

TIME, SPACE, AND MAGICAL REALISM. SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *EAST, WEST* AND THE JUXTAPOSITION OF TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL LANDSCAPES¹

Corina Mariana MITRULESCU
"Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy, Sibiu

E-mail: corina.mitrulescu@yahoo.com

Abstract:

Although best known for his novels, Salman Rushdie has effectively managed to contrast magical or fantastical elements in his short stories. East, West is a collection of short stories in which Salman Rushdie skilfully weaves together narratives to control time and space in novel ways by blurring the lines between reality and fantasy. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how the author, by the layering of historical periods or the disruption of concepts of linear time, is able to create complex temporal and spatial landscapes within his narratives. In order to depict displacement and hybridity, a variety of spatial contexts are juxtaposed, from the modern landscapes of London and New York to the busy streets of Bombay. As deeper realities about the human condition are revealed, the lines separating reality from the imagined are shifted. East, West presents Rushdie's postcolonial perspective and his ideas of displacement

¹ Article History: Received: 02.09.2024. Revised: 25.09.2024. Accepted: 28.09.2024. Published: 15.11.2024. Distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution License CC BY-NC 4.0.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) Citation: MITRULESCU, C.M. (2024). TIME, SPACE, AND MAGICAL REALISM. SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *EAST, WEST* AND THE JUXTAPOSITION OF TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL LANDSCAPES. *Incuriuni în imaginar* 15. *Magical Realism in Literature*. Vol. 15. Nr. 1. pp. 23-44
<https://doi.org/10.29302/InImag.2024.15.2.1>

No funding was received either for the research presented in the article or for the creation of the article.

and alienation through the investigation of time and space while magical realism is used as a potent technique for delving into issues relating to hybridity and cultural identity.

Keywords: cultural hybridity; *East*; *West*; magical realism; Salman Rushdie; short stories; spatial and temporal juxtaposition.

1. Introduction

This paper intends to address why time and space are crucial devices that Rushdie employs in his works. Time and space are categories that cannot be analysed individually, because they are not distinctive and, as Quayson (2020) points out, are always fully integrated into the magical realist textual apparatus that they are part of. Reading Rushdie's works from a spatial and temporal perspective is important because it helps understand marginalization, displacement, and hybridity, which have become paradigms that are frequently taken into consideration by the postcolonial critique. This paper, therefore, seeks to present some insightful observations about the spatial and temporal configuration of our modern and globalized world by discussing Rushdie's collection of short stories *East, West*.

East, West is divided into three parts which correspond to three different geographical spaces: "East", "West", and "East, West"; these coincide with locations set primarily in Western Europe (mainly England), the U.S. and India. It is interesting to note this sectional organization of the book because it is somehow surprising in the sense that the different parts are not categorized according to the traditional perception of the two spaces. While one might expect *East* to deal with more exotic spaces and fantastical events, it stands out through its realistic preoccupations; by contrast, *West* deals with

stories that are almost absurd in the unfolding of their plot. It is precisely this contrast that undermines the readers' expectations determined by a stereotyped view of the world. The East/West dichotomy is shaped by the author in terms that demonstrate the inaccuracy of the perception of a division between the two spaces.

In his 2002 lecture *Step Across this Line*, Salman Rushdie talked about borders, making one of the most significant statements on this topic; he considers that borders “insulate us against the world’s harsher realities” as they reduce us to our simplest selves but, at the same time, he equals the frontier with a “wake-up call”:

The frontier is a wake-up call. At the frontier we can't avoid the truth; the comforting layers of the quotidian, which insulate us against the world's harsher realities, are stripped away, and, wide-eyed in the harsh florescent light of the frontier's windowless halls, we see things as they are. The wake-up call of the frontier is also a call to arms . . . At the frontier our liberty is stripped away—we hope temporarily—and we enter the universe of control. Even the freest of free societies are unfree at the edge, where things and people go out and other people and things come in; where only the right things and people must go in and out. Here, at the edge, we submit to scrutiny, to inspection, to judgment. (Rushdie, 2002, p. 79)

