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Rushdie's *East, West* and Desai's *Fasting, Feasting***

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The Poetics of Displacement in Indian English Fiction: Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King*, Rushdie's *East, West* and Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*



This essay analyses the poetics of displacement found in three works by three authors born in India and writing in English: Rudyard Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories*, Salman Rushdie's *East, West*, and Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*. Focusing on the aspects of harmony, credibility and metafiction in these works, I will outline how these authors with very different backgrounds but a common "double unbelonging" have succeeded in offering their readers a consciousness of displacement and disruption which has become the driving energy that migrants and migrant literatures have offered to the world.

To write about displacement, it is necessary to define what "place" is. "Place is never neutral," writes Ashcroft, "but corresponds to a normative landscape – ideas about what is right and appropriate as well as ideas about how the world is structured" (77). This is why Rushdie tells us that the migrant suffers "a triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behaviour and codes are very unlike, and sometimes even offensive to, his own" (*Homelands* 277-8). Place, therefore, cannot be regarded by the displaced person as a stable reality, but rather, just like reality itself for Rushdie, as "an artefact, that [...] does not exist until it is made, and that, like any other artefact, [...] can be made well or badly, and that [...] can also, of course, be unmade" (*Homelands* 280). As Ashcroft puts it:

The most important process in the struggle over place [...] is the narration by which place develops in particular identity. It is the narrations and contesting narration by which place comes into being [...]. The sense of place an individual might develop is never entirely separate from the text created by cultural discourse [...]. This contributes to the reality of the physical word itself. (88)

With this essay, I will try to reach an understanding of common "poetics of displacement" in the fiction of three authors born in India and writing in English – Rudyard Kipling, Salman Rushdie and Anita Desai, focusing on the aspects of harmony, credibility and metafiction in three of their works: Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories*, Rushdie's *East, West*, and Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*. I have preferred to define the three writers of this study simply as "three authors born in India and writing in English," (Kipling and Rushdie were born in Bombay, Desai in Mussoorie), but it is obviously necessary to point out that these authors have very different backgrounds. Rushdie was born to Indian parents, belonging to the Kashmiri Muslim minority, and moved to England when he was 14 years old; Kipling, born to English parents, was sent to England for schooling at the age of six and came back in 1882, at the age of 17, to work as a journalist in India; Desai was born to a Bengali father and a German mother. Different backgrounds, as we will see, that do not amount to a very different condition, as their mixed heritages and cultural backgrounds, their "double unbelonging," have brought these authors to share a common poetics to describe what are, indeed, very different kinds of displacement.

The Narration of a Displaced “Self”

Once place and displacement are defined, we need to understand how a displaced identity can be narrated. Rushdie writes that his aim is “to create a literary language and literary forms in which the experience of formerly colonized, still-disadvantaged peoples might find full expression,” and to give “a migrant’s-eye view of the world” (*Homelands* 394).

“Most of the stories in the present collection,” writes Cornell about Kipling’s *The Man Who Would Be King*, “focus on the actions of men and women who find themselves isolated, like Punch, in just such a desolate and hostile world” (xxii). British author Kipling, with his Indian fiction, can then also be considered to be one of the forefathers of a migrant literature which tries to:

Get inside the minds of ordinary people confronted with extraordinary situations for which their limited education and experience at home had left them unprepared [...] who were confronted with radically unfamiliar places, cultures and conflicts [...] [with a] close and sympathetic attention to the real lives of the Anglo-Indian British who did the work of empire, and to the lives of the Indians who were its usually unwilling subjects. (Damrosch xx, xxi, xxii)

Anita Desai is certainly part of this group of writers, if we consider that “while for most of her career Desai was not an expatriate writer, her mixed background arguably places her in a similarly liminal position to that of exiles” (Dvořák 15). She dedicates her *Fasting, Feasting* “To Those Whose Stories I’ve Told,” and Dvořák describes “Desai’s creolization as negotiating a gap between worlds, and corresponding to that hybrid mode of postcolonial cross-cultural creation which cultural theorists such as Wilson Harris, Édouard Glissant, Homi Bhabha, and Salman Rushdie have celebrated,” (35) a literature of “hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs [...] *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*” (*Homelands* 394).

