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FICTIONALIZING THE PAST:
THE DOSTOEVSKIAN UNDERGROUND MEN OF
ELLISON AND RUSHDIE

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of the underground man has intrigued writers throughout the centuries, but three writers seem to truly define the situations that produce such a figure. Those writers are Fyodor Dostoevsky in Notes From Underground, Ralph Ellison in Invisible Man, and Salman Rushdie in Midnight's Children. These three writers recognize that in societies that experience extreme acculturation, contradictions within the self occur that one can hardly begin to resolve. This sense of conflict can cause one to take refuge in the underground. Thus, Fyodor Dostoyevsky recognizes the underground man to be a necessary product of the culture of eastern and western contradictions of Russia in the mid-nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, Ralph Ellison and Salman Rushdie recognize similar conditions in their societies and began to formulate similar ideas about the way people deal with culture clashes. What Ellison and Rushdie were each able to create, however, was a structure similar to Dostoevsky's but more advanced, for they were able to recognize a possible way out of the predicament of the underground through memory.

Why begin with Dostoevsky if the underground is a subject that spans centuries? Dostoevsky's Notes From Underground was a revolutionary novel both in Dostoevsky's own career and in the history of literature. Although the majority of Dostoevsky's contemporaries did not grasp the significance of Notes From Underground at its time of publication, many scholars mark it as a turning point for Dostoevsky. Joseph Frank describes it as Dostoevsky's "first great creation"¹ after his years in a Siberian prison and "the prelude to the great period in which Dostoevsky's talent finally came to maturity; and there is no question that with it he attains a new artistic level."² Dostoevsky's criticism of idealism and reason is encountered "for

the first time, and moreover in the greatest detail, in Notes From Underground," states critic Vasily Romanov.³ When Bakhtin discusses Dostoevsky's works, he moves from The Double directly to Notes From Underground "passing over a whole series of intervening works,"⁴ showing that Bakhtin believes it to be a new movement in Dostoevsky's career after a number of works that he did not feel required comment. It is obvious that scholars find Notes From Underground to be a pivotal work in the career of Dostoevsky.

However, it is even more evident that critics believe Notes From Underground to be not only a turning point in Dostoevsky's work, but in novelistic history as a whole as well. Joseph Frank notes, "Few works in modern literature are more widely read than Dostoevsky's Notes From Underground or so often cited as a key text revelatory of the hidden depths of the sensibility of our time."⁵ Indeed, such diverse modern schools of thought as Existentialism, Freudianism, Expressionism, and Surrealism claim Dostoevsky as an ancestor. The narrator of the novel is seen to represent many varied roles in society, from the neglected soul to the self-punishing liar to the obstinate pessimist. Each school selects the particulars of one section of Notes From Underground to prove its lineage from Dostoevsky's underground man.

However, though many critics find Dostoevsky's Notes From Underground to be a turning point in literature, few of them speculate on why it is that Dostoevsky created such a revolutionary character. What might he be saying about Russia and the Russian people that he saw around him?

Joseph Frank begins to give us an answer. "The underground man *must* exist as a type because he is the inevitable product of such a cultural formation; and his character does in fact reflect two phases of this historical evolution."⁶ Frank explains that because of Peter the

Great's influence on Russia which stretched well into the nineteenth century, the underground man *must* exist. The confusion of the Romantic notion of an ideal society in the 1840's and the Russian nationalism prevalent in the 1860's clashed in the underground man to produce a confused, contradictory and ambivalent character. Frank suggests that after his imprisonment in Siberia, Dostoevsky must have felt liberated to express, through the underground man, his resentment toward these supposedly advanced ideas of Russian radicals at that time.

Dostoevsky himself gives us further clues to his inspiration, both in his footnote to Notes From Underground and in an essay he wrote on Pushkin, that reveal the idea he had when he created the underground man. The footnote reads:

Both the author of these notes and the Notes are fictitious, of course.

Nevertheless, people like the author of these notes not only may, but actually must exist in our society, considering the circumstances under which our society was formed. I wanted to bring before the public with more prominence than usual one of the characters of the recent past. He's a representation of the current generation. In the entitled "Underground" this person introduced himself and his views, and, as it were, wants to explain the reason why he appeared and why he has to appear in our midst.

The following excerpt contains the actual notes of this person about several events in his life.⁷

Thus, Dostoevsky removes himself from the responsibility of authorship. Although many readers misread the Notes, believing that Dostoevsky's actual intention was to express his personal views

in the novel, Notes is intentionally a satire of exactly what can happen to a man who lives among such contradictions and cannot reconcile them.

Dostoevsky continues by saying that the author of the notes must exist due to the circumstances he is faced with. Why must he exist? What circumstances? In an essay on Pushkin, Dostoevsky states his understanding of the situation. Russia, faced with Europeanization from Peter the Great, embraced European culture. Because of this assimilation, Russians lost their sense of national identity.⁸ The underground man rebels against the idealism of the European romantics as well. Such themes as the sublime and beautiful arise again and again as ideas the underground man wants to stick his tongue out at. This sense of loss is reflected in the underground man, who after understanding that it is another man's logic and culture that overwhelm his society, feels he must rebel against it. For this reason, he will not agree with anyone; he will not oblige anyone; he will not conform in any way. At the same time, the underground man is so full of his own version of the same idealism that he dreams of everything beautiful and sublime -- even himself as beautiful and sublime. He imagines a world where he may stick out his tongue at palaces without fear. But the underground man knows that such idealism paired with rebellion against it is full of contradictions and cannot figure out how to avoid it. He sees the world as a confining place, where people want him to believe two times two is four, but at the same time as a place of liberation where we can all continue trying to disprove that same equation. As Geoffrey Kabat states in Ideology and Imagination, "In all of his writings, Dostoevsky is attempting to reconcile the oppositions of the Petersburg period and thereby to mediate between the chaotic present and harmonious future, to establish continuity, at least in thought, between what appear as radically discontinuous states."⁹ Because of the

underground man's living in Russia when Russian and European cultures meet, his hope for an ideal world clashes with his hatred for idealism, leaving him confused and even deranged. Dostoevsky's hope is to move from this state of confusion to a state of harmony.

How does Dostoevsky propose to produce this harmony? He begins to give the reader glimpses of it in Part II of Notes, when the underground man seems to recognize in himself a need for fellowship in "Apropos of the Wet Snow." He begs to have dinner with his old school enemies. He allows Liza, the prostitute, into his home and into his heart. Unfortunately, Underground Man is so jaded that he ruins every chance he has to make friends and join in social activities. He inevitably insults the people he is with -- whether it be his lowly servant Appollon or the woman he wishes to impress, Liza. The inability to resolve the conflicts within himself presented in Part I extend into Part II to impede any opportunity the underground man has of creating bonds with his fellow man. At the end of his notes, the underground man is left alone; even Appollon has left him -- with no one even to write to any longer. Without any remorse, he ends up hating man and himself.