Rushdie believes that the existence of borders and the categorization of the individuals who live within the confines of such borders are false and non-existent. Rushdie's fiction reflects the ideas expressed during his lectures at Yale University. His characters are transported to cultures that are very different from their own and they become only partially separated from their original culture. This means that every physical body that crosses a border also transports a culture that can reshape the space where that person decides to settle. Thus, fragments of the

original culture are grafted into the new landscape, leading to the creation of hybrids through juxtaposition. Rushdie's characters are shaped by the migration experience, both physically and mentally; as a result, in turn, they are able to transform the new space they inhabit in unexpected ways.

As a consequence, because Rushdie's stories subvert the prevailing colonial rhetoric that views East and West as completely separate things, *East, West* becomes a unique blend of magical realism and satire. Rather than setting the two concepts in opposition, Rushdie integrates East and West through the interconnectedness and intertextuality of the short stories included in the collection, thus complicating the essence of the East/West binary.

In *The Question of the Other: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism* Wendy Faris notes that authors can defy rationality through magical realism as it creates two opposing systems, one represented by the real and the other by the fantastic. The key elements of this genre, as proposed by Faris, are characterized by the inclusion into reality of an 'irreducible element' that cannot be interpreted according to the established laws of the universe "as they have been formulated by modern, postenlightenment empiricism", i.e. "magical realism is a combination of realism and the fantastic in which the former predominates." (Faris, 2002, p. 102)

2. Magical realism as a tool for subverting spatial and temporal norms

Writers such as Rushdie who employ magic realist devices in their works tend to present time in a non-linear way. Magical realism challenges the nature of reality by fusing fact and fiction through the incorporation of magical events in realistic settings in order to make them justifiable. Magical realism is concerned with questions of

blending, hybridization, and change, as the traditional chronological time and space are subverted.

Rather than sticking to a single style throughout the *East, West* collection, Rushdie plays with the conventions of magical realism, using them in inconsistent ways. Not all his stories include elements of magical realism, and the collection aligns with Rushdie's idea of what should constitute the substance of a text, namely the idea that the stories should not adhere to traditional norms and should be written in different styles and tones, thereby preventing his work from conforming to the conventions of a single genre. The premise that there is more to the relationship between East and West than just an opposing binary is supported by the artistic richness of his stories which reflect the nuances of the relationship between the Orient and the Occident.

Rushdie usually uses spaces in his short stories to map the human condition. The fact that he deconstructs linear time either through fusing past, present, and future or by exposing historical events to multiple temporal interpretations cannot but change the way that space is constructed as well. Space is not seen "as an abstraction from above, but as a lived negotiation, where through one's own lived body, one interacts with space, lives space, experiences space to construct that space." (Liang, 2020, p. 118) This means that each space is created according to each individual; since many of Rushdie's characters are migrants or alienated individuals, the space they create becomes the space of the *other*, a space that spreads out somewhere outside the established social norms. There is no frontier that can ever completely separate the space of *otherness* and that of entrenched norms; as a result, there is always negotiation and hybridization that result from these intersections. Therefore, landscapes resulting from these negotiations are not fixed and are configured by the migrants' representations of that space.

According to Vivian (2014, p. 3), “One of the ways that this collective fragmentation manifests itself is through a writer’s treatment of time.” The short stories included in *East, West* illustrate the idea of reconstructing time and space as an attempt to recover what the characters have lost. Rushdie’s narratives use temporal space as a device to investigate and convey meaning to postcolonial identities. Rushdie demonstrates that time is all-pervasive and multidimensional and that it can either inflate or compress to the point where both national and personal memories of the individuals become amalgamated.

Rushdie’s short stories reveal a series of very intricate interlinks between time and space based on how social and political relations are produced. His characters struggle with the dislocation and rootlessness that they experience in a strange new space, at the same time rebelling against this repressive space and attempting to alter it to create something that would benefit their own needs and purposes.

