Chapter I

Introduction

Salman Rushdie, a famous and controversial Anglo-Indian novelist, was born on June 19, 1947, in Bombay and grew up in a middle-class Muslim family. His father is an educated-Cambridge businessman. At the age of fourteen, Rushdie entered Rugby School in England, where he began his academic life. In 1967, his parents left Bombay for Karachi, Pakistan, joining unwillingly the Muslim Exodus. During these years, Rushdie faces an annoying task of taking a political side because of the vehement war between Pakistan and India. Rushdie has experienced the quandary of dispora since his school days in England. Thus, how to anchor his self-identity has become one of his most crucial concerns. He inscribes his nomadic experience in the novels, using postmodern writing devices, including metafictional parodies, magical realism, and so forth to mock and criticize the contemporary political and religious turmoil between Pakistan and India. The devices also challenge the western cultural hegemonic discourse. In 1975, Rushdie published his first science fiction, *Grimus*. Then, in succession, he published a series of novels and essays, including *Midnight Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), *The Satanic Verses* (1988), *East, West* (1994) and so forth, by which he becomes well-known while the book, *The Satanic Verses*, makes his life at risk. The novel is accused of blaspheming the holiness of Islam and causes the former Iran spiritual leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to condemn Rushdie to death. The event is called “Rushdie Affair” or “fatwa,” which forces Rushdie to exile. Now Rushdie is under protection by an anonymous scholar in England and devotes himself to writing.
This thesis is going to analyze *East, West*, published after *The Satanic Verses*. Although some consider the novel loose and fragmented, it reflects Rushdie’s pivotal view to diaspora/migrant identity, language, and literary writing. In the novel, we can see how Rushdie challenges the dichotomous worldview in terms of his ambivalent attitude. *East, West*, a collection of nine short stories, is divided into three sections—“East,” “West,” and “East, West.” The “East” section contains “Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies,” “The Free Radio,” and “The Prophet’s Hair.” The three stories are set in India and Pakistan. The first one describes a woman, a would-be migrant, who gives up living in England and finally chooses to stay in her hometown. The second story is about a young handsome rickshaw-wallah, Ramani, who uses “self-deception” and “imagination” as aids to happiness (Goonetilleke 126). The third one follows the form and tone of *The Arabian Nights* in a cynical way to probe the undistinguished line between good and evil in religion (Goonetilleke 127).

In the “West” section—“Yorick,” “At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers,” and “Christopher Columbus and Queen Isabella of Spain Consume Their Relationship”—Rushdie parodies the western literary and historical tradition to subvert the western hegemonic culture and discourse. “Yorick” parodies William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* to subvert the western literary canon. The second story depicts an auction of the ruby slippers, by which Dorothy comes back safely to her Auntie Em (a warm, safe place) in *The Wizard of Oz*. The slippers are the symbol of peace and hope. However, the slippers here are boxed in a bulletproof case and cannot save their owners out of the nightmarish society (Goonetilleke 128). In the final story, Rushdie revises the western history about the romance between Columbus
and Queen of Spain. Their sexual relationship implies the union of both continent
and sea regimes. It successfully satirizes (unmasks) the glorious European colonial
history.

Finally, the “East, West” section is also composed of three stories—“The
Harmony of the Spheres,” “Chekov and Zulu” and “The Courter.” From these titles,
readers can implicitly perceive the combination of the East and the West. The
bipolar worlds are merged together but differences still remain; the idea of
incommensurability adequately conveys that Rushdie denies being fixed and
homogenized by specific discourse. “The Harmony of the Spheres” is a story
describing the friendship between a paranoid schizophrenia writer, Eliot Crane and his
wife, Lucy, and the Indian couple, Khan and Mala. The cross-culture relationship
and conflicts occur between extra-marital affairs between the two couples and the
black magic which intends to synthesize both the East and the West. “Chekov and
Zulu,” the second story, is about the friendship of two friends. Chekov (an Indian)
and Zulu (a Sikh), whose code names are from Star Trek, have been intimate friends
since their childhood. They both come to London as “intrepid diplomants,”
suggested as spies in England. After the assassination of Indira Gandhi, who is killed
by a Sikh safeguard, they are fated to separate because of their disparate political
opinions. The third story, “The Courter,” is Rushdie’s autobiographical story, which
reflects his own voice most (King 650). The part of cultural crossing happens
among Mary and the porter and the narrator himself. The story is about the
narrator’s early memories in London, including cultural conflicts his family has
encountered and the romance between Certainly-Mary, an Indian ayah, and the porter,
an Eastern European. After reading the stories, we know that the East and the West is impossible to be synthesized together totally. Those who attempt to combine them together are doomed to fail. Only those who perceive cultural differences and refuse to take sides can survive.