The three works analysed in this essay bear witness to the attempts by the main characters to find some kind of harmony between the different worlds they inhabit. As Jasper Jain writes about Desai’s work: “The world of Anita Desai’s novels is an ambivalent one [...] where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at, and the desire to love and live clashes – at times violently – with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony” (23). The “aspiration” to harmony in Desai’s and Rushdie’s works is actually even more important than harmony itself, which will never be reached or, if reached, will not last. As the displacements these characters undergo are very different, their attempted solutions also differ.

Desai’s character Uma is “at home yet homeless,” (Sharma 71) desperately looking for an “elsewhere. Elsewhere. Elsewhere,” (Desai 117) while her brother Arun, on the contrary, seems to be looking for a nowhere, “the total freedom of anonymity, the total absence of relations, of demands, needs, requests, ties, responsibilities, commitments,” (172) through “a resistance to being included” (171). Likewise, Rushdie’s characters are constantly suspended “between here-and-there, between [their] two othernesses, [their] double unbelonging” (*East, West* 141). The “harmony of the spheres” they are desperately looking for, the bridge that could connect the two worlds and make their identity whole, is not the same bridge that Desai’s characters are trying to find. While

Rushdie's characters in *East, West* struggle for a reunion of the elements of the East and of the West within themselves, both Uma and Arun are hoping for something else: not the East for Uma (who does not know the West), and neither the East nor the West for Arun.

What Kipling's characters are looking for in the short story "The Man Who Would Be King," is once again neither the East nor the West, but what Rushdie's Isabella calls the "Unknown" or the "Unknowable" (*East, West* 116). Their quest, which initially involved conquering a kingdom, later becomes an imperialist campaign; Dravot wants to create a "fine damned Nation" first, and "an Empire" later (*East, West* 269).

While Kipling's and Desai's movements in and out of a culture and of a place are also physical movements, for Rushdie, even though "all his stories deal with characters on the verge of leaving or coming back [...] these movements encompass a wide variety ranging from transatlantic travels to textual borrowing and rewriting, to imaginary travels," (Cabaret 169) and "if we take a look at the first and last stories of the collection, we also realize they can be read as bridges in and out of the collection rather than as doors opening and closing the collection" (Cabaret 169-70). Rushdie's displacements and *re*-placements can then also be simply textual; the new world looked for by Rushdie might be the *word* itself, a narrated world, in which everything can become true, or can at least be believed.

Rushdie's narrators, though, are often not to be trusted. Talking about Saleem, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie writes:

His mistakes are the mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and his vision is fragmentary. It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost. (*Homelands* 10-1).

In *East, West* the reliability of the narrators changes, and there is an extended use of metafiction, defined by Patricia Waugh as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2).

Ramani's construction of a new and shining reality in "The Free Radio" from Rushdie's *East, West* is his only way to recover the reality he has lost, his own body. And his words sound just like the music coming out of his imaginary radio. At the end of "The Harmony of the Spheres," we discover that the narrator is much less credible than the character he himself had discredited throughout the story, and we discover this through Eliot Crane's writings, another narration. Metafiction is also present in Columbus's "dream of a dream," (*East, West* 115) which becomes a reality when Isabella summons him, and in "The Prophet's Hair," where the levels of narration are almost infinite: there is an initial narrator, then Huma tells Sín a story, and Sín himself is nothing but a character in Huma's childhood. The revelations of the secret are also fundamental for the plot (from Hashim to his son Atta, and from Atta to the rest of the family), as well as the prophetic dream by Atta, who will die after having it, and the letter Huma sent to the police, which will cause Sín's death by telling a story, with the help of "the tongue of a malicious cat-burglar" (57).

About *The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories*, Cornell writes that "it is significant that in the last three stories in this volume [...] the presence of the narrator and his complex relation to characters and events immeasurably deepen the richness of

effect” (xviii). Kipling’s story “The Judgement of Dungara” begins with the following words: “They tell the tale,” (122) but the narrator adds that he has no “space” to include everything:

The tale of the Mission is a long one, and I have no space to show how Justus, forgetful of his injudicious predecessor, grievously smote Moto, the husband of Matui, for his brutality; how Moto was startled [...] All these things belong to the history of many months. (126-7)

In “On the City Wall,” Lalun is introduced as the one who “would need, so Wali Dad says, a thousand pens of gold and ink scented with musk” (224). Not only is she the one who knows everything about everybody, who could say one word and ruin a thousand men, but she is also, in herself, a song, and she says: “I choose to tell what I choose to tell,” just a few lines after Wali Dad has admitted: “I belong to a nation of liars” (228).

