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Narratives of 'Liquid Modernity': Translation, Migrancy and Nomadism in Salman Rushdie's Novels

For Salman Rushdie, an Indian-born British writer of Muslim extraction currently living in America, it seems only natural that his ongoing fictional project should have targeted questions of self-definition and self-location (in its various avatars: dis-location, mis-location, re-location). As he confesses, his works record 'an attempt to come to terms with the various component parts of myself – countries, memories, histories, families, gods.'¹ It therefore comes as little surprise that externally-imposed labels such as 'commonwealth' literature should be rejected as chimerical. A chimera is, after all, to cite the modern usage of the term from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'a mere wild fancy; an unfounded conception.' A phantasm divorced from reality, an 'unreal monstrous creature of the imagination' (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 63) or, to retrieve its classical definitions from Homer's *Iliad* or Hesiod's *Theogony*, a fabulous fire-breathing monster admixing in its composite body feline, capric and serpentine features.

Wherefore this phantom, beastly category, reminiscent of the chthonian, chaotic antagonists of Olympian deities (Leeming 104)? Notwithstanding its improbability or incongruity, the chimera analogy signals that for a writer who has insistently

placed himself in the direct lineage of the *mohajirs*, any endeavour to fix his identity in single, static categorial slots amounts to enfreakment. Consequently, by deploying tropes of identity that point to some irreducible organic substratum while at the same time suggesting its necessary cultural mutations under the aegis of travel, Rushdie commits himself to querying solid, monolithic notions of individual (as well as communal) identity, and adopts translation, migrancy, and nomadism as the fluid, molecular alternatives to inclusion in molar, massifying structures (Deleuze & Guattari, 283). Instead of rootedness, 'cultural transplantation,' rather than procreation, 'cross-pollination,' and in lieu of clear genealogical traces, a 'polyglot family tree,' where direct ancestry is repudiated in favour of one's freely choosing, in rhizomatic lines of fugue that traverse the east-west divide, one's literary forebears, whether they be Swift, Conrad, Tagore, or Ram Mohan Roy (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 20-21). Given his liminal position within the hyphenated space² straddling such diverse cultures, Rushdie's work is ambivalently poised between both the western and the eastern literary traditions, and resorts to what Caren Kaplan calls 'mythologised narrativisations of displacement' as practices of cultural (self-) identification (2).

To this effect, particularly in later



narratives such as *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), Rushdie seems to confirm, as well as amend to some extent, Zygmunt Bauman's diagnosis of the progressive liquefaction of the age of modernity, whereby solid, rigid, traditional societal and power structures are being supplanted, in this 'post-panoptical' stage, by more fluid and flexible, extra-territorial figurations. In Bauman's account of globalised postmodernity, contrasted with the solids' staticness, fixity and spatial containment, the fluids' mobile and transient occupation of space renders them amenable to comparison with travel:

"Fluids travel easily. They 'flow', 'spill', 'run out', 'splash', 'pour over', 'leak', 'flood', 'spray', 'drip', 'seep', 'ooze'; unlike solids, they are not easily stopped – they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others and bore or soak their way through others still meeting with solids they emerge unscathed, while the solids they have met, if they stay solid, are changed – get moist or drenched. The extraordinary mobility of fluids is what associates them with the idea of 'lightness'" (Bauman 2).

Neither fixed by space nor bounded by time, liquids offer Bauman a potent metaphor for characterising postmodernity, 'second modernity' or 'surmodernity' as an age which no longer endorses the supremacy of sedentarism over nomadism, settlement over free-flowing traffic, or location over migration. Instead, with the advent of electronically propagated information, which has condensed time to instantaneity and has volatilised spatial distance, "the difference between 'close by' and 'far away' or for that matter between the wilderness and the civilized, orderly space, has been all but cancelled" (11). In

fact, one major transformation that distinguishes 'light' or 'liquefied' modernity from its 'heavy' or 'solid' counterpart is the breakdown, erosion or melting away of frontiers. Territorial borderlines and their function of dividing, separating, containing and reinforcing systemic order lose both consistency and relevance faced with spontaneous flows along network-like capillaries (25). Boundaries or, rather, their permeability in-forms Rushdie's liminal figurations of identity as interconnecting native and foreign, self and other, margin and centre, east and west: as he confesses, 'I've been crossing frontiers all my life – physical, social, intellectual, artistic borderlines' (*The Ground Beneath My Feet* 42). Travel, which for cultural anthropologist James Clifford involves a 'range of practices for situating the self in [a] space' and 'a figure for different modes of dwelling and displacement' (1989), is first and foremost rendered in Rushdie's works as 'translation,' understood in its dual sense as both transference across spatial frontiers and conveyance from one language or culture into another. The geographical and linguistic meanings of 'translation' merge in the following quasi-identical definitions extracted from Rushdie's non-fictional and fictional prose, which strike a similar note with George Steiner's reference to the 'extraterritorial,' homeless, unhoused poets of the twentieth century, who are 'wanderers across language'³:

"The word 'translation' comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained" (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 17).



