

On Storytelling & Magic Realism in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children, Shame, and Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

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ABSTRACT: Salman Rushdie's novels are humorous books about serious times. His cosmopolitanism and hybrid identity allowed him access to multiple cultures, religions, languages, dialects, and various modes of writing. His style is often classified as magic realism, blending the imaginary with the real. He draws inspiration from both English literature and Indian classical sources. Throughout his works, there is a lineage of 'bastards of history', a carnival of shameful characters scrolling all along his works. Rushdie intertwines fiction with reality, incorporating intertextual references to Western literature in his texts, and frequently employing mythology to explore history. This paper focuses on Rushdie's three novels: *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, analyzing his postmodern storytelling techniques that aim to explore human vices and follies while offering socio-political criticism.

KEYWORDS : *Magic Realism, Rushdie, Satire, Storytelling, Transfictional Identities*

I. INTRODUCTION

"Throughout history, the truth-seekers and truth-tellers have been aware of the risks of their business" (Arendt, 1)

Salman Rushdie's novels are funny books about serious times. His cosmopolitanism and hybrid identity, allowed him access to several cultures, several religions, several languages and dialects, and multiple modes of writings. His style is often classified as magic realism, blending the imaginary with the real. He has equally drawn on English literature and Indian classic sources. There is a whole genealogy of 'bastards of history', a carnival of shameful characters scrolling all along his works. Rushdie seamlessly blends fiction with reality, incorporating intertextual references to Western literature in his texts, and he quite often advocates mythology for the sake of history.

Rushdie's writing style is influenced by the first generation of Indian writers writing in English, but he himself also impacted a third generation of Indian writers. In an interview, Rushdie calls this new generation "a transition generation, a generation of change...a mixed-up generation...a generation for which the future is beginning and the past is still there... and lives in the present" (Satalia, 2006). He brought his own innovative touch to both Indian-English literature and to the old English satiric mode; he negotiates myth and history fabricating historiographic novels shedding light on Indian history and Indians' scars. "The Indo-Anglican text becomes the site of collisions or negotiations between the conventions of a borrowed fictional form and the indigenous art of storytelling, between history and myth" (Shew, 1180).

The Indian writer draws from old works and adds his voice to offer a new vision. "The dialogic work carries on a continual dialogue with other works of literature and other authors. It does not merely answer, correct, silence, or extend a previous work, but informs and is continually informed by the previous work" (Halasek, 3). In this sense, Bakhtin's "dialogism" is akin to the idea that "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (Halasek, 3). Rushdie modifies past narrative techniques, while advocating for new ones inspired by the inherited tradition of Indian writing. His palimpsestine texts revisit past erasures without denying them; his works draw on history while providing the writer's contextual interpretation of it. Thus, the magical elements in his novels serve as metaphors for reality. His texts encompass a variety of subgenres within the genre itself. He establishes his own aesthetic real where the fabulist/fantastical and realistic modes are intertwined rather than compartmentalized. His novels consist of a multitude of stories and multiplex genres. His "satirical medley" *Midnight's Children* published (1981), "modern fairy-tale" *Shame* (1983), and fable *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) showcase his brilliance and underscore his talent as a remarkable storyteller who redefines fiction, blending profound criticism with humor and creating a unique literary genre.

II. Midnight's Children: a "Satiric Medley"

"mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 394)

Rushdie tells the story of a fragmented family whose members share no blood bonds; they are only linked by providence and share a history of suffering and doubt. The whole novel is about a narrator lost within his own story. Saleem Sinai, a child born at the stroke of midnight on the same day India gained independence from the British Empire. Saleem's destiny is thus tied to his country's fate forever. He is "a bastard of history" - to use Rushdie's words. Mary Peirera, a midwife, switched a rich baby, Shiva, with a poor one, Saleem, thus permuting their destinies forever. Then Shiva, who should have been Saleem, becomes Saleem's enemy until the end of the novel.

Saleem suddenly discovers his magical powers. There are other children born on the same day as Saleem and who are gifted with different magical abilities. They gather in a conference they called MCC- Midnight's Children Conference. At the beginning of the novel, Saleem discovers his telepathic abilities which exceed the limits, as he can hear people's inner thoughts rather than mere voices and sounds. He then loses his memory, enters in an amnesic state, and transforms into a Buddha-like figure. In this state, he discovers another magical sense: the ability to sniff out fairness and unfairness, leading him to being used as a police dog. Towards the end of the novel, a new child is born to Saleem, not actually his own, yet another "bastard of history" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 404), named Adaam Sinai/Ganesh. Aadam is a silent child gifted with elephant-like ears.

