

**Rewriting Kashmir: History, Memory and Historiographic Metafiction in
Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown***

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Abstract

This article examines Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) as a major example of historiographic metafiction that reimagines the relationship between history, memory and narrative. Employing Linda Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction as its principal analytical framework, the study argues that Rushdie deliberately blurs the boundaries between documented history and fictional invention to expose the instability of official historical narratives. Through nonlinear narration, metafictional self-consciousness, intertextual engagement and the incorporation of historical figures and events, the novel interrogates the possibility of representing historical truth in any objective or unmediated form. At the same time, it reconstructs the troubled history of Kashmir by foregrounding experiences marginalised within dominant political discourses and by exploring the interconnected forces of colonialism, nationalism, religious extremism and global terrorism. The analysis further demonstrates that the novel transforms private experiences of love, betrayal, exile, and revenge into narratives that illuminate wider geopolitical conflicts, thereby revealing the inseparability of individual lives and historical processes. Rather than presenting history as a fixed body of facts, *Shalimar the Clown* portrays it as a contested field of competing narratives shaped by ideology, memory and representation. Ultimately, the article contends that Rushdie employs historiographic metafiction not only to recover suppressed histories but also to challenge readers to recognise the interpretative nature of historical knowledge and the ethical responsibility involved in reconstructing the past.

Keywords:

Metafiction, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, Parody, Intertextuality, Magic Realism

Introduction:

“She heard the voice on the tape, its death’s-head ugliness, which was somehow both familiar and alien” (Rushdie 3). These opening lines of Salman Rushdie’s ninth novel immediately establish the eerie, unsettling atmosphere permeating *Shalimar the Clown*. The voice belongs to Shalimar, once a Kashmiri tightrope performer and village entertainer, who has transformed into a terrorist and assassin. The recording is made shortly before he kills Maximilian Ophuls, the former United States ambassador to India, outside his residence in Los Angeles in 1993 (Rushdie 3). At first glance, the murder of a Western diplomat by his Muslim chauffeur appears reminiscent of narratives associated with global terrorism. However, Rushdie’s novel transcends the conventions of a political thriller or journalistic account. Instead, it becomes a complex exploration of the forces that turn an innocent and joyful village clown into a violent killer, revealing how intimate personal betrayals become deeply entangled with larger geopolitical conflicts.

This inquiry is conducted through a narrative architecture that is quintessentially postmodern: multiple perspectives shuttle between Kashmir, Los Angeles, Strasbourg and London; time is folded and refolded across six decades; the dead speak, the future is foreseen, and the boundaries between history and fiction are systematically dissolved. The result is a novel that, as Florian Stadler observes, “cuts across different time periods and territories, challenging the legacies of empire, nationhood and emergent new empires” (Stadler 194). To understand the novel’s peculiar combination of historical engagement and formal self-reflexivity, it is necessary to turn to a theoretical framework that addresses precisely this conjunction: Linda Hutcheon’s concept of ‘historiographic metafiction’.

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon writes that postmodernism is characterised by “the paradox of the pastiche, the parody, the self-reflexivity, and the historical ‘nudge’” (Hutcheon 3). Pertinently, historiographic metafiction represents the most sophisticated expression of these tendencies, for it rejects both the naive realism of traditional historical fiction (which treats the past as transparently recoverable) and the radical textualism of some poststructuralist theories (which dissolve history into language). Instead, Hutcheon argues, historiographic

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metafiction occupies a middle ground: these novels are “both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (Hutcheon 5). They acknowledge that the past is accessible only through textual representations- narratives, documents, archives, testimonies- and that these representations are inevitably shaped by the ideologies and conventions of their production. Yet they do not conclude that history is nothing but a fiction. On the contrary, they engage seriously with the material realities of the past while simultaneously exposing the constructedness of all historical accounts.

This dual orientation has profound implications for how we read *Shalimar the Clown*. Hutcheon’s category is not merely descriptive; it is, as she insists, politically charged. Historiographic metafiction does not abandon history to pure textual play. Rather, it engages in what she calls a “reinscription of history,” an attempt to “rewrite a history that includes the voices the traditional texts exclude” (Hutcheon 228-238). In Rushdie’s novel, this reinscription operates on multiple levels: the novel gives fictional voice to the silenced history of Kashmir, a region “torn back and forth by the military power of two warring nations” (Rushdie, “Kashmir. Paradise Lost”). It challenges official narratives of terrorism that isolate individual acts of violence from their historical contexts. And it subjects its own storytelling to constant interrogation, reminding readers that the history we receive is always mediated- by power, by language and by the inescapably subjective act of narration.

