children* in England was 1,750 copies, but it eventually sold 40,000 copies in hardcover. Marketing the book in the United States was more difficult, perhaps due to the lack of American attachment to India, the novel’s major setting and subject. Eventually Alfred P. Knopf did acquire it and they marketed it aggressively. A review by V.S. Pritchett was slated to appear in the *New Yorker* to coincide with the US release. It went on to sell very well in hardcover in the US, where the paperback rights went...
to Avon. Winning the Booker Prize in 1981 significantly boosted sales and the novel was continually reprinted. *Shame* followed a similar trajectory, selling even more initial copies in the US in hardcover, and appearing as a Vintage trade paperback. In 1983 and twice subsequently *Granta* has published a “Best of Young British Novelists” list, the brainchild of Desmond Clark at the UK’s Book Marketing Council. Rushdie appeared on the first list in 1983. Thus, living in London, one of the two major publishing centres in the English-speaking world, and writing predominantly about South Asia for an international audience of English-language readers, Rushdie was a well-known writer from a very early stage in his career.

Until the mid-1980s Rushdie’s works were sold to publishers in London and New York separately, with their primary market and first appearance in London. However, after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* it became difficult to locate Rushdie primarily in London or the UK. In 1987 Rushdie fired his English agent Deborah Rogers and left his editor Liz Calder, who had moved to Bloomsbury Press and was expected to bring Rushdie’s next book with her. *The Jaguar Smile* (1987), Rushdie’s most avowedly leftist work, was the first Rushdie title not edited by Calder. Instead he hired maverick New York agent Andrew Wylie (“the Jackal”), a sure sign that he was a major player in the literary market and also that he hoped to secure a large advance for his next novel, *The Satanic Verses*. In fact *The Satanic Verses* was sold abroad in Germany and Italy before it was published in England and the US, in order to “establish the book’s value in the market-place”, Ian Hamilton claims. Two publishers, Knopf and Viking-Penguin, were eventually contending for the book, driving advances up and peaking the interests of industry insiders. Viking eventually won the publication rights, through the combined appeal of the size of the offered advance, $850,000 US and the placement of their branch offices in India and throughout the world. It was published in September 1988.

The novel’s opponents perceived a link between Rushdie and the United States, though he continued to live in England. In Karachi they stormed the US Information Center and burned the US flag alongside dummies made in Rushdie’s likeness. Though not the connection his enemies intended, in terms of his career as an author the association was not unwarranted. Rather than appearing first in the London market through Victor Gollancz, Jonathan Cape, or Bloomsbury, *The Satanic Verses* and most of Rushdie’s subsequent works have been released by dominant international publishers like Viking (a Random House imprint, part of the Bertelsmann empire), with primary offices in New York and branches throughout the world. Though Rushdie stayed in London throughout the period of the fatwa and though attention to his
plight and to his literary work continued in that city, from that time the process of publishing his books originated in New York with his agent there, from which location they were then released and reviewed wherever his publishers had their many global branch offices. In this sense, attention to Rushdie’s career suggests it is representative of literary publishing’s increasingly global structure. The market has come to involve primarily lead authors making deals for global distribution with conglomerates that operate locally though numerous branch offices that are often headquartered in New York. Finally and most recently, Rushdie himself left London behind to move to New York City. 1999’s The Ground Beneath Her Feet has that city as one of its major settings and Fury (2001) takes it as a main subject.

The reception of Fury was generally hostile. Rushdie himself was subject to critique, as he had recently invited public censure by leaving his third wife and their son to move to New York and start a relationship with Padma Lakshmi, a Miss Universe contestant and model half his age. Indeed, a complaint about the novel that appears repeatedly in the literary press is that it is merely a memoir, a calculated effort at self-construction and defence designed to deflect the public criticism of his private life. Amitava Kumar’s review of the novel accuses Rushdie of gross self-regard, claiming that the book’s major theme is success or stardom, in Kumar’s view the things that Rushdie “really cares about”. Kumar argues that the book’s protagonist is entirely complicit in everything he seems to critique and that its political narrative is undermined by Rushdie’s fundamental inability to sympathetically approach those unlike him in stature, education, or class, a product of his “zeal for self-glorification”. Kumar sees Rushdie’s own work in Fury’s description of the fiction written by character Jack Rhinehart: “lucrative profiles of the super-powerful, super-famous, and super-rich”.

Fury features a fictional account of a national liberation struggle, largely based on the real political turmoil in Fiji in 1999 and 2000 and receiving considerable newspaper coverage in New York. Thus one of the novel’s companion texts is The Jaguar Smile, Rushdie’s non-fictional travel narrative about his visit to Nicaragua just after the successful Sandinista revolution. Both works draw attention to the processes through which images and their origins become radically separate, as cultural products are used to sell or promote political ideologies. Yet their differences are key, because reading Fury against The Jaguar Smile also suggests that as Rushdie has moved into the realm of multinational publishing and global popular culture his perspective on the subject of the political uses of culture has changed. He has abandoned a more straightforward adherence to a leftist politics sympathetic to resistance movements, as expressed in The Jaguar Smile, in favour of representing how
those politics are incorporated into contemporary media culture and enshrined in cultural commodities that themselves have no discernible authorship or origins. As accusations about the status of *Fury* as a veiled memoir suggest, our reading of the novel depends on familiarity with Rushdie as a personality and as an author with a distinct career trajectory. Yet, with Rushdie’s career in mind, what I want to suggest is that the novel’s more significant solipsism is its paranoia about the way mass media make cultural products available for highly politicized forms of appropriation or interpretation that betray the controlling intentions of their authors. As Rushdie’s career has developed—in tandem with the increasing control of literary publishing by multinational corporations—there has been a parallel movement within his fiction from a general attention to the politics of contemporary nation-formation, particularly within a South Asian context, to a more solipsistic interest in the status of authorship and origins within the field of cultural production for a global market.

