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**Games of Identity and Alterity
in the Novels
of
Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul**

Foreword by Virgil STANCIU

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Foreword

Postcolonial fiction in English is certainly best represented by Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul, authors who were so engrossed in the humanitarian, sociological and psychological problems besetting immigrants that they hardly paid heed to any other subject. Rushdie relied heavily on popular culture – not only literature, but also myth, music, legend, religion – to concoct a formula that was extremely successful with readers the world over and made him famous for the excellence of his work, alongside the political persecutions that made of him a sort of cultural rebel-hero, and greatly enhanced his popularity. Sir Vidia, on the other hand, kept himself aloof of the mundane aspects of life, only aspiring to bring his writings to perfection and be recognized as a major Commonwealth author. He, and not Rushdie, got the Nobel Prize. Ms Emilia Ivancu’s book studies the fiction of these two canonic representatives of postcolonial fiction, who both reflect the multiple facets of the (post)colonial subject, preferring to lay the accent on the fate of the individual and deal with his groping for identity, rather than with the often discussed sociological and political implications of the phenomenon. In fact, the two novelists have had an ambiguous, if not strained, relationship with the ethnic groups they belong to, which have often attacked violently their writings and rejected their opinions. As Rushdie and Naipaul come from different geographical areas, have had different life experiences and are of different ages, they construct postcolonial identity and subjectivity in different ways, giving the analyst the possibility to

Men), they are not able to reach truly to each other, so they are haunted by an ectoplasmic spectrality. Their identities are diasporic identities, which dissipate themselves in the struggle between the true self and the image imposed by the others.

Ms Ivancu's study is as delightful as it is serious. It offers a complex view of the main characteristics of postcolonial literature, powerfully marked by the works of Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul and a very deep understanding of the relation between a character and his/her self, between the self and the Other, and also between the self and the world. The approach is multidisciplinary, and the texts are analysed from a multi-layered comparative perspective, which manages to produce a solid paradigm for the correct evaluation of this type of fiction.

Ms Emilia Ivancu has read an impressive number of reference books necessary for a thorough understanding of the singular position of the postcolonial writer and of the problems of subjectivity in his relation to the Other and the world: works of postcolonial theory (Raymond Williams, H. Bhabha, Edward Said etc.), modern studies in psychology, sociology and anthropology (Foucault, Lefebvre, Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and others). Based on their ideas, she forged a coherent and expressive critical discourse, of exemplary rigour, but refreshingly original at the same time.

Virgil STANCIU

Introduction

The presence of and the encounter with the Other has been extant in the human mind and thinking ever since Antiquity, when man must have been surprised to see, as the well-known Polish writer Ryszard Kapuściński writes, that there are other people on the planet as well: 'What an important moment in the history of the world, what a major discovery – the discovery that there are people in the world too!'¹ From that important discovery up to the present moment, the fascination with the Other has remained consistent. Nevertheless today, what we can call hybridity – that is a mélange of cultural elements our environment consists of – ultimately means no longer homogeneous or racially pure civilizations, and the consequence is, as the same Kapuściński formulated in 2006, that 'culture is becoming increasingly hybrid and heterogeneous.'² Along with the development of media and communication, as well as the emergence of new states – former colonies, which become independent – new cultures start to gain confidence and follow their urge to attain affirmation, finding their way back to the centres of the European continent, thus remaking the journeys initiated into the heart of the colonies by another Polish born, yet controversial writer, Joseph Conrad.

¹ Ryszard Kapuściński, *The Other*, Translated by Antonia Lloyd Jones, with an introduction by Neal Ascherson, London and New York: 2008, p. 80.

² Ryszard Kapuściński, *The Other*, p. 89.

This is the direction in which, in the context of Postcolonial literature of English expression, the present research analyses the works of two writers of Indian origin, who, coming from actually two opposite directions, meet and fulfil their destiny as writers in England, their lives and works illustrating the challenges and new trends in post-(post)modern culture today.

In the light of the encounter with the Other (in which the Other can be the Self, another person or even another space), Salman Rushdie, in his novel, *The Enchantress of Florence*, tackles the issue of what this encounter with the Other truly means. The conclusion, surprisingly, underlines not the organically different aspects of the people participating to this meeting, but rather that they are very much alike. One of his sentences comes and cancels the famous Sartrean line: 'L'enfer, c'est les autres.'³ by simply negating it: 'Hell is not other people.'⁴ On the other hand, V. S. Naipaul, also an Indian writer by origin, but born in Trinidad, and educated in Britain, in very many of his writings discusses the problem of roots and genealogy, either from an individual point of view or from the point of view of nations/collectivities. The idea of the genealogy of post-colonial discourse develops, in the case of V. S. Naipaul, through the paradox of a blessing in disguise, Naipaul himself admitting that his curse of having been born in a forgotten former colony of the British Empire gave him the chance to find a firm literary voice exactly at its very centre, in England, thus, somehow reaching a conclusion similar to that of Rushdie.

