Rushdie's Sorcery with Language

Dana BĂDULESCU*

> "The real language problem: how to bend it shape it, how to let it be our freedom, how to repossess its poisoned wells, how to master the river of words of time of blood: about all that you haven't got a clue. How hard that struggle, how inevitable the defeat" (Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*).

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1. Finding a Voice

Time and again, in his writings and in interviews, Rushdie speaks about a writer's voice and about how hard it is for a novelist to find it. In his essay "Is Nothing Sacred?" Rushdie argues that

> the most wonderful of the many wonderful truths about the novel form is that the greater the writer, the greater his or her exceptionality (Rushdie 1992: 425).

According to Rushdie, "exceptionality" in novel writing, which is so difficult to attain, is a matter of handling language:

> the geniuses of the novel are those whose voices are fully and undisguisably their own, who […] *sign every word they write* (Rushdie 1992: 425–426).

"Exceptionality" may seem an ambitious goal when one struggles with one language to make every word one's own, but for Rushdie, who is a transnational and transcultural hybrid writer, literature is "the arena of discourse, the place where the struggle of languages can be acted out" (Rushdie 1992: 427). Rushdie is not the writer of one place, one culture or one language. His writings claim several places, cultures and languages across continents.

Everything started in Bombay, where Rushdie was born and grew up until the age of fourteen. As he accounts for its atmosphere, Bombay was a cosmopolitan city where languages, cultures, styles and fashions blended. The narrators of *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, who are born in Bombay, are literally filled

* The "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, Romania.

Assistant Professor PhD and postdoctoral researcher, grantee of the Postdoctoral Programme Project "Applied social, human and political sciences. A programme of postdoctoral research training and scholarships in the field of human and political sciences".

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with the city's polymorphic composition. Saleem Sinai feels that "consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside" him (Rushdie 1995: 9) Several languages and cultural identities wage their battle within Rushdie's characters, most of whom are also narrators reflecting their world for the reader, as fiercely as they wage it within the writer himself. However, these linguistic and cultural "multitudes" need to be contained, they need at least something that may look like a one-language medium, and here is where English comes as the most convenient solution. In "Imaginary Homelands" Rushdie points out that one of the problems of Indo-British writers "has to do with attitudes towards the use of English," which "needs remaking" for their own purposes. English is used by these writers despite their "ambiguity" towards it. There is a cultural and political implication of this self-conscious attitude to the language, and that, according to Rushdie, amounts to cultural and linguistic freedom, which should be the consequence of their postcolonial independent status. In the name of the whole community of Indo-British writers, Rushdie states that "to conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free" (Rushdie 1992: 17).

2. "We are translated men"

However, "embracing" the English language in the case of these postcolonial Indo-British writers is an act of transculturation at the level of language, which is very similar to translation. Rushdie sees himself, his fellow Indian writers writing in English, and most of his characters as what he calls "translated men." This act of "translation," with all its cultural implications, is these writers' means of "forging" "a British Indian identity". Looking at the issue of language and the writer's task of "forging" it from this angle, which is an echo of Stephen Dedalus's determination "to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race," Rushdie was born in Bombay, but later he was "borne across the world," in other words in a space which, linguistically speaking, is translation. The writer explains: "The word 'translation' comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men". It is interesting and intriguing that what Rushdie actually does in such statements is to "translate" a linguistic process into an ontological one: writing means *being* translated. "Translated man" is of course a metaphor, but etymologically the Greek word has the same meaning as the Latin word "translatio": "metapherein" means "carrying beyond," which amounts to the same process. Is this translation and the metaphorical status of being a "translated man" a loss or a gain? Rushdie is inclined to look on the bright side of it, at least linguistically: "It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained" (Rushdie 1992: 17).

Although this space of translation is so fascinating, sometimes one may slip into a crevice, travel back in time and space and dangerously undo one's carefully translated persona. Saladin Chamcha, one of the protagonists in *The Satanic Verses* who "had shaped himself a voice to go with the face," flies back to India and while on the plane he falls "into a torpid sleep" and has a nightmare. Woken up by a flight attendant, Chamcha breaks into "the Bombay lilts he had so diligently (and so long ago!) unmade". In Chamcha's case, the translation process has been clearly from an Indian base into a British English that would cover up the base. Losing his British

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speech, Chamcha fatally relapses into his Indian skin, the whole journey back home looks like a catastrophic regress, turning the nightmare into a pathetic comedy of the return of the repressed in the heated fancy of the unmade-remade Indian Saladin Chamcha: "How had the past bubbled up, in transmogrified vowels and vocab? What next? Would he take to putting coconut-oil in his hair? Would he take to squeezing his nostrils between thumb and forefinger, blowing noisily and drawing forth a glutinous silver arc of muck? […] What further, diabolic humiliations were in store?" (Rushdie 1988: 33–34).