**II: Rushdie’s Globality in *Fury***

*Fury*’s main character is Malik Solanka, a celebrity intellectual and “retired historian of ideas” recently moved to New York City. He has left his second wife and son in London for a world that is both a promise of respite from his rage about his family life and a provocation to his furious contempt for much of contemporary culture. Strolling through the streets of the city in the novel’s early pages, Malik’s thoughts indicate some of this contempt:

> In all of India, China, Africa, and much of the southern American continent, those who had the leisure and wallet for fashion—or more simply, in the poorer latitudes, for the mere acquisition of things—would have killed for the street merchandise of Manhattan, as also for the cast-off clothing and soft furnishings to be found in the opulent thrift stores.

He continues, “America insulted the rest of the planet [. . .] by treating such bounty with the shoulder-shrugging casualness of the inequitably wealthy” (p. 6). While such sentiments can be read as Rushdie’s attempt to mediate the charges of venality levied at his own recent personal exploits, the structural inequality Malik notices is not something he then sets out to separate himself from. Instead his life has been defined by a serious entanglement in consumer culture and the media that markets it. Giving up a job at Cambridge in the late 1980s, Malik was commissioned by the BBC to develop a series of history-of-philosophy programs for television, thus moving from a stable academic job to the more fragmented, piecemeal and haphazard work of producing creative content for television and eventually for the internet. The cultural content Malik
creates for *The Adventures of Little Brain* is based on popularized versions of the thought of important European philosophers. He is an author of cultural texts designed for mass consumption.

Malik’s show is a sensation, benefiting from what the narrator speaks of as the “industry of culture” which, since the 1970s, has come to “replace that of ideology, becoming ‘primary’ in the way that economics used to be”. Malik first notices Mila Milo, the young woman who goes on to market the narratives he creates in New York, because, like many other teenage girls, she models herself on Little Brain, Malik’s own celebrated character. Little Brain is as such a representative cultural product, involved in a history that has made culture’s products “primary” rather than representational. She is “first a doll, later a puppet, then an animated cartoon, and afterwards an actress, or, at various other times, a talk-show host, gymnast, ballerina, or supermodel, in a Little Brain outfit” (p. 96). She is also a symbol of Malik’s impotence when faced with the power of critical and market reception. This impotence is suggested by her very name, which connotes her intelligence and inquisitiveness but also, importantly, her autonomy as an entity productive of ideas and subjectivities for a mass audience. Malik is only her creator in the most right-wing sense and the industry of culture guarantees that she will endlessly proliferate. Authorial control of the meanings attached to her proliferating texts is limited at best. “She had outgrown her creator”, no longer a “simulacrum” but somehow real, much to Malik’s dismay. She eventually even passes out of Malik’s hands completely and into the control of a “concept group” at the BBC called the Little Brain Trust (p. 97). Her creator can no longer safely be considered the controlling figure in making meaning for his product. “This creature of his own imagining”, we are told, “born of his best self and purest endeavor, was turning before his eyes into the kind of monster of tawdry celebrity he most profoundly abhorred” (p. 98).

The novel’s plot and its various metafictional layers are complicated and require some elucidation here. In coming to New York Malik partially flees his own renown and the inescapable presence of Little Brain in his life. Still, New York offers no relief. Malik meets a woman named Neela Mahendra, a recognizable stand-in for the book’s real-life dedicatee, Padma Lakshmi. Neela is a television producer involved in the nationalist political struggle of a South Pacific nation with the Swiftian name Lilliput-Blefuscu, a transparent stand-in for Fiji. Her family are Indo-Lilliputians (“Indo-Lillies”), her ancestors Indian indentured labourers brought to the islands in the 1890s. Their fight is with the indigenous “Elbee” (L.B./Lilliput-Blefuscu) community over constitutional rights to the land they have worked for four generations (pp. 157–8). Neela’s interest in this struggle has a profound impact on Malik’s
creative life. With encouragement from Mila Milo, Malik begins to create a new set of characters with a market value intimately tied to the politically-inflected narrative “back-story” he imagines for them. Mila Milo even convinces Malik to sell these characters and their surrounding narrative to her internet company, guaranteeing him creative control while her company markets his cultural product in cyberspace. Malik’s experience with such marketing has obviously been traumatic and Mila urges him to embrace the demise of myths of singular authority and creative genius, urging him to a “be a little more flexible”, since “the whole concept of ownership as far as ideas is so different now, it’s so much more cooperative” (p. 178).

