

The Postcolonial Bildungsroman as First Philosophical Text
The Problem of Authenticity Explored in
The Buddha of Suburbia

Ahmed Ansari

School of Design

Carnegie Mellon University

How do the protagonists of the modified bildungsroman negotiate the different societies in which they find themselves? What constitutes 'maturation' for these protagonists? What is the endpoint of their development? And also, how can such a character ultimately be successful?

Maria Karafilis, *Crossing the Borders of Genre*ⁱ

Karim, this is the meaning of my life.

Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*ⁱⁱ

The Postcolonial Bildungsroman as First Philosophical Text

The very definition of a genre is problematic, given the postmodern turn in the humanities in the latter half of the twentieth century. In a world where essential, fixed, definitive categories break down and become prone to flux, any kind of postcolonial reading of a literary text in the light of genre becomes tricky, given that genres embody what can be bordered and well defined within a specific politico-aesthetic space, and rely on establishing convention and expectation rather than in disrupting either. The traditional nineteenth-early twentieth century *bildungsroman* is, therefore, as Ericka Hoagland points out in her PhD dissertation, *Postcolonializing the Bildungsroman*, particularly hard hit, because of its traditional narrative structure that centers around the interpellation of a protagonist into the dominant discourses of society at the time.ⁱⁱⁱ

However, there is a form of disclosure that happens within the *bildungsroman*, regardless of what period in its evolution we look at, which tells us something about the binary oppositions that exist within the prevailing social structures of the times, for if there were no such oppositions, there would be no transformative experiences for the protagonists of

these narratives, and therefore, no process of *bildung* (for example, the oppositions set up in *David Copperfield* between the worlds of the industrial working class and the suburban upper class in England). The *bildungsroman* has therefore always been a commentary on the competing social discourses of the times rather than solely a description of the character development of its heroes/heroines. This remains true regardless of what ideological message the narrative serves in upholding in the end, whether their protagonists successfully interpellate into the status quo of their times (*Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*) or not (Ayn Rand's *We the Living*, with its heroine shot at the border only yards away from freedom, and the child narrator of *To Kill A Mockingbird* are both great examples of this).

In this sense, *bildungsromans*, in their functioning as socio-ideological commentaries, whether explicitly so through the thoughts and actions of their characters or through the world that they set up, uphold Brah's definition of the binary not as "*trans-historical universalism presumed to be an inevitable part of human nature*", but "*a socially constructed category whose trajectory warrants investigation in terms of how it was constituted, regulated, embodied and contested, rather than taken as always already present*".^{iv} Thus one can argue that the *bildungsroman* is, within Brah's reading, a form of *diasporic* text, in disclosing and commenting on the relations and tensions that exist between different kinds of binaries: political, cultural, economic, theological, gender, race etc.

In addition, what makes the *bildungsroman* narrative such a compelling candidate as investigative text is that it is not mere political commentary, but carries real ontological weight – the protagonists of *bildungsroman* narratives are always grappling with the

process of *becoming* – introspection and reflection are not simply detached critical/analytical devices designed to shed light on the politics of social binaries, but become charged with affect, giving us crucial insight into how these multitudinous, shifting binaries shape and develop people: *“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”* ^v

Postcolonial *bildungsroman*'s, and especially narratives that deal with diasporic, immigrant, or transnational identities, by virtue of occupying the fringes, or the spaces in between, competing binaries, are especially set up to reflect on the nature of the spaces they occupy, and the tensions inherent in these binaries suddenly take center stage, become explicit. To the maturing diasporic protagonist of the postcolonial *bildungsroman*, the answers to questions like *“who am I?”*, and *“what am I?”* are questions fraught with risk: in Nuruddin Farah's *Maps*, the problem that the orphan Askar is confronted with in the question of what constitutes his maturity is a purely ontological one: *‘A man indeed. Are you “a man”? One day I would like you to define what or who is “a man”.*' Farah brings our attention to the very construction of the concept of gender by, as Brah puts it, problematizing it, showing us what is to be gained when *“a narrative about identity continuously interrogates and problematizes the very notion of a stable and essential identity by deconstructing the narrator's own position.”* (Brah, 14)

