

“Death was not the end”: resentment, history and narrative structure in Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown*

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Salman Rushdie’s 2005 novel *Shalimar the Clown* adroitly offsets the more contemporary history of the unrest in Kashmir against Holocaust history, and weaves the two together to highlight their interconnection. In inscribing both these historical narratives, the pattern that emerges from Rushdie’s signature stylistic excess is repetition: not merely of words and phrases and expressions but of stages in the plot. It appears as if the plot is in a state of eternal regression, where events are mirrored by subsequent events and where causality creates a cyclical narrative without any hope for closure. This lack of closure becomes significant when the novel is read as a vigilante narrative, in which the leitmotif of revenge, fuelled by dissatisfaction with state-sanctioned redressal, breaks down the dividing line between the personal and the political. Shalimar’s personal resentment launches his quest of Max Ophuls, the Resistance hero who seduces his wife Boonyi. However, Shalimar’s quest is magnified into his involvement with the larger political project of the insurgents demanding independent Kashmir. Again, Shalimar’s successful “hunting” of Ophuls posits him as a quarry for Max and Boonyi’s daughter India/Kashmira, who seeks to avenge her father’s death. In both cases, redemptive vigilante action is an externalization of a long-held resentment, and seeks closure through addressing the cause of this resentment. Quest for closure is the structuring principle of vigilante narratives as such, but the narrative structure of the novel complicates this trajectory through its concatenation of repetitive events and its perpetual deferral of the promised *jouissance* of revenge. In his reflections on the experience of the Holocaust, Jean Amery defines resentment as a “logically inconsistent condition”, claiming that the “the time-sense of the person trapped in resentment is twisted around, dis-ordered, if you wish, for it desires two impossible things: regression into the past and nullification of what happened” (1980:68).¹ This paper argues that the narrative

¹ Jean Amery (1912-1978) was an Austrian philosopher and essayist, who joined the Resistance movement in Belgium in 1938. Captured by the Nazis in 1943, he survived several years in the concentration camps. His best-

structure of *Shalimar the Clown* encodes this “dis-ordered” temporality, driven as it is by personal and political resentment. Vigilante justice would, for Shalimar and Kashmira, not only undo the wrongs that their resentments stem from, but recreate a pristine past and thus rewrite history. To this end, the cyclicity of the narrative endlessly reenacts the past, which is present not only as a palimpsest but as a point in history to which narrative must always return. This cyclical movement is an ironic negation of narrative/emotional closure that revenge promises to give, and a postmodernist reassessment of the function of history. In the novel, the temporality of resentment that defies closure negates not only the structure of revenge narratives but the linearity of historiography, since history is reimagined as constructed and multivalent.

Harboring resentment, writing revenge

The narrative of *Shalimar the Clown* continually blurs the dividing line between the personal and the political. The eponymous Shalimar merges his hunt for Maximillian Ophuls— the American ambassador to India in the late sixties who had seduced and carried off his wife Boonyi— with the larger project of the liberation of Kashmir, to which end he becomes an initiate in pan-Islamic insurgent groups. Boonyi, obese, disillusioned and abandoned by the ambassador, returns to Kashmir only to be first treated as a *mritak* (living dead) by her family, and later killed by Shalimar. The successful climax of Shalimar’s quest is staged in Los Angeles where Max’s assassination sets India/Kashmira on the trail of Shalimar. Dissatisfied with the outcome of Shalimar’s trial (who is sentenced to serve time in a maximum-security prison in San Quentin, which he eventually escapes from), India inscribes her own vigilante narrative, which ends inconclusively, as does the novel. This arc of the narrative is strategically interrupted by near-cinematic flashbacks to the idyllic Kashmir that serves as the backdrop of Shalimar and Boonyi’s youthful romance, an idyll that darkens and degenerates as Indo-Pak hostilities threaten to rip it apart. We also witness the destruction of *kashmiriyat*, the uniquely Kashmiri ideal of tolerance

known writings primarily consist of personal and philosophical reflections on experiences at the concentration camps, in particular on his torture by the SS army.

