



HYBRIDIZATION, THIRD SPACE AND LANGUAGE IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S SHORT STORY "THE COURTER"

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Salman Rushdie's works have been widely examined under the lenses of magic realism and hybridity. *East, West*, one of his main short story collection, has been studied mainly as a whole and in relation to the two previously mentioned concepts. The short story analysed in this article belongs to one of the three sections in which the collection is divided, called "East, West". In this part, Rushdie makes evident the juxtaposition of these two parts of the world in order to present to readers with the problematisation of self-alienation due to hybridity and what Homi Bhabha calls "third space". In the present paper, the focus is given to just on one of the stories, "The Courter", to analyse how hybridity and the concept of third space are portrayed, by means of language, in the depiction of the two main characters. These two main characters, the narrator, a teenager from India studying in a London boarding school, and his family's *ayah*, who has always been taking care of the children, serve Rushdie as the exemplification of that problematisation he creates around diasporic characters. In order to do so, the analysis relies on three critical frames: hybridity, third space and imagined communities. The first two were mainly theorised by Homi Bhabha in relation to political discourse. However, they will be applied within the scope of literary discourse. The third one was developed by Benedict Anderson for the explanation of the origins of nationalism. One aspect which is

relevant for the analysis is the absence of magic realism in the story, since Rushdie is known for its use in his works. As a conclusion, this lack of magic realism enhances the problematisation of self-alienation, to which Rushdie offers two different solutions: one related to the concept of third space and the other to the concept of imagined communities.

Keywords: Salman Rushdie; hybridity; third space; The Courter; (magic) realism; imagined communities

1. Introduction

Salman Rushdie is one of the big names within the field of Postcolonial Studies. He was born in Bombay, but he moved to England. This is the reason why his novels and short stories have got a lot of critical attention: he is a postcolonial subject himself, and he pours that into paper. His second novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), was widely acclaimed, winning the Booker Prize in the same year of its publication. Rushdie's works are characterised by the use of magic realism and the connections he establishes between the East and the West in order to offer an alternative reading of the traditional conception of the dichotomy colonizer/colonized. One of his short story collections, *East, West* (1994), has also been widely acclaimed since it perfectly depicts a sense of hybridity between those two parts of the world.

The present paper will focus on the last story of that collection, "The Courter", which belongs to the section "East, West". As the title indicates, this part brings to light the juxtaposition between East and West and how that affects "hybrid" citizens who live in Britain. In order to analyse that short story, I will be focusing mainly on three aspects: hybridity, Third Space, mainly theorised by Homi Bhabha, and how language is used as a tool to enhance the two previous concepts. Following a close reading and a comparative analysis, I will support the study of this short story with the thoughts of scholars such as Gillian Gane, Jessica Brown, Homi Bhabha and Amar Acheariou, amongst others.

2. Critical Background

Hybridity is the “postcolonial term” par excellence. It has got different nuances with the passing of time; its origins can be found going back as far as the time of Egyptians and Greeks (Acheaïou 2011a, 87). Looking into the modern period, the first time this term was used in an academic environment was within the field of biology in 1837: Charles Darwin employed it to refer to “his experiments with cross-fertilization of plants” (Acheaïou 2011a, 88). During the nineteenth century, this concept began to be associated with racial degeneration and its use was spread through Western colonialism, in which “hybridity was closely connected to supremacist race politics” (Acheaïou 2011a, 88). A century later, hybridity, which was increasingly starting to be associated with culture, was still been discussed in most Western universities (Acheaïou 2011a, 89). However, from the twentieth century onwards, this concept has entered most academic circles as a major discussion in Cultural Studies, due to the works of several writers and scholars, such as Derek Walcott, Salman Rushdie, Paul Gilroy and Homi Bhabha, amongst others (Acheaïou 2011a, 89).