'I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion [...] that something can also be gained' (Rushdie, *Shame* 29).

Both statements occur in the context of attempting to situate Asian writers in Western culture – itself, as Edward Said remarks in *Reflections on Exile*, 'in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees' (173). Yet exile, in Said's vision, is a 'condition of terminal loss'; it is predicated as one's pathological dis-engagement from one's place of origins, as out-of-placeness. Estrangement, the 'unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home' (173) signals a loss of integrity, a fall from some prelapsarian wholeness or Antaeon oneness with the ground beneath one's feet, which fractures into unbridgeable chasms between home and away. Rushdie does underscore Said's definition of exile as a postlapsarian 'discontinuous state of being'; nevertheless, he also supplements the exiles' *contrapuntal* 'plurality of vision' (Said 186) by claiming that given the migrants' condition of simultaneous belonging/not-belonging, geographical distance implodes and simply serves to grant them 'stereoscopic' awareness, a dialogic rather than monologic perspective upon a past that corresponds to a lost home and a present that encompasses foreignness:

'We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork. And as a result – as my use of the Christian notion of the Fall indicates – we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two

cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools' (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 15).

What is to be gained from existing in translation, if dislodgment is a common human predicament ('the past is a country from which we have all emigrated'), experienced all the more intensely by a writer literally dis-placed into the 'elsewhere' implicit in 'out-of-country' and 'out-of-language' (12)? The answer Rushdie provides highlights memory as the archaeological tool for provisionally recon-structing the past from the 'broken pots of antiquity' into imaginative at-homeness:

"our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (10).

The plural implicit in the previous statement signals a refusal to succumb to a ghetto mentality, which would circumvent the 'homeland' within constricting cultural boundaries, turning physical dislocation into a 'form of internal exile' (17). As Said also suggests, too strict an enclosure within the borders of 'familiar territory' might easily veer into a carceral experience: the exiles' defining experience is that of crossing barriers 'of thought and experience' (185).

Novels like *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983) revolve around the articulation of 'imaginary homelands.' In contrast with the alleged solidity of the myths legitimating the birth of post-Independence India or of seceded Pakistan, these narratives appear to promote the notion that in order for these countries to be taking stock, they have to be fluidly projected into 'hundreds of millions of possible versions' (*Imaginary* 10). Against a



historical canvas of intensive re-codification of ethnic, religious and national frontiers, anti-heroic questers like Saleem Sinai and Omar Khayyam Shakil (only nominally related to the Persian poet) feel uncomfortably anchored in the margins. Saleem – whose facial topography uncannily replicates the geographical contours of his country and whose birth on the cusp of India's liberation triggers his lamentations of being 'handcuffed' or 'chained' to his country's history – is confined in a pickling factory. From this position of invisibility, he is clamouring, nevertheless, a grandiose role of both chronicler and heroic founder of the nation. Fraught with deliberate or fortuitous inconsistencies, his project of writing an epic of the nation⁴ derails, in Shandean or Sheherazadian manner, into a 'chutnification of history' (*Midnight's* 459). In effect, his is just another alternative, *petit histoire*, through which he contests monolithic, hegemonic narratives about a homeland 'which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream' (112). As Su maintains (558), the magical gift boasted by Saleem, that of becoming the All-India Radio and convening inside his head the Conference of the 1001 Children of Midnight, attests to, on the one hand, his desire to transcend spatial limitations through the establishment of a virtual, globalised network of like-minds, and on the other hand, to his falling prey to the very totalising impulses that have rendered India 'insufficiently imagined' (*Imaginary* 387).

