"Ovidius" University
Faculty of Letters

THE ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF FICTION: SALMAN RUSHDIE'S PLAY WITH HISTORY

Scientific Coordinator:
Professor Adina CIUGUREANU

Doctoral student: Mariana SARIU (BOERU)

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As the very title of the present thesis indicates, **one of its most important aims** is to discuss Salman Rushdie's novelistic engagement with the discourse of history. More precisely, starting from the observation that throughout the Rushdie novels under the current scrutiny the two tropes of history and fiction appear in a permanent relationship (confrontational, antagonistic, subversive, mimicking, intertwining, parallel or tangential, nevertheless always cross-pollinating) and seem to be disputing the same ontological territory, this thesis will seek to illuminate some of the literary, cultural and political implications of this relationship, using the postcolonial cultural discourse as the main, but not sole, theoretical framework.

The theoretical chapter attempts to answer the question why history and fiction have become competitors in the cultural consciousness of postmodernity. The traditional view that history can actually produce a *faithful reconstruction of the past* has been strongly interrogated starting with the second half of the 20th century. The epistemological foundation of classical history has been shaken by several theoretical insights such as 1) the poststructuralist separation of language from reality and subsequent recognition of the self-referentiality of language in its incapacity to refer to anything else outside itself; 2) a severe loss of confidence in the truth claims of the scientific discourse or even in the possibility of producing any universally valid truths; 3) the inherently contingent nature of truth which is dependent on interpretations and one's linguistic capacity to formulate it; 4) the ultimately linguistic construction of reality and the

social construction of meaning; 5) the utter impossibility of stabilizing meaning into fixed signifier-signified relations due to its inherent slippery and plural nature which has lead to a severe decentering of the Western intellectual universe; 6) the epistemological incredulity towards the totalizing, logocentric Western paradigm of rationality and order as narrativized in humanity's grand, overarching stories of religion, science or democracy; 7) the inherent ideological nature of all discourses as carriers of power; 8) the mutually implying binary truth-power, in which truth is a linguistic construct of power, a discourse considered true by society rules and regulations in force at a certain place and moment in time; 9) the dissolution of the integrity of the rational self and the exposure of its socially and linguistically constructed, composite and fluid nature; 10) the rise of multiplied representations which are vacuous of any real life signifieds.

Thus, following the loss of its scientific legitimacy and the rise of epistemological skepticism and indeterminacy, history has come to be seen as yet another grand story among many. In fact, history is *the* story that postmodernity has chosen to turn to (traditionalist historians will prefer *turn against*) in order to articulate it anxieties and doubts. Moreover, classical history has had its internal reevaluations too, beginning with what is called *the narrative turn* in history and following with the radical relativism of postmodernist historiography.

The premise of *the narrative turn* in history is that the historian has to resort to the narrative strategies, normally characteristic of fiction writing, in order to make his discourse meaningful, convincing and, most importantly, comprehensible. The regular individual would not be able to make sense of history if confronted with an avalanche of disparate, unconnected, unfamiliar historical evidence and thus, the

historian must re-*present* history by making it familiar to modern readers. It is the very closeness between the writing of history and the writing of fiction which is the main proposition of *the narrative turn* in history, informing Roland Barthes's rather apocalyptical prophecy that: "Historical narrative is dying because the sign of History from now on is no longer the real, but the intelligible." (Barthes, 1986, 139)

In this way the border between history and fiction becomes blurred as one borrows characteristics and strategies from the other and neither has the epistemological strength to be claiming exclusive ownership of the truth or the ontological grounding in reality. In fact, Keith Jenkins, a prominent postmodernist historian, boldly urges us to recognize history "not as an epistemology but as an aesthetic" and the past and history as "empty signifiers". (Jenkins, 49) Jenkins sees historical texts as "propositional invitations to *imagine* the past *ad infinitum*". (Jenkins, 49)

Moreover, the traditional differentiation between history as *rational science* and therefore, yielding of *historical facts* and fiction as *fantasy* and therefore yielding of *imaginary things* is shattered in the postmodern conscience. The line of argumentation is simple but powerful. If history is the only one of the two to speak the truth then it follows that what is included in history is *true* and *real* and what is excluded from the historical account is *not real* or simply *does not matter*. As it has been shown, history is written by the selection and organization of historical evidence which obviously means that not all facts are going to make it into the final story. Some stories and voices will be marginalized or completely excluded and thus relegated to the realm of the *non-real* which is that of fiction.

