

Metafictional Rethinking of Representation in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983).

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Abstract: Metafiction is a literary technique used by postmodernist novelists such as Salman Rushdie. The metafictional strategies deployed in metafiction highlight its status as an artifact. Also, they make it a subversive genre on many levels, and particularly on the level of form. Some of the metafictional aspects which feature in Rushdie's novels, namely, *Midnight's Children* (MCH) and *Shame* (SH), are the non-linear narrative, the self-conscious comments of the author/narrator, the highly-intrusive author, the author's digressions and the reader's involvement in the narrative, hence, blurring the conventional clear-cut distinction between author and reader.

Keywords: Non-linearity- Self-reflexivity- Fictionality - Metafictionality

INTRODUCTION

The case I would submit in this paper is that metafictionality, despite the ambiguity and complexity of the term, is an inherent characteristic of postmodern narrative fiction. Besides, given that the narrative structure (code) is the basic specificity of a novel, I would attempt to conduct an objective analysis of the selected texts relying on basic structures and codes present in the system in general (literature), and in the text as part of a whole in particular (the metafictional text as a specific literary genre). Moreover, to add more validation to my thesis statement (metafictionality), I would show that my reading of the corpus is essentially a theory-based project. Thus, it is based on a model of analysis, that is, Patricia Waugh's theory of metafiction. Finally, given that metafictionality is an integral part of the postmodern mode of representation, namely, the narrative, I would prove that the metafictional text is basically a literary genre despite the postmodern paradox of use and abuse of conventional norms (Linda Hutcheon). In order to achieve this enterprise, many postmodern strategies will be deployed, namely, non-linear narrative, self-reflexivity, and so on...

The purpose of this paper is to conduct an objective analysis by sorting out the basic metafictional elements shared by Salman Rushdie's novels *Midnight's Children* (1981) [1] and *Shame* (1983) [2]. Therefore, the type of study I would like to conduct is expected to be theory-based. After the introduction, the first part constitutes an overall survey of Patricia Waugh's theory of metafiction as a contemporary mode of narrative

fiction. This is the theoretical framework of the study. Also my project is a corpus-based investigation. In the second part, the practical side of the project, the focus will be on the deployment of the selected analytical tools which seem most appropriate for the integrated analysis of the corpus. In fact, the presentation of Patricia Waugh's technique will show the metafictional self-reflective mode of representation. This inward-directed mode of representation will investigate the common metafictional features in the corpus. Finally, in the conclusion I will summarize the findings of my investigation along with its possible limitations requiring further research.

PATRICIA WAUGH'S MODEL: METAFICTION:

Since it was coined by William H. Gass in 1970 [3], the term metafiction, which refers to the novel's self-reflexive tendency, has been described by various terms mentioned in Mark Currie's book entitled *Metafiction* (1995). Among these terms we find: "self-conscious", "introspective", "introverted", "narcissistic", or "auto-representation" [4]. Patricia Waugh, in her book entitled *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), provides a comprehensive definition of metafiction by describing it as: "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" [5](p, 2). She further adds that metafictional works are those which "explore a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction"[5]. Yet, in her review of Waugh's book, Ann Jefferson wrote an article (which

appeared in *Poetics Today*. 7:3 (1896): 574-6) arguing that “The trouble is that Waugh cannot have it both and present metafiction as an inherent characteristic of narrative fiction and as a response to the contemporary social and cultural vision” [6] (p.574). This double definition of metafiction, which is also employed by other theorists, makes it difficult to know whether it applies to contemporary metafiction or to all works containing self-reflexivity. Mark Currie’s definition of metafiction highlights its self-critical tendency by depicting it as a “borderline discourse, a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, which takes the border as its subject” [4] (p, 2). Yet, he also encompasses all works that are marginally metafictional by proposing that, “to see the dramatized narrator or novelist as metanarrative devices is to interpret as substantial proportion of fiction as metafiction” [4] (p.4).

As we have seen above, while some critics claim that metafiction marks the end of the novel as a genre, its advocates argue that, on the opposite, it signals the novel’s rebirth. P. Waugh states that far from “dying”, the novel has reached a mature recognition of its existence as writing, which can only ensure its continued vitality in and relevance to a contemporary world which is similarly beginning to gain awareness of precisely how its values and practices are constructed and legitimized” [5] (p, 19). She further claims that other genres have undergone the same reflexivity and that the definition of the novel itself, “notoriously defies definition” [5] (p, 2). She also comments that “Contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of external verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures” [5] (p, 7). She further claims that, “by studying metafiction, one is in effect, studying that which gives the novel its identity” [5] (p, 5).

