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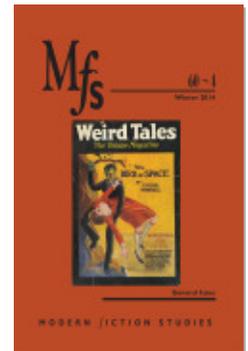
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## The Dialectic of Shame: Representation in the MetaNarrative of Salman Rushdie's *Shame*

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**Ayelet Ben-Yishai**

I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my "male" plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and 'female' side.

—Salman Rushdie, *Shame*

This passage from Salman Rushdie's third novel has been pivotal in most analyses of the novel, and indeed will also prove important to mine, if more peripherally. *Shame* is probably the least written-about of all of Rushdie's novels, and when they did write about it, many critics have centered their argument around his treatment of women, hence the importance of the passage quoted above. Opinions have varied, ranging

from charges that his treatment is misogynist (Ahmad 144, 148; Cundy 52) to praise for his emancipatory vision (Needham). Within this range we find readings of "ambivalent" feminism (Hai 16–50) and, more complexly, "critical-therefore-emancipatory because of its ambivalence" ones (Levinson; Mufti<sup>1</sup>). In this paper I too take up a feminist reading, but attempt to approach it from yet another angle, one that ultimately allows for most of these interpretations but frames them according to a different question, that of representation or mediation. I wish to show that both *Shame* the novel, as well as "shame" the concept as it is articulated in the novel, are conceptualizations of a dialectic of representation, and *as such* necessarily engage a feminist dialectic. Ultimately, I argue that the novel formulates a critique of the domination of women not through the women represented, but through the representation of these women.

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The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centering to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan.

—Salman Rushdie, *Shame*

As exemplified in this passage, the question of representation is overtly thematized in the novel with the overarching question of Pakistan versus Peccavistan. In this and other passages, the narrator interrogates the question he posits himself, whether the novel is about the fictional "Peccavistan" named in the novel or "really" about the real Pakistan. The obvious answer is that the novel retraces the historical, real-life infamous struggle for power over Pakistan between General Zia Ul-Haq and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, respectively portrayed in the novel as Raza "Razor Guts" Hyder and Iskandar "Isky" Harrapa. But the answer is also "not quite," for the novel—as shown in the quote above—purposefully and overtly evades an isomorphic correlation between historical "fact" and textual "fiction." Furthermore, the novel cannot be easily classified: despite its allegorical moments, the novel is not an allegory because its levels of meaning are not distinct from each other. This is not a story

about an imaginary country that is meant to be understood as Pakistan but a story about Pakistan that is not quite Pakistan. Likewise, the novel cannot be classified as "historical fiction" or even the textual equivalent of a "docu-drama" because instead of striving for verisimilitude as these genres require, the narrator shies away from it. The Pakistan/Peccavistan question thus serves to foreground the centrality of the question of representation to the novel, in all its levels of form and meaning.

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If this were a realistic novel about Pakistan, I would not be talking about Bilquis and the wind; I would be talking about my youngest sister. Who is twenty-two, and studying engineering in Karachi; who can't sit on her hair anymore, and who (unlike me) is a Pakistani citizen. On my good days, I think of her as Pakistan, and then I feel very fond of the place, and find it easy to forgive its (her) love of Coca-Cola and imported motor-cars.

—Salman Rushdie, *Shame*

In order to take up this question of representation, I have chosen to focus my reading on the series of narratorial/authorial "asides" that recur throughout the novel, in which the narrator, taking on the persona of the real-life Rushdie himself, addresses the reader in a metanarrative that exposes his thoughts, memories, and deliberations in the process of writing the story of *Shame*.<sup>2</sup> As the passages already quoted in this paper show, these asides range in character, form, and content: from postmodernist theoretical analyses of the novel; through more personal ruminations or anecdotes that appear to be true to Salman Rushdie's "real" life and his relationship with Pakistan; to the narrator's deliberations as a writer of this self-same novel. Thus, the question of representation is foregrounded in these asides by their very appearance and conceit of being somewhat more real and ontologically less fictional. However, the act of mediation between the different levels of the story is represented as transparent, and, as a result, it is elided. And indeed, some of this novel's critics have referred to these passages as conclusive in that they can provide an authoritative key to an interpretation of the novel or, alternatively, provide the (conventionally missing) link between the real-life author and his fictional text.<sup>3</sup>

Ascribing the metanarrative to Rushdie himself is not as unaccountable as it may seem. The form of these metanarratives works relentlessly to give the impression of "laying bare the device." Because they foreground the novel's own conceits of representation, they do seem to be ontologically absolute moments of candor, truth, and almost transparency—of very limited (if any) mediation. Aijaz Ahmad, for one, is willing to accept this conceit for his purpose of talking about Rushdie's ideology: "The narrative within the book itself is controlled *transparently* by repeated direct, personal interventions on the part of the narrator—who is for the purposes of our interpretations here, mainly Rushdie himself" (Ahmad 132; emphasis added).

