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# The Concept of Liminality as a Theoretical Tool in Literary Memory Studies: Liminal Aspects of Memory in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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**Abstract:** There is something peculiar about memory insofar as it tends to be formed across boundaries. We can think of it as located in an in-between zone, on the threshold »where the outside world meets the world inside you« (Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*). Somehow, memory oscillates between the inside and the outside, connecting the subjective and the objective, the imaginary and the real, the self and the other, the individual and the collective. Memory involves all aspects of human life, be they biological, psychological, social, or cultural. Due to its omnipresence, memory is the object of a diverse range of disciplines. Correspondingly, the field of memory studies is situated at the intersection of a bewildering variety of disciplines, which creates exciting interdisciplinary opportunities, but also epistemological and methodological challenges. According to Mieke Bal, interdisciplinarity »must seek its heuristic and methodological basis in *concepts* rather than *methods*«. Liminality is a concept that seems particularly well-suited to address problems that arise from the distinctive in-between position of memory. So far, however, it has been largely ignored in memory studies. The concept of liminality deals with ›threshold‹ characteristics. Liminal phenomena and states are »betwixt and between«; they are »necessarily ambiguous« and »slip through the network of classifications« (Victor Turner). The concept of liminality helps to avoid »delusions of certainty« (Siri Hustvedt) by drawing attention to interstitial entities and processes that resist clear-cut categorizations and are inherently blurry and impalpable.

»Every brain is the product of other brains« (Hustvedt) and so is memory: »we always carry with us and in us a number of distinct persons« (Maurice Halbwachs). Instead of being able to distinguish clearly between individual, social, and cultural memory, we are confronted with their dynamic interactions and complex entanglements: »to understand me, you'll have to swallow a world« (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*). There is »the constant ›travel‹ of mnemonic con-

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tents between media and minds« (Astrid Erll), as well as their ›migration‹ from one culture to another (Aby Warburg). Memory is deeply relational and always in motion in regions of the ›between‹. This contribution focuses on these qualities through the lens of liminality. Its purpose is to introduce the concept of liminality as an analytical tool in literary memory studies and to put it to the test by applying it to a paradigmatic literary text about memory. Section one provides an introduction to the concept of liminality as it was developed by the anthropologist Victor Turner. The second section brings liminality and memory together and reflects on liminal, relational, and complex aspects of memory, with the main emphasis on complexity. In section three, the focus shifts to literature and the applicability of liminality as a concept in literary memory studies. Theories implicitly dealing with liminality are given special consideration: the triadic model of Wolfgang Iser's literary anthropology, Paul Ricoeur's circle of threefold mimesis, and Homi Bhabha's theory of ›Third Space‹. Section four examines liminal aspects of memory in *Midnight's Children*, using the concept of liminality as a tool for literary analysis. The article ends with a brief conclusion and outlook.

This contribution argues that liminality is an innovative concept in literary theory and literary memory studies. Liminality facilitates processual approaches and helps to avoid false certainties created by static concepts. Two different perspectives on liminality can be taken in literary memory studies: we can either study the mnemonic liminality of literature itself or the mnemonic liminality represented in literature. The ›fictional privileges‹ of literature in dealing with mnemonic liminality receive particular attention. Literature's experientiality and its unique freedom in the depiction of consciousness allow fictional texts to portray the subjective experience of mnemonic liminality. Literature can represent mnemonic liminality in practically all of its aspects. Such representations concern, for instance, the multi-layered overlappings between memory and imagination, the complex interactions between the individual and collective levels of memory, the intricacies of communication and the crucial role of language and media in these processes. As a theoretical tool in literary memory studies, the concept of liminality enables us to identify and interpret the literary staging and reflection of these liminal aspects of memory as well as the narrative techniques involved. Although the variety of techniques is potentially unlimited, some devices seem especially effective. The analysis of *Midnight's Children* shows that magic realism as well as metaphors and allegories are particularly powerful means of representing the liminality of memory. Furthermore, the narrator's behavior plays a crucial role in the staging of mnemonic liminality. In the case of *Midnight's Children*, the narrator's partial unreliability as well as his numerous intertextual and intercultural references signify liminal aspects of his memory. The narrator crosses certain boundaries when his remembering self overlays his remembered self or when

he oscillates between his first-person perspective and a miraculous omniscience that makes him appear to be the receptacle of other people's memories. Moreover, structural means of representation such as leitmotifs and the semanticization of space and objects are forceful techniques to depict mnemonic liminality.

**Keywords:** memory, liminality, relationality, complexity, literary memory studies

It may be far more tough-minded and rigorous to recognize while traveling in the borderlands that the sharp line so visible on the map is not inscribed into the countryside and that the lowering fogs we encounter on the way have an interest and beauty of their own.

Siri Hustvedt (2016, 366)

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For Chris who is travelling with me in the borderlands

At the beginning of Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*, the narrator Saleem Sinai warns his readers: »there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours [...]! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well« (Rushdie 1995, 9). Later Saleem points out that he is not »particularly exceptional in this matter« (ibid., 383). He insists that the epistemological strategy he recommends holds for every single individual: »To understand just one life, you have to swallow the world« (ibid., 109). Like Saleem, we are all swallowers of the world. Literally and metaphorically, we are constantly ingesting and digesting, inhaling and exhaling our world, this infinitely complex ecosystem we are a part of. Throughout Rushdie's novel, this vital exchange with the world is accentuated by the prominent role of noses. In the first chapter, the symbolic essence attributed to the nose is encapsulated in the curious remark of the ancient boatman Tai: »It's the place where the outside world meets the world inside you« (ibid., 17). We can think of memory as such a place. Situated on the threshold between the inner and the outer world, memory has an intrinsic liminal quality. This puzzling liminality of memory is the focus of this article.

Rushdie himself characterized *Midnight's Children* as »a novel of memory and about memory« (Rushdie 1992, 10). Literary imagery such as the »swallowing« of worlds and hypersensitive noses illustrate problems of memory that have been grappled with in scholarly texts as well. »Every brain is the product of other brains« (Hustvedt 2016, 410), Siri Hustvedt observes, and so is memory. »Our memories remain collective,« Maurice Halbwachs emphasizes, »since we always carry with us and in us a number of distinct persons« (Halbwachs 1980, 23). Instead of being able to distinguish clearly between different forms of individual

and collective memory, we are confronted with their dynamic interactions and inextricable entanglements. There is »the constant ›travel‹ of mnemonic contents between media and minds«, as Astrid Erll puts it (Erll 2011b, 13), as well as their cross-border movements on the ›migration routes of culture‹, which Aby Warburg famously called »Wanderstraßen der Kultur« (Warburg/Saxl 2004, 73).

