

## SHAKESPEARE IN RUSHDIE/SHAKESPEAREAN RUSHDIE

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Postcolonial readers situate Shakespeare at the starting point and Salman Rushdie at the other end of the spectrum of multicultural authors who have laid claims to universality. While the fact that Rushdie's epoch-making novel *Midnight's Children* adapted for the theatre by Tim Supple, was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2003 would have come as a surprise to many, the Bard himself, his birthplace, allusions to and quotations from his work, parodic rewriting of his plots and brilliant recasting of his characters have always punctuated Rushdie's fiction and non-fiction. The linguistic inventiveness of Shakespeare and Rushdie and the Ovidian intertext in both bring them even closer. This paper argues that the presence of Shakespeare in Rushdie may be viewed not so much as an attempt to deconstruct and subvert the canon like Angela Carter's but rather as an unconscious effort to rival and reinvent his genius in the novel form. Rushdie's project of tropicalizing London seems to be an ironic translation of the Shakespearean idea of "making Britain India".

Keywords: Shakespeare; Rushdie; intertextuality; postcolonial rewriting; inventiveness; fatherly text

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## SHAKESPEARE EN RUSHDIE/RUSHDIE SHAKESPERIANO

*Los manuales sobre postcolonialismo ubican a Shakespeare al comienzo y a Salman Rushdie al final del espectro de autores multiculturales que se han ganado el derecho a ser considerados universales. Aunque a muchos les sorprendiera el hecho de que *Midnight's Children*, la decisiva novela de Rushdie, fuera adaptada al teatro por Tim Supple y producida por la Royal Shakespeare Company en 2003, tanto la ficción como la no-ficción de Rushdie siempre han estado salpicadas por apariciones del Bardo, de su lugar de nacimiento, de alusiones a, y citas de, sus obras, así como de reescrituras paródicas de sus argumentos y reinterpretaciones de sus personajes. La inventiva lingüística de Shakespeare y Rushdie y el intertexto ovidiano presente en ambos los acercan aún más. En este artículo se defiende que la presencia de Shakespeare en Rushdie se puede interpretar no tanto como un intento de deconstruir y subvertir el canon a lo Angela Carter sino más bien como un esfuerzo inconsciente de rivalizar con, y reinventar, la genialidad shakesperiana en forma novelada. El proyecto de Rushdie de tropicalizar Londres parece una irónica versión de la idea de Shakespeare de "hacer de Gran Bretaña la India".*

*Palabras clave: Shakespeare; Rushdie; intertextualidad; reescritura postcolonial; inventiva; texto paternal*

## 1. Englishness and multiculturalism

“Will you give up your Indian empire or your Shakespeare, you English?” asked Carlyle in 1841 in his book *On Heroes and Hero Worship* (Carlyle 1966: 113). The imperial sun has set, as he had predicted. But the discourse of postcolonial readers situates Shakespeare at the starting point and Rushdie at the other end of the spectrum of great writers who have laid claims to universality.<sup>1</sup> This is not surprising in so far as none other than the staunchest defender of the Western canon, Harold Bloom, has called Shakespeare “the true multicultural author” (Rothernberg 2003). Issues of multiculturalism in Shakespeare have become topical conference themes in universities<sup>2</sup> across the globe. In British India, English studies idealized Englishness in general and Shakespeare in particular. Shakespeare performances by English troupes in Bombay and Calcutta date back to 1770 and 1780 respectively, i.e. long before Macaulay’s famous 1835 Minute introduced English education in India.<sup>3</sup> The reception of Shakespeare in India was so favourable that the Bard was the ultimate reference in early Indo-Anglian literature, as we can gather from G.V. Desani’s irreverent postmodern and postcolonial autofiction *All About H. Hatter* (1948). Banerjee, the anglicised Bengali Babu in this novel could indeed be called the *bardolator* before Bloom. 1965 was another noteworthy year in the history of Shakespeare in India. It was in that year that both Merchant Ivory’s film *Shakespearewallah* and Raja Rao’s metaphysical novel *The Cat and Shakespeare* were released. Contemporary India’s reputed dramatist and moviemaker Girish Karnad had long ago acknowledged Shakespeare as a major influence.

Readers familiar with recent Indian writing will call to mind Arundhati Roy’s quotation of Ariel’s Song in *The God of Small Things* (Roy 1997: 59). Chantal Zabus, in her seminal study on *Tempests after Shakespeare* (Zabus 2002: 1), has set out the case for *The Tempest* as the most enduring of Shakespeare’s texts whose rewriting has helped shape three contemporary movements – postcolonialism, postfeminism and postpatriarchy. Unlike the Caribbean, where rewriting *The Tempest* has become an ideologically overetermined literary task, in India Shakespeare’s multiculturalism has been indigenized in many ways. First, through translations of Shakespeare’s plays into vernacular languages. Secondly, through modern rewritings in English such as playwright Royston Abel’s *Othello: a Play in Black and White*, his *Romeo and Juliet in Technicolour* and *Goodbye Desdemona*.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, through adaptations of Shakespeare’s

<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the 7th European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) conference in Zaragoza in 2004. It has been improved (thanks to the critical comments offered by Chantal Zabus and Janet Wilson, both of whose goodwill is acknowledged with gratitude) and updated.