Chamcha may fail pathetically to be a perfect "translated man", but at least he is not a narrator. Rushdie's struggles with containing his languages into one polyglot-sounding language to articulate the multitude of cultural identities "jostling" inside him, in other words his own predicament as a "translated man" is projected onto his narrators. With every successful narrative voice, Rushdie scores a victory. Saleem Sinai may be the narrative voice with which Rushdie is most pleased of all the voices he has ever created so far. That preference for Saleem's voice may be due to the timing of *Midnight's Children* in Rushdie's novel-writing career. This is in fact the novel in which, through Saleem Sinai, the writer himself felt that he found his own voice at last[1].

3. "Chutnification"

At the very end of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem speaks about a method which he playfully calls "chutnification". From this novel on, the pleasure one takes in reading Rushdie's fiction and non-fiction books cannot miss the appetizing ring Saleem gives to writing here. Although he designedly gives the impression that he speaks about cooking, Saleem uses this analogy with Indian cuisine to refer to the new language Rushdie himself has "forged" in this novel. The best way to get to the essence of his books and enjoy them, Rushdie implies, is by tasting their exquisite blend of spices and flavours, which has an Indian name, "chutney", but which is, in Bakhtin's phrase, hetero- and polyglossic. Saleem wonders: "What is required for chutnification?" The answer does not enumerate only a medley of ingredients, but also the sensual image of "Koli women with their saris hitched up between their legs". Once the covered body has done its luring trick, the next step is to uncover it. Stripped off, the body's anatomy is scanned with such a keen eye for detail that its spare parts are metamorphosed into those ingredients, so this new language sounds not only appetizing but appetizingly sexy (or shall we say "hot"?). What else is needed? Here language does its further tricks under the lover's adoring gaze: "eyes, blue as ice, which are undeceived by the superficial blandishments of fruit – which can see corruption beneath citrus-skin; fingers which, with featheriest touch, can probe the secret inconstant hearts of green tomatoes". Mesmerised by this magic number of linguistic illusionism which beguiles one with its deliciously sensual metamorphosis of ingredients into beautiful body parts echoing the ingredients, the

[1] In an interview, Rushdie declares that he always thought, looking back, that finding Saleem's voice was in fact the moment when he became a writer, because that was the first time that he could "write [his] sentences, which were not anyone else's". See Charlie Rose Show, 13th April 1999, an interview with Salman Rushdie about *The Ground beneath Her Feet* at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuWLbqGmi8k.

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reader is now completely seduced and prepared for the supreme perception given by the sense of smell: "above all" one needs "a nose capable of discerning the hidden languages of what-must-be-pickled, its humours and messages and emotions" (Rushdie 1995: 460). Saleem's language here is an "un-English English," as Rushdie would call it. It is an English-looking rainbow in whose spectre of variegated colours Rushdie's scrumptious Indianisms blend sensuously with Latinate words in the loving embrace of the English language. The ending of *Midnight's Children* is not only a 'declaration of independence' as far as language and cultural identity are concerned, but also a completed act of seduction and a conquest.

"Chutnification" leads Saleem to pickling, which is a means of preservation. Thus, this medley of everyday language is pickled, then carefully jarred and "one day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history," which may be "too strong for some palates". Whatever their effects on this or that palate, pickles are "acts of love" (Rushdie 1995: 461) because one cares to preserve only what one loves. Rushdie's new language is therefore a baby born of love, and the reader is implicitly urged to bear that in mind.

Is this "cooking" method, with all its incredible associations and metamorphic effects, an ordinary recipe? Is Saleem, and behind him or above him Rushdie, an ordinary cook? Perish the thought! This is cooking as an act of magic. The whole chapter is titled "Abracadabra," and the *hypocrite lecteur* is warned against false linguistic presumptions. "Abracadabra" is "not an Indian word at all, [it is] a cabbalistic formula derived from the name of the supreme god of the Basilidan gnostics, containing the number 365, the number of the days of the year, and of the heavens, and of the spirits emanating from the god Abraxas" (Rushdie 1995: 459).

Indeed, Rushdie's supreme commandment to his readers seems to be "thou shalt believe in magic", and words are the very medium of his sorcery. Those words, as Saleem a.k.a. Rushdie the magician discovers in *Midnight's Children*, are not the words of just one language. Several languages, as many as needed for the purpose, are magically summoned and they obediently leap to the magician's call. Rustom Bharucha, an insider of Indian culture, describes the effect of Rushdie's "chutnification": "It is as if the Queen's English has been 'chutnified', fried in sizzling ghee, and dipped in curry". Bharucha argues that this "appetite" for words is "distinctly Indian" (with tongue in cheek, the critic casually wonders: "Or is it Pakistani? We shall not distinguish between these cuisines"). Wherever the appetite may come from, India or Pakistan, the result of "chutnification" is "a bastardized, hybridized, and more recently Hindi-film-cinematized English that is now almost two centuries old" (Bharucha 1994: 160). The point Bharucha makes here is that Rushdie's purpose when he deploys this "bastardized" language is not merely to colour his style Indian, but to eventually liberate "Indian English (both the literature and the language) from its false puritanism, its fake gentility" (Bharucha 1994: 161). In other words, as Rushdie himself insists, writing is a political act, and when he writes language, or in his case languages serve the purpose of liberating the whole culture from colonial domination[2].