Hence, memory is profoundly relational, transcultural, and liminal insofar as it is always in motion in regions of the ›between‹. What kinds of mysterious transformations are happening in this elusive place of transition ›where the outside world meets the world inside?‹ »Things – even people – have a way of leaking into each other,« Saleem, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, explains, »like flavours when you cook« (Rushdie 1995, 38). In these fluid ›contact zones‹ (cf. Pratt 1991) things are merging in new and unpredictable ways. Saleem's use of culinary imagery lets us think of the aroma from bubbling pots and pans rather than of distinct structures that can be easily pinpointed. Every human being constitutes a singular intersection where the outside world and the world inside, the collective and the individual world continuously ›leak‹ into each other, and the accumulation of this experience turns into uniquely flavored configurations of memory. On a large scale, something similar can be observed in the generation of transcultural memory when different cultures ›meet‹ in border regions and ›leak‹ into each other. There is something peculiar about memory insofar as it tends to be formed at intersections and across boundaries. This applies even to the basic neurophysiological level where a particular memory emerges through specific interactions of neural networks across different brain regions (cf. Erll 2011a, 87 sq.). It is also true for the field of memory studies which is situated at the crossroads of a bewildering variety of disciplines due to the fact that memory intersects with all aspects of human life, be they biological, psychological, social, or cultural.

This characteristic in-between position of memory and memory studies creates exciting interdisciplinary opportunities, but also epistemological and methodological challenges. In view of such challenges, the cultural and literary theorist Mieke Bal points out that »interdisciplinarity in the humanities [...] must seek its heuristic and methodological basis in *concepts* rather than *methods*« (Bal 2002, 5). She emphasizes »the methodological potential of concepts« (ibid., 10), focusing on them »not so much as firmly established univocal terms but as dynamic in themselves« (ibid., 11). Liminality can be considered as such a dynamic transdisciplinary concept in the sense Bal is promoting. It is a concept that seems especially applicable to address problems that arise from the distinctive location of memory at intersections where things are prone to overlap and to merge into each other. So far, however, it has not played a significant role in memory studies or literary memory studies. The basic thesis of this essay is that

the concept of liminality can help us to attain a deeper understanding of the more elusive, ambiguous, and creative aspects of memory and, consequently, of literary texts dealing with those aspects.

The aim of this contribution is to introduce the concept of liminality as a theoretical tool in literary memory studies and to test its usefulness by applying it to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as a paradigmatic text about memory. After a short introduction to the concept of liminality in section one, the second section brings liminality and memory together by reflecting on liminal, relational, and complex aspects of memory. Section three turns to literature and the uses of liminality for literary memory studies. The fourth section examines liminal aspects of memory in *Midnight's Children*, utilizing the concept of liminality as an instrument for literary analysis. Section five provides a brief conclusion and outlook.

## 1 The Concept of Liminality

The term ›liminal‹ derives from the Latin word ›limen‹ for ›threshold‹ and was introduced in 1909 by the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep in his book *The Rites of Passage* where he refers to the middle stage in ritual passages as »*liminal (or threshold) rites*« (van Gennep 1960, 21). Rites of passage structure the critical periods in the lives of individuals when they undergo significant transitions, usually connected with a change of status in society. Van Gennep distinguishes three phases in these rituals: the »preliminal« rites of separation from the previous world, the »liminal« rites of the threshold stage, and finally the »postliminal« rites of incorporation into the new world (cf. *ibid.*). The liminal phase constitutes an experience of existential change during which the person involved »wavers between two worlds« (*ibid.*, 18).

More than half a century later, the anthropologist Victor Turner rediscovered van Gennep's ground-breaking work and recognized the importance of the liminal. He coined the term ›liminality‹ and developed the concept further as a decidedly processual approach in sharp contrast to the leading structuralism of his time (cf. Thomassen 2015, 45 sq.). A liminal situation is for Turner »an inter-structural phase in social dynamics« (Turner 1967, 98). He stresses that liminal entities »are necessarily ambiguous« (Turner 1995, 95) and »at the very least ›betwixt and between‹ all the recognized fixed points in spacetime of structural classification« (Turner 1967, 97). For Turner, this ›betwixt and between‹ position of the liminal results in its »structural ›invisibility‹«, since it is »at once no longer classified, and not yet classified« (*ibid.*, 96). It is »that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both« (*ibid.*, 99). These characterizations of the liminal explain

why the concept of liminality can serve as an epistemological tool for dealing with phenomena that obstinately elude clear-cut definitions and categorizations, as the complexities of memory tend to do. Whenever we are confronted with concepts that turn out to be unclear or even contradictory, there are two possible reasons, as Turner points out: »In the first case, we are dealing with what has been defectively defined or ordered, in the second with what cannot be defined in static terms« (ibid., 97sq.).

There is a second aspect of the liminal which is highly pertinent in the context of memory, its formation, and the function of imagination and creativity in these processes. Turner notes that liminality constitutes a »stage of reflection«, in which the elements of culture are being mixed anew (cf. Turner 1967, 105sq.), and comes up with the following hypothesis: »Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise« (ibid., 97). With regard to memory, this theory may account for the enigmatic transformations of mnemonic contents and forms unfolding in the liminal spaces between the ›outside world‹ and the ›world inside‹ where memory is on the move.

It was Turner himself who opened up the concept of liminality to problems outside anthropology (cf. Thomassen 2015, 46). Since then, it has become a truly ›travelling concept‹ (cf. Bal 2002) between different disciplines. Cultural anthropologist Les Roberts elucidates this conceptual expansion of liminality: »[...] what is understood by the term ›liminality‹ today encompasses a wide array of meanings and theoretical associations that go far beyond those more traditionally linked with anthropological discussions on ritual [...] and cross-societal ›rites of passage‹« (Roberts 2018, 35sq.). Interdisciplinary application of liminality is mostly encouraged by anthropologists. Arpad Szakolczai claims that the »applicability of the term is wide, potentially ›unlimited‹« (Szakolczai 2009, 165), provided one takes into account that »the role of experience is crucial to a full understanding of the term, however applied« (ibid., 141). Similarly, Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra emphasize that »any meaningful application of liminality needs to pay due attention to the anthropological and experiential underpinning of the term« (Horvath/Thomassen/Wydra 2015, 7). Such attention should come naturally whenever liminality is applied within memory studies. After all, human experience and remembering are inextricably linked. It is an indispensable task of memory studies to take account of the experiential aspects of memory, its subjectivity and interiority, and thus to consider the experience of its liminal qualities as well.