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, Philosophy and Multiculturalism, Lorand Eotvos University, Budapest, March 17-20, 2004. See also the webpage of Shakespeare in Asia festival organized at Stanford in 2004: <http://sia.stanford.edu/home.html>

<sup>3</sup> Browse the webpage *Shakespeare in India*.  
<http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Library/Criticism/shakespearein/india2.html>

<sup>4</sup> Performed in 1999 and 2000. Play texts not yet available for sale.

plays in local drama and cinema. Films such as Sohrab Modi's reworking of Hamlet in *Khoon Ka Khoon* (Urdu, 1935), Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet* (1954), Debu Sen's *Do Dooni Char* (Hindi, 1968) based on *The Comedy of Errors* or Gulzar's version of the same play entitled *Angoor* (Hindi, 1982), Jayaraj's *Kaliyattam* (Malayalam, 1997) inspired by *Othello*, and Vishal Bharadwaj's *Maqbool*, a Bollywood remake of *Macbeth* (Hindi, 2004) or his *Omkara* (Hindi, 2006) which transforms *Othello* into a chieftain of a gang of outlaws in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, have left their imprint on the Indian performing arts scene. Indeed, the indigenization of Shakespeare in India finds a parallel in Rushdie's use of Shakespeare to negotiate postcoloniality in English literature.<sup>5</sup> While the adaptation by Tim Supple of Rushdie's epoch-making novel *Midnight's Children* for theatre and its production by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2003 would have come as a surprise to many, Rushdie scholars have for long been taking the measure of Shakespearean intertextuality in his novels (Maliackal 2001). Tim Supple has himself followed up with an Indian themed production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* performed in The Round House in London (2007) after twelve performances in the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon.

If there is rewriting of Shakespeare in Rushdie, it is not the complete rewriting of one entire play or another in one novel or short story as is the case with many other postcolonial authors (Loomba 1998). Rewriting occurs piecemeal and is inflected in various modes – quotation, allusion, parody, recasting of characters, irradiation of metaphors – not to mention the intertwining of supratextual topics such as the history of colonial encounters and infratextual elements such as music and language which set up a common horizon of understanding. It permeates the whole textual production of Rushdie, both fictional and non-fictional. The triply challenging transformative work that Rushdie has had to perform – re-invigorating an Elizabethan and English playwright's texts for the benefit of the contemporary and multicultural novel reading public – may partly explain the fractured textuality. Besides, Rushdie's theorizing of his writing techniques throws a different light on this practice. The first-person narrator of the *Moor's Last Sigh* tells us:

Thanks to my unusual, and by (conventional standards) hopelessly inadequate education, I had become a kind of information magpie, gathering to myself all manner of shiny scraps of fat and hocus and books and art history and politics and music and film, and developing too a certain skill in manipulating and arranging these pitiful shards so that they glittered, and caught the light. Fool's gold or priceless nuggets mined from my singular childhood's rich bohemian seam? I leave it to others to decide. (Rushdie 1995: 240)

Wilful and confusing intertextuality is encoded in Rushdie's writing, prompting readers to make meaning of it by separating out the several layers that comprise his palimpsestic text.

Rushdie had not publicly acknowledged his debt to Shakespeare, although references and allusions to Shakespeare are sprinkled throughout his writing. But the secret was partly given away in 1996 when *The New Yorker* (May 13, 1996: 36) published

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<sup>5</sup> Is Rushdie an Indian or a British writer? Rushdie himself has taken a stand against containing writers in passports and would like to be identified as an international one. However, his stereophonic vision necessarily includes India as a perceptual environment.

a trivial news item on Rushdie's visit to the Folger Library, where he had been shown a proclamation signed by Queen Elizabeth herself attacking the circulation of seditious books in her realm. In the course of a literary game, Rushdie was challenged to rename a Shakespeare play as if it had been written by Robert Ludlum, the author of such thrillers as *The Bourne Ultimatum* and *The Scarlatti Inheritance*. Rushdie came up with *The Elsinore Vacillation* (*Hamlet*), *The Dunsinane Deforestation* (*Macbeth*), *The Kerchief Implication* (*Othello*), *The Rialto Forfeit* (*The Merchant of Venice*) *The Capulet Infatuation* (*Romeo and Juliet*), and *The Solstice Entrancement* (*Midsummer Night's Dream*). Rushdie proposes other variations such as *The Moor Murders*, *The Cordelia Conundrum* and *The Elsinore Uncertainty* in his novel *Fury* (Rushdie 2001: 20). Although these titles were invented in a light-hearted manner, they do reveal Rushdie's preference for some Shakespeare classics.