Thus, there seems to be a perpetual fight for ontological territory between the postmodern historical fiction and the discourse of history in which the writing of fiction becomes a means of questioning grand history by producing a "countermemory" or "counternarrative" (Price, 3) to the unchallenged *certainties* of the historical past. Postmodern historical fiction makes it a point of constantly revisiting the past in order to maintain it *open to the present* and thus prevent it from falling into the trap of a conclusive, prescribed, immovable, teleological historical narrative. In its process of redefining the concepts of *reality* and *truth* postmodern historical fiction rediscovers those suppressed, marginal or distorted histories.

Nevertheless, unlike history, which, by large, is still convinced of its capacity for issuing *the truth*, postmodern historical fiction is well aware of its own narrativizing strategies, of the fact that any discursive construction, fictional or non-fictional is bound to be maculated by unavoidable ideologies, assumptions and presumptions, fallacies and falsifications. Therefore, postmodern historical fiction resorts to metafictional, self-reflexive narrative strategies, on the one hand, to flaunt its fictionality by exposing its inner-works and thus its own limitations and, on the other hand, to produce a commentary on and a critique of both the writing of fiction and, most importantly, the writing of history.

How does Salman Rushdie's fiction navigate the history vs. fiction divide? The general claim of this thesis is that Salman Rushdie deploys an array of largely postmodernist narrative strategies in order to raise mainly postcolonial issues such as: 1) dismantling the disparaging and untruthful representations of the former colonies in the historical discourse of colonial Europe by *writing back* or *re-writing history* from

the perspective of the colonized, 2) writing the new, postcolonial nation-state in fiction by exposing and interrogating the pedagogical, stifling and mystifying tendencies of indigenous national historiography, 3) problematizing the construction of the postcolonial self in the wake of migration, 4) decolonizing literary representations to allow for the articulation of a new cultural identity. In short, these will be the thematic lines along which this thesis will articulate its analysis: the writing of postcolonial history, the writing of the postcolonial nation, the writing of the postcolonial self and finally the writing of postcolonial literature. They will be identified and investigated in each of the novels discussed herein.

Rushdie certainly does not shy away from resorting to the narrative strategies typically employed by the Western postmodern historical fiction such as the use of unreliable narrators, the mixture of historical facts and fabulations, an intermingling of the categories of the real and the fantastic or magical, temporal confusions, the collapse of spatial and temporal borders, the mixture of literary and non-literary genres, the use of the Bakhtian carnival, parody and pastiche, the multitude of voices and perspectives, a focus on the bodily and the non-pornographic obscenity, verbal excesses and playfulness etc.

Nevertheless, Rushdie's fiction also echoes some of the most important theoretical acquisitions of the postcolonial cultural discourse such as: the use of the textual strategy of *mimicry* to subvert dominant colonial representations, the use of the *palimpsest* as a means of recuperating a pre-colonial historical consciousness from underneath colonial inscriptions, the gesture of *writing back* or *writing against the grain* to produce resistance and effect ideological change, the embracing of the *ambivalence* of perspective and the *hybridity* of national,

cultural, linguistic, ethnic or religious *postcolonial identity*, the location of the migrant consciousness in *a borderline space of in-betweeness*, transcending both national territorial borders and the binaries of belonging, etc. These concepts are briefly presented in this introduction and then elaborated on both in the theoretical chapter, and, most importantly, in each of the critical chapters that follow.

The literary corpus to be herein investigated comprises the following novels by Salman Rushdie: *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), *The Satanic Verses* (1988), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005). In addition, frequent references will be made to Rushdie's non-fictional work, primarily to his two essay collections *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991* (1992) and *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992–2002* (2002) and his numerous journal, TV and radio interviews in order to enlist the writer's own commentaries and opinions in the support of the present critical endeavor. Mention must be made that Rushdie's other three prominent novels *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) have not been also considered on account of their limited relevance to the topic and aims of this study. While *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury* deal with popular culture in the age of globalization, *The Enchantress of Florence* is the re-writing of *The Arabian Nights* against the background of 16th century India and Europe.

The novels that have been selected are connected by their commitment to national and world history in the light postcoloniality. More precisely, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* could be seen as Rushdie's national *triptych* as they all, chronologically fictionalize India's pre- and post-independence history. Thus, the novels

engage, on the one hand, the history of European colonial expansion into the South Asian subcontinent, that is, the West's political, cultural and social representations of itself and of its colonies, and, on the other hand, the indigenous historiography of pre- and post-independence India. In doing so, they imaginatively chart the discursive configurations and the subsequent evolution of the new postcolonial nation. *The Satanic Verses* and *Shalimar the Clown* expand the scope of Rushdie's fiction to a global reach and mark the historical transition from the 1980s nationalism to the 21st century trans-nationalism.

