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Abstract

This thesis seeks to discuss and define the concept of human life and its relationship with narrative as this is probed, questioned, and represented in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Isabel Greenberg's *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* (2016). Both of these literary works place a particular focus on the way in which narrative is inexorably bound up with formative ideas of what it means to be human. What is more, both *Midnight's Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* suggest how, in the wider frame of narrative, notions of the human can be seen to be constructed on an unstable, shifting sense of textuality. The thesis will explore the way in which the primary texts arguably suggest that narrative is tantamount to a human life and, correspondingly, how the construct that is a human life is informed, shaped, and interpolated through narrative.

The project takes its cue from the claim that narrative is the medium by which we think and understand our existence and, correspondingly, that narrative is shaped by the way in which we experience life. The first aim of the thesis is to delineate to what extent narrative and human life are intertwined, and whether the stages of human life correlate with the stages of a narrative text. In order to discuss this notion, the thesis will be organized into *beginning*, *middle*, and *end* which largely correspond with *birth*, *life*, and *death* respectively. The second aim is to try to understand the way in which temporality interacts and intersects with the aforementioned stages of both human life and narrative work. In order to achieve this, I will explicate the discourse of Julia Kristeva, Paul Ricoeur, Frank Kermode, and Peter Brooks alongside a contextualisation of their theories within the analysis of the primary texts.

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List of abbreviations

MC – *Midnight's Children* (1981)

NOH – *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* (2016)

OED – *Oxford English Dictionary* (Online)

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1. Introduction

This thesis seeks to discuss and define the concept of human life and its relationship with narrative as this is probed, questioned, and represented in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Isabel Greenberg's *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* (2016). Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a bildungsroman novel narrated by Saleem, who is both the subject and teller of the tale. It is a well-known postmodern work with a significant amount of examination within the realm of critical theory. The relationship that Saleem draws between himself, and the newly independent nation of India has often led to the analysis of the text through a post-colonial lens. While there are a number of interesting arguments that can be drawn by employing a post-colonial analysis to the work of *Midnight's Children*, the fundamental way in which human and narrative are irrevocably intertwined in this text incites the need to employ narrative theory in order to probe our understanding of human life and its relationship to narrative. It is for this reason that Greenberg's *The One Hundred Nights of Hero*, a recent, lesser-known graphic novel, has been chosen as an additional primary text. Though these works are markedly different in terms of when they were published, the setting of the novel, the gender of the narrator and even the medium of the works themselves, there are significant parallels between the two novels regarding life and narrative. Due to their vast differences, the comparison of these novels serves to further highlight the interesting argument surrounding the intricacies of the constructions of narrative and human. The fact that *Midnight's Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* comment upon these constructions to a significant extent reveals how both novels necessitate the discussion of the formative relationship between narrative and the human life and the symbiotic relationship that exists between them.

Midnight's Children and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* both reinforce and problematise the relationship between human life and narrative, placing a particular focus on the way in which narrative is inexorably bound up with formative ideas of what it means to be human. What is more, both of these literary works suggest how, in the wider frame of narrative, notions of the human can be seen to be constructed on an unstable, shifting sense of textuality. The thesis will explore the way in which the primary texts suggest that narrative is tantamount to a human life and how the construct that is a human life is informed, shaped, and interpolated through and as narrative. The project takes its cue from the claim that narrative is the medium by which we think and understand our existence and, correspondingly, that narrative is shaped by the way in which we experience life. The first aim of the thesis is to delineate to what extent

narrative and human life are intertwined, and whether the stages of human life correlate with the stages of a narrative text. In order to discuss this notion, the thesis will be organized into *beginning*, *middle*, and *end* which largely correspond with *birth*, *life*, and *death* respectively. The second aim is to try to understand the way in which temporality interacts and intersects with the aforementioned stages of both human life and narrative work. In order to achieve this, I will explicate the discourse of Paul Ricoeur, Frank Kermode and Peter Brooks alongside a contextualisation of their theories within the analysis of the primary texts.

The Beginning – Birth chapter will examine the way in which beginning invokes connotations of a narrative that is *birthed forth*. The inherent role of authority, and the way in which it is embedded within the idea of a male creator, will be discussed in relation to the consequent marginalisation of the female experience in the creation of narrative. The parallels between a narrative beginning and the beginning brought about by birth in human life will form a fundamental part of this chapter. This aspect of the argument will initiate an examination of the role of gender in relation to the formation of human life or narrative work. The role of the author and the way in which they are seen as “fathering” a narrative will be contrasted with the argumentation set out in Barthes’ “Death of the Author” (1968). A close reading of the beginning of both *Midnight’s Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* will be utilised in order to probe what a beginning constitutes and if it can be located as a singular entity. In consideration of this, it will be pertinent to instigate a discussion of the role of orality in creating a multiplicity of beginning. Both primary texts utilise a portrayal of oral storytelling which serves to further destabilise the notion of a singular beginning.

The Middle – Life chapter will illustrate the difficulty in defining and locating the middle of narrative. The middle as the drive towards the end will be discussed in light of the discourse of Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending* (2000), as well as Ricoeur’s examination of the present moment in *Time and Narrative* (1990). The ambiguous duration between beginning and end is a site within which to probe essential questions of how we experience the middle of human life. The middle is a site that is potentially the most destabilising in terms of the way in which its unbounded, elusive definition lends itself to a permeability of being. The middle will be examined in relation to the way it instigates a negotiation of meaning between beginning and end of both human life and narrative work. The assumed site of the middle, the journey between beginning and end, within the primary texts signify a human relationship to temporality and how we try to make meaning from time. As will be demonstrated, this is exemplified in *Midnight’s Children* through Saleem’s insistence that his life has meaning and the assertion that his life is driven by a tick tock that counts down to his birth and after that

continues to drive him towards a seemingly inevitable end. *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* is a text in which the middle is necessarily and overtly perpetuated in order to delay the end. The notion of making meaning from time is problematised when the purpose of the narrative itself is to extend or prolong time through its own metafictional structures. The question of temporality is perhaps most significantly present in the middle of narrative, in the sense that the space and unboundedness of the middle allows for a more readily visible identification of if a narrative is curated in such a way that disrupts the sequential flow of human temporality.

In the End – Death chapter, there will be an investigation of the end contrasted against the notion of endlessness. Both *Midnight's Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* challenge the idea of the end through the references to infinity that are particularly prominent at the end of each text. References to the *Arabian Nights* are prevalent throughout both primary texts and are also particularly numerous at the end of *Midnight's Children* which serve to heighten this notion of an endless infinite time, that is in conflict with the temporality that seems to govern human life and narrative. A close reading of the primary texts will illuminate the parallels between human end and narrative end and whether a singular end can be located. In order to examine whether the end of human life corresponds to the end of a narrative work, it is vital to consider the end of both of these constructions through the lens of gender. The way in which gender is portrayed in relation to linear temporality is problematised in both primary texts. The consideration of gender allows for the examination of different conceptions of time that don't necessarily conform to the sequentiality of patrilinear time and as such the chapter will utilise Julia Kristeva's arguments in "Women's Time" (1981) and "About Chinese Women" (1977) in relation to the female subjective experience of time.

2. Literary Review

To demarcate how the primary texts construct what it means to be human and whether human life and narrative are synonymous, it is vital to discuss the fundamental elements pertaining to the concept of the human that are both created and problematised by narrative. In order to undertake such a discussion, the praxis of storytelling within the vital framework of narrative theory will be discussed, incorporating considerations of desire, temporality, and gender, the latter being discussed through the lens of feminist theory. To reveal the extent to which the idea of human life is created by narrative, it seems pertinent to discuss the idea of *beginning*, *middle*, and *end*, examining to what extent the two primary texts conform to or challenge the ideas posed by each of these aspects and how notions of linearity, or lack thereof, are exemplified as a human being's relationship to temporality. It is, however, perhaps even more vital to investigate the driving force behind the need for narrative, what it is in storytelling that we find so compelling that we cannot get enough of it. In order to safeguard this aspect of the investigation, I will also draw upon psychoanalytic theory, with particular focus on Lacan with regard to his discourse on the way in which language perpetuates desire. Here, we also must take heed of the drive towards the end discussed by Brooks, which is given a new meaning upon engaging with Lacan's view of the nature of desire which will always remain unsatisfied. The drive toward the end in order to find coherence is futile, but it seems precisely this futility that drives us forward in the hope of finding an inconceivable unity. This endeavour for the end in order to seek a unity of meaning, displayed by both Saleem and Manfred in *Midnight's Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* respectively, is an attempt to create meaning from time. This is why both primary texts will be analysed utilising the theories of Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* (1990), Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (2000) and Brooks' *Reading for the Plot* (1992).

2.1 Narrative

To begin to discuss the notion of narrative, a distinction between story and narrative must be made. In his work *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks refers to the terms "fabula" and "sjuzet" coined by Russian formalism to distinguish the chronological events of story from the narrative presentation of these events (12). Brooks explains that "*fabula* is defined as the order of events referred to by the narrative, whereas *sjuzet* is the order of events presented in the narrative

discourse” (12). *Fabula*, therefore, corresponds with story and *sjuzet* is tantamount to narrative. In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks seeks to propose a dynamic model of narrative that moves beyond the static paradigms delineated by the prevailing discourse that arose from Russian formalism and French structuralism. While Brooks credits the field of narratology for providing the basis for which literature is viewed as “one part of a wider range of man’s signifying practices” (Brooks XIII), his model of narrative, focusing on the driving force of plot, moves away from the rigidity of formalism and instead seeks to discuss the “temporal dynamic that shapes narratives in our reading of them” (Brooks XIII) For Brooks, the interaction between reader and narrative is where sites of meaning are produced. The reader has an active role in the production of meaning that occurs in the engagement with the narrative. Brooks, moreover, postures that plot is “the dynamic shaping force of the narrative discourse” (13). In this sense, plot is the curation of narrative material that is presented to the reader, and the reader’s engagement with the narrative is through the “design” set forth by plot. Meaning is produced by the reader’s engagement with this presentation of events that occurs within a given text, thus, it can be said that the plot is an active meaning producer.

This concept of plot reveals how narrative is bound up with temporal experience. We experience a narrative both in terms of the temporality set out within the plot of a story, and also in the reality of the “real” world, in the temporality of the person reading the narrative. The way in which plot shapes narrative is always orientated “*in terms of the impending end*” (Brooks 52). Plot, then, is what drives the narrative in the same way that time drives the human. We cannot escape temporality within narrative because time, as Brooks describes, is the very essence of narrative:

returning us to the frequently eluded fact that narrative meanings are developed in time, that any narrative partakes more or less of what Proust called “un jeu formidable ... avec le Temps,” and that this game of time is not merely in the world of reference (or in the *fabula*) but also in the narrative, in the *sjuzet*, if only because the meanings developed by narrative *take time*: they unfold through the time of reading. (Brooks 92)

In other words, the manifestation of meaning that occurs when a reader interacts with a work cannot be disentangled from the temporal experience that occurs in this reading. There are three aspects of time that can be regarded as significant in the interaction of human and narrative work: firstly, there is the sense of the time that is irrevocably bound up with the essence of

what it is to be human, then there is the time that occurs in the reading of the narrative, and finally, the time within the world of the narrative text. In all of these facets of time there is the inherent implication of the sequentiality of beginning, middle, and end in the sense that both narrative and human alike are propelled forwards in time towards an inevitable end.

Through the discussions of narrative, it becomes clear that we cannot exist in a given time without this temporal positioning of a human identity. The idea of narrative as bound up with the temporal is also ventured by Bennett and Royle, in *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (2016), who state that narrative “is characterized by its foregrounding of a series of events or actions which are connected in time” (55). It is significant to note the way in which narrative disturbs the sequentiality of *story*, or, to employ the terms used by Brooks, the way in which *sjuzet* disrupts the temporality of the events that occur in the *fabula*. For this thesis, discussions of *story* will refer to the chronological events which are shaped by narrative. The concept of *storytelling*, however, will instead share more similarities with the principles of narrative in terms of the way in which the “telling” aspect is charged with an organizational system that engages with the purposeful arranging of events from which meaning is then derived. In this way storytelling can be seen as closely aligned to Brooks’ conception of plot, which is the “interpretative activity” that the reader negotiates with in the interaction between *sjuzet* and *fabula* (13). For the purposes of this thesis, *story* will be characterised by linearity, *narrative* will embody the dynamic way in which meaning is produced by the presentation of events at the level of the story and its inevitable interaction with temporality and the term *storytelling* will be used to convey narrative that is employed by a teller in order to emit a text that is characterised and fuelled by desire.

2.1.1 Desire

This driving force toward to the end is generated by the human desire to know. In *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2000), Jonathan Culler discusses the notion of *epistemophilia*, which he links with desire. The movement of narrative, for Culler, “is driven by desire in the form of ‘epistemophilia’ a desire to know: we want to discover secrets, to know the end, to find truth.” (Culler 90-91). The desire to know, is representative of what humanness itself is. As humans we have a desire to understand, to illuminate the unknown, to find truth and meaning within a narrative, and by extension, within the world. The idea that the

consuming of narrative is bound up with desire is also discussed by Brooks, who relates it to the ideas set out in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, principally with regard to Freud's concept of the death drive and the tension that this induces between *origin* and *ending* (108). Freud's death drive is concerned with the idea that an organism wishes to return to the "quiescence" of an inorganic state, its aim is to die in the proper manner, without its life being cut prematurely short (Brooks 102). Brooks discusses this concept in terms of the "arabesque" of plot, which, he argues, mirrors the way in which the "narratable life" of the organism is governed by "deviance" and "detour" (108). For Brooks, the desire for the end of a narrative is propagated through these detours, but the acquisition of the finality we seek is deferred due to the complex relationship between *origin* and *ending*: "Repetition as return speaks as a textual version of the death instinct, plotting the text, beyond the seeming dominance of the pleasure principle, toward its proper end, imaging this end as necessarily a time before the beginning" (Brooks 127). In other words, Brooks describes the nature of narrative necessarily drives us toward an end due to the functioning of the death instinct that is generated through the narrative work, the end is referred to as a time before the beginning because the end represents the quiescence within which an organism wishes to return to its prior state. This "detour" and "deviance" that Brooks discusses is integral to the "arabesque" of plot and will form a significant foundation of the argumentation in the Middle – Life chapter. It follows that the middle of narrative as the site of the drive towards an end opens up discussions of what happens when we reach this termination of text.

In "Narrative" J. Hillis Miller questions why, even when we come to an end of a narrative, our desire for stories is not satiated. Throughout his essay, Miller is attempting to understand the "human capacity to tell stories" (69). In order to do so, he questions the ubiquity of narrative and its status as "natural" suggesting that this innocuity is what hides its problematic nature (Miller 67). Miller claims that the structured nature of the "conventional trajectory" of beginning, middle, and end is not benign and that the very structuring of narrative perhaps even creates the most fundamental notions of human life and culture, which is why, he posits, we need the *same* stories repeated continuously throughout our lives, in order to reinforce the ideology in which we are situated (71-72). Miller then goes on to question why we need *more* stories, with each story that we consume rendering us unsatisfied (72). Thus, we inevitably seek out a new story, and "and then another, and yet another, without ever coming to the end of our need for stories or without ever assuaging the hunger they are meant to satisfy" (Miller 72). This insatiable appetite for stories is invoked through both *Midnight's Children*

and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero*. The latter's references to an endless desire for stories, that is demonstrated by the overt parallels to the *Arabian Nights*, necessitate the need to discuss the competing desires in relation to both the teller and consumer of the tale. The desire that is emulated in *Midnight's Children* is markedly similar to that of *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* in terms of a desire to narrate, but Saleem's desire to narrate is also more overtly correlated to his desire for meaning. The nature of desire that Miller describes is in terms of an "implacable law" that he argues is inherently linguistic, rather than psychological (72), yet due to the discussion of unsatiated desire, it would be remiss not to frame this in terms of Lacan's concept of lack.

For Lacan, desire emerges in response to lack which results in a search for the lost unity that is experienced by the split subject. In "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949), Lacan discusses the body and the psyche in relation to the way in which the reflection an infant sees creates a vision of wholeness that is at odds with its physical weakness and "nursling dependence" ("The Mirror Stage" 1112). In the *mirror stage*, the infant experiences itself as a separate entity from the mother for the first time. The loss of the identification with the breast and the vision of itself as separate, whole being in the mirror is the point at which the "Ideal-I", the *I* that exists before the self becomes subjugated to language, is exhibited (Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative" 1112). The wholeness of its form is in contrast to the fragmented and "turbulent" movements that the infant exhibits, and the idea of being a whole, coherent being is a concept in which the infant will pursue over the course of his or her life (Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative" 1113). It is upon the immersion of language, at the culmination of the *mirror stage*, that the *I* is alienated from itself (Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative" 1115). It is language that reveals the human as its subject and positions it in relation to the Other (Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative" 1112). The role of the Other embodies what a human being wants but can never attain (Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative" 1115). This notion is key in the consideration of the nature of desire and how it comes into being.

Lacan postures that even before the immersion into language, the infant can demand the love of the mother, which is vital to discussions of desire as this is said to be manifested as a result "of the difference between need and demand" (Brooks 55). In "The Signification of the Phallus" (1958), Lacan states that whatever is left after a demand has been subtracted from a need, is desire: "Thus desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon

of their splitting.” (Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus” 1134). In considering this equation, the question of the origin of desire still remains, how is desire produced and emitted? In “The Signification of the Phallus” Lacan seeks to expose how language not only creates desire in the subject but, in fact, *is* desire itself. He uses Saussure’s concept of the signified and the signifier and places emphasis on the latter over the former in terms of producing the subject and the inherent lack within him (1133). In this sense, it is not our yearning for objects or any other externality that creates desire, but, rather, language itself is the medium through which lack is reinforced and desire is, thus, manifested and brought into being. The lack inherent in the subject means the pursuit of “the Other” in order satisfy demand and fill the void within oneself is an ever-continuous process perpetuated in language (Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus” 1134). This notion is also discussed in “The Agency of the letter in the Unconscious” (1957), whereby the subjection to the signifier instigates the symbiotic process of lack and desire constituted through language:

it is the signifier-to-signifier connection that allows for the elision by which the signifier instates lack of being [le manque de l’être] in the object-relation, using signification’s referral [renvoi] value to invest it with the desire aiming at the lack that it supports. (Lacan, “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious” 1126)

In other words, because the signifier can never represent the signified and instead refers only to other signifiers, this “signifier-to-signifier connection” perpetuates desire through the lack that this process inscribes. Desire is disseminated by language through the lack that it creates in the subject. It is a perpetual cycle in which desire can never be satiated because there is no object that can satisfy our desire. In terms of applying this to narrative desire, it can be argued that we use stories in order to try to achieve a cohesive whole but will continually fall short of the unity that we seek. The desire to consume stories in order to satisfy the emptiness or the lack that was unfulfilled by previous narratives is propagated by the quest for wholeness can never be satisfied. In this sense, rather than wanting more stories simply for entertainment, we instead need more in order to fill the lack inherent within our language and, thus, our being. The fact that our desire will never be satisfied paradoxically drives the desire for more. In this sense there is an endlessness to our desire for narratives.

2.1.2 Temporality: Beginning, Middle, and End

The kinetic nature of beginning, middle, and end amid the context of narrative desire, initiates the necessity to discuss ideas of temporality and what Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* refers to as the “temporal character of human experience” (3). We experience temporality in terms of the way in which our human life is structured, in the sense that we experience life through the framework of narrative which is embedded in temporality. The reading of the human as a temporal being emerges through the examination of the primary texts; the idea of human existence having a beginning, middle and end that is experienced through a rigid linearity is a notion that is implicitly challenged. The characters in *Midnight’s Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* organise their existence in the form of telling, of narrating their life in which the present moment is bound up with the history that has preceded it, leading to a cyclical curation of the way a human life is fabricated. To this end, it will be vital to examine Ricoeur’s discussion of Augustine’s “threefold present” that necessarily incorporates the past and the anticipation of the future (Ricoeur 11).

To discuss the construction of a human life, it also becomes important to ask where this idea of ‘humanness’ begins? Correspondingly, in this thesis, I will undertake a study of the notion of the narrative function of beginnings and how this informs the idea of what a human life is. In order to do so I will refer to ideas set out by Edward Said in *Beginnings: Intention & Method* (2012), particularly in relation to beginnings as a dynamic “active” entity in which the “passive” nature of “origin” and static nature of linearity is denied (6). It will be interesting to discuss this in light of Brooks who, as previously noted, discusses narrative in terms of “its orientation toward the end” (108). In terms of the narrative drive toward an end, Brooks discusses the principles of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Freud’s concept of the “death instinct” as a forward drive in narrative, propelling us toward a narrative and human end (Brooks 127). For Brooks, a beginning anticipates an end, and an end can be conceived of as a time that occurs before the beginning (Brooks 127). In this sense beginnings are increasingly more complex than comprising a mere starting point. While Brooks doesn’t seek to differentiate between origin and beginning, for Said the two terms represent distinctly different entities. Beginnings, according to Said, are dynamic in their production of meaning and compel our thoughts to function in a circular experience due to the interwoven nature of the interaction between the present and the past:

Constructing the tautology that says one begins at the beginning depends on the ability of both mind and language to reverse themselves, and thus to move from present to past and back again, from a complex situation to an anterior simplicity and back again, or from one point to another as if in a circle (Said 29-30)

Said's comments here are also applicable to the literary texts in question. The reader continuously experiences a cyclical return to beginnings in their interaction with each text, something that is particularly pertinent in *The One Hundred Years of Hero* through the use of peritexts and the layering of stories within stories. In *Midnight's Children*, interaction with the circularity of beginnings comes about through the narration that Saleem offers forward in which the act of recalling the narrative of his ancestors, as well as his own history, are responsible for thematising the disruption of temporality and the recurring nature of beginnings in the creation of the human life.

There is a rupture from a sequential sense of temporality through the disruption that the reader experiences in these differing narrative strands of the two primary texts. In *The One Hundred Nights of Hero*, the linking of Hero, Mrs A and the Moon as daughter, mother and grandmother respectively, contributes to the circularity in Greenberg's novel, in the sense that the moon herself is directly involved in two of the interior stories, and is a passive presence throughout the other tales through her non-linguistic, pictorial visibility. Her existence in the stories embodies this idea of eternal presence, that every moment is a state of beginning. This sense of eternity and a temporality that departs from the traditional linearity of time evokes Julia Kristeva's concept of *monumental time* which she defines in "Women's Time":

On the other hand, and perhaps as a consequence, there is the massive presence of a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word 'temporality' hardly fits: all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space." (191)

In "Women's Time," Kristeva seeks to define a sense of time that is not constructed in that traditional, masculine lens of time, offering instead concepts of time that can incorporate and do not diminish female subjectivity. Kristeva posits two conceptions of time, *monumental* and *cyclical*, that deviate from the patrilinear structure of history (191). *Cyclical time* is defined by repetition, the cycles in which a woman is subject to through her fertility, and *monumental time* is not experienced in the traditional way of time but is characterised instead by the infinite

space in which women are connected across time (Kristeva 191). This linking of Hero, Mrs A and the moon as daughter, mother and grandmother in *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* embodies the idea of a cyclical time that is experienced through biological rhythms in the sense that at one time, these women would have inhabited the same body. Grandmothers, mothers, and daughters share the same physical space through the pregnancy of the former, the daughter within the womb and her daughter within the ovary of the developing foetus. Yet, in this sense, there is also a connection to the infinite through generations of women who are connected across time, which challenges the concept of linearity and thus places it in the realm of Kristeva's monumental time. The problematization of sequential temporality predicates the need for an alternate view of discussing time in relation to what it is to be a woman and what it is to be a human being.

