

Les mémoires de nos lauréats (*suite*)

Moustapha Diop El Hadji : *The back-story Dimension in Salman Rushdie's Fury*

During my first reading of *Fury*, I was always tilting my head and blinking an eye whenever I came upon the word "back-story", as if it had an unsettling and enigmatic character, like the eloquent bloodstains the psychopath in *Seven* leaves as a signature on his crime scenes. I *did* sense its appropriateness in the context of media culture, which is prominent among the novel's features, as well as its consistency with the perspective of the main protagonist, Malik Solanka; but I also felt the word's suggestive power behind some situations in which it referred to the narrative particulars of a character's personal experience. There must be, I then suspected, something more involved in this semantic reconfiguration than a mere parodic representation of contemporary life as a dollhouse drama. This *something more* about the novel's back-story element is what I set out to explore in my dissertation.

I first consider the notional possibilities Rushdie is toying with in this novel, notably in terms of character psychology. I thereby place great emphasis on the narrative aspect of each back-story, the extent to which relevant past experiences have a hold on the individuation process of each main figure and the way the latter interact with each other. I also attempt to assess the back-story's value as a sort of narrative blueprint in Solanka's plasticine performances as a dollmaker.

In Chapter 2 the back-story element is cast within the thematic framework of the novel. Here I focus on its illustrative function in the *narrative argument* Rushdie has elaborated for the exposition of a number of themes, such as metamorphosis, to which he constantly returns in his fiction. The point I attempt to make is that, from a compositional standpoint, these topoi – in this specific case: fury, escape and regeneration – can only be *justified* by relating them to a technical constraint, a narrative necessity, as it were, and that is the role the back-story plays as a plot-structuring unit which provides a sense of continuity to the actual progress of some parts of the narrative.

I have tentatively extended the referential range of the back-story in the last chapter, so that the word's semantism may cover the three areas of inquiry which form the *intellectual argument* Rushdie is also developing in *Fury*: culture, history and communal memory. The psychological facts I was concerned with in the first two chapters are thus situated within a broader context, so that individual consciousness may be restored to its proper place in the realm of ideology. I first pay special attention to the *Puppet Kings* story in my attempt to account for – or recover – the critical potential of Solanka's allegorical representation of the back-story of culture as a concept – and not a lived reality. Then I deal successively with the restructuration of historical consciousness in the audiovisual age and the narrative made up by the Indo-Lillies in order to come to terms with their predicament as diasporic Indians. Historical discourse as a spatial projection and, ultimately, an ideological cornerstone, is the common factor linking these last two sections.

The novel's representation of contemporary reality certainly raises a welter of engaging issues, such as Rushdie's unmasking of the perennial centre/periphery binary opposition as merely a sentimental affair; market ideology and the noisy atmosphere of bazaar contemporary intellectual life is smacking of; or the long transition from writing to visuality, which raises the question whether, in the context of mass culture, literature is doomed to lead a parasitic life by taking its cue from the prevailing mode of representation – after the moving picture, now comes Internet along with its groundbreaking representational combinations. But I did not want to slacken the structure of my argument and mix things up. For the sake of internal coherence, I have thus restricted myself to dealing with subjects, such as hybridity or communalism, Rushdie explicitly addresses in the novel and which are eminently relevant to the historicist outlook I take on the notion of back-story in this final chapter.