The novelty of the present study lies precisely in the connections made between the incipient postcolonial national discursive formations and their global, transnational hypostases. If previous recent studies still continue to consider only Rushdie's first three novels (see Agnes Gyorke's *Postmodern Nations in Salman Rushdie's Fiction*, published in 2010 or Nicole Weickgenannt Thiara's *Salman Rushdie and Indian Historiography. Writing the Nation into Being* which came out in 2009) this investigation will strive to map out the trajectory of the Indian nation as it has been drawn by Rushdie's fiction until the present, and, in doing so, it aims to illuminate its perpetual metamorphoses, the tensions and strains to which the pressures of global politics have subjected it and to what social and cultural effects they have done so.

The present thesis moves chronologically from analyzing the *parodic mimicry* of the essentializing and totalizing discourse of nationalist historiography in *Midnight's Children*'s story of the *birth* of independent India in chapter 2, to exposing the *grotesque farce* of artificially creating the country of Pakistan based solely on the discourse of religion in *Shame*, in chapter 3, then to the *demonic discourse of fiction* articulated against the frozen certainties of the

Islamic past in *The Satanic Verses*, in chapter 4, to *the palimpsest of layered narratives and identities* in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, in chapter 5 and finally to *the history writ large* across the networks of transnational, global stories in *Shalimar the Clown*, in chapter 6.

Chapter 2 "Narrating India Into and Out of Being: *Midnight's Children*'s Story(ies) of the Nation" has analyzed Rushdie's literary project of exposing the unavoidable reliance of the historical discourse on narrative strategies. For instance, the metaphor of the nation as a body is a common place in all nationalist discourses trying to unite the otherwise so diverse Indian population into one essentializing concept of *Indian nationality*. Rushdie takes over the metaphor of the national body and, on the one hand, turns it into the novel's main organizing trope and theme, i.e. Saleem is the individual as the body of the nation, and on the other, he reverses its metaphorical function in the literal text of history by literalizing it in his fictional text. Thus, while India is forcefully partitioned by the separation of Pakistan right after its independence in 1947, Saleem's body also suffers successive literal mutilations, culminating with his final equally *literal* death by dissipation at the end of the novel.

Saleem, the narrator of the text, acts both as writer and historian as he struggles to respond to what he calls "the national longing for form" (MC, 297). As a writer Saleem writes his own story while as a historian, he tries to write the story of his nation. The tension comes from the fact that the two narrative drives dispute the same territory in the economy of the novel thus apparently pointing to the impossibility of separating the two subject positions. In *Midnight's Children* historiography and autobiography are disputing the same territory. Just as a historian will use *his* own world schemata and *his* ideology to

impose order upon the historical events about which he is writing, so will Saleem impose himself as the main consciousness in the *story* of the Indian nation. Both the conventional historian and Saleem are bound to *write themselves* into their respective stories. Moreover, both are intoxicated by the illusion of omniscience. Thanks to the newly found gift of telepathy at the age of nine, when he starts hearing voices and turns into the self-entitled "All-India Radio" (MC, 163), Saleem becomes rather delusional and he comes to believe he is the center of the universe, its organizing principle, plenipotentiary: "I was already beginning to take my place at the centre of the universe; and by the time I had finished, I would give meaning to it all" (MC, 126 -127).

Saleem's egocentrism will lead him to will believe to be the cause of all historical and personal events occurring in his lifetime. He is the sole cause of the Indio-Pakistani war which according to him was waged with the unique purpose to wipe Saleem's family off the face of the earth. Saleem is actually trying to make sense of brutal, erratic and nonsensical historical events by attributing them personal meaning and collecting then coherently in his story. From the very first page of the novel the narrator informs the reader that: "I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning - yes, meaning - something. I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity." (MC, 1)

However, history is not made up of coherent, meaningful events therefore any attempt at making it comprehensible will lead to narrativization and thus fictionalization. Thus, after the initial enthusiasm, the illusion of control, the illusion of being able to maintain mental and physical integrity and of being able to use language constructively so that it encapsulates and represents the world, well after that initial momentum, Saleem is brutally awaken by the indifferent

blows of history and consequently realizes the scientific frailty of his historical endeavor. From that moment on he openly draws the readers' attention to his factual mistakes, thus casting the same doubtful light upon the conventional historian's work. Through a succession of strategically placed "errata," Rushdie actually hints at the impossibility of *any* narrative containing all of the events necessary for a true fidelity to a past. *Midnight's Children*'s self-undermining narrative is thus constructed as *casuality* against the *causality* of linear history.