[2] Rushdie dedicates a whole essay in *Imaginary Homelands*, which is titled "Outside the Whale" to writing as a political act. Rushdie's text is a response to George Orwell's argument in his 1940 essay "Inside the Whale". If, through the biblical story of Jonah and the metaphor of the whale, Orwell pleads for detachment from the problems of the outside world, Rushdie argues in strong opposition to

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"The empire writes back to the centre" is Rushdie's engaging remark, selected by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin in their groundbreaking book *The Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Thus, Rushdie becomes the emblematic voice of all these postcolonial writers who use the former empire's language to tell their own stories. There are many avatars of the figure of the artist in *The Satanic Verses*, a book where "language is courage," as Jacqueline Bardolph argues (Bardolph 1994: 209). Rushdie is aware that language is not only courage, but also power. It has the power to create and also the power to destroy. Bharucha shows that "Rushdie's words can kill" (Bharucha 1994: 165). The Grandee of Jahilia, in a border-state verging on dream, thinks to himself that "the pen is mightier than the sword" (Rushdie 1988: 102). Indeed, the words in *The Satanic Verses*, by which Rushdie meant nothing but fiction, turned against him in a dangerous way. In *The Satanic Verses* "chutnification" takes the form of a polyphony where not only words and languages, but also voices merge into the orchestrating narrative voice. Like Joyce in *Ulysses*, Rushdie mixes languages, registers and styles, probing into narrative strategies of bringing them into harmony and letting them sparkle in clash at the same time. Saladin Chamcha, one of the key figures in the book, is "the Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice" (Rushdie 1988: 60).

The language in *The Satanic Verses* is as "metamorphic" as identities, dreams and visions. "Metamorphic" is a word that contains in a nutshell Rushdie's idea of shifting settings, characters, worlds, and the writer uses the word in later novels too. More often than not, the language is self-reflexive. There are essayistic passages in *The Satanic Verses* and in later novels in which this new language narcissistically contemplates its own novelty, examining its looks in the mirror of the book's pages which reflect it: "How does newness come into the world? How is it born?" the voice wonders. This is essentially the "newness" of language, which looking at itself in the mirror, explores and discovers itself. At this stage, Rushdie dwells on the self-reflexiveness of language to probe into its expressive potential. Like everything and everybody else in Rushdie's writings, language is the result of "fusions", "conjoinings", but also "translations". Being "born," language is a living thing, and the voice wonders how it survives, "extreme and dangerous as it is" (Rushdie 1988: 8).

The Satanic Verses is, as the whole planet knows, the novel which consecrated Rushdie beyond dispute as an outstanding contemporary writer in his own "voice", but also the novel which stirred a global scandal and put the writer's life in serious jeopardy. Through Baal the satirical poet, there is an awareness in the novel that writing is a dangerous enterprise. Baal muses on the poet's work, which is "to name the unnamable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep". So far, the undertaking sounds heroic, but like soldiers on the battlefield, the poet may be wounded; Baal knows it, and continues to muse: "And if rivers of blood flow from the cuts his verses inflict, then they will nourish him" (Rushdie 1988: 97). If the poet's work may be, as it often is, dangerous and transgressive, there is something in the poet's nature which transcends this realm of contingency soaked in blood, something of the kind of magic, which makes the poet rise above the pettiness and cruelty of the world.

Orwell's idea: "works of art, even works of entertainment, do not come into being in a social and political vacuum" and "the way they operate in a society cannot be separated from politics, from history. For every text, a context" (Rushdie 1992: 92).

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Moraes Zogoiby, better known as the Moor, the narrator in Rushdie's next novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* finds himself literally in this situation when blood flowing from his wounds smudges the words he sets down. There is "blood and more blood," (Rushdie 1995: 432) and yet the Moor continues to write the story's end. It looks as if the whole story were written in blood.

4. Palimpsest, "Palimpstine" and the Iconic Text

If "chutnification" is Rushdie's metaphor for his newly created polymorphous language in which several tongues blend and clash to eventually meet in the embrace of English, and if writing for a postcolonial writer is metaphorically being a "translated man," the text is layered like a palimpsest.

