

INTRODUCTION

The Unspeakable Body of the Tale

All good art is provocative. . . . I do want art to stir you up, to make you think and feel. . . . That's what the work of art does to you. If it doesn't, it's inert.

—Salman Rushdie¹

IN HANEEF RAMAY'S abstract painting *Muhammad* (circa 1958; see frontispiece), a human figure sits facing sideways, silhouetted against blazing red flames, gazing meditatively at the curling tongues of a fire that appears to emanate both from him and beyond him.² A viewer unfamiliar with Arabic script may not realize that this geometrically shaped figure also is (or figures) the calligraphic inscription of a sacred word, "Muhammad." (Written in Arabic as مُحَمَّد, with four letters: meem, heih, meem, daal.) This pictorial representation of a human body acts as a visual pun, coinciding with the verbal text that names that body. What relation does this startling convergence suggest between word and image, and word and body? How could one become the other? Which represents which? Quranic calligraphy has long been a subject of interest and reverence in twentieth-century

Pakistani painting and sculpture.³ By conflating word and image, however, Ramay's painting approaches what is forbidden to Islamic representation: the body of the Holy Prophet.⁴ Artful through his art, the artist replaces and simultaneously represents that body as a text. In so doing, he also suggests some crucial connections between words and bodies.

Ramay's painting presents the prophet Muhammad in the moment of *becoming* the Prophet: the messenger in the darkness of the cave, or *hira*, receiving the *wahi*, the illumination of the Divine Word. From this inaugural moment, the painting suggests, this body will bring word—eventually a sacred book—of a revolutionary new religion that will in turn become flesh, transforming peoples, identities, histories. Words thus are both produced by and act upon bodies with material, bodily force. Henceforth, the Prophet's words will act upon those who are converted by them to Islam, upon bodies that will literally take those words on their tongues, to recite, to bend in devotional postures, to adopt distinctive bodily markers. Yet words and bodies are not only interdependent but also analogous, for both can act or be acted upon, and both can be turned into an instrument of another's design. Muhammad's words and body have power to enact material, revolutionary change, but they are also vulnerable: his words can be misused or misinterpreted by others, and bodies can be constrained, hurt, or punished. By depicting both the word and the body (of) Muhammad as the same, as equally elemental, powerful, and fragile, Ramay disorders any priority we might assume of one over the other. By implication, this painting also invokes the bodily power of the word to evoke more generally the agency of art. What can art as a human construct—verbal or pictorial—*do* in the world of which it is a part?

I begin with Ramay's painting because it raises questions central to this book and exemplifies their convergence. Although it calls upon visual representation to evoke the verbal, it is fascinated with the relations between words and bodies, with verbal agency and art's material effectuality. Why should postcolonial art be preoccupied with its own agency; its political, material, social effectuality; its dependence on and exploitability in the world; its capacity to tell truth? What hubris, or anxiety, could drive both colonial and postcolonial literature to claim political agency, to imagine that words can matter, that language, so seemingly remote and abstract, can yet embrace, touch, and have material effects on the world? And why should the human body become central

to such literary self-imagining, to the articulation of relations between texts and their world? Why do artists turn to the human body as the figure and site of literary agency: the condition of art's concomitant power and vulnerability?

Ramay's *Muhammad* depicts a pivotal historical moment when words enacted change; in so doing, it radically re-imagines that moment. By rendering ambiguous the source of those flaming tongues of light and fire, it introduces a staggering doubt: do they emerge from some divine source beyond representation, or from the Prophet himself? Is this human body/word a source or a medium, an autonomous agent or a tool of divine intent? Through those flames, at once suggestive of creation and destruction, of comfort and pain, surrounding his lone body or emanating powerfully from him, the painting hints subversively that Muhammad's flaming words may well be his own, engendered by *human* inspiration, illumination, and desire, calling upon its Muslim viewers to rethink their history and religion and the secular power of human/divine revelation. Thus, this painting also reflects upon its own agency as a human work of art: if Muhammad's "message" could change the world, how autonomous is art's message and what work can it do? Is its function to submit, revere, commemorate, or to question, critique, imagine alternatives for change? In a postcolonial nation such as Pakistan—founded as a secular homeland for Muslims seeking separation from India—what kind of agent can art be? From this religious and political context arises a secular art, interacting with its environment and asking how art may participate in the (re)making of its world.⁵

In a surprisingly comparable mode, Salman Rushdie's work also draws upon the human body to pose questions about its own agency. Early in *Midnight's Children* (1981), Saleem the narrator breaks off the saga of his life, family, and nation to reflect: "Family history, of course, has its own proper dietary laws. One is supposed to swallow and digest only the permitted parts of it, the halal portions of the past, drained of their redness, their blood. Unfortunately, this makes the stories less juicy; so I am about to become the first and only member of my family to flout the laws of halal. *Letting no blood escape from the body of the tale, I arrive at the unspeakable part; and undaunted, press on*" (my emphasis).⁶ "Flouting" cultural and familial prohibitions to tell "unspeakable" truths, reconstructing a past that parental authority would erase, and evoking a shameful maternal sexuality, Saleem advertises his transgressions as a storyteller. Thus Rushdie flaunts his own daring, his fictive effort to tell dangerous yet salutary

truths about the national and communal histories that he too casts as forbidden, forgotten, and familial. Yet why should this verbal act be cast as a bodily one of eating and sharing slaughtered flesh, as if stories (histories) taken in and given out, passed from mouth to mouth, were as necessary as food? Why should family history be “swallowed” and “digested” by the storyteller, assimilated and incorporated into his body, and then re-produced for his audience to consume? Unlike the storytellers who abide by the “laws” of their community, he, Rushdie suggests, will break the religious division between “halal” and “haram” meat.⁷ *Not* letting the blood escape from his stories, Rushdie claims, he will present them whole, unpurified, and uncensored rather than “drained” of their blood, color, and life. To “press on to the unspeakable part” is to render his stories more sustaining and juicy (or “juicygory”),⁸ to swallow the blood with the full “body of the tale.”

Like Ramay, Rushdie calls upon the body to suggest both the vulnerability and the resistant, political potential of his work. His carnivorous metaphor suggests both the vitality and the violence inherent in narration and consumption: stories both nourish and can be subject to censorship or amputation. And like Ramay, reimagining a critical historical moment through this bodily language, Rushdie returns to the past to regain control of how that past is remembered and hence to recast how the present and future, both individual and collective, will be fashioned. But Rushdie’s writing explicitly both raises doubts about and insists on its own agency. It valorizes its potential to enter other bodies, to change them and their world. *Midnight’s Children*, his seminal novel of post-colonial nationhood, concludes with the well-known assertion that Saleem the narrator (and Rushdie too) has been “chutnifying history.” Saleem conflates his writing of history with his manual work making condiments in a pickle factory, preserving in “words and pickles” his “memories, dreams, and ideas, . . . humors, messages, emotions,” which are to be consumed by his readers (*MC*, 548–49). But this labor has political power: these “pickled chapters” are to be “*unleashed* upon the amnesiac nation” that will consume them (*MC*, 549; my emphasis). Thus, Rushdie proposes that his writing will infiltrate the unsuspecting bodies (and body) of the nation that consumes it, infusing them with healthy, vital alternative versions of national-as-familial history to contest politically sanctioned ones. His writing will remind that nation of what it may have forgotten, insisting only upon the truth that no history is truthful, educating its

readers and changing how they see and are seen, what they remember of themselves, who they are and can be.