There are few articles commenting on this novel. However, if we categorize the available critical materials, we see that there are extremely opposite critiques about the novel. On the one hand, some critics, such as Dean Flower, criticize the book as an “uneven” collection of the nine stories, arranged to suggest more “coherence” and “sequential” design (491). It also “misses” the point of its own tales and runs to “excess” in its content. Rushdie fails to reach the same “huge mad energy” in this novel like that of his previous works (Flower 491). In other words, the structure of the novel is loose, fragmented, and without a holistic vision. Nevertheless, some other critics maintain that though these stories are not preplanned, they seem to fall into a pattern (Goonetilleke 125). Most of the stories demonstrate the “conflict” and “confluence” of the people living between the borderlands of the two worlds (Rubin B1). They not only epitomize the writer’s diasporic dilemma but convey his ambivalent attitude towards self-identity.

Due to his diasporic experience, Rushdie writes from double perspectives—an “insider” and “outsider” in a society. This spectacular stance offers him a chance to view the world in a “stereoscopic vision” instead of a conventional “whole vision” (Davis 81). The stereoscopic vision creates a unified image in another angle diverse from the western one. He fuses alternative realities and cultures into his writing, which challenges the Eurocentric historical view (Davis 81-2). All stories in the
novel take place in the borderline between the East and the West, where the two
cultures mix and mongrelize. Under such circumstances, Rushdie opposes standing
at a certain point; instead, he chooses to stay in a zone of “in-betweenness” (Critchton
59), in which hybridity is the kernel of the idea. Rushdie’s ambivalent attitude
towards his identity and his conception of an imaginary “homeland” are praised by a
lot of critics. His taking-no-side philosophy assimilates Homi Bhabha’s term
--“liminal space,” which deconstructs “pure,” “essential” or ontological existence and
dichotomous values as well. Rushdie employs the liminal space in East, West to
challenge dichotomous/monolithic values embedded in diasporic identity, language,
and literary writings.

My thesis mainly focuses on how Rushdie employs the third space in different
aspects to defy monolithic values. The space makes him a free agent in the
dichotomous world. I will divide the thesis into three main sections: diaspora space,
linguistic space, and literary space (a new zone of the novel and metafictional parody).
Before discussing the novel in terms of the third space, I have to introduce the basic
idea of Bhabha’s “in-between space (liminal space),” which is the foundation of other
forms of third space in the thesis.

Bhabha, as a postcolonial theorist, is concerned with culture and identity politics.
In the series of his writings, he promotes the ideas of in-between/liminal space and
cultural hybridity/difference within colonial discourse. For him, no culture is full
itself, for there are still other cultures contradicting its authority; cultural formation is
itself a signification process as well. The facts challenge the holistic view of cultural
discourse (Bhabha, “The Third Space” 210). He once claimed, “the colonial
presence is always ambivalent, split between its presence as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference” (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 107). Holistic and monolithic colonial discourse actually sustains its dominance by repressing and silencing the Other’s voices. However, these silenced voices, which cannot be oversimplified, become subversive forces within the seemingly univocal colonial discourse. Factually, colonial discourse is a site of cultural hybridity, where suppressed cultures are regarded as dangerous and unstable elements. Bhabha asserts that hybridity is “a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (*LC* 114). Cultural difference bolsters the silenced cultures to sustain their cultural uniqueness and rebel against naturalization or generalization in colonial discourse (Olson and Worsham 16). Cultural difference is an important element of the liminal space, in which cultural hybridity[^2] forms a process of cultural and social negotiation (Olson and Worsham 19). Hybridity is “the name for the strategic reversal of the process of

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[^1]: Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* in the dissertation will be abbreviated as *LC* in the following pages.