But this is not Dostoevsky's solution. It is just the opposite -- Dostoevsky shows us that a hatred of man is an inevitable reality for some men, but not the option the Russian man should choose to take. Instead, in his essay on Pushkin, Dostoevsky suggests that the Russian man should strive for brotherhood among his fellow Russians and finally among all men. "To become a genuine and all-around Russian means, perhaps (and this you should remember), to become brother of all men, *a universal man*, if you please."¹⁰ From a fellowship with all Russians, the Russian should spread his humanitarianism to all men throughout Europe, spreading the word of God. This is a theme which Dostoevsky expands in his later novels, but

which is introduced in Notes From Underground. The underground man is a man who has been influenced by the contradictions produced by the Europeanism which permeated Russian society in 1860. However, through his actions, the reader can see that the underground man becomes a sympathetic character only when he begins to accept people into his life. His humanity is his greatest downfall in his own eyes, but for the reader who understands that Notes is a satire, it is obvious that Dostoevsky intended the underground man's humanity to be his most sympathetic trait. That results from Dostoevsky's belief that it is the destiny and imperative of the Russian man to achieve world fellowship and brotherhood.

The underground man's downfall, though, is his inauthentic desire for brotherhood. The underground man does not wish to join in fellowship with Russians because he has love and faith in his heart, so much as he wishes to be a hero. "I suddenly became a hero. . . . It's hard to describe now what my dreams consisted of then, and how I could've been so satisfied with them, but I was. Besides, even now I can take pride in them at certain times."¹¹ The reason Dostoevsky allows such a character to be confused and hated at the end of the novel is that he recognizes in Russian society the non-genuine attempt at brotherhood. In the idealism presented by the romantic Chernychevsky and embodied in the Crystal Palace, the underground man fights against people who would love one another for their own sake, out of self-centeredness. At the same time, the underground man is unable to see the same self-centeredness in himself. He does not go out to embrace humanity for humanity's sake; instead, he does it so he will seem a hero. Thus, Dostoevsky presents a character who contradicts himself because he has not been able to reconcile the hatred he has for the ideals he has been programmed to believe in. The

underground man is a way for Dostoevsky to present all the ills evident in Russian society and the way that society produces people who are selfish and contradictory.

Thus, Notes From Underground is a turning point not only for literature but for Russian culture as well. James Billington notes in The Icon and the Axe, "The unique importance of Dostoevsky for Russian cultural history . . . lay in his attempt to uncover some new positive answer for humanity in the depth of Russian popular experience."¹² Though his style may be innovative and inspirational for writers to follow, one of Dostoevsky's main accomplishments was his ability to effectively satirize the state of an ambivalent man, and through him, an ambivalent nation. He showed, through the underground man, the contradictions prevalent in Russian society in the 1840's to 60's. His ability to expose such inconsistencies marked a turning point in literary history as well as in Russian intellectual history.

DOSTOEVSKY'S UNDERGROUND AND 20TH CENTURY UNDERGROUND MEN

“The predicament of the underground man and the problems and ideas he touches upon are all human and universal; they transcend societies and time periods. One only has to look around to find numerous glaring examples in our own century.”¹³

Much like Dostoevsky, some writers of the twentieth century saw themselves as trapped in a culture that was not their own and desired a change. Because of the after-effects of institutions such as slavery, colonialism and forced exile that have plagued the twentieth century, many cultures have felt lost in the culture of others. Much like Dostoevsky, writers like Salman Rushdie (in Midnight's Children) and Ralph Ellison (in Invisible Man) mourn a loss of the culture of their people and wish to effect a sort of understanding of that loss through their writing. These two writers, in fact, echo some of the same thoughts Dostoevsky expresses in his Notes from Underground in their writing, through both their style and their themes. Though they may not have been consciously inspired by Dostoevsky's Notes, somehow their experience inspired them to some of the same ideas and conclusions as Dostoevsky. These writers share a common ground, but they differ from Dostoevsky in that their particular cultures had to be represented differently.

All three of these novels deal with a main character who is in some way underground. Dostoevsky's underground man is not truly underground, though he imagines himself as if he is. He is considered underground for two reasons. He thinks of himself as figuratively underground -- he is so very subversive in his own mind that he believes he is part of an underground movement of one to change the world. At the same time, he has no contact with the outside world and he is utterly alone in his wretched apartment. In Invisible Man, on the other hand, the

invisible man is actually underground when he is writing his journal. He has lived on the outside for the majority of his life, but he is hiding, under a building, in order to "think things out in peace."¹⁴ He claims that his "hibernation is a covert preparation for a more overt action."¹⁵ Likewise, Saleem of Midnight's Children is in hiding. His hiding is not literally under the ground as the invisible man's is but is in a female-run pickle and condiments factory where he has little contact with the outside world or reality. There in the factory he is allowed to be enmeshed in the world of his past and recording it.

Recording the personal past is, in fact, the mode by which these books are written. For the shorter first part of Notes from Underground, the underground man is simply ranting about his position on the condition of Russia, but for the majority of his notes, the underground man is recording his past and examining how he came to be the way he is. For the invisible man in Ellison's novel, writing his journal is a way of understanding the past and possibly a means to action. Perhaps, his covert hibernation *is* an overt action, not just a preparation. In other words, his writing his story is an attempt to make something happen, to open people's eyes. In any case, his writing a journal to uncover the actions of his past is similar to both the underground man and Saleem. Saleem is very definite about his reasons for writing a journal -- he wishes to parallel his life with that of the new India and leave a record of it for his son and the next generation of Indians. Saleem realizes, "looking into the eyes of the child . . . I found his empty, limpid pupils a second mirror of humility, which showed me that from now on, mine would be as peripheral a role as that of any redundant oldster: the traditional function, perhaps, of reminiscer, of teller-of-tales,"¹⁶ and that is the place he takes in writing the story of the Midnight's Children. Whether he is writing it in vain as a redundant old man or as a passage of

needed information is left to discuss. Nevertheless, all three narrators seem to be telling their story in order to record their past experiences.

What is compelling about all three of the story tellers is that they really have an ambiguous audience. At all times throughout the three novels, the narrators address another party, a supposed audience. However, these audiences seem arbitrary, even nonexistent at times. For example, in Notes, the underground man constantly addresses his audience as "gentlemen," and yet he knows that he is not speaking to anyone in particular, nor does he truly expect his notes to be read.

But can you really be so gullible as to imagine that I'll print all this and give it to you to read? And here's another problem I have: why do I keep calling you 'gentlemen'? Why do I address you as if you really were my readers? Confessions such as the one I plan to set forth here aren't published and given to people to read. Anyway, I don't possess sufficient fortitude, nor do I consider it necessary to do so. But don't you see, a certain notion has come into my mind and I wish to realize it at any cost.¹⁷

The underground man is not speaking to anyone but himself, but he is part of an on-going dialectic that he has in his mind. He plays both the protagonist and the antagonist and all that lies in between. His only audience, then, is himself, and that is all that matters for him in the underground. His movement of one is only received by one -- himself, for he is no man of action, as he will admit himself; he merely wants to go over his ideas on his own. His only means of doing that is to imagine an audience that will defeat his premises so that he may continue his argument more fully. He merely uses the 'gentlemen' as an arbitrary debate mate.