## 2 Liminality and Memory

The concept of liminality can be applied to matters of memory in various productive ways. This section focuses on the connection between individual and collective memory as an especially salient example of a problem that involves mnemonic liminality. One of the most persistent epistemological challenges in memory studies consists in the fact that conventional concepts of individual and collective memory turn out to be somewhat aporetic when they are applied to the chaotic reality of memory and remembering. Individual memory only develops in relation to others and to the world and is therefore, in this sense, always collective or »collected« (Olick 1999, 338). On the other hand, collective memory seems to remain a mere metaphor (cf. Erll 2011a, 96–101), since it ultimately depends on the organic memories of individuals to be actualized. Memory is indeed never happening exclusively either on the individual level or on the collective level, but in the murky borderlands in-between where the two levels are overlapping and interacting. The concept of liminality heightens our awareness of such processes in border regions, as well as our tolerance for their ambiguity and blurriness. As an analytical tool, liminality helps us to conceptualize the link between the individual and the collective level of memory as intrinsically dynamic. It constitutes an epistemology which sensitizes us to phenomena that go along with transition and change and »cannot be defined in static terms« (Turner 1967, 97 sq.). Models of individual and collective memory lead to contradictions when they are conceived of as static. By contrast, liminality is a concept that can assist us in developing and refining processual approaches in memory studies.

There is already a paradigm shift underway in memory studies, propelling the field towards dynamic models that allow for a better explanation of movement and change in memory. Astrid Erll's work on »travelling«, »transcultural«, and »relational memory« decidedly points the way in this direction (cf. Erll 2011b; cf. Erll 2018). She convincingly makes the case for relationality as »a key term for a reflexive memory culture today« (Erll 2018, 274). Certainly, relationality can be considered as a new leading concept in memory studies. A major focus of research should be on the interrelations and interactions that underlie memory. So why do we need liminality as an epistemological instrument in the tool kit of memory studies if relationality proves to be the key? While it is true that relationality is the dominant feature of memory, it must be differentiated from the less obvious liminal aspects of memory. Even though, regarding the nexus between individual and collective memory, the relational and liminal qualities of memory have to be viewed as linked, they are hardly identical. Erll characterizes relationality as a term that »tends to describe an ongoing connectivity among diverse elements, which creates meaningful structures and at the same time transforms all ele-

ments involved« (Erl1 2018, 278). However, it is the lens of liminality that enables us to zoom in on the thresholds between those elements where old structures are being dissolved and transformed into new ones. Research that centers on the relationality of memory necessarily stresses the relationships and connections between the various entities involved in a mnemonic configuration. For instance, it treats different family members and their respective memories of a particular event as related but distinct entities. The concept of liminality, on the other hand, specifically draws our attention to the interstices between these entities in which their properties merge, change, and can no longer be clearly distinguished from one another. As a theoretical tool, liminality alerts us to these threshold characteristics of memory. It permits us to identify such instances of ambiguity, transformation, and uncertainty as mnemonic liminality and to explore them as consequences of the relational, complex, and dynamic nature of memory.

The usefulness of the concept of liminality can be illustrated by taking a closer look at the ›fuzziness‹ of memory and the problems it poses for memory studies. Erl1 describes the actual basis of collective memory as »a messy state of mnemonic affairs« (Erl1 2011b, 14) and elaborates: »Mnemonic constellations may look static and bounded when scholars select for their research [...] manageable sections of reality [...], but they become fuzzy as soon as the perspective is widened« (ibid.). If we examine memory from such a broader angle, »we find ourselves confronted with dynamic, multilinear and often fuzzy trajectories of cultural remembering and forgetting« (ibid.). It seems worth going even beyond Erl1's dynamic approach and to consider forms of individual and collective memory as phenomena that emerge from complex nonlinear systems.

Like consciousness, individual organic memory can be viewed as an emergent property of the human brain, »the most complex system in the known universe« (Singer 2005, 17). The brains themselves, these highly complex neurophysiological systems, are related to other brains, whereby complex psychological, social, and cultural systems emerge including collective memory (cf. Stone/Jay 2019). Neuroscientist David Eagleman vividly outlines the processes that constantly drive the emergence and development of these immensely complex systems: »Each individual brain is embedded in a world of other brains. Across the space of a dinner table, or the length of a lecture hall, or the reach of the internet, all the human neurons on the planet are influencing one [an]other, creating a system of unimaginable complexity« (Eagleman 2016, 105). Neurophysiologist Wolf Singer stresses that the complexity of such systems, be they natural or social, does not simply mean they are complicated, but that ›complexity‹ must be understood as a technical term that »designates specific characteristics of a system made up of many individual active elements that interact in very special ways« (Singer 2005, 17). What are the specific characteristics of complex systems? Complex



systems are self-organizing and »characterized by highly nonlinear dynamics« (ibid.) that far exceed our capacity for understanding or control. What is more, complex systems exhibit emergent properties by creating qualities that cannot be derived from the characteristics of their components (cf. ibid.). Being more than the sum of their parts, complex systems defy reductionism. They have variability, spontaneous order, and chaotic behavior: »[O]rder arises spontaneously in those systems – chaos and order together« (Gleick 2008, 8). Complexity means that a system's behavior cannot be easily inferred from its properties: »the developmental trajectories of complex systems are open and difficult to forecast, even when the starting conditions are fully known« (Singer 2005, 18).

This article follows the hypothesis that individual memory, collective memory, and all their infinitely manifold relations and connections emerge from the dynamics of a variety of highly complex biological, psychological, social, and cultural systems that are themselves intricately interrelated. We can assume that in many cases it is complexity in the technical sense shown above which causes the »messy state of mnemonic affairs« and the »fuzzy trajectories of cultural remembering« (Erl 2011b, 14). But how should this uncertainty concerning memory be dealt with? Neurobiologist Robert Sapolsky describes two opposing ways of dealing with the variability of complex systems. First, there is the reductive approach: »A cornerstone of Western science is an acceptance of reductionism, the belief that an effective way to understand a complex system is to understand its component parts« (Sapolsky/Balt 1996, 193). From the reductive viewpoint, variability not due to unrecognized factors »is simply ›noise‹ that will decrease with improved instruments« (ibid., 194). Second, there is the nonlinear approach which has a very different conception of variability: »The emphasis in this new science of complexity and chaos is on the emergent properties of complex systems. In such cases, variability is not mere noise, but is intrinsic to the component parts of the system« (ibid.).