Rushdie's alternation of a unifying and coherent narrative and an excessive and fragmentary non-narrative suggests some different possibilities for how the historical real can be, and should be, represented. In fact, Rushdie presents *a* history of India which does not claim exclusive rights to presenting the only truth but rather strives to express *human truths* that are often ignored by historical accounts. For instance, the partition of India by the separation of Pakistan and the ensuing distortion of events by two contrasting national narratives, Indian and Pakistani, make Saleem reach the conclusion that "what's real and what's true aren't necessarily the same" (MC, 79). This is why Saleem prefers the truth of memory to that of historiography because 'in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own" (MC, 211).

In the process of textualizing India, Rushdie combines elements of magic realism, (Saleem's head functioning as the radio for all the midnight children to convene, his telepathic surveys across the country, his truth-sniffing Cyrano nose, etc.) with Bakhtinian carnival (the communist magicians' ghettos), Oriental mythology (Ramayana and Mahabharata) with the modernist surrealism of the war in the

Bangladesh jungle (echoing Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) and the oral tradition of the Arabian Nights to try to recapture and restore India's fabulousness and multiplicity in his fiction.

Chapter 3 "History Written "at an Angle to Reality": Pakistani Dystopia in *Shame*" has explored *the fictional wars* for ontological territory between the dystopian, grotesque farce of *Peccavistan* that Rushdie positions "at an angle" (S, 22) to the real country of Pakistan and its official historical narrative. Rushdie creates a text which, on the one hand, insists on its pure fictionality while, on the other hand, it insinuates that it might offer some truthful and poignant insights into the real living conditions in Pakistan, behind the opaque veils of nationalist propaganda and its religious indoctrination.

The novel's relationship with the historically established facts is tangential, Rushdie's fiction merely grazing the historical narrative. This approach allows him a positioning of "nearness to history" (Nicholls, 114), a narrative strategy of proximity in which fiction is never completely superimposed over the discourse of history, nor does it purport to be its substitute, but rather it takes over the latter's signs and turn them into its own signifieds. The connection to the past is achieved obliquely via coincidental onomastics and popular culture representations. For instance, Rushdie indirectly connects president Iskander Harappa to Alexander the Great (by the name reference and the fact that the Harappa domain could actually be localized on the map of real Alexander's conquests) but this is where the coincidence stops. Iskander's electoral campaigning strategy (by ripping off his shirt to show the crowd his metaphorical wounds caused by the nation's war losses) has nothing to do with the great hero himself, but rather with the popular culture's version of Alexander, the eponymous movie (in which

the character Alexander would bare his chest before his soldiers to show them his battle wounds and thus motivate them to fight). This episode could point, on the one hand, to the spectacularization of the political discourse which is now entirely dependant on the visual element having been voided of any ideological substance, and, on the other hand, the reliance of the historical discourse on representation and mediation in order to be more easily consumed just as any other popular culture product. In addition, it is Rushdie's view that the heroism of the past and the greatness of ancient tragedies can only come back to present as mere farce, buffoonery and props on account of the lack of morality of the modern personages. History is *Shame* can not be revived because the country only exists in a present which is dominated by political corruption, family rivalry and nationalist propaganda.

In *Shame* we have a female main character, Sufiya Zinobia, who cannot speak for herself so Rushdie resorts to a male narrator. The object of narration is Pakistan and its shameful history, embodied in the female character Sufiya Zinobia, the "shame made flesh" (S, 144) of her family and nation. Thus, *the body* of the story is female while its *voice*, its *logos* is still male. If women are not allowed a voice and a narrative in the real Pakistani public arena, then Rushdie decides to make his fictional space available for women to express themselves, even if still outside the borders of logocentrism. The narrator has not been able to grant women the power of *words* but he has substituted that with *an artistic mind* (Rani Harappa) and *supernatural allegorical physical powers* (Sufyia Zenobia Hyder Shakil) In this way women get a say and social agency by two means of self-expression and action: the weaving of *the narrative shawls of true history*, eighteen "receptacles of memory" (Teverson, 139) by the president's wife, Rani Harappa, in

which she exposes the horrors of her husband's presidency, and the powerful, animal, murderous actions of Sufiya Hyder, the idiot girl of general Raza Hyder, which would cause the political downfall of her father. Their stories, what the narrator calls "the female plot" come to reflect and subvert the official "male plot" (S, 173). Both women will contribute to a severe disruption of the male-based national narrative and thus suggest ways in which the historical conditions can actually be changed by a strong reaction of the mind and body politic. Basically, Rushdie resolves to transform the peripheral stories of women into the "privileged" *angle* to reality of the novel.

