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Leonard G. Finn
Valdosta State University

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Failings of Form in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*

Leonard G. Finn

Leonard G. Finn is a Ph.D. candidate at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. He is finishing his dissertation, "Imagining Pakistan," a literary study focusing on the ideological forces at work in the development, establishment and continued existence of Pakistan. He currently teaches in the department of English at Valdosta State University.

Hanging on in quiet desperation is the English way.
—Pink Floyd

I don't think there is a need for an entity like God in my life.
—Salman Rushdie, in an interview with David Frost

1.

The emphasis on language as a privileged site of political struggle and the resulting celebration of power relations as anarchical and dispersed are among the most politically dangerous maneuvers sanctioned by some forms of poststructural/postcolonial theory in cultural studies today.[1] Insofar as these emphases tend to conflate any kind of "resistance" within a structure of power relations as "revolutionary," they participate in undermining the struggles of oppressed people. Specifically they allow the valorization of any work able to produce "postcolonial" credentials as politically progressive without understanding the specific history of aesthetic forms and ideologies that produced that work. A relatively common example of this type of criticism may be observed in an article by Arjuna Srivastava published in *Ariel* in 1989. His argument drives at a formal analysis of what is unquestionably a seminal "postcolonial" novel, Salman Rushdie's *Shame*. History, he

argues, is an imposed form — specifically myth *à la* Roland Barthes — on real events; therefore, any project that puts forward a narrativization of history countering the traditional, hegemonic view of it is "liberating." That this argument is not necessarily opposed to what Rushdie himself would say about his work counts for precious little. The analysis defends Rushdie — often enough with his own words — against all accusations that "his work is becoming more and more British in idiom and style" (Srivastava 75): it is true that Rushdie is writing novels in English, but, Srivastava claims at one point, Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* "specifically mentions that at one point he is speaking Urdu" (76) and in *Shame* our notions of "written linearity as a given are challenged." Srivastava suggests that "these recurring acts of reader estrangements serve a political end: they force the reader to question her own ideological assumptions about literature, language and culture, and they are a way of redressing the balance." This is all well and good, but does it therefore follow that Rushdie's novels are "liberating" in any real sense?

The problem is that in its ever-growing role as the sanctioned representative of the "radical left" in the mainstream, poststructuralism is granting to itself the ability to define the limits of the left's ideological expression. In other words, in defining as "revolutionary" ideologies and aesthetics which ultimately stem from dominant ideologies, poststructuralism participates in the twofold task of permitting "safe," assimilable, subordinate ideologies as pressure valves, while simultaneously defusing and/or excluding those ideologies that may potentially be able to analyze existing social interactions — locally, nationally and globally — in genuinely radical ways. To return to Srivastava, his article criticizes the traditional, linear view of history as "knowing the end result, and linking it retrospectively to its beginning" (63); one might, however, say the same of his analysis of *Shame*. Instead of seeking to understand how a text works and to comprehend its conditions of production, Srivastava — and much of what falls under the rubric of "postcolonial" (and, more generally, poststructuralist) criticism — essentially creates but another myth in certifying a text simply because it deals with the "condition of post-coloniality."

The analysis of *Shame* that follows owes much to Aijaz Ahmad's excellent essay on the novel (123-58). Ahmad's conclusions — as well as his theoretical enemies — remain, I think, quite similar to my own in the final instance. However, while Ahmad is more concerned with asking "unauthorized" questions about the content of the novel, which force to the surface underlying ideological motives in the text, my analysis will keep to more formal lines, hoping to demonstrate that the novel's formal structure — above and beyond what might be thought of as primarily its content — serves to preclude the possibility of revolutionary solutions to the problem of Pakistan.

One might suggest that Sara Suleri's well-known essay on *Shame* has already shown us a critical perspective on that novel from a formal approach. She argues that *Shame*

> must take on as its fictional provenance a series of events so sensational, so violent in its currency as gossip, that the text is impelled to construct elaborate defenses against the lure of melodrama by focusing obsessively on its

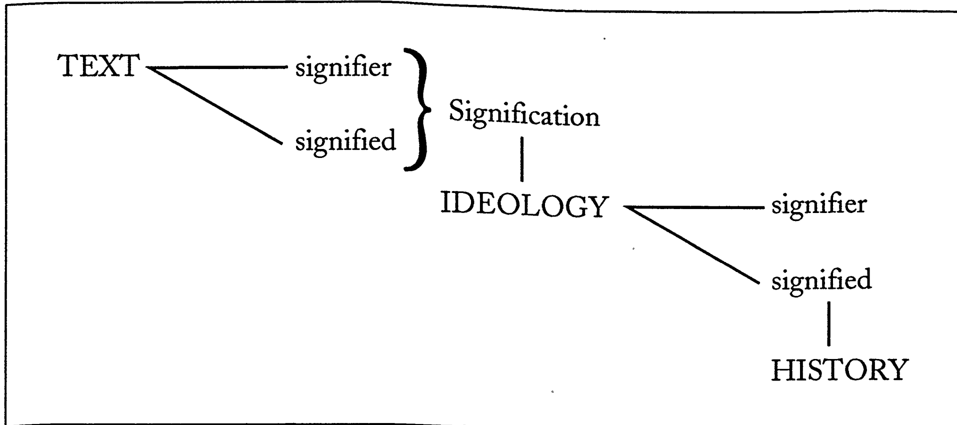
> own literariness and its status as a formal artifact. Its narrative self-consciousness suggests a deep embarrassment at the idea of political discourse, a nostalgic will to create apolitical pockets in the garments of such language. As a consequence *Shame* turns to narcissism as a ploy of evasion, enacting rather than addressing the curious posture of what it means to be ashamed. . . . *Shame*'s narrative peculiarities become paradigmatic of the casualties frequently accrued by contemporary postcolonial writing. These mutilations are most readily apprehended through a reading of the strangely shrugging course of Rushdie's narrative, which implies that because it cannot possibly do justice to its history, it can at least do violence to itself. (174)

Her observations are well taken, but her conclusions are not far-reaching enough. To be sure, *Shame* is seeking to avoid melodrama via its self-conscious narrative technique; and certainly this move serves to dehistoricize and to present as folklore, ahistorical and uncontextualized, the events surrounding the execution of Z. A. Bhutto (Suleri 184). Suleri's analysis, however, ultimately falls short. Rushdie's "nostalgic will" is not towards the apolitical but rather towards the idea of liberal humanism, a well-established ideological underpinning of capitalism and the political entities that have nurtured and proliferated it since the time of the French Revolution. Similarly, Suleri's seeming wish for the novel — that it had addressed "the curious posture of what it means to be ashamed" — explicitly evades calling for a politically progressive presentation of the problem of Pakistan by focusing instead on a desire for a more confessional, more personal narrative. From this perspective, Suleri's critique appears to become a continuation of the politics that Rushdie's novel offers, continuing its turning away from "history" towards the "apolitical" realm of "what it means to be human."

Suleri argues that there exists in *Shame* a "peculiar complicity between a recognizably radical ideology and a startlingly conservative need to take refuge in formalism" [175]. The problem is that there is nothing particularly radical about the ideology portrayed in *Shame*. A conservative form has by no means been imposed on the novel's ideological content; rather, its conservative content has found an appropriately conservative form. Suleri's formal oversight is, I would argue, due to her peculiar understanding of the relationship between form and content within the text. Form cannot simply be imagined as the body into which the all-powerful author breathes the spirit of content. Nonetheless, this model is precisely the one that Suleri's critique of *Shame* requires: *Shame* could have been made better, she argues, if its "radical ideology," a critique of Pakistani politics, had found a similarly radical mode of expression. A far more useful and, I believe, ultimately more progressive paradigm, one that allows us better to understand the dialectical relationship between form and content, is offered by Terry Eagleton:

> The signified *within the text* is what I have termed its "pseudo-real" — the imaginary situation which the text is "about." But this pseudo-real is not to be directly correlated with the historically real; it is, rather, an effect or

aspect of the text's whole process of signification. What that whole process signifies is ideology, which is itself a signification of history. The relations in question can be clarified by a simple diagram:



(80)

To recast Eagleton's argument in the terms of this discussion, one would say that form (signifier) and content (signified) are engaged in an active relationship (signification) that can be described as a process of meaning production. The task of the literary critic is therefore to understand the mechanisms through which each text produces meaning and the relationship that its production has to the ideological configurations at the historical moment of its production. As Eagleton argues, "the 'truth' of the text is not an essence but a practice — the practice of its relation to ideology, and in terms of that to history" (98). Discovering the "truth" is therefore not simply a matter of cataloging politically questionable elements found in the text or showing how an aspect of the form subverts traditional, hegemonic conventions. Rather, the literary critic must lay bare the way in which the text *works* as "a ceaseless reciprocal *operation* of the text on ideology and ideology on text, a mutual structuring and destructuring in which the text constantly overdetermines its own determinations" (99).

At this point, I would like to propose that a useful — though not uncontroversial — tool for beginning this critical investigation is the Greimassian semiotic rectangle.[2] What Greimas's theory permits us to do — which a more poststructurally oriented reading cannot — is to identify the extreme limits of a text's imagination, that is, the range of solutions it can offer or dismiss. The concept of closure is important here: ideology marks the limits of imagined actions and outcomes in a given situation and therefore does not open up possibilities so much as it *closes* them off. If, as Fredric Jameson has observed, texts attempt "to resolve, in the imaginary, what is socially irreconcilable" (*Marxism* 382-3), I would suggest that the semiotic rectangle allows us to map the ideological geography of the text's imaginary realm. In other words, through the semiotic rectangle it is possible to unravel what the text "knows" and, logically,

what it does not "know" in order the better to understand its practice. This "semiotic reduction," as Jameson has explained, "aims at rewriting a verbal or linguistic text into more fundamental mechanisms of meaning" ("Foreword" ix). In other words, one is at this point attempting to extract a cognitive ideology from its narrativization in the novel — a what-the-text-knows from what-it-says. The rectangle, therefore,

> constitutes a virtual map of conceptual closure, or better still, of the closure of ideology itself, that is, as a mechanism, which, while seeming to generate a rich variety of possible concepts and positions, remains in fact, locked into some initial aporia or double bind *that it cannot transform from the inside by its own means.* (xv)

To anticipate, this is literally the trap within which Rushdie's *Shame* is caught: its existence is, in a sense, its own solution.