How can these interdisciplinary insights from neurobiology and the science of complexity and chaos be used in memory studies and what can be the function of liminality in this regard? The distinction between the reductive and the nonlinear approaches alerts us to the possibility that some of the observed fuzziness of memory might not just be ›noise‹, but intrinsic to the phenomenon itself. In the humanistic branches of memory studies, the concept of liminality discourages static and reductive perspectives on memory and facilitates processual and nonlinear approaches. If we analyze the unpredictable processes of memory through the prism of liminality, we will be well-equipped to recognize the complex qualities of memory. Being aware of the elusive nature of the liminal, we are prepared to deal with uncertainty in a more open-minded and tolerant way. We are thus encouraged to accept the idea that memory, be it individual or collective, might

be inherently foggy. Judging from its complexity, this is exactly the quality to be expected of memory. Looking through the lens of liminality, we are sensitized to the nonlinear, chaotic, and emergent properties of memory. The self-regulated, bottom-up order emerging in a complex system cannot be reduced to its parts, regardless of whether these parts are the neurons of the brain producing mental states of memory or individual organic memories and media constituting the collective memory of a community. Through the interactions of countless simple components, a synergy emerges, the creation of a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The concept of liminality promotes such a dynamic and holistic perspective on the connection between individual and collective memory and makes us wonder whether ›collective memory‹ is really just a metaphor.

### 3 Uses of Liminality for Literary Memory Studies

The previous section makes the case for liminality as a theoretical tool in memory studies in general. Mnemonic liminality does not primarily constitute an artistic epistemology of memory. But what about its specific applicability in literary theory? This article argues that liminality has the potential to be an innovative concept in literary theory and that it can be applied in literary memory studies in diverse and fruitful ways. Principally, two different perspectives on liminality can be taken in literary memory studies: we can either study the mnemonic liminality of literature or the mnemonic liminality *in* literature, particularly as far as fictions of memory are concerned. The term ›fictions of memory‹ »refers to literary, non-referential narratives that depict the workings of memory« (Neumann 2008, 334). The first research perspective on mnemonic liminality focuses on aspects of these narratives that show a liminal quality themselves; the second perspective concentrates on the literary representation and reflection of mnemonic liminality *in* these narratives. Besides unadulterated fictions of memory, literary non-fictional forms of autobiographical writing such as factual metaautobiographies (cf. Mueller-Greene 2018, 124–127) are also suitable objects to study mnemonic liminality.

In dealing with the mnemonic liminality of literature, it is important to recognize that literary texts already have an inherent affinity to memory (cf. Erll 2011a, 145–149) and to liminality (cf. Achilles/Bergmann 2015, 6–14) separately. On the one hand, similarities of literature and memory include the use of narrativization, condensation, and genre patterns (cf. Erll 2011a, 145). On the other hand, literature and liminality are both characterized by an ambiguity that allows meanings and values to shift. Moreover, literature, just like liminality, provides a space for

reflection in which conventional configurations of culture can be broken down into their component parts and recombined (cf. Turner 1967, 105 sq.). The triadic model of Wolfgang Iser's literary anthropology is highly compatible with Turner's anthropological concept of the liminal (cf. Achilles 2015, 40 sq.). In Iser's theory, the fictive assumes an intermediary position between the real and the imaginary that is distinctly liminal: »The fictive, then, might be called a ›transitional object‹, always hovering between the real and the imaginary, linking the two together. As such it exists, for it houses all the processes of interchange« (Iser 1993, 20). This interchange between the real and the imaginary is achieved by »acts of fictionalizing« (ibid., 19). All fictionalizing acts have in common that they are »acts of boundary-crossing« (ibid.) in two directions, that is in the direction of the imaginary and in the direction of the real. In a fictional text, »extratextual reality merges into the imaginary, and the imaginary merges into reality« (ibid., 3). Postmodernist historical novels such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* exhibit a particularly strong liminality: »Being located on the border between historiography and literature, fact and fiction, postmodernist historical fiction shows a pronounced tendency to cross boundaries and to blur genre distinctions« (Nünning 1997, 219).

Here comes in the question of literature's affinity to liminal aspects of memory. Evidently, the cognitive and intergeneric liminality of literature between the real and the imaginary as well as between nonfiction and fiction have a structural semblance with the cognitive and epistemic liminality that is generated in acts of remembering, when memory and imagination are merging into one another (cf. Mueller-Greene 2018, 127). A partial overlap between memory and imagination can also be observed on the neural level where »a common brain network underlies both memory and imagination« (Schacter et al. 2012, 677). Neuroscientists could demonstrate »that a distributed brain network, including the hippocampus, is recruited during both episodic memory recall and the visualization of fictitious experiences« (Hassabis/Kumaran/Maguire 2007, 14373). Literature and especially fictions of memory show a remarkable affinity to mnemonic liminality caused by such boundary-crossings in the interstices between memory and imagination.

This form of mnemonic liminality we might mainly associate with the individual level, but it also applies to collective memory and imagination. The affinity of literature to collective forms of mnemonic liminality merits special attention because of its particular cultural significance. First, it is worth taking another look at liminality in general in order to get a deeper understanding of its function as a crucial driving force of culture. With reference to the liminal stage in ritual, Turner points out that there are three processes going on in parallel: »The first is the reduction of culture into recognized components or factors; the second

is their recombination in fantastic or monstrous patterns and shapes; and the third is their recombination in ways that make sense with regard to the new state and status that the neophytes will enter» (Turner 1967, 106). During this dynamic phase of liminality, »ideas, sentiments, and facts that had been hitherto [...] accepted unthinkingly are [...] made into objects of reflection« (ibid., 105). Liminality with its underlying processes of dissolution and manifold recombination is a period of analysis, reflection, and enhanced creativity. This is the reason why liminality can be viewed as a key factor in cultural invention and change (cf. Bachmann-Medick 2009, 115–118). Literature, being itself a creative medium of cultural reflection and innovation, has a distinct affinity with liminality in this respect. Turner's description of the three parallel processes during a rite's liminal stage is not only reflected in Iser's literary theory of fictionalizing acts that mediate between the real and the imaginary, but also in Paul Ricœur's model of threefold mimesis (cf. Ricœur 1984, 261). Both, Iser and Ricœur, are implicitly dealing with liminal processes.