The novel is not a fairy tale, but there is a kind of romance in it, suggested by the presence of Saleem's lover Padma who throughout the novel –just like us readers– listens to the narrator's story. *Midnight's Children* is a "satiric medley" through which Rushdie provides the reader with a varied menu of human defects and follies. He transports the reader into satiric wonderlands that blur the boundaries between the imaginary and the real. Rushdie declares: "we are poor, we are ignorant, and we completely refuse to learn" (*East, West*, 12).

Indeed, in times like these, satire is the sole weapon! Satire is a genre meant to corrode vices and expose human follies; it allows writers to express scabrous views in their literary works in an attempt to unveil corruption, raise awareness and improve the world. Rushdie built on an old tradition of English satirists such as Archilochus, Aristophanes, Juvenile, Horace, Ben Jonson, La Fontaine, Swift and Laurence Sterne amongst others, and declared war on human vices and follies. As he ironically puts it: "Virtue versus vice, ascetic versus bawd, God against the Devil: that's the game. *Messieurs, Mesdames: faites vos jeux*" (*Shame*, 240). Rushdie uses old satirists' techniques of highlighting physical deformities to generate laughter and provide meaning through physical traits, but at the same time, he subverts this legacy by engendering irony and sarcasm. The whole novel is a 'carnavalesque' 'carnival'.

There is indeed a whole genealogy of 'bastards of history' as a carnival of shameful characters scrolling all along the saga: the boatman Tai who "had taken his unexplained decision to give up washing...Tai chose to stink. For three years now, he had neither bathed nor washed himself after answering calls of nature" (*MC*, 27), Saleem's cousin Zafar "wetting his pants in the presence of history" (*MC*, 292), Zafar's fiancée "obstinately refused to menstruate precisely in order to be spared marriage to him" (*MC*, 337), the attributed image of a Witch Widow to Indira Gandhi (*MC*, 395, 421) and the comical labour of Parvati-the-witch who "obstinately refused to dilate" (*MC*, 417) waiting for the prime minister to resign; and Ganesh alias Aadam Sinai the latest of the long list of grotesque figures "at the precise instant of India's arrival at Emergency, he emerged" (*MC*, 419). His satiric narrative is a plethora of old and postmodern subgenres. Like a magician, he transforms curses not into cures but into art; he exposes vices, laughs at imperfections and vilifies human follies. *Midnight's Children* is a "satiric medley" (Knight, 31) through which Rushdie provides the reader with a varied menu of human defects and follies, and thus "tiny details assume grotesque proportions" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 13). Just like most old satirists, Rushdie presents his characters as mere distortions of nature.

In *Volpone*, Jonson argues that his aim is "to mix profit with your pleasure" (13) and this is in fact at the very heart of satire. Rushdie's saga shares several features with Jonson's play, mainly in the way he presents his protagonist "I have no wife, no parent, child, ally, to give my substance to" (Jonson, 17). Just like *Volpone*, Saleem is rootless; his parents are not his own, a child who shares no blood bonds with him, only enemies in perspective and an illegitimate "substance" as historical heritage. The Fox in *Volpone* "milked their hopes" (22) just like the Widow and the myth of independence in *Midnight's Children*, spoon-feeding Indians with mirages. Rushdie's discursive strategies draw heavily on Jonson's insinuations. The two literary works bear "betrayals and confessions" (*MC*, 428). They share the same pessimism towards the possibility of a better world. Indeed, where *Volpone* argues that "to be a fool born is a disease incurable" (*Volpone* 47), Rushdie maintains that "what can't be cured must be endured" (*MC*, 435).

Rushdie shares Swift's misanthropy. Both focus on human defects and political corruption. Their political satires bear harsh and direct criticism of the political system of their times. Rushdie, throughout his novel, scrutinizes Indira Gandhi's government; he directs his attacks towards its wrong decisions and their outcomes. He distorts her image and insults her reign, claiming "the great are eternally at the mercy of tiny men. And also: tiny madwomen". He dwarfs her and highlights the ignorance of politicians who are proclaimed right only by the power of their political position. The Indian writer also endows his protagonist Saleem with a "historical" nose similar to Cyrano de Bergerac's or Pinocchio's. Nonetheless he also provides his puppet with: a sniffing faculty, amnesia, and sexual impotence. Saleem endures a literary heritage of physical deformities and then becomes part of the whole list of the same "distortions of nature" recounted in old English satires.

