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Hanif Kureishi's Fiction: on the cyclicality of story and characterization

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ABSTRACT

Throughout his fifty years as a playwright, novelist and short story writer Hanif Kureishi has weaved his novels' characters' motivations and (lack of) progress in relation to the ebullient social contexts that unraveled just in the background of the central narrations of his books. These two aspects of his witty and profound writing reveal and clarify a perhaps unnoticed third aspect to his *oeuvre*: a cyclicality to Kureishi's prose that repeats plot points, characterization, and themes. I argue that this aspect grants never-before-considered perspectives, which I shall endeavor to uncover in some of Kureishi's most thematically rich novels and short story: *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), *The Black Album* (1995), *Something to Tell You* (2008) and *My Son the Fanatic* (1995). Instead of being considered in isolation as to their themes, it is possible to notice relations between various texts, such as the importance of identity politics, or the rise of fundamentalism in Thatcherite and post-Thatcherite England. Such a statement presents in conflict and reconciliation a constant representation of the experience of the human condition. Generational conflicts, often portrayed by a father-son dichotomy; the opposition between secularism and traditionalism or fundamentalism; the desperate search for connection and intimacy beyond the simplest carnal sphere of human communication; campaigning for one's rights. All are examples of Kureishi's style of writing, as it shines through and excels at depicting the constantly fluctuating and ever-changing whims of (post)modern society.

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FOREWORD

This thesis aims to present a thorough and comprehensive analysis of Hanif Kureishi's fiction. My research will take into consideration three novels and one short story, namely *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), *The Black Album* (1995), *Something to Tell You* (2008) and *My Son the Fanatic* (1995), respectively. Consequently, it will be presented precisely and chronologically, by date of publication. This thesis is divided into five sections.

In the Introduction, I shall present information which clarifies much of the contextual background to Kureishi's writing, of social, political and literary nature. I shall also provide a summary of each novel and short story's setting and narrative, with particular attention to the presentation of the major characters which act as ideological, political or social representatives of the novel or short story's message. Additionally, I shall present Kureishi's fiction's characteristic of recurrent characterizations and events in the fiction presented above.

In Chapter One, I shall focus on Kureishi's first novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and its protagonist, Karim Amir. Through his experiences and voyage throughout London and its suburbs, Kureishi confronts the stigmas associated with ethnic identities and the prominent sexual objectification of such individuals by the white community. Moreover, the propagation of elements of Orientalism and colonial discourse in the novel shall be pointed to as well.

In Chapter Two, I shall focus on Kureishi's sophomore novel, *The Black Album*, and the short story *My Son the Fanatic*, analyzing the resurgence of fundamentalist and extremist modes of identification of the United Kingdom's Muslim community, and the forming rifts between the older, secularist generation and the new, religious youth.

In Chapter Three, I shall focus on Kureishi's introspective dialogue structured in *Something to Tell You*, from the point of view of its protagonist Jamal. Therefore, I shall underline the dialogue between past and present and the struggle to accept the reality of change, and the fear of growing older and becoming undesirable.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SF *My Son the Fanatic*

STY *Something to Tell You*

TBA *The Black Album*

TBS *The Buddha of Suburbia*

INTRODUCTION

Hanif Kureishi's Fiction in Context

The perspectives expertly weaved into the (meta)narrative fabric of Kureishi's novels and short stories are based on the sociopolitical occurrences that color his writings and create the diverse and complex lives experienced by his equally complex characters. *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *The Black Album* – and in truth, all of Kureishi's opus – are best experienced by knowing extensively what was happening in England (and consequently the United Kingdom) and its people, the undisputed protagonists of his writing. Life in the second postwar period can be defined as a decade-long process of reaffirmation of the British ethos, in all its merits and faults. However, it is also a period dedicated to the search for an acceptable compromise in the new social panorama brought on by the immigrant population, born in the colonies and now living in Britain. More importantly, Kureishi and his many characters belong to a second generation, that of sons and daughters of immigrants, who see themselves as English and/or British first, and ethnic second. Needless to say, both generations' experiences provided lessons, precisely in the lively cultural background that interests Kureishi and, consequently, myself: a new working-class or middle-class consciousness has emerged from those processes, influenced by itself so much as by those who 'border' the new social class.

The son of a relatively affluent man from Pakistan, Kureishi's works are precise and insightful insofar as they describe, anatomize, and depict the struggles of the first generation of "New Commonwealth" citizens.[1] These are the individuals who lived through and following the liberalization of Seventies' Britain, and during Blair's ten-year tenure, marked by a return to the welfare state of before. Indeed, the testimonies given to us by Kureishi are as profound and hard-hitting as they are because his writing goes further than perhaps what many colleagues in the field had by then. By this I mean that he crosses a threshold from discussing English social classes' indisposition towards the *status quo*, to presenting those classes' own indecisiveness and contradictions to inspire in the reader a deeper rumination as to the condition of Britain itself.

[1] B. Moore-Gilbert. *Hanif Kureishi*, 2001 : 13

Despite there being no ascertainable preference as to the cultural heritage of his characters, it would be disingenuous to say that Kureishi does not draw on the experiences of the Asian communities that flowed into the United Kingdom immediately following the second postwar period, and specifically from his background as a British person of Pakistani and Indian descent. Indeed, the simplest way to attest this can be found in the interchangeable use of the most particular of slurs hurled at any and all characters with an obvious disinterest in their "accuracy". There is an intentional desire to draw attention to the imperative blindness of racism and the prejudice aimed at his community. However, an equal amount of care is used in outlining the characteristics of the idea of the immigrant he portrays.

His depictions are undoubtedly steeped in the past with reference to how the efforts taken by Britain, and then the United Kingdom, to manage the influx of immigrants have influenced the assimilation and social standing of the Asian community. To name but a few general examples, there is the exclusion from specialized care services seen through by the Commonwealth Immigrant Advisory Council – established by the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. The Council's decisions were taken on the basis that contingencies such as the one mentioned above would contravene the supposed universality of the welfare state. Furthermore, Kureishi's writing also alludes to the overall failure of the integration policies ratified by the Council, inspired by and based off of French immigration control. These resolutions are seen by Eleanor Passmore and Andrew Thompson (2008) as palliatives "to placate Commonwealth countries and British liberal opinion".[2]

On a more personal level, if it could it be called as such, the relative importance of Kureishi's experience as a man of Pakistani descent cannot be refuted. Perhaps the most telling aspect of his writing that implies this is the relevance and importance given to the paternal figure, often perfunctory, dominating and emotionally stifling. Indeed, Renee Reichl Luthra and Lucinda Platt's (2017) research on the matter found that the majority of Pakistani immigration was "male-dominated and largely unchecked until the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act" but also that, more importantly, Pakistani immigrants came to be employed mostly in England's growing labor areas, such as

[2] E. Passmore, A. Thompson. "Multiculturalism, Decolonisation and Immigration: Integration Policy in Britain after the Second World War", in *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, 14 (3) : 46-47.

London or the Midlands.[3] This data supports the idea that immigration and integration act as a backdrop to Kureishi and his creations' maturity: the acceptance of an ideal Pakistani/Muslim identity is central to his characters' progress as individuals who, historically and as a community, have consistently recognized their origins as Asian first and English second, and maintain this self-categorization without any widespread rejection of these label. Luthra and Platt recognize that this behavior, unfortunately, has caused a parallel identification of the Pakistani/Muslim community as problematic – in and some political and social aspects – by the British white majority.[4] Hanif Kureishi expands his scope from the individual to the mass of less fortunate and have-nots by instrumentalizing them as vessels of a poignant social examination of both the aloof and estranged upper classes, and their quandaries and paradoxes.

Throughout the selected works hereby presented, my intent will be both to illustrate the specific instances of the "Other" that are shown by Kureishi, and to highlight the narrative throughlines that accompany these characters when they reappear in other texts, particularly in the roles of the protagonist-narrators, and the close circle of acquaintances that surround them in their day to day – the most striking characteristic of Kureishi's authorship. Karim (from *The Buddha*), Jamal (from *Something to Tell You*), to name but two, their friends, and rivals share one trait that is essential to the satisfactory discussion in the present text – their nature as subjects living on the outskirts of or suffering through the decade-spanning integration process in the United Kingdom. Tragically, as Radek Glabazňa (2010) summarizes, most characters are not aware of the consequences that their conditions would wreak on their sense of self and other's perception of it.[5]

However, such an existential interrogative is not static or, rather, repetitive in its presentation. Integration as an idea is itself a point of interest in Kureishi's prose: the discussions related to it constitute a sort of cyclical questioning of the goals and results of integration policies. This cycle mirrors the author's own return to similar narrative devices and plot points, but now analyzed through a different point of view. The young men and women who confront themselves with their unsatisfactory condition are at first

[3] R. R. Luthra, L. Platt. "The Changing Face of Pakistani Migration to the United Kingdom", in *AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community*, 15 (1) : 20.
[4] R. R. Luthra, L. Platt. 2017 : 19.
[5] R. Glabazňa. "Theatre of Identity: *The Buddha of Suburbia*", in *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film*, 2 (1) : 66.

the protagonists of the Kureishi's *oeuvre*; then they become the opposing force (or should I say the critiqued outlook) who disparage new ideas. Much like Kureishi's characters, in fact, integration as an ideological and sociopolitical program has itself garnered a number of acceptations. Previously mentioned Passmore and Thompson define it as twofold, that is to say, "[f]irst, [integration] refers to social inclusion" and, secondly, "[it] implies a sense of civic identity, manifested in shared attitudes, values and beliefs."[6] Ideas that come into the spotlight explicitly in Kureishi's fiction as the principal driving force of his characters' disenfranchised outlook on "new" Britain, even if and when they seem to successfully acclimatize to it.

Cyclicality is a key element to Kureishi's prose, which I envision as equally twofold. Firstly, I point to the reintroduction of similar yet subtly different characters in the considered texts as an element worthy of attention. They suggest Kureishi's willingness to retrace his steps along with his maturation as an intellectual and author: to reconsider what was once believed with a keener, more experienced eye. Secondly, all narrative power in *The Buddha* or *The Black Album* stems from an implicit certainty in the texts, as they are interested in showing their protagonists' attempts at escaping from their status: Furthermore, these protagonists' desire to construct or shape a model Britain fit for them is equally important to Kureishi's message.

Consequently, how they inadvertently provoke further unhappiness and dissatisfaction in future generations is equally a source from which the narrative can draw inspiration. Wanting a "better" England (or Britain) in which to live is an objective poignantly outlined in the central "issues" plaguing Kureishi's mouthpieces: Karim (from *The Buddha of Suburbia*) searches for the completion of his experiences, which his normal life could not give him; Shahid (from *The Black Album*) moves to London in search of independence and success, not unlike Karim, while balancing modernity and religiosity; Parvez (from *My Son the Fanatic*) confronts the return to Muslim traditionalism, opposed in his secularism by his own son; finally, Jamal (from *Something to Tell You*) desperately hunts for a spark of the vigor of youth amongst the boring *status quo* of the early 2000s, his accomplished life unfulfilling. This should not take away from the interconnectedness present in the texts, since, as discussed above, Kureishi structures

[6] E. Passmore, A. Thompson. 2008 : 37.

his literary maturity on the pretense of establishing a fruitful dialogue both with the reader (regardless of social and/or cultural ties) and himself.

Nonetheless, in considering but a selection of Kureishi's body of work, my research's aim is to put the elements introduced here shortly in the spotlight, as "samples" of the author's craft and literary refinement, specifically concerning three core elements:

1. the protagonists' struggles as a reflection of the everchanging social conflicts inside and outside the English Asian community;
2. the dominating cyclicality of character and narrative choices by the author;
3. the author's inherent conflict with the political forces responsible for guaranteeing an equal social standing between white and ethnic communities.

Additionally, each section will consider the characters and narrative devices employed by Kureishi in relation to the texts' most central and outspoken subject of analysis. Hence, "Chapter One", focused on Kureishi's most acclaimed novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, will be concerned with highlighting the previously mentioned aspects of his writing, with particular attention dedicated to how they complement Karim's attempts at carving a path for himself in pre-Thatcherite England, and how he falls prey to the colonizing gaze of his white peers and acquaintances. "Chapter Two" will focus on the thematically complementary *The Black Album* and *My Son the Fanatic*, whose narrative foci have already shifted towards the incompatibility of the English lifestyle with the dissatisfied youth's experiences – borne as a result of the country's push for liberalization under Margaret Thatcher. The repressed and disenfranchised Asian Muslim communities now find in the strictness and certainty of religious diktats renewed stability and confidence to rebel against their oppressors. Finally, "Chapter Three" will consider the way in which Kureishi weaves Jamal's motivations and reflections in *Something to Tell You* into the new millennium's stagnation.