and peaceful coexistence of different religious faiths, which Boonyi and Shalimar's union is symbolic of. Parallel flashbacks take us back to Max Ophuls's early days in Nazi-occupied Strasbourg. Max's flamboyant heroism in the French resistance — which gives him a quasi-mythical stature — both anticipates and serves as an interesting counterpoint to Shalimar's guerilla tactics. Textual parallels and mirroring strategies similar to this connect temporally and spatially disconnected parts of the novel, leaving the reader with the impression of listening to a twice-told tale. Max's daughter India's desire to seek justice for her father's death appears to be a reenactment of Max's own wish to avenge his parents' death in a Nazi concentration camp, which he did by joining the French Resistance Movement. Again, the blurred line between Max's and Shalimar's supposedly different kinds of insurgency reappears when India both physically and mentally arms herself for her private guerilla warfare against her father's killer: “After a day of archery or boxing or martial arts, or a trip out of town to Saltzman's shooting range, she came home and retired wordlessly to her private wing [...] she no longer lived in America. She lived in a combat zone” (Rushdie 2006: 382). Aside from these textual strategies, there are actual moments of *déjà vu* in the narrative. Shalimar's first and innocuous encounter with India negates the moment of Boonyi's death as he reincarnates the mother in the daughter:

When he saw her, when those green eyes speared him, he began to tremble [...] she's alive. He didn't know what he wanted. She was living in America now and by some miracle she was twenty-four years old again, mocking him with her emerald eyes, she was the same and not the same, but she was alive again. (Rushdie 2006: 323)

Resurrection is a leitmotif that halts the expected linear movement of the narrative and confounds the chronology. For Shalimar, the desire for revenge is derailed by the simultaneous negation of an earlier violent act of vengeance (Boonyi's murder) and a less clearly articulated wish to actually have her back in the moment of his encountering India. When India finally learns that Shalimar had killed both her parents, she underscores the futility of his violence by emphasizing to him that both her parents are resurrected in her, an idea that she keeps returning to in her incessant letters to Shalimar as he bides his time in the death row in San Quentin: “You

wanted to wipe them out but you failed, you killed nobody. Here I stand. I am my mother and my father I am Maximillain Ophuls and Boonyi Kaul. They are not dead not gone not forgotten” (Rushdie 2006:379). The reincarnation of Max and Boonyi is not only India's genetic legacy but her textual performance; her written words to Shalimar are resonant with an awareness of the inherent textuality of her revenge:

I am your Black Scherazade, she wrote. I will write to you without missing a day without missing a night not to save my life but to take yours to wind around you the poisonous snakes of my words until their fangs stab your neck [...] I will write to you and my words will haunt your dreams. Every night I will tell the story of your death". (Rushdie 2006: 374)

The Scherazade allusion once again turns our attention not only to the fact that agency resides with the teller of the tale, but also to the dis-ordering of the temporal structure where death is not the end: within this framework of textuality death could be staged countless times. The destabilization of time is achieved through the textualization of revenge, a deliberate refusal to move towards any kind of closure. The cyclical death-resurrection-death of Shalimar is also a way for India to keep alive her resentment. This connection between the disruption of *normal* chronology and the perpetuation of resentment brings the analysis back to Jean Amery.

At the Mind's Limits is a document of Holocaust survival: its meditations span the actual time that Amery spent in Auschwitz and the aftermath of his "survival." In it, Amery reflects on the precariousness not only of intellect but of humanity, and subverts our understanding of “normal” human responses. In theorizing the transformative power of victimization, Amery underscores the paradoxical nature of resentment, which “demands that the irreversible be turned around, that the event be undone” (1986: 68). Thus, resentment disrupts the progression of a narrative towards future. But if the past is restored to its pristine wholeness, resentment loses its *raison d'être*, while turning away from the future guarantees a lack of closure. This cyclical visualization of resentment refutes the common wisdom of “time as a healer”, which Amery, given his situation, dismisses as “anti-moral”. Challenging Nietzsche's vision in *Genealogy of Morals* of the resentful man whose soul is “squinted” and who is by implication a lesser or

damaged being in comparison with one who can forgive, Amery labels forgiveness as “immoral” too:

Whoever lazily and cheaply forgives, subjugates himself to the social and biological time-sense which is also called the ‘natural’ one. Natural consciousness of time actually is rooted in the physiological process of wound-healing and became part of the social conception of reality. But precisely for this reason it is not only extramoral, but also *antimoral* in character. (1986: 72)

According to Amery, the perpetuation of resentment and the consequent refusal of natural time are choices that the victim makes, and this choice is essentially moral, though anti-biological, anti-real and even anti-social:

The moral power to resist contains the protest, the revolt against reality, which is rational only as long as it is moral. The moral person demands annulment of time— in the particular case under question, by nailing the criminal to his deed. (1986:72)

One way to accomplish this inverted time-sense, this "moral" turning back of the clock, is by challenging the linearity of time in a fictional narrative. Postmodern narratives have been known to interrogate the linear nature of time. The narration in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* expresses this skepticism about the objectivity of measurable time. In an essay titled “The Brief History of Postmodern Plot,” Catherine Burgass points out how, in *Midnight's Children*, this is done through the use of metafictional passages which balance “time out of narrative time” with the roughly chronological telling of Saleem's story (2005: 403). Any such metafictional commentary on the relative nature of time is absent in *Shalimar the Clown*. Instead, the manipulation of time in the novel is geared towards the interconnectedness of the lives or stories of the characters, and by extension, towards the larger theme of resentment and revenge. When compared with *Midnight's Children*, the concept of time in *Shalimar the Clown* seems to be more moral than philosophical, and therefore closer to Amery's theorization of the time-sense associated with resentment. The prototypical victim in the scheme of the novel is Shalimar, whose personal resentment against Max is magnified into his involvement with the Jammu Kashmir Liberation

Front, and through the cyclical logic of the narrative, is redirected towards Max as the narrative progresses. However, the same cyclical narrative logic transforms Shalimar into an assassin and the wrongdoer that India, who is now the victim, needs to hunt down. As demonstrated earlier, India's retaliation clearly fixes Shalimar in an inescapable cycle; to use Amery's words, she “nails the criminal to his deed”. Similarly, larger political projects cannot distract Shalimar from the single-mindedness of his pursuit of Max, though the inexorable logic of cyclicity ensures the undoing of his vigilante justice. Justice commensurate to the violent murders of her parents is also what India seeks:

She wanted avenging angels, angels of death and damnation, to come to her aid. Blood called out for blood and she wanted the ancient Furies to descend shrieking from the sky and give her unquiet father's spirit peace. She didn't know what she wanted. She was full of thoughts of death. (Rushdie 2006: 331)

And yet, India feels uncertain of death as a fitting retaliation, and opts instead for reminding him of the eternal negation of the closure he has sought.

Public “history” and private stories

The resentment that fuels the regressive narrative of *Shalimar the Clown*, however, is entirely personal, and its connection to the unfolding of the historical narrative in the novel uncovers a reassessment of the nature of history itself. The postmodernist skepticism towards the linearity — or indeed the viability — of officially recorded history finds expression in the breakdown of the distinction between the personal and the political. The fact the sections of the novel are named after each of the main characters — India, Shalimar the Clown, Max and Boonyi — is telling: beyond a simplistic assessment of the work as a “novel of character”, this pushes the reader to recognize the primacy of the characters in the novel. The arc of the historical narrative in *Shalimar the Clown* is shaped by the intensely personal investment of the characters in the events around them, and the cyclicity of resentment that defines their time-sense. Thus, the novel is an ironic and somewhat flippant restatement of the cliché of history repeating itself. The agency imputed to history in this commonplace is wrested away from it in the novel, and handed

to individuals who inscribe history by imposing their own “dis-ordered temporality” on it. Agency no doubt becomes a contested term in this context. Granted that the agency of individuals arrested in a time-sense that Amery describes as “twisted around” is ultimately questionable, but the characters in *Shalimar the Clown* become agential in challenging the view of history as being conclusive or even reliable in any way. The relative agentiality of the characters in the novel is functional in highlighting the inherent textuality of history and thereby undercutting its autonomy. This redefinition of history takes place in reimagining of linear time in the personal narratives that are foregrounded in the novel.