I thus argue that the *bildungsroman* may be treated as a first philosophical text dealing directly with questions of an ontological nature: the quest for identity is caught up with the quest for defining *what is and what is not*, as much as it concerned with the quest to find meaning in one's life, and the way that it does this is through a primarily phenomenological

framework, in dealing with ontology through the lens of *lived, unfolding human experience*, thus fulfilling Heidegger's claim that "*phenomenology is our way of access to what is to be the theme of ontology, and it is our way of giving it demonstrative precision. Only as phenomenology is ontology possible.*"^{vi} As David Smith notes in his analysis of the lived experience: "*I see/think/do...*" *this feature is both a phenomenological and an ontological feature of each experience: it is part of what it is for the experience to be experienced (phenomenological), and part of what it is for the experience to be (ontological).*^{vii} In the *bildungsroman* novel, because of its first person accounts of the lived experience, the politics of the world are intrinsically intertwined with both the disclosure of it as experienced through the eyes of our heroes, and the development of complex, multifaceted systems of beliefs and values that constitute the heroes identity.

Building the Phenomenological Account

Thus, if we consider *bildungsroman* narratives as phenomenologically motivated accounts of the world, two key areas of inquiry arise: Firstly, what are the ways in which the phenomenal account is built? What are the devices that seek to explore this inner space, this mental world, of the protagonist?

In *Contesting Identities*, Brah further points out that in self-reflexive autobiographical accounts the reconstitution of narratives in memory serves to hold the various 'homes' and 'identities' of complex identities in suspension, allowing the protagonist to work through them (Brah, 14). The phenomenological account of the *bildungsroman* uses not only memory, but a whole slew of devices that serve the purposes of suspending the myriad identities that diasporic narrators have to negotiate through and belong to primarily

ontological categories of experience: the awareness of the passage of time, of aging and mortality in oneself and others, self-awareness and reflection, the tension between personal choice and the negotiation of reconstituting the self in different public roles under socio-cultural imperatives, the feeling of acting out through one's own body.

Secondly, how does such an account delineate (or not) a separation between the phenomenal self and 'the world'? How are we, the reader, to constitute an objective reading of the world within which the narrative is set? If the primary mode of questioning of a phenomenal self is ontological, then in what relation does the ontological exist with the social, political, economic, aesthetic etc.?

Unlike the traditional/modern subject who was constructed phenomenally through a series of mobile but stabilizing socio-cultural frames which functioned as a source of both identity and authority, where the subject constitutes itself through either occasions of mutual presence (direct interactions with other people), or as interactions with institutions and entities (the office, Church, the army, the 'older' generation), or their agents (the boss, the priest, the rebel, parents), the postcolonial diasporic or cosmopolitan subject cannot fully rely solely on these, for there is a third, more abstract level of relation at play that he/she must negotiate within – that of the social 'imaginary', the realm of images and signifiers that exist above and beyond institutions and individuals, bridging, as Anthony Giddens argues, the local to the global, and, if we extend the argument to include the cosmopolitan, immigrant, or diasporic subject where local and global are further implicated within one's own culture and the Other: *"the transformations of place, and the intrusion of distance into local activities, combined with the centrality of mediated experience radically change what*

'the world' actually is. This is so both on the level of the phenomenal world of the individual and the general universe of social activity within which collective activity within which collective social life is enacted. Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds are for the most part truly global."^{viii} As example, Giddens points to the ways in which modern life has transformed the way space fragments through technological mediation: a person may be more familiar with the political crises in the Middle East through television and the internet than with the affairs of their next door neighbor. This also echoes Appuradai's claim of the imagination as "*an organized field of social practices, a form of work, and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (i.e. individuals), and global possibilities*"^{ix}, conditioned by different dimensions of global cultural flow: ethnic, medial, technological, financial, and ideological. Thus the constitution of the diasporic protagonist of our novels is always taking place at both the level of the immediate and the abstract – the interaction of individuals is always mediated through the agency of institutions and the global, ever-present and ever fluctuating system of signification.

