

GREAT METROPOLITAN CREATIONS. THE TECTONICS OF DISCOURSE IN THE POSTCOLONIAL CITY

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ABSTRACT. This study proposes to view the postcolonial city as a fugitive, manifold, heterogeneous, impermanent and textualised site, interwoven with the metaphorically and literally tectonic forces of cultural discourse (of political, historical, personal or literary origin), which can be found in a constant process of collision, bringing about dichotomised displacements, palimpsestic fusions and emergences of hybrid or protean forms. The paper's perspective builds heavily on the tradition of post-structuralist thought as it problematizes the arbitrariness of cultural belief-systems, showing: how the city and self mould each other changing both cityscapes and personalities; how English is accepted, rejected or appropriated under the influence of a postmodern urban environment marked by colonialism; how the clash between the styles of discourse in the East and West perpetuate or create new traditions; how corruption, cultural imperialism and sensationalism might lead, in turn, to war, cultural dominance, contradiction or globalization, protean forms and polyphony; and how migrants create fictions to connect with their pasts and future. Within this approach, special concern is given to hybridity's modes of operation and to their role in shaping both place and identity. Interactions between urban experience and personal destiny are analysed through the prism of the postmodern, postcolonial novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* by Salman Rushdie, chosen for its representative status within these currents, and for its adherence to the norms of historiographic metafiction and postcolonial life-writing, allowing insight into the political exploration of conceptions of subjectivity, history and modes of writing through the personal perspective of the migrant.

KEY WORDS: postcolonial city, tectonics of discourse, hybridity, third space, fictionalised space

Introduction

At the present moment, the modern and postmodern city's mode of existence has come to be characterized by sociology, human geography and architectural theory as fugitive, manifold, heterogeneous, impermanent and textualised. The unknowability and avant-garde behaviour of the city has prompted many to consider it as a sovereign semiotic system or as a text, and, probably competing only with film, literature has quickly taken on the task of transposing the city's shifting infrastructure onto the platforms of

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poetry and narrative. The metropolis looms especially large in the novel, which has generously given space and new modes of expression for all places or urban encounter, having held with the city through all of its different stages of development and regional happenings. From the days of the industrially blooming and inhumanely menacing London of Dickens, the spectacle of Paris and the neurosis of Saint Petersburg, the city has come a long way through the eclectic streetscapes of Woolf and Joyce, to arrive at the simulacrum-London of Barnes and the magically-real, postcolonial realm of Rushdie. Such a route is so epic in proportions and styles that exploring it would exceed beyond hope the limits of the present study. However, for the understanding of the most recent, globalized and post-colonial form of the metamorphosing metropolis, some emphasis will be placed on the continuity between the modern and postmodern idea of freedom in urban space and its production of hybrid forms that cross the frontiers of established dichotomies of culture and identity. For this aspect has continued to be cherished and rethought through the works of Baudelaire, Döblin and Wilde, up to the present of Saramago, Calvino or Murakami, proposing and questioning new, both liberating and conflicting practices of living together in the megalopolis of the many.

This study proposes to view the postcolonial city as a site interwoven with the metaphorically and literally tectonic forces of cultural discourses (of political, historical, personal or literary origin), which can be found in a constant process of collision bringing about dichotomised displacements, palimpsestic fusions and emergences of hybrid or protean forms. The paper's perspective builds heavily on the tradition of post-structuralist thought, bearing in mind the arbitrariness of all cultural belief-systems and maintaining the idea that their structure as well as their legitimacy, along with their "right to the real", may always be called to question. In accordance with such an angle to urban discourses, special concern shall be given to hybridity's modes of operation and to their role in shaping both place and identity.

After laying down the foundations for an analysis of the fugitive "word city" of postmodern becoming, and for the tectonics of its functioning, resulting collisions will be analysed through the prism of the postmodern, postcolonial novel of Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*¹. The choice for this work over so many others stems, first of all, from its well-defined stance within the current. What is presented as a general trend in *The Empire Writes Back* describes this book as well:

1 Abbreviated in references as TGBHF.

the postmodern projects of deconstructing Master narratives, unsettling binaries and admitting marginalised knowledges, follow closely the objectives of the post-colonial critical project. Similarly, these various perspectives are conjoined in their attention to the relationship between discourse and power, the socially constituted and fragmented subject and the unruly politics of signification—the workings of irony, parody, mimicry (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2002: 117).

In addition, the novel's adherence to the norms of historiographic metafiction and postcolonial life-writing signals that it allows for the political exploration of conceptions of subjectivity, history and modes of writing through the personal perspective of the migrant, making it eligible for the study of the interactions between urban experience and personal destiny.

In the book's first half we encounter the destinies of the Cama and Merchant families, unfolding upon the changing grounds of post-independence Bombay, while in the second part we can follow the three main characters, Rai, Vina and Ormus, as they flee Bombay to manifold Manhattan, seeking self, love, success and home through different forms of art (song, photography and literature). Their experience is indicative of the migrants' way of life in the modern and postmodern metropolis, otherwise there would have been no point to writing either the novel, or this analysis. However, we must always bear in mind the subjectivity of an author and the uniqueness of personal perspective. As Rushdie has explained in *Shame*, "My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality" (1984: 29). Placing the migrant's situation outright on the level of a general human condition might signal an inclination towards the very (grand) narratives one wishes to subvert—therefore, we must always bear in mind the arbitrary literary perspective of the well-to-do Indian immigrant, brought up and educated in the liberal, postmodernist Western tradition, and from that, of one particular "specimen", too.

The division of topics is thematically structured around the collisions produced by the tectonics of city and identity over the tectonics of mentality, of the vernacular, of politics and of fiction. It shall be discussed how conflicts evolve inside each area, resulting in displacements and hybridizations that seem to resolve or perpetuate the clash between opposing forces. Thus, it will be shown how the city and self mould each other changing both cityscapes and personalities, how English is accepted, rejected or appropriated under the influence of a postmodern urban environment marked by colonialism, how the clash between the styles of discourse in the East and West perpetuate or create new traditions, how corruption, cultural imperialism and sensationalism might lead, in turn, to war, cultural dominance, contradiction or to globalization, protean forms and polyphony, and how migrants create fictions to connect with their pasts and future. In the novel, creating fictions of one kind or another, along with writing, is posited as a

legitimate way of access to the multiplicity of experience: the narrator Rai chooses interpretation over silence, digging freely into people and the real. But it is important not to forget that such “imaginary homelands” are but erratic constructs, and we might easily find that “our world is no more than a vision in some other accidental individual’s damaged eye” (TGBHF, 437).

