Dr Robert Craig – *Interculturality & Transculturality*  10/2/23

**Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990)**

**Useful quotations:**

**1.** ‘I don’t care -- Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. **Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored.** Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it. Anyway, why search the inner room when it’s enough to say that I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family, I don’t know why.’ ***-- BS*, p. 3.**

**2.** ‘[T]he thing that made me realize that “God”, as I now called Dad, was seriously scheming, was the queer sound I heard coming from his room as I was going up to bed. I put my ear against the white paintwork of the door. **Yes, God was talking to himself, but not intimately. He was speaking slowly, in a deeper voice than usual, as if he were addressing a crowd. He was hissing his s’s and exaggerating his Indian accent. He’d spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous, and now he was putting it back in spadeloads. Why?’ *-- BS*, p. 21.**

**3.** ‘“The whites will never promote us”, Dad said, “Note an Indian while there is a white man left on the earth. You don’t have to deal with them -- they still think they have an Empire when they don’t have two pennies to rub together”.’ ***-- BS*, p. 27.**

**4.** ‘So there it was. Helen loved me futilely, and I loved Charlie futilely, and he loved Miss Patchouli futilely, and no doubt she loved some other fucker futilely. The only unfutiley loving couple were God and Eva.’***-- BS*, p. 38.**

**5.** ‘“We don’t want you blackies coming to the house.”

“Have there be many?”

“Many what, you little coon?”

“Blackies.”

“Where?”

“Coming to the house.”

“We don’t like it”, Hairy Back said. “However many niggers there are, we don’t like it. We’re with Enoch. If you put one of your black ‘ands near my daughter I’ll smash it with a ’ammer! With a ’ammer!”’. ***-- BS*, p. 40.**

**6.** ‘At the age of thirteen Jamila was reading non-stop, Baudelaire and Colette and Radiguet and all that rude lot, and borrowing records of Ravel […] Then she got this thing about wanting to be Simone de Beauvoir, which is when she and I started having sex every couple of weeks or so. […] [W]hen Miss Cutmore left South London, for Bath, Jamila got grudging and started to hate Miss Cutmore for forgetting that was Indian. Jamila thought Miss Cutmore really wanted to eradicate everything that was foreign in her. “She spoke to my parents as if they were peasants”, Jamila said. She drove me mad by saying Miss Cutmore had colonized her, but Jamila was the strongest-willed person I’d met: no one could turn her into a colony. **Anyway, I hated ungrateful people. Without Miss Cutmore, Jamila wouldn’t have even heard the word “colony”. “Miss Cutmore started you off”, I told her.’**

**-- *BS*, p. 53.**

**7.** ‘It was unusual, I knew, the way I wanted to sleep with boys as well as girls. I liked strong bodies and the backs of boys’ necks. […] But I liked cunts and breasts, all of women’s softness, long smooth legs and the way women dressed. **I felt it would be heart-breaking to have to choose one or the other, like having to decide between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. […] When I did think about it I considered myself lucky that I could go to parties and go home with anyone from either sex -- not that I went to many parties, none at all really, but if I did, I could, you know, trade either way.’** -- ***BS*, p. 55.**

**8.** ‘I was sick […] of being affectionately called Shitface and Curryface, and of coming home covered in spit and snot and chalk and woodshavings. We did a lot of woodwork at our school, and the other kids liked to lock me and my friends in the storeroom and have us chant, “Manchester United, Manchester United, we are the boot boys” as they held chisels to our throats and cut off our shoelaces.’ -- ***BS*, p. 63.**

**9.** ‘Maybe there were similarities between what was happening with Dad, with his discovery of Eastern philosophy, and Anwar’s last stand. Perhaps it was the immigrant condition living itself through them. For years they were both happy to live like Englishmen. Anwar even scoffed pork pies as long as Jeeta wasn’t looking. […] **Now, as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning internally, or at least to be resisting the English here. It was puzzling: neither of them expressed any desire actually to see their origins again. “India’s a rotten place”, Anwar grumbled. “Why would I wanted to go there again? It’s filthy and hot and it’s a big pain-in-the-arse to get anything done. If I went anywhere it would be to Florida and Las Vegas for gambling”’. -- *BS*, p. 64.**

**10.** ‘“Anwar is my oldest friend in the world”, he said sadly when we told him everything. “We old Indians come to like this England less and less and we return to an imagined India”.’