Rani Harappa's outburst of creativity is articulated on multiple layers of deep significance in the novel. On the one hand, Rani's "epitaph of wool" (S, 201) is meant to help her regain agency and a sense of her own uniquely feminine self, undefined by a patriarchal, oppressive discourse of marriage (she signs her work in her maiden name) and, on the other hand, she sends the trunk of shawls to her daughter Arjumand in order to free the latter of her obsession with her adulated father and to restore her daughter's historical memory which had been perverted by her father's dominating spectrum. Thus, Rani passes on her own *legacy of memory*, the memory of all women, of the utterly repressed, of what could not have been *spoken*, a non-narrative, artistic history.

It might be argued that the visual texture of the shawls helps the narrative utter those *unspeakable things* that its logocentric rhetoric could not express on its own. Because the modern crisis of representation has broken the unmediated connection between words and the world, discourse itself has lost its ability to *articulate* ultimate,

ideology-free truths. In *Shame* the artistic medium is employed to put the word-bound historical narrative into perspective.

Chapter 4 "The Truth of the Divine word. *Re-presenting* the Historical/religious Past in *The Satanic Verses*" has analyzed Rushdie's approach to several great metanarratives which have been constitutive of and organizing the existence of mankind, namely religion, national history and national identity. In the process of the critical analysis, the chapter has shown that Rushdie de-centers, destabilizes and moves into the present the narrative of the sacred texts of Islam by dismantling the image of *the sacred* as a closed story, frozen in time and yielding of only one meaning and by making the sacred present and alive in a typical postmodernist act of historicization. Rushdie textualizes Islam and questions its divine origins and the originality of its sacred teachings.

Rushdie plays on the alleged illiteracy of the Prophet to have him dictate the *sunna* to his exile scribe Salman Farsi the Persian (one might notice the connection to Salman the author). Salman, the scribe, begins to alter the original version of the teachings while transposing them into written form in order to test the prophet's memory and authenticity. Unfortunately, the prophet does not recognize the perversion of his own words in writing when the scribe reads them back to him which will shatter Salman's religious devotion. The very fictional quality of the sacred texts begins thus to emerge. Rushdie actually performs a double act of subversion, by demonstrating, first, that the great narrative of religion is actually a construct, a pastiche of two (or more if we include Salman the writer) consciousnesses and, second, that it has lost its original form by the very act of being transposed into written form (a second-hand rendition), of being

textualized, fictionalized and included in the novel where ironically it is positioned against other fictional discourses.

In addition, the chapter has analyzed how truth and fiction mix in the novel, what role memory plays as a tool of rendition and fictionalization and moreover, how the novel disrupts established views or narratives. In this particular case the epics or narratives under scrutiny are the South-Asian immigrants' narratives of nation, identity and tradition and the imperial Britain's own narratives of itself and its history. To the impossible narratives of the migrant community in Britain who dream of the retrieval of a past unitary selfhood, of a communal identity and sense of belonging, of mother India, of their language and traditions Rushdie proposes the more honest and alternative fiction. What is more, the emigrants are not the only ones who need to re-evaluate their view and rendition of history. According to Rushdie, so does the imperial Britain. The linear, sumptuous and glorious story that the British tell themselves about their history needs to be re-evaluated in order to include the stories of the migrants within the metropolitan centre who are already re-telling and re-shaping it. Informed by the influences of global migration, Rushdie attacks the nostalgic look upon such traditional tropes as *the nation* and the *national history* and proposes an invigorating, more honest and constructive assessment of such tropes.