Both unreliable narration and metafiction are part of Kipling’s “The Man Who Would Be King.” We are brought to question the credibility of Carnehan, once he comes back to the editor to tell him the story of their becoming kings, because of his apparent disturbed state of mind, and because he seems to have no proof of his story other than Dravot’s head. But we are later also led to question the “Kipling-like editor,” (Damrosch xxi) when we discover that Carnehan, apparently, had nothing with him when he died. Dravot’s head, the only physical proof of the truthfulness of the story is nowhere to be found, and we are left to wonder whether it ever existed. “There the matter rests,” writes Kipling (279) as a conclusion to the story and to our doubts.

In Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting* we receive several versions of Anamika’s death: one by Anamika’s mother-in-law, one by the neighbours, one by the husband, one by Anamika’s family (although it is more of a judgement than a version of the story) and then Uma’s silence, “what Uma said was nothing” (151). All these versions do not differ from the message conveyed by the author, though. Whatever the truth is, Anamika died because of the marriage she was forced into by her family. Just as one reality can never be considered dogmatically, then, many realities can actually lead to a single truth. If the subjects narrated are unstable, constantly suspended between “here” and “there,” East and West, “elsewhere” and nowhere at all, between the “Known” and the “Unknown,” or the “Unknowable,” then their narrations and the language narrating their stories, cannot be simple, constant, or predictable. The narration, like the language used, can be seen as shifting and unstable, thus reflecting the struggle to find a proper “place.”

Gender, Sexuality and Family

Gender, sexuality, and family are crucial matters in most of these stories. In *Fasting, Feasting* the dominance of the male subjects is more problematic than elsewhere in Desai’s writing. While the birth of a male child in the family calls for “proper attention,” (30) this will force Uma to stay at home and help with the baby rather than continue her studies. Arun is similarly controlled by his family: when he receives the invitation to stay for a while with the Pattons, we learn that:

Immediately Arun was overcome by the sensation of his family laying its hands upon him, pushing him down into a chair at his desk, shoving a textbook under his nose, catching that nose and making him swallow cod liver oil, spooning food into him, telling him: Arun, this, Arun, that, Arun, nothing but... (175)

Families “bind” and “tie” the characters of Desai’s work (Sharrad, 179-200); we see this once more in the reflection of Arun’s family in his “temporary” American family. Arun’s being a vegetarian is despised by his father as much as by Mr. Patton, and by looking at him Arun “had experience of, even if a mirror reflection of it – his father’s very expression, walking off, denying any opposition, any challenge to his authority, his stony wait for it to grow disheartened, despair – and disappear” (186). Melanie also suffers, in the lack of attention on the part of her mother, from the same sense of inadequacy as that experienced by Arun’s sister Uma. Mrs. Patton “smiles a bright plastic copy of a mother-smile that Arun remembers from another world and another time,” (194) and in the end, “on the other side of the world, he is caught up again in the sugar-sticky web of family conflict” (195).

The very formation of families, through the institution of marriage, is also a risk: the marriages described by Desai are unstable and problematic socio-economic constructions. “According to Desai,” writes Manavar, “most marriages prove to be unions of incompatibility” (13). We can clearly see this in the marriages represented in *Fasting, Feasting*, as well as in those described by Kipling in *The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories*, and at times in Rushdie’s *East, West*, to the point that marriage becomes one of the main sources of displacement, and of tragedy in these books. In *Fasting, Feasting*, Uma will pay for her inability to find a suitor, as shown by the tricks played on her and on her family, and her parents’ silent (and sometimes voiced) resentment. Anamika, Uma’s beautiful and intelligent cousin, will burn to death, probably directly by the hand of her mother-in-law, but surely as a consequence of her marriage, and even Aruna’s apparently perfect marriage turns the younger daughter into a stranger to the family.