Some supporters, in their attempt to defend metafiction, even trace self-reflexivity as far as Miguel Cervantes’s fifteenth century novel *Don Quixote*, William Shakespeare’s sixteenth century play *Hamlet*, Jane Austin’s nineteenth century novel *Northanger Abbey* (1817) and many others. These are cited instances in which classic works display metafictional tendency. Yet, other detractors question the provisional use of the metafictional technique since it is not only identified in some isolated works of fiction but mainly deployed temporarily. Thus, they believe that these works cannot be considered as metafictional.

On the other hand, Orłowski argues that proponents of metafictional novel argue that the latter gains its significance beyond its fictional realms by outwardly projecting its inner self-reflexive tendencies. She adds that, ironically, the metafictional novel becomes real by

not pretending to be real. [7] (p.3). Mark Currie claims that metafiction allows its readers a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative while providing an accurate modal for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a series [of] constructive systems [4] (p.:7). He further highlights the significance of metafiction by claiming that it provides an “unlimited vitality: which was once thought introspective and self-referential is in fact outward looking” [4] (p:2). Similarly, Linda Hutchen, in “The Pastime of Past Time”: Fiction, History, Historiographic Metafiction.” *GENRE XX* (Fall-Winter 1987), explains that: in overtly or covertly baring its fictional and linguistic systems, narcissistic narrative [metafiction] transforms the authorial process of shaping, of making, into part of the pleasure and challenge of reading as co-operative, interpretive experience” [8] (p.154).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

In this part, the main focus will be on the aesthetic dimension of the study of Rushdie’s novels, *Midnight’s Children* (*MCH*) and *Shame* (*SH*). The first section will be about the non-linear narrative in both texts. The second one will deal with the reader’s involvement. Finally, the third one will focus on the narrator’s self-conscious comment.

Non-Linear Narrative:

Non-linear narrative is increasingly gaining ground mainly in literature. But what is the origin of this term? It can be considered as a combination of two already well-established techniques. On the one hand, the retrospective technique, which comes from the Latin word “retrospectare”, that is, “look back”, was created by the Greek dramatists – Sophocles Euripides in the 400s BC. Jules Rawlinson in “A Quick Look at Non-linear Narrative” notices that the technique has again been common since Ibsen designed the modern bourgeois drama. He further adds that: “The term is related to the classical requirements for the location, the future and action, and means that the storyline rolls up the past to clarify the contemporary conflict situation. Unfolding can occur in the dialogue, without telling or monologues, resulting in tragedy...” [9]. On the other hand, the second technique is “in media res” which in Latin stands for “in the middle of things”. This term in literary theory implies that “The story goes straight to the point with no introduction of character, plot or storyline” [9]. This technique is especially common in film since it gives a dramatic start to draw the reader’s attention.

Non-linear narrative has already become a common feature of twentieth as well as twenty first century artistic production, namely, fiction, film, drama, digital forms and music. In fact, the emergence, or re-emergence, of non-linear and fractured narrative both in the visual and the literary arts seems to reflect the links

between the current intercultural transformations and political changes all over the world. Non-linear forms seem to emerge from those increasing interactions of different cultures through the colonial, post-colonial and post-cold war reconfigurations of the world. These fractured and experimental artistic forms seem to be nothing but a response to the breakdown of the Western developmental metaphor and its grand narratives of progress, freedom and democracy. Therefore, the vexed question of non-linear narrative raises several problems such as: What forms of resistance or revision can this emerging genre provide? Which specific influences, including those of non-western cultures, can be traced in this type of narrative?

Non-linear Narrative in Rushdie's Novels *MCH* and *SH*:

Rushdie's novels are subversive on both levels of form and content. For instance, the form of the novel, either in the case of *MCH* or *SH* as autobiography, helps the author to subvert the conventional historical discourse of the West in many ways. The narrator tries to shape his story as he wants, hence keeping what events he likes and leaving those he dislikes. As an unreliable narrator, this also enables him to choose the order of the events as he wishes. The narrator tries to follow the logical chronological order of the events he narrates as it is often done in the account of a usual autobiography, yet he fails to achieve this aim. This failure to accomplish linear history writing is mainly due to the narrator's adoption of a digressive mode of narration.

a. *Midnight's Children's* (*MCH*) Non-linear Narrative:

In *MCH* the protagonist Saleem Sinai uses flashbacks referring to past events, foreshadows prophesying future events, narrates stories within stories (Chinese box structure), and even resorts to digressions within digressions. That is why Saleem, who tries to avoid wasting time and to complete his narration, states that he must "work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning- something I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity" [1] (p. 9). Padma herself is aware of this delay in narrating his birth and she actually reminds him of this: "But there is Padma at my elbow, bullying me back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened-next" [1] (p. 38). She is even annoyed with Saleem's non-linear narrative and she would rather adopt linearity or what she calls 'what-happened-nextism' [1] (p. 39). That is why she told him: "At this rate, you'll be two hundred years old before you manage to tell me about your birth." [1] (p. 38) The same case is seen in Laurence Sterne's narrative in *Tristram Shandy*. As Saleem starts narrating the time long before his birth, the relation between the time inside the narrative and that outside it is often a cause of tension.