The theoretical resonance of Rushdie’s project extends beyond Hutcheon. Hayden White, in his influential essay “The Historical Text as Literary Artefact,” argues that historical narratives are shaped by the same literary devices and narrative structures that characterise fiction. According to White, historical writing does not simply reproduce the past objectively; rather, “the historical narrative does not image the things it indicates; it calls to mind images of the things it indicates” (White 122). Through this argument, White emphasises that history, like literature, is mediated through language, representation, and narrative construction. For White, the distinction between history and fiction is not a difference in kind but a difference in the degree to which each acknowledges its own constructedness. Rushdie’s novel takes White’s insight to its logical extreme: by self-consciously deploying the devices of fiction to represent historical events, *Shalimar the Clown* forces readers to confront the literary nature of all historical representation. The novel does not abandon historical truth but insists that truth can only be approached indirectly, through the very fictional means that historiographic metafiction foregrounds.

Patricia Waugh's foundational study of metafiction provides an additional theoretical lens. Waugh defines metafiction as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 2). *Shalimar the Clown* exemplifies this definition at every turn. The novel repeatedly reminds readers that it is a constructed narrative: characters reflect on the stories they inhabit, the narrator comments on the act of narration, and the boundaries between different genres and discourses are systematically blurred. Yet unlike purely experimental metafiction, Rushdie's self-consciousness is always directed outward, toward the historical world. The novel's formal play serves not to escape history but to engage it more deeply, by exposing the narrative strategies through which official histories are built and maintained.

One of the most striking passages in *Shalimar the Clown* occurs when Abdullah Noman, the village headman of Pachigam, witnesses the deliberate destruction of a power station that plunges his village into darkness. Rushdie's narrator describes Noman's experience as "the bizarre sensation of living through a metaphor made real. The world he knew was disappearing; this blind, inky night was the incontestable sign of the times" (Rushdie 88). This is a moment of profound metafictional self-awareness. Noman is not merely experiencing a blackout; he is experiencing the collapse of the distinction between figurative language and material reality. The darkness that envelops him is both a literal event (an act of sabotage) and a metaphor for the historical darkness descending upon Kashmir. The metaphor has become real, and reality has become metaphorical. As Priscilla Wald observes in her review of Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb's *Epidemic Empire*, Noman's experience "resembles the feeling of crisis—literally, a turning point in which change is at once inevitable and uncertain" (Wald). Wald further notes that "the intensity of living through this moment of change is like looking blindly into the sun and therefore 'must,' Rushdie's narrator explains, 'be looked at indirectly'" (Wald). This emphasis on indirection complements Linda Hutcheon's conception of historiographic metafiction, which approaches history through self-conscious narrative mediation rather than transparent representation (Hutcheon 105–23).

The novel's manipulation of narrative time is another dimension of this metafictional self-consciousness. The plot does not unfold chronologically. Instead, the reader encounters the murder of Max Ophuls in the opening pages— in 1993 Los Angeles— and then is carried backwards and forward across decades: to the idyllic Kashmir of the 1940s and 1950s, to the French Resistance during World War II, to Strasbourg and London in the intervening years,

and finally back to the present of the narrative. This temporal fragmentation is not arbitrary. It enacts the novel's central claim: that the present is always haunted by the past and that the causal chains connecting personal betrayal, geopolitical conflict, and political violence cannot be understood through linear chronology. As one reviewer noted, "Time becomes a Mobius strip in' Shalimar's Clown, 'advancing across continents and straddling the millennium to reach a cliffhanger close" (Ciag 2). The Mobius strip is a fitting metaphor: a surface with only one side, where inside and outside, past and present, become continuous with each other. Rushdie's narrative time refuses the conventional distinction between background and foreground, cause and effect. The love triangle between Shalimar, Boonyi and Max is not a private drama played out against the backdrop of public history; rather, the personal and the political are shown to be mutually constitutive, each inhabiting the other's territory. By making the processes of narration visible- by drawing attention to how stories are told, how time is ordered, how events are selected and arranged- the novel reminds us, in true historiographic metafictional fashion, that all histories are narratives and all narratives are choices. As Stephen Morton observes, "Rushdie explodes the conventions of national allegory that he established in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* to represent the conflict in Kashmir" (Morton 337-345). That explosion of convention is not a rejection of politics but a refinement of it: a recognition that representing the complexity of Kashmir requires more than the simple allegorical equations of an earlier moment.