However, following Althusser, I would like to read these ostensibly "transparent" moments in the text as those not least, but most, pregnant with mediation and, consequently, with ideology. How then, does the narrator mediate his representation precisely at the point of the conceit of no mediation? In other words, the "different question" I wish to pose is not whether or how this novel represents (or misrepresents) women, Pakistan, or anything else for that matter; but rather the question of what this novel says about the very possibility and meaning of the act of representation and the mediations that are elided in this very act.

I begin this inquiry by looking closely at the narrator's own definition of his mode of representation. "If this were a realistic novel about Pakistan, [. . .]" says the narrator over and again in one of his longer asides (65–68). He then immediately proceeds to elaborate a list of things he would have had to include had this been a realistic novel about Pakistan. This marks and creates a formal contrast between the asides and the novel proper, thus producing a correlated dichotomy between the narrative (fiction) and metanarrative (fact). The markers of the real, as pointed out by the narrator, are of two related kinds: The first is a long list of historical/cultural/political ostensibly real-life anecdotes about Pakistan, ranging from corruption—"President Ayub Khan's alleged Swiss bank account"—to "genocide in Baluchistan"; from ludicrous censorship of Western films to globally strategic anti-Semitism (67). These anecdotes mark the real by their verifiable referentiality: many of these facts are common knowledge, and the rest can be authenticated by relatively simple research. The use of such referential facts imparts a similar truth effect to the whole of the metanarrative. But the result undercuts the

narrator's own stated intent: he lists the things he *would have had* to include had this been a realistic novel; this, of course, creates the opposite effect—the "realistic" is de facto included in his novel and hence not excluded. Moreover, had he restricted his novel to these verifiable facts it could not have been a novel—characterized by its fictionality<sup>4</sup>—but another documentation of some sort. In other words, the "realistic novel"—as defined by the narrator—is an oxymoron and could not have, in fact, been written.

The second marker of this would-be realistic novel is the personal anecdote, in which the narrator, in his Rushdie-persona, reveals the limits of his personal perspective and shows how his story of Pakistan is specific:

Even though I lived in Pakistan for a long time, I have never lived there for longer than six months at a stretch. [...] I have learned Pakistan in slices, the same way as I have learned my growing sister. [...] I have felt closer to each successive incarnation [of my sister] than to the one before. (This goes for the country, too.)

I think that what I am confessing is that, however I choose to write about over-there, I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors, [...]. I must reconcile myself to the broken bits. (66)

A number of things combine here to create a realistic effect. First is the confessional, autobiographical mode—we always tend to sound more "truthful" when we confess our limitations. The narrator seems to create a sense of candor and honesty by professing an inability to produce a complete narrative about Pakistan, due to his inconsistent residence in the country. But this candor is also ironic, for *Shame* is heavily invested, both thematically and formally, in fragmented, radically subjective narrative technique, as is much of Rushdie's fiction. The text itself implies that the narrator's inadequacy is shared by all human perspectives and narrators. In other words, neither he nor a full-fledged Pakistani resident could have created a comprehensive narrative. This is especially true in light of the repeated allusions to Pakistani censorship, rendering the "outsider" more, not less, capable of telling the "truth" about Pakistan. Thus, while the narrator is ostensibly confessing his limitations, he is at the same time showing that he is just as reliable a narrator as any other—his

fragments are as good as the next; the "reconciliation" is a celebration. The same is true for the academic tone the narrator takes here and elsewhere in his asides, analyzing the narrative by means of the metanarrative. This seems to lay bare the device of the narrative, deconstructing the text, but yet again, the deconstructive moment turns on itself, exposing its very textuality as opposed to its referentiality. The result is that textuality, rather than referentiality, has become the marker of the reality-effect.

The second reality-effect component of the "personal" marker of the realistic novel is specificity. The narrator writes about his sister, "[w]ho is twenty-two, and studying engineering in Karachi; who can't sit on her hair anymore, and who (unlike me) is a Pakistani citizen" (65–66). This specificity and personal tone (as well as the production of the Rushdie persona) lends an autobiographical—hence non-fictional—tone to the text. But this marker is also short lived: the sister is almost immediately allegorized (in one of the most banal of allegorizations—woman-as-nation) as Pakistan. Nevertheless, this equation of specificity with the realistic is further supported by the text when the narrator states, two pages later, that

By now, if I had been writing a book of this nature, it would have done me no good to protest that I was writing universally, not only about Pakistan. The book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing! Realism can break a writer's heart.

