

**The conflict between the personal and the social in Rushdie's
Shame; 'History' v. 'history'**

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Master's Thesis
English Philology
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University of Oulu
Autumn 2015

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1 Introduction.

At its most simplistic, the novel *Shame* is a tale about the birth of the nation of Pakistan. Its author, Salman Rushdie, is perhaps uniquely placed to tell this tale. He was born in Bombay, then British India, on 19th June, 1947 to a wealthy Muslim family of Kashmiri descent. Less than two months after his birth, his country was subject to major political change. British India was divided, and the nation of Pakistan was created on 14th August, 1947. The following day India gained its independence from Britain. Rushdie was therefore born at a pivotal point in his country's history. His upbringing and education is equally pivotal as it provides an insight into his writing style and perspective, as he is a product of both the Indian and British educational systems. He initially attended the Cathedral and John Connon School in Mumbai (Bombay), before leaving for England where he studied at Rugby School and King's College, University of Cambridge, where he read history. These key elements to Rushdie's background empower his writing, and make *Shame* a significant work of literature.

The novel reflects the social consciousness following the 'birth of Pakistan' after the British have withdrawn from India. The breakdown of the British Empire was a pivotal point in British history, as it brought into question the morality of oppression and occupation; this is reflected in the postcolonial movement in literature, where writers have attempted to come to terms with the collective 'shame' of the imperial past. Rushdie's perspective is particularly interesting in this context as he is the product of both oppressor and oppressed, as a British Muslim born in India before Independence who received a privileged British education. His language is the language of the oppressor; his words transcend this constraint and provide an insight into the perspectives of the oppressed. If there is to be hope for the future, in a multicultural and technologically advanced world, drawn ever closer by breakthroughs in communication, but seemingly further apart as religious tensions increase, this hope must emanate from the learning of the lessons of the past. Writers such as Rushdie, who is a product of several cultures, can transcend cultural and spiritual barriers and promote understanding and tolerance.

Rushdie's *Shame* is both vividly colourful, and controversial, both in style and content. At its heart the novel questions historical norms and perspectives, and the constraints of humanity's linear view of time. It is intriguing because it exposes the exploitation of 'history' for political ends; it deconstructs the definition of nation and national identity and cuts through the veneer of social constraints imposed upon the individual. It is this deeper sense of understanding that makes this novel as relevant now as it was when it was first published in 1983. *Shame* is not so much about the logistics of creating a new nation, Pakistan, but rather the fact that whilst the nation itself may be 'new', its people are still very much under the influence of the psychological baggage of history; a history that has been manipulated by the governing group of the time. As Judie Newman points out, the darkness and uncertainty of the past and how this past has been represented by history, is the linchpin of postcolonial writing:

despite the challenge which postcolonial writing lays down to the temporal paradigm of 'Eng. Lit.', its deliberations keep turning into an argument with history, whether as a pseudo-tradition, commodified past or silenced trauma (Newman 1995:192).

What is revolutionary about Rushdie's view of history is that he embraces the inaccuracies and biases, the exaggeration and distortion of facts. The quagmire of history is, for Rushdie, a testament to the human condition itself. The limitations of any particular historical perspective reflect the fact that when it comes to past events, absolute truth is unattainable. Human beings have to live in this world full of uncertainty, and so must come to terms with it.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, written in 1981 and Booker Prize novel for 1983, represented a breakthrough for the author, not only in the popularity stakes, but also in the development of his style (as described by Adib Khan):

By resorting to the comical epic, Rushdie was able to use outlandish humour to expose some of the unpalatable truths about India's past without undue offence to the more delicate sensibilities (Khan 1996:1).

While this comic aspect to Rushdie's writing could be regarded as being decidedly less prominent in *Shame*, being confined to key moments in the novel, a sense of irony remains throughout. It is this ironical stance which makes the writing so powerful. Rushdie's view of events and traditions appear to do the impossible; he seems to transcend the confined limits in which we, as individuals, operate, by providing the reader with a convincing insight into the perspectives of others. Also, the irony is evident in the fact that very few individuals have the power to change History with a capital 'H'. Rather, we as individuals are subjected to significant events rather than having power over them.

The central theme of this paper is that there are two distinct versions of history which are exposed in *Shame*; the official 'History' with a capital 'H' of the state, and the unofficial, personal 'histories' with a small 'h' of the characters in the novel. There is also the historical perspective of the author as well, which makes objective criticism difficult. The narrative process within the novel is a complex dialectic between the personal and the social; between what the state wishes people to believe has happened, and what people have actually witnessed, with the acknowledged limitations of memory and hindsight. The truth is a tantalising mirage; the closer the reader believes they are to it, the more Rushdie's playful style leads them away. There are many views of the past depicted in the novel, therefore, but none of them could be described as definitive; they are all flawed by the subjectivity of the human condition. What Rushdie is doing, however, is forcing the reader to make up their own mind; to create their own 'history' from the versions he presents.

As well as being labelled as postcolonial writing, the novel has been described as postmodern fiction. Both of these assertions are examined in this paper. The

“different” techniques that Rushdie applies in the telling of his story will be addressed in the first section of this paper. For example, I shall address questions of structure; the extent to which this novel can be described as “bibliographical”; and the “tone” of the novel. The second part of this paper details what I believe to be the main theme of the novel, which is the question of the nature of history, and the individual’s place within society. In telling his story, Rushdie is “creating” a history of his own. What is striking about this novel is that it illuminates the hazy uncertainty which exists between what people believe to be “fact” and what they see as “fiction”, and this is, of course, Rushdie’s point.

The first two sections of this paper provide a context for the analysis of *Shame* that follows. Section 1 provides a concise summary of the complex history of the region that is now called Pakistan, in order to provide a historical perspective for the novel. Section two addresses the literary context of the novel; the postcolonial movement in literature, and its place within the postmodernist movement. Section Three considers the background and literary style of the author, examining the author/narrator relationship and the question of whether the novel can be described as being autobiographical. The role of the storyteller in both past and present, and the importance of satire in exposing the hypocrisy of political 'History' are also examined. Section four focuses on the ways in which the novel provides an insight into the social and historical evolution of Pakistan from the perspectives of the characters through their reactions to social pressures and the way they see their role in the creation of their country and its identity. This section also provides an examination of the dualistic nature of life in the novel, Rushdie’s technique of using comic satire to confront political questions, and symbolism to portray the physical environmental evidence of social unrest.

1 The Historical Position of Pakistan.

1.1 The Birth of a Nation.

The history of the region that is now called Pakistan is singularly complex. However, an overview of the history of the region is essential to understand the context of *Shame* as a political novel, and a work of postcolonial literature. Judy Newman described postcolonial writing as an “argument with history” (Newman 1995:192). This section, therefore, provides the context of the official view of history that Rushdie, as a postcolonial writer, is arguing against. Isobel Shaw has interpreted the key stages of Pakistan’s history as follows:

The story of Pakistan divides into six distinct periods: prehistory; the ancient empires, from about 3000BC to the sixth century AD; the coming of Islam, from 711 to the late 14th century; the Mughal period, from 1526 to the 18th century; the British period, from the mid-18th century to 1947; and Pakistan since Partition and Independence (Shaw 1996:64).

However, this is a simplified overview of the region’s history as the name “Pakistan” was not used until 1933, less than fifteen years before the country’s creation. This section concentrates on the more recent history of the region, because it is in the last sixty or seventy years that Pakistan’s identity as a Muslim state has been shaped, from ideal to reality, and it is this shaping of a national consciousness that is central to *Shame*.

Pakistan is a relatively new country, built from two separate land masses of what had been India, separated by hundreds of miles of Indian land. In 1947 the British announced that they planned to “establish two successor states to their rule - India and Pakistan” (Tames 1984:45). For many years before this there had been an escalating tide of feeling in Indian society not only towards the ending of British rule, but also towards the creation of a separate and independent state for Indian Muslims. This gained political momentum in 1940 when the Muslim League, formed

in 1906, finally called for the construction of a separate state called Pakistan. The Muslim League had been founded in order to provide a voice for the Muslim people of India who mostly lived in the north-eastern and north-western states, and whilst representing a majority in these states were, none the less, a minority in the diverse ethnic structure of India as a whole. The idea of political autonomy for the Muslim northern states had been proposed in 1930 by the then president of the Muslim League, Sir Mohammad Iqbal, who believed that these regions “should have complete control of their internal affairs within a loose Indian Federation” (Tames 1984:41).

Up to this point in time there had been no political pressure to form a separate Muslim state; the League still thinking in terms of promoting the reforms necessary to create a less rigid “Indian Federation”. However, this political direction soon changed. The notion of a completely separate Muslim homeland was gaining momentum in the region’s psyche, and in 1933, the name “Pakistan” was coined by Chaudhuri Rahmat Ali: “meaning in Urdu ‘Land of the Pure’, and made from the initial letters of the Muslim-dominated regions of the *Punjab*, the *Afghan* frontier, *Kashmir* and *Sind* plus the Persian ‘stan’ meaning ‘country’” (Tames 1984:41). Pakistan had therefore been defined geographically, and the bringing about of this state had consolidated into an achievable objective.