However, Giddens further argues that the increasing level of abstraction to which modern individuals must reach to in order to construct a clear and cogent sense of self results in a number of ontological fractures that they must resolve. In conjunction with Appuradai's landscapes, the understanding of these 'dilemmas' is crucial to our understanding of the difficulties encountered in constituting the postcolonial cosmopolitan individual:

- a) A dilemma of *unification versus fragmentation*, whereas the individual must negotiate between the need to present divergent selves in different contexts and situations, and the integration of these diverse presentations into a coherent

identity – Monica Ali does a brilliant way of explaining this in one of the opening chapters in *Brick Lane*: “*When I’m in Bangladesh I put on a sari and cover my head and all that. But here I go out to work. I work with white girls and I’m just one of them...*”^x

- b) A dilemma of *powerlessness versus appropriation*, whereby the individual must cede trust and power in order to generate new potentials and capacities – one can read this in the way educated individuals from developing countries will often travel to developed countries as low-wage migrant labor to gain economic opportunities because of the differences in currency valuation despite a perceived loss of social status;
- c) A dilemma of *authority versus uncertainty*, where the individual must negotiate a compromise between the freedom to choose between a multitude of agencies and institutions bearing authority, and the uncertainty that comes from ceding control of one’s choices to them – again, we can look to *Brick Lane* to see the ways in which the Bengal Tigers and Karim change their positions vis-à-vis ethnic relations within the community and appeal to religion in different ways;
- d) A dilemma of *personalized versus commodified experience*, as autonomy and individuality expresses itself more and more through material, market-mediated goods, and even self-actualization becomes pre-packaged and globally market managed commodity (think beauty product advertising, soap operas, self-help books), it becomes more and more difficult to determine just how to instantiate an individual identity. This becomes a key fracture in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, as we shall see.

Ultimately, though, I would like to tie all of these dilemmas to a central ontological concern: all of these tensions have to do with the problem of constituting the authentic self. What the above tensions expose is a map of the problematique inherent in any kind of identity creation in the postmodern age, but it would now be useful to bring them all into what I consider the keystone dilemma of the protagonists of our bildungsromans: what is my genuine, authentic being?

The Question of Authenticity

The quest for identity is also always a quest for authenticity: *what is the 'real', 'true' I?* This need to realize a true, authentic self is what drives the protagonist of the postcolonial *bildungsroman*, and this is something that differentiates the postcolonial from the traditional novel – and while it can be argued that authenticity is a key element of the traditional *bildungsroman* account, I would argue that it does not emerge as explicitly a concern in traditional narratives, primarily because the drive for authenticity is sublimated within the pursuit of personal happiness, whether this is achieved through reconciling duty with personal desires (*Jane Eyre*), the pursuit of freedom (*We the Living*), finding love (*Sons & Lovers*), or artistic awakening (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*).

In the postcolonial bildungsroman, the key prerequisite to a meaningful, happy existence is the successful resolution of what constitutes the self, and thus this resolution takes on a fundamentally ontological node of inquiry, since nothing about what constitutes one's being (ethnicity, culture, ideology, gender, sexuality), is set in stone – as we have identified, the problematic always lurks in the background of all of these, exhibiting in all sorts of ontological fractures, and a successful constitution of a personal narrative is contingent on

framing a definition of the authenticity of it. Thus, in *Maps*, Askar's search for a coherent, sustainable personal and national identity is underscored by the question of what a true, authentic Somali is; in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, the titular character tries hard to find a personal narrative that is consistent with both her background and her new home in America even as she tries to break away from her own colonial inheritance and upbringing (in reference to living in the shadow of her mother: "*I would see her face before me, a face that was godlike, for it seemed to know its own origins, to know all the things it was made of*"^{xi}); in Christina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*, all the characters are wrestling, in their own ways, question the notion of authenticity with regard to being Cuban and to Cuba (this is drawn out most explicitly in Pilar's character).