Fortunately, however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairy-tale, so that's all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken, either. (67–68)

This passage affords us a closer look at the reason given in the text for the separation of fictional narrative from its factual "realistic" metanarrative asides. Once more, the dichotomy of representation is thematized: a text can only be fictional or factual—either obscure to reality or transparent to it, realistic or "fairy-tale." It is in this vein that the reader is instructed to approach this text. Or maybe not? For in its sarcastic tone, the text subverts this fact/fiction dichotomy, alluding to its very impossibility. Moreover, in implicitly assigning this notion to the

much-derided Pakistani censors, he emphasizes the over-simplification and ludicrousness of the very idea of such a dichotomy. Yet again, the text subverts the premises it establishes; turning a mirror onto both the transparency of the "realistic" metanarrative as well as the fictional "fairy-tale" narrative—and more importantly, to representation itself.

Representation is thus established as a troubled concept, central to the novel as a whole and specifically to the metanarrative within it. It constantly subverts the seemingly natural categories that it sets up; calling the concept of representation itself into question. Therefore, the "different question" that I have posited above regarding the very possibility and meaning of the act of representation and its mediation is pointed out by the text itself. What then, is represented by the novel's concern with representation? What might the meaning of this concern ultimately be? I approach these questions of representation through various theoretical and critical texts that inform my understanding of the intertwining dialectics of representation and feminism in *Shame*. In doing so, I will articulate my argument by differentiating it from these other texts, tracing, in a negative way, its own contours.

The first type of reading I would like to distance myself from in this context is the postcolonial deconstructionist reading espoused by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*.<sup>5</sup> Granted, the reading by which representation always already subverts and refracts its own ability to represent is one to which the text lends itself with great ease. The narrator's arguments for fragmented representation are convincing, for as I have shown they appear to be more truthful and "real." As a result, it becomes commonsensical, indeed almost natural to end by saying that we, like the narrator, must "reconcile" ourselves to the broken bits and fragmented mirrors through which we represent the world. For Bhabha, this would seem (as I have hinted it might seem for the narrator as well) a moment of celebration, "an empowering condition of hybridity; an emergence that turns 'return' into reinscription or redescription; an iteration that is not belated, but ironic and insurgent" (227). Thus the impasse of representation becomes an empowering moment, produced and reproduced through its rearticulation. The metanarrator (the Rushdie-persona) certainly seems to read his work that way. However, this paper follows the methodology of questioning that which seems natural. So, while Rushdie's prose does seem to go hand-in-hand with Bhabha's theory,

I would like to attempt to release that clasp and read Rushdie's representation as a negative dialectic of shame constituting a dialectic of mediation because of its stakes for feminist reading.

Enter shame. It is the metanarrator who establishes the notion of shame as a dialectic, though he does not use the specific term: "What's the opposite of shame? What's left when *sharam* is subtracted? That's obvious: shamelessness" (33). First, we must note that the positioning of shamelessness opposite shame is not an obvious one. The lexical and semantic opposite of shame is not shamelessness but rather honor;<sup>6</sup> while the "opposite" of shamelessness would be shamefulness. Opposing shame and shamelessness in this text is, of course, hardly a mistake or misunderstanding, but rather an indication that the relationship between the two concepts is not one of opposites, but one of negation (subtraction) and hence a dialectic. The dialectic of shame in this novel is not with its opposite—honor, but with its lack—shamelessness. The antithesis is not distinct from the thesis, but rather inscribed within its production: shameless behavior produces shame.

Having (tentatively) identified shame as the thesis and shamelessness as its antithesis, the narrator continues, "Between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn [. . .]. Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence" (118). What then is the nature of this dialectic, which, fierce and destructive, can only generate violence? I would like to show that it can be read in three ways, all of which are supported by the novel itself. The first is a dialectic that consists of a juxtaposition of two opposites and an ability to contain them both at the same time; the second is one that establishes a self/other dependency between its two components and then internalizes that relationship in order to overcome it; the third form is related to Horkheimer and Adorno's negative dialectic, wherein the dialectical relationship necessarily produces excess or residue, thus providing its own undoing and/or critique.

The key to the first reading can be found in the last metanarrational aside of the novel, opening a chapter entitled "Stability": the narrator recounts discussing a play, Büchner's *Danton's Death*, which he has seen with "visitors from Pakistan": "'The point is,' one of my friends argued, 'that this opposition exists all right; but it is an internal dialectic.' That made sense. The people are not only like Robespierre. They, we, are Danton too. We are Robeston and Danpierre. The inconsistency doesn't matter;

I myself manage to hold large numbers of wholly irreconcilable views simultaneously, without the least difficulty. I do not think others are less versatile" (256). The narrator understands the dialectic to be the subject's ability to hold or embody two or more inconsistent and even irreconcilable views at the same time. It is, in his mind, a matter of versatility, reminiscent once again of Bhabha's empowering notion of the hybridity of the migrant whose ability to be many things at once is his advantage over others.<sup>7</sup>