Although a novelist, Rushdie was involved in theatre and started acting during his student days. He was a member of the Cambridge Footlights Theatre. When he came back to England in 1971 after a stint with Pakistani television, he was an actor at the Oval theatre in Kensington. His father, the Cambridge-returned lawyer, Anis Ahmed Rushdie, protested so much against this not too respectable profession that Rushdie turned to copywriting for the advertisement agencies, Ogilvy and Mather and Charles Barker, to make a living. The story of how his father objected to his penchant for acting is recounted in *The Satanic Verses*, one of whose lead characters, Saladin Chamcha, is an actor: "Might as well be a confounded gigolo" (Rushdie 1987: 47). Like Shakespeare, Rushdie knew too only well the risks of the profession – the unsettling gaze of the public, the betraying false moustache, the multiple voices and masks the actor has to put on, the transient glory. In Rushdie's third novel, *Shame*, which in fact he started writing as a play, the protagonist Omar Khayaam Shakil discloses his own and his Pakistani friends' reaction to a London performance of Georg Büchner's play, *Danton's Death* (1979). This episode reveals Rushdie's theatre-going habits and interweaves the theatre as a meaningful strand in his text. Moreover, the story in *Shame* of the performance of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Rushdie 1984: 241) by university students emphasizes the relevance of Shakespeare's plays in a postcolonial context. The production was to be in modern dress and to end with the assassination of the General in full uniform. As a result, the authorities wanted the play scrapped. The academics decided to defend the ancient dramatist against the assault of the military generals and reached a compromise. A prominent British diplomat was asked to perform the role of Caesar in imperial regalia. The generals seated in the front row wildly applauded the patriotic overthrow of imperialism. In the same novel, the narrator disconcertingly connects the death of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to that of Romeo and Juliet (1984: 229). Although this off-hand comparison of the love affair between the politician and his electorate with the teenage romance of the lovers of Verona might look like a gratuitous flaunting of Shakespeare on Rushdie's part, his purpose is to stage the theatricality of Pakistani politics which, in fact, is closer to the melodrama of Indian cinema where the borderline between the high and the low is fuzzy. Rushdie is well aware of the political import of Shakespeare's theatre and puts it to good use to endow his novels with a dramatic impact. Saladin Chamcha's unconditional praise of *Othello* in *The Satanic Verses* – "*Othello*, just that one play was worth the total output of any other dramatist in

any other language” (Rushdie 1987: 398) – bears witness to the constructive force of Shakespeare in Rushdie.

## 2. Intended intertextuality

To conjure up Shakespeare in Rushdie, it is logical to start with Shakespeare’s birthplace. Indeed, a visit to Stratford-upon-Avon forms part of the literary pilgrimage of many an Indo-Anglian writer (Visvanathan 2002: 108-09). In the story entitled ‘Chekov and Zulu’ in Rushdie’s short story collection *East, West* (Rushdie 1994: 149-71), which narrates the assassination of Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi in the manner of a star trek movie, Chekov asks his old Sikh Zulu to drive him to Stratford-upon-Avon for a performance of the Renaissance allegory of state, *Coriolanus* (1994: 160). This passing mention of Shakespeare’s play is perhaps a deictic pointer to the semi-homosexual bonds existing between two former Board School mates from Dehra Doon which parallel those between Coriolanus and Aufidius. More importantly, it is intended to psychologically prepare the reader for the tragic worst-case scenario that is played out at the end of the story in which Rajiv Gandhi is killed by a Sri Lankan Tamil suicide bomber.

After the birthplace, we come across the figure of Shakespeare himself in the short story entitled ‘Yorick’. The narrator is none other than Yorick, the dead and buried jester of the Danish King Horwendillus in *Hamlet*. He refers to Shakespeare irreverently as Master Chackpaw (Rushdie 1994: 81). This simple pun encapsulates the whole history of postcolonial hybridity (Sandten 2000: 76-84). The term *Chackpaw* was no doubt inspired by the Wishbone show’s *Shakespaw*. Could the legacy of Shakespeare be derided as mere chalk paw prints drawn for the benefit of the Empire’s children to guide them and lead them somewhere in a literary game? The formulation *Master Chackpaw* is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, it reveals the postcolonial author’s admiration for Shakespeare and, on the other, his determination to upset the established subalternities of the English society as regards race and class. This parody of Hamlet “which ruins at least one great soliloquy” (Rushdie 1994: 81) is an ironical statement on, and a paradoxical plea for, postcolonial freedom. The clown “offers no defence, but this: that these matters are shrouded in antiquity, and so there’s no certainty in them; so let the versions coexist, for there is no need to choose” (1994: 81). Issues of postmodernism are thus linked to those of postcolonialism.