To analyze this notion of authenticity in being I shall turn to the philosopher who first opened the question of Being: Martin Heidegger – he was not only the first, but arguably the most influential philosopher in his influence – both Sartre and the existential school, and later phenomenologists like Merleau Ponty and Hubert Dreyfus, have framed their definitions of authenticity either as extrapolations of Heidegger or as critiques of his work.

Heidegger opens his analysis of being by distinguishing between the ontic notion of being as opposed to the ontological formulation of Being. In his magnum opus, *Being and Time*, he opens by examining what we really mean when we ask "does *x* exist?" For example, to say "this man exists" would imply that I know what "to exist" means, and it is exactly this that Heidegger holds up to scrutiny when he frames it as the ontological question of the meaning of Being (*Sein* in the German). Without an understanding of Being, Heidegger suggests, we can have no true understanding of *beings* as entities – the ontological

underlies the ontic. Furthermore, what distinguishes human beings from all other forms of life and matter is the fact that the ontological question matters, i.e. as Mulhall calls it in his translation of Heidegger, that while objects merely *persist* and animals merely *live*, Dasein¹ *leads its life*, a crucial distinction in terms of what it implies about human understanding of choice and potential:

“Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does do by taking hold or by neglecting. The question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself. The understanding of oneself which leads along this way we call existentiall.” (Heidegger, 52)

As Ewing teases out in her exegesis on Heidegger, Heidegger speaks of Dasein’s possibility to “be or not be itself”, implying that there is an authentic “self” that Dasein can be, and that the questioning of oneself is lead through the way he terms “existential”, through the process of living and existing in the ontic, everyday world. For Heidegger, truth in being is not some transcendental thing that we reach through contemplating an abstract, immaterial realm – humans live, breath and enact being in *the* world as it exists all around them.

“The Self of everyday Dasein is the they-self, which we distinguish from the authentic Self – that is, from the Self that has been taken hold of in its own way. As they-self the particular Dasein has been dispersed into the ‘they’, and must first find itself.” (Heidegger, 167)

¹ Heidegger’s term for human being, the being for whom Being is a question.

Heidegger makes an argument here that *Dasein* as it exists every day is inauthentic because it has chosen to be sublimated into the mass of the 'they', those that "*disburden Dasein of its Being*" and "*prescribe that way of interpreting the world*" (Heidegger, 165, 167). In the view of the late Heidegger's work the 'they' are the totalizing paradigms or understandings of Being that we unconsciously or consciously are interpellated into and follow. It is interesting to note that Heidegger frames letting the 'they' dictate who you are as an individual choice – it almost sounds like the surrender of the freedom to find for yourself who you truly are.

So if the inauthentic self falls into following the 'they', what does Heidegger identify as the authentic self, and how does *Dasein* begin to move to find this authentic self? For this, in Ewing's analysis of *Being and Time*: "*...Heidegger seems to be claiming that the Self...gets brought to itself by the call of conscience in anxiety. All that is annihilated in anxiety is Dasein's unexamined identification with the 'they'.*"^{xii} What is disclosed is that the possibilities that *Dasein* thought it had are not its own, but decided by the 'they'. Furthermore, she observes that Heidegger, wherever he talks of the Self, talks of Self as a way of being, rather than *a* being. Ewing concludes in her argument that it is in the face of angst that we face a gestalt switch that allows us to face ourselves and own up to our own potential – we find that "*the nature of the Self as revealed in anxiety may only be a free capacity to choose one's possibilities for oneself, to decide for oneself, to take hold or neglect.*" (Heidegger, 232) Heidegger terms this way of being a form of anticipatory resoluteness towards our own potential.

