OPACITY IN AUSTER AND RUSHDIE: SO FAR, SO CLOSE[1]

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to identify and examine a series of convergences in the works of Paul Auster and Salman Rushdie, two authors who seem far apart given their own individual and cultural background as well as the marked differences in tone and content matter of their narrative. However, careful consideration of some of their inspirational sources and narrative strategies betray some aesthetic and epistemological affinities. This confluence also derives from fostering opacity in their writing and producing texts which resist univocal readings. Relying on the theoretical framework of Critical Transparency Studies, it will be argued that the endorsement of textual opacity may be due to a shared conviction that literature offers a lifeline to face the chaos and reductive views that characterize our contemporary age.

KEYWORDS: Auster, *New York Trilogy*, Rushdie, *Quichotte*, opacity, aesthetics, epistemology.

LA OPACIDAD EN AUSTER Y RUSHDIE: TAN LEJOS, TAN CERCA

RESUMEN: El propósito de este artículo es identificar y examinar una serie de convergencias entre las obras de Paul Auster y Salman Rushdie, autores aparentemente muy distantes en cuanto a sus orígenes personales y formación cultural así como en el tono y la temática de su narrativa. Sin embargo, un examen minucioso de algunas de las fuentes de las que se nutren, así como de algunas de sus estrategias narrativas, sugiere una serie de afinidades estéticas y epistemológicas entre ellos. Esta confluencia deriva además de fomentar una opacidad que genera textos resistentes a la lectura unívoca. Basándome en el marco teórico de los Estudios Críticos sobre Transparencia, argumentaré que esa apuesta común por la opacidad textual deriva de la convicción compartida de que la literatura es una tabla de salvación ante el caos y las visiones reduccionistas que caracterizan nuestro tiempo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Auster, *New York Trilogy*, Rushdie, *Quichotte*, opacidad, estética, epistemología.

INTRODUCTION

Although coming initially from distant cultural traditions, Paul Auster (1947-2024) and Salman Rushdie (1947-) have shared literary and political concerns which eventually brought them closer in later stages of life. The fact that they were born on the

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same year may be seen as a matter of coincidence, but apart from that, nothing in principle might have anticipated they would both become members of the same intellectual community and reciprocate in admiration after Rushdie moved to the US in 2000. The truth is Rushdie has written on Auster's interest in the workings of chance («Heraclitus», *The Languages of Truth* 2021: 55) and acknowledged that both authors became close friends.[2] In fact, the Anglo-Indian writer devotes several passages honoring the US writer in his book *Knife* (2024).[3]

In this essay, I contend that both Auster and Rushdie deal with the dichotomy transparency/opacity in their works intuitively realizing there is a mutual interdependence between the two notions which each of them exploits in different ways. Their understanding that textual transparency is rather an illusion while narrative opacity may expose deeper truths, as Clare Birchall argues (2011: 9), will be revealed in the close reading of two texts: Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1987), where I focus on the workings of the paradox transparency/opacity in «City of Glass» and Rushdie's *Quichotte* (2019), where opacity also operates for the sake of epistemic and political resistance. What I intend to establish by looking into the works of Auster and Rushdie and their relationship to the idea of textual opacity is that fictional truths may be bound up with what is occluded by the text's packaging, that is, by formal devices and narrative strategies that should in theory work to fulfill the usual demands for full transparency. However, far from making their texts transparent, these two authors make opacity a tool of aesthetic, epistemic and political resistance. Invoking Édouard Glissant's «right to opacity» (1997), it is Birchall who claims that transparency may be performative (2021), advocating that choosing opacity over clarity in any kind of writing may be a strategy of resistance against attempts at reducing and simplifying contentious issues.

I would like to argue that what these two authors have in common is a postmodern attitude of skepticism that makes them question the limits between reality and fiction, truth and invention, authority/authorship as a source of truth, sharing the belief that language is self-referential, and hence, unable to directly relate the world outside. In the following pages I intend to identify that proclivity towards an aesthetics of opacity in their respective writing by focusing on the closer reading of those two works –«City of Glass» and *Quichotte*– where it is possible to discern instances of narrative opacity and their purported aims.

AUSTER AND HIS PORTRAYAL OF CONTEMPORARY ANGST

Auster was born in Newark, New Jersey, of a middle-class family of Jewish ascendancy and is felt to be a quintessentially US writer, while Rushdie was born of affluent parents of Muslim tradition in Bombay, becoming a leading representative of the «late modern Indian diaspora», of displaced, hyphenated individuals moving around the Globe (Mishra, 2007: 3). Instances of how such a disparate upbringing and life experience has had an impact on the writers' fiction are to be found, for instance, in their distinct choice of settings, characters and topics.

[2] Rushdie served as PEN America's President from 2004-2009, of which Auster was a member too, and in the wake of 9/11 founded the World Voices Festival, the most import event celebrating international literature in the US.

[3] References to Auster in *Knife* (2024) include his being immensely grateful for the support received in a rally organized by PEN America («Stand with Salman: Defend the Freedom to Write») outside the NY Public Library on August 19, 2022, where Paul Auster, among others, read passages from Rushdie's work (2024: 80). Other noteworthy passages (2024: 134, 170) underline a mutual literary appreciation and a personal sense of attachment.

Auster systematically sets his stories in identifiable contemporary urban American settings, with New York City as central stage −*The New York Trilogy*, *Leviathan* (1992) or *Brooklyn Follies* (2005)–, some forays into Vermont or across the US, and sporadic escapes of his protagonists to France, as Auster himself did in his twenties, taking odd jobs to survive as he recounts in *The Invention of Solitude* (1982) and *Hand to Mouth* (1997). Furthermore, Auster is mainly concerned with contemporary American characters, generally middle-class white males deeply engaged in some epistemological or ontological quest. Despite Auster's all-Americanness, some of his novels like *4321* (2017) reveal the author's awareness of migrancy as a commonly shared American experience. However, these references to ancestors just uncover an exploration of self-identity rather than being an examination of uprootedness and non-belonging, which are so central to all of Rushdie's narrative. In fact, Auster focuses on the lives of the umpteenth generation of white Europeans fully assimilated into American soil as they attempt to make sense of sudden reversals of fortune, which is very different from the kind of mystifying incidents depicted by Rushdie when, for instance, Saladin Chamcha miraculously survives an airplane explosion and lands in the racially intolerant UK of the Thatcher era in *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Columbus has prophetic dreams in an ethnically prejudiced 1492 Spain in *East, West* (1996), or when Ismail Smile endures the hardships of looking different to the dominant racial group in the Trump age and witnesses unbelievable metamorphoses of the people around in *Quichotte*.