The space becomes discontinuous and fragmented, leading to a fragmentation of the individual as well. Rushdie, as a migrant himself, seems to identify with this idea, seeking to find meaning in displacement and the sense of loss; thus, he attempts to push out the boundaries of his narratives as much as he can. On the other hand, while time is perceived as something linear and homogeneous by the literary discourses that are substantiated by the Eurocentric rationale, it becomes reversible and atemporal in the literature produced by the colonized nations. De Riso explains the existence of this completely different model of the temporal axis through historical supposition; according to him, the population of Southeast Asia, in general, and India, in particular, has become aware of the “abstract time produced by the clock” only recently. In pre-colonial India, “measurable time

played a negligible role for the majority of the population” (De Riso, 2017, p. 48) as there were thirteen calendrical systems present on the Indian subcontinent at the time of the British conquest. This multitude of systems obviously led to overlapping and discontinuations, thus making it possible for writers such as Rushdie to devise stories that explore alternative times.

3. The function of non-linear time and spatial deconstruction in *The Prophet’s Hair* and *At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers*

When examining Rushdie’s short stories, one can easily observe that the author employs the literary device of magical realism in many of them, but in very different ways. This paper is further going to analyse *The Prophet’s Hair* and *At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers*, two narrations that employ magical realism in a dissimilar manner; while the first story is set in an exotic East, the other is set in a dystopian world located in the West.

The Prophet’s Hair, one of the stories included in the *East* section of the book, is a good example of a time continuum lacking any linear sense of progression. There are almost endless layers of narration in *The Prophet’s Hair*: there is an original narrator who tells the story to the readers, then there is Huma who also tells Sí n a story, while Sí n becomes the bogeyman from Huma’s childhood or the Thief of Thieves. There is also a stratified story at the end of the narrative: Hashim tells a secret to his son Atta. Then Atta tells it to the rest of the family, after which he dies.

The time of the story is ambiguous as Rushdie sets the action during winter, “early in the year 19—”. The space is more clearly defined: the ill-famed part of the city of Srinagar, where “the houses of wood and corrugated iron seemed perpetually on the verge of losing their balance.” (Rushdie, 1996, p. 31) Atta, an apparently well-off

young man, is robbed and almost beaten to death in a dark alley; his body is carried to a lake, where he is taken across the water to the embankment of a canal where he is left to his fate. He is found by a flower vendor and taken to his house where his mother and sister are waiting for him to return. Atta falls into a coma and the city's best doctors prove unable to find a cure for him. To complicate the story even more, the next night, Huma, Atta's sister, goes to the same infamous part of the city to hire a thief. The strangeness of the situation is intensified by the fact that Huma, although of exceptional beauty, is bruised all over her arm and forehead. After being taken to a "gloom-wrapped house" by an old woman, Huma is taken to what appears to be the den of the leader of the thieves. Here, she has to provide details of what she expects them to do as well as a financial settlement regarding the compensation offered for their efforts.

The story that Huma tells the thief does not cast too much light on what had actually happened. The reader finds out that her wealthy father, the moneylender Hashim, found a "small vial floating between the boat and his private quay" and, after picking the silver cylinder out of the water, he found a "silver pendant bearing a single strand of human hair." (Rushdie, 1996, p. 35) Hashim immediately knows that he is in possession of the relic of the Prophet Muhammad, which had been stolen from its shrine some time ago. Congratulating himself on this strike of luck, Hashim does not proceed to perform his civic duty and return the silver vial to the shrine but, suffering from a collector's mania, decides to keep it for himself.

From this moment on, havoc is unleashed upon the moneylender's household and gradually leads to the current situation where his children are forced to find a thief who could steal the relic and return it to its proper worshipping place.