John Russon furthers this argument by further analyzing this notion of angst. He argues that when one sees nothing as being meaningful, where what once had personal meaning has now been disclosed to be merely a following the 'they', it is exactly then that "mattering" matters, i.e. one recognizes oneself as the one who *lets* things matter: "*normally, we treat things in the world as imposing their meanings on us: this is important because it is a job or because it is cold...in authenticity, one can no longer 'go along with' the simple 'way things are' but recognizes oneself as the one who must set the terms of care.*" To summarize Russon's argument, authenticity according to Heidegger is a commitment to being open to letting what matters show itself – it is a form of learning that is carried out in actualization. To *be* authentic is to *live* authentically. As a final point, Russon makes an interesting observation: "*authentic selfhood is thus a kind of blind faith: faithful, because it is a keeping of the promise to be open; blind, because, qua futural, it cannot see what it is promising or how/whether it will be justified.*"^{xiii}

To summarize so far, we now see that the postcolonial *bildungsroman* does three things unique to the genre: it makes explicit and explores the notion of being in relation to 'authentic' being and the construction of an 'authentic' self; it does this by illuminating the tensions within the inner worlds of its protagonists through a variety of phenomenological devices; and it shows us how ontological questions regarding an 'authentic' self are enframed within 'worldly' paradigms that perform ideological, ethical and aesthetic functions, and that the fracturing or, as Heidegger would put it, the source of angst comes from the ontological fractures that result from the way man exists in the postmodern world. From the definition of authenticity that we have taken from Heidegger and his

interpreters, I would now like to take up Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* as a case study exemplifying the above three points.

Authenticity, Identity, & World in *The Buddha*

In an interview with the London Independent, Hanif Kureishi reflects upon the aftermath of the sexual revolution, the counterculture movements from the 60s through the 80s, and postmodernity: *"If you look at 'The Buddha of Suburbia,' an unrepressed world seems like a very cheerful prospect. But now it has happened, and it's dehumanized people. It's like the repetitiveness of strippers: clothes on, clothes off, clothes on, clothes off. We have inaugurated a 'Thatcherism of the soul'... In the 1950s we repressed sex, and now we repress love. Today, if you look around you, it's human connection that's elusive."*^{xiv}

And indeed, *The Buddha of Suburbia* starts off on a similar note of disillusionment – in the words of its hero, Karim, the firstborn son of an Indian immigrant father and British mother living in the suburbs of 70s South London: *"I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action, and sexual interest I could find, because things were so gloomy, so heavy, in our family."* (Kureishi, 1) This disillusionment is jolted when Karim's father, Harun, announces that he has found a way out of the humdrum of his own existence: *"Our lives become stale, they become set. We are afraid of the new, of anything that might make us grow or change. But that is living death, not life..."* (Kureishi, 89) In an amusing twist on orientalist notions of Hindu mysticism, Harun has supposedly gone back to his roots and found a new way to live– in Heideggerian terms, his response to the "averageness of the- they" is a form of enlightened hedonism: live for yourself, your own pleasure, your own comfort, etc. Amusingly, while couched as an "Indian" philosophy, Harun's preachings are,

in a wry observation by his son, completely English: *“This was the English passion, not for self-improvement or culture or wit, but for DIY, Do It Yourself, for bigger and better houses with more mod cons, the painstaking accumulation of comfort and, with it, status - the concrete display of earned cash.”* (Kureishi, 25) Supported by the like-minded Eva, Harun rises to become a sort of ‘buddha’ figure to the suburbs, attracting disappointed white socialites looking to find solutions to their own unhappiness, by telling them what they already believe in and want to hear.

Early on in the novel, Harun starts an affair with Eva, eventually culminating in the breakup of his own family and the subsequent move of the two lovers, with their sons in tow, to urban Central London. It is interesting to note, over the course of the novel, how Harun and Eva live out this search for authentic meaning in their lives – in a cruel irony, one might argue that Harun falls into the very trap he seeks to get out of in the first place. Harun’s existential angst emerges from a combination of the ontological tensions that Giddens talked about, and echoes in his contemporaries (Eva, but also Ted, his brother-in-law, for instance): a feeling of powerlessness emerging from the complete lack of potential within his life, the need to create a break from what he sees as the commodified, materially oriented shallowness of his generation. But in reverting to preaching a credos of jettisoning the material and embracing a philosophy of self-help and seeking individual development and pleasure under the generic, sellable guise of Indian spirituality and mysticism, Harun falls into the trap of retreating further away from the authenticity he promises and deeper into commodification of the self – this is most evident in the way he embraces his newfound socio-economic mobility. Harun has, ironically, found a form of anticipatory resoluteness, but it is not the sort of anticipatory resoluteness that Heidegger identifies as

authentic – it is not grounded in a form of care or involved in a freeing of oneself to realize one's own potential in a responsible light.