These two events – meeting Neela and starting a new creative project – are not unrelated. Indeed, in creating his new narrative Malik’s influences are the set of events taking place in Lilliput-Blefuscu and his urge to represent the traumas entailed in his previous experiences as creator of The Adventures of Little Brain. Malik is said to create each new character by imagining its “back-story”, a framework which the narrator describes as a “fictional beast capable of constant metamorphosis, which fed on every scrap it could find: its creator’s personal history, scraps of gossip, deep learning, current affairs, high and low culture, and the most nourishing diet of all – namely, the past” (p. 190). Malik’s creative process thus ensures that the contents of his eminently marketable narratives are built on the tribulations of his own personal life, as well as on contemporary politics. In fact the new story’s main figure, an “amoral cyberneticist” called Akasz Kronos – described as “an artist”, and “[t]he most dangerous man in the world” (p. 146) – is based on Malik himself, just as Malik is a figure for Rushdie.

While Malik elaborates the story of The Puppet Kings (as he titles the new set of stories he creates), the “real” political conflict in Lilliput-Blefuscu rages on. Neela and Malik attend an Indo-Lilly parade and demonstration in New York, run by Babur, leader of the FRM/“Fremen” (the Filbistani Resistance Movement), waving the flag of his proposed “Republic of Filbistan” – “Filb” standing for “Free Indian Lilliput-Blefuscu.” Meanwhile a coup is occurring in the embattled nation. An indigenous Elbee called Skyresh Bolgolam is working to reverse the reforms in favour of Indo-Lillies made in a new constitution, recently implemented by liberal president Golbasto Gue. The “back-story” of The Puppet Kings is given in this context. Akasz Kronos creates a puppet race to respond to the “terminal crisis” of his civilization. He then sells his puppets to the leader of Baburia, a nation made up of “two small mountain-islands”. As Malik’s Puppet Kings narrative emerges, it becomes clear that it directly references the political situation in Lilliput-Blefuscu, which we have already recognized is itself a stand-in for Fiji.
Each of Kronos’s puppets is based on a figure in Malik’s life. There is the Rich Ex-Wife puppet (Sara Lear) and the Goddess of Victory puppet (modelled on Kronos’s love Zameen, in turn modelled on Neela, said to be modelled on Padma). There is even a Dollmaker puppet, Kronos embodying himself in his creation and adding another level to Fury’s metafictional layers, since Rushdie clearly figures himself in Malik, Malik in Kronos and Kronos in the Dollmaker puppet.

Fittingly, the Puppet Kings break free of Kronos’s control, as the Dollmaker plots with the other puppets until they learn to overthrow the “Prime Directive” of Kronos’s program, which should guarantee that only he has ultimate control over the puppets’ actions. The puppets then stage a revolution, plotting to live in Baburia not as workers but as equals to the native Baburians. The action of The Puppet Kings begins there and is presented in instalments through Mila Milo’s web company and read by millions throughout the world. Mila Milo’s Puppet Kings website thrives globally, settling “production, distribution, and marketing agreements with key players – Mattel, Amazon, Sony, Columbia, Banana Republic” (p. 214). Malik is trapped again in a media world, talking to journalists about his narratives, a procedure described as “an unnerving, hollowing kind of work, during which he could hear himself sounding false, knowing also that a second layer of falsehood would be added by the journalists’ responses to his words” (p. 217). The PlanetGalileo.com website, which sells merchandise of all kinds, guarantees that Malik’s narratives are ripe for every form of commercialization: “Click on the links for more PK [Puppet Kings] info or on the icons below for answers to 101 FAQs, access to interactivities, and to see the wide range of PK merchandise available for INSTANT shipping NOW. All major credit cards accepted” (p. 168). Malik’s narrative, in short, “proliferated into this many-armed, multimedia beast” (p. 190), and he is further implicated in the commercial culture he once hoped to flee, cast like Kronos (who is, after all, modelled on himself) in the role of greedy artist in search of ever more lucre.

These two worlds – the political life of the Indo-Lillies and the cultural industry of PlanetGalileo.com – already intertwined, only become further enmeshed. Thus the fictional narrative of The Puppet Kings, partly derived from the energy of the conflict in Lilliput-Blefuscu, in turn becomes implicated in the region’s future political life. In Mildendo, capital of Lilliput-Blefuscu, toy stores are raided, masked men making off with just-imported supplies of Kronosian Cyborg masks and costumes. The FRM, it turns out, identify with the plight of the Puppet Kings, “whose inalienable right to be treated as equals – as fully moral and sentient beings – was denied by Mogol the Baburian [king of Babur]” (p. 226). Such identification is entirely natural, of course, given that Malik
modelled the Peekay (PK/Puppet King) Revolution while inspired by the FRM’s own. The slogan of the Peekay Revolution is “Let the Fittest Survive” and t-shirts bearing those words begin to appear around New York. As with Little Brain, again Malik’s characters “began to burst out of their cages and take to the streets. From around the world came news of their images, grown gigantic, standing many stories high on city walls” (p. 225). Malik begins, horrified, to witness the “intervention of the living dolls from the imaginary planet Galileo-1 in the public affairs of the actually existing earth” (p. 226). “Real life had started obeying the dictates of fiction”, the narrator observes, “providing precisely the raw material he needed to transmute through the alchemy of his reborn art” (p. 170). In short, Malik’s own art, and in turn that art’s reception, are deeply reliant on the dissolution of barriers between the categories of the real and the fictional, the actual and the simulation, human beings and their fictional representations. That dissolution also confuses the boundaries between political movements and the cultural products from which they derive energy, or to which they make reference, in disseminating information about the merits of a given cause.