Salman Rushdie, during an interview in 1985, stated that the digressive mode of writing is actually an extension of the story-telling tradition of the Indian culture:

Listening to this man (a famous story teller in Baroda) reminded me of the shape of the oral narrative. An oral narrative doesn't go from the beginning to the middle to the end of the 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 summarizes itself, it frequently digresses off into something that the story teller appears just to have thought of then it comes back to the main thrust of the narrative. [10]

b. *Shame's* (*SH*) Non-Linear Narrative:

By means of adopting a non-linear narrative in *SH* Rushdie aims at undermining the conventional linear narrative and the cause-effect relationship- a characteristic feature of historical novel. He believes that the chronological narration is an inadequate mode of representing the diversity of Pakistani as well as Indian history, hence the necessity of subverting it through non-linearity and digressions. Since the author cannot do without digressions in his account of history, he self-consciously remarks:

But I have been out of doors for quite long enough now, and I must get my narrative out of the sun before it is affected by mirages or heart-stroke. [...] (it seems that the future cannot be restrained, and insists on seeping back into the past). [2] (p. 24)

As a parody of traditional historiography, the narrator in *SH* tries to construct a narrative in which "ends must not be permitted to precede beginnings and middles" (*SH* 22). That is why he reminds the reader that "First things first" [2] (p. 31). But he ends up by abandoning the conventional technique of linear narrative since he cannot avoid prophesying events happening before their fixed moment in the narrative. As a matter of fact, the narrator provides the reader with effects before their supposed causes. For instance, he hints to the death of Sufiya Zinobia much earlier than it should be in the narrative, without first revealing its cause [2] (p. 22). However, he decides to "command this death scene back into the wings at once," [2] (p. 23) and inform the reader that "Sufiya Zinobia must wait for a few pages yet" [2] (p. 49).

Reader's involvement:

In her book entitled *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Linda Hutcheon argues that "The reader's task becomes increasingly difficult and demanding, as he sorts out the various narrative threads. The universe he thus creates, he must then acknowledge as fictional and of his own making" [11] (p. 49). Thus the role of the reader in the metafictional text is no

longer a passive receiver but rather an active participant in the writing process. The novel gives us more information about the nature of fiction by being very specific about the roles of the reader in the text. The author uses many narrative strategies which make the reader think about the principles of novel writing. One of the hallmarks of literary postmodernism, as well as literary modernism, is the unclear relationship between the author and the reader. There is an increasing demand from the author for participation of his readers. But because of the fragmented way in which the story is written and the unclear relationship between the characters in the novel, the reader sometimes finds it difficult to have a coherent picture.

For instance, in a metafictional text like *MCH*, the main character Saleem Sinai is required to take an active role in the creation of the text. As Saleem wants to fill in certain gaps in the text, he points to the inefficiency of his writing by asking the reader to complete these by himself: "I have not, I think, been good at describing emotions- believing my audience to be capable of *joining in*; of imagining for themselves what I have been unable to re-imagine, so that my story becomes yours as well" [1] (p. 293). In *MCH* Padma acts the role of both a listener to Saleem, his future husband, and his critical reader. In fact, though illiterate, she often comments on his narrative. For instance, in one of her comments, she argues that Saleem only "does some foolish writer." Then she adds: "Forgive, Saleem baba, but I must tell it truly" [1] (p. 293).

Narrator's Self-conscious Comments in Rushdie's *MCH* and *SH*:

Metafiction is a literary technique deployed Salman Rushdie in their novels. Along with parody, it shows that there is no absolute 'Truth' and objectivity in the representation of the past. Patricia Waugh argues that in metafiction, as a subversive genre, history, "although ultimately a material reality (a presence), [...] is also 'fictional,' also a set of alternative worlds" [5] (p. 106). The metafictional strategies used in metafiction highlight its status as an artifact. Also by means of metafiction, Fowles's and Rushdie's novels show that reality is a mere construct, thus problematizing its objectivity. When historical events are inserted in the metafictional context, the boundary between fact and fiction is blurred.

Narrator's Self-conscious Comments in Rushdie's *MCH*:

One of the metafictional elements which feature prominently in *Midnight's Children (MCH)* is 'the Chinese box structure' which Linda Hutcheon puts forward in *Narcissistic Narrative* [11] (p.57). Saleem Sinai, the main character in the novel, is a novelist himself, hence Rushdie's interest in artists in his work like the other metafictionists. Being the central

character in the text, Saleem is trying hard to write his autobiography which makes the novel by its very nature about the writing of fiction itself. In other words, it is fiction about fiction. By means of his self-reflexive comments, Saleem, who is both the narrator and writer of his autobiography, often reminds us of the fictional nature of his story.