Because he cannot bear the burden of this secret by himself, Hashim decides to confess to his only son, Atta, who swears to secrecy, does not share his father's vision though. Later that day, the servant finds Hashim sitting in the same place and horribly swollen:

His eyes bulged even more than they always had, they were red-rimmed, and his knuckles were white.

He seemed to be on the point of bursting! As though, under the influence of the misappropriated relic, he had filled up with some spectral fluid which might at any moment ooze uncontrollably from his every bodily opening.

He had to be helped to the table, and then the explosion did indeed take place. (Rushdie, 1996, p. 37)

Hashim's body does not literally explode, but instead, he starts to cascade in an unstoppable stream of "awful truths" that lead to the demolition of the fragile construction of his family's life. He turns upon his wife and children and even reveals the existence of a mistress and his disgust at his son's lack of academic ability and at his daughter's lasciviousness as she refused to cover her face whenever she went out.

From this moment on, Hashim becomes overly religious, praying five times a day and forcing his family to do the same. He sets all the family's books on fire, except for the Qur'an, and orders his family to read this book for at least two hours daily. Hashim's fits of rage extend to the members of his family as he begins to violently hit his wife and son. On refusing to wear a hijab, Huma becomes disowned by her father and is asked to leave the paternal home.

In a desperate attempt to put an end to his family ordeal, Atta steals the vial from his father's office and decides to return it to the mosque but loses it somewhere on the way. Once again, Hashim finds the relic floating

along the quay and once again he picks it up and brings it back home. It is Huma who comes up with a plan that could save them all: if the relic had been previously stolen from the mosque, then it could also be stolen from their house. And this is the reason why Atta went to the thieves' quarter in the first place, and then Huma, after her brother was beaten up.

At this point, the story takes a leap, and the action returns to the present; together with Shiekh Sín, the 'Thief of Thieves', Huma concocts a plan that is supposed to bring peace to their home once more. The Shiekh was to strike that night which granted the thief all the auspices of a successful endeavour: the sky is cloudy, and the lake capped in mist. While Atta is lying in a deep coma, Huma is waiting impatiently for the thief to perform his part of the plan. Atta wakes up from his coma for a brief moment at the exact time the thief is about to pick up the vial and starts to scream that there is a thief in the house, thus waking Hashim up, after which he drops dead. In the ensuing confusion, the moneylender does not see the thief in his room and hurries outside; as he sees a shadow approaching, he thrusts the sword he was carrying into the chest of the person; upon turning the lights on, he realizes that he had stabbed his daughter to death, and, overwhelmed by his deed, he puts an end to his life. The wife, the sole survivor of the carnage in the moneylender's house, is committed to an asylum for the insane as she is driven mad by everything that happened. In the meantime, Shiekh Sín had managed to successfully remove the relic but realizing that everything had gone wrong, he returned home carrying the silver vial with him. He is killed during a police raid and the relic is thus recovered and taken to the mosque.

Both space and time are fragmented by Rushdie in this short story. The narration juxtaposes two very different spaces: the insalubrious alleys of the ill-famed

part of the city and the beautiful large prosperous household on the shores of the lake. The ink darkness of the gutters in one part of the city clashes with the brightness of the space that the family inhabits.

The narration jumps back and forth, mixing present and past and leading the reader through a labyrinth of occurrences that end up shaping not only the future of the family but also their perpetuation and preservation, in other words, their own existence. The story starts with Hashim's children trying to hire a thief, it returns six days to the past to tell how their father came into the possession of the Prophet's hair and goes back even further to reveal how the theft of the holy relic had happened; then, it vaults into the present to conclude the story, only to reverse once more to explain, in a last act, what had come of the Shiekh's family. And this occurrence, maybe more than all the others, blows out an effluvium of magical realism. Although the action seems grounded in realism throughout the entire story, the explanation at the end is mind-blowing: the four sons of the dead Shiekh who were physically crippled and lived on the streets as beggars were miraculously cured and restored to health on the morning of their father's death, as a result of the healing powers of the Prophet's hair. Subsequently, they become very upset because they can no longer earn their living: "They were, all four of them, very properly furious, because the miracle had reduced their earning powers by 75 per cent, at the most conservative estimate; so they were ruined men." (Rushdie, 1996, p. 46)