Rushdie's self-descriptions optimistically suggest that writing can be a material bodily act and have material, bodily effects, that the relation between his fiction and the world is not just one-directional: they link the body and language to advance a mutually transformative relation between language and the material to which it bears more than a referential relation. A trope of storytelling central to *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) proposes that the world is absorbed or taken *in* by the writer-protagonist (inhaled as oxygen), is incorporated into his flesh, transforming it, and then is breathed *out* in altered form (exhaled as carbon dioxide) so that what he sighs or (re)produces, as *word*, will in turn materially transform that world (*Moor*, 53–54). These bodily representations of language attempt to break down binary oppositions between language and material reality, between word and world, between inside and outside: both insist on the mutual reinforcement and inextricability of language and body, as well as the porous continuities between the self and its environment.

But such grand claims of material effectuality also reveal their own anxiety. Rushdie shows repeatedly how writers and writing are vulnerable to being co-opted or destroyed because of the truths that they might reveal. Because of this power, words can be destroyed or dismembered just as bodies can. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's communicative body undergoes the terrible "sperectomies" of Indian state repression, and his telepathic talents are co-opted by Pakistan's totalitarianism for genocidal ends. In *The Satanic Verses* (1988), the irrepressible Baal is executed for his blasphemous verses, while Salman, the more cowardly scribe, subverts but serves those whose authority he fears. By the time of his writing *The Moor's Last Sigh*, in the aftermath of the fatwa (1989), Rushdie's playful, audacious urge to tell forbidden truths, to name the unnamable, has turned into a sober insistence on the need to resist silencing. To sigh is literally to change the air through the action of one's body and figuratively to resist, to assert one's continued existence despite forces that may extinguish life: "I exhale, I overcome. . . . I sigh, therefore I am," announces the Moor, displacing the Cartesian mind with his body as the site of being.⁹ If the Moor's "last sigh" refers to his long life story—Rushdie's novel—then to sigh is to continue to narrate, to insist on one's own version of reality, to give proof of coping with life, and to live responsibly in the world, because (especially after the fatwa) for

Rushdie the failure to struggle to change the world, to write, and to tell stories is indeed to die.

This book examines a preoccupation with what I call “literary agency,” with how the capacity to act and to act for others, to affect and to be affected by their world, haunts and shapes both colonial and postcolonial literary texts.¹⁰ More specifically, I examine how and why this preoccupation is centrally tied to evocations of the human body. For the purposes of this study, I focus on the work of Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster, and Salman Rushdie, three of the most influential and self-conscious writers to emerge from the history of British imperialism in India. Yet while the three share a certain set of cultural, historical, and political contexts and have a vertical if embattled literary relationship with each other (each subsequent writer is highly aware of, familiar with, and contestatory of the work of his precursors), they are also usefully different in representing three distinct political and historical positionalities—respectively, colonial, colonial anticolonial, and postcolonial—allowing me to chart both their similarities and their differences within a tight focus and to elaborate how, despite their differences, they articulate shared concerns with the agency of their work as they call upon the body to articulate those concerns. Through intensive readings of their fiction, essays, letters, and travel writings, I explore how this overriding concern about the function and status of art both manifests and works itself out by assuming central links between human language and the bodily. I argue that because they wrote in contexts of embattled power relations, and perhaps because they were situated between various cultural borders, these writers focus self-reflectively in their writing on the unstable capacity of words to be used and abused, to tell (or make) truth and to be censored. This central concern with literary agency is embedded in (indeed, definitive of) colonial and postcolonial literature. But I contend that for these writers (and indeed for many others, as I suggest in my epilogue), all of whom evoke distinctive and complex relations between words and bodies, the human body becomes central to the imagining of the text in the world because it uniquely concretizes a three-fold instability about human agency: it is at once the site of autonomy, instrumentality, and subjection. What is distinctive about each writer is how he or she imagines this relationship and hence the power or susceptibility of art. Unlike many writers, however, Kipling, Forster, and Rushdie sustain this link between body, text, and literary agency throughout their work.

It is perhaps inevitable that political writing—fraught with dangers of censorship, prohibition, and retribution—should be acutely aware of its cultural and political potential and vulnerability. Anxiety, instead of necessarily being psychically disabling, can also be enabling when it shapes how a writer approaches his or her craft. Colonial experiences often produce what Trinh Minh-ha has called the “both-in-one insider/outsider,” who is precariously located on the borders between unequal cultures, whose cultural (dis)location—or, in Rushdie’s phrase, “at once plural and partial” identities—can enable both sympathetic and critical perspectives.¹¹ For such colonial and postcolonial writers with often multiple, conflicting allegiances—Anglo-Indian Kipling, born in Bombay, racially white, pro-imperial yet skeptical of English claims to know and rule India; English Forster, anti-imperialist yet not an advocate of Indian nationalism; and Anglicized Rushdie, born in India, a citizen of Britain, highly critical of Pakistan, to which his family migrated—the need for self-location becomes greater and the stakes of literary agency more fraught. If “it is the force of circumstance that triggers anxiety about agency,”¹² the self-examination and self-exposure of colonial and postcolonial writers reveals a complex cultural condition as well as concern about literature’s *raison d’être*. All three writers studied here dwell upon the agency of their words (which take on an independent existence of their own), not outside of but *in* their art; indeed, their work is shaped by this concern. Though each calls *differently* upon the human body to center that concern about agency, they all seem to presume that art is not an inert artifact but something that *acts* upon others and upon the world, that *does* something, shaping subjectivities and actions, making a material difference in the world.¹³ The doubleness of my title, *Making Words Matter*, thus suggests both the making of literature that matters in the world, and the making of it *into* matter, that is, making it material.

At the same time that it reveals unexpected connections, this study also reveals significant differences between the writers it examines, in particular showing how the issue of literary agency shifts tellingly over the literary-historical trajectory it charts (Victorian to postcolonial). As an imperial writer still subject to imperial censorship, Kipling is less concerned with enacting social change and more with the degree to which his writing can be damaged or evade damage, as well as with how he can encode an implicit though ambivalent critique of empire. Forster’s work is perhaps the most marked by its concern

with censorship (about homosexuality or empire), yet it is also far more intent upon finding ways to transgress, to speak the proscribed body, to have effect—though necessarily in covert form. Most dramatically of all three, since 1989 Rushdie has himself been threatened with bodily silencing and his book has been subjected to public burning, yet he, ironically, has been (both before and after the fatwa) the most defiant of censorship in his writing and the most overtly focused on how his fiction can affect national and global communities. This study is, however, not interested in merely comparing three significant writers. Rather, its purpose is to explore a broader problematic of the political agency of colonial and postcolonial literatures and the ways in which, even in highly different circumstances, these literatures are shaped by that self-consciousness. Establishing an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for these questions (and their relation to contemporary scholarship) here is thus key to my readings in the following chapters.