The titles of Rushdie’s novels somehow allude to Shakespeare’s plays. *Midnight’s Children* is the first although perhaps not the most obvious example. The historical fact of India’s attaining independence at midnight was underscored by Nehru’s ‘tryst with destiny’ speech. “At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India awakens to life and freedom” (Nehru 1947). Later the Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre’s bestselling *Freedom at Midnight* (Collins and Lapierre 1975) emphasized the time factor. But the idea of nationhood as a collective dream or a mass fantasy that Rushdie puts forward in the novel (Rushdie 1982: 112) that was awarded the Booker of Bookers in 1993, certainly warrants a connection with *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Besides, the idea of dream occurs as a leitmotif in the novel. It is no coincidence that the

novel's theatrical version was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company. The allusion to August Strindberg's *Dream* in *The Satanic Verses* (Rushdie 1987: 442) confirms our intuition that the dreamlike aspect of *Midnight's Children* was theatrically inspired, for Strindberg held that "In dreams, time and space do not exist ... the characters split, double, multiply, evaporate, solidify, diffuse, clarify. But one consciousness reigns above them all – that of the dreamer" (Strindberg 1999: 176). The Swedish dramatist himself was inspired by Shakespeare. Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, while being a simultaneous reference to Alfred Dehodencq's painting and Luis Bunuel's film, primarily calls to mind Shakespeare's *Othello*. As for Rushdie's novel, *Fury* (Rushdie 2001), the title is obviously taken from *Macbeth*: "Life is ... a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". A variation of the quotation from *Macbeth* appears in the previously published *The Moor's Last Sigh*: "A Moor's tale complete with sound and fury" (Rushdie 2001: 4). Considering that William Faulkner had already taken *Sound and Fury* and that *Signifying Nothing* is the title of a book by Malcolm Evans, Rushdie has perhaps had to content himself with this one word quote from Shakespeare.

The figure and texts of Shakespeare are not just filigrees in Rushdie. Shakespeare is foregrounded by direct quotations from his plays in some of the novels. The first quotation to be identified by the author himself is found in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (Rushdie 1995: 114). It comes from *The Merchant of Venice* and illustrates the different attitudes Portia shows towards her suitors. When the prince of Morocco fails the test, she says: "A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains! Go. / Let all of his complexion choose me so" ([*The Merchant of Venice* Act II, Sc. VII, ll.78-79] Shakespeare 1995: 436). When her lover Bassanio makes the right choice, he justifies it thus, "... ornament is but the guiled shore, / To a most dangerous sea; the beauteous scarf / Veiling an Indian beauty; in a word, / The seeming truth which cunning times put on" ([*The Merchant of Venice* Act III, Sc. 2, ll. 97-100] Shakespeare 1995: 439).

The narrator's avowed purpose in invoking this text is to contrast Portia, who is presented by Shakespeare as the very archetype of justice, with his heroine Aurora. But Rushdie gets almost professorial and gives an explanation of the racism inherent in the text with regard to both Arabs and Jews. The bracketing of Othello and Shylock together is an idea that was first mentioned in *The Satanic Verses* (Rushdie 1987: 398). The other quotations in *The Moor's Last Sigh* come from *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Camoens Da Gama comforts his wife (and Aurora's mother), Isabelle Souza, who is suffering from tuberculosis, by reading out from *Hamlet* (Rushdie 1995: 51): "Absent thee from felicity awhile / And for a season draw thy breath in pain" ([*Hamlet* Act 5, Sc. 2, ll. 299-300] Shakespeare 1995: 687).

This quotation prepares the readers for the tragic and premature death of Belle alias Isabella. Aurora's son Moraes considers himself "fortune's fool" like Romeo (Rushdie 1995: 418). His family name *Zagoiby* meaning 'unlucky' in Arabic is what enables Rushdie to perform this skilful metamorphosis of the Moor into the Italian lover.

Some times the quotations are intended to explicitly echo Shakespearean themes such as the green-eyed monster of jealousy or the nature of human destiny or the status of women. In *The Satanic Verses*, one of the twin heroes, Saladin Chamcha, explains his relationship with his friend and rival Gibreel Farishta (Rushdie 1987: 428) by quoting

from *Othello*: “I follow him to serve my turn upon him” ([*Othello* Act I, Sc. 1, l. 42] Shakespeare 1995: 821).

If the italics in the text prod the reader to look for an intertext, there are places where the quotations are so welded into the text that the reader has to exercise his/her vigilance in order not to miss the innuendo as, for example, in the *King Lear*-marked “wanton attitude to tumbling flies” (Rushdie 1987: 133), the *Hamlet*-inspired interrogation “wife or widow?” (1987: 172) or the character of a woman “protesting too much” (1987: 262) or the “watery grave” (1987: 172) borrowed from *Pericles*. The prevalence of quotations poses the question of authenticity and mimicry. Rushdie has internalized Shakespeare as an inherent component of the English language so that he is able to contextualize and decontextualize Shakespeare at will.