Premises for Discussing the City

Taking a look at studies of urban environment from the areas of sociology, human geography and literature, we can find certain common conceptions about the modern and postmodern city that show how the legacy of modernity’s radical changes to the structure of urban experience has evolved within the contemporary metropolis. As a first characteristic of the city’s mode of existence, its unknowability remains a key aspect. According to Fritzsche, this feature generally reflects the modern impermanence of identity and the undermining of “grand designs and meanings” (1998: 44). The modern novel of the city, as Joyce’s *Ulysses*, can be mapped, charted and documented. Yet, it eludes fixity by its anachronisms, willed or unwilling incongruences and the mingling of fictional and real-world material. In this genre, as Fritzsche notes, “the [accommodation] of the city’s disharmony... discontinuity, dissociation, and unpredictability steadily overruled the orderings of plot and narrative” (1998: 37). However, Joyce’s textual displacements prove more eclectic and avant-garde in style than Rushdie’s, since the latter explores the mysteries of city life through elaborately developed stories and ideas. We find, just as in the case of Leopold Bloom, that for Rai, the city “by showing me everything it told me nothing”, it “was expressionistic, it screamed at you, but it wore a domino mask.”

Furthermore, urban reality is manifold, as the same place can mean different sites for different people. Just as the Dublin of the Citizen (the nationalist), Bloom (the outsider) and Stephen (the would-be exile) can never be the same, Ameer’s (the modernising architect), Darius’ (pro-empire) or Vina’s (the migrant) Bombay can significantly diverge.

In addition, the urban environment is the realm of heterogeneity. Barthes defines the city centre as “the privileged place where the other is and where we ourselves are the other, as the place where we play the other”, as a “ludic space” of meeting (Barthes, 1971/2005: 171). According to Doreen Massey, in postmodernity “we recognise space as the product of interrelations, as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny” (Massey, 2008: 9). In this manner, Rushdie’s “impure old Bombay” accommodates eastern and western thought, a variety of languages and religions, discourses and ideas, demonstrating the incongruity of postmodernist experience just as modernist literary experimentations build on the “fast-paced industrial city” (Fritzsche, 1998: 9). But

the postmodern city is the global city, characterised by “Late Capitalism’s accumulative ways; such as spectacular sites of consumption, architectural pastiche, gentrified neighbourhoods and manufacturing sites reinvented as tourist destinations” (Jacobs, 2002: .31). Such a site, as often as it welcomes multiplicity, is wrecked by the differences it accommodates, leading, for example, to segregation based on racial or economic markers in the West, as well as political and ethnic conflicts pinpointed by Rushdie on numerous occasions in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and other works.

Along with being unknowable and heterogeneous, the modern and postmodern city bears the mark of impermanence. Fritzsche talks about Berlin’s (and other modern cities’) “changing physiognomy, its tables of contrasts, and its loss of coherence” being the result of the oversaturated universe and fast-paced changes of its architecture and infrastructure, and political and media discourses (Fritzsche, 1998: 189). Similarly, summing up the debate over postmodern space, Doreen Massey defines it as something “always under construction”. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* demonstrates that permanence is just an illusion, affirming that “Bombay forgets its history with each sunset and rewrites itself anew with the coming of the dawn”—the uncertainties caused by the process of its modernization mean that “the ground itself seemed uncertain, the land, the physical land, seemed to cry out for reconstruction, and before you took a step you had to test the earth to see if it would bear your weight” (TGBHF, 62). The “grandeur of Rome”, of Empire, will fade, making way for a gigantic building site of residences and identities.

The city is, in like manner, good at blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. In Fritzsche’s view, at the heyday of the modern era the popularity of newspapers has come to create a “word city”, “a fabrication that overlaid, sensationalised, and falsified the actual city” (1998: 10). Play with such word-cities is easily observable in Joyce’s novel through “Aeolus”, “Cyclops”, “Eumaeus” and other chapters. One can navigate the city quite in the way one reads a newspaper, and in Barthes’ view, the city can be pursued as a text: “when we move about a city, we are all in the situation of the reader of the 100,000 million poems of Quenean, where one can find a different poem by changing a single line; unawares, we are somewhat like this avant-garde reader when we are in a city” (Barthes, 1971/2005: 170). Fritzsche calls it “an act of rereading and re-writing”, as texts and paths overlap and collide (1998: 173). The modern flaneur is he “who doesn’t walk in straight lines”—Rai and Ormus try this in Bombay and London, looking for “the real” but finding only ungraspable diversity. This palimpsestic structure and interactivity figure in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* in the way Ameer reconstructs the “syntax” of the metropolis, erasing earlier forms, and in the way Rai writes about the literary melange that is Bombay,

inside the register of intertextuality. Here stories and storeys are linked inextricably as new villas *rewrite* history—the vocabulary of urbanism and literature get mixed up as we read of stories with “No Entry” signs *building* judgements and lives. For Doreen Massey, stories of space unite “the history, change, movement of things” in an area, space being defined as “a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (2008: 12). In Rushdie’s Bombay, “the stories jostled you in the street, you stepped over their sleeping forms on the sidewalks or in the doorways”—it is a “metropolis of many narratives that converged briefly and then separated for ever, discovering their different dooms in that crows of stories” (TGBHF, 52).

In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the postmodern metropolis, as space defined by “simultaneity of stories-so-far”, contains some utterly erased, depersonalized and ahistorical zones, which appear mainly around the character of Ormus Cama. In Marc Auge’s theory, expressed in *Non-places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995), this contrast can be explained using the notions of anthropological place and non-space. In anthropological place a ‘concrete and symbolic construction of space’ occurs; it is a place, in short, of identity, of relations and of history, and could be summed up with the equation: land=society=nation=culture=religion. Its territory is geometric in that it can be mapped and centralities are created within it (buildings, squares, town centres, plus figures of political power). Moreover, social interactions are constant in this environment—it is the place of the metropolis in all its unknowable, ever-changing heterogeneity, in short. ‘Non-place’, on the other hand, is a term that refers to the places we so often encounter in postmodernity: hospitals, transit points, airports, supermarkets, refugee camps and hotels, theme parks, temporary abodes, highways and the like. These places do not tend towards the symbolic, as anthropological places do, and are solitary: no communities or human bonds are formed in non-places. They are, in a sense, settings one would not remember distinctly and attach great personal significance to: they cannot be defined as concerned with identity, or as being relational or historical.