Focusing on the meaning the term hybridity currently has within academia, it clearly differs from the one it used to have during the nineteenth century: “discussions of hybridity have moved from the earlier focus on race and bio-politics to a strictly semiotic, discursive, and cultural realm” (Acheaïou 2011a, 89). However, as previously said in the introduction, Homi Bhabha is the scholar who, following the path which Edward Said opened with his studies on “Orientalism”, extensively developed and theorised the notion of hybridity. Amar Acheaïou argues that Homi Bhabha “instigated a theory of hybridity that contests the idea that colonial discourse and power were homogenous and hegemonic” (2011a, 90). In fact, Bhabha goes a step beyond and connects the notion of hybridity with the concept of “Third Space”, which gives a richer view on postcolonial subjects and cultures (2011a, 90). These two concepts complement each other and, from the end of the twentieth century onwards, they have been considered as a milestone within the field of Postcolonial Studies (Acheaïou 2011a, 90).

Before addressing Salman Rushdie and his short story, it is necessary to introduce how Homi Bhabha theorises and connects the concepts of hybridity and Third Space since those concepts are essential within the context of the present article. His writings have been essential for the understanding of those two notions in connection to Postcolonialism. He extensively develops them in his book *The Location of Culture*, published in 1994. In this piece of work, Bhabha firstly presents hybridity of identity as the way of moving away from singularities about gender, class and race in the modern world (1994, 1). Consequently, subjects find themselves in “in-between” spaces from which they can stand against the dominant culture (1994, 1-2). These interstices, using Bhabha’s words, are the place where domains of differences overlap with each other (1994, 2). Moreover, these new spaces are created out of cultural translation, by the encounter of two different cultural backgrounds (Bhabha 1994, 7). These translations need to be done from elements that “are neither the One nor the Other, but something else besides” (Bhabha 1994, 28).

In this respect, Bhabha emphasises how, although these interstices and translations can be found in all kind of discourses, they are very important within cultural diversity in postcolonial environments (1994, 32). This is so because, as Benedict Anderson states through his book *Imagined Communities* (1983), Western nations and their cultures have always been presented as unitary and homogenous entities; although, following Bhabha’s theory, those “in-between” spaces prove the opposite. In addition, this “hybrid space”, also called Third Space, allow subjects to “appropriate, translate, and read anew” cultural signs from the dominant discourse (Bhabha 1994, 37). This aspect is relevant in relation to Rushdie’s short story “The Courter” since its two main characters, the narrator and his family’s *ayah*, are involved in the creation of hybrid cultural understandings from a personal point of view.

Together with Homi Bhabha, Salman Rushdie is another important figure within this analysis as well as within Postcolonial Studies. He is one of the most emblematic names within this field. He manages to represent hybrid characters with a high degree of sensibility in all his works, since he is a migrant subject himself. However, he is also well-known for his use of magic realism. Ursula

Kluwick extensively develops this aspect of Rushdie's works, indicating how he uses this literary device:

A naturalising view of magic is already thwarted by the fact that the sheer implausibility of their stories seems to disconcert Rushdie's narrators themselves, inciting them to question their truth value, freely admit their lack of veracity, openly ponder how far their readers' belief will stretch, and try to convince them(selves) that everything they claim is true *nevertheless* (2011, 22).

This is a pervasive aspect of his novels and short stories. However, as I will discuss later, magic realism cannot be found in the short story chosen for this analysis, although collection to which it belongs, *East, West*, does possess a certain degree of magic realism. This aspect will be commented upon later since it is relevant for the analysis.

Paying attention to his writing production, it could be said that Salman Rushdie is a very prolific writer, having published all types of writings: novels, short story collections, children's books and essays. His novels have been widely studied under the lens of Postcolonialism, being *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988) his two most famous ones. Rushdie is not the only author who has addressed the traditional postcolonial dichotomy, mentioned in the introduction of this paper, existing between East and West in his works (Mardossian qdt. in Brown 2011, 19). However, what Rushdie does is to focus on language as the main tool to exemplify hybridity, *in-betweenness* and Third Space (Brown 2011, 50). His short story collections have also received some attention in relation to this aspect, although *East, West* (1994) is Rushdie's best-known one. Here, the dichotomy and juxtaposition between these two parts of the world are emphasised through the three parts in which the collection is divided, its different settings and its different characters (Klassen 2013, 2).