It is interesting to note how Harun's philosophy reaches its conclusions in both his maturation and Eva's by the end of the novel. While Eva has completely bought into the benefits that it has brought her (referring to it by the end of a novel as a 'paradigm' she has developed – another ideology to raise up against ideologies), throughout the novel we gain glimpses and hints that Harun is very much aware of the hollowness of his own response to his quest for authenticity, and has feelings of guilt and regret regarding his actions, although by the end of the novel we find that he has gradually begun to believe less so in the content of his own teachings and move towards a form of openness to letting what matters show itself: *"I want to discuss how we live our lives, what our values are, what sort of people we've become and what we can be if we want."* (Kureishi, 266)

What I believe that Harun has realized by the end of the novel is the hollowness of precisely what philosopher Zizek refers to as the prevailing 'hedonistic ascetism' that characterizes the general postmodern response to the question of authenticity: *In today's market, we find a whole series of products deprived of their damaging properties: coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, beer without alcohol, sex without love...Virtual reality is experienced as reality without being so. Everything is permitted, you can enjoy everything- on condition that it is stripped of the substance that makes it dangerous.*^{xv} I would take Zizek's position further and argue that, through Harun's character, Kureishi is extending this argument to culture and cultural signifiers: culture becomes virtual, an empty signifier to be filled with whatever meaning you wish to believe in, and which can be repackaged and sold to the

masses. However, in Harun's epiphany at the end, we can extract a definition of authenticity with regards to culture and the self in *The Buddha of Suburbia* consistent with Heidegger's definition – like everything else, authenticity lies in living in a kind of resolve to be open to *what culture opens up to you* – culture is not essential in its nature, but nor is it completely void of meaning or contingent on whatever it is made into – culture is *lived* and acts in affirming authenticity insofar as it discloses things in ways that they matter.

While we find the older generation either embracing this new found “live for yourself” creed, Kureishi paints a slightly different, subtler dilemma with the younger generation. For Karim and his peers, his childhood friend Jamila, and Eva's son, Charlie, *“the spirit of the age among the people I knew manifested itself as general drift and idleness. We didn't want money. What for? We could get by, living off parents, friends or the State. And if we were going to be bored...we could at least be bored on our own terms, lying smashed in ruined houses rather than working in the machine.”* (Kureishi, 94)

Kureishi here refers explicitly to the defining paradigm that frames the ontological fractures of the postmodern age, and to which Harun and the older generation in the novel responded to with hedonism: that of nihilism. The distinction between Karim's generation and that of his father's, is that he harbors no illusions about finding any kind of meaningful response to meaninglessness in life and is openly nihilistic. Furthermore, Karim and his peers find different ways of responding to this existential crisis, and we shall now quickly take a look at Karim's and Charlie's responses to this problem in turn.

Charlie's character parallels his mother – he is a social climber, and his resolution of the ontological commoditization of the self is to embrace it wholeheartedly in an idolization of

rock and roll and its musical icons. Aping the fashions of David Bowie while Bowie is in fashion, for the first half of the novel Charlie spends much of his time finding identification with the 'they'. And yet, for all his ambition, his successful gigs playing at *"art colleges, in pubs and at small festivals in muddy fields"* (Kureishi, 117) and the small publicity that he gets from these, Charlie realizes that there is something wholly inauthentic about the way he lives: *"But he was getting nowhere and felt frustrated. He could see that it was getting late, and ultimately he was only in a rotten rock'n'roll band called Mustn't Grumble which sounded like Hawkwind."*