Against this understanding of dialectic-as-hybridity the metanarrator shows a different understanding, again gleaned from the opposition between Danton and Robespierre in that same play, of the nature of the dialectic. He comments: "This opposition—the epicure against the puritan—is [...] the true dialectic of history. [...] Virtue versus vice, ascetic versus bawd, God against the Devil: that's the game" (254). What is forcefully implied is that the last, unnamed, item in this list of oppositions is that between shame and shamelessness. This relationship between the puritan and the epicure, and hence between shame and shamelessness, is more complex than the mere juxtaposition of the irreconcilable. For the two entities in this reading of a dialectic are dependent upon each other for their very existence—the epicure can only be defined as such or become one against an existing notion of puritanity that he or she can then transgress. Hence the dialectic between shame and shamelessness—the latter is and can only be defined against the former, which is in turn constituted by the latter. There is no unmarked term upon which the relationship hinges. In other words, shamelessness can only be defined against shame, whereas it is through shameless behavior that shame is created. I will continue elaborating on this point, but not before the (belated) introduction of Sufiya Zinobia Hyder, shame incarnate; and her husband Omar Khayyam Shakil, the embodiment of shamelessness.<sup>8</sup>

Sufiya Zinobia is born into shame for being a girl instead of a boy. At the age of almost two, she contracts brain fever; the cure leaves her mentally retarded. As Ahmad correctly observes, in the course of the novel, her shame "comes to refer less and less to herself (her femaleness, her mental retardation) or to her family and becomes increasingly focused on the world as Sufiya finds it; she becomes, almost literally, the conscience of the shameless world" (146). Her allegorical marriage to Omar Khayyam, forbidden by his three shameful mothers to feel shame, reinforces the interdependence of the two concepts they embody.

The above second reading is, indeed, dialectical in portraying the dependency of the two opposites on each other; the metanarrator now adopting a more Hegelian view of the dialectic—"the true dialectic of history" (254). The result of this dialectic is overcoming its opposition by progressing to a third term that preserves that which it overcomes. Thus the dialectical opposites are contained within a trajectory of progression. In this case, the metanarrator takes "shame" and "shamelessness" and pits them against each other, creating the narrative that preserves them both, but contained, now understood as "the game." Shame and shamelessness are no longer as threatening since they are contained by their very dependency on each other; they can be transcended, grasped from without.

But this view from without carries its own dangers. First and foremost, the position of exteriority gives the observer the privilege of not being implicated in or by the dialectical terms. The metanarrator assumes he recognizes the dialectic for what it is and that "it" is extrinsic to himself. Having the power of comprehension, he is able to transcend the dialectic; he is on the outside looking in. He is not part of shame or shamelessness because he is able to explain them. This can lead (and, I argue, does lead) to a reification of the concepts of shame and shamelessness. And indeed, shame is represented as an object whose meaning is sealed, independent and exterior to its user; hence it is reified and, ultimately, fetishized as "Eastern": "This word: shame. No, I must write it in its original form, not in this peculiar language tainted by wrong concepts [. . .] *Sharam*, that's the word. For which this paltry 'shame' is a wholly inadequate translation. Three letters, *shin rè mim* (written naturally, from right to left)" (33). Shame is (or was) a pure "natural" Eastern (Oriental?) concept, before it was "tainted" by the English language. This quote assumes, of course, that concepts exist originally in pure form, untainted by a subject position from which they are uttered.<sup>9</sup>

All things considered, this version of the dialectic does not, in my mind, account for the mediation at work within it. The ideas of shame and shamelessness are not unmediated concepts or received notions simply reflecting an external, pre-existing concept. Rather, it is only in their articulation from concrete subject positions that they become meaningful. In the above, second, reading of the dialectic, shame and shamelessness are perceived as hermetic unequivocal concepts; this reading thus lacks an awareness of the subject position that creates their meaning.

If we want to go beyond a description of the personification of shame towards an explanation of it—to distinguish between what shame is and the way it manifests itself—we must first acknowledge that a double set of mediations is at work in the conceptualization of shame in the novel. One is the representation of shame as a reified object; the second, of course, the personification of this construct in Sufiya Zinobia. Following the methodological steps of Moishe Postone in his essay "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism," we can recognize that the two mediations present themselves antinomically, as the opposition of the abstract (concept/word) and the concrete (the character).<sup>10</sup> Postone argues that "[b]ecause, additionally, both sides of the antinomy are objectified, each appears to be quasi-natural" (308). As I have shown, both the mediations in the novel—shame as a reified object as well as Sufiya as shame personified—have indeed been objectified and naturalized. It is exactly a wariness of the naturalness of these two representations that leads me to the third, most productive way to read the dialectic in this novel: looking at these mediations *through each other*, in a negative dialectic.

