

**Jūratė Radavičiūtė**

*Vilnius University*

*Kaunas Faculty of Humanities*

*Department of Foreign Languages*

*Muitinės str. 8, LT-44280 Kaunas, Lithuania*

*E-mail: jurate.radaviciute@khf.vu.lt*

*Research interests: contemporary English literature, postmodernism, deconstruction, post-colonialism*

### **VIOLENCE AS THE MANIFESTATION OF SIMULACRA IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S NOVEL *SHAME***

*The article analyses Salman Rushdie's novel "Shame" from the perspective of portraying two female characters Bilquis Hyder and her daughter Naveed and how the violence underlying the instability of the images they construct manifests itself. The research is carried out within the theoretical framework of postmodernism with the view to the concept of the postmodern sign elaborated by Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida. The postmodern sign is characterised by the loss of a reference to reality which is masked by the abundance of supplements for reality. The vulnerability of such a sign is revealed through the process of crisis the sign is subjected to, because it uncovers the void underlying the simulacrum of the sign. The portrayal of Hyder women reveals the concept of the simulacrum from the point of view of its reliance on thingness for existence. The indeterminacy of the simulacrum is revealed through the repeated occurrence of the images of the wind and childbirth, which signify the threat of violence underlying the simulacrum.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Rushdie, Shame, simulacra, postmodernism, sign.*

The reality of the postmodern society is to a great extent different from the reality before the evolution of the sign. Having served as the basis for the perception of a sign in the past, the reality of postmodernism is considered to be a sign instead. Jean Baudrillard (1983: 3) claims that the reality is now perceived as a process, rather than an entity, as it is produced from the elements constituting a simulacrum, to quote the theorist, "the real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models-and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times."

He uses a different term to refer to this form of reality, i.e., the hyperreal. The excess of meaning, which is characteristic of hyperreality, according to Jean Baudrillard (1983: 32),

originates from the multiplicity and variety of models coexisting within one discourse. The meaning is produced within the discourse and is, consequently, affected by an infinite number of models, which “allows for all possible interpretations, even the most contradictory – all true.” The creation of hyperreality occurs on the basis of simulacra and the play of the supplements triggered by the absence of the transcendental signified within the concept of it.

The focus of this analysis of Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame* is on the portraying of two female characters, Bilquis Hyder and her daughter Naveed, and how the violence underlying the instability of the images they construct to present the manifest itself.

The image of the queen dominates the initial stages of the portrayal of Bilquis Hyder. The indeterminacy of the connotations attributed to the image is emphasized through an extensive use of irony to describe the contrast between the perception of the elements constituting the image by Bilquis, her father, and the people outside the family.

The first reference to the image of the queen is related to Bilquis' father who calls himself “the chief administrative officer of a glorious Empire” referring to his daughter as a princess in this context (Rushdie 1995: 59). The comment about the Empire soon follows defining the Empire Talkies which the Bilquis' father owns as “a fleapit of a picture theatre in the old quarter of the town” (Rushdie 1995: 60). The contrast is further developed in the description of Bilquis' image of herself as a queen. Under the influence of her father's emperor dreams as well as the images of the films which displayed “the giant, shimmering illusions of princesses”, Bilquis reinvents herself starting to behave “with the grandeur befitting a dream-empress” (Rushdie 1995: 61). However, her image is ridiculed by the neighbours who call her “queen of coughs, that is to say of expelled air, of sickness and hot wind” (Rushdie 1995: 61).

Bilquis' image of a queen is entirely created from the images surrounding her: her father's emperor aspirations reflected in the name of the cinema, his image of himself as an emperor, and the form of addressing his daughter as a princess. It is further enhanced by the images of the films portraying the grandeur of the princesses and their knights. The contrast between her image of herself and her image, which is perceived by the others, is immense. However, at this stage, the two interpretations of the image coexist peacefully without an intersection.