Why should writers preoccupied with the agency of their writing be drawn to the human body to ground their concerns? What does *agency* have to do with the *body*? The instability of the word *agent* is evident in its antithetical everyday meanings: one who acts autonomously, effectively, and intentionally, versus one who acts for another as a tool subordinate to someone else's will and design. The modern notion of agency includes being both "active initiator and passive instrument."¹⁴ A basic reason why the human body draws writers concerned about literary agency is that the body uniquely concretizes the complexities of human agency. As philosophical action theory reminds us, human intention can be manifested and executed only through bodily action. Norman Care and Charles Landesman define action, something we *do* (as opposed to what happens *to* us), as involving "genuine physical interventions of a person in the world."¹⁵ However, as A. I. Melden points out, though every action involves some "bodily movement, . . . not every bodily movement counts as an action," thus restricting action to bodily movements for which we are morally responsible.¹⁶ Theorizing agency, the sociologist Anthony Giddens defines action as a "stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporal beings in the ongoing process of events in the world."¹⁷ Action and agency are thus fundamentally tied to bodily being. Our modern Western sense of individual and political autonomy is based on Hobbes's and Locke's definitions of selfhood as possession of one's own body, or bodily freedom. Hobbes's political theory

in *Leviathan* depends on his “reduction of human beings to self-moving and self-directing systems of matter.”¹⁸ For Locke, the one thing every human owned was his body, hence his property was that which he acquired by bodily labor: “[E]very man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labor of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his.”¹⁹ However, as historian Michel Foucault has shown, power is enacted singularly upon and through human bodies: bodies can be acted upon, or used, by others.²⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin argues that it is through representations of the grotesque or lower body that the oppressed (by class and also by race) have traditionally sought means of resistance to dominant authority.²¹ Across disciplines, thinkers agree, the very fact of embodiment, the sense of inhabiting a body, is what both founds and confounds our sense of selfhood, autonomy, responsibility, and the ability to resist and to act in and upon our world.

Thus, the human body functions both symbolically and literally as the site of this threefold instability about human agency: it is at once the site of autonomy, instrumentality, and subjection. It is the primary vehicle for intentional action and responsibility; it can be made an instrument for another’s intention; and as literary critic Elaine Scarry movingly describes, it can be made most abject when subjected to pain, punishment, or constraint.²² The human body then becomes crucial for both colonial and postcolonial writers’ representation of literary subjection, instrumentalization, and intervention in the public sphere because the body concretizes these instabilities of human agency: it is the site of subjectivity and subjection, of power and disempowerment, of vulnerability and resistance, of identity (usually encoded in racialized or gendered terms), and of separation from and interpenetration by the world, a seemingly stable constant of selfhood yet constantly subject to change. Moreover, the body centers the individual *and* relational experiences of inhabiting it, so that we are at once ourselves and ourselves in relation to others. This concomitant independence and interrelationality of the body and its multiple processes allows all of the writers I study here to explore the autonomy and material interrelations between literature and its environment.

In recent years, the broader problem of human agency has become a focus of renewed interest for scholars in a variety of fields. By replacing the humanist notion of the holistic “self” with the fragmented, multiply determined “subject,” post-structuralism has complicated our understanding of individuality,

selfhood, and intentionality as well as of acting with autonomy, responsibility, and will. At the same time, the disappearance of the “self” has been challenged by scholars concerned with historically suppressed or silenced subjectivities, who emphasize the personhood, resistance, and self-representation of women, subalterns, and ethnic or sexual minorities in and beyond literature. Literary and cultural critics have begun to explore the agency of characters and readers, as well as of language and texts. Literature and language act upon us, shaping our sense of ourselves and of our world. As Bruce Robbins puts it, “Novels both have and are agents. . . . One way in which they are agents is by producing and propagating fictions of agency and agent-characters which have worldly consequences in encouraging or discouraging various forms of action.”²³ Jerome McGann contends that Romantic poets such as Blake and Byron show us that “poetry is a form of [social] action rather than a form of representation.”²⁴ Likewise, postcolonial critics have emphasized how language can be a tool of both oppression and resistance. “Colonialism is an operation of discourse,” state Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, “established initially by guns, guile and disease” but “maintained . . . by textuality.”²⁵ Postcolonial writing, “with its signification of authority,” seeks to “wrest” power back from “dominant European culture,” assert Bill Ashcroft et al.²⁶ In his study of imperialism in eighteenth-century literature, Srinivas Aravamudan proposes the term “‘tropicopolitan’ as a name for the colonized subject . . . and agent of resistance” who “tropicalizes” colonial or metropolitan discourses as a “motivated” act of resistance, while Ketu Katrak’s important study shows how postcolonial women’s cultural texts underscore how women both experience and resist oppression through their bodies.²⁷ Thus, literary scholars working in a variety of historical periods have begun to examine how literature both addresses and affects the way human beings act in the world.

None, however, have explored how an anxiety about the agency of literature marks literature itself or why a consideration of the body is necessary to address that concern. And though literary scholars have amply examined the representation of bodies as sites of oppression and resistance, they have not considered how the body may be necessary to the *self*-representation of the text. This book contributes to these ongoing dialogues about agency and the body both within and beyond postcolonial studies and opens them up to the newer

question of *literary* agency. It examines how texts are built on a consciousness of their own agency, an awareness of how words have an independent existence and can be independently (mis)read, used, or destroyed. Postcolonial criticism depends on Benedict Anderson's and Homi Bhabha's contentions that nations are "imagined communities," that narration is constitutive of nations, enabling communities to imagine and (re)invent themselves. But it has not addressed how writers involved in this cultural work of narration as nation making or empire making are aware of their role and responsibilities or how that awareness is reinscribed into the texts. This book shows how writers as diverse as Kipling, Forster, and Rushdie base their work on a self-awareness of its links to its world, seeking to use its power responsibly, as well as to delineate the limitations upon it. I draw on the work of postcolonial scholars who emphasize the ambivalence of colonial literature (for example, Homi Bhabha) and connect colonial and postcolonial texts to unravel the intimacies they share (in a manner similar to that of Sara Suleri), complicating the dichotomies identified by early postcolonial criticism (as exemplified by the work of Edward Said and Abdul JanMohamed).²⁸ But self-referentiality still tends to be regarded as a form of apolitical retreat.²⁹ I attempt to show how that turn inward can be a form of reflecting on the outward and, indeed, a form of political engagement.