Going beyond Faris's description of magical realism as the fusion of fantasy and reality, Rushdie incorporates magical realism into the stories of *East, West* in a number of ways that help him push the style even further toward absurdity. Reality is combined with fantastical elements and bizarre circumstances in *At the Auction of the Ruby*

Slippers, a story that is part of the *West* section of the book. It is almost immediately clear to the readers that the story represents an exaggerated departure from reality as Rushdie's dystopian tale delves into questions of identity and homelessness, while also examining the force and the menaces of fiction. The shift from reality into fiction becomes instantly apparent when the narrator starts describing the celebrities present at the sale. The consumer-driven ethos of Western culture is condemned in this story despite its futuristic setting and its plenty of fanciful, unrealistic features.

In this dystopian world, people live in confined spaces and rarely venture out into the world. The extraordinary event that determines people to get out of their bunkers is represented by the auction of some magic slippers. The first-person narrator describes a bizarre world, where most people suffer from diseases and SWAT teams are ready to intervene in case "the excitement leads to unexpected births or deaths." (Rushdie, 1996, p. 63)

There are all sorts of security systems that the programmers have developed in order to keep the magic slippers from being stolen by the memorabilia junkies; in a gesture of extreme veneration, some of them even try to kiss the transparent cage in which the slippers are kept and end up electrocuted. Even more unusual, most of those in the public are drooling so heavily at the sight of the ruby-sequined slippers that a janitor must constantly use a mop to clean the floor.

Rushdie presents the story in such a credible manner that the reader does not question the authenticity of what is being recounted. Although everything that happens is highly implausible, by employing techniques that are specific to magical realism, the author succeeds in conferring an aura of veracity to the strange occurrences in the story.

The public is vibrant; individuals who vary from quantum physicians and imaginary beings from times past to homeless tramps, smugglers, political refugees, aliens, and philosophers are all congregating towards the shrine where the slippers are on display. Nonetheless, the tramps are removed at some point by the SWAT teams who redistribute them somewhere outside the city limits, “a smoking no-man’s-land surrounded by giant advertising hoarding into which we venture no more” where wild dogs will feast on them (Rushdie, 1996, p. 65).

The space where the auction takes place seems to be enormous; it is not clearly described, but Rushdie suggests that it is very large since it allows for huge crowds to gather and admire the ruby slippers. The space is separated somehow into more sections since there seems to be a room where the slippers are exhibited and another one where a party is in full swing. The Grand Saleroom of the Auctioneers is a magical place where anything can be sold and bought, from husbands and wives to the Taj Mahal, the Alps or the Statue of Liberty, and even demons or human souls.

This Big-Brother-*esque* type of society is massively disciplined by “freelance commandos bearing battlefield nuclear weapons” (Rushdie, 1996, p. 69) and guards who only need to crack their bullwhips to make the crowds control themselves.

Rushdie gives the readers a hallucinatory explanation for why the ruby slippers are revered: they have the power to protect people from witches and sorcerers but, above all, they are able to reverse everyone to “a lost state of normalcy in which we have almost ceased to believe.” (Rushdie, 1996, p. 66)

The ruby slippers are allegedly capable of controlling both time and space since they are considered to be a kind of space machine which, according to Rushdie, is the equivalent of a time machine. Orphan

children are present at the auction as well in the hope that they will be able to travel back in time to reunite with their beloved dead parents.

The universe that Rushdie creates in this narrative is made up of a chaotic mix of times and spaces, where “Heroes step down off cinema screens and marry members of the audience.” (Rushdie, 1996, p. 68) Such an incredible situation can be elucidated quite easily; it is the “moral decay of our post-millennial culture” that has allowed a “permeation of the real world by the fictional.” (Rushdie, 1996, p. 68) But because the inhabitants of this dystopian world must deal with the reality of their resources diminishing by the day, they accept this “unrestricted migration of imaginary beings” (Rushdie, 1996, p. 68) into reality as a form of escapism.