Neither exists in pure form, as Vivvy and Ameer Merchant are capable of transforming their chance meeting at the maternity hospital into an epic beginning of family history. Ormus is an inhabitant of both realms (and a link between the “real” world of the fiction and its Underworld)—he is a negotiator and metaphor for both Bombay and Manhattan life, a global icon of pop-mythology, as well as a solitary figure hidden in his hotel suite of “white hectares”, in “unworldly cleanliness and order and barrenness” (TGBHF, 516). After losing Vina, he completely gives himself up to this nothingness, occupying only transitory spaces like hotel rooms, limousines and stadium environments. The erased locations might serve to reflect his

despair in the face of lost love, being the befitting territories of his voluntarily segregated inner self. His white hell might retain an illusion of continuity through homogeneity against the hurtful transientness of human life (TGBHF, 559). The novel demonstrates that all those who give up on change and hope end up in a similar inferno, as is the case of Darius, Persis, Vivvy and Cyrus (inhabiting the non-space of a prison). Ormus is assassinated by the supposedly dead Vina (killed in a non-place, having been swallowed by the earth itself) at the only occasion he chooses to go outside—the whiteness of snow and emptiness is made to dominate the otherwise busy New York streets, turning it into a “ghost-town” suitable for Orpheus’ final catabasis.

The Tectonics of Discourses

Inside such palimpsestic word-cities of unpredictability, multiplicity, heterogeneity and impermanence, forces of tectonic magnitudes operate and bring about historical, territorial, political and personal collisions, undermining structures and discourses of permanence. Vassilena Parashkekova, in her study on Rushdie’s cities, outlines the metaphorical and architectural origins of the term tectonics, along with its processes and effects. The changing of “geohistorical accumulations” is achieved with a practice of “counterdiscursive urban reconfigurations”, subversive, eruptive, mobilizing forces that reveal the gaps, absurdities and contradictions of dominant discourses (2013: 17). In the universe of the novel, the fight between stability (set up by the normative forces of civilization) and instability (the “wolf of change”) remains eternal and unresolved, announcing “our inner irreconcilability, the tectonic contradictoriness that has gotten us all and has commenced to rip us to pieces like the unstable earth itself” (TGBHF, 339).

The novel looks beyond the dichotomy between dominant discourses and the ones that seek to undermine them, demonstrating that their tectonic movements might result in fusions as well as replacements. It shall be seen how collisions and earthquakes (literal and allegorical) bring about the blending of the Self and the Other by merging city with identity, by the use of interlanguage, by introducing the character of the hybrid, by perpetual metamorphoses, by contamination as a result of cultural imperialism flowing “both ways” and by bridging gaps between universes with the help of art. The personification of fusion in the character of Vina can be everything all at once in Ormus’s song: “my ground, my favourite sound, my country road, my city street, my only love, my sky above and the ground beneath my feet” (TGBHF, 475).

All manners of discursive worlds are in a state of collision and fusion with one another, counting in the registers of politics, of media, identity and art. Even the reality of the real is questioned through a multitude of

alternative worlds, real and fictional at the same time. It is a realm where Pierre Menard wrote *Don Quijote* and the Watergate Affair is just a novel, and where the Otherworld of Ormus and America/India coexist with equal rights. As Rachel Trousdale explains, “real events in our world are transformed into fiction... as our fiction becomes Rai’s world’s truth, so our truth becomes their fiction, and each world enacts the possible-world scenarios imagined in the other” (Trousdale, 2010: 153).

The Metropolis and the Self

The city and its inhabitants are inseparably linked through the tectonics of belonging and drifting away, signalled by the use of language and by other cultural, historical and fictional discourses. Changes to the city have immediate impact upon the lives of its citizens: “You can’t just keep dividing and slicing—India-Pakistan, Maharashtra-Gujarat—without the effects being felt at the level of the family unit, the loving couple, the hidden soul. Everything starts shifting, changing, getting partitioned... People fly off into space” (TGBHF, 164). These connections are playfully emphasized by the narrator’s name, Rai, which means prince, but also desire, “a man’s personal inclination, *the direction he chose to go in; and will, the force of a man’s character*” (TGBHF, 18). The city of Bombay contains shelters built on Olympian heights of old belvederes filled with family memories like the Camas’ apartment or Rai’s Villa Thracia. Some can even try to “command the wildness of the city”, as Ormus attempts, but the main flow of events in the novel points to the willed or unwilling uprootedness of its characters. They jump readily or are forced into negotiating the unstable geographical and discursive grounds of the metropolis and the self. Territory and self intersect as Rai’s morally questionable founding of his reputation is parallel to the building of Indian independence through corrupted politics: “In this quaking, unreliable time, I have built my house—morally speaking—upon shifting Indian sands. *Terra infirma*” (TGBHF, 244). Further on in the novel, his efforts of making up for this by throwing himself into war-time photography are never proven to have given absolution.

Likewise, Vina finds herself in a situation where places constantly collide with her self-image: “the right place was always the one she wasn’t in... she could (she did) unaccountably take flight and disappear; and then discover that the new place she’d reached was just as wrong as the place she’d left” (TGBHF, 163). Her story is likened to the myth of Troy, full of loss and perpetual destruction of both home and identity, so that “[Chickaboom] was her first Troy. Bombay would be her second, and the rest of her life her third; and wherever she went, there was war” (TGBHF, 110).

Humans and the geographies they inhabit are indicative of each other on other levels as well. As the historian Vivvy Merchant explains, “see

where people lived and worked and shopped... and it becomes plain what they were like" (TGBHF, 80). But beside the historian's method of speculation over facts pointing to character, the relationship between places and their dwellers can also be fruitfully explored based on the premise that people and their city function according to similar rhythms.

In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, conflicts between the growing new Bombay and the shrinking old one are extrapolated and illustrated through tragi-comically presented human relationships. Ameer and Vivvy Merchant's marriage begins with their love for Bombay, flourishes on its sustenance and ends with the city's decline into infrastructural conflict. Their first meeting at the neutral non-space of the hospital flowers into an understanding based on androgynic correspondences that point to the anthropological, past-and meaning-filled Bombay: both bear the traditional name of Merchant and both are architects, although they represent two opposing sides of interest in built environment. As a historian, Vivvy is pulled towards archaeology and "[prefers] the mustinesses of records offices to the unfathomable messiness of Bombay life" (TGBHF, 32), digging into people through real and metaphoric sand like his son Rai does through photography and writing. Preoccupied with the conservation of memories and the perpetuation of the older and locally characteristic eastern art nouveau style, he collides head on with the postmodernist visions of his wife Ameer, who is always to be found out at the construction sites, supervising the building of the "discourse of the future" ("my mother Ameer's vision of the "scrapers", the giant concrete-and-steel exclamations that destroyed forever the quieter syntax of the old city of Bombay", 154). She is intent on designing and building skyscrapers, palimpsestically imposing them upon (the preferably erased) ground Vivvy strives so hard to preserve. Their conflict brews into a force so powerful as to destroy their relationship completely, just as Bombay is rocketed towards the height of its boom of transformations. The nonresolvability of this collision is illustrated by the couple's fight over the keeping or selling of their own home, in the face of a ruthlessly pushy private urban development project. The tragic outcome of their separation is just as much a family drama as an open elegy addressed to the human and infrastructural casualties of urban change.