With this basic outline in mind, reference to The Jaguar Smile becomes appropriate. Rushdie seems to use his earlier experiences in Nicaragua as a means of imagining the process through which cultural products like Malik’s web-based narratives are endowed with political weight. In 1986–7, when Rushdie was writing The Jaguar Smile, Nicaragua’s Sandinista revolutionaries were being vilified in the mainstream Western press as pro-Soviet communists. The Reagan administration had in fact started an infamous war by proxy against the rebel left-wing leaders by financially and militarily supporting the Contra militia; the media coverage of the Sandinistan cause merely supported the administration’s prerogative. Rushdie became a sponsor of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, then active in London, and visited the country in July 1986 not as a neutral observer but as the guest of an organization suggestively called the Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers (ASTC). The ASTC brought sympathetic writers and artists to the country to see the revolution from the inside. Rushdie’s visit to Nicaragua happened just after the International Court of Justice in the Hague had ruled that US aid to the Contras – whom Rushdie calls “the counter-revolutionary arm the CIA had invented, assembled, organized and armed” – was in violation of international law.13 As Rushdie notes, “[t]he situation was surreal: the country that was in fact acting illegally, that was the outlaw, was hurling such epithets as totalitarian, tyrannous and Stalinist at the elected government of a country that hadn’t broken any laws at all; the bandit was posing as the sheriff” (p. 40). The Sandinistas were painfully aware of the power of those “hurling […]
epithets” and of the general role that the Western media was playing in negatively interpreting their revolutionary political program. The ASTC knew bringing cultural workers to Nicaragua could help put a positive spin on the country’s new political leadership. It seems appropriate, then, to suggest that the Sandinistas were strategically deploying sympathizers like Rushdie in an effort to encourage positive interpretations of their struggle.

A major focus of The Jaguar Smile became, in turn, Rushdie’s argument with the Sandinistas’ willingness to control the media within Nicaragua and censor information unsympathetic to their movement. A related feature of Rushdie’s account is its focus on the prominence of the political iconography of a “martyr-culture” throughout the country (p. 19). That iconography is central to Nicaragua’s landscape as Rushdie depicts it. He recounts: “Of the ten earliest leaders of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, nine had been killed before Somoza fell. Their faces, painted in the Sandinista colours of red and black, stared gigantically down on the Plaza de la Revolución” (p. 18). Such iconography is visible everywhere and seems to make up a prominent part of the country’s internal communications system.

One such image is Sandino’s hat, the representative icon of the revolution’s “most famous ghost”, Augusto César Sandino (p. 21). Indeed, at the headquarters of the biggest trade union in Nicaragua, the CST (Central Sandinista de Trabajadores), Lenin and Marx flank Sandino’s hat in a powerful triptych that acts to associate the Sandinista cause with the revolutionary history of socialist politics and cultural production. The proliferation of such images serves a direct political purpose as a locus of revolutionary meaning. During the turmoil of 1920s and 30s, as a liberal Sandino contested the US-backed conservative politics of both Adolfo Díaz and the first Somoza, hiding in the mountains with his resistance fighters until he was betrayed after finally negotiating a peace deal. The image of Sandino’s hat, typically obscuring his face, became central to the Sandinistas’ political iconography, evoking a form of stark opposition to US-backed conservative politics in Central America. Though Sandino was not a socialist, the Sandinistas turned his death into a kind of martyrdom as an aid to their ongoing effort to construct the kind of historical narrative of local resistance that would justify their own struggle. As Rushdie further suggests, a figure like Sandino also worked to distance their particular struggle from a communist lineage associated with Castro, Lenin or Marx.

Rushdie reveals the stories behind several other prominent political icons in the course of the book, discussing figures like Julio Buitrago and Carlos Fonseca. He typically points to these figures, explaining their histories and how they came to such prominence in the Nicaraguan
imagination, in order to show that the omnipresent iconography that is meant to represent them carries the weight of the recent political past. It is through this very public form of culture that the Sandinistas attempted to contest the meaning-making power of the right-wing broadcast press throughout Central America, which reached viewers and listeners in Nicaragua itself and influenced international news coverage of the Sandinista government. In Rushdie’s depiction, the very real political struggle in Nicaragua thus has key cultural correlates, since its success depends at least in part on the Sandinistas’ ability to contest rival narratives both locally and internationally.

When Rushdie visits FSLN leader Daniel Ortega at home he notes that his children appear in “Masters of the Universe” t-shirts, “featuring the eternal battle of He-Man and Skeletor”. Rushdie reminds his readers of the “omnipresence of US culture” (p. 51) in the country:

In Nicaragua, there were old Jack Nicholson movies on the television, Coca-Cola did great business, the people listened to Madonna on the radio, singing about living in a material world / and I am a material girl; baseball was a national obsession [. . .]. In the old Somoza days, when the newspapers were censored, they would print photographs of Marilyn Monroe and other Hollywood movie stars in place of the banned articles. (pp. 36–7)

Around the time of Rushdie’s visit Ortega himself was touring the US, making appearances on various talk-shows, actively trying to constrain the interpretations of the Sandinista revolution that were being encouraged by the Western media. Ortega was attempting to use the tools of his opponents against them. Yet Rushdie’s interest in Ortega’s talk-show tour makes the political leader’s compromised position, as someone reliant on the US media culture he ultimately despised, into another instance of the necessary but troubled alliance that captivates him throughout The Jaguar Smile: the alliance between the Sandinistan political project and the media available for its promotion, or between “Hollywood” and “radical protest” (p. 37).