As Peter Brooker points out in *New York Fictions* (1996) «Auster's stories reflect on […] interlaced concerns of language, literature and identity, seeking moments or types of stability between the extremes of fixity and randomness» (1996: 145). What emerges as the most distinctive motif in Auster's fiction is chance, rendering fate so whimsical that existence seems uncertain and futile. Readers of Auster are thus quite familiar with the sudden reversals of fortune his characters undergo, turning his novels into meditations on the randomness of life. However, as Alford (2006: 15) has noted, there is a contradictory attitude in Auster regarding chance as he tries to cope with a bewildering world. On the one hand, he is blatantly pessimistic and this outlook is conveyed with all its severity in his non-fiction works («Our lives don't really belong to us, you see –they belong to the world, and in spite of our efforts to make sense of it, the world is a place beyond our understanding» (Auster 1997: 289), while the other tends to be gentler and more comforting, emerging in his fictional writings. In fact, the latter evolve from a full display of utter alienation and nihilism in his 1980s-1990s fiction to a certain degree of optimism surfacing in some of his post-2000 novels, like *Brooklyn Follies* or *Baumgartner*, where the ideas of community and hope timidly emerge to counter his existential angst. Accordingly, «the 'brave' Auster sees the world as it is, meaningless. The 'weak' Auster gives in to the impulse to paper over the world and its randomness with acts of understanding that obscure the world's fundamental meaninglessness» (Alford, 2004: 116). His novels might then be construed as failed attempts at deciphering reality, at unveiling mystery in a world where contingency, not the logics of causality, rules. That also explains why all his novels lack proper closure. In this respect, Auster's indebtedness to Beckett in his insistence on the absurdity of life is not only acknowledged in interviews (Auster and Hutchisson, 2013: 27) but fully visible in many of Auster's stories. Likewise, his kinship with Kafka's absurd surrealism is wonderfully translated in the anecdote about the letters the Czech author is said to have written in the name of a missing doll to console the weeping girl who lost it. This favorite recollection of Tom Wood's in *Brooklyn Follies* (Auster, 2005: 153-155) also exposes Auster's faith in the healing power of storytelling against randomness and loss. Seen in this light, it could be

argued that Auster writes about chance and coincidence in an attempt to account for the mysteries of an unfathomable «reality». As Auster noted in an interview with Josep Mallia, «the world is filled with strange events. Reality is a great deal more mysterious than we ever give credit for» (Auster, 1992: 260). The writer's responsibility is, according to Auster, none other than «to watch out for all these mysterious goings-on in the world» (1992: 273).

Auster's heightened awareness of chance determining people's lives reveals in fact his questioning of a core American belief, namely, the assurance that individuals can shape their own destiny in accordance with the myth of the American dream.[4] As a matter of fact, having characters like Nathan Glass and Tom Wood in *Brooklyn Follies* (2005) confronting constant reversals of fortune undermines that faith in the myth, being replaced by a distrust of utopian hopes echoed by Nathan's words –«America had gone to hell» (2005: 16)–. On another note, the writer's own experience of surviving a lightning strike while the boy next to him died in a summer camp, retold in *The Invention of Solitude*, also underscores the sense of utter uncertainty and futility that governs human life. And it is undoubtedly unruly chance what disrupts Archie Fergusons's life path and becomes the novel's motor as four possible versions of a life unfold in one of Auster's last novels, *4321*. Moreover, the writer's obsession with this motif is also visible in the collection of supposedly real-life stories about luck he gathered in *The Red Notebook* (1993). What is plain is that chance is the trigger in Auster's fiction, pushing his readers into a profound metaphysical enquiry about the meaning of life and self-identity.

Far from being an exclusively American concern, this apprehension with our limitless exposure to randomness is a universal predicament which may well justify Auster's appeal beyond the English-speaking world. As it is then, Auster fundamentally draws on an all-American experience embodied in protagonists who are writers of sorts nevertheless making his stories fully relatable to the uncertainties of the postmodern condition.[5] Many of Auster's characters are alienated and bewildered subjects without purpose, either driving or wandering aimlessly in search for answers to the puzzles of existence or else being locked in bounded spaces. However, as noted above, to deal with this shared predicament –human vulnerability in the face of uncertainty–, his characters ramble, literally and figuratively, in search for answers through endless roads as in *The Music of Chance* (1991) or through the labyrinth of streets of the big impersonal city in «City of Glass». Alternatively, Auster's characters are confined to the solitude of a closed space –often the writer's workroom– for extended periods. In such cases, much of the action –rather mental forays– unfolds in a closed room as happens to Daniel Quinn in «City of Glass», where the possibility of going out is always ruled out in favor of staying in the confines of a room, isolated from the outside world. Auster constantly returns to the room as a physical, but above all, an imaginary space, inspired by Poe's imaginary room, described by the writer as «a vault of contemplation, a noiseless sanctuary where the soul can at least find the measure of peace» (Auster, 2006: 16).

[4] In the opening of the US *Declaration of Independence* this foundational principle is stated as follows, «We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness» (*Declaration of Independence*, 1776)

[5] Brendan Martin´s volume, *Paul Auster's Postmodernity* (2008), offers an excellent synthesis of the writer's relationship to literary postmodernity regarding a full range of his factual and fictional writings. Herzogenrath's *An Art of Desire. Reading Paul Auster* (1999) explores the rewriting and deconstruction of genre conventions, emphasizing a kind of outside of the text (chance, the real, the unsayable) a kind of hope for a «transparent language» that is impossible to fulfil.

Such space must be interpreted as a metaphor for the mind of his fictional characters –young novelists or poets, journalists, translators, critics, professors, or even detectives having to hand in reports. It is there, in his head and the room as well, where Mr. Blank, a disoriented and amnesiac old man is visited in *Travels in the Scriptorium* (Auster, 2006: 179) by the fictional characters of some of Auster's previous fictions thus providing a surreal chance for his *alter ego* to meet again his invented creatures. One by one they come into the room where Mr. Blank reads another manuscript supposedly written by Fanshawe, the protagonist of «The Locked Room» in *The New York Trilogy*. *Travels in the Scriptorium* is a dark narrative of claustrophobic seclusion, which figures as a mental expedition within Auster's work. It is indeed a highly metafictional piece since Mr Blank is allowed to encounter his most cherished creations and engage in conversation with them about the possibilities of fiction overwriting reality. In fact, many of Auster's texts develop this obsession with seclusion and bound space as «an inner refuge» (2006: 100), where the protagonist stays engaged in an obsessive metaphysical quest by writing, reading and thinking to solve existential conundrums.

