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## Re-imagined Chaos and Order in Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

As an emigrant writer, Salman Rushdie's project of rewriting Western reality and writing back to the centre is typical of the postcolonial phenomenon where, "the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis" (Bhabha, *Nation* 6). Rushdie's literary style draws from varied Eastern and Western literary sources like the *Arabian Nights*, Indian mythology and the Sanskrit epics of the *Mahabharatha* and *Ramayana*, Greco-roman myths and Western master narratives. His novels and short fictions play with dominant Western discourses by subverting them or going beyond the established order of old world perception, by indulging in a mode of rewriting that merges and reworks the old into the new. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is no exception, with its collage-like assembling of classical mythical allusions, syncretic arrangement of a hybrid melange of native and foreign forms, warped alternative versions of history, chaotic narration, abuse of mythology and high cultural forms. In this novel, Rushdie uses the imagery of a chaotic shifting ground to give centre stage to the migrant quest for identity, and shows that "however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for the writer to occupy" (IH 15).

In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Rushdie uses the classical literary tool of a descent narrative to show the migrant's chaotic trajectory into a hybrid carnivalesque space, an "interstitial space", where "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference (and) the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha, *Location* 2). My paper will study how by figuring Virgil's account of the classical roman myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in his narrative, Rushdie configures the medieval account of the Dantean *katabatic* journey in the Inferno and Conrad's colonial journey motif in *Heart of Darkness*, thus merging old and new world aesthetic perceptions in

the multi-dimensional textual space. My study shall consider how this fictional ground is further reconfigured and re-imagined anew in the context of modern rock and roll, where Rushdie moulds classical modes of harmony and order into a fictional universe of postmodern disorder. I shall explore how Rushdie's genius lies in his capacity to perceive ruptures and fissures in what is often represented as a seamless national history, and reconfigure on the strength of fragments, an alternative vision that accommodates both the individual and the collective experience to create a voice outside the Eurocentrism of Western master narratives. I shall argue that contrary to the modernist separation of chaos and order, Rushdie's postmodernist narrative still installs that order, but then uses it to demystify our everyday processes of structuring chaos, of imparting or assigning meaning. We shall see how this reconfiguration of the fictional ground as one that is re-imagined and shaped by new enabling projects is representative of "that Third Space, ... which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha, *Location* 37).

*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* opens in a crescendo of chaos, when the main protagonist, Vina Apsara, a world-renowned rock music icon, is swallowed up in a Mexican earthquake. Rushdie's alter-ego narrator, Umeed Rai, intrudes into the story to pass metanarrative comments on his role of bringing life to the dying tale, by comparing himself to Lord Shiva, the creator and destroyer of worlds in Hindu mythology (GBF 22). By stressing on the artifice of storytelling, and his fame as an image-maker of death capable of capturing last moments like death, funerals and catastrophes, the overt narrator watches, comments, and gives a faithful record of events. Rai's narrative journey starts on the day of Vina's death, in keeping with the Hindu cyclic perspective of life that the beginning of one journey starts at

the end of another. The narrator's homodiegetic point of view explicitly rejects simple linearity in recounting the story:

*Our lives disconnect and reconnect, we move on, and later we may again touch one another, again bounce away. This is the felt shape of a human life, neither simply linear nor wholly disjunctive nor endlessly bifurcating, but rather this bouncy-castle sequence of bumpings-into and tumbling apart. (GBF 599)*

The homodiegetic narrative voice of the photographer-narrator seems a symbol for the ever-present *paparazzi* intruding into private lives of celebrities to freeze moments with a flash of the camera. Following a tradition similar to questioning classical *katabatic* heroes of destiny,<sup>1</sup> Rai sets forth on his narrative journey questioning language as fuel for the journey: "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" (GBF 21).