In sum, throughout The Jaguar Smile Rushdie’s focus is the Sandinistas’ political iconography – coupled with their contentious control of media resources within the country – as counter to the power of the US-backed right-wing media that sought to influence public perception of the revolution. The decoration of public spaces with slogans and images of revolutionary heroes and Ortega’s manipulation of the mechanisms of promotion available in the US media, are two parts of this same countering attempt. The book that Rushdie produced is itself caught up in these efforts. The Jaguar Smile was possible due to the Sandinistas’ interest in controlling public perception of their cause, resulting in the
ASTC bringing largely sympathetic writers like Rushdie to the country. It did not hurt that Rushdie was a considerably famous writer who would have little trouble selling a book manuscript about his trip and whose published work would enter the market accompanied by reviews, interviews, and potentially even televised appearances. Published in 1987, the book that marks Rushdie’s adherence to a leftist political tradition in fact coincides with his turn toward New York, Andrew Wylie and the more aggressive investment in his own career that I outlined above, an investment that just preceded the global dissemination of *The Satanic Verses* and the political crisis that attended it.

Rushdie’s account of the Nicaraguan political struggle and its media implications influences how he represents the activities of the Indo-Lillies, or Indo-Fijians, in *Fury*. Indeed, Rushdie’s decision to set *Fury’s* loosely fictional liberation struggle in a nation meant as a stand-in for Fiji has considerable interest in relation to *The Jaguar Smile*. The revolution orchestrated by the Sandinistas has a political valency not entirely unlike Fiji’s recent volatility. The Fiji Labour Party, endorsed by a significant portion of the Indo-Fijian population, came to power in May 1999, making Mahendra Pal Chaudhry (a prominent socialist and trade unionist) the first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister. Many welcomed his “Rainbow Coalition” as a positive move toward breaking down the boundaries between so-called “ethnic” Fijians and Indo-Fijians. However, some ethnic Fijians opposed the new government on the grounds that Fiji should always be run for and controlled by other Fijians; in 2000 they actually took control through violent means, encouraging some Indo-Fijians to organize their own countering protests. This coup and countercoup roughly form the set of events that *Fury* references. They were anticipated by a similar coup in 1987, which saw an elected coalition government deposed by a militia made up of right-wing supporters of a state run by and for ethnic Fijians alone. Scholars have linked that 1987 coup to American and Australian anti-communist interests, which perceived the Fiji Labour Party, then part of the elected coalition, as a left-wing group that welcomed links to the Soviet Union and other communist states.

During the events of 2000, debates raged about which segment of Fiji’s population controlled the majority of the nation’s resources. On the one hand, ethnic Fijians and their sympathizers have tended to position the Indo-Fijians as orchestrating a reversal of fortune, taking the dominant position in the nation’s economy and leaving a large number of indigenous Fijians unemployed and then disenfranchized. On the other hand, another set of interests notes the way ethnic Fijians have engaged in the cultural performance of their ethnicity to gain a privileged position in the region’s political and economic life. This privilege extends
back to the time when the Fijians were themselves fairly contented subjects of the British Empire, spared the specific work that other colonial peoples were subject to because Indian labourers were indentured instead. Those Indian workers were brought to Fiji to begin with in order to allow for the maintenance of the traditional Fijian way of life and the system of chiefs set up to administer the colony.\textsuperscript{17} Despite the ethnically mixed history of the area, which has involved the migrations of populations from throughout Polynesia, as well as from India and China, the Fijians have maintained their specific connection to the land through the marketing of a distinct national identity for the purposes of both national politics and global tourism. In particular, as Andrew Ross points out, the Fijians have presented their culture as a “lifestyle trade commodity” within the niche of eco-tourism, in a way that specifically avoids reference to the region’s significant political strife, multiculturalism and the majority population of Indo-Fijians.\textsuperscript{18}

The Indo-Fijians thus faced and continue to face a significant challenge in bringing their concerns to the attention of the media and into the consciousness of those who might visit the region as tourists. In \textit{Fury}, Neela explains her region’s media image as a hindrance to political progress, claiming that people in the West consider Lilliput-Blefuscu “a South Sea paradise, a place for honeymoons and other trysts” (p. 63). Malik also later attempts to ingratiate himself to Babur through reference to the Puppet Kings web company, claiming it can help him reach “a mass global audience” in order to “win hearts and minds” (p. 244). Indeed, the FRM’s appropriation of the Puppet Kings narrative and its staging of various media events are active responses to the necessity of formulating a presence that can counter the more powerful images prevalent within their specific national culture, as well as internationally.