Based on Aristotle's definition of narrative as the imitation (mimesis) of action, Ricœur distinguishes »three moments of mimesis« (Ricœur 1984, 53): the prefiguration (mimesis1), configuration (mimesis2), and refiguration (mimesis3) of the human world of acting and suffering (cf. ibid.). The first boundary-crossing from the extratextual world to the text consists in the »operation of emplotment« (ibid., 66) and in the act of writing: the »passage from the paradigmatic to the syntagmatic constitutes the transition from mimesis1 to mimesis2. It is the work of the configuring activity« (ibid.). The second boundary-crossing from the text to the reader consists in the act of reading: the voice of the text that addresses itself to a reader is »situated at the point of transition between configuration and refiguration, inasmuch as reading marks the point of intersection between the world of the text and the world of the reader« (Ricœur 1985, 99). In Ricœur's »circle of mimesis« (Ricœur 1984, 71–76), a »reciprocal overlapping« (Ricœur 1988, 192) of history and fiction is happening: »From these intimate exchanges between the historicization of the fictional narrative and the fictionalization of the historical narrative is born what we will call human time, which is nothing other than narrated time« (ibid., 102). Ricœur underscores that »these two interweaving movements mutually belong to each other« (ibid.). By interacting with the world and the reader in such complex, creative, and mutually transformative ways, literary texts are also constantly interacting with their »mnemonic context« (Erl1 2011a, 152). The transitions between the prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration of a literary text in Ricœur's circle of mimesis do not only represent the liminality of literature, but also literature's dynamic exchange with cultural memory. Hence, Ricœur's model implicitly demonstrates the affinity of literature to collective forms of mnemonic liminality. What is more, as a medium of cultural

memory (cf. *ibid.*, 144–171), literature itself is an important contributor to mnemonic liminality on a collective level. Ricœur's circle of mimesis has been used very productively in cultural and literary memory studies to conceptualize literature as a medium of cultural memory (cf. *ibid.*, 152–160) and to explain the complex interchanges between literature and cultural memory, text and context, which constitute »a relationship of mutual influence and change« (*ibid.*, 152). Rethinking Ricœur's model with the concept of liminality highlights the threshold character of this ultimately unfathomable exchange between literature and cultural memory. Liminality deepens our understanding of the complexity of this relationship, not only of its inherent unpredictability and blurriness but also of its emergent and transformative qualities.

Last but not least, cultural studies theorist Homi K. Bhabha has to be mentioned as a thinker of liminality whose theory of ›Third Space‹ can be used by literary memory studies to examine mnemonic liminality. This is particularly true in a postcolonial context but is not limited to it. Bhabha stresses: »It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated« (Bhabha 2004, 2). Like all forms of communication, these negotiations have to traverse the regions of the in-between: »The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space« (*ibid.*, 53). Bhabha's following description of this elusive threshold space in communication is similar to Turner's characterization of liminality as the source of new configurations of ideas (cf. Turner 1967, sq. 97): »It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew« (Bhabha 2004, 55). This activity of semantic recombination and innovation outlined by Bhabha is at work in the »recreation of popular memory« achieved by literature (*ibid.*, 284).

The models of Iser, Ricœur, and Bhabha not only bespeak the mnemonic liminality of literature and culture, they are also suitable theoretical tools to explore mnemonic liminality in literature, which is the literary representation and reflection of liminality in processes of individual and collective memory. Some aspects of the ›fictional privileges‹ (cf. Erll 2011a, 149 sq.) of literature in dealing with mnemonic liminality can be elucidated by means of these three theories. Iser's triadic model of the real, the fictive, and the imaginary offers a theoretical basis for the specific capability of fiction to stage mnemonic liminality by merging elements of memory and imagination. Through the narrative technique of magic

realism, »a genre-specific form of liminality« (Achilles/Bergmann 2015, 18), this fictionally created overlap between memory and imagination, between the real and the fantastic, can be achieved in a particularly pronounced way. Interestingly, such a mix of the real with the fantastic is highly reminiscent of Turner's description of the liminal stage in which the components of culture are recombined »in fantastic or monstrous patterns and shapes« (Turner 1967, 106). As for Ricoeur's circle of mimesis, it provides a theoretical foundation for the privilege of fiction to select elements of memory and imagination (mimesis1) and combine them in creative configurations (mimesis2). It also explains how these new configurations are being fed back into society through their readers (mimesis3). Thus, literature's specific capacity for mimesis of memory (cf. Neumann 2008, 334–341; cf. Erll 2011a, 77–82) and correspondingly for mimesis of mnemonic liminality is also a distinctive capacity to contribute to the negotiation and reshaping of cultural memory and to »constitute an imaginative counter-memory« (Neumann 2008, 339). This potential of literature to »rehistoricize« by creating fictional »[c]ounter-narratives« (Bhabha 2004, 213) can also be conceptualized with Bhabha's »Third Space«.

Literature's experientiality and its unique freedom in the evocation and depiction of consciousness (cf. Fludernik 1996, 12 sq.) are further fictional privileges relevant in the representation of liminal aspects of memory. They empower fictional texts to portray the experience of mnemonic liminality from the inside and to provide intimate insights into its subjectivity and phenomenology. Literature can represent and reflect virtually all aspects of mnemonic liminality: The multi-layered overlappings in the border regions between memory and imagination, be they individual or collective, are a central theme. The complex interactions between individual memory and different forms of collective memory, such as family, local, national, and cultural memory, constitute another principal theme. Intergenerational, transnational, and transcultural memory are also important subjects. Types of mediation that underlie these interactions are a further major theme, especially the intricacies of communication and the crucial role of language and media in these processes of interchange. As a theoretical tool in literary memory studies, the concept of liminality enables us to discern and analyze the literary staging and reflection of these liminal aspects of memory. Correspondingly, it prompts us to pay attention to the narrative devices involved. Any analysis of those formal features needs to take into consideration that through the »semanticization of literary form« (cf. Nünning 2013, 684 sq.) they are charged with meaning themselves. The variety of possible devices is potentially unlimited. However, there are some techniques such as magic realism, unreliable narration, metaphorization, allegorization, and intertextuality that seem particularly well-suited to illustrate the liminality of memory. Constituting

boundary-crossings themselves, they share a structural similarity to mnemonic liminality. The narrator can also cross certain boundaries: the remembering self of a first-person narrator can interfere with the remembered self; or a first-person narrator can claim omniscience. Structural means of representation such as leitmotifs and the semanticization of space and of objects are further methods to evoke and symbolize mnemonic liminality.

## 4 Liminal Aspects of Memory in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie has written »the fabulist historiography of post-Independence India« (Bhabha 2004, 7). It is not only »a novel of memory and about memory« (Rushdie 1992, 10), but also a novel of liminality and *about* liminality. The book's publication in 1981 constitutes a threshold moment in literary history, a »watershed« event (Eagleton 2013, 1) that »inaugurated the ›contemporary‹ period of literature in English« (ibid.). *Midnight's Children* has a »hypercanonical status in the West« (Frank 2010, 187) and its impact on the cultural memory of modern India is extraordinary. It »has inspired a generation of Indian writers« (Gurnah 2007, 91) and »is now a central text in the study of the postcolonial phenomenon in writing in English« (ibid.).