A striking example of Saleem's self-reflexive comments on the process of writing his autobiography shows the constructedness, that is, the constructed nature, of what he narrates:

I must interrupt myself. I wasn't going to today, because Padma has started getting irritated whenever my narration becomes self-conscious, whenever, like an incompetent puppeteer, I reveal the hands holding the strings; but I simply must register a protest. So, breaking into a chapter which, by a happy chance, I have named 'A Public Announcement', I issue (in the strongest possible terms) the following general medical alert: 'A Certain Doctor N.Q. Baligga [...] is a quack. Ought to be locked up, struck off, defenestrated. [...] Damn Fool,' I underline my point, 'can't see what's under his nose!' [1] (p. 65)

Since Saleem Sinai is highly conscious of the role he is acting in the novel as writer/narrator, he continuously comments on the errors and the digressions he makes during the process of his writing. For instance, he makes explicit that:

Because I am rushing ahead at breakneck speed, errors are possible, and overstatements, and jarring alterations in tone; I'm racing the cracks, but I remain conscious that errors have already been made, and that, as my decay accelerates, (my writing speed is having trouble keeping up), the risk of unreliability grows [...] in autobiography, as in all literature, what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe. [1] (p. 270-271)

In the previous comment, Saleem Sinai directly draws our attention to the status of his writing as a piece of literature and specifically as an autobiography including metafictional elements. In this passage the narrator uses the indicative mood such as the simple present tense (errors are, I remain, my decay accelerates, the risk grows), the present progressive (I am rushing, I'm racing, my writing speed is having), the present perfect simple (errors have already been made) and the simple past (what happened). The present progressive indicates that the author is still in the process of writing his autobiography. The indicative mood is especially used in this passage for generalization. This tendency for generalization is shown through the use of the simple past as in "What

actually happened” along with other expressions like the quantifier “all” (as in *all* literature).

The indicative mood equally shows the author’s certainty; however, uncertainty is revealed when he makes errors during the process of writing his autobiography. Uncertainty is also revealed by the use of a specific lexical repertoire. For instance, we find words like errors, unreliability, trouble, overstatements, risk and so on. These words have negative connotations. Besides, the absence of determiners, as in 0-article words (autobiography, literature, unreliability) and indefinite plurals (errors, overstatements, alterations), all of these facts indicate the author’s uncertainty.

The presence of self-reflexivity is presupposed not only by the tenses referring back to the time of speaking/writing angle, but also by the pronouns. Apart from the shift in tenses, there is equally a shift in pronouns such as the move from the first personal pronoun singular “I” to the third one deduced from “the author”. The use of the first personal pronoun indicates that the author is deeply involved in the process of writing his autobiography, hence the narrator’s subjectivity. He is narrating specific events related to his own life (I am rushing, I am racing, I remain, my decay). Then there is a sudden shift from the first personal pronoun “I” to the third person he/author. So the narrator moves from subjectivity to objectivity, that is, from involvement to distance. The third personal pronoun is traditionally deployed by the author to give an objective account of real events or rather to narrate “facts” as well as to convey constant “truth”. In addition, passivisation as in “errors have already been made” reinforces the objectivity of the narrator. Furthermore, in order to be objective, the narrator has not specified to whom the events were important as in the following example: “what actually happened is less important”. But as a postmodern novelist, Rushdie, who is supposed to be the real author, the maestro of the text, actually makes another character speak on his behalf. Though he seems to be neutral, the verisimilitude of literature entails the author’s complicity.

Therefore, the rationale behind the deployment of these linguistic tools, that is, the deictic categories of time, space and person along with the use of modality, is to make the self-reflexive comments explicit in the analysis of metafictional texts. These tools refer back to the time of speaking/writing. From the time of speaking/writing angle, self-reflexivity is shown by means of a variety of tenses: the simple present tense shows the fact as perceived at the time of speaking/writing; the present progressive shows the involvement of the speaker/narrator at the time of speaking/ writing; the simple past indicates a completed action in a definite time and place in the past; and the simple present perfect relates a past action to the

present time of speaking/writing. As far as modals are concerned, they show the different degrees of certainty. After the application of these tools on the previous excerpts, we deduce that there are contradictory data in the examined passages. On the one hand, there are certainty, generalization, distance and objectivity; on the other hand, there are uncertainty, involvement, subjectivity and specificity. These are indicators of orality and fragmentation of the author/narrator. The author is caught in the process of writing and he is highly conscious of the mistakes he makes. Thus the text is not a finite product; there is an ongoing process. There is absence of consistency in the author’s writing process. Provisionality and temporality are substitutes for absolute and permanent “Truth”. The lack of certainty, objectivity and consistency along with contradictory attitudes and data account for the postmodern questioning of stable norms and constant values and data.

