

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 11 : 5 May 2011

ISSN 1930-2940

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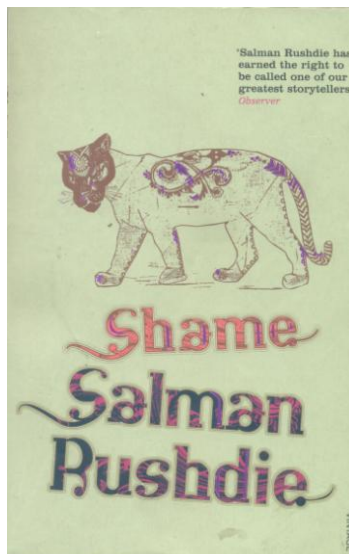
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Authorial Intrusion in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*

Evelynn Sheen Divakar, M.Phil., PGDELT



Authorial Intrusion

Vickie Britton describes authorial intrusion as "... literary device where the author inserts his own thoughts and opinions into the story". Authorial intrusion was a common device in

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Victorian literature. Writers like Jane Austen, John Fowles, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, Charles Dickens and others were found to often stop in between their narratives and address the reader directly.

This literary device provided the writer a propitious opportunity digress from the main narrative and furnish the reader with the writer's opinions. More often in Victorian literature the writer used this brass ring to influence the reader's own opinion. Gothic literature utilized this device for foreshadowing and to build an aura of suspense in the plot.

Showing and Telling – Implications of Authorial Intrusion

This trend in writing can be directly linked to “showing and telling”. The mantra for contemporary writing is to show and not tell. A work that is replete with authorial intrusion would naturally end up “telling”. However, authorial intrusion does not imply that the writer exerts overriding authority on the perspective of the reader. The intrusion of the writer may also be a consequence of the desire of the writer to present an objective and multi-dimensional view of the event or character. It may also be a recourse, to present the story, when the narrator is unreliable and instable.

Salman Rushdie and Authorial Intrusion

Though authorial intrusion is generally frowned upon in contemporary literature since it is believed that the reader's understanding and interpretation of the work is limited when the writer breaks in and provides opinions, it can be an effective tool in the hands of a skilled writer. Salman Rushdie is one such writer who often uses authorial intrusion to create a myriad of effects. Rushdie is writer who cannot be boxed easily. He is writer who has achieved international recognition as a postmodern writer. One of the significant features of his style is his tendency towards ‘reflexivity’. Reflexivity is the inclination of the writer to raise issues regarding the “...their own nature, status, and role” (Barry).

Replete with Authorial Intrusions

Rushdie's novel *Shame* is replete with instances where the writer speaks directly to the reader. However the authorial intrusion in *Shame* is different from what we find in the Victorian novels and the Gothic novels. Rushdie does not use authorial intrusion to build an atmosphere of suspense neither to foreshadow nor does he use it to impose his ideology on the reader. Authorial intrusion in the hands of Rushdie is used for several purposes.

Readers' Active Participation and Authorial Intrusion

The postmodern writer is very conscious of involving the reader in the narrative. The reader is an active participant in the flow of the events because he leaves the acceptance of the credibility of the story in the hands of the reader.

***Shame*, a Myth of the Political History of Pakistan**

Shame is a novel that deals with the politically turbulent history of Pakistan. Rushdie is in the process of making a myth of the political history of Pakistan. He is fully aware of what he is doing and wants the reader to be fully involved in the process.

When Rushdie interrupts his own narrative with a personal voice and addresses a reader or throws a question at the reader, he is actually vesting the reader with some of the responsibility that the storyteller bears on his shoulders. For example the instance when the writer is describing the commencement of Omar Khayyam's insomnia he talks about his midnight adventures in the book and leaves a decision in the hands of the reader in the following sentence: "...but as to whether he grew up into a caped crusader or cloaked bloodsucker, into Batman or Dracula, I leave it to the reader to decide" (22).

Reflexivity and Authorial Intrusion

Rushdie's authorial intrusion is closely linked to reflexivity. At times the writer would question the very validity of his narrative and the skill with which his own work is crafted. For instance he questions the effectiveness of Omar as a hero: "Dizzy, peripheral, inverted, infatuated, insomniac, stargazing, fat: what manner of hero is this?" The reader is also left with a lingering doubt if such a hero would be able to shoulder his responsibility and wear the robe of a protagonist with ease.

Chapter two "Necklace of Shoes" begins with a long intrusion which to a careless reader might appear as a digression. Rushdie opens this chapter with a little snippet of information about his family and their house he thus takes the reader into confidence by sharing information about his family. However the purpose of this form of authorial intrusion is not confined to taking the reader into confidence. The location of Rushdie's house in the "Defence" provides Rushdie a chance to throw a glaring spotlight on the corrupt practices of those who held authority when it comes to land dealings.

The Method of Reflexivity

Rushdie relates a similar incident when he wanted to eagerly initiate a conversation on the recent execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto but he was silently reprimanded for this, "But only half the question got past my lips; the other half joined the ranks of the area's many unasked queries..." (27). Through this incident Rushdie very subtly hinted that censorship had not just extended its grip to the realm of freedom of speech but also the realm of thought. Throughout the novel Rushdie affirms that the country in the book, the country which is the wing without the bird, is not Pakistan. However by drawing the reader's attention to the very conspicuous parallels between the events that were sending seismic tremors across Pakistan and the fictitious country in the book, Rushdie is giving this magical realist book a touch of reality. The events in the book thus can claim to have their roots in real events that happened during the most turbulent days in Pakistani history.

Creating Dramatic Effect through Authorial Intrusion

Rushdie also uses authorial intrusion to create a certain dramatic effect on the readers. It also serves as a jolt to startle and wake the reader who has gently slipped into a stupor mellifluent linguistic flow that the writer is adept at creating.

For example, “Shame, dear reader, is not the exclusive property of the East” (29). In contrast to the above example Rushdie easily slips into an easy conversational tone in the narrative. He draws the reader into what Toni Morrison calls a “co-conspiracy” by demanding the reader’s acknowledgement and approval of the story that he is telling.

The reader is enchanted into a world of secrets (secrets that everybody is aware of but nobody dares to acknowledge), of half whispered truths, of pasts that have been neatly swept under the carpet, and of a present that is stranger than reality. The writer thus treats the reader as a comrade in the quest for the real story. Thus reader cannot remain a passive spectator of events, he is drawn into the story, the struggle and the ideology of the characters.

Authorial Intrusion and Magical Realism

Rushdie’s *Shame* also presents an interesting study on how authorial intrusion works in a magical realist work. The reader hears the author’s premonitory voice foreshadowing some of the most “magical” elements. Though the reader is shocked into realization of the veiled truth behind the fantastic truth it is the authorial voice that gently guides the reader to the reality.

Foregrounding

The writer also uses authorial intrusion to foreground certain issues which would otherwise be lost in the background. For instance when uses the allusion to the Norse mythological tree of Yggdrasil to foreground the dual identity of a migrant experience. Thus Rushdie has been successful in blending authorial intrusion with his postmodernist and magical realist works.

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