‘The stories of anywhere are also the stories of everywhere else’: Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence*

In a 2005 interview with the *Paris Review*, Salman Rushdie said: ‘My life has given me this other subject: worlds in collision. How do you make people see that everyone’s story is now a part of everyone else’s story? It’s one thing to say it, but how can you make a reader feel that is their lived experience?’¹ His statement makes a case for the ability of literature to encourage readers to empathically imagine themselves into the ‘lived experience’ of the other, producing new global ties not unlike those that Judith Butler has called for in her recent work (see Chapter 1). However, like Dave Eggers’ *What Is the What* – as well as the majority of other authors I have discussed in this study – Rushdie’s post-9/11 fiction does not stop at a *redressing* of imbalances in empathy (or of the power structures that underlie it), but additionally works towards a deconstruction of the categories of identity and difference that allow such an imbalance to occur in the first place. Bringing to a conclusion the expansion of this argument’s scope that began in Chapter 3, which focused on novels that challenge perceptions of difference between two national identity categories (the United States and Iraq), the transnationalism of Rushdie’s recent fiction is such that this final chapter is less delimited by country or identity type. While the previous two chapters explored a complex *negotiation* of difference in fiction, this chapter is more interested in the broader question of what it means to *be* different in a widely globalised post-9/11 world. (This is not to make a sharp categorical divide between Rushdie’s novels and those analysed previously, but rather to respond to a subtle shift between the texts in their thematic focus.) I am thinking here, again, of Heidegger’s concept of ‘world picture’, which I discussed in the Introduction: that is, a mode of ‘grasping’ the world which understands that one’s perception of it...
is perpetually both framed by and, in turn, a reframing of reality.\(^2\) In their attempt to show that ‘the stories of anywhere are also the stories of everywhere else’, I suggest that Rushdie’s recent novels constitute a response, of sorts, to a paradigmatic challenge that the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath presented to his own ‘world picture’.\(^3\) This challenge specifically pertains to his earlier thinking on difference.

In works such as *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Rushdie approvingly depicted a merging or hybridising of apparently incommensurable worlds: as Rachel Trousdale succinctly puts it in a recent study, ‘[e]ach person in Rushdie’s work is made of multiple internal selves, and community formation in *The Satanic Verses* begins by recognizing the plurality of selves we each contain’.\(^4\) However, in his more recent novels Rushdie grapples with the question of whether, at a time when US Presidents, al-Qaeda and even liberal British novelists such as Ian McEwan agree upon quite clearly delineated borders dividing ‘us’ from ‘them’, the idealisation of fissiparous identity boundaries can or should still be considered desirable. My contention is that, at least in his fiction, Rushdie answers this question in the affirmative: hybridity, interstitiality and historicity emerge from his post-9/11 novels with a newfound sense of contemporaneity. Instead of discarding them as outmoded postmodern tropes, he attempts to rethink these concepts and, in doing so, to persuade his readers that such ideas are still important. What results is a reaffirmation of his longstanding aspiration to subvert the homogeneous, sectarian discursive frameworks that allow ideas of absolute difference and rigid borders to be conceptualised in the first place.

**History and identity**

In Chapter 3, I suggested that the narrative of Hari Kunzru’s *Gods Without Men* (2011) might be described as ‘polytemporal’, and that as a result it demonstrably reinforces Judith Butler’s contention that ‘thinking through the problem of temporality and politics ... may open up a different approach to cultural difference, one that eludes the claims of pluralism and intersectionality alike’.\(^5\) Rushdie’s recent fiction does something similar: like Kunzru’s text, it offers ‘a constant interplay of one through the other of the old and the new’.\(^6\) It is through this kind of temporal ‘interplay’, I argue, that his novels *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) reaffirm a long-established propensity in his fiction to subvert homogeneous discursive frameworks.

The primary way in which this interplay manifests in these novels, I suggest, is in their heavy and extended emphasis on the inseparability of