For the invisible man, the audience is likewise mentioned, but not specifically named. Much like the underground man, he addresses an unknown "you" and anticipates that "you"'s response to many of his statements. For example, he writes, "I can hear you say, 'What a horrible, irresponsible bastard!' And you're right. I leap to agree with you."¹⁸ He is addressing an audience that at the end of the novel he suggests he may be not only speaking to, but *for*. At the same time, he is addressing an audience that does not necessarily exist, it is completely ambiguous and unknown. However, he may have a purpose for addressing the reader, for he seems to expect this to be a lesson for those who read him. His statements of the moral of the story such as, "Only in division is there true health"¹⁹ and "Our fate is to become one, and yet many"²⁰ seem to be lessons the reader should return to when he comes to the last line, "Who know but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"²¹ Thus, the invisible man is, like the underground man, talking to no one in particular, but the invisible man seems to have a more active intent in writing his notes than to have a drawn out discussion with himself. He is, it seems, writing for a potential audience, though not immediately present, who is to learn from his personal mistakes.

In Midnight's Children, the same more or less pedagogical goal seems to be present. Saleem has a definite audience, Padma, his lover in the pickle factory, but Padma is not really the intended audience for Saleem. He is content to share his story with Padma, but even when she leaves, he continues it. He does not need her presence to tell the story of his family and his life. Instead, as mentioned before, Saleem wants to leave his story for the next generation to learn from. Padma is merely someone who is being *allowed* to witness the recording of Saleem's history. Thus, all three narrators, though addressing another, really are writing without

a specified present audience. In addition, all seem to have the understanding that their tale, even if it were to reach another person, would fall on deaf ears, just as Saleem expected that he would be merely a redundant old story teller to his son, not a man to be learned from.

But it seems that each of these journals are written (by their actual author, not the narrator) as a lesson to the reader. Dostoevsky, as has been mentioned, wanted Notes From Underground to be read as a satire that delineates the contradictions of the people and nation of Russia. His goal then is to make obvious the inconsistencies that seem to be blinding the people of his time. Likewise, Ralph Ellison seems to be revealing many of the traps that hinder naive black men's ability to attain the American dream. It is a diary of the pitfalls of growing up, but also a diary of the pitfalls that permeate the racist American society of Ellison's time. It is designed as a lesson not only to the black men who want to avoid the unfortunate fate of the invisible man, but also to those people who help in producing the fate of the invisible man. Much like Notes from Underground and Invisible Man, Rushdie seems to remind the reader to be aware of the past in order to avoid the horrors that come from the post-colonial experience. By remembering what oppressors did to India, Indians could attempt to thwart further oppression. Unfortunately, all three authors face the fear that their lessons will fall on deaf ears, as did their narrators.

Further probing into the similarities of the novels leads us to the similarities of their authors' social and political situations. Dostoevsky, as mentioned earlier, lived in a time of clashing values, as he saw it. Dostoevsky felt as though European culture, traditions, and values had been placed upon Russian society who merely wished to be brothers with the Europeans, thus in their inherent desire to share in the life of others, the Russians lost a part of their past

which they needed to regain. In Russia of the 1860s, Dostoevsky saw in the Slavophiles a resurgence of men who wanted to bring back the old Russian nationalism, and yet he still saw the effects of European idealism in people like Chernyshevsky. He believed that neither of these should be the goal of the Russian man, so he chose to have the underground man represent the failure of both positions.

Somewhat similarly, Ralph Ellison saw his people as misunderstanding their past as well. Unlike Dostoevsky, however, he wanted black Americans to be in touch with the memories of the past that were sometimes hard to face. He believed that in slavery, the African people lost much of their past, but, like Dostoevsky, he did not prescribe to the African-American people a simple turning back to their African roots, as he had some of his characters portray. Instead, he wanted African-Americans to understand that their past was both African and American. In retrieving and understanding their past, their past as Americans was necessary as well. In American society in the 1950s, Ellison saw many figures who either proposed a brotherhood of all men in the socialist party or a separation of all men according to race, as in the Garvey Movement. This inspired him to suggest, like Dostoevsky, that such polarization is not the solution. In order to come to such an understanding, Ellison implies that an understanding of your past is needed -- be it in the form of slave songs, folktales or memories of joy and shame.

The India Rushdie sees from his faraway home of England (in 1980 when the novel was written) is one of controversy as well. The premise of Midnight's Children is based on an understanding of recent Indian history, as the prior novels are based on an understanding of their particular histories. India gained its independence from England on August 15, 1947 at

midnight. However, like many post-colonial countries, the previous English rule was supplanted by an equally oppressive rule by the Indians themselves. Through the course of Midnight's Children, Salman Rushdie tracks the growth and decline and eventual fragmentation of India through Saleem, the narrator of the novel. But the fragmentation seems to be the real focus of the novel, for Rushdie wishes to emphasize the real problem that this fragmentation presents. Rushdie saw, in the India he witnessed break up, a country that has ignored the reality of what was happening to them. For example, Indira Gandhi issued an "Emergency" which called for the sterilization of all Muslims in India. Many people chose to ignore or deny the emergency, as did Gandhi herself. This sort of fictionalizing -- lying about what is actually happening around oneself -- is what seems to have inspired Rushdie to write Midnight's Children. He had to reveal such discrepancies so that people could discover what had happened in their past, and as Saleem wishes to warn the future generations, so does Rushdie.

Thus, the three novelists all seem to have similar situations. All have seen their culture forcibly mutated by the workings of others. All feel that the past needs to be reconnected to the present in some way -- that the people of their countries must understand their past in order to understand the present and themselves. They all see the inability of the people around them to recognize that they are leaving themselves behind when they attempt to ignore some part of their past -- be it their own people's culture or the influence of other people's cultures upon them. Dostoevsky, Ellison, and Rushdie all want to reveal these problems.

And yet, these novels are in no way the same book. Obviously, Dostoevsky's novels have been an influence to many, but Invisible Man and Midnight's Children seem to be more than simply inspired by Notes or imitations of Notes. These novels express in very different

ways the very specific nature of each man's condition. They each develop themes similar to Dostoevsky's underground man, but their treatments of the themes make them specifically African-American or Indian (whether intentionally or not). Dostoevsky said that Notes From Underground was specifically a Russian novel that expressed the circumstances that were particular to Russia. He was correct -- the life of the underground man was a result of very particular circumstances in Russia of the 1840s and 1860s. But in a wider sense, the themes he produces in that Russian novel such as lying and dreaming touch the entire globe of people who have been caught at a cross-roads of cultures and need to find a way to understand and organize those cultures into one being, one nation. Thus, Ellison and Rushdie explore the same themes as Dostoevsky, but make them unmistakably their own. Their treatment of Dostoevskian themes quickly reminds us that this has all happened before, and in doing so, they remind us not to forget the past.