An important component of this chapter has been to scrutinize the condition of the postcolonial migrant self, its representations and misrepresentations as thematized by *The Satanic Verses*. It seems that Rushdie ironically proposes a demonic state of the migrant as a man fallen from grace, someone who has willingly severed his ties with the *paradise* of unbroken and unquestioned national identity. The host

country has not been extremely welcoming with Rushdie's migrants either, as they are both demonized and discriminated against, being seen as a hazard to national integrity and security. Thus, the migrant has entered a state of *rootlessness*, of not belonging, which he can only control if he embraces his own mongrelization and hybridization. Rushdie resolves to kill the essence of the pure, "untranslated" (SV, 442) self as, in his view, the self is necessarily fragmented - a construct of bits of ideals, perceptions, desires and beliefs, cultures, histories, and traditions, in one word a hybrid. Rushdie is bound to reject as mere fiction the integrity of both the communitarian and the migrant subject. Moreover, the novel shows that the migrant, in the very process of moving, of crossing over, redefines the old traditional territorial boundaries, maps and divisions, especially the cultural ones. Therefore, both the location of culture (in Homi Bhabha's terms) and the location of the migrant identity are now to be found in the interstitial and the global.

The chapter has also discussed how language functions in the novel. There are two main purposes for Rushdie's typical postmodern approach to language: 1) to decolonize the English language in literary productions and 2) to oppose the unitary meaning claimed by the authoritative discourses at play on the modern scene by deconstructing the binary opposition signifier-signified and allowing many different voices to *speak* within the fictional space of the novel.

Rushdie's position in the language question has been clearly stated on numerous occasions. He believes that "the English language (…) is *tainted by history* (…). Something of *the unwashed odour of the chamcha* lingers around its cadences. The language, like much else in the newly independent societies, *needs to be decolonized*, *remade in*

other images." ("The Empire Writes Back With a Vengeance") The *taint* that the colonial history has left on the English language denotes the assumptions of power, the gaps and absences of the colonized voices and their culture from an idiom expressing assumed superiority and alterity. In Rushdie's view the *decolonization* process involves re-imagining the post-colonial identity of the formerly colonized countries such as his native India and what is more the re-imagining of the English language so that it serves and represents the interests of those it formerly oppressed. Rather than a mere total rejection, a wipe-off of a painful past (which is impossible), the language, especially that of fiction, allows former colonial subjects to *mutate* it, hybridize it and turn it into their own liberation.

Rushdie's linguistic inventiveness and playfulness, his view of language as a game, the possibility of expressing a multiplicity of meanings, come to oppose what Derrida calls logocentrism, that is the unitary discourses of religion and politics. : In Rushdie's own words: "meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved" (IH, 12). Therefore, Rushdie finds that the truth value of discourse (in Foucauldian terms of truth and power-plays) is always multiple, possibly conflicting, and most of the times ambiguous, ambivalent and relative. To the perfection of closed logocentric discourses, Rushdie opposes the postmodern, open uncertainty and relativity as the only possible *centre*.

Chapter 5 "Layered History(ies) in *The Moor's Last Sigh*: The Palimpsest Uncovered" has discussed the re-emergence of religion as the most powerful harbinger of official, state-sponsored

discrimination, provoked by an ever-growing *ethnocentric* Hindu nationalist movement.

Hindu fundamentalist discourse reclaims the *essence* of Indian culture from under what is seen as the layered impositions of foreign cultures (the Mughals and the British) and finds its definition exclusively in Hindu ancestry. Hence, it seeks to create a cultural and political community articulated on the sole criterion of *being* part of the majority while all the other religious and ethnic communities seem to be *written out/off* and relegated to the peripheries of the non-integrated minority, stripped of their national identity and banished out of the common Indian historical narrative.

That is why Rushdie chooses to thematize the concept of the palimpsest because of its capacity to illustrate the complex processes of historical and cultural inscription, re-inscription, erasure, covering, uncovering and recovery which characterize the Indian national narrative. First, the palimpsest is an adequate description of the multilayered and multicultural social reality of India. Second, it is a paradigm for historical exploration in which the historian and, in our case, the fiction reader peel off the leaves off the past and thus create new historical narratives in the process of selection and interpretation. Third, the palimpsest is a metaphor for the postmodern fiction text which is fully conscious of its intratextual relationship with other texts, of its composite texture of interwoven conscious and unconscious quotations, references and interpretations. Fourth, the palimpsest is a model of visual art, a theme heavily explored in the novel, in the paintings of Moor's mother, Aurora.