However, in contrast to his largely sympathetic portrait of the necessities behind the Sandinistàn revolution, Rushdie represents the FRM political program with considerable ambiguity and as orchestrated and controlled by an increasingly authoritarian and violent man. In many ways Rushdie relies quite heavily on the actual events taking place in Fiji in early 2000, events he wrote about himself in the \textit{New York Times} around the time of \textit{Fury}’s composition.\textsuperscript{19} In the novel, instead of complicating the much-maligned notion that the agitation against Chaudhry’s government was a fight for power between two races and instead of any focus on the leftist political orientation many attributed to the newly elected “Rainbow Coalition”, Rushdie has Neela insist that the ethnic Elbees staged their coup in reaction to the threat that the “Big Endiawallahs” who espouse “free-market mercantilism, and profit mentality” might take over the country (p. 158). Neela’s views, though those of an Indo-Lilly, exist in significant discord with most accounts of Fiji’s ethnic
politics, as she rather sympathetically suggests that the indigenous Elbees fear the capitalist mercantilism – rather than the leftist labour-orientation that others identified – urged by the new coalition politics. In contrast to Nicaragua, then, and when the conflict involves a population of Indo-Fijians, not to mention a large number of more recent Gujarati immigrants, Rushdie adopts a divided voice, representing a more ambiguous position toward the uprising in which Babur and his compatriots are engaged.20

In Fury’s final pages, as Malik pursues Neela to Lilliput-Blefuscu, where she is concluding her documentary with an insider’s view of the FRM countercoup, Malik’s fictional narrative and the “real” world of the FRM struggle clash head on. Babur appears in a Kronos/Dollmaker costume, going by the name of Commander Akasz (p. 227). All the Fremen wear masks of Puppet King characters. Having originally modelled Akasz on himself, when Malik arrives in Mildendo he notes that “the dominant image in Lilliput-Blefuscu – a country close to civil war [. . .] was, as he had known it must be, a close likeness of himself” (p. 239). He is in a “Theatre of Masks” where “the original, the man with no mask, was perceived as the mask’s imitator: the creation was real while the creator was the counterfeit!” (p. 239). Neela’s face, too, is concealed beneath a Zameen mask, “an imitation of itself” (p. 243). “Lilliput-Blefuscu had reinvented itself in his image”, we read, “[i]ts streets were his biography, patrolled by figments of his imagination and altered versions of people he had known” (p. 246). Thus, his fictional creations, directly drawn from the political struggles of contemporary life, suffer not the fate of irrelevance or passing fashion, but rather influence and inspire the political struggles for national sovereignty so common to the latter half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first. Or, said differently, and in reference to Nicaragua, Malik’s experience dramatizes the extent to which political life has a fictional, cultural valency, as political movements adopt styles dependent on cultural ideologies and the resources of the culture industries. The Jaguar Smile suggests that through Rushdie’s eyes Nicaragua is a landscape – like that of Lilliput-Blefuscu – exemplifying the relationship between politics and cultural iconography. Liberation movements thrive on the narratives of cultural resistance that they create and appropriate; they feed, creatively, on what Malik’s narratives also need: “personal history, scraps of gossip, deep learning, current affairs, high and low culture, and the most nourishing diet of all [. . .] the past” (p. 190). Though one text is apparently fact and the other fiction, The Jaguar Smile mirrors the later book’s interest in the relationship between liberationist political movements and the power of the celebrated image. In The Jaguar Smile the Sandinistas and the Western media are engaged in a
struggle over who gets to control political mythmaking. Every icon and every narrative can be appropriated and transmitted as a political message. In Fury, alternatively, while the struggle is still over the making of meaning, it takes place between a producer of cultural goods and the larger audience of receivers who do with his works what they will. In either case, as narratives take on a variety of iconic significances, the importance of their origins is radically upset. But Fury performs an important departure. The Jaguar Smile is significantly invested in championing the meaning-making practices of the Sandinistas and pays so much attention to the cultural industries in order to explain the disadvantaged position of the Nicaraguan revolutionaries. Fury makes no attempt to justify or explain the revolutionary program of the FRM, but rather focuses on the culture industries in order to emphasize the way revolutionary politics are incorporated by global popular culture like the Puppet Kings web phenomenon, as well as how revolutionary movements in turn appropriate that global culture in ways cultural producers may never have imagined. Like the FRM, the revolutionaries in The Jaguar Smile go into battle in disguise: “Sandinista guerrillas often went into action wearing masks of pink mesh with simple faces painted on them”, we are told (p. 25). Whereas in The Jaguar Smile Rushdie sees resistance fighters taking on masks of peasant anonymity and sees the heroes of the revolution all across the landscape that the Sandinistas seek to control, in Fury what Rushdie sees in Lilliput-Blefuscu’s political iconography (through Malik’s eyes, seeing himself in Babur’s Kronos costume) is his own face.