In both texts, moreover, there are also other elements that serve to dislocate the sense of the traditional linearity of narrative, such as digressions and interruptions. The reader is continuously reminded of the means by which we are experiencing the narrative; this disruption of linearity directs our gaze towards time itself, and the way in which we experience our world, through history and through the stories of those that have gone before us. The speaker(s) within each primary text embody the role of curator of stories; using textual fragments of history and the present moment to embody a kaleidoscope of meaning, their narration is the attempt to unify this meaning. Both Saleem in *Midnight's Children* and the omniscient unknown speaker in *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* seemingly acknowledge the metafictional aspect of their narratives and personify how, in narrating, they are embodying the human nature to find connection, to grasp at some semblance of humanness in the midst of the governance of time that underpins human life.

2.2 Gender

The discussion of the problematic nature of a sequential sense of temporality, especially in light of Kristeva's work in "Women's Time", leads to considerations of gender and the way in which a human life is constructed through this polarising lens. To begin to discuss gender, it may be necessary to look toward a general definition in order to interrogate what a description of gender entails and excludes. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines gender as "[t]he state of being male or female as expressed by social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones; the collective attributes or traits associated with a particular sex or determined as a result of one's sex" ("gender, n."). The way in which this definition is

problematic is that a binary opposition still exists within the terms *male* and *female*; even the order of the words positions men before, and therefore above, women. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2010), Judith Butler questions “binarism and its implicit hierarchy” (“Gender Trouble” in *The Norton Anthology* 2378) and the way in which a binary definition of gender is used to control the construct of *female* as an all-encompassing term that has specific, rigid notions of what femininity entails. Butler disagrees that a distinction exists between gender and sex, with the former often deemed cultural and the latter biological. Rather, she suggests that “perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* 9-10). If both sex and gender are cultural constructions, then the way in which society treats gender as binary allows the power structures inherent within these oppositions to be deployed in order to regulate and control the way in which gender is performed.

For Myra Jehlen, whose work “Gender” explores the notion of gender as a cultural construct, the examination of gender can be used as “an additional lens, or a way of lifting the curtain to an unseen recess of the self and of society” (Jehlen 265). From this thought, comes the idea that gender cannot be separated from the human, because it cannot be separated from culture. Humans are embedded within the cultural landscape and cannot exist outside of this framework, but if, as Jehlen suggests, the critique of gender is a way in which to reveal unspoken, “unseen” aspects of self, then this renders the discussion of gender within literature as the only means by which we can interrogate and disrupt essentialist notions of what gender appears to be. Yet, in the dissection of literature, Jehlen suggests that the use of terms such as *masculine* and *feminine* are employed merely as “analytical terms” in order to discuss a work rather than the words themselves being deemed inherently problematic which would allow them to be regarded as the real “objects of analysis” (263). Jehlen argues the point that without discussions of gender, women are “essentially invisible” (265). The use of the universal male as default when talking about the human race, *mankind*, means that women are omitted from inclusion in a generalised human existence, and if, as Jehlen argues, “gender is *not* a category of human nature” then gender is a construction in which is used to control rigid notions of human identity, displacing, and silencing those who find themselves in the margins (265).

To further expand on the submerged aspects of gender, the discussion of desire and sexuality should be examined in relation to the portrayal of heterosexual relationships as the norm. Butler borrows the term “compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler, “Gender Trouble” in *The*

Norton Anthology 2378) from Adrienne Rich, in order to describe the way in which the assumed heterosexuality of women positions them as an object of male desire and, accordingly, constrains the female gender to a reductive view of what their sexuality can be permitted to entail. The “stability of gender categories” is problematised through the unveiling of “presumptive heterosexuality” as a tool in which to control the behaviour and actions of women (Butler, “Gender Trouble” in *The Norton Anthology* 2376). The *presumptive heterosexuality* that Butler describes is interesting in terms of the examination of the primary texts, both texts deal with gender in varying degrees of transparency. *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* dismantles the notion of traditional gender roles and stereotypes of femininity in an overt way, using the characters of Hero and Cherry to make apparent the way in which the “compulsory heterosexuality”, that exists in response to an all-encompassing priority of male desire, is damaging to the extent of threatening the erasure women who don’t conform to the heteronormative ideal of “woman” in their identification with the female gender. *Midnight’s Children*, on the other hand, finds its complexity in challenging traditional notions of gender, yet simultaneously reinforcing reductive notions of femininity, particularly in relation to the broader male narrative. Regardless of the extent to which challenges to essentialist notions of gender are visible within these texts, questions of the demarcation of gender arise in *Midnight’s Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* due to the performative way in which they curate a notion of *human*.

For Butler, gender is inherently performative. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* she discusses this performativity in relation to drag which, she proposes, blurs the boundaries of *male* and *female* and ultimately mocks the structure of gender itself as a construct: “In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity” (Butler, “Gender Trouble” in *The Norton Anthology* 2385). In other words, the way in which gender is performed by drag artists brings about the perception of the way in which the human performs gender as part of their daily life, revealing the “fabricated unity” of sex and gender as a myth. In *The One Hundred Nights of Hero*, Cherry’s performative heterosexuality to Manfred brings about a heightened awareness of gender, through the subversion of idea that the female gender is “naturally” oriented towards a male desire. The characters of Cherry and Hero destabilize the assumption of heterosexuality precisely by performing it in order to engineer rebellion, primarily in order to keep the life they had together, but ultimately to dismantle the patriarchal rule that governs their civilisation. In her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980), Adrienne Rich

explores the way in which an assumption of heterosexual identity as the norm, oppresses women. Women who don't experience or perform their identity as heteronormative are systemically marginalised, punished and erased from history, thus, the performativity of gender is a performance which occurs under threat. (Rich 1527).

The situation of coercion and duress described by both Butler and Rich in relation to gender roles necessitates the examination of gender in relation to the way in which literature and correspondingly the creation of what it means to be human, has been dominated by the male narrative and the male lens of history. In "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976), Hélène Cixous discusses *écriture féminine* and the function it has in dismantling the way in which women are repressed and censored by reductive notions of gender. She pushes back against the phallogocentric view of gender and sexuality that has been disseminated from Freud and Lacan (Cixous 1884). Cixous states that: "writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy" (1872). The "masculine economy" that Cixous describes has been responsible for omitting women from view and has controlled the way in which female subjectivity is represented and constructed, to the detriment of women. Thus, *Midnight's Children*, and the masculine economy of narrative that is employed in the novel, becomes an essential site from which to examine the idea that the narrative of history is curated by a male voice. Both history itself in terms of the grand narrative of human existence and the history embedded in the narrative of *Midnight's Children* are dominated by a male voice and framed through a male lens. If the children of midnight are, as Saleem refers to as, "fathered [...] by history" (159), then what role do women have in terms of birthing the narrative of history? They are removed and rendered absent from this aspect of creation. This absence bodies forth the previously discussed concept of a patrilinear time that Kristeva, in "Women's Time," argues excludes female subjectivity (192).

The discussion of gender, then, is imperative for making visible the existence of women: "as a critical term "gender" invokes women only insofar as in its absence they are essentially invisible" (Jehlen 265). It is deeply problematic that without discussions of gender, women and their experience would be rendered absent from discourse, particularly with regards to marginalised women, who experience exclusion due to their sexuality, race, and class. Rich discusses the way in which feminism is troubled by the assumed heterosexuality of women and states that it: "remains a tenable assumption partly because lesbian existence has been written out of history" (1527). This premise is evident in *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* when Cherry exclaims: "Listen! Our stories must not be forgotten! You make sure your daughters tell them! We are the league of secret storytellers and our stories must live on!" (Greenberg

“Part the Fifth”). Through the construct of gender, seemingly fundamental notions of what it means human can be disrupted and challenged, the investigation of literature to enlighten a new spectrum of what it means to be a woman and what it means to be human is vital to the reciprocal relationship between human self and the literature that creates it.

3. Beginning – Birth

If narrative is tantamount to a human life, then questions of beginning are arguably parallel to notions of birth. This chapter will explore the concept of *beginning* and question whether it is possible to locate it as a singular, definable entity. The notion of birth will be discussed in order to explore the beginning of human life and, by extension, of narrative life, with regards to the relationship between birth, belonging to a female realm, and birthing forth a narrative which has been considered as arising from an inherently male domain. In order to examine the relationship between narrative and human life, it will be crucial to dissect the beginnings of both *Midnight's Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* as well as the subsequent incidents of beginning that occur as each narrative progresses. A close reading of the beginning of each primary text is vital in revealing the challenges and discrepancies that occur in considerations of the concept of a beginning and how this is embodied through the experience of human life. Both texts problematise beginnings in relation to narrative and human life and lead to questions of what a beginning constitutes, where it can be located and how it is inherently entangled with notions of time.

3.1 *Midnight's Children*

In *Midnight's Children*, the notion of a beginning is a slippery concept, both occurring as a static entity with reference to fate, history, and the corresponding presentation of supposed “facts,” yet also materialising as a dynamic, transient state which can be manifested in multiple sites which is evident through Saleem’s interjections within his description of his birth. The opening passage of the novel presents both these states of beginning concurrently, and, in doing so, destabilises the notion of a singular beginning:

I was born in the city of Bombay ... once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more ... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. There were gasps. And, outside the window, fireworks and crowds. A few seconds later, my father broke his big toe; but his accident was a mere trifle when set beside what had befallen me in that

benighted moment, because thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was to be no escape. Soothsayers had prophesied me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, politicians ratified my authenticity. I was left entirely without a say in the matter. I, Saleem Sinai, later variously called Snotnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, Buddha and even Piece-of-the-Moon, had become heavily embroiled in Fate – at the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement. And I couldn't even wipe my own nose at the time. Now, however, time (having no further use for me) is running out. I will soon be thirty-one years old. Perhaps. If my crumbling, over-used body permits. But I have no hope of saving my life, nor can I count on having even a thousand nights and a night. I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning – yes, meaning – something. I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity. (Rushdie 3-4)

The beginning of *Midnight's Children* contains three integral themes that are essential to the examination of the concept of beginnings and birth, the elements that merit discussion are: *authority*, *voice*, and *temporality*. The opening of *Midnight's Children* and its relationship to notions of beginning and birth will be a central passage in this chapter and will be examined through these three aforementioned lenses.

3.1.1 Authority

The function of the narrator protagonist and the use of “I” that is synonymous with autobiography blurs the boundaries between author and speaker and problematises the authority that is ascribed to a beginning. The first sentence of the novel: “I was born in the city in Bombay ... once upon a time” is compelling in terms of the tenor of voice that “I” emits. The sense of autobiography is inherent within a first-person narrative. It presents us with complexity in terms of the fact that the *I* who is speaking is not the same *I* as the author, yet there is still a fundamental intricacy in this correspondence. The “I” cannot help but draw our attention to what is outside the text, its position at the beginning of the text, its existence as the very first word further places it in a liminal state of being and arguably problematises the notion of beginning as a singular, static entity. In *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, Bennett and Royle claim that in texts that evoke an autobiographical tone, the “I” becomes

implicated in the ghostly presence of the author: “In presenting us with the voice of a fictional speaker, these texts draw attention to the figure of the author as a sort of concealed or cryptic, haunting but unspecified presence” (20). The voice, within narratives that mirror an autobiographical tone, can’t help but raise questions of authorship, drawing our attention to some “unspecified” other outside the text. The role of Saleem as a narrator-protagonist complicates his relationship to the text, he appears to blur the boundaries between what is inside and outside the novel. His interjections “No, that won’t do [...] No, it’s important to be more [...] Oh, spell it out, spell it out” (3), almost appear extrinsic to the story, the jolting nature of these interjections bring awareness to the text’s nature as a fictional construction. The neurotic duality of the voice in this passage appears to emit a notion of how a story *should* be told and bodies forth this notion that narrative is fundamentally curated, which by extension means there must be a curator. The tension that exists, in this beginning passage, arises from the role of curator being dislocated from Rushdie and seemingly transmitted to Saleem. Throughout the narrative Saleem claims authorship through the curation of his story, his self-aware voice is apparent in the opening passage here and is pervasive as the novel progresses. Saleem’s entangled relationship with the narrative, being both its object and its conveyor, renders the notion of authorship as a site of complexity and the beginning as a location in which to question assumptions of authority that are held within the “I” of the text.

The idea of the “I” and the text being inhabited by the “ghostly presence” of the author is a notion in which is rejected by poststructuralist thought, it is, instead, the disappearance of the author from the meaning of a work which has emerged as a key tenet of poststructuralism. A fundamental discourse in this field emerges from “The Death of the Author” (1968) in which Roland Barthes proposes the idea of the Author as obsolete when looking for meaning within a text. For Barthes, the disappearance of the author liberates the text (“The Death of the Author” 1271). It is the idea that the author is no longer a God-like figure from which the origin of meaning is derived (Barthes, “The Death of the Author” 1270). It is interesting to apply this notion of diminished power to authorial meaning to the character of Saleem who, by the process of writing his story and recounting his history, can be considered as an author. Saleem’s obsession with his birth is synonymous with his need for meaning, the authority that he assumes in order to “create” such meaning is bound up in the negotiation of an authorial voice that wants to emit truth, and, as such, is in conflict with the fictional and metafictional nature of writing. For Barthes, any notion of a singular authorial truth, from which the meaning of a text emerges, is obliterated in the negotiation of the “tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” that comprise a text (Barthes, “The Death of the Author” 1270). In other words, the

text is a space in which a multiplicity of writing is contained, and the layers of textuality intersect in a way that resists the concept of original. In opening paragraph of the novel, there are several layers of intertextuality, the words that Saleem narrates are bound up in, what Barthes terms, the “echoes” of other texts (“From Work to Text” 1280). Whilst he is trying to recount the story of his birth, an event he believes to be of such singular importance it is narrated prior to the inauguration of India’s independence, he is inundated with references to other texts and genres. The statement “once upon a time,” in the opening sentence of MC, contains overt references to the fairy-tale genre and provides a contrast between orality of storytelling and the textuality of writing. The name of the gynaecologist, Narlikar, is the name of a prominent Indian astrophysicist, which brings to light parallels between what is text and what is “real.” There are also two explicit references to the *Arabian Nights* tales which further draws upon the “polyphonous” nature of storytelling. Saleem’s pursuit of a singular meaning to ascribe to his life, evident from the very first sentence and prevalent throughout the novel, is obliterated into multiplicity from the very beginning of the narrative, and even, due to the intertextual references, before the narrative itself begins. In light of Barthes’ notion of the displacement of the author from the meaning of the text, it can be said that as soon as Saleem’s narration begins, “this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins” (“The Death of the Author 1268). In this sense, Rushdie is removed from the voice of Saleem and Saleem unwittingly removes himself from any notion of authorship and “truth” through the narration that he emits. For Barthes, as soon as narration begins, the voice from which it emerges and the origin from which it has derived is instantly displaced: “writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin” (“The Death of the Author 1268). Thus, the notion of a singular beginning is rendered untenable, authority is problematised in relation to this obliteration of origin and the emergence of multiplicity that is exposed in trying to locate a beginning is disseminated through the process of narration.

The relationship between curating a narrative and the dislocation of the beginning, as a singular site of meaning, is bound up in the “truth” of Saleem’s birth. Throughout MC, Saleem repeatedly tells us of his desire to tell the truth. He wishes to purvey his authority through the misguided sense that what is written is true and exhibits a need for this “truth” to disseminate meaning. The authority that he assumes through the emitting of a narrative alongside the obsession with the meaning his birth holds, presents us with an aporia, by which the story of his birth, that he is so ardently consumed by, is revealed to be a lie. It is product of deceit through the swapping of name tags by Mary Pereira, and a product of fiction when Saleem employs curative elements narrative rather than the sequential “truth” of story, to conceal his

“true” parentage and “true” origin. The birth described at the beginning of the narrative is arguably not the birth of Saleem. The indistinguishable moments that occur alongside the birth: “there were gasps. And, outside the window, fireworks and crowds” (3), do not define whether it is Saleem’s, or Shiva’s birth being described. However, Saleem mentioning that a few seconds after he is born his father breaks his big toe, and the reader’s realisation as the novel progresses that it is, in fact, Shiva’s biological father who breaks his big toe, leads us to question whether or not he is recounting Shiva’s birth instead of his own. The process by which birth and questions of origin are entangled within the slippery nature of fiction is embodied in the character of Ahmed Sinai:

that was how, thirty hours before my birth, my father demonstrated that he, too, longed for fictional ancestors... how he came to invent a family pedigree that, in later years, when whisky had blurred the edges of his memory and djinn- bottles came to confuse him, would obliterate all traces of reality. (Rushdie 148)

Saleem’s recounting of his father’s need for meaning and the way in which the use of fiction both facilitates and obstructs this meaning reveals how fiction contains tendencies that are capable of both creating and destroying what we consider to be reality. In both these instances, Saleem’s birth and Ahmed’s creation of fictional ancestors, the act of creating is tantamount to the act destruction. The creation of Ahmed’s fictional ancestors obliterates his origin through the fiction becoming more real than the truth of his ancestry in the loss of his memory. The positioning of what may or may not be Saleem’s birth at the beginning of the text renders the beginning as a site of contestation, of ambiguity and, as such, the act of creation, the narrating of his birth, turns into act of destruction, the removal of the beginning and, thus, his birth as a site of significance. The authority that he assumes in order to pursue his need for meaning is located in this notion of a singular beginning and obliterated by the usurping of “truth” in the face of the ambiguity and multiplicity that is brought about by narration. The ambiguity over whose birth is being described rendered significant when we consider that the omitted birth, whether Saleem or Shiva’s is marked only by absence, by lack of sound and lack of narration. The silence surrounding the *other* birth, arguably contains more meaning to the reader than the narrativized birth due to containing the “truth” of Saleem’s origin. But this supposed truth is further displaced in the consideration of how any form of narration necessarily displaces truth. In light of this, singular truth like singular beginning can never be attained. The beginning as a static site of meaning is undermined by the revealing of the “true” story of his birth. Yet, the

murky ambiguity of whose birth Saleem is narrating reveals that even the truth of the birth is in fact a construct of fiction due to the nature of writing and of creating a narrative.

The discussion of narrative beginnings calls into question the beginning of a human life and the way in which the idea of birthing forth a narrative has been traditionally associated with male forms of writing. In *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Said discusses his notion of the meaning of *authority* and its connection to an author who he describes as “a person who originates or gives existence to something, a begetter, beginner, father, or ancestor, a person who sets forth written statements” (Said 83). For Said, authority is that which describes the power of the novelist to begin (83-84). The point of significance here is to think of the way in which Said defines the author as a father, as one who brings something into existence. That Said refers to an author as a “begetter” and a “father” who brings something into existence is not only removing the role of the woman as mother, as an equal counterpart in an act of creation, whether that creation is human or textual, but it also places the author in a God-like status, which is also considered by the majority of religions as inherently male. The omission of his mothers, both, his biological mother, and the mother who raised him, from the opening paragraph of the novel delineates a very calculated removal of women from the notion of beginning, originator, bringer of life. The character of Mary Pereira, a catalyst for the life he experienced who comes to be one of the many mothers he collects throughout his life, is not referenced. Both the construct of history and the narrative of MC is dominated by a male voice, framed through a male lens, which calls into question the modes by which we experience a human life. If the narratives we consume are intrinsically positioned in terms of the male experience and positioned in the masculine landscape of history, it then becomes increasingly important to discuss notions of birth and the way in which women are removed from the process of creation, both in terms of creating the female experience through narrative constructions, and also through physically birthing an actual human life. If the children of midnight are, as Saleem refers to as, “fathered by history” then what role does femininity play in terms of birthing the narrative of history? Women are seemingly removed and absent from this aspect of creation.

In MC, Saleem equates his ability to write a narrative of the events leading up to and including his life with the ability to give birth. At the close of the description of the birth of his son, his present-day-self interjects: “now that I’ve given birth to my flap-eared, silent son” (587). Here, authorship becomes synonymous with giving birth, while the woman who has birthed the child is erased from the meaning of bringing a life into existence. In her article

“Aestheticism, the Maternal and ‘that Extremity of Love’: Women's Poetic Representations of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Mothering in a Society in Transition” Patricia Rigg discusses the role of the maternal and the regulations imposed upon it by the male medicalisation of birth, as well as the constraints of writing being “defined as masculine through the phallic analogy of the pen” (511-512). She upholds women’s poetry in the nineteenth century as a liberation from these constraints as well as acting as a magnifying lens by which to reveal how “male authors have historically appropriated the pregnancy metaphor to suggest the process of writing” (512). That Saleem “gives birth” to his son through the process of writing removes Parvati, the mother of Aadam, from her role as mother, from her role as the one who delivered the child into the world. In “Desire”, Judith Butler discusses way in which women are rendered absent from processes of reproduction, in terms of the nature of desire and the way in which it can function as a “desexualised desire for the form or reflection of a masculine self in another” (375). She expands upon Luce Irigaray’s notion of the “homoerotic impulse toward self-duplication” (Butler, “Desire” 375). In other words, that man desires to see himself reflected in another man; this reflection then becomes reduplicated, and a “spiritual” conception of man, without the need for woman, is achieved (Butler, “Desire” 375). Butler goes onto discuss the distinction between “active” and “passive” desires in Aristotelian philosophy and suggests that they are correlated to men and women respectively, with the former desire deemed “active” and governable while the latter is regarded as “passive” and “ungovernable” (“Desire” 377). The passivity of female desire, as opposed to the active male desire, relegates a woman’s role in reproduction to a passive state in which woman is absent from procreation and perpetuates a “fantasy of masculine autogenesis” (Butler, “Desire” 377). Butler describes this phenomenon as a “fantastic logic in whereby men beget other men, reproducing and mirroring themselves at the expense of women and of their own reproductive origins” (“Desire” 375). In this sense, Saleem’s removal of woman from the act of reproduction intimates that Saleem begets himself, he is essentially removed from his own “true” origins. He is already aware that his parents are not his parents, in light of Butler’s *masculine autogenesis*, his true biological mother, Vanita, becomes expendable, like Parvati-the-Witch, she is also rendered obsolete. If narrative and the authority that is assumed by the emitting of a narrative are synonymous with giving birth, it becomes important to consider gender, in light of the fact that woman is dislocated from these two sites of meaning.

3.1.2 Voice

There is a deliberate disconnect in the statement “I was born in the city of Bombay ... once upon a time” (Rushdie 3), whereby the ellipsis serves as a calculated separation between two distinct voices. The pause highlights the inverted order of the two statements in such a way that arguably positions Saleem, or more accurately, he positions himself, before the sense of beginning invoked by “once upon a time.” The fact that this happens at the beginning of the novel in the first sentence instantly renders any notion of a stable, traditional beginning as a fallacy. The loaded phrase “once upon a time” invokes the metafictional aspect of textuality, the incantation that marks the beginning of a fairy tale draws upon the interconnectedness of texts. Marina Warner, in *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale* (2014), describes the “polyphonous” voice of the fairy tale through its connection to a multiplicity of voices (64). The phrase “once upon a time” instantly posits the intertextuality of fiction, by invoking fairy tale, which itself is a form of story that has been told over and over many in many iterations and voices which further disturbs any transparent notion of a singular beginning. The negotiation between orality and textuality forms a key part of the hybridity and fluidity of the fairy tale genre which “keeps on the move between written and spoken versions and back again” (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* 44). This information becomes significant when we consider it in light of *Midnight’s Children*, which oscillates between the narrative set down through the realm of the textual and experienced by us, the reader, yet also invokes a sense of orality through the narrator’s exchanges with Padma, to whom he is relaying his story in a verbal medium. The sentence “I was born in Bombay ... once upon a time” plays upon the formulaic third person omniscient narrator in a fairy tale, associated with a primarily verbal form of storytelling, with the self-aware, first-person narration that characterises this novel. The two halves of the sentence alternate the close, almost magnified perspective of Saleem’s first person, narrator-protagonist persona with the distant, omniscient perspective that would characterise a third person narrative, particularly those located in oral forms of storytelling. There are two distinct voices present in the opening paragraph of the novel, one providing general information and one attempting to procure a deeper understanding of this beginning moment, pressing the other voice for a more detailed account. The probing pattern of the narrative in this passage reveals how the notion of beginning shifts as the amount of narrative information, that is available to the reader, increases. The almost question-and-answer like structure reveals possession of the knowledge of a reader, a consumer of the text and, in this sense, the need to curate the story in a certain way, a way that necessarily both orders and

disorders the text, which begins with the illusion of a beginning. The passage signifies how the more information we have, the previously held notion of the beginning shifts. The negotiation between these two types of voices as well as the implications that occur from the relationship between orality and textuality highlights the difficulty of locating a static beginning.