DOSTOEVSKY AND ELLISON: ROMANTIC DREAMS AND DREAMS OF THE PAST

One theme Dostoevsky touches upon in Notes From Underground is the dreams of the underground man. The underground man is constantly dreaming of the way things should be, of the ideal situations in his opinion, situations where he can be heroic, generous, loving. Once, the underground man even admits to having spent three months in a dream-like trance where he constantly fantasized about what the world could be like. In these moments, the underground man comes to understand both Dostoevsky's hope for the world and the misunderstanding of that hope by Russians.

In Chapter II of *Apropos of the Wet Snow*, the underground man passes into a prolonged dream state where he felt all "was sublime and beautiful."²² In this state, the underground man rejects the person he has become, and "[he] suddenly became a hero."²³ He no longer stands down from people who intimidate him, and as a result, he no longer hates himself. In this dream state, he is able to feel remorse for the wrongful deeds he has heretofore been unable to apologize for. At the same time, he is able to experience the joy of "faith, hope, and love."²⁴ It seems the underground man is able to experience in these moments the feelings Dostoevsky believes to be inherent in all men, but overlooked by the men of pure reason and the underground man. In this phase, the underground man even dreams of a time when he can step directly "into God's world"²⁵ -- a notion that never enters the underground man's mind at any other time in his memoirs. It seems as though at these moments of dream time, the underground man is able to reach the levels of love and Christianity Dostoevsky dreamed of himself for all of humanity.

On the other hand, there are two problems that arise from these dreams. First, the underground man is unable to see reality in his dreams. He in no way wants to involve his usual understanding of himself in the picture. In his dreams, he denies any connection to the vile man he claims to be throughout the rest of his memoirs. He believes he can be only "either a hero or dirt -- there was no middle ground."²⁶ This makes it seem as if the dream world of the underground man can never be anything other than a dream, as does the fact that he is unable to bring his dreams of love into his real relationships. He says that after his months of dreaming, he

began to feel an irresistible urge to plunge into society . . . My dreams had reached such a degree of happiness that it was absolutely essential for me to embrace people and all humanity at once; for that reason I needed to have at least one person on hand who actually existed. However, one could only call upon Anton Antonych on Tuesday (his receiving day); consequently, I always had to adjust the urge to embrace all humanity so that it occurred on Tuesday.²⁷

The underground man feels this need to express his love and joy, but again he must fit it into a societal schedule, he must align himself with the very things he is avoiding -- schedules, equations, rules of the world into which his life does not fit. The underground man is even willing to fit his love into a schedule, but this is only the first of the ways his need to express brotherhood is quashed. When he decides to visit old school friends, he is unable to express his love for they are still so entwined in their schedules, jobs, and salaries -- ways the underground man never became accustomed to and that love does not fit into. Because he does not fit into

their norms, he feels alienated, and consequently, loses his need to "embrace all humanity" for it is certainly not embracing him as it did in his dreams.

Furthermore, it is this expectation that love and brotherhood will benefit the underground man that Dostoevsky is highlighting in this dream section. The underground man certainly dreams of love, but it is generally of everyone else's love for him that he longs for. He imagines himself as a man who gives unendingly to the community so that it may see him as a hero and love him entirely. The love people feel for him would bring people together. This sort of self-centered idealized dream of brotherhood is the same as that which Dostoevsky and the underground man are admonishing in Chernychevsky and his romantic colleagues. Dostoevsky sees such dreams as perversions of genuine Christian fellowship and portrays this perversion in the underground man.

Thus, Dostoevsky shows how even a man who is able to see the need for humanity, joy, love, Christianity -- all those things that Dostoevsky cherished -- has perverted such dreams. Not only have the people the underground man encountered decreased any hope an idealistic man might have of embracing humanity and stepping into God's world, but his own corruption of such dreams has made them inauthentic. For Dostoevsky, then, dreams come to be a fictionalization of brotherhood. Though the underground man does attempt to incorporate these dreams into his life, because they are so inauthentic, they are no more than a corruption of Christian ideals -- a dream Dostoevsky scoffs at.

As Dostoevsky uses the underground man's dreams to evoke an alternate, though fictional, reality, Ellison employs dreams as a way to delve into possibilities that are not discovered during every day life. As we will see, the dream for Ellison is a reality that can and

must be incorporated into the real world of human beings in order for a person to understand himself at a time when clashing cultures can confuse a person's understanding of himself.

* * * * *

In Invisible Man, it often seems unfortunate that the narrator only has insight into his identity when he is in some altered state of consciousness. However, these surreal dream episodes bring to the invisible man memories of childhood, folklore, and lessons learned. But these lessons are soon forgotten. How are we to understand these scenes?

The surreal scenes in which the invisible man learns about his identity serve several purposes. The dream sequences seem to reveal hidden truths to the narrator -- sometimes even outlining the themes of the entire novel, of the narrator's entire life. In these scenes, the invisible man is suddenly able to understand the events in his life, and he has the power to break free from the bonds of his continual identity crisis (as opposed to the underground man who only comes to a partial understanding and therefore is unable to carry it over to real life). In each dream episode, the invisible man excuses himself for such a slide from his ordinary behavior by saying, "everything seemed to slow down,"²⁸ or "the room seemed to flatten,"²⁹ or "I heard myself yelling,"³⁰ so that the reader is aware of a shift to the surreal in the action. The events that take place are not as they seem. The narrator does not want the reader to think that he behaves this way every day, for suddenly his actions and the actions of those around him are out of his control. For example, when the invisible man first introduces himself, he tells a story of a drug-induced hallucination in which the entire plot of the novel is suggested. The hallucination begins by depicting a white woman who resembles the woman he saw dance naked in the Battle Royal scene and ends describing a "speeding machine"³¹ which is an allusion

to the robot seen in his dream at the end of the novel. What is the purpose of these hallucinations? And how is it that the invisible man cannot connect these dreams to his life when he is not in such a dream-like state?

"In this country, there is a tradition of forgetfulness, a tradition for moving on, of denying the past,"³² which is seen in the way the invisible man lives his daily life as if his history, individual experiences, and dreams do not affect him. Because he believes he must progress and that progression must be linear, he believes he must shed his Southern and old-fashioned black ways to take on the characteristics which best suit the world in which he lives -- or the world in which he believes. The dream-like moments when the invisible man understands that his fictional world is not America and is not immune to the consequences of history are short and few.