My analysis will also attempt to provide a greater understanding of how Kureishi's prose has evolved, or rather, has changed its principal interest from instance to instance, but has never lost its attention for the English Asian community from which he hails. This is despite the lack of attention directed towards his opus, since, as Bart Moore-Gilbert (2001) points out, "a good two-thirds of the critical writing on Kureishi has originated

outside of Britain."[7] Secondly, my analysis aims to demonstrate Kureishi's careful writing, so as to not limit himself and his discussion(s), to avoid fitting the narration into a precise argument that overrides any opposition or objections. As Moore-Gilbert once again presents,[8] Kureishi does, for example, show the backwardness and spuriousness of blind faith as a supplement to social and moral crises of the self. Having said that, I am in agreement with Andreas Athanasiades (2015) in saying Islam offers – without a shadow of a doubt – a method of inclusion and reunion for a community that has been distanced and criminalized by the white majority.[9] Islam itself represents another of Kureishi's major talking points. Such an affirmation is supported by the inherently religious undertones to his fiction by-and-large, but also because the condition of the Muslim in England and Britain is consistently challenged, defined and influenced by the extreme rather than normality.

Kureishi has been outspoken about the consequences of the radicalism fathered and fostered by what essentially are bad actors, led astray by their strict reading and preaching of Islam, as well as by the abuse and ostracization suffered at the hand of English culture. In an interview for Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* in relation to the 2017 Westminster terrorist attack, Kureishi presents these feelings even more earnestly. To Kureishi, the problem faced by the Muslim communities in the United Kingdom and Europe is prejudiced by the extremist fringes that have declared war against the West.[10] However, he also makes no attempt at masquerading the West's own hypocrisy.[11] He especially moves against the political forces identified in his later work with ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair, whose actions in the East, the time of the conflicts in Iraq, come under scrutiny constantly and consistently in *Something to Tell You*. He depicts the obsession, and the continuous outrage directed at Muslims, juxtaposing it to the silence that has instead been allowed to hang in the air when they are the victims of violence.

Certainly, the books and short story that I shall discuss cannot and should not be reduced to a bare understanding of a singular, dominating authorial desire that directs the

[7] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 193.
[8] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 202.
[9] A. Athanasiades. "Repossessing Islam: Affective Identity and Islamic Fundamentalism in Hanif Kureishi", in *Indialogs*, 2 : 57.
[10] E. Franceschini. "Hanif Kureishi: 'La Londra multietnica si sveglierà senza paura'.", *La Repubblica*, March 2017.
[11] E. Franceschini, March 2017.

reader's attention to a single problem. Part of Kureishi's successful style of writing that compliments his work as a playwright also stems from the manner with which he inserts references and/or secondary plotlines that can spark further reflection and discussion on their own: for example, the transition from the mentioning of IRA bombings in *The Black Album* (TBA, 107-110) to the terrorist attacks in *Something to Tell You* (STY, 471-480), both the most extreme consequences of a community that perceives itself as unequal and mistreated – although fundamentally different in their aims; another example might be characters' obsession with music, and how their preferences directly communicate to the reader a part of their personality and beliefs. As such, these cases will also be made apparent and discussed whenever relevant to or an insightful view on the matter at hand.

In the following paragraphs, I offer a summary of the plot and central themes surrounding each of the texts that are included in the thesis, starting with the 1990 award-winning novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Despite its being the first long prose work by Kureishi, it is in fact still hailed as his most successful attempt at converting his style to prose writing. The novel centers around the struggles of Karim Amir in 1970s London and its nearby suburbs. Over three years of his early adulthood, coinciding with the end of Callaghan's tenure as Prime Minister (TBS, 240), the book explores the politics and problems of identity and the failures of the Labour Party to respond to the growing disenfranchisement from and resentment towards the government and the traditional white majority. More importantly, the hypocrisy of progressivist characters in the novel is explored in great depth; for example, Eva, a woman interested in New Wave spiritualism, seeks to climb the social ladder after suffering a life of submission. She entertains a relationship with Karim's father Haroon, the titular "Buddha," highlighting the issues of Orientalism perpetrated by ethnic minorities to appease the hegemonic white culture. Eleanor and Helen, Karim's lovers, help in developing the theme of intimacy. Finally, Charlie, Eva's neurotic son and Karim's first love, and director Matthew Pyke, whose play opens to Karim the world of acting, help in exploring the difficult existence of queer identities in a time where only non-minority self-expression was accepted.

The growing resentment towards the oppressor boils over in *The Black Album* (1995), concerned with the worrying rise of traditionalist, fundamentalist Muslim groups. The novel's protagonist Shahid confronts the two paths that unfold in front of him, with the unspoken hope for there to be a "third way" to escape from blind progressivism and

noxious extremism. On one hand, his professor and lover Deedee Osgood presents new intellectual and emotional experiences, while on the other hand, his affinity with Riaz Al-Hussein's radical group, among whose members figures Chad – a sort of opposite representation of Shahid –, offers companionship and community in an age marked by Thatcherite individualism and discrimination.

Moreover, the short story *My Son the Fanatic* offers a complementary point of view on the matter, which helps clarify some of *The Black Album*'s arguments. By homing in on the rift forming between secularist father Parvez and Muslim extremist son Ali Kureishi explores the damaging faith given to traditionalist expressions of identity. Additionally, the short story maintains the implied analysis of British society's failures in dealing with minorities; missteps which have caused a rise in the reliance of isolated communities on violent manifestations of identity to protect themselves from harm.

Lastly, *Something to Tell You*, published in 2008, distances itself from outright discussion of the critical issues pointed to in Kureishi's previous decade as to the condition of (children of) immigrants. In fact, the novel's primary concern is with the normality – although the text depicts it more closely to societal ennui – that grips the United Kingdom by the end of the 2000s. Specifically, *Something to Tell You* retraces some of the accusations aimed by its author to the Left, such as the lackluster and unchanged educational system inherited from Thatcherite reforms, or the at-the-time shocking absence of opposition to Tony Blair's participation in Middle Eastern affairs during the Iraq War. The latter acts as a proverbial background to Kureishi's recent writing's fascination with the masculine: sexuality, societal roles, expectations, and so forth. Jamal Khan, a successful and renowned psychoanalyst, is a departure from Kureishi's typical protagonist insofar as the reader observes how little he accomplishes now that he has lost much of his vigor and attractiveness. Jamal struggles as he comes to terms with the changes in his and his lovers' life (Ajita, Karen and Josephine). However, the novel is just as much a story of secrets. The mystery of Ajita's father's death, the unspeakable crime Jamal claims to have committed, and the prospect of his life's unravelling are interwoven with numerous scenes in which he and his close friends and acquaintances reflect upon years gone by. Under an autobiographical lens, *Something to Tell You* is Kureishi's rationalization of the changing currents of time, the last homage to the life of a generation that has yet to accept the necessity of change, like their parents

once did. The book is a story about closing doors and opening new ones, the end of a cycle and the start of another, a deep and personal discussion which unfortunately has been ignored by contemporary literary critics; a hole in the critical understanding of Kureishi which I offer to fill.

CHAPTER ONE

Youth and Alienation in *THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA*

Defining Kureishi's debut novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) in a strictly narrative sense is a question worth lingering on. Moore-Gilbert, in his comprehensive critical study on the writer, places in "traditional social realism"[12] its primary affiliation as to its genre. Specifically, his argument is supported by the fact that, throughout *The Buddha*'s sprawling yet strongly episodic narrative, its narration's principal driving force comes from Kureishi's expert mixing of classic British Nineteenth century literature, focused on the description of England's inequalities, and the equally realistic and prosaic "orality"[13] that underlines many of the conversations between Karim and his family, close friends, or colleagues, the legacy of his previous time as playwright. Indeed, the preference for word-of-mouth and gossip leads the reader to several realizations concerning *The Buddha*'s plethora of characters, especially where standard narration might falter or fail at conveying Kureishi's intentions. In my opinion, the blend of these two writing styles justifies without uncertainty the description of *The Buddha of Suburbia* as a postcolonial novel, steeped in hybrid forms of prose and character.

Its oral trait can, in a sense, give the reader an inkling as to Karim's own passion for theatre and acting. He spent time since childhood with his close friend Jamila's family, regaling her with "mucky" stories of particularly shocking or sexual content (TBS, 54). Karim is presented explicitly in the narrative as a competent if mercurial narrator, with an interest in depictions of the condition in which he and his author lived, and for compelling stories that can capture his listeners' attention. His penchant for storytelling is also one of the reasons that spur director Pyke to select him as an actor for his upcoming play, though he treats Karim like an object more so than a person throughout production and rehearsals. Already in his first outing as a novelist, Kureishi focuses on the strength and ever-lasting impact that communication has on the individual. However, in this same instance, if we momentarily shift our attention to the later *Something to Tell You* we can

[12] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001: 109.
[13] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 108.

notice just as clearly where Kureishi identifies an apparent flaw in Karim's orality: what counts as entertaining to audiences (even the absolute smallest one) is not the moral of the story, nor its advice. It is not the process of cause and effect that leads to a satisfying conclusion, rather the feelings of outrage, hilarity and/or disbelief that the story elicits in its listener. Indeed, Karen – Jamal's second lover – has the foresight to intuit that (trash) TV is the tool of the future; it has the power to influence and twist the viewers' perspective on any issue, if they are led to believe what they are told.

This is not to say that *The Buddha* does not equally represent this aspect of media in an interesting way: the novel itself is another story told by Karim, and its opening is almost a cliché. In the novel's first paragraph, we are told who Karim is, how he identifies himself – and, therefore, how his identity will be challenged by the white community –, not to mention the manner in which the suburbs he lives in are stifling his vitality. Living in the dissatisfying, boring and ignorant suburbs, a forming rift between his parents causes the young man to confront the realities of Britain. Karim stands at the confluence of the novel's actions, thoroughly confused and aimless. *The Buddha* depicts the crises that are caused by the social context in which he lives, kickstarted by his father. These help in directing the analysis of the mounting pressures that lead Karim to crack in pivotal moments: the breakdown of his parents' marriage and the separation of the family, the realization that, in pursuing a role in Pyke's play, he has sold out his identity and, finally, the failure to find solace in the company of Charlie.

What is more, Karim's propensity for narration is what allows Kureishi to outline and detail how English society has already broken down into separated, almost segregated communities that refuse to interact with each other. Their faults lie in the white population's aversion for the non-English, regardless of how much the latter try to integrate into the country. For all intents and purposes, Karim believes himself to be "an Englishman born and bred" (TBS, 3), although he is at least aware of his heritage as the son of an immigrant. Moreover, by the end of the novel, he is more prone to define himself as the latter rather than the former. Regardless, individuals – such as director Pyke or Eleanor – see Karim as the "Other" and metaphorically constrain him into that point of view by making him a subject to be laughed at, to be stereotyped into a barely-civilized man-beast, to be obliged to renegue his roots for the good of a play and transforming him into an object of sexual gratification.

Karim and Charlie's relationship, and the former's unrequited love for the latter, is telling of Kureishi's style of writing. He challenges his readers' pre-constituted beliefs and certainties. Through Karim's unrequited love Kureishi displays an understanding of the issues of gender, sexuality and queerness. Karim's first rejection comes, in fact, not from the British, but from his own community. His father is mortified that his son is attracted to men – though, to be precise, Karim is bisexual – and the conflict generated by Karim's infraction on his father's idea of masculinity matters greatly in understanding why his attraction to the male sex becomes even less outwardly demonstrated. Charlie is important to the novel's message too, because he serves as a vessel through which Kureishi can underline the identity crises housed in *The Buddha*'s youth, which relate to the desire to be and act as someone different. To be more precise, Karim desires to be with Charlie as much as he wants to be like him; a toxic relationship in which the Asian subject is made inferior. Perhaps it could be argued that Charlie is not made out to be wholly negative in his behavior by Kureishi. Indeed, in examining the queer undertones of the novel, Malik Haroon Afzal, H. M. Zahid Iqbal and Muhammad Safdar (2023) conclude that Karim's pining for his peer is an emotional response to his turbulent life.[14] However, I would argue that Charlie's role in *The Buddha* is not as clear-cut as the writing might suggest; in fact, Karim's obsession with him is self-destructive, since it prevents him from confronting his trauma and leaves him struggling along the path. He and Charlie cannot be alike because the latter never had to come to terms with the former's discrimination because of his status as a minority, and a homosexual. My rebuttal comes in response to numerous passages in the novel also taken into consideration by Afzal, Iqbal and Safdar, where Karim displays his unhealthy admiration for Charlie, such as:

> "What was his charm? How had he seduced me for so long? I would have done anything for Charlie […]. But his strength was his ability to make you marvel at yourself. The attention he gave you, when he gave you attention, was absolute. […] Charlie was the cruellest and most lethal type of seducer. He extorted, not only sex, but love and loyalty, kindness and encouragement, before moving on. […] [T]here was one essential ingredient I lacked: Charlie's strong will and his massively forceful desire to possess whatever it was that took his fancy" (TBS, 119).