At first sight, Auster's solipsism would locate Rushdie, who delights in observing crowds and multitudes, wide apart from the American novelist. Yet, this self-absorption is in no way to be understood as disregard for others:

> The astonishing thing […] is that at the moment when you are most truly alone, when you truly enter a state of solitude, that is the moment when you are not alone anymore, when you start to feel your connection with others. I believe I even quote Rimbaud in that book, «Je est un autre» –I is another– and I take that sentence quite literally. In the process of writing or thinking about yourself, you actually become someone else. (Auster and Hutchisson, 2013: 33)

In this sense, Auster has an unyielding conviction that fiction and imaginative writing have a redemptive power, the power to establish a relationship with a community of others who share a common predicament.

That faith in the great potential of storytelling as a lifeline is perhaps the strongest point of convergence between the two authors. There is a shared belief in the potential of stories to console by conveying deeper and hidden truths that escape the unaware and, in short, to make life more meaningful than it actually is thanks to the greater insights literature affords. Because their texts are dense with intertextual allusions, metafictional reflection and apparently trivial detail intended to convey a sense of transparent reality and make-believe, Auster's and Rushdie's novels offer several layers of interpretation, and their readers are often compelled to reread to disclose further meaning in their narratives. Hence, the apparently nonsensical or futile quests of Quinn in «City of Glass» and Ismail Smile in *Quichotte* would mirror to a certain extent the readers' quest for meaning in these alluring but demanding texts. There are other affinities between Auster and Rushdie that I will enumerate now as I give an overview of Rushdie's own fiction and its most salient aspects.

RUSHDIE'S SENSE OF NON-BELONGING AND MAGIC REALISM

The life of Salman Rushdie can be described as anything but uneventful. He was separated from his family in India to pursue an education in the UK at an early age, having his first experience of non-belonging then. After graduating in History from Cambridge, Rushdie returned to his family home in Pakistan where they had moved as a result of India's partition. Yet, due to his unwillingness to conform in a society tightly controlled

by religiously-minded rulers, he returned to the UK to start his adult life as an émigré. That fact undeniably determined his personal outlook and marked very strongly his literary production. As he claims in *Languages of Truth*, «for migrant writers, voluntary migrants and involuntary, exiles and refugees…instability is a given –instability of abode, of the future, of family, of the self» (2021: 59). No doubt, Rushdie sees himself within that category, falling «somewhere in between, sometimes looking East, sometimes West, but always with a sense of the provisionality of all truths» (2021: 60). To a certain extent, it is that idea of instability and 'provisionality' what also connects Rushdie and Auster, for whom contingency determines human destinies, leaving people bewildered and confused. Stories are also provisional truths, not dogma, and as such they should be interpreted.

As is well known, only seven years after becoming a critically acclaimed author due to the 1981 Booker Prize for *Midnight's Children*, the public condemnation issued in 1989 by ayatollah Khomeini for *The Satanic Verses* (1988) kept Rushdie in hiding for a long time. It was during those eleven years of terrible seclusion, loneliness and fear – seven terrorist attacks had been perpetrated by 1993 in connection to the book–[6] that he had to «dive for cover» (2012: 140) as he retells in his memoir *Joseph Anton*, going under a different identity and the constant supervision of the British security services. Yet, in 2000, Rushdie decided on a new start. It was then that he eventually landed in «Austerian territory», by settling down in NYC, where he managed to lead a fairly discrete life considering the circumstances. However, after skipping for many years the death threat, Rushdie was brutally attacked in 2022, surviving the terrorist action only by a narrow escape.

Hence, Rushdie's experience is a world away from Auster's, for Rushdie's is mainly anchored in his own assemblage of the many different cultures, peoples, languages he has been in touch with throughout his wandering life, which has brought him great insights into difference, dislodgment and hybridity. Rushdie's collection of tales, *East, West*, masterfully conveys that synthesis after years of itinerancy, of being a transnational author, aware of the fact that any place may be a «home», even if just a provisional one. As a writer, he seems fascinated by the rich plurality of India, as revealed in *Midnight's Children*, and for that matter, he is also deeply aware of the diversity and the complexity that characterizes our current globalized world, where reductionist views fall short of solving thorny issues and providing simple answers. In short, Rushdie celebrates the ever-changing nature of a multifaceted reality which is incommensurable and difficult to formulate, refusing to make sweeping statements that render people and things outside our comprehension more intelligible and manageable. That is precisely the reason why Rushdie delights in texts that defy the current demands for full transparency, producing instead stories in exuberant and vibrant prose that seem unclear but overflow with meaning.

Despite the divergences with Auster's lived experience, I contend that it is perhaps that same awareness of contingency, of the shifting nature and multiplicity of identity, of the apparent meaningless of a world that has gone awry what makes Auster and Rushdie engage in their writing in search of ways of coping with that elusive and baffling reality. It is also perhaps that knowledge what also brought them closer in the later years of their lives. Both defended the freedom to write as relevant members of the PEN America

[6] Several people related to the publication of *Satanic Verses* were the target of those attacks. In July 1991 the Italian translator, Ettore Capriolo, was viciously stabbed but managed to survive and his Japanese translator, Hitoshi Igarashi, eventually killed, while two years later, the Norwegian publisher of the book was shot from the back but survived.

society and Rushdie had a significant role in opening it up to international authors, leading campaigns for the freedom of speech in world literature.

For Rushdie's writing differs from Auster's in his cultural richness and linguistic diversity but at the same time in his being able to absorb difference and distance between apparently opposed traditions and combining them to produce a rich collage of images, flavors and smells in his fiction, which make it impossible to locate it in a single geographical space. From that powerful fusion of diverse or even antithetical elements emerges a unique voice that is made of multiple echoes from the eastern and western cultural traditions from which Rushdie has drawn. Therefore, Rushdie's fiction is drenched with allusions to high culture of heterogeneous origin, including Hindu divinities, the prophet Mohamed and angelic presences of Judeo-Christian lineage, versicles of sacred texts of several religions, historical figures, parodical quotes and literary figures ranging from Cervantes's *Don Quixote* to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and homages to Kafka and Ionesco, just to mention but a few. But at the same time, Rushdie relishes in popular culture, bringing to life fictional Bollywood's actors and thriving TV presenters, crazy rich entrepreneurs, corrupt political and military leaders, as well as religious fanatics and misled romantics, whom he renders in buoyant prose with the sardonic humor that pervades his whole production. But above all, what makes Rushdie inimitable is his capacity to merge the realm of the magic with the darkest realities of religious extremism, political oppression, migrancy and racism.