As a consequence, I intend to discuss here the modality in which the Self and the Other interfere and inter-react in the novels of

³ Jean Paul Sartre, *Huis clos. Twentieth Century Texts*, Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2000, p. 95 (Engl. *Hell is other people*.)

⁴ Salman Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence*, London: Vintage Books, 2009, p. 504.

these two writers, in what I have called a *game-like relationship*, i.e. a relationship whose purpose is not necessarily to win whatever game is played, but rather to perform an action which, like almost all man's actions, has the structure of a game, as Huizinga puts it in *Homo Ludens*⁵. The result of such a game is the encounter with the Other. This game between identities and alterities is seen as performance to reach to and manage the Other or the Self, first at the cultural level, then as projection at the narrative level. These intrinsic relations that appear at the level of narration and culture, as well as of language, and consequently at the level of perception of the world envisaged and created, take place and develop in what Homi Bhabha called 'the third space'⁶. This is the space of hybridity, where differences do not turn into *islands of identity*⁷, but meet other differences. The space where identities and alterities are born and function is where 'The Other must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial negation of a primordial identity – cultural or psychic – that introduces the system of differentiation which enables the cultural to be signified as a linguistic, symbolic, historic reality.'⁸ This *topos* is seen in the context of a, conventionally named here, *Postcolonial literature*, a term which already for some time has seemed and proved to be unsatisfying, because it lacks 'race and gender', and lies the emphasis on the patriarchal, European roots, rather than on the *cultural diversity* of each of the former colonies, as Boyce Davies argues it. Concurrently its corresponding term,

⁵ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, London: Routledge, 1950.

⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Third Space: Interview with Homi K. Bhabha* in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, p. 211.

⁷ Homi Bhabha, *Boundaries, Differences, Passages*, VolkswagenStiftung – A Foundation of Knowledge, http://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/fileadmin/downloads/Bhabha__Homi.pdf.

⁸ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 52.

post-coloniality rather can read as *post-European-(colonial)ity*⁹ in the opinion of the same literary critic. Nevertheless, as conventional as this Postcolonial background may seem, it will be in its hybrid, third space context that the two novelists will be discussed, especially because both of them, similar and different in life as well as in their work, challenge the proximity and the meeting with the Other, in all major segments that make up the dimension of identity and consequently alterity: *time, history, memory, narrative, space and place, migrancy, journey and/or encounter*. However, these are major themes discussed in my book, which, because of its multidisciplinary structure, will resort to derivative themes and issues, such as *autobiographical discourses, heterotopias and isotopies, spectrality and epiphany*, even though they will not be seen as subsidiary from the point of view of their importance.

The structure is as follows. The first chapter **Postcolonialism/Postcoloniality: Directions, Assertions, Interrogations** aims to present the main characteristics in the evolution of Postcolonial fiction, where identity and alterity, inherited as main engines from colonialism, are put to work and create a new space of discussion and affirmation. Thus, the chapter explores concepts such as *nation/vs/narration, mimicry, temporal and spatial maps, history and his-story, re-membering, chronotopes* – all being essential elements in the genealogy postcolonialism, that is they construct this third space Homi Bhabha speaks of. The same third space ultimately generates a narrative discourse which dismantles and challenges the canonical discourse of history, and proposes another vision/other visions upon past, space and the Other.

⁹ Boyce Davies qtd. in Patricia Krüs, 'Myth and Revolution in the Caribbean Postmodern', *Cultural Identity and Postmodern Writing*, Edited by Theo D'haen and Pieter Vermeulen, Amsterdam – New York, Rodopi, 2006, p. 151.

The second chapter, **Playing Time and Identity**, approaches one of the main elements that will, all along the research, create a structured body of analysis, together with space and journey. Here, in spite of the fact that the main focus is on Time, seen in the case of both novelists, in all its forms, it is also analysed in direct relation with space. The opening point will be Anthony Giddens's theory of the primordial connection between time and space, characteristic of the premodern societies, and their disconnection which appeared together with the standardization of time and the separation of place from space¹⁰. Starting from this premise, this chapter analyses the way time is perceived by characters in novels such as *Midnight's Children, The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Shalimar the Clown*, or *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*, and the way they are affected by it.

The third chapter, **Memory and Narration or Memini Ergo Sum** is a continuation of the previous chapter, and aims to identify the type of relation between memory and narration in the novels of the two writers, and the way the identity and/or alterity of the characters is/are shaped by them. The autobiographical discursive patterns applied are those of St. Augustine and Samuel Beckett found in James Olney's book *Memory and Narrative. The Weave of Life-Writing*¹¹. The identity of the characters is also approached from Paul Ricoeur's theory of *narrative identity vs. personal identity*, where the narrator can see *oneself as another* through the process of narration. The aim here is to demonstrate that, in the case of Rushdie's narrative discourse, the characters find no difficulty in remembering; moreover, memory seems more powerful and meaningful than the past reality itself, and the characters find

¹⁰ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009 (1990).