In *Chronoschisms* (1997), a consideration of the interconnection of time, narrative and postmodernism, Ursula K. Heise theorizes the nexus between the concepts of time and history in postmodern texts. The attempt to complicate linear time that had begun in modernist narratives undergoes a more radical shift in the postmodernist project. Not only is there further fragmentation of the perceived linearity of time, but, as Heise argues with reference to Lyotard’s claim about the demise of the “grand narrative” of history, postmodernism turns its attention on the multiplicity of *histories* that replace this overarching, monolithic narrative. Heise argues that:

if the interest in the large-scale, universal historical development has diminished in the last thirty years, interest in histories understood as more local and concrete narratives has proliferated. The receding importance of those stories that had formed the backbone of Western historical self-awareness has opened the way for the articulation of other stories that have been repressed, or had seemed too marginal that had been repressed, or had seemed too marginal or too deviant to find an audience before. (1997:16)

Heise’s formulation challenges the celebrated ahistoricity of postmodernism. If writing counter-histories that challenge the progressivist monolith of the “grand narrative” or uncovering marginalized histories constitute important elements in postmodernism, history’s centrality to the postmodernist project is undeniable. However, postmodernist texts not only recuperate multiple, counter-hegemonic histories, but also consider history as a textual artifact. In other words, they expose how history gets constructed through co-opting “concrete” and “local” narratives, or how, oftentimes, these “concrete” or “local” narratives become the starting point for the construction of the overarching narrative in which they later become subsumed. Postmodern fiction has

consistently worked to highlight this textuality of history by exposing its process of construction, and *Shalimar the Clown* is no exception. In it, larger historical processes — the upheavals in Kashmir and Strasbourg — and their inconclusive outcomes are shown to be magnifications of the personal conflicts of the characters.

A major part of Salman Rushdie's oeuvre demonstrates a preoccupation with history and the means of challenging its received notion. In his 1995 novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the perceived linearity of history is interrogated by reimagining history as a palimpsest. In this richly layered vision of history, narratives as seemingly disparate as that of the Nasrid dynasty of fifteenth-century Spain not only coexists with but are connected to contemporary events like the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and the Mumbai riots that followed it. Rushdie also uses the narrative to construct an alternative feminist historiography that clearly challenges the patriarchal narratives of the family and the nation. In *Fury* (2001), the fluid and palimpsestic nature of history is incarnated in the time-hopping puppet Little Brain, who interrogates intellectuals and philosophers across centuries. Little Brain's effortless traversing in time and space could, on the one hand, emblemize the ahistoricity associated with postmodernism; on the other, it may serve to highlight the points of interconnection among the apparently scattered moments in history. But Rushdie's most memorable and persuasive interrogation of a conventional understanding of history is staged in *Midnight's Children* (1981), a metafictional account of the evolution of postcolonial India. Saleem Sinai, the narrator in *Midnight's Children*, born at the exact moment of India's independence, sees himself as "mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country" (Rushdie 2006:3). The mention of handcuffs and chain belies the agency implicit in this metonymic substitution, which posits Saleem not as a victim of history but as its scribe. The famously meandering, faltering, unreliable narration destabilizes the line between public and private histories and deconstructs the notion of history as linear, monolithic and infallibly factual.