Marrying the thief’s widow is the reason for Ramani’s “crime against his own body” in Rushdie’s “The Free Radio,” (*East, West* 28) the *nasbandi* (vasectomy) he undergoes to marry the woman he loves, who is much older than he and has several children already. Here, marriage is symbolically represented by Ramani’s letting his wife “deprive [him] of [his] manhood” (26). Although in Desai’s novels it is the women who suffer the deprivation, not only of their womanhood, but of their very life and identity, the loss is very similar, if not identical, both for the family created through these marriages, and for the society based upon them.

Marriage turns Kipling’s “gods” in “The Man Who Would Be King” into humans, causing their sudden fall from Heaven to Hell. The initial contract signed by Daniel Dravot and Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan stated that they would not “*look at any Liquor, nor any Woman black, white, or brown, so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful*” (254). When Dravot decides to break this part of the pact, it is not only his friend who reminds him of the pact, and asks him to “keep clear o’ women” (270) because they will “only bring [...] harm,” (271) but also Billy Fish, their best man, who asks Carnehan to “make the King drop all this nonsense about marriage, [...] doing him and me and yourself a great service” (273). And in fact, when a woman is chosen to be his wife, she bites him and draws blood; the evidence of his being “Not a God or a Devil but only a man!” (274) will cause his ruin. “Dravot’s wounding by his would-be-bride,” writes Booker, is a rather transparent example of the air of feminine threat that informs virtually all of Kipling’s work, just as his beheading serves as a potential image of castration” (114). Most of the stories in this collection have unsuccessful marriages as a starting (or ending) point of their plot. In “Black Jack” the Sergeant is able to escape a military plot

against him (although only thanks to the fundamental help of Mulvaney), but he cannot do the same when he dies on account of a jealous husband: "An', in the end, as I said, O'Hara met his death from Raferty for foolin' wid his wife" (Kipling 220). The same can be said about Jack Pansay in "The Phantom Rickshaw," as a married woman is also what causes tragedy, although this time it is due to the refusal by a married woman. In the end, for all of these characters, who "are also fleeing from the feminine," (Booker 114) the encounter with the feminine is what will cause the disruption of their life or quest, bringing them to madness, death, or the end of their empire to come.

The sexual relationship between Isabella and Columbus alluded to in Rushdie's story is also a metaphor for empire and colonization; not only because of the historical figures these two characters represent, but also because Isabella does not come back to Columbus until she has conquered everything, and realizes that "no conquest satisfies her, no peak of ecstasy is high enough. [...] she will never, *never*, NEVER! be satisfied by the possession of the Known. Only the Unknown, perhaps even the Unknowable, can satisfy her" (*East, West* 114-6). Columbus, too, believes that "the search for money and patronage [...] is not so different from the quest for love," (112) and views in "consummation" (107) a parallel to the quest for new lands, and for the Unknown. The Unknown is also represented by language, since Columbus, the "unspeakable foreigner," (197) responds to Isabella's summoning by transforming his own words into an orgasm, or at least the promise of one: "he opens his mouth, and what almost spills out is the bitter refusal: no. 'Yes,' he tells the heralds. *Yes. I'll come*" (119).

If sex is a language, it is an absolutely unspeakable one in Uma and Arun's family. Desai's work begins with a clear "concern and embarrassment" (15) in the family due to the late pregnancy of the mother. We are told that the two girls, Uma and Aruna, "failed to understand the language although they caught the tone, and even the meaning. Something grossly physical – *sexual*. The word squealed loudly in their throats and they pressed their lips together so it should not escape" (15). But their youth is not the only reason why they fail to understand. Even as adults, the only time Aruna tries to ask her sister if she had any sexual relationship with her husband, Uma's reaction is to "bury her [own] head in her pillow and howl 'No! No!'" (95). The repressed language of sexuality will never be spoken by Uma, who will remain a virgin, as far as we know, and it will only come through in the form of some very shy allusions to Melanie's beauty in the words of Arun.

Another kind of repressed sexuality is to be found in Rushdie's "The Harmony of the Spheres"; the hidden sexuality of Mala, the narrator's wife, causes "the collapse of harmony, the demolition of the spheres of [his] heart," (*East, West* 145) and of the whole story. Following his discovery of the sexual encounters between Mala and Eliot Crane, the reader comes to reconsider the whole story and acquire a vision of the world diverging from what was initially offered through the narrator's point-of-view. When we understand that "serious, serene Mala, non-smoking, non-drinking, vegetarian, drug-free, lonely Mala from Mauritius, the medical student with the Gioconda smile" (129) is different from what we were led to think, we see the ground under the narrator's feet collapse: every certainty he had, his "harmony," his very place in the world, vanishes. He is, once and for all, dis-placed.