What follows is an analysis of the formal structures of *Shame* in an attempt to understand the specific character of the ideologies that appear in that novel. The analysis will begin by producing a semiotic rectangle of the novel as whole. Putting that rectangle aside briefly, I will demonstrate that *Shame* contains two generic forms — the fairy tale and the political satire — and that the antagonism and interactions between these two genres in the novel play as significant a role as that between any of the characters. Indeed, by revisiting the original semiotic rectangle and emphasizing in turn the fairy tale and then the political

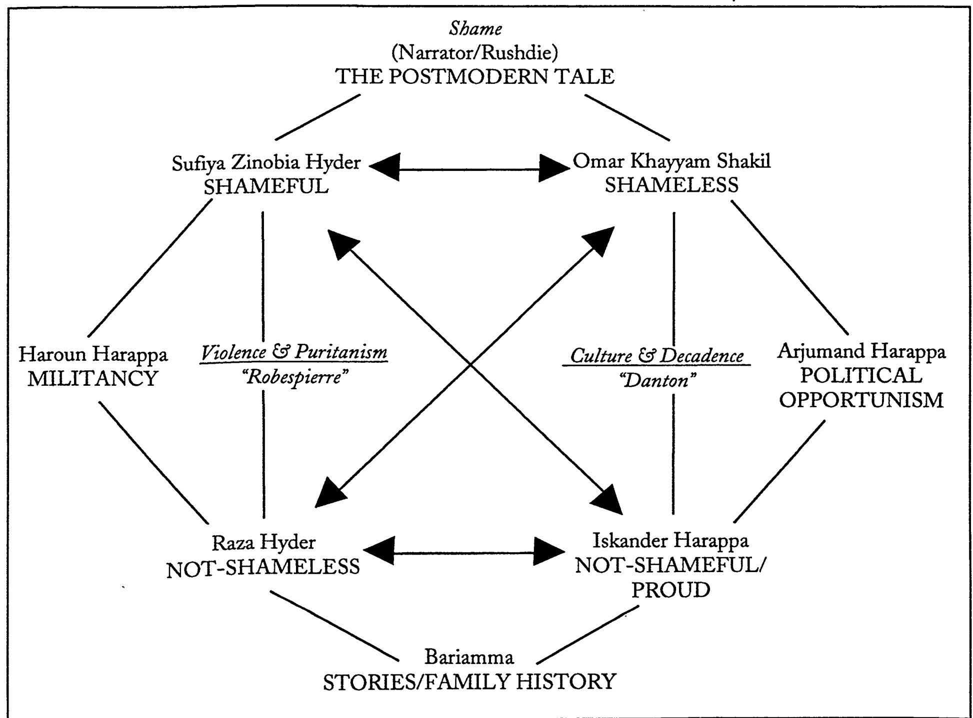


Diagram 1. Overall Semiotic Rectangle of *Shame*

satire, we find that, despite *Shame*'s overt appearance as political satire, Rushdie can only resolve the political issues presented in the novel forcibly through the form of the fairy tale and the ahistorical understanding of "man" and history which that genre can contain.

2.

Shame is, by its own testimony, apparently about two characters, Sufiya and Omar. As the Narrator observes, "this novel is about Sufiya Zinobia. . . . Or perhaps . . . Sufiya Zinobia is about this novel" (59); and Omar is, of course, "our peripheral hero" (234). Taking a cue from the novel's title, one might say that they represent, respectively, "shamefulness" and "shamelessness." As the rectangle is not symmetrical, it is important to insist on its first term being occupied by Sufiya/"shamefulness." From these two contraries (s_1 & s_2), one can derive the rest of the rectangle as shown in diagram 1.

Neutral Contraries:
Raza Hyder ($-s_2$) and Iskander Harappa ($-s_1$)

The neutral contraries ($-s_2$ & $-s_1$) in the rectangle, Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa, are characterized by a higher degree of ambivalence than the contraries on the complex axis (s_1 & s_2). Whereas Sufiya and Omar are, with a few notable exceptions, strong place-markers of "shameless" and "shameful," Raza and Isky are not so clear-cut. Their more ambiguous respective existences in the novel can be observed easily enough, but the Narrator also goes to some significant lengths to put this topic on the table. Discussing a play about the French Revolution, the Narrator observes that with Isky and Raza it is not simply a black-and-white opposition of Danton versus Robespierre, "the epicure against the puritan" (266). Both characters act in roles which must be defined negatively. Raza is not "shameful" but rather "not-shameless." Isky is not shameless, but merely "not-shameful." If anything, in Isky's case, "pride" may seem an appropriate term. It is certainly indicative of his attitude throughout his imprisonment, and it is finally responsible for his premature death at the hands of Colonel Shuja (262).

Haroun Harappa/Militancy:
The Combined Term (Simple Implication) of Deixis 1 ($s_1 + -s_2$)

The deixis shared by Sufiya and Raza is one characterized not only by puritanism — that is, by a taboo against pleasure shared by both characters, though articulated and circumvented in different ways — but also by extreme violence, the psychological-supernatural violence of Sufiya and the state violence initiated by Raza. It may at first seem odd that Haroun Harappa occupies a position that is the synthesis of the two chief Hyder characters. The key, however, lies in the real person whom Haroun is supposed to represent: Prime Minister Z. A. Bhutto's son, Mir Murtaza Bhutto.

In *Shame*, Haroun is a ridiculous, minor character. He is, in the Narrator's opinion, "a buffoon" (285). If he is removed from the novel, the plot suffers only minor damage, almost as if he were a later addition. Mir Murtaza Bhutto, on the other hand, did something rather significant two years before *Shame* was published: he organized the largest hijacking in history. *The London Sunday Times* painted him as follows:

> To his detractors [Mir Murtaza] Bhutto is known as Baby. He is undoubtedly intelligent, but until early 1979, he seemed fonder of parties than politics. . . . He surrounded himself with American friends, and chased girls. He was, in short, a playboy. . . . [After his father's execution] he would only talk about revenge: "Today, we launch the long struggle," he said. ("The Vengeance" 17)

When his father was executed, Murtaza suddenly transformed himself from an epicurean student at Oxford into a dedicated, revenge-driven puritan-militant. He immediately dropped out of Oxford and traveled to Libya and Syria, settling eventually in Kabul. Modeling it on the Palestinian Liberation Organization, he formed the Pakistani Liberation Army. Their first major strike, carried out by the militant wing of the group, *al-Zulfikar* (literally "the sword," represented overtly in *Shame* as *al-Iskander*), was the hijacking of Pakistani International Airlines (PIA) Flight 326.

Through their fictional counterparts, Haroun and *al-Iskander*, the Narrator labels Murtaza's and *al-Zulfikar*'s approach to the problem of Pakistan as buffoonery. Indeed, Haroun's efforts are entirely futile, as he is eventually captured at the conclusion of the novel's hijacking episode (287). Rushdie's antagonism to militancy (through the Narrator, of course) should not come as any great surprise at this point in the novel. Long before we even meet Haroun, we have been exposed to the absurdity of Babar's participation in what is clearly meant to be Baluchistani resistance. This group likely corresponds in reality to the Baluchistan People's Liberation Front. Rushdie's depiction of the guerrillas is undeniably dismissive, portraying them as a gang of naive fools:

> [W]hen [Babar] was in the mountains with the separatist guerrillas, he was told the story of the angels and the earthquakes and the subterranean Paradise; their belief that the golden angels were on their side gave the guerrillas an unshakable certainty of the justice of their cause, and made it easy for them to die for it. (140)

The futility and absurdity of their practice is crudely brought home in Rushdie's discussion of their sexual inclinations:

> There were guerrillas who preferred the passivity of sheep; for others the goats' friskiness was impossible to resist. Many of Babar's companions went so far as to fall in love with four-legged mistresses, and although they were all wanted men they would risk their lives in the bazaars of Q. in order to purchase gifts for their loved ones: combs for fleeces were acquired, also

> ribbons and bells for darling nannies who never deigned to express their gratitude. (141-2)

As Timothy Brennan points out, Babar "resists the backwardness of his comrades who regularly copulate with sheep" by falling in love instead with a popular singer (138). The difference is enough to elevate Babar above the common rebel, but he is finally no more effectual (or admirable) than the rest. The end result of Rushdie's "analysis" is laughter — a laughter the precise purpose of which is to generate immediate and unmeditated dismissal. Bakhtin has noted that laughter familiarizes an object, brings it close, "thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it" (23). In sharp contrast to Bakhtin's description, the purpose of laughter in this case aims at a pretense of familiarity, one in which the object of mirth — militancy — can be easily and summarily dismissed by a sweeping gesture of contempt without a hint of serious analysis. Militancy, while appearing as an option, is finally untenable in the novel as a solution.