[14] M. H. Afzal, H. M. Zahid Aqbal, M. Safdar. "Performing Bodies as Elephants in the Room: A Postcolonial Queer Approach to Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*", in *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, 50 : 9.

To be like Charlie is to renegue one's own uniqueness. Karim's greatest advancement in the acceptance of his identity is when he finally decides to leave his role model and try to pursue a path to true acceptance. As Athanasiades points out, the extravagant lives led by characters such as Eva, the Pykes, or Charlie are the result of issues that are engaged "within historical, societal and political frames" and are "socially generated."[15] To that end, each of the mentioned characters try to remedy their unhappiness by selecting lifestyles that are ideally associated with a good way of living: Eva expresses her progressive liberation from marriage through her house make-overs, the Pykes find carnal intimacy with acquaintances, since their marital life is strained as is, and Charlie styles his persona to capture the public's attention.

A great portion of Kureishi's characterization of his mouthpiece Karim is dedicated to communicating the young adult's difficulty in directing sexuality towards one or the other sex. To choose and establish a sexual preference, in fact, is tantamount to espousing a set of behaviors and expectations. I would point to the problems in accepting queer identity like those faced by Karim – mentioned by Afzal, Iqbal and Safdar as proof of Kureishi's discourse – as testimonies of "the problem of race, religion and culture" and "the manifestation of cultural conflicts" of much greater scope.[16]

Nonetheless, Kureishi chooses for his protagonist to be bisexual, although Karim – and his author by consequence – repeatedly specifies that his interests are not the result of a long intimate introspection, but an almost natural propensity to make love actively and passively. That is to say, Karim adopts conventional modes of conduct when making love to a woman, and more submissive ones when with a man. Karim's different behaviors can be cited as frames of reference for my argument: his blasé attitude towards women and brazen sensuality towards men, respectively, depict his fragmentary state of uncertain identity. The former character of his sexuality is repeated in every relationship or intimate encounter with women, where his role as male lover requires that he take the initiative, "provided [he] found them attractive" (TBS, 32): for example, he plays hard-to-get with Helen to gauge how interested she is in him. The latter of Karim's sexual traits is, instead, telling of his true sensibility and timidness. The first act of intimacy between Karim and a male character is with Charlie (TBS, 17), and it is approached by him with

[15] A. Athanasiades, 2015 : 58-59.
[16] M. H. Afzal, H. M. Zahid Aqbal, M. Safdar, 2023 : 1, 10.

insecurity and fear of upsetting his would-be partner. Unfortunately, Karim's preference for Charlie is what frustrates his love, as he is rejected by Charlie and will be again in the future. His relationship with Terry (TBS, 145-146, 239) is brief and devoid of actual tenderness, one of convenience, in which Karim remains the object that shall satisfy the stronger white man's libido; as for Pyke, the encounter reads closer to forced prostitution (TBS, 196-204).

Essentially, *The Buddha* concentrates the identity-muddling effects of 1970s England into Karim, what Nahem Yousef (1996) describes as a heterogenous *bricolage* constituted by "the 'Othering' of […] communities by white British institutions",[17] though it should be clarified that Karim is not the victim of these only; in fact, he suffers by the hand of his family and friends, as previously mentioned. At the same time Karim and most of the characters themselves fail to complete their maturation. According to Glabazňa, there is in fact no single character in the entirety of the novel that understands who they want to be or what they already are, which he relates to "migrancy", a metaphysical condition of life affecting all, not to mention the restlessness that persecutes many.[18] Such restlessness then overflows from the individual and roosts in others too. Karim suffers under the same yoke that other paternal figures in Kureishi's fiction impose on their own offspring. Haroon is quite vocal in his idea of what his son's future should be, expecting him to "interpret" the same role he has as a strong, virile, masculine womanizer without fail (TBS, 18), and to become a doctor. Jamila's father Anwar descends into abuse and starts frequenting his local mosque once he feels expropriated of his authority as his family's patriarch (TBS, 58-61, 171-172). To summarize, Karim and Jamila are meant to be a vessel through which their fathers (and lieges) can bask in the knowledge of having raised industrious children.

Haroon gives *The Buddha* its name, as it is he who kickstarts much of the events that will lead his son to suffer identity crises throughout the rest of the novel. By what the reader can gather both from the events of the narrative or Karim's description of and reflections on his father, Haroon is not a ground-breaking character. On one hand, he, like other of Kureishi's characters – for example, Anwar or Changez in the same novel, or Ravi in the 1981 play *Borderline* – came to Britain for a chance at a better life, and

[17] N. Yousef. "Hanif Kureishi and 'the brown man's burden'", in *Critical Survey*, Diverse communities, 8 (1) : 16.
[18] R. Glabazňa, 2010 : 66.

whether he did seize his chance is another matter. On the other hand, what separates Haroon from the rest is how he takes advantage of his heritage to gain respectability and fame in South London. Through Haroon, Karim has witnessed the cultural parody pursued by the white gaze, accepted by the politics of racism, and represented in his acquaintances Eleanor and director Pyke. Acts which compound, in Moore-Gilbert's view, into a clichéd representation of the "Oriental groom."[19]

Orientalism and the concept of "being Oriental" land squarely in the discussion of identity and, when related to Haroon, allow the reader to appreciate what Moore-Gilbert accurately describes as Kureishi reversing the English literary trope of the subservient Indian holy man – equated to the spiritual undertones of colonial discourse – and concomitantly putting the colonized subject in a position of power through his proselytizing of New Wave religions to the English.[20] Such a reversal is, in my opinion, instrumental in the author's communication to the reader of the inherent purchase that old and decrepit colonialist views hold on the English public, a sentiment further expanded on once Karim moves with his father to the City. It is also as much as of an example of the lengths some – precisely like Haroon – go to in an effort to break away from the alienation, separation and idleness which is prevalently present in Karim's own reasoning as to his choices. Namely, sacrificing his Indian identity in Shadwell and Pyke's plays, or briefly leaving London for the Big Apple (TBS, 109, 240-242).

In my opinion, Lisa Lau's (2009) analysis of what she coins Re-Orientalism, that is to say,

> "[…] Orientalism [that] is no longer only the relationship of the dominance and representation of the Oriental by the non-Oriental or Occidental, but [a process of representation which has] been taken over (in part at least) by other Orientals,"[21]

can offer some interesting clarifications on father and son's search for identity if we reapply a number of Lau's points on South Asian women's writing to the novel. Haroon and Karim check off her three markers of stereotyping Re-Orientalism: a desire

[19] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 123.
[20] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 123.
[21] L. Lau. "Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals", in Modern Asian Studies, 43 (2) : 572.

to belong in a community, the disparaging of ethnic roots, and the presentation of an issue with biographical ties to the author.[22] Firstly, they both respond to the necessity of being seen as part of a community by playing pretend: Haroon dons traditionally Eastern outfits when reprising his role of wise man; Karim uses a severely stereotyped version of his close friend Changez to great effect in Pyke's play, reaffirming demeaning *topoi* of Eastern idiocy. Secondly, Kureishi smartly employs generalizations and totalizations by having his characters hypocritically denounce lifestyles they dislike, though Haroon certainly expresses his hatred for normal life more frequently (TBS, 264). Finally, Karim can be identified as Kureishi's mouthpiece insofar as he is the subject of much of the discrimination that his author despises. Nonetheless, I specify that Kureishi does not incur in Lau's critique of the practice,[23] as it is done carefully, as to not risk falling into generalizations himself.

Indeed, throughout the novel Karim makes no effort at considering his father's profession as a guru nothing more than a stratagem to climb the social ladder, though he in turn follows much of the same steps his father takes to reach the same goal by the end of the novel, particularly by affiliating himself to a white-majority group of acquaintances that systematically objectify father and son; moreover, they categorize their every trait into what they think father and son should constrain to. Such is but an example of the central father-son rapport that is presented to the reader throughout Karim's "progress," a dichotomy marked by similarities and conflicts raging amongst a fracturing nuclear household.

Furthermore, Moore-Gilbert points to Kipling as a prime metanarrative and literary device employed by Kureishi. Through Kipling, Kureishi symbolizes Karim's disorganized and ever-churning self-identity, concentrated into a series of aspects of contemporary London that, once again, reflect and reverse the tropes of colonial discourse. Most strikingly, the conflict between "different cultural identifications" competing for primacy during the extremely fragile process of maturation Mowgli-Karim is undergoing,[24] all the while his acceptance of the "difference" from the white British man is whittled down. An event which happens despite how Karim's attempts at internalizing his ethnic heritage – following Anwar's funeral – should reconnect him to

[22] L. Lau, 2009 : 582-588.
[23] L. Lau, 2009: 585-586.
[24] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 124-126.

his roots (TBS, 212). These considerations also complement Allie's opposite reasoning as to his own identity, formed from both the separation of his family and the abuse suffered as the son of an immigrant. Surprisingly and, perhaps, in a counterintuitive turn of events, Allie vehemently objects to the babying of immigrants, and argues that they should be willing to forego their own identity to be recognized as actual citizens, eventually blurting out that "[t]hey should put up and go on with their lives" (TBS, 267) in place of floundering against an enemy that he does not think exists.[25]

Of the characters principally responsible for Karim's second – and perhaps major – crisis, there are three that influence him most, though it could be argued that others, like Jamila, or his own family, play just as much of a role, if minor. These individuals are: Eva, the go-getting, liberal, sexually and socially liberated woman that steers her lover's son into acting; Eleanor, whose piquant sensuality intrigues Karim; and director Pyke, the successful if idling theatre director, embodiment of Kureishi's searing critique of the corruption of the newfangled kitchen-sink and fringe theatre, and the rapidity with which it has managed to run out of ideas, now consisting of barely-thought-provoking, trite plays on "class, race, [sexuality] and farce" (TBS, 189).

Eva is amongst the strongest of *The Buddha*'s secondary characters thanks in part to the intriguing way in which both Karim and the reader are slowly accustomed to her behavior and habits, not to mention how realistically she reflects the liberal woman of 1970s England; I would go so far as pointing to her as one of – if not the most – well-developed of Kureishi's female supporting characters. In saying so, my principal argument is to be found in the credibility of her actions. By letting her engage with Karim, the author can offer an effective deconstruction of the merits and faults of the sexual revolution. Indeed, Eva and Jamila resemble each other insofar as their characteristics go. Both are passionate to a fault and reserve much of their time to the pursuit of a goal, and their individuality grows the more their partner's shrivels and withers in time; in turn, this is also where they diverge significantly.

Starting with the former, Eva could be seen as a positive and negative character interchangeably. On the one hand, as just mentioned, she embodies the spirit of the cultural revolution, of the liberation of women and their separation from the role of angels of the house once decried by Woolf. She certainly plays a part in Karim's attempts at

[25] R. Glabazňa, 2010 : 68.

finding solace in his identity as a cultural mix of "Indianness" and "Englishness". On the other hand, although these actions lend credence to such a role, Eva inevitably falls victim to the glamour of social circles. Her ascension to socialite in respectable London leaves her to bare her true self completely. Where *The Buddha*'s first eight chapters – coinciding with "Part One: In the Suburbs" (TBS, 3-124) – deal principally with the issue of colonial appropriation by the smaller elites in the outskirts of London, "Part Two: In the City" (TBS, 125-284) is more interested in how the pursuit of respectability is but another facet of the hegemonic white narrative.

Eva's fetishization of the "Oriental" comes from subscribing to Eastern-inspired New Age spiritualism, thus appropriating herself of the colonized culture. Religion remains a tool to discard once she, her son, Haroon and Karim enter London; this turn is unsurprising, as it corroborates Kureishi's statements in Kamiel's brief interview for Scribner's joint reissue of *The Black Album* and *My Son the Fanatic*, wherein he expands the scope of his critique of current Muslim fervor to religiosity as a whole. Religion, thus, is "intellectually stultifying and claustrophobic," a "religion-lite" that offers palliatives to satiate the hunger for certainty in an ever-changing society.[26] Moore-Gilbert labels hers as a "liberal racism" espoused by the cultural elite and founded on a language of "patronizing exoticism,"[27] which in turn compliments the fickleness of Eva's character.

At the conclusion of the novel, she has managed to inter Haroon's propensity at aphorisms in a renewed normality from which the titular "Buddha" – again deprived of his masculine status and authority – desires freedom. Thus, I find Moore-Gilbert's statement partially correct, since it could be argued that the issue of exoticism extends further in scope to the condemnation of the fitfulness of the practice on its own, comparable to Eva's proclivity for change: she gives her persona new "coats of paint" and moves on once she perceives that more is to gain by being someone else. It is, then, unsurprising to see the exact process present itself again in her son Charlie, who undergoes several changes of personality throughout *The Buddha*. Eva's three households encapsulate her voyage from static suburban life from which she seeks freedom, to lively socialite, to established, upper-class lady, an individual that would not be out of place in Caryl Churchill's body of work.