According to Pop Titus, the stories that are set in an Eastern environment show readers how the Western culture underlies the Indian setting (2011, 2). In contrast, the stories set in a Western environment portray that general exotic and "orientalist" perception of the East (2011, 3). It is also worth highlighting how the stories in the section "East" are anecdotal and everyday-like, while the ones

in “West” address historical events and figures that are relevant for Western culture (Barbeito and Lozano 2012, 190). These are some of the ways in which Rushdie manages to juxtapose East and West by means of narrative techniques. Consequently, it could be said that, although Rushdie connects East and West by means of literature, he also emphasises their differences (Titus 2011, 1).

However, these differences properly meet and mingle with each other in the last section of the collection, which is also called “East, West”. This last part explores the ways in which these two sides of the world meet and how that affects characters, which are hybrid in themselves (Titus 2011, 2). This juxtaposition is not only present throughout the three short stories found in this section, but Rushdie makes it explicit in the title itself: the comma which separates, or connects, the words “East” and “West” (Barbeito and Lozano 2012, 178). Thus, it is used intentionally to work both as “a separator” and “a bridge” (Eagleton qtd. in Titus 2011, 2). Moreover, this comma is also essential for understanding the title as a dichotomy, since “using a slash would cause the title to be interpreted as “East or West”, rather than “East and West”” (Klassen 2013, 2). In fact, the meaning intended by the use of the comma goes beyond juxtaposition: this punctuation mark represents that Third Space Homi Bhabha theorises and which Salman Rushdie uses as the place to locate his characters (Barbeito and Lozano 2012, 184).

3. Analysis

Within this last section of the collection, the last story is, from my point of view, the most revealing one in terms of hybridity. “The Courter” presents the story of an Indian family living in London. The narrator, now as an adult, recounts the family’s *ayah*’s relationship with the porter of the building where they were living at the time. In doing so, he also exposes his feelings towards his situation as a hybrid person, how he felt back then and how he feels now. As it happens with the section “East, West”, this short story also “celebrates connections across the boundaries of race, nation and language”, resulting in a hybrid identity of the characters (Gane 2001, 48). This process of blending between cultures is the prominent point of Rushdie’s short story (Klassen 2013, 13). In

addition, this “new culture” created out of this blending process does not fit into the traditional East/West binary (Klassen 2013, 16). In fact, as it was mentioned in the introduction, language is a very powerful tool which Rushdie uses in order to exemplify the characters’ hybridity, focusing specially on the narrator and Mary, the family’s *ayah*, although they do not interact with language in the same way.

However, in this respect, Salman Rushdie has received some criticism: as Andrew Teverson argues, some scholars have relied their critiques on the fact that Rushdie uses English as the medium to write his narratives (2007, 32). What these academics state is that, by using English, Rushdie perpetuates the cultural domination of the British imperialistic past (Teverson 2007, 32). Teverson, on the other hand, enhances the fact that languages are not homogenous, that is, even though they have been used to spread a message of hate, they also belonged to the subjugated resistance (2007, 34). In addition, he also explains how languages are dynamic systems that are transformed with the passing of time (2007, 34). This is relevant in Rushdie’s short story because he appropriates the English language for telling the story of a migrant, and subjugated, family. In fact, Rushdie is not the only one who uses English as a tool to emphasise hybridity in his works, other writers such as Sujata Bhatt also comments upon the problematic aspect of using English as the medium to express your experiences as a migrant (Teverson 2007, 35).

Language is the main tool found in “The Courter” by means of which Rushdie brings to the fore the hybridity found in the two main characters: the narrator and the *ayah* (Gane 2001, 62). In fact, language is the site where East emerges in the story, since the setting and all of the main aspects in the text are related to the West (Gane 2001, 62). Thus, it could be argued that “Rushdie’s fiction does not reflect the successful appropriation of English but is a fiction of the failure of English” (Teverson 2007, 37). Moreover, this seems to be the basis of this short story : all the main characters have problems with the pronunciation of standard English, causing a change of meaning in some words (Gane 2001, 48). Out of these altered meanings a new understanding arises, which is hybrid in itself (Gane 2001, 48). This new “hybrid reality” is created by Rushdie out of the

encounter of British English and Hindi. This aspect is emphasised even in the title of the short story: “The Courter” is a hybrid word which is created by Mary, the *ayah*, since she does not properly pronounce the letter “p” in English, as it is indicated right at the beginning of the story:

English was hard for Certainly-Mary [...]. The letter p was a particular problem, often turning into a f or a c; when she proceeded through the lobby with a wheeled wicker shopping basket, she would say, ‘Going shocking’ [...] (In Hindi and Konkani, however, her p’s knew their place). So: thanks to her unexpected, somehow stomach-churning magic, he was no longer porter, but courter (Rushdie 1995, 176-177).