The novel's engagement with parody and intertextuality further deepens its historiographic metafictional project. Hutcheon emphasises that parody is central to the mode, describing it as a form of "critical distance" that involves both "repetition with difference" and "ironic inversion" (Hutcheon 101). Parodic texts simultaneously adopt and subvert the conventions of earlier genres, turning parody into a form of critique that questions and complicates those conventions. *Shalimar the Clown* is saturated with such parodic and intertextual gestures, drawing on everything from Shakespearean tragedy and the *Ramayana* to the conventions of the spy thriller and the Hollywood melodrama.

The novel's title itself is intertextual. Shalimar Gardens in Srinagar, one of the Mughal gardens laid out when the Mughals reigned over the subcontinent, provides the name to the novel. (Rushdie 398) But the gardens also evoke a history of syncretic cultural achievement, of Persian and Islamic aesthetics transplanted to the Kashmiri landscape. To name a novel after these gardens- and to bestow that name on a character who will transform from clown to

jihadist- is to invoke a lost paradise, an Edenic Kashmir that the narrative will then proceed to destroy. The title thus functions as an elegy, a lament for what has been lost and a reminder that the destruction of Kashmir is, among other things, the destruction of a particular form of cultural hybridity.

The most extended intertextual engagement in the novel, however, is with the *Ramayana*, the great Hindu epic. Shalimar and Boonyi are presented as a kind of tragic Rama and Sita, but inverted: their love is transgressively interfaith (Muslim and Hindu), their separation is not the result of demonic abduction but of human betrayal, and the demonic figure is not a monster but the cosmopolitan ambassador Max Ophuls. As Nona Walia observes in her *Times of India* feature, *Shalimar the Clown* draws upon “Indian mythology, Los Angeles fakery and Hindu culture” (Walia). The result is a systematic parodic rewriting of the epic’s moral architecture. Where the *Ramayana* is structured around clear categories of good and evil, hero and villain, *Shalimar the Clown* offers a world in which victims become perpetrators, and perpetrators victims, in dizzying succession. This parodic inversion is precisely the kind of critical engagement that Hutcheon identifies as central to historiographic metafiction: by repeating the epic form with a difference, Rushdie questions the moral certainties that underwrite both religious fundamentalism and nationalist historiography.

Parodic engagement with Shakespeare is equally pervasive. The novel’s epigraph is drawn from *The Tempest*: “Hell is empty, / And all the devils are here.” This citation announces the novel’s descent into a world without transcendence, where evil is not an external force but an immanent product of human relationships. Pei-chen Liao’s chapter on the novel foregrounds another Shakespearean resonance: her title, “The Uncanny Violence of Strangers,” parodies Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*—“Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers” (Liao 1)—and through Williams, it gestures back toward the stranger-as-enemy figure in Shakespearean drama (Liao 23-25). In Rushdie’s novel, the stranger is always ambiguous: Max is a stranger to Kashmir and to Boonyi, yet he depends on the kindness of his Kashmiri driver; Shalimar is a stranger to the West, yet he becomes intimately embedded within it. This ambiguity reflects the broader historiographic metafictional concern with the instability of identity categories and the impossibility of drawing clean lines between self and other, past and present, fact and fiction.

As Nona Walia playfully suggests in her *Times of India* feature “Our Shakespeares?” Rushdie’s fiction invites comparison with Shakespeare because of its dramatic scope, linguistic

inventiveness, and engagement with universal questions of power, identity, and betrayal (Walia). The nickname aptly captures the dual character of Rushdie's intertextual practice: he appropriates and reworks elements of the Western literary canon while simultaneously grounding them in South Asian cultural, historical, and religious traditions. This process is not a matter of simple imitation or pastiche. Rather, it exemplifies what Linda Hutcheon describes as "critical parody," whereby inherited literary forms are both invoked and subjected to critical revision (Hutcheon 101). By bringing Elizabethan tragedy, the *Ramayana*, and the conventions of the contemporary political thriller into dialogue, Rushdie fashions a hybrid narrative form that reflects the transnational realities of globalisation, migration and diaspora.