But what can we as readers learn from these moments? Ellison demonstrates that a person's past plays a role in his future. Progress cannot simply be linear as the invisible man wishes it to be; his past and his memories are an integral part of his life. For example, when he is semi-conscious in the hospital after electro-shock treatment -- again a dream-like moment -- he seems to have an awareness of how important his past is to him. He can not remember his name or his mother's, and he realizes, "There was no getting around it. I could no more escape than I could think of my identity. Perhaps, I thought, the two things are involved with each other. When I discover who I am, I will be free."³³ The invisible man recognizes this correlation for perhaps the first time here. He also knows that his identity is somehow tied to his childhood and his memories when he is asked by the doctor about Brer Rabbit. "Somehow I *was* [italics mine] Buckeye the Rabbit. . . . Yet I could not bring myself to admit it; it was too

ridiculous -- and somehow too dangerous.”³⁴ Ellison reveals much about the invisible man in this statement. First, when he says he is Buckeye the Rabbit, the reader recognizes that the past is an integral part of the invisible man, that even old childhood rhymes are part of his present identity. Because the rhymes about Buckeye the Rabbit are allegories that he remembers from his childhood, they spark a memory of the past which reminds the invisible man that he cannot escape the implications of his childhood or his memories. These implications are demonstrated further as he continues his speech on being Brer Rabbit. Second, the invisible man will not admit to himself that his past is a part of him. Therefore, the reader knows one reason why the invisible man is not as enlightened every day as he seems in altered states -- he has trouble admitting that the past is a part of his present. Third, the invisible man finds the idea of being Brer Rabbit "ridiculous." The invisible man has been taught to abhor the traits that resemble black Southern or childish ways. For example, the invisible man admits later in the novel that he felt he had to hide the love of yams or pork chops in order to be perceived as a respectable black man. But while he is in the hospital, even in this moment of seeming understanding, the narrator is compelled to believe that his past is something to scorn. Moreover, he thinks of Brer Rabbit as ridiculous and "dangerous" as well. Why dangerous? Perhaps because of what it means to be Brer Rabbit. In black folklore, the Brer Rabbit character is one who uses trickery and cunning to outsmart his enemies. The stories of Brer Rabbit were used as allegories of slaves who outwitted their masters. Thus, it is not only the invisible man's past, but a larger past which encompasses rhymes and folklore of his people. The invisible man is afraid to be Brer Rabbit because he is afraid of the larger implications of being Brer Rabbit. Being that character not only means playing a role from his childhood but also a role in a larger scheme,

that of slaves, a role that many wish to forget. Therefore, he feels being Brer Rabbit is dangerous, for he believes he must forget his past in order to be respectful and grateful to the white man. After all, it has been white men that "help" him throughout his life. Hadn't the powerful men of his home town given him a scholarship to the prestigious black college? Hadn't Norton defended him against the evil Bledsoe? Hadn't Emerson, Jr. gotten him a job?

Thus, an understanding of himself as the Brer Rabbit character is one that would be hard to deal with for the invisible man. To come to such an understanding, the invisible man would have to face many events in his life as well as in the life of the African-American people that are distasteful and disturbing. For instance, he would have to face slavery as a reality. He would also have to realize how hateful the white men were who gave him his scholarship. Such concepts are hard to deal with in real life, so the invisible man relegates them to his dreams -- a place where he is able to deal with reality without the consequences.

Why, then, does the invisible man ultimately liken himself to Brer Rabbit? In this scene (as well as in the paint factory when he adds the wrong chemical to the paint), the invisible man is outsmarting the white men whether he knows it or not. The white men in the white suits in the white room at the hospital have tried to administer electro-shock treatment with the result to be "as complete a change as you'll find in your famous fairy-tale cases of criminals transformed into amiable fellows . . . He'll [Invisible Man] experience no major conflict of motives, and what is even better, society will suffer no traumata on his account."³⁵ However, they have failed to produce such a result. The invisible man has outsmarted them, for he has remembered his past even if it is a fictional background, and he seems to be fighting to hold on to some idea on an identity.

In fact, after leaving the hospital, the invisible man expresses a need to accept his black Southern ways reintroduced to him in his dreams when he eats a yam. He goes so far as to act as if the ways of his childhood will be enough to sustain him as an adult. However, the last yam the invisible man eats proves to be bitter when he tastes it. From this, the reader can infer that the invisible man realizes that he cannot live simply as he did as a child, for it is not only his childhood that bears on his identity as an adult, but every one of his experiences. Therefore, although the invisible man does not feel he is able to "continue on the yam level,"³⁶ he continues to express his discontent when he sees an old black couple "dispossessed" in an eviction. Obviously, these are not the actions of a man who has been stripped of his identity, personality, and motivation by the white man and his machinery. The invisible man has outsmarted them; he is Brer Rabbit. A final lesson the reader can learn by the narrator's statement that he is Brer Rabbit is in his statement that "it was annoying that he had hit upon an old identity."³⁷ The invisible man had already retreated to the idea that Brer Rabbit is not part of his present identity, but an old childhood one. However, Ellison would not have us believe that. By allowing the reader to see that the invisible man is still playing the part of Brer Rabbit, without even realizing it, Ellison proves that it is not merely an old identity; it is a part of his identity as a whole and it was through the ability to deal with his identity in his dreams that the invisible man is able to do this.

A sense of identity is awakened again in the invisible man at the scene of Tod Clifton's death. The narrator sees the death of his friend "without emotion . . . Everything seemed slowed down . . . my eyes blurred"³⁸ -- once again signaling the dream-like trance he is about to experience. The invisible man witnesses the death, confused and frightened, unsure whether it

was a policeman's fault or Clifton's own. He says he does not understand why Clifton would choose such a fate, why he would "choose to plunge into nothingness, into the void of faceless faces, of soundless voices, lying outside history."³⁹ The narrator claims that he can not understand how, after working with the Brotherhood, Clifton could turn away from history -- the history as recorded by the Brotherhood, the proper scientific way of looking at the world. The dream reveals the answer to the invisible man seems to answer them himself:

I tried to step away and look at it from a distance of words read in books, half remembered. For history records the patterns of men's lives, they say . . . All things, it is said, are duly recorded - all things of importance that is. But not quite, for actually it is only the known, the seen, the heard and only those events that the recorder regards as important that are put down, those lies his keepers keep their power by. But the cop would be Clifton's historian, his judge, his witness, and his executioner, and I was the only brother in the watching crowd. And I, the only witness for the defense, knew neither the extent of his guilt, nor the nature of his crime. Where were the historians today? And how would they put it down?⁴⁰

He begins as if he were following the scientific method of the Brotherhood; he studies the scene as if it were in a book, through the eyes of an historian. But he comes to a conclusion that is wholly un-scientific, anti-Brotherhood. He realizes in this surreal moment that not everything is as scientific as the Brotherhood would like it to be. Not

everything is recorded in the history books. For just one moment, he knows that Clifton's death, although important to his own identity as well as that of black America, will not be recorded by the historians. Because it is as difficult to deal with as his own relationship to Brer Rabbit, the invisible man knows that it will be forgotten by others and its lessons never learned unless he records it in some way. Thus, Invisible Man comes to be a sort of solution to the very problem it confronts: it will record some of the history which has been unrecorded to this moment. It is the invisible man and Ellison's attempt to remind America of its largely unexplored history. Thus, by coming in touch with a reality that is hard to deal with -- the death of a friend and the rejection of his way of life in the brotherhood -- through a dream, the invisible man is able to record the unwritten history of America.

As a further reminder to the invisible man of how the forgotten past is so much a part of his identity, Ellison inserts a spiritual in this same scene, spontaneously sung at Tod Clifton's funeral. "Many Thousands Gone" is a song which "speaks first of all of the time when a slave will be released from bondage --whether through emancipation, escape, or death -- but it may also be read as a tribute to the thousands of Africans who have died in the middle passage from Africa to America, under slavery, through violence and hardships since."⁴¹ Ellison seemingly speaks to the invisible man and to the reader every time a spiritual or element of folklore is introduced. In this moment, the invisible man is brought closer to that unwritten history so hard to deal with. Each time it is found in a surreal scene such as this one, the invisible man learns more about himself,

his suppressed memories are brought to the fore, and he enjoys a moment of enlightenment.