In attending to important theoretical and political issues, recent postcolonial criticism has sometimes neglected the density or literariness of the language; the shifts, ironies, and contradictions; or the ways political concerns may be amplified and complicated by symbolic or formal choices. *Making Words Matter* takes a very different approach: I show how politics inheres in the aesthetics of the writings I examine, and I undertake methods of interpretation that attend to this inextricability. I avoid the tendency in postcolonial criticism to focus on politics as thematics; instead, I emphasize how reading formal or figurative features can also allow us to read politically. Having established its theoretical credentials, postcolonial literary studies now needs to shift toward what Gaurav Desai has called "a newer, historically, culturally and politically conscious literary criticism," that is, more subtle, attentive critical readings of both colonial and postcolonial texts that are informed but unencumbered by theory, as we draw upon other disciplines and read traditionally "non-literary texts."³⁰ In a similar vein, Derek Attridge urges "a mode of attention to the

specificity and singularity of literary writing as it manifests itself through the deployment of form.”³¹ Attending to the formal properties of colonial and post-colonial texts is not to return to modes of reading that bracket off politics from aesthetics; rather, it can augment our political understanding of a text. The arguments of this book are made through such textual readings. One of my goals is to read these texts as complex and dense, existing in a fraught world, to explore the interrelations between a text’s features and its contexts of power.

Focusing on literary nuances or regarding texts as supplemental (in the sense of carrying something extra) to dominant ideological imprinting assumes, however, that writers do not just passively absorb and reproduce the discourses and ideologies that surround them—that they engage actively in some way with their world to produce something new, to wrestle with questions of their time without being determined by those discourses. Margery Sabin argues for the critical need to read colonial and postcolonial writers as both subject to the ideologies of their times and able to question them. Hence she distinguishes the goals and methods of literary analysis from social studies: “I call my standard of selection and method of analysis ‘literary’ in that dissenters and mavericks are discussed here as authors, whose unorthodoxy manifests itself in distinctive qualities of language and design in their writing. . . . My sequence of argument tends to reverse the order now dominant in postcolonial analysis, where the stature of an admired text usually comes at the start of an argument that, in the end, presses the author back into the general cultural pattern. I tend to put the acknowledgement of a collective colonialist discourse first and then turn to what still remains distinctive and divergent in a particular text.”³² In attending to this “unorthodoxy,” Sabin implicitly reminds us of the agency of writers who are not, in Anthony Giddens’s telling phrase, mere “cultural dopes.”³³ Writers can worry about the agency of their writing only if they have the agency to think about their agency. They can be concerned with the degree to which their work is imprinted by (or can contest) circumstantial forces only if they have the independence to think about their deviation from some norm.

As post-structuralist, Marxist, and New Historicist critics agree, multiple ideologies coexist in a culture at any one time, and their conflict provides the liberatory spaces for writers to develop resistances or individual positions within conflicting discourses. Hence Louis Montrose states, “The possibility of political and institutional agency cannot be based upon the illusion of an escape

from ideology. However, the very process of subjectively living the confrontations or contradictions within or among ideologies makes it possible to experience facets of our own subjection at shifting internal distances—to read, as in a refracted light, one fragment of our ideological inscription by means of another. A reflexive knowledge so partial and unstable may, nevertheless, provide subjects with a means to empowerment as agents.”³⁴ Sabin argues for scrupulosity and self-restraint in critical reading, allowing the text to guide the critic, instead of subsuming the text under a predefined argument or agenda or using the text to illustrate an argument of which the critic is already convinced. Such a schooled critical practice assumes that there is something unexpected to be found in a text if we as readers are willing to see it. Bart Moore-Gilbert similarly exhorts postcolonial critics to read colonial discourse with a view to its shifts over time, geographic location, complexities, ironies, and textual and “formal properties,” which, he argues, might complicate our understanding of its ideology.³⁵ I locate my work in the postcolonial scholarship that is now returning to *reading* texts while grounded in historical, theoretical, and culturally aware questions and attuned to the elements of their *difference*.³⁶ But first I would like to elaborate on some of the broader theoretical underpinnings of this project which depends on three key concepts: agency, truth, and the body.

Literary Agency

[A] person is not simply the *actor* who follows ideological scripts, but is also an *agent* who reads them in order to insert him/herself into them—or not.

—Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject*³⁷

At a crucial point in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, the quiet protagonist Fanny Price faces a difficult choice: either she must accede to the demands of her rich cousins and accept a role in the salacious play that they are rehearsing, or she must stake out a position of her own and refuse to do as they want. Her act of resistance (and of moral choice), however, is expressed through a very ambiguous metaphor: “I cannot *act*,” she plaintively insists.³⁸ In this loaded episode,

Austen's pun on the verb *to act* pulls apart its antithetical meanings: of taking independent action versus playing a role given to one by another, being subject to another's words and will—indeed, being untrue to oneself, to some essential self. Fanny, a submissive, powerless, poor relation in the Bertram household, has as yet never been able to act for herself; she has had to play the roles given to her by her family and society. Austen's metropolitan novel (with its colonial geography, as Edward Said has argued)³⁹ traces the development of this individual who matures despite her circumstances; in its humanist assumptions of individual selfhood, will, and agency, the novel is concerned with Fanny's learning to act for herself and become an autonomous moral being. Yet as we can now recognize, even Fanny's final growth and stature remain limited in that she can act only within highly limited though less visible constraints, within a framework of gendered, racial, and national ideologies that she cannot or does not question.

This problem of human agency, of the degree to which individuals have a real ability to enact choices beyond the perceived and unperceived, external and internalized limitations of their circumstances, is evoked in a similar play on “acting” in Hanif Kureishi's 1990 novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*. In an equally exigent crisis, Karim Amir, the “Englishman born and bred, almost” (3), son of a Pakistani father and English mother, gets his first job as an actor and discovers that the role he has been assigned to play is Mowgli, Kipling's Indian jungle-boy; he is then ordered to “act” on stage wearing only a loincloth and “shit-brown cream” and affecting an “authentic” Indian accent.⁴⁰ Satirizing the unintended racism of liberal 1980s Britain and its perpetuation of imperial legacies, the novel explores how the ineffectual Karim, at first unable to “act,” *can* effect some degree of agency. Faced with the choice of submitting to the overdetermined role assigned to him (of reenacting anew the ridiculous native) or of giving up his aspirations for a theatrical career, Karim acts in both senses: he plays Mowgli but subverts the role from within, “sending up” the accent, exposing through postcolonial mockery and mimicry the colonial stereotype he is forced to play (158).

These colonial and postcolonial examples raise a broad question: to what extent are human beings free to act within or able to change the circumstances in which they are unavoidably placed? These examples also connect action with the issue of truth: to act, to combat the forces threatening one, is somehow

to be true to oneself. Through the dual meanings of the term *acting*, they illustrate the conflicted modern usage of the term *agency*: an agent can (1) be autonomous, independent, choosing to act independently; or (2) act for another, in another's interests, subject to another's will or intentions, functioning as a tool or instrument. But agents can also (3) be *denied* agency and be acted upon, made into nonagents, left with no choice. This three-sided nature of agency is what interests me, as I extend the problem of human agency to literary agency, to the predicament of texts in the world, to their capacity (beyond their authors' agency) to (1) have effects; (2) be used as instruments for other interests; or (3) be silenced, suppressed, damaged, or censored.