The array of quotations from Shakespeare will only be complete with the lines from *Julius Caesar* cited in the eponymous essay that concludes Rushdie’s collected work of non-fiction, *Step Across This Line* (Rushdie 2002: 437-39), about the eleventh of September terrorist attacks on New York, a photo of which adorns the dust jacket of his novel *Fury*: “The evil that men do lives after them, /The good is oft interred with their bones” ([*Julius Caesar* Act III, Sc. 2, ll. 76-77] Shakespeare 1995: 615).<sup>6</sup>

“... Never till now,  
Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.  
Either there is a civil strife in heaven,  
Or else the world, too saucy with the gods, / Incenses them to send destruction”  
([*Julius Caesar* Act I, Sc. 3, ll. 9-13] Shakespeare 1995: 604).

“Men in fire walk up and down the streets.  
And yesterday the bird of night did sit,  
Even at noon-day, upon the market-place,  
Hooting and shrieking. When these prodigies  
Do so conjointly meet, let not men say  
‘These are their reasons, they are natural’;  
Unto the climate that they point upon.  
For, I believe, they are portentous things”  
([*Julius Caesar* Act I, Scene 3, ll. 25-31] Shakespeare 1995: 604-05).

The point that Rushdie wants to make is that dreams and omens, whether discussed by the character of Casca or by Bin Laden and his accomplices are murderers’ exculpations. Rushdie underscores Shakespeare’s attitude to evil, which emphasizes human and not divine responsibility: “The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars / But in ourselves” ([*Julius Caesar* Act I, Scene 2, ll. 141-42] Shakespeare 1995: 603).

Rushdie goes back to *Othello* again in this essay. The Moor does not find cloven hoofs when he looks at Iago’s feet. Rushdie’s conclusion is trenchant and clear: “The world is real. There are no demons. Men are demonic enough” (Rushdie 2002: 439). By invoking Shakespeare as the authority in human values at a critical and tragic moment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Rushdie consecrates the sacredness of his secular truth.

Rushdie’s alternative version of *Hamlet* and the mixing up of characters’ names within the play have given birth to his most hilarious short fiction entitled ‘Yorick’.

<sup>6</sup> These few lines are also quoted by Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* (1997: 275).

Tristram Shandy's parson is but one of his offspring, according to the clownish narrator who also claims to be one of the multicoloured heirs of Yorick's exiled child. This is where Rushdie gets close to painting a portrait of himself as jester. It is to be noted that the protagonist of his latest novels (2005, 2008) are clowns: Shalimar and Mogor Dell 'Amore'. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie deliberately cultivates the confusion between the foreigner and the fool (Rushdie 2008: 6). Finally, the fool wearing a coat of coloured leather lozenges will turn out to be a bastard child of an improbable encounter between Renaissance Italy and Moghul India, thus prefiguring the mixed heritage of colonial encounter which the author himself partakes of. Using the fool's point of view enables Rushdie to debunk the imperial grandstand view, whether it is articulated by the West or by Islam.

In 'Yorick', like James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, Rushdie offers a different reading and interpretation of Hamlet. His purpose in telling his tale is to elucidate the reason why in William Shakespeare's play, the morbid prince seems unaware of his father's real name. Uncertain parenthood and impure origin are recurring themes in Rushdie, which explain his particular sensitivity to the debarred father's name in the play. In Rushdie's story, Yorick marries Ophelia. They have a child whose name is not revealed in the text. The princeling Hamlet has the habit of waking them up early in the morning. He considers Yorick as his second father and has transferred his oedipal hatred to Ophelia. When he accidentally witnesses his father making love to his mother, he mistakenly thinks that he is trying to murder her. Punished by his father, he plots revenge and decides to use Yorick. He pours poison in his ear by telling him that his wife and the king are having an affair. Yorick kills the king by literally pouring hebona into the king's ears. Wronged, Ophelia goes mad and dies. The king's brother understands the enigma, gets the clown executed and marries Gertrude. Jealous, Hamlet then accuses Claudius of murdering the king. However, haunted by his own guilt, Hamlet spurns his own Ophelia and commits suicide.

Rushdie's highly self-conscious narrative, in which the author is construed as a fool and the reader as someone smart who applies sensitive reading technologies, offers a comic reversal of the writer's authority. All the material and formal elements such as the paper, the beginning, the plot, the urgency that drives it, the allotted length and the conclusion are openly revealed to the reader as well as the aim of such a literary enterprise, i.e. attaining immortality, in this humorous meta-narrative on writing the short story. This sub-story provides excellent comic relief to the tragedy of the main story and really succeeds in shifting the focus from Hamlet to Yorick. With this short story Rushdie joins the whole line of European and American authors who have rewritten *Hamlet*, i.e. Heiner Mueller (2000), Tom Stoppard (1991), Margaret Atwood (2001), Iris Murdoch (2003), John Updike (2001) and Lee Blessing (1992). Rushdie not only refers to the play text of Shakespeare but to one of its performances at least in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. He pays homage to the actor Jonathan Pryce who "produced the ghost from within himself, in an astonishing feat of body and voice control" (Rushdie 1999: 490-91) in a Royal Court Theatre production of *Hamlet* in 1980.