Palimpsest becomes the master metaphor in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. This master trope "translates" the text's hybridity both temporally and spatially. Palimpsest, a term for a parchment on which inscriptions had been made after the erasure of earlier ones, becomes in Rushdie's novel a metaphor for the historically layered pluralism and hybridity of the city of Bombay, for the mosaic of cultures, religions and languages of India, for the layers of history upon layers of history within the Moor's own "megalopolis" body.

Palimpsest becomes an imaginary fantastic territory in the paintings of Aurora Zogoiby, the Moor's mother. Throughout her life, the Moor's artist mother has painted these fantastic visions of India, delving far and deep into the past, i.e. uncovering its layers, making associations across cultures, and having the Moor and his fast-growing body in the centre, its "megalopolis" size containing the nation's multi-layered history. This fantasy world is called "Palimpstine," and alternatively "Mooristan" in the novel.

What Rushdie does here by hyperbolizing the palimpsest is to foreground writing itself as palimpsestic. Writing is what we read, and words are its medium. They are words which have surfaced into the text form their layered "tombs". However, writing is what contains the novel, the whole "body" of words, but it is not the only one art in it. The writing's palimpsest is a mirror of Aurora's "Palimpstine," a series of paintings.

Describing those paintings, the words in the novel reflect them in ekphrasis. It is significant that the earliest extant collection of ekphrases is the *Eikones*[3] of Philostratus. Depicting Aurora's paintings, Rushdie's text becomes "iconic" in several ways. "Ekphrasis" comes from the Greek "*ek,*" meaning "out," and "*phrasis,*" meaning "speak." Etymologically, the Greek word "*ekphrazein*" means "to proclaim or call an inanimate object by name." Ekphrasis is a rhetorical device which joins image and word; it visualizes the objects, naming them. The modern usage of ekphrasis is that of a literary description of a work of art. Like metaphor (which is a literary trope) and translation (which is a linguistic and cultural process), ekphrasis bridges over the visual arts and literature. Aurora's paintings aestheticize Rushdie's novel, turning it into an intersection of mirrors[4]. What Rushdie-the-word-sorcerer discovers writing *The Moor's Last Sigh* is how to make words "show" the

[3] Eikones = (Greek) "Images".

[4] For a detailed argument of how the arts mirror each other in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, see Dana Bădulescu, "Bolovanul Istoriei se rostogolește în opera lui Salman Rushdie," in *Sfera politicii*, no. 164, 2011, http://www.sferapoliticii.ro/sfera/164/art11-Badulescu.php.

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world, how to make them visual reflections of it. From now on, his novels will be imbrications of literature and the arts in their aesthetic "cross-pollination"[5].

Writing is not only a political act. This is just one of the many things it is. Rushdie will never deny it; he will even overstate the importance of the connection between these two realms[6]. Writing being a political act, words are politically loaded, writing strategies are politically oriented and motivated. The use of palimpsest is another example of the political implications of Rushdie's writing[7]. However, novel is fiction, literature is art, and art transfigures the ordinary and transcends the mundane. It reflects politics and history, but it rises above them. The extensive use of ekphrasis in this novel is Rushdie's means of transcendence from the shapeless chaotic mundane into the iconic aestheticized realm of art.

5. "ORPHEUS – ROCK'N'ROLL - YES!!!"

In an interview about *The Ground beneath Her Feet*, a novel published in 1999 at the end of the 20th century and of the millennium, Rushdie declares that he was planning to write this rock'n'roll novel as early as 1991, while he was still busy writing *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Coming across one of his notebooks of the period, he could see he had written "in big capital letters the words: ORPHEUS – ROCK'N'ROLL – YES!!!" followed by "several exclamation marks". That is the writer's explanation for the novel's birth, which, this time, started from three words and several punctuation marks. The first two of those words bring the mythical archetype of Orpheus and the contemporary phenomenon of rock'n'roll together. Once again, Rushdie's *fin-de-siècle* novel brings two worlds, with all their cultural freight, together: past and present, the old and the new. Spatially speaking, the novel moves across continents in a large sweep, back and forth between South America, India, England, and North America. In contemporary time, it opens in 1989, then moves back in time to as early as the 1950s, when rock'n'roll was born, forwards again, almost obsessively in 1989, the year of the heroine's death, and beyond 1989 into the 1990s, close to its publication date.

In the same interview, Rushdie remembers that while writing the novel, he was pleased with the narrator's voice, which he actually loved because he felt he could "speak through him in new and fresh ways", and "the only comparable feeling

[5] This is Rushdie's coinage for an entire web of influences of writers and texts across cultures and ages, which can be applied to his methods of translating the languages of other arts (especially painting, but also the cinema, photography and music) into the language of fiction.

[6] In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie reinforces the idea that writing is a political act in several essays. In the essay "Imaginary Homelands" he invokes Milan Kundera's contention that "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting". Rushdie sees his own books as "novels of memory", and in the same essay he states that "writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory, and the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of truth" (Rushdie 1992: 14).