Religion, the Occult and Rituality

Rushdie wrote that “a form must be created which allows the miraculous and the mundane to co-exist at the same level – as the same order of event,” (*Homelands* 376) because this would be the only way of expressing the reality of a place like India, where these two apparently diverging worlds share the same space in everyday life, mingling with each other.

Reading Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting* with this quotation in mind, we cannot avoid thinking about the divine worlds colliding in Uma’s life. Raised a Hindu in her home, she studies at a convent school. The difficulty of reconciling these two worlds is clear from the beginning, when her mother accuses her husband of having sent their daughter to such a school: “‘See what these nuns do!’ she raged to Papa. ‘What ideas they fill in the girls’ heads! I always said don’t send them to a convent school. Keep them at home, I said – but who listened? And now – !’” (29). And in fact Uma is usually “kept at home,” but her rare excursions out of the family environment bring her to very intense encounters with the world of religion; through Mrs. O’Henry, “the Baptist missionary’s wife,” (98) and through Mira-masi who takes Uma along on one of her pilgrimages. This episode is particularly interesting, as Uma experiences here her first “trance” or “fit,” as the family will later say in referring to it. “‘You are the Lord’s child,’ says Mira-masi to her, ‘The Lord has chosen you. You bear his mark’” (59). The people surrounding her “became very respectful of Uma now, watchful and curious,” (60) “the head priests beckoned her, inviting her to come in [...] The young priest who played the harmonium gazed directly at her when he sang, and his voice was no longer steady but quavered emotionally” (61).

Is Uma a goddess, one of the “300 millions of gods” Rushdie refers to when he writes that, in India, the “vast multitude of deities co-exists in everyday life with the doubly vast multitude of people. You bump into gods in the streets. You jostle past them, you step over their sleeping forms. They take your seat in the bus” (*Homelands* 380)? And, if Uma was chosen by the Lord, who was He that chose her? For Uma does not seem to know which one to choose for herself: the God of Mother Agnes, of Mrs. O’Henry, of her mother, of Mira-masi, none of those, or all of them combined?

Kipling’s characters Drevot and Carnehan exploited the belief of the people they conquered in order to become gods, and rule over their lands. The priests of the people summoned for the Masonic ritual are the ones who declare them gods when they find out that the apron Dravot is wearing has the same mark that is on the stone of Imbra, of which not even the priests knew anything. Their power resides exactly in their being suspended between divinity and humanity; in their human abilities and in the divine aura that makes them untouchable. They live on the bridge built “between here-and-there,” the bridge between the occult and the rational inhabited by Rushdie’s Eliot Crane. They could be considered themselves as a bridge: by conquering Kafristan, in fact, they brought to this faraway and almost unknown land the customs of Britain and India: violence, colonialism, imperialism, nationalism.

Dravot and Carnehan become gods, they earn and lose their empire through rituals. Another ritual is crucial to “The Judgement of Dungara,” in which the conversion of the Buria Kol by Justus and his wife causes the failure of the mission. As suggested by Athon Dazé, Justus gives the converts new clothes made of a special fibre, “white and smooth,” (Kipling 127) but what Justus does not know is that it is also poisonous.

And the failure of this mission, according to Wilson, is “a disaster as great as Dan and Peachey’s kingdom” (92).

In Desai’s novel, Indian and American rituals showcase the differences and similarities between the two cultures. Both parts of the book begin with a food ritual, as “food has always been a universal basis of cultural identity, and its sharing the foundation of social order [...] the refecation of a society’s structure and world vision” (Dvořák 17). The Indian tea is paralleled by the American barbecue, and the uneasiness felt by Uma on account of all her duties is paralleled by Arun’s uneasiness at the table, having to “confess – again” (165) his difference, his alienation which is indeed double, as he is the only vegetarian in both houses. Feasting, after all, is not much better than fasting. Arun seems to spend his time with the Pattons only through these American food rituals: the barbecue, shopping for groceries at the Foodmart, for which Arun feels increasing disgust. And Arun “grows tense, finds his throat muscles contracting, tight with anxiety,” (208) precisely when Mrs. Patton encourages him to eat his “own kind of food,” (177) to make him feel both part of the family and at home, none of which will ever happen. In America, at the Pattons’, Arun is “Ahroon” or “Red,” neither Indian nor American, but he is over-Indian in the eyes of the family. Mrs. Patton’s *re*-placement of Arun in his own world, in the India he physically and mentally does not inhabit anymore, through the food he has never been keen on eating, even when he was at home, is here the very cause of Arun’s displacement.