One problem that the Muslim League faced at this time was opposition from the Indian National Congress, who refused to accept that the Muslim League was representative of the majority of Muslims in India. The Indian National Congress was inaugurated on 28th December 1885, with the blessing of the British Government, in order to aid communication between the many ethnic groups within Indian society, and therefore make it more stable, politically. It should be remembered that roughly only half of India was directly under British rule, with the remainder under the jurisdiction of over six hundred regional princes. The Indian National Congress was based in Bombay, and was filled by the educated Indian middle classes; the majority of whom were professional people such as lawyers and teachers, who had considerable political influence. Their opposition to the Muslim

League had the effect of slowing down the movement towards the creation of Pakistan. However, the events that followed, caused a swift change in the Muslim League's fortunes. When the Second World War broke out in 1939, the Indian Viceroy declared India to be at war, at Britain's side, "without consulting any of the nationalist leaders" (Tames 1984:41) of Congress. This prompted a mass resignation from these leaders, and meant that Congress lost its grip on power. The effect that this had was that the Muslim League gained in size and influence, so that, in the early months of 1940 it was no longer plausible to argue that it was not the mouthpiece of the Muslim north. The British therefore agreed to divide the sub-continent in 1947.

1.2 The Aftermath

The nation of Pakistan was born, but the country's birth was heavily overshadowed by violence. The process of partition meant that millions of people were forced to flee their homes and cross the border into their new "homeland", and the tension that this caused inevitably led to hostility. As Isobel Shaw describes:

The most explosive problem area was the fertile Punjab, where Hindu, Muslim and Sikh populations were inextricably mixed. At independence, an estimated six million Muslim refugees, mainly from Punjab, streamed across the border into Pakistan, while some four and a half million Sikhs and Hindus went the other way (into India). This migration was accompanied by some of the most grisly communal violence of modern times, resulting in the loss of perhaps half a million lives (Shaw 1996:73)

This violence and struggle, as well as political tension with India, would be evident right up to the present. *Shame* depicts the physical violence of Pakistan's emergence, but also focuses on the central psychological byproduct of this violence - the guilt, both personal and collective, that arises from harming others. Malcolm Bradbury, a well known novelist and columnist from the London *Guardian* newspaper described Rushdie's novel as being concerned with "shame and shamelessness, born from the violence which is modern history." (Rushdie 1995: Rear Cover.) It is impossible to understand shame, without understanding the context of its origins.

The ongoing process of partition, in the shape of the mass migration between India and Pakistan left a legacy of bitterness on both sides. As Williams and Crowther described, this "exodus constituted the largest migration of mankind in the history of the world." (Williams & Crowther 1989:64).

It is therefore not surprising that violence between India and Pakistan was to flare up again. It was the fate of the Himalayan kingdom of Kashmir which brought the crisis to a head, and this subject is of particular relevance to Rushdie's own history, as a

British Muslim of Kashmiri descent. The ruler of Kashmir, a Hindu, had refused to give up his province to either Pakistan or India as a part of the partition process. The population of Kashmir was predominantly Muslim, (roughly eighty percent), and therefore Pakistan gave its support to the Pakistani hill-peoples in their invasion of Kashmir. India, therefore, reacted by promising support to the region's Sikh leader, on the understanding that Kashmir should join India. The resulting fighting lasted until 1949, when the U.N. brokered a ceasefire in Kashmir; which effectively meant that the country became partitioned, at the cease-fire line. The northern third of the country was controlled by the Pakistani Azad (Free) Kashmir government, and the remainder by India. The status of Kashmir became a 'thorn in the side' of Indo-Pakistani relations right up until the present, as Shaw suggests, "The conflict is unlikely to be resolved until India makes good its 45-year-old promise of a plebiscite to determine the wishes of the Kashmiris now living under Indian rule" (Shaw 1996:72).

The violence of Pakistan's early years was echoed in the political situation in the country. Within five years of the nation's birth, its first two prime ministers had been assassinated. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, hailed as the 'Father of the Nation' was killed thirteen months after taking office. His successor and friend, Liaquat Ali Khan was killed some three years later, with no suitable successor available to take over the leadership of government. This left Pakistan in an extremely vulnerable state at just the time when it most needed strong leadership. It is not surprising, therefore, that Pakistan's constitution was not finally drafted until 1956. It was highly ironic that very soon afterwards, in 1956, the constitution was torn up by General Ayub Khan who seized power in a military coup d'état under which he set up a martial law government. The country has been controlled by the army ever since.

2 Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, Cosmopolitanism and Globalisation – *Shame's Literary Context.*

Literary theory is a minefield, and in more than thirty years since the publication of *Shame* there have been numerous discourses attempting to provide a literary context for the novel. While there may be a temptation to ignore the Literary Theorists, or literal theorists (because literal viewpoints can take the beauty away from art), there remains a requirement to identify *Shame's* place within the canon of literature. Nonetheless, recognition should be given to a growing momentum against theory, particularly since the year 2000. For example, Ian Almond in his article *Suffering in Silence – Or in English* saw merit in the critique of theory

(from Terry Eagleton and others) as a subtle means of dissolving political solidarity, derailing emancipatory agendas, and trivialising critical enquiry (Almond 2007:583).

It would be fair to say that this represents a defence of the argument that art transcends the labels used to define it, and supports a view of the limitations of particular political readings of literature, such as feminism, which are of value in a social context but are limited in terms of their objectivity. All interpretative stances are of course of equal value, and no single interpretation stands above others.

Rushdie's *Shame* has been described as postmodern, and as part of the counter-canon of Third World literature. At its simplest, the '-post' in postmodernism means 'after'; i.e. that this was a tangible movement in the arts that came about after the modernist movement. Modernism represented a backlash against the realism of the nineteenth century:

The modernist avant-garde...first posited modernism as a comprehensive negation, both formal and philosophical, of the canonical realism of 19th century Europe (Ahmad 1991:1461).

Ahmad goes on to describe the two requirements for including a work within the counter-canon of postmodern or Third World literature. He says that to be defined as postmodern a novel “had to have enough of modernism within it” but also to “diverge sufficiently in a new avant-gardist way” (Ahmad 1991:1461). This shows the problematic nature of postmodernism’s foundations. Modernism was much easier to define, as it was a definite break from the earlier realist tradition. Postmodernism by Ahmad’s definition is made up of elements of modernism but also of elements of a new avant garde. The issue is that the very nature of the avant garde is its free expression and its transcendence of boundaries, which makes it difficult to pinpoint in a literary sense. It is also impossible to determine where modernist avant garde ends and postmodernist avant garde begins. For Gillian Gane it is the “evocation of instability, mutability, and migrancy” which make Rushdie’s works “eminently postmodern” (Gane 2002:28), and therefore these ideas of instability, mutability and migrancy must transcend the avant garde. Rushdie’s own attack on realism in as much as he believes it can “break a writer’s heart” (Rushdie 1995:70) is surely an admission of postmodernist leanings.

Ahmad further defines the Third World novel as providing:

form (preferably allegory, but epic also, or fairytale, or whatever) to the national experience...[and that these texts] refer, then, in one way or another, to representations of colonialism, nationhood [and] post-coloniality (Ahmad 1991:1461).

For Ahmad, not only does this definition apply to *Shame*, but he believes that the novel stands out as “something of a classic of this counter-canon” with Salman Rushdie himself occupying a “distinguished place at the very apex of ‘Third World’ literature” (Ahmad 1991:1461).

However, in the years after the above was written Ahmad develops increasing hostility towards Rushdie’s work. Bart Moore Gilbert, writing in 2000, describes Ahmad as “most notoriously associated [with] the attack on postcolonial theory from

within". Ahmad's hostility towards Rushdie and his peers [was] because of a perceived "hierarchy" which "privileges the Western canon over Third World culture (Moore Gilbert 2000:17):

According to Ahmad, postcolonial theory subsequently favours the work of the migrant intelligentsia of Third World origin based in the West. (Moore Gilbert 2000:16)

What this means is that the education systems and norms of the western cultures provide the framework and background to these writers, and not the culture they are writing about. This is a difficult argument to refute. Obviously Rushdie's own personal circumstances mean he falls foul of this criticism. His writing style and approach is that of the highly educated, middle class, western academic. He writes about what he knows. The poor have no voice in *Shame*, it could be argued.

What is interesting is the fact that Ahmad's own views have been criticised too, for their patriarchal nature. It has been said that:

while [Ahmad] provides searching critiques of the representation of women in some contemporary postcolonial fiction (for example Rushdie's *Shame*), the essential patriarchal bias of Ahmad's own criticism is indicated by a complete absence of reference to women critics. (Moore Gilbert 2000:169)

A number of critics such as Brennan, Gane and Needham have acknowledged Rushdie's status as a "cosmopolitan writer" whose stance is against "nationalism". Rushdie's writing is postcolonial in the sense that it is a critique of the national building process of both Pakistan in *Shame* and India in *Midnight's Children*, but it is the antithesis of a glorification of it. His critique "is tied to what for [him] represents a failure in the nation-forming process, indeed of nationalism itself" (Needham 1990:655).