It is worth highlighting how Rushdie makes explicit the fact that Mary does not have any pronunciation problems in her native language, but she does in English. This misspronunciation of English words on the part of Mary creates a “prosthetic language” which, according to Sánchez-Palencia Carazo, is the best medium of communication for hybrid subjects – Mary in this case – living in a “space of cultural difference” (2004, 3).

In addition to this first reference to “broken English” (Gane 2001, 48), the first chapter within the story is also very revealing in terms of language: here, Rushdie decides “to contaminate standard English with Hindi borrowings” (Sánchez-Palencia Carazo 2004, 2). These words are used, to some extent, to introduce India in the text, to highlight the presence of the East within the West (Gane 2001, 59). These traces of the East enhance the cultural wealth of India by means of language (Gane 2001, 60). This saturation of Hindi words at the beginning of the story may force the reader to pay attention to hybridity, creating a “palimpsestic narrative” (Titus 2011, 5):

‘Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats, and now Kesington Ghats’, he said, giggling. ‘Mountains’. [...] ‘But ghats in India are also stairs’, she said. ‘Yes yes certainly. For instance in Hindu holy city of Varanasi, where the Brahmins sit talking the filgrims’ money is called Dasashwamedh-ghat. Broad-broad staircase down to River Ganga. O, most certainly! Also Manikarnika-ghat’ (Rushdie 1995, 175).

This way, Rushdie subtly presents Mary as a hybrid character from the beginning of the story, since she is the one who

uses all those Hindi words in her conversation with Mercir, the porter. As Homi Bhabha states, “in the very process of domination the language of the master becomes hybrid – neither the one thing nor the other” (1994, 33), which can be seen in this first chapter. In fact, Rushdie highlights Mary’s hybridity not only by mixing both English and Hindi words, which results in a hybrid language. He also calls attention to other parts of it, such as grammatical and syntactic structures, found in his different works (Brown 2011, 57). In this respect, Mary’s hybridity is found in the way she alters sentences when she speaks, for example, changing the word order or repeating some words. However, as Jessica Brown points out, this aspect is more prominent in other works by Rushdie (2011, 57).

Indeed, this hybrid language helps her to find and keep her native roots by using an alien medium such as English (Nirmala 2019, 157). By means of “broken English”, as mentioned before, Mary connects with both cultures, not having to neglect her native one (Titus 2011, 5). Following Amar Acheraiou’s thoughts on Bhabha’s theory, hybridity allows colonized people to resist and even subvert “the colonizer’s cultural, political and ideological domination” (2011a, 95). Thus, applying this to Mary, hybridity is what enables her to keep both sides of her identity, an aspect that is exemplified through her use of “broken English”. Consequently, she occupies an in-between position within both English and Hindi cultures.

At this point, Bhabha’s notion of “Third Space” is applicable to the analysis of Mary as a hybrid character. As it was developed before, Bhabha uses this concept to refer to those spaces in which hybrid subjects find themselves after the interaction of their native culture and a foreign one. In the case of Mary, what allows her to “inhabit” in that Third Space is language. In fact, language can be interpreted as a “home” for the migrant, as Günter Grass points out in a debate with Salman Rushdie: “entering the home of language necessarily involves a form of estrangement, the loss of sweet home. Even if the material home remains, language is always an ‘other home’” (Reder qtd. in Barbeito and Lozano 2012, 180). Even though he is making reference to migrant writers with that statement, it can be extrapolated to the case of Mary: she lives in a foreign country and she also has to deal with an alien language

because she is a migrant. Thus, due to her two identities, she is able to appropriate that language and turn it into her “home”, her “Third Space” in which she is able to articulate, using Bhabha’s words, her culture’s hybridity (1994, 38).