The novel flaunts numerous characters comparable to Vivvy and Ameer in their obsession with place. Sir Darius Xerxes Cama is a dignitary of the "old order", a "relic of colonialism", deeply Anglophilic and opposed to any change to his hometown: "Anyway, Bombay isn't India. The British built her and the Parsis have her character. Let them have their independence elsewhere if they must, but leave us our Bombay under beneficent Parsi-British rule" (TGBHF, 49). By incorporating English elements into his life he feels "as if he were entering into his better nature", and his "thing-

stuffed” apartment and preoccupations with the systematization of Indo-European mythological heritage signal the stability he covets. Any attempt at change seems to harass him, including the whole idea of an actually existing new generation, embodied in his sons. His resistance to independence is the same as his resistance to his son’s new music, both linked in the novel to “ourselves as they might be”. Against the uncertainty of hope and the unknown of the future he sets up the idea of the Empire, the eternal grandeur of Rome his name is such a boldly self-advertising pun on. Preserving colonialism in an attitude of mimicry is what defines his character, so that his utterly confused and debasing decline is inevitably concurrent with the decline of English Rule. After the moment of Independence, he is transferred into his own theorized social class of the outsider: he is rejected both by his dreamland of England because of the shifting ground he has built his reputation on, and by his homeland Bombay due to the shifting ground of its politics.

Another technique fiction can make use of in order to probe into the relations between people and the territory they inhabit is the metaphor of the human as a city, and of the city as human (less explored, but it is mentioned that Bombay is an “old lady” or a daughter to some). Disorientations that occur are formulated so as to refer to both territory and relationships, signalling a fusion of the two, as in the case of the love of Vina for Ormus: “Disorientation: loss of the East. And of Ormus Cama, her sun” (TGBHF, 5). As what regards individuals, they are often presented in urban/geographic terms: Darius Cama appears as a “great metropolitan creation of the British” along with Bombay, his *corpore* getting “stark raving *insano*” as Bombay loses its stability, while “beneath V.V. Merchant’s shyness... [there is] the existence of a great soul... a rock upon which, as [Ameer] afterwards liked blasphemously to boast, she could build her church” (TGBHF, 33). In the same style, Vivvy regards Ameer as a metropolis, referring to “her fortifications, her esplanades, her traffic-flow, her new developments, her crime rate” (TGBHF, 100). It is said of Ormus, too, that “his name, his face, became part of the definition of the city in that departed heyday” (TGBHF, 181), referring to Bombay, and, at the end, his ashes are scattered over Manhattan in a ritual that unites him in body with the site of his spirit’s unfolding. In plus, at the end of the novel Persis becomes the personification of the sweet memory of India and Bombay, elegiacally begged by Rai to remain as she once was: “Stay where you are, Persis... don’t move a muscle. Don’t age, don’t change... I want to think of you this way: eternal, unchanging, immortal” (TGBHF, 573). The metaphors and exemplary stories are elaborated under the banner of the previously established premise of the city as a site of continuous change, where shifting

places mark out the contours of shifting selves within a tectonics problematizing stability and bringing about palimpsestic collisions.

The Use of English

Linguistically calibrated tectonic forces wreak havoc on a use of English performed according to academic norms or native formulae. *The Empire Writes Back* (2002) systematizes such movements by postulating that from the perspectives of postcolonial discourse, English is not only either directly adopted or rejected as a whole, but also strategically appropriated through the techniques of synecdoche, untranslated words, the use of interlanguage, syntactic fusion, code-switching and vernacular transcription. By this process, presenting new situations and different ways of structuring the world through the dismantled language of the centre can become a formalized expression of the need to “[mark] a separation from the site of colonial privilege” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2002: 37-52) and to replace the “syntax of ethnic purity” (Rushdie, 1991: 285) with the “syntax of emancipation” (Rushdie, 1991: 291).

In the novel, the transcription of Yul Singh’s or Shri Piloo Doodhwala’s speeches demonstrates the use of all the above-mentioned techniques for the appropriation of English. Singh modifies conventional syntax in such a manner that his speech generates an unpredictably flowing and wandering text. Under the aegis of a personality defined by urgency both in words and deeds, extra information is added to an otherwise syntactically correct sentence at random points: “I owe everything personally to my own lovely wife who unfortunately she’s not accompanying me on this trip” (TGBHF, 188) or “I fly to Bombay to see my sweet old mother who god bless her I’ve now left out there” (TGBHF, 187). Along with “proper” grammar, punctuation also often gives his babble the slip. Despite this excess, his communications prove to be deeply lacunal: direct answers are eluded and intentions remain hidden as he beats around the bush, so that crucial information and meanings in connection with his persona are difficult to get to both for other characters and for the reader. Owing to all these, it becomes clear how his self-proclaimed “clean tongue” is discredited not only by swearwords, but by a dismantled language. In addition, his name gets to be played with on the phonetic level: combining “Yul” with the dignified reference to the traditional Sikh addition of “Singh” meaning lion results in the thematically motivated and sharply ironic label of “you’ll sing”. Bearing this in mind, it can be argued that the appropriation of English in the case of Yul manifests twists that leave marks of severe shredding not only on the conqueror’s language, but also on the authority of the magnate himself. Especially if we consider that fact that he is not only a representative of old Bombay, but of corporate America as well.

A similarly major case of language appropriation can be found in Shri Piloo Doodhwala's articulations. The narrator succeeds in transcribing his accent by disrespecting rules of orthography: "All persons should be having hop, ewen when their situation is hopliss" (TGBHF, 69). Syntactic inaccuracies figure less than words that got "borne across" rather than translated ("goodfather", "what-all", "magnificentourage"), erratic formulations ("Idea is good, but ... it has prompted one further idea, which is ewen betterer" (TGBHF, 117) or even code-switching through the insertion of untranslated terms ("sand building like a *Shiv-lingam*"). Piloo's language further manifests unconventional use of register through the way he negotiates a trade of human flesh, speaking of giving up parentage strictly in business terms: "Monies hawe been paid. Phees, cash, spending on account. There has been major outlay of phunds, and in consequence one is considerably out of pocket. Reimbursement is not unreasonably required" (TGBHF, 119). As Yul Singh, Piloo releases tirades of self-affirming jumbles of superfluous information, leaving the listener and reader bedazzled as regards his real intentions. The unsuccessful counter-advertisement he commissions to save his milk company is a similarly shifting, linguistically unstable construct that makes a pun on his own name ("PILOO—the Dude with Doodh" –meaning milk) and is shouted through a "large speech-bubble issuing from his own leering face" (TGBHF, 115). And the riddle-simulacrum his later "goat-ghoast" scam creates fit his personality and style all too well. Just like Yul Singh, Piloo stands on the middle ground between the accommodation of the conqueror's and modernity's high discourse of capitalism and the phrases and mentality of provincial India's goat-filled hills.