Most discussions of agency use the term only in the first sense, as an index of autonomy. After Marx, Freud, and Saussure and our understanding of ideological formation and interpellation, of the split, unknowable psyche, and of the prison-house of language, it is no longer possible to think of the "individual" or "self" as whole, self-knowing, or self-determining or, in Paul Smith's words, as "the intending and knowing . . . conscious and coherent originator of meanings and actions." As "subjects," we are no longer sovereign over our thoughts or actions, the "bearers of consciousness," or "active mind(s) or thinking agent(s)";⁴¹ rather, we are "subjects" in the sense of being subordinated, or subjected by forces within and without us, determined instead of self-determining. Our very sense of "self" is "other."

Human agency becomes a fraught issue, because how, then, can humans be autonomous, or claim credit or responsibility for their actions and choices? Smith contends that post-structuralist theory has overlooked the grounds for human agency and that "the human agent *exceeds* the 'subject'" (xxx). He defines *agent* as "the place from which resistance to the ideological is produced or played out . . . (even though that resistance too must be produced in an ideological context)" (xxxv). Sociologist Anthony Giddens identifies the opposition between "agency" and "structure" at the heart of rifts in contemporary Western thought: he shows how, on the one hand, Anglo-American philosophy has focused on intention and rationality to the exclusion of social institutions and frameworks; on the other hand, the social sciences have emphasized structure to an extreme degree of social determinism. Instead, Giddens proposes a dialectical relationship, arguing that even as human actions are produced by and within social structures, they in turn produce social systems and act within

them. While acts are always “situated practices,” he states, a necessary feature of action is that an agent “could [always] have acted otherwise.” To Giddens, structure “is not to be conceptualized as a barrier to action, but as essentially involved in its production, . . . as both enabling and constraining.”⁴² Tellingly, most efforts to find room for human agency express a strong desire for at least a limited or mediated human agency. As literary theorist Meili Steele puts it, “We are both constructing and constructed subjects, and our deliberations need to be informed by both vocabularies.”⁴³ Reflecting upon New Historicism, Louis Montrose writes, “I am aware of a strong stake, not in any illusion of individual autonomy, but in the possibilities for limited and localized agency within the regime of power and knowledge that at once sustains and constrains us.”⁴⁴ Historian Perry Anderson critiques E. P. Thompson’s famous attack on Louis Althusser by recasting the latter’s pessimism about “the role of human agency in history” and proposes “self-determination” as a more reasonable term that acknowledges the limited yet real choices we have in everyday actions.⁴⁵ Such a concept of agency has had obvious importance for postcolonial critics, who have tried to locate at least a “peripheral” subaltern agency despite colonial suppression—both physical and discursive.⁴⁶

This book recasts the question of agency in different terms: instead of the agency of the colonized subject or of the reader of colonial discourse, it explores the agency of literary texts produced in contexts of colonization and decolonization. If we were to understand agency in the terms set by action philosophy, in which agents are by definition conscious, rational intentional beings, to speak of texts having agency might seem a contradiction in terms. Obviously, I do not suppose that texts have consciousness or volition or that they “act” in the sense that humans do, with intention or rationality.⁴⁷ However, most literary and cultural critics now assume that texts do “cultural work,” that they act in the world just as they are produced and limited by it.⁴⁸ Montrose observes, “To speak, then, of the social production of ‘literature’ or of any particular text is to signify not only that it is socially produced but also that it is socially productive—that it is the product of work and that it performs work in the process of being written, enacted, or read.” Later, he elaborates, “In its anti-reflectionism, its shift of emphasis from the formal analysis of *artifacts* to the ideological analysis of discursive *practices*, . . . the emergent historical orientation in literary studies is pervasively concerned with writing as a mode of *action*.”⁴⁹ Montrose’s empha-

sis on writing as a “mode of action,” on texts as being “socially productive” as well as produced, is crucial, recalling Kenneth Burke’s argument that language is a form of “symbolic action,” that it is not only denotative but also “suasive” by nature: it exhorts, it *does* something (though Montrose emphasizes the ways in which texts are equally subject to ideological and other forces).⁵⁰ Shelley famously dubbed poets the “unacknowledged legislators of the world,” because through their words, writers act upon the world, to bring about social, political, and cultural transformation.⁵¹ But as he recognized, those words remain in the world and act in it beyond their authors’ knowledge or control. Reader-response theory has similarly contributed to our understanding that texts are not merely static objects that reflect the world but are instead “performative acts” that become “a way of world-making”; although “the text itself is the outcome of an intentional act whereby an author refers to and intervenes in an existing world,” an author cannot anticipate what will happen between a text and its readers.⁵²

Although texts do not act in the ways of humans and cannot be deprived of choice or volition, they do act in that they have profound effects on humans and social environments. Hence, because of their potential power, texts (like humans) are also subject to being used, misused, shaped by various ideologies, or subjected to silence and destruction. This is the sense in which I examine the agency of colonial and postcolonial texts, their capacity to act and be acted upon. Literary agency is thus related to, yet not the same as, authorial agency, for it exists independently of the author’s agency, even though it is to some degree an extension of that authorial agency.

Truth and Unspeakability

The secret of the imagination [is] that in its fictional forms it still deals in matters of truth and error.

—Jerome McGann,
*Towards a Literature of Knowledge*⁵³

At a Royal Academy dinner in 1906, Kipling opened his speech on literature with the following parable:

There is an ancient legend which tells us that when a man first achieved a most notable deed he wished to explain to his Tribe what he had done. As soon as he began to speak, however, he was smitten with dumbness, he lacked words, and sat down. Then there arose . . . a masterless man, one who had taken no part in the action of his fellow, who had no special virtues, but who was afflicted . . . with the magic of the necessary word. He saw; he told; he described the merits of the notable deed in such a fashion . . . that the words “became alive and walked up and down in the hearts of all his hearers.” Thereupon, the Tribe seeing that the words were certainly alive, and fearing lest the man with the words would hand down untrue tales about them to their children, took and killed him. But, later, they saw that the magic was in the words, not in the man.⁵⁴

Kipling begins by differentiating the man of action, or the doer of deeds “smitten with dumbness,” from the storyteller, the man who records that action, as if his own storytelling were not action itself.⁵⁵ Exemplifying his habitual concern about the extent to which his writing constituted action, this parable also testifies to Kipling’s sense that words are “alive” and act independently of their speakers, in part because they outlive and outdo them: if the primal storyteller is “masterless,” so are his words. Hence the danger to both words and their users, he suggests, for it is because of this agency that words seem to have—their potential to tell (or not tell) truths—that words and those who use them are feared (and “afflicted”). The agency of literature is thus inextricable from its truth-bearing potential. Bodily themselves and having bodily effects, these words that are “alive” and “walk up and down in the hearts of [their] hearers” have power because they can shape the future of the tribe and how it is remembered. “We desire above all things to stand well with our children,” Kipling explains (4); for their potential to pass on true or untrue histories that the tribe cannot control, words can be destroyed. Kipling’s parable thus also suggests a primal relation between the agency or truth-capacity of words, and the storyteller, the destruction of whose body is equated with the destruction of his words. As a cautionary tale of the dangers (and attractions) of censorship, it expresses Kipling’s anxiety as he addresses his own tribe about his writing.