Much critical attention has been focused on both the style and the significance of *Midnight's Children*. Linda Hutcheon includes the novel in a category that she terms "postmodern "historiographic metafiction"—novels that are intensely self-reflexive but that also

both re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge” (2005:276). Hutcheon’s formulation of this particular genre emphasizes an *awareness* of the process of writing history (as fiction), and she also highlights the questions that are raised by the interchangeability of the categories of history and fiction. By its inclusion in this category, Hutcheon underscores the ability of the novel to interrogate the ontological nature of history. In a reading of the novel titled ‘*Midnight’s Children, History and Complexity: Reading Rushdie in the Context of the Cold War*’, M. Keith Booker critiques Hutcheon’s inclusion of the novel with other Western postmodern texts. For Brooks, Hutcheon’s “inattention to cultural and historical diversity is particularly problematic,” and he questions Hutcheon’s inability to situate Rushdie’s work in a distinctly non-Western/postcolonial tradition (1999: 296). In an in-depth analysis of *Midnight Children* that follows this critique, Brooks assesses whether the novel better fits the category “postcolonial” or “postmodern”, and thereby considers the implication of its “subversive” historiography. While most of this analysis falls outside the scope of this paper, it may be profitable to ask a similar question of *Shalimar the Clown*. In what sense could *Shalimar the Clown* be considered a postcolonial text? To claim that the use of non-linear time or unconventional historiography is an implicitly postcolonial move to challenge Eurocentric textual strategies would be simplistic. What, precisely, does the treatment of time and history challenge, and in what sense could this subversion be read as “postcolonial”? The overarching narrative that *Shalimar the Clown* challenges is the narrative of the postcolonial nation that tends to subsume multiple histories in its epic sweep, thereby replicating the hegemony of imperial discourse. This is particularly true of the part of the novel that focuses on Kashmir; the narrative of the novel effectively juxtaposes the local with the national, in order to demonstrate the coercive potential of the national historical narrative to override and obliterate the local. Also, the novel challenges the hegemonic structure of the national history by highlighting its essential *constructedness* through the fact that public history is written, controlled and driven by private stories, stories that inscribe their cyclicity on historical processes.

Time after time: repetitions and narrative structure in *Shalimar the Clown*

One of the most predictable responses from the readers of *Shalimar the Clown* is a sense of *déjà vu*. The narrative moves through a series of crises, but each new crisis, seemingly unconnected to the previous one, looks back to it in a manner that could only be read as a deliberate reconstruction of what happened before. Shalimar's transformation from a simple, pleasure-loving village boy to a cold-blooded, calculating assassin in quest of the wrongdoer is a slow but focused passage that constitutes one of the main turning points in the narrative. After his desertion by Boonyi, the change in Shalimar's personality is sensed by the Pachigamis around him, both family and friends:

But Shalimar the clown withdrew into himself, barely speaking for days at a time except during rehearsals in the practice glade. Everyone in the acting group noticed that his style of performance had changed. He was as dynamically physical a comedian as ever, but there was a new ferocity in him that could easily frighten people instead of making them laugh. (Rushdie 2006: 231)

India's withdrawal from her social circle and her single-minded obsession with revenge is very similar to Shalimar's response to the "injustice" done to him. Her creative impulses, like Shalimar's, are transmuted into a warped energy directed at undoing the calamity of her father's death through revenge:

Then her father dies and she stopped working on the film and sat on the Shaker chair and got up and went out and shot bullets and worked the punchball and tangled with her martial arts teacher and fucked strangers once each and drew blood and came home to shower and what she kept thinking was where are the angels, where were they when he needed them, the truth being that weren't any, no winged marvels keeping watch over the City of Angels. No guardian spirits to save her father. Where were the goddamned angels when he died. (Rushdie 2006: 333-334)

This self-imposed isolation, this energy turned inwards before being focused on the quarry, this general sense of directionlessness preceding an all-encompassing obsession with revenge render Shalimar and India virtually indistinguishable, despite the specificity of their situations and the disparate spaces and time-frames that they inhabit. In the plot, their stories are both echoed and

sutured by that of the man who connects their destinies, who walks into his house in Nazi-occupied Strasbourg to find evidence of violence that has forever changed the lives of his Jewish parents. Petrified by the situation, the young Max Ophuls tries to obliterate the significance of the evidence lying before him:

He went through the rooms one by one, darkening them, returning them to the night, letting them mourn [...] He found a bottle of cognac that had some been spared. It lay unbroken in a corner next to a chaise between blowing curtains. He pulled out the cork and drank. Time passed. No it did not pass. Time stood still. Beauty passed, love passed, bloody-mindedness and mulishness passed. Time stood still with its hands up. Stubborn bastards faded away. (Rushdie 2006:157)

Personal loss followed by a process of metamorphosis, time “standing till” frozen in a desire for revenge — the repetition of this motif connects separate historical moments in 1930s Strasbourg, 1960s Kashmir and Los Angeles in the twenty-first century. These interconnected scenes not only underscore the tragic elements in the narrative, but also confound the trajectory of the purported vigilante narrative by blurring the boundaries between victims and perpetrators, thus foretelling the impossibility of narrative closure. Ursula K. Heise comments on the tendency of postmodernist texts to:

stand out through the insistent reiteration of identical scenes, presented in almost literally the same words every time. Only slight variations distinguish one description or account from the other, although these gradual alterations of wordings or narrated elements can lead to quite disparate and contradictory versions of what the reader must take to be the same scene or incident. (Heise 2005: 368)

The effect that the recursive narrative in *Shalimar the Clown* has on the reader is similar to Heise’s formulation. Though the scenes in this case are far from identical, they elicit in the reader a sense of a familiar scene being tweaked ever so slightly that the passage of time — which in this case stretches over several decades — becomes the change becomes nearly imperceptible. This constant pulling back to a remembered point in the narrative amounts to a questioning of the unidirectionality of time. Just as the linear nature of time is disrupted and reordered by the cyclical temporal logic of resentment, narrative repetitions in *Shalimar the*

Clown interrupt the “progress” of time, a pattern that also determines the representation of history in the novel.

Reimagining History

Historical discourse enters the narrative of *Shalimar the Clown* through the characters’ attempts to shape the trajectory of their private destinies. Max Ophuls’ involvement with the Resistance had been tentative at best before his parents were captured by the Nazis. This particular turning point in his life transforms him into one of the most flamboyant figures of the French Resistance, whose fabled escape on the celebrated Bugatti² plane is immortalized in Resistance lore. Shalimar’s involvement with terrorist groups seeking the liberation of Kashmir is prompted by personal vendetta: his gradual rise in the ranks of the insurgent group transports him from Kashmir to Afghanistan to the Philippines and finally to the United State of America, progressively closer to his purported victim. Shalimar’s trajectory informs the reader of the pan-Islamic terrorist group’s ideology and activities. India’s acquaintance with the ravaged Kashmir torn asunder by its diverse claimants happens as an outcome of her private “pilgrimage” to find her lost roots. The perception of, involvement in and inscription of both past and contemporary history is intensely personal in *Shalimar the Clown*. And just as the lives of the characters are intertwined, so are the interconnection of seemingly different histories revealed in the narrative. On arriving in war-torn Kashmir as the ambassador of the United States, Max awakens to a feeling of *déjà vu* at the sight of this frontier province:

He had come a long way but perhaps not very far. Could any two places have been more different, he asked himself, could any two places have been more the same? Human nature, the great constant, surely persisted in spite of all surface differences. One snaking frontier had made him what he was, he found himself

² Rushdie refers to Bugatti Racer, the historical aircraft designed by Ettore Bugatti (1881-1947), which was commissioned by the French government and abandoned as an unfinished project during the German occupation. In the novel, Max Ophuls makes a dramatic escape from Strasbourg by flying this aircraft, an episode that earns him the sobriquet of “The Flying Jew.”

thinking. Had he come here, to another such unstable twilight zone, in order to be unmade? (Rushdie 2006:180)