In terms of style, and even risking oversimplification, it may be asserted that Auster is in essence a postmodern that tends to realism in terms of style, while Rushdie, also postmodern in his outlook, stands almost at the opposite end of that spectrum, operating within the realm of the supernatural as it merges with the real, revealing a strong kinship with writers like Gabriel García Márquez. While Rushdie is defined as a fabulist, the foremost representative of magic realism writing in English today, it may be said that Auster's storylines mostly follow the path of causes and effects, with an inaugural realistic incident triggering some sort of chain reaction that sets in motion a sequence of unforeseen events as the famous dialing of «a wrong number that started it» (3) in «City of Glass». There, a strange series of calls asking for detective Paul Auster launches Daniel Quinn onto a maddening quest. In an interview referring to *The New York Trilogy* Auster claims that

> It becomes more apparent that [the characters are] surrounded by things they don't know or understand. So in that sense there might be some psychological resonance. Even though the situations aren't strictly realistic, they might follow some realistic psychology. These are things that we all feel –that confusion, that lack of knowing what it is that surrounds us. (Auster and Hutchisson, 2013: 35)

Consequently, despite the puzzling nature of events, everything to a certain extent in Auster's writing responds to natural, realistic causes, with no supernatural or fantastical elements intruding in the narrative. In contrast, Rushdie's narrative is characterized by a constant interference of the magical within the sphere of the real and possible, managing to blur the boundaries between the factual and the imaginary, by providing fabulous episodes and endings. In this respect, Rushdie is much more radical in his imaginative outbursts, demanding from readers a greater leap of faith to follow his protagonists' destinies, wherever they may take them.[7] In an essay on García Márquez, Rushdie states

[7] A good instance of Rushdie's daring invention is the incredible episode of *Satanic Verses* where a hijacked plane explodes over the English Channel with the miraculous survival of a long sky fall of

that magical realism «is a development out of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely 'Third World' consciousness» and in the world described, «impossible things happen constantly, and quite plausibly, out in the open under midday sun» (Rushdie 1991: 301). When considering Rushdie's fiction in the light of the transparency/ opacity dichotomy, it is quite revealing that magical occurrences should take place, as he states, in full sight, while their true meaning lies beneath the surface. In that respect, Rushdie's fiction is deeply allegorical.

Having delineated the writers' idiosyncrasies and the reasons why they would in principle seem two unrelated authors, I will argue that both Auster and Rushdie, each in their own way, have consistently cultivated a taste for narrative opacity, though in each case they may lean, depending on the text, more towards an exploration of epistemological, ontological or political dilemmas.

THE TRANSPARENCY/OPACITY DILEMMA

I use the concept of narrative opacity to refer to moments when the text for whatever reason resists clear interpretation –where narration, perspective and the reality of the story become ambiguous or self-contradictory. Instead of giving readers transparent access to the fictional world, the writer deliberately makes us aware of the several layers of narration, fictionality and imagination. In Literary Studies the discussion has followed several paths, focusing on the political nuances and the aesthetic possibilities of playing with the transparency/opacity dichotomy. In this essay I deal with the multiple effects of narrative opacity in Auster's and Rushdie's writing, and I offer an interpretation of the possible motivations behind the adoption of narrative strategies of opacity.

In *Poetics of Relation* (1997) Édouard Glissant advocates the right to opacity, the right not to be reduced in a world where the logics of the Enlightenment still prevail, particularly in the Western hemisphere. From a postcolonial perspective, Glissant argues that a rationalistic logic has been imposed on people, ideas, entities and cultures that become categorized in binary opposites (good/evil, human/non-human, civilized/barbaric…). And yet, such a way of dealing with reality is not enough to account for a multifarious and complex reality and make sense of it, enabling us to understand diversity and heterogeneity. As Glissant puts it in his advocacy for opacity, «if we examine the process of 'understanding' people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is the requirement for transparency» (189) and it is precisely for that reason that we are forced «to reduce» difference (190). Furthermore, we live in an age where transparency, not opacity, is overvalued as opposed to the detrimental implications of opacity. However, within the field of Critical Transparency Studies that clear-cut dichotomy has been recently problematized.

As Birchall has pointed out: «The idea of transparency as a political and cultural ideal has left secrecy [opacity] to accumulate negative connotations. But the moral discourse that condemns secrecy and rewards transparency may cause us to misread the symbiotic relationship between these terms» (2011:7). The problem is that power, control and legitimacy have been organized and defended on grounds of liability and transparent narratives. In that respect, a transparent government is deemed as one that is fully accountable and its operations knowable to the people, which suggests transparency must be a critical tool to circumvent political corruption, for example. However, when

Gibreel Farishta, a Bollywood star, and Saladin Chamcha, an Indian expatriate voice actor. As they fall and land in an English town, they gradually transform into an angelic and demonic figure respectively. The narrative basically tells how each character follows a radically different destiny in Britain.

transparency mechanisms are also applied by governmental agencies and big corporations to make people «legible» or «transparent», we come to realize the oppressive nature of this overrated notion, which enables easy classification and domination of those who are surveilled or categorized according to dominant values. In line with the above, Derrida also claims for the right to opacity when stating that «If a right to the secret is not maintained, we are in a totalitarian space» (Derrida with Ferraris, 2001: 59).

Hence, there is now within the sphere of Transparency Studies a number of scholars and thinkers who, like Birchall and Glissant, challenge the prevailing opinion regarding the benefits of transparency as opposed to the ills of secrecy and opacity, in what is a strategic debate that aims to shift public opinion towards a revaluation of opacity in ethical and political terms, but also in aesthetic as well as epistemic grounds. As Birchall has suggested, the dichotomy between «transparency» and «secrecy» cannot be taken at its face value since those are just «malleable, floating signifiers» (2021: 4), so it is necessary to think beyond that mutually exclusive binary structure:

> Secrecy and transparency therefore have no essential meaning outside of the discursive formations that invoke them […] But what makes secrecy and transparency more complex as signifiers is that they each refer to form rather than any specific content, any individual piece of information that might be called secret or transparent. They are not themselves information; rather, they label and determine the value of the information they carry. (Birchall 2021: 5)

As argued, the logics by which transparency and opacity should be read as positive and negative in their outcome must be reconsidered. I contend that it is writers like Auster and Rushdie, who following Glissant's[8] and Birch's premises, promote opacity in their own writing in the understanding that «the opaque is not the obscure, though it is possible for it to be so and be accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced» (Glissant 1997: 191). Rushdie and Auster provide numerous examples in their writing of an effort to resist transparent readings and reductive views.