Nevertheless, it is also important to highlight that she is not the only character who has problems with English. The narrator’s father, as he recounts, also has to face some situations in relation to the problematic use of language:

‘I asked for baby compound, Johnson’s powder teething jelly, and she brought them out. Then I asked did she have any nipples, and she slapped my face.’ [...] My father grew thunderous, empurpled. Durré controlled herself. ‘But Abba’, she said, at length, ‘here they call them teats’. [...] ‘But how shameless!’ my mother said. ‘The same word as for what’s on your bosoms?’ [...] ‘These English’, sighed Certainly-Mary. ‘But aren’t they the limit? Certainly-yes; they are’ (Rushdie 1995, 183-184).

This passage exemplifies how, as Gillian Gane argues, “even when meaning is successfully transmitted, there are inevitable mismatches between two different ways of carving up and labelling the world, and the message conveyed may be quite different from that intended” (2001, 53). These mistakes portray how English is hybridised by the influence of a foreign language, Hindi in this case (Gane 2001, 55). However, even though she is not the only one having problems, English is harder for illiterate Mary than for her educated family (Gane 2001, 53). Thus, she creates a “new space” of understanding and communication out of those mistakes (Gane 2001, 55). This “new reality” is what was previously designate as Bhabha’s concept of Third Space.

On the other hand, the narrator does not seem to have any serious problems with language. However, he does not feel completely comfortable with its use, realising that he also has to face some difficulties speaking it, as he says after the episode of his father’s mistake in the pharmacy: “And also because in the general hilarity I was able to conceal the shaming truth that I, who had been in England for so long, would have made the same mistake as Abba did” (Rushdie 1995, 185). The narrator is aware of his position as a migrant, even though he has been living in England for a long time. In fact, he confesses that his father and Mary the *ayah* are not the

only ones who have linguistic problems with English (Gane 2001, 53):

It wasn't just Certainly-Mary and my parents who had trouble with the English language. My schoolfellows tittered when in my Bombay way I said 'brought-up' for upbringing (as in 'where was your brought-up?') and 'thrice' for three times and 'quarter-plate' for side-plate and 'macaroni' for pasta in general (Rushdie 1995, 185).

The narrator, as it can be seen here, has some problems with the use of English in the same way as Mary does. However, he has the complete opposite attitude towards his position as a hybrid subject. Language could have been the same space for his hybridity as it was for Mary. Instead, he just tries to assimilate and imitate the English culture in order to avoid been perceived as "the other" (Sánchez-Palencia Carazo 2004, 3). He does so by fully consuming Western products such as songs, literature, TV shows, movies, etc (Sen 2001, 131). In fact, there are several references to those aspects of Western culture throughout the short story: the narrator mentions different Western singers, such as Chubby Checker, Neil Sedaka, Pat Boone and Roy Orbison (Rushdie 1995, 180, 209); there is a reference to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (Rushdie 1995, 191); and he also mentions some songs, like *Big Girls Don't Cry* (Rushdie 1995, 192). These examples are connected to what Homi Bhabha states about mimicry and migrants: "The desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry – through a process of writing and repetition – is the final irony of partial representation" (1994, 88). Thus, using his words, it could be said that the narrator is "almost the same but not quite" (1994, 89). In fact, even though the narrator is not conscious about it, his attempts of imitation enhance his hybrid identity and in-between position, manifesting "those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference" (Bhabha 1994, 88).

Consequently, his attitude is that of rejection towards his hybrid identity. He calls attention to this aspect while he is narrating the story from his adult perspective, recounting the feelings he had as a teenager towards his position:

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 how your gestures already mirror his; 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 (Rushdie 1995, 202).

In this passage, the narrator is making reference to his father, who intrinsically represents his Indian roots; the same roots Mary embraces through the use of “broken English (Nirmala 2019, 157). In contrast, he wants to move away from hybridity, and he tries to do so by acquiring a British passport “that will enable him to get away from his father” (Gane 2001, 56):

I spent one half-term weekend in 1963 at the home in Beccles, Suffolk of Field Marshal Sir Charles Lutwidge-Dogson, an old India hand and a family friend who was supporting my application for 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, [...] I would get away from him [his father]. I would not have this face-pulling in my life (Rushdie 1995, 191, 202).