Cosmopolitan writers, such as Rushdie, tread a difficult path as they are both insiders and outsiders:

[They] are writers attached to specific locales in the ‘Third’ world who mediate, interpret, translate this world for ‘First’ world/metropolitan readers. Their success depends upon their being simultaneously ‘alien’ and ‘familiar’ – their being able, that is, to offer an ‘insider’s’ (hence, ‘authentic’) view of ‘Third’ world cultures while complying with their metropolitan readers’ tastes which require, most importantly, an entrenched scepticism toward, even revulsion of, nationalism (Needham 1990:655).

According to Dutta, this “position of participant/observer, insider/outsider leads to a conceptual conflation between subject and object and self and others” and that it is this perspective and its’ inherent problems which “may be used to critique the inside-outside position, the favorite vantage point of the postcolonial intellectual (Dutta 2008:76). For Gane, Rushdie is firmly on “the side of the *post* and the *trans*, the cosmopolitan, the global...[celebrating] “newness, hybridity, pluralism and migrancy” (Gane 2002:28). It is this view that brings into question the extent to which Rushdie is compliant with “metropolitan readers’ tastes” as cited above because the dynamism of this ‘celebration’ would be limited by pandering to the tastes of readers. There is further evidence against this pandering. For example, Vijay Mishra asserts that “the linguistic verve and experimentation” that can be seen in Rushdie’s texts which are “taken as a sign of celebration” can also be read as a “straightforward challenge to metropolitan English” (Mishra 2009:394). If Rushdie is indeed challenging metropolitan English then he logically cannot be compliant with metropolitan readers’ tastes.

Shame was written at a time before the internet, and therefore before ‘globalization’ as the world understands it now. However, globalization is very much at the heart of Rushdie’s writing, and Michael Berube recognises Rushdie as a pioneer in this respect:

globalization only started providing really compelling reasons for reconceiving literary study as postnational sometime around the birth of midnight's children on New Year's Day 1947, as they were conceived by Salman Rushdie in 1980. (Berube 2002:9).

This view is supported by his assertion that:

they will write histories of twentieth-century English-language literature in which the distinction between modernism and postmodernism will come to seem much less significant than – or will perhaps be subsumed by – the division of the century into periods before and after the global expansion of English-language literature. And for this division as for so many others, World War II will serve quite nicely as a temporal and ideological marker. (Berube 2002:3).

The concept of globalization in literature is, however, controversial. Writing in 2002, Peter Killiney compared the term postcolonialism with globalisation and saw globalization as “more politically neutral and, at [that] moment...less useful as a critical term.” He also recognised that “literary scholars [were] still struggling to adopt this word into their own critical vocabulary” (Killiney 2002:50). However, in this same paper Killiney appears to have changed his mind and to have reconciled these two literary terms. His view was that Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* offered a “narrative of globalization as a cure for the ills of postcolonialism” (Killiney 2002:51).

Berube brings the issue of globalization full circle by recognising that contemporary literature is both an “artifact and agent of globalization” (Berube 2002:10).

3 Nations in the Imagination.

3.1 On Truth and Fiction.

There is one single theme that is intrinsic to all of Rushdie's writing; it is the nature of the individual's place within a society, and the way that the individual comes to terms with their own socialisation, and the collective past. Rushdie acknowledges the fact that absolute truth is unattainable for the individual; even the most hardened realist can only provide their reader with a perspective, and any single perspective, whilst entirely valid, must be met with a moderation of scepticism. As Rushdie professes about his own homeland:

my India was just that: 'my' India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously honourable and suspect (Rushdie 1992: 10).

Imaginative truth is both 'honourable' because it reflects something that someone believes to be true, but is 'suspect' because it is merely belief, and not truth itself. As Rushdie himself said in a conversation in 1983 with Una Chaudhuri (associate professor of English at New York University); "in order to describe reality you do not have to write realism, because realism is only one rule about reality: there are lots of others." (Chaudhuri 1983:2) For Rushdie, therefore, there is only fiction; what is important about a novel is not so much its literal 'truth', but its *meaning* to the individual, and the way they relate to it. This concentration on the individual means that Rushdie's literary style can surely be aligned with the postmodernist movement, because he is concerned with "textuality, and ...the neglected question of subjectivity, the individual's own response to and involvement in culture and cultural practices." (Bassnett 1997:13)

Bassnett's words are echoed in *Shame*:

How hard to pin down the truth, especially when one is obliged to see the world in slices; snapshots conceal as much as they make plain.

All stories are haunted by the ghosts of the stories they might have been.
(Rushdie 1995:116)

What he is saying here is that all stories are subjective. They are edited by the story teller, who decides the tone of the story, uses language to describe events and what information to retain or to leave out. It is this decision making which leaves “all stories...haunted by the ghosts of the stories they might have been.” As the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill is attributed to have said (but of unknown origin), “History is written by the victors”. The point being that the victorious have their say at their leisure, while the vanquished have no voice following their surrender. Official History, with a capital ‘H’ is not only subjective, but is highly selective and biased too.

Shame itself, along with its author, is haunted by various stories from varied times and places. One particularly harrowing example of a “story within the story” is that of a young Pakistani immigrant woman living in London who is murdered by her father for sleeping with a white boy (an allegation, for what it’s worth, that later turns out to be false). What haunts Rushdie almost as much as the savage act itself is the realisation (and consequent shame) that he understands *how* that this could happen:

But even more appalling was the realisation that, like the interviewed friends etc., I, too, found myself understanding the killer. The news did not seem alien to me. We who have grown up on a diet of honour and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to peoples living in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy: that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altars of their pride. (Rushdie 1995:115)

It is this relationship between shame and history (i.e. that shame can be in a sense collective guilt) that is central to this novel, and is what I shall examine in greater detail later in this paper. What Rushdie is saying is that fanaticism of any kind is a danger, whether it is in the name of religion, tradition, honour or pride.

What is recognised by Rushdie is the power of stories; they are the fuel of history, and while they have the power to transmit the truth, they can also mislead. When stories are used in religion, and taken literally and not allegorically, they can cause men to take terrible actions.

Most people, for instance, know a story relating to a real event that has become distorted; the story has been embellished to a certain extent and has influenced the memory. It is this grey area which exists between fact and fiction that is present in this novel. Tales and 'history' become confused. This is evident where Bilquîs is initiated into her husband's family through the acceptance of her *tale* of being blown up by a bomb in her father's cinema as she is returning home and her subsequent homelessness and meeting with her future husband:

This was when Bilquîs knew that she had become a member of the family; in the sanctification of her tale lay initiation, kinship, blood. 'The recounting of histories,' Raza told his wife, 'is for us a rite of blood.' (Rushdie 1995:77)

This same "right of blood" is what is responsible for the murder of the girl in London that I mentioned earlier. It is the right of religious bigotry made manifest.

Another aspect of Rushdie's style which is particularly interesting. Rushdie uses "run-on-words" (Brennan 1989:125) like "juicygory" above or "ramming-down-the-throat" (Rushdie 1995:251) throughout *Shame* and Brennan exposes this type of literary style as being a throw-back to an ancient writing style; what is interesting is the fact that these "details of style sometimes suggest the *Quran* specifically. {They} probably mimic the practice of Arabic calligraphers, who often connected adjacent

letters when copying the Arabic in order to create a pleasing visual effect from the continuously patterned line." (Brennan 1989:125)

With more than fifteen official languages in India, it is not surprising that "the true Indian literature of the first postcolonial half century has been made in the language the British left behind" (Mishra 2009:386).

3.2 Broken Mirrors.

In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie describes a theme in *Midnight's Children* that reoccurs in *Shame* and which surfaces in much of his other writing; it is concerned with the nature of human memory. Whilst we often try to fool ourselves that our memories are somehow sacred reflections of past truths, this is, of course, not the case. We see the world through imperfect eyes and have no real control over what we remember. Our memories at best represent snippets of past events with the space in between filled by what we *believe* to have happened. The dislocated and incomplete nature of human memory could be viewed as an unassailable obstacle for a writer such as Rushdie who attempts to gain access to the past. If it is impossible to trust our own memories, it is certainly impossible to trust the memories of others written down and presented as history.

Rushdie sees his position as a writer as "oblig(ing) him to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (Rushdie 1992:11). (The metaphor of the broken mirror in *Shame* shall be addressed in the final section of this paper.) However, he does not perceive that all is lost for a writer attempting to come to terms with the events of history. The limits of human perception are an intrinsic part of what it is to be human:

But human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. (Rushdie 1992:12)

It is this fragmentary nature of our relationship with the past, and how we come to terms with it that is of concern to Rushdie. However, perhaps it is possible to transcend our limitations if we embrace them:

The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains*; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities. (Rushdie 1992:12)

Paradoxically, therefore, it is perhaps the limitations of human memory that may prove its strength; for while we appear to have little or no control over what we remember, and remember both the trivial and the inescapable, the fact is that we still remember. There is something behind this; there is something in the brain that triggers these memories as opposed to others. It is this that makes us inately human.