3.1.3 Temporality

In the opening paragraph of *Midnight's Children*, the imagery of “clock-hands” and their joining of “palms in respectful greeting” of Saleem’s arrival appears as a very deliberate attempt to body forth the notion of time. It is not merely just the portrayal of an embodiment of time, but also a humanisation of time, a personification of it in order to begin to parallel the way humanness and time are irrevocably woven together. Kermode refers to this phenomenon throughout *The Sense of an Ending*, postulating that a ticking clock is humanized through the description of the sound that is emitted from the clock is tantamount to it saying *tick-tock* (45). For Kermode, the emphasis on *tick* as beginning and *tock* as an end necessarily defines the pause between as a “significant duration” (45). This duration and its connection to beginning and end, is why Kermode defines *tick-tock* as “a model of what we call a plot, an organization that humanizes time by giving it form; and the interval between *tock* and *tick* represents purely successive, disorganized time of the sort that we need to humanize” (45). In *Midnight's Children*, notions of time, narrative, and humanness are all problematised through the character of Saleem and the narrative he emits. Saleem is “handcuffed to history” (3) conjoining the events that occur in his country’s history to what he believes to be the cause of those events: his own life. Although, if we consider the events that occur in the novel from the linear chronology of story rather than the deliberately disordered narrative, then instead of being linked with India’s history, he is, instead, connected to its future. It is precisely this changeable perspective that plays with and distorts notions of time. Saleem’s narrative shifts between past, present and future depending on his positioning amongst the narrative. Time is integral to the forward movement of narrative, and of human existence, yet it is also bound up in past and the complexity of the present which operates as a fleeting moment of newness before being relinquished to history. There is frequently the mention of time running out, this occurs alongside references to Saleem’s prematurely aging body and the race towards his inevitable demise:

Now, however, time (having no further use for me) is running out. I will soon be thirty-one years old. Perhaps. If my crumbling, over-used body permits. But I have no hope of saving my life, nor can I count on having even a thousand nights and a night. I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning – yes, meaning – something. I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity. (Rushdie 3-4)

If narrative and human life are interchangeable, then it is arguably because they both structure and are structured by time. The need for a beginning, middle and end is imposed by the humanisation of time, and time necessarily ensures that human life follows the birth-life-death structure. As people we are time, we are representative of it with our aging bodies, Saleem's voice is representative of this with his story that spans over generations, and the deterioration of his body and fragmentation of his narrative that occurs over the progression of the novel. The statement "time [...] is running out" and its location at the beginning of the novel, positions, as Brooks discusses, the end in the beginning (103). In light of this, time is both finite, the cause of deterioration and ultimately death, yet also infinite represented by the connection to *Arabian Nights* with the references to Scheherazade and "a thousand nights and a night," setting out the notion that time is both governing and governed by narrative and human existence.

If, for Saleem, emitting a narrative is synonymous with birth and the creation of life, then it necessitates a discussion of temporality, the notions of *beginning*, *middle* and *end* become problematised. It can be argued that Saleem has essentially birthed himself in recounting his life through narrative. In recalling the generations leading up to his birth and positioning himself in the midst of his family history with prophetic references to his birth and life, he precedes his own beginning: "Now that I've let out the details of my birth, now that the perforated sheet stands between doctor and patient, there's no going back" (24). The doctor and patient, his grandfather and grandmother respectively, despite recognisably being the catalyst for Saleem's life and, by extension, his narrative, are positioned in the latter part of the sentence while Saleem privileges his birth before the moment his grandparents met. The inversion of the order of familial relationships and beginning-end continuums are markedly numerous within the narrative. Throughout MC, Saleem discusses the possibility that one of his powers can arguably include his apparent skill of "giving birth to parents" (337) which he describes as "a form of reverse fertility" (337). The idea of giving birth to parents displaces any traditional sense of *beginning*, in the sense that, a child preceding their parents inverts the linear timespan and positions, as previously discussed: "the end [as] a time before the

beginning” (Brooks 103). The circularity that this induces problematises the idea of a beginning that occurs as a static, singular origin, a starting point of meaning from which the rest of the narrative will disseminate through the prosaic beginning-middle-end structure. If we consider idea that the end is located before the beginning, then any previously held notion of linearity is eradicated which leads to a questioning of how narrative, and by extension, human life is experienced and shaped by the need for linearity in order to pursue meaning, and the inevitability of circularity that denies this denouement.

There is an indisputable tension in the text between linearity and circularity. This is particularly evident when Saleem states: “Even ends have beginnings; everything must be told in sequence” (469). The complexity of this statement arises from the incompatibility between the circularity of *ends* bound up in *beginnings*, and the linearity that arises from *sequence*. Linearity within the novel comes about through the process by which Saleem strives to tell everything “in sequence” and refuses to narrate that which is ahead of its time. Thus, despite the paradox of him birthing himself and the sense of circularity this initiates, it seems that the character of Saleem clings to linearity. Women, however, who he describes as both making and unmaking him, are often responsible for his interjections from present day, and, in doing so, disrupt the linearity of story and induce a sense of circularity through the interjections that they cause Saleem to make. Padma, in particular, often serves as a catalyst for his interjections, she is a character who is responsible for disrupting the flow of linearity that Saleem seemingly craves. This is highlighted most prominently at the beginning of book three, towards the end of the novel, Saleem, in order to fast forward narrative time, “insert[s] a Bombay-talkie-style close-up – a calendar ruffled by a breeze, its pages flying off in rapid succession to denote the passing of the years” (482). The imagery of a calendar and the sequential nature of time in this manner is contrasted against Padma’s response: “why you’re waiting? Begin,’ the lotus instructs me loftily, ‘Begin all over again”” (483). The contradiction to Saleem’s linear calendar, Padma’s “begin all over again” encompasses the circularity of a narrative, possessing the knowledge that a beginning can occur within an end. It can perhaps, be argued that women in the novel are often bound up with and receptive to a circular sense of time, while men in the novel strive for linearity, but are thwarted in their attempt at experiencing time in the traditional linear way.

For women in the novel, a sense of circularity governing the experience of their existence is reinforced through the regeneration that is brought about by being renamed in marriage. In this sense, locating a beginning in the form of a static, singular origin is contaminated with a multitude of names that are not her own, which makes considerations of

beginnings become increasingly important when we consider the female gender. It is significant to consider that a woman can never locate her “true” name due to the marriages and the subsequent name changes of her ancestors. In *Midnight’s Children*, the act of renaming occurs when newly married women in the text are given a new name by their husband, not only are they divested of their last name, the name of their father, but they are also stripped of the name their mother gave them, this foundational point of identity is now dictated by a man:

she took a name which I chose for her out of the repository of my dreams, becoming Laylah, night, so that she too was caught up in the repetitive echo of all the other people who have been obliged to change their names... like my own mother Amina Sinai, Parvati-the-witch became a new person in order to have a child. (Rushdie 580)

That this renaming happens “in order to have a child” is problematic in that the masculine realm claims ownership of the circular existence that is inherent within the menstrual cycle, that allows gestation to occur, of a woman. In the act of bestowing a name onto her, Saleem and the male gender in the overall tradition is responsible not only for claiming the identity of woman, but also supposedly creating it. In becoming “a new person in order to have a child” they are dislocated from their own notion of self and effectively erased from the process of birth. The new person they have become, in order to birth a child, is claimed by man. Throughout history, women’s names have been erased, with the child taking the name of the father and then later in life, if marriage occurs, most likely losing this name to another man. It is significant, then, that Mumtaz becomes Amina and loses the name her mother bestowed on to her: “Amina has stopped being Mumtaz and Ahmed Sinai has become, in a sense, her father as well as her husband” (144). The removal of maternal influence on this base level of identity further incites the *male autogenesis* notion that Butler discusses. That Ahmed is said to become “her father as well as her husband” privileges the male gender with the power to conceive and birth women. The removal of woman from conceptions of birth has its roots in the sanitization of the supposed grotesque, physical aspect of birthing and the privileging of the male mind that can conceptualise a being into existence. Butler writes: “the girl, considered as the flawed copy, or the mother, the medium through which procreation becomes possible and who physicalizes and, hence, demeans that higher form of the spiritual reduplication of ‘man’ that is philosophy” (“Desire” 376). The idea that woman is inherently bound with body and man is linked to mind, while reductive and reinforcing dangerous hierarchies, is arguably significant when it comes to conceptions of time. The pursuit of a singular beginning becomes less critical when we

consider Kristeva's alternative conceptions of time, *cyclical* and *monumental* as a counter to the patrilinear that governs human existence.

The cyclical time, that Kristeva discusses, positions time in relation to "the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm" that governs a woman's body ("Women's Time" 191). The repetition and cycles that occur within the life of a woman make her existence compatible with cyclical or circular conceptions of time. The sense that women experience existence through a circular sense of time grounded by this connection to body can be read throughout MC. Saleem's focal point for women is often in reference to their body, their physical size, with Reverend Mother being likened to a house, the "colossal" (621), "preternatural breasts" (622) of Durga the washerwoman, Amina's buttocks a "black mango" (222), Padma's hairy forearms (24). Whereas the male characters, Saleem focuses on features that occur about the head: his nose (64), his map-stained face (487), his "bulby temples" (169), his grandfather's nose (9), the "centre-parting of William Methwold" (135), the "forcep-hollows" of Sonny (169), referring to his other friends as Eyeslice and Hairoil (130). The grounding of women in the realms of the body, while situating them in the lower position of the mind/body hierarchy, can arguably be read as a liberation from a masculine time that constrains them if we consider this in light of Kristeva's cyclical and monumental time. Linear time, that is structured through beginning, middle, and end, is necessitated and perpetuated through the relationship of lack and desire, particularly a concept of lack that is reductive when considered in relation to female subjectivity. Kristeva postures that "linear time is that of language considered as the enunciation of sentences (noun + verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending), and that this time rests on its own stumbling block, which is also the stumbling block of that enunciation – death" ("Women's Time" 192). Masculine time which dominates the sentence, the novel and human existence is positioned towards the end and, in doing so, rests on the "stumbling block" of death. There is an inherent aporia in the patrilinear timeline and the desire for the end. The embracing of cyclical, repetitive, and circular time represents liberation of female subjectivity from the constrains of masculine conceptions of time and existence.

3.2 *The One Hundred Nights of Hero*

The lenses, *authority*, *voice*, and *temporality*, through which the concept of beginnings and birth were examined in the text of *Midnight's Children*, are integral to the discussion of *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* (NOH). Greenberg's text serves to further problematise authority,

voice and temporality through the medium of the graphic novel and its interwoven nature that comprises of textual and pictorial elements. The discussion of the destabilization of these lenses is vital to exploring the displacement of a singular beginning and the opening of NOH is significant in portraying the challenges that are inherent within notions of beginning. The beginning of the text begins with an exchange between an assumed teller and consumer of the tale:

“Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Then I shall begin.”

In the beginning was the world. And it was weird. This is because it came from the head of a strange girl with a beak. This is Kiddo. She is the daughter of a God: Birdman. And the sister of another God: Kid. And of course she was a God herself. So they were Gods, but also they were a family, because this story is all about that. About humans and human-ness. Fathers and daughters, brothers and sisters. Love and betrayal and loyalty and madness. Lovers and heroes and the passing of time and all those marvellous baffling things... Those things that make us human.

(Greenberg “Prologue”)

The above passage, from the beginning pages of NOH, will be examined in light of authority, voice, and temporality in order to deconstruct how the text deals with the notion of beginning. Later parts of the novel will also be discussed due to the nature of the narrative of NOH to continually “begin” as a result of the utilisation of the story-within-story structure and how this necessarily instigates the permeation of beginning into all aspects of the text.

3.2.1 Authority

The orality present within the narrative of *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* challenges notions of authority with regard to the nature of an oral tale to be dislocated from a singular authorial voice through the telling and retelling of the narrative. In NOH, there is a deliberate commenting on the nature of oral storytelling and how each retelling is, in itself, altering the narrative and making the tale anew. The sentence “in the beginning was the world” already positions the beginning as a site for polemical debate through its parallels to the biblical “in the

beginning was the “Word” (*The Holy Bible*, John 1:1), yet the beginning of NOH occurs before this statement. The opening of NOH, is the series of textual representation of speech: “Are you ready?” “Yes.” “Then I shall begin” (Greenberg “Prologue”). This exchange presents two significant points of interest. Firstly, there is the problematisation of the notion of beginning through the statement “then I shall begin,” which renders the idea of the beginning displaced from the site at which the reader expected it. Even though we know the text to have begun, the statement positions the words preceding it in a liminal space hovering between inside and outside the text. The uncertainty surrounding where the narrative begins frames the notion of beginning as an unstable site that is elusive and indefinable. The second point of interest is the focality on speech as a medium of storytelling. The exchange that occurs here is clearly invoking speech, as indicated by the punctuation. Though the voice seemingly attempts to claim a singular beginning through the words “I shall begin,” the orality that is induced in the narrative counters this and heightens the futility of trying to ascribe a single voice to a single beginning where it is clear that even in a singular speaker, there is a multiplicity of voices. In *Once Upon a Time*, Marina Warner draws upon the genre of fairy tale and its foundations in a verbal medium. The traditionally oral nature of this medium perpetuates the way in which the retelling of tales both reinforces the story itself, yet, at the same time, the narrative is made anew through the changes that occur in each recounting. The idea of a singular origin of a story is usurped when we consider the similarity of tales that have occurred throughout history across differing cultures: “Stories were migrants, blow-ins, border-crossers, tunnellers from France and Italy and more distant territories where earlier and similar stories had been passed on in Arabic and Persian and Chinese and Sanskrit.” (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* 59). For Warner, fairy tales are, by nature of their orality, “polyphonous” due to this connection to different voices and creators across cultures (*Once Upon a Time* 64). This is particularly important to consider in NOH in which Greenberg draws upon the folk tales “The Two Sisters” and “The Buried Moon” for “Dreadful Wind and Rain” and “Phases” respectively. In the narrative itself, Hero’s stories have been passed from her mother and her mother had the stories recounted to her by Wilmot, who was the original channel through which people would disseminate their tales. These nameless people, who would recount their stories to Wilmot represent the anonymity, the obscurity that is brought about through oral storytelling. The origin of a story is consistently deferred, and, in this sense, the God-like authority of a singular beginning is refused.

3.2.2 Voice

The nature of telling a story orally, as Hero does, necessitates the discussion of where the text begins in terms of the recounting of words that have been passed through different voices where there is no obvious ‘authorial’ God-like origin. The opening passage of NOH ventures forth a meta discussion of beginnings: “In the beginning was the world” (Greenberg “Prologue”). This overt reference to the Bible and the supposed beginning of all things referred to in the opening lines of the book of John: “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). Greenberg upends notions of there being a “stable” beginning, resisting the biblical “in the beginning” by having text that precedes this statement, but also, she resists the constraints held in notions of “the Word”, instead choosing “the world.” *The Word* is arguably associated with reductive male narratives and functions as a tool for imposing the linear sequencing of text. Whereas *the world* is not only spherical in shape but, arguably, cyclical in nature, encompassing human life and the oral tradition of storytelling which has been a tool for conveying counter histories and stories that are absent from mainstream narratives. Marina Warner, in *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1995), discusses storytelling and the relationship between a tale and its teller. She discusses the role of orality in women’s storytelling and the way in which it has been seen as lesser in terms of a narrative accomplishment, often being rendered gossip or tittle tattle. For Warner, women’s voices have been oppressed in all areas of narrative and can be traced to the biblical precedent of silencing women:

that Adam was made first, to symbolize his precedence over Eve, and that Eve, the pattern of all women to come, sinned through speech, by tempting Adam to eat with her words. So speech must be denied her daughters. The prejudice against women’s talk has scriptural legitimacy. (Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* 29-30)

The resistance against women speaking and creating narratives with their voices is created by the power structure of male over female, Adam over Eve. Greenberg’s choice of the “world” over the “Word” dismantles the innate hierarchy in language and brings about a consciousness of how women have been suppressed from the use of the “Word,” both in the written domain as well as the silencing of women’s voices. The Word has oppressed and marginalised women in terms of inaccurate or invisible portrayals of the female subjective experience that have dominated male narratives. *World*, however, encompasses an amalgamation of textuality,

visuality and orality, it enables the female subjective experience to be bodied forth in ways other than the written language and the detrimental hierarchies that is contained within it.

3.2.3 Temporality

The medium of the graphic novel contains sites of exploration that allow for the permeability of beginnings and the liminal position it occupies between its location inside and outside of the text. The panels within a graphic novel can often be overlaid with narration and other information relative to the story, yet even though this forms part of the text it still feels extrinsic to the frame narrative. In NOH, the interjections from the unknown, omniscient narrator, who is positioned above the gods in the narrative, overlays the stories that are being recounted: “Yes, 24 nights have already passed! I know what you’re thinking but I’m not going to include every break for daylight, it would ruin the flow! But believe you me, Hero is really spinning this tale out” (Greenberg “Part the Third”). The emplacement of this omniscient, unknown voice in the white “gutter” space problematises the notion of inside versus outside of narrative, positioning it in a liminal site of existence. The statement “it would ruin the flow” draws attention to the metafictional nature of this narrative. The rupture from the flow of the story, in order to state how to pause would detract from the fluidity of the forward drive of narrative dislocates the linear sequencing which had preceded this interjection. It leads to a questioning of where the text begins, the interjections in Hero’s stories continually bring about an awareness of the function of storytelling itself, to disguise and disrupt time, to replace time in the “real world” with the temporality embedded within the narrative. This unknown speaker signifies this idea that the true beginning can never be known, its identity remains inaccessible, and its position seems to incorporate and infinite expanse of time in the way that it knows the whole history of early earth and precedes even its creation. In *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode draws upon ideas of time and a human’s connection to *beginning* and *end* (4). In analysing apocalyptic thought and notions of eternal, he references The Bible as “a familiar model of history. It begins at the beginning (‘In the beginning...’) and ends with a vision of the end (‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus’)” (6). It is noteworthy that the basis for history is linearity, and is bodied forth by The Bible, as Kermode notes, beginning at the beginning which is in anticipation of the end. This end, Kermode argues, signals the end of human time, with the suggestion of the apocalypse signalling the start of celestial, eternal time which is incompatible with human life. If the beginning is bound up in the end and perpetuated through the resulting

circularity and the infinity that this induces, then the temporality of the narrative and specifically the notion of a singular beginning, in NOH is problematised.

Considerations of the tension between linear and circular time within a narrative are explored within NOH, the graphic novel is inescapably embedded in the visual which necessarily instigates a complicated dynamic to the textuality of the narrative and complicates the sequential temporality that one expects over the course of a story. The narrative may be, as Brooks describes, oriented towards the end, yet the seemingly corresponding images in a graphic novel exist as a static timeless entity. Katalin Orbán, in “A Language of Scratches and Stitches: The Graphic Novel between Hyperreading and Print,” describes how “even linear graphic narratives involve a fundamentally divided attention” with regards to the relationship of images to words and the layering of “overview” that the reader engages with in the process of negotiating the textuality in image and the visuality attached to words (170). It leads to the question of how one begins to read an image? Disregarding the fact that very few narratives are purely sequential in nature, there is still an inherently sequential way to read a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter, a novel, but where does one begin to read an image? There is no *beginning, middle, and end* in an image. The beginning of NOH opens with the exchange: “Are you ready?” “Yes” “Then I shall begin” (Greenberg “Prologue”). This first page seems inherently textual, with only these words available for the reader to engage with and the background of the page being black, however, it could be argued that this seemingly empty darkness, within which the words are located, is itself is an image. The speech balloons are employed as a device which instigates the visual depiction of speech and the negotiation between voice and audience, author, and reader. Though the words themselves and their location on the page give a sequential, logical order in which to read this exchange, the image as a whole still initiates a refusal of linearity. The darkness provides no reference to who is speaking or where they are speaking from. As an image, the page does not need to distinguish beginning or end in the way that words do, it simply can exist as an entity on its own. The complexity of this arises when the words begin to mirror this refusal of linearity, though seemingly sequential, as previously discussed, the statement “then I shall begin” is problematic in that it undermines the notion of beginning itself. The narrative was already underway with the question “Are you ready?” the notion of the beginning occurring after the start of the text. This is only one of the many “beginnings” that occur throughout the text, the refusal of linearity is further enhanced by the visuality of images and orality induced by Hero’s narrative.

Though NOH champions oral storytelling as a way of breaking free from the constraints of traditional narrative, Greenberg’s work is inescapably bound up in textuality. Greenberg

problematizes the use of written language and invokes notions of hierarchies through the positioning of these words:

And of course she was a God herself. So they were Gods, but also they were a family, because this story is all about that. About humans and human-ness. Fathers and daughters, brothers and sisters. Love and betrayal and loyalty and madness. Lovers and heroes and the passing of time and all those marvellous baffling things... those things that make us human. (Greenberg "Prologue")

There is an overt hierarchy present here, fathers over daughters, brothers over sisters, gods over humans, humans over humanness. The last comparison leads to the question of whether there is a difference between the construct of the seeming totality of human and the fragmented "human-ness". "Human-ness," the dash here is significant, represents the fragmented, chaotic experience of the human life. This shifts our attention again to the idea of where this idea of human begins and how perhaps humanness is a state of continual beginning. Rather than originating from a God and emerging as total being who is termed human, *humanness* represents life as a state of a series of fragments, a collection of "baffling things" that cannot be objectively set out. If the notion of human is linear, following a linear progression of the course of a life, with a beginning, a middle and an end and by extension encompassed in a unity of existence, then humanness, the innate, absurd, fragmented way that a human experiences their life, is in conflict with totality of human. It is interesting to consider that, while the first terms within the hierarchy: father, brother and human, represent the masculine desire for totality as set out in phallogocentric and psychoanalytic terms, the second terms: sister, daughter, human-ness embrace the non-linear, fragmentary mode of human existence. In this sense, though, at a surface level, it seems that sister and daughter are placed in the inferior position within the binary pairing in which they are situated, further examination of their placement as the second term in a binary pairing alongside human-ness reveals the freedom that could be associated with the constructs of sister and daughter. If we consider them in terms of Kristeva's concepts of cyclical and monumental time, then they are liberated from the constraints of a linearity of existence that occurs alongside a need for singular meaning and totality of life. Though omniscient narrator initially positions father over daughters and brothers over sisters, Wilmot goes on to state the need for: "stories of the women and men that do not get told" (Greenberg "Part the Third"). The positioning of women over men reveals that oral storytelling necessitates and enables the bodying forth of stories and experiences that have been previously side-lined, marginalised, or silenced. It presents textuality as a site which both

problematizes language through the seemingly inescapable gender bias, but also as a tool with which to work alongside the liberating aspects of orality and dismantle the innate hierarchies within language.