In the opening chapter, Rai recalls Virgil's account of the Orpheus myth, as it appears in *Georgics* (IV. 315-566). Virgil's account of the entire tale through the mouth of the sea-god, Proteus to Aristaeus is transformed innovatively by Rushdie, who narrates the story through Aristaeus; the pair of star-crossed lovers are configured into a love-triangle, with the narrator, Rai, as the left-out third, donning the mantle of Aristaeus, and following Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara to New York, on their quest to find a "new life" in the west (GBF 271). Rushdie's preference for Virgil's tragic version of the Orphic myth not only underlines the immigrant experience of loss and disorientation while settling-in into the interstitial space, but also highlights Rushdie's adoption of the Virgilian tool of *mythopoeia*, which enables him adopt a style similar to the roman *auctore* and "borrow from a variety of sources and alter and combine versions together, as opposed to the view that he merely versified an existing

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<sup>1</sup> Classical descent heroes like Odysseus, Heracles, Orpheus, Pollux, Theseus, and Aeneas undertook long, perilous journeys into the Underworld, but were haunted by questions of success in their quest (Clark 195).

tradition” (Clark 95).<sup>2</sup> Rushdie juxtaposes ancient mythologies of the West and the East with modern myths.<sup>3</sup> The protagonist’s name Vina Apsara comes from the stringed Indian instrument, the ‘Vina’ that makes a divine sound, and ‘Apsara’, which means goddess. Rushdie’s Vina Apsara is cast as the embodiment of the winged serpent Quetzalcoatl, the mythological Mexican God who brought music to the earth. Here Rushdie abuses and distorts the original myth of Quetzalcoatl, the Lord of the Morning Star, the inventor of books and the calendar, to accommodate his version of Quetzalcoatl’s invention of music. Rushdie’s serpent-god unleashes mighty storms to disperse musicians from the house of the sun to the earth. This is evident in Vina’s blatant claim to Ormus “I am the winged serpent, and this is the house of the sun, and you, and you, are music” (GBF 102). The connection to myths is thus established early in the novel, and as the narrative unfolds, we witness the metamorphosis of Vina and Ormus themselves into contemporary mythic figures, which I will discuss later in this paper.

In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Rushdie reframes the idea of Conrad’s “journey within-in”<sup>4</sup> by refashioning and re-imagining the colonial metaphor<sup>5</sup> of a “voyage-in”. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said explains Marlow’s “voyage in” as the movement and integration of Third World thinkers into the metropolitan First World. Said focuses on how

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<sup>2</sup> Virgil transformed Homeric and Hellenistic elements of the Orphic myth, by adding contemporary overtones to adapt the theme to his own day (Clark 14). The *Georgics*’ original purpose of serving as an agricultural treatise, may account for the inclusion of Aristaeus, the beekeeper, in Virgil’s account of the Orpheus myth. Virgil’s didactic verse transformed nature and commonplace agricultural activities, into great poetry. Here it is interesting to note that Rushdie quotes Virgil’s version, but remains silent about Ovid’s account of the Orphic descent, which remains faithful to pre-Virgilian accounts of Greek myths and legends. Orpheus’ ghost “flies downward to the Stygian shore” and is reunited with Eurydice (Ovid XI. 71.)

<sup>3</sup> There are numerous references to the Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche, Orpheus and Eurydice, Venus and Adonis, and Hindu myths of Rati and Kama (GBF 365, 464).

<sup>4</sup> Conrad’s mythic fascination for the Dantean descent through the circles of Hell and the infernal encounter, inspired him to create a narrative where Marlow’s journey down the Congo from the Company station, the Central Station and the Inner station, leads to the final diabolic encounter with Kurtz. At the Inner Station, the surface journey transforms into an interior one. Marlow’s descent into the unconscious is what Steve Ressler terms as a “journey within-in” in his work *Joseph Conrad: Consciousness and Integrity* (15-16).

