Hanif Kureishi’s current critical standing as one of the leading representatives of ‘Black British,’ ‘Asian British,’ or ‘Postcolonial British’ writing in the contemporary literary scene in Great Britain is largely built upon the wide appeal and popular success of his first two novels, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and *The Black Album* (1995). Written in a realistic vein and set against the minutely captured background of ordinary life experiences in the multicultural London of the 1970s and 1980s, his narrative fictions focus on the life stories of first- and second-generation immigrants from the Indian subcontinent, using the two main protagonists, Karim Amir and Shahid Hasan, both born and raised near London, as narrative focalizers. Their stories are presented either in the form of a fictional autobiography, with Karim as narrator-protagonist, or through an impersonal third-person narration, with Shahid as a focalized consciousness.

As a wide range of substantial critical interpretations over the last decade or so has convincingly demonstrated, both novels very much invite readings through the lens of postcolonial theory, as demonstrated by Homi Bhabha’s important distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference, in order to analytically identify and

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unearth their highly perceptive and profound imaginative contributions to the complex and conflict-ridden predicament of the immigrant condition in the multicultural metropolis. Eminently visible because of their ‘brown’ skin color, biologically marked as racially different minoritarian Others, collectively stereotyped by the ‘white’ majority as victimized objects of racial abuse and violence, and alternatively cast as eroticized objects of exotic desire mainly by representatives of a ‘postmodern subject of cultural diversity’ (cf. Winkgens 2004), Kureishi’s immigrant protagonists—torn between the prescribed binary subject positions of cultural assimilation and diasporic isolation—are primarily concerned with trying to locate themselves, to make sense of their ‘in-between-ness’ and to sort out the concrete options of their potential for cultural and ethnic hybridity. This ambiguous position is demonstrated by Karim, who, in the famous first lines of his first-person narration, describes himself as “an Englishman born and bred, almost,” but also as an “odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not” (BS 3). In keeping with this self-characterization, both protagonists construct complex, self-referentially negotiated identities and embark on a quest for highly individualized life paths befitting their personal dispositions and aspirations.

Characteristically enough, and this has become a hallmark of Kureishi’s two early novels, both protagonists not only negate and repudiate the monologic purity of the assimilationist and diasporic form of subjectivation, as well as resist the hedonistic allure of a ‘postmodern subject of cultural diversity’ throughout their chosen life paths and the novels as a whole, but instead strongly prefer the dialogic dynamics of intercultural exchange and renegotiation characteristic of the ‘third space’ of cultural hybridity and a ‘politics of cultural difference’ in Bhabha’s sense. But as “heralds of hybridity” (Schoene), they also subscribe to a total individualization of identity, of the culturally indeterminate individual not discursively determined by normative fictions of cultural integrity or the collective boundaries of ethnic belonging. Answering to the strong impact of newly emerging and deeply transformed subject cultures experienced as powerful liberating processes of individualization in the metropolitan life of the 1970s and 1980s (cf. Schoene 122f.), Kureishi’s protagonists gain the freedom and develop the internal abilities to choose and change, to dissolve and rematerialize as individuals in the emphatic sense of the word. Thus, they pave the way for the “possibility of imagining the proliferation of individual identities beyond the bounds of racial