Within the aforementioned hierarchy, the mother is noticeably absent, as she often is in the stories throughout *NOH*, which leads to the question of what the role of mother or, more specifically, her absence serves. The role of the mother is absent from the stories that Hero tells, with the exception of “The League of Secret Storytellers” (Greenberg “Part the Third”). The exception here is significant, as this tale depicts the beginning of the formation of the “Secret Storytellers”, Wilmot, Mrs A and Esa, who act as a catalyst for the dissemination of stories and crucially, tells us of Hero’s mother. The reason why Hero’s mother is significant here is that she highlights the lack of mothers in the other tales. Her presence serves as a reminder for the omitted mothers and draws parallels to the mother’s absence from other narratives and how she is often erased in much the same way that the female subjective experience is often erased from the male narrative structure. It has been previously noted that in *MC*, the mother is displaced as the origin of existence demonstrated, by the hijacking of both birth and birthing forth a narrative, evident in the prophecy of “dynasties lurking in his grandfather’s nose” (142). Ultimately this removes woman and the womb from reproduction which Rushdie continually does in both subtle and overt ways throughout *MC*. In contrast, in *NOH*, despite the figure of the mother being noticeably absent in many of the stories that Hero tells, her presence as an entity, a concept that exists, is undeniable. When Mrs A questions her father about whether she has a mother, he replies: “everyone has a mother” (Greenberg “Part the Fourth”). This exchange takes place with her mother as a pictorial visibility, the moon, in the background. While the origin of Mrs A is depicted as the moon, the nature of the moon and name of this particular story, “Phases,” suggests the cyclical pattern of female existence defies the static notion of origin and positions beginning as a recurring phase that can occur life, as in narrative, continuously. The static concept of beginning is challenged due to the multiplicity of beginning in this tale. There is firstly the formation of the group and thus the beginning of the telling of tales, yet even before the Secret Storytellers formation, the stories existed, transferring the notion of beginning to a murky, obscured unknown. There is also the beginning of Hero, through Mrs A’s pregnancy and the resulting circularity that ensues with Kristeva’s considerations of temporality and gestation. It is also here that the reader is presented with a story within a story within a story. The further we descend through the narrative layers the more we are removed from beginning as a solid, quantifiable entity, and the more we, as the reader, negotiate a permeability with the concept of beginning.

3.3 Conclusion

The two primary texts principally deal with the pervasiveness of narrative and the way that it is essential to ideas of being human through its ability to be in a constant state of *beginning*, which both mirrors and creates the experience of human life. The examination of beginning in relation to *Midnight's Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* has revealed the entangled relationship between beginning and end and the resulting circularity that is induced from Brooks' notion of the end, that can be said to be a time before the beginning (109). In NOH, the League of Secret Storytellers arguably represent the idea that the beginning is not a fixed point due to the nature of stories to undergo a metamorphosis as a result of the negotiation of meaning that occurs when a reader or, in this case, a listener engages with the text. Further, as we can see most significantly in NOH, it can be said that the interpolation and regurgitation of stories through multiple recipients of the narrative pose a challenge to the site of fixed beginning. The power of stories and their prevalence across cultures requires a discussion of how and where stories themselves begin. Warner discusses the arguments between "universalists" who believe that the same stories appear across differing cultures due to a "collective unconscious" (*Once Upon a Time* 61). Whereas the "diffusionists" postulate that the reason for the similarity in stories across around the world is due to the nature of humans to pass stories on:

Theories about world literature [...] emphasize the porousness of borders, geographical and linguistic: no frontier can keep a good story from roaming. It will travel, and travel far, and travel back again in a different guise, a changed mood, and, above all, a new meaning. (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* 62)

Within both primary texts there is the distinct commentary upon the way in which the emitting of an oral narrative places it in a position of multiplicity. The exchange between teller and receiver of the narrative reveals the way in which the meaning of a narrative work is transient and that a text, whether verbal or written, can be made anew upon the interaction of person and text. We have seen evidence of this within the primary texts. In NOH, through the League of Secret Storytellers and how they curate and emit their narratives, effectively taking stories and producing them into a new "tapestry" of meaning (Greenberg "Part the Third"). In MC, Saleem's orality, invoked through his exchanges with Padma, serve to introduce a circularity within the text, consequently, this disruption to linearity means that beginning is not located in a singular place. This is particularly evident within the opening paragraph of MC, through his

interruptions that expose the dichotomy between his two narrative voices, the one that produces the written text and the one that emits the oral narrative. Thus, the *beginning* is problematised by the way in which human life interacts with a written or verbal text. The interaction between human life and narrative text and the ways in which they irrevocably form the other is the reason why it is possible for stories to be so widely disseminated and interwoven in human existence. Because we can only think through narrative structures, the creation of stories is the harnessing of this mode of existence in order to try and make sense of human life, that in a sense, is always in a state of beginning due to experiencing life through the present moment. This reinforces the idea that the emitting of stories is an innate part of being human and the beginning as a dynamic site in which has a complex relationship both in terms of what it means to be human and what it is to begin a narrative.

4. Middle – Life

The ambiguity of the middle makes it difficult to define what exactly constitutes a middle and how it is meaningful to a narrative work. Both *Midnight's Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* use the obscurity of the middle as a site of destabilisation of the sequentiality that is induced by the beginning, middle, and end structure of story. For NOH, the middle is magnified through its story-within-story structure, through which, when the readers emerge from one layer of story, they find themselves still immersed in the midst of another. In MC, Saleem, though placing the utmost significance on his beginning and his end in both his life and his narrative, unwittingly reinforces the middle as a site of the negotiation of meaning and the attempted reconciliation between these two points.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle states that for something to be considered a whole it needs to have a beginning, a middle and an end (Aristotle 105). This underpins the notion of the middle as a vital part of the narrative work, yet in literary criticism, and also the human condition, the locus of meaning seems to lie purely at the end. This is a concept that will be discussed at length in both this chapter as well as the consecutive chapter with regards to the utilisation of Kermode's argument of how "the provision of an end" bestows meaning on to a narrative work and that human beings who are in "the midst" need the satisfying consonance that an ending bestows on the beginning and the middle (17). This chapter will also attempt to decipher what the middle is and how it induces meaning in a narrative work, as well as considerations of how the concept of the middle factors into the experience of a human life. If narrative simply corresponds to a human life in the sense that beginning is birth and the end is death, can the middle be regarded as life? If narrative is the lens through which a human experiences life and life is considered to exist as the journeying middle between birth and death, the link that exists between these two junctures, in the form of the concept of the present moment, also needs to be examined. In order to explore these notions, this chapter will utilise Ricoeur's discussion of whether the present is a combination of an incorporation of past and anticipation of future, as well as his analysis of the complexity of the interconnection between time, narrative, and human life. For Ricoeur, the question remains whether time governs narrative or whether narrative is a way of humanising time, as evident in his statement that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (52). Due to the temporal nature of the human life, neither human and nor narrative can escape beginning, middle and end. Yet both "the middle", and "life" exist in a strange, contradictory, "arabesque" (Brooks 108), between

the point of beginning and the point of the end, and, in being so, challenges the patrilinear temporality that characterises the journey from birth to death and beginning to end.

4.1 *Midnight's Children*

Saleem's narration in MC instigates the discussion of what constitutes a human life and, as such, renders it significant to discuss the examination of the present moment because it is through the present that we, as humans, experience life. However, the present moment is not so easily defined. It is not bound to a state of being purely in the present but arguably exists in a negotiation of past and future. Similarly, the beginning, middle, and end are not so easily defined as past, present, and future. This is markedly evident in MC where we see that the beginning of the novel is the future with regard to the outlining of the birth of Saleem, which seemingly, as part of the frame narrative, has not yet occurred in the chronological sequencing of the story. Saleem himself, later testifies to this through the multiple references, occurring throughout Book One, to the fact that he is leading up to his birth. Therefore, the discussion of his birth in the opening paragraph of the novel immediately complicates the temporality of the narrative which, then, immediately after this paragraph, moves to the present-day Saleem: "Now, however, time (having no further use for me) is running out" (3). The word "Now" indicates the present-day Saleem speaking, the narration from his present-moment viewpoint, which naturally takes place in the future in regard to his birth. Placing his birth in a strange state of being both future and past: future in relation to the narrative, and past in relation to the narrator Saleem's recounting of the narrative. It could be argued that it takes place, perhaps, even further in the past, if we disregard Saleem's insistence throughout the majority Book One that his birth is yet to come, his birth happened before his grandparents even met. His present moment exists in a negotiation of the past and the enigmatic, elusive idea of the future in relation to the present. Interestingly, Saleem's present moment is located in the near-end of the narrative. The precariousness of such a present moment lies in its imminent end, or, as Kermode would argue, its immanent end (25). The immanent end, Kermode argues, is the idea that "the End is present at every moment" (26). In other words, rather than existing in a state of imminence, the end, instead, is inherent within all moments. This intrinsic end, that is embodied and continuously foreshadowed from the present-day Saleem's narration, is problematised by the extension of the present moment into a future which would, ordinarily, be inaccessible. In light of this, any discussion of what the middle constitutes will inevitably be complex due to

the consideration of the present moment as the mode of experiencing life and all the complexity of an inescapable “immanent” end that is bound up in this.

4.1.1 Tick-Tock: The Temporal and the Eternal

In *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode discusses the “extensive middles” that need to be arranged in harmony with “remote origins” and “predictable ends” (56). The model of the *tick-tock*, and the pause between, as a “significant duration” and a “special kind of middle” allows the consideration for what the constitutes the middle (Kermode 45). It can be argued that, in this sense, the point between tick and tock is defined by absence. The beginning as *tick* and the end as *tock* are punctuated by sound, by presence, whereas the middle, the duration between *tick* and *tock*, is marked by the absence of definitive sound (Kermode 45). It is the ambiguity between two definitive points. For Kermode, the point between beginning and end, birth and death, is “a duration (rather than a space) organizing the moment in terms of the end, giving meaning to the interval between *tick* and *tock* because we humanly do not want it to be an indeterminate interval between the *tick* of birth and the *tock* of death” (Kermode 57-58). In other words, the end confers meaning onto the middle, the interval between, in order satisfy the human need for meaning. As humans we strive to know that everything in between the *tick* and the *tock* is not merely absurdity. Saleem embodies this fear and announces, at the beginning of the narrative, that “above all things [he] fear[s] absurdity” (4). His resulting narrative is, therefore, a negotiation with meaning, the middle by Saleem striving to make his life mean something. If the only thing that confers meaning on to a narrative work and on to a human life is the beginning and the ending, the birth and the death, then there is this drive to make the interval between these two points, in respect to both narrative work and human life, have meaning through its negotiation with beginning and end: “For to make sense of our lives from where we are, as it were, stranded in the middle, we need fictions of beginnings and fictions of ends, fictions which unite beginning and end and endow the interval between them with meaning” (Kermode 190). Everything in the middle we try to make meaningful in order to counter the dread that it’s really just absurd. We need to know that there is an “end”, we need to know, as Kermode states, that there is just not an “indeterminate interval” between birth and death, beginning and end (58).

Though dealing with the end as the point of significance in a narrative work, Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* is vital in examining what constitutes the middle and how it can be made meaningful by an end. For Kermode

it is our insatiable interest in the future (towards which we are biologically orientated) that makes it necessary for us to relate to the past, and to the moment in the middle, by plots: by which I mean not only concordant imaginary incidents, but all the other, perhaps subtler, concords that can be arranged in a narrative. (Kermode 52)

What Kermode makes evident here is the inescapable imposition of human temporality onto a narrative text. In this sense, the idea that a human life is bound to a past-present-future structure explicates the need for narrative to make sense of human time. Kermode stresses the need for narrative to provide concordance to temporality. This concordance, however, is not easily achieved. The complex nature of time and the way in which it interweaves within a narrative work and human life, problematises the idea that such concordance can ever be achieved. Though human time appears sequential, narrative time is not. A key discussion in the mitigation of the sequentially of time in a narrative text is the concept of Chronos and Kairos, which Kermode utilises during the course of his argument on the significance of endings: "Within this organization that which was conceived of as simply successive becomes charged with past and future: what was *chronos* becomes *kairos*" (Kermode 46). Kermode borrows the usage of the aforementioned emphasised terms from notable theologians and goes on to further elaborate on the definition of *chronos* and *kairos*. Chronos is notably defined by time that passes, the traditional notion of temporality as time that is finite and will, inevitably, come to an end (47). Kairos is "a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end" (47). What is evident here is the relation to the end. Chronos is time which passes, the linear, sequential flow of time from beginning to end, embodied in the temporality of the Bible, which as Kermode points out begins "in the beginning" and ends at the end of all human time, with the apocalypse outlined in Revelation (6). Whereas Kairos, though described by Kermode as a point in time, a seemingly static moment or "season," is nevertheless positioned in terms of the end by the significance that the end bestows upon it.

Despite Kermode's discourse of the importance of the end in terms of meaning production, it can be argued that it is not merely the end that merits a discussion of how human time is meaningful. Kairos, Kermode states, is "poised between beginning and end" and we know that this moment, when it is dislocated from the successiveness of Chronos, becomes "charged with past and future" (46). Therefore, even though Kairos may be a suspended

relation in between beginning and end, it does not necessarily mean that this point in time is static. The idea that it is “charged with past and future” lends itself to Kermode’s notion of the interval between *tick* and *tock* as a duration rather than a static point. From this discussion arises the idea that the present moment can be experienced as this moment of Kairos, charged with the significance of past and future located in the suspension of the moment between beginning and end. The moment between beginning and end, the middle, then, is a site in which to investigate what Ricoeur first describes as the point-like present but then goes on to discuss a present in which contains an “internal multiplicity,” in terms of its negotiation of the present with the past and the future (Ricoeur 10). In light of the discourse of Ricoeur and Kermode, the present moment can be immersed in Kairos with its accompanying negotiation between past and future, beginning and end. Though Kermode places the emphasis on the end with regards to bestowing meaning onto a narrative work and a human life, Ricoeur states: “For something to stop, it is in fact necessary that there be a beginning and an end, hence a measurable interval” (Ricoeur 17). This inverts the end-oriented argument and instead illuminates the measurable interval, the middle perhaps, as a vital segment in which provides the basis for something, a narrative work or a human life, to end.

Though delimited by the *tick-tock*, it is still ambiguous what the interval, the middle duration between beginning and end truly consists of. The inference that the middle is a vast, unknowable quantity which needs the organizing principles of beginning and end to not only make sense of it, but also to bestow meaning upon it is fundamental for Kermode’s model of *tick-tock*: “The interval between *tock* and *tick* represents purely successive, disorganized time of the sort that we need to humanize” (Kermode 45). We can see here that the unquantifiable, unknowable time in the duration between the beginning and the end is sequential due to its positioning and the inevitability to be perpetuated forward to an end. Yet is also disorganised through a human’s relationship to temporality and the posits of meaning that are brought about by Kairos. The need to humanize time necessarily disorganises it in order to create meaning. This notion is highly significant in terms of the narrative of Saleem in *Midnight’s Children*. Saleem embodies this notion of extracting meaning from the temporality of human existence. He refers to himself as a “child of ticktock” (533). His narrative is driven by the “metronomic drumming” (135) of the metaphorical ticking clock that sequentially drives both the narrative and himself to an end. Yet his determination to create meaning from the temporality that governs the narrative results in a circularity that ensues from his negotiation with the past and the way in which his future, present self is bound to a reflective state of trying to make sense of the meaning in his life: “above all the ghostly essence of that perforated sheet, which

doomed my mother to learn to love a man in segments, and which condemned me to see my own life – its meanings, its structures – in fragments also; so that by the time I understood it, it was far too late” (143). The “ghostly essence” of the past haunting the future self that occurs as a motif that reinforces the notion that though human time is supposedly linear, the fragmentation of the human self dissolves linearity and is dispersed through an accumulation of meaningful points within a human life. The middle then, as life, can be argued as the negotiation of these fragments, trying to join, as Kermode postulates, the beginning to the end. It can be argued, therefore, that the middle is a site of temporality in which we, as humans, try to make sense, to understand the connections, but inevitably, like Saleem, we run out of time.

In *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur analyses the notions of past, present, and future in relation to a human life and the way in which the concept of the eternal, which he describes as “the other of time” (236), both challenges and reinforces the human temporal world. His examination of Augustine’s *Confessions* brings forth a discussion of how eternity and time differ in relation to what surrounds the present, stating that “in eternity nothing moves into the past: all is present [totum esse praesens]. Time, on the other hand, is never all present at once” (Augustine qtd. in Ricoeur 25). We can see, from Ricoeur’s utilisation of Augustine’s argument, the way in which this concept extends to narrative, in the sense that we can never be presented with its entirety in one instantaneous moment. Narrative unfolds through time, both through the time it takes to complete the reading in the “real” world and also through the inner temporal world of the narrative itself. A figure that complicates the temporality of the narrative is the omniscient narrator who appears to be above time, their knowledge seemingly existing in a timeless entirety. In *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Culler engages with the discussion of how a narrative is shaped by the various focalizations that may be employed through a character or narrator and draws upon the “godlike figure” of the omniscient narrator who is seemingly unlimited in his knowledge of the “innermost thoughts and hidden motives of the characters” (90). If the omniscient narrator is, as Culler says, a “godlike figure” presiding over the narrative (90), then they can be problematised in the sense that the term omniscience and its allusions to the concept of eternity are incompatible with a narrator who is embedded in narrative in which true omniscience can never be conveyed due to the essential time-boundedness of a narrative. This is evident in MC where Saleem, discussing his omniscience, states: “I have become, it seems to me, the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities, the wild god of memory and the lotus goddess of the present ... but I now become reconciled to the narrow one-dimensionality of a straight line?” (206). The analogy of the triangle that Saleem employs here, is paramount in revealing the way in which omniscience in

narrative is an illusion which is rendered so by its binding to a narrative form. Saleem, as the apex of the triangle is seemingly located above the main body of narrative, however, his position above the narrative does not equate to existing outside of the narrative, he is still subjected to its form. Though he is the topmost point of the narrative, and his “field of view” incorporates its entirety, he is still located with the boundary of narrative. This is significant when we consider that narrative, like human life, is time-bounded. As such, though the space within the triangle represents the “wild god of memory”, “the lotus goddess of the present” and the resulting disruption of temporality in the negotiation between the two, the “narrow one-dimensionality of [the] straight line” that characterises the base, signifies the inevitability of a subjection to sequentiality through beginning, middle and end. The base of the triangle, the straight line between the two equal angles which we can characterise as beginning and end, represents the inevitable linearity of story. So, although narrative, by its curation, is not linear, it is still underpinned by the properties of time, through its need to exist in a state of beginning, middle, and end. This unfolding of the inner temporal working of the narrative, regardless of the order in these aforementioned concepts are presented in the narrative, is incompatible with the concept of omniscience which is bound up in the realm of the eternal where there is only present: “It is in eternity, which is supreme [celsitudine] over time because it is a never-ending present, that you are at once before all past time and after all future time” (Augustine qtd. in Ricoeur 26). In this sense, Saleem would have to exist outside of the triangle of his narrative to be omniscient. His connection to the apex of the triangle, representative of his incorporation in the narrative, means that he cannot be “before all past time and after all future time” (Augustine qtd. in Ricoeur 26). Narrative, like the human life, is time-bounded, thus omniscience in narrative, the capacity to be all-knowing and having this knowledge in a space of “eternal presence”, is at odds with the only way in which this omniscient knowledge could be disseminated, through an inherently temporal narrative. Omniscience in fiction is still bound to a human’s perception of a temporal world, a perception in which can only be thought through narrative terms. An omniscient narrator cannot be truly omniscient if they are located in a beginning-middle-and-end structure and curate their knowledge in a way that can only be presented through narrative.

The question of how a story is disseminated through a narrator elicits the discussion of the way in which curation and the varying lenses of focalization that are utilised in the creation of a narrative. As mentioned above, Culler draws upon the “godlike figure” that is evoked by encounters with narratives that are emitted by an omniscient narrator and the way in which this narration displays a seemingly limitless knowledge that will be disseminated to the reader:

“Omniscient narration, where there seem in principle no limitations on what can be known and told, is common not only in traditional tales but in modern novels, where the choice of what will actually be told is crucial” (90). This distinction between what can be told and what will actually be told, is interesting in terms of MC and NOH as both are told from an omniscient perspective but then have characters who focalize a more limited knowledge of events. In MC we are, for instance, presented with two forms of Saleem. There is Saleem the omniscient narrator who emits the narrative, and Saleem the character encompassed within the narrative who experiences the events happening to him within the narrative present. The omniscient narrator Saleem is, to use Culler’s terms, focalized through a *telescope*, which means that he is able to see the whole area and magnify different parts of a perceived whole. The character Saleem is focalized through a *microscope*, during his narrative present, even though he is telepathically connected to the midnight’s children and the resulting layers of vision and knowledge that he acquires with this, he frequently is too close to events to see their meaningful connection, or, more often, assumes connections where there are none. The oscillation between these two variations of Saleem is a depiction of how we, as humans, experience life. Saleem, as well as employing the differing lenses within his narration, also overtly discusses this ability to pan back and forth between distant and close perspectives as the mode by which we experience life:

Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems – but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the stars’ faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality. (Rushdie 229)

A human positioned in the present moment experiences life through a microscope in the sense that moments, as they are lived, become magnified, the “tiny details” assuming “grotesque proportions”. The present moment would, perhaps, remain grotesque if not anchored to the meaning bestowed by a future or ending that has not yet occurred. Similarly, when we are in the process of reading a narrative and immersed in the depiction of the detail of the present narrative moment, the need for a connection that explains one moment in relation to another becomes unmasked. There needs to be an anchor to a, seemingly, concrete past and as well as

the expectation of a future, if we are to employ Augustine's threefold present (Ricoeur 11). In other words, the distortion of the present moment can only be demystified by employing the connections of previous moments as well as the anticipation of future moments. Neither narrative nor life can be experienced as what Ricoeur refers to as an "eternal present" (27). To do so would involve placing it outside time in the realm of the eternal, rather than the temporal which human existence is irrevocably immersed in. By extension, though the middle of a narrative, as well as the present moment in life, appears all encompassing and is "dissolve[d] into dancing grain" (Rushdie 229), we are always aware of its relation to a beginning and an end, a past and a future. Our need for meaning is both created and perpetuated through narrative in its invocation of a potential unity. The beginning-middle-end structure underpins this human need to derive meaning from a perceived whole, from seemingly achieving the perceived omniscience that the narration imposes. Narrative is the medium by which we organise and interpolate events and moments in life. Even though we seemingly experience life through a continuous present moment, the anchor to the past and the magnetism of the future is an inescapable part of the way in which narrative instils and creates meaning in human life. It is significant, then, that Saleem oscillates between a distant and close perspective in the emitting of his narrative. Particularly in relation to the previously problematised term omniscient narrator, and its resulting connection to the eternal that is seemingly incompatible with the temporality of narrative. It is, in fact, this omniscient perspective which arguably reinforces notions of time through Ricoeur's discussion of Augustine's "never-ending present" in which "you are at once before all past time and after all future time" (Augustine qtd. in Ricoeur 26). Ricoeur defines eternity as the "other of time" that instead of challenging temporality, serves to deepen and "intensify" it (236). The focalization of the distant perspective through the omniscient narrator Saleem in relation to the close perspective of the character Saleem mirrors the way that we interpolate our own life and serves to function as a tool in which to reveal the human need for meaning, to understand the wider implications of a given event or moment in the midst of the intricacies and complexities of time and the conflicting yet stabilising effect that notions of eternity have upon temporality.

4.1.2 Memory and the Present

The focalization of the distant perspective through the perceived omniscience of the narrator-Saleem functions as a tool through which the role of narrative in memory is revealed. When we employ memory to look back at our life, the mode through which we see moments and

events is telescopic in the sense that “modes of connection” (Rushdie 330), are forged and the wider picture becomes accessible. The oscillation between the close perspective of the present moment and the wider perspective that is generated through the engagement of memory induces the idea of curation in relation to a human life. Like a narrator, we use the distant and close perspective in order to curate events and occurrences within life to suit the narrative that we choose to emit. In *MC*, the character-Saleem makes it evident that memory, like narrative, is inherently curated:

Memory’s truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogenous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else’s version more than his own. (Rushdie 292)

Memory is not an accurate depiction of a given moment and, like narrative, it “creates its own reality” (292). Its curated and constructed nature is indicative of the role of narrative in the formation and recollection of memories and, as such, renders memory as a site in which questions of what makes a human life are challenged. In order to delve further into the question of human life in relation to memory and its corresponding role in narrative, it is pertinent to apply Ricoeur’s notion of the present and how it manifests through human temporality to the analysis of *MC*.