<sup>5</sup> Colonialist journey metaphors include images of bringing light and civilization to the dark, barbaric places in the world, of journeying into unknown territories that were difficult to describe, of imposing order where there had been chaos and confusion, of educating natives who were ignorant and backward and positing the white man as a racial superior.

migrancy, has led to a reconfiguration of the world (295). By drawing our attention to the overlapping and intertwining produced as a result of colonial inversion of narratives, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, that emphasize a "voyage in" to the Third-World's interior in name of colonization, Said's re-appropriation of the journey motif and his reversal of its direction suggest the ways in which exiled intellectuals, like Rushdie, write back to the centre by migrating across a liminal space separating the First and Third Worlds:

*The voyage in, then, constitutes an especially interesting variety of hybrid cultural work.... No longer does history run unilaterally, as Hegel believed, from east to west, or from south to north, becoming more sophisticated and developed, less primitive and backward as it goes. Instead, the weapons of criticism have become part of the historical legacy of empire, in which the separations and exclusions of 'divide and rule' are erased and surprising new configurations spring up. (295)*

It is in this spirit of Said's "voyage in" that *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* opposes the Eurocentrism of master discourses, as Rushdie re-imagines and reworks the colonial motif of journey that figures in *Heart of Darkness*. The conventional spatial co-ordinates of colonial narratives from the centre to the periphery are reconfigured into a migrant quest from the periphery to the centre. Unlike Marlow's quest, which takes him into the depths of the allegedly "uncivilised" world, with the purpose of bringing light to darkness and imposing order on chaos, Rushdie's protagonists discover that chaos is an inherent part of the migrant experience in their journey from India to England, the United States and Mexico. They discover that "the imaginary of spatial distance – to live somehow beyond the border of our times – throws into relief the temporal, social differences that interrupt (the) collusive sense of cultural contemporaneity"(Bhabha, *Location* 4). While crossing borders the three protagonists, bear a strong likeness to the "three kings of Disorient" (GBF 194). The narrator plays on the pun of the magi to show that "disorientation is a loss of the East". He tells the reader: "Ask any navigator: the east is what you sail by. Lose the east and you lose your bearings, your certainties, your knowledge of what is and what may be, perhaps even your

life” (GBF 193). In journeying from the periphery to the centre, Rai’s narration is replete with an accumulation of paradoxes. The chaotic accumulation of verbiage shows a world where the migrant discovers fissures and cracks.

*The maps are wrong. Frontiers snake across disputed territory, bending and cracking. A road no longer goes where it went yesterday... Well known books acquire different endings. Color bursts out of black-and-white movies ... Free the press! Ban nosy journalists! (GBF 387-8)*

The semantic dissociations in the subject and the predicate as in “East is West! Up is down! Yes is No! In is Out! Lies are Truth! Hate is Love! Two and two makes five!” highlight the chaotic trajectory of the migrant journey (GBF 387). The homoioteleuton placing of the same final syllables and words in “The novel is dead! Honor is dead! God is dead!” lay stress on the chaotic milieu of the interstitial space (GBF 387). This is in keeping with classical epic conventions, as Rushdie begins the action of his novel in *medias res* or in the midst of things. But he deflates the classical codes of decorum and high style in the epic, by deviating to the use of Rabelaisian low style. He resorts to the grotesque in an attempt to deviate from preconceived standards of harmonious proportion. Unlike the Dantean descent to the Inferno, which shows the depths of hell, the Rushdiean “journey to the centre of the earth” leads to a transitory passage “on Pleasure Island” (GBF 410). In this carnivalesque space, all ranks and walks of life are dissolved in contradiction, excess, and laughter. Strange hybrid forms emerge like vampire lesbians from Sodom, guitarists from Mars, believers of the divine mother, and spacegods from silver spaceships. Rushdie shows how dissimilar entities are combined and exist in complement with each other. This hybrid carnivalesque space teams in a melange of genders, classes, religions and ethnicities. The collage like assembling of isolexisms and compound forms in his elaboration of “penis-ironers, testicle-boilers, shit-eaters, penis-boilers, testicle-eaters” highlight the hybrid nature of the interstitial space where the quest for identity is continually contested (GBF 414).