An accident alters the balance of the situation. The role of a crisis or a catastrophe in the postmodern discourse is stressed by different theorists. Jean Baudrillard (1983: 42) maintains that the simulacrum uses the discourse of crisis to prove its own existence by incorporating the signs of reality. However, Jacques Derrida (1997: 260) asserts that “the catastrophe opens the play of the supplements because it inscribes local difference.”

The image of the wind, which incorporates the connotation of crisis into the portrayal of Bilquis Hyder could be viewed in respect of both of these assumptions. First, the image functions as a part of an already-existing discourse, for it is mentioned in respect to Bilquis' queenly image as it is perceived by her neighbours. Outside the discourse of the crisis, it is of minor importance; however, at the height of the crisis, its significance increases:

The walls of her father's Empire puffed outwards like a hot puri while that wind like the cough of a sick giant burned away her eyebrows (which never grew again), and tore the clothes off her body until she stood infant-naked in the street but she failed to notice her nudity because the universe was ending, and in the echoing alienness of the deadly wind her burning eyes saw everything come flying out (Rushdie 1995: 63).

The excerpt reveals the change of a dominant interpretation of the queenly image: the abundance of royal references is replaced with the variety of negative images: puri, wind, cough of a sick giant, which have already been mentioned, and are enriched through the use of new related elements: nudity, alienness, infant-naked, deadly wind, ending. The process of the play of supplements is dynamic, for it is presented through the multiple action verbs, such as: puff off, burn away, tear off, fly out. The description of the process reveals the nothingness underlying the system of supplements, for the wind is said to leave no things on its way: not a thing remains of her father's empire; Bilquis herself is absolutely denuded through the loss of her clothes and the eyebrows.

The nudity caused by the wind is supplemented with the abundance of things after the crisis ends, which marks the return of Bilquis' private queenly image. The period of Raza Hyder's courtship is marked with the supplementation of the loss induced by the wind:

During their days in the fort, the pouch-eyed Captain visited Bilquis regularly, always bringing with him some item of clothing or beautification: blouses, saris, sandals, eyebrow pencils with which to replace the lost hairs, brassieres, lipsticks were showered on her (Rushdie 1995: 66).

The supplementation of things revives the recovery of the old self which is manifested in Bilquis' behaviour as well as the marginalisation of a negative attitude towards her changed self. The contrast is emphasised through the reappearance of the queenly references to herself in Bilquis' language ("Captain who outfits strange ladies like queens", "the old dream of queenlines" (Rushdie 1995: 66–67)) as well as the comments of the other with the references to Bilquis as a "scavenger, harlot, whore" (Rushdie 1995: 67). The negative comments are marginalized through the means of isolation from her fellow refugees inside the territory Raza Hyder has created for her.

Although the revival of the initial image takes place, the certainty, which has distinguished it at the period of Bilquis' life in the father's house, disappears; it is replaced with indeterminacy which is manifested in the portrayal of Bilquis as well as her two daughters. The depiction of Bilquis' fear of the wind reveals the sense of instability of her recreated image of herself and the environment surrounding her:

...as she grew older the wind awakened strange terrors in Bilquis. ... She developed a horror of movement, and placed an embargo on the relocation of even the most trivial of household items. Chairs, ashtrays, flowerpots took root, rendered immobile by the force of her fearful will (Rushdie 1995: 68).

The presence of things which has once served as a warrant of stability acquires the connotation of absence, for they have proved to be vulnerable to the impact of the wind. Therefore, the things themselves do not ensure the durability of the world which they compose. Bilquis demonstrates the faith in the power of will to substitute the indeterminacy of things.

The theme of will, as a means of creating a stable image, is developed in the portrayal of Bilquis' younger daughter Naveed. Naveed employs her will to create an image of herself as an astounding beauty. The indeterminacy of the image is revealed through the difference of opinions that her image calls for. Arjumand Harappa expresses her viewpoint in negative terms, claiming that Naveed is "plain as a plate ... and not so fair-skinned at all" (Rushdie 1995: 154–155). In contrast, Haroun considers her to be "the loveliest bride on earth" (Rushdie 1995:155).