In *MC*, Saleem suffers from a complete loss of memory and is “fated to plunge memoryless into an adulthood whose every aspect grew daily more grotesque” (482). Saleem’s amnesia explores the function of narrative in memory and the way in which notions of past, present, and future are integral inferring meaning from human life. His memory loss renders him untethered to his own history and, as such, this dislocation from the past places him in the realm of the grotesque. The grotesquery of a purely present moment, if it could exist, is located in the magnification of the given moment and the annihilation of meaning that would arise from the interaction of the past and the concept of the future upon the present moment. In other words, if the present moment was infinite without reference to a past or future, then the aspect of the grotesque is due to the potentiality for non-meaning. We can see this through the previously discussed analogy of the cinema screen, that Saleem uses to describe the blurred distortion that occurs on approaching the present moment, compared to a seemingly ever-more “concrete” past and thereby reinforcing that we need an anchor to the past in order to decipher a blurred, magnified present. When Saleem experiences the loss of the opacity of his past

through amnesia, his immersion in the absurdity of the present reveals the necessity of narrative in making sense of and, crucially, producing meaning from human time. Ricoeur introduces *Time and Narrative* with a discussion of the circular, symbiotic nature of both time and narrative in their interaction within human existence: “Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience” (Ricoeur 3). Time is humanized through the utilisation of narrative that underpins human thought and speech, and narrative has meaning due to its inevitable and unavoidable negotiation with the human experience of time. The idea that the present moment needs an anchor to the past reinforces the importance of memory in human life.

We need narrative to derive meaning from human temporal existence and that existence is necessarily bound up with the temporality of in the past, present, and future, as well as the beginning, middle, and end. Although, of course, these concepts do not directly correspond to each other and there is ambiguity and overlap between these paradigms, as well as within them. For instance, the question of what the present incorporates is not as simple as equating it to an isolated stasis between past and future. Therefore, any examination of a present moment must incorporate what Ricoeur refers to as the “internal multiplicity” of the present in its interaction with past and future and the way in which these constructs shape and inform it (10). Ricoeur outlines Augustine’s notion of the abolishing of a conception of time as past, present, and future in favour of a different paradigm of time: the present of the past, the present of the present and the present of the future (11). The discussion of the “threefold” present that Augustine proposes highlights the importance of expectation with regards to the positioning of the future within the present, and the role of memory as the site in which the past becomes present: “The present of past things is the memory; the present of present things is direct perception [...] and the present of future things is expectation” (Augustine qtd. in Ricoeur 11). The utilisation of memory in a human life means that the present moment can never be truly and singularly present. We see evidence of this in MC, Saleem’s narration is characterised by the frenetic layering of both past and future acting upon a seemingly narrative present:

I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug – that my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons, has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I am literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of acceleration. I ask you only to accept (as I have accepted) that I shall

eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust. This is why I have resolved to confide in paper, before I forget. (Rushdie 43)

The narrative present that Saleem speaks from is “buffeted by” history in its kinetic interaction with the past. This excerpt is characteristic of Saleem’s narrative as a whole. We cannot be in his past without interjections from the present, and, as displayed here, we cannot be in Saleem’s present without the continual irruptions of the past. That he enounces he has been “mutilated by doors” and “brained by spittoons” indicates the literal disfiguring of the physical body by scars from the past, yet also denotes the metaphorical scarring of the present by the memory of the past. The expectation of the future is also continually compounded by the seemingly prophetic references Saleem makes with regard to his own fate. That he shall “eventually crumble into (approximately six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust” (43), not only reveals the expectation of future, but it also transposes, through the reference to dust, the jarring, uncanny idea of endlessness. Saleem’s claim to eventually disperse into numerous dust particles, despite the finite number of particles that Saleem estimates, substantiates the concept of infinity that is inherent through the inherent pervasiveness of dust. Its ever-presence and, despite Saleem’s claim, its uncountability hints at the idea of being infinite. The notion of Saleem’s present moment extending into an unbounded and infinite future, evident in the imagery of the human body metamorphosing into infinite dust, leads to the consideration of whether life extends into the endless future, even when we, ourselves, end and become dust. This idea of the infinite is further enhanced by the reading from the common book of prayer “in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life [...] earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust” (1979 Book of Common Prayer). Further, if we are equating “life” as the duration between birth and death, to “the middle” as the duration between the beginning and the end, it becomes significant to question what would happen if the middle extended into infinity, if it refused to end but instead lingered in a state of permanent presence that extended into an endless and infinite future? The implausibility of this is, at a surface level, palpable, however, it is demonstrably significant to further explore the role of the middle as a site for the contestation of the end. The role of dust is vital in signifying the previously described frenetic layering of the past and future upon the present moment and the way in which this acts in conjunction with the narrative middle whereby beginning and end epitomize memory, “the present of the past” and expectation “the present of the future” in what Ricoeur describes as the “threefold” present from Augustine’s doctrine on time (11).

Though the ever-presence of dust signifies the infinity of the future, it also, according to Rebecca Munford's interpretation of Georges Bataille's insights on dust as an entity, signifies the past as a constant presence in the present (Munford 61). In *Decadent Daughters and Monstrous Mothers: Angela Carter and European Gothic* (2015), Munford, in the context of the Sadeian Gothic, discusses Bataille's writing on dust. She examines his claim that "dismal sheets of dust constantly invade earthly habitations and uniformly defile them: as if it were a matter of making ready attics and old rooms for the imminent occupation of the obsessions, phantoms, spectres that the decayed odour of old dust nourishes and intoxicates" (Bataille qtd in Munford 61). This notion of a haunting of the present by the past, signified by the presence of dust, is markedly evident in MC when Methwold's estate becomes enshrouded in dust from the building work ordered by the Narlikar women:

In the ghost-haze of dust it sometimes seemed we could discern the shapes of the past, the mirage of Lila Sabarmati's pulverized pianola or the prison bars at the window of Toxy Catrack's cell; Dubash's nude statuette danced in dust-form through our chambers, and Sonny Ibrahim's bullfight-posters visited us as clouds. The Narlikar women had moved away while bulldozers did their work; we were alone inside the dust-storm, which gave us all the appearance of neglected furniture, as if we were chairs and tables which had been abandoned for decades without covering-sheets; we looked like the ghosts of ourselves. (Rushdie 377)

Dust, in this passage, epitomizes the idea that the past resides in the present, a notion in which is a recurring motif throughout MC. Yet in this passage, the juxtaposition between the ghostly transience and intense physicality of the present moment, that necessarily incorporates the past, is most overtly displayed. We are informed of "the ghost-haze" and "mirage" of the "shapes of the past" alongside references to the "pulverised pianola", "the prison bars", the "bullfight-posters" the "nude statuette [that] danced". It is interesting to note the violence that is incorporated into three of the latter four the references, though perhaps even the nudity of the statuette could be regarded as an exhibition of violence through the weaponization and regulation of the female body. These images of aggression epitomise the forcefulness of the past that asserts itself on the present, yet, at the same time, they occur alongside a past that creeps insidiously as a "ghost-haze" of dust. This comparison between transience and physicality is pertinent to the discussion of the present moment, which is bound to the past, and, as such, is necessarily experienced through the kinetic, forceful irruption of the past, as

well as its implicit, intangible presence. The idea that the past is vital in bestowing meaning onto the present moment is apparent. However, though the past is integral to the present moment, it is, in fact, only brought into being by the present: “So wherever they are and whatever they are [future and past things], it is only by being present that they *are*” (Augustine qtd. in Ricoeur 10). In light of this discussion, it becomes pertinent to argue that the same is also true for beginning, middle and end. Though the beginning and the end are lauded as a site of authority within the majority of critical theory, it is only through the journeying middle that the meaning can be available at all. The end may bestow meaning onto the middle but, equally, without the middle, there could be no meaning. That narrative governs human life and is irrevocably bound to human temporality makes it clear that the idea of a purely present moment, existing without ties to a past or future is an impossibility in a human life. Yet equally the past and future are necessarily brought into being by the present. The complex relationship between these three constructs and the way in which they interweave in human life are embodied through Saleem’s interaction with memory. Narrative is the way in which we conceptualise these temporal aspects of human existence and as such, the role of memory, in its inherent utilisation of narrative, reveals the way in which meaning can be deduced from human time.

In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks ventures that narrative is concerned with the past and the “rescue of meaning from passing time” (321). Brooks investigates “the psychoanalytic model of remembering” in order to explore the function of repetition and reconstruction and the way in which they establish meaning within a narrative work (321). The function of repetition and reconstruction is narrative’s own memory. The nature by which we construct a memory anew each time we engage with it is correspondingly how repetition, in a text, though repeating an event or motif that has occurred within the narrative, is inherently refigured through the new surrounding textuality in which it is embedded:

Narrative, we have seen, must ever present itself as a repetition of events that have already happened, and within this postulate of a generalized repetition it must make use of specific, perceptible repetitions in order to create plot, that is, to show us a significant interconnection of events. An event gains meaning by its repetition, which is both the recall of an earlier moment and a variation of it: the concept of repetition hovers ambiguously between the idea of reproduction and that of change, forward and backward movement. (Brooks 99-100)

The investigation of the role of memory and the way in which its underlying narrative composition is utilised in the middle, makes it pertinent to examine the arguments of Brooks in *Reading for the Plot*. Brooks, through his explication of Freud's discourse in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), discusses the forward drives that propel a narrative and postulates the role of repetition as a "form of remembering" which necessarily inhibits a strictly linear drive toward an end. Repetition is a force of "forward and backward movement" within a narrative text and is a fundamental part of the middle in which the oscillating forward and backward momentum necessarily delays the end (Brooks 100). Brooks outlines how, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud discusses the biological organism, which, if not for any "external stimuli" would repeat the same course of life in order to achieve its wish to return to a state of "quiescence" (102-103). Brooks utilises this notion in order to analyse the forward "pulsation" of a narrative text (102). For Freud, the biological organism's journey to quiescence is necessarily delayed through "modifications" that occur in response to extrinsic factors that threaten to "short-circuit" the organism's natural lifespan (Brooks 102). For Brooks, this concept corresponds directly to the way in which the middle of narrative, "the dilatory space," necessarily delayed through its goal of achieving the "correct" or proper end (103). This drive towards the "right end" renders the narrative plot, particularly the middle, as the site of delay: "Between these two moments of quiescence, plot itself stands as a kind of divergence or deviance, a postponement in the discharge which leads back to the inanimate" (103). The aim of repetition is to produce a return, a doubling back within life, in order to prevent the potentiality for a short-circuit which would result in a premature or "improper end" (104). Brooks uses Freud's master plot in order to transpose his findings from the human psyche to the inner workings of a narrative text: "The "dilatory space" of narrative, as Barthes calls it – the space of retard, postponement, error, and partial revelation – is the place of transformation: where the problems posed to and by initiatory desire are worked out and worked through" (92). The middle of narrative is a site of delay, a postponement of that moment of clarity that should be imposed by an end. The word *transformation* is key here, though beginning may be multiplicitious and unbounded, the middle is even harder to categorise due to its ever-shifting transformation. It is arguably defined by, what Brooks deduces from Freud's discourse, the "perpetual sliding or slippage of the signified from under the signifier" (56). It is the site of desire perpetuated by the signifying chain, it's meaning is always displaced and located in a seemingly unattainable end. Though the aim of desire is the end, we will never be able to achieve this end and thus, desire is located in the perpetual search for meaning and search for the end which occurs in the "dilatory space" of the middle (92).

Saleem's search for meaning is obstructed when he develops the amnesia that disassociates him from the past, the narrative connections that formulate the life as he knew it become detached and his connection to the meaning that he derives from his life is severed. This is particularly magnified through the fact that it lies in Saleem's nature to crave meaning. His whole narrative is a search for meaning, yet when he loses his memory and his connection to the past, he not only loses the memories and layers of narrative that construct his life, but also his drive to procure a grand meaning from his life. His past self no longer formulates his future self, and the present is seemingly all that remains. He is temporally dislocated from himself and seemingly only exists in a state of eternal presence which can be derived from the statement: "Don't try and fill my head with that history. I am who I am, that's all there is" (Rushdie 489). The words *I am* embody this idea of being, of existing in the present. Interestingly, however, this statement also has overt links to the concept of eternity due to the same statement appearing in the Bible, in Exodus 13, when God declares to Moses: "I am what I am" (*New International Version*, Exodus 3.14). Though it can be argued that any attempt to invoke a sense of eternity and existence in an eternal present moment is thwarted through the very words that were supposed to invoke the sense of the eternal. "I am who I am" is an attempt by Saleem to not be weighed down by "that history" and to embody an eternal presence that knows no past (489). Yet the religious connotations and metafiction that are evoked from the phrase "I am who I am" reveals that it is impossible to speak without being weighed down by "history", or, more specifically, weighed down by language which can never be free from its immersion into layers of interconnecting textuality, or, as outlined above, Brooks' reading of the "slippage of the signified from under the signifier" (56).

4.2 *The One Hundred Nights of Hero*

As in *Midnight's Children*, the location of the middle in *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* is a source of ambiguity. The examination of NOH will illuminate how the story-within-story structure further complicates the question of where the middle can be located within the narrative. The narrative of NOH, in its representation of the way in which the main body of the narrative is propelled by the desire of its reader, or in the case of NOH, its listener, necessitates the discussion of the function of the middle is. Is it the "significant duration" (45), that Kermode describes between *tick* and *tock*, beginning and end? Or is it as Brooks, extrapolating from Freud's work, argues that the middle is the necessary oscillation between beginning and end in order to delay quiescence until the proper moment? The middle is, seemingly, inexplicably

both the most significant and insignificant part of the text. Everything exists on the positioning of meaning. If meaning is located at the end, then the middle acting as a necessary postponement of the end serves as a basis for which meaning is formed. Despite the end bestowing a meaning onto the work as a whole, there could not, in fact, be any meaning if it was not for the action that occurs in the middle. However, it seems inconceivable that meaning could occur without an end. Isn't a narrative work meaningful because, like human life, it will inevitably come to an end? Surprisingly, however, the middle in NOH exists as a magnified resistance of the end, both through its story-within-story structure, as well as its rejection of patrilinear time through the visual and textual parallels to the eternal.

Though this section will deal with the construct of the middle, it is still unclear where this middle, begins or ends in NOH. While it remains to be argued whether the middle can be quantified in specific parameters, the supposed site of the middle in NOH initiates the question of how the human life is constructed. The claim that the omniscient narrator makes in NOH, that the narrative will be concerned with all those "marvellous baffling things" that make us human (Greenberg "Prologue"), is vital in deciphering whether human life and narrative are inextricably bound together. The human life, with its interdependent relationship with narrative and temporality, is also subject to all "those things that makes us human" (Greenberg "Prologue"), substantiating the idea that a human being is a cultural construct. If, in *Midnight's Children*, we see the formation of the "I" in the phallogocentric sense of controlling and conquering the narrative, in NOH we see the formation of the human subject through the propagation of storytelling as the way in which we are made human. NOH is exemplified by a textuality that attempts to characterise human existence, that is, the narrative of NOH makes us aware of how we look to stories to inform the concept of the human and how these stories instigate cycles of endless permutations which further question the status of the human and problematise the linearity of human life. As such, in order to examine the middle in relation to both narrative and human life it will be necessary to examine the middle of NOH through the lenses of gender and desire as well as the constructs of narrative and temporality.

4.2.1 The Drive of Desire

The middle, as a site of desire, is crucial to the narrative of *The One Hundred Nights of Hero*, whereby stories, and the necessarily prolonged middle, are posited forth in order to assuage the appetites of Manfred. This notion of stories to fulfil an insatiable desire is most notably portrayed within the *Arabian Nights* tales and then emulated within *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* and *Midnight's Children*. In the *Arabian Nights*, Scheherazade exploits the king's desire to know, in order to save her own life. The *Arabian Nights* embody the very notion of desire and the way in which it is narrative is both impeccably immersed in and perpetuated by desire. In order to examine the role of desire in narrative it is pertinent to look to Brooks' argumentation in *Reading for the Plot* in which he explicates Lacan's concept of desire as the gap between the "perpetual want" and the inability to attain the gratification of this "want" as the site in which desire is manifested (55). Brooks applies this Lacanian notion of desire onto narration and suggests that the "pressure toward meaning" which is invoked through the metonymy of the signifying chain necessarily perpetuates the forward movement of the narrative (55-56). In MC, Saleem's narration is characterised by his insatiable appetite for telling, the middle is characterised by his drive towards the end is propelled by his desire to know and to gain meaning from knowledge that he has ascertained through narration. He recounts the history of his family in order to disentangle the threads of meaning that weave into his own existence, his desire to know who he is formulates the fundamental questions that we as humans ask ourselves. The *epistemophilia*, that Culler describes, is part of the intrinsic nature of what makes us human, our desire to seek ultimate truth, to find a unity of meaning that would bestow significance onto our lives.

The concept of desire driving narrative is most overtly displayed in NOH as a result of its significant parallels to the *Arabian Nights*. In NOH, the story-within-story structure occurs as a result of Hero and Cherry's plan to exploit Manfred's desire for the end. The way in which Manfred, and we as readers, become immersed in the middle reveals how desire is a construct that is powerful enough to fuel our consumption for narrative to an extent that delays the end, the thing we desire, indefinitely. Yet, as in MC, it is not merely the desire of the listener that fuels the story, Hero's stories are also driven by her desire to tell. Brooks argues that "the need to tell [is] a primary human drive that seeks to seduce and subjugate the listener, to implicate him in the thrust of a desire that can never quite speak its name" (61). The teller of the story exerts power over the listener. In this sense, Cherry is complicit in the subjugation of Manfred, displacing his desire for sex, wealth, and material commodities, for *epistemophilia* which is so

overpowering that it supplants these previous desires. Her desire to tell is granted power by his unceasing desire to know. Saleem's relationship between his desire to narrate and his desire to know, is seemingly symbiotic, with each desire propagating the other, thus, invoking the question: which desire can be deemed the driving force of his narrative and, by extension, his life? The complexity of the way these desires interweave with power that flows back and forth between teller of the tale and recipient of the tale and the way in which the boundaries of these two "roles" can be blurred, makes it pertinent to explore the many levels of desire that occur in the telling and consumption of a narrative, in relation to this idea of human life and what it arguably entails.

In utilising Brooks argument in *Reading for the Plot*, it can be argued that the desire that operates within a text is a notably paradoxical entity. In order to examine the contradictory nature of desire it is pertinent to examine the two drives that Brooks describes as being at work within a narrative text. Brooks argues that the "forward-moving" principles of the death drive, the aim of life to return through quiescence through the proper end, and the pleasure principle, which seeks "the gratification of discharge", in actuality, upon their interaction with each other, nullify the forward movement that drives them (102-103). Within narrative, the death drive and the pleasure principle, through the function of repetition, generate a "dilatatory" aspect within the text resulting in a postponement of the end (103). It is overtly clear how these drives are bound up in desire. The death drive is the desire for the organism to exist and die in the correct way and the pleasure principle is the desire for gratification (Brooks 102). The way in which they, together, retard the forward movement of narrative can therefore be extended to desire which, on the one hand, drives the narrative forwards towards the end but, simultaneously, it appears to suspend this forward progression through the same epistemophilia that drives the text towards its termination. Epistemophilia, the human desire to know makes the middle necessary as it is through the "arabesque" of the middle (Brooks 108), that we are exposed to sites of meaning that, in the end, we hope will converge to bestow "ultimate" meaning upon the work and, by extension, our lives. Therefore, the desire to know both perpetuates and delays the forward movement of the text, the journey that the reader takes through the narrative middle is necessarily, as Brooks delineates, bound up with functions that creates returns and delays within the text (103). NOH is abundant in tools of delay that result in "the postponement in the discharge of energy" (Brooks 101). Hero propels her stories toward the culmination of the one hundred nights yet also, necessarily, creates pleasure in the delay that impedes Manfred's demand to know the end. She weaponizes his desire to know the end against him:

- Manfred: “Where are we going? And more to the point, where is this story going? Was that the end?”
- Hero: “Oh it is absolutely not the end. But we have reached a moment where, should you wish, we could stop and hear no more.”
(Greenberg “Part the Third”)

It is Manfred’s inextinguishable desire to know what happens, to have a moment that brings about final closure that confers meaning upon the preceding narrative, that means he could never be capable of simply discontinuing his consumption of the narrative. Hero utilises the nature of middle, as the site of desire, and uses its delays, repetitions, and returns in order to exploit the paradoxical, competing desires at work in Manfred. The “arabesque” of the middle is, thus, irrevocably bound up in processes of desire. This “dilatatory” effect of the arabesque (Brooks 108), that engenders and perpetuates desire, brings forth questions of the temporality of “a middle that might turn forward or back” (Brooks 100).

4.2.2 Temporality

As previously discussed, the inference that the middle is a vast, unknowable quantity which needs the organizing principles of beginning and end to not only make sense of it, but also to bestow meaning upon it is fundamental for Kermode’s model of *tick-tock*. Kermode considers the way in which the *tick-tock* and the duration between are markedly different in their structure, or lack thereof: “the first interval is organized and limited, the second is not” (45). He refers to the first interval as the *tick-tock* and the second interval as the duration between. In other words, the first interval, the *tick-tock* is a quantifiable entity, in the sense that both *tick* and *tock* have an overt and bounded presence. Whereas, the second interval, the duration between, is only given boundaries because of its position between *tick* and *tock*. This is particularly relevant for NOH as the seeming unboundedness of the middle is weaponised by Hero in order to exploit Manfred’s desire and necessarily delay the end to ensure both her and Cherry’s safety. From NOH it is clear that this desire can be exploited in order to disturb notions of time. In being subjected to the stories that Hero tells, Manfred becomes disassociated from linear time:

But as the nights blurred into a delightful kaleidoscope of strange and beautiful words of the moonlit garden, of silks and cushions and fabrics woven with designs that enchanted him and crept into his dreams, he found himself unable to keep track of time. (Greenberg “Part the Fifth”)

The nights blurring in a “kaleidoscope of strange and beautiful words” is emulative of the idea that stories, while they have an inherent temporality, have the potential to also usurp the temporality that they seemingly portray, particularly with regard to stories that are spoken. The oral storytelling that is depicted in NOH is a highly effective weapon in obscuring a sense of time by the nature of its verbal medium. In this sense, Manfred cannot negotiate a concrete sense of time partly because the nature of the stories he hears is not set down in a physical medium. He cannot keep track of the narrative and, due to narrative’s inherent symbiosis with temporality, he, consequently, cannot keep track of time. The blurring of “beautiful words” that distort the linear temporality governing Manfred’s life is indicative of the nature of the middle to distort and dilate time. The ambiguity and unboundedness that characterise the middle render it tenable as a site for the destabilisation and disruption of time.