Hutcheon argues that historiographic metafiction distinguishes itself by simultaneously foregrounding its fictional status while still "lay[ing] claim to historical events and personages" (5). Rather than reproducing the past as an objective record, such narratives interrogate the processes through which history is remembered, narrated, and authorised. *Shalimar the Clown* exemplifies this strategy by integrating recognisable historical figures into an otherwise fictional narrative. Among those who appear briefly are Osama bin Laden and Heinrich Himmler, figures whose presence immediately situates the novel within broader histories of political violence. Theo Tait likewise observes that Rushdie's narrative "features Osama bin Laden, Heinrich Himmler, Rodney King and Lord Lucan too," highlighting the novel's remarkable juxtaposition of disparate historical personalities (Tait). Although these appearances occupy only a small portion of the narrative, they function as important points of reference that connect Rushdie's fictional world to documented historical realities.

The inclusion of Osama bin Laden is particularly significant because it places the novel firmly within the intellectual and political climate that followed the attacks of 11 September 2001. Rather than presenting terrorism as an isolated phenomenon associated exclusively with contemporary Islamic extremism, Rushdie situates it within a longer genealogy of violence that also encompasses fascism, war, colonial conflict, and geopolitical intervention. By allowing twentieth-century atrocities and post-9/11 anxieties to coexist within the same narrative framework, the novel questions simplified explanations of terrorism and instead emphasises historical continuities across different political eras. This perspective is reinforced by the epigraph from *The Tempest*: "Hell is empty, / And all the devils are here" (Shakespeare 1.2.214–15). Within the context of *Shalimar the Clown*, Shakespeare's lines suggest that

violence originates not from supernatural evil but from human actions, ideological conflicts, and the accumulated consequences of historical choices.

While historical individuals appear only intermittently, the novel's most enduring historical presence is Kashmir itself. Rushdie transforms the region into both a geographical setting and a historical protagonist whose fractured past shapes every major narrative development. The fictional world draws extensively upon documented events, including the Partition of 1947, the subsequent territorial dispute between India and Pakistan, prolonged militarisation, insurgency, the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits, and the growth of militant movements. Consequently, the novel's representation of Kashmir remains firmly grounded in historical experience even as it adopts the formal strategies of fiction.

Contemporary criticism has similarly recognised that the novel mourns the disappearance of an earlier culture of coexistence. A review in *Frontline* characterises *Shalimar the Clown* as a narrative "about a lost paradise," capturing the elegiac quality that pervades Rushdie's reconstruction of Kashmir. Developing this idea further, Javaid Bhat argues that Pachigam, the novel's central village, should be understood as a symbolic representation of Kashmir itself. He describes the village as "hybrid, fluid, and a space marked by difference," while also identifying it as "a microcosm of Kashmir" that reflects the region's "ambiguous relationship with the larger 'postcolonial,' 'post-imperial' entities of India and Pakistan" (Bhat 2). Read in this light, Pachigam represents more than a fictional community; it embodies the pluralistic traditions historically associated with Kashmir before they were fractured by nationalism, external political intervention, and religious extremism. Rushdie's reconstruction of this lost social world illustrates how historiographic metafiction can recover marginalised historical experiences while simultaneously questioning the authority of official historical narratives.

Rushdie's engagement with Kashmir's history is not, however, a straightforward act of documentary fidelity. The novel explicitly thematises the difficulty of representing Kashmir at all. At one point, a character reflects:

He closed his eyes and pictured his Kashmir. He conjured up its crystal lakes, Shishnag, Wular, Nagin, Dal; its trees, the walnut, the poplar, the chinar, the apple, the peach; its mighty peaks, Nanga Parbat, Rakaposhi, Harmukh. The Pandits Sanskritised the Himalayas ... O! Those days of peace when we all were in love, and the rain was in our hands wherever we went... Everyone carries his address in his pocket so that at least his body would reach home (Rushdie 305).