In *Heart of Darkness*, while developing the infernal scene, *Marlow* focuses upon the extreme human distortion and physical dislocation of the sufferers. The appalling nightmare resembles a scene of torture. Dying blacks are described as “bundles of acute angles (who) sat with their legs drawn up,” and “scattered in every pose of contorted collapse”. The sight, *Marlow* judges, is akin to “some picture of a massacre or a pestilence”(25). The Conradian landscape of pain boldly recreates Dante’s example in the *Inferno* and is cast in a language of hyperbole traditionally associated with epic poetry. “Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair (24). *Rushdie* also portrays classical literary pictures of “massacre” and “pestilence,” but in a different light. He draws on Bakhtin’s notion of carnival that makes the grotesque body the centre about which the political dimensions of space are reconfigured. For Bakhtin, the grotesque body “... is always unfinished, outgrows itself, (and) transgresses its own limits.... It is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements” (26-7). This notion of transformative liminal space, figured by the contradictory and perpetually metamorphosing body is evident in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. The *Rushdiean* carnivalesque space is alive with bestial wildness provoked by the “quakershaker” songs of *Ormus Cama*:

*There is a loud howling as of wolves...and dionysiac scenes. The fans possessed by the music, tear at their garments, at one another, at the air. Young women’s arms snake upwards, entwined, their hands moving like wings... there is much snuffling and slavering and many porcine grunts. When the crowd roars it is like a lion and beneath the roar there is sometimes heard a hissing, as of serpents. (GBF 430)*

By using animal metaphors to describe the crowd’s grotesque reactions, *Rushdie’s* hybridity refutes the idea of anything being “pure” or “essential” and stresses on the notion of heterogeneity and difference. “It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the



Pure” (IH 394). In this carnivalesque space, the space of liminality serves to consecrate inventive freedom and permit the combination of a variety of different elements, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted (Bakhtin 34). Rushdie implicitly suggests that music lies outside the spheres of normal reason, by enumerating a list of opposing pairs. The departure from rationalism to mysticism is conveyed by the fact that he uses each poetic pair to show the mingling of varied elements in the hybrid space.

*Where reason and light meet madness and darkness, where science meets art and peace meets battle: where the adult meets the child, where life faces death and scorns it, make your music there. (GBF 431)*

By describing music as a grandiloquent development of new ideas, created by the intermingling of cultures, Rushdie conveys the hybrid and transnational quality of Ormus’ music. He describes the hybrid tones in the tracks:

*The sexiness of the Cuban horns, the mind-bending patterns of the Brazilian drums, the Chilean woodwinds moaning like the winds of oppression, the African male voice choruses like trees swaying in freedom’s breeze, the grand old ladies of Algerian music with their yearning squawks and ululations the holy passion of the Pakistani qawwals. (GBF 416).*

By intermingling strains of different musical genres, Rushdie brings forth the idea that rock and roll has the capacity of transcending cultures and frontiers. Bakhtin describes the carnivalesque as something that is created when the themes of the carnival twist, mutate, and invert standard themes of societal makeup. The private and the universal are blended in contradictory unity (23). This is obvious in the songs sung by the “Ormus-Vina VTO” music group. The narrator gives a photographic view of the global reception of VTO’s peace ballads and anti-war messages in search of universal peace. “Americans buy the Ballads by the wagonload, but the album’s anti-war message causes a few subterranean rumbles” (GBF 419). And on the other side, “Vina continues to reveal everything to everyone all the time. The

