

Salman Rushdie's *East, West:* The Third Space

ENGE 5850

Semester 2, 2016-2017

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Recap

Terry Eagleton in “Deadly Fetishes” (1994)

“The comma between ‘East’ and ‘West’ in Salman Rushdie’s title thus forms a bridge as well as marking a gap, as we move within the book – itself divided into three sections (‘East’, ‘West’ and ‘East, West’) – from an Eastern to a Western way of dividing up the real.”



Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991)

“But human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all the senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death.”

Homi Bhabha in “The Commitment to Theory” (1994)

“The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot ‘in itself’ be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation.”



Homi Bhabha in “The Commitment to Theory” (1994)

“The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People.”



Homi Bhabha in “The Commitment to Theory” (1994)

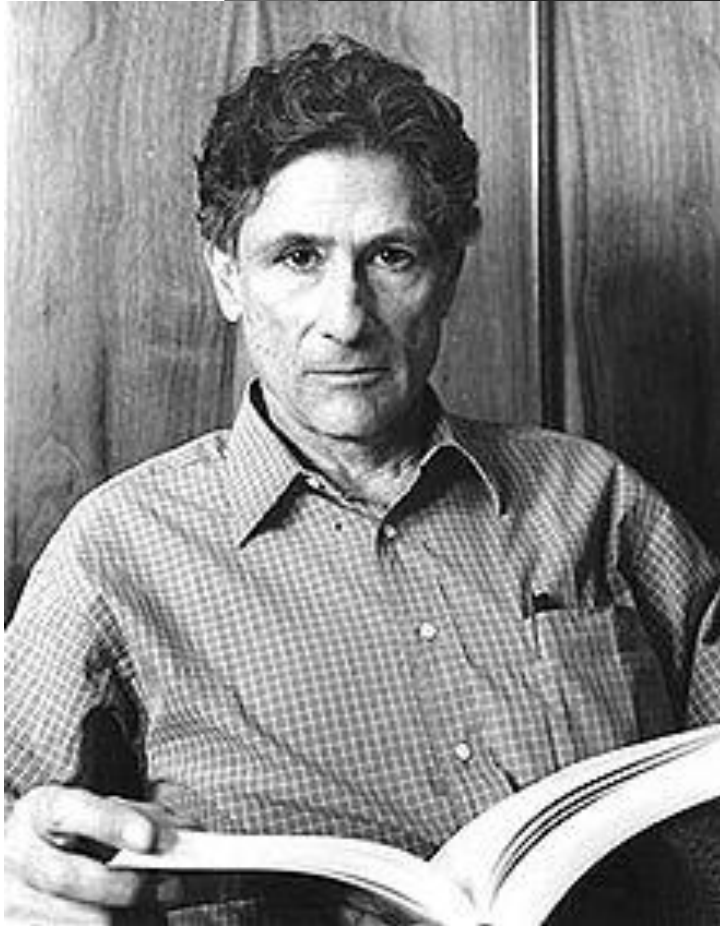
“It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.”



Edward Saïd in “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginal” (1994)

The state of exile can be productive because it offers “certain rewards and even privileges”

“while you are neither winning prizes nor being welcomed into all those self-congratulating honor societies that routinely exclude embarrassing troublemakers who do not toe the party line, you are at the same time deriving some positive things from exile and marginality.”





Salman Rushdie in “The Indian Writer in England” (1983)

“however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles. Or it may be that that is simply what we must think in order to do our work.”

Part 3: “East, West”

“The Harmony of the
Spheres”

“Eliot had elaborated a conspiracy theory in which most of his friends were revealed to be agents of hostile powers, both Earthly and extra-terrestrial. I was an invader from Mars, one of many such dangerous beings who had sneaked into Britain when certain essential forms of vigilance had been relaxed. Martians had great gifts of mimicry.” (135)

The concept of “home”

- “When I met Eliot I was a little unhinged myself – suffering from a disharmony of my personal spheres. There was the Laura episode, and beyond it a number of difficult questions about home and identity that I had no idea how to answer. Eliot’s instinct about Mala and me was one answer that I was grateful for. Home, like Hell, turned out to be other people. For me, it turned out to be her.” (139)
- “She had never been to India, and my birth and childhood and continuous connections there made me, in her eyes, ridiculously glamorous, like a visitor from Xanadu. *For he on honey-dew hath fed/And drunk the milk of Paradise.*” (140)

“Hybridity”

“But in Eliot’s enormous, generously shared mental storehouse of the varieties of ‘forbidden knowledge’ I thought I’d found another way of making a bridge between here-and-there, between my two othernesses, my double unbelonging. In that world of magic and power there seemed to exist the kind of fusion of world-views, European Amerindian Oriental Levantine, in which I desperately wanted to believe.” (141)

“Harmony”

- “It would grant me – Eliot’s favourite word, this – harmony.” (141)
- “So, here it came: the collapse of harmony, the demolition of the spheres of my heart.” (146)

Discussion

Does “harmony,” as suggested by Eliot, exist?

To what extent does “The Harmony of the Spheres” illustrate the concept of “hybridity”?

“Chekov and Zulu”

“We never saw one episode of the TV series [...] The whole thing was just a legend wafting its way from the US to the UK to our lovely hill-station of Dehra Dun. After a while we got a couple of cheap paperback novelizations.”