[7] Minoli Saldago argues that by using the palimpsest as an analog for the postcolonial condition, Rushdie at the same time finds a discursive paradigm by which he shapes writing away from Western linearity and into a postcolonial-charged synchronicity. See Minoli Saldago, "The Politics of the Palimpsest in *The Moor's Last Sigh*" in *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*, Edited by Abdulrazak Gurnah, CUP, 2007, p. 161–164. See also Dana Bădulescu, "Bolovanul istoriei se rostogolește în opera lui Salman Rushdie", in *Sfera politicii*, no. 164, 2011 (http://www.sferapoliticii.ro/sfera/164/art11-Badulescu.php).

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[he] can remember as a writer" is having Saleem Sinai tell the story of *Midnight's Children* twenty years before. The story in *The Ground beneath Her Feet* is told by Umeed Merchant, better known as Rai, an Indian-born photographer who is also desperately but more or less hopelessly in love with Vina Apsara, an American-born rock star of Indian origin on her father's side.

Rai's narrative voice gave its author the feeling that it "opened new doors in [his] writing"[8]. What new doors does this novel open? That the narrator, also a character in the novel, is a photographer allows Rushdie to continue to experiment with visual aesthetics in his writing. If the Moor's narrative reflects Aurora's paintings in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rai reflects his photographs, which he depicts in a series of ekphrases throughout the novel, in his own narrative. The experiment is pushed further, as Rai's photographs and narrative echo and reflect the rock'n'roll music of the two protagonists Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara.

There is a recurrent word in the novel, repeated "like a mantra"[9]: "*disorientation*". Looking into the word and breaking it into its components, one gets to "dis-orient-ation," i.e. as Rai explains, "loss of the East" (Rushdie 2000: 5). The East is the Orient. In what ways is it lost, and how does language reflect the loss? "Disorientation" is a pun, and when he puns, Rushdie's linguistic resourcefulness and virtuosity are at their best. The story is literally a "loss of the East" in the sense that the three Indians Ormus, Rai and Vina go West and never return to India. Vina, born in America, is sent to India, where she meets and falls in love with Ormus, and then she leaves India again and returns to America. Ormus goes to England, and then, persuaded by Vina, he goes to America to be with her. Rai, because their destinies are intertwined in a triangle of love, goes to America. None of them returns to India, but what each and the three of them together find in the West is "disorienting" because it is loose, unfixed and uncertain. "The ground beneath their feet" is gradually melting, and it literally shakes several times in the novel, whose successive moments are marked by successive earthquakes of various intensities on the Richter scale. Vocabulary related to "earthquake", which is recurrent in the novel, abounds: there are "fissures," there are "cracks," there are "faults" (also to be read as "errors"), there are "chasms". Rai muses: "This is all that will remain of us: our light in our eye. Our shadows in our images. Our floating forms, falling through nothingness, after the ground vanishes, the solid ground beneath our feet" (Rushdie 2000: 508). However, for Vina "disorientation" also means the loss "of Ormus Cama, her sun" (Rushdie 2000: 5). Before she dies and loses Ormus in death, she loses him to madness while still alive. Ormus's "disorientation" is psychologically charged: he develops a "double vision" which gives him access to two worlds at once; later he loses the double vision, but he experiences hallucinations, he suffers from terrible migraines, and he develops an obsessive fear of catastrophe, which actually happens. The West itself is "disoriented" and tries to find its Orient(-ation?) in the music of Ormus and Vina. The two lovers set up a band, which they call VTO, and "America, disoriented,

[8] This is what Rushdie declares in Charlie Rose Show, 13th April 1999, an interview with Salman Rushdie about *The Ground beneath Her Feet* at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= QuWLbqGmi8k.

[9] Rushdie in Charlie Rose Show, 13th April 1999, an interview with Salman Rushdie about *The Ground beneath Her Feet* at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuWLbqGmi8k.

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seeking a new voice, succumbs to theirs. Young Americans, in search of new frontiers, board VTO's Orient express" (Rushdie 2000: 379).

This novel is, as Geetha Ganapathy-Dore argues, "not so much a planetary novel as a creative passage to America". Ganapathy-Dore also looks into the meanings radiated by "disorientation" in the novel. The critic contends that "disorientation" is personal, spatial, temporal, ideological and representational" and that "the disconcertingly filmic mode in which it is written bears witness to Rushdie's belief in the capacity of the cinema to save the novel from its *fin-de-siècle* crisis"[10]. This is not the first time when Rushdie employs filmic narrative[11]. Language itself in Rai's hands is "disoriented": it loses its "chutnified" flavour, and gains a westernized casualness, an Americanized ring. It sounds colloquial and often slangy, it takes a sing-song tone, it references or invents rock'n'roll album or song titles and lyrics. In the same sentence, Rai's frame of reference, vocabulary and tone may swerve from (fake) classical references and academic jargon to the beat of a song, whose lyrics "copy" the wishy-washy nonsense of pop: "Keep away from her," said Ameer Merchant, but once the inexorable dynamic of the mythic has been set in motion, you might as well try and keep bees from honey, crooks from money, politicians from babies, philosophers from maybes" (Rushdie 2000: 83).