OPACITY IN AUSTER'S FICTION

Auster is well-known for creating very complex narrative structures with multiple narrative frames where stories-within-stories are embedded, which already suggests that despite its realism, there is an awareness of the obscure, incomprehensible nature of (self)identity and the evasive quality of reality. This becomes obvious when reading such works as *The New York Trilogy*, *The Music of Chance*, *Brooklyn Follies*, *4321* or *Baumgartner*. The confusion of his characters pins down the unintelligibility of many of the life-changing incidents which Auster so masterfully fictionalizes in all their seeming absurdity.

Auster's relish for metafictionality, which reveals the blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction, is clearly one of the most obvious devices intended for narrative opacity that can be found in his writing. That is the case in the three interlocked stories of *The New York Trilogy*, where narrators constantly comment on the processes of writing, reading and interpreting ambivalent signs, equating the task of the reader with that of the detective. However, despite having characters involved in tasks of detection –

[8] According to Bonasia (2023) there seems to be a clear resonance of Glissant's theorization of alternative modes of representation of postcolonial reality in *The Poetics of Relation* in Rushdie's fiction. Rushdie's representation fuses the real with the magical or fantastic, allowing him to depict reality in a much more powerful and truthful way than conventional forms of realism.

a metaphor for reading– and relying clearly on the conventions of detective fiction, Auster's trilogy destabilizes those very same conventions by replacing the revelation of truth with ambiguity and a sense of uncertainty generated by the notion of fragmentation and self-reflexivity (Russell 2004: 97-112). Therefore, narrative opacity in Auster's work appears most clearly at moments where meaning, authorship, identity, or narrative structure collapses, something that is mainly achieved by his manipulation of formal devices.

In «City of Glass»[9] there is an utter dissolution of the sense of identity, provoking uncertainty as to who the «I» of the story is, with the narrative voice becoming highly unreliable. Daniel Quinn is a writer of detective fiction going by the pseudonym of William Wilson, who is mistaken for a detective called «Paul Auster». He is eventually hired as a private eye, even though he is not one, given Quinn's familiarity with mystery plots. He goes by that name, Paul Auster, as he tries to solve the Stillmans' case, which he paradoxically fails to resolve, frustrating readerly expectations and rendering the whole story apparently meaningless. Paul Auster not only is the non-fictive author of «City of Glass» but also «exists» as a character in the novel, confronting readers with a great dilemma as to his ontological status. These constant doublings are truly mystifying, causing obscurity in the narrative, but they force readers to probe the limits of the fictional and the real providing access to deeper truths. Another truly destabilizing moment occurs in chapter 10, when Daniel Quinn frustrated by his failure to find any clue to Peter Stillman decides to meet Paul Auster paying him a visit (Auster, 1988: 92). The fictional Paul Auster is also a writer, married to Siri Hustvedt, and has a son called Daniel with whom Daniel Quinn suddenly identifies («I'm you, and you're me» (1988:102)). This overlapping of identity –there are also two Peter Stillmans, father and son– disorients the reader and makes the supposed line dividing fiction and reality dissolve, producing a deep sense of ontological vacuity, given the difficulty of telling who is who and what level of reality we are in. In conventional detective fiction such identity mess-up would have been avoided for the sake of verisimilitude, but Auster breaks with the rules of the genre and fosters ontological indeterminacy. Furthermore, Quinn not only assumes several names and identities as he tries to solve his case, but he ends up being absolutely irrelevant –an invisible, anonymous being in the city. It could then be argued that such a narrative strategy is intended to question the very notion of a steady, verifiable self-identity.

In addition, if we take into account that Quinn is hired to solve a mystery and that, according to generic conventions, the detective plot promises revelation and transparency, the fact that the Stillmans' case is left unresolved –for both the son and the father eventually disappear without a trace– it may be argued that the surveillance and interpretative task Quinn is engaged in is meaningless, something that also applies to «Ghosts». In that second story within the trilogy the logics of detective fiction are also invoked only to be deconstructed. There a man named Blue is hired by White to follow a man called Black. Once again, the narrative refuses transparency and closure. There is no resolution and the act of watching becomes an allegory for writing/reading itself. It is also

[9] Auster seems to be fully aware of the aporia between transparency and opacity implicit in the title «City of Glass» since the fact that the city is made of glass façades does not make Quinn's task of surveillance any easier, but a complete failure. There is also the pun on the «private eye/I» Quinn assumes to be. The paradox arises from the supposed ability to see beyond the surface detectives have but which proves useless in Quinn, since he is unable to disclose the mysteries of his case. Eventually, his quest to find out about Stillman eventually turns into a maddening exploration of self-identity that lacks depth. As the narrator's voice states: «As for Quinn, there is little that need detain us. Who he was, where he came from, and what he did are of no great importance» (3) for he is just a fictional character in a detective fiction in the same way the Stillmans are.

worth remarking that the surveillance of Blue by Black –notice the trope of opacity or unfathomableness implicit in the idea of blackness– gives out nothing about the man being spied, except a flattened, paperweight personality, which is what total transparency produces –a reduction of the convolutedness of singularity. It may also be contended that Auster deliberately withholds narrative resolution in the three stories of *The New York Trilogy* to foreground the failure of interpretation, the impossibility of reaching a definite solution to the mysteries we are all, as his characters are, faced with.

Furthermore, the boundaries between the narrator and Fanshawe in «The Locked Room» once again blur. In that last story of the trilogy the unnamed narrator tries to reconstruct the existence of Fanshawe, his missing friend, whom he eventually replaces in the life he has abandoned for unknown reasons. Whether Fanshawe is dead or alive is the mystery the narrator must solve. And yet, the narrator eventually discovers that his enigmatic friend has been paradoxically observing him all along rather than the other way around, so he has turned into the object of investigation. At one point it is even suggested that Fanshawe may be the very author of the text we are reading, according to which the very idea of authorship collapses into a *mise-en-abyme*, reflecting one of the main issues in the trilogy, the self-referentiality of fiction. It is particularly at that point that the text becomes metafictional, commenting on its own making and the act of storytelling and resulting in the impossibility for the reader to tell the difference between «fiction» and «reality», a favorite concern of postmodern authors like Auster and Rushdie. As it is then, *The New York Trilogy* is rendered as an opaque text, underscoring the fabricated, artificial nature of fictional worlds, despite their semblance of reality.

Another issue that is foregrounded in the trilogy is the fact that, according to poststructuralist thought, language is not a transparent vehicle that gives access to the truth or refers to extralinguistic reality beyond itself. Instead, language is viewed by postmodern writers like Auster and Rushdie as a fallible vehicle of communication with barriers to meaning and understanding. This perception is patent in «City of Glass», where Peter Stillman Jr. –who hires Quinn as the «Auster» detective– speaks in broken, fragmented English due to his having been secluded by his father for many years in a cruel experiment. Trying to decipher the meaning conveyed by Stillman's words, the reader witnesses a literal disintegration of language, which also mirrors the character's fragmentation of the self. It may be claimed then that Auster seems to be portraying the ambiguous status of language, which communicates but also fails to do so transparently as both detectives and writers are trapped in a world where words obscure rather than reveal truth as a transparent glass would do.