Goats and references to goat songs figure as key hints throughout the novel, pointing to the collisions between the high ideals and language of tragedy in literature and the subversive or disruptive, unintelligible cries of animals or of uncharted emotions or territories. The Apollonian and the Dionysian, "measured" and stable language, place and identity versus language and people "gone wild" lie at the core of the infrastructure of the novel. Ameer Merchant's subversive word games, puns and rhymes, besides bringing forth new *meanings* through unexpected links, create an alternative route for the emergence of an important side of the novel's exemplary adherence to minor literature's linguistic and political manifestations. According to Soren Frank's elaboration on the Deleuzian idea of presence effects in minor literature, the songs, visions and word games might draw attention to the *materiality of language* (Frank, 2008: 154). This is an aspect that produces intensities that struggle for the "deterritorialization of language", forcing some well-established forms of expression and language systems out of balance (2008: 152). Language may even slip away completely, so that, as in the case of a conversation between Vina and Rai, the only answers the

reader gets to questions are mumbled articulations: “Mmhm?”, “Unhnh”, “Hynhnyhnm” (TGBHF, 345).

Between the total decomposition or rejection of English and meticulous correctitude, there lies the middle ground of appropriation. This concept is close to what Bhabha alluded to as “Third Space, which enables other positions to emerge... [giving rise to] a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (1990: 211). What it engenders is best illustrated through Pilo’s, Yul’s and even Vina’s “interlanguage” (Ashcroft et al., 2002: 65), a term coined by Nemser and elaborated in *The Empire Writes Back* as an “approximate system which is cohesive and distinct from both source language and target language”. Through the strategies of appropriation and through what is denoted as “fossilization” (“phonological, morphological, and synthetic forms in the speech of the speaker of a second language which do not conform to target language norms, even after years of instruction”), the transcription of these characters’ speech designates a place of resistance “in cross-cultural writing” (Ashcroft et al., 2002: 66).

Vina’s and Molly Schnabel’s speech can be situated at this middle ground of language-clash. The example of Molly appears in the novel almost independently of plot, as a direct disclosure of the linguistic existence of a “multinational conglomerate babe” (TGBHF, 511). Her Irish descent and Indian background enable her to have the knack for parodying the immigrant’s language, as she stands both as a willing example (she speaks it on purpose, making an effort) and an unwilling exception (her “original” English is the “right” one) for its use: “O, baba, what to tell? Wehicle broke down just close by. I am thinking, can I use the phone and give mechanic a tinkle? Sorry to inconvenience” (TGBHF, 510). The rebuttal this remark gets from Rai (“For God’s sake, Molly, this is America. Talk American”, 511), himself an immigrant, is once again ironic, since it calls attention to the clash between blending in and being true to one’s roots as a migrant.

Vina’s language serves to reveal both her American and her Indian side, but always from the standpoint of an undecided limbo, an in-between. Her rejection of India as a child manifests itself through a fight by her “bad-mouthing everything in sight” (TGBHF, 487). Her anger later turns into an embrace of Bombay’s “garbage argot”—*Mumbai ki kachrapati baat-cheet*, the “polyglot trash-talk” of the mixture of Hindi and Urdu nicknamed “Hug-me”, “in which a sentence could begin in one language, swoop through a second and even a third and then swing back round to the first” (TGBHF, 7). This serves as an indicator of her identity: of memories and her belonging to India (where “Bombayites... were people who spoke five languages badly and no language well”, 7), just as English stands for America and her forming and upbringing there. After her final migration to the States, Hug-me often signals a gash in the present through which feelings from old

Bombay might resurface, coming through in difficult (and even final) moments both for her and for Rai.

Additionally, changing what English means is attempted through penetrating the canonical discourse of literature. Subverting traditions is achieved through a constant play with other works: the result is a universe of intertextuality so tightly woven as to make it impossible or at least mind-bogglingly difficult to separate the present narrative from the texts of its literary predecessors. We can find numerous bits of Joyce (like making Molly Bloom out of Vina through instances of unpunctuated, song-like, pop-culture-language and many more), references to Melville, Kafka, Borges and Tolkien (embossed with internet conspiracy stories borrowed from the language of fan-fiction that revolves around the language of fantasy literature) and others, among movie bits, lyrics and ads of all sorts (maybe as further reference to Joyce and his techniques). Presenting the city in this manner is equal to putting together a literary cocktail:

Imagine, if you will, the elaborately ritualised (yes, and marriage-obsessed) formal society of Jane Austen, grafted on to the stenchy, pullulating London beloved of Dickens, as full of chaos and surprises as a rotting fish is full of writhing worms; swash & rollick the whole into a Shandy-and-arack cocktail; colour it magenta, vermilion, scarlet, lime; sprinkle with crooks & bawds, and you have something like my fabulous home town (TGBHF, 101).

The varieties of the use of English give rise to what is coined as “english” in *The Empire Writes Back*, a term for the cross-cultural multiplicity of creations that are neither English nor an original Other language, but a collection of *hug-all*, personalized discourses located somewhere in the *third space* of in-between. Through the perspective of the migrant, in Rushdie’s words, writing in an appropriated English is not to be taken as a “post-colonial anomaly, the bastard child of Empire” (Rushdie & West, 1997: xii), but as a “re-making [of English] for our own purposes”, indicative of the clash of cultural tendencies and identities, marking attempts to “conquer English” precisely as a road to freedom from its constraining grip (Rushdie, 1991: 17).

Between East and West

The impossibility of bridging the discourses of East and West is sadly depicted through the failure of the research project of Darius. He is brought down not only by the radical racketeering of the mob at the stadium or on the streets of independence (along with new architectural and leadership tendencies), but also by the shadow of Nazism spreading itself over his field of studies. Comparative religions is tainted by the association of its terms with anti-Semitism:

when language is stolen and poisoned, the poison works its way backwards through time and sideways into the reputations of innocent men. The word “Aryan”, which, for Max Müller and his generation, had a purely linguistic meaning, was now in the hands of less academic persons, poisoners, who were speaking of races of men, races of masters and races of servants and other races too (TGBHF, 44).

