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# "The Past is a Country from which we have all Emigrated": Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial and Postmodern Embrace of Memory

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### "THE PAST IS A COUNTRY FROM WHICH WE HAVE ALL EMIGRATED": SALMAN RUSHDIE'S POST-COLONIAL AND POSTMODERN EMBRACE OF MEMORY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Stephen James Bell

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania School of Graduate Studies and Research Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

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Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This dissertation examines Salman Rushdie's major works for the ways that they consistently affirm the power of memory to construct a concrete, rooted identity for characters and nation-states despite the prerogative of migrants to translate themselves into new creations through a dismissal of the weight of the past. If "exile is a dream of glorious return" (212), as one of his characters reflects in *The Satanic Verses*, few diasporic writers living today rival Rushdie for the singular inspiration he draws from memories of home and the past. So vital is the idea of home and belonging to Rushdie that, notwithstanding the frequent charges of his critics that he represents no more than a disconnected cosmopolitan, I would categorize his position as one of "centripetal migrancy." The word centripetal comes from the Latin, with *centrum* "center" and *petere* "to seek," forming the idea of a constant quest for the center.

Theories that are utilized throughout the dissertation include postcolonialism, particularly the works of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, and postmodernism, focusing on the approaches of Frederic Jameson, Linda Hutcheon, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida. All postcolonial nations live, as it were, at the confluence of many rivers. Having had their agency, subjectivity, and (many times) their very past stripped from them during the imperialist encounter, they desire to recover their distinct histories, languages and narratives that had been written over or erased by European power. The intentional exercise of memory in all its contradictory truth and potential for slippage therefore becomes a powerful tool in the hands of most postcolonial authors. Postmodern theory insists on the palimpsestic, layered quality of reality; by insisting on the partial, fragmented quality of memory, Rushdie counters a totalizing, essentialist approach that would do violence to the multivarious, heterogeneous quality of the past. He thus becomes what I would term the premier "centripetal migrant," whose slippery critical location is balanced Janus-faced between the future and the past. Each major work of Rushdie's is incorporated into this analysis, a piece of single-author scholarship organized thematically, with particular weight being placed on his early subcontinental fiction.