Rushdie's characters have an offhand way of referring to Hamlet or Brutus as household synonyms for procrastinating personalities and betrayers (Rushdie 1987: 228, 316). But Rushdie has reshaped some of Shakespeare's important characters into

their postcolonial incarnations. The most striking example is Saladin Chamcha, the actor in *The Satanic Verses* who belongs to a theatre group called Prospero Players (Rushdie 1987: 49). Readers are at once made to think of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991). The gaze of the racist police officers in England transforms the law-abiding anglophile subject Chamcha into the devilish figure of the goat. The metamorphosis of a human into an animal reminds us of Shakespeare's Bottom whose comic transformation into a donkey is an entertaining factor in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But Chamcha's transmogrification into a cuckolded husband and a grotesque illegal alien is no laughing matter. It is pathetic. The manticore he meets in the hospital complains: "They have the power of description and we succumb to the pictures they construct" (Rushdie 1987: 168). The linguistic register dealing with animals gives us the clue to the fact that Rushdie has in mind the representation of Caliban by Stephano in *The Tempest*: "Have we devils here? Do you put tricks upon us with savages and men of Ind? / ... This is some monster of the isle with four legs" ([*The Tempest* Act II, Scene 2, ll. 57-65] Shakespeare 1995: 1178).

By embodying his self in the outmoded envelope provided by the colonizers, Rushdie others the New Empire within Britain in its own language: "It's an image white society has rejected for so long that we can really take it, / you know, occupy it, inhabit it, reclaim it and make it our own" (Rushdie 1987: 287).

"Reclaiming language from one's opponents is, therefore, central to the purpose of *The Satanic Verses*" (Rushdie 1992: 402). In a sense, Rushdie was playing the same game with reference to the Muslim world by representing the Prophet of Islam as Mahound with a view to voicing the doubts of Iqbal, Ghazali, Khayaam. But the fictionalization of the Prophet's image was misread by the believers. Besides, the Shakespearean intertext in this novel is somehow overwritten by more philosophical discussions on the nature of metamorphosis in Ovid and Virgil.

*The Moor's Sigh* centres on a bastard child, Moraes Zagoiby. His mother, Aurora da Gama, is Catholic and his father, Abraham Zagoiby, is Jewish on his father's side and Arab on his mother's side, his mother being a descendant of Abu Abdallah, the last of the Nasrids, Sultan Boabdil of Granada. When Abraham decides to marry Aurora, his mother makes him execute a bond, Shylock-style, in which he promises to bring up his firstborn son in the Jewish tradition. "An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven ... I stay here on my bond" (Rushdie 1995: 113). His mother, Flory, insists: "I crave the law, the penalty and the forfeit of my bond" (1995: 113.). Later, Moraes's artistic mother, Aurora, paints a rather ambivalent picture of her son as the stabbed Othello and herself as the murdered Desdemona (1995: 224-25). Rushdie's invocation of Shakespeare's *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* in this novel serves a twofold purpose. Elizabethan England viewed miscegenation with suspicion. From the idea of the Virgin Queen to the mistrust of illegitimate sons, purity was upheld as a supreme value that preserved the integrity of England. Rushdie's affirmation of the mongrel identity of the postcolonial "I was – what's the word these days? – atomised. Yessir: A real Bombay mix. Bastard: I like the sound of the word" (1995: 104) shows the evolution of English society, which has embraced multiculturalism in its postimperial phase. Caliban is described by Trinculo as smelling like a fish. The bastard postcolonial has now the courage to identify himself as "smelly shit" (1995: 104). The Cochin Jews mentioned in

Rushdie's novel (1995:76) are but symbolic incarnations of religious minorities in modern nation-states: Moors and Jews in Venice, Muslims in India. The likely real name of Othello in Shakespeare's play, Attallah or Attaulah is given by a Muslim immigrant from East Bengal in London, Sufyan, in *The Satanic Verses* (Rushdie 1987: 248). As a Muslim who has been (thrice) married to white women, Rushdie seems to identify himself more with Othello than with any of Shakespeare's other characters.

The identity of Vina Apsara, the heroine of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is multidimensional and her regal beauty is certainly modelled on Princess Diana's. She has a Greek American ancestry. Her mother's name, Helen, is a pointer to Helen of Troy. However, the story of her star-crossed love for Ormus Cama makes them a mythical love pair like Romeo and Juliet. The narrator's comparison of her to the Egyptian queen Hatshepsut (Rushdie 1999: 68) and the fact that she has two suitors like Cleopatra associate her with the category of women whose beauty "age cannot wither nor custom stale" (Rushdie 1999: 68). Vina Apsara thus becomes a recast of Cleopatra, Juliet and many other beautiful women of the East and West put together.