However, many moments find the invisible man without a clue as to what the songs and folklore he encounters in dreams are telling him. For example, when he hears the song, "They Picked Poor Robin Clean," the invisible man often has no idea what his ancestors were singing about. Similarly, he is perpetually confused as to what his grandfather meant when he said in a dream, "Keep that Nigger Boy Running." Although in his dream, the narrator understood enough about his life to have his grandfather make such a comment, in his waking moments, the invisible man does not understand but does allow the dream to haunt him his entire life. What is significant about such moments is that the invisible man is reminded of his history and that the reader understand what the songs or the grandfather meant. Ralph Ellison writes in Going to the Territory: "I do so suggest that our unknown history doesn't stop having consequences even though we ignore it."⁴² The significance of the narrator remembering these bits of songs and tales is to re-remind the reader that these memories do exist -- for the invisible man and for the reader -- and they still have consequences in their lives. Ellison, then, attempts to remind America of its forgotten past. The dreams of folktales are not merely childhood memories of the narrator's but an integral part of America's unwritten history. Although the slaves, for instance, were not often able to record what they viewed as their history, they were able to pass their ideas to their descendants through the vernacular -- oral history, songs, folktales, symbols, games, African elements in an American culture. Often these reminders of our unwritten history were passed as allegories, which might

elude the white master. Benjamin Quarles notes in The Negro In the Making of America: "In his autobiography, a former slave states that 'a keen observer might have detected in our repeated singing of:

O Canaan, sweet Canaan,

I am bound for the land of Canaan

something more than a hope of reaching heaven, we meant to reach the North, and the North was our Canaan.' But whatever paradise the slave was singing about, be it in this life or the next, he was giving expression to his discontent with things as they were."⁴³ Therefore, the reader must pay special attention to the reading of allegory in every song that the invisible man remembers in his dreams.

When Ellison includes these fragments of American history in order to remind the reader of the integral role of unwritten history in the making of America, he reminds the reader of three things. First, much of history has been ignored by Americans (such as the invisible man) on the personal level. Second, the reader must look into his own history to reveal the history that has made him the person he is. Third, Ellison enlarges the realm of identity crisis to the national level, where he tells the reader that any nation that wishes to form a national identity must come to terms with its forgotten past just as the invisible man must.

In an America that supposedly wishes to accommodate many different races and cultures into a society that is to become a "melting pot," Ellison obviously witnesses the same identity crisis faced by the individual in that society. He states in Shadow and Act: "Americans have been locked in a deadly struggle with time, with history. We've fled

the past and trained ourselves to suppress, if not forget, troublesome details of the national memory, and a great part of our optimism, like our progress, has been bought at the cost of ignoring the processes through which we've arrived at any given moment in our national existence."⁴⁴ Just as the invisible man has attempted to see his progress as linear -- as if he must ignore his past to find his future -- much of America has ignored the undesirable parts of its past in an attempt to believe it has fulfilled Revolutionary ideology and the promise that "all men were created equal." Much of America's history has gone unwritten in order to define America as progressive and egalitarian. But that history has been remembered in dreams -- in a place where we can readily understand and manipulate that history. The short fairytales and songs which come as dreams to the invisible man are both reminders of his own personal history and reminders of the history of all of America. They are Ralph Ellison's reminders to America.

Such a reminder would seem to be Ellison's hope that America can come to a conclusion such as the invisible man's in his last dream sequence. When the narrator finds that he has been castrated by the men who have been "keeping him running" all his life, he also realizes that the treatment of black men as if they are invisible not only hurts the victim, but each individual in America, and America's identity as well. Those "who stereotype or ignore the Negro and other minorities, in the final analysis, stereotype and distort their own humanity."⁴⁵ The invisible man knows when he calls out "We must stop him!"⁴⁶, that in the act of using the black man as a stepping stone to success, the racist will see the downfall of his own dreams -- dreams of equality and inalienable rights. America will never achieve the ideal that it dreamed up for itself as a "land of the

free" as long as it ignores the unwritten history that Ellison so readily reminds us of in the invisible man's dreams.

That dream of an American identity will only form, according to Ellison, when we discover that "our fate is to become one, and yet many."⁴⁷ Our fate is not the Northern or the Southern way alone, or the black or the white alone, or the written or the unwritten history alone. It is an acceptance of all the extremes, and all that lies in between. For "all life is divided and . . . only in division is there true health."⁴⁸ Ellison's use of the surreal moments in the invisible man help the reader to come to that difficult conclusion just as the invisible man did.

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This also helps us to re-understand what Dostoevsky was getting at in Notes From Underground. When we read Ellison's dreams as a connection to a difficult reality that is authentic and can be incorporated into the invisible man's understanding of the world, we see the Dostoevskian underground man's flaw -- he is never able to go beyond the romantic, self-centered understanding of his dreams of brotherhood. He does not dream of a healthy fate as both one and many, but one that is one hero (the underground man) and many worshipers. The underground man never understands what Ellison makes clear -- that brotherly love is not about heroism, but about acceptance of reality, no matter how hard it is to handle.

DOSTOEVSKY AND RUSHDIE: LIES AS AN ALTERNATE REALITY

Much like the dreams of the underground man, the lies of the narrator of Notes from Underground serve as an alternate reality for him. He wishes to be a hero, but knows that he possesses none of the qualities of a hero. Therefore, the underground man chooses to embellish because of vanity, to make himself seem more of a hero. However, both the reader and the narrator recognize that this lying only makes him less of a hero.

The underground man attributes this fictionalizing to inevitability. He reminisces on Heinrich Heine's belief that no autobiographer can avoid lying in telling the story of his life. Here, he admits a second reason is to lie because he fears the whole truth. He screams at himself through the voice of the gentlemen, "You really want to say something, but you conceal your final word out of fear because you lack the resolve to utter it; you have only cowardly impudence."⁴⁹ Thus, the underground man understands that it is because he does not want to face his hatefulness and his anti-heroic nature that he conjures up lies to hide his hideousness even from himself, for he swears he is writing for no one but himself. He consistently relies on a fictional world -- be it through lies or dreams -- in order to avoid reality.

The autobiography of Saleem Sinai, the narrator-protagonist in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, is no exception to Heinrich Heine's rule regarding autobiographers. By manipulating details of historical reality, forgetting certain events in his personal life, and even blatantly lying, Saleem becomes a character of questionable integrity. Rushdie,

then, presents the reader with the task of understanding why Saleem lies when he is telling the story of his own life.