In the end, Charlie finally finds the answer to his frustration with the lack of social mobility in the sleepy suburbs of South London in an identification with the new sound of punk rock and grunge music in the city. Realizing on an intuitive level that this is the sound of the future and the answer to not only his but an entire generation's yearning for an outlet to the boredom in their lives, Charlie opportunistically and successfully coasts on the success of the rising genre as a punk rock star. In the end, he travels to America and finds everything he has ever wanted – fame, money, pleasure...and yet Charlie is not happy: *"Fame was something that Charlie had desired from the moment he stuck the revered face of Brian Jones to his bedroom wall. But having obtained it, he found he couldn't shut it off when he grew tired of it."* And yet, he finds himself unwilling to give it all up – Charlie's character is not one that, in the end, finds personal growth or genuine meaning to life – he does not even find happiness.

The Buddha of Suburbia is Karim's journey, told from his point of view, and it is here that the phenomenological account of the *bildungsroman* begins to really do interesting things

for a Heideggerian reading of Kureishi's story. At the beginning of the novel, Karim is bored, and, unlike Charlie, Eva, Harun, or the other ancillary characters of the novel, unambitious and uninspired – he has no definite ideas about how to escape the apparent meaninglessness of his life. What Kureishi does establish early on though, is that Karim possesses both a rare reflexivity and openness in the way that Heidegger characterizes anticipatory resoluteness: on the very first page of the novel, in response to the static, unchanging nature of his situation, Karim states: *"Quite frankly, it was all getting me down and I was ready for anything."*

This openness to experience is, ultimately, I argue, what allows Karim to be the most ambiguously resolved, and yet most subtly powerful character, in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and what is remarkable about him is in the way Kureishi sets him up as (in Heidegger's language), a world-discloser – everything we know about the development of the other characters is through his lens, and he provides the main critical voice in the novel. Throughout the novel, Karim is explicitly engaged with questioning authenticity, and he does this by holding up the experiences of the others to scrutiny and as a means to introspection.

For example, the following passage reflecting on comparing Eva to his own mother exposes a tendency to reach down to the ontological underlying the ontic everyday: *"I thought about the difference between the interesting people and the nice people. And how they can't always be identical. The interesting people you wanted to be with – their minds were unusual...then there were the nice people who weren't interesting, and you didn't want to know what they thought of anything...they were good and meek and deserved more love. But*

it was the interesting ones, like Eva with her hard, taking edge, who ended up with everything." This observation takes an incisive look at the constitution of two very different responses to the question of being, and it is in reflections like these that Kureishi thus establishes the mode of Karim's existence as being primarily hermeneutic – it is an existence occupied and driven by the questioning of the ontological by making the ontic problematic, and this identification of the problematic is made for us precisely because Karim's account is a phenomenological one.

Over the course of the novel, Karim escapes the suburbs, finds work in the city as an actor, falls in and out of love, visits America, and returns to England in time to witness the formal engagement of his father to Eva, and the resolutions to many of the other characters' personal dilemmas. Throughout the novel he negotiates constantly between projected binaries at the ontological level: between his Indianness and Englishness (*"I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishmen, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories"*), his bisexuality, between love and sex (*"I didn't want to feel this deeply; the disturbance, the possession. Sex I loved, like drugs, it was play, headiness...but love was too powerful for me. Love swam right into the body...while sex, the prick, was always outside"*), between selfish ambition and the cost that ambition brings in relationships (*"How can people just talk because they like the sound of their own voices and never think of the people around them?"*); and yet identifies in none of them with either/or – in living perpetually as a liminal entity, driven by questioning, Karim thus fulfills Heidegger's definition of the authentic as the resoluteness and constant orientation to one's own potential.

By the end of the novel, however, Karim finds no definite answer to the question of what constitutes an authentic existence, and yet it is in precisely his awareness of the necessity of the question and his realization that meaning is constituted in the striving for meaning, that Karim *becomes* Heidegger's definition of *lived* authenticity, as he makes a resolution, a commitment, to hold an openness to what matters in his life: *"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. And so I sat in the centre of this old city that I loved, which itself sat at the bottom of a tiny island. I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn't always be that way."* (Kureishi, 284)

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