3.3 "Maps in the Psyche."

Another aspect that is intrinsic to *Shame* is the relationship between history and geography. Rushdie exposes the fact that the borders and names on maps are very deeply ingrained in the minds of individuals; they are a product of history, of wars and trading routes. Borders not only divide nations both geographically and physically, but also create psychological boundaries; borders in the mind between *us* and *them*. The importance of this theme in *Midnight's Children* has been described by Rushdie himself in a conversation with Una Chaudhuri:

One of the things you have to do with new countries is to draw maps of them. That's one of the things that the book was an attempt to do. And that's one of the things that writers can do for readers, provide them with imaginative maps. And then you can put yourself on the map. If the book is something that means something to you, then what you're doing is seeming to describe the place you know in which you can see yourself. (Chaudhuri 1983:5)

This need to create a "new country" in the mind which is freed from as many preconceptions as possible, remains, as Susan Bassnett points out, an important element in *Shame* too: "the question of geography - maps of the world, boundaries and borders, maps of the psyche, topographies of the inner world - is throughout paramount". (Bassnett 1997:73) For both Bassnett and Rushdie, therefore, it is important that people come to terms with their own prejudices and narrow-mindedness; an event which can launch the individual on a course towards perhaps obtaining a greater understanding of other cultures:

Maps have margins and they have centres, but the real imaginative springboard can frequently come when we notice that these centres and margins are differently placed according to our own, native or non-native, experiences and traditions. (Bassnett 1997:68)

In a world where competition and exploitation are taken as intrinsic parts of human nature, perhaps the only way forward is for the individuals of different cultures to recognise their shared human experience; *Shame* and other postcolonial novels are not so much concerned with the differences between individuals in different cultures, as with their similarities.

3.4 The Narrative Technique - Stories Upon Stories.

In order to portray the colour and vividness of the human experience Rushdie abandons the traditional restraints of the linear novel. Rushdie, interestingly, delves into his own cultural history in order to replace this more traditional approach. The inspirations behind his literary technique in *Shame*, as in his earlier novel *Midnight's Children*, are the "traditional techniques of the Indian oral tradition" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1993:300). In the following article Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin cite Rushdie's views:

An oral narrative does not go from the beginning to the middle to the end of a story. It goes in great swoops, it goes in spirals or in loops, it every so often reiterates something that happened earlier to remind you, and then takes you off again, sometimes summarises itself, it frequently digresses off into something that the story teller appears to have just thought of, then it comes back to the main thrust of the narrative...(ibid.)

This kind of oral narrative reflects the mechanics of the human mind. Our minds are constantly delving into the realm of memory in reaction to environmental stimuli over which we have little control. We may smell something or hear something that reminds us of a past event or place. Digression is the nature of human expression, and the oral narrative provides Rushdie with a vehicle that allows him the breathing space to develop on his train of consciousness and to draw on other tales and anecdotes in order to illustrate his point.

However, this link between the oral narrative and the thought process is mirrored in a major principle of Indian thought, a philosophical tradition that has clearly had a profound influence on Rushdie. The "great swoops, spirals and loops..."(ibid.) of the oral narrative are mirrored in the Indian belief in "an immense cyclical pattern... by which order is brought out of chaos and the universe dissolved back into chaos" (Wallis 1993:68). Therefore to engage in this kind of oral narrative is to engage in a

fundamental process of reflection which, in turn, reflects the great cycles of history itself.

The Indian narrative technique does not, therefore, seek to describe an overt reality, like, for instance, the stream of consciousness technique adopted by the modernist school of writers of the early twentieth century. For whilst the modernist writer attempted to purvey realism by entering the mind of a character and explaining this character's thoughts in great detail even to the point of triviality, the Indic oral narrative moves in a very different direction. Rather than adopting an approach which seeks to tell a story entirely from someone else's perspective, by attempting to enter the mind of a central character, the Indic narrative tradition draws from the personal experiences of the storyteller, coupled with the fictional tales of their imagination or past. It could therefore be argued that the central 'character' in an Indic oral tale is, in this sense, the narrator of the story itself. However, the storyteller cannot really be described as a character, because he/she is not a fictitious entity. However, the storyteller must surely be seen as being the moral guardian of the story, because, as I am about to explain, this kind of storytelling is a journey into the reality of the self, rather than the reality of the world outside, and therefore it reveals a great deal about the author him/herself.

By using the Indic narrative technique, Rushdie is involved in a degree of risk taking. The author of this type of narrative technique, as he/she features in the narrative him/herself, is pushing past the limits of what can be described as fiction. For whilst an author who creates a narrative entirely around fictional characters can always maintain that this narrative is fictional, no matter how 'similar' to a real event or person that it seems, it is surely much harder for an author who uses a medium such as the Indic oral tradition, a digressive technique which allows the author to express his/her own views, to 'hide behind the term fiction' effectively. The act of telling this kind of story is not simply an attempt to communicate to others, but also represents a process of inner reflection. Rushdie is not simply trying to place his own history on display, as seeking to come to terms with his relationship to it.

In *World Mythology*, edited by Roy Wallis, the primary aspects of Indian thought are highlighted; it is fascinating how closely they are reflected in the narrative technique of *Shame*. The first aspect of Indian thought, as I have already mentioned, is the idea that the universe, and therefore any attempt to understand it, is not governed by linear constraints; reality, in Indian thought represents a dialectic between chaos and order, a theme which Rushdie exploits to the full in the narrative technique of *Shame*. Secondly, there is the idea that “things are not what they seem, and thus all reality is in some sense delusory” (Wallis 1993:68). This idea of illusion is evident at various points in *Shame*, particularly where reality is twisted by those in political power. The maintenance of pomp and ceremony by the British right up until the moment of leaving India, is an example of a refusal to acknowledge reality, whereas, with particular irony, the rewriting of history for the new Pakistan goes one step further; it is an attempt to create an entirely new reality. I shall examine this in greater detail in section four.

The Indic oral tradition is therefore intensely human; it is the mechanism adopted by a subjective being trying to make sense of their existence in the universe. However, the irony is that the quest for absolute truth is fatally flawed; the human condition of subjectivity prevents us from attaining the absolute, and when we believe that we are close to achieving our goal we soon realise that we are no further than we were when we began our quest, or may have even ended up further from the truth than ignorance suggested originally. However, what is important is not the arrival, but the journey itself. This philosophical journey is not linear, but cyclical: it develops of its own accord. It is this idea of the “descent into and ascent from chaos” that is intrinsic to the Indic oral narrative. This kind of narrative, which is borne out by an examination of the introspective nature of *Shame*, is constantly trying to reaffirm itself. It is a train of thought that justifies its own direction as it moves along. Because of the intrinsically human quality of the oral narrative, and its use as a vehicle for the communication of religious beliefs, it comes as no surprise, therefore, that the types of stories found in the Indic oral tradition are paralleled in many other cultures around the world. The Indic oral tales can be broken down under two separate headings. Firstly, that of the fable; a moral tale in which animals are given human

characteristics and the ability to speak. A good example of this can be seen in the tale "The Bird and the Jackal as Friends", where "the jackal asks the bird to obtain food. The bird flies near men carrying baskets of food. They drop them to pursue the bird and the jackal eats the food." (Thompson and Roberts 1960:223) This kind of animal fable is paralleled in Europe in the fables attributed to the mystical Greek figure Aesop. What this also highlights is how difficult it is to trace the origins of such tales. Aesop, like the bard Homer, said to have written the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is a figure veiled in the myths of folklore. The following entry in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Drabble 1998:9) under Aesop highlights the evolutionary process that oral tales are subjected to down the ages:

The fables were orally transmitted for the most part, but some were put into verse by Babrius (3rd cent. AD), while some were translated into Latin by Phaedrus (1st cent. AD), and Avianus (? 4th cent. AD). They became known to the West in the Renaissance through the 14th-cent. prose version compiled by the Byzantine scholar Maximus Planudes. *Erasmus produced a Latin edition in 1513 which was then widely used in schools.

However, the Indic tales are perhaps even more mysterious because there is no evidence of authorship linked to them at all. Yet it is precisely this mystical aura that surrounds stories passed down through the generations by an oral tradition that gives them a transcendental quality. Their 'truths' transcend the barriers of time.

The other type of Indic tale is that of the folktale. These tales often take the form of a quest, a good example of which is described by Thompson and Roberts (1960:56); "The Youth on a Quest for his Lost Father" is a tale about a boy who is taunted about being without his father. The boy sets out on a quest which culminates in him finding his father dead, impaled on the horn of a rhinoceros. A god overhears the boy's crying and restores his father to life. It is easy to see parallels to this kind of 'quest' in Central European folk tales such as "Jack and the Beanstalk", which most Europeans are familiar with. However, what is extremely interesting is the fact that some folktales actually transcend geographical boundaries and can be found in more than

one oral tradition. For example, the story "Sleeping Beauty" can be found in both The Indic and Central European oral traditions with very few differences between versions.