Helen took Dad’s hand and patted it comfortingly.

“But this is your home”, she said. “We like you being here. You benefit our country with your traditions.”’

***-- BS*, p. 74.**

‘Helen wouldn’t hold on to anything properly in case mosquitos jumped out of the suitcases and gave her malaria.’

***-- BS*, p. 78.**

**11.** ‘I had a lot of spare time, and from leading a steady life in my bedroom with my radio, and with my parents downstairs, I now wandered among different houses and flats carrying my life equipment in a big canvas bag and never washing my hair. I was not too unhappy, criss-crossing South London and the suburbs by bus, no one knowing where I was. **Whenever someone -- Mum, Dad, Ted -- tried to locate me, I was always somewhere else, occasionally going to a lecture and then heading out to see Changez and Jamila.’ -- *BS*, p. 94.**

‘Watching Jamila sometimes made me think the world was divided into three sorts of people: those who knew what they wanted to do; those (the unhappiest) who never know what their purpose in life was; and those who found out later on. **I was in the last category, I reckoned, which didn’t stop me wishing I’d been born into the first.’ -- *BS*, p. 95.**

**12.** So this was London at last, and nothing gave me more pleasure than strolling around my new possession all day. London seemed like a house with five thousand rooms, all different; the kick was to work out how they connected, and eventually to walk through all of them. – ***BS*, p. 126.**

**13.** ‘Myself, I went to the Nashville every night and reckoned that Charlie’s glory in South London was the most he’d ever get. **In [128] London the kids looked fabulous; they dressed and walked and talked like little gods. We could have been from Bombay. We’d never catch up’. -- *BS*, pp. 127-28.**

**14.** ‘As [Eva] spoke of the new Dylan album and what Riverside Studios was doing, I saw she wanted to scour that suburban stigma right off her body. She didn’t realize it was in the body and not on the skin; **she didn’t see there could be nothing more suburban than suburbanites repudiating themselves**.’ ***-- BS*, p. 134.**

**14.** ‘“[T]ake a rucksack and see India, if it’s the last thing you do in your life.”

“Right, Mr Shadwell.”

‘He said, “What a breed of people two hundred years of imperialism has given birth to. If the pioneers from the East India Company could see you. What puzzlement there’d be. Everyone looks at you, I’m sure, and thinks: and Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we’ll hear now from him. And you’re from Orpington.”

“Yeah.”

“Oh God, what a strange world. The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century. Yes?”’ ***-- BS*, p. 141.**

‘Karim, you have been cast for authenticity and not for experience.’ ***-- BS*, p. 147.**

**15.** ‘Pyke was the star of the flourishing alternative theatre scene; he was one of the most original directors around. […] Pyke’s shows were […] commended for their fantastic intermissions, dazzling occasions where the fashionable audience came dressed in such style they resembled Chinese peasant, industrial workers (boiler suits) or South American insurgents (berets).’ ***-- BS*, p. 160**

**16.** ‘The Princess wanted to get a licence to sell liquor on the premises; she wanted to sell newspapers and increase the stock. She could see how it was all done, but Anwar was impossible, you couldn’t discuss anything with him. Like many Muslim men… Anwar thought he was right about everything. No doubt on any subject ever entered his head’.

***-- BS*, p. 172**

**17.** ‘I was misled by my ignorance of London into thinking my Eleanor was less middle class than she turned out to be. She dressed roughly, wearing a lot of scarves, lived in Notting Hill and -- sometimes -- talked with a Catford accent. My mother would have been appalled by Eleanor’s clothes and manners, and her saying “shit” and “fuck” every ten seconds. This wouldn’t have perturbed Eva: she would have been disappointed and perplexed by Eleanor’s concealment of her social origins and the way she took her “connections” for granted.’