### 3. Random intertextual links

I have so far dealt with obligatory or intended intertextuality in this article. However, readers who have a close knowledge of Shakespeare's plays may feel tempted to detect some casual borrowings from Shakespeare's images or plot lines by Rushdie. While identifying these might look like a mere attempt at Fluellenism, it does help highlight the pervasive presence of Shakespeare in the readers' circular memory which contributes to random intertextual links forged by them to make meaning of Rushdie's complex narratives. The very Indian and mystifying astrological forecasts by the seer Sri Ramram Seth in *Midnight's Children*, especially the chilling "And he will die before he is dead" (Rushdie 1982: 88), remind us of the witches' predictions in *Macbeth*. The three sisters at the father's deathbed enquiring about their heritage in *Shame* (Rushdie 1984: 14) inevitably recalls the challenge to patriarchy portrayed in *King Lear*, while the balcony scene in *The Satanic Verses* where Hind kisses the Grandee (Rushdie 1987: 371) is an ironic re-enacting of *Romeo and Juliet*. Cross-dressing is another device that Rushdie may have borrowed from Shakespeare. In *Shame*, two Pakistani men, Raza Hyder and Omar Khayaam Shakil, dress like women in purdah (Rushdie 1984: 268). The bus drivers and co-passengers take them for transvestites or *hijras*. While this may be a tactic inspired by Sir Richard Burton, who travelled to Mecca in disguise, the cross-dressing page in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1991) certainly is reminiscent of Viola in *Twelfth Night* or Rosalind in *As You Like It*. Tom Stoppard's film *Shakespeare in Love* proposes a modernist revision of the Renaissance theatrical practice in which men played women's roles. Rushdie's hypertexts preserve the original Shakespearean hypotexts on questions of gender equality and keep the gender debate alive. Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* has been designed to deal with the question of "exits" (Rushdie 1999: 213). The word *exit* harks back to the 'All the world is a stage' speech uttered by Jacques in *As You Like It*. Two Indians, one old and one young, decide the independence of the heroine Vina Apsara over a poker game which is not far removed

from the contest for the hand of Emilia in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The Shakespearean metaphor of *Juliet as the sun* irradiates this novel, which ideologically deconstructs the West as Disorient: “Disorientation; loss of the East. And of Ormus Cama, her sun” (Rushdie 1999: 5).

Rushdie’s preferred time frame is, of course, the decolonized and globalized world. But he does not shy away from settling scores with the past. According to him, being handcuffed to history is the fate of the postcolonial subject and the harsh and deifying ties of history are stronger than any mortal love. Thus references to the Elizabethan era and the seafarers occur frequently in his texts. In *Midnight’s Children* for instance, a painting by Sir John Everett Millais entitled *The Boyhood of Raleigh*, in which a barefooted Walter Raleigh is pointing his finger to the New World and talking to two young Elizabethan lads, adorns the child Saleem’s room. One of the two grown-up adults who fall onto English shores at the opening of *The Satanic Verses* might well be the East Indian boy who has looked upon Sir Walter Raleigh as a source of inspiration for an adventurous selfhood. If Shakespeare was constructing the dream England of his mind by representing its peripheries such as the Caribbean, Rushdie, though attracted to ‘Babylondon’, is bent upon tropicalizing it. It is his way of translating Shakespeare’s “making Britain India” ([Henry VIII, Act I, Sc. 1, l. 21] Shakespeare 1995: 1195). Besides, Shakespeare is not the only Elizabethan dramatist to be quoted by Rushdie. A parodic postmodern allusion to Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine The Great* in *The Satanic Verses* (Rushdie 1997: 525) completes the Elizabethan subtext in Rushdie.<sup>7</sup>

The preparation for colonial encounters is handled in the short story entitled ‘Christopher Columbus and Queen Isabella of Spain Consummate their Relationship (Santa Fé, A.D. 1492)’. It is a prelude to the novel, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, because it is after receiving the keys of Al Hambra from Boabdil that Isabella decides to let Columbus help her possess the unknown territories beyond the sea. What is interesting about this short story is its impact created by the postcolonial author’s contrapuntal rewriting of Shakespeare’s point of view across the centuries. While Shakespeare portrays Othello as the outsider, Rushdie makes Columbus an emblematic figure of the foreigner. “It is considered *de rigueur* to keep a few foreigners around. They lend the place a certain cosmopolitan tone. They are often poor and consequently willing to perform diverse necessary but dirty jobs” (Rushdie 1994: 108).