more intimate the detail the surer it is to see the light of day” (GBF 423). Vina’s decision to live her private life in public is characteristic of the carnivalesque environment, where private and universal are blended in contradictory unity.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow discovers that “the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel, but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out as a glow brings out a haze” (8). This view from Conrad suggesting that the path to meaning is through the consideration of both the inside and the outside architecture of a story, has been welded and recast as “double exposures” in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, where the photographer-narrator focuses on multiple illusions in his narration, caused by distorted vision (492, 561). Rushdie explains in *Imaginary Homelands* that migrant writers perceive the world through a “double perspective” as they occupy a perpetual position of “in-betweenness,” being insiders and outsiders unable to exist comfortably in both cultures (19). Ormus Cama’s stereoscopic vision results in his viewing of two different incompatible versions of the world with distorted facts and fictions. In this chaotic metafictional universe, reality, myth and fiction intertwine in narrative, and the alert reader has the task of distinguishing between the historical real, the fictional real, and the hyper-real. Not only does the self-reflexive text emphasise the artifice of storytelling, suggested by the fact that Rai, tells the story in order to reveal the truth of Vina’s ascent to the status of myth, it also transgresses literary conventions to cast doubt on its own reliability and produce a certain hesitation in the implied reader. The reader is first confronted with the narrator’s blatant claim that “the genius of Ormus Cama did not emerge in response to, or imitation of, America” and that rock and roll originated in India (GBF 103). He further adds the audacious statement “that his early music, the music he heard in his head during the unsinging childhood years, was not of the West, except in the sense that the West was in Bombay from the beginning, impure old Bombay, where West, East, North and South had always been scrambled, like codes, like eggs (GBF 103). Along with this absurd claim of

the existence of the West in Bombay, the narrator brings forth the idea that this Westernness existed in a confused and scrambled state of affairs. Certain “known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error” (Hutcheon 114). Rushdie’s reangled version of history refers to “the freak double killing of President Bobby Kennedy and...ex-president Jack...” (GBF 247). The historical misconfiguration extends to “the names of the would-be assassins, Oswald, whose rifle jammed, and Steel...cameraman called Zapruder...” (GBF 202).<sup>6</sup> In Rushdie’s reordered universe, The Rolling Stones and Roy Orbison fade into insignificance with “John Lennon singing ‘Satisfaction,’ and the Kinks’ ‘Pretty Woman’” (GBF 289). By altering and revising the “historical real,” Rushdie’s hybridity favours the notion of intermingling and transculturation. The text contains both contradictions and coincidences that force readers to question the reality of the universe, the “historical real” created by Rushdie. There is no “real,” as everything that exists is created within another reality, a “hyper-reality” where “all we have now are simulations of reality, which aren’t any more or less ‘real’ than the reality they simulate” (Baudrillard 30). The Rushdiean carnivalesque space celebrates “hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs” (IH 394). By borrowing from various sources, juxtaposing the real, the fanatastic and the hyperreal, Rushdie blurs the boundary between the fictional real, the historical real, and the hyperreal to create a voice outside existing Eurocentric and Indian master narratives, where Third World history is shaped and considered keeping Europe as subject.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lee Harvey Oswald was indeed the convicted assassin, but Ronald Steel is a controversial writer, who believed that Robert Kennedy was the assassin, and Abraham Zapruder was the man who happened to catch the incident on film.

<sup>7</sup> In her study *Salman Rushdie’s Postcolonial Metaphors*, Sanga states that “The hybridity created by mixing, parodying, and borrowing is done at times in such a subversive manner, that it becomes a powerful form of resistance not only to Western epistemology but to the subcontinent’s dominant ideologies as well” (77).