Arjumand Harappa/Political Opportunism:
The Combined Term (Simple Implication) of Deixis 1 (s_2 + $-s_1$)

If militancy is, in a sense, putting your money where your mouth is, then political opportunism is putting your mouth where the money is. Rushdie's caricature of political opportunism, Arjumand Harappa, is obviously enough based upon Benazir Bhutto. On the whole, Rushdie has precious little positive to say about the recently ex-Prime Minister, except that she is better than General Zia ul-Haq. In his review of her book, *Daughter of Destiny* (1989), Rushdie is exceedingly condemning of the rosy picture she paints of her father's government:

> The resulting omissions from the story are as revealing as the bits she puts in. She manages, for example, to get through her entire account of her father's government without once mentioning the little matter of genocide in Baluchistan. She speaks quite correctly of the Zia regime's torture camps, both in Baluchistan and elsewhere . . . but draws a daughterly veil over the Bhutto people's very similar misdeeds. She fails to mention Bhutto's strenuous efforts at election-rigging in 1977, efforts which, by giving him a victory of ludicrously implausible proportions, gave Zia his opening, allowing him to take over on the pretext of holding new, non-controversial polls. Worst of all, she falsifies Bhutto's role in the events leading to the secession of Bangladesh to a quite scandalous degree. ("Daughter" 57)

Obviously, Benazir Bhutto rode into power when she did due in no small part to her name. Since Z. A. Bhutto's execution, his tomb has become something of a shrine for many. Benazir Bhutto's need to keep her father's memory alive and untarnished was a primary political necessity. Likewise, Arjumand's similarly worshipful adoration of her father makes her character the synthesis of

shamelessness (Omar) and *pride* (Isky). Indeed, the novel implies an almost incestuous relationship between Arjumand Harappa/Benazir Bhutto and Iskander Harappa/Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. First, Isky's wife, Rani Harappa, notes on occasion: "There are times when [Arjumand] seems more like [Isky's] wife than I do" (188). Second, Benazir Bhutto's real family nickname, Pinkie, is used by Rushdie as the name of Isky's paramour.[3]

Of course, this all occurred some six years after *Shame* was written. During the time of the novel's composition, Benazir Bhutto was in and out of jail and under house arrest. Rushdie is not without a measure of respect for her position and her efforts. He declares:

> She is a brave woman, has had a hard life and has come a long way as a politician from the inexperienced days when she would issue Zia with ultimatums she could not enforce. In Pakistan's forthcoming elections Benazir Bhutto and the People's Party represent Pakistan's best hope, and if I had a vote in those elections, I would probably cast it in her favour. ("Daughter" 58)

Nonetheless, as early as *Shame*, Rushdie is already highly suspicious of Benazir Bhutto's use of her father to further her own political ambitions. After Arjumand and Haroun seize power from the fleeing Raza Hyder, Arjumand has her mother placed under guard for having made the shawls portraying The Shamelessness of Iskander Harappa: "People engaged in building new myths have no time for embroidered criticisms" (306). This is particularly interesting in light of the political opposition Benazir would eventually face from her brother, Murtaza, and her mother. It is entirely likely that she was engaged in a struggle against her mother for control of the PPP almost immediately following her father's execution. Her book, *Daughter of Destiny*, makes it very clear — even in its title — that she alone is the torchbearer of Z. A. Bhutto's legacy, and that she is regularly put into confrontation with that legacy's implacable enemy, General Zia. Going beyond the simple solipsism generated by the form of an autobiography, Benazir Bhutto is not just the protagonist of her book but of Pakistan and its future. Sure enough, nothing injudicious is ever said about other family members. Even her descriptions of her strong disagreements with Murtaza's belief in violence are articulated as hot-headed political discussions; when all is said and done, they are still one big family.[4] Still, other family members are pushed into the background or are seen as being misguided. As her book title suggests, Benazir is the one who has right and history on her side. This fostering and manipulation of the myth of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to further her own political ambitions finally leaves Rushdie cold about Benazir Bhutto's politics at the time of his writing *Shame*.

One should also note an interesting detail about both combined terms: they represent the two solutions to the political problems of Pakistan enacted by the children of Z. A. Bhutto. One is a course of armed violence operating from outside Pakistan, while the other is a strategy of Machiavellian manipulation from both inside and outside Pakistan. These were certainly two of the more

publicized forms of resistance to the government of General Zia at the time of *Shame*'s writing. As one might easily surmise, neither of these strategies is, for Rushdie, *the* long-term solution to the problems of Pakistan. Nonetheless, both are dismissed not through any type of political analysis, but rather through — of all things — an analysis of sexual peculiarities associated with their proponents. Militancy as a solution is dismissed, in the first place, through the humor surrounding the bestial practice of the rebels in Q., and, secondly, through the claim that Haroun's activities stem from sexual sublimation following Naveed's rejection of him. Similarly, Benazir Bhutto's representative, Arjumand, is characterized as a repressed, man-hating woman — the "virgin Ironpants" — who loves her father perhaps a little too much and finally adopts a cold political ambition after his death, using her heretofore despised sexuality as a weapon (209) and putting her mother under arrest once Raza is overthrown. Haroun's sexual indiscriminacy stands directly juxtaposed to Arjumand's sexual frigidity. It is therefore not surprising that these two dismissed solutions join together towards the end of the novel to begin "a new cycle of shamelessness and shame" in Pakistan (306).

Bariamma/Family History/Stories:
The Neutral Term ($-s_1 + -s_2$)

Bariamma occupies the unique position of being the other storyteller in *Shame*. The Narrator observes:

> Bariamma's mildly droning recital of the catalogue of family horrors had the effect of somehow defusing them, making them safe, embalming them in the mummifying fluid of her own incontrovertible respectability. The telling of the tales proved the family's ability to survive them, to retain, in spite of everything, its grip on its honour and its unswerving moral code. . . . [Her] stories . . . were the glue that held the clan together, binding the generations in webs of whispered secrets. Her story altered, at first, in the retellings, but finally it settled down, and after that nobody, neither teller nor listener, would tolerate any deviation from the hallowed, sacred text. (79)

As Brennan has observed, the equating of Bariamma's stories with a "hallowed, sacred text" is far from innocent (128). The *Quran* was ostensibly the *raison d'être* for Pakistan's existence and, at the time of *Shame*'s writing, the proffered legitimation for the Zia government. To claim, then, that the "sacred text" of Bariamma's stories held the "family" together — especially considering Ahmad's recognition that the history of Pakistan is represented as a family affair in *Shame* — is to cast some suspicion on their ultimate beneficence (Ahmad 140).

It is not too difficult to imagine Bariamma's position as a synthesis of Raza Hyder and Isky Harappa. For one, she is the matriarch of the family and genealogically the one who binds them together. She is the element that trans-

forms *Shame*'s imagined history of Pakistan into a family feud, a rivalry between distantly related cousins. Second, her stories are neither shameless nor shameful: they exist as they are — at least, after those first few revisions — in order to show what the family has been through. In this they are beyond being shameless or shameful. The tales exist in the past, and the existence of the family in the present proves its ability to surmount the past, whether shameless or shameful. As the neutral term, however, Bariamma and her tales, as well as the connections to the past and the sense of family and community the tales represent, are precisely that term in the equation structurally excluded from being the solution to the novel.

The Narrator/Shame/The Postmodern Tale:
The Complex or Ideal Term ($s_1 + s_2$)

Looking at the neutral axis and its synthesis, one discovers that the three terms form a big, happy family — quite literally. Likewise, in a sense, the complex axis and its synthesis form another family of sorts. Sufiya, Omar and the Narrator are the only three main characters conceived outside of the known personalities of Pakistani politics. Not surprisingly, Sufiya and Omar are the two characters who engage the majority of the Narrator's more self-reflexive moments and are most often in the spotlight of his thoughts and analyses throughout the course of the novel. The three of them are the last characters left onstage in the final pages of the book, and it is out of the ruins of the final apocalyptic meeting of Sufiya and Omar that the Narrator rises to present his tale. In essence, then, the Narrator and his "postmodern" novel are born of the cataclysmic union of shamefulness and shamelessness.

The issue ahead of us is twofold: what is the specific nature of this "postmodern" narration and why are Bariamma's stories so opposed to it? These are finally, strictly speaking, formal questions; in order to answer them, it is necessary to dissect *Shame* into what seem to be two of its major constituent genres: the fairy tale and the political satire.

3.

We will start this process by taking Rushdie — or more precisely, the Narrator — at his word when he says that *Shame* is a "modern fairy tale" (72).[5] Viewing the novel from this partial perspective allows us to separate it formally into different but interacting parts. Following Vladimir Propp's well-known schema in *Morphology of the Folktale*, we find that *Shame* does indeed show the structure of a "fairy tale" — but only some of the time. The breakdown of the novel into Propp's morphological categories brings to light a fairy tale with two "moves," as Propp calls them: Raza's murder of Omar's brother, Babar, and Omar's desire for Raza's daughter, Sufiya. These two moves come together in Omar's marriage to Sufiya — and the betrayal of family that his choice entails — and are resolved through the deaths of both villain and hero at the end. At this point,

a number of observations about the "fairy tale" extracted from *Shame* appear.[6] First and foremost, only half the novel — quite literally — belongs to the fairy tale portion of the narrative. If one were to be totally schematic about it, approximately 150 pages of *Shame* (including all of chapters 4, 5 and 9) contribute nothing to the novel's progression through the functional elements of the "fairy tale" as delineated above. These pages are located primarily in the first three-quarters of the novel, whereas the last quarter of the novel remains dominated by the "fairy tale."[7]

Second, the Harappas play no part whatsoever in the fairy tale portion of *Shame*. As half the text is outside the "fairy tale," it should come as no great surprise that half the dramatis personae are likewise absent. Arguably, Iskander Harappa does appear functionally as a "home" from which the hero, Omar, is forced (a classic fairy tale device [see Propp 39]), but the overall importance of this role is marginal and its absence from the scheme of the fairy tale (or its being assigned to another character) would affect the tale little, if at all.

With the Harappas out of the way, one discovers that *Shame*'s "fairy tale" is really only about the Shakil-Hyder families with — and this is the third point — the character of Raza Hyder generally acting in Propp's functional role of the villain. Propp explains that the villain's "role is to disturb the peace of a happy family, to cause some form of misfortune, damage, or harm" (27). Raza, especially in the murder of Babar, which will produce the Three Sisters' motive for revenge, enacts most of the specific functions attributed by Propp to the villain of a fairy tale.[8] While it is not his first appearance in the novel as a whole, Raza's entry into the town of Q. (along with his subsequent interaction with Babar) marks his entrance into the fairy tale aspect of *Shame*.

Raza's occupation of this structural position may not seem immediately surprising considering that the "inspiration" for Raza, General Zia, was generally viewed as a villain in the British press and among Pakistani cosmopolitans living in Britain at the time.[9] This was especially true after the execution of Bhutto. Nonetheless, Rushdie is, after the fashion of his general pessimism, out to condemn anyone and everyone. The events that follow Raza's entry into Q. fall so neatly into Propp's functional elements, that, in a sense, the pathology of the fairy tale cannot afford Rushdie the luxury of such an encompassing sardonic stance.[10] It is almost as if Rushdie had Propp's *Morphology* opened in front of him as he wrote. Raza's strong ties to the functional role of the villain of Rushdie's "fairy tale" will eventually have a significant impact on this analysis.