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In Imaginary Homelands, Rushdie begins to explore the reasons Saleem lies in Midnight's Children. He asserts that the lies were not merely mistakes on the part of the author but were a means to discredit the narrator, Saleem. Among the reasons Rushdie explains for Saleem's behavior is the incompetent memory of human beings. "He is remembering, of course, and one of the simplest truths about any set of memories is that many of them will be false."⁵⁰ This reason is the most compelling in a discussion of identity, for it assumes that we are what we remember we are. The "truths" of our history are no longer of consequence, for it is the memory of our history that forms our identity. However, Midnight's Children proves to us that the truth of history is of imminent importance because what we actually are and the events that actually happen are what changes us in reality. Escaping the truth by selectively remembering allows us to ignore the very things that are leading to our demise and eventually compels us to repeat our mistakes.

When Saleem writes his autobiography that is to become Midnight's Children, the reader is automatically fascinated by his vast recollection of the history of his family. He knows the intimate details of his grandfather's life, including details of his sex life and his own personal thoughts. In fact, details of how his grandfather met his grandmother are more exact than his description of meeting Padma, his own girlfriend.

This may simply be because he met plump Padma in a pickle factory and theirs was not a charming love story such as that of Aadam Aziz's love for Naseem. However, I believe this to be a symptom of Saleem's selective memory. He continues to talk about life before he was born for nearly a quarter of his narrative. He allows even the most embarrassing truths about his family to be revealed in order to give us a sort of excuse for how he came to be the way he is. The reader is able to forgive him this, for his history does play a large part in his development.

On the other hand, the strange quality of Saleem's narrative continues. Not only does he know explicit details of his family history, but he explicates his early life with such accuracy, the reader is bound to doubt its authenticity. These suspicious memories include the color of the room in which he was born, secret conversations of his mother and ayah when he was only months old, even "the grinning barber, who held me by the foreskin while my member waggled like a slithering snake; and the razor descending, and the pain; but I'm told that, at the time, I didn't even blink."⁵¹ When Saleem admits this, the reader is compelled to question his certainty of the facts. If he feels he must mention now that he was *told* he didn't blink, we might assume that all other stories of his early life (and possibly even the life of his family prior to his birth?) are facts that he remembers first hand. This power to remember is easy to forgive when we understand that Saleem is a child endowed with magical powers. Perhaps one of his "talents" is that he has an extraordinary memory.

The reader might conclude, then, that Saleem's talent of recall is a result of his being born a Midnight's Child -- if it wasn't for the fact that Saleem also seems to *forget*

constantly. In fact, Saleem does not only forget minute details but also those that are significant to the telling of his own story. For example, Saleem mistakes stops on regularly traveled train routes, details of common Hindu myths that play into his idea of his identity, even the day of Gandhi's death.

Why all the forgetting? It is important, again, to remember that Saleem is relying on his memory, but a memory that has an almost unbelievable grasp on the distant past. Why, then, does he forget the *recent* past? Saleem tries to anticipate this question by writing: "Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems - but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. . . The illusion itself is reality."⁵² Thus, the reader is led to believe that Saleem has a more concrete understanding of the history of his family before his death because of its distance. But the details of his life must be accepted as he remembers them, no matter how mistaken he may be. When he discovers that he has mistaken the date of Gandhi's death, he admits,

But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events
might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at
the wrong time. Does one error invalidate the entire fabric?
Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that
I'm prepared to distort everything -- to re-write the whole history
of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?

Today, in my confusion, I can't judge. I'll have to leave it to others.⁵³

The reader is left to judge whether to believe Saleem or not. There is really no choice to make. He has answered his own question in his own way. Reality in his autobiography is *his* reality, and the reader must accept it as such.

But has Saleem distorted events in his memory in order to place himself at the center of the action? Don't we all remember things as they occurred to us, with ourselves the obvious center of the action? Certainly, but Saleem's egocentrism goes farther than most. A mild case of egotism is seen when he assumes that his sister and the girl he liked were fighting over him. The truth is revealed later in Saleem's narrative that the girls were fighting over cats. He even has the nerve to contend "the purpose of [an] entire war had been to re-unite me with an old life, to bring me back together with old friends."⁵⁴ At the end of his novel, he stoops so far as to blatantly lie about his enemy, Shiva's, death. "I fell victim to the temptation of every autobiographer, to the illusion that since the past exists only in one's memories and the words which strive vainly to encapsulate them, it is possible to create past events simply by saying they occurred."⁵⁵ Saleem admits to the reader that he will be making mistakes, even lying in this, his "autobiography," seemingly warranting doubt of his story and warning the reader to reconsider everything he states matter-of-factly.

Furthermore, his attitude of responsibility/blame/credit is stressed more in his comparison of himself to India. Beginning with a letter from the government stating

that he is the reflection of the new India, Saleem begins to assume that all occurrences in India are due to his being involved in one way or another. The most blatant example is that Saleem blames himself (or perhaps takes credit) for the partition of the state of Bombay. Blaming his first love, Saleem believes that he "became directly responsible for the violence which ended with the partition of Bombay"⁵⁶ when he spoke the only words he knew in Gujarati: a taunting chant. Because these words became the chant of the Marathi speaking people, Saleem takes credit for the war and partition which resulted. Would this war have taken place without Saleem? It had been taking place for many years. We seem to be getting closer to an understanding of the source of his lying when he further accounts for the partition by remarking that his tenth birthday marked the election of All-India Conference -- those elected would begin the partition. However, Saleem later remembers that the election was before his birthday, not after, and he is left to puzzle over his senility. Later, when Saleem loses a patch of hair and a piece of his finger, he assumes that it is a parallel to the breaking apart of India. This parallel could be made if Saleem expected the reader to read the novel as a fiction not as a memoir, but in reality, children lose hair all the time, and neither of his dismembered parts seem to precisely parallel any specific moment in Indian history.

We may conclude, then, that Saleem is stretching the metaphor of his life. On one level, the reader is allowed to believe that Saleem is actually a mirror for young India. However, taken a step further, the reader realizes that Saleem only

takes credit for it because he *thinks* he is the reflection of India, not that he is the reflection. This pattern continues throughout Saleem's so-called autobiography.

If I hadn't wanted to be a hero, Mr. Zagallo would never have pulled out my hair. If my hair had remained intact, Glandy Keith and Fat Perce wouldn't have taunted me; Masha Miovic wouldn't have goaded me into losing my finger. And from my finger flowed the blood which was neither Alpha-nor-Omega, and sent me into exile; and in exile I was filled with the lust for revenge which led to the murder of Homi Catrak; and if Homi hadn't died, perhaps my uncle would not have strolled off the roof into the sea breezes; and then my grandfather would not have gone to Kashmir and been broken by the effort of climbing the Sankara Acharya hill. And my grandfather was the founder of my family, and my fate was linked by my birthday to that of the nation, and the father of the nation was Nehru. Nehru's death: can I avoid the conclusion that that, too, was all my fault.⁵⁷

The reader must say yes, Saleem *can* avoid this conclusion; this particular passage makes it as clear as possible. Saleem is making parallels where there are none. This is obvious in his use of the words "perhaps" and "would." These words are very indefinite, as are Saleem's connections. Saleem actually seems to be trying to make things his fault and, thereby, make his life analogous to the life of India. The

consequences are, once again, outlined by Saleem, himself, as if he expects the reader to catch on to his lies. He tells the reader: "Reality can have a metaphorical content; that does not make it less real."⁵⁸ Of course, Saleem's autobiography is a metaphor for India. He supposes that he is the mirror of the country, and although the reader must consider the fact that he is not such an accurate replication of India, the reader must examine the implication of his shaping his life to reflect the history of India. If Saleem is a metaphor for India, then what is India hiding? What does Saleem's selective memory say about the memory of India?