Naveed's determination to be beautiful is retained throughout her attempts to get married. The play with the contrasts brings forth the sense of indeterminacy in the portrayal of her image. The final episode, which illustrates the coexistence of the two images, is the scene of her wedding: the guests arrive "in their oldest, most tattered clothes" are contrasted to the bride Naveed Hyder "oiled hennaed bejeweled" (Rushdie 1995: 169). The crisis, which Naveed faces after her wedding, is due to her loss of the control over her life. Similarly to her mother, whose image of herself has been shattered by the wind, Naveed is overwhelmed by the increasing number of children she is forced to give birth to. Having been transformed into a reproduction tool, she is unable to curtail the process of production, which she is entitled to perform.

The connotation of movement, which is attributed to the image of birth-giving, relates it to the image of the wind: the process of birth giving is compared to "the endless stream of humanity flowing out between her thighs" (Rushdie 1995: 207). Naveed's failure to stabilize the movement ends with the emergence of her marginalized image:

No more attempts to sit on her hair: the absolute determination to be beautiful... faded from her features, and she stood revealed as the

plain, unremarkable matron she had always really been (Rushdie 1995: 207).

Similarly to her mother, Naveed denuded by the wind displays the image which has been carefully disguised with the means of beautification. Although it has never been eliminated, at the peak of the crisis, it emerges to dominate Naveed's image.

The episode of Naveed's death illustrates the agony underlying the concept of the simulacra and draws parallels with the other episodes of her life.

That night Begum Talvar Ulhaq, the former Good News Hyder, was found in her bedroom at the Hyder residence, hanged by the neck, dead... There was jasmine in her hair and she filled the room with the fragrance of Joy by Jean Patou, the most expensive perfume in the world, imported from France to cover up the smell of her bowels opening in death (Rushdie 1995: 228).

The celebration of death through the resurrection of a simulacrum is chosen over the dominance of the void, the nothingness of the movement which disables the functioning of a simulacrum in favour of the play of simulacra. The episode stresses the indeterminacy of the simulacra through the exposure of the inappropriateness of the constituting elements of the image: the fragrance of joy and the blossom of a jasmine clash with the tragedy of the episode strengthening the impact of the scene. The episode is reminiscent of Naveed's wedding scene where the tattered clothes of the guests are contrasted with the festive looks of the bride and the groom, serving as an implication of the indeterminacy of the significations attributed to the scene.

To sum up, the portrayal of Hyder women reveals the concept of the simulacrum from the point of view of its reliance on thingness for existence. The depiction of Bilquis demonstrates the significance of things to verify the existence of simulacra. Having originated in the dream, which bears no relation to the reality surrounding her, Bilquis' queenly fantasy feeds on random things which she chooses as proofs of the existence of her dream. The indeterminacy of the simulacrum is revealed through the repeated occurrence of the image of the wind, which signifies the threat of violence underlying the simulacrum.

The portrayal of Bilquis' daughter Naveed reveals the role of the will in the formation of the simulacrum. Determined to create an image of herself as a beauty, Naveed pursues a goal of gaining power. However, despite the success of her attempts, the result she achieves is opposite to her expectations: having married the man of her dreams, she is turned into a child-producing machine. The moment of her death marks the failure of the simulacrum she has created in terms of the objectives; however, it is as well the moment of the celebration of the simulacrum, for it is relieved from any references to the outside reality.

## References

- BAUDRILLARD, J., 1983. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agent Series.
- DERRIDA, J., 1997. *Of Grammatology*. London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- RUSHDIE, S., 1995. *Shame*. London: Vintage Books.

Gauta 2014 06 12

Priimta publikuoti 2014 12 12