This methodology can be traced to Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. Their dialectical approach is characterized by the use of the self same concept as both object and subject position. In fact, according to Martin Jay, it is the ability to include both these moments, negative as well as positive, which is presented as the very strength of the concept (*Begriffe*) by Horkheimer and Adorno (261). In their critique, the Enlightenment is both the object and the subject position for their project. This is not to say that the two—enlightenment as historical object and enlightenment as theory—are identical. In fact it is the way they both "escape" this identity that creates their dialectic in the form of reflective opposition. A similar move can be located in their reading of Homer's *Odyssey*; the text serves both as an object of their reading and at the same time as the source of theory for that very reading. Finally, the notion of sacrifice within the *Odyssey* is elaborated as an ultimate dialectical moment; Odysseus is both sacrifice and priest (Horkheimer and Adorno 50), a nexus for their reading of the *Odyssey* as the "inherent relationship between self-renunciation and self preservation" (Jay 264). Thus, the same dialectical move is traced in three different levels of *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*: in its overarching project (the dialectic of enlightenment); in its approach to the literary (the reading of

the *Odyssey*); and in its analysis of trope within the literary text (the analysis of sacrifice). This provides a methodological understanding of the negative (cultural) dialectic as the use of subject matter (object) as theorizing its own conceptuality. In other words, closer to those of Horkheimer and Adorno, this method negates the object with its own perception, while maintaining their "reflective opposition" (Jay 267).

An invitation to take this third approach can also be located in the novel. Since *Shame* is not a purely allegorical novel, both Sufiya and Omar Khayyam are but *representations* of shame and shamelessness; the characters do not embody that which they represent, because they cannot do so. Due to this very act of mediation, they are in excess of their corresponding concepts as well as of each other. Ahmad makes this precise observation, but fails to follow through on its meaning: "[T]he very dialectic—of shamelessness and shame, and their condensation in eruptions of violence—which governs the conceptual framework of the novel is fundamentally flawed; symbolic values that Rushdie assigns to Sufiya Zinobia simply exceed the terms within which he has fashioned her whole existence" (146). Moreover, and at the same time, her existence exceeds the symbolic value she embodies. It is this excess that is the marker of mediation—of the impossibility of a complete allegorical identification between the character and what she purportedly represents. Thus, this excess is not a "flaw" in the conceptual framework of the novel, but is the inevitable residue, intrinsic to the negative dialectic, according to Horkheimer and Adorno.

This approach accords with that of Marjorie Levinson, who takes Ahmad to task for a Marxist reading of *Shame* that "reproduces the false antithesis identified by Lukàcs as the foundation of capitalist science: namely, immediacy and abstraction" (103). Levinson argues that Ahmad's reading is not dialectical, thus espousing a "binary, moralistic, transcendental critique" (107). Reading Sufiya Zinobia and Omar Khayyam as transparencies through which one can see shame and shamelessness and their dialectic, ultimately results in a reification, wherein the abstraction of shame is naturally perceived to *be personified* or actualized in Sufiya Zinobia, shamelessness in Omar Khayyam, and the dialectic at work in their relationship.

We return to shame, now approached as a negative dialectic. We no longer need shamelessness to create this dialectic, because the negation

of shame is already contained in its conceptualization. In other words, the dialectical relationship is no longer that of shame and shamelessness but rather of shame as object and its perception as such. Since neither of these representations is transparent, they must be "detoured through another transparency"—observed through each other—for "unless they are so produced, they remain abstractions masquerading as particulars" (Levinson 115). Only when we look at shame as a nontransparency, as a reified construct, through another nontransparency, the mediated characters, can we examine its naturalization by asking *why* and *how* Sufiya Zinobia is incarnated as shame.

The best place to do so is the aside in which the metanarrator describes his real-life and imaginary sources—his how and why—for his "heroine." Sufiya Zinobia was initially created "out of the corpse" (118) of a Pakistani girl in London who was stabbed to death by her father for making love to a white boy and bringing "such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain" (117). Two more "phantoms" join the first girl in the making of Sufiya Zinobia, both from London, another girl and a boy. The girl, "'Asian' again," is beaten up by a group of white teenage boys, and "afterwards, remembering her beating, she feels not angry but ashamed." In the narrator-as-writer's imagination the violence that is the result of shame unleashes in the second girl great fury and strength far beyond her physical ability, as she "thrashed the white kids within an inch of their lives" (119). The boy, "from a news clipping" had been found "blazing in a parking lot" (120). Apparently (and unaccountably) he had ignited of his own accord.

How do these three sources work against or with each other in the implied writer's mind? How are they perceived and objectified? Let us begin with the first girl. The narrator recounts how the story of her murder "appalled" him not only because of the infanticide itself, but because of the family's friends and relatives who refused to condemn the father's actions and understood the man's point of view, and went on supporting him even when it turned out that the girl had never actually "gone all the way" with her boyfriend (117).

The narrator's horror is increased when he realizes that the girl did not really "go all the way," which implies that had she done so, her death would still have been unjustifiable, but a little less so, perhaps because in his eyes the shame is real, even if the means of its eradication

are wrong. Further explanation is given when the narrator candidly admits: "But even more appalling was my realization that like the interviewed friends etc., I, too, found myself understanding the killer" (117).