All in all, Auster's narrative strategies position the reader in a situation of uncertainty, forcing him to become a sort of detective, assembling clues to make sense of the stories, only to discover that at each turn interpretation of words and events is only provisional. In other words, it could be claimed that in the stories that make *The New York Trilogy*, the reader's attempts at understanding are mirrored and frustrated by the protagonists'. The structure of the trilogy, then, creates a sense of hermeneutic opacity since there is not an ultimate meaning that may be grasped. Meaning regarding, for instance, the surrealist situations the protagonists are trapped in or the motivations of the characters under investigation deludes the detective figures –Quinn, Blue and the unnamed narrator. However, what is underscored is an obsession with writing reports and notebooks to provide an accurate record of reality which, nevertheless, proves useless when read, as they provide no satisfying answers to the mysteries confronting the characters. Narrative opacity in *The New York Trilogy* is achieved by the formal devices outlined above causing great disorientation in the readers who faced with such a dense

network of signifiers cannot reach a univocal, transparent interpretation of a highly resistant text.

RUSHDIE'S TASTE FOR OPACITY

Before embarking on how opacity works in Rushdie's narrative, it is worth remembering that the Anglo-Indian author is considered as a significant representative of the Indian diaspora. Mishra identifies Rushdie as a member of the so-called «non-essentialist diaspora», since the writer accepts his hybrid and hyphenated nature, celebrating diaspora's multiplicity and its being in constant transformation, and calling into question the reductionist idea that «a people must have a land in order to be a people» (2007: 20). In contrast, those whom Mishra has called «essentialists» members of the diaspora exclusively identify with a single place of origin and claim a self-identity inseparable from their national and ethnic one, longing for a return to an idealized homeland and, above all, holding ideas of ethnic purity. Rushdie is more at ease with the former condition, that of transnational subjects with non-exclusionary views of belonging, aware of the fact that a return to that idyllic place called «home» is impossible. Given the migrants' «physical alienation from India», the writer claims, «we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost … we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind» (Rushdie 1991: 10).

Rushdie is clearly aware of the fact that his own fiction may be suspected of unreliability and incompleteness, like a broken mirror, an image he employs to speak of the subjective and fragmentary vision of his protagonist in *Midnight's Children*. Yet, instead of lamenting the difficulty implicit in the interpretation of an obscure and fractured narrative, Rushdie appreciates such apparent limitation and concludes that «the writer is obliged to deal with broken mirrors, some of whose fragments are irretrievably lost», adding that, paradoxically, «the broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed» (Rushdie 1991:11). If we take the broken mirror as a metaphor for the writer's partial memory which is supplemented by his own imagination, the statement would justify Rushdie's preference for magical realist depictions rather than for other narrative strategies aimed at conventional forms of realism producing apparently «more transparent renderings», but which would be, following Glissant, rather reductive to convey the multifarious and enigmatic reality of India and its peoples and of the millions of diasporic individuals around the globe. More realistic or transparent portrayals of the kaleidoscopic variety inherent in India and people of Indian origin may depict them as flat, stereotyped figures befitting easy understanding from a Western perspective.

Rushdie's adoption of the narrative strategies of magic realism, with the miraculous taking precedence over the real, also aligns with his understanding of the novel as a form that rejects «totalized explanations» of the «modern condition» because the form was created to «discuss the fragmentation of truth» (1991: 422). He further insists on the fact that the novel, this «most freakish, hybrid, metamorphic of forms» (1991:425) expresses the new episteme of the postmodern condition. It may be contended then that Rushdie uses the novel to test reality and history and the grand narratives in which they are presented. As argued by Mishra, Rushdie «pushes for a generic hybridity (a postmodern resistance to the classical bifurcation of East/West)» in his novels, which aligns with an urge to probe the substance and limits of hegemonic discourse. Thus, at the heart of *Midnight's Children* «is the question of history as epistemology and as a form of true representation» (2007: 214). The novel is so packed with impenetrable signifiers

that a single comprehensive interpretation of any of its episodes or of the whole narrative often eludes its readers. Consequently, it may be claimed that Rushdie, like Auster, is truly aware of the possibilities fiction affords to challenge given «truths» through fiction. He endlessly invites readers to go beyond the surface to unveil what lies inscribed in the obscurity of his fragmentary narratives, experimental postmodern and postcolonial fictions, which most often figure as magic-realist texts.

Rushdie's highly demanding writings are often resistant to a straightforward reading due to several formal and structural features that may be well identified. One of them is lack of linearity of his plots as happens in *Midnight's Children*, a text that despite its extension, ends exactly where it begins. Another is the rich polyglossia through which the reader has to navigate together with the invented expressions (often hyphenated terms) that «contaminate» –or supplement– the English text. The pastiche of different genres often obfuscates meaning too as happens in *Quichotte*, where one can find a parody of chivalric novels, surrealist transformations and satirical dream-visions of a mass-media abducted society blasted in a sci-fi ending. Furthermore, the blending of several cultural traditions is at the heart of his unique manner of writing, fusing the eloquence of Eastern Indian epics, the tradition of oral transmission of ancient tales, together with contemporary Bollywoodian inflections. And, last, but not least, there is the blend of Western literary classics with experimental narrative models that range from Cervantes's metafictional satire and Lawrence Sterne's baroque style in digressive autobiographical writing to modern-day dramatic intermissions of interior monologue. Apart from those strategies, opacity in Rushdie is also generated by the tentativeness of his characters' assertions and their inner contradictions. This is most obvious when Saleem Sinai, the unreliable protagonist and narrator of *Midnight's Children* demands from his reader/listener to «believe and [do]n't believe» (Rushdie 1981: 456), pointing to the untrustworthiness of his life narrative, which overlaps with his own version of the history of India since the night of its independence –an alternative to «official history»–, increasing the opacity of his telling. At the inconclusive closing of his lengthy account the reader is left with everything –and paradoxically with nothing– to make sense of. The magic component, Saleem's telepathic and premonitory powers, as well as the incredible coincidences and happenings of his life unavoidably open spaces for metaphorical interpretations of the episodes presented by the highly digressive narrator that Saleem is. In this sense, it is worth noting that, according to Rushdie, in fiction

> the truth is not arrived at by purely mimetic means […] Literature of the fantastic –the wonder tale, the fable, the folktale, the magic realist novel– has always embodied profound truths about human beings, their finest attributes and their deepest prejudices too. (Rushdie, 2021:26)

In fact, Rushdie makes an adamant defense of the imagination as a means to better understand a bewildering extra-linguistic world because it «is used to enrich reality, not to escape from it; the wonderful has deep roots in the real and for that reason is able to use the surreal to create metaphors and images of the real that come to feel more real than reality, more truthful than the truth» (Rushdie, 2021:126).