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[26] D. Kamiel. "An Interview with Hanif Kureishi", in Hanif K., *The Black Album with My Son the Fanatic: A Novel and a Short Story*, 2009 : 300-302.
[27] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 137-138.

As for the latter, Jamila descends from Kureishi's theatre. She is related to *Borderline*'s Yasmin directly, and more so tangentially to Amina (a character in the same play) insofar as family relations go. A literary inheritance that is also picked up on, once again, by Moore-Gilbert.[28] Her politics are decidedly radical, anti-racist and Leftist; furthermore, she mirrors a myriad of Kureishi's characters by virtue of residing in a commune by the tail end of the novel, like Sammy's in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), Riaz's fundamentalist cadre in *The Black Album*, or even the one Jamal briefly lived in (STY, 260) in *Something to Tell You*. She severs any relation to her family and is persuaded to bring with her Changez out of convenience (TBS, 214-215), and in doing so she commits a similar objectifying process to the one Eva subjects Haroon to, as her husband becomes a nanny (TBS, 231). Thusly, one could argue that Jamila's own faith in her politics supersedes the problem of racism and blinds her to the reiteration of colonial discourse when it materially comes in favor of "the Party" – Terry's moniker to refer to the Left. Jamila's marital status, too, can and does reflect Eva's, as they are trapped in unhappy matrimonies that either fizzled out or were coerced out of them, in Jamila's case (TBS, 60-61, 77). Moreover, both women find renewed vigor by dedicating themselves to a goal near and dear to their heart, which, in Jamila's case, is the condemnation of the government's racist discourse aimed at keeping the immigrant population down.

It is interesting to note that Karim maintains complicated relationships with Jamila and Charlie. Karim's bisexuality stems from an authorial desire to contradict representations of perceived Asian taboos on intimacy. Nonetheless, there is a difference. I find myself in agreement with Sanjeev Kumar Upadhyay's evaluation (2021) of Karim and Jamila's relationships with British partners – and infrequently with each other – as a sexual *revanche* stemming from the racial abuse suffered. So much so that Karim reasons that having sex with Helen is more a matter of proving her father wrong, than of actual physical attraction.[29] Annabelle Cone (2004) points out a moral confusion that frustrates any and all attempts at establishing actual intimacy. All sexual encounters portrayed in *The Buddha* are outside the boundaries of marriage,

[28] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 132-134.
[29] S. Kumar Upadhyay. "Redefining the Sexual Orientations in Hanif Kureishi's 'The Buddha of Suburbia', in *The Creative Launcher*, 5 (6) : 149.

" […] in the arms of a woman […] whose 'otherness' from the 'black' point of view may not so much confirm the male immigrant's place in white Anglo society, but a place elsewhere, […] outside the confining boundaries of East and West."[30]

Indeed, by the end of the novel only Margaret, Karim's mother, appears to be in a stable and healthy relationship, although it could be argued that Eva and Haroon's marriage might miraculously mend the rifts that are already separating them.

Going back to the other two characters most poignant to Karim's identity, Eleanor and Pyke return on what was said of Eva, insofar as Kureishi employs them to concentrate on separate issues already raised by her in the narrative.

Eleanor's thirst for new experiences, brought on by the boredom of modern times, manages only to have her sink deeper in idleness. It possesses nuances related more closely to what Kureishi alludes to through her than what is outright stated in the narrative. Like Eva, Eleanor looks down on Karim for his foreignness – for example, by thinking his accent is "cute" – while touting faux liberalism and espousing the sophistication preeminent in the upper class she was born in. However, her actual interests are not in any way related to progressivism, and she generally prefers wandering into parties in search of a captivating sight, when she is not attending drab kitchen-sink plays on the arrival of "terminal class struggle" (TBS, 207).

While she embodies the capriciousness and vacuity of upper-class pseudo-intellectualism, Eleanor is not made the subject of a moralizing critique of sexuality; in fact, her role in shaking the foundations of Karim's own, particularly in the desire elicited in him, is a strong point in favor of the opposite. Said sexuality is quite voracious and works in favor of the female sex's masculinization and strengthening in the novel[31]; the traditionally powerful sex is instead made inconspicuous and timid. In her examination of *The Buddha*'s sexuality, Kumar's statements on Jamila[32] can also be applied to Eleanor, insofar as she, too, takes control of her femininity and uses it on her own terms (although she initially refuses any physical contact with Karim) to break the chains tying her to conventional sexual and gender stereotypes. However, she is part of the classes enforcing the status quo instead of being the one trying to "expose her traditional cultural

[30] A. Cone. "The Politics of Intimacy in Hanif Kureishi's Films and Fiction", in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 32 (4) : 263.
[31] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 113.
[32] See note 29, p. 26.

norms."[33] What is to be criticized of Eleanor's sexuality is how her liberation comes at the cost of the minority's, which she pursues – just like Eva – because of the exotic looks that they possess in contrast to plain English men,[34] and which she discards the moment the relationship is frowned upon, or a better match comes along – which is partly the reason why she frequents Pyke, in a *menage-a-trois* (TBS, 226, 238).

Finally, Karim's relationship with and abuse at the hands of his director, Californian playwright Matthew Pyke, and his wife Marlene, is Kureishi's final, more eloquent expression of the forces at play in Britain that subject the immigrant to total submission. Eva's authority and Eleanor's attractiveness coalesce in the Pykes. Kureishi is eloquent in the portrayal of the two:

"For Marlene and Matthew, who were created by the 1960s and had the money and facilities to live out their fantasies in the 1970s, sex was both recreational and informative" (TBS, 190).

The celebrities live a life of luxury that even Eva would dream of and use the social purchase they have gained (thanks to the cultural revolution of the 1960s) to propose their own universe of debauchery and physical gratification that is fundamentally contradictory to the conditions they have to thank for their success. As previously mentioned, Matthew essentially lives off the fame garnered at the peak of his career and proposes an overwrought theatre where the white English voice persists as the bearer of social critique, while the persecuted are left to fill the role of comic relief. Pyke's own directions to his actors are suppressive, demand submission, and seem outright incomprehensible. However, they ring true when considered from the perspective of Karim by the end of *The Buddha*. In designing his "not-self," as Pyke labels it, Karim went through a process of derealization that took elements from his authentic identity and reapplied those characteristics to the persona he wanted to embody (TBS, 219); it is thanks to this process that he effectively rejects his cultural background for the sake of recognition. His role as Tariq in Pyke's play is that of an inept, clueless immigrant, a by-the-books stereotype that surpasses even Shadwell's degradation of Karim's identity before he landed the job with the Californian. Once Karim is charmed by Pyke, the second

[33] S. Kumar Upadhyay, 2021 : 147-148.
[34] S. Kumar Upadhyay, 2021 : 149.

moment in which his self-worth is eroded comes when he engages in swinging with the director and his wife, and vice versa. The Pykes' perversion is highlighted then by Karim's objectification, transformed into an instrument of pleasure by the white elite and their "hidden sexuality."[35] The instigating reason for such a sexual encounter that deviates from "normal" sex is Karim's desire to feature in Matthew Pyke's play. The upper-class man uses this condition to his advantage to sate the need for exotic sexual relations that a strained marriage cannot give him, in the meantime depicting the breakdown of communication in a nuclear family, just like the novel had before with Karim's parents'.

The Buddha is surprisingly modern in tackling the issue of alienated Asian youth insofar as it refutes the traditional dénouement of the *Bildungsroman*. By interacting with the characters mentioned above, the reader picks up on how Karim's inexperience leaves him susceptible to the innumerable ways in which his acquaintances shape and model his behavior, quite like a journey in which he absorbs the morals offered to him by the experiences and characters he interacts with – a postmodernist picaresque.[36] It is this genre that *The Buddha*'s conclusion resembles most, since Karim remains in stasis. In a final reflection upon coming back to England, Karim states:

> "I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn't always be that way" (TBS, 284).

These final two sentences perfectly encapsulate the tragedy of a young man defeated by individualism; that is, the polarizing forces that have tugged at Karim's seams, be they Haroon's misogynistic paternal suggestions, Jamila's anti-racist fervor, or Pyke's objectifying sexual hunger, to name a few. They have managed to leave Karim in an even more fragmented and uncertain state.

[35] S. Kumar Upadhyay, 2021 : 150.
[36] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 109.

CHAPTER TWO

Fundamentalism and Identity in *THE BLACK ALBUM* and *MY SON THE FANATIC*

What emerges when reading through Kureishi's second, less critically acclaimed novel, *The Black Album* (1995) is the disorienting split that comes soon into its narration. On the one hand, Sarah Upstone (2008), in her article dedicated to the novel, gives praise to its writing for the marked political involvement of its message in spite of the consequential weakening of its literary status[37]:

"[The novel's] didacticism is in the service of forcefully stressing the value of the concept of plurality and cultural hybridity against systems of fundamentalist thought."[38]

On the other hand, Moore-Gilbert is of the advice that *The Black Album* should also be considered in lieu of Kureishi's critique of leftist politics, contingent on the "more specific focus on the relationship between western feminism and the struggles of the racially oppressed."[39]

Furthermore, these two viewpoints should be considered in relation to the great effect that the fatwah against Rushdie had on the author. Regardless of the scathing remarks made by white and ethnic critics both, the injunction came to him as a shock. It allowed him to put into perspective how freedom of speech in writing is untenable when writers are made to fear retaliation. More importantly, *The Black Album* voices Kureishi's mortified realization that his own community would be more than willing to condemn his *oeuvre*, if not himself, given enough reason and a chance to channel their frustrations into a politically weaponized outlet. The novel, while the two above-mentioned interpretations are the most readily available, is its author's testimony of a time in which "everyone was

[37] S. Upstone. "A Question of Black and White: Returning to Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album*", in *Postcolonial Text*, 4 (1) : 4.
[38] S. Upstone, 2008 : 5.
[39] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 140.

insisting on their identity, coming out as a woman, gay, black, Jew,"[40] when belonging assumes the meaning of camaraderie, the sharing of hopes and uncompromising agendas.

Such differing yet complementary views synthesize the novel's principal conflict occurring inside its protagonist's mind. Shahid, for all intents and purposes, is a spiritual successor to Karim insofar as both deal with the issue of identity. However, the two sides of said conflict possess now a clearer divide, as they are associated with two opposing forces in Shahid's life.[41] Riaz's community of second-generation Asian Muslims espouses a more traditional rhetoric centered around the observance of religious doctrine to order their tumultuous social life; they are troubled by the fear of being assimilated into Western culture. Deedee is instead the representative of the progressivism that has come to Britain since the cultural revolution, and of the secularism which Kureishi had previously explored with Eva in *The Buddha*; like Eva, Deedee too commits the same mistakes of the well-meaning radical by betraying a "whiff of colonial missionary", despite maintaining a clear animosity against Riaz's enchaining dogmatisms.[42]

In employing some of the discourse around the role played by the secular feminist in his writing, Kureishi does discuss recurring talking points related to the other sex as well. Like Karim, Shahid too interprets intimacy as a relationship in which there is more to take than to give, previously detailed with reference to Kumar.[43] Shahid frequents Deedee because she is a sexual object to be conquered and to parade around as the victory of the immigrant over the English; similarly, Shahid is preferred by Deedee for traits such as his olive skin, reprising the discourse on "the Oriental" as a sexual object to be desired by the dominating white.[44] This objectification is now perceived by the minority, and is actively campaigned against (TBA, 236).

The inequality of the physical relationship between Shahid and Deedee is then echoed in the ideological and political stage by comparing and contrasting it to the manner in which Riaz and Chad coerce Shahid into doing their bidding, be it reviewing Riaz's religious manuscript, or the procurement of a broom and a string to "suspend the burning filth" – here referring to Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, often alluded to in the text – so that all can witness their protest (TBA, 225).

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[40] K. Malik. "Kureishi on the Rushdie Affair", *Prospect*, April 2009.
[41] A. Athanasiades, 2015 : 63.
[42] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 141.
[43] See note 29, p. 26.
[44] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 142.