Unlike the Dantean descent in the *Inferno* leading to divine justice and the Conradian quest uncovering human injustice, the Rushdiean descent narrative leads to the unfolding of a new metamorphic identity. Ormus and Vina metamorphose into contemporary mythic gods. It is interesting to consider Barthes' argument that "myth is not defined by the object of the message, but the way in which it utters this message," and that myth as a double-structure contains within it "a perpetual alibi," as "its signifier has two sides for it always to have an 'elsewhere' at its disposal" (109). Barthes' theory contends that mass culture contributes to the construction of modern myth, and that the "double-structure of myth" allows society to propagate its ideological meanings whilst at the same moment allowing for a denial of this procedure (123). Viewed in this light, Rai's photographic view of celebrity and the events of rock and roll may be considered as present-day realities into which different meanings can be interpreted. Rai points out that "A photograph can create the meaning of an event. Sometimes even when it's fake" (GBF 513). The narrator's eye-blink choice of photos, cancels or silences the real by freezing it and distorting it. After Vina's death, Rai focuses on the rising cult of impersonations of Vina in various forms: rappers, drag queens, transsexuals, hookers, cabaret dancers, and even Star Trek Vinas. He remarks that "by then, Vina was already passing into myth, becoming a vessel into which any moron could pour his stupidities, or let's say a mirror of the culture, and we can understand the nature of this culture if we say that it found its truest mirror in a corpse" (GBF 4). Here we find the relegation of high culture to the background and the replacing of "moronic" low culture. Rai's narrative judges Western music as "trash" from America and poses the question: "Why raise low culture so high, and glorify what is base? Why defend impurity that vice, as if it were a virtue?" (GBF 103). Rushdie poses the idea that rock and roll is an ever-present undercurrent in human affairs, present before and after its adoption by humanity. But at the same time he juxtaposes the idea that it is unsuitable to grand or profound expressions, reiterating the postmodern idea of a rejection of

the distinction between “high” and “low” or popular culture, “both in choice of materials used to produce art and in methods of displaying, distributing, and consuming art” (Jameson 3).

The metamorphosis of Vina’s image into ever-changing forms may be compared to Pythagoras’ concept of *metempsychosis* in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, in which souls never retain their own appearance permanently, but revel in their “ever-inventive nature” which “continually produce one shape from another” (Ovid XV 251-2). The narrator throws a final sardonic eye on Vina and Ormus, portrayed as larger than life contemporary mythic God-figures in his homodiegetic narrative, by suggesting that it is mandatory for the earth to be rid of them. He is the only protagonist who resists metamorphic change by asserting that he is not a “shallow protean, forever shifting shape” (GBF 633-4). But he accepts the migrant need to “mutate into another final form, a form beyond metamorphosis” (GBF 508). After experiencing “*kenosis*”, an emptying which demanded “new cleanliness, and a new cycle of time,” Rai looks forward like traditional *katabatic* descent heroes towards “*Plerosis*, the filling of time with new beginnings, ... characterised by a time of superabundant power, of wild, fruitful excess” (GBF 123).<sup>8</sup> In classical *katabasis*, the descent to the underworld reveals a labyrinth, where “Virgil emphasises the difficulty not of entering, but of leaving the labyrinth” (Clark 148). In the Rushdiean labyrinth, Rai’s challenge lies in choosing between the old and the new culture. In the introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha talks of “the borderline work of culture,” as one that “demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present,” and of one that “creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation.” “Such art,” he suggests, “renews the past,

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<sup>8</sup> *Kenosis* is a Greek term taken from Phil. 2:7, where Christ is spoken of as having “emptied himself” (Christ made himself nothing) and taken human form. Kenotic theology elaborates two basic movements in rituals: *Kenosis* or rituals of emptying and *Plerosis* or rituals of filling. Rituals of *Kenosis* portray the evacuating of the meaning of time, as it approaches the end of a cycle. The wearing down of time at this moment produces noxious and defiling effects, and thus the appropriate response is an ascetic form of behavior accompanied with austerities. In the rituals of *Plerosis*, during the filling of time or the beginning again of the new time, dramas of excess and overabundance of power are portrayed in the rituals. Rushdie borrows on this notion of emptying and filling to show the migrant’s “interstitial” experience.

refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (7). Rai’s oscillation between the two cultures results in a newness caused by the intermingling of two different cultures, which offsets what Bhabha calls a “sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* - here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth” (*Location* 1). Like classical backward-looking descent heroes, Rai casts a backward nostalgic look at his homeland India and bids farewell.