Rai's voice is highly self-conscious. The photographer sets his whole arsenal of rhetorical skills to the task of telling Vina's story from the point of view of a "non-belonger"[12]. The reader can almost see Rushdie looking over Rai's shoulder and whispering the words into his ear. Rai's voice, like Saleem's in *Midnight's Children*, is a ventriloquist's. In one of the book's passages, he questions his own stance: "What hope can I, a mere journeyman shutterburg, a harvester of quotidian images from the abundance of what is, have of literary respectability?" At this point in this (self-)ironical quiz, Rai nonchalantly drops an association between his (post)colonial predicament and that of Apuleius. Rai continues, sharpening his quill to actually show pride in his "mongrel self"[13]: "Like Lucius Apuleius of Madaura, a Moroccan colonial of Greek ancestry aspiring to the ranks of the Latin colossi of Rome, I should (belatedly) excuse my (post)colonial clumsiness and hope that you are not put off by

[10] Geetha Ganapathy-Dore, "An Orphic Journey to the Disorient: Salman Rushdie's *The Ground beneath Her Feet*" in "World Literature Written in English, Vol. 38, Issue 2, 2000, pp. 17–27 at http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17449850008589325.

[11] For a detailed argument of Rushdie's use of filmic narrative in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, see Dana Bădulescu, "Bolovanul istoriei se rostogoleşte în opera lui Salman Rushdie" in *Sfera politicii*, 2011, no. 164 (http://www.sferapoliticii.ro/sfera/164/art11-Badulescu.php). Rushdie's interest in experimenting with translating visual art techniques into writing started earlier than *The Moor's Last Sigh*, but *The Moor* is the first in a series of novels where he commits his writerly skills to further experiments and to an extended use of ekphrasis.

[12] "Non-belonger" is another coinage Rushdie creates in this linguistically playful novel. Rai glosses: "in every generation there are a few souls, call them lucky or cursed, who are simply *born not belonging*, who came into the world semi-detached, if you like, without strong affiliation to family or location or nation or race; that there may even be millions, billions of such souls, as many non-belongers as belongers, perhaps" (Rushdie 2000: 72–73).

[13] In defending *The Satanic Verses* against those who considered it to be blasphemous to Islam, Rushdie described his novel as "a love-song to our mongrel selves" which rejoices in the "hybridity, impurity, ingtermingling the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs". As quoted by John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, Routledge, 2004, p. 147.

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the oddness of my tale". Of course, his (post)colonial condition leads him to the issue of language, which is, ultimately, the quintessential aspect of a text:

> Just as Apuleius did not fully "Romanize" his language and style, thinking it better to find an idiolect that permitted him to express himself in the fashion of his Greek ancestors, so also I…

Rai suspends the flow of his thoughts with a few dots here to allow his sentence to sound aural, natural, and continues: "but look here, there is an important difference between myself and the author of *The Transformations* and *The Golden Ass*" (Rushdie 2000: 388). Everything in this web of references and speculations matters: it is not only that Apuleius was one of those writers "beyond the pale" (Rushdie 2000: 42), that Apuleius's novel is – ironically for that reason – the only Latin novel that has survived in its entirety, that an event in the writer's biography is associated with the use of magic of which he was accused; what matters as much as all these is the fact that Apuleius wrote a book titled *Metamorphoses*, which ends with the hero eager to be initiated into the mystery cult of Isis. Apuleius's hero Lucius, like Ormus whom Rushdie casts as Orpheus and who takes chastity vows, abstains from forbidden food, bathes and purifies himself. Lucius, like Ormus, eventually goes through a process of initiation, which involves a journey to the underworld.

This is what Rushdie's language is in *The Ground beneath Her Feet*: his own new idiolect which is a result of linguistic, cultural, spatial, and psychological "disorientation," and which he carried further into his next novel.

6. After "Disorientation"

The Ground beneath Her Feet was "disorienting" for Rushdie himself. After this novel, which already started the "disorientation" process, the main setting or at least the revolving axis of his novels is America (or the "dream" if it).

In *Fury*, which came out in 2001, a few months before the attack in September, Rushdie seems to have had the prescience of an imminent terrorist onslaught that was lurking underneath, a huge accumulation of wrath that was on the verge of exploding[14]. In fact, both *Fury*, published before the event, and *Shalimar the Clown*, published four years later, take up the theme of terrorism, which *The Satanic Verses* had backlashed in 1989.