As to what that protest entails, it is a response to Western philosophy, as much as it is a condemnation of the fatwah[45] against the Iranian author. *The Black Album* is essentially preoccupied with exploring the renascent draw of religion on Muslim youth and how blind faith contradicts all Kureishi loves: "liberal attitudes, free speech, the whole thing."[46] Riaz, Chad and the rest of the former's disciples function as the principal vehicle of Kureishi's critique towards Muslim ethnocentrism as a method of self-realization and actualization. Firstly, through them Kureishi denounces the deprivation undergone by submitting to Riaz's rhetoric placidly and, consequently, observing the rulings of an "arbitrary God," as he explains to Kamiel. Secondly, the successful fashioning of such draconic beliefs is to Kureshi proof of the inescapable allure of religion, which had already been suggested in *The Buddha* with Haroon and Eva. Overreliance on religion is anatomized as a Freudian infantile desire for certainty. A reassurance that there is no need for the believer to generate their own set of morals and convictions when they are provided to him or her automatically. The conflict generated between Islam and secularism proposes Kureishi's conceptualization of the mutual fascination for each other and, ideally, the equally conflicting manners in which Shahid tries to fit in, in search of camaraderie:

> "We have fantasies about the order and strictness of fundamentalism. The fundamentalists have powerful fantasies about those dirty people in the West who are having sex all the time, stoned out of their heads and living in toilets. […] [W]hat a terrible place. But we can't wait to get there!"[47]

Moore-Gilbert underlines the importance of the debate taking place both in Shahid's consciousness and outside of it. He argues that *The Black Album* exists in function to the "condition of England" genre insofar as it instrumentalizes the tensions between Britain's post-war restructuring and the fracturing of self-image, placing them in a context of educational neglect.[48] It should be noted that this localization is not only meant to denounce the conditions which foster Riaz's closeted community but are also involved in the discourse on Islam spanning the novel.

[45] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 28.
[46] D. Kamiel, in H. Kureishi, 2009 : 301.
[47] D. Kamiel, in H. Kureishi, 2009 : 303.
[48] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 111.

Returning to religion is as much of a response to exclusion as it is a matter of reconnecting with one's roots; it is a haven against the stereotyping Western gaze. Athanasiades corroborates such a perspective and further adds that *The Black Album* excels at spurring external social participation from the reader because of its focus on the question of religiosity as a marker of identity.[49] In his analysis, Moore-Gilbert recognizes Kureishi's intent of unmasking immigrant identity and nationalistic pride as products of Britain's construction of a society that denotes certain behaviors as deviating from the norm or unruly.[50] However, he then concludes that "[*The Black Album*] is less assured than [*The Buddha of Suburbia*]" in its critique of the social issues that foment the Muslim community's violent responses.[51] The reason lies in the former's narrative style, which prefers an objective presentation of facts to *The Buddha*'s more nuanced take on issues of identity. While denying that *The Buddha*'s Karim is a more well-rounded character than Shahid would be disingenuous, arguing – as Moore-Gilbert does by making reference to Appiah – that the former novel benefits in its discussions because of a greater involvement in Karim's introspection is equally incorrect, in my opinion. Moore-Gilbert observes that characters like Shahid or Deedee lack the "*gravitas* and complexity traditionally associated with the three-dimensional characters of social realism"[52]; however, we need not go far to argue the opposite.

In both novels the distinction and description of "character pursued by and obsessed with identity" can be given to Charlie – Eva's musically-gifted, neurotic son – and Chad – Riaz's right-hand man, a most devout and devoted follower – because both are essentially running away from an unrecognizable old self. Identities abound in Charlie's case in particular, as he erratically switches from one to the other with the nonchalance of discarding clothes. Nonetheless, he remains fundamentally unchanged during the course of the novel. The "Charlie" Karim is acquainted with at the start of the novel, who appreciates *The Beatles*, *The Rolling Stones* and hoards musical records (TBS, 14) is the same "Charlie" that discards them once he becomes infatuated with the irreverent scorn of punk (TBS, 131). That "Charlie" too is the same that makes his fortune in the United States as a pop singer (TBS, 247) by the end of *The Buddha* by "[appealing]

[49] A. Athanasiades, 2015 : 57.
[50] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 128.
[51] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 144.
[52] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 145.

to the people that had the most disposable income." At his most vulnerable, Charlie remains a young man that has yet to find his middle ground. Unlike Karim, however, he responds with frightening irritation and anger at the realization that his selected personality is not the "real Charlie" he desires.

Similarly, Chad struggles to identify himself, coming from a past of delinquency and violence. As told to Shahid by dealer Scrapper, he too has separated a part of himself, a previous identity, from the man he is at the time of *The Black Album*'s narration. Once known as Trevor, he sold drugs with Scrapper, before coming to the realization that he had no actual knowledge of himself. In adopting his new identity Chad lets go of some of his individuality, chained to Riaz's will. It is in this sense that he resembles Charlie: he, too, tries to appear as someone else to conform to a specific set of cultural and ethical values. I would go so far as to affirm the fact that Chad manages to find solace and satisfaction with who he is by *The Black Album*'s end, while Charlie retains an air of dissatisfaction with his current self.

As can be understood, it is by putting characters such as Charlie and Chad at the forefront of the reader's attention that Kureishi effectively discusses the problematic nature of identity and the social estrangement to which his characters are constantly subjected. Through them he opens the possibility of a reflection on the "anarchic states of desire" that exist in the socially marginalized British Muslim communities.[53] This is also true in the sense that it is by having Shahid, Riaz, and his other disciples hypothesizing and arguing over the nature of the differences between Muslim and British culture that Kureishi can depict the nuances and pitfalls of tying one's personality to a strict set of denominators. Shahid's defiant words to Chad when tasked with procuring the broom and string for the book burning (TBA, 225-226) summarize the author's explosive contempt and puzzlement directed at the youths who renounce individuality for religious conformity; however, those words ring hollow in part because, for one, Shahid goes along with the plan and, secondly, he too is tied to another's leash, that being Deedee's.

Deedee Osgood is a flawed liberal like many of Kureishi's "white" characters and can be categorized more specifically with others like Terry in *The Buddha* or Henry in *Something to Tell You*, who are more concerned with condemning one system of

[53] A. Athanasiades, 2015 : 58.

governance rather than considering any solutions for it: they direct little to no attention at ethnic minorities. Upstone once again corroborates this interpretation by pointing to Kureishi's didacticism and hybridity as tools for his postcolonial *oeuvre*,[54] which unfortunately have been misinterpreted by critics in their considerations. In competing for Shahid's attention, Deedee becomes the representative of individuality as much as of the "White Album." The "unspoken, silenced Other" which, as Upstone comments, contributes to the overall attention Kureishi directs at the question of Britishness in the postcolonial age.[55] The framing of Kureishi's discourse on Shahid's – and for that matter, the totality of British ethnic minorities' – social belonging is thus quite the conundrum. Rather than pointing to one answer as absolute, I propose that both Upstone's perspective and Moore-Gilbert's possess a kernel of truth to them, given that, as it often is when discussing Kureishi, the correct answer lies in between the two.

Overall, *The Black Album* is staunchly individualistic insofar as it rejects ethnocentrism as a valid argument for the manifestation of an individuality separate from the Orientalist gaze of white Britain. However, it also (un)intentionally recovers and reuses Orientalist stereotypes of superstitious reverence and austere dogmatism,[56] which are recursive in colonial discourse. The novel, however, is also positively abuzz with political back-and-forth, particularly as it challenges the convenient distinction between left- and right-wing ideologizing: the Muslim community's destituteness is a denouncement of Thatcherite discrimination. It is proof that the fundamentalist problem is the consequence of the Right's marginalization[57] – a neglect which reaches even the British themselves, if we consider Strapper's condition.

At its core *The Black Album* sets out to organize a series of debates centered around the exclusion of British Muslims from the social agora. The subsequent isolation the neglected pursue as a means of creating a personal micro-society in which to feel at home is also important, however. Additionally, Kureishi defends – without falling into extremism – such isolation and suspicion towards the hegemonic culture and its government insofar as the justifications given by the liberal – at times socialist – characters in the novel (Deedee, Brownlow, senator Rudder) generally fail at proving

[54] S. Upstone, 2008 : 6.
[55] S. Upstone, 2008 : 7-8.
[56] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 147-148.
[57] S. Upstone, 2008 : 8-9.

satisfactory to Riaz and his followers; thus, they do not desist from their protest. At most, they use the British Muslim minority as a launching pad for their own political careers (in Rudder's case) or to experience a sense of vindication and superiority by proving they were in the right (in Brownlow's case).

The left-wing politicians and intellectuals' inability to present acceptable responses to the isolation of Muslim communities is responsible for the creation of people like Chad, whose extremism is recognized by Shahid as a maddened response to the racial abuse suffered throughout their lives. If Chad is Riaz's "dog," that is but a consequence, as Moore-Gilbert summarizes, of

> "the intolerance of the host society towards its 'Others', which generates the physical and ideological resistance that the dominant ethnicity most abhors and fears." [58]

The consequence of blindly repossessing Islam and converting it into a vessel of hatred and disavowal of differences, since they do not conform to a standard – as Riaz does – is ultimately the fault of both "Black" and "White" Britain. The former, as stated above, is naturally despondent and repressively "anti-social,"[59] while the latter touts open-mindedness and promises solutions that have yet to be drafted. Thus, unreadiness and lack of response to the growing Muslim discontent breed violent action and deadly consequences.

Athanasiades[60] and Upstone[61] both find faults in the purely literary critique of later Kureishi in regard to his dwindling capabilities as a politically inspiring writer. They argue that contemporary consciences can and should recognize the frighteningly accurate previsions *The Black Album* gives of the future. While arguably set in 1989 and the time following the proclamation of the fatwah against Rushdie, the text makes explicit reference to the 1991 bombings of Paddington and Victoria stations by the IRA. And so, the former[62] diagnoses Kureishi's inspiration for writing *The Black Album* in the desire to "compensate for a limited perspective of Islamic fundamentalism," and the real life

[58] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 136.
[59] S. Upstone, 2008 : 12.
[60] A. Athanasiades, 2015 : 61.
[61] S. Upstone, 2008 : 2.
[62] A. Athanasiades, 2015 : 62.

purchase that multiculturalism has in determining conflict. The latter[63] adds credence to their theses by pointing out that cross-cultural violence in *The Black Album* remains unattributable to the exploits of a single individual but is instead the end result of "seething causes which [require] vengeance" (TBA, 109) and that can explode momentarily, without previous notice. This is alluded to by Kureishi in the nonchalance with which the reader is first made aware of the bombings: as the backdrop to Shahid and the group's wake in a harassed woman's suburban dwelling, to protect her from any danger that might come her and her family's way (TBA, 107).

Shahid's final decision to protect Deedee and their life of (perhaps hedonistic) pleasure is a representation of the author's own experience, supported in its likelihood by the comments given to Kamiel and reported above.[64] Athanasiades posits an inverse reading of Moore-Gilbert's own interpretation[65] of the role played by Shahid as representative of a third way of confronting Britain's fracturing communities. The "liberal" alternative is exploited temporarily until a better solution presents itself. I find myself in agreement with the former, as Shahid's final alignment can be more aptly read as an honest redefinition of "belonging defined by cultural diversity rather than cultural (or racial) uniformity,"[66] not a reflection of an unavailable solution whose closest alternative is to be found in Deedee's subtle Orientalism and "absolutist liberalism."[67]

Coming to this conclusion is primarily supported by Kureishi's own reflections on the matter relating to Rushdie's denouncement by the Muslim world at the time the novel is set or, more recently, the firm stance taken against the rising tensions between liberal Western society and Muslim terrorism. Although his writing on cultural friction tied to religion has progressively fizzled out in the last two decades, with the notable exception of *Something to Tell You*, Kureishi remains firm in his and *The Black Album*'s original appraisal of the fundamentalist as a secondary threat to the peaceful coexistence of "White" and "Black" Britain.

Indeed, it is the danger of further isolation caused by terrorist attacks that troubles Kureishi. The inevitable assimilation of fundamentalists with normal, rational Muslims (in particular) and ethnic minorities (in general) could damage international and

[63] See note 50, p. 34.
[64] See note 29, p. 26.
[65] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 147.
[66] A. Athanasiades, 2015 : 66.
[67] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 148.

intercultural relations[68] more than a suicide bombing or stabbing attack (like Westminster's in 2017) ever have the chance to. In summary, Riaz Al-Hussain's cadre of nihilistic ethnocentrists is identifiable as the consequence of segregation and racial abuse. Then, the fundamentalist group's actions feed the racist narrative of the intolerant immigrant, creating a vicious circle of imposed identities that erode at the foundations of a multiethnic Britain. As Kureishi admits, the troubling reality of the birth of white identities aiming to re-inscribe Britain as a white nation could be pivotal in erasing its postcolonial heritage in one singular motion.[69]

However, as previously mentioned, *The Black Album* is neither Kureishi's final interaction with prose writing, nor is it a one-and-done observation on the nature of "New" Islam. Indeed, the short story *My Son the Fanatic* (1995), first published in *The New Yorker* the same year the novel was, functions perfectly as a companion piece to the novel because of its older protagonist. Parvez's role as the narrator's vessel in the short story both retraces some of Kureishi's previous characterization in *The Buddha* and offers a conflict whose nuances are inspired by and expand *The Black Album*'s.