The marginal *topos* of the frontier – understood either as 'contact zone' of transculturation (Pratt 6-7) or as disjunctive breach of space – is also explored in *Shame*, in which the trope of cloistering (with its corollaries of self-willed and induced incarceration) ambivalently offers protection and alternative means of spatial ex-

ploration. In this novel, Omar Khayyam Shakil is a 'peripheral man,' a 'creature of the edge' (24) who grows up in captivity, trapped inside a labyrinthine mansion that hovers above the 'hell hole' of a dumbbell-shaped, border town, polarised now, in the fourteenth century of the Hegiran calendar, not only between the extreme emotions of honour and shame, but also between the older, indigenous bazaar and the more recent district of the 'alien,' or British sahibs (11-12). The carceral discipline enforced upon him by his three-some maternal custodians hyperbolically inflates his sense of marginality, of 'living at the edge of the world, so close that he might fall off at any moment' (21). Designed to thwart any outburst of shame, Omar's entombment/enwombment in this tightly-sealed closed system – which, sooner or later, is bound to lose its labile equilibrium and liquefy into a 'sweltering, entropical zone' (30) – emphasises the cumbersome 'heaviness' of any (territorial) confinement. Examples here abound: the zenana, the triune mothers' self-inter(n)ment in the 'unmanageably infinite mansion' of Nishapur (14), Shakil's vertigo about the great nothingness lying beyond the Impossible Mountains, Rani Harappa's stranding in the 'backyard of the universe' (94) or Sufyia Zinobia's virtual imprisonment in her family's Takallouf, the 'untranslatable,' 'opaque,' 'tongue-tying' shame (104).

Several possibilities emerge as a result of such forced insulation. Under the gravitational pressure of motion restrictions, the curvature of spacetime turns Shakil's border universe into a 'hideously indeterminate,' heterotopian maze haunted by the 'minotaur of forbidden light' (30-32), a 'topological world,' in Brian McHale's terms (*Postmodernist* 141), where his identity oscillates among a plurality of



grossly distended gothic frames of reference. Shakil's vandalism of the ghost-infested mansion (his 'massacre' of the place's history) conveys him in the direct lineage of the European wild man and the barbarian 'noble savage,' restricted as he is to the compensatory, surrogate freedom of a feral child, rampaging wildly about like a 'time-traveller' bereft of his magic capsule. The iridescent or opalescent effect (McHale, *Postmodernist* 39) is further amplified by Shakil's insertion in the vampiric, transworld genealogy of either 'caped crusader or cloaked bloodsucker,' Batman or Dracula (*Shame* 22). What Rushdie foregrounds through Shakil's monstrously outgrown ontological plurality is the unresolved dialectics between the twin fantasies of roots and routes, between enracined allegiances to the mother-country and the compulsion for trans-border flight, for self-deracination. Himself a respectable physician concealing his beastly double within (albeit zombified through his severing all ties with the rooting emotion of shame)⁵, Omar Khayyam Shakil confirms Stevenson's prophecy that 'man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens' (Stevenson 61). As a counterpart to Omar's shamelessness, Sufyia Zinobia Ryder furthers the Jekyll-Hyde antinomy to its outermost extremes and becomes shame incarnate, literalising the fairy-tale motif of the beast erupting within the beauty, of the 'bacilli of humiliation' (141) unleashing a violent inner metamorphosis into 'a chimera, the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage' (263). Sufyia's immurement within the collective phantasm of shame triggers her immunological cataclysm and fosters her corporeal transformation into a roaming panther with a basilisk stare and a pale skin betraying her *mohajir* descent, which refuses consignment

to the peripheries by 'conventions of disbelief' (199) and cancels, through her savage ransacking of walled-in citadels, the resistance of space and time alike.

Enforced migrancy, on the other hand, tends to engender the longing for immobility, for rootedness. The massive population migrations, triggered by the collective fantasy of constructing Pakistan as the Land of the Pure mean, for Saleem Sinai, abandoning his native Bombay and implanting his umbilical cord in Karachi: a failed project since the pursuit of the new promised land only leads the 'dispossessed multitudes' to erect real or imaginary barriers aimed to enforce a sense of at-homeness into unfamiliar territory (such is the case of Jamila Singer's adoption of *purdah* and becoming the star icon of her new nation). For Saleem Sinai, however, this entails a relapse into carceral confinement: his sole means of resisting massification attempts and retrieving his native Bombay is by being teleported or fleeing without permit or passport, in magical realist fashion, aboard Parvati-the-Witch's wicker basket along 'the air-lanes of the subcontinent' (*Midnight's* 381).