One of the striking mistakes that Saleem has made is the wrong date he has given about the date of the death of Indira Gandhi, hence his putting it in the wrong part in the chronology of his narrative. But Saleem accepts it as it is stating that:

Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date. But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time. [1] (p. 166)

Saleem insists that he gives us access to history only through his account of the past reality. By means of mingling fact and fiction as well as making errors, Saleem wants to show the impossibility of any correct version of historical events, which somewhat justifies his insistence on his own version of reality as an alternative to the official one. Rushdie, in *Imaginary Homelands*, states that: “Only a madman would prefer someone else’s version to his own” [10] (p.:25). Rushdie himself draws our attention to the errors that Saleem often makes in his narration:

During his [that is Saleem’s] account of the evolution of the city of Bombay, he tells us the city’s patron-goddess Mumbadevi has fallen out of favour with contemporary Bombaytes: ‘The calendar of festivals reveals her decline ... Where is Mumbadevi’s day?’ As a matter of fact, the calendar of festivals includes a perfectly good Mumbadevi Day, or at least it does in all versions of India except Saleem’s.

And how could Lata Mangeshkar have been heard singing on all-India Radio as early as 1946? And does Saleem not know that it was not General Sam who accepted the surrender of Pakistan Army at the end of Bangladesh War- the Indian officer who was Tiger

Niazi's old chum being, of course, Jagjit Singh Arora? And why does Saleem allege that the brand of cigarettes, State Express 555, is manufactured by W.D. &H.Q. Wills? [10] (p.22)

It was also- along with Saleem's other blunder about the date of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination- a way of telling the reader to maintain a healthy distrust. [10] (p.25)

Therefore, as Rushdie equally argues, the errors that Saleem makes during his account of past reality are in fact "memory's truth" [10] (p.211). As a matter of fact, 'subjective truth' can be altered. In *MCH* Saleem's subjective account, which is based on his memories, has become a substitute for the conventional scientific and objective documentation of historical truthfulness. His reliance on his memory alters reality and renders it a mere construct. That is why he insists on the significant role of memory in the process of constructing reality and selecting events:

'I told you the truth,' I say yet again, 'Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind, it selects, it eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own. [1] (p. 211)

The reliability of the narrator, that is, the degree of his knowledge and omniscience, is a significant aspect of postmodern narratorial techniques. Is he knowledgeable or tentative and uncertain? The Postmodern project militates against omniscience and looks for contradictions. The whole point of narratorial techniques is to highlight these contradictions in the text and question the sincerity of the narrator. As a matter of fact, since Saleem relies on his memory to relate historical events and often makes errors during the writing process, both his reliability and credibility as narrator may be affected. That is why he wonders if those errors have influence on his narrative:

Does one error invalidate the entire fabric? Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything- to re- write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role? Today, in my confusion, I can't judge. I'll have to leave it to others. [1] (p. 166)

Saleem's account of India's history in *MCH* is conveyed through its fragmented style. In fact, this account of historical events is essentially based on fragments of memory- a fallible memory as Rushdie argues in *Imaginary Homelands*. He makes his narrator "suspect in his narration; his mistakes are the mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and his vision is

fragmentary" [10] (p.:10). As an illustration of this fragmented vision of reality is the image of the "perforated sheet" in the novel. This image is conveyed through Dr Adam Aziz's examination of his future wife immediately after his return from Europe. Dr Aziz sees the different parts of the body only through the hole in the sheet without having access to the entirety of the body being examined:

So gradually Doctor Aziz came to have a picture of Naseem in his mind, a badly-fitting collage of her severally-inspected parts. This phantasm of a partitioned woman began to haunt him, and not only in his dreams. Glued together by his imagination, she accompanied him on all his rounds, she moved into the front room of his mind [...] but she was headless, because he had never seen her face. [1] (p. 25)

The image of 'the perforated sheet' is used in the novel as a challenge to the conventional historiography. It offers the reader a fragmented picture of reality instead of the modernist search for a coherent whole. Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* aims to convey a fragmented picture of India, especially when he refers to the "broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" [10] (p.:11). Instead of an objective, monolithic and coherent version, Saleem offers a fragmented account through his individual life. The individual mode of writing history, along with Saleem's self-reflexive comments, is offered as an alternative to the official totalizing mode. Therefore the objective of this strategy of fragmentation deployed by Rushdie is to challenge absolutes for the representation of reality and reject objectivity which legitimizes totality and homogeneity.