Rushdie's satiric style is identified with Pope's didactic works (Barnard, 1995). Both writers use myths in their works as metaphors for literal truths. They share the same arrogance of satirists proud of their skilfulness and scatological glee. "Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see/ Men not afraid of God, afraid of me" (qtd. in Knight, 41). This statement by Pope recalls a similar joke by Rushdie when he laughed at the fact that all the politicians he attacked in his works died -whether naturally or were assassinated. This is another feature that also recalls Archilochus, whose satire was so witty and powerful that it led to the death of two people.

His work is also influenced by the Irish novelist Laurence Sterne (1713-1768). His most well-known book *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* is often mentioned as the twin of *Midnight's Children*. Saleem and Shandy live in constant fear that they will not complete their life story, every time they narrate only a fraction of the past. Both books are characterized by self-consciousness, a feature of the postmodern novel. This overview of English satirists and the drawn inter textual analogy between old English works and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* only show that satirists now and then are aware of the power of their conceit, they do believe in the capacity of their wit to provoke change.

III. REPROCESSING OLD INDIAN MYTHS

"My writing and thought have therefore been [as] deeply influenced by Hindu myths" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 404).

In *Midnight's Children*, there are five characters with names that the writer chose from Indian mythology: Buddha, Shiva, Ganesh, Parvati and Durga. In the novel, characters bearing these names represent a new wave of legends for history to record. In Indian mythology, Buddha, the founder of Buddhism (a religion without God, a school of wisdom), "the wise man of India" (Comte, 62) spent most of his short life (he died at the age of 24) meditating and searching for truth, "his long search showed him the way to escape from illusions and pain" (Comte, 62). Ironically, Rushdie made an analogy between Saleem Sinai and Buddha; but the novel's protagonist inherited only one characteristic from the myth: his long state of contemplation. Buddha spent his days sitting in deep meditation, and then attained awakening and enlightenment, whereas Saleem shocked by the horrors of his life, stopped thinking. In this state of extreme despair, he forgot all his past and started sniffing myths of truth instead. The insufficiently imagined protagonist Saleem represents the image of stagnation and absence of progress.

The second Indian myth mentioned in the text is Shiva. *Shiva* was called *Mahadeva*, 'the Great God', he was the organizer of the world. He was also known by the names *Bhairava* 'the Terror', *Hara* 'the Ravisher', or *Kala* 'death' (Comte, 187). Just like Buddha, he was always represented in a meditative posture. Shiva the myth and Shiva the alter ego of Saleem in *Midnight's Children* share many characteristics. This character suggests what Saleem could have been if only Mary Pereira did not switch the babies at birth. Ironically, this Indian myth was considered by his worshipers (called "shaivites") as the Ultimate Reality; and Shiva in *Midnight's Children* is Saleem's ultimate reality. He is even the most obvious truth in his life, "Shiva and Saleem, victor and victim; understand our rivalry, and you will gain an understanding of the age in which you live. (The reverse of this statement is also true)" (MC, 432). Rushdie establishes a special relationship between the two protagonists, a kind of rivalry that opposes two forces: two ideals, the political ideal versus poetic truth. This, as Rushdie writes: "Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 14). He opposes Saleem the writer to Shiva the politician; the fight subsumes the survival of the fittest. The established dichotomy of wit versus war and words versus weapons implies the vicious circle of an unceasing struggle.

As the story progresses, myths become intertwined, and on the novel's canvas, Rushdie reunites Shiva, Parvati, Ganesh and Durga. He gives life to the myths and recreates the fragmented pieces of the mythological family: Parvati -in mythology- was Shiva's lover who gave him three children, one of them is Ganesha. Durga was also

Shiva's wife, she gave him two sons: Skanda and Ganesha; she is the embodiment of feminine and creative energy (Comte, 187). In the novel, characters bearing these names represent a new wave of legends for history to record. But in *Midnight's Children*, Durga is only Ganesh/Aadam's nurse, "she was a woman whose biceps bulged; whose preternatural breasts unleashed a torrent of milk capable of nourishing regiments; and who, it was rumored darkly (although I suspect the rumor of being started by herself) had two wombs.... every day a dozen new stories gushed from her lips" (MC, 445). Durga is the myth of salvation and represents the power of knowledge (Comte, 77); Rushdie advocates the image projected by the myth at the end of his novel for a didactic purpose, in the *Mahabharata* fashion. Durga projects the image of Mother India, the partitioned country with 'two wombs' (MC, 446); a generous country waiting lavishly for posterity to rise up, and write a legitimate history.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie encodes mythical imagery in his narrative, thus creating a familiar and private space in his book that allows him to maintain a special bond with Indian readers. Only Indians can grasp Rushdie's nuances, conveyed through the imagery of the revered gods of India. Obviously, these myths are part of Rushdie's cultural repertoire, yet as a postmodern satirist, he skillfully employs these symbols for a satirical purpose. The overall effect is a society composed of a cacophony of distorted representations of nature. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie argues that "We are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 12). In *Shalimar the Clown*, he further asserts: "Normality, that's the myth. Human beings aren't normal" (177).