One of the most relevant passages regarding cross-cultural translation occurs in *Shame*, a 'novel of leavetaking' (28), albeit one in which the exile or the émigré narrator remains sutured by invisible, elastic straps extending across geographical and imaginary frontiers to an interstitial space that conflates, 'at a slight angle,' a real and a fictional country (29). Various constructed as a homeland whose name was born in exile, since it was acronymically coined by Muslim immigrants to the metropolitan core (87), or as Peccavistan, in the apocryphal narrative recounting the nineteenth-century British governor's purported confession on conquering the province of Sind (*Peccavi*, 'I have sinned'), Pakistan represents a palimpsest country,



superposing the flaking layers of foundational myths. Transcending boundaries, breaking through the weight of such myths defines the condition of migrants or *mohajirs*: implicit in their gesture of flight, 'which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds' (85), is their eschewal of the eschatological consequences, pictured here in terms of the Norse Yggdrasil approaching ignic consummation (88), of upholding the phantasm of roots. If gravity and belonging constitute conservative, hegemonic narratives designed to arrest movement and enmesh people firmly in their birthplaces, their counter narratives, anti-gravity and non-belonging trans-late Rushdie's migrants ('borne-across humans,' *Imaginary* 278) into the nomadic consciousness that defies 'homologation into dominant ways of representing the self' (Braidotti 25).

While inevitably fraught with distortions and slippages, trans-lating, ferrying across language boundaries then defines Rushdie's liquid location in between the eclecticism of his Indian heritage and the transnational, cross-lingual space of English (or, rather, Hinglish), which, due to mutual pollination with the colonised languages of the Asian subcontinent, also lends itself to further 'remaking' by Indian writers who are now 'carving new territories for themselves within its frontiers' (*Imaginary* 69, 64). Whether it be through the Angrezi in which he is compelled to write (*Shame* 38), or *Hug-me*, the Bombayite 'garbage argot' freely switching between Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Marathi and English in the course of a single sentence (*Ground* 5), Rushdie's rejection of embeddedness in ethnocentric, monolithic cultural spaces rigidly structured around a 'fantasy of purity' (*Imaginary* 68) and his forging of a malleable rhetorical melange may also explain his reluctance to accept the chimera of a 'commonwealth' identity (a static

hybrid) and his mobile spanning across linguistic and cultural frontiers.

In the light of Caroline Walker Bynum's distinctions between hybridity and metamorphosis as representational and rhetorical gateways to fundamentally different notions of selfhood (29), Rushdie's t(r)opological use of translation as a metaphor and a space of fluid location foregrounds his quest for a processual, dynamic mapping of identity. As Walker Bynum explains, hybridity congeals mutability, while metamorphosis endorses process. Hybrids preclude ideas of transformation, making visible the co-existence or 'simultaneity of two-ness'; in contrast, the two-ness implicit in metamorphosis unfolds temporally – in narrative or, one might say, peripatetic fashion – between a pole of departure and a pole of arrival, between a 'one-ness' that is left behind and a one-ness that is approached (rather than attained):

'Hybrid reveals a world of difference, a world that *is* and is multiple; metamorphosis reveals a world of stories, of things under way. Metamorphosis breaks down categories by breaching them; hybrid forces contradictory or incompatible categories to coexist and serve as commentary each on the other' (31).

Nowhere does Rushdie outline the routes of passage from one hybrid site to another, and address the perils inherent in arresting such lines of flight into the fixity of 'entity-ness' (Walker-Bynum 31), more vividly than in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999). The novel carries a step further the 'conflict between the fantasy of Home and the fantasy of Away' (*Ground* 55) and features ex-centric travellers who render Europe and America into what James Clifford calls 'sites of travel,' which are



being 'traversed from the outside,' to the effect of 'enacting differently centred worlds' (Clifford, 'Travelling' 103 & *passim*). Travel, charting passageways between east and west in terms of aerial translations across real and invisible fault-lines, unsettles the horizontal-vertical and the margin-centre dyads. Whereas the boundaries of homelands vacillate between fluidity and fixity and apparently vanish in the endless global territorial reconfigurations, subjected as they are to endless processes of partitioning and secession that afflict the Indian subcontinent,

'[e]verything starts shifting, changing, getting partitioned, separated by frontiers, splitting, re-splitting, coming apart. Centrifugal forces begin to pull harder than their centripetal opposites. Gravity dies. People fly off into space' (168),

for Ormus Cama, Umeed Merchant and Vina Apsara, westernised *mohajirs* or eastern hipsters 'on the road,' the imaginary chasms dividing orient from occident are traumatically experienced at the level of flesh. It is not gratuitous that Rushdie should have outlined corporeal travel by reference to biological processes implicit in cross-culturation: exiting Bombay/Wombay is a birth process, skin shedding is a sign of rebirth and renewal, developing phantom limbs is like forming new allegiances to the country of adoption, viral infections – see Vina's coming down with Wisdom-of-the-East-itis, or gurushitia – all boil down to a (facetious) 'scientific' approach to culture, defined as follows: '[a] group of micro-organisms grown in a nutrient substance under controlled conditions' (97).