What I hope that this brief examination of folktales has proved is just how deeply ingrained in the human spirit is the art of storytelling. We are exposed to folktales at a very early age and quickly become accustomed to their structure and content. What creates their magic, therefore, is not simply the timelessness of the tale, but the way that the tale is told. The storyteller breathes life into the tale by placing something of their own experience into the traditional 'shell' of a story. It is this 'art of storytelling' that takes central stage in *Shame*. It is interesting, yet possibly ironic, that the Indic oral tradition of Rushdie's own history is the vehicle for his questioning of history in this novel. However, perhaps this irony can be understood when the Indic oral tradition is seen from a different slant, that of religion.

One issue that must be addressed at this stage is the fact that the Indic oral tradition is very much intertwined with the traditions of Islam itself. Not only does Rushdie use the oral narrative of folk tradition, therefore, but he is also using a traditional vehicle for the Muslim religion. Once again, Rushdie could be viewed as treading on dangerous ground. As Timothy Brennan points out, whilst Rushdie may try to get around any problems by saying that his use of "anecdotal breaks" in the story "is only the written simulation of the very common practice among storytellers to interrupt themselves...", "it is also (and he does not mention this) the calculated device of one wanting to mirror the 'recital', which is what *Quran* literally means." (Brennan 1989:125) If Rushdie is indeed "mirroring a recital", who is to say, therefore, that he is not "mirroring *the* recital" i.e. the *Quran*, which could be regarded as blasphemous. However, if this novel is about the questioning of historical norms then surely religion, an intrinsic influence on people in both the past and the present, cannot escape unscathed; it represents the power behind the nation. Perhaps his use of the Indic narrative technique runs deeper than being a useful tool for describing events from many times and perspectives, but also in a way highlights the social norms that a religion holds as absolute. This must surely be seen as another

example of Rushdie 'sailing close to the political wind' with regard to a possible religious backlash.

The novel *Shame* is not simply one story, therefore, but represents a collection of different stories from different perspectives. It draws on many influences, breaks down barriers and is not hampered by the restrictive nature of convention. This is, however, a rather dangerous situation, because the storyteller must assume a great responsibility. As Rushdie says in the following lines:

And now I must stop saying what I am not writing about, there's nothing special in that; every story one chooses to tell is a kind of censorship, it prevents the telling of other tales... (Rushdie 1995:71)

This highlights the complexity of what he is attempting to accomplish in the novel. *Shame*, written along the lines of an oral narrative, is open to criticism from some quarters, who could argue that some of his "deviations" from the main plot of the story are unnecessary, and represent a break-down in its cohesive structure. Similarly, as I mentioned above, the way that this mode of storytelling mirrors the Muslim holy book, could even be seen as blasphemous. However, far from accepting that this mode of storytelling represents a break-down in cohesion, I believe that it is this way of writing which makes this novel powerful; it provides an insight into the author's own train of thought and into the driving force behind his writing. (I shall explore this concept in much greater detail in sub-section 3.6 where I shall examine the autobiographical influences in *Shame*.) Rushdie's use of the oral tradition breathes life and colour into the novel in much the same way as an impressionist style of painting a picture. It deeply resonates and reflects life on a subjective level, and is not concerned with seeking the unobtainable; an objective reality.

3.5 'Time' in Shame.

As mentioned in 3.4, the novel *Shame* has a transcendental quality. One reason for this is Rushdie's use of the Indic oral tradition which allows him to negotiate events in the past, present or future at will. However, equally important is the *way* that he does this.

From very early on in the novel the reader is asked to question their own preconceptions about time; preconceptions that grow out of their socialisation into a particular culture which is often viewed as universal:

All this happened in the fourteenth century. I'm using the Hegiran calendar, naturally; don't imagine that stories of this type always take place longlong ago. Time cannot be homogenised as easily as milk, and in those parts, until quite recently, the thirteen-hundreds were in full swing. (Rushdie 1995:13)

Time is exposed by Rushdie as being arbitrary by nature at this early point in the novel to prepare the reader for more to come. Some events are so significant in our lives that they transcend time. For example, for many people who lived through World War II, their lives were statified by this pivotal event. It was the defining point of their lives; even in old age it is common to hear them still refer to events as being before, during or after the war. This is entirely understandable of course, but the point I am making is that the six years of war had a much more significant effect on their lives than quantifiable years, days and months in physical time.

Similarly, the novel easily transcends geographical boundaries, from the East Wing to the West Wing of Pakistan, to London where the Pakistani people are living as immigrants. There is an irony here of course as the immigrants are creating a new cuture within the mother country of the nation that colonised them. A new history as a coming together of two cultures. What is particularly striking about the novel, therefore, is its fluidity. It is not restricted for the reasons mentioned above, and has a character of its own. This has two implications. Firstly, *Shame* is a 'history' of its

own. Secondly, it allows the author a free reign to include anecdotes and stories of his own within the framework of the main tale. How much is in earnest, and how much is 'tongue-in-cheek' is for the reader to decide. Ironically, this is just Rushdie's polished and entertaining writing style, but was enough for a fatwa to be declared on him following publication of *The Satanic Verses*.

Humanity's attempts to harness time by quantifying it and creating calendars to describe it are exposed in the above quotation as failure. Human beings are finite creatures who are affected by time, but have no affect upon it. Humour is typically evident at the end of this quotation; humour is a powerful tool used by Rushdie to highlight such preconceptions ingrained in cultural history, and this issue shall be examined in greater detail in section four.

Rushdie uses his ability to time-travel in *Shame* to the full. The reader is not only reminded of the massive influence of the past on the present (in the form of the material and psychological relics of colonialism and pre-colonialism), but is also offered glimpses into the future by the author. For example, in the following extract Rushdie warns the reader of the impending doom awaiting Raza Hyder and his wife Bilquîs after his hold on the country's government is lost:

But neither Raza nor Bilquîs could have known that their story had scarcely begun, that it would be the juiciest and goriest of all the juicygory sagas...
(Rushdie 1995:77)

He has described one motivating factor behind *Shame* as being the need to "write a book which didn't have a dominant center" (Chaudhuri 1983:6). In his previous novel, *Midnight's Children*, the story was narrated by the central character Saleem, and because of this the novel has a much more linear structure than *Shame*. As Timothy Brennan points out:

All-India Saleem - the universal poetic consciousness - gives way in *Shame* to a train of discrete individual points of view with equal narrative weight. It is a book with more than five 'heroes', all equally 'in it for themselves'. (Brennan 1989:122-3)

Unlike *Midnight's Children*, therefore, *Shame* does not reflect the past, present and future of a single narrator, but the pasts, presents and futures of several narrators, which makes it even less constrained by linear time. The questioning of the nature of time therefore represents a development in Rushdie's literary style between the writing of these two novels. However, what the above quotation also brings into question is the *nature* of the narration in *Shame*. It is surely fair to suggest that by using several narrators all possessing similar "narrative weight", Rushdie is more easily able to explore questions regarding the historical norms from various perspectives. However, whilst it could be argued that by using several narrators Rushdie is distancing himself from the text, the opposite is perhaps the case. Rushdie himself controls the way that these narratives interconnect with each other, and this draws him further into the text than if there had been one single narrator. If the "telling of a tale prevents the telling of other tales" as I cited from Rushdie in 3.4, then by using several narrators in *Shame* and thereby telling several tales Rushdie is either undertaking a process of "censorship" or fulfilling his self-proclaimed "greater responsibility". In the next sub-section (3.6) I shall examine this very issue of how far *Shame* can be described as autobiographical.

3.6 The Autobiographical Nature of Shame.

As I have already intimated, the structure of this novel is such that it allows Rushdie to present and explore his own views in his writing. He does this in three ways. Firstly, by describing his own position as an Indian immigrant (or mohajir to take the Indian term) living in England {Section 3.6.1}. Secondly, by airing his views from behind the comparative safety of the term 'fiction' {Section 3.6.2} (I shall expand upon this issue which was introduced earlier in this paper); and finally, by telling short stories to illustrate his points {Section 3.6.3}.

3.6.1 Rushdie as Indian Immigrant.

Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* gives a detailed explanation as to his own historical perspective as a multi-racial culmination of his Indian origins and his English upbringing. On returning to his 'lost city' of Bombay, the history which had such an influence on the earliest part of his life comes vividly back to him:

The colours of my history had seeped out my mind's eye; now my other two eyes were assaulted by colours, by the vividness of the red tiles, the yellow-edged green of cactus -leaves, the brilliance of bougainvillea creeper. (Rushdie 1992:9)

The above quotation vividly describes an essential principle in *Shame*; that the way the individual sees 'reality' is essentially focused by the "colours of their history seeping from their mind's eye". We see *through* our eyes, but *with* our minds; minds that are burdened not only by the events of our own immediate past, but by the collective past of our History.