IV. POSTCOLONIAL/ POSTMODERN AFFILIATIONS/TECHNIQUES

Midnight's Children blends the English satirical heritage with postmodern and postcolonial aesthetics in order to deconstruct and subvert power. The Indian writer uses a plethora of literary techniques and constructions such as Menippean satire, rhizome, simulacrum, inversion, "historiographic metafiction" and leitmotif to grapple with several existentialist themes, such as identity and history. The novel rejects any kind of linearity; narration always goes back and forth, there is no progress in Saleem's story; it all the time regresses to the sceptical uncertain past and projects an improbable future. Rushdie's book is a recipe of genres, it is a metafiction characterised by temporal distortions. Rushdie deconstructs all the facets of the postmodern world: he transgresses all boundaries and indirectly calls readers to rename things and to rethink them. He subverts all norms and calls for a cure to the wide spreading "optimism virus": he sees chaos in freedom "paradise-bringing bombs" (*Midnight's Children*, 341), he sees hatred in love "the only anecdote to hatred is love" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 413), he only sees uncertainties around "nothing was real, nothing certain" (*Midnight's Children*, 340).

Just like his protagonist Saleem, the illegitimate child of India, Rushdie is the illegitimate writer of the West. His text promotes a Western literary heritage, while simultaneously challenging this 'archaeological' inheritance by rejecting the very characteristics of Western texts: rationality and strict linearity. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie employs the postmodernist rhetoric of pastiche; in fact, the book is a medley of various other texts. The definition of the word "pastiche" is "the form or surface quality of a given cultural artifact mimicked or reproduced within a new context of cultural production" (Nash, 7). Like parody, pastiche involves copying from the original and accommodating the new version to the new context. Hence, the novel is a pastiche of history, a piece of a motley cosmopolitan work. Rushdie, as a post-colonial writer, challenges the colonial discourse by penetrating it and appropriating its very techniques. In fact, his novel represents a palimpsest of Western texts; it retains their discursive features while erasing their ancestral ideologies.

Magic Realism: Legacy, Tradition and Change

Rushdie brought his own innovative touch to both Indian-English literature and the old English satiric mode; he negotiates myth and history, fabricating a historiographic novel shedding light on Indian history and Indians' scars. "The Indo-Anglican text becomes the site of collisions or negotiations between the conventions of a borrowed fictional form and the indigenous art of storytelling, between history and myth" (Shew, 1180).

Rushdie's 'dialogic' *Midnight's Children* carries on a very old history of Indian writings, using mythology and magic; but it also breaks with the tradition of moralizing through obvious messages which often end up with the triumph of virtue over evil forces. His new postmodern narrative techniques adopt inversions and insinuations rather than direct morals. This autobiographical novel, advocates both magic realism and satire to project an alleviated image of India, that "chaos making sense" -to use Rushdie's words.

The writer whispers his dreams and hopes for the nation, because he is aware that within the mess of a multilingual multicultural and multi-religious India, the only way to promulgate an agency of change is to invent a tale that mixes up mythology with history. This act of creation may one day become as effective and magical as Aadam Sinai's "Abracadabra". Rushdie mixes Muslim religious stories with Indian mythological forces,

blending the whole with his satirical legacy to finally write a marvellous postmodern magic realist tale. He misleads the readers and challenges their historical and literary knowledge. The weird reality in India needs a touch of humour, a flavour of imaginary and magical elements and a great deal of sarcasm to shake and shock the reader, and mainly those towards whom the attack is directed.

***Shame*: A “Modern Fairy Tale”**

“I am writing a sort of modern fairy-tale. So that’s all right. Nobody needs get upset” (*Shame*, 70).

Shame opens with the patriarchal force of Shakil who imprisons his three daughters Chhunni, Munni, and Bunny, embodying three grotesque figures. They were unable to free themselves from their father’s chains, until death did them apart. Shakil dies, leaving them ruined; and their misfortunes also symbolize Pakistan’s bankruptcy. Freed from his presence in their claustrophobic world, the three women engage in a mundane life still within their closed box. However, they do not dare to leave their birthplace; they are physically free but still psychologically bound to the way they were raised. They have been taught to be obedient and never to deviate from the prescribed way of living. They have been taught to stagnate in their birthplace. Rushdie ironically describes this rigid way of being and thinking: “We know the force of gravity, but not its origins; and to explain why we become attached to our birthplaces we pretend that we are trees and speak of roots. Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths sprouting through the soles. Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places” (*Shame*, 86).