[^2]: Regarding the “liminal space,” the idea of “hybridity” cannot be avoided. Hybridity, “the process or the moment of homogenization when dissimilar entities are combined and exist in complement with each other,” is one of the most employed words in the post-colonial theory (Sanga 75). It refers to a kind of “transcultural” form, which occurs within a “contact zone” produced by colonization (Ashcroft *KCPS* 118). Edward Brathwaite demonstrates such “transcultural” form as “the ongoing development of indigenous forms and the mutual interaction between different histories and traditions” (Sanga 77). Because of its particular synthesized form, hybridity contests the idea of purity, essentiality, and fixity of identity in the colonizer’s monolithic voice (Sanga 75).
domination through disavowal” and it is the “revaluation of the assumption of
colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects” (Bhabha,
*LC* 112). It discloses the existence of the deformed and the discriminated in
dominant discourse and subverts the dominant discourse by shifting the gaze on the
discriminated back to the dominant (Bhabha, *LC* 112). However, hybridity is not the
end itself; it is a strategy which “alerts us to the difficulty of living with differences,
their ultimate irreducible resistance to complete dissolution” (Ang 149-50). In other
words, it is a device for “analyzing complicated entanglement” and the power to
destabilize the established cultural relation (Ang 150).

Hence, cultural hybridity is “a source of cultural permeability and
vulnerability that is a necessary condition for living together in-diffrence” (Ang 150),
which blurs the borderline. It is the same as the liminal space, where various
cultural discourses confront and negotiate with one another. The concept of “liminal
space” comes from Bhabha, who appropriates the word “limen” to elaborate his idea
of the third space. “Liminality,” a term derived from the word “limen” means a
threshold. It is often used in psychology to indicate the threshold between the
“sensate” and the “subliminal.” It is an “in-between” space (Ashcroft, *Key Concepts
in Post-colonial Studies* 3 130). The liminal space used in post-colonial theory
represents an “in-between” space where transcultural interactions occur. It is a site
in which continuous cultural movements and interactions take place. The
representative example is the ambivalent identity of migrants, who face the dilemma
of self identification. They waver in the liminal space between their “assumption of

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1 The book will be abbreviated as *KCPS* in the following pages.
the new ‘non-colonial’ identity” and the identity “colonial discourse” imposes on them (Ashcroft, *KCPS* 130). The process of self identification is not a simple movement from one certain identity to another. Instead, it is a “constant process of engagement, contestation, and appropriation” (Ashcroft, *KCPS* 130). Within the liminal space, both the polarities of “imperial discourse” and the “national or racial characterization” are questioned (Ashcroft, *KCPS* 131). The ambivalent dimension, a “contact zone” between two cultures, blurs the hierarchy of cultures and allies with “hybridity.” Bhabha asserts, “[T]his *interstitial passage* between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (*LC* 4, emphasis added). Both the “liminal space” and “hybridity” question any form of cultural hegemony and subvert the prestige of fixed identity. Within this ambivalent space, what has been pinned down in a specific stance is going to be redefined and revalued.

Bhabha further argues, “displacement and liminality opens up the possibility of articulating different, even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities” (“The Third Space” 210-11); he again elaborates the liminal (third) space as a dyad which “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (“The Third Space” 211). The space is a dynamic area in which incommensurable entities negotiate and then forms newness into the dichotomous world. As a result of the newness they bring, both cultural hybridity and the liminal space endow the silenced with power to question generalization of culture and essentialism and then to revaluate the original/dominant discourse. Although the liminal/third space and
cultural hybridity prevent the silenced from generalization and create new cultures, they may fall into the pitfall of essentialism as well. According to Floya Anthias and Jan Assmann, the liminal space may run the risk of falling into essentialism by excluding otherness in order to maintain their subject positions or cultural uniqueness. For Bhabha, however, the liminal space is the process changing with time and circumstances; it is an open and dynamic system welcoming the incommensurable and otherness. As Bhabha propounds,

The intervention of the third space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as integrated, open, expanding code. (LC 37)

Within the liminal space, all have to keep changing, avoiding falling into the fixed ideology again. Hence, agents within the third space will really gain freedom. Bhabha’s liminal space in the postcolonial theory helps us find other types of third space in diverse disciplines. For instance, the three kinds of third space in the thesis are diaspora space, linguistic space, and literary space. These ambivalent spaces empower diasporans, colonial people, and novelists/readers to problematize and rethink essentialist/conventional discourse. In the following chapters, I will elaborate on the three kinds of third space in East, West to see how Rushdie by the characters finds an outlet for his identification quandary and how he challenges the western cultural, linguistic, and literary hegemony while without conforming to the eastern discourse at the same time.