Fourth, as told through the form of the "fairy tale," Sufiya's transformation into the Beast occurs strictly through sexual anxiety. Like Rushdie's dismissal of Haroun and Arjumand because of their sexual hang-ups, the "fairy tale" reduces to a psychosexual issue the "shame" that brings the Beast out of Sufiya. Sufiya is a girl in a woman's body, unable to control her drives, prevented from fulfilling them, and incapable, finally, of even recognizing them:

> There is a thing that women do at night with husbands. She does not do it, Shahbanou does it for her. *I hate fish*. Her husband does not come to her at night. . . . But she *is* a *wife*. She *has* a *husband*. She can't work this out. The horrible thing and the horrible not-doing-the-thing. . . . There is

an ocean. She feels its tide. And, somewhere in its depths, a Beast, stirring. (237)

The sexual relationship between Shahbanou and Omar and the eventual pregnancy of the former are the catalyst for bringing the Beast in Sufiya to the surface.

Sufiya Zinobia stiff as a board in bed. Trying to bring the good things out of her head, babies, her father's smile. But instead there is only the thing inside Shahbanou, the thing that husbands make, because he did not give me the baby she took it inside her instead. She, Sufiya, possessed by fault and shame. That woman who loved me. And my husband, who can blame him, he never had a wife. Overandover [sic] in her empty room; she is a tide rising towards flood, she feels something coming, roaring, feels it take her, the thing, the flood or perhaps the thing in the flood, the Beast bursting forth to wreak its havoc on the world, and after that she knows nothing, will remember nothing, because it, the thing, is free. (241-2)

Sufiya is a classic case of sexual repression producing powerful hysteria. Absent in the "fairy tale" are any non-sexual reasons for the transformation. Indeed, what we have is a tale of a hero seeking to break through his love's repressed sexuality. Initially terrified of its power when it is finally released as the Beast, our hero *willingly* succumbs to its passion in a deadly embrace:

[Omar] stood beside the bed and waited for her [Sufiya/Beast] like a bridegroom on his wedding night. . . . He struggled against [her eyes'] hypnotic power, their gravitational pull, but it was no use, his eyes lifted, until he was staring into the fiery yellow heart of her, and saw there, just for an instant, some flickering, some dimming of the flame in doubt, as though she had entertained for that tiny fragment of time the wild fantasy that she was indeed a bride entering the chamber of her beloved; but the furnace burned the doubts away, and as he stood before her unable to move, her hands, his wife's hands, reached out to him and closed.

His body was falling away from her, a headless trunk, and after that the Beast faded in her once again, she stood there blinking stupidly, unsteady on her feet, as if she didn't know that all the stories had to end together, that the fire was just gathering its strength, that on the day of reckoning the judges are not exempt from judgment, and that the power of the Beast of shame cannot be held for long within any one frame of flesh and blood, because it grows, it feeds and swells, until the vessel bursts. (317)

The language is blatantly erotic; the sex-death correspondence is plain, and the expenditure of sexual force experienced by the Beast in Omar's decapitation is all too obvious. What isn't completely evident is that Omar must desire his death, at least according to Omar's own discourse on the nature of hypnosis: "Impossible to persuade a subject to do anything she [or he] is unwilling to do" (138). The question we should ask is: if marriages and sexual consummations

are, by their very nature, *productive*, what is finally produced in the cataclysm of the final scene? Or better still, what is finally *reproduced*? As I have said above, the Narrator is the only one left standing in the last paragraph. Who is he? And what do he and his story stand for?

4.

What remains of the novel after the fairy tale portion of *Shame* is extracted amounts more or less to the narrative of the political situation in Peccavistan: the rebellion in Q., the Independence of the Eastern Province, the rise of Iskander and his party, Iskander's overthrow, and the ascendancy of Raza and his Islamic Republic. As is obvious — and as others have discussed quite adequately elsewhere — correspondences between events in Peccavistan and real events in Pakistan pervade the novel. As Brennan has succinctly phrased it, "*Shame* covers a central episode in Pakistan's internal life, which it portrays as a family squabble between Iskander Harappa (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) and his successor and executioner Raza Hyder (Zia ul-Haq)" (119).[11]

Indeed, this is the specificity of the political parody offered in *Shame*: the reduction of political struggle in Pakistan to an internal family antagonism. Ahmad observes critically:

> The problem is that the experience of a certain class — rather, a ruling elite — is presented, in the rhetorical stance of the book, as the experience of a "country." Far from being about "the East" or even about "Pakistan," the book is actually about a rather narrow social stratum — so narrow, in fact, that Rushdie himself is able to portray all the major characters as belonging to a single *family*. (140)

Ahmad's criticism on this point is obviously very well founded, even if Rushdie's reduction of this political struggle to a family quarrel is not completely invented.[12] Nonetheless, briefly, for the purpose of this argument, let us accept this authorial strategy uncritically as an allegory, but with a twist. Frank Palmeri writes:

> As a mode of praise, allegory raises its subject from a lower rank to a higher one; as a figure, it implies systematic, hierarchical, authoritarian, and cosmic order. When parody dissolves allegory, irony results. (14)

In the case of *Shame*, allegory is able to elevate the topic of an elite family to that of the nation as a whole, but with the dissolution brought on by parody, irony remains. Additionally, these two modes — allegory and irony — work perfectly into Rushdie's play on the novel's "fifteenth-century" setting. Palmeri again observes:

> Whereas allegory served as the preeminent form of expression in the Middle Ages, irony has served as the predominant form of literary expression for the last three centuries.

Strangely enough, *Shame*'s fifteenth-century setting can be either "medieval" times (forgetting the Hegirian calendar and invoking allegory) or modern times (by recalling the Islamic reckoning and thereby emphasizing irony). One can therefore see the combination of allegory (far from a "mode of praise" here) and parody in *Shame* as a means, at one and the same time, of reducing political struggle to family conflict and of utilizing that hierarchical reduction to ridicule the real.

According to Palmeri, narrative satire — for we can call the other genre in *Shame* political satire — is characterized by the following features: 1) the reduction of nobility to commonality; 2) following Bakhtin, "an unresolved dialogue between opposed and parodied philosophical alternatives . . . [describing] a dialectic without a synthesis"; 3) the ability to subsume other genres; 4) the presence of reversals but the absence of recognitions; and 5) as opposed to poetical satire, a more subversive and progressive world view due to its higher potential degree of overdetermination (1-17). Excluding the first of these, which is not only obvious in some of the cruder moments of *Shame* but has already been suggested in the reduction of political struggle to family conflict, we will now proceed through these points in an effort to tease out the specific nature of the political-satiric genre in *Shame* and its ramifications overall.

In keeping with the second characteristic of satire, this genre in *Shame* is incapable of producing a solution to the problems it poses. Palmeri writes:

> [N]arrative satires aim not to arrive at a truth that can be neatly formulated, but rather to use the process of parodic inversion in order to investigate philosophical attitudes toward the world; to this end, they invert both the officially accepted orthodoxy and its antagonistic inverted opposite. This parodic dialogicality produces satire's distinctive open-endedness, which resists both comic and tragic forms of resolution and closure. The marriage that closes comedies emblematically signifies reconciliation between opposing social groups and philosophies, but satire excludes compromises and middle grounds as it portrays extreme positions and their opposites. Narrative satires do not end with an achieved harmony; the struggle they embody between opposed views of the world reaches no satisfactory resolution or synthesis. (4)

The political-satiric portion of the novel represents Pakistani politics as an antagonism between two opposed alternatives — the "Socialist"/Western reformism of Harappa versus the Islamic militarism of Raza Hyder, both disingenuous, corrupt and repressive.[13] This antagonism is schematically represented in diagram 2 (see below, page 50). The ideological terms occupied by Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder are finally unsynthesizable in the text, or rather, to anticipate the course of my argument, they are unsynthesizable within the political-satiric portion of the novel. It is not a simple matter of putting the black hat on Raza/Zia and placing him in the position of scapegoat for the troubles of Pakistan. The issues run deeper than this and reveal a more overdetermined structure in play. The Narrator is therefore correct to observe:

> Iskander Harappa was not just Danton; Raza Hyder wasn't Robespierre pure-and-simple. Isky certainly lived it up, perhaps he was something of an epicure, but he also believed that he was always, unarguably, right. . . . And Raza Hyder? Is it possible to believe that he took no pleasure in what he did, that the pleasure principle was not in operation, even though he claimed to act in the name of God? I don't think so.
>
> Isky and Raza. They, too, were Danpierre and Robeston. Which may be an explanation; but it cannot, of course, be an excuse. (267)

Or for that matter, a solution. For further understanding of this problem, one must turn to the third "capability" of political satire: its ability to subsume other genres.