What Rushdie effectively accomplishes by paralleling Saleem and India is the satire of the selective memory of India's recent past. Saleem admits there are cracks "beyond hope of reassembly" in his memory so that "it will be necessary to improvise on occasion"⁵⁹ to remind us of the "forgetfulness" of India. This part of his life *does* parallel India's if the reader understands a few events in recent post-independence Indian history. The facts are that not even fifteen years ago, Indira Gandhi established a state of "Emergency." During this period, Gandhi (the "Widow" in Midnight's Children) effectively removed the power from the states of India to herself, sabotaged campaigns of those who ran against her disciples, and encouraged Hindu fanaticism. Her extreme policies went so far as to sanction of murder of Sikhs in their sacred temple as well as the sterilization of minorities -- a sterilization which was figurative as well as literal. By sterilizing enough "unwanted" men, women and children, Gandhi made frightened children out of all the minorities (just as she drained the powers out of the Midnight's Children by

sterilization). The result was exactly as she had planned: Muslims fled to Pakistan, Sikhs became her servants, and the untouchables were silent. Thus, she was able to erase effectively that part of India she did not deem worthy.

The day after Indira Gandhi's death, Rushdie gave his warning to India: "Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it."⁶⁰ Gandhi had chosen to forget the facts of India's past. She spread the forgetfulness to the people of India when she insisted that the Emergency never occurred; people believed her -- or, at least, wanted to. Thereby, Gandhi was able to forget the horrors she committed in order to place herself in the center of all attention. And by selectively remembering the events by which she came to break up a national identity, she left India to break apart into fragments. Thus, Saleem breaks apart into many pieces when he is unable to connect all of the truths and lies within himself. Because he chooses to make his life a mirror of the new India, he chooses to forget important events that shaped him into the man that he is.

I refuse absolutely to take the larger view; we are too close to what-is-happening, perspective is impossible, later perhaps analysts will say why and wherefore, will adduce underlying economic trends and political developments, but right now we're too close to the cinema-screen, the picture is breaking up into dots, only subjective judgments are possible. Subjectively, then, I hang my head in shame.⁶¹

The memories that India chooses to remember become the identity of India,

according to Rushdie in Midnight's Children. Although the life one chooses to remember may seem a more pleasant reality, Rushdie's warning is all the more important: the disregard for India's true history only propels the repetition of it. India is still partitioned because of the refusal to look back at its mistakes. Likewise, Saleem's identity is irreparably fragmented by what he believes himself to be. Because that identity was that of India's, Saleem's life is fated to share in India's demise.

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Because Salman Rushdie was faced with the post-colonial nightmare that Edward Said explains as the way a formerly oppressed culture will take its freedom as a chance to act in imitation of their former oppressors, he recognized the need to remember the past. Rushdie saw lying as a necessary part of his culture-clashed societies just as Dostoevsky did. Both groups of people were faced with aspects of their cultures they did not know how to deal with and responded by ignoring the facts and lying. While Dostoevsky portrayed lying as an individual's moral problem due to his inability to resolve contradictions within himself, what Rushdie did differently is that he showed how the people's lying is a reflection of the state's lying to them. Furthermore, Rushdie used his novel as an outlet to warn against the problems inherent in such lying -- deception of self, decline, and negative fragmentation -- of both the nation and the human being.

CONCLUSION: PROBLEMS PRESENTED, LESSONS LEARNED

Fyodor Dostoevsky lived in Russia when there was a clashing of cultures so different, he felt the Russian people had been corrupted by the contradictions inherent in such difference. Ralph Ellison lived in America when white was right and he was not, so that he felt a similar acculturation. Salman Rushdie lived in India at a time when Indians were trying to recover from the domination of English culture. All three recognized that the people in their nations, faced with diversity and differing cultures were unable to handle many of the contradictions and unpleasant realities this caused.

Through their work, all three novelists sought to reveal the difficulties inherent in such situations. All three recognized as major issues lying or dreaming. Dostoevsky introduced both characteristics as themes in Notes From Underground. He sees dreaming as a part of a romantic imagination -- an imagination that hides and corrupts true Christian love. Lying, for him, seems to be a way to avoid recognizing the ugliness in ourselves. The only problem with Dostoevsky's novel is that it merely points to a character that embodies all the contradictions that arose in his view of Russia. The only possible response to the problems the underground man presents is a vague one -- love. However, the love seen in Notes From Underground is ephemeral and distasteful. Dostoevsky never provides a conclusion to the memoir, so that the reader is left without a possible means to avoid the underground man's situation.

Ellison and Rushdie seen to provide a unanimous response to the Dostoevskian dilemmas of dreams and lying. Though it is not a solution, the response to such contradictions is to remember the past. Both writers create characters who reveal how a truthful connection to the past through memory is essential for man to progress beyond the contradictions they find when they do not fit the mold of the dominant culture. Ellison introduces a useful way to understand dreams that expands our understanding of them after reading Dostoevsky. While dreams can be illusory for Ellison, he seems to be showing the reader how they can be used to reconnect ties to the past. No longer do dreams have to be seen as romantic visions of heroism and pity, but they are ways to realize the realities that lie behind the seeming illusions. Rushdie, on the other hand, seems to agree with Dostoevsky's assessment of lying. There is not much good to be found in lying as there can be found in dreams. Therefore, Rushdie understands lies much as Dostoevsky does -- as ways to avoid the truth. He sees, in Saleem and India, flaws that they chose to bury because of their hideousness, their unspeakableness. Thus, he develops the theme of lying much like Dostoevsky does, as an obvious cover-up. Rushdie goes further in *Midnight's Children*, however, by embedding his novels with references to how lying has caused the downfall of Saleem, thus leaving the reader to understand how remembering reality can be a useful way to begin to avoid the dangers of acculturation.

By connecting these themes to the very specific world they lived in, Ellison and Rushdie see a need to connect with the past that Dostoevsky never expressed. By

understanding folklore of Africans and African-Americans, black people in America like the invisible man can understand and accept as influences both the dominant culture around them and their unwritten history. By recognizing that their Indian government is only an imitation of the oppression of the English government, Indians like Saleem might be able to prevent further oppression.

Thus, the two 20th century writers are able, through the exploration of dreams and lies, to make a suggestion for a negotiation of all influences in subaltern people's lives. Through recognition of the past, people faced with culture clash could understand both their own heritage and the other's in order to feel secure enough in themselves to avoid fictionalizing events that are hard to deal with. Ellison and Rushdie provided such an idea (while exploring characters who certainly were not able to understand the need for memory) because they knew the alternative was not a desirable one. That alternative was the underground.

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26. *ibid* 39.
27. *ibid* 40.
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29. *ibid* 474.
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31. *ibid* 12.
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55. ibid 529.
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