It can be argued that Manfred’s inability to keep track of time is a result of his attempt to infiltrate female subjective time, which is incompatible with the patrilinear existence that he embodies. That the stories take place exclusively at night immerses Manfred in an inherently female space. In *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* (2012), Warner introduces her examination of the *Arabian Nights* by noting the “mysterious arrangements” of the stories only being narrated at night:

Profane stories can only continue in the privacy and darkness of night, the time and place of dreams. There, Shahrazad can wind the vengeful ruler into an exchange of confidences between one young woman and another: he is placed in the position of the male eavesdropper on their women’s knowledge, tantalised into discovering more about the greater complexities and subtleties of human psychology – male as well as female – in response to the vicissitudes of fate. (Warner, *Stranger Magic* 2)

The image of the king as an eavesdropper illuminates the seismic shift in power that is brought about by the bodying forth of “women’s knowledge” in the female sphere of the night. In much the same way as the king in *Nights*, it also becomes evident that Manfred, in submersing himself in the female realms of night-time and oral storytelling, has relinquished his control over

Cherry and Hero and allows himself to fall into the passive spectator of the dissemination of female knowledge. It be argued that the narrative he hears has permeated his life and, in this way, has mirrored the violation of his mind that he, himself, wanted to incite upon Cherry's body. The enchantment of the narrative has "crept into his dreams" (Greenberg "Part the Fifth"), giving rise to the notion that the stories he has heard have been assimilated into him. He cannot unhear it and he can't dislocate the meanings he has derived from the stories to an external isolated vacuum, it now irrevocably exists within him. Thus, while the beginning of the narrative was concerned with Manfred's plan to enter the body of Cherry, it appears that Hero has entered and subjugated his mind. His notion of patrilinear time is reconfigured to the extent that his plan fails, and he appears to have, as Jerome describes, "lost the plot" as well as his sense of time (Greenberg "Part the fifth"). The narratives that emerge from the female space, that Manfred attempts to inhabit, are responsible for the disruption of the sequential flow of time. In this sense, it can be argued that the middle opens up the possibility of the embodiment and projection of female temporality that necessarily distorts and "dilates" narrative in order to subvert the phallogentric conception of time.

The story-within-story framework, that is utilised by Greenberg through Hero, further perpetuates this confusion of temporality. It can be argued that the disruption of the sequential flow of the frame narrative of NOH is due to the inner stories functioning as moments of Kairos. The inner stories embody the need, that Kermode describes, for the "duration" between beginning and end to be "purged of simple chronicity" (46). Though Kairos is given significance in relation to the end, it does not follow the sequentially of human time but instead is a moment of significance that, in itself, disrupts "humanly uninteresting successiveness" (Kermode 46). The inner stories, in NOH, could arguably exist as their own entity without the overarching structure of the frame narrative, yet their relation to the frame narrative reveals them to be moments of significance. The Kairos of these narratives is induced through the meaning that is generated from their complex relationship to beginning and end. These moments of Kairos serve to interrupt the chronicity of the frame story and disrupt notions of the linearity that is supposed to characterise human existence. While we, as humans, experience the middle of our life through the "simple chronicity" of time, the moments of Kairos that we experience are dislocated from passing time and instead exist in a complex stasis between beginning and end. The way in which Kairos can function to disrupt chronicity in both narrative and life engenders the middle as a site in which temporality is multifaceted. Though positioned toward an end, the inner stories as Kairos reveals the idea that the Shahrazad method of storytelling, the story within story, embodies the state of deviance that the middle perpetuates,

it continually deviates from the closure of the end despite continuing the forward movement in the seemingly unbounded “duration” between beginning and end.

The middle of NOH is characterised as a complex “arabesque” between beginning and end. Warner characterises the “arabesque” as a deviation from Hogarth’s “line of beauty” in its “efflorescing on all sides” (*Stranger Magic* 7). Brooks uses the term arabesque in relation to the pictorial reference in Balzac’s *La Peau de chagrin* which was inspired by the symbolic arabesque that was brought about by the movement of a cane in Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (Brooks 59). The oscillation that also occurs at a textual level in the narrative of *Tristram Shandy*, and the subsequent commentary on it by Balzac, Brooks takes the arabesque to be a “comment upon narrative itself” (60). Brooks applies this arabesque to narrative as a whole and suggests that narrative’s “unfettered, digressive line” (59), that could occur between beginning and end, necessarily prevents the “collapse of one into the other, of life into immediate death” (104). It can be said that the arabesque is essential to the nature of the middle. Its shape is significant in depicting how time can be compressed. The nature of the middle, through its undulating arabesque of plot, necessarily compresses and distorts the conception of time in order to postpone the end. Brooks argues for the middle as a site of “detour” that functions “under the compulsion of imposed delay” (107). The detour from the quantifiable nature of beginning and end and the delay that is brought about within the ambiguity of the middle is notably evident in one of the inner stories of NOH:

Now... what happened next, some say one thing, some say another. Some say Minnerie pushed her sister into the water, and held her down, until her thrashing body went dead as wood. Some say Bennorie jumped in after the mirror. Some say Bennorie pushed Minnerie in, and Minnerie pulled her in after. Some say they were grappling for the mirror, and Bennorie fell and Minnerie tried to catch her but the fast flowing river bore her away too quickly. Believe whatever you like, but all the versions end the same way. With the body of Bennorie floating away face down in the river, and Minnerie alone in the shallows. (Greenberg “Part the Third”)

In the midst of the story of the “Dreadful Wind and Rain” in “Part the Third,” the omniscient narrator notes that whatever version of story the reader subscribes to, the outcome remains the same. Yet despite the inevitability of this ending, the middle is the permeable, dynamic, unexpected journey between. The ambiguity of the middle is counter to, what Kermode describes as, the quantifiable nature of *tick* and *tock*, beginning and the end (45). The middle

is site of deviation. Even though the story ends, the meaning derived from the end will differ in relation to the journey of the middle. This is further heightened through the fact that this end is not an end, but, in fact, a catalyst for the subsequent plot. Though Bennorie is at an end, her story continues along the “fast flowing” river that, in itself, could represent the arabesque of narrative. The omniscient narrator states the need to “pause for a moment and digress” (Greenberg “Part the Third”). Yet this apparent departure from the plot is not as it seems, not a digression but a progression toward the next stage of the plot. The river carries her to an abandoned shore where her clothes will be stripped from her body, her hair from her scalp and her flesh from her bones in order so that she can be made “into something interesting” (Greenberg “Part the Third”). This is arguably a metaphor for the way in which the digression or arabesque of the middle seemingly pauses time in order to create a moment of significance that will make its presence known in the cataclysm of the end. The transfigured form of Bennorie into the “ghoulish instrument” of the harp appears at the true culmination of the story and as such represents the significance and the necessary presence of the middle to the end.

4.2.3 The Wise Old Crone

The middle as the arabesque that delays the end, that prohibits life collapsing “into immediate death” (Brooks 104), arguably becomes problematised when examined through the lens of gender. For women, it can be argued that middle age is perceived by society as the beginning of the end. The middle of a woman’s life is characterised as the period in which they begin to be further marginalised and are rendered either invisible or stigmatised due to their continued aging. There is a heightened visibility of older women in NOH. The point of significance regarding this is the way in which these characters are not demonised for their age. The two characters who carry the title of “Wise Old Crone” are not subject to descriptions of witch-like qualities, and their seemingly supernatural knowledge does not place them in an ostracised position of being “other”. Though the title of the “Wise Old Crone” renders the character nameless and has the potentiality to reduce the women to generalised archetypes, it can be argued that the capitalisation of “Wise Old Crone” suggests the reclaiming of the power that would have, in other cultural contexts, been otherwise subverted by the negative connotations associated with “crone”. The simplicity of the character of the “Wise Old Crone” is a reappropriation of the reductionist way in which older women have often been treated within both literature and life. In *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Warner utilises the figure of The Crone in order to reveal the way in which notions of what it is to be female are regulated, specifically

the way in which outspoken female voices are demeaned and subject to increasing demonisation as the journey to old age progresses:

by the seventeenth century the outward form of the garrulous crone was established as an allegory of unwifely transgressions, of disobedience, opinion, anger, outspokenness, and general lack of compliance with male desires and behests. Female old age represented a violation of teleology, and this carried implications beyond the physical state, into wider prescriptions of femininity. (Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* 43)

This description of the crone as a symbol of the unruly, outspoken wife has significant parallels to the way in which the Reverend Mother is portrayed in MC. Though she is never overtly labelled a “crone” her intractability and witch-like quality of holding a specific type of traditional knowledge, that is at odds with what is considered modern or “the norm”, renders her as embodying the archetype of The Crone. Saleem tells us that: “She had become a prematurely old, wide woman, with two enormous moles like witch’s nipples on her face; and she lived within an invisible fortress of her own making, an ironclad citadel of traditions and certainties” (47). She is representative of the way in which aging female characters are punished for their progression through life. Her outspokenness as a wife and her refusal to submit to Aadam’s attempt to transform her into a “modern Indian woman” (39), is how she, instead, transforms from Naseem into Reverend Mother. As her age and her outspokenness increase, she is subject to further aspersions upon her appearance, her physicality increases with age, she takes up increasing amounts of space and becomes seemingly grotesque in her stature. Warner argues that if women do not epitomize the “virtue of Obedience” then they are subject to descriptions of physical decomposition:

her desirability decreased, speaking implied unruliness, disobedience. And the penalty for this – the quick, ready-to-hand expression of this undesirable lack of compliance – was the appearance of physical decay. Decrepitude enciphered ugliness, ugliness unloveliness, unloveliness unwomanliness, unwomanliness infertility: a state of being against nature. (Warner *From the Beast to the Blonde* 44)

It is interesting to consider this notion of the older woman representing a state of being against nature. Warner goes on to argue that the invocation of the infertile female body is rendered as a site of the subversive and as such is subject to derision (*From the Beast to the Blonde* 44) In

this sense, it is crucial to examine the figure of the Wise Old Crone and Reverend Mother in order to establish the way in which NOH attempts to dispel the disdain surrounding female aging. In NOH, the Wise Old Crone that appears in “Part the Fourth” is presented as a grandmother, who also “happened to be the village’s Wise Old Crone” (Greenberg). She is illustrated as sitting by the fire, in a rocking chair, and seems to embody an ordinary, aged woman. She is not demonised for the wrinkles that are depicted under her eyes, nor the fact that she can no longer bear children. Her possession of magical knowledge and the forthright way in which she disseminates this knowledge to her grandson establishes her as a character that attempts to dispel the vilification of older women. The description of her as “the village’s Wise Old Crone” indicates the acceptance of her, and correspondingly of all older women, as having a place of worth within society. It is in stark contrast to Reverend Mother who, while described as a formidable woman, is isolated precisely because of her formidability: “an invisible fortress of her own making” (Rushdie 47). The depiction of the later stages of female life are crucial in determining why the female and male relationships to temporality are so manifestly different. For women, it seems that there is only the beginning, as the middle and the end are where they become discarded or dehumanised by society and culture.

4.2.4 Was That the End?

The way in which the middle is manifested through a male lens in NOH is arguably portrayed through Manfred’s continual attempt to “join the beginning to the end” (Kermode 164). For Manfred, as previously discussed, the middle is the desire for the end in order to bestow significance onto the plotted middle of the narrative. Yet there is another force, that functions within the realm of desire, at work in Manfred’s propulsion towards the end. Brooks claims that “ambition is inherently totalizing” and is the impetus to continually strive to be and to have more (39). We can see that Manfred’s desire to “master” Cherry functions through an ambition, fuelled by desire, to possess more than he currently has. Brooks argues that the figure of the ambitious male in plot symbolises the “readers efforts to construct meanings in ever-larger wholes, to totalize his experience of human existence in time, to grasp past, present, and future in a significant shape” (39). Therefore, it can be said that male ambition, through the overarching mechanism of desire, is epitomised by the need to construct meaning from time, both in life through past, present, and future as well as in narrative through beginning, middle, and end. It is in this sense that Manfred is concerned with what and when the end will be. Though the force of ambition drives female characters in the plot of NOH it is, as Brooks notes,

the “formation of an inner drive toward the assertion of selfhood in resistance to the overt and violating male plots of ambition” (39). We can see this epitomised in the drive of Cherry and Hero to exist as lovers in a world which seems to function solely under heteronormativity, as well as the collectively shared ambition for women to freely read and engage with texts and the written words with the same agency as men in the novel. Rather than trying to master time in order to bestow meaning onto their stories and, by extension, themselves, they use their stories as a counter to the male ambition and desires that attempt to impose a rigidity brought about by an assumed endpoint of meaning. In NOH Manfred frequently probes the question of when the ending will arrive: “Where are we going? And more to the point, where is this story going? Was that the end?” (Greenberg “Part the Third”). He does this in terms of the stories he hears, in the sense that he wants to know how they have ended, yet he also attempts to establish when the end will occur in relation to how much time he has left to hear the stories that Hero disseminates. In doing so, Manfred embodies this need to join beginning and end. He epitomises what Brooks posits as “the desire to wrest beginnings and ends from the uninterrupted flow of middles, from temporality itself; the search for that significant closure that would illuminate the sense of an existence, the meaning of life” (Brooks 140). The character of Manfred, through his “totalizing ambition” and desire to know the end, reveals the way in which experiencing narrative and life through a male lens seems to disregard the middle as a site of importance. Yet in doing so, he fails to complete what he sets out achieve, experiencing the meaning that would occur from the joining of beginning and end.

4.3 Conclusion

As a result of the examination of MC and NOH it can be argued that the middle cannot be defined, it cannot be located in a particular place of the text, it is the ambiguous “arabesque” that attempts to induce meaning between beginning and end. The need to create meaning from the middle is characterised by Saleem’s narrative journey in MC. Though his frame narrative functions through sequential human time, the narrative he emits to Padma, and by extension, the reader, is characterised by an incessant oscillation between different temporalities. The way in which the temporalities of past and present interact and intersect is characteristic of the way in which the middle produces meaning from the negotiation with beginning and end. Saleem epitomises the way in which we curate narrative, in the negotiation of past and present, within our own lives in order to derive meaning from them. We, like Saleem, in some way emit this

to ourselves and those around us in order to further embed ourselves within an attempt to seek meaning. The reason why the word “emit” is used in throughout the chapter, in relation to a narrative voice that speaks, is in order to portray that a narrator’s voice is not innocent. It is to illuminate the notion that the voice is always aware they are telling a story and that there is, necessarily, someone who is consuming it. The reason why this is fundamental in the discussion of the middle and life is due to the calculated, curative measures that seem to be redundant, like Saleem’s references to events and persons that will only “make sense” as the story progresses, but in actuality are weaving an intricate web of meaning between beginning and end. The middle appears as an, sometimes arbitrary, “arabesque” between beginning and end, yet it is the premediated curation and dissemination of knowledge in order to culminate in the climax that will reach its peak as a result of the meandering journey that preceded it. The middle, therefore, though impossible to define, is a vital component in the meaning production of both a narrative text and human life.

It can be said that human life as the duration between birth and death, is synonymous with the meandering absurdity of the middle. The concept of the present moment, as the only way of experiencing life and the narrative middle, has been examined in relation to absurdity. Though arguably neither human life nor narrative work necessarily needs an end in order to be made meaningful. This is particularly evident in NOH where the endings of the inner story don’t necessarily function as a provider of meaning upon the preceding narration, the endings themselves exist as a tool of Hero’s with which she attempts to instigate the desire for more stories in order to delay both the narrative end and the end of herself and Cherry’s lives. Manfred is the embodiment of the desire for the end in order to bestow meaning onto a story, the patrilinear temporality through which he exists is dislocated through the seamless flow of the meandering middle, of stories into stories that merge into a “kaleidoscope of strange and beautiful words” (Greenberg “Part the Fifth”). It has been argued that the inner stories of NOH function as moments of Kairos. It is evident that these moments induce a loss of Manfred’s sense of time, he loses track of the number of nights left to complete his wager which dislocates him from linearity and subjects him to the oscillating ambiguity of the narrative middle. Kermode states that “in every plot there is an escape from chronicity” and that the functioning of Kairos is the production of moments of significance derived in relation to beginning or end (50). However, if Kairos can be experienced as the present moment, then it is evident that though the concept of the end may bestow meaning on to the middle of life, the middle of narrative, and the present moment, the moment(s) of significance can occur before the end has taken place. The concept of the end may bring meaning to a human life or narrative work, but

the end itself, if it can even be located, is not fundamental in meaning production. The middle of life and the middle of narrative is the attempt to try to draw together these moments of Kairos and fragments of meaning into a unity, or what Kermode describes as, a concordance between beginning and end (6).

The definition of what the middle constitutes is characterised by ambiguity and absence of classification, it is seemingly, at a surface level, what is neither beginning nor end. However, paradoxically, the middle is a site in which the meaning of the beginning and the end are both destabilised yet at the same time brought into existence. That human life is experienced, as Kermode describes, “in the midst” (7), means that the present moment appears to us as a seamless continuation. Though time passes we only ever experience it through the lens of the present. It is similar to the way in which we perceive a narrative work, though we are aware of its beginning and, as Ricoeur notes, we have an anticipation of its end, we as the reader only experience it through the present moment. All of the narrative appears to be the middle because that is where we, the reader, are located in the “midst” of life. The way in which narrative jumps back and forth between past and present tense does not negate this argument. As Ricoeur draws upon Augustine’s theorisation in *Confessions*, of an alternate conception of a threefold present that necessarily includes the past and expectation of a future. The present then incorporates the multiplicity of past and future and is the lens through which we view life and narrative. For something to end or begin there has to be a before and an after respectively. Thus, the middle brings these two sites, beginning and end into being.

5. End – Death

The end is a site which both the drive of narrative and life pursues us endlessly toward. The epistemophilia that exists as the human desire to know is driven by the human need to create meaning from time. The negotiation of human temporality and the way in which it is created, informed, and problematised through narrative is evident in both *Midnight's Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero*. However, in both texts there seems to be a disconnect between the end as a potential site of finality and meaning, and the end as a fiction created by human thought, and consequently rendered interminable. If narrative and the course of a human life are found to be synonymous, that is, they create and inform each other, then the end is a construction in which the mortality of human life is attempted to be comprehended. This chapter will explore the way in which the end seems a concrete point of reference that functions as a guiding light, through both life and narrative, for the human “in the midst” (Kermode 7), at the same time as the end is always out of reach, unknowable and inaccessible.

5.1 *Midnight's Children*

In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks discusses the fear of an improper end “which is symmetrical to – but far more immediate and present than – the fear of endlessness” (109). Narrative helps us to work through the anxiety surrounding the end, but also the human anxiety at the thought of “endlessness,” and the lack of meaning that would be incurred if there was, in fact, no end. In MC, Saleem personifies the human imperative to employ narrative in order to make sense of the time that we have experienced as well as the time that still remains. However, though the narrator Saleem, through the character Saleem, displays that time, it is in itself an unknown quantity to those who experience it. This is in tension with the fact that the narrator Saleem apparently knows the exact moment his death will occur. As humans, we are never in a position where we know when or how we end, but in order to give life meaning, we need to know there will be an end. In MC, the end is problematised through the narrator Saleem who narrates his death, and what happens beyond, visualising several generations into the future:

Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust, just as, all in good time, they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his, and

his who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died, because it is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace. (Rushdie 647)

Saleem describes the annihilation of one thousand and one generations and, in doing so, evokes the aporia that is brought about through the two competing concepts of death and eternity, end and endlessness. There is also a further layer of meaning that is brought about by the intertextual reference to the *Arabian Nights* through the number one thousand and one which holds connotations of the eternal through the infinity inherent within the number itself. This brings forth the way in which narrative seemingly both interweaves with linear and eternal temporalities. Narrative, following the demarcation set out by human temporality, insists that there must be an end, yet also seems to exist in an ever-present eternity that is perpetuated in an “annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes” (Rushdie 647). Towards the beginning of the narrative Saleem states that “by the time I had finished, I would give meaning to it all” (173). Yet his singular meaning is unattainable by an end that disseminates to eternity, paradoxically, through a thousand and one ends.

5.1.1 The Finite and the Infinite

The concept of the eternal is further heightened and complicated by the reference to “specks of voiceless dust” (Rushdie 647), which, as discussed in the Middle – Life chapter of the thesis, is both a symbol of infinity and of the way in which the past lingers in the present. The idea that beginnings are bound up with ends is evident throughout the narrative of *Midnight's Children*. The reference to dust, for instance, invokes connotations of the end through the family name of Sinai. Saleem, listing the various symbolisations that arise from the name Sinai, eventually concludes that “when all that is said and done; when Ibn Sina is forgotten and the moon has set; when snakes lie hidden and revelations end, it is the name of the desert – of barrenness, infertility, dust; the name of the end” (423). That dust signifies “the name of the end” and is located in the name he is given upon his birth, suggests that Saleem's birth and his life are bound up with death. This idea of the beginning predicating the end is encapsulated when Saleem makes reference to the fact that “a chapter ends when one's parents die, but a new kind of chapter also begins” (482). This is interesting in terms of the way in which parents

are those who bring one into being and are the catalyst for one's beginning. Though Amina and Ahmed are not Saleem's biological parents, they are still the catalyst for his life. As Saleem notes, his "true" parentage doesn't matter because neither he nor his family "could not think [their] way out of [their] pasts" (158). They bring about his beginning through the submission of his photograph to *The Times of India* and this, consequently, leads to Saleem's belief that he is positioned alongside the fate of India. His parents, therefore, instate his beginning. They also, however, bring about his end through the "name of the end" contained in the name Sinai. Further, their end brings about a new beginning in Saleem. The bomb that kills his parents induces the amnesia that figuratively wipes him clean of his history. It is interesting to note that this occurs at the end of Book One and that the new beginning of his life as "the buddha" commences at the start of Book Two, yet this ending and beginning invoked by the death of his parents neither occurs at the beginning or end of MC. It is arguably in the duration of the middle, which further destabilises a fixed point of beginning or end. At the commencement of Saleem's narration about his parent's end, he notes the way in which "even ends have beginnings; everything must be told in sequence" (469). There exists an overt aporia here, between the sequentiality that should be imposed by beginnings and ends, and the refusal for narrative to submit to a singular beginning or end. It seems, paradoxically, that ends are bound up with beginnings. This consequently subverts the finality of the end and instead gives rise to a more elusive, less finite concept of end.

The idea that the beginning is located in the end and the end is located in the beginning is a notion which Brooks delineates during his discussion of Freud's repetition function within narrative texts:

it may finally be in the logic of our argument that repetition speaks in the text of a return which ultimately subverts the very notion of beginning and end, suggesting that the idea of a beginning presupposes the end, that the end is a time before the beginning, and hence that the interminable never can be finally bound in a plot. Any final authority claimed by narrative plots, whether of origin or end, is illusory. (Brooks 109)

Here, Brooks transposes the Freudian concept of analysis being "interminable" onto narrative, his argument that narrative itself is not contained by plot perpetuates this notion of the endlessness and interminability of narrative. The idea that the "beginning presupposes the end" is manifested in both the opening and concluding paragraphs of MC. The references to the *Arabian Nights* connect both the beginning and the end through the repetition that Brooks

argues constitutes a “return” within the narrative that “subverts the very notion of beginning and end” (109). The subversion of the consecutiveness of beginning and end departs from the presumed linearity of human life and, in this way, renders the narrative work in the realm of the infinite. Saleem states toward the end of the narrative that “to pickle is to give immortality” (644). The “chutnification” of his chapters is symbolic of the way in which narrative itself is already pickled in immortality: “the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of pickling time! I, however, have pickled chapters” (Rushdie 642). Here it is evident, again, that Saleem’s quest to derive meaning from his life, and therefore human time, is formulated through the narrative structures through which he thinks and lives. The pickling of chapters that contain the narrative of his life overtly symbolises the way in which the human subject is informed and created through narrative. If human life and narrative are synonymous, if one cannot exist without the other, then the end of narrative is a site in which the notion of finality and the finitude of human life are explicitly worked through.

5.1.2 Temporality

The way in which the concept of death interweaves with the end of a narrative is symbolised through the narrative of MC in which the entirety of Saleem’s narration is a “ticktock” first leading to his birth, and then counting down to his death:

What is waiting to be told: the return of ticktock. But now time is counting down to an end, not a birth; there is, too, a weariness to be mentioned, a general fatigue so profound that the end, when it comes, will be the only solution, because human beings, like nations and fictional characters, can simply run out of steam, and then there’s nothing for it but to finish with them. (Rushdie 454).