This passage is at once lyrical and poignant. It evokes the beauty of Kashmir in a litany of proper names, yet it is haunted by the knowledge that “everyone carries his address in his pocket”- that death is always present, and that the body may need to be identified after violence. The passage also contains a subtle historiographic gesture: “The Pandits Sanskritised the Himalayas” (Rushdie 61) is a compressed reference to the long history of cultural and religious contestation over the region, a history that pre-dates and exceeds the postcolonial conflict between India and Pakistan. By incorporating such historically informed details into a fictional narrative, Rushdie performs the central operation of historiographic metafiction: he makes history visible as a matter of lived experience, while simultaneously insisting that history is always a matter of representation. The novel does not claim to tell the final truth about Kashmir; it claims, more modestly and perhaps more powerfully, to imagine a truth- one that official histories have excluded.

At the level of plot, *Shalimar the Clown* is structured around two betrayals. The first, and most direct, is Shalimar’s betrayal of his innocent origins. The novel traces his transformation from Noman Sher Noman, a sweet-natured tightrope walker, to *Shalimar the Clown*, a cold-blooded assassin and jihadist. As one reviewer summarises, “The shy, romantic boy enraptured by myth becomes a cold-blooded combatant” (Oli 54). This transformation is not, Rushdie insists, a simple conversion to ideology. It is driven by personal betrayal: Max Ophuls’s seduction of Boonyi, and her willing departure from Kashmir. Ideology- the rhetoric of jihad, of resistance, of religious duty- provides the language for Shalimar’s rage, but the rage itself is rooted in the most elemental of human emotions: jealousy, humiliation, the desire for revenge. In an interview with NPR, Rushdie reflected on the central metaphor of the novel, explaining that *Shalimar the Clown* is “about paradise smashed up” rather than merely “paradise lost” (Rushdie, “Shalimar the Clown Takes Rushdie Back to Kashmir”). The destruction of paradise is therefore presented not as an act of divine will or historical inevitability but as the consequence of human choices operating simultaneously at the intimate and geopolitical levels. This refusal to separate personal motivation from political history exemplifies historiographic metafiction's commitment to reconstructing history from the lived experiences of individuals. A second and more far-reaching betrayal in *Shalimar the Clown* is the erosion of Kashmir’s long-standing culture of communal coexistence. At the beginning of the novel, Pachigam is depicted as a village where religious identities do not prevent social intimacy. Muslims and Hindus participate in one another’s festivals and rituals, and the marriage of Shalimar and

Boonyi is solemnised according to both Islamic and Hindu traditions, reflecting a shared cultural ethos rather than sectarian division (Rushdie 76–82). Rushdie presents this inclusive social order as an embodiment of *Kashmiriyat*, the historically rooted ideal of religious pluralism and cultural harmony that once characterised the region.

The gradual disintegration of this pluralistic world constitutes one of the novel's deepest tragedies. Rushdie attributes this collapse to a convergence of external political interventions and internal ideological transformations. State militarisation, cross-border militancy, global geopolitical interests, and the rise of religious fundamentalism collectively dismantle the social fabric that had sustained communal coexistence for generations. Significantly, however, the novel does not portray the destruction of Pachigam as the consequence of outside forces alone. Javaid Bhat argues that Pachigam functions as “a microcosm of Kashmir,” a community that is initially “hybrid, fluid, and a space marked by difference” before it gradually succumbs to sectarian divisions (Bhat). His reading emphasises that the village's downfall results not merely from political intervention but also from the willingness of its inhabitants to internalise competing nationalist and religious ideologies. As mutual trust gives way to suspicion and exclusion, the social bonds that once united the community begin to unravel. In this respect, Pachigam reflects the historical transformation of Kashmir itself—from a culturally plural society into a landscape increasingly fractured by competing nationalisms, communal polarisation, and extremist politics. Rushdie's representation of this process reinforces the novel's historiographic project by illustrating how large-scale historical conflicts reshape everyday lives and permanently alter collective memory.