In *Fury*, Malik Solanka, "retired historian of ideas" (Rushdie 2002: 3) of Indian origin, a migrant to London and now settled in New York, goes to America to be "eaten" by it. New York is the very place that – Solanka imagines – can do the trick because it gives one a "sense of being crowded out by other people's stories, of walking like a phantom through a city that was in the middle of a story which didn't need him as a character" (Rushdie 2002: 89). However, Solanka is a character in his own right, and his formation as a historian of ideas "orients" the novel's vocabulary towards academic jargon. Nevertheless, since Solanka is also the author of a puppet called "Little Brain" which inhabits the virtual space and which eventually makes Solanka leave the academy for the more glamorous media, the novel's language and

[14] For an argument of fury as a theme in the novel and also its suggestive dust jacket, see Dana Bădulescu, "Salman Rushdie's 'Unfettered Republic of the Tongue' in *Fury"* at http://philologia.org.rs/Files/broj_4.pdf, p. 139–146.

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style are also tainted by IT jargon. Apart from Little Brain, Solanka is the inventor of the back-story of a hypertext suggestively titled "The Fittest Survive: The Coming of the Puppet Kings".

The hypertext spurs Malik's propensity towards experimenting with new narrative strategies which allow him unlimited freedom to branch out his back story and to abolish linear chronology. Malik is absolutely seduced by these new possibilities, and his enthusiasm, which is a surprise to himself, is translated into computer terminology: "He, who had been so dubious about the coming of the brave new electronic world, was swept off his feet by the possibilities offered by the new technology, with its formal preference for lateral leaps and its relative uninterest in linear progression, a bias that had already bred in its users a greater interest in variation than in chronology" (Rushdie 2002: 186). In its combination of old myths and new digital technology, Solanka's back-story in progress is Rushdie's translation of *The Matrix* style in fiction.

Solanka is a projection of Rushdie himself. Like Solanka, Rushdie has become almost a computer addict. He confesses that he started using a computer only when Khomeini's 1989 fatwa drove him underground: "My writing has got tighter and more concise because I no longer have to perform the mechanical act of re-typing endlessly," he explained during an interview while in hiding. "And all the time that was taken up by that mechanical act is freed to think".

These new possibilities opened up to Solanka and to Rushdie by the new digital technologies give new possibilities to the contemporary writer's readers and critics to deal with the work. In 2010, Emory University organized an exhibition of Rushdie's outdated computers aimed at showcasing the impact of technology on the creative process. The archivists tried

> to recreate Mr. Rushdie's writing experience and the original computer environment". At the Emory exhibition, "visitors can log onto a computer and see the screen that Mr. Rushdie saw, search his file folders as he did, an early draft of Mr. Rushdie's 1999 novel, "The Ground Beneath Her Feet," and edit a sentence or post an editorial comment[15].

Therefore, what Rushdie reflected in *Fury* is an awareness of amazing possibilities opened up by computer technologies and the ways they can influence language, style and narrativity. What the Emory exhibition did was to raise the readers' awareness of these new possibilities.

7. The Enchantress of Florence

Rushdie's 2008 novel *The Enchantress* of Florence is set in the 16th century, across the world, in India, Italy and America, which was, at that moment, just "a world of fantasy which men were still dreaming into being" (Rushdie 2009: 418). The novel harps on Rushdie's old themes of migration and cultural connectivity and on the tension between travelling and staying put.

The atmosphere foregrounded in this particular novel is that of the culture of the Renaissance, when the power of imagination and magic prevailed. The

[15] Patricia Cohen, "Fending off Digital Decay, Bit by Bit" at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/16/books/16archive.html?pagewanted=all.

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archetypal figure of the "enchantress" is central to this cultural atmosphere, and as Rushdie accounts for it, the Renaissance was the moment when womanhood and magic were related to youth and beauty, and this representation of femininity ambiguously verged on good and on evil at the same time. The seductress's several names are indicative of that ambiguity. The writer's interest in the suggestiveness of names is reflected in the Italian and French versions of her name Angelica/ Angelique, which hint to her purity and innocence, on the one hand, and Qara Kőz/ Lady Black Eyes, which signal her virtually evil nature, on the other. However, she is not the only seductress in the novel, and here is Rushdie at his best playing his mirror games with enchantresses, one of whom is called Mirror.

This is a story, or rather again a collection of stories that has a luring effect upon the reader. The reading seduces through its places and characters, but also through its language, which is a polyglot mix embraced by English with an archaic Renaissance flavour. The very first lines make a strong visual impact, and the image of a traveller coming from an unknown place and approaching what might be "the throne of a monarch" "in the day's last light" when "the glowing lake below the palace-city looked like a sea of molten gold" (Rushdie 2009: 5) sounds more like the lines of a poem and transports the reader into a fantastic realm of fairy tale.