The three sisters then share a triune maternity and give birth to Omar Khayam, a more grotesque character. These three caricatured figures symbolise the infertility of this “imagined community”; and though they gave birth, their progenitor is a “bastard” who only inherited oblivion and loss. Omar seems to be a happy character; he does not have one caring mother, he has three; but this overdose of love is not enough. “He was not free. His roving freedom-of-the-house was only the pseudo-liberty of a zoo animal; and his mothers were his loving, caring keepers” (*Shame*, 35). He stands for a nation entrapped within its political system, unable to cope with it. A family tree is drawn on the first page of the novel in order to make family bonds clear; this tree might also recall previous vanishing historical monarchies. The novel opens with a mysterious and intriguing beginning (but I think after becoming familiar with Rushdie’s style, we come to learn that a family tree does not intend to explain family bonds but rather to destabilize and defamiliarize and mock the very idea of tree and roots).

Shame is a patriarchal novel, where women are subjugated and silenced, as confirmed by Rushdie: “I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry” (*Shame*, 173). He further adds, “a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honor and propriety” (*Shame*, 173). It is a community, as described by Chhunni, that “makes women feel like to cry and die...but men, it makes them go wild” (*Shame*, 39). The writer presents examples in his narrative of women who suffer from violence and are terrorized: a girl killed by her father to preserve the family’s honor, a woman raped and silenced by shame, Iskander’s daughter binding her breasts in bandages to wage war on her feminine self and hiding her femininity to please her father’s desire for a son (*Shame*, 126). Rushdie exposes these cases of physical and psychological violence to denounce and express his fury towards the shamelessness occurring in this “imagined community” (Anderson) as well as elsewhere in the world. Salman Rushdie himself is a member of an association defending the rights of women exposed to violence in the USA.

Since violence is not only physical, the novelist imagined protagonists who suffer from erasure and psychological intimidation. Rani and Bilquis, “two wives are abandoned in their separate exiles, each with a daughter who should have been a son” (*Shame*, 104). They embody exiled women whose only crime is not being able to give birth to a boy, an heir, and a victory for their respective husbands, Iskander Harrapa and Raza Hyder. Rani happened to be a queen for a day only when Isky wanted her to appear in public with him for political protocols, otherwise she stays in her exile ingurgitating violence and oblivion and weaving shawls she called the “shamelessness of Iskander the Great”, and “shawls of international shame” (*Shame*, 193). Rushdie expresses sympathy for the character as he states: “Iskander the assassin of possibility, immortalized on a cloth, on which she, the artist, had depicted his victim as a young girl, small, physically frail, internally damaged: she had taken for her model her memory of an idiot, (.....) and the autobiographical shawl, the portrait of the artist as an old crone” (*Shame*, 194). This may be because she represents all the artists in this world who silently transgress and transcend the ghost of the arborescent corrupt forces hanging over their freedom of speech. She silently works on her shawls weaving unspoken words because in her world “there are things that cannot be said. No, it's more than that: there are things that cannot be permitted to be true” (*Shame*, 82); but also “because revenge is patient, it awaits its perfect moment?” (*Shame*, 144).

Rushdie denounces violence in patriarchal societies that used to impose “hudud” (Sara Suleri) and limitations in order to silence not only women but also communities. Violence appears as a ubiquitous theme in *Shame*, denouncing the corruption of the political system in Peccavistan, the imagined country that symbolizes Pakistan and the third world as a whole. “The novel represents a palimpsest of Pakistani history” (Hart); in fact, “the present and the past, the fictive and the factual: the boundaries may frequently be transgressed in postmodern fiction” (Hutcheon, 69). The Indian novelist also sheds light on the violence and hypocrisy of dictators who veil their lies and sham with fallacious religious discourses, aiming at “singularity rather than plurality, religious extremism rather than tolerance, closure of possibilities rather than multiple possibilities” (*Shame*, 47). Thus, the novelist harshly rejects and opposes one-man government. The dictator’s corruption is embodied in the novel in the characters of Iskander Harrapa and Raza Hyder; though both are portrayed as ridiculous buffoons, their symbolic representation is tragic rather than farcical. There has been an urgent need for transcendence and transgression to make radical socio-political changes. This chaotic world imagined by Rushdie needed violence to exterminate evil and to purge.