The point of transition across cultures fosters these travellers' simultaneous exposure to 'worlds in collision,' 'universes tearing into each other, striving

to become one, destroying each other in the effort' (401). While the possibility that Rushdie's diagnosis of a historical crisis currently engulfing the world may be hinting at Velikovsky's highly controversial, catastrophic outlook on celestial mechanics cannot be ruled out, and while his dystopian forecast, amplified in *Fury* and enacted in *Shalimar the Clown*, envisages the 'colliding thought-worlds' of Western liberalism and Eastern fundamentalism (Booth & Dunne 1), it seems more likely that the 'close encounters' (McHale, *Postmodernist* 60) between different worlds (eastern and western, celestial and infernal, 'real' and imaginary) staged in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* foregrounds the fluidisation of their boundaries into heterotopian zones that allow for a shattering of rigid, totalised, unified formations of subject identity. Instead, conveyance across 'contact zones' – what Mary Louise Pratt refers to as the space hosting an ongoing process of intertwining and overlapping between 'mutually differentiative cultural and historical backgrounds' (6) – weakens the ontological consistence of solipsistic worlds and strips bare the process of identity construction.⁶

Transportation across the rift gaping wide between worlds and under-worlds or otherworlds engenders somatic modifications variously charted as molecular mutations or grotesque transformations (see for instance, in *The Satanic Verses*, Saladdin Chamcha's metamorphosis into a horned, hooped goat-man hybrid). Invariably described as an aerial passage, travel occasions the crossing of an insubstantial frontier, the piercing through of an epidermal layer that functions simultaneously – to use the figurations in Steven Connor's cultural history of skin – as a screen (a translucent sheath warranting the integrity of the worlds it contains), as a



membrane (a porous, permeable surface enabling the exchange between inside and outside) and as a milieu or 'a place of minglings, a mingling of places' (26).

In *Midnight's Children*, it is Bombay that represents such a contact zone or 'global integral' of melding cultures and identities, but in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* this threshold is crossed in mid-air: Ormus Cama, 'musical sorcerer,' 'golden troubadour,' 'the age's unholy fool,' claiming to be the 'secret originator, the prime innovator of music, the secret language of all humanity, our common heritage, whatever mother tongue we speak' (91), begins his katabatic descent in search for his Eurydice at the exact point of thrusting through a translucent celestial membrane, 'an ectoplasmic barrier,' ghostly guards patrolling it and all (260). Flying over Bosphorus, Ormus enters this 'transit zone,' which expands into a protracted liminal phase in his rite of passage and determines a 'biochemical quiver,' a mutation 'at the level of the cell, of the gene, of the particle' (260), to the effect that from 'flesh devotee' he becomes a 'preacher of the spirit,' unsettling the flimsy distinction between western hedonism and eastern asceticism. What Ormus actually achieves is overcoming repressive, structured, hierarchical forms of identity and embarking on a 'nomadic politics' (Braidotti 35) of transgressing, trespassing, breaking through molar aggregates. This movement towards forming new alliances, along lines that are horizontal, dispersive rather than vertical, integrative, is reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'molecular becoming' (283). In Rushdie's narrative this is translated as Sir Darius Xerxes Cama's 'fourth function of outsideness' or as the disruptive drive of rootlessness or nomadism, against which

'those who value stability, who fear

transience, uncertainty, change, have erected a powerful system of stigmas and taboos [...] so that we mostly conform, we pretend to be motivated by loyalties and solidarities we do not really feel, we hide our secret identities beneath the false skins of those identities which bear the belongsers' seal of approval. But the truth leaks out in our dreams; alone in our beds [...], we soar, we fly, we flee. And in the waking dreams our societies permit, in our myths, our arts, our songs, we celebrate the non-belongsers, the different ones, the outlaws, the freaks' (74).