This British passport, as he believes, will allow him to go away from his father and, implicitly, to escape his roots and his position as a hybrid subject (Gane 2001, 58). Following his thoughts, “the passport will open further possibilities in the West, driving him further away from his home land” (Ganzer 2018, 43). However, the narrator does not realise that he cannot escape that in-between position since “he exists in England as much as India exists in him” (Ganzer 2018, 43). In addition, his choice of moving away from his family as well as from his hybrid identity shows how he fails in recognising and embracing hybridity (Ganzer 2018, 43). Although his beginnings are in the East, the narrator foresees a better future in the West (Gane 2001, 59).

After this presentation and analysis of both Mary and the narrator, it can be seen how Rushdie is able to portray the characters' experiences about their conditions as migrants through strangeness and the realm of language in this short story (Barbeito and Lozano 2012, 179). These two characters show readers how, even though they have different relations with language, they both occupy that Third Space which exists between English and Hindi cultures. However, the short story offers two different ways of dealing with hybridity and “in-betweenness”. Towards of the end of “The

Courter”, the narrator recounts how Mary started to have palpitations, to feel sick:

Mary’s heart trouble turned out to be a mystery; unpredictable, it came and went. She was subjected to all sorts of tests during the next six months, but each time the doctors ended up by shaking their heads: they couldn’t find anything wrong with her. Physically, she was right as rain; except that there were these periods when her heart kicked and bucked in her chest [...] (Rushdie 1995, 208).

It is worth highlighting how this passage appears in the story after an episode where Mary and the narrator’s mother get assaulted in the street out of a racist attack. Indeed, this was actually a problem existing in the late 1960s in Britain: a new racism emerged, which was based in linguistic differences (Mishra 1995, 20).¹

In relation to Mary and her strange palpitations, the narrator exposes how she came to a conclusion of what could be causing her that uneasiness:

At the beginning of the summer Mary made an announcement. ‘I know what is going 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. [...] Or was it that her heart, roped by two different loves, was being pulled both East and West, [...] and she knew that to love she would have to choose? ‘I must go,’ said Certainly-Mary. ‘Yes, certainly. *Bas*. Enough.’ (Rushdie 1995, 208-209).

¹ Although Benedict Anderson theorised the understanding of nations as imagined communities, people who perpetuated racism conceived them as homogenous entities based on race (Mishra 1995, 20). In this respect, Rushdie manages to represent real problems of this kind existing back in those days.

Although she was happy while living in England, she finally had to make a choice between East and West (Gane 2001, 60). This decision was biased by her identity as a migrant, which enables her to shape her relation to home on the basis of her unique experiences (Brown 2011, 18). Even though she was able to find her roots through English and to live in-between two cultures, racism and other people's perspectives about her identity as a migrant forced her to choose (Titus 2011, 5).

At the other end of the spectrum, the narrator also chose between East and West, although he selected the complete opposite option to Mary (Gane 2001, 60). His decision was also affected by his own cultural identity and his experience as a hybrid subject (Brown 2011, 18). His solution to this situation was the hope of getting a British citizenship, which he did indeed: "I became a British citizenship that year" (Rushdie 1995, 210). However, even though the end of the short story may seem quite pessimist in relation to hybridity, the narrator makes a final reflection in the last page:

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 this 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. Lassoos, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both. Do you hear? I refuse to choose (Rushdie 1995, 211).

This last utterance brings some light upon hybridity and "in-betweenness". Even though he rejected his roots when he was a teenager, he realises as an adult that he does not have to choose just one of the parts of his hybrid identity (Gane 2001, 59). In fact, at the beginning of the short story, after he introduced Mary and his family, he calls attention to this final decision: "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" (1995, 178).