This moment of great honesty and self-reflection speaks for an understanding of the subjective nature of shame, for its location in the mind of the beholder. But the narrator is quick to externalize this understanding: "The news did not seem alien to me. We who have grown up on a diet of honour and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to peoples living in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy: that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altars of their pride" (117–18).

The narrator resists personal agency and responsibility and ascribes it to his own socialization, thus separating this cultural conditioning from his "real" self. But at the same time he does something more subtle but still of crucial importance—he shifts his focus of inquiry from the concept of shame to its consequences. It is the murder that obsesses the narrator, and not shame, which is left as an unanalyzed given; a commodity to be consumed: "a diet of honour and shame." This is supported by the conclusion of this paragraph, which I have already quoted: "Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence" (118). The narrator's thesis, and, to some extent, the novel's, is about the connection between shame and violence and not, despite the text's repeated claims, about the origin of shame itself. The latter is perceived and presented as an immediate fact, not a social construct.

Even more tellingly, the narrator describes his obsession with shame as manifested in the girl's dead body: "Wanting to write about shame, I was at first haunted by the imagined spectre of that dead body." The description of the (imagined) body that follows reads like a clichéd build-up to a detective novel,<sup>11</sup> once again reifying the specific in the generic. The description continues in biblical form, using "And" for narrative progression, culminating in "And the father left with blood-cleansed name and grief" (118). This too serves to reify the murder, placing it within a mythological order, before the death of God, evoking the story of Ibrahim/Abraham's sacrifice of Ishmael (in the Islamic tradition) or Isaac (in the Judeo-Christian tradition).<sup>12</sup> The tone of this passage is severely censorious; there seems to be no possible reading that would sanction this murder in any way. In fact, the inclusion of these two disparate genres—

crime fiction and biblical register—serves to critique and implicate them in the death of the young girl. However, in the process of doing so, the girl is distanced, effaced, and the text refocuses—uncritically—on the idea; on shame as a reified construct.

It seems that the narrator feels that he has "lost" the girl and attempts to return to her in the next passage:

I even went so far as to give the dead girl a name: Anahita Muhammad, known as Anna. In my imagination she spoke with an East London accent but wore jeans, blue brown pink, out of some atavistic reluctance to show her legs. She would certainly have understood the language her parents spoke at home but would obstinately have refused to utter a word of it herself. Anna Muhammad: lively, no doubt attractive, a little too dangerously so at sixteen. Mecca meant ballrooms to her, rotating silver balls, strobe lighting, youth. She danced behind my eyes, her nature changing each time I glimpsed her: now innocent, now whore, then a third or fourth thing. But finally she eluded me, she became a ghost, and I realized that to write about her, about shame, I would have to go back East, to let the idea breathe its favourite air. Anna, deported, repatriated to a country she had never seen, caught brain-fever and turned into a sort of idiot.

He names her. The real-life girl about whom he had read in the papers, must have had a name and, since the story was so publicized, one that should have been relatively easy to find out. But the narrator is no longer interested in the girl herself but in the concept of shame she has come to embody for him. His final move of abstraction from the specific woman is done, paradoxically, by personifying her as concept; appropriating her to himself. She now exists only in his imagination as his "private dancer." This is the dialectical moment where the concept—shame—reveals both its abstraction from its underlying misogyny (its "labor process") and its objectification in the reified personification of the girl.<sup>13</sup>

What can we then discover about shame through this moment when the two mediations are superimposed on each other? We find that in order to conceptualize shame the narrator had to rid the girl of her specificity and to internalize and appropriate her. The girl, object of shame,

does not have a subject position within the dialectic, for it is contained within the male gaze. She is trapped between the (male) imperative for her to be attractive and the "danger" (also from men) of being so. Her status as object is further illustrated when the narrator describes her changing nature as a succession of "things" that are already inscribed by the very idea he is analyzing: "innocent" or "whore" assumes shame. The changing nature of the girl moves from one category of shame to another but does not question the categories themselves. We seem to have a variant of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. The narrator has internalized the girl; in looking at her he finds himself, manifested in his (socialized) perceptions of received categories.

However, the passage is more complex. Even trapped inside his imagination, a figure seemingly identifiable with his conception of shame, the girl manages to elude the narrator: she dances *behind* his eyes and then becomes a ghost—a magic that, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, is the residue and excess of the dialectic. She thus escapes identification as shame. In order to recapture her the narrator/writer takes her "back East" and she turns into "a sort of idiot." The narrator never answers the question he asks of himself: "Why did I do that to her?" (119) We can only conjecture that this too was an attempt to empty her of a subject position, make her conform to the idea she is supposed to embody, by turning her into a sheer victim. But Sufiya Zinobia refuses to comply. In her furious (though unconscious) outbursts she kills and mutilates, avenging shame—both hers and others'.