Rushdie relishes in creating tropes of transformation, hybridity and diversity –like the jars of pickled vegetables Saleem's listener and lover, Padma, spices with multiple flavors and scents making the vegetables look, taste and smell different from what they were originally. Those metamorphoses, like the ones Saleem and the rest of Midnight's children undergo in their life, destabilize his sense of reality and self-identity and make the text resistant to a single transparent reading. Hence, in an allegorical reading, Saleem

Sinai is the embodiment of India, of the multitude –a member of the one thousand and one children magically connected as a symbol of the nation's diversity and instability– converging on a single historical night, August 15th, 1947, when India became independent and they were all born. It is the uncertain playfulness of transfiguration that interests Rushdie the most because the intrinsic instability of the metamorphic being counters the demands for reduction and simplification.

Although *Midnight's Children* and *Satanic Verses* would also be valid instances to demonstrate Rushdie's tendency to make his tales deeply allegorical and hence opaque, I will resort to *Quichotte* (2019), a much more recent novel, as paradigmatic example of how the author uses metafictional discourse, doubling and ontological inconsistency to make the boundaries between reality and fiction, author and character, text and world collapse. Greater complexity and depth are also added by the intertextual references that constantly punctuate the narrative. In *Quichotte,* moments of obscurity are not incidental but central to the novel's structure and themes, foregrounding the fact that it is often difficult to distinguish between writer and character, fact and fiction, and reality and delusion.

For a start, there is in *Quichotte* a double narrative structure that forces the reader to jump from one world to another, getting a fragmented glimpse of two alternate but intertwined worlds. On the one hand, we find in the opening chapter the «Quichotte» narrative, where an ageing South Asian US salesman, Ismail Smile, becomes obsessed with TV star, Salma R., his Dulcinea, and reinvents himself as a modern-day Quixote embarking on a quest to conquer his beloved and rescue her from death at the end of the world. Rushdie humorously portrays the delusional Ismail Smile as a stalker, who intrudes in Salma's life by sending absurdly rhetorical missives and acting as her «heroic» fentanyl-dealer and savior. On the other hand, we find the «Brother» narrative (chapter 2: «An Author, Sam Duchamp, reflects upon his Past and enters new Territory», pp. 21-35), where a writer nicknamed «Brother» is writing the Quichotte story. As a result, there are two narrative frames, that of the Duchamp-Brother and that of his creation, Ismail, interrupting each other constantly thus causing an impression of fragmentation. It is worth commenting that Brother is also a «New York-based writer of Indian origin», like Rushdie, who happens to have «written eight modestly (un)successful spy fictions under a pen name» (Rushdie, 2019: 21). The «Quichotte» story in *Quichotte* starts to affect the «real» world of Brother, the fictional author who invents Quichotte, and vice versa, once the boundaries between the two narrative levels overlap, disorienting the reader with its metafictional/ontological opacity. It is never clear whether Quichotte exists only in Brother's imagination or whether Brother is a character created by Quichotte's own dreaming. This undecidability as to who is the real or non-fictional one produces opacity also at an epistemological level, which is a hallmark of postmodern metafiction. Apart from that, in the Quichotte sections there are passages in italics that serve as long stage directions, where the reader is invited to embark on little digressions on the impression the odd figure of Ismail may cause around («*a gent in there, formally dressed, suit and tie*» (96)) when driving his Chevy Cruze. Most people take him for a lunatic and mock him, as it happens to Quixote in Cervantes's novel.

Moreover, a further device causing ontological opacity in Rushdie's novel is the portrayal of Quichotte's imaginary son, Sancho (chapter 6: «Sancho, Quichotte's imaginary Child, seeks to understand his Nature» pp. 82-93). He is as pragmatic as Cervantes's Sancho and questions the father who is «waiting for a sign» (2019: 97) to decide where to start his chivalric quest:

> 'There's signs all over.' Sancho was not a stranger to sarcasm. 'That one says *Showers* and that one says *Slow*. And there's one back there saying *Bait Shop*. Also *Self-Permitting Station*, that's a good one. It's right over there. You can just permit yourself to do whatever you want. Problem Solved. Can we go now?'. (2019: 97-98)

Although it is Quichotte who imagines Sancho, the latter becomes an autonomous character who questions his own identity as he meets his «father» and «creator». This confrontation of the character of Sancho with his «author», Ismail, is once again another turn of the screw, challenging traditional notions of authorship and underscoring the undecidable quality Sancho's status.

As for the world depicted in the fiction that is Rushdie's book, it is difficult to tell the difference between the «real» –the America of the first Trump era in which the novel was composed– and the fictional world Quichotte inhabits. Although there is what seems to be a mimetic representation of the US with its absorption in mass-media consumerism and conspiratorial theories, the fictional world is quite distorted as sudden magical transformations start happening around Ismail, like the sudden apparition of a wished-for son who assumes the role and name of Sancho. In the satirically depicted media landscape filled with reality TV excess, plots for global conspiracy and racism, all of it, unfortunately, quite plausible in today's world, Rushdie introduces a son for Ismail, a single man not having begotten any child of his own. It may be concluded, provisionally though, that Sancho is only a fabrication of Ismail's imagination, a presence that exists just because Ismail strongly wishes to have a son. However, the point that Rushdie seems to be making is that Quichotte's delusions, including the emergence of a son-figure, seem as sound or as maddening as the material world Rushdie inhabits, where unbelievable events start happening and not only in the TV reality shows Ismail watches day and night. In this respect, the most remarkable event suggesting that the fantastic may be far more revealing than what seems believable is the unexpected transformation into mastodonts of the inhabitants of Berenger in chapter 12 («A Sequence of absurd Events during a brief Sojourn in New Jersey», pp. 178-191), where racism is satirically figured as a regression of human beings into extinct savage creatures. This bewildering incident, where Ismail and Sancho are threatened and expelled from town by its monstrous-looking inhabitants because of their racial difference clearly allows readers to see more vividly the reality of that regression, with most of Berenger's citizens turning into beastly mastodonts in an episode resonating with Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*. The merging of what seems believable –two travelers arriving at an American town– with what is delirious or outrageous –their having to escape to avoid a sure lynching– seems to be a more effective strategy to present the truth and denounce the rise of racial prejudice and hatred of migrants in the US since Trump's administration.