-- ***BS*, p. 173.**

**18.** ‘In the suburbs education wasn’t considered a particular advantage and certainly couldn’t be seen as worthwhile in itself. Getting into business young was more important. But now I was among people who wrote books as naturally as we played football. What infuriated me -- what made me loathe both them and myself -- was their confidence and knowledge. The easy talk of art, theatre, architecture, travel; the languages, the vocabulary, knowing the way round a whole culture -- it was invaluable and irreplaceable capital. […] **For Eleanor’s crowd hard words and sophisticated ideas were in the air they breathed from birth, and this language was the currency that bought you the best of what the world could offer. But for us it could only ever be a second language, consciously acquired.**’ -- ***BS*, pp. 177-78.**

**19.** ‘Tracey usually said little, so when she did begin to talk about my Anwar the group listened by kept out of the discussion. This thing was suddenly between “minorities”. […] Your picture is what white people already think of us. That we’re funny, with strange habits and weird customs. To the white man we’re already people without humanity, and then you go and have Anwar madly waving his stick at the white boys. I can’t believe that anything like this could happen. You show us as unorganized aggressors. **Why do you hate yourselves and all black people so much, Karim?’ -- *BS*, p. 180.**

**20.** ‘Changez, if I knew my Changez, would be abusing any Pakistanis and Indians he saw in the street. “Look at that low-class person”, he’d say in a loud void […]. “Yes, they have souls, but the reason there is bad racialism is because they are so dirty, so rough-looking, so bad-mannered. And they are wearing such strange clothes for the Englishman, turbans and all. To be accepted they must take up the English ways and forget their filthy villages! They must decide to be either here or there. Look how much here I am! And why doesn’t that bugger over there look the Englishman in the eye! No wonder the Englishman will hit him!”’.

-- ***BS*, p. 210.**

**21.** ‘I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now -- the Indians -- that in some way these were y people, and that I’d spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I’d been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them. Partly I blamed Dad for this. After all, like Anwar, for most of his life he’d never shown any interest in going back to India […] He **wasn’t proud of his past, but he wasn’t unproud of it either; it just existed, and there wasn’t any point in fetishizing it, as some liberals and Asian radicals liked to to.’** ***-- BS*, pp. 212-13.**

**22.** ‘What a strange business this acting is, Pyke said; you are trying to convince people that you’re someone else, that this is not-me. The way to do it is this, he said: when in character, playing not-me, you have to be yourself. **To make your not-self real you have to steal from your authentic self.** A false stroke, a wrong note, anything pretended and to the audience you are as obvious as a Catholic naked in a mosque. The closer you play to yourself the better. Paradox of paradoxes: to be someone else successfully you must be yourself. This I learned!’ ***-- BS*, pp. 219-20.**

**23.** ‘I was playing an immigrant fresh from a small Indian town. I insisted on assembling the costume myself: I knew I could do something apt. I worse high white platform boost, wide cheery flares that stuck to my arse like sweetpaper and flapped around my ankles, and a spotted shirt with a wise “Concorde” collar flattened over my jacket lapels. […] l walked out on stage, farting with fear, there was laughter, uncertain at first, then from the belly as they took me in. As I continued, gusts of pleasure lifted me. I was a wretched and comic character. The other actors had the loaded lines, the many-syllabled political analysis, the flame-throwing attacks on pusillanimous Labour governments, but it was me the audience warmed to. **They laughed at my jokes, which concerned the sexual ambition and humiliation of an Indian in England.’** -- ***BS*, p. 220.**

**24.** ‘Suddenly three dark-skinned men ran into the room, banging some sort of wooden hook on hand-held drums. Then a black man, wearing bright pink trousers and naked form the waist up, started to fling himself, his arms outstretched, around the room. Two black women joined him, and fluttered away with their hands. Another man in sparkly trousers flew into the room, and the four of them did a kind of mating dance barely a foot from Tracey and me. And Dr Bob squatted in a corner yelling, “Yeah” and “Right on” as the Haitians danced. **It made me feel like a colonial watching the natives perform. At the end there was rapturous applause and Dr Bob made us shake hands with all of them.’ -- *BS*, p. 244.**

**25.** ‘How London had moved on in ten months. No hippies or punks: instead, everyone was smartly dressed, and the men had short hair, white shirts and baggy trousers held up by braces. it was like being in a room full of George Orwell lookalikes, except that Orwell would have eschewed earrings. […] Allie’s girlfriend was a model, a thin black girl who said nothing except that being in a soap opera could only lead to better things. **I looked around for someone to pick up, but was so lonely I knew they’d smell it on me. I wasn’t indifferent enough for seduction.’ -- *BS*, p. 271.**

**26.** ‘I could think about the past and what I’d been through as I’d struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in the future I would live more deeply. […] I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn’t always be that way.’ -- ***BS*, pp. 283-84.**