In this world of carnivalesque, the catalyst Rushdie imagined “the wrong miracle” (*Shame*, 89) Sufiya Zinobia, daughter of Bilquis and Raza Hyder. The author sees in her “a saint, a person who suffers in our stead” (*Shame*, 141). She is innocent, pure and was able to preserve these qualities just because she is an idiot for according to Rushdie “idiots are, by definition, innocent” (*Shame*, 120). She is, in fact, an extended metaphor of Pakistan’s shame and shamelessness. In this black comedy, Sufiya kept transmogrifying and vomiting violence. The violence she incarnates is an anthological vortex; an inescapable issue from the shamelessness dominating this “imagined community”. She explodes wherever there is shame: killing the turkeys in Pinkies’s house, violently aggressing Talvar Ulhaq and beheading men after raping them. Every time there is shame and shamelessness, Zinobia is there to make justice to the world; justice for the silenced and betrayed women, anger against patriarchal forces reducing women to mere machines and bodies. Iskander’s daughter Arjumand thinks with the conviction that “this woman’s body...it brings a person nothing but babies, pinches and shame” (*Shame*, 107). She is a “wrong miracle” as well, she should have been a son; and she is a victim as well for she is confined to hide her femininity to please her father who warned her “[I]t’s a man’s world. Rise above your gender as you grow. This is no place to be a woman in” (*Shame*, 126). Sufiya embodies revenge for all the submitted women in this imagined world, but she also stands for all mentally retarded countries where “democracy had never been more than a bird of passage” (*Shame*, 204).

At the end of the novel “the wrong miracle”, Sufiya Zinobia surprisingly kills her innocent husband, Omar Khayyam, instead of her corrupt father, Raza. Through this ending, Rushdie emphasizes that what he despises the most is not the corrupt leaders but rather the guilty victims that his character Omar Khayyam represents. According to the writer, silence and oblivion are more perilous than political sham and corruption. Sufiya Zinobia explodes at the end leaving no room for any kind of alternative for this “imagined community”. The only beacon of light that shines within this chaotic world of grotesque and violence is the art of Rani Harrapa: which has the power to transcend. “Rushdie’s narrative style can be viewed as a tongue-in-cheek use and abuse of numerous literary narrative conventions and theoretical perspectives that include exaggerated reflections of colonial mimicry, unreliable narrators, fairytale motifs, and intertextuality” (Hart). He employs magic realism to blur the lines between fantasy and reality, using irony and parody to subvert the system from within. “He utilizes an arsenal of storytelling techniques to make violence palatable so that his readers may be more willing to critique the East’s and the West’s cultures of shame” (Hart). These techniques allow him to harshly criticize the political systems dominated by arboreal forces dominating not only in Pakistan but also in the entire Third-World. Rushdie’s position as a hybrid writer, enables him to serve as a transnational translator, bridging the gap between the East and the West. The Indian writer satirizes history and historicizes through satire. His book, *Shame*, “floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time” (*Shame*, 87).

The notion of violence as the only alternative to shake and shock, purge and cure from the dirt of patriarchal societies and the corruption of mentally retarded political systems, was used before by Rushdie in a previous book he wrote when he was much younger entitled “Terminal Report”, where the main character becomes violent when exposed to racism. In *Shame* Sufiya is that “alterego”, another reincarnation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, a dystopian figure, and a radical solution for radical change. Rushdie continues writing with the same poisonous satire dealing with “a past that refuses to be suppressed, that is daily doing battle with the present” (*Shame*, 88) because “the past still resists complete human understanding” (Hutcheon, 65). He insists that his main goals as an intellectual are “liberty; equality; fraternity” (*Shame*, 251), because “narrative representation -storytelling- is a historical and political act” (Hutcheon, 48).

Rushdie's Fable *Haroun & the Sea of Stories*

"...all books contain the amalgamation of a certain number of age-old truths" (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 10)

The novel is presented to the reader as the writer's attempt to venture into the realm of children's books. It is indeed a story that he wrote for his son Zafar. But it proves to be a story for all time and all ages, similar to the *Arabian Nights* and to *Kalila & Dimna*, perfused with metaphors, imbued with history. The storyteller Rashid Khalifa, his wife Soraya and their son Haroun lived in "a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name. It stood by a mournful sea full of glumfish, which were so miserably sad that they made people blech with melancholy even though the skies were blue" (*Haroun & the Sea of Stories*, 15). Rashid brought "cheerfulness" to this sad city; he was called "Rachid the Ocean of Notions" (Ibid.) because of his captivating stories and incredible talent as a storyteller.