Conflicting Identities

“‘The Sikh community has always been thought loyal to the nation,’ Chekov reflected. ‘Backbone of the Army, to say nothing of the Delhi taxi service. Super-citizens, one might say, seemingly wedded to the national idea. But such ideas are being questioned now, you must admit; there are those who would point to the comb, bangle dagger et cetera as signs of the enemy within.’” (152)

Postcolonialism & Imperialism

- “Their museums are full of our treasures, I meant. Their fortunes and cities, built on the loot they took. So on, so forth. One forgives, of course; that is our national nature. One need not forget.” (156)
- ““You should be more content,’ said Zulu, shipping oars and gulping cola. ‘You should be less hungry, less cross. See how much you have! It is enough. Sit back and enjoy. I have less, and it suffices for me. The sun is shining. The colonial period is a closed book.’” (157)

Hybridity?

“Because time had stopped, Chekov was able to make a number of private observations. ‘These Tamil revolutionists are not England-returned,’ he noted. ‘So finally, we have learned to produce the goods at home, and no longer need to import. Bang goes that old dinner -party standby; so to speak.’ And, less dryly: ‘The tragedy is not how one dies,’ he thought. ‘It is how one has lived.’” (170)

Discussion

To what extent does “Chekov and Zulu” illustrate the concept of “hybridity”?

How is it similar to or different from “The Harmony of the Spheres” in this regard?

Do you think it is a successful demonstration of the concept of “hybridity”?

“The Courter”

“This message from an intimate stranger reached out to me in my enforced exile from the beloved country of my birth and moved me, stirring things that had been buried very deep. Of course it also made me feel guilty about having done so little for Mary over the years. For whatever reason, it has become more important than ever to set down the story I’ve been carrying around unwritten for so long, the story of Aya and the gentle man whom she renamed – with unintentional but prophetic overtones of romance – ‘the courter’. I see now that it is not just their story, but ours, mine, as well.” (178)

Courtship as an “adventure”

“Such was their courtship. ‘It is like an adventure, baba,’ Mary once tried to explain to me. ‘It is like going with him to his country, you know? What a pace, baap-ré! Beautiful and dangerous and funny and full of fuzzles. For me it is a big-big discovery. What to tell you? I go for the game. It is a wonder.’ (195)



Mixed-up as a bridge

- Salman Rushdie in an Interview by Charlie Rose (1996)
 - the shared “ex-colonial” status held by India and the U.S.,
 - “They’re both cultures made up of mixture [...] made up of people who come from elsewhere [...] they’re both mixed up people.”

Courtship as an “asylum”

“The courter was a widower, and had grown-up children somewhere, lost long ago behind the ever-higher walls of Eastern Europe. But in the game of chess they had found a form of flirtation, an endless renewal that precluded the possibility of boredom, a courtly wonderland of the ageing heart.” (195)

Failure of the courtship

“‘I know what is wrong with me,’ she told my parents, out of the blue. ‘I need to go home.’ ‘But, Aya,’ my mother argued, ‘homesickness is not a real disease.’ ‘God knows for what-all we came over to this country,’ Mary said. ‘But I can no longer stay. No. Certainly not.’ Her determination was absolute. So it was England that was breaking her heart breaking it by not being India. London was killing her, by not being Bombay. And Mixed-Up? I wondered, was the courter killing her, too, because he was no longer himself? Or was it that her heart, roped by two different loves was being pulled both East and West, whinnying and rearing, like those movie horses being yanked this way by Clark Gable and that way by Montgomery Clift, and she knew that to live she would have to choose?” (208-209)

The concept of “root” to the narrator

“As I witnessed their wars I felt myself coming unstuck from the idea of family itself. I looked at my screaming sister and thought how brilliantly self-destructive she was, how triumphantly she was ruining her relations with the people she needed most. And I looked at my choleric, face-pulling father and thought about British citizenship. My existing Indian passport permitted me to travel only to a very few countries, which were carefully listed on the second right-hand page. But I might soon have a British passport and then, by hook or by crook, I would get away from him. I would not have this face-pulling in my life. At sixteen, you still think you can escape from your father. You aren't listening to his voice speaking through your mouth, you don't see him in the way you hold your body, in the way you sign your name. You don't hear his whisper in your blood.” (202)

“Hybridity”

“I became a British citizen that year. I was one of the lucky ones I guess, because in spite of that chess game I had the Dodo on my side. And the passport did, in many ways, set me free. It allowed me to come and go, to make choices that were not the ones my father would have wished. But I, too, have ropes around my neck I have them to his day, pulling me this way and that East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, choose, choose. I buck, I snort, I whinny, I rear I kick. Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoes, lariats, I choose neither of you and both. Do you hear? I refuse to choose.”
(210-211)

Discussion

Why does the narrator refuse to choose?
What is the significance of such a proclamation?

To what extent does “The Courter” illustrate the concept of “hybridity”?

How is it similar to or different from “The Harmony of the Spheres” and “Chekov and Zulu” in this regard?

Do you think it is a successful demonstration of the concept of “hybridity”?



Conclusion

Rushdie in “Paris Review - The Art of Fiction No. 186, Salman Rushdie” (2005)

- “Bombay, where I grew up, was a city in which the West was totally mixed up with the East ... my life [has] given me the ability to make stories in which different parts of the world are brought together, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes in conflict.”

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