¹¹ James Olney, *Memory and Narrative. The Weave of Life-Writing*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

it healing to remember and narrate, every gesture acquiring an Orphic meaning. Concurrently, for Naipaul's characters, similarly to Beckett's discourse, the relation between memory and narration is a divorced one, and consequently, the scattered past cannot be voiced in a linear narrative discourse, but rather in a mode of effort to unify them, therefore all narrations having the same frame.

If the previous two chapters explore the relation between self and time, memory and narration, and the way the self is defined by them, the next chapter approaches the dimension of space and place as active generators of identity and imaginary maps. Space, in the case of both writers, is a productive engine, but it takes different forms and functions differently. Here the purpose is to demonstrate that in Salman Rushdie's novels, space has the value of *heterotopia* as defined by Michel Foucault¹² or as *u-topia* (a space without a place) as seen by Henri Lefebvre¹³, both Alephic in themselves, with a strong potential from the point of view of the perspective upon the world. If this seems to work in Rushdie's case, with the second novelist, Naipaul, I will demonstrate how the spaces and places in his novels are what Henri Lefebvre named *isotopies*¹⁴ (replicas of the same initial *topos*). This happens because, as in the case of time, for Naipaul's characters, space is not homely, and, as a consequence, it becomes compensatory. As a result, if we speak either of *heterotopias* (*Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*) or *isotopies* (*The Enigma of Arrival*, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, *A Way in the World*), both types are fluctuating,

¹² Michel Foucault, *Preface to The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Random House, Inc., New York, 1994; *Des espaces autres*, <http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia>.

¹³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, Translated by Robert Bonono, Foreword by Neil Smith, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 1991.

¹⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*.

they are borderlines, and thus become spaces of negotiation for the identities and alterities in the novels.

The last chapter of the book, **The Journey to the Self, the Journey to the Other**, is meant, on the one hand, to unify space and time, because it is time and space that a journey requires in order to be performed. On the other hand, the objective is to show how through the unification of the two i.e. space and time, the identities and alterities of the characters reflect one another, and are also reflected in their journey. Consequently, starting from Jean Baudriillard and Marc Guillaume's theory of *spectrality*, and continuing with Henry Corbin's term *Mundus Imaginalis*¹⁵ based on the philosophy of the Sufi philosopher, Sohrawardi, the aim is to prove that the characters in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*, for example, (princess Qara Kōz or her servant The Mirror) have prismatic spectralities. Their journey is the journey to NA-KOJA-ABAD (in Persian – *the Land of Nowhere*), at the end of which they meet the Other in a form of the type of epiphany as theorised by Lévinas. On the other hand, Naipaul's characters (Salim, Yvette), 'suffer' from ectoplasmic spectrality because of the masks they wear; as a consequence the encounter with the Other cannot take place because theirs is a journey of the Sartrean being-for-itself (*l'pour-soi*) towards the being-in-itself (*l'en soi*).

It is important to mention that in the present approach the choice of the novels is not exclusive, and the analysis actually represents, in every case, a pattern and a premise that can be extended to other novels, to which sometimes, only some references have been made. This pattern, whether we speak about time, memory and narrative, spaces and places and ultimately the journey to the

¹⁵ Henry Corbin, 'Mundus imaginalis or The Imaginary and the Imaginal' at The Hermetic Library, Copyright © 1996–2009, John G. Bell, August, 2009, http://www.hermetic.com/bey/mundus_imaginalis.htm.

other coagulates the experience of two migrant writers, who paradoxically, refusing to be tagged in any way, consider themselves to be two separate literary voices which, nonetheless, determine, influence and unify both the literature of the centre and that of the margins.

CHAPTER 1

POSTCOLONIALISM/POSTCOLONIALITY: DIRECTIONS, ASSERTIONS, INTERROGATIONS

The way we see the world affects the world we see.

Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line*

Identity and/or Alterity as Na(rra)tion

In her book on colonial and postcolonial fiction, Elleke Boehmer identifies four major aims and themes of postcolonial literature: the quest for personal and racial/cultural identity built on the spiritual guardianship of traditional laws, the belief that writing is 'n integral part of self-definition, the emphasis on historical reconstruction, the ethical imperative of reconciliation with the past.¹ All these four themes and purposes assumed by the Postcolonial writers can actually be reduced to a greater statement: literature has been and is mainly today a powerful medium through which self-definition is sought and affirmed. Definitely, this is not something acquired in the Post(-)colonial times, by a certain group of writers or by a single writer only, but rather, due to the power words have always

¹ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature. Migrant Metaphors*. Second Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 221.