When one day his wife deserted him and fled with their neighbor Mr Sengupta, Rashid found himself clueless. When his son asked him the question that resonated like a leitmotif, a key idea but was also a turning point in the story "what's the use of stories that aren't even true?" Rashid lost his talent for telling stories, and thus lost his job because storytelling is the only work he knows, as he tells his son Haroun (22). Since Soraya left, her son also started having "wandering attention" (23), "his mind was always wandering off somewhere and leaving his body behind" (Ibid.). Due to this situation, Rashid decided to embark with his son in a new journey to the Town of G and the Valley of K, where he might regain his mind. Since then, Haroun started having several unexpected encounters with magical creatures such as the Water Genie Iff (56), and landing in fantastic places such as the Moody Land (47) or the Ocean of the Stream of Story, "the biggest library in the universe" (72). Most of what he saw made him realize that "it wasn't *only a story*, after all" (50). The novel is written à la *Alice in the Wonderland*, and we readers are cuddled by Rushdie's several stories within the story, smoothly transported by the ocean of Haroun's adventures and his deep dives into his dreams and thoughts.

The Politics of the Fable: Transfictional Identities

"do those names mean anything?" Haroun asked.
"all names mean something" rachid replied (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, 40)

Rushdie endows his characters with names that bear the trace of history, meant to sustain the hybridity of the novel (this is recurrent in all his novels); as they represent a panache of facts and mythology. Most of them represent historical figures revisited and historical events distorted and criticised (this is recurrent in all his novels; we will see it in *Shame* and *Haroun*). The genius of Rushdie's satire lies in his ironic onomastics. Most of his characters bear names they are unable to assume. His protagonists are the embodiment of a chorus of losers. He in fact invents through the magic of words, a universe of "transfictional identities" (Massé, 89) where fiction and mythology mix up with reality. The novelist pays particular attention to names, he argues "Our names contain our fates.... we are also the victims of our titles" (*MC*, 304). The choice of names is intentional, all *Midnight's Children's* protagonists' names (as in all novels) are loaded with meaning.

Rushdie starts analysing the etymology of the name "Saleem" in the chapter entitled "Drainage and the Desert"; he first looks at Sinai linking it to Ibn Sina "master magician, Sufi adept" (*MC*, 304), then to "Sin the moon, the ancient god of Hadhramaut, with his own mode of connection, his powers of action-at-a-distance upon the tides of the world" (*MC*, 304-305), and focuses on the first letter of the name "but Sin is also the letter S, as sinus as a snake; serpents lie coiled within the name" (*MC*, 305). Confused with his protagonist's story as readers are, Rushdie sees no issue for such a schizophrenic personage. The name of Saleem may insinuate to other figures in history, such as Musailima (Maslamah Ben Habib), a blasphemous liar in the times of the prophet Mohamed. The established resemblance between the two characters is far from being religious. Saleem and Musailima pretended prophecy, and they join together in the fact of being liars. The protagonist's name also refers to the mythological figure of Salmacis the nymph, who raped Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite in Greek mythology, and they both fuse resulting in one hermaphrodite individual. The analogy between Saleem and Salmacis parallels with the fusion of Saleem's destiny with that of India. The outcome of this tight relation is a "hermaphrodite" country, with a schizophrenic identity; made up of men and led by a woman. The hidden insinuation lying behind the etymology of the name bears a harsh satiric attack on the politics of the nations that Rushdie vilifies. Through names referring to historical events and real facts, Rushdie also establishes a central binary opposition between Shiva and Saleem, representing the twin nations of Pakistan and India whose fates were "exchanged" by the British Empire. Rushdie draws from his religious background to enrich his metaphorical world. This parody reflects his magical realist style, blending his desires and imagination with actual events to create his own universe.

In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* as in almost all of Rushdie's novels, names stand for extended metaphors, attributes or parody. As Iff explains "to give a thing a name, a label, a handle; to rescue it from anonymity, to pluck it out of the Place of Namelessness in short to identify it- well, that's a way of bringing the said thing into being" (63). But Rushdie does more than merely label or identify through names; he resurrects names from the past, from history to incarnate his intention. His characters bear in their names the intended irony and the camouflage of criticism. They are loaded with meaning and dissent. In the novel, we read about Haroun and his father Rashid; blending both names, we recognize the famous Abbasid caliph Haroun Rashid who established the library Beit el Hikma and whose court stories were mentioned in *One Thousand and One Nights*. There is also Buttoo, the corrupt politician. Khatam Shud "a Hindustani word uttered by story-tellers to announce the end of their narration" (Jean-Pierre Durix) who might stand for Khomeini who issued the fatwa against Rushdie and wanted to end his art. The whole narrative is about storytelling and the aim of trusting the message they bear and what they really mean: Iff asks Haroun "And the past, did it happen? And the future, will it come? Believe in your own eyes and you'll get into a lot of trouble" (63). For Rushdie, "the gardener of stories", "fantasy can artificially turn sadness into joy" (Durix). The book also draws on the hybrid heritage of the writer as it is inspired by the Indian "Sanskrit volume entitled *Kutha-Sarit-Sagara* written by the Kashmiri eleventh-century Brahmin Somadeva." (Durix) as well as by *One Thousand and One Nights*.