The novel's conceptualization of Indian national identity refuses to submit to the dominating practice of suppressing difference for the

higher goal of unity or communality. On the contrary, as it has been demonstrated, the novel thematizes the concept of "cultural difference" as the only viable basis for the realistic articulation of Indian identity. *The Moor* argues for and exemplifies Rushdie's aesthetics of *mongrelization*, a cultural attitude that celebrates hybridity and impurity, symbolized in the novel by the mix of Indian spices called "masala" (one of the novel's main tropes). Therefore, Moraes Zogoiby, the Moor, makes a point in stressing his *masala* identity, a product of the' "pepper love" (MLS, 98) between a Catholic Portuguese mother and a Jewish father of Moorish origins. He defiantly declares his mongrel self: "I, however, was raised neither as Catholic nor as Jew. I was both, and nothing: a jewholic-anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was - what's the word these days? - *atomised*. Yessir: a real Bombay mix." (MLS, 112) Moreover, his parents cannot make any claims to racial purity either, as there are suspicions on both sides.

The Moor's hybrid lineage parallels India's equally convoluted historical narrative of multiple cultural waves and perpetual cultural mixing. Thus, the Moor's retrospective narration recalls, reclaims and re(layers) both four generations of family history and India's great history by drawing on the trope of the palimpsest. There are multiple implications of Rushdie's use of the palimpsest as a metaphor and a paradigm for the writing and reading of history, especially in India's postcolonial context. A postcolonial text is characterized by the simultaneous existence of a "double time" (Bhabha, 1990, 290) that marks both a break from the colonial past and a connection to it by writing back to or against the grain of colonial history. In addition, the palimpsest occupies a liminal, ambivalent space from which it conjures up the representation of both the violent moves of the colonizer's

suppression of the existing native social, cultural and historical realities to impose new colonial ones and of the equally violent postcolonial deletion of the past foreign inscriptions.

Origins are important in postcolonial writing because they are located in an anteriority of native unbroken, unspoiled, homogenous identity which present day post-nationalism seeks to unearth for ideological purposes. By creating characters that are unsure of their own origins, Rushdie challenges the possibility of writing a single, original, foundational story which would run uninterruptedly from "the beginning" until the preset time. Instead, Rushdie suggests the existence of *multiple beginnings*, multiple *presences*, multiple *stories and histories*, filtered not through the conscience of the historian but that of the individual in order to be humanized and personalized and thus positioned against the certainties of both colonial and nationalist historiography.

Rushdie's fiction dissents from the cause-effect logic of traditional history by collapsing its temporal and spatial dimensions and thus articulating the post-colonial *nation* as a space of hybridity, synchronous antagonism and plurality, in which stories, races, peoples and traditions mix, cross-pollinate, produce and reproduce themselves anew while retaining traces of former inscriptions. Rushdie's version of Indian history is based on the paradigm of the performative, disruptive palimpsest while his vision of *Indianness* is one of compositeness, in which all elements retain their individuality while co-exiting peacefully.

Chapter 6 "Disentangling World History(ies). From West to East and Back: (Re)Colonizing Journeys in *Shalimar The Clown*" has investigated the novel's engagement with world politics with an emphasis on history *writ large*. Although, still concerned with the South

Asian continent, Rushdie has expanded the scope of his fiction which now moves freely from Europe to South Asia and America.

The chapter has demonstrated that such concepts as the nation-state, national identity, religious or ideological affiliations have been blurred by globalization, as illustrated by the Kashmiri conflict, and therefore, the relationships of historical causality have turned intricate and arcane, consequently making the writing of world history even more difficult. Rushdie uses the life trajectory of his protagonist Max Ophulus, a survivor of the Nazi occupation of France, who becomes the American ambassador in India, and then a counterterrorist chief who secretly supports terrorist cells in the Arab world on behalf of the American government, to make a strong point about the simplistic inadequacy of still putting forth such explanations as fighting for one's independence or for one's national identity.

The argument is that world history is a combination and recombination of a multitude of events, of Deleuzian lines of flight, leading to deterritorialization, this time seen in the abolition of the possibility of a unique historical narrative. One event might not actually emerge out of its own territory but rather be obscurely related to another disparate event across the world. One poignant example might be Shalimar the Clown's murder of Max in LA. Initially, it was considered to be a political assassination, carried out in order to expose and punish US's involvement in the Arab world, later on, however, we find out that Shalimar is the husband of the Kashmiri woman who had been seduced and abandoned by Max while he was serving as an ambassador in India. Although, by the time he killed Max, Shalimar had already become a world-known terrorist, having indirectly benefited from Max's cover support, his murder has no political implications. Thus, the heightened

mobility and unpredictability with which events combine and recombine in the global world appear to be causing a severe slippage of meaning (in the Derridean sense), a delay of the possibility to stabilize the connections between historical events which have become somewhat *inconsistent*, *light* and ephemeral. No longer can history be expected to provide *the story* of the world, to make sense and give coherence to human existence, which is now characterized by a simultaneity of experiences propagated especially by modern means of communication and representation.