The war of cultural dichotomies played on the level of language is likewise embodied through the conflict of Darius’ sons. They both provide specific discourses to signal belonging: Ormus takes flight to America and composes the lyrics and songs of the uprooted East mingling with the West, while Cyrus (he who strangles music) stays in India and opts for extensive Eastern learning, stating in the famous letter about his brother that “his self-hating, deracinated music has long been at the service... of the arrogance of the West, where the world’s tragedy is repackaged as youth entertainment and given infectious, foot-trapping beat” (TGBHF, 556). Ironically, the two brothers are crafted to be alike, as Cyrus provides a mythology of spaces and tales of his own for followers to grab, being a “serial killer who tempts his victims with his highly articulate and mesmerizing travellers’ tales of glittering cities and mountain ranges like devil’s teeth” (TGBHF, 153).

Vina is maybe the most obviously neutral character who stands at the middle ground between the two powers, always “crossing frontiers”, never opting for purist forms and behaviours, a “melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that” (Rushdie, 1991: 395). Her persona might stand as a realization of Bhabha’s hybrid, occupying a “third space” “which displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (Bhabha, 1990: 211). Dressed as pop-slut in a “garish pastiche of the sixties” (Boyagoda, 2008: 38) mixed with the attire of priestess of multiple religions, she embodies the “seizure of the sign... a contestation of the given symbols of authority” (Bhabha, 1992: 63). She is consciously displaying and advertising herself as both traditional Bombayite and polymer New Yorker, as a believer in ancient practices and a sexual eccentric at the same time, “post-racial” and “post-national” in her “global charlatanism” (Boyagoda, 2008: 37). With this “pan-ethnic everywoman” (Boyagoda, 2008: 42), “the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Bhabha, 1990: 211). She serves as a separate universe of discourse, as after her death “her radical absence is a void or an abyss into which a tide of meanings can pour... she has become an empty receptacle, an arena of discourse, and we can invent her in our own image” (TGBHF, 485). She becomes a pagan goddess claimed as a relic by multiple places, a “patron divinity of the age of uncertainty” and the hopeful phrase

“Vina significat humanitatem” remains attached to her, along with the blasphemous statement that, like Jesus, “she died that men might learn how to feel.” Making Vina *mean something* is a ritual Rai opts for as well, by writing his memoir along with her biography. Thus, he is taking the unattainable, inexplicable figure of *the woman*, in a traditionally gendered approach, as a method of coping with loss and the “mystery at the heart of meaning”. Forsaken, lonely Ormus does the same in his eccentric search for the one true Vina, seeking her in vain during his life among thousands of other women, all of them radically different or plainly fake look-alike.

America is posited as the privileged space for metamorphoses, a land that, besides signifying the uttermost of Western ideals, provides space for Vina-like hybridization and multiplicity, letting non-belonging be an “alternative form of community affiliation” (Trousdale, 2010: 144). It is described in the novel as an “amnesiac culture”, keen on forgetting or rewriting its past, and as a great home to migrants, because, in Vina’s words, “not belonging, that’s an old American tradition, see? that’s the American way” (TGBHF, 331).

According to Randy Boyagoda, as a “protean culture” it comes across as a-historical by overabundance (“the United States by its immigrants has resulted in such excess that it produces a condition of effective pastlessness for American society”, 2008: 27) and de-territorialized (“post-national citizens from throughout the global south are the foremost practitioners of American cultural forms”, 2008: 29). America is seemingly ideal ground for Rai and his friends, since “[in] America... everyone’s like me, because everyone comes from somewhere else. All those histories, persecutions, massacres, piracies, slaveries” (TGBHF, 252)—the list is long but not exhaustive. How faulty even this perspective might be is exposed through Vina’s nightmares of racial hunts, and Rushdie’s political misfortune has proved that brooding over differences is many migrants’ strong side. But the book never states that we can find a true land of acceptance anywhere—on the contrary, it searches to illuminate just on how many levels worldviews and identities may come into collision: “where the plates of different realities met, there were shudders and rifts. Chasms opened. A man could lose his life” (TGBHF, 238).

Like the author’s other works, the book seems fully aware of the dangers of such holisms as “the nation, the culture or even of the self”, as these are “most often used to assert cultural or political supremacy and [seek] to obliterate the relations of difference that constitute the language of history and culture” (Asad, 1993). But as Boyagoda stresses, here natives mingle with immigrants creating not only irreconcilable clashes, but, like Vina, loved for “making herself the exaggerated avatar of [people’s] own jumbled selves” (TGBHF, 339), products of fusion as well, “emergent, hybrid forms

of cultural identity” (Asad, 1993). The novel poses here a challenge to “the humanist assumption of a unified self and an integrated consciousness by both installing coherent subjectivity and subverting it” (Hutcheon, 1989/2001: xii). Her metamorphoses are a product of a tortured past: as a child, she has been “literally selfless, her personality smashed, like a mirror, by the fist of her life”, “a rag-bag of selves”, “floating in a void, denatured, dehistoricized, clawing at the shapelessness, trying to make some sort of mark” (TGBHF, 121). Later in life, her build-up of palimpsestic identities stands as the demonstration of great strength through embracing constant change.

Metamorphosis is certainly a common enough practice among the characters by now, so that Rai may be right in asserting that “I have truly become an American, inventing myself anew to make a new world in the company of other altered lives” (TGBHF, 441). “Metamorphosis... is what we can perform, our human magic” (461). In Boyagoda’s view, other “shape-shifter types” are Mull Standish, who “is a professional... very American shape-shifter, able to inhabit any persona that advances his financial interests” and Ormus, a “mishmash of self-fiction and fragments of authentic history” (Boyagoda, 2008: 36). However, as the character of Goddess-Ma maliciously but rightly enounces, Ormus’ “suppression of race and skin modalities in the interests of the untenable Western dogma of universals is in reality a flight from self into the arms of the desired, admired Other” (TGBHF, 565). His “many selves can be, in song, a single multitude”, yet what he is really looking for is a woman, a love and place that are never really possible to find.

But according to Rai, “we’re not all shallow proteans, forever shifting shape” (TGBHF, 462). In view of what the novel seems to stand for (collisions, hybridity, multiplicity, flight), this statement sounds all too problematic, as does his final choice of putting down roots—in the manner of Candide, tending to his garden of a house and family and American Way of life. It may be true that metamorphosis can end in a final, acceptable form, but who can tell that choosing the comforts of stability against the shifting, menacing “wolf of place and time” does not push one into false certainties? Maybe Rai can escape that, since he ultimately resides, willingly or unwillingly, at the gate of the unknown, in his home named Orpheum guarded by the dog Cerberus.