Displacement, Replacement and Redisplacement

By analysing the themes shared by these works by Kipling, Rushdie and Desai, we have come to see common aspects in the poetics these authors have used to express different forms of displacement. The characters in Kipling’s world still had the opportunity to look forward, with the naïve hope of Bobby Wick in “Only a Subaltern,” to a future where everything still seemed to be possible, at least for a second, even becoming kings of an unknown land; “a world where will and energy can be expressed, for once, in meaningful action, even though the consequences involve the actors in a catastrophic downfall” (Cornell xxxvii). Whereas success is neither granted nor likely for Desai’s characters, Kipling’s characters “earn our sympathetic admiration not in proportion to their success but because they act resolutely in the face of a world that mocks or ignores their lonely endeavour” (Cornell xxiv).

Desai’s attention is on the present, leaving little opportunity for looking forward to a future which does not promise change, or for returning to a past that has become part of the present. According to Afzal-Khan:

Desai ultimately subordinates her poetic and mythic imagination to her moral vision. In other words, she is morally much more in favor of a “realistic” approach to life [...]. She has opted to remain within history, despite its ravages and cruelties. She has shown in novel after novel her moral disapproval of a stance that refuses to shoulder responsibility for the past and present and chooses to withdraw from a painful present reality into a romantic or mythicized past. (60, 96)

Rushdie’s position seems to be the opposite of Desai’s, as he “has used the genre of myth both as a ‘strategy of liberation’ and as an ideological form that avoids historical petrification” (Afzal-Khan 143). Peter Brigg goes even further, in indicating disorder as Rushdie’s own choice of order:

Rushdie proposes order and meaning, only to destroy them with the extremes of ironic voice and the creation of the over-ordered fantasy. What is left is the welter of confusion, suffering, passion and disorder that is the human condition in the lands Rushdie chooses to mourn [...]. Disorder is proved. (185)

Rushdie looks at the past, and at himself in “broken mirrors” to find the image of a past that is lost, but which could lead to a new future, a new world Desai does not seem to believe in, as “in fact, the very idea of achieving some kind of mythic retreat or escape from the burdens of reality, no matter how attractive, is rejected at the end of her novels” (Afzal-Khan 60).

And if the whole world is the only home for Kipling’s and especially for Rushdie’s characters, for Desai’s even “domestic life is not their world, but a trap where their individuality is endangered and thus complete lack of interest and dissonance in their relationship bring solitary confinements and show their reluctance to face reality” (Metha 9). And the outer or other worlds are not any better:

No, he had not escaped. He had travelled and he had stumbled into what was like a plastic representation of what he had known at home; not the real thing – which was plain, unbeautiful, misshapen, fraught and compromised – but the unreal thing – clean, bright, gleaming, without taste, savour or nourishment. (Desai 185)

If none of the characters is able to find a stable place in the world, they all seem to find some kind of place *in* displacement. Kipling’s adventures, Desai’s alienation, and Rushdie’s attempt at replacement, all seem to lead to a *redisplacement*, a conscious placement in displacement. “Just as place may be ‘created, reproduced and defended’ by the colonizer,” writes in fact Ashcroft, “it may also be produced and reproduced by the colonized” (77).

If displacement is the only reality possible, and it has to be accepted, if not chosen, then its physical and psychological disruption needs to be transformed into a textual one, becoming a gain rather than a loss. This constant disruption can in fact lead to a wider understanding of the “other,” and to a universal language, because, as Rushdie writes: “maybe this impurity is the norm in the history of cultures, and [...] notions of purity are the aberration,” (“Minority Literatures” 35) and “throughout human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings” (*Homelands* 394). Displacement and disruption (see Sofu) can both be used as new forces and new energies, because the conscious use of these fragmentations of identity can become – or rather has already become – the essential message that migrants and migrant literatures have offered to the world.

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