With his »chutnification of history« (Rushdie 1995, 459), the narrator Saleem Sinai does not only immortalize a stunning evocation and reflection of his memories; he also gives an idiosyncratic and harrowing account of an acutely liminal phase in his country's history: of India's transition from British colonial rule to Independence and the tragic events in the wake of its Partition. Saleem's birth on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947, on the stroke of midnight at the very beginning of Independence is laden with all the hopes and expectations of this highly liminal moment in history. But the possibilities of the historic moment he and his fellow midnight children embody will be brutally crushed. The narrative arc of Saleem's story, mirroring the history of his country, painfully demonstrates »the deep-seated ambivalence of liminal situations« (Szokolczai 2009, 166). Being a time of renewal and possibilities, liminality is necessarily also a time of crisis: »The stimulation of creative potentials is inseparable from tragic experiences« (ibid.). The literary representation and reflection of mnemonic liminality in *Midnight's Children* must be considered in this wider thematic context of memory and liminality in general.

Writing his life's story, Saleem sees himself at the top of a triangle in a liminal position: »I hover at the apex, above present and past« (Rushdie 1995, 194). He also hovers between memory and imagination which becomes apparent when

he lectures his skeptical listener Padma about »Memory's truth« (ibid., 211). His partial unreliability as a narrator is foregrounded when he tells Padma that memory »creates its own reality« (ibid.). He even takes recourse to ancient Hindu philosophy to pompously legitimate his idea of truth: »we only see dimly through that dream-web, which is Maya« (ibid.). This amounts to a description of the unavoidable fuzziness of memory.

A guiding theme in Saleem's narration is the »eternal opposition of inside and outside« (ibid., 236). The leitmotif of the nose as »the place where the outside world meets the world inside you« (ibid., 17) ingeniously symbolizes the peculiar threshold location where memory, along with perception and consciousness, is constantly on the move, like the air we are breathing. Seemingly inside, memory remains closely related to the outside world that brought it about in the first place. In our exchange with the world, new memories are continually forming and old memories changing. Whenever a memory is narrated, it rejoins the outside world and has the potential to engender in others new memories and narrations in an infinite interchange. Saleem characterizes his narration as »the pouring-out of what-was-inside-me« (ibid., 383). He sees his whole identity as emerging from complex interactions in the world that transcend his own existence: »I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come« (ibid.). The immense complexity of interdependencies is enacted in the eccentric phraseology of Saleem's reflection that seems to overload his sentences with meaning. The memories that pour out of him represent a whole world which his readers in turn have to swallow: »I repeat for the last time: to understand me, you'll have to swallow a world« (ibid.). However, Saleem does not stop at himself but refers to his fellow Indians and the inconceivable complexity of all their interconnected worlds: »every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude« (ibid.).

Such reflections on the liminal processes that are sustaining the interdependence of individual, intersubjective, and collective forms of memory are numerous in *Midnight's Children*. Most notably, however, these processes are being dealt with in a metaphorical way. »Swallowing a world« is a central metaphor Saleem emphasizes repeatedly. It denotes a liminal activity during which the world that is being swallowed undergoes a passage from the outside to the inside. In addition, this metaphor of active world appropriation implies chewing and digesting and therefore a considerable amount of disintegration and recombination characteristic of liminality. By contrast, a more passive and ethereal transfer is signified by »leaking into each other« (ibid., 38), the other central metaphor in the novel that is dealing with mnemonic liminality. There are many instances in the



book where certain memories, ideas, or individual peculiarities ›leak‹ from one person to another. This metaphor powerfully illustrates the impalpable workings of intersubjective, intergenerational, and especially family memory. The manifold leaking processes are also enacted in Saleem's ›miracle-laden omniscience‹ (ibid., 150). His far-reaching knowledge, which is incompatible with his status as a first-person narrator, seems to suggest that everything has somehow leaked into him.

Transcultural memory is at times depicted in a way that implies its exuding from places and things. When the estate of the departing colonial William Methwold is sold ›with every last thing in them‹ (ibid., 95), European culture is being transferred to the new Indian owners in an imperceptible liminal process: ›the sharp edges of things are getting blurred, so they have all failed to notice what is happening: the Estate, Methwold's Estate, is changing them‹ (ibid., 99). Another form of intercultural overlap is shown in the way Saleem's thinking is steeped in the cultural memory of Hinduism: ›Born and raised in the Muslim tradition, I find myself overwhelmed all of a sudden by an older learning‹ (ibid., 194). Saleem's numerous intertextual references to Hindu mythology demonstrate the blurring of boundaries between religious cultures in his hometown of Bombay. Despite being a Muslim, Saleem playfully locates himself within the Hindu pantheon: ›Am I [...] merely mortal – or something more? Such as – yes, why not – mammoth-trunked, Ganesh-nosed as I am – perhaps, the Elephant‹ (ibid., 195).

Cultural and mnemonic liminality is also represented more obliquely through the semanticization of space and objects. The presentation of the ›phantasmagoric‹ (ibid., 335) Rann of Kutch, an extended area of salt marshes that straddles part of the border between India and Pakistan, as a liminal ›amphibious zone‹ (ibid.) can be considered as a striking example of such a semanticization of space. It reflects the national and cultural liminality between India and Pakistan as well as Saleem's precarious liminal status when he ›was flung across the Partition-created frontier into Pakistan‹ (ibid., 283). Another example is the haunting depiction of the ›historyless‹ (ibid., 360) jungle in the Sundarbans, a ›dream-forest‹ (ibid., 363) where the days are ›dissolving into each other‹ (ibid.). It mirrors the liminal state of the amnesiac Saleem before and while he regains his memory. The ›perforated sheet‹ and the ›silver spittoon‹ are examples of the semanticization of objects. As a screen, the perforated sheet creates a liminal border zone between Saleem's grandparents when they incrementally get to know each other through the hole (cf. ibid., 22sq.). Later the sheet takes on a ›ghostly essence‹ (ibid., 107) which condemns Saleem ›to see my own life – its meanings, its structures – in fragments‹ (ibid.). Thus, the perforated sheet symbolizes the fragmentary state of Saleem's memory very effectively. The leitmotif of spittoons is another example of a forceful semanticization of an object. It is introduced in connection with the

»betel-chewers at the paan-shop« (ibid., 39) whose conversations represent the local communicative memory of the vicinity of Saleem's grandparents in Agra. Their »game of hit-the-spittoon« (ibid.) illustrates their »leaking into each other«. Later, a silver spittoon is the only memento Saleem has of his family. As a »receptacle of memories as well as spittle-juice« (ibid., 448), Saleem's silver spittoon can be regarded as the central symbol of the »leaking« aspect of mnemonic liminality in *Midnight's Children*.