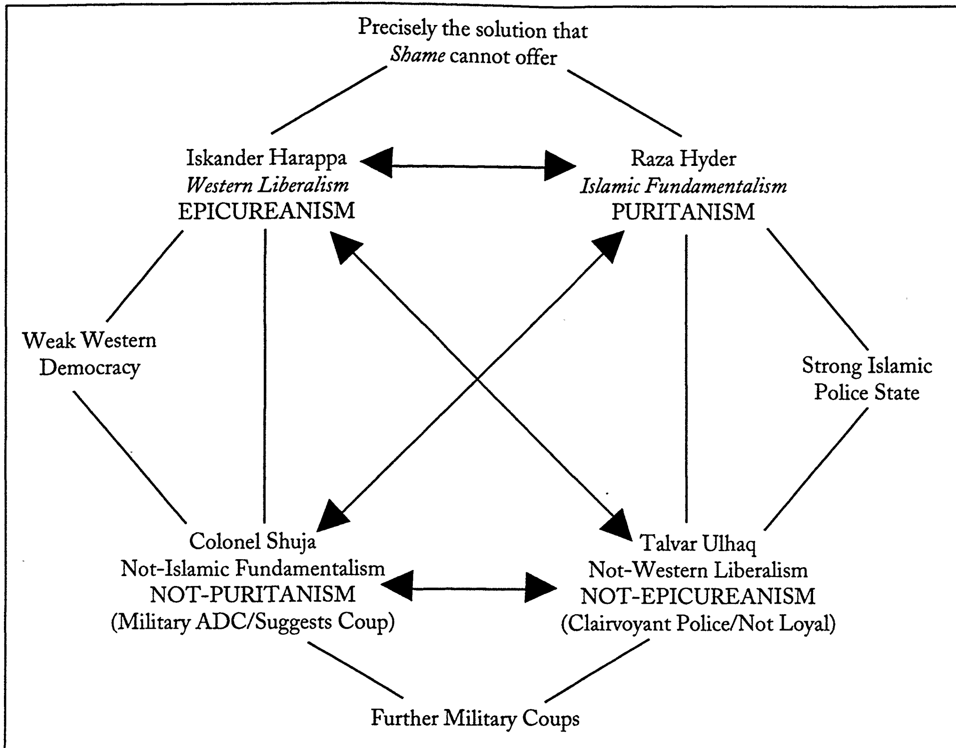


Diagram 2. Semiotic Rectangle of Political-Satiric Portion of *Shame*

Narrative satire, as Palmeri points out, is the literary form most capable of incorporating other genres within its structure. This is, of course, not unique to the satiric novel. Bakhtin writes that the novel

> permits the incorporation of various genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc.) and extra-artistic (every-day, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and others). In principle, any genre could be included in the construction of the novel. . . . Such incorporated genres usually preserve within the novel their own structural

> integrity and independence, as well as their own linguistic and stylistic peculiarities. (320-21)

Nonetheless, Palmeri argues that the extremely dialogic nature of narrative satire makes it unusually welcoming to opposing narrative styles in order "to suggest the conventionality and limitation of any single form of reference. In this way, narrative satire establishes a dialogue among forms" (5). Thus, it would appear that *Shame*, as narrative satire, is able to incorporate the fairy-tale form within itself — or at least this configuration is required by and for the standard reading of the novel.

Such a reading is precisely what has made *Shame*, in Ahmad's words, a "classic of [the] counter-canon," though the novel's ostensible purpose is likewise what made this reading possible in the first place. The "postcolonial" or "Third World" novel seeks "to give appropriate *form* (preferably allegory, but epic also, or fairy tale, or whatever) to the *national* experience" (Ahmad 125, 124). As Ahmad argues, this developing counter-canon of "postcolonial" writing arbitrates inclusion and exclusion of texts based upon the level of overt commentary on the nature of being colonized and grappling with its aftereffects. Likewise, the overwhelming impulse among literary critics when reading a text such as *Shame* is to analyze it primarily from this perspective. Doing so forces one to read *Shame* first and foremost as political satire (that is, as a political allegory with parody). To do this, however, one must understand the fairy-tale element as a device in the service of the more important, all-encompassing political satire, disregarding what the Narrator makes perfectly clear: *Shame* is "a modern fairy tale" (72).

As it turns out, the Narrator is only too correct: *Shame* is first and last — quite literally — a fairy tale. If one views the fairy tale as being only the "peripheral" tale — in the same way that Omar is the "peripheral hero" in the novel — then one misses the inevitable formal failings of the political-satiric genre for Rushdie. In other words, *Shame*'s political satire cannot really *contain* the fairy-tale portion of the novel. We find instead that the genres remain quite distinct from one another, each occupying, conveniently enough, just about half the novel. On the one hand we have the political-satiric portion of the novel (the political struggle between Isky and Raza); on the other we have the fairy tale (the tale of love and revenge between the Shakils and the Hyders); and between them (or better still, above them), mediating them, turning the one off and the other on, we find the Narrator and a textbook example of "postmodern" self-reflexive narration. Further still, both on a purely obvious and on a structural level, we can see that the fairy-tale portion both begins the novel *and ends it*. This latter point is important: the Narrator cannot resolve the dilemmas broached by the novel's political-satiric portion within that genre; the novel must instead escape into the form of the fairy tale in order to produce, or at least to pursue, a solution. Quite literally then, in an attempt to escape from the insolubility of narrative satire, the Narrator himself kicks Raza out of power and installs Arjumand and Haroun in a manner that he self-mockingly admits is slipshod:

> Well, well, I musn't forget I'm only telling a fairy-story. My dictator will be toppled by goblinish, faery [*sic*] means. "Makes it pretty easy for you," is the obvious criticism; and I agree, I agree. But add, even if it does sound a bit peevish: "*You* try and get rid of a dictator some time." (284)

Thus concludes *Shame*'s political satire: the fairy tale, in the person of Sufiya Zinobia/Beast, spirals in towards the center to chase the political satire out of the novel for good. The last twenty or so pages are spent in the mode of the fairy-tale genre attempting to resolve the ideological antagonisms produced over the course of the novel as whole.

The structural implications of this formal retreat can be clearly demonstrated by making a revision to an abridged form of the original semiotic rectangle (diagram 1). The changes are shown in diagram 3. First, unlike the rec-

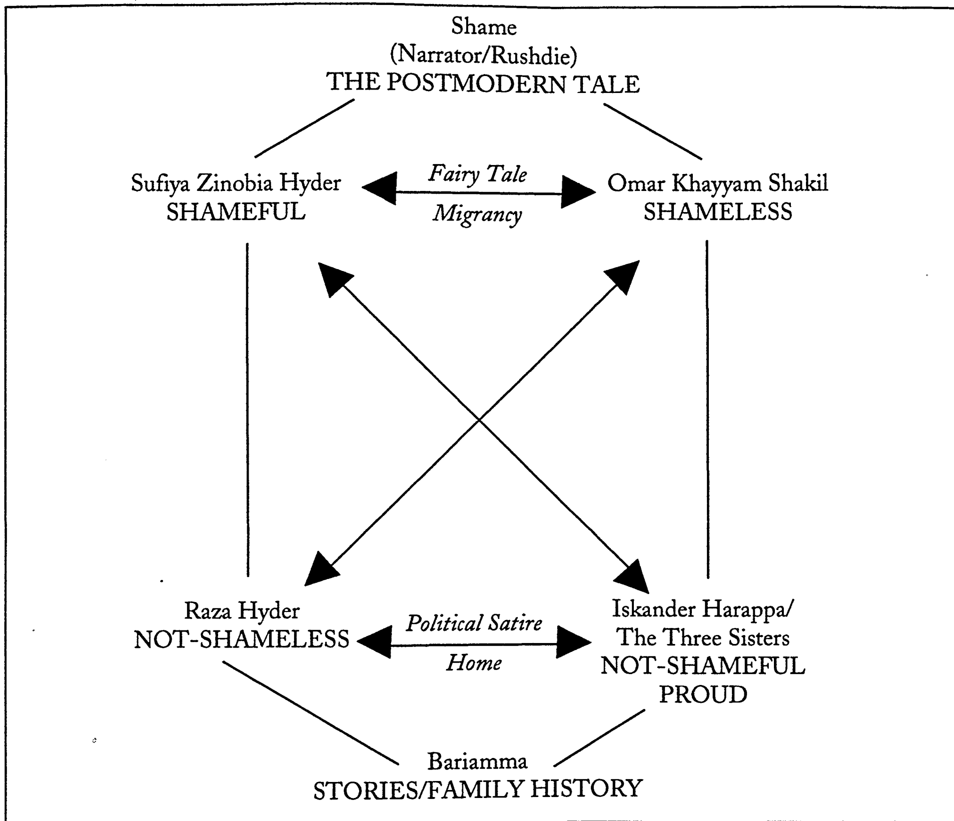


Diagram 3. Revisions to the Original Semiotic Rectangle of *Shame*

tangle drawn specifically from the political-satiric genre (diagram 2), the overall rectangle for the whole novel has access to the importance of the Narrator and his narrative self-awareness. This larger perspective permits a synthesis of Isky and Raza to be found in the form of Bariamma and the stories that hold the family together and in power. Whereas no synthesis between these terms

was possible within the confines of the genre of political satire, one is possible in the overall narrative; but it is a synthesis *that can never be a solution*. The solution to *Shame* is not found in the genre of political satire or — apparently contradicting the demands of "counter-canonicity" — in the questions of the Pakistani nation that it satirizes. The solution is instead found outside both in the form of the fairy tale and in the state of migrancy.[14]

Moreover, there is actually a fluctuation in the third term of *Shame*'s overall semiotic rectangle, depending upon whether one emphasizes the fairy-tale portion of the narrative or the political satire portion (see diagram 4). When

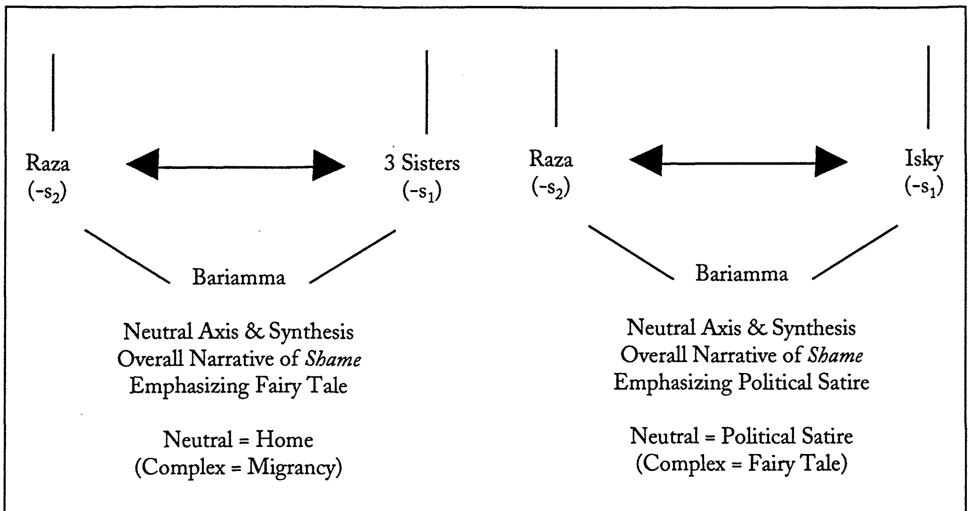


Diagram 4. Comparison of Neutral Axes and Terms

the emphasis is placed on the fairy-tale genre in the overall narrative, the Three Sisters seem to represent the $-s_1$ position of "not-shameful"/"pride" (alongside Isky, to the small extent that he appears in this portion of the novel). What do Raza and the Three Sisters have in common? In the most mundane, yet important, sense, they both represent *homes* in which Omar lives at various points in his life. The opposite of "home" in *Shame* is a state of migrancy; and the fact of this antinomy places further weight upon the sense of "home." In the larger sense suggested by the use of migrancy in the novel, one might interpret "home" more generally as the nation-home. On the other hand, emphasizing the political-satiric portion of the narrative brings out the formal antagonism in the piece: the neutral axis, political satire (Raza versus Isky), opposes the complex axis, fairy tale (Sufiya versus Omar). Their combination, as seen in diagram 4, yields the general antagonism in the novel between the political satire of the nation (the neutral axis) and the fairy tale of migrancy (the complex axis).