In the light of Max's career-destroying romance with Boonyi that begins in Kashmir, these musings seems premonitory. However, Max's perception of a narrative arc that connects the two distant frontier provinces of Kashmir and Strasbourg comes from an impulse born of personal experience. He discovers and indeed forges a connection between the histories of two spatially and temporally disconnected points, a connection heretofore uninscribed. In imagining this connection, he surrenders to the cyclicity of history, abandoning his erstwhile fame. Similarly, a betrayed and humiliated Shalimar, still in Kashmir with his troupe of performers, attempts to find expression for his personal and political frustrations by metaphorically staging both America's attack on Vietnam and India's occupation of Kashmir:

One day he proposed that the Anarkali play in which the dancing girl was grabbed by the soldiers who had come to take her to be bricked up in her wall might be sharpened if the soldiers came on in American army uniforms and Anarkali donned the flattened straw cone hat of a Vietnamese peasant woman. The American seizure of Anarkali-as-Vietnam would, he argued, immediately be understood as the Indian army's stifling presence in Kashmir, which they were forbidden to depict. (Rushdie 2006: 231)

Shalimar's use of the story of Anarkali³ as a double metaphor is not only a form of artistic subversion of mandated state regulations, but also a multi-layered perception of histories past and present. In his brutalized imagination, three disparate histories of oppression and coercion are conjoined logically, although he eventually dismisses the plan for the performance. Counter-histories such as this are posited against the "official" history of the state of Kashmir, from which violence and bloodshed are painstakingly erased. Readers bear witness to one such erasure when Shalimar's village Pachigam is razed to the ground in a crackdown operation by the Indian army. Not only is the actual physical locus destroyed and its inhabitants killed, but the act of

³ Anarkali was the legendary slave-girl from Lahore who earned the wrath of the Mughal emperor Akbar for her fabled romance with his son Saleem. The legend of Anarkali is a staple in performance of the itinerant players of Pachigam in *Shalimar the Clown*.

destruction itself is erased from the official history of Kashmir. Ironically, the village continues to exist on the map of Kashmir, although the violence that erased it is deliberately suppressed in successive attempts at state-mandated, “clean” historiography, “Third and final attempt: The beautiful village of Pachigam still exists” (Rushdie 2006: 309). This selective amnesia of the state is also confronted by the personal narrative of revenge. When India visits Kashmir to find out more about her mother, she encounters the remains of Pachigam and learns about its destruction, a narrative that becomes interchangeable with the obliterated memory of Boonyi’s murder. Memory, resentment and revenge once more become instrumental in uncovering buried stories and histories. In a reading of the novel, Florian Stadler argues:

By making the Kashmir conflict central to *Shalimar the Clown*, he (Rushdie) reassesses India’s discourse of democracy and pluralism, questions India’s actions on the nation’s periphery and implicitly its unity as a constructed postcolonial nation-state. (2009: 195)

Such myths of stability are exploded by narratives of resentment, which, by their cyclical nature, disallow the possibility of closure both in personal memory and in the “grand narratives” of the nation. Even death and destruction cannot erase stories that need to be brought into light and memories that need to be perpetuated.

The negation of death, either through resurrecting the dead or through inventing alternative modes of justice, is a significant motif in *Shalimar the Clown*. Throughout the novel, which is marked by different kinds of violence, there seems to be a deliberate avoidance of the representation of the act of death, or more specifically of murder. The description of Boonyi’s murder is deliberately cryptic, sounding more like a reenactment of the consummation of Boonyi and Shalimar’s adolescent love: “He moved towards her. He was reading her body. He held it in his hands. Now, she commanded him, Now” (Rushdie 2006: 318). Years later, India hears the actual act reconstructed on her visit to the neighboring village of Pachigam. Similarly, Max’s murder goes unwitnessed: “It was as if the whole street had turned its back on the event” (Rushdie 2006:41). The audience is shut out of the event, as is India, who, even in her shock, can distinguish the body of her father from its essence: “She didn’t open the door. Her father wasn’t there. Just a mess that needed to be cleaned up” (Rushdie 2006: 40). And finally, we are left with