It is interesting to note the phrase “the return of ticktock” which implies that time has been paused. It is suggestive of the way in which narrative can seemingly delay the progression of linear time. Time is the fundamental progression of linearity which propels human life toward an inevitable end. It underpins and constrains a narrative text to the same finality. However, narrative distorts notions of time, the inner narrative time inherent within a novel can be delayed through interruptions or repetitions that serve to rupture the temporality within the text. In light of this pausing, or dilation, of time, it can be posited that human temporality arguably contains the same “dilatatory” functions of narrative because of the way in which narrative

underpins human consciousness. The relationship of a human life to its end is correspondingly mirrored within a narrative work. As Brooks states:

the further we inquire into the problem of ends, the more it seems to compel a further inquiry into its relation to the human end. As Frank Kermode has put it, man is always “in the midst,” without direct knowledge of origin or endpoint, seeking the imaginative equivalents of closure that will confer significance on experience.

(Brooks 95)

The idea that the end of human life is irrevocably bound up with the end of narrative is displayed most overtly through Saleem’s relationship to his narration. He is constantly “racing the cracks” (375), and his narration has to keep up so that he does not terminate before his narrative does. However, this frantic attempt to out-narrativize his own life eventually succumbs to the inevitability of the end. To this end, the narrative of Saleem epitomises the tension that exists between time and narrative, in the sense that though time facilitates narrative it also constrains it, and, by extension, facilitates yet constrains human life. As previously discussed, Ricoeur argues that narrative is a way of humanising time: “narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (52). In this sense, human negotiation with time is an attempt to bring about meaning. The way in which the essential time-boundedness of life is comprehended through this human need for life to have meaning, narrative is, thus, the humanisation of time in the attempt to counter what could merely be absurd. It can be said that, through the emitting of his narrative, Saleem seeks “the imaginative equivalents of closure that will confer significance on experience” (Brooks 95), through his continual attempt to avoid “absurdity” by bestowing meaning on his life. In this sense, if narrative and the course of a human life are to be conflated, both death and the end are mediums through which we counter the ambiguity of life and the middle. As humans, we need to know there will be an end in order to render the middle, of either narrative work or human life, less daunting. In this sense, the assumed finality of the end that a narrative work imposes provides the boundary that holds the potentiality for meaning production, yet this supposed finality is at odds with the, previously discussed, endlessness that narrative perpetuates.

It is interesting to consider that time underpins both concepts of death and the end, yet these remain an unknown entity from the human being who experiences life “in the midst” (Kermode 58). In Book Two of MC, Shaheed, one of the buddha’s comrades in the CUTIA

unit, is a character who embodies this looming dread of the end, without any knowledge of when it might occur. His dread of his end is further heightened upon the examination of the tension that this holds with his beginning. It is significant here that the foundation of his death is located in the very name he received at birth. Saleem recounts the day that Shaheed enlisted to the army, when he subsequently finds out from his father that his name means “martyr” (490). In his name, given to him at the beginning of his life, the terminus of the end is foretold. Consequently, Shaheed begins to see death in his dreams:

The overwhelming power of names, and the resulting approach of martyrdom, had begun to prey heavily on Shaheed’s mind; in his dreams he began to see his death, which took the form of a bright pomegranate, and floated in mid-air behind him, following him everywhere, biding its time. (Rushdie 491)

The omen of his death “following him everywhere, biding its time” is indicative of the way in which a human life is subject to the knowledge of its imminent and, as Kermode argues, its immanent end. Though this dread of the end is, for Shaheed, increasingly all-encompassing, it also gives clarity to his situation “in the midst” of life. In the Sundarbans, the jungle that Saleem’s alias, the buddha, leads them to in his decision to desert the army, Shaheed is the only one to remain mentally coherent: “Shaheed alone remained capable of thought, because although he was drenched and worn out and the night-jungle screeched around him, his head became partly clear whenever he thought about the pomegranate of his death” (504). It is evident, again, here that death, or the end, seems to act as an anchor point which counters the “arabesque” that characterises the middle. The entirety of the Sundarbans escapade symbolises the absurdity of the middle resulting from a journey that had no fixed terminus. As such he leads them on an ambiguous, meandering journey that characterises the middle: “They had all long ago forgotten the purpose of their journey; the chase, which had begun far away in the real world, acquired in the altered light of the Sundarbans a quality of absurd fantasy which enabled them to dismiss it once and for all” (506). That, in the Sundarbans, Shaheed is the only one to keep his composure, as a result of the anchor to the “reality” that death and the end provides, reinforces the notion of the end as a stabilising force which grounds the middle to the temporality of human life.

The form that the omen of death takes in Shaheed’s dreams is significant as the word *pomegranate* comes from the French “pomme grenade” (“pomegranate, n. and adj”). The first

entry for grenade in the OED is the obsolete meaning of “pomegranate” (“grenade, n.1”). The imagery of the pomegranate as the cause of his death becomes explicitly clear when Shaheed’s death occurs in the form of a grenade strike. However, though the grenade does cause Shaheed’s death, the image of the pomegranate dispels the notion of the end as a fixed, stable site of meaning. The finality of the end is usurped in the consideration of the pomegranate as a symbol not only of death but also of beginning, through the way in which the pomegranate acts as a pseudo apple representing the wisdom obtained from the Edenic Tree of Knowledge. The description of the fall of man occurs at the beginning of the Bible and denotes the beginning of man’s downfall and the resulting beginning of human life, as we understand and perceive it today, necessarily removed from that of the eternal. The price of the wisdom that Adam and Eve receive from consuming the apple is the separation from the eternal and the resultant mortality of their human life. That Shaheed has received knowledge of his death dislocates the symbol of death to the beginning of knowledge that brings about the inevitability of the end. The circularity that this induces is at odds with a linearity that places the end as a singular finality. The vision of the pomegranate contains a further symbolisation of the beginning through its function as a “symbol of fertility and fecundity” throughout history (Kumari et al 1220). That the pomegranate has been associated with birth and new growth places it in the realm of “divine femininity” (Kumari et al 1218). The symbol of the pomegranate is representative of the beginning in the end and the consequent refusal of a singular end that this induces. It is the usurping of death and the end through pomegranate as a symbol of birth as well as the eliciting of the knowledge of the way in which, through the connection to a human temporality, a human life will, at some point, end. Yet paradoxically, this idea of human end is, like Shaheed and Saleem in the names bestowed on to them at birth, located in the beginning.

The notion that the end is located in the beginning potentially problematises human time which is characterised by linearity. The omniscient narration of Saleem both begins and ends the narrative which means that the “story ends where it began, within the immediate perceptual field of a narrator” (Kermode 21). Though Kermode uses this statement to describe Robbe-Grillet’s *Les Gommages* (1953), it is nevertheless interesting to consider in the context of MC. That the narrative of MC begins and ends within “immediate perceptual field of a narrator” induces a sense of circularity and gives rise to this idea of eternity. This circularity of ends and beginnings reinforces a rejection of human temporality and instead extends it into an ambiguous entity that has some grounding in an eternal sense of time. In his narrative Saleem

overtly portrays the idea of the end being bound up with the beginning, which occurs in the sky-blue room of his childhood:

my special doom, of which lay – what? – my future, perhaps; my special doom, of which I was aware from the beginning, as a shimmering grey presence in that sky-blue room, indistinct at first, but impossible to ignore ... because the finger pointed even further than that shimmering horizon, it pointed beyond teak frame, across a brief expanse of sky-blue wall, driving my eyes towards another frame, in which my inescapable destiny hung, forever fixed under glass. (Rushdie 167)

It is significant that “the beginning” he refers to is seemingly ambiguous, yet the pointing finger of the Raleigh painting directs his, and therefore the reader’s, gaze toward the newspaper article in which Saleem’s birth and life is bound up with a fate which turns out to be his doom. In this sense, it can be argued that the above passage symbolises the inescapable framing of a life through narrative. Saleem’s life, in this instance, is both the demarcation and amalgamation of past, present, and future and the potentiality for meaning that a human life holds. The character Saleem’s position “in the midst” renders him a product of past, present, and the anticipation of the future without the knowledge of what meaning will result from the interaction of these three dimensions of time. The narrator Saleem, in his assumed omniscience, holds the knowledge that is unattainable by the character Saleem and, in doing so, has the potential to deduce meaning from his life. That the finger points beyond the shimmering horizon which, for Saleem, is time and the meaning that results from it, mimics the way in which Saleem extends himself unnaturally into a future, beyond the end, which, as a human in the “middest,” is inaccessible to him. Even though his presumed omniscience renders him mobile within the temporality of the narrative, his location within a narrative work, and therefore his subjection to human temporality, means that his extension beyond the realm of a human life further heightens this problematization of finite time.

5.1.3 Gendered Time

The role of the gendered experience of time is of utmost significance within the narrative of MC. It has been discussed at length the way in which Saleem himself epitomises time through his desperation to finish his narrative before the cracks consume him. However, his portrayal of other male characters in relation to time arguably differs from the way in which Saleem

emits his narrative through omniscience and circularity that invokes notions of the eternal. Saleem's characterisation of the linearity that governs masculine time and the conflict that it holds with the concept of the eternity that narrative induces, is evident in the following passage:

Tomorrow, at last, there will be an end to stories which I (not having been present at their birth) have to drag out of the whirling recesses of my mind; because the metronome music of Mountbatten's countdown calendar can be ignored no longer. At Methwold's Estate, old Musa is still ticking like a time-bomb; but he can't be heard, because another sound is swelling now, deafening, insistent; the sound of seconds passing, of an approaching, inevitable midnight. (Rushdie 141)

The idea that time drives narrative forward towards an end is explicit here. There are two forces seemingly at work in this passage, the drive of the traditional view of human linear time that exists in the form of a "countdown calendar" yet also the narrative time that suggests human time "can be ignored" for an unspecified period. This idea of time, pausing, or even ceasing, to be gives way to the only other concept of time which could account for this phenomenon, the "stillness of the eternal present" (Ricoeur 27). What is significant, in light of this, is the way in which the patrilinear "ticktock" (Rushdie 143), is inherent within in the male figures, yet the narrator Saleem, despite being male and also claiming to be subject to the finite time imposed by the "ticktock", seems to exist outside linear temporality. Though the character Saleem seems to be governed by the linearity of human time, the narrator Saleem seems to be only transiently connected to human time. Instead, he seems to embody the concept of the eternal evident in the parallels to it within the "swelling" of an "approaching inevitable midnight" (141) The "sound of seconds passing" (141), in order to get to midnight, a site that holds connotations of eternity, is, again, characteristic of Saleem's narrative that continually positions end against endlessness.

The narrative function of "old Musa" configures the experience of patrilinear time with the rupturing force of the end. That he is described as "ticking like a time-bomb" (141), refers to the way in which human and narrative end, though integral to linear time, paradoxically serves as a rupturing of the sequentiality that has characterised the preceding life or narrative. However, the rupture of a continuing sequence that the end induces is not the only way in which linear temporality, in life and narrative, is undermined. It can be argued that in life and narrative, there are multiple beginnings and ends which result in the fluctuations of the

temporality that governs the perception of time as an overarching structure of beginning, middle and end. In *MC*, old Musa and his time-bomb status is representative of this. Though Saleem's references, throughout *MC*, to the end that will be instigated by old Musa, the time-bomb of old Musa does not bring about the end that the phrase time-bomb itself implies. His detonation is, instead, in the form of the catalyst he becomes upon Mary Pereira encountering his leprosy-marked visage and believing him to be the ghost of Joseph D'Costa. This is paramount, as the "time-bomb" that old Musa represents and the connotations of death and the end that the "time-bomb" induces, is in fact subverted and instead relocated to the beginning, birth, and crucially, to the female character of Mary. The anticipation of an end is instead transposed to time-bomb of birth and beginnings and the female figure that propelled them. In this sense, Mary is representative of the female subjectivity of human time and the way in which it refuses to be homogenised within the patriarchal linearity of existence. In "Women's Time" Julia Kristeva discusses the way in which "the time of history" is not compatible with the female experience of time (192). As such, the way in which the character of Mary Pereira usurps the end, imposed by the continual foreshadowing of Musa as a time bomb, symbolises the placement of the female experience of time in the realm of cyclical and monumental time. This gives rise to the idea that masculine time, though linear, is undermined by the end prescribed by linearity due to the way in which a final end is unattainable.

The symbolism of death and the end being transposed with beginning and birth through the female experience of time is interesting to consider in light of Kristeva's discourse on monumental and cyclical time. The way in which these conceptions of time are juxtaposed against the patrilinear time that governs a male experience of time is exhibited most prominently through an examination of the following two passages:

Because now the cracks, the cracks and always the cracks are narrowing my future towards its single inescapable full point; and even Padma must take a back seat if I'm to finish my tales. (Rushdie 537)

What had been (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had been expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming, one might say, a book – perhaps an encyclopaedia – even a whole language. (Rushdie 133)

The second passage occurs at the stage within the novel which describes the pregnancy of Amina Sinai, for whom time “had come to a complete stop” (134). Amina is the embodiment of cyclical and monumental time through the way in which her impending motherhood results in her experiencing the stoppage of linear time. In the period of time which is characterised as “the end of the time before she became a mother” (134), Amina is encompassed not only by the circularity induced by the maternal conceptions of time but also by her physical surroundings, the walls that encircle her and the “balloon” of her pregnancy that is encompassed by her body: “Amina found herself in a circular first-floor tower room, scarcely able to move beneath the weight of her leaden balloon” (133). It is interesting to consider that in this circular female space, she experiences the pausing of linear time through the circularity induced by the cyclical nature of a woman’s body and the monumental conception of time, with its grounding in the eternal that is brought about through gestation. In this sense her maternal perception of time and her resulting existence in circularity of time displaces the linearity that characterises the male form of existence. In light of the examination of the second passage, it is evident that a comparison between the two passages elicits a distinction between male patrilinear time which narrows the “future towards its single inescapable full point” (537), alongside the manifestation of female time which through the monumental time encompassing a pregnancy, which begins as a “full stop” (133), or full point and expands into multiplicity. Furthermore, a key part of this discussion is the way in which the human life is regarded through narrative. The journey from conception is inescapably intertwined with the way in which a human is formed through narrative expanding from “a full stop”, representative of a fertilized egg, “a word, a sentence, a paragraph,” an embryo, through to “a book – perhaps even an encyclopaedia – even a whole language” (133), denoting a fully developed foetus. And that this progression from fertilized egg to fully formed human, from full stop to an entire language is made possible through the space of monumental time brought about by pregnancy. What is particularly noteworthy is that, in the second passage, the beginning is referenced, but the end is not even alluded to. The potentiality of human life, and the multiplicity it induces, hangs in the phrase “even a whole language,” (133) it exhibits the way in which the realm of maternal time is not positioned in terms of an impending end. In the first passage the positioning of the end as a singular finality is inherent through the references to the narrowing of “the future,” the “single inescapable full point” and the need to “finish [his] tales” (537). However, this symbolisation of a maternal time that rejects linearity is, in fact, complicated in light of the argumentation surrounding temporality in “Women’s Time.” Kristeva remarks upon the fact that language itself is inherently sequential and that linear time exists within the sequence of

“the enunciation of sentences (noun + verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending)” (192). This interrelation of human life with narrative, exhibited by the above comparison of the formation of a human life with the progression from a full stop through to an entire language, seems problematised by this statement, considering that narrative is conducted through language. The way in which the passage describes the synonymy between human life and narrative necessarily places the human in the realm of linearity of language. However, despite being constituted through language, narrative itself is a rejection of the linear. If one considers the definition of narrative outlined in the Literary Review chapter as that which is distinctly different to the sequentiality of story, it can be argued that narrative is a site in which, despite conducted through the linearity of sentences, can be said to usurp linearity through the dilatory mechanisms that serve to delay or seemingly pause time.

A further way in which MC engages with the delay of time occurs through the oral recounting of the story to Padma. If it is the case that the written word is linear, then the orality of the tale, initiated by Padma, subverts the linear temporality contained within Saleem’s written account of his life. Padma is a character who embodies the female experience of time through monumental time and the resulting connection to eternity. It has previously been remarked that she bestows upon Saleem the power to begin all over again and that she is often the catalyst for Saleem’s interruptions to the story and, as such, brings about a circularity that ensues from the interaction of the past with the present. She also, due to her illiteracy, induces Saleem to disseminate the story to her through the medium of oral storytelling which, in itself, as previously noted, dissolves the linearity of story through a multiplicity of voice. Saleem, himself, exclaims that she might be able to counter the finality and finitude of his life and narrative:

In the burning heat of Padma’s determination, I am assailed by the demented notion that it might be possible, after all, that she may be capable of altering the ending of my story by the phenomenal force of her will, that cracks – and death itself – might yield to the power of her unquenchable solicitude... ‘There is the future to think of,’ she warned me – and maybe (I permit myself to think for the first time since I began this narrative) – maybe there is! An infinity of new endings cluster around my head, buzzing like heat-insects. (Rushdie 620-621)

Here Saleem intimates the way in which Padma could defy the linearity of time by subverting even “death itself”. In light of this it can be argued that the female experience of time has the potential to instigate an “infinity of new endings”. This subverts patrilinear time and gives rise to the infinity induced by cyclical and monumental time. It is interesting to also note the presence of the “buzzing” of “heat-insects”. The buzzing can be said to be a continuous sound that is contrary to the silence of death and the end. The heat insects again induce a connection to the eternal by reinforcing the notion of infinity through the sheer innumerability of them. Though Padma can experience time through cyclical and monumental conceptions of time, this time is incontrovertibly discordant with the male experience of time and, as such, Saleem succumbs to the inevitability of the end.

Though the majority of critical theory places emphasis on the end as a site of meaning, it is interesting to consider the possibility of the insignificance of the end of narrative and, by extension, the end of human life. This notion of the insignificance of the end is symbolised through the image of “antlike people,” who, due to their innumerability, are deprived of the significance of meaning (Rushdie 526). References to ants are used throughout MC alongside images or depictions of death and as such represent the inconsequentiality of human life and its end. It is significant to note that the ants are only present at sites of male death. They are present in the “field of leaking bonemarrow” where Saleem, searching for “Farooq’s praying corpse,” comes across his friends in a gruesome, ant-infested pyramid of slow death (519-520). Ants are present in the jungle of the Sundarbans where Shaheed, who is killing ants, exclaims that they, himself, the buddha, Farooq and Ayooba will all be “dead, like an ant” if they are discovered to have fled the army (515). They are present at the death of Shaheed whose bisected body becomes a “banquet of the ants” (526). It can be argued that the presence of the ants in these terminating moments induces the symbolisation of the tension between a human life that craves meaning and the way in which a human is one of the “teeming multitudes” in the world and, as such, his life and death is rendered unimportant. This is in direct conflict with Saleem who considers his individual life of the utmost importance and is determined that it must “mean” something. This is why the presence of ants, and the resulting symbolism of the meaningless of human life, at male sites of death is particularly calculated, as the characteristic way in which Saleem attempts to derive meaning from patrilinear time is futile. The placement of ants at sites of death within the novel induce this notion of the meaninglessness of both life and death. This is particularly evident at the death of Shaheed, whose body has been bisected by a grenade and whose moment of death occurs during a war which further annuls the

significance of his existence. He is just another anonymous casualty of war, the cause for which he has died and the supposed purpose of his life to be a martyr is inconsequential. That he is consumed by ants is similar to the way in which Saleem, at the end of MC, succumbs to the “vastness of numbers” (646), and accepts the insignificance that characterise his life and death.

5.2 *The One Hundred Nights of Hero*

The One Hundred Nights of Hero is a text in which, through the emulation of the *Arabian Nights*, problematises the notion of a fixed and final end. The story-within-story structure is an overt attempt to postpone the end. The rupturing effect that the ends of the inner stories have on the linear flow of the frame narrative brings the reader’s awareness to the fact that what they are perceiving is a constructed fictional entity. In this sense, the disruption of the linear time of the frame narrative induces a consciousness of “real” time in which the text is being read and brings to light the way in which narrative is responsible for both the creation of and problematisation of human time. The nature of this story-within story structure necessitates the presence of multiple endings which can be examined in light of their relationship to the concept of beginnings and middles, as well as their overall connection to, and rupturing of, the frame narrative.

The ending of the overall frame narrative occurs as an epilogue, which itself seems to function as an additional end. The reason why “Epilogue” appears as an additional end is due to the summarising and concluding tone of the text, the resolution to the climax has already occurred at the end of “Part the Sixth” through the revealing of Hero as the omniscient narrator and the emplacement of Cherry and Hero in the eternal time of the celestial. This epilogue draws attention to the fact that the supposed end, signified through the assumed culmination of Hero and Cherry’s story in “Part the Sixth,” is not contained to a fixed finality and still merits comment upon and further dissemination. The final text of the narrative is as follows:

That night they went down to the beaches at Skerngaard and they lit many fires and built cairns for Hero and Cherry. And all night long they told each other stories. And in the sky above the three moons were full and bright and blazing, and the two new stars shone and shone and shone, so brightly, some said, that it was almost as though it were day. (Greenberg “Epilogue”)

The statement that “they told each other stories” presents the interminability of narrative; the continuance of the perpetuation of stories both in terms of the characters present in the image as well as Hero’s continued narration contributes to the refusal of an end. The iconography of this page extends over a full spread with the only guttering present visible at the very top of the page, making it seem as if it exists above the narrative and, in doing so, places the narration in a place that seems to exist outside time. The image underneath depicts Wilmot, Esa, and Mrs A looking towards the sky which encompasses the moon and the new constellation symbolising Hero and Cherry. Mrs A is looking towards Hero’s star and her mother, the Moon, which, in itself, functions as a refusal of sequentiality as the death of the daughter disrupts linearity and the assumed natural progression of life and death. However, the image on this page may function to signify a refusal of death itself. Rather than depicting Hero’s death, it may be more accurate to refer to Hero’s absence in this image as the removal of her from human time as it can be argued that Hero and Cherry are not dead but are instead in existence outside of human temporality through their emplacement in the eternal celestial body. The final page spread could also be read as illustrating the way in which the written word is positioned, and, moreover, still valued above orality and the transmission of female knowledge that the oral medium enables. It implicitly places what Kristeva describes as the linearity of the written word above the timeless eternity that can be associated within the female space of time. This disruption of a linear sense of female existence is depicted through the way in which the reader attempts to read an image. As previously discussed, there is no start or end point to the reading of the iconography of this page and this, consequently, further exemplifies a need to examine a different conception of female time and the complex relation it has to a narrative medium.

5.2.1 Maternal Time

The utilisation of Kristeva’s conceptions of female time are integral to the discussion of NOH. The images of motherhood, both textual and pictorial, while not frequently explicitly referenced, are a constant presence throughout the novel:

Hero: “Well, what do you think? Was that a good story? A good last story to end our tale?”

Cherry: “It was perfect. It had everything; sisters, kings, dancing, moons... You’ve wrapped everything up nicely my love. You’ve crossed the Ts and dotted the Is and brought it all back in a very clever and satisfying way.”