Principally, *My Son the Fanatic* gains much in terms of social commentary thanks to the juxtaposition of Parvez's secularism and lax religiosity to his son's Ali's inversely proportional fervor. A first read of the short story lets the reader uncover the surface-level connections between Parvez and Haroon and, partly, between Karim and Ali. Both paternal figures are accustomed to a representation of themselves that is heavily predicated on a "normalized" or "*à la mode*" lifestyle, while the youth seek redemption from the stifling conditions and abusive social hierarchies in which they were raised since birth. Nonetheless, part of Kureishi's innovation comes from the inversion of realities to which the four subscribe: Parvez pays little to no mind to religion past his strict education in Lahore (SF, 291) whereas Haroon advocates for Eastern mysticism; Karim rejects uncertain faith for connection and success, whereas Ali renegues Western ideals as he comes to terms with his brothers' persecution in Britain.

Furthermore, Ali shares much with Riaz; both are self-assured and draconically austere in their vindication of Islam. Thus, Parvez and Ali's conflict in *My Son the Fanatic* allows for the ideological strongarming put on paper by Kureishi to resonate more deeply

[68] E. Franceschini, March 2017.
[69] E. Franceschini, March 2017.

and completely than Shahid and Riaz's. The latter has to respond to the narrative's necessity for a paternal-like character which Shahid can ideologically oppose, while the literal and figurative spirit of Shahid's deceased father still embodies the binding expectations put upon him academically and as a man, which more aptly resemble Haroon's qualms with his own son.

The short story does not suffer from the partial doubling of the paternal conflict, allowing for Kureishi's critique on both modern Western customs (the "White") and Eastern proselytizing (the "Black"). What is more, the inconsistency between who is in the "right" and who is in the "wrong" plays off Bhabha's "third space" identity politics. This perspective is supported by Abbas Murad Dohan (2023)[70] through his analysis of the short story's protagonist duo's swinging moral compasses and ambivalence. Parvez has a latent dislike of and generally disavows Islam but fashions himself an observant Muslim to please Ali; conversely, Ali's conversion stems, at least partially, from genuine preoccupation for the rampant abuse of his people, but the response he advises eschews from logical protest and falls into blind hatred and the rejection of anything non-Muslim.

Once again, the protagonists' course correction overshoots its intended result. In Parvez's case, he has devolved into quiet homogenization into the hegemonic British culture. In Ali's case, the obtainment of a purer identity impregnable to modern vices, borne by what Shahd Alshammari (2018) describes as an internal "intercultural struggle,"[71] has severed any contact with his social circles. Interestingly, Ali could perhaps be interpreted as a harsher condemnation of the failures of modern institutions due to elements borrowed from Shahid and Farhat[72] (another of Riaz's group). Both characters struggle to maintain an interest in higher education because of the implicit expected adjustment to Western standards. An act the two are terrified of, despite how their actions transmit these preoccupations separately to the reader. As Ali elucidates to his father (FS, 295-6), "'grovelling' to the whites" reinforces the West's convictions of superiority. Moreover, the comparison between Farhat and Ali is further strengthened by their similar choice in field of study, accounting (SF, 295).

[70] A. M. Dohan. "*My Son the Fanatic* into Identity, Culture, and Integration: Third Space Manifestations", in *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*, 5 (11) : 10-11.
[71] S. Alshammari. "Hanif Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic" and the Illusion of 'Pure' Identity", in *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 9 (6) : 57.
[72] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 150.

The mirroring of Ali and his father becomes complete once we consider how Parvez refutes the former's ideology, a passage most important to grasp at how "neither completely resemble nor completely differ" from each other and that "neither [are] a complete English nor a complete Muslim."[73] The conclusion I come to, thanks to Dohan's underlining of the complex hybridity of Kureishi's writing, is that the awareness of such a problem is retroactively applicable to the other father-son dichotomies that are in his novels: Karim and Haroon; Shahid and his late father; Rafi and Jamal, although the perspective chosen in *Something to Tell You* favors the father once again. All four pairs suffer from a repeated breakdown in communication caused and accelerated by the shifting social circumstances their respective narratives are built upon. Furthermore, the youths desire to belong to a group,[74] which their parents cannot but necessarily oppose ideologically, whether it is a sexual (in Karim's case), spiritual (in Shahid and Ali's), or social opposition (in Rafi's case).

The resulting tensions harbored by both men culminate in Parvez's violent aggression of his beloved son, now turned to moralizing watchman. Alshammari describes it best when observing that

> "[t]he difficulty with 'essentialising' one identity is that it imposes restrictions and makes it almost impossible to view things from multiple perspectives and accept other ways of asserting identities."[75]

Fundamentally, that is, Kureishi asks his readers to consider numerous personal and community-centered variables. Variables which have led British ethnic minorities to engage in divisive ideological confrontations on the matter of identity politics, not to mention the method with which they interact with British society. The answer appears to be a critique of the incorrect, "colonial" manifestations adopted by the older generation and the counter-current self-aggrandizing Muslim renaissance of the younger. To that intent, it is through the presence of Bettina, a disenfranchised manifestation of the friendly prostitute, that Kureishi's message seeps through Parvez and Ali's mutual deafness to each other's complaints. Through Bettina, Kureishi asserts that it is by embracing the

[73] A. M. Dohan, 2023 : 12.
[74] U. Ambursley. The Search For Identity in *The Black Album*, 2006 : 18.
[75] S. Alshammari, 2018 : 59.

hardships and struggles of ethnic identity that one can come closer to inner acceptance and the recognition of the "Other" as an equal worthy of recognition.[76]

[76] S. Alshammari, 2018 : 58.

CHAPTER THREE

Introspection and Confronting the Past in *SOMETHING TO TELL YOU*

As mentioned previously, Kureishi's writing ceases to focus primarily on matters of racial inequality and religious fundamentalism following the mixed critical reception to *The Black Album*. However, reflections on these problematic traits of British society remain and in fact inform some of his later work, insofar as they are assimilated into the background in which characters move and act. By the turn of the millennium, in works such as *Love in A Blue Time* (1998) or *Intimacy* (2001), the scope of the narratives shifts to the analysis of the male characters' struggles and quests for partnership – either emotional, familial, or sexual. Kureishi's later male protagonists often come to disregard the opposite sex, if not even non-heteronormative identities.

Simultaneously, the early 2000s are a period of rejuvenated discourse of all types. Kureishi once more touches upon matters of discrimination towards women or, just as he did in *The Buddha*, how progressive movements such as feminism might incur in contradictions. On a purely political scale, Kureishi rejects the principles of Blairism, or rather, he argues that the political concept of Blairism is itself non-existent. He states as such in an interview for *The Guardian*'s Emma Brockes (2003), wherein he is of the express opinion that "Tony Blair doesn't have any ideology."[77] This creative period is marked by an increased autobiographical tinge in his works. Moore-Gilbert is in support of the claims that see in *Intimacy* a "hostile account"[78] of Kureishi's failing relationship with film producer Tracey Scoffield. Creators like *Intimacy*'s Jay come from a comfortable world of commercial and social security, which Moore-Gilbert points to as the sign of a growing introspection, specifically on the dissatisfaction with the work produced following success – echoing Kureishi's own creative and personal crisis at arguably his authorial peak.[79] Furthermore, his paternal love and admiration for his children, twins Sachin and Carlo, creates a shift in perspective: the narrators now become fathers rather than sons.

[77] E. Brockes. "'When you're writing, you look for conflict'.", *The Guardian*.
[78] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 171.
[79] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 152-154.

Notwithstanding public backlash, in my opinion current Kureishi writes from a point of view intrinsically tied to his condition as a man, a father, and a writer in a decade of new values. All characteristics which reappear, as proven above, in his later output, but which I would identify as best represented in *Something to Tell You* (2008). Discounting the novel's protagonist Jamal's (secondary) career as an author, *Something to Tell You* acts as a grand summary of many of the topics touched upon briefly and how its author has been shaped by these experiences. The reader does not need to look for them, as the novel's narrative benefits from numerous intertexts, such as Jamal having reached (relative) fame thanks to a series of books on psychoanalysis; however, he struggles with writer's block during the events of the novel. Moreover, he takes care of his teenaged son Rafi and wants to rekindle the relationship between himself and ex-wife Josephine. Furthermore, Jamal's closest friends, playwright Henry and singer-songwriter Mustaq both struggle with creativity and inspiration like their author, while imitating other of Kureishi's characters: director Pyke and Charlie, respectively. Finally, the women with whom Jamal spends much of his time during the novel struggle themselves with a society that has yet to accept their fight for many of the freedoms gained in the past decades. Jamal's consciousness rationalizes them as objects to be admired and desired by an insatiable thirst for pure sexuality. These themes all coalesce into a narrative designed to portray the immobile sociopolitical landscape of England's new millennium.

However, the novel is also a story about the past and how men and women are unwilling to let go of preconceived ideas, or, in Jamal's case, forgive themselves for deplorable actions. Understandably, *Something to Tell You* confronts Kureishi's own convictions regarding his poetics and politics in literature. To embrace this memorialistic intent, the narrative is split into two timelines in which Jamal moves: the 1970s, during Margaret Thatcher's time as Prime Minister, and the year 2005, during Blair's own tenure. The manner in which the timelines appear is not linear, however; interspersed through the novel are recollections and breaks in the action in the present. Then two time periods often intertwine. Analepsis and prolepsis cannot function on their own in the text because one informs the other; logically, the narrative's memorialistic intent cannot come to fruition if the reader is not allowed to confront and find points of similarity and conflict. Not to mention, much of what happens in the present is a direct consequence of Jamal's past decisions. Besides these considerations, Kureishi's choice to alternate his novel's

setting is practical insofar as it mirrors the ebb and flow of Jamal's therapy sessions. Through this deliberate peculiarity, the novel itself assumes the function of therapy for its own protagonist, while the reader embodies the role of therapist.

One action stands above the rest as the event around which the narration in the present revolves around: Jamal is responsible for his first love Ajita's father's death. He is haunted by remorse and guilt. On one hand, Jamal excuses himself of the crime due to the father's horrid sexual abuse he subjected his daughter to (STY, 163); on the other hand, he is mortified that the death led to his separation from Ajita (STY, 189), who left for her native India soon after. In truth, Jamal's is not the only secret hidden throughout the novel's sprawling cityscape. Indeed, Kureishi's intention to ponder on the nature of secrets and the conditions which allow them to flourish is stated twice in the first few lines of the novel, not unlike what he had done previously in *The Buddha*.[80] Space is given right at the narration's beginning to set the stage and tone of the debates to come, a trait which further reprises *The Black Album*'s verbal set-pieces. Much of Kureishi's recent writing, as identified by Moore-Gilbert,[81] is centered around dissatisfaction, sexuality and class struggle, like in *Something to Tell You*'s case. Jamal is a psychoanalyst thoroughly interested in the nature of the human psyche and how his patients rationalize coping mechanisms and idiosyncrasies; thusly he states:

> "Secrets are my currency: I deal in them for a living. The secrets of desire, of what people really want, and of what they fear the most. […] Why are pleasure and punishment closely related? How do our bodies speak? Why do we make ourselves ill? Why do you want to fail? Why is pleasure hard to bear?" (STY, 3).

These rhetorical questions Jamal-Kureishi poses to the reader cannot be satisfyingly answered because of the innumerable reasons anyone could give. Moreover, Jamal himself tries to give some justification perhaps unconsciously, by virtue of his inaction in the time intercurred from the crime: he refuses to confess. Regardless of his duty to listen to what his patients cannot bear anyone else to know, Jamal hypocritically disregards his own modus operandi as a psychoanalyst and wallows in the memory of the crime, pitiless and cowardly in his self-hatred. That is not all, as the hypocrisy from

[80] See p. 18.
[81] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 180.

Jamal's part extends well beyond simply the psychological and touches upon discourses already referenced above. Like in *The Buddha* and *The Black Album*, the reader can encounter debates on, for example, Jamal's underlying jealousy of his son's youthful athleticism and attractiveness (STY, 256, 325-326), or the insistent need for physical connection, expressed by his constant libidinous fantasies (STY, 336). The latter point frustrates Jamal immensely, to the degree that he blames his own son for having him "give up [his] sexuality" (STY, 442), something even now threatening to bar him from its pleasures.