Of crucial significance to the theme of liminality is what Saleem calls »the fantastic heart« (ibid., 195) of his story: his telepathic powers »to look into the hearts and minds of men« (ibid., 200). Saleem even has the ability to allow all his fellow midnight children to assemble in the »parliament of my brain« (ibid., 227). He achieves that by turning his mind »into a kind of forum in which they could talk to one another, through me« (ibid.). Curiously, he has acquired this unheard-of skill, which enables him »to act as a sort of national network« (ibid.), through »two accidents« (ibid., 237) that injured his brain and transformed his mind. The description of Saleem's passage from being a fairly normal child to being a miraculous »radio receiver« (ibid., 164) shows liminality at work. During these events, the inside of Saleem's head appears like a liminal landscape. In the preliminary stages of his transformation, a first telepathic experience »gave a door in my mind a little nudge« (ibid., 130). This door is »forced open« (ibid., 163) when Saleem is hiding in his mother's large washing-chest. There, a »sniff« causes a cataclysmic boundary-crossing inside his head: »something bursts« and mucus is »rising higher than mucus was ever intended to rise [...], reaching as far, perhaps, as the frontiers of the brain« (ibid., 162). He starts hearing voices inside his head, an ability which a second accident, a severe concussion, brings to perfection.

Endowed with these fantastic powers, Saleem gives the midnight children a meeting-place in his mind and serves as their medium of communication. It is significant that through the magic realism of the story the unrepresentable is being represented: human brains interconnecting in the elusive place of transition where the outside world meets the world inside, in the in-between region where communication is happening and thoughts and memories are being exchanged, merged, and transformed. Saleem's head becomes an arena of human interconnectivity, a liminal place in the sense of Bhabha's »Third Space« through which all the communications and negotiations of the »Midnight Children's Conference« (ibid., 207) have to pass. Soon conflicts arise between the children because the world of grown-ups with all its political, social, and cultural prejudices is even leaking into this utopian space: »children are the vessels into which adults pour their poison« (ibid., 256). Interestingly, Saleem is struggling with his task of remembering and relating these events appropriately. He admits that in his rendi-

tion of their discussions the midnight children including himself sound »like old men with beards« (ibid.). Somehow, Saleem's narrating self has overlapped with his remembered ten-year-old self.

When sinus surgery restores order in Saleem's nasal passages, his telepathic powers are replaced by a hypersensitive sense of smell that enables him to distinguish »the perfumes of emotions and all the thousand and one drives which make us human« (ibid., 317). He acquires »the powers of sniffing-out-the-truth, of smelling-what-was-in-the-air, of following trails« (ibid., 307). Magic realism is again at work. Through his superhuman nose he still possesses a privileged access to the regions of the in-between where the outside world meets the world inside. As a telepathic child, Saleem »rode the turbulent thought-waves« (ibid., 262) of Bombay. In his adolescent years, he explores »the olfactory avenues« (ibid., 316) of Karachi with his miraculous nose. Besides thought-waves and myriads of smells, there are also ghosts that populate the elusive place of the in-between: memories of the dead but also of things like »the wraith of an old white washing-chest« (ibid., 342) make ghostly appearances in the novel. In this realm of thoughts, feelings, and spirits, people imperceptibly leak into each other. This liminal zone magically allows Saleem's grandmother to eavesdrop on her daughters' dreams (cf. ibid., 55) and his aunt Alia's »culinary witchcraft« (ibid., 332) to impinge upon the emotional life of all the family members through »the impregnation of food with emotions« (ibid., 330).

When almost all of Saleem's family members are killed in air-raids during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, Saleem loses his memory and ability to feel. The horrific event is followed by a remarkable representation of the liminal aspects of memory and identity that spans three chapters. For more than six years, traumatized Saleem does not know who he is. He is »numb as ice, anaesthetized against feelings as well as memories« (ibid., 353). Past and present »are divided by an unbridgeable gulf« (ibid., 351). Not until the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, when Saleem deserts into the Sundarbans and undergoes profoundly liminal experiences in the jungle, does he regain his memory, except for his name which he still cannot remember. It is the midnight child Parvati-the-witch who gives him back his name and identity (cf. ibid., 379); only his numbness still remains. With the help of Parvati's sorcery, passport-less Saleem makes his escape from Dacca back to India by travelling in her »basket of invisibility« (ibid., 381). In the basket, he literally disappears and undergoes a state of extreme liminality. His »[m]emories of invisibility« (ibid.) are reminiscent of Turner's assessment of the »structural ›invisibility‹« (Turner 1967, 96) of threshold people. Saleem is »betwixt and between« (ibid., 97): »I was in the basket, but also not in the basket« (Rushdie 1995, 381). In the course of this transformative experience, Saleem finally regains his ability to feel. It is again the technique of magic realism that especially suc-

ceeds in representing the unrepresentable interstices where the worlds meet and merge into each other. The leitmotif of holes also captures this in-between zone: the hole in the perforated sheet and the ›hole‹ in Saleem's agnostic grandfather (cf. *ibid.*, 10) that eventually leaks into Saleem himself (cf. *ibid.*, 275). Moreover, some of Saleem's crucial transformations are happening in ›holes‹: the notorious ›washing-chest is a hole in the world‹ (*ibid.*, 156) and Parvati's basket of invisibility can be considered as the epitome of such a mysterious hole.

The history of post-Independence India and its reflection in the life of Saleem are at the heart of *Midnight's Children*. Saleem, born at the moment of Independence, views his life as the mirror of his country's development, just as Prime Minister Nehru has declared it to be in his congratulatory letter on the occasion of his midnight birth (cf. *ibid.*, 122). Thus, Saleem's life with its promising beginning and catastrophic decline becomes an allegory of his nation's history. This allegorical relationship has a liminal quality. Being ›mysteriously handcuffed to history‹ (*ibid.*, 9), Saleem's private life and public events, his individual memory and the national memory overlap strikingly. Another form of liminality affects the national memory itself: it merges strongly with national imagination. The imagined world leaks into the real world. For Saleem, the new independent India is ›imaginary‹, ›a mass fantasy‹, a ›collective dream‹ (*ibid.*, 112). From the beginning, he also suggests that there is some danger lurking in the masses and their fantasies that is threatening this dream. Saleem uses a particular metaphor to express this sinister aspect of the masses: the ›many-headed monster‹ (*ibid.*, 115). The monster embodies destruction, chaos, and crisis, the dark side of liminality. This is exactly what Saleem fears most. His striving for form, meaning, and purpose is actually a struggle against the liminal forces of dissolution and shapelessness the many-headed monster represents. This struggle is driving his frantic writing efforts which are supposed to give the fleeting experiences of his life shape and durability. His fear of meaninglessness has tortured him since his childhood days: ›I had already felt within myself the first movings of that shapeless animal which still [...] champs and scratches in my stomach: cursed by a multitude of hopes [...], I became afraid that everyone was wrong – that my much-trumpeted existence might turn out to be utterly useless, void, and without the shred of a purpose‹ (*ibid.*, 152).