Florian Stadtler argues that *Shalimar the Clown* fundamentally reconsiders the language through which terrorism is understood and represented. Rather than accepting the category of “terrorist” as self-evident, Rushdie exposes it as a politically contingent designation shaped by competing historical and ideological perspectives. Shalimar, whose assassination of Maximilian Ophuls invites immediate condemnation, is readily identified as a terrorist. Yet the novel simultaneously complicates this judgment by presenting Max as a diplomat deeply implicated in the geopolitical structures and state policies that have contributed to large-scale violence. Through this juxtaposition, Rushdie shifts attention from isolated acts of political violence to the broader historical systems that enable and legitimise them.

Stadtler contends that Rushdie “subverts” conventional understandings of “terror” and “terrorism” by examining their relationship to identity, violence, and the lived consequences of transnational political conflict (Stadtler 197–99). In doing so, *Shalimar the Clown* moves beyond narrowly national or regional interpretations of terrorism and instead situates it within interconnected global histories of empire, nationalism and militarisation. As Stadtler concludes, the novel “reroutes postcolonial paradigms by examining transnational terror networks, and their regional and international impact on politics, cultures and identities” (199).

Rushdie’s interrogation of terrorism also resonates with Linda Hutcheon’s conception of historiographic metafiction, which questions the apparently stable categories through which historical narratives are constructed and legitimised (Hutcheon 105). By refusing to draw an uncomplicated distinction between the terrorist and the statesman, the novel invites readers to examine how political authority, historical memory, and ideological power shape the moral language through which violence is interpreted. Rather than absolving Shalimar of responsibility, Rushdie situates his actions within a wider historical context, thereby exposing the ethical ambiguities that conventional political narratives often conceal.

One of the most disturbing episodes in *Shalimar the Clown* is Boonyi’s death after her return to Kashmir following her relationship with Max Ophuls. Rather than being killed by Shalimar, whose desire for revenge has driven much of the narrative, she is executed by the elders of her own community in what amounts to a ritualised honour killing. Rushdie depicts the execution with unsettling restraint: the punishment is carried out not by an anonymous crowd but by members of the village who had once accepted and cared for her (Rushdie 286–90). This inversion transforms the scene into a devastating commentary on the collapse of communal ethics and the violence that can emerge from the very structures meant to preserve social order. Importantly, Rushdie avoids reducing Boonyi to either an innocent martyr or a wholly culpable transgressor. Her decision to leave Pachigam with Max, her subsequent disillusionment, and her eventual return are all portrayed as personal choices. Yet those choices unfold within a political and patriarchal environment that severely restricts female autonomy. Boonyi’s fate therefore illustrates the complex relationship between individual agency and the larger historical, cultural, and ideological forces that shape human action. Her tragedy cannot be understood solely in terms of personal responsibility or communal punishment; instead, it reflects the destructive convergence of gendered power, social honour, and political instability.

Such moral complexity aligns closely with Linda Hutcheon's understanding of historiographic metafiction. Hutcheon argues that postmodern historical fiction does not reinforce fixed ethical or historical certainties but instead "problematizes" the assumptions through which historical meaning is constructed (101). Rushdie's representation of Boonyi's death exemplifies this principle by refusing straightforward judgments of innocence and guilt. The episode invites readers to confront the ambiguities of violence, responsibility and historical circumstance rather than offering the reassurance of a simple moral resolution.

This ambiguity extends to the question of justice. The novel offers no resolution, no final reckoning. Shalimar kills Max, but that killing does not restore his honour or bring back Boonyi. India, Max's daughter, is left to piece together the fragments of a story she cannot fully comprehend. Kashmir remains contested, its people caught between India and Pakistan, between tradition and modernity, between the dream of peace and the reality of violence. As the abstract of one study notes, "Although the novel ends as if an entangled knot of ideologically driven violence is followed by counter-violence, I suggest that Rushdie proposes instead an ethical reconsideration of violence that requires a crucial recognition/negotiation of self and other" (Bhat 2). In Hutcheon's terms, this refusal of closure is a hallmark of historiographic metafiction. These novels do not offer the comfort of a well-made plot, with clear heroes and villains, clear causes and effects. They offer instead a recognition of the messiness of history, the impossibility of clean moral accounting and the necessity of continuing to ask questions even when answers are not forthcoming.