Moreover, the chapter has investigated the novel's implications that America's cultural, economic, political and military forays into Third World countries are symbolic of its neoimperialist expansion, by analyzing Max's seduction of Boonyi. Max is the white man who has come to a Third World area to bring in the civilizing rule of democracy and with it the equally civilizing practice of female sexual liberation. Boonyi feels constrained in a marriage which lacks opportunities and condemns her to a traditional role of submission and silence. She sees in Max her ticket out of her small, limited world and the possibility of further artistic success (she is a traditional dancer) on a bigger stage. She leaves her husband and moves in with Max in an apartment in the city. As the time goes by, Boonyi realizes that she has only exchanged on birdcage for another and disappointed abandons herself to an uncontrolled consumption of food, becoming obese. Their relationship ends once their illegitimate daughter, India-Kashmira, is born and Boonyi is forced to give up her daughter to Max's British wife and to return alone to her native village. On a larger cultural level, America achieves control of smaller developing areas by political but also economic means. It does not enter these areas to help these countries

reach self-government and economic self-sufficiency but rather to appropriate and subjugate by creating a consumerist behavior.

The chapter has also continued its concern with the construction of the postcolonial identity. The argument developed in its last section is that the characters in *Shalimar the Clown* are more than *migrants*, they are *nomads* of the global world. What distinguishes them from the rest of the characters discussed so far (Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta in *The Satanic Verses*, the Moor in *The Moor's Last Sigh*) is the fact that they do not necessary rely on such "hollow booming words, *land, belonging, home*" (SV, 4–5) to construct their identity. Even though nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, class contribute circumstantially to how the nomads in *Shalimar* evolve, these categories are not essential components in the characters' identity crises. For example, Max Ophuls does not live the identity crisis of a Jew who has lost his home and parents and who does not know who he is anymore. It is neither religion nor his ethnic background that informs or propels Ophuls in his evolution on the world scene but rather his educational background and his determination to act globally. He is bound by no national ties to any particular country and he permanently adjusts and reconfigures his self in accordance with the new circumstances. Thus, the main characters in *Shalimar* are inscribed by incessant processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization which prevent them from foreseeing or pursuing a teleological end state. It appears as though the key to surviving in the global world is precisely the constant reinvention of the self, but not all of Rushdie's migrants are also nomads who are capable of reinventing themselves. Those who cannot are crushed under the pressure of a world they can no longer integrate in.

In conclusion, Salman Rushdie is a novelist who has definitely followed his own rules for writers: "Go for broke. Always try and do too much. Dispense with safety nets. (…) Keep grinning. Be bloody-minded. Argue with the world" (Reder, 2000, ix) for, so far, he has argued with any form of monologism, with the monolithic, opaque, oppressive and divisive discourse of religious fanaticism, with the fallacious certainties, vicious exclusions and erasures, and violent impositions of both colonial and nationalist historiography, with the fiction of the racial purity and the equally fictitious integrity of the postcolonial migrant and native identity, with the histrionics and hypocrisy of political discourses, with chauvinism encouraged by the undiscerning application of the Islam laws and with escalated racism in the aftermath of postcolonial migration. To all these, Rushdie opposes a vision of plurality, hybridity and mongrelization, of multiculturalism which maintains peoples, cultures and traditions in a permanent dialogue from positions of equality and which encourages cultural cross-pollinations.

Throughout his fiction Rushdie has promoted an attitude of incredulity towards any form of metanarrative, be that national history, national identity or religion. His epistemological approach is one of utter doubt, of permanent questioning, of looking at a matter from multiple perspectives so as to avoid either simplistic interpretations or disinterested relativism. Rushdie's textual strategies might be postmodern but he is far from supporting any form of postmodern relativism. His political attitude is that of the informed, active commentator who considers it his civic duty to present the social and political reality of the postcolonial nation with a permanent critique which prevents him from succumbing into what he considers to be the

greatest civic sin, i.e. quiescence. In his essay “Outside the Whale” he clearly states his political attitude: “In place of Jonah’s womb I recommend the ancient tradition of making a big fuss, as nosily a complaint about the world as is humanly possible.” (IH, 99)

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