This example illustrates how intimately literary agency is connected to the issue of the truth of (or in) literature. The capacity of imaginative writing to act in the world is bound to its ability, precisely through its fictionality, to convey

some sort of truth that shapes readers' realities and influences how we perceive and act in the world. In however attenuated a form, literature addresses and refers to reality and carries effects of truth and falsehood. If it referred to nothing, or only to itself, it would have no relevance. For colonial and postcolonial writers, the capacity of their writing to act in the world is inseparable from its ability to tell dangerous truths, to push the boundaries of the unspeakable, or to participate in the making of new truths that shape reality. This study shows how these writers emphasize what can and cannot be said, the boundaries between language and the unspeakable and between external censorship and internal self-silencing, because truth is precisely what is at stake.

The unspeakable can be produced by at least two kinds of factors. First, truths of various sorts can be censored, or prohibited in public discourse by external authorities—social, cultural, or legal. These include colonial powers for Kipling; legal and cultural proscriptions against homosexuality for Forster; and neocolonial nations for Rushdie. But truths can also be unspeakable because language itself is limited, bounded by cultural or experiential parameters. Either it carries cultural values and prohibitions (such as when Forster struggles with the “obduracy” of language to “carnality” [*Letters*, 1:316]), or it is simply untranslatable in a particular language (as indicated by Rushdie's remarks about the South Asian concept of “sharam,” poorly translated as *shame* [*Shame*, 34–35]). Each strives to re-create language, inventing ways to intimate alternative truths despite the resistance of language, through indirection, suggestion, or forms of negation.

The issue of literary truth is not often addressed in contemporary critical discourse, though it needs to be, at the very least because both colonial and postcolonial writers are explicitly preoccupied with it.⁵⁶ Kipling's fiction reveals truths about the British Empire in India that may not redound to the Empire's credit. As a self-consciously imperial storyteller, Kipling worries about not only actual censorship but also how much his writing is shaped by internalized prohibitions. (Kipling's anxiety about censorship—and self-censorship—was not unfounded, because even English writers in British India could be indicted for sedition, and his book *A Fleet in Being* was censored in 1898 for allegedly betraying naval secrets.)⁵⁷ For Forster, obliged to maintain silence about homosexuality in print and subject to surveillance by British censors in India, the (unspeakable) truth *is* the proscribed sexual and racialized body itself, the

premise or condition for language. For Rushdie, truth is a fraught intellectual and political problem: as he openly indicts the falsehoods of official histories and the propaganda of corrupt governments, how can he claim to tell the truth himself, given his insistence that the truth of history or fiction is necessarily partial, relative, and constructed?

Contemporary efforts to address literary truth are affected by two kinds of histories. One is the tradition (starting with Plato's famous denunciation of poetry as a lie) that regards the truth of imaginative literature as literal correspondence to an external reality.⁵⁸ Defenders of poetry since Sir Philip Sidney have long claimed instead a greater *imaginative* truth for poetry.⁵⁹ Tzvetan Todorov has argued that fiction cannot lie, because it *presents* itself as fiction; a text can lie only if it claims veracity.⁶⁰ The problem with such defenses is that the referentiality of literature cannot be relinquished altogether. At some level, after all, the furor over *The Satanic Verses* was occasioned by the correct recognition that the novel challenges cultural dogma by offering alternative versions about how religious pieties are constructed, a truth that is deeply threatening to those invested in those pieties. (In other words, even the imaginative truths of the novel were referential and hit home.) Postcolonial critics frequently evaluate a fictive text's degree of verisimilitude—how a novelist or filmmaker discloses hidden truths about a society or political force, or represents a historical event—for the stakes of representation are high when audiences are unfamiliar with the cultural or political situations a text delineates or when the peoples it describes have suffered histories of asymmetric power and misrepresentation.⁶¹ Thus, for postcolonial criticism in particular, it becomes crucial to retain some version of truth as correspondence that is not crude. Poetry has relevance or truth value for us because, as Graham Dunstan Martin argues, it has “some degree of correspondence to external reality. . . . Fictional referents do indeed refer, though indirectly, . . . [This] allows a writer the freedom to recreate the infinite detail of experience, and hence to refer to the real world more fully (and paradoxically) more directly than any work of fact or reportage can.”⁶²

More recently, trends in post-structuralism and postmodernism have discredited discussions of truth; with their emphasis on the constructed nature of truth, these theories seem to undermine the possibility of truth altogether. Following upon Nietzsche's assertion that truth is a matter of linguistic and cultural convenience (“a mobile army of metaphors . . . : truths are illusions about

which one has forgotten that this is what they are”) and Foucault’s insight that truth claims depend on the power networks within which they are formulated, some scholars have concluded that truth cannot be regarded as a legitimate basis for literary or cultural interpretation, which is just a matter of language games, dependent on the consensus of interpretive communities.⁶³ Michael Riffaterre argues that narrative truth is solely a matter of the *appearance* of verisimilitude in accordance with given textual conventions.⁶⁴ Thus, in Riffaterre’s view, “readers need not be familiar with the reality that the text is about in order to believe it true. The only reference against which they need to test the narrative’s truth is language” (8). But by this token, orientalist or racist representations may appear true to some readers because they fit with those readers’ ideological beliefs or language. In postcolonial fiction, film, or drama, the question of truth carries extremely high stakes, for contesting the misrepresentations of dominant imperial and neoimperial discourses as well as nationalist propaganda and histories.

It is worth here recalling the philosophical distinction between ontology and epistemology, between the existence of reality beyond language and the problems of knowing it. Even post-structuralist thinkers do not doubt the existence of reality—only of our truth-claims to know it, given the limitations of language and cognition. We can make distinctions between degrees of truth without giving up a belief in its existence. That does not resolve the problems of truth (because then we need to determine better or worse degrees of truth, by what ideological standards, what intellectual frameworks, and so forth), but it does mean that we need not give up on truth altogether. In an interview, while insisting on the need to understand how power relations in a society constitute its conditions of truth making, Foucault also demands a (limited) agency on the part of intellectuals. They must, he argues, strive to uncover the ways that truth is constructed in particular regimes and to change the “political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth” itself, even when they are situated within those regimes (“Truth and Power”, 133): “There is a battle ‘for truth,’ or at least ‘around truth’—it being understood once again that by truth I do not mean ‘the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted,’ but rather ‘the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true,’ . . . a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays” (132).