*India, my terra infirma, my maelstrom, my cornucopia, my crowd. India, my too-muchness, my everything at once, my Hug-me, my fable, my mother, my father and my first great truth.... India, fount of my imagination, source of my savagery, breaker of my heart. Goodbye. (GBF 273)*

Rai’s nostalgia for the homeland is evident in his view of “home as another lost jewel” (GBF 543). In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie’s reprise of J.P Hartley’s argument, “The past is a country from which we have all emigrated, its loss is part of our common humanity,” confirms that “exiles or emigrants or expatriates,” are “haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back” and “create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (10).

Rushdie’s alter-ego narrator tries to capture what is lost through a process of remembering and writing, imposing order on chaotic memory. Rai’s self-reflexive narrative claims to impose order and “set the record straight, telling the story of the photograph over and over again” (GBF 515). But he echoes Jean-François Lyotard’s view of incredulity in the postmodern rendering of metanarratives (26). Rai labels them as “Impossible stories, ... (which) change our lives, and our minds, as often as the authorised versions, the stories we are expected to trust, upon which we are asked, or told, to build our judgments, our lives” (GBF 199). Rushdie insists that his fiction champions “doubts, uncertainties (as) it dissents from the end of debate, of dispute, of dissent (IH 396). In defending his right to defend all issues

endlessly, to postpone closure indefinitely, to oppose certainties of all kinds whether they originate in the East or the West, Rushdie positions himself as a writer in a postmodern world where nothing can be asserted with assurance (IH 404-5). This refusal to countenance any of the grand narratives that have governed Eastern or Western civilization is precisely the stance that Lyotard identifies as central to the postmodern condition. He argues that stability and order are maintained in modern societies through the means of “grand narratives” or “master narratives,” which are stories a culture tells itself about its practices and beliefs. For Lyotard, the path to navigating the unrepresentable, or what he calls “the postmodern sublime”, is found in mini-narratives, small strategies employed as needed in the context of the moment and abandoned once they are no longer useful, always aware of their constructed nature (26). The *Ground Beneath Her Feet* is replete with the narrator’s loss of faith in master narratives of history and media, and stresses on the need to organise life around mini-narratives, a variety of more local and subcultural myths and stories. The narrator’s lamenting tone proclaiming the loss of meaning in the world reveals that there is, indeed, no objective reality, thus leaving the individual to construct his own meaning. In place of these master narratives, Rai introduces chaotic memory as the only basis of truth for the individual. Considering the self-contradictory nature of postmodern theory, which asserts the need for a metanarrative with precise values and premises (à la Habermas), and the problematizing of both the process and product of such a procedure (à la Lyotard), Rushdie’s postmodernist narrative plays on these two contradictory discourses – bearing the marks of a metanarrative and at the same time voicing an incredulity to master and metanarrative discourses (Hutcheon 229). The narrative throws the individual human subject into chaos and flux and interrogates the notion of consensus, where “whatever narratives or systems that once allowed us to think we could unproblematically and universally define public agreement have now been questioned by the acknowledgment of differences - in theory and in artistic practice” (Hutcheon 7). Unlike the

modernist dissension of art and life, human imagination versus chaos and disorder, Rushdie's postmodernist narrative still installs that order, but then uses it to deconstruct our everyday processes of viewing chaos, of imparting or assigning new meaning.

By re-configuring the classical modes of harmony and order into a fictional universe of postmodern disorder, Rushdie's master trope of uncertainty, highlights the ruptures and fissures in the in-between space of imagination. Looking in from the outside, through a migrant's double vision, he re-imagines chaos and order in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* through a perspective that is created by both remembered, empirical realities and imagined invented worlds.

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