Another aspect that increases narrative opacity in Rushdie's novel is the constant presence of metafictional commentary on Brother's part. As the writer of Ismail's adventures, Brother often interrupts the main plotline to reflect on his own writing, that is, the process of constructing the story of Quichotte. Hence, the narrative keeps reminding us that we are reading a book being written by someone within the book, thus deferring narrative authority, as happens in Auster's trilogy. This fictional self-awareness prevents total immersion in the world of fiction since the story is about storytelling itself too. Furthermore, the intertextual and allusive density present in *Quichotte* must be added to the series of formal strategies Rushdie resorts to so as to force readers to go beyond a mere reading for plot and to search for the deeper implications hidden under the surface of his sardonic retelling of the Quixote quest in a modern-day US. For a start, Rushdie's narrative is clearly a rewriting of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, with the chapters being

headed with long descriptive titles in an archaic style, the use of framed narratives and having a deluded and old-fashioned protagonist being mocked by everyone he meets. But apart from that, the novel is also full of references to *Pinocchio, Lolita, The Wizard of Oz* and *Moby Dick* in addition to many other references to famous films and popular TV series and pop songs. In fact, many scenes evoke other fictions so that meaning of each episode and of the whole narrative is always deferred to the other texts with which Rushdie's novel converses. In this regard, Rushdie's *Quichotte* becomes rather saturated with references, so that it is difficult to pin down any single interpretative frame.

The line between the real and the fictional eventually collapses in *Quichotte* when the framework of the «real» world of Brother and that of the «fictional» world of Ismail-Quichotte disintegrate as meteors fall announcing the end of the world, portals open to save the few privileged ones, the ultra-rich owners of high-tech companies in the US, and the two worlds converge. Opacity here derives from the inability of the reader to determine whether this apocalyptic fusion is literal or just figurative. The narrative refuses closure, foregrounding the novel's theme that all narratives, like all realities, are unstable constructions.

TWO AUTHORS CONVERGING

Despite differences in cultural background and narrative style, Auster and Rushdie seem to share a preference for narrative forms and strategies that foster a profound sense of uncertainty and provisionality. It has been contended that to do so their fiction cultivates an aesthetics of opacity, which obfuscates the deeper meaning of their texts by not granting simple answers to the conundrums posed. Their opaque fiction based on unreliable and fragmented versions of reality rather invites readers to continue their search for answers after the narrative ends, usually without a conventional closure, questioning thus the validity of given or apparent truths. By means of a constant probing of reality, fiction in the hands of Auster and Rushdie becomes a useful tool to challenge prevalent notions and dominant views, while offering the opportunity of immersing ourselves in alternative worlds to better understand the confusing one we inhabit.

As it is, both writers seem to converge on their radical questioning and distrust of grand narratives regarding truth and reality. From different perspectives, they embark on an exploration of (self-)identity, authorship, fiction, reality and history, and contingency which makes them adopt a provisional stance. I have tried to demonstrate that, to such end, their fiction promotes aesthetic opacity with epistemic and ontological implications, to which we could add a political dimension in Rushdie's case. Such opacity is most patent when considering the central role of chance in Auster's fiction, presenting human existence not as teleologically meaningful, but as something fully inexplicable and absurd, like the mysteries the characters in Auster's novels attempt to explore without reaching a final solution. Thus, in *The New York Trilogy*, the mysteries the detective figures try to decipher remain unreadable and cryptic, only yielding more and more questions. Much of the effort at interpreting the real significance of the cases being investigated lies in the writing of factual reports and in the reading of direct accounts of events, and yet the whole truth is never fully available and what the reader gets is only fragments, a partial view of the whole. It may be argued that by investing in narrative opacity, Auster encourages further epistemic and ontological exploration, insisting on the issues that seem most vital to him: the impossibility to fully understanding human existence in all its complexity and the uncertainty as to self-identity, determined by contingency, time and place. As argued, Auster's interest in opacity lies in the fact that

people and reality remain essentially impenetrable and unknowable. By resisting narrative transparency Auster makes an aesthetic and ethical choice, which implies acknowledging the singularity of being and the intricacy of life events so as to offer greater insights to those who stand the bet and engage in a close reading of his stories.

In Rushdie's case, his fusing of magical and surrealist elements with the real also complicates direct access to the truth, inviting multiple and provisional interpretations of the episodes and the reality depicted in his fiction. Rushdie's distrust of sweeping statements and reductive categorizations of people as an «other» aligns with the greater breadth of vision that his transnational and cosmopolitan status grants him. In Rushdie, narrative opacity includes the epistemic and ontological, but also an obvious political dimension of dissent with the epistemological paradigm of the West. He problematizes the limitations of the reductionist lens with which the racial or cultural other is pictured in monolithic societies where Western knowledge and Enlightenment ideals dominate mainstream discourse. Moreover, it is a heightened awareness of the heterogeneous and layered nature of identity and reality that compels Rushdie to write complex texts that refuse an uncomplicated interpretation. Once again reducing the complex, multifaceted worlds he depicts to their bare bones would mean betraying his own transnational and postmodern condition and the renouncing the possibility of dissent.

Among the shared strategies for narrative opacity both authors employ, metafictional commentary is worth mentioning. Both texts, «City of Glass» and *Quichotte* include not only obvious allusions to Cervantes's masterpiece *Don Quixote*, but also adopt metafictionality as a main narrative device to make their texts opaque, a clear sign of Auster's and Rushdie's indebtedness to the father of the modern novel whose radical experiments with still untried narrative forms paved the way for generations of writers to come. Indeed, the discussion on the real authorship of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* between Paul Auster, the character, and Daniel Quinn (whose initials (DQ) are the same as those of Don Quixote) in «City of Glass» can only be interpreted as a homage to the Spanish founder of the novel, while the ludicrous character of Ismail Smail must be considered the perfect embodiment of the deluded knight errant had he lived in the twenty-first century. Compulsive fixations and lunacy as those of Don Quixote are also common motifs in both fictions, «City of Glass» and *Quichotte*, yielding surrealistic events as the deranged protagonists try to make sense of their senseless condition.

It is by employing the formal devices examined above that an overlapping of such categories as self/other, unity/multiplicity, fiction/reality, invention/ truth takes place within Auster's and Rushdie's fictions, underscoring their unwillingness to establish a hierarchy between them and overdetermining textual interpretation. Ultimately, what remains clear is that the two contemporary writers share an unbending faith in the redeeming powers of storytelling. It is for that reason that they have created highly resistant texts which invite us to look into the hazy glass of their imagination to see if we can perceive and read in it our own reflection.

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