Politics and Media

The tone of political propaganda and power clashes is first introduced through Darius’ big cricket match, where the discourses of colonialist mentality are loudly protested through the destructive powers of song (“Don’t be wicket, ban communal cricket.” “Lady Daria, don’t be slack. Make a duck and off you quack... Lady Donald, make a duck.” TGBHF, 29). As Hutch-

eon emphasizes, “the linguistic and the political, the rhetorical and the repressive... are the connections postmodernism places in confrontation with... humanist faith in language and its ability to represent the subject or “truth”, past or present, historical or fictional” (Hutcheon, 1989/2001: 187). The transformation of Bombay is tainted by corruption and the contamination of politics gains allegoric dimensions in the apocalyptic equation between moral downfall and earthquakes/catastrophes, both on the local and the global level. The Emergency, the changing of the city’s name, ethnic uproars, clashes between East and West, the aggression of globalization and power-hungry capitalism are (not unrealistically) linked to pollution and floods. As Maria, a tauntingly named otherworldly character tries to explain: “Underlying all earthquakes is the idea of Fault... The Earth has many faults, of course... But human Faults cause earthquakes too. What is coming is a judgement” (TGBHF, 327). The sad question goes like this: “Suppose the earth just got sick of our greed and cruelty and vanity and bigotry and incompetence and hate” (TGBHF, 573). “Earthquakes are the new hegemonic geopolitics”, we find, within the framing of a sarcastic allegory of nuclear power struggles, where damage comes from the enemy and from internal “corruption, poverty, fanaticism and neglect”. In fact, the corruption of all cities is moulded into one, and “Groovy Manhattan is plainly no better than Swinging London” with its “rusting decadence... shoulder-barging vulgarity... [and] third-world feel (the poverty, the traffic, the slo-mo dereliction of the winos and the cracked-glass dereliction of too many of the buildings, the unplanned vistas of urban blight, the ugly street furniture)” (TGBHF, 387).

The issue of cultural imperialism is delineated through the language and industry of music, notes and lyrics alike. New York is the new Rome, having replaced London as *the colonial metropolis* (Parashkevova, 2013: 14). America means Might, creating around itself newly “colonised” consumer-serf areas, a “power so great that it shapes our daily lives even though it barely knows we exist” (TGBHF, 419-20). Apparently, this also works the other way around, as the subconscious Las Vegas of Ormus’ mind is fed by the experience of his own mega-cultural city:

the music he heard in his head during the unsinging childhood years, was not of the West, except in the sense that West was in Bombay from the beginning, impure old Bombay where West, East, North and South had always been scrambled, like codes (TGBHF, 95-6).

Vina and her performances are spiritual food as much as commodity meticulously calculated, their publicizing timed (by shrewd managers like Standish and Yul Singh) to be offered up for cash, even more so after her death. But the messages their words convey (especially through their album

Quaker-shaker) are deemed to be radically political, and their concerts are banned from India for bearing the potential of causing earthquakes that are jokingly literal, yet seriously literary. They become the prophets not only of love but of uprootedness, proclaiming that “everything you thought you knew: it’s not true. And everything you knew you said, was all in your head” (TGBHF, 353). Their words slyly seep among the lines of the novel, contaminating and liberatingly shifting the literary register into a mesh of more conventional bildungsroman-consciousness, presented in the fashion of the Arabian Nights, seasoned with lyrics, ads and propaganda, with a result not entirely unlike the discursive kaleidoscope of *Ulysses*.

Attention is drawn here to the fact that media shifts reality and language as well as their songs or political propaganda would, and one does not need to look only to the fineries of Pilloo’s politically self-promoting dairy-ad. At the finale of a cruelly funny and angry outpouring, the novel sums up the question of where it stands on the dichotomies of sensationalist messages from the everyday:

Pictures don’t lie! This image has been faked! Free the press! Ban nosy journalists! The novel is dead! Honor is dead! God is dead! Aargh, they’re all alive, and they’re coming after us! That star is rising! No, she’s falling! We dined at nine! We dined at eight! You were on time! No, you were late! East is West! Up is down! Yes is No! In is Out! Lies are Truth! Hate is Love! Two and two makes five! And everything is for the best, in this best of all possible worlds” (TGBHF, 353).

Many sorts of en vogue shifting realities (taken from television, journalism, philosophy and other academic areas, horror movies and personal bits) are pitted against each other through phrases of mainstream discourse, only to fall flat on the chord of abject dismissal by Voltaire’s sarcastic phrase. Sure, anything can be enounced for fifteen seconds and Rushdie, as he demonstrates from the start of the book, is familiar even with the berserkerries of the universe of internet commentary—but shouts get lots among the throng of howls, and there’s the grotesque beauty of the hybridity of Bakhtinian polyphony for you.

Worlds of Fiction

The issue of how fiction shapes the city and inhabitant looms large in the novel, since it highlights the ways in which the arbitrarily created norms of grammar and discourses linked to politics and the media mould reality to their liking. The metafictional nature of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* manifests itself in a many-layered construction of alternative fictional worlds, each “heading for collision” with the other, each brought about by a differently motivated force (be it highly personal or broadly political). The tecton-

ically rifted “tears in the reality” of the novel reproduce the postmodern trend for uncertainties (“There is nothing to hold on to. Nothing is any longer, with any certainty, *so*”, 508), yet they inherently contain the tragic-ness that revolves around the search for the meaning of human life and its finalities (“We, too, are travellers between the worlds... Having embarked, we have no option but to go forward on that soul’s journey in which we will be shown what is best, and worst, in human nature”, 255). However, the reality of the real is questioned on numerous accounts, but the legitimacy of the possible, alternative universes is never disputed, and their moral value never conclusively judged.

The Ground Beneath Her Feet flashes a politics that produces ideology and schemes that need to be probed to their depths. This process has already been pinpointed, but other, less subtle ways in which politics weaves fictions are incorporated into the novel as well. As has been noted, Darius Cama is a great metropolitan creation of the British just like his beloved Bombay, is a produce of colonialism and orientalism—both are built with elaborate and willingly intrusive discourses that have more to do with tales than with mundane facts. Piloo’s goat farm scam is another sarcastic example of political fiction, highlighting the embedment of the simulacrum into our economic and cultural conceptions of how and what world goes round.