This second quality of shame, that which avenges its own shamefulness, is not left abstract by the metatext either, but is personified by the second girl. However, she who is given agency, is not named. This vengeful quality of shame is described by Rushdie—both in the narrative and in the metanarrative—as the regenerative possibility for women, and, as others have noted, a very bleak option at that. In any case, the important thing to note at this point is the necessity of splitting the two qualities of shame, personifying them in two girls. The incommensurability of either girl with shame, their relegation into the supernatural, to magic, is the marker of negative dialectic—that which negates the object through its own perception.

We find ourselves at an impasse: despite the narrator's honest attempts to give a voice and a central place to women and the shame

that oppresses them, his narrative ultimately circles back on itself, generalizing the singular, turning oppression into abstraction. Is this, then, simply an "honorable failure" as Gayatri Spivak would have it? ("Reading" 223). I have suggested that this need not necessarily be the case. Our way out of this impasse is indicated by Marjorie Levinson: "the appropriate Marxist move is to search out the historical conditions of that representation of *arrested dialectic*. [. . . T]he contradictions and arrests that deform Rushdie's novel, keeping it from assuming some received utopian shape, also give it the power to shadow forth its culture's immanent and founding negation" (124–25, emphasis added).

In order to perform this search, we must return to the idea of sacrifice, constitutive both of Rushdie's *Shame* and of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In the former, shame is repeatedly referred to as a form of sacrifice.<sup>14</sup> Of the father who murdered his daughter the narrator says: "men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altars of their pride" (118). In this description, men are subjects while their "love" (again an abstraction of the woman/daughter as defined by men's regard) functions as the object (15). This is the difference between Rushdie's sacrifice and Horkheimer and Adorno's, where it is Odysseus who embodies both sacrifice and priest, thus obliterating the subject/object split.

In order to do the same, Rushdie's father must kill the girl. In his perception he is sacrificing part of himself—"his dearest love"—he too is both sacrifice and priest. The subject (man)/object (woman) split is ultimately internalized in the father as a dialectic. Once again, Rushdie shifts the focus from the woman, whose plight he is trying to underscore, to the struggles of the man. Andrew Hewitt finds that Horkheimer and Adorno do the same: "That male domination involves a certain *self-immolation* on the part of the male may well be true—very probably it is—but the thrust of the argument here is to bypass man's domination of woman in the rush to get at the crux of the issue, the "real" heart of the matter: man's alienated domination of himself" (154–55, emphasis added).

So we arrive at the third source of Sufiya Zinobia, as elaborated in the metanarrative, the boy who burns to death, apparently from self-combustion. Anna is the victim, or object, of shame; the second, nameless, girl turns shame into agency, a subject position; but it takes a boy to put the two together.

In her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak has shown that a woman cannot be represented as both priest and sacrifice of her own sati. The practice of sati, argues Spivak, has been represented, time and again, by various dominant discourses (whether "brown" or "white," feminist or not) but in all those discourses the sexed subaltern is always the *object*, never the *subject* of her self-immolation, not to mention both at once. Her argument is corroborated by this novel. Rushdie needs the boy to incorporate both subject and object positions. The boy is both subject and object of his pyre; both priest and sacrifice of his self-immolation. He is the one who discovers "the truth" (120).<sup>15</sup>

Linked thematically as well as theoretically through the motif of self-immolation, this argument—of the gendered subject/object split internalized within man—resonates with Andrew Hewitt's feminist reading of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* where he traces the exclusion of women in the internalization of the dialectic by man: "in focusing upon the category of (masculine) self-domination, Horkheimer and Adorno ignore the persistence of outer-directed domination—man's domination of woman, for example. The central role played by the category of alienation [. . .] allows them to focus, among other things, upon: 'male domination, which—as a permanent deprivation of instinct—is nevertheless a symbolic self-mutilation on the part of the man [Adorno and Horkheimer 72]'" (Hewitt 154–55).

According to Hewitt, man interpolates himself, through sacrifice, from the realm of domination to that of power, which is domination by representation. "[Man] trades off his subordination to a network of power in order to maintain his own direct privilege" (144). As we have seen in *Shame*, man indeed sacrifices one part of himself—"his dearest love"—in order to gain power (represented as pride) over the woman. However, by so doing, argues Hewitt, he loses the *experience* of domination, which is relegated to women, instrumentalized as the representation of exclusion. (The woman, by the way, loses her life.) He points out that Horkheimer and Adorno, although cognizant of the exclusion of women as a category, "are obliged to repeat the generalizing gesture they condemn. How can it be asserted that 'woman' is denied the honor of individualization without once again denying her the honor of individualization, by forcing her into the singular yet generic category of 'woman'?" (148)

If we agree that power is domination as representation then we have to conclude that Rushdie's women characters—represented as they are in both in narrative and metanarrative—are certainly unemancipated. But, as Hewitt shows, there is no way for them to be represented as emancipated for it is the very representation that dominates them. Moreover, even if this were possible it would result in a liberation from domination into a more complex system of power (157).