Narrator's Self-conscious Comments in Rushdie's *SH*:

The contrast between the traditional technique of modernist omniscient narrator and the unreliable narrator in postmodern literature is equally revealed in Rushdie's novel *Shame (SH)*. Relying on his memory to relate what took place during the party that Omar Khayyam Shakil's three mothers Chhunni, Munnee and Bunny organized after their father's death, the narrator reveals his inability to remember things clearly: "[A]ll three ladies became curiously vague; so that I am unable to clear away the improbabilities which have mushroomed around that party during the dark passage of the years" [2] (p. 16). But later on, the author adopts the strategy of an omniscient narrator to show that he knows everything about the proceedings of the party and their organizers, that is, the three scandalous ladies:

There arises a delicate question: how did they pay for it all? With some embarrassment on their behalf, and purely to show the present author, who has already been obliged to leave many questions in a state of unanswered ambiguity, is capable of giving clear replies

when absolutely necessary, I reveal that Hashmat Bibi had delivered a last sealed envelope to the door of the town's least savoury establishment, wherein the Quranic strictures against usury counted for nothing, whose shelves and storage chests groaned under the weight of the accumulated debris of innumerable decayed histories... damn and blast it. To be frank- she went to the pawnshop. [2] (p.18-19)

Added to the interrogation of the factuality of history through mingling facts and fiction as well as magic realism, the self-conscious narrator is a further technique deployed by Rushdie to show history as a construct. Like Saleem in *MCH*, the narrator in *SH* makes self-reflexive comments on the construction of his autobiography as well as on the reliability of his narrative. One example of these self-reflexive comments is when he includes himself as Omar's friend to narrate his story and problematizes his right to tell Omar's story: "Maybe my friend should be telling this story, or another one, his own; but he doesn't write poetry anymore. So here I am instead, inventing what never happened to me" [2] (p. 28). Like Saleem in *MCH*, the narrator in *SH* tends to shape his story as he likes, thus choosing to leave some events out while including some other information. As a result, the narrator becomes unreliable in his account of the events which took place in a certain period of Pakistan's history. However, the presence of an unreliable narrator is a significant narratorial technique since it not only allows the narrator to shape the events in the order he wishes but also to determine what to include and what to reject. Because of his inability to avoid digression, the narrator cannot respect causality as it is detectable in conventional linear history writing.

The authorial intrusions play an important role in the construction of the narrative. In addition to the self-reflexive comments on the construction of the narrative, this intrusive writing strengthens the digressive narration in the text as well as undermines the factuality of the traditional mode of history writing. This process consists in intruding things from the external real world into the fictional world of the novel, namely, his personal reflections on writing history, his own experience of migration, quotes from medical sources and dictionary meanings. One striking example of authorial intrusion illustrating the incorporation of his experience as a migrant, that is, an immigrant in England, is the following quotation: "I, too, know something of this immigrant business. I am an emigrant from one country (India) and a new comer in two (England where I live, and Pakistan, to which my family moved against my will)" [2] (p. 85).

Therefore, the technique of intruding himself and his personal experience into the textual narrative is a means that gives way to alternative versions of history, hence allowing other voices to be heard as it

occurs in the storytelling tradition. In another intrusion, the author indicates that: "I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build up imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change" [2] (p. 87). That is why it is quite obvious that the intrusive author, during his process of rewriting history, tries to impose his counter arguments on the already existing history of Pakistan since he knows that "it is the true desire of every artist to impose his or her vision of the world" [2] (p. 87).

Like in *MCH*, in *SH* the intrusive author tries to refract the discourse of totalitarian history writing, through his repeated intrusions, so as to make other suppressed voice heard. In fact, peripheral voices are allowed to come to the fore, or more precisely to the centre. In one of his intrusions, Rushdie comments upon the selective process of history writing and tries to show how the peripheral participants are dominated and marginalized by the mightier ones:

History is natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance; new species of facts arise, and old, saurian truths go to the wall, blindfolded and smoking last cigarettes. Only the mutations of the strong survive. The weak, the anonymous, the defeated leave few marks: field-patterns, axe-heads, broken pitchers, burial mounds, the fading memory of their youthful beauty. History loves only those who dominate her: it is a relationship of mutual enslavement. No room in it [...] for the likes of Omar Khayyam Shakil. [2] (p. 124)