From what can be garnered, *Something to Tell You* emerges from Kureishi's later *oeuvre* thanks to the sheer number of subtexts and critiques that are concentrated into its length of slightly over five-hundred pages. It is quite a shame, then, that literary critique has continued to relegate *Something to Tell You* to the status of minor novel since its publication, compared to Kureishi's classics or more recent work of profound introspection such as *The Body* (2003) or previously mentioned *Intimacy*. Furthermore, almost twenty years after its publication, *Something to Tell You* lacks a thorough critical analysis – for that matter, little critical interest in general has been directed towards it at all. However, the novel serves the purpose of exploring another of Kureishi's eternal interests: conflict, either interpersonal or intimately personal. If conflict in the previous two novels and short story was innately based on ethnic exclusion and the perpetration of harmful colonial discourses, *Something to Tell You* searches for "the bits that are difficult" but exiting nonetheless, given that they allow for windows into one's soul and psyche.[82] That is to say, the more controversial and, in Ajita's father's case, abominable to explore, the more profound and insightful the writing can be. It is because of the willingness to explore such topics that the novel should, in my opinion, be reevaluated for its merits, rather than faults. Kureishi himself opens, in a dialogue between his past and present as a writer, a window into the life of a man, a father, and an author whose life's prime is gone from them.

The recurrent issue with the novel, as per both professional and public reviews, is that its premise, set up extensively by Kureishi through Jamal's actions and discussions with his peers, stumbles at the final hurdle. That is to say, as Adam Mars-Jones (2008) concisely puts it in his review for *The Guardian*, the tragic events that lead Jamal to lose

[82] E. Brockes, November 2003.

Ajita for much of his life "don't quite live up to their billing in the novel," and "the plot runs out of steam towards the end of the book," even if, he concedes, the narration's slowing pace is a deliberate choice from Kureishi.[83] However, although I agree that Kureishi could have written a better conclusion – or at least, a more satisfying one than what is in the novel –, I am of the opinion that the crime is not itself the focal point of the narration, but rather the mental toll of keeping the secret in the first place. Mars-Jones[84] proves, in part, my argument, as the cathartic excretion immediately after confiding in his psychoanalyst, doctor Tahir, shows the condition in which Jamal has led himself in mind and body by trying to ignore the guilt that had been growing the more he refused to confront it (STY, 93-103). Jamal's devotion and respect for Tahir leads him to pursue a career as a psychoanalyst, so much so that he turns into the understanding father figure Jamal had never had.

Confronting oneself is an equally relevant and recurrent theme throughout the novel, as the people Jamal interacts with are looking for an escape too, a way to change and rid themselves of some aspects they despise; conversely, the discourse on change and confronting one's dissatisfaction can also affect the subject positively. While the never-ending guilt tormenting him is undoubtedly the novel's major focus, Jamal spends much of the novel comparing himself as a paternal figure to his own father's disappointing and absent role in the family. Additionally, later on in the book he reaches a depressed, melancholic conviction as he states:

"[M]y generation had begun to die. One by one we'd be picked off: illness, and then death. More funerals than weddings" (STY, 493).

This affirmation describes the overall fascination that each character has in *Something to Tell You* with change: a deep-rooted fear of growing old and frail. Compared to their bodies' spryness and fitness in their youth, pleasure is now denied in their middle-age. Such a condition frightens characters such as Karen, Jamal's second lover, for example, who admits immediately in her first discussion in the novel with Jamal that she misses "being in love, or being loved" (STY, 253). Karen despairs for her physical and

[83] A. Mars-Jones. "True tales from the couch", *The Guardian*.
[84] A. Mars-Jones, February 2008.

sexual worthlessness once she discovers her ex-husband's new, younger partner has become pregnant with his child (STY, 344-346), compounded later by a cancer diagnosis, which definitively shatters her sense of femininity. To paraphrase Moore-Gilbert's considerations on *Sleep With Me* (1999), each and every personal relationship in *Something to Tell You* is

"intertwined with broader cultural/political issues, insofar as memories of the radicalism and experimental lifestyles of student days initiate a critique of the 'realism' and routine of middle age – and vice versa."[85]

In Jamal's case, the frustrations borne of his body's aging are correlated to his crime. Sexuality, while still an immense force in Jamal's life, is forever tainted by the certainty that it was his need that caused him to bear the cross of murderer, even if Ajita's father had been a sickening man. Jamal's libido is so overpowering that not only does he frequent a sex worker only known as "the Goddess" regularly, but he also associates his profession to a transaction: in exchange for payment, both he and his mistress engage in a business of "intimacy with strangers" (STY, 413), meant to be an outlet for stress. Indeed, Jamal's sexuality remains latent and confined to either his thoughts or the occasional service from the Goddess. It is only once his friend Henry voices a strong discontent with his current predicament, and a desire to experience once more, that Jamal's sexuality resurfaces, together with his memories of Ajita.

Henry is another stand-in for Kureishi's autobiographical tendencies in the novel. An acclaimed playwright, Henry Richardson laments the disappearance of excitement from his life and the vacuous habits that accompany it (STY, 6). He desires and chases after an "excess of [love and desire]" (STY, 7) – sexual in nature – to avoid falling into life's lull, following schedules and routines. Furthermore, Henry represents his author's search for the "fringe", for the expressiveness of humanity found away from the public eye, while disparaging Labour's own failing ideology and political ethos. However, Henry, as a character, additionally functions as a narrative device through which Kureishi can repropose and perhaps subvert a number of his writing's recurring clichés, namely the opposition between father and son, and the correlation between rejecting the *status*

[85] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 180.

quo and presenting a new countercultural movement. Both aspects are tied to Henry's primary objective throughout the novel: sexual and ideological liberation. He fills the role of characters such as *The Buddha*'s Haroon and Anwar, of the absent yet domineering father to his children Sam and Lisa They are further estranged by Henry's return to active sexual life, incapable of fathoming such a change. The former is quite distant from his father, and unbeknownst to him, is the recipient of Henry's jeering remarks, who accuses his son of taunting him by bringing his attractive fiancé – quite insensibly nicknamed "the mule woman" by Jamal – with him to London; the latter, Lisa, is partly a reinvention of *The Buddha*'s Jamila or *Borderline*'s Yasmin: a socially-active young woman of strong and unflinching anti-racist and progressive political activism, whose parents' accumulated wealth in the face of growing disparities disgusts her. Regarding the novel's often mentioned background of rising tensions due to Blair's involvement in the Iraq War, Lisa adopts an eye-for-an-eye approach to the controversy, opposed to her father's stentorian but innocuous condemnation. She justifies the promise of terrorist violence in England as rightful reparation for the Empire's colonization. In her own threatening words, blinded by fervor and staggeringly reactionary convictions:

> "Why doesn't [Henry] actually support the insurgents in Iraq, and the bombers and resisters around the world? Why doesn't [Henry] accept the idea of the struggle moving to Britain? […] Blair has brought retribution on himself and on us" (STY, 440-441).

Admittedly, Lisa is perhaps the only character who challenges Jamal's psychoanalysis, accusing his work of being no more than therapy for vain celebrities. Her critique does, however, ring hollow the moment she visits Jamal for her own therapy sessions; although her initial motivation is to disprove its effectiveness, Jamal's therapy manages to let him ingratiate himself to Lisa as a confidant of sorts. He substitutes the missing parental figures in her life but culminating in an admittedly manipulatory resolution. After dissuading her from selling a precious Ingres, Lisa is moved to sympathy by Jamal's tear-jerking reflections on his enfeebling bond with his son, and lets her admiration for him lead her to a moment of intimacy with Jamal, which he considers "recompense" enough for having troubled him with the retrieval of the painting and for having him dirty his new shoes to reach her shack (STY, 441-444).

Henry in part reflects and opposes Jamal insofar as he twists the influence of Chekhov and Dostoevsky on Jamal and the novel itself. Anton Chekhov is amongst Kureishi's literary influences, together with Rudyard Kipling's colonial narratives.[86] So much so that Jamal outright names his uncle's four daughters – met in Pakistan – "the Raj Quartet," "dog-eyed beauties" (STY, 194) fallen prey to Jamal's sexualizing, Orientalist gaze. As for Chekhov, Moore-Gilbert dedicates part of his analysis on *Sleep With Me* to the interconnectedness of some of its actants with characters from Chekhov's *oeuvre*.[87] Of particular interest to *Something to Tell You* are the novels cited by Moore-Gilbert, such as *Ivanov* (1887) or *Uncle Vanya* (1897), and those directly referenced by Jamal in the book's pages: he compares himself to *Crime and Punishment*'s (1866) murderer-protagonist Raskolnikov. Jointly with frequent references to Freud or Lacan, among other exponents of intellectual culture, these passages are a contradictory, but thoroughly human representation of a man torn between the appreciation for humanity's intelligence, and the fulfilment of base desires.

Conversely, at his core, and by self-admission, Henry despises "'official' culture". However, one need not go far to demonstrate his hypocrisy: for example, Henry's surly remarks on the ignorance plaguing England (STY, 10) echo quite aptly *Ivanov*'s Shabyelsky's complaints of his peers' "so low and small-minded and dull-witted" minds – an homage to Chekhov which Moore-Gilbert finds present in others of Kureishi's writings.[88] Such hypocrisy is further compounded by the knowledge that Henry goes to great lengths to keep contact with his affluent acquaintances, quoting "official," mainstream authors such as Ibsen (STY, 9), or planning an adaptation of *Don Giovanni* due to it being "too puritanical" for his liking (STY, 415), instead of brainstorming a completely original piece.

Mainstream and pop culture occupy long passages in the novel, and are concentrated into Mustaq, Ajita's younger brother, a successful singer-songwriter who clearly borrows part of his characterization from Charlie. The latter appears together with Karim as one of the guests invited to Mustaq's party (STY, 280, 318-320). "Part Two" (STY, 249-388) of *Something to Tell You* is partly interested in describing the effects and results of popular culture on the creative spirit. In place of an ordinary meeting between

[86] See note 24, p. 23.
[87] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 181-185.
[88] B. Moore-Gilbert, 2001 : 182.

peers, Mustaq's party at his magnificent villa, a kitsch recreation of Victorian mansions, is a debaucherous celebration of wealth, drug use, and sexuality. The building acts as a reminder of Ajita and Mustaq's youth in London, a stereotypical gilded cage like their father's house. Its garden is scattered with grotesque statues created by Mustaq's partner, Alan, that realistically lack any artistic subtext. It could be argued, then, that Alan's illness, like Karen's cancer, is a literary device employed by Kureishi to strongly imply the corrupting, rotting effects of his contemporary culture, devoid of passion, thought or meritocracy. Mustaq's story is similar to Charlie: in addition to the exact same career choice, Mustaq found in music and Seventies' eccentricity an outlet for his repressed homosexuality and feelings: he is finally seen as desirable and respected. However, his recognition is costly, as he adopts a pseudonym to obscure his Indian roots. Moreover, Mustaq is deeply tied to the memory of his father, with whom he had a troubled, but intimate bond: to that end, he slowly assumes some of his father's traits (STY, 465-466), particularly his overprotectiveness towards Ajita, afraid that she might suffer again from the memory of her father's death.

Ajita is the victim of masculinity and gender roles, of the patriarchal community to which she is tied to by blood: she, too, like Jamila, suffers under her father's yoke, her mother relegated to the role as caretaker of the house and the children. Certainly, her father's inexcusable actions render such a comparison quasi-trivial; however, it is important to note that, like Jamila, Ajita partially overcomes her family and her past, something which Jamal never could or does by the end of the novel. Ajita reappears at Mustaq's. She is more mature, is married to an American businessman and is a mother of two: even her voice has been "colonized" by her home abroad, having lost her distinctive accent – mirroring Karim's resolution to lose his own.[89] By the end of the novel, she resolves to divorce her husband, having "done [her] duty" (STY, 463) by raising their children, an action Jamal asks her to reconsider. By attempting to constrain his old love to the role of matriarch through Jamal, Kureishi associates Ajita to Josephine, Jamal's divorced wife, proposing once again those clichés of motherhood as outdated, chauvinistic burdens carried up-to-now by women. By reconquering her life and agency little by little, Ajita becomes the single character in the entirety of *Something to Tell You*

[89] See p. 27.

who overcomes her past and moves towards the future, flawed, as she never truly stops blaming herself for her father's actions, but freer, nonetheless.

In turn, Jamal suffers one final defeat at the hands of his past. Said defeat comes to fruition because of his long-kept secret. Wolf, a friend who suggested the attack on Ajita's father (STY, 182-183) that led to his death, returns after years of absence. He threatens Jamal by promising to reveal their secret if the latter does not repay the former for the life he lost. Wolf transforms himself into a physical manifestation and reminder of Jamal's crime. Eventually, Wolf enters a relationship with Ajita: now he imposes his selfish and egocentric love over her, when once it had been Jamal doing so, in an equally selfish and futile attempt to cancel the apparent mark left by her father on her body (STY, 167). Although Wolf's sudden death shortly after gives Jamal hope that his secret was not revealed, that is not the case; however, Ajita does not blame Jamal, rather herself for not having done anything about the abuse; moreover, she chooses not to tell Mustaq. Thusly, the principal conflict that has led the narrative until the conclusion ends abruptly, "there will be no resolution" (STY, 501). Finally, Ajita can untie the knots which have kept her in the past and move on, tired of having been lorded over by the three men of her life: her father, her brother, and her first love. The destruction of his frail world, built on a lie, leaves Jamal unsettled and uncertain, but his predicament now can allow him to find peace eventually, like Ajita has:

"I am no longer young, and yet not old. I have reached the age of wondering how I will live, and what I will do, with my remaining time and desire. […] I am not, I feel certain, finished with love […], nor it with me" (STY, 520).