Rushdie: Transnational Translator

"Didn't human beings need pain and suffering to learn and grow?" (*Shalimar the Clown*, 67)

The Indian writer translates India to the world, in a language comprehensible to the West; he thus plays the role of a transnational translator. He argues that: "I too, am a translated man...I have been born across. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion...that something can also be gained" (*Shame*, 29). Rushdie blends his Hindi-Urdu heritage with the English of his diaspora to give rise to a post-modern style that came to be called the "Indianisation or Rushdification of English" Rushdie invades and advocates the English language, because it represents an efficient tool for a post-colonial to make his voice heard and to translate his ideology to the West. Writing about India or Pakistan, using English and not Hindi and advocating magic realism flavoured with an English satiric touch, allowed the writer to produce a cross-cultural text that translates the East to the West, and reconnects him to his roots.

The postmodern writer plays the role of a philosopher, who stares at the world and parodies its vices and ridicule. Nirad Chaudhuri thinks that a writer bears the responsibility of playing the role of Ganesha "the master of intelligence and the patron of artists and writers" (Comte, 87) and Rushdie refers to the same idea through the character of Adam Sinai, who advocates silence for a while and then pronounces a word full of impossible miraculous hope "Abracadabra". The word has the capacity of "I speak therefore I create" which is Rushdie's alternative to change the bleak postcolonial reality of India. It represents the performative power of language. Chomsky asserts: "Intellectuals are in a position to expose the lies of governments, to analyse actions according to their causes and motives and often hidden intentions" (1967).

Rushdie's Sea of Stories

"...the real world was full of magic, so magical worlds could easily be real" (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, 50)

Haroun Khalifa, Omar Khayyam, Sufiya Zinobia and Saleem Sinai represent cosmopolitan children of midnight, born in-between, hyphenated, torn between darkness and light, a hybrid genre neither belonging to the East nor to the West, a "patchwork type" (*Two Years*, 34), from the sea of shame, out of mentally-retarded 'imaginary homelands' (so that no one gets offended), to the diaspora of stories. Rushdie's children are strangely strong, endowed with magical powers and prowess, boiling with questions and curiosity. They ride a carpet and travel between past, present and future. The book is their womb, the world is their land and the reader is their shore.

V. CONCLUSION

Rushdie mixes Muslim religious stories with Indian mythological forces, blending the whole with his satirical legacy to finally write a marvellous postmodern magic realist tale, misleading the readers and challenging their historical and literary knowledge. He confuses them in order to compel them to think and cogitate about their own existence. He defamiliarizes in order to familiarize. He pushes strangeness to the extreme only to shake his readers and make them aware of the degeneration of humanity and the horror of our times. He claims: «Everywhere was now a part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no longer our own, individual, discrete. This unsettled people. There were collisions and explosions. The world was no longer calm...that is the land of lost content. For the poet,

happiness was the past» (*Shalimar the Clown*, 37). Just like Shehrazad, he attempts to civilise through stories. He contends: “Stories were stories and real life was real life, naked, ugly, and finally impossible to cosmeticize in the greasepaint of a tale” (*Shalimar the Clown*, 204).

Rushdie exorcises voices of the past to rethink humanity’s struggle against the forces of evil. He contends “we are mysteries to ourselves. We don’t know why we do things, why we fall in love or commit murder or throw a stone at a sheet of glass” (*Shalimar the Clown*, 66). He blurs the boundaries between magic and reality, deconstructs history, and jeopardizes what has survived. He only sees uncertainties around “nothing was real, nothing certain” (*MC*, 340). He believes that change could begin with imagination, with a story! He regretfully claims in the epilogue of *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*:

We no longer dreamt...Now in sleep there was only darkness. The mind fell dark, so that the great theatre of the night might begin its unforeseeable performances, but nothing came. Fewer and fewer of us, in each successive generation, retained the ability to dream, until now we find ourselves in a time when dreams are things we would dream of, if we could only dream. We read of you in ancient books, O dreams, but the dream factories are closed. This is the price we pay for peace, prosperity, understanding, wisdom, goodness and truth: that the wilderness in us, which sleep unleashed, has been tamed, and the darkness in us, which drove the theatre of the night, is soothed. (286)

He is convinced of the transcending power of the intellectual, the philosopher, and the writer. He confidently declares, “The genius of my magic will triumph over the ugliness of the times” (*Shalimar the Clown*, 88).

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