Rushdie tries to rewrite the official history of "fictional" Pakistan, like that of India, from the point of view of peripheral characters. Thus he produces different versions of history through the various characters in the novel. These versions, which constitute stories within the main story, become themselves Rushdie's own version of history. For instance, in *SH* the peripheral hero Omar "was afflicted, from his earlier days, by a sense of inversion, of a world turned upside-down. And by something worse: the fear that he was living at the edge of the world, so close that he might fall off at any moment" [2] (p. 21). Like Saleem, Omar's marginal life is further confirmed in the novel, especially to the peculiar conditions of his early days as well as the eccentric habits of his three sequestered mothers: "a fellow who is not even the hero of his own life; a man born and raised in the condition of being out of things" [2] (p. 24).. Even when Omar fled his sequestered way of life and got married to Sufiya Zinobia, Raza Hyder's daughter, he revealed that his role in the political life of the country remained insignificant compared to the two political figures of the ruling families in Pakistan, that is, Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa, Omar's close friend: "I am a

peripheral man [...] Other persons have been the principal actors in my life-story, Hyder and Harappa, my leading men. [...] I watched from the wings, not knowing how to act" [2] (p. 283).

However, though Omar, like Saleem, seems to have a minor effect on the political events of Pakistan, there is a tendency from the author Rushdie to put his peripheral hero at the center. In fact, Omar actually becomes Rushdie's focus in his version of Pakistani history: "a minor character, yet also, paradoxically, central" [2] (p. 49). He admits that: "it was the fate of Omar Khayyam Shakil to affect, from his position on the periphery, the great events whose central figures were other people" [2] (p. 108). The attempt to write history from the perspective of peripheral characters, like Saleem or Omar in *MCH* and *SH* respectively, is a strategy to refract the totalitarian discourse of history. Thus, the official history becomes another story among other stories told by individual characters. History is shown as a construction of past reality. Not only do central characters participate in this process, but equally minor persons actively take role in this fabric. For instance, in the second part of the novel entitled "The Duelists" Omar, though he did not know it, was the cause of the duel between the two political figures in Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Iskander Harappa) and Zia ul-Haq (General Raza Hyder), though because of a woman:

It was he who said with a tongue made too loose by the neurotic drinking of the evening that Mrs Bilquis Hyder was a lucky woman, Iskander had done her a favour by pinching Pinkie Aurangzeb from under Raza's nose. "If Isky hadn't been there maybe our hero's Begum would have to console herself with children, because there would be no man to fill her bed."
[2] (p.108-109)

Unlike the conventional official history, the narrator/author tries to include in his historical writing process the personal accounts of ex-centric individuals and narrate past events in a storytelling way: "Once upon a time there were two families, their destinies inseparable even by death" [2] (p. 173). This reveals the great effects of political tyranny on the life of individuals who are victims of these historical events.

On the other hand, Rushdie paradoxically includes in his narrative the story of women as peripheral characters in order to make their voice heard. The narrator self-consciously comments that: "If this were a realistic novel about Pakistan, I would not be writing about Bilquis and the wind" [2] (p. 68). Thus, the narrator blends both realistic events and fictionalized narratives so as to create alternative versions of history. By ironically making a shift of focus in his narrative, Rushdie puts women characters at the centre. Political

events, both their causes and effects, are explained through them. The narrator self-consciously comments:

I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my 'male' plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and 'female' side. [2] (p. 173)

The movement of peripheral characters towards the centre, in *MCH* and in *SH*, is both ways: either the characters are victims of violent political events in the country or they can even change the course of its history. While Raza Hyder's wife Bilquis in *SH* belongs to the first group, Omar's wife Sufiya Zinobia belongs to the second category of people. For instance, before and following the "moth-eaten partition that chopped up the old country" [2] (p.61), that is, India in 1947, there was political turmoil because of intolerance between the pros and the cons: "...well, it was a time for all types of craziness, that's all" [2] (p. 61). When Bilquis's father Mahmoud the Woman decided to oppose the Partition by "a double bill into his Talkies: Randolph Scott and Gai-wallah would succeed one another on his screen," two films being symbols of the opposing groups and the Partition, his cinema theatre called Empire was bombed. The explosion also caused the death of Mahmoud and the other spectators who were inside the cinema. Mahmoud lost his Empire and his life "because of a single error, which arose of his fatal personality flaw, namely tolerance. 'Time to rise above all this partition foolishness,' he informed his mirror one day" [2] (p. 62). But this violent incident had a great effect on Bilquis who witnessed it and caused her a life-long fear:

The walls of her father's Empire puffed outwards like a hot puri while that wind like the cough of a sick giant burned away her eyebrows (which never grew again) and tore the lothes off her body until she stood infant-naked in the street;but she failed to notice her nudity because the universe was ending, and in the echoing alienness of the deadly wind her burning eyes saw everything come flying out, seats, ticket books, fans, and then pieces of her father's shattered corpse and the charred shards of the future. [2] (p. 63)

The narrator refers to the fear Bilquis felt in the street in the aftermath of her father's death as well as to the political developments which occurred at that time like the rivalry between the opposing groups just before the partition and the hostilities which followed it when "the two newly-partitioned nations announced the commencement of hostilities on the Kashmiri frontier"

[2] (p. 76). But later on, old Bilquis will never stop retelling and reciting the horror stories because they have become an integral part of the oral tradition. In fact, "The telling of the tales proved the family's ability to survive them, to retain, in spite of everything, its grip on its honour and its unswerving moral code...[S]tories, such stories, were the clan together, binding the generations in webs of whispered secrets" [2] (p. 76).