The many-headed monster also alludes to the overabundance of personal and national history Saleem has ›swallowed‹: ›Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me‹ (*ibid.*, 9). The world he has swallowed and that has been leaking into him is now causing his ›cracking‹: ›I have begun to crack all over like an old jug‹ (*ibid.*, 37). Saleem is ›literally disintegrating‹ (*ibid.*). ›Cracking‹ is – besides ›swallowing‹ and ›leaking‹ – the third major metaphor in the text denoting liminal aspects of memory. It expresses the dark side of mnemonic liminality

by not just being messy but destructive. In Saleem, the exchange between the outside and the inside world has gotten out of balance. Too much of the outside world has found its way into him, and now he is cracking up. He has swallowed a many-headed monster, so it seems, and it is destroying him from the inside. Saleem is struggling against the dark liminal forces of death by shaping and externalizing his life in his autobiography as well as in his miraculously memory-preserving chutneys: »in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories« (ibid., 459). In this respect, the metaphor of »chutnification« (ibid.) emphasizes those aspects of memory that are not liminal but promise some stability and durability. At the same time, his words and pickles are liminal themselves by merging Saleem's »memories, dreams, ideas« (ibid., 460) and by making it possible that they can be »unleashed upon the amnesiac nation« (ibid.) to stir the national memory and to generate a counter-memory.

Saleem concludes by writing the future of his imminent death. When the many-headed monster is claiming him, he will break to pieces and be swallowed up by the void he has feared all his life: »Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust« (ibid., 463). Carrying allegorization to extremes, Saleem predicts that he will disintegrate into an equal number of dust particles, mirroring his country even in his death: »there isn't much of me left, and soon there will be nothing at all. Six hundred million specks of dust« (ibid., 383). In death, Saleem's dust will mirror the many-headed monster, not the optimistic dream at the time of his and his nation's birth. He cannot withstand the chaotic and destructive forces of liminality and will be sucked into its »annihilating whirlpool« (ibid., 463). In an ultimate exchange between the outside world and the world inside, Saleem will be released into the world he has once swallowed. His dust will be »voiceless« (ibid.), but his »words and pickles« (ibid., 459) will speak for him and carry his memories across the threshold where they will rejoin the memory of the nation.

## 5 Conclusion

The merging of Saleem's memory with the memory of India becomes real through the literary reception of *Midnight's Children*. This can be understood both as a »boundary-crossing« in the sense of Iser's »fictionalizing acts« (cf. Iser 1993, 19) and as a »refiguration« in terms of Ricœur's »mimesis3« (cf. Ricœur 1984, 53). Having entered the cultural memory of India, *Midnight's Children* constitutes a powerful example of the mnemonic liminality of literature. With its highly imaginative and

fantastic account of India's Partition and Independence, the novel has created a counter-memory, a daring recombination of the elements of Indian history that can be associated with both the transformative processes during Turner's ›liminal stage‹ (cf. Turner 1967, 106) and the ›rehistoricizing‹ activities in Bhabha's ›Third Space‹ (cf. Bhabha 2004, 55). As a novel about memory, *Midnight's Children* also proves to be a prime example of mnemonic liminality in literature since liminal aspects of memory play a pivotal role in it.

Consistent with the recent research literature in memory studies, this contribution has conceived of memory as relational, complex, ›travelling‹, and trans-cultural. However, its specific focus has been on the peculiar threshold character of memory. That means it has examined memory as a liminal phenomenon that is crossing boundaries between inside and outside, subject and object, self and other, individual and collective, real and imaginary, true and false, past and present, etc. The article has considered memory as moving within these in-between zones and as circulating between individuals, social groups, societies, and cultures. It argues that the concept of liminality provides a new perspective that allows us to recognize memory as a dynamic phenomenon that cannot be defined in static terms, defies categorizations and reductive approaches, and exhibits an intrinsic fuzziness.

The location of liminal entities ›betwixt and between‹ (Turner 1967, 97) renders them ›structurally ›invisible‹‹ (ibid., 98). Correspondingly, mnemonic liminality is mostly unobservable. And here come into play the privileges of fiction that equip literature with especially potent tools to represent the unrepresentable. An important result of the brief analysis of *Midnight's Children* is the finding that magic realism as well as bold metaphors and allegories are particularly powerful means of representing the unrepresentable liminality of memory. Furthermore, the use of leitmotifs and the semanticization of space and objects have proven to be effective techniques to portray and symbolize liminal aspects of memory. The behavior of the narrator also manifests certain threshold qualities: Saleem's partial unreliability locates his autobiography between reality and imagination. His abundant intertextual references to Hindu mythology illustrate the overlapping of his Muslim identity with the cultural memory of Hinduism. Moreover, the narrator's position between present and past is foregrounded when his remembering adult self inadvertently overlays his remembered childhood self. While this interference is a fairly common and realistic occurrence, the narrator's oscillation between his own first-person perspective and a seemingly marvelous omniscience is a rather eccentric device to claim that the memories of others have somehow found their way into him.

Within memory studies in general, more efforts to examine, theorize, and contextualize the phenomenon of mnemonic liminality are needed. As for lit-

erary memory studies in particular, two main approaches for further research have been distinguished: The first research perspective concerns the study of the mnemonic liminality of literature itself. This approach has the potential to enrich literary theory by developing new innovative theories as well as by utilizing, rethinking, and reevaluating established cultural and literary theories in the light of mnemonic liminality, as has been rudimentarily attempted in this essay with the theories of Victor Turner, Wolfgang Iser, Paul Ricœur, and Homi Bhabha. The second research perspective concerns the study of mnemonic liminality in literature. This includes analyzing the treatment of liminal aspects of memory in many more paradigmatic texts, exploring the diverse range of themes connected with the liminality of memory, and identifying and assessing the large variety of narrative techniques that are deployed in these texts to stage and reflect mnemonic liminality.

The concept of liminality promotes and refines processual and nonlinear approaches to memory. Understanding liminality, we are sensitized to the inherent ambiguity, uncertainty, and complexity of memory. This helps us to avoid false »categorical cleanliness« (Hustvedt 2016, 364) and to recognize the blurriness of memory as intrinsic to the phenomenon itself. Liminality teaches literary memory studies an important lesson: While exploring the borderlands of memory, we must question the sharp lines on the map and acknowledge the fog we encounter on the way.

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