Shalimar and India facing each other in a dark room, with weapons poised at each other. She seems the more purposeful and surefooted of the two, but the outcome, nonetheless, remains uncertain. This reluctance to posit death as some kind of finality in the narrative reads like a deliberate undercutting of authorial control. In his analysis of the works of Nikolai Leskov in "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin emphasizes the importance of death in the art of narration: "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death [...] it is the natural history to which his stories refer back" (Benjamin 1936:7). It is this movement towards the end point of natural history that is denied us in *Shalimar the Clown*. The novel's deliberate disruption of "natural" time-sense could be read as a moral stance that finds an interesting convergence with Rushdie's postmodern affiliations. However, Benjamin argues that the omnipotence of death has been undercut in modern and postmodern narratives, because of the decreasing centrality of death in human experience and the consequent incommunicability of the experience:

It has been observable for a number of centuries how in the general consciousness the thought of death has declined in omnipresence and vividness. Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one [...] In the course of modern times dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. (Benjamin 1936: 6)

That said, Benjamin admits that the essential communicability of a narrative subject's life is implicitly validated by his death, though the experience of death may not be staged as part of the narrative. The deferral of death in *Shalimar the Clown* attests to the postmodernist sensibility that Benjamin refers to. Death in *Shalimar the Clown* is more a communal than an individual experience. Communities live under the shadow of death; but the violence that generates this ambience is by and large a product of personal resentment. Rushdie's refusal to stage death in *Shalimar the Clown* is particularly significant considering the novel is a revenge narrative, where the validation of revenge needs to come from experiencing death. But destabilizing the finality of death also unsettles and continually reinscribes the battle lines in novel, keeping the cyclical time-frame of resentment intact.

Shalimar the Clown is a radical redefinition of the conventional vigilante narrative that substitutes the finality of revenge with the perpetuation of resentment, and thus challenges the myth of closure in history. The novel deconstructs the notion of history as a monolith, contained and recordable within tangible parameters. The shifting, kaleidoscopic perspectives on personal narratives contribute to and are replicated in the production of history in *Shalimar the Clown*. As argued earlier in the article, this reconfiguration of history in the novel could be termed both postmodernist and postcolonial. In his evaluation of *Midnight's Children*, M. Keith Booker emphasizes the irreconcilability of postmodern and postcolonial elements in Rushdie's fiction.⁴ *Shalimar the Clown* successfully brings about this synthesis: while it articulates a postmodernist skepticism about the univalence and unilinearity of history, it also functions as a postcolonial critique of the monolithic discourse of the nation and its imagined history. The novel's narrative consistently highlights the fact that the relation between Shalimar's resentment and how it shapes history remains under-articulated in public discourse:

The murderous rage of Shalimar the clown, his possession by the devil, burned fiercely in him and carried him forward but in the murmurous night it was just one of the many stories, one small particular untold tale in a crowd of such tales, one minuscule portion of the unwritten history of Kashmir. (Rushdie 2006: 259)

The lines above succinctly sum up the artistic and political project of *Shalimar the Clown*: the attempt to uncover "untold tales" and "unwritten histories" that get obliterated in the process of constructing the grand narrative of the nation. Unlike *Midnight's Children* in which Saleem Sinai's narrative functions as an allegory of the national narrative, the multiple, unresolved narratives of resentment in *Shalimar the Clown* both contest the notion of a unilinear "national history" and expose the hegemonic politics of historiography.

⁴ In his essay 'Midnight's Children, History and Complexity: Reading Rushdie in the Context of the Cold War', M. Keith Booker adopts a Marxist critical approach to argue that the complexity of Rushdie's fiction is more aligned to the bourgeois Western postmodernist textual practice than the linearity of subversive postcolonial texts. *Shalimar the Clown*, as demonstrated in this article, appears to have resolved this opposition by adopting the postmodern narrative form to contain a postcolonial political stance.

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