Thus, it is imperative for Foucault to uncover the truth of the *making* of truths, to believe that there is something to be unearthed and exposed—namely, the conditions that produce truth within a society.⁶⁵ Similarly, as Christopher Norris argues, the work of a post-structuralist such as Derrida, despite his unconventional approach, is guided by a principled belief that critical and philosophical inquiry seeks to find some truth about a text and the problems it poses.⁶⁶

In this book, I use the term *truth* not in any singular abstract or absolute sense, least of all as “Truth,” but as a deeply problematic though necessary concept for political writing, whose meanings vary with different contexts and writers. In my discussion of each writer, I approach the issue of truth in accordance with the particular concerns and assumptions each brings to it. I do emphasize, however, the critical need to maintain both a sense of the referentiality of colonial and postcolonial imaginative literature *and* an understanding of the constructed and contingent nature of truth-claims, while retaining a sense of the degrees of difference. Indeed, as we will see, Rushdie’s understanding of these considerations is what makes his struggles with truth-telling more fraught than those of either Kipling or Forster.

The Body and Language

The body furnishes the building blocks of symbolization, and eventually of language itself, which then takes us away from the body, but always in a tension that reminds us that mind and language need to recover the body, as an otherness that is somehow primary to their very definition.

—Peter Brooks, *Body Work*⁶⁷

If literary criticism has lately been wary of taking on “truth,” it has been only too eager to embrace “the body”: the body as subject and object, as experienced and observed; the body as racialized and gendered construct; the body as socially symbolic and literal thing; the body written upon or itself signifying, as silent and unreadable or as speaking its own language(s); the body as a whole or in parts; the body as surface and depth, exterior and interior. Perhaps this

is because, as Elaine Scarry writes, “The turn to history and the body—the attempt to restore the material world to literature—has been in part inspired by a . . . collective regret at the very weightlessness, the inconsequentiality of conversation about literature.”⁶⁸ Or, as William Jewett notes, “the eighteenth-century fear that we are (only) our bodies has been replaced with the postmodern fear that we are (only) our words.”⁶⁹ Thus, criticism shares in a broader cultural desire to retrieve a concreteness or materiality that has been repressed in rationalist, post-Cartesian discourses. Several disciplines have sought to refocus attention on the human body as a key site for understanding human ways of constructing identity and social relations, as well as the politics of subjection and subjectivity.

But this fascination with the body has also produced debates on how the body is to be understood, on the degree to which we presume it to be a physical given or a social construction, since even our “experience” of it is mediated by learned ways of understanding our bodies and selves. Indebted to thinkers such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault, cultural historians and critics have begun to rethink the body as itself having a history and politics. Judith Butler argues that Foucault assumed a body prior to “cultural inscription”; instead, she argues for the body as entirely socially constructed.⁷⁰ Phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty reject the Cartesian mind-body split and recast the body as the basis for experience, perception, and even thought, not secondary to but inseparable from the mind. Cognitive scientists, linguists, and philosophers have begun to investigate precisely how the mind is embodied or indeed part of the body, as manifested in our cognitive and linguistic schema.⁷¹

In this study, I do not assume that the body is either a natural given or only a social construct, nor do I advance a theory of the body per se. As Peter Brooks suggests, we need to grant a “broad semantic range for [the term] ‘body’—biological entity, psycho-sexual construction, cultural product—since . . . it is all of these, often at once, to writers and readers.”⁷² I examine how different colonial and postcolonial writers draw upon and recast the human body in necessarily *different* ways to address their concerns about the political exigencies surrounding his writing. A central question for me is how we may understand the body in relation to language, since I am primarily concerned here with how and why these writers require the human body to represent or serve as a basis for their writing.

For Elaine Scarry, the body is a prelingual entity. In her account of torture, Scarry argues that the intensity of bodily sensation destroys language, returning us to prelingual sounds and to the unmaking of the world.⁷³ This assumption of bodily experience as prior to the onset of language is also central to Lacan's account of infant development, though Lacan assumes a hierarchy in which language replaces and displaces infantile experiences of the body. Peter Brooks acknowledges the primacy of bodily experience but argues for a dialectic between language and body. On the one hand, as the epigraph above suggests, language is precisely "other" to the body: one is a signifying, symbolic system, whereas the other is pre- or extralingual, the site of primal sensations that can only belatedly be translated into language. Our bodies are always felt, present to us, whereas language can only name that which is absent or removed from it. On the other hand, as psychoanalysis compellingly suggests, the body is what enables language to come into being and indeed is "the source of human symbolism" — for it is literally through the body that we produce a voice or writing, and the acquisition of language arises from infantile bodily sensation and (arguably) the understanding of sexual difference (Brooks, *Body Work*, xii). But Brooks contends that once language becomes a system that removes us from the body, it also needs to return to the body, as its own source and other, as a site of meaning or truth. Hence his chiasmic formulation that "the semioticization of the body is accompanied by the somatization of story": language becomes bodily as it tries to make the body signify and gather meaning (38). This may explain why writers as different as the ones in this study return to the body: from the fear that their language is too removed from reality; from the desire to borrow some degree of materiality for language; and from the urge to make their language renew contact with its source and ultimately its truth. However, whereas Brooks and others focus on the sexualized body or on the body as subject and object of erotic desire, I include in the realm of the bodily not only its sexual or erotic dimensions but also, more centrally, the processes of everyday experience and life functions such as eating, breathing, excreting, smelling, birthing, breast-feeding, suffering, and dying. In so doing, I identify three aspects of the body that are crucial to all three writers when they address literary agency: the body as a site upon which power converges, as well as a site of resistance to power; the body as the site of relations to others and to the world; and the body as a site of truth.

That the body is the site of both power and resistance is fairly obvious, for it is subjected to suffering, torture, imprisonment, punishment, and regulation, and through it we fight, evade, or assert resistance. What is less obvious is how subtly everyday forms of power operate upon us as and through our bodies. In a telling example from Rushdie's *Shame*, the illegitimate antihero Omar Khayyam learns that his three mothers refused to submit to certain Islamic rituals when he was born: they did not allow anyone to "whisper the name of God into [his] ear," have his head shaved, or "permit the foreskin to be removed" (15). All three are seemingly innocuous cultural rituals for newborns, but they are also bodily ways of marking individuals from the moment of birth and inscribing upon them a specific identity that carries the weight of (and inculcation into) a patriarchal religious order. For a child to become a proper Muslim, first, a powerful priestly male voice must literally enter the ears of a newborn as the first thing it hears in life, announcing the first tenet of Islamic faith (telling it to believe that God is great and Muhammad is his prophet); second, its hair must be removed because it is impure, given that it has been in contact with female (maternal) uterine matter; and third, male children must be circumcised, their bodies thereby marked as "pure" or clean. It is therefore upon the body that social power is enacted; but through the body it is also resisted, for the three "mothers," in their effort to build a matriarchal rebellion against the patriarchal system that has oppressed them, use their son's body to mark his (and their) difference.