Shakespeare’s plays are also remembered for their unforgettable songs, which impart a musical identity. Salman Rushdie is a fan of the Rolling Stones and U2. He also possesses a vast knowledge of Eastern musical traditions embodied in Urdu gazals. Rushdie is fond of quoting popular schoolboys’ and sailors’ songs and lyrics from modern pop singers, not to mention verses from famous operas. He has also tried his hand at song-writing in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Music is indeed the food of love in this novel where the Ovidian intertext connects Shakespeare and Rushdie: “*Orpheus*

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<sup>7</sup> The quotation is in the guise of a pastiche from the English theatre critic Kenneth Tynan who had imagined the polysyllabic characters in Marlowe’s play as “a horde of pills and wonder drugs bent on decimating one another” (Tynan, K. 1967. 23-26).

with his lute made trees / And the mountain tops that freeze, / Bow themselves, when he did sing" ([*King Henry VIII*, Act III, Sc. 1, ll. 3-5] Shakespeare 1995: 1208).<sup>8</sup>

Whether Rushdie's songs will endure the test of time as much as Shakespeare's remains to be seen. However, if we have to choose one single element that allows us to put Shakespeare and Rushdie on the same footing, it would be their linguistic inventiveness. The narrator of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* might have been talking about Rushdie and Shakespeare when he describes himself and his mother as "language's magpies by nature stealing whatever sounded bright and shiny" (Rushdie 1999: 56-57). Both have amplified and developed the flexibility of the English language and its potential for concrete imagery by freely borrowing foreign loan-words and inserting them into English syntax, coining new words, manufacturing portmanteau words and formulating puns, which become truly interlingual in Rushdie. Both draw from the literary and vulgar varieties of English. As is the case with Shakespeare, certain Rushdian expressions have passed from his text into everyday language (e.g. chutnification, Hinglish). Writers from the Caribbean have regarded the gift of language as poisonous (Zabus 2002: 38). George Lamming posits the idea of language as a prison house, whereas according to Rushdie, "to conquer English is to complete the process of making ourselves free" (Rushdie 1992: 17) For him, "language is courage: the ability to conceive a thought, to speak it, and by doing so to make it come true" (Rushdie 1987: 281).

#### 4. Conclusion

The identification and interpretation of Shakespearean intertexts in Rushdie cannot be dismissed as a childish game on the part of the reader who, through his or her Elizabethan glasses, looks at Rushdie's world as Shakespeare-coloured. Nor can it be seen as an eruption of toxins of admiration for Shakespeare infused into Rushdie's artistic bloodstream. That Rushdie has a vast knowledge of Shakespeare's plays is undeniable. There is also no doubt that he has an irreverent tendency to 'write back' to the imperial centre. However, the presence of Shakespeare in Rushdie may be viewed not so much as an attempt to deconstruct and subvert the canon, as Angela Carter did, as an unconscious effort to rival and reinvent Shakespeare's genius in the novel form. One of Rushdie's imaginary egos, Professor Solanka, the protagonist of *Fury*, alludes to an indecorous conclusion to the first dinner he had with his wife Eleanor during which they discussed Shakespeare. Eleanor, naked and with "her head on his lap and a battered *Complete Works* face down across her bush" (Rushdie 2001: 10) tells him about the importance of the inexplicable in Shakespeare before making love to him. Later, when he is tempted to quote to her from her own thesis to explain his running away from her, he realizes his arrogance. "What was he thinking of, giving himself and his paltry actions, these high Shakespearean airs? Did he truly dare to set himself beside *The Moor of Venice* and *King Lear*, to liken his humble mysteries to theirs? Such vanity was surely a more than adequate ground for divorce" (Rushdie 2001: 12). This episode

<sup>8</sup> It is I who quote these lines from *Henry VIII*.

shows that Rushdie does not want to posture self-consciously as a postcolonial Shakespeare. The author who has had to resist Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa is only too aware of his own mortality, as we can gather from the quotation from *Cymbeline* inserted in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (Rushdie 1999: 445), "All must, like chimney sweepers come to dust" ([*Cymbeline* Act IV, Scene 2, l. 264] Shakespeare 1995: 1154). The texture of the Shakespearean palimpsest in his novels is quite different from the more visible presence of Shakespeare in George Lamming or Suniti Namjoshi for example. Rushdie's non-anxious mode of appropriating Shakespeare sets him apart from other postcolonial writers.

We ought, therefore, to look elsewhere for another plausible explanation. Rushdie's hybridization of the narrative art through Shakespeare's theatre and other performing arts may simply have been a creative outlet to resolve the tension in his relationship with his father. The fact that the most irreverent of postcolonial authors holds in reverence the most canonical of English authors obliquely tells the story of how, like his protagonist Saleem, Salman has found a putative and imaginary literary father. Hence the filiation in my title. According to newspaper reports, there was a reading from Shakespeare at Rushdie's fourth wedding in New York which reveals Rushdie's emotional attachment to the fatherly text. The plausible hypothesis put forward by the American writer Robin Williams (Anne Underwood 2004), according to which Shakespeare's texts were written by the Swan of Avon, Lady Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, only adds spice to the story.

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Received 26 January 2009

Revised version accepted 19 June 2009

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