Obviously, Malik cannot control the narratives that make up The Puppet Kings. He cannot decide to what movements they lend a voice, to what purposes they are put. The price of involvement in the creation of culture is the potential for dangerous appropriations and the entanglement of one’s works with real violence. Whereas The Jaguar Smile might have applauded the efforts of the Sandinistas to control the meaning of their struggle, in Fury Malik views the adoption of his stories and images by the FRM with considerable horror, despite the fact that he used Lilliput-Blefuscu’s politics in the creation of his Puppet Kings narratives to begin with. Malik has already seen Little Brain lent to the world of high fashion and global popular culture and he thematizes this experience in The Puppet Kings by making Kronos incapable of controlling the Puppetmaster cyborg and his kin. In depicting Malik’s form of literary labour (extended cultural production) and his related creative acts, Rushdie thematizes his own ambiguous relationship with his textual products. Predicting Kumar’s critique of its “zeal for self-glorification”, the novel tells its readers that it is not a mere biography in a mask. It is not a straightforward attempt on the part of the author to constrain his
image in the eyes of an increasingly critical public, a public put off by his willingness to make himself a popular spectacle and pursue an Americanized dream of global popularity. *Fury* rather parades its biographical masking. It is about the *process* of writing veiled memoirs, as Malik interprets his own career through the narratives he creates. What is true of *The Puppet Kings* is true of *Fury*: both are about lives making their way into fictions and fiction making its way, all too viscerally, back into the world where meaning is made. It is then all too appropriate – given the fate of Malik’s own narratives – that critical reception of *Fury* almost universally read the text as the product of Rushdie’s self-obsessed solipsism. What needs to be acknowledged is that the book is not about Rushdie’s life, but about “Rushdie” as brand name, as paratext, and as icon. It concerns the very process through which “Rushdie” then turns his “back-story” – a story defined by the contentious politicization of literary works – into yet another book, available again for scrutiny and critique. If *The Jaguar Smile* sees contemporary political movements necessarily drawing on the resources of media and participating in the conscious creation of a historically situated iconography, in *Fury* those movements instead pose a direct challenge to the creative rights of one individual, who is granted a special power to manipulate both his own history and contemporary politics within his fictional works. For Malik, the subsequent reintegration of those narratives into the world produces an anxiety about the way the meaning they take on erases not just his intentions but also, as the novel’s frequent references to masks suggests, his very identity.

The difference is surely produced by Rushdie’s increasingly solipsistic fascination with the status of his own authorship. In fact, in terms of Rushdie’s own career, the FRM and their brutal leader (who is certainly no Daniel Ortega) resemble no one so much as the fundamentalists who enacted, in Rushdie’s oft-expressed view, a politicized appropriation of *The Satanic Verses* completely analogous to what the FRM do to Malik’s works. Much of the logic of *Fury* is derived from the cultural politics of the *Satanic Verses* affair, which, as a number of critics have noted, made Roland Barthes’ pronouncements about the “death of the author” all too literal. Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère notes that the “fate” of *The Satanic Verses* as a novel “exemplifies the process of commodification, which appropriates objects and restructures their meaning according to the imperatives of political opportunism or consumerist logic”.21 If *Fury* amply demonstrates Rushdie’s belief that ideas have real effects in the world and his interest in what Dutheil de la Rochère calls “the interplay between fact and fiction, reality and imagination, the world and word”, it also shows what the *Satanic Verses* affair suggested: simply put, “that the agency of writing escapes the control of the author and exceeds
his intentions”\textsuperscript{22} Rushdie has himself said, in relation to the fatwa, that in attempting to portray an “objective reality” he “became its subject”, seeing in turn an alternative self going around as Rushdie but in the image of the devil, and fearing that “my other may succeed in obliterating me”.\textsuperscript{23} Malik has the same fear that Babur, in the guise of Akasz, may obliterate him.

As the marketing of biographical authors does indeed become more and more pronounced as a mode of differentiation within the marketplace, \textit{Fury} suggests that the proliferation of texts in their critical and market contexts makes authorial control over meaning insignificant, while making certain authors central to the literary landscape. Rather than celebrating its author’s prominence, though, \textit{Fury} laments it and also excuses it by depicting a world in which what happens to an author’s texts and personae is literally \textit{beyond his control}. In other words, the book excuses the author from accountability for his position within the market by dramatizing its operations as out of the hands of any one author.

In a basic sense, in \textit{Fury} Rushdie attempts to re-centre his own authorship by thematizing its marginalization, a process he initiated in part after the \textit{Satanic Verses} affair made it necessary for him to affirm his authorial intentions, after writing a novel that questions the idea of origins at every turn. “In Good Faith”, one of Rushdie’s passionate defences of his controversial novel against the charges of its enemies, is full of statements like “we must return for a moment to the actually existing book”, “de-contextualization has created a complete reversal of meaning” and “the original intentions of \textit{The Satanic Verses} have been so thoroughly scrambled by events as to be lost for ever”.\textsuperscript{24} One of the major problems with a credo like Barthes’ is the way it denies the author precisely such moves, such attempts to enact what Séan Burke refers to as an author’s specific political power “to distance himself from the attribution of erroneous, blasphemous or criminal motives”.\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Fury} re-inscribes Rushdie as a subject of conversation, but by lamenting the irreparable loss of any true authorial control that might police the way his works are used within a culture at large.