Writers such as Naipaul and Rushdie, however, are not simply affected by one particular History, like the majority of people, but are caught between two official versions of History. Because they have found themselves in the position of being split between two sources of 'identity', they have had to find their own 'identities' as

"displaced narrators" (Waugh 1995:184). However, whilst being "displaced" can surely be seen as a traumatic experience, it is through this experience that Rushdie has gained a valuable insight into both cultures, because his experience transcends a nationalism which individuals from one single country cannot escape. Rushdie is not tethered by the constraints of one single position; this feeling of literary freedom is exemplified in the following quotation from *Shame* cited by George Landow (n.d.:1) in his article "Rushdie on Roots, Rootlessness, Migration, On Being Between":

We {migrants} have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated upwards from history from memory, from Time.

Perhaps the above quotation provides the reader with an insight into Rushdie's motivations for writing; the act of writing could be one of the only ways to cure this "floating" feeling, and allow Rushdie to reconnect himself with his roots. Patricia Waugh has expressed this very view that the act of writing is an attempt to "reclaim history" (Waugh 1995:212). She quotes C.S. Lewis as having said that "literature heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality". (ibid.) Attempting to "reclaim history", therefore, poses many risks to the individual, and doubly so in Rushdie's case as a "displaced narrator", but in the following lines it appears that this is a path to which Rushdie has deeply resigned himself:

Bombay is a city built upon reclaimed land; I who have been away so long that I almost qualify for the title {of reclaimed}, was gripped by the conviction that I, too, had a city and a history to reclaim. (Rushdie 1992:10)

Rushdie's two quotations above provide an indication of the kind of historical perspective that Rushdie has ingrained in him through a life in two very different cultures. It is this idea of dislocation which is openly explored by Rushdie in *Shame*. For example, there are several lengthy passages in the novel where he refers to his own 'immigrant' experiences, which graphically relate to the story he is telling:

I, too, know something of this immigrant business. I am an emigrant from one country (India) and a newcomer in two (England, where I live, and Pakistan, to which my family moved against my will). And I have a theory that the resentments we *mohajirs* engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds: that is to say, we have flown. (Rushdie 1995:85)

Pakistan is a country created from nothing; and, as George Landow points out in an article called "Rushdie on Names, History and Pakistan" (Landow {date not given}:1 it has been the 'mohajirs' like Rushdie who are engaged in creating a history for Pakistan, a history born out of a fierce dialectic:

Who commandeered the job of rewriting history -- The immigrants, the mohajirs. In what languages? -- Urdu and English, both imported tongues, although one travelled less distance than the other. It is possible to see the subsequent history of Pakistan as a duel between two layers of time, the obscured world forcing its way back through what-had-been-imposed.

The above quotation does not explain the motivations behind Rushdie's own involvement in this process of construction, an issue which I shall now address. There are surely two reasons why Rushdie feels a need to become involved in this process. Firstly, for the reason presented at the beginning of this sub-section; to use the literary process as a vehicle for the reclamation of his own historical identity; and secondly, as put forward by Patricia Waugh, Rushdie's tackling of such controversial subject matter is an attempt to provide an alternative political voice to that of "fundamentalist nationalism"; she sees him as being "anxious to demonstrate that his fictions will provide alternative political models to those adopted by the momologic visions of fundamentalist nationalism." (Waugh 1995:52) I am very much in agreement with her. The author's own background, and its complicated nature, is therefore an essential influence on *Shame*. It is present both below the surface of the text, at times so subtle as to reflect the subconscious, whilst at other times breaking

through the surface as to be obviously visible. In the next section, 3.62, I shall examine the nature of this duality in Rushdie's writing.

If theory and critique come down to arguments over the validity of a writer's perspective, then Rushdie's perspective, "his story" is unique and within days of being truly astonishing (I shall explain what this means shortly). He is truly a man born between nations, as this extract from "The Perforated Sheet" taken from *Midnight's Children* in the book *Mirrorwork* shows. These words resonate through all the sections of this paper:

I was born in the city of Bombay...once upon a time. No that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at midnight. No...it's important to be more... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out; spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. (Rushdie 1997:160)

Although these words refer to Rushdie's character Saleem, it is impossible not to see them as autobiographical. Rushdie himself being born a mere two months earlier in the same city. Surely this establishes Rushdie's credentials as a postcolonial writer.

It is this attachment to history that has given Rushdie his voice, much in the same way that Sartre describes his creative impulse during and after the war in "Situation of the Writer in 1947" in *Literature in the Modern World*. There are so many echoes in Sartre's work, from the same year as Rushdie/Saleem's birth:

History flowed in upon us; in everything we touched, in the air we breathed, in the page we read, in the one we wrote; in love itself we discovered, like a taste of history, so to speak, a bitter and ambiguous mixture of the absolute and the transitory. (Walder 1993:203)

It is surely ironic that oppression can actually be a positive influence on creativity.

In order to show the absurdity of literary theory and criticism at it's best, I would like to finish this section with a few words from Ania Loomba, who quotes Timothy Brennan's defending of Rushdie against the allegations made by Ahmad, above. He believes that the European influence gives credibility to rather than takes it away from Rushdie's works. I believe this takes the argument full circle, and at this point I would like to leave this subject to the theorists and critics and move on with more interesting subjective issues:

Brennan suggests that such writing appropriates and inverts the form of the European novel; writers like Rushdie and Vargas Llosa are 'well poised to thematize the centrality of nation-forming while at the same time demythifying it from a European perch.' (Loomba 1998:205)

But perhaps the most succinct and relevant quotation in relation to post-colonialism on which to end this section of the paper is made by Jonathan Culler, where he says that:

Post-colonial theory and writing has become an attempt to intervene in the construction of culture and knowledge, and, for intellectuals who come from post-colonial societies, to write their way back into a history others have written. (Culler 1997:127)

This quotation surely applies to Rushdie, and in particular, to *Shame*.

3.6.2 From Rhetoric...

One aspect of *Shame* highlights the difficulty that Rushdie faces in writing about issues which are so intrinsically personal to him. This can be seen in the dialectic in the novel which manifests itself as a result of Rushdie's attempts to control his emotions. The controversial nature of this novel coupled with the author's own emotional feelings about its subject-matter represent a potentially explosive mixture, and in this sub-section I shall address how Rushdie imposes a structure of control over his emotions, and, in the following sub-section, how at certain points in the novel this structure appears to, if not actually breakdown, be reduced to a state of extreme fragility.

In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie gives the reason behind his literary technique. He believes that it is only by "pushing to the limits of what is possible" (Rushdie 1992:15) that an artist of any kind can succeed. Books, he believes, "become good when they go to this edge and risk falling over it - when they endanger the artist by what he has, or has not, *artistically* dared." (ibid.) The mechanisms which Rushdie uses in his attempt to balance on this knife-edge without falling off are both fascinating and complex. Rushdie uses his skill as a rhetorician in an attempt to side-step any controversy that he might evoke in the telling of his tale. The mechanics of rhetoric represents a source of intellectual comfort on the one hand; being a structure to which Rushdie is very much accustomed, whilst also allowing him in a certain way to 'transcend' his own position as an individual. It is through using rhetoric, that Rushdie feels more comfortable with addressing certain controversial issues. He feels that he can use the term "fiction" as a barrier behind which he can remain and yet still voice his thoughts. He reminds the reader of this fact at various times in the novel in what can only be described as a disclamation of responsibility:

Fortunately, however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairy-tale, so that's all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken either.

What a relief! (Rushdie 1995:70)

What is ironic about these sentiments is that Rushdie sadly overestimates human nature; it is this style of writing which ultimately sees Rushdie accused by Muslims of blasphemy after his publication of *The Satanic Verses*, with the resulting sentence of death or *fatwa* being invoked on Rushdie by the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. However, Rushdie is surely aware of the razor-edge on which he makes his stand. This is especially evident in the lines which precede the above quotation, which appear to prophesise this fundamentalist reaction to *The Satanic Verses*. He foresaw what could happen if one of his novels was taken to be *more* than fiction; to being perceived as a reflection of his 'reality'.

{A realistic} book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing! Realism can break a writer's heart. (Rushdie 1995:70)

At times, however, Rushdie comes out from behind his disguise as narrator and actually enters the novel as himself. The barrier is lifted, and the emotions are given free reign.

3.6.3 ...To Reality.

Shame itself, along with its author, is haunted by various stories from various times and places; as I have mentioned earlier, it is this aspect that could be seen as postmodern. However, whilst I have already dealt with the fact that *Shame* is a collection of narratives, telling the tales of various characters, at certain key points in *Shame* Rushdie actually allows himself to be dragged into his story. He attempts to explain this in the following words:

There is an "I" figure in it which is me and occasionally says things. And even that isn't quite me because novelists, being sneaky people, will fictionalize even the bit that looks like autobiography. One of the things that interested me was to occasionally slip out of fiction and to seem to be writing nonfiction -- to put essay-type material into the book. And, as it were, to look at the theme both fictionally and nonfictionally at the same time and see if that produced fruitful results. (Chaudhuri 1983:6)

The above quotation appears intrinsically problematic. Rushdie seems to have taken his position as 'sovereign-writer' past the extreme. He cannot have it both ways; in the second line he says that he can "fictionalize even the bit that looks like autobiography", and yet by the end of the quotation he is talking about examining "the theme both fictionally and nonfictionally". Somewhere in between these words reality has crept into the equation, because nonfiction is realism, i.e. it is an attempt to accurately communicate past events.