In the end, *Shalimar the Clown* is a novel about the limits and possibilities of narrative. It is deeply aware that history cannot be told directly- that the complexity of Kashmir, the tangled roots of terrorism, the interplay of personal betrayal and geopolitical catastrophe, exceed the capacities of any simple story. Hence the narrator's insistence that the crisis "must be looked at indirectly" (Rushdie 88). The indirection of metafiction, of parody, of temporal fragmentation, is not a literary game. It is an ethical and epistemological necessity. Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction provides a framework for understanding this necessity. By simultaneously embracing and questioning the conventions of historical fiction, the novel acknowledges that the past is accessible only through representation, while refusing to abandon the effort to represent it. By incorporating actual historical figures and events, it anchors its fictional universe in the real world. By making the processes of its own narration visible, it

reminds us that all histories are told from a point of view- and that the point of view of the marginalised, the displaced, the voiceless, must be imagined if it is to be heard at all.

Critics have occasionally suggested that Salman Rushdie's fiction privileges stylistic innovation at the expense of political commitment. *Shalimar the Clown*, however, challenges such assessments by demonstrating that formal experimentation can itself become a means of historical and political inquiry. Through its fragmented chronology, shifting narrative perspectives, and metafictional strategies, the novel confronts the intertwined histories of Kashmir, colonialism, terrorism, and global violence without reducing them to simplistic ideological narratives. Rushdie does not offer historical certainty or political solutions; instead, he invites readers to engage critically with the complexities and contradictions that shape historical experience.

The novel also acknowledges the ethical limitations of representation. Narrative alone cannot undo political violence or restore fractured communities, yet storytelling remains indispensable because it preserves memories that might otherwise disappear from public consciousness. By recovering silenced histories and resisting reductive explanations, *Shalimar the Clown* affirms literature's capacity to challenge official versions of the past and to keep contested histories open to interpretation.

This commitment to memory is encapsulated in the symbolic significance of the novel's title. Near the conclusion, the narrator explains that the word "Shalimar" means "abode of joy," a meaning that evokes the celebrated Mughal gardens of Kashmir and an earlier vision of cultural harmony (Rushdie 398). The irony is profound. By the novel's end, the name is inseparable from loss: the village performer has become an assassin, communal coexistence has collapsed, and the landscape once associated with joy has been transformed by violence and grief. The symbolic movement from paradise to devastation mirrors the historical trajectory that Rushdie reconstructs throughout the narrative.

In this respect, *Shalimar the Clown* exemplifies what Linda Hutcheon identifies as historiographic metafiction, a mode of writing that simultaneously questions historical authority while insisting upon the importance of remembering the past (Hutcheon 5, 105). Rather than claiming to recover an uncontested historical truth, the novel foregrounds the

interpretative nature of both history and fiction. Its achievement lies not in resolving historical conflicts but in preserving their complexity, reminding readers that the histories of Kashmir are composed of competing memories, unresolved wounds and narratives that resist closure. Rushdie's novel ultimately demonstrates that storytelling is itself an ethical act: by refusing silence, it preserves the possibility of historical understanding while acknowledging that every account of the past remains partial, contested and open to revision.

Conclusion

Shalimar the Clown stands as one of Salman Rushdie's most compelling engagements with history, violence, and memory, demonstrating the full complexity of historiographic metafiction as theorised by Linda Hutcheon. Through its fragmented narrative structure, intertextual richness, metafictional self-consciousness, and deep historical engagement, the novel resists any singular or authoritative version of truth. Instead, it presents history as contested, mediated and inseparable from the stories through which it is narrated. Rushdie reconstructs Kashmir not merely as a geopolitical site of conflict but as a symbolic landscape of lost pluralism, fractured identities, and betrayed human relationships. By intertwining personal tragedy with global political violence, the novel reveals how intimate lives are shaped and often destroyed by larger historical forces. At the same time, *Shalimar the Clown* challenges reductive discourses surrounding terrorism, nationalism, and religious identity, insisting upon moral ambiguity and historical complexity. Ultimately, Rushdie's novel affirms the ethical necessity of storytelling in times of violence. Even when history cannot be represented directly or completely, historiographic metafiction enables literature to recover suppressed voices, question dominant narratives and preserve the memory of worlds that political conflict seeks to erase.

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