Both the narrator and Mary have some contradictory feelings towards their "in-betweenness." However, as Gillian Gane states, readers do not finally get to know which aspects of the East

affects both of them (2001, 60). In the case of Mary, as seen before, it may be “homesickness”. In relation to the narrator, it may be the alienation he experiences as a migrant, even though he tries to assimilate the British culture. Either way, hybridity is not a straightforward term or identity, it “amounts to a space of the impossible whereby the colonial subject’s identity is trapped in the imperialistic dialectics of possession and dispossession, conquest and alienation” (Acheraiou 2008b, 130-131). That is why language works as a powerful tool which enables them to “be in two places at once” and “that holds out the hope of bringing together East and West” (Gane 2001, 63).

After having analysed some of the most outstanding aspects of this short story, it is also important to highlight how Salman Rushdie uses magic realism² in this collection. One of the basic aspects emphasised by his use of magic realism is the East/West binary, which can be found in most of Rushdie’s works (Klassen 2013, 6). However, he sometimes manipulates it in order to deconstruct the classic perceptions of the Eastern and Western worlds, situating them as two opposing, yet connected, systems (Klassen 2013, 14). In addition, the use of magic realism also allows Rushdie to offer to his characters a way of escaping and challenging the influence of the colonizing culture, Britain in this case (Klassen 2013, 15). Through *East, West*, he manages to introduce magic realism in different ways, which enhances a wide range of postcolonial subjects (Klassen 2013, 17). In fact, Rushdie’s work includes “more realistic preoccupations [...] in the first section (East) contrasting with the more dreamlike and almost absurd tone of the second section (West) (Klassen 2013, 7).

However, even though it is a very characteristic aspect of Rushdie’s works, magic realism cannot be found in the short story “The Courter”. This is relevant since that narrative technique can be observed in all the other short stories of the collection, with different degrees of magic and realism (Klassen 2013, 7-8). In contrast, this

² This term was coined by Franz Rod, within the field of art, and Massimo Bontempelli, in relation to literature. They both highlighted that “magic realism” rendered visible the magic behind everyday objects, “stressing the intrinsically wonderful aspects of reality” (Kluwick 2011, 7).

last short story does not show any hints of magic realism. This may be so because, as Gillian Gane exposes, Rushdie put his own thoughts in the text through the narrator's mouth, who gives a final reflection on how hybrid subjects should not be forced to choose between one culture and the other (2001, 59). This way, Rushdie manages to emphasise and transmit one of the most important messages of his works.

4. Conclusion

“The Courter”, together with the whole collection where it belongs to, can be seen as a “Rushdiesque manifesto for in-betweenness” (Sánchez-Palencia Carazo 2004, 4). As previously stated, Rushdie pours his own experience as a migrant into the paper, creating characters that interact with cultures, hybridity and Third Space. He also manages to create a very realistic language which tailors every character and his/her situation as a migrant (Nirmala 2019, 158). In addition, one of the most important aspects of his use of the language is how he had achieved a total decolonization of English in his works (Nirmala 2019, 158). This means that he presents an “English language world which is not Anglo-centric” (Nirmala 2019, 159). In fact, within that non Anglo-centrism is where hybridity and Third Space work as “conduits of revolutionary politics of identity and cultural relationships” (Acheaïou 2011a, 91). The narrator and Mary, even though they have different relations with those two notions, stand against the dominant culture to some extent.

As mentioned above, the end of the short story may seem quite pessimistic in what concerns hybridity. However, as J. Manuel Barbeito and María Lozano argue, by not offering readers a happy ending, Rushdie makes explicit “the disjunction inscribed in the title of the work” (2012, 194). *East, West*, and consequently “The Courter”, calls attention to those aspect of Postcolonialism that sometimes are taken for granted, like the very notion of hybridity. With this work, Rushdie exposes his readers to a wide range of examples from which they can acquire a more realistic understanding of migrants. In fact, these realistic representations also help him in the demystification of the East as well as the West,

creating a postcolonial connection between these two parts of the world. That “in-betweeness” is present in the short story “The Courter” mainly in the figure of the narrator. While Mary the *ayah* is not able to cope with hybridity and what that hybridity entails, the protagonist offers readers a glimpse of how he is able to embrace his roots together with his new hybrid identity. However, it is important to bring attention into the fact that both characters stand against the dominant and traditional Western discourse. Besides, it will be interesting for further research the analysis of hybridity as a discourse that has a multiplicity of differences as well as delving into the possible overlapping that might exist with other minorities.

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