More importantly, the identity of the migrant is at question when we look at how fictional worlds operate in the novel. According to Nair and Bhattacharya, the migrant might re-constitute himself through a “neurosis of personal nemesis”, or chose a return to the past through “the certainties of nostalgia” (1990: 18). Nostalgia contains, however, less certainties than would be hoped for, as with Rushdie, “historical moments are sundered to reveal heterotopic paths not taken”, “alternative histories collide” (Mishra, 2003: 65) in a “disjunctive temporality”, questioning the status of the past and of its mythologies (Mishra, 2003: 82; 78). As Linda Hutcheon notes, within historiographic metafiction a photograph or a document “can no longer pretend to be a transparent means to a past event; it is instead the textually transformed trace of that past” (Hutcheon, 1989/2001: 87). Tunnels and graveyards in the city are “gaps in the earth through which our history seeps and is at once lost, and retained in metamorphosed form” (TGBHF, 54), as Rai puts it. But, as he notes elsewhere, “A kind of India happens everywhere... everywhere is terrible and wonder-filled and overwhelming if you open your senses to the actual’s pulsating beat... So lead us not into exotica and deliver us from nostalgia” (TGBHF, 417). Rapid change effaces the sites of memories, and “the destruction of your childhood home—a villa, a city—is like the death of a parent: an orphaning... A tombstone city stands upon the graveyard of the lost” (TGBHF, 168). Some who do not pace with change get turned into stone, as has been mentioned:

this is how Persis, Vivvy, Darius and Cyrus end, and how Lady Spenta, Ormus, Vina and Rai survive. Leaving home is trying to escape one's past, an attempt to leave "Wombay" for a new beginning.

"The neurosis of nemesis" in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* begins with the dream of the elsewhere, of a "There must be somewhere better than this" expressed through longings for an earthly or otherworldly "paradise". As Rushdie puts it, the "imaginary homelands" function in the way his narrator explains in *Shame*: "I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist" (Rushdie, 1984: 87). Most characters yearn for such space in this novel as well: Darius dreams of the garden of England, Lady Spenta of a place of illumination, Vivvy longs for the city of the past, Ameer for the city of the future. The American Dream is articulated through the aspirations of Vina, Ormus and Rai for the United States of the "Great Attractor", the "dream America everyone carries around in his head, America the beautiful... [a] country that never existed but needed to exist" (TGBHF, 419). For them, England is just a limbo before New York, a disaster area with a "generation lost in space". When Ormus walks the streets of London, he is "looking for other Englands, older Englands, making them real..." For him, "to be utterly lost amidst buildings you recognize, to know nothing about a cityscape of which you have carried around for years... is a delirious enough experience" (TGBHF, 289).

After being literally reborn into America, he begins his real cycle of Orphean activity (joining his brothers Gayo, Cyrus and Virus, all connected to an Otherworld of sorts), faithful to the myth on many levels. His credo is the following: "Sing against death. Command the wildness of the city... Cross frontiers. Fly away" (TGBHF, 146). His music is a plug to an Underworld of yet uncreated artwork (a magical, otherworldly metropolis, a "city of dazzling lights"), where he dives in order to bring back both comfort and destruction through song, "offering people a promised land or what":

Our lives are not what we deserve; they are, let us agree, in many painful ways deficient. Song turns them into something else. Song shows us a world that is worthy of our yearning, it shows us our selves as they might be, if we were worthy of the world (TGBHF, 19-20),

and "the songs are about the collapse of all walls, boundaries, restraints. They describe worlds in collision" (TGBHF, 390). His fictionally real universes of heavens and hells add to the confusion of what is real and what is fancy and how all that will end, making him a nicely fitting descendant of orphic rituals though his shows:

incessant images of heaven and hell, both conceived of as places on earth, nuptial motels and flame-grilled-burger bars, video arcades and ballet schools, football crowds and war zones... The fictional universe of the show gave the impression of floating free of the real world, of being a separate reality that made contact with the earth every so often, for a night or two at a time, so that people could visit it and shake their pretty things (TGBHF, 558).

Moreover, the fantasy of Home (the dream of roots) and the fantasy of the Away (the mirage of the Journey) are expressed by his music, affirming the uncertainties of the human condition:

At the frontier of the skin no dogs patrol... Where I end and you begin. Where I cross from sin to sin. Abandon hope and enter in. And lose my soul. At the frontier of the skin no guards patrol... At the frontier of the skin mad dogs patrol. At the frontier of the skin. Where they kill to keep you in. Where you must not slip your skin. Or change your role. You can't pass out I can't pass in. You must end as you begin. Or lose your soul. At the frontier of the skin armed guards patrol (TGBHF, 55).

But it is suggested that the real hero in Virgil's story of Orpheus is really the bee-keeper, here identified as the narrator Rai, or "Umeed Merchant, photographer, [who] can spontaneously generate new meaning from the putrefying carcass of what is the case" (TGBHF, 22). Though photography and literature, he is the main creator of fictions and administrator of time (because taking a photo is a moral decision of taking a snippet out of space and time), boasting even that "Our creations can go the distance with Creation; more than that, our imagining—our imagemaking—is an indispensable part of the great work of making real" (p. 466). His palimpsestic photos capture multiple layers of the universe, both in the supernaturally literal, and, as has probably been intended, in the figurative sense of capturing and later showing/exhibiting the multiplicity of experience. With a more or less successful "knack for invisibility", he "shimmies", both as photographer and narrator, "into [people's] charmed space", digging into them and exposing them by bringing to the surface some of their essence.

Literature is an alternative, worthy space for humans to be transposed into, a place where belonging can turn into a benefit. Vina, she herself a creator of her own fictional-composite identity, is immortalised by Rai through the novel, in a place of words: "maybe she can find a sort of peace here, on the page, in this underworld of ink and lies, that respite which was denied her by life". He then proceeds to state boldly: "So I stand at the gate of the inferno of language, there's a barking dog and a ferryman waiting and a coin under my tongue for the fare" (TGBHF, 21).

For Rai, writing a novel about the mouldability of the real, of time, space and identity is perhaps also a way of trying to survive through discourse

and art. Ormus remains through his music and lyrics, Vina is immortalised by Rai's memoir and Rai by the photographs he has created. His father finds comfort in the written histories of the city, Darius does his research in order to escape shame and account for his outsider status by creating something canonical, and Lady Cama seeks the discourse of religion for inner peace (but she, too, finally finds it in a garden). And all of them are, as an author might hope, eternalised by the novel. As the characters produced by art speak sadly out to the reader or to the viewer of photographs, they articulate a generally applicable human condition: "This is all that will remain of us: our light in your eye. Our shadows in your images. Our floating forms, falling through nothingness, after the ground vanishes, the ground beneath our feet" (TGBHF, 508).

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