Even after his presumptuous re-discovery of America ('We are the Pilgrim Children, Ormus thinks. Where the first foot falls, let it be Bombay Rock,' 258), Ormus da Cama, *qua* Orpheus *qua* Morpheus *qua* Metamorpheus, remains enthralled in this transitional phase. On board the 'Mayflower,' his shape-shifting metamorphosis is not tarnished with any anxieties of identity loss; on the contrary, it involves his retrieval of 'westernness' as a natural legacy of his Bombay background. Ormus (whose radically composite selves encompass references to not only Orpheus, but also to Hormuz, Vasco da Gama and Gayomart, his still-born, non-identical, dizygotic twin) experiences dis-orientation, loss of geographical bearings, and entry into a heterotopian zone in which historical facts get entangled with fictional constructs to the point that they become indistinguishable. 'Spaces of alternate ordering,' spaces of deferred transition across gaps that 'can never be closed up' (Hetherington viii-ix), heterotopias allow for the 'unreal' to take precedence over and even prompt manifestations of the 'real.' In mid-flight, the gash in the sky-membrane becomes a junction point, a node at which forking



paths collude, creating scope for an 'ontological parallax' (McHale, *Constructing* 54). Examples of this include, to use McHale's comprehensive survey of the landscapes of postmodernist fiction (1987), Chinese-box worlds (the slashes in the screen of Ormus's in-flight movie revealing another movie and so on); intertextual zones hypothesising about the interference of characters from other fictional worlds (Tolkien's demoniacal Sauron causing Vina Apsara's descent into the Underworld); or worlds under erasure, the most memorable example regarding the crossing of the ultimate frontier – the frontier of the skin: 'At the frontier of the skin no dogs patrol,' which is instantaneously invalidated by 'At the frontier of the skin mad dogs patrol' (55).

Ormus's ventures into alternative universes witness the melting of everything that is 'rock-hard' into thin air (361), the off-centring of the world's axes, which causes frontiers to glide across territories and abysmal gaps to fracture the solid ground beneath one's feet. Not only does his route through the looking glass provide him access to parallel worlds in which England is 'ersatz' America, Kennedy escapes assassination attempts in Dallas and the Watergate Affair is a mere fantasy thriller, but the extreme fluidisation of his 'double vision,' which triggers an excessive permeability of transworld frontiers, brings about apocalyptic visions of the earth imploding in a world-encompassing mega-quake:

'The barriers between the world of dreams and the waking world, between the spheres of the actual and the imagines, are breaking down. There is a progression. Something is changing. Instead of the gashes through which he formerly saw these visions, the windows

to the other quiddity now have blurry edges. [...] The frontiers are softening. The time may not be far off when they disappear entirely. This notion, which ought to excite him, instead fills him with terrible dread. If the forking paths are coming together, if a point of confluence is ahead, [...] if such a decompartmentalisation were to occur, and all verities suddenly failed, could we survive the force of the event?' (400)

One answer – supplied, obviously, in the context of the America's counter-culture and its Dionysian excesses – is protean metamorphosis. The earthquake songs that Ormus Cama dedicates to the advent of chaos and anarchic mutability trigger the audiences' bestial transformations and their bohemian, centrifugal errantry as the sole alternatives to hyper-institutionalised forms of the oppressive civilisation and their drive towards dehumanisation.

Ormus's horrific blueprint of a 'millenarian eschatology' (296) is still pending to unveil the 'unsolidity of solid ground' (55) in Rushdie's two latest novels. *Fury* (2001) and, more recently, *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) document the dis-orientation experienced by nomadic selves in the metropolitan sprawls of America. In particular, although acknowledging a post-historical stage of Western society, by outlining America as the 'Promised Land' of liberal democracy (Fukuyama ix), these novels nonetheless undermine the notion of modernity's blueprint utopia come true by, on the one hand, performing a Baudrillardian critique of hyperreality,⁷ and on the other, highlighting the resurgence of universalising narratives such as nationalism, religious fundamentalism and global campaigns against terror. England in the 1960s no longer represented the 'dream-country' that might centripetally lure these



self-outcasts, but a society that expectorated outsiders (for instance, Sir Darius Xerxes Cama), or ghettoised them in contemporary replicas of panoptical structures, reducing them to the condition of ‘immigrunting,’ ‘immigratitude’ and ‘immigrovelling.’ America, on the other hand, the ‘Great Attractor’ (*The Ground* 102), the space of non-belonging, as well as of voracious consumerism by definition, magnetically attracts and devours them:

‘I want to be in America, America where everyone’s like me, because everyone comes from somewhere else. [...] all that yearning, hope, greed, excess, the whole lot adding up to a fabulous noisy historyless self-inventing citizenry of jumbles and confusions; all those variform manglings of English adding up to the livingest English in the world’ (258-259).