In other words, Rushdie wants to matter as an author of his text’s meaning, but not, he claims, as an author figure lionized by the global media and by multinational publishing. “A Dream of Glorious Return”, his account of his recent trip to India, construed as an opportunity to heal the rift between himself and his homeland, supports this point. After detailing the various barriers to his acting as an average citizen – access restrictions, bodyguards – his emphasis is on his desire “to bore India into submission”, to be uninteresting to the – average person in a way that celebrities rarely are.\textsuperscript{26} “People – journalists, policemen, friends,
strangers all write scripts for me, and I get trapped inside those fantasies”, he writes. In his own script, though, “the problems I’ve faced are gradually overcome, and I resume the ordinary literary life that is all I’ve ever wanted”.27 Fury shares this same language, depicting a beleaguered author who wants to stop living in a scenario he did not create for himself, because it causes problems that challenge his right to his own life. Indeed, as he comes to realize that the country is not so obsessed with his presence as he had thought (or been led to believe) and begins to think that the burden of the Satanic Verses can finally be cast off, he celebrates. If media coverage states, “Oh, there’s a novelist in town to go to a dinner? What’s his name? Rushdie? So what?”, Rushdie thinks that all the better.28 In fact, he describes his euphoria about passing into irrelevance as “an event of immense emotional impact, exceeding in force even the tumultuous reception of Midnight’s Children almost twenty years ago”.29

Fury is a novel in which the word “celebrity” is densely present. Rushdie’s negotiation with the term and its implications signifies his negotiation with his own position within a market-place laden with values about the status of literary culture and its relationship to economics in general. The fate of the term “celebrity” itself suggests the changing nature of the literary economy. What was once used to describe a state of fame or public renown (“Salman Rushdie’s deserved celebrity”) came to stand in for an individual (“Salman Rushdie is a deserving celebrity”) only in the mid-nineteenth century, during the time of Mark Twain and Charles Dickens and what Daniel J. Boorstin calls the “Graphic Revolution”, a period of tremendous growth in marketing culture in general.30 Joe Moran contends that it was during this period that American newspapers and magazines marketed writers by encouraging them “to work in journalistic, reportorial forms which implicitly connected writing and personality and which appeared in close proximity with more direct attempts to manufacture a persona through news, reviews, interviews and photographs”.31 In the British case, the progressive erasure of the availability of anonymity or pseudonymity as an authorial posture suggests a similar historical trajectory. In London, author-based marketing techniques developed in leaps and bounds after the collapse of the monopoly of the circulating libraries over consumption of fiction during the late nineteenth century. As Leah Price argues, signed authorship became more and more entrenched as advertisements and “gimmicks” (including “autographed photographs, illustrated interviews, house tours”) increasingly violated all distinctions between the public and the private, between the text and the flesh of the author who composed it.32

An obvious approach to Fury would involve the albeit tempting
suggestion that Rushdie is partially involved in a basic and common process of disavowal, through which he attempts to deride the sort of authorial celebritification that sells literary texts. Literary celebrity in the contemporary market-place is after all an odd fit with commercial culture in general, as it is often premised on a critique of the very consumer mechanisms that allow it to exist. Reading Fury as a form of disavowal would involve seeing Rushdie’s as concerned with maintaining the disjunction between literary and other forms of celebrity. However, the novel assumes throughout that there is no such thing as non-involvement and that the only option one has is to be complicitous with celebritification while constantly questioning the nature and implications of that involvement. The text is self-referential and solipsistic, as Kumar and others note, but it is self-defensive about something other than the author’s life-style choices, which are after all no more admirable when figured in Malik’s own behaviour. The text’s more important solipsism is its obsession with the status of its author within the literary market-place that endlessly celebrates, consecrates and derides him. It is important to note how Rushdie’s critique of the commodity function of cultural texts takes shape and what sort of autonomy the author seeks. Its critique is ultimately less of the commercialization of literary production and more of the way that commercialization makes texts so readily available for political appropriation. In Fury Rushdie registers the anxieties of an author whose works have consistently been the most tantalizing political commodities for various consumer groups, from postcolonial critics in Western universities to religious leaders in the Islamic world. The critique Rushdie offers is not generally of commodification, but specifically of the lack of authorial control allowed to him as a major producer of texts for the niche of postcolonial literatures in English. As Rai claims about the contest over Vina’s death in The Ground Beneath Her Feet, debates about culture within the industry of the global popular are never just economic, dealing with “audience share or advertising revenue”.³³ The effort to separate legitimate cultural production from large-scale production is outdated. Instead, as Rai claims, “Meaning itself is the prize”,³⁴ and that meaning is significantly political. Fury thus expresses Rushdie’s anxiety about the impossibility of authoring the political meaning of his own works.

NOTES
5 *ibid.*, p. 108.
6 *ibid.*, p. 112.
7 *Salman Rushdie*, p. 150.
10 Amitava Kumar, “The Bend in their Rivers”, *The Nation*, 26 Nov. 2001, p. 34.
11 *ibid.*, p. 35.
12 *Fury*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2001, p. 3. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited in the text.


17 *ibid.*, p. 13.


20 Rushdie’s attitude toward Babur and his cronies in *Fury* is all the more strange given his stated support for the Indo-Fijian position in his *New York Times* article, where he also questions the tendency to position the two races against one another. The difference between political reality and fictional representation is, in this case, understandable when one takes account of the attention Rushdie wants to pay, in *Fury*, to specific aspects of the process through which political struggles are mediated.


22 *ibid.*


24 *ibid.*, pp. 395, 402, 403.


27 *ibid.*, p. 191.

28 *ibid.*, p. 206.

29 *ibid.*, p. 207.


34 *ibid.*