What is ironic about all these sentiments is that Rushdie appears to be appealing to the more tolerant and liberal aspects of a reader's reality. He may be overestimating human nature here, or he may simply be accepting of the potential for religious backlash that might come from his work, with the bigotry that goes with religious intolerance.

I do not believe, therefore, that the above 'disclaimer' is successful when compared with the rhetorical 'disclaimer' used by Rushdie that I described in the previous subsection. These lapses into 'nonfiction' happen at times in the story when Rushdie cannot help being sucked in; he is overwhelmed by his emotions and forgoes the disciplined structure of logic and rhetoric that he uses to protect himself from accusations at other times, and gives way to his feelings, from which there can be no shield. Rushdie is exposed; these instances cannot surely be seen as anything less than autobiographical. One particularly harrowing example of one of these 'stories within the story' is that of a young Pakistani immigrant woman living in London who is murdered by her father for sleeping with a white boy (an allegation, for what it's worth, that later turns out to be false). What haunts Rushdie (and I say Rushdie because I believe, for the reasons given above, that author and narrator are one-and-the-same in this part of the novel) almost as much as the savage act itself is the realisation, and the consequent shame, that he understands *how* this could happen:

But even more appalling was the realisation that, like the interviewed friends etc., I, too, found myself understanding the killer. The news did not seem alien to me. We who have grown up on a diet of honour and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to peoples living in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy: that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altars of their pride. (Rushdie 1995:115)

In the above quotation Rushdie exposes his own inner conflict between the social conventions of the official History that he has been exposed to from childhood, and his own moral autonomy; a history that is created, grows and adapts as he goes through life. He senses the shame which is a part of his social identity, and has therefore linked himself directly with the central point of *Shame* and this paper. This inner dialectic between what is said to be 'true' at a social level, and what an individual *feels* to be 'true' at a personal level is intrinsic to Rushdie's writing.

If Rushdie has any defence against an accusation that the above quotation is autobiography, then perhaps it is that even if he is writing autobiographically, then

this represents only one version of the story, one perspective, and is not pertaining to be absolute truth. What is recognised by Rushdie is the power of stories; they are the fuel of history, and while they have the power to transmit the truth, they can also mislead. Stories can be embellished to a certain extent and new “memories” are created too. It is this grey area which exists between fact and fiction that is present in this novel. Tales and 'history' become confused.

By creating official versions of what has happened in the past, i.e. History with a capital 'H', humanity has attempted to pin down and "homogenise" the past in the same way as it has attempted to harness time itself (as examined in 3.5) by breaking past, present and future into recognisable chunks in the form of hours, minutes and seconds, etcetera. These attempts to prevent the process of change should come as no surprise, because humans are subject to constant change. Our bodies and minds change from one day to the next under the effects of environmental stimuli, and therefore the way we view the past and what we remember is not stable either. If a link with absolute truth is unattainable, therefore, what is important is what we *believe* to be true and, equally importantly, how we can convince others to believe as well. I *believe* that the above quotation is a belief of Rushdie; of what he believes to have happened. However, what is ironic is that the subject of the 'story', the murdered Pakistani girl, is the victim of her father's beliefs; he believes that she slept with the white boy and his murderous action is a result of his belief in a religious History. In a way, therefore, by writing autobiographically and allowing himself to be pulled into the text, Rushdie forces the reader into making a stand as well; he forces the reader into making a reaction.

A good example within the text where a similar decision has to be made between the characters as to what is the truth is where Bilquîs is initiated into her husband's family through the acceptance of her 'tale' of the bomb attack on her father's cinema as she is returning home and her subsequent homelessness and meeting with her future husband:

This was when Bilquîs knew that she had become a member of the family; in the sanctification of her tale lay initiation, kinship, blood. 'The recounting of histories', Raza told his wife, 'is for us a rite of blood'. (Rushdie 1995:77)

This represents the creation of a social History; it is an agreement between people regarding past events. What is disturbing is the fact that generations of compounded agreements about past events in the guise of an official History are the same "rite of blood" that is responsible for the murder of the girl in London that I mentioned earlier.

As to how far *Shame* can be described as autobiographical, therefore, is a matter of speculation. I believe that the majority of the novel is carefully written as fiction, using a rhetorical stance in order for the author to distance himself from the narration. However, at certain points in the novel, Rushdie, by using first-person prose, seems to be writing as himself. This places the emphasis on the side of the reader, as to whether they believe these parts of the story to be fiction or nonfiction. I believe that this is just part of an elaborate game that Rushdie plays with the reader, and that, by hoping that his use of fiction and nonfiction will produce "fruitful results" (Chaudhuri 1983:6), the fact remains that if he is writing nonfiction, which obviously emanates from his own particular perspective, then he must be prepared to face the critical consequences. Writing is either fiction, or pertains to describe the truth; there is no middle ground.

At this point, of course, I am playing the same little game with my own reader as well. The best stories, of course, push the boundaries of believability to the limits. They are true in as much as they are linked to real events or situations, or describe human issues, failings or strengths, but their purpose is to entertain, and the best story tellers never allow something as trivial as 'the truth' to get in the way of a good story. This fact has been true since the first story was told and retold by early civilisations. Some of the most powerful 'truths' we have are found in stories themselves, and they resonate down the ages and are not bound in time. Religions are based upon them for example.

Earlier in this paper I described how stories develop a life of their own. I gave the example of the fisherman whose tale of catching the biggest fish of his life changed over time as he embellished the story and fell into exaggeration to make it more entertaining. He did what all humans do. He developed the tale based on the reaction of his audience, cut bits out that weren't well received, embellished the best bits, etc. In doing this he took the truth of an actual event, but added the personal and emotional truths of what the story meant to him, his experience, how he felt. This is his-story, his version of history. The question we have to ask ourselves is whether the factual truth that is lost (i.e. the fact that the fish wasn't quite as big as he latterly claimed) is outweighed by the additional truths given to the story in terms of the feelings and emotions he is able to explore in its telling over time. Surely this is much more important than the size of the fish after all.

When a story is told by different individuals and at different times down the centuries, it undergoes changes. Subtle embellishments are added over the years as the story is told by the fire side. Rushdie is basically a story teller. What is interesting is that my own views have matured in respect of the autobiographical nature of this novel in recent years. I started writing this paper in 1997, and now, in 2015, the eighteen years have seen me move from a young man to a middle aged father. The edge of my criticism has mellowed during this time, and experience has brought with it a better understanding of human nature. I used to think that Rushdie was using his skill as a rhetorician in an attempt to side step controversy that he might evoke in the telling of his story. I used to think that he felt he could use the term 'fiction' as a barrier behind which he could remain and still voice his thoughts. I now disagree with the young critic from eighteen years ago. Rushdie clearly knows what he is doing. He knows that this defence is weak in the extreme. He could not seriously believe that it offered any serious protection. The greatest irony of all is the fact that Rushdie knew he would be vilified for these views, and yet still he did not shy away from them. His conscience would not allow that. This conviction is what makes him a literary great, and more than that, a brave and decent human being. In this regard, we have to accept that the fatwa death sentence passed on him after the publication

of *The Satanic Verses* had the air of inevitability about it. If a person upsets the biggots for long enough, there will inevitably be repercussions.

4 The Manifestations of Collective Guilt in Shame

4.1 Comedy and Shame

At this point I shall examine the issue of comedy in Rushdie's *Shame*. A comic element is prolific in this novel. Timothy Brennan, in his book on Rushdie's "Myths of Nation", presents us with a quotation from Rushdie himself which sheds light on the reason behind this proliferation of comedy in the text;

"Rushdie had said that *Shame*'s first draft was 'very very depressing, unbelievably morbid', and that he later reworked it 'in the language of comedy.'" (Brennan 1989:118)

The published version of this novel, therefore, is very different from the original. This begs the question of why Rushdie decided to make this change. Perhaps there are several reasons behind this. Obviously, Rushdie intended to make the novel more entertaining and more readable, but perhaps it is reasonable to suggest other motives that could also influence the choice of this sort of addition. Brennan is extremely skeptical about the comic effect in this novel, writing it off as a form of crude, colourless, parody;

"the comic relief Rushdie promised came primarily in the form of hopeless mockery on the verbal level, a willy-nilly distancing in a 'postmodern' mood of automatic, and humourless, parody." (Brennan 1989:118)

I have two reactions to this accusation. It does seem fair to a certain extent. Rushdie uses comedy as a break from the tragic action in much the same way as Shakespeare does in his "Porter's Scene" in *Macbeth*. Humour has not really changed a great deal. The porter's jokes about lechery ("it provokes and unprovokes; it provokes the desire, but takes away the performance.") (Shakespeare 1992:2.3.28) are mirrored in the extreme in *Shame*. A good example is where Omar declares his love to Farah

