

**Hanif
Kureishi
(1954)**



**“La bontà non mi attrae
particolarmente.
Mi piace la passione.”**

**“Gli artisti dovrebbero essere
terroristi, non massaggiatori”**

Principal works

■ Long fiction

The Buddha of Suburbia, 1990 (Whitebread Award for the best first novel)

The Black Album, 1995

Intimacy, 1999

Gabriel's Gift, 2001

The Body, 2004 ; *Something to Tell You*, 2008

■ Short fiction

Love in a Blue Time, 1997

Midnight All Day, 1999

■ Drama and screenplays

1988 *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*

1991 *London Kills Me*

1996 *My Beautiful Laundrette and other writings*

1997 *My Son The Fanatic*

1999 *Hanif Kureishi Plays One*

1999 *Sleep With Me*

2002 *Collected Screenplays*

2003 *The "Mother"*

2007 *Venus*

■ Filmography

- 1985 *My Beautiful Laundrette*
- 1987 *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*
- 1991 *London Kills Me*
- 1993 *The Buddha of Suburbia* (television miniseries)
- 1997 *My Son the Fanatic*
- 2001 *Intimacy*
- 2003 *The God of Small Tales* (short)
- 2003 *The Mother*
- 2006 *Venus*
- 2007 *Weddings and Beheadings* (2007)

Biographical information

- Born in 1954 in Bromley (suburb in South London); from the 70s in West London
- Mixed origins (race and class wise): Pakistani father, English mother – yet his father wanted his children to be English (minority within a minority)
- Like Karim: “A funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories” (*BS*, p. 3) – histories of colonizer and colonized

- From drama of non-belonging, suffered inbetweenness into new appreciation of *hybridity*
- Diverse experience: Bromley Technical High School (David Bowie and Billy Idol's school), philosophy degree at King's College London, writer of pornography (under pseudonym Antonia French and Karim), work in fringe theatres
- Representative of the 1990s emergence of a successful British Asian cultural and artistic production (e.g. Ayub Khan-Din's 1997 play *East is East*) but not only

Main concerns

- **Realism:** “A writer's job, if we have any job in society, is to tell the truth as we see it, to write about the world as we observe it, and the world is a strange place and people are divided, unusual, wicked, and good.”
- **Local realism:** absence of decolonised and postcolonial world; focus on London (inner-city and suburbs); use of SR English vs postcolonial “chutnifying” of the English language
- **World writing:** London as synecdoche of post-war cultural world changes

- **Embracing traditions:** e.g. indebted to “state of the nation novel” and English realism
- **Autobiographism:** often criticised (by his sister too)
- **Liberalism and liberty:** “sex, drugs and rock’n’roll” vs any manifestation of extreme ideology (left- and right-wing)
- **Alternative families:** vs Thatcher’s and Reagan’s proselytising about the traditional nuclear family in the 80s

■ VS theoretical labelling:

“I think the postcolonial label has always bothered me slightly because, to me, it is a narrow term. And so much of my work is not about that and so you feel that you’re being squashed into a category that you don’t quite fit and you fear that there are lots of other aspects of your work which people might then be ignoring”.

- VS essentialist notions of race, class, gender and nation: the self is always mobile and plural
- VS absolutist dichotomy dominant vs minority culture: in favour of complementarity, linkage, mutual exchange and inter-cultural relations

- The burden of representation: “I resist the idea of being representative” (Rushdie)
- ❖ “Ethnic”, “minoritarian” artist’s responsibility to his original community – source of anxiety (e.g. pressure on Karim to represent the Asian community)
- ❖ Kureishi’s disavowal of those labels and his duty to speak on behalf of Asian Britain (also due to his untypical origins and upbringing and his being monoglot)
- ❖ Poststructuralist idea of multiple, diverse and not single communities (cf. difference between Karim and Changez)

■ Consequences of decolonisation

- ❖ “Internal” or “domestic” colonialism:
London replicating the world’s patterning
- ❖ Institutional structures and social hierarchies still subordinate “minorities”
(e. g. job market, housing, education)
- ❖ Identity issue: “So what does it mean to be British?”
- ❖ Britain’s inferiority complex after disgregation of empire and rise of US

- ❖ Hybridity: hybrid treatment, no easy solution
- Dialectical and progressive movement leading to synchronism between different cultures (Rushdie's extolling of mongrelization or Bhabha's more complementary model of the third zone):
vs purity, vs extreme dichotomies, vs absolutist ontologies, vs total integration meant as assimilation to the host culture

➤ BUT:

- unlike Rushdie, apparent disinterest in interlacing or fusing western and eastern traditions;
- heterogeneity OVER hybridity
- vs syntheses? In line with Terry Eagleton's utopian wish to live "in sheer irreducible difference now"?

- American globalisation/ “cultural imperialism”
- ❖ VS Thatcher’s extolling of American business-based society and individualism
- ❖ Pro American social movements from the 60s (cf. Karim’s support of American feminist and gay movements vs left-wing anti-US radicals)
- ❖ Influence of Afro-American writing in the 50s and 60s, of Baldwin, Kerouac, Salinger, Roth
- ❖ Appreciation of Hollywood cinema, American pop music and mass-media culture as means to reach a wide audience

■ Influence of pop music

- ❖ Commodity: e.g. Charlie selling “Englishness” in New York
- ❖ Template for the progressive processes of hybridisation and cross-fertilisation (Haroon and Margaret meet at a dance listening to Glenn Miller, Count Basie and Louis Armstrong)
- ❖ Pop music and the “sexual revolution” of the 60s: pointing to more flexible notions of sexuality and gender and class roles

“Pop is the cry of the “outsider” – free speaking to a large audience. It has done more to remake British identity than any other form, and the spirit of punk still inspires it. British music has always been mixed up in all senses. It is a democratic form, and it is multicultural; it has been black and Asian, working-class, middle-class, gay and lesbian. If I find myself talking to the kids about this, it is because this is their history, too, and something they might like to know about – indeed, probably should know about, as an alternative education.”

“Pop still represents the voices of those who are not normally listened to, and there remains something subversive and obscene about it. The odour of cheap sexuality, drugs and drinking, as well as desperation and people going mad, reminds us that pop is, ultimately, about the deepest and most important things: anarchic enjoyment and bodily pleasure. Unlike most art, which becomes over-sophisticated as it develops, pop remains simple and direct. As with music hall, its most important qualities are vulgarity, naivety and exhibitionism.” (*New Statesman*, 19 March 2007)

■ Intertextuality and appropriation (mostly Western culture and literature):

“You might say that all culture works by appropriation. There’s me, an Asian kid sitting in Bromley in my bedroom listening to The Rolling Stones who appropriated black music and at the same time I am reading James Baldwin”

■ Postmodernism

- ❖ Moral relativism
- ❖ VS oppositional politics
- ❖ Anti-essentialist notion of identity
- ❖ Mixture of high and low art
- ❖ Embracing global developments as a form of cultural enrichment
- ❖ Intertextuality
- ❖ Hybridity
- ❖ Idea of cultural difference and harmony in diversity (Spivak)