Whereas England in these narratives increasingly lends itself to Lévi-Strauss’s distinction in *Tristes Tropiques*⁸ between the anthropoemic strategies of modern societies, which either eject or isolate polluting individuals from the social body and the anthropophagic strategies of primitive societies, which absorb, swallow up or cannibalise upon strangers (389-390), America and its consumption practices more neatly fall into the latter category. America’s omnivorous appetite, her tremendous devouring urges (*Fury* 69) becomes the perfect place for the reinvention of the self, particularly for Professor Solanka, who has come to the promised land out of the professed desire to obliterate his roots, to erase, in computer fashion, the virtual reality of his ‘back-story’, to discard his ‘useless baggage of blood and tribe’ and initiate the process of ‘automorphosis’ or re-programming of the self:

‘Give me a name, America.../ Bathe me in amnesia and clothe me in your powerful unknowing.../ No longer a historian but a man without histories let me be. I’ll rip my lying mother tongue out of my throat and speak your broken English instead. Scan me, digitise me, beam me up. If the past is the sick old Earth, then, America, be my flying saucer. Fly me to the rim of space. The moon’s not far enough’ (51).

If non-belonging, nomadism is celebrated in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Fury* and *Shalimar the Clown* represent narratives of return, of reversing the routes of previous voyages, eastwards, in an attempt to recover the lost contours of homelands which have to be imaginatively retrieved into existence. Homebound voyages in *Midnight’s Children* could still be fraught with the migrants’ acquisition of an ‘altered vision’ upon their no longer recognisable native lands. The European sojourn of Saleem Sinai’s grandfather, Aadam Aziz, in the first decades of twentieth century, predictably bestowed upon him the imperative of translating the western project of emancipation and progress to Kashmir:

‘Now, returning, he saw through travelled eyes. Instead of the beauty of the tiny valley circled by giant teeth, he noticed the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and felt sad, to be at home and feel so utterly enclosed. He also felt – inexplicably – as though the old place resented his educated, stethoscoped return’ (11).

For Professor Solanka, ex-Cambridge academic, and Noman Noman, *alias* Shalimar the Clown, actor turned terrorist, however, abandoning their homelands was



dictated by personal, rather than historical traumas, in the first place: parental abuse, in the case of the former, and dishonoured manhood, in the case of the latter (Rushdie, 'Inside'). The point of departure is this time, America itself, as both novels go further towards exploring what Bauman calls a post-Panoptical society. In contrast with Bentham's Panopticon, considered by Foucault to epitomize the model of modern power, Bauman maintains, post-Panoptical strategies of power no longer depend on fixing or immobilising the inmates in space; on the contrary, what is at stake nowadays is not spatial confinement but spatial fluidisation, not the erection of boundaries but their demolition so as to allow the flow of increasingly mobile global powers:

'For power to be free to flow, the world must be free of fences, barriers, fortified borders and checkpoints. Any dense and tight network of social bonds, and particularly a territorially rooted tight network, is an obstacle to be cleared out of the way. Global powers are bent on dismantling such networks for the sake of their continuous and growing fluidity, that principal source of their strength and the warrant of their invincibility' (Bauman 14).

While conceding to this spatial disengagement of power, these two novels also record its provisional re-'territorialisation' and re-'solidification' through the resurgence of conflictual tensions and their legitimating grand narratives in various nodal points of the global network: revolutionary upheavals in *Fury* and global (counter)terrorism in *Shalimar the Clown*. The west is still seen to be generating models for the east, but this is done at the level of the hyperreal engendering the real

(Baudrillard *Simulacra* 23), as America has become the new centreweight in the global village, the 'quicksand metropolis' with 'no mysteries, no depths, only surfaces and revelations' (*Shalimar* 5).

Despite his disenchantment with America's terminal crisis and its 'mechanisation of the human' (182), the dolls Solanka is devoted to creating and endowing with their own history (his cyborgian Frankendolls) reach such tremendous rates of popularity that he is unawares caught in a virtual reality project, PlanetGalileo.com, an alterial multidimensional universe of the Puppet Kings, a realm of computer-generated simulacra. These proliferate into a multimedia beast, capable of constant metamorphosis, as Solanka admits, through the looting of ancient mythical narratives. In *Shalimar the Clown*, migration, forced exodus for the Kashmiris is moulded on the western myth of a lost, unregainable Paradise: hence, Shalimar, the verdant Mughal garden of 'Kashmir, in a time before memory' is a fallen Eden (4), soon to become part and parcel of the 'multipolar, multicivilisational' world politics and risk being swept away in the tidal wave of an imminent 'clash of civilisations' (Huntington 20, 28). For India Ophuls, whose father's gesture of violent interpellation has doomed to bear the weight of a burdensome, foreign toponym, being forcibly equated with the exotic province of British colonialism is unacceptable: her own 'violent English history' impels her to journey in search of her maternal roots and recuperate an original identity subsumed under the name of Kashmira. Nevertheless, her passage through a 'magic portal' does not return her to the Garden of Paradise; postlapsarian Kashmir, like Los Angeles, like wartime Strasbourg, appears apocalyptic, entrenched in executions, police brutality, explosions, riots:

'Everywhere was now a part of



everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no longer our own, individual, discrete. [...] there were collisions and explosions. The world was no longer calm' (37).