Strangely, the glue that the Narrator applies formally to the novel is none other than General Zia's counterpart, Raza Hyder. As Jameson has observed of Greimas's semiotic rectangle, the fourth term is the most critical; it is the negation of the negation ("Foreword" xvii). It is Raza, then, who unites the two

genres at their own levels, moving in and out and between them, and playing the role of the villain in both: the killer of Babar and the executioner — intended, at least — of Isky. Likewise, in the real world, the existence of the novel *Shame* is predicated upon the actions of General Zia. Regardless of Rushdie's claims to a more universal indictment of politics in Pakistan, "Zia" — that is, the ideological place-marker for the individual named Zia ul-Haq and his perceived actions in Pakistan — is the *raison d'être* for *Shame*.

We come then to the penultimate characteristic of narrative satire: its half-tragic quality (in the Aristotelian sense) of having reversal without recognition. There are many reversals in *Shame*, and, as indicated above, there is recognition, insofar as Omar "recognizes himself" for what he is. Nonetheless, he is the only character to do so. Isky goes down after his own obnoxious fashion; Raza does not even realize he has said his last words. Only Omar catches a glimpse of who he is and what he has done — though only immediately before his destruction at the hands of his bride. At this point in the argument, Omar's solitary recognition should come as no great surprise: there can be no recognition in the political-satiric genre proper, but only through the fairy-tale element of *Shame*. In other words, *Shame* does not break the "rules" of the political-satiric genre here; it merely circumvents them through the employment of its "fairy tale."

Typically the fairy tale projects a particular image of "man" through its hero. Max Lüthi suggests:

> The fairy tale sees man as one who is essentially isolated, but who, for just this reason — because he is not rigidly committed, not tied down — can establish relationships with anything in the world. . . . The fairy tale . . . which knows of failure and depicts it in its secondary characters, shows in its heroes that despite our ignorance of ultimate things, it is possible to find a secure place in the world. (143)

Lüthi's characterization of the hero certainly appears able to subsume Omar, the migrant and translated man, under its rubric. Indeed, just as the Narrator believes that the epigraph to *Shame* could be the last line of Kafka's *The Trial*, Lüthi pinpoints similarities between the fairy tale and the work of Franz Kafka. Specifically, characters are not individuals so much as they are figures, "doers and receivers of the action" (145). Again, Omar's peripheral existence — his not being the principal actor in what is supposedly his own story — is perfectly in line with Lüthi's characterization. For Lüthi, a fundamental difference between the fairy tale and the works of Kafka obtains:

> Whereas Kafka's figures stand helpless and despairing amidst the confusion of relationships they do not understand, the fairy-tale hero . . . unexpectedly proves to be strong, noble, and blessed. The spirit of the folk fairy tale parallels that in modern literature to a degree, but then the listener is relieved of his feelings of emptiness and filled with confidence.

Omar never reaches a point in *Shame* where he is "strong, noble, or blessed." True, he alone in the novel achieves a certain recognition about what has hap-

pened in the story of his life. Nonetheless, his reaction is purely that of resignation, welcomed as the consummation of a marriage, but no less a resignation because of it. He is, to borrow Lüthi's expression, a negative hero of modern literature.

I have claimed from the outset, however, that Omar is not really the ideal solution to the ideological problems posed by the novel, despite his being the hero of the fairy-tale portion of *Shame*. This position is instead occupied by the Narrator, who alone remains standing at the apocalyptic conclusion of the novel:

> And then the explosion comes, a shock-wave that demolishes the house, and after it the fireball of her burning, rolling outwards to the horizon like the sea, and last of all the cloud, which rises and spreads and hangs over the nothingness of the scene, until *I can no longer see what is no longer there*; the silent cloud, in the shape of a giant, grey and headless man, a figure of dreams, a phantom with one arm lifted in a gesture of farewell. (317; emphasis added)

The Narrator's solitary emergence from the narrative is in essence a birth, the result of the pseudo-sexual union of Omar and Sufiya. As I have previously argued, the combined terms of the overall semiotic rectangle, Haroun and Arjumand (see diagram 1), are expressed through "abnormal" sexuality; similarly, the ideal term is synthesized quite literally through a "proper" — indeed, long overdue — "sexual" encounter.

Moreover, the Narrator is also the product, at a formal level, of the attempt to synthesize the two genres operating in *Shame*. Throughout the vast majority of the novel, the Narrator works by mediating between political-satiric and fairy-tale genres. Finally, however, it is the Narrator alone who exists at the novel's conclusion after Sufiya has spiraled in and swept away the political satire, and after Omar and Sufiya have consummated their marriage in a *Götterdämmerung*, bringing down the walls of *Shame*'s fairy-tale world. This destruction of genres is precisely an attempt to accomplish formally what the novel does in its content: the imposition of solutions through escape, in this case, an escape from formal insolubility. These formal antagonisms are represented in diagram 5 (see below, page 56). Just as the form of political satire does not allow for the resolution of ideological tensions — thus forcing *Shame* instead towards the fairy-tale genre for its conclusion — the interplay between the political-satiric and the fairy-tale genres does not permit a synthesis of the two in any way and requires an "artificial" resolution to show the reader "the way out."

To consider how Palmeri's final characteristic of narrative satire — its progressive political nature — works in *Shame* requires that one follow the same moves analytically that Rushdie makes in the text: one must leave the realm of political satire, consider the world of the fairy tale, and finally end up alone with the Narrator. To follow this path, let us consider Lüthi's analysis of the "image of man" in fairy tales, to which I have already referred: at times it explicitly strays

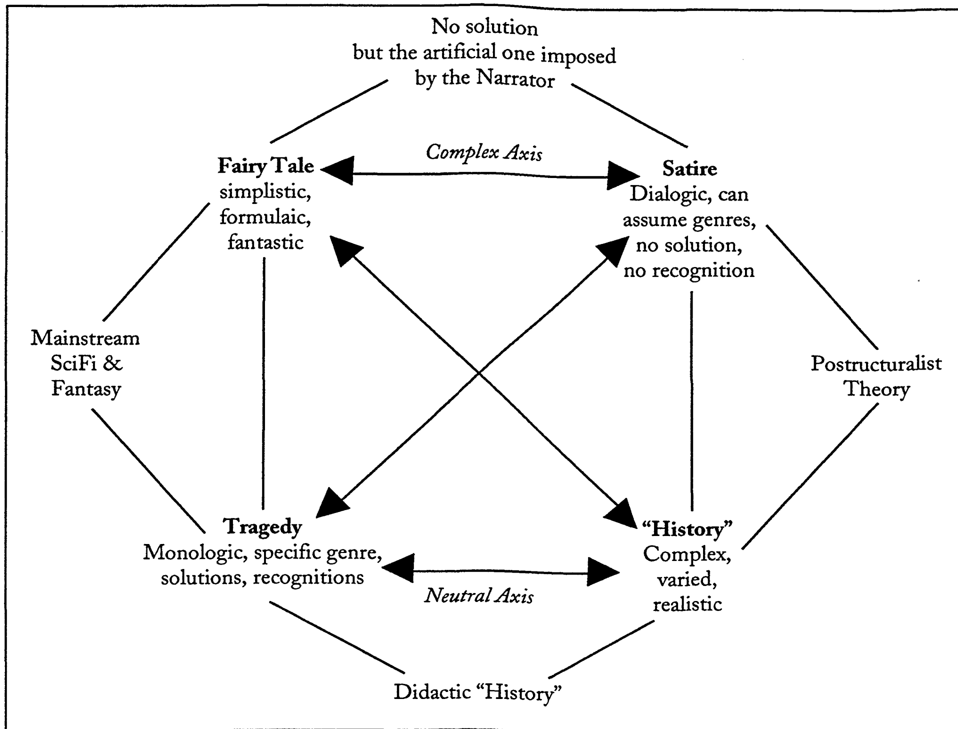


Diagram 5. Semiotic Rectangle Demonstrating
Formal Tensions at Work in *Shame*

from a pure formalism — let alone historicism — in order to valorize a neo-Jungian perspective of the genre. He writes:

> It has . . . been said that fairy tales derive from the wishful thinking of poor people or those who have been unsuccessful or slighted. But such psychological and sociological interpretations are too limited. Wish dreams and wishful thinking play a part in fairy tales, just as they do in all human matters, and social tension and yearnings also are reflected in them. . . . Fairy-tale figures have an immediate appeal. . . . [Kings, princes, gold, dragons] are, for the human imagination, age-old symbols for what is high, noble, and pure or dangerous, bestial and unfathomable. . . . [T]hese are images for something more fundamental: man's deliverance from an unauthentic existence and his commencement of a true one. . . . [T]he fairy tale depicts processes of development and maturation. (138-9)

Despite the fact that throughout his work on fairy tales Lüthi pays attention to the sociological and historical specificity of fairy tales, he appears ultimately concerned with the universal "human" essence that these tales all seem to portray. Yet this retreat is far from unusual: ideologically speaking, the fairy tale appears to talk to (and from) an ahistorical, transcultural concept of "man." The fairy tale is (and "always-has-been") told to children who, unaware of its

moment of production, nonetheless delight in the hearing. Not surprisingly, there is a powerfully non-ideological appearance to the genre: it is concerned with the "human essence," not with those more particular beliefs or interests of transient societies.