Moreover, even though we tend to think of the body as defining the contours of selfhood, the limit point of responsibility and individual freedom, it is a site of both selfhood and relations to others and the world. The body is co-extensive with the world; it exists and is defined in relation to specific environmental and physical conditions, and it comes into being and experiences itself in relation to others—through affects of love, desire, hostility, and so forth. Like Bakhtin, Francis Barker describes the modern body as a "related and relational" phenomenon: "[T]he body . . . is not a hypostatized object, still less a simple biological mechanism of given desires and needs acted on externally by controls and enticements, but a relation in a system of liaisons which are material, discursive, psychic, sexual, but without stop or center. It would be better to speak of a certain 'bodiliness' than of 'the body.' . . . The site of an operation of power, of an exercise of meaning" (italics in original).⁷⁴ Omar Khayyam's body is not "his" from birth: it is generated by not one but *three* mothers who control and mark it with their

agenda; it is the site of his complex relations to them as well as to a broader cultural and social world that shapes him; it experiences itself in relation to others and the world. And finally, perhaps because the body seems so materially present, so undeniably a thing-in-itself, beyond the vagaries of language, the body is also taken to be the site or emblem of truth and reality: the touch of the caves in *A Passage to India*—a bodily emanation of suppressed forces—induces a revelation or realization of truth; in *Midnight's Children*, the touch of Amina Sinai's pregnant belly produces a magically "true" prophecy of the nation.



This book consists of six chapters, two on each writer. Chapter 1 examines Kipling's Indian short stories (primarily 1886–1902) to trace how Kipling constructs a telling colonial imaginary in which he casts his own writing as a hybrid, interracial bodily product. Like the "Anglo-Indian" children in his stories (British but breast-fed by Indian women), these bicultural and bilingual products, he suggests, are capable of both perpetuating and subverting imperial power, for which they can be censored or killed. Historicizing Kipling's concerns in the context of censorship in British India, I argue that the obsessive recurrence of child-death and censorship in his stories bespeaks an anxiety about literary agency that becomes a form of muted and oblique, though not always consistent, imperial critique. Yet Kipling suggests that as a bodily living thing, his writing can survive by telling colonial truths under cover of lies. Chapter 2 reads Kipling's most important novel, *Kim* (1901), as a cautionary double narrative that tells two parallel stories at once: a tale about Kipling's text and a tale of the adolescent body of Kim, the interracial product of empire conscripted into imperial service. The novel begins with the child Kim in the same position as the text in relation to empire—with linguistic powers that can be both useful to and subversive of the Great Game. By the end, Kim is damaged, no longer autonomous, overwritten by imperial codes of signification. In charting this process, I argue, the novel separates itself, both articulating its anxiety about agency as a child of empire, and exposing that process of destruction. For Kipling, the body of the Anglo-Indian child—multiparented, imagined as at once preternaturally powerful and vulnerable—centers his anxiety about the predicament of his own fiction.

Chapter 3 examines Forster's fourteen-year hiatus in his novel-publishing career (1910–24, framed by his two trips to India) to argue that this crisis of writing was produced by a conjoint anxiety about the political efficacy of language and the desire to incorporate the body in that language. From his first short story, "The Story of a Panic," in which English bourgeois complacency is violently disrupted by the emergence of the god Pan who brings truth, to *A Passage to India*, Forster uses coded language as an agent of political intervention. To be effective, language for Forster must speak that proscribed body, make it materialize (in ways that may be covert), with the hope of changing language and of promoting social transformation. In this chapter I analyze his letters, Indian travel writings, and *Maurice* to trace a new mode of speaking the body that he developed together with an anti-imperialist politics in the course of his travels and writings from India. I show how Forster's understanding of interracial and (homo)sexual desire changed crucially over this period, so that although his Indian writings enabled *Maurice*, the change also led to a split in his unpublished and published work: in one, he allowed himself to explore this uncomfortable dynamic; in the other, he maintained silence. Chapter 4 then reads *A Passage to India*, his last and most renowned novel, as shaped and underwritten by the issues that produced his crisis. Unlike post-structuralist readings that cast its concern with language as a measure of the failure of language in general, or postcolonial readings that emphasize politics and history but ignore that concern, my reading argues that language is a central subject of the novel and is inextricable from its anti-colonial and sexual politics. Grounded upon Forster's belated understanding of interracial and sexual relations, the novel critiques colonial (specifically, Anglo-Indian) language and epistemology and incorporates the outlawed body and homoerotic desire into his language to suggest the resistant power of that conjoint racial and sexual force. I then show how that silenced but resistant body is mapped onto the Indian landscape—in particular, the Marabar Caves.

Chapter 5 examines Rushdie's recurrent concern with bodies, body parts, and bodily effluvia to suggest that through it he constructs a new idiom to render the agency of his postcolonial narrative, both to recast colonial legacies and to reimagine a postcolonial community or nation. It concentrates on his two foundational novels of nationhood, *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, showing

how Rushdie emphasizes the materiality and constitutive power of his language through three specific modes. Drawing upon the anthropologist Mary Douglas's argument that social hierarchies are built on the perception of bodily effluvia as "dirt" or "matter out of place," it argues that Rushdie's excremental language serves to disorder those boundaries as a form of political intervention within the social body politic. It concludes with a reading of the pivotal but neglected episode of the Sundarbans as Rushdie's rewriting of the repressed trauma of the 1971 genocide committed by the Pakistan army in Bengal, enabled through the three modes of bodiliness identified in this chapter.

Having established how Rushdie presents the bodiliness of his language to contend that his writing can act and have material effects, I then examine, in chapter 6, Rushdie's efforts at truth-telling (about the past) and truth making (of a viable postcolonial future) as ways of creating reality in and through his narratives. This chapter focuses on two (related) issues—truth-telling and dreams. First is a consideration of how Rushdie indicts national myth making as a form of bodily violence, as a "rite of blood," while insisting on both the partiality and the contingency of his more salutary truth-telling, as well as on the falsity of such nationalist histories. I read Rushdie's dreams as a mode of truth-telling, as another register of the bodily, to argue that Rushdie constructs dream-endings in all his major novels as a form of resistance to closure, not to heighten the end, as narrative theory predicts, but rather to defer the end and open up possibilities that often defy logic, thereby creating terms to make such postcolonial futures materially possible. It seems even more important for Rushdie as a postcolonial writer to build a language that can approximate the sheer fleshiness, materiality, relationality, and vulnerability of the human body. Only through such a language can he fulfil the ardent hope that underpins his seminal work: to make words *matter*, in every sense; to enable them to have powerful material, political, and social effects; to "leak" into nations and communities and hence transform organically how they imagine themselves as well as others.