Zoroaster after having watched her through an old telescope. Her reply is typical of Omar's luck;

'Voyeur,' she replied, 'I shit on your words. Your balls dropped too soon and you got the hots, no more to it than that. Don't load your family problems on to me.' (Rushdie 1995:29)

Comedy is used in the novel in one other way, however, which leads me to believe that Brennan's above statement describing it as "humourless parody" does not recognise. Rushdie uses humour to highlight the nature of life in a country in turmoil, in a state of craziness. There are several good examples of this. An example being where the authorities prevent a portrayal of the play *Julius Caesar*, because it includes the scene where the Head of State is murdered. After saying that the play can go ahead only after the removal of this scene, a solution is met that is full of comic irony;

"Finally, the producer came up with a brilliant, a positively Solomonic solution. He invited a prominent British diplomat to play Caesar, dressed in (British) Imperial regalia. The Army relaxed, the play opened;" (Rushdie 1995:241)

This quote reminds us that it is quite acceptable for the old order (the British) to be lampooned by the new nation (of Pakistan). The farcical nature of the British 'stiff upper lip' can be seen at other points in the novel too. The delapidated appearance of the colonial buildings, set against the gin and tonic soirées of the British 'Angrez' ladies near the start of the novel is a prime example reminiscent of the band continuing to play while the Titanic sank.

Comedy, therefore, has more than a simply superficial influence in this novel. The comic element to *Shame* appears to have a double purpose. Firstly, there are examples of comedy for its own sake, but others where Rushdie has used comic irony to highlight political or personal stupidity.

4.3 Women and Shame

The “culture of shame and honour which oppresses women” (Drabble 1998:851) is a central part of the novel *Shame* according to *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. It is the nature of the portrayal of women in the novel that I shall examine in this section of the paper.

It is also fair to say that that the “shit on your words” quote above is an example of what Rushdie says about the women of Pakistan being “much more impressive than her men” in *Women and the Subject of Rushdie’s Shame* cited by Landow in the article below. Landow says that the women in *Shame*

seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story (Landow [no date given]:1)

and this certainly seems true. The women are survivors. They are subjected to male dominance, violence and manipulation, but somehow seem to rise above it and remain strong or possibly hardened because of it. Just as a baby is born through a mother’s pain, so the nation of Pakistan’s birth is born through the strength and pain of its women in the novel.

There is also a marked difference in the way that the strong Asian female characters in the novel are contrasted to the rather watery, weak Angrez white women. The character of Old Mr Shakil right at the beginning of the novel provides the reader with a perspective from the older Indian generation. He is a very likeable character, full of the ferocity of a certain type of senior citizen who refuses to give up in his latter years. He can remember the days when the colony was at its height, and indeed right near the end of his life he still talks about the English in a way that still retains an air of newness. They are still alien to him in many ways, especially the women, who have a fragile and pathetic air about them:

they were merely white, or actually grey, owing to the deliterious effect of that stony sun upon their frail cloud-nurtured skins, and also to their habit of drinking dark Burgundies in the noonday sun... The old man heard the music of the imperialists... heavy with the gaiety of despair, and he cursed the hotel of dreams in a loud, clear voice. (Rushdie 1995:12)

It is interesting that the imperialists are like almost cartoon-like in their lack of characterisation. They are the past; they have no relevance and no voice. They cannot show remorse for subjugating a foreign nation.

A good further example of where the buffoonery of the men is laid bare also attributed to Bilquîs. Farah Zoroaster exhibits a sexual power over men, in this case over Omar, but Bilquîs power is much more overt. She actually manipulates her husband Raza at a political level. At times she seems to be ‘pulling the political’ strings and we are left wondering whether there are any limits to her influence or power over her husband, and therefore her nation too.

The question of whether there is a central character in the novel is a difficult one. If there is a heroine, however, it must surely be Sufiya Zinobia. She is the heroine because of her inner strength, and also because of her suffering. Like Omar, she is some kind of byproduct of Indian society, and the way she is treated seems extremely hard for a person who has grown up with a western historical perspective to understand. Raza, her father, desperately wanted a son and she was nothing more than a disappointment to her family because of this, and she later personifies the family’s “shame” after she becomes pregnant. The result of all this on Sufiya’s character is that she grows up in an environment without love and therefore she cannot create her own moral framework because of this ostricisation and develop mentally; remaining a child stuck in a woman’s body, and a prisoner of historical bigotry in a similar way to Omar Khayyam.

Occasionally something would snap in the mind of Sufiya, when the pressure became too great, and the build up of anger in her would come out in the rage of a

furious vengeance like when she kills two hundred and eighteen turkeys at Pinkie's farm with her bare hands:

Sufiya Zinobia had torn off their heads and then reaching down into their bodies to their guts up through their necks with her tiny and weaponless hands. (Rushdie 1995:138)

This act can be seen as the zenith of the female narrative in the novel. It is of course an allegory that exposes the subjugation of women in the novel. So often the subject of violence, it is surely unexpected that this violence should be finally exposed through the very hands of his most symbolic female character. It represents a dialectic which goes against the innocence and purity of this young woman, which of course makes her actions even more powerful in their symbolism.

Conclusion

Contemporary society is built upon the bones and ruins of the past. The ghosts of history, though long dead, still maintain an influence on the lives of the living; our own cultural identities have, to a large degree, been shaped even before we enter this world. When a baby is born, it immediately begins a process of socialisation, designed to allow it to operate in a particular society, and this necessitates the learning of views and events of the past. While this child is not guilty of the events that happened before its birth, it is deeply effected by their repercussions. It is this idea of the individual being 'born into shame', that is intrinsic to the subject of this paper, Salman Rushdie's *Shame*.

The novel that Rushdie has created in *Shame* can be viewed essentially as an allegory on the birth of Pakistan. Right from the start of the novel we see snapshots of the history upon which this nation was built. The legacy of the British Raj is a particularly strong motif, for example. The high status buildings created by the British as symbols of power are conspicuous throughout the novel in their crumbling state. They are like ghosts of a former order, since the British have departed. There is neither the political will nor the financial will to maintain these 'white elephants' of colonialism once the new nation is born, yet still they remain, a throw-back to the past. They are symbols of oppression, and represent the shame of the coloniser.

The idea of being 'born into shame' is also a consistent theme throughout the novel. One of the central characters, Omar, is born out of wedlock and to one of three sisters, we never find out which is the mother. The shame is evident in the way that they barricade themselves into their mansion and retreat from the outside world. This shame from birth could be said to mirror the greatest tragedy and therefore shame that happened during the birth of the nation of Pakistan itself. As the displaced peoples moved between India and Pakistan in 1947 when the new nation of Pakistan was created, there was massive bloodshed on religious grounds as the groups clashed during the migration. Over a million people died in the 'birth-throws' of Pakistan and the free India. Just as a mother pays the price of the birth of her baby in blood, pain,

sweat and tears, the people of these two great nations paid in the same way at their birth.

Regarding the historical influences in the novel, Rushdie emphasises the fact that “History” as an objective term does not exist. It is a concept that has been socially created by humanity, and consequently can only be applied with a small “h” to represent a particular historical perspective. Events in the past soon become shrouded in mystery and are therefore often open to an influx of fictional here-say. Similarly two people’s views on the same event will never be exactly the same because of the problems of interpretation, memory and integrity. In this paper I hope to have shown how Salman Rushdie has tackled historical questions by employing several different standpoints, so as to get a closer, consensus view of the unobtainable goal of reality than the bigoted, jingoistic History of the officialdom of Church or State. However, what must not be forgotten is the power of the term “history”, as Guttman points out, Rushdie sees this term as “fundamental to your existence” (Guttman 1991:2) and it is therefore capable of being used, or ab-used by the powerful in order to perpetuate a society how they want. History is and must be written as histories; the experiences of individuals who are in their actions in the present dictating what shall be remembered of the past.

In literary terms, the novel has been described as “postmodern” because of its dynamic structure and literary style, and if it has to be pigeon-holed by the literary critics then this term seems applicable, also because of the time it was written. What is striking about the novel is the influence, seen both covertly and overtly, that Rushdie’s own background as an immigrant has on the writing. I touched on this subject before, in the previous paragraph, but here I wish to acknowledge the structure Rushdie adopts for the novel. It is structured in a similar way that stories are told in the “Indian oral tradition” which leaves Rushdie with plenty of opportunities to present his own perspective. Oral narratives are common across the world.

If we consider the novel in further detail, Rushdie has created a work that is colourful in the extreme. This colour represents the vibrancy of human memory. There are elements of the vibrant and idyllic. Rushdie clearly allows the fond memories of his childhood land free rein at times, with the sights, sounds and feelings coming through a filter of 'rose-tinted spectacles'; a common way of reminiscing about the past that we all share as human beings. What is interesting though is that this colour is also evident in the descriptions of violence in the novel, where the colour is imprinted through the heightened terror of the moment; again, a very human and natural way of reacting to past events, in this case of a traumatic nature.

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