To twist the logic of Lüthi's claim around, one could say something similar of *Shame*. It is regularly imagined that *Shame*, being a quintessential "postcolonial novel," expresses "the wishful thinking of poor people or those who have been unsuccessful or slighted." On the contrary, however, *Shame* is finally about and ultimately resolves itself within an image of man that is supposedly universal and transcultural. The Narrator quite explicitly offers the following solution to the problems of Pakistan:

> [When a dictator falls] it is discovered that he has brought God down with him, that the justifying myth of the nation has been unmade. This leaves only two options: disintegration, or a new dictatorship . . . no, there is a third, and I shall not be so pessimistic as to deny its possibility. The third option is the substitution of a new myth for the old one. Here are three such myths, all available from stock at short notice: liberty; equality; fraternity.
>
> I recommend them highly. (278)

The recommendation is presented with sarcasm, suggesting that the solution is really a "no-brainer." These values should be obvious to all precisely because they reaffirm a sense of what it means to be "human." The novel's detour through the genre of the fairy tale is actually a retreat into a form that permits one to reaffirm a universal image of man, of "being human." In other words, the Narrator must move through an ideology of liberal humanism in order to reach some sort of ideological closure. *The novel cannot resolve itself within a solution conscious of its own historical specificity, but rather only within a historically based ideology imagined as ahistorical.* Through his invocation of the rights of man, the Narrator finally validates as universal the "myths" generated by the French Revolution, much as he has previously sought parallels to Isky and Raza in the antagonism between Danton and Robespierre. It seems, then, that *Shame* departs significantly from Palmeri's characterization of satire: far from being a politically progressive literary text, *Shame* is ironically a reaffirmation of the basic ideological bywords of European colonizing powers. [15]

5.

I would argue that the foremost task for the Marxist critic today must be the defense of a rigorous standard of literary criticism. In order to understand the ways in which historical ideologies appear in literary objects, one needs to analyze the formal structures of those objects. When one works only with the thematic elements, one misses textual subtleties that, often enough, are crucial to understanding how texts relate to their real conditions of production. *Shame*, viewed in this light, is far from the revolutionary text that a poststructuralist

reading technique allows. Instead, *Shame* seems literally to enact what Terry Eagleton has said about texts in general:

> [T]he text presents itself to us less as historical than as a sportive flight from history, a reversal and resistance of history, a momentarily liberated zone in which the exigencies of the real seem to evaporate, an enclave of freedom enclosed within the realm of necessity. We know that such freedom is largely illusory — that the text is *governed*; but it is not illusory merely in the sense of being a false perception of our own. The text's illusion of freedom is part of its very nature — an effect of its peculiarly *overdetermined* relation to historical reality. (72)

Shame appears to follow this pattern at every turn: the protagonist is "peripheral," the fairy tale is outside the political satire, the Narrator is outside Pakistan, and liberty, equality and fraternity are outside history. Nevertheless, the mechanism through which the text finds its "enclave of freedom" is not so straightforward. Brennan has argued that Rushdie's work, in contrast to standard "postmodernist" texts, contains "too much 'real history' . . . juxtaposed with a highly personal, subjective and often humorous account of the effect of those real historical events on people who, while they are unable to master history's flow, make the events meaningful by coming to understand their human cost" (141). The qualities of Rushdie's writing to which Brennan refers are the very same that make Rushdie so appealing aesthetically; conversely, they are also the devices through which *Shame* is able to defuse history within itself. "History is what hurts," Jameson has somewhat famously opined. When all is said and done, *Shame* is a complexly structured attempt to shake off that pain. Seemingly avoiding Eagleton's "sportive flight from history," *Shame* confronts history, manipulates it, and packs it into terms that the text can handle — or more properly, that it thinks it can handle. It first tries to laugh the pain away through political satire and then tries to escape through the fairy tale. After a cathartic moment reminiscent of Kafka, the Narrator simply obliterates history, and it is here, in the brief moment of its lonely apocalypse, that the text finds its "liberated zone," outside of history. These formal tensions and antagonisms (as well as the text's attempts to resolve them) are the product of *Shame*'s particularly overdetermined relationship to history. The text forces "ideology into contradiction, discloses the limits and absences which mark its relation to history, and in doing so puts itself into question, producing a lack and disorder within itself" (Eagleton 95). If *Shame* is successful aesthetically and, for many critics, politically, it is because it handles the difficult contradictions that it produces exceptionally well.

Aesthetic merits aside, one can read *Shame* as "liberatory" only by adopting a reading technique that similarly strives to occlude history. With its hidden pessimistic, nihilistic attitude toward struggles against exploitation, poststructuralism (and for that matter *Shame*) tends to demonize slow, trepeditious, often faltering class-based revolutionary movements, while simultaneously glorifying any successful discursively counter-hegemonic act as the most politically meritorious course of action. It is an attitude easily accommodated by *Shame*. To return briefly to Srivastava's article on Rushdie, we find:

> The so-called colonial writers [whom Rushdie] writes about are determined to subvert the "myth" (in Barthes' terminology) of literary tradition and canon, to *revolutionize* the language through (among others) metafictive techniques. What they point to by using the dominant language is Barthes' view that myth-language of an oppressive group is "rich, multiform, supple" — it eternalizes the world, by relying on intransitive language (149). If "myth" is essentially right wing, then writing is *revolutionary* and left wing, and to the consternation of the dominant group of mythmakers, extremely committed literature (Barthes 148, 156). To those who are still sceptical about the value of using writing as a political tool, Catherine Belsey cautions that any political struggle has to be verbalized in order to escape forever being marginalized (21). Rushdie echoes this view in *Shame*. (76; emphasis added)[16]

The purpose of Srivastava's article is to prove that Rushdie's working in the "dominant" genre, language and mode of history is highly subversive, and thus, in the Foucauldian sense, "liberating." While it is true that *Shame* is revolutionary, we should remember that its revolution actually took place back in 1789. *Shame* cannot stand up to a revolutionary role in the current conjuncture. It is deeply entrenched in an anti-revolutionary, bourgeois ideology that Srivastava entirely ignores. Srivastava quotes the passage wherein the Narrator suggests liberty, equality and fraternity as solutions, noting only that "Rushdie is not blind to the fact of his own role as political propagandist. . . . Rushdie's novels are intensely political" (76-7). Aside from their being somewhat mundane, these observations simply gloss over the political implications of Rushdie's waving the Tricolor in the one moment where he explicitly offers a solution. Neatly elided is an unqualified, unanalyzed revalidation of the dominant "myths" of "Western" society, ideals that stand in sharp contrast to the historical processes of imperialism that produced the ideology of the "two-nation theory," the actual nation-state of Pakistan itself, and eventually the events there that would become the explicit and immediate inspiration for *Shame*.

One can argue that Rushdie's appropriation of a "Western" literary form in a "Western" language is "revolutionized" through the application of "postmodern" literary techniques — for example, metafiction — only by ignoring those formal qualities of *Shame* that are supposedly under analysis. More than any Quranic or Gandhian view of history (as Srivastava suggests), *Shame* comes out of a still powerful modernist literary tradition. Its author is a well-educated, canonically well-read British cosmopolitan. *Shame*'s literary ancestors are therefore, not surprisingly, the works of Kafka, Eliot, Joyce, and so forth. If the very form of the novel may be considered problematic due to its development alongside mercantile and industrial capitalism, can modernism, developing alongside the late imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, be viewed any less suspiciously? In other words, following Benjamin's observation that "the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate astonishing quantities of revolutionary themes . . . [and] can propagate them without calling its own existence, and the existence of the class that

owns it, seriously into question" (229; cf. Althusser 30), it is important to see the modernist form as a hegemonic apparatus of literary production entirely capable of defusing even the most radical of subordinate ideologies. *Shame*'s content is not particularly revolutionary, and its form serves to reinforce and even disguise the novel's conservative posture. Raymond Williams once observed that

> the avant-garde, in the sense of an artistic movement which is simultaneously both a cultural and political campaign, has become notably less common. Yet there are avant-garde political positions from the earliest stages — dissident from fixed bourgeois forms, but still as bourgeois dissidents — which can be seen as a genuine vanguard of a truly modern international bourgeoisie which has emerged since 1945. The politics of this New Right, with its versions of libertarianism in a dissolution or deregulation of all the bonds and all national and cultural formulations in interest of what is represented as the ideal open market and the truly open society, look very familiar in retrospect. *For the sovereign individual is offered as the dominant political and cultural form, even in a world more evidently controlled by concentrated economic and military power. That it can be offered as such a form, in such conditions, depends partly on that emphasis which was once, within settled empires and conservative institutions, so challenging and so marginal.* (61-2; emphasis added)

It may be a matter of debate as to how "avant-garde" Rushdie actually is, but the point, I believe, still stands: the forms — the genres — in *Shame* converge upon the pinpointed term of the individual, the migrant cosmopolitan writer, rising above the apocalyptic contestations of history. In doing so, the novel accomplishes the formal assimilation of the few counter-hegemonic ideologies that it contains into an overall narrative of "postcoloniality." The Narrator criticizes Omar in a revealing manner:

> Men who deny their pasts become incapable of thinking them real. Absorbed into the great whore-city, having left the frontier universe of Q. far behind him once again, Omar Khayyam Shakil's home-town now seems to him like a sort of bad dream, a fantasy, a ghost. The city and the frontier are incompatible worlds; choosing Karachi, Shakil rejects the other. It becomes, for him, a feathery insubstantial thing, a discarded skin. He is no longer affected by what happens there, by its logic and demands. He is homeless: that is to say, a metropolitan through and through. A city is a camp for refugees. (157)