In *The Enchantress*, Rushdie returns to his interest in art and in aestheticizing the novel. Like *The Moor's Last Sigh*, this novel is a collection of ekphrases. Thus, Dashwant the painter falls in love with the hidden "dream-woman" Qara Kőz/Lady Black Eyes/Angelica/Angelique, paints her, and eventually vanishes into his own painting. This, and the whole idea of a community of painters at Akbar's court literally inventing Mughal Hindustan through painting, as Aurora invented India and her history in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, reiterates Rushdie's postmodernist sensibility. The world is a projection of collective or individual imagination, the world can be dreamed into being through art, or just dreamed into being. However, it is art that gives dreams shape.

It is shape which contains the several fascinating love stories of *The Enchantress*, but the many filigrees in this shape are again words, languages. Here is another voice in Rushdie's writing to tell the enchantress's story. He is what we may call in our contemporary language an international citizen of several names, languages and cultures. Ucello/Mogor dell'amore's Italian origin is rather dubious. He does not seem to belong to one place, one culture, one language, he is the traveller (though not the only one in the novel, of course) who travels, very often perilously, for insecurity, and who has a story to tell either to make a fortune or to perish by it. When he is introduced in the first chapter, the reader finds out that "He could dream in several languages: Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Persian, Russian, English and Portuguese. He had picked up languages the way most sailors picked up diseases: languages were his gonorrhea, his syphilis, his scurvy, his plague. As soon as he fell asleep half the world started babbling in his brain, telling wondrous traveller's tales" (Rushdie 2009: 12). When he introduces himself to a Scottish lord, Ucello speaks "perfect English" (Rushdie 2009: 16) and his manners look almost aristocratic. The narrative itself blends Italian and English beautifully and naturally, making of Mogor dell'amore a perfect 'translated man':

> A book sealed their friendship: the **Canzoniere** of Petrarch, an edition of which lay, as always, by the Scottish milord's elbow on a little **pietra dura** tabletop.

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> 'Ah, mighty Petrarca,' 'Uccello' cried. 'Now there is a true magician.' And striking a Roman senator's oratorical pose he began to declaim [in Italian]: […] Whereupon Lord Hauksbank took up the sonnet's thread in English (Rushdie 2009: 18–19).

Mogor dell'amore is one more narrator in Rushdie's novels who is aware that language exerts a magic, often seducing, but sometimes also dangerous, power. He is yet another narrator for whom this magic is not just of one language, but of several languages woven into a seducing yarn.

8. The Translated Man's Languages from 'Chutnification' through 'Disorientation' to Seduction

What Rushdie tried to achieve in the first place as a writer was finding a voice of his own so that he could tell his stories that are nobody else's stories in words that are nobody else's words. Once that voice found with Saleem Sinai, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, the novel which consecrated him as an outstanding writer, Rushdie had Saleem experiment with the several languages with which he himself had grown up, containing them in a 'chutnified' English. Metaphorically, that is both cooking and magic.

In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie projects his own self into characters whom he calls "translated men," since the language(s) they speak and the culture(s) they appropriate are not of one place but of the whole world, across continents. However, Bombay is the epitome of the pluralism and hybridity that nourish Rushdie's writing.

In his 1999 novel *The Ground beneath Her Feet* Rushdie "disorients" his fiction. "Disorientation" has several connotations in the novel, but the all-pervasive one is "loss of the East". Indeed, *Fury*, his next novel, is set in New York, the epicentre of the contemporary world of pluralism and hybridity, an almost hyperreal place, but also a city seething with fury. With *Fury* and through his character Malik Solanka, Rushdie's style becomes intensely coloured by high-tech jargon, and the narrative itself reflects hypertextuality.

The Enchantress of Florence, Rushdie's 2008 novel set in the 16th century Renaissance, is a return to writing and reading as magic and seduction and to the aestheticized textuality of *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Settings have a fantastic aura of fairy tale, and the narrator is a traveller who "catches" languages as sailors "catch" viruses. His story embeds several other seducing stories where enchantresses multiply. Queens and whole empires can be summoned into existence or vaporized into non-existence by the whims of imagination, whose supreme manifestation is art.

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Abstract

This article looks into how postcolonial writer Salman Rushdie does a work of "magic" with languages in order to find his own voice to tell his unrooted and hybrid stories. Hybridity and unrootedness are essential aspects of his writing. This study traces Rushdie's experiments with languages from *Midnight's Children*, the novel where he felt he found a voice of his own, and through to *The Enchantress of Florence*, a novel of linguistic and artistic refinement. From one novel to the next, Rushdie found new inflections of his voice in his narrators and characters, who "chutnified" English, "translated" their languages into their idioms, aestheticized and palimpsested their world, "disoriented" it, turned it into a "hypertext", or seduced the readers with their stories.

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