However, the solution to yet another variant of the impasse described above is the foregrounding of representation itself. This, argues Hewitt, is suggested by the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "The 'way out,' which is really a 'way in,' a way into the very heart of representation—that Horkheimer and Adorno offer consists in articulating in and through the figure of woman a critique not only of social relations made possible within a certain system of representation but a critique of the representational system itself" (157). Thus, the novel formulates a critique of the domination of women not through the women represented, but through the representation of these women.

Rephrasing this argument in the terms set by Spivak, I can say that the sexed subaltern subject still does not speak. The novel does not give a voice to Anahita/Anna, or to the unnamed "Asian girl" or even to its fictional characters, foremost Sufiya Zinobia. However, its representation of these women can be read as exposing the violence and the silencing imposed on their voices by the selfsame representation—ultimately echoing Spivak's own argument.

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What I have tried to represent in this paper is the double mediation at work in Rushdie's representation of shame. I have shown that this concept is both a reified abstraction of the social forces dominating women *as well as* a cause for this domination of women. The meta-narrator does not seem to be cognizant of this distinction. Thus, while declaring his interrogation of the concept he is, in fact, questioning the causal connection between shame and the violence (domination) it generates. In this he is unsuccessful: the connection cannot be severed because the domination is inherent in the concept itself. On the other hand, the concept cannot be interrogated because it is a naturalized abstraction of the social forces at work.

However, through the excess accrued in the process of this naturalization in the text, Rushdie marks its non-immanent, representational quality, or, if you will, its negative component. Focusing on these moments of this text, we can defamiliarize them, gaining access to their "mode of production." By superimposing these two mediations upon each other we find an entering point into what initially had seemed like a vicious circle. Thus, the novel's radical critique is located in the narrative's *inability* to embody shame in one character, in Anna's evasion and disappearance, in the residue and excess accompanying each and every attempt at representation—and especially that of women—in the novel. Shame, in this case, is a reified abstraction of men's domination of women; its failure to be represented reveals its abstraction and thus harbors its own critique.

## Notes

I would like to thank Colleen Lye, Shai Ginsburg, Amy Huber, Irene Perciali and Jenny L. White for their rigorous and encouraging comments on earlier versions of this paper.

1. Mufti makes this claim in his discussion of Rushdie's fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*, but I think that it can be easily applied here with the same degree of success. (My critique of Mufti's argument will be implied in a later stage of this paper.)
2. While the narrative implies that this metanarrator is indeed the real-life Salman Rushdie, he is not the implied author of this narrative, hence my decision not to refer to him as such. The implied author is commonly understood as a construct of the text "inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text" (Rimmon-Kenan 87). The narrative voice I quote throughout this essay is not implied by the text or inferred from it. Rather it has a distinct narrative *presence* in the novel. I have called it the metanarrator to distinguish this voice from that of the narrator of the diegesis itself. The metanarrator narrates the process of narration of the diegesis.
3. See for instance Ahmad, who writes in reference to the metanarrative passages, "we should recall what Rushdie himself tells us [. . .]" (133).
4. A good case in point is the genre of the *realist* novel in the tradition of Eliot, Balzac, and Dickens, which, paradoxically, achieves its reality effect in

its fictionality (which enables its narrative omniscience and detailed specificity) and not in its fidelity to reference. See Gallagher.

5. Especially 223–29, where he discusses Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.
6. As attested by Rushdie himself: "Because shame and its opposite, which is honour, seem to me kind of central to the society I was describing, to such an extent that it was impossible to explain the society except by looking at it through those concepts" ("*Midnight's Children*" 54).
7. Most would argue, and I would agree, that this is not a *dialectic* relationship. But since it is explicitly named so in the novel, I have decided to leave it, possibly in the interest of a future observation of the post-structural, deconstructive adoption and (mis)use of the dialectic concept.
8. Since my paper focuses specifically on the metanarrative asides in this novel, I will in no way be giving a comprehensive reading of these characters, who are at the center of the narrative itself. They are presented here briefly, in order to introduce the discussion of how these characters are represented and talked about in the metanarrative.
9. Or maybe untainted as long as they are uttered by those who were "naturally" meant to use the concept in its "pure" form.
10. My indebtedness to Postone's essay goes much farther and wider than its specific contribution here; it has influenced and indeed shaped my argument throughout this paper.
11. *À la* Raymond Chandler, or a scene in the film noir genre of cinema.
12. The girl's throat is described as "slit like a halal chicken" implying the God-instructed purifying process this murder brings about.
13. And note the narrator's shame at his own "understanding" of the murder.
14. Elsewhere, the narrator says of Sufiya Zinobia, "What is a saint? A saint is a person who suffers in our stead" (146).
15. However, though the boy can embody both the subject and object of his sacrifice—internalizing the dialectic—he is not directly linked to shame. This, I would argue, is due to his maleness—since shame is a category used (as I have shown) for the domination of women.

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