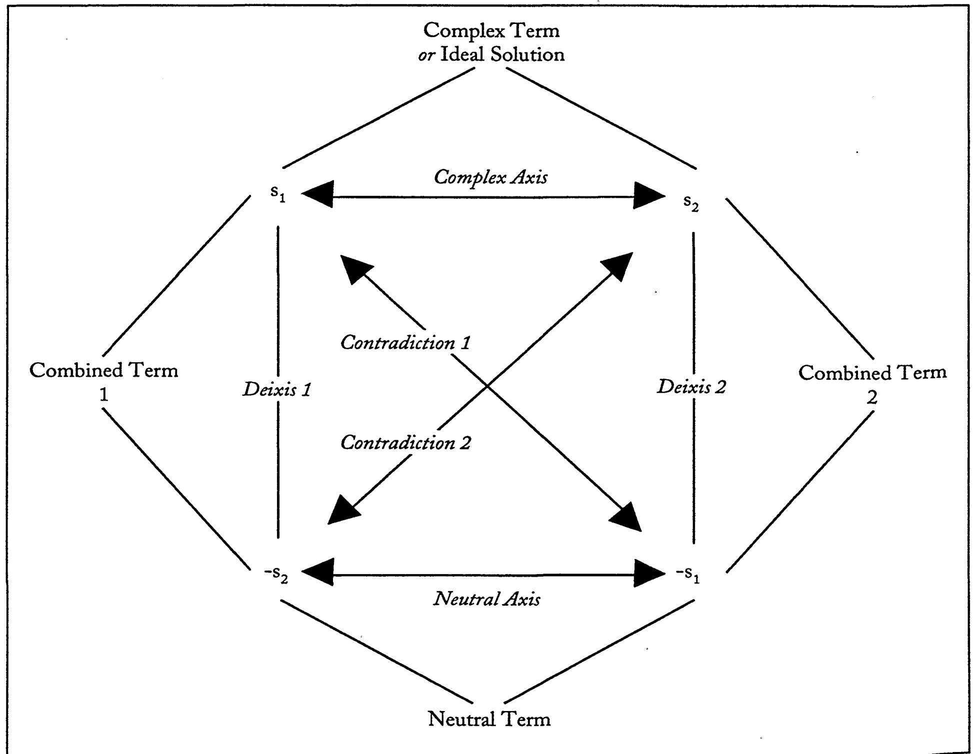
The difference between Omar and the Narrator is, according to the latter, the former's denial of his past. If there is one thing that the mere existence of the novel is supposed to demonstrate to the reader, it is that the Narrator is certainly not guilty of this denial. His history is far from insubstantial; his roots — Indian, Pakistani and English — still make claims on him. Nevertheless, the condition of migrancy portrayed by the Narrator in *Shame* facilitates an

imagined *separation* from history through the form of the "sovereign individual." In the end, the Narrator seems to stand outside the novel — and, by implication, history — peering into it as through a microscope, commenting on it and finally rising above its ashes in the end.

Notes

1. Quite clearly, the terms "poststructuralist" and "postcolonial" are not interchangeable adjectives. Rather, I use the term "postcolonial" to connote those theoretical perspectives of world imperialism past *and present* that have been heavily influenced by — indeed, have risen alongside and out of — poststructuralist movements. Insofar as I believe the two to be very much part of the same moment and sharing in similar politically problematic perspectives, the terms overlap to some extent for me. Simply put, I situate "postcolonial" theory within the realm of poststructuralism.

2. Very simply described, the rectangle attempts to diagram the competing ideologies in the text as well as the results of their various combinations. The



first step in the process is to identify the two main antagonistic ideologies in the text, oftentimes represented by particular characters or groups of characters. These two terms are called *contraries* and are designated by the symbols, s_1 and s_2. Next, one identifies the exact opposites of these two contraries, thus logi-

cally completing the antagonism of s_1 and s_2. Each of these two new terms is, respectively, in a *contradictory* relationship with the corresponding old term and is, as such, designated $-s_1$ or $-s_2$. (They are arranged in the rectangle as shown below.) After the identification of the competing ideologies and their logical contradictions, one begins to combine the terms around the sides of the rectangle. The contraries, s_1 and s_2, combine to form the *complex term* or *ideal solution.* This is straightforward enough: the solution to the problems posed in the text is the resolution of the antagonism between the two principal competing ideologies. On the other hand, the contraries, $-s_1$ and $-s_2$, combine to form the *neutral term.* Logically, the synthesis of the these two contraries produces a term that *can never* be the solution to the text's dilemma. (It is important to note, however, that while the text does not offer it as a solution, the neutral term *is* nevertheless a possibility that the text is capable of imagining but *must* explicitly or implicitly dismiss.) Lastly, the terms produced on the left and right sides of the rectangle are simply known as the *combined terms.* These generally fill out the rectangle, marking the range of possibilities offered by the text. Unlike the neutral term, the combined terms are, to some extent, imagined by the text as viable possibilities. Unlike the ideal solution, however, they are not the resolution that the text can finally offer. As with the original four terms of the rectangle in its simple form, the combined terms are often represented by particular characters. (My reading of Greimas is derived from Jameson ["Foreword" viii-xvii].)

3. See any of the accounts of conversations with family in Bhutto, *Daughter of Destiny.*

4. See, for instance, *Daughter of Destiny* 287-8 (a conversation on violence in struggle between Murtaza and Benazir taking place after the PIA hijacking) and 295-8 (the interaction between Murtaza and Benazir when their brother, Shahnawaz, is found dead, likely from poisoning).

5. Throughout this essay, I use masculine pronouns to designate the Narrator. While the Narrator does indicate that he has recently become a father (123), it is the only reference that *Shame* makes to his gender. The unqualified assumption that the Narrator is male would be amiss in a novel in which, as Ahmad argues, gender is complexly figured.

6. In an earlier draft of this essay, I included a tedious exposition of the fairy-tale portion. Moments in the novel were linked up with the appropriate fairy-tale element, as described by Propp. The conclusions that this section of my essay reaches were made based upon that exposition.

7. Obviously, I do not mean to suggest that the generic divisions in *Shame* are rigidly distinct and that lines of demarcation may easily be drawn throughout the text to indicate their respective territories. Characters, plot devices, settings and so forth all overlap, and thus the genres do as well. Instead, we might say that at any given moment in the novel one generic form or the other is largely dominant and, anticipating a later argument in this essay, that the two forms work with, against, and off one another. Indeed, from an aesthetic perspective, it is precisely this interplay that makes *Shame* interesting; but, from a political perspective, as I hope to prove, it is also what makes *Shame* finally reactionary.

8. On the two occasions in which the function of the villain is fulfilled by a character other than Raza Hyder, it is performed by the guerrillas in Q. It is not Raza who deceives Babar but rather an earthquake, drink and, more importantly, the guerrillas involved in the armed struggle in Q. Considering Rushdie's attitude towards militancy, it is not insignificant that these guerrilla groups should be the sole substitute for Raza in the role of villain.

9. In later years, after the writing of *Shame*, Zia was portrayed less harshly in the wake of Thatcher's and Reagan's support for his government.

10. This is, of course, not a particularly outrageous claim. It is, more or less, simply a matter of Rushdie's siding with the lesser of two evils. For example, while Rushdie has always had grave problems with the PPP and Bhutto (both Benazir and her father), he still prefers them to the regime of General Zia ul Haq. See Rushdie, "Zia" and "Daughter."

11. Brennan's essay on *Shame* lists a number of Peccavistan-Pakistan correspondences (as well as a few words on the significance of names in the novel). Part 2 of the present study details a number of others. One peculiar correspondence occurs when Rani Harappa sees Isky's corpse. Claiming that Isky could not have been hanged, because there is no mark from the rope left on his neck, she deduces that his killers must have hanged him after he was already dead (*Shame* 205). Shortly after Z. A. Bhutto's death, this same rumor was circulated. Bhutto's first wife (not Begum Nusrat Bhutto, who was not allowed to see the corpse) claimed that the former prime minister's corpse "showed none of the normal signs of hanging," and the family suggested that he had been tortured to death in an effort to extract a confession ("Bhutto Murdered" 5). See also "Bhutto's Widow" 20, and Schofield 241. It is interesting to note that the difference between Bhutto and Isky is that while the former was rumored to have been tortured to death, the latter brought on his sudden death in Rushdie's novel by insulting Talvar Ulhaq (262).

12. As Zia allegedly said to Benazir Bhutto, "Our families have known each other for generations" (*Daughter of Destiny* 247).

13. Suleri argues this point, viewing the political milieu of *Shame* as a conflict between westernization and fundamentalism (182).

14. It is important to note here that, following Propp's scheme of the form, fairy tales always involve characters leaving their home or community, in order to return at some later point. "Migrancy," quite literally, is a formal characteristic of the fairy tale genre and we find it present in *Shame*, not just in Omar's journey but also in the Beast's escape from Sufiya, from the attic and from the bounds of behavior considered acceptable to the community.

15. It is not that "liberty, equality and fraternity" are inherently undesirable but rather that they are extremely loaded terms, carrying an historical burden of meaning from which they cannot be disentangled. Their invocation is problematic insofar as it is a reteat away from history (and a progressive analysis of it) towards "myths" that present themselves as given and ahistorical. Rushdie is not necessarily wrong to suggest "liberty, equality and fraternity" as solutions, but what one finds missing in *Shame* is any sense of how these ideals are to be truly realized, a lack ultimately owing to the limits of Rushdie's political and ideological horizon: liberal humanism.

16. Srivastava's reading of Barthes is not entirely correct. Barthes does not make the blanket claim that all writing is necessarily revolutionary. He writes instead: "I have been asked whether there are myths 'on the Left.' Of course, inasmuch, precisely, as the Left is not revolution. Left-wing myth supervenes precisely at the moment when revolution changes itself into 'the Left,' that is, when it accepts to wear a mask, to hide its name, to generate an innocent meta-language and to distort itself into 'Nature'" (146-7). Insofar as Rushdie's suggested myths of liberty, equality and fraternity are "all available from stock," surely Barthes argues against Srivastava's point by noting: "Left-wing myth is always an artificial myth, a reconstituted myth: hence its clumsiness" (148).

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