However, not only Bilquis was victim of the political conflict and violence in the country. Rani Humayun, Iskander Harappa's wife and Bilquis's cousin, is equally subject to violence and political oppression. She was oppressed by her husband, known for his carefree youth and debauchery, because she could not give birth to a son. Rani's silent resistance to her husband's tyranny and lust for power is expressed through the shawls that she has embroidered during her secluded life in a distant country estate in Mohenjo separated from Iskander Harappa. She was kept under arrest in her house with her daughter Arjumand for six years, two before the execution of Iskander and four after it. Symbolically she revealed her feelings by naming her eighteen shawls like "the badminton shawl", "the slapping shawl", "the kicking shawl", "the hissing shawl", "the torture shawl", "the swearing shawl" etc...[2] (p. 191-193). referring to the extent of her husband's oppressive rule and its great effect on her and the other people in the country. They are actually preserved fragments of her memories of the past, the "unspeakable past". The narrator wants to give voice to her suppressed feelings. Rani's eighteen shawls of memory depict "The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great". She gave them this name and decided to lock them inside a trunk and send them to her daughter Arjumand as "they said unspeakable things which nobody wanted to hear" [2] (p.191).

Therefore, instead of focusing on oppressive political events themselves, the narrator's emphasis was on the people like Bilquis Hyder and Rani Harappa who were two female victims of those events, hence the decentralization of the active participants such as Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa. On the other hand, the narrator similarly draws our attention to other peripheral female characters which are brought to the centre and became able to change the course of events in the history of fictional Pakistan. Among these characters Sophiya Zinobia, Omar Khayyam's wife and General Raza Hyder's daughter, seems to be at first a minor participant in the story. Yet, as the narrator introduces her in a fairy tale manner, she is depicted as, unlike what she seems to be, a very complex character and full of contradictions:

There was once a young woman, Sufiya Zinobia, also known as 'Shame'. She was of slight build, had a weakness for pine-kernels, and her arms and legs were imperfectly co-ordinated when she walked. Despite this

ambulatory awkwardness, however, she would not have struck a stranger as being particularly abnormal appearances...notwithstanding, however, this Sufiya Zinobia turned out to be, in reality, one of those supernatural beings, those exterminating or avenging angels, or werewolves, or vampires, about whom we are happy to read in stories...the mere likelihood of their existence would utterly subvert the laws by which we live, the processes by which we understand the world. [2] (p.197).

The contradictions in Sufiya's character have brought down her father. Her feeling of shame for other people's misdeeds urges her to behave violently. For instance, her husband's betrayal often gives her strange feelings, new internal blushes, that are unnoticeable by others: "There is a thing that women do at night with their husbands. She does not do it, Shahbanou does it for her...Her husband does not come to her at night...There is an ocean but there is a feeling of sinking. It makes her sick. There is an ocean. She feels its tide. And, somewhere in its depths, a Beast, stirring" [2] (p. 215). When Shahbanou her ayah, ie servant, affirmed that a husband is for babies and babies are not for Sufiya, the latter blushed. The narrator argues that Sufiya has discovered, especially after the event of her violent assault on the neighbour's turkeys which irritated her mother bilquis, "the hidden path that links *sharam* [shame] to violence" [2] (p. 139).

Therefore, by means of the deployed strategies of nonlinearity, self-reflexivity, author's intrusion and reader's involvement in the narrative, both in *SH* as well as in *MCH*, Rushdie has decentralized the great political figures in both countries and brought peripheral characters to the centre.

CONCLUSION:

The study of the aforementioned texts, that is, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children (MCH)* and *Shame (SH)*, has revealed that they share a common feature: both of them are exemplary types of postmodernist literature. In fact, focus has been on metafictionality which constitutes an integral part and an intrinsic characteristic of the literariness of these texts. The investigation of these artistic works, by means of the deployment of experimental techniques such as non-linearity, self-reflexivity, author/narrator's intrusion as well as reader's frequent involvement, has revealed that these texts are highly subversive, especially on the level of the form. However, the aesthetic dimension by itself may not be sufficient to carry out a comprehensive study of a literary text. In addition to the inward-oriented look, an outward-oriented perspective, that is, a context-based treatment, may prove very useful to understand the author's ideology and the socio-political conditions in which the literary work is produced.

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