In *Shalimar the Clown*, heavy modernity and its structural solidity are embodied in Max Ophuls, former American Ambassador to India, legislator, architect and, eventually, witness of the demise registered by the post-WWII international 'narrative of emancipation' (Lyotard 37):

'He tried to believe that the global structures he had helped to build, the pathways of influence, money and power, the multinational associations, the treaty organisations, the frameworks of co-operation and law whose purpose had been to deal with a hot war turned cold, would still function in the future that lay beyond what he could foresee' (*Shalimar* 20).

Having survived the Holocaust, Ophuls nevertheless succumbs to the 'utopian fallacy' of man's perfectibility while at the same time upholding a Hobbesian model of power, whereby a sovereign must by necessity and force contain the Leviathan's natural aggressive instincts. This philosopher-prince's homiletic teachings to India – ambivalently indebted to the confrontational strategies in Machiavelli's political thought and Sun Tzu's art of war - include the story of the 'palace of power,'⁹ a Chinese-box, Pan-optical structure of windowless rooms, guarded by human-beast monsters, whom one must progressively behead in order to access the control chamber and its ever-elusive 'man of true power.' Max Ophuls's career as 'maker of the world' is coeval with the transition from this territorialized,

adversarial model of power, relying on the contrast between the subordinates' visible immobilisation in space and the guards' invisible yet assumed locatedness at the centre of the Panopticon, to the extra-territorial power-relations of 'liquid modernity,' when the chief hegemonic practices (such as 'escape, slippage, elision and avoidance') rely on the volatility, inaccessibility and spatial fluidity of the power elites (Bauman 11) – the very techniques appropriated by Shalimar, whose counterfeit passports and expert tightrope walking enables him to scour the secret lanes of the invisible world.

While Professor Solanka is metaphorically chased out of America by the three Furies that haunt him for his Oresteian sin, his puppets take on a life of their own, in the sense of triggering the revolutionary fervour that escalates across the globe, in the half-real, half tongue-in-cheek republic of Lilliput-Blefuscu. Solanka's difficulty resides in realising that this remote archipelago is more than a stage on which a masque is being played out. That in the 'golden age' of technophilic posthumanism and consumerist ecstasy, fury can still have a literal meaning, that conflicts keep escalating and geopolitical borders still demand redefinition. For Solanka, return home to his 'damned Yoknapatawpha' (220) is possible not in the sense of either virtual or corporeal homecoming (flying east, thus simultaneously towards the future and his past, he refuses transit in Bombay, preferring to await take-off on board the plane), but of recovering his familial ground, ending the cycle of parental abandonment that generated his exile in the first place. All in all, albeit acknowledging the complexities of cultural location in post- or neocolonial situations, Rushdie does seem to privilege deterritorialisation as an active pursuit of homelands of the imagination.



Travel becomes the figurative translation – across increasingly fluidised barriers – of multiply-localised selves, along routes that fork, intersect, and perpetually defer the (chimerical) recuperation of roots.

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¹<http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth87>

² For excellent insights into 'migration,' 'translation,' and 'hybridity' as Rushdie's postcolonial metaphors, see Sanga (2001).

³ George Steiner, *Extraterritorial. Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution*. London: Faber & Faber 1972, p. 21. Qtd. in Said, p. 174.

⁴ See Su (550 & *passim*).

⁵ Rushdie's exact syntagm here makes reference to Shakil's mutating into 'ethical zombie,' given his 'willed severance from his past' (*Shame* 127).

⁶ See McHale (101).

⁷ "The acceleration of modernity, of technology, of events and media, of all exchanges – economic, political and sexual – has propelled us to 'escape velocity,' with the result that we have flown free of the referential sphere of the real and of history" (Baudrillard, *Illusion* 1).

⁸ A distinction also adopted by Zygmunt Bauman (101).

⁹ Also explicitly related to James George Frazer's 'enchanted grove' whence the 'high priest of the golden bough' is violently removed (*Shalimar* 16).