CONCLUSION

Having thoroughly discussed several of his most accomplished novels and short stories, Hanif Kureishi's fiction can be surmised to be an effective presentation and representation of the conflicting aspects of English society: the rough, troubled history of its ethnic communities – of colonial memory – and the struggle to retain a distinct identity that shies away from harmful stereotypes. Furthermore, the relationship between parent and child – presented from both points of view – acts as an ever-present and fundamental aspect of his *oeuvre*. By following in a chronological manner Kureishi's evolution as a writer, two principal details cannot be ignored: the concurrent definition of a series of traits tied to narrative and characterization, which frequently reappear – slightly changed – in Kureishi's fiction, and a constant desire to exhaust whatever avenue of political, social or religious thought that inspires him.

Such reiterations demonstrate, as mentioned above, an undeniable cyclicality to both the use of certain character "types" and of a particular manner in which they articulate their author's conclusions. Firstly, as I have illustrated in the previous chapters, the return of several of such character "types" is effective insofar as they allow the reader to gain further understanding of several aspects which might have gone unnoticed in previous books; that is to say, not once do these "types" represent a sterile re-adaptation, be they a young man in search of an identity which they can feel accepted in (like Charlie Kay in *The Buddha* or Chad in *The Black Album*), or a woman navigating through a society which has yet to accept their independence from tradition (like Jamila in *The Buddha* or Lisa in *Something to Tell You*). Secondly, the novels and short story which have been the subject of my thesis are structured around a central topic of interest to Kureishi, although it would be disingenuous to assert that each is absolutely unique in its discussion of a certain topic. Rather, while issues such as the fetishization of identity, described by Brahim El Fida (2023) as the compelling need to embody "native" concepts,[90] consistently reappear in all works considered in my thesis, they assume major or minor importance in relation to other *topoi* investigated by Kureishi. For example,

[90] B. El Fida. "Criticism of Identity Fetishism in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*", in *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities*, 3 (4) : 189.

Donald Weber's (1997) critical article on the nature of *The Black Album* highlights the worrisome appeal of fundamentalist ideologies espoused by Muslim communities, by taking into consideration the question of belonging, Kureishi's "comic-ironic disposition" of its discussion, and the postmodern manner in which the self is idealized.[91] To summarize, neither are any of these topics limited to a single, representative narrative, nor are they incomplete, clichéd, or uninspiring.

In conclusion, the staggering amount of interconnectedness of Hanif Kureishi's fiction and the reiteration of themes, narrative devices, and/or characterization are – in my opinion – tangible proof of his expert literary craft. They testify to his fiction's genuineness as literary works interested in worthwhile, if complex, questions. Such questions range from debates on identity, to ones on harmful stereotypes, presented by "white" and "ethnic" individuals alike. Furthermore, reflections on the validity of the creative enterprise of writing can also be mentioned, as Kureishi describes the growing discontent with the present when compared with his youth. As a whole, Kureishi's fiction is a (post)modernist body which is, without question, one of the most compact and varied in contemporary English literature's history.

[91] D. Weber. 1997. "'No Secrets Were Safe from Me': Situating Hanif Kureishi", in *The Massachusetts Review*, 38 (1) : 125-126.

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SUMMARY

Hanif Kureishi è riconosciuto ancor oggi da critica e pubblico come uno dei più apprezzati autori della letteratura inglese di eredità postcoloniale. Stimato autore in un primo momento di opere teatrali provocanti ed al contempo di grande interesse sociale e, in seguito, di romanzi come *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), pubblicato in Italia con il titolo *Il Budda delle periferie*, il suo stile coglie ispirazione dalla corrente del postmodernismo letterario contemporaneo. Ripercorrendo le strade della sua natia Londra, Kureishi indaga l'animo dei protagonisti delle sue opere e di coloro che li attorniano con arguzia e ironia, smascherando l'ipocrisia della società inglese, ancora eccessivamente segnata da correnti di pensiero colonialista e razzista del secolo passato.

In questo contesto, propongo di considerare le opere di Hanif Kureishi da una prospettiva sovente ignorata o considerata in maniera insoddisfacente dalle opere critiche ad essi dedicate. Difatti, la narrativa di Kureishi presenta notevoli spunti di discussione riguardo alla ripetitività, o sarebbe meglio dire, la ricorrenza di due determinati aspetti della sua scrittura. Questi sono l'esposizione di tematiche di ampio respiro, come la ricerca di un'identità in cui riconoscersi, e il ripresentarsi di caratterizzazioni dei propri personaggi funzionali alla trasmissione al lettore di un pensiero o un ideale specifico, entrambi caratteri irrimediabilmente legati alle prospettive sociopolitiche, sociali e religiose nella Londra multietnica degli anni Settanta e dei primi anni Duemila.

La prima opera in prosa di Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, riflette appieno le indecisioni interiori del proprio protagonista, Karim Amir. Nonostante si consideri "inglese" di nascita come di cultura, le sue esperienze nella Londra sfrontata e sfrenata degli anni Settanta causano una serie di crisi interiori relative alla propria identità, provocando nel giovane una forte alienazione nei confronti di famiglia e amici. Egli è insidiato dal padre severo e maschilista Haroon, il "Budda" del titolo, che si ritaglia una sorta di popolarità, impersonando un santone di chiare rimembranze esotiste di matrice coloniale. L'esotismo, il fascino verso l'Oriente e il corpo "orientale", pervade il romanzo ed è anch'esso motivo di conflitto per Karim, le cui relazioni amorose sono soggette senza eccezioni a tale vizio, anzi pregiudizio razzista. Ciò detto, Kureishi è accorto nel rappresentare gli errori propri delle comunità minoritarie inglesi, in particolare quella

asiatica, troppo accogliente e rapida nel diffondere stereotipi. È il caso di Karim che, pur di ottenere un ruolo di spicco in una produzione teatrale, poi rivelatosi tutt'altra cosa, adotta maniere e caratteristiche dei propri conoscenti, trasformandosi in un cliché razzista. *The Buddha of Suburbia* è, però, anche un romanzo sulle lacune dello spirito progressista sbocciato a seguito della rivoluzione culturale del decennio precedente; Karim, infatti, soffre dell'oggettificazione della classe borghese londinese agiata nei suoi confronti, la quale, apparentemente, sposa principi vicini alle sinistre politiche, ma che spesso finisce col riproporre i pregiudizi dai quali padre e figlio, Haroon e Karim, provano a sfuggire allontanandosi dai sobborghi in cui hanno sempre vissuto. La figura femminile emancipata è possibilmente l'unica a sopravvivere e a resistere nella confusione sociale che precede l'elezione di Margaret Thatcher a Primo Ministro del Regno Unito; in un rapporto invertito, all'aumentare delle libertà e al ribellarsi dalle costrizioni imposte loro dal tradizionalismo, le donne con cui Karim interagisce sopraffanno l'uomo, ripetutamente ridotto, come nel caso del suo amico intimo Changez, a fare da balia ai figli o a marito passivo.

La discriminazione e l'agognata indipendenza della donna, legate idealmente alle stesse problematiche sociali riscontrate da Karim in *The Buddha*, ricorrono in *The Black Album* (1995) e nel suo protagonista Shahid. Laddove il primo patisce la propria incapacità di accettare sé stesso poiché plagiato nelle proprie idee da stereotipi e aspettative verso un certo comportamento, il secondo è posto davanti ad un bivio ideologico che provoca una crisi di identità. Da un lato vi è Deedee Osgood, professoressa presso l'università frequentata da Shahid, la quale conduce una vita libera da qualsivoglia obbligo dovuto al proprio lavoro, alla propria vita o alla propria sessualità, tuttavia colpevole di un'attrazione per Shahid ugualmente dettata, come nel caso di Karim, dalla diversità dello studente rispetto allo "standard" dell'uomo inglese. Dall'altro lato, Shahid stabilisce un legame di forte appartenenza con il gruppo fondamentalista di matrice islamica estremista di Riaz Al-Hussain, tra i cui membri spicca Chad, che, come Charlie, amico e primo amore di Karim, cerca di definire una visione di sé che rappresenti soddisfacentemente i propri sentimenti nei confronti della comunità musulmana, rispetto al "nemico" inglese. *The Black Album* deriva gran parte delle sue riflessioni sulla minaccia incombente dell'intolleranza – tanto islamica quanto europea – nei confronti di comunità percepite come una minaccia per il mantenimento di uno *status quo* favorevole;

dopotutto, il romanzo si ispira e fa riferimento in maniera obliqua alla fatwah indetta dallo ayatollah iraniano nei confronti di Salman Rushdie, il cui libro viene bruciato dal collettivo di Riaz per protesta contro le critiche rivolte all'Islam. Shahid, posto tra le due correnti di pensiero, pare incarnare una strada alternativa, sebbene nebulosa ed indefinita, la quale rigetta la rigorosità e l'odio fondamentalista, accettando di vivere in una società più liberale e progressista (rappresentata da Deedee), ma rifiutando qualsiasi tentativo di strumentalizzazione del corpo "nero" per favorire un programma politico o ideologico.

A quanto detto si aggiunge anche il dibattito contenuto nel racconto breve *My Son the Fanatic* (1995), pubblicato lo stesso anno di *The Black Album*, in cui Kureishi delinea le rotture che vanno formandosi tra la generazione adulta, giunta dalle colonie nel Regno Unito in cerca di lavoro e fortuna, e quella giovane, che risponde con uguale astio nei confronti del razzismo ad essa diretto. Rispetto al romanzo, il racconto aggiunge una prospettiva in esso assente, ossia quella generazionale, che si concentra sulle incomprensioni nate da due ideologie opposte: il secolarismo del genitore e il tradizionalismo del figlio. Parvez prova a comprendere le ragioni che hanno portato l'amato figlio Ali ad abbracciare tale pensiero; sfortunatamente, l'unica maniera con cui egli riesce a razionalizzare la separazione tra i due è la violenza. In tal modo, Kureishi dimostra come entrambe le parti siano in errore, poiché nessuno è desideroso di dialogare per giungere a una soluzione, per quanto improbabile essa sia oramai.

Infine, con *Something to Tell You* (2008) Kureishi propone una riflessione sulla propria carriera, dimostrando una grande capacità di introspezione ed autovalutazione. Attraverso Jamal Khan, psicanalista di mezza età, Kureishi lamenta la "normalità" e l'immobilità giunta con il passare del tempo, oltre che le difficoltà come uomo nell'accettare la perdita di attraenza sessuale, la soppressione della propria sessualità a favore della cura dei figli e la perdita di creatività o ispirazione letteraria. Jamal e i suoi amici Henry e Mustaq, tutti creativi di qualche tipo (autore, drammaturgo e cantautore rispettivamente), tentano di combattere la noiosità delle loro vite. Tuttavia, *Something to Tell You* si sofferma su come il nascondere segreti metta in crisi le relazioni che si hanno con gli altri. Jamal è responsabile della morte del padre di Ajita, la sua prima amante, il quale abusava di lei. I rimorsi che lo attanagliano lo portano a specializzarsi negli studi di psicanalisi; ciononostante, egli è restio ad ammettere la propria colpevolezza ogniqualvolta si presenti l'opportunità di confessare la propria responsabilità per il

decesso dell'uomo. Come Kureishi spiega tramite la voce di Jamal, uno dei punti più importanti di indagine del romanzo sono le modalità attraverso le quali noi dialoghiamo con il nostro "sé" e mascheriamo responsabilità e traumi: in tal modo lo scrittore affronta nuovamente la questione dell'identità non accettata.

In conclusione, Hanif Kureishi, attraverso una scrittura sagace e professionale, descrive attentamente il disagio e la sua narrativa è una testimonianza costante di tali problematiche. Accostando giovani uomini e donne in cerca di una stabilità sociale, emotiva e relazionale nella società inglese della seconda metà del ventesimo secolo e oltre, Kureishi riscontra non solo contraddizioni imprescindibili, sia nella comunità formata da immigrati dalle colonie che nella comunità inglese "bianca", ma anche come il dialogo fra l'una e l'altra sia in certi casi complicato e come, spesso, la seconda imponga le proprie concezioni di alterità e differenza sulla prima. Da ciò risulta una narrativa ampiamente interessante e dalla forte unicità nel *continuum* letterario inglese (post)moderno, le cui domande incontrano risposte altrettanto complicate, la riflessione sulle quali stimola il lettore a riconoscere la profondità autoriale della prosa di Kureishi.