Hero: “But there is still our ending.” (Greenberg “Part the Sixth”)

Though the text of the narrative contains no overt reference to motherhood, the image, within which this exchange is narrated, denotes Hero and Cherry situated in a circular room and encompassed within a circle of light that has emanated from the moon. The significance of this arises from the way in which the discussion of the end of their stories and the end of their lives is, in actuality, displaced by the parallels to the eternal held within the conception of both cyclical and monumental time. The moon represents the connection to the cyclical nature of female existence through the monthly cycle that is perpetuated through ovulation and menstruation. The connection to monumental time is brought about through the connection to motherhood and gestation and the way in which these aspects of female existences seem to be located outside of time. As has been previously noted, Hero, her mother and her grandmother would have once all inhabited the same body. The pregnancy of the grandmother would have contained the mother, Mrs A, as the developing foetus and within the ovary of the foetus, the daughter, Hero would be present as an ovum. This image of women contained in the womb-like circularity of a tower room holds a significant correspondence to the way in which Amina Sinai experienced the stoppage of linear time through her pregnancy. Kristeva also discusses the way in which pregnancy seems to induce a pausing of linear time through the disruption of monthly menstrual cycles in her essay “About Chinese Women” (1977):

A pregnancy: an escape from the temporality of day-today social obligations, an interruption of the regular monthly cycles where the surfaces – skin, sight – are abandoned in favour of a descent into the depths of the body, where one hears, tastes and smells the infinitesimal life of the cells. Perhaps the notion that the period of gestation approaches *another temporality*, more cosmic and ‘objective’ than human and ‘subjective’, is just another myth designed to restore time (even if different) at the very moment when time breaks up, before the product (the child) emerges.

(Kristeva “About Chinese Women” 154)

In this passage, the discussion of the myth of “another temporality” for Kristeva, signifies the way in which women cannot be part of the symbolic order except through relation to the father (“About Chinese Women” 154). If they show a relation to the maternal body then, as Toril Moi describes in her introduction to “About Chinese Women,” they are positioned within the “Judeo-Christian culture [which] represents woman as the unconscious of the symbolic order,

as a timeless, drive-related, *jouissance*, which through its very marginality threatens to break the symbolic chain” (Moi 139). If we read the image of Hero and Cherry in light of this argumentation then the connection to the maternal through the light of the moon reinforces their position to a “timeless, drive-related *jouissance*” (Moi 139) in which they have no power. However, the iconography which depicts them being bathed in light could also be said to invert the binary pairing of light and dark that always positions woman in the second, less privileged term of the pair. If man and woman are to be conflated with light and dark respectively, then the fact that Cherry and Hero are bathed in light allows the reader to see the way in which they have traversed the bias inherent within language. That they have been embodied in the female sphere of night-time and their resulting emplacement within darkness is significant. If “the cold light of day” (Greenberg “Part the Second”), by which Manfred insists that he cannot take a woman’s virtue, is the realm of the masculine rational, and the night, by extension of the hierarchy within language, holds associations of the female irrational, then Hero and Cherry are manifested as a reclamation of the power of the dark, or more accurately, the utilisation of a power within the dark and the reappropriation of language which continually demeans their position. The last words of the novel are that the stars of Hero and Cherry shone so brightly that: “it was almost as though it were day” (Greenberg “Epilogue”). This concluding statement invokes the notion of the creation of a different conception of temporality, one that is intrinsically female, rejecting both night and day and the hierarchy contained within them. That the stars of Hero and Cherry are said to emit light that rivals the light present in the day brings about a time that is neither day nor night. The word “almost,” it can be argued, is not a failing to reach the light emitted within the day, but a depiction of the way in which the light is fundamentally different to that of the day, it exists as entirely other. If the harnessing of a female space of time, it is the revision of darkness as a negative association of chaos, or the unknown or dread, or death. This new conception of time rejects day and night and, in doing so, rejects linear temporality and the end that would be inherent within it.

5.2.2 The Unnamed and the Intemporal

Kristeva, in the article “About Chinese Women,” discusses the creation of monolithic religion and the way in which it governs the female self. Kristeva notes that, in the Bible, Adam names all the living things and bestows the label woman onto woman because she came from man: “Divided from man, made of that very thing which is lacking in him, the biblical woman will be wife, daughter or sister, or all of them at once, but she will rarely have a name” (Kristeva

140). The biblical precedent for defining a woman by these titles is brought about by the need for an overt separation of man and woman, a calculated distinction made in order to ensure “the propagation of the race” (Kristeva, “About Chinese Women” 140). The emplacement of her within a family unit, defined by “wife daughter or sister” (Kristeva, “About Chinese Women” 140), denies a woman the chance to have an agency of self that could be brought about through her name and depicts the way in which the female self could not be conceived of outside the time of the Father (Kristeva, “About Chinese Women” 153). The act of stripping a woman of her name in order to demean her multiplicity is evident in *NOH* through the way in which Cherry is referred to, by Jerome, as wife. Manfred also refuses to ever name her instead using the term “woman” in an overtly derogative tone. Shortly following Manfred and Jerome’s discussion in which they make “A Wager Most Foul” (Greenberg “Part the First”), the as yet unknown narrator gives Cherry a name and, in doing so, gives her power: “Let us pause in the story and meet this wife [...] this wife (we should name her really. Her name is Cherry)” (Greenberg “Part the First”). This is significant as it can be argued that the seemingly unknown, omniscient narrator is, in fact, Hero herself. The fact that she names Cherry gives her equal state in their relationship which does not contain the inherent power imbalance of a heterosexual relationship. What is particularly interesting is the way in which the narrator, Hero, speaks of pausing the story to meet Cherry. The act of naming her interrupts the sequential temporality of the frame narrative which is significant in light of the argumentation surrounding a usurping of patrilinear time in the face of female subjectivity. This notion is also heightened through the visuality of this page. The “splash”, which is used to refer to a page which is unfragmented by guttering, contains a layering of images. The way in which the majority of the text is overlaid on the iconography itself, instead of contained within speech balloons or guttering, is evocative of the way in which linear time is distorted and unbounded through the naming of Cherry. The layering of text and images denotes a multiplicity that rejects a linear reading and, as such, shatters Cherry’s existence in the purely patrilinear realm. She is no longer referred to, by the narrator, as “wife,” a term that instates her, with regard to the way Kristeva argues monolithic religion regulates the position of women in a linearity induced by genealogy. In this sense, Cherry emerges from a realm which would categorise her purely by her worth in relation to a man. The narrator gives only her first name, further removing her connection to a male linearity instated through the use of a paternal surname. It can be argued that the points of significance, brought about by this page in the novel, amalgamate to form a rejection of a patrilinear time that would position a woman in terms of the linearity induced through the creation of generations of family.

In “About Chinese Women,” Kristeva discusses the position of the human being in the symbolic order which is, she argues, “a temporal order” (152). This is interesting in terms of the way in which this also applies to gods in the novel. Though the god Kiddo, who created Early Earth, is given a name, she is still subject to the way in which her position as a daughter and, thus, her position in the temporal is continually reinforced: “Everything in the Universe must know its place. Including you daughter of mine” (Greenberg “Prologue”). This statement gives rise to the way in which, as Kristeva argues, monolithic religion necessarily removes women from sites of power through the governing word of the Father and situates them in “the principle of a male, paternal divinity and a pantheon in the image of the family (father-mother-son)” (Kristeva “About Chinese Women” 140). Though Kid, Kiddo, and BirdMan are gods and are depicted within an eternal realm of time, the hierarchical and necessarily linear function of family is still in existence. That BirdMan uses the above statement to justify the taking over of Early Earth is suggestive of the fact that monolithic religion enforces God as a male figure, which displaces, as Moi notes in her introduction of Kristeva’s essay, of earlier “maternal and fertility-oriented religion” (138). In the narrative of NOH, the people of Early Earth believe their god to be Birdman, though later in the novel Cherry reveals an implicit knowledge of Kiddo:

They say that it was Kiddo his daughter who made this world. But that she made it full of sin, and so BirdMan took it over. But I think this is a lie. I think that the sin and the darkness comes from the rule of men. That is what I think. I will pray to Kiddo, and to the Moon Sisters. Down with Birdman, down with the Beaked Brothers.

(Greenberg “Part the Fifth”).

This revelation brings an awareness to the way in which God as a male entity has dominated monolithic religion over earlier religions that worshipped “maternal deities” (Kristeva 140). Cherry says this in retaliation to the invocation of the name of the Beaked Brothers who are responsible for the regulation of law and subsequent control and marginalisation of women from realms of knowledge. The Beaked Brothers represent the way in which the proponents of monolithic religion are responsible for the continued regulation of women. The position of women in the symbolic temporal order that Kristeva describes hinges on the existence of an all-powerful creator.

The prologue of NOH incites an examination of the way in which monolithic religion assumes a male divine creator that created the world from nothing. The removal of Kiddo as

the god of Early Earth signifies the displacement of a female energy in the creation of the world, Catherine Keller discusses this notion in her work *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (2005). Keller discusses the way in which the second verse of genesis can be utilised to resist the notion that the world was created out of nothingness: “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:2). She posits that the presence of the deep is the chaos which predates creation and that this chaos is a female energy of “tehom” (Keller 28). Keller argues that the knowledge of the chaos that existed before creation has been suppressed by later theological scholars: “Theologies have tried to draw the line at “God,” to say that, whenever the creation starts, it is preceded by absolutely nothing – nothing but the pure and simple presence of God the Creator” (Keller 9-10). Her work contains the theorisation that that this “creatio ex nihilo” doctrine, the idea that the world was created out of nothingness, is in the interest of Christianity as it perpetuates the notion of an omnipotent male God (Keller 15). The lesser examined second verse of Genesis and its signification of a presence predating creation is worthy of examination in relation to beginnings:

A churning, complicating darkness was wedged between the two verses which everyone knows with indelible certainty: between “*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*” and “*God said: let there be light ...*” This interstitial darkness refuses to disappear. It refuses to appear as nothing, as vacuum, as mere absence highlighting the Presence of the creator, as nonentity limning all the created entities. It gapes open in the text: “and the earth was tohu vabohu, and darkness was upon the face of tehom and the ruach Elohim was vibrating upon the face of the mayim...” (Keller 9)

There is a “complicating” darkness, that refuses to appear as nothing, portrayed in the prologue of NOH through the black page in which the opening lines of speech are located (Greenberg “Prologue”). This page implicitly challenges the site of beginning. As has been previously discussed, the text on the page indicates an intention to begin, when it has, in actuality, already begun. The consideration of the darkness of the page itself, and its invocation of the deep of tehom, further heightens a rejection of the fixity of a single beginning. As Keller states: “the chaos is *always already there*. Verse 2 differs from an absolute origin; it inserts its otherness – neither “Creator” nor “creature” – into the origin” (9). The question remains, why the discussion of creation as the invocation of beginning and origins is an element of significance

in relation to the end? The argument in response to this question is that the fixed site of *origin*, a word which Keller utilises from Said's discussion in *Beginning: Intention and Method*, has no place in either human life or narrative work. Instead, human life and narrative work is necessarily imbued with the fluidity of beginning. Beginnings are a dynamic entity; Keller argues that that "beginning is going on. Everywhere. Amidst all the endings" (Keller 3). In this sense, the permeability of beginning correlates with the interminability of end. If beginning of all things, through creation, is marked by a darkness that reveals a prior presence, and so a prior beginning, then the infinity of beginning extends through all aspects of temporality. If there is no fixed beginning, there can be no fixed end. The darkness of that envelops speech at the beginning is also present at the end of the novel, the depiction of an oceanic body of water representative of *tehom*, the connection to cyclical and monumental time through the women present as well as the cyclical phases that are invoked by the iconography of the moon all serve to resist the finality of the end.

5.3 Conclusion

The narrative of NOH depicts how the end cannot be located as a static, singular entity. The plurality of endings in NOH functions to subvert the assumed linearity of beginning, middle and end and instead body forth the way in which these concepts interact and intersect in an incessant oscillation of temporality. The end as a concept that drives the human being to find meaning in human life and narrative work is vital, but it can never be reached. Rather, it will always succumb to multiplicity. As previously discussed, the end of "Part the Sixth," where Hero and Cherry are no longer located in the patrilinear temporality that governs Early Earth, seems to signal to the reader the end of the story. The iconography of Cherry and Hero depicted over a full spread, that is omitted of any fragmenting gutter space appears to locate them in the seemingly eternal omniscience that has characterised the preceding narration of the novel. The way in which this ending reveals that Hero has been the one narrating from the beginning induces a sense of circularity through a consideration of Kermode's statement that the "story ends where it began, within the immediate perceptual field of a narrator" (21). This statement has been previously examined in relation to *Midnight's Children* and is a fundamental point in both of the primary texts. The reason for this is the way in which the beginning and ending of a novel are encompassed by an omniscience that is seemingly incompatible with human temporality. This is especially true in MC, where Saleem extends himself beyond the present

within which his frame narrative is contained, into a future which has not yet occurred. By extending himself beyond death and the consequent inference of infinity through the eternal is also mirrored in NOH. Both Hero and Cherry exist in a space that is beyond death, this culmination of the climax, which occurs at the end of “Part the Sixth,” is usurped of its position as the end due to the subsequent epilogue. The epilogue which has already displaced one ending, displaces the ending it supposedly contains through the revealing of the continued propagation of stories and the way in which the epilogue is still narrated by and, thus, still in the “immediate perceptual field of the narrator” (Kermode 21). The position of the eternal and infinite that this induces problematises linear time and the fixed site of beginning, middle, and end.

In *Midnight's Children* it seems that the end which Saleem has forewarned the reader of for so long, does not materialise. Though Saleem narrates how his death will occur, this event takes place in the impending future rather than the present or the past that the rest of the novel has been narrated in. As humans, we experience life as a continuous present, and even though the future is a concept inherently important to ideas of human temporality, we are never located within it; it always remains inaccessible, out of reach and unknowable. The fact that present-day Saleem narrates his future, extending himself into it through narrative, renders himself and his narrative in a state of both ending and not ending. By positioning his death in the future, it seems to exist outside of the narrative because, for the reader, it has not occurred yet. The paradoxical infinity produced by the description of his death inducing a thousand and one ends defers the site of the end as a singular finality and instead disseminates it into “teeming multitudes”. In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks concludes his argumentation with a discussion of the elusiveness of a narrative end:

Ends, it seems, have become difficult to achieve. In their absence, or in their permanent deferral, one is condemned to playing: to concocting endgames, playing in anticipation of a terminal structuring moment of revelation that never comes, creating the space of an as-if, a fiction of finality. (Brooks 313)

It is evident that this “anticipation of a terminal structuring moment” is prevalent throughout the narrative of MC. The short previews and references of what is yet to come, that Saleem’s interjections often serve as in the narrative, act as signposts for the assumed eventual significance of these things. The reader assumes these references will ultimately integrate to a unity that means “something” in the end. The “revelation that never comes” (Brooks 313), is

epitomised by the end of MC, whereby the entirety of the novel has been leading up to discovering the meaning behind Saleem's birth, life and death is shattered into multiplicity. The way in which this corresponds to human life is overt. We, as humans, need life to mean something. We employ the narrative structures that characterise and form our existence in order to create meaning from human time, but this meaning cannot be obtained. It is always elusive, out of reach, unknowable. Transposed to a future that is inaccessible to us and any attempt to grasp a singular meaning is thwarted in the "annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes" (647).

6. Conclusion

Both *Midnight's Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* reveal the interconnectedness of human life, time, and narrative to the extent that it seems impossible to extract one concept from the other. The depiction of the human drive to consume and propagate stories, through Hero's narration, places emphasis on the way in which "humans are storytellers" (Greenberg "Part the Second"), and, in doing so, signifies the fundamental thing "that makes us human" (Greenberg "Prologue"). It can be argued that both primary texts attempt to encapsulate what it means to be human. In NOH, the narrator describes the nature of the tale about to be told and states it will be about "all those marvellous baffling things ... those things that make us human" (Greenberg "Prologue"). In MC, Saleem describes how he can categorise "all the thousand and one drives that make us human" (441). In the discussion of what makes us human, both narrators depict what they infer to be some of the fundamental elements of what it means to be human. The omniscient narrator, who is arguably Hero, states that it is "love and betrayal and loyalty and madness. Lovers and heroes and the passing of time" (Greenberg "Prologue") and Saleem lists "love and death, greed and humility" (441). It is interesting that both texts reference the passing of time in some way, in NOH it is expressly mentioned, in Saleem it is inferred through the reference to death. Yet, in these passages, neither narrator references what truly "makes us human," is our position in narrative itself. This seems paradoxical as both texts are arguably the attempt to convey a story, or stories, in order to reveal that which makes us human. The omission of an overt statement of narrative as what defines human life can arguably symbolise the way in which we are so immersed within narrative that we cannot see it as fundamental way in which the human life is constructed. It is impossible to have a narrative that is not, in some way, human, and correspondingly the human life cannot be separated from the narrative structures that both govern and create it.

The first aim of the thesis was to demarcate to what extent narrative and human life are intertwined and whether the stages of human life correlate with the stages of a narrative text. While an examination of *Midnight's Children* and *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* has made it evident that human life and narrative both create and inform each other and are, in this sense, synonymous, an examination of the texts with regard to whether the stages of life conform with the stages of a narrative text has exposed the way in which narrative text and human life do not rigidly conform to beginning, middle, and end. The idea of beginning, middle, and end correlating to birth, life, and death is reductive as the concepts of each stage have been found to embody a multiplicity which refuses a singularity of meaning. The novels of MC and NOH

embody the way in which narrative utilises beginning, middle, end in order to disrupt and destabilise the sequential temporality that we perceive to govern human life. The refusal of a singular beginning and end in MC and NOH illuminates the way in which this multiplicity of beginning and end makes both concepts impossible to locate within both narrative text and human life. There are multiple beginnings and ends that occur throughout the text. Each of these commentaries upon beginning and end, further serves to distance the concept of sequentiality and instead reveals the way in which, though human time seems linear, its immersion within narrative necessarily subverts it.

The second aim of the thesis to investigate the interaction of temporality within the stages of human life and narrative work. As discussed above, the way in which a human life cannot be conceived of outside of narrative has a significant impact on the way in which time can be perceived and conceptualised in both life, text, and the narrative structures that govern them. The notion of temporality is infinitely complex and, consequently, I cannot claim to have established the precise way in which the notions of time inform and interact with the aforementioned stages of human life and narrative text. However, it is hopefully demonstrable that the question of temporality instigates a deeper analysis into the complexity of human life, narrative and the way in which a relationship to time is inherently embedded within both of these constructs. As humans we cannot function beyond the scope of narrative and the consequent emplacement of time that arises from the comprehension of life through narrative. While the stages of life do not necessarily correspond to the stages of beginning, middle and end, the concept of temporality has still revealed some significantly fundamental points of note in the intersections between them.

The usurping of a linear conception of temporality is evident from the beginning of the novels. The idea of a singular beginning is deconstructed through the negotiation of textuality and orality that is invoked through opening text of MC and NOH. The exchange that opens the narrative of NOH embodies the “polyphonous” nature of oral storytelling by refuting the godlike authority that exists within the conception of a single beginning. The text states, “then I shall begin” (Greenberg “Prologue”) when, in fact, the narrative had already begun, which induces the kind of self-aware narration that acknowledges the impossibility of truly *beginning*. This is heightened by the examination of the claim “in the beginning was the world” (Greenberg “Prologue”). In the Beginning – Birth chapter I contrasted this statement with the biblical “in the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1) The argument set forth the comparison of the cyclical nature of world, through orality and human life, alongside “the Word” that

represents the linear sequencing of text. The culmination of which posited that “in the beginning was the world” symbolises a rejection of linearity of the biblical and patrilinear Word, and an embracing of the cyclical “world” that incorporates the female subjective experience. The notion of written word versus orality is also markedly evident in MC. The statement “I was born in the city of Bombay ... once upon a time” (Rushdie 3), brings about a dichotomy of written text and oral telling. The positioning of the two differing mediums of telling, writing which primarily conceived of functioning through linearity, and orality, which I have argued induces circularity, comment upon the concept of time as sequential juxtaposed against alternative conceptions of time, such as Kristeva’s *monumental* or *cyclical* time. Saleem’s interjections represented in this opening statement are due to the recounting of his narrative to Padma through an oral medium. These interjections, that I have analysed in the Beginning – Birth chapter, function as a rupture of the beginning and an immersion into multiplicity that permeates and dissolves any notion of a single beginning. That Saleem, through these interruptions, speaks from the present, and the nature of the present moment to, seemingly, continually begin, renders the beginning, as well as the rest of the text saturated with the sense of beginning that the present moment induces.

Similarly, in NOH, the omniscient narrator is also seen to disrupt the flow of the story throughout with interjections that rupture the inner stories. What is particularly interesting is that she seems to narrate from a place of the eternal present. It can be argued that both narrators tell their stories from a place of the eternal present. As discussed, in *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur discusses the discourse, set out by Augustine, that unlike eternity “time, on the other hand, is never all present at once” (Augustine qtd. in Ricoeur 25). If eternity is where all time is present at once, then it is interesting when we apply this notion to the narration in MC and NOH, in the consideration of how the narrative that these narrators emit is present to them all at once. In every moment of their narration, the narrators have knowledge of the entirety of the story and, as such, the narrative that they disseminate comes from a place of the eternal present. However, the emitting of narrative will always be necessarily bound to temporality through the complex relationship that exists in the interaction between time, narrative and human life. The conflict between the eternal and the temporal is overt throughout both of the primary texts, yet as Ricoeur states, because eternity is regarded as that which excludes time, its “mutual negation” means that it functions as “the other of time” and in doing so “intensifies the experience” of it (236). In other words, the fact that time, that passes, is removed from the eternal and, as such, renders the eternal defined by a state of “double or mutual negation”

(Ricoeur 236), the eternal actually serves as a concept in which reinforces the notion of time itself. The complicated relationship between eternity and temporality is exhibited in the primary texts and serves to comment upon the nature of narrative and human life and the way in which they are bound up with negotiations of time. It seems that, as humans, we cannot exist outside of narrative. This is argued in relation to Saleem's "apex of the isosceles triangle" (206), in which he attempts to hover above the narrative yet despite being above the base and body of the triangle, representing narrative, he is still connected to it through his position on the apex, which symbolises the position he holds in the narrative present. It can be said that the omniscient narrator, Hero, though depicted in an eternal space is still emitting narrative and thus still bound to its temporality. Although, it can be argued that the resistance NOH provides in relation to an end, refuses a temporality in which the end could exist. In this sense, the ending(s) of NOH had distinct parallels to the concept of eternity. While time can be conceived of as the, seemingly, fundamental progression of linearity which propels human life toward an inevitable end, underpinning and constraining a narrative text to the same finality, narrative itself usurps the finality imposed upon it by time. Though the narrative text of NOH and MC have the appearance of an ending, the oscillation and circularity that is induced by the references to the eternal and to the infinite, function as the rejection of patrilinear time, that is solely positioned in terms of an impending end, and consequently, annihilates the idea of a singular end.

As mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, much of the critical theory on MC has been predicated upon a postcolonial reading. Though I used MC as a point of departure for the discussion of narrative and human life, it would have been interesting to also discuss the narrative of MC through the lens of the postcolonial. This reading could have produced a dialogue on the subject as an individual within a nation and how this has political ramifications for the course of a human life. I had set out the intention for this thesis to engage in a discussion though utilisation of a lesser examined lens in order to produce an interesting narrative of *Midnight's Children*, but as the postcolonial self is such an integral part of the text, it would have been worthwhile to analyse it in some form and not omit it completely. Another element that has been reinforced as a point of significance, during my examination of *The One Hundred Nights of Hero*, is the relationship between text and image. *The One Hundred Night of Hero*, due to the nature of the graphic novel medium, contains iconography that induces a multiplicity of meaning, both reinforcing and problematising a human's relationship to narrative. A further way the argumentation in the thesis could be supplemented is through a more in-depth

discussion of the graphic novel and the way in which the technical aspects of the medium bring about new meanings and readings. This has led me towards a consideration of how the visuality of the graphic novel engenders a fundamentally different reading approach which, as Orbán notes, perhaps has more in common with the way our brains comprehend visual and textual stimuli, in terms of hyperreading in the information age (“A Language of Scratches and Stitches” 169). It is clear that the way in which we conceptualise notions of human life is ever developing, and that notions of what makes us human, though always grounded in narrative, will invariably shift alongside the developments of the age, and the passing of time.

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