The time continuum is frequently disrupted by digressions; the author jumps back and forth, from the present-day public events at the auction of the slippers to past personal occurrences. The flux of the chronological order of events is interrupted by a series of side stories that apparently are not related in any way to the main strand of the plot. There is a story about the narrator’s past relationship with his cousin; from this, the narration vaults to the story of a dying astronaut stranded on Mars because of the cancellation of funds dedicated to space programmes, then it bounces back to the present. We are told that the narrator had decided to buy the slippers at all costs to offer them to his cousin in a desperate attempt to win her back. The story is pushed back again as the narrator remembers another auction that he participated in. We are once again brought into the present to witness the denouement of this strange story. As the narrator is desperately bidding for the slippers, he has a moment of epiphany during which he experiences something very similar to what one would call a “wake to reality”. He realizes that it was lust that had pushed him to bid; he is

now detached from the feelings of yearning for his cousin and decides to retire from the auction.

4. Identity and cultural hybridity: *Good Advice Is Rarer than Rubies* and *Chekov and Zulu*

Good Advice Is Rarer than Rubies, included in the *East* section of the book, tells the story of Miss Rehana, a young Indian woman who goes to the British Consulate to get a visa. Due to an arrangement made by her parents when she was nine years old, she found herself betrothed to a much older man. Mustafa Dar, twenty-one years her senior, lives in Bradford, England, and Rehana is supposed to get her visa in order to emigrate to England to be with her future husband, even though she hardly knows him. They have occasional phone conversations and she complains that, even though she has a photo of him, he is a stranger, “Even his voice, I do not recognize it on the phone.” (Rushdie, 1996, p. 18) When she arrives at the Consulate, she is approached by Muhammad Ali, a charlatan who earns his living by offering his advice to ignorant applicants and charging them in exchange for the false promise that he will help them get the passport. He is so taken by Rehana’s beauty that he is willing to help her without any compensation in return. He gives her some advice regarding how she ought to respond to the *sahibs*’ queries. During the interview, Rehana does exactly the opposite of what she had been advised which results in her application being rejected. From the conversation that ensues with Muhammad Ali after she had been turned down, one may assume that Miss Rehana purposefully answered the questions wrong as she did not want to move to a country that Muhammad dubs as “a great nation full of the coldest fish in the world” (Rushdie, 1996, p. 14) where she would feel uprooted and displaced. Instead, she chooses to remain in India where she can pursue her career as an *ayah* and grow as an individual.

The action takes place at the British Consulate in India, which is a hybrid space since it is theoretically located on British territory where the British government still retains control, even though it is in India. England is discussed but never really described, therefore the country continues to be more of an illusive idea than a tangible vision.

Although under British control, the Consulate does not seem British at all when it comes to the habits of the officers in service there. When Miss Rehana wants to know when she will be allowed in, the guard answers in an elusive manner: “Half an hour... Maybe two hours. Who knows. The sahibs are eating their breakfast.” (Rushdie, 1996, p. 12) Apparently, in India, time flows differently than in England; there is no fixed timetable for the appointments, and everything is done according to the whims of the *sahibs*.

The gates, the guard in his khaki uniform and cockaded turban, and the idea that the *sahibs* inside the Consulate had the power to decide the course of someone’s life offer the image of a stern and grim space. In contrast, the space that unfolds outside this faint imitation of England on Indian territory, although dusty, is full of life and colour; the shanty-town is shabby-looking, but the buses are “brightly painted in multicoloured arabesques” and “green and gold letters” (Rushdie, 1996, p. 12) and the people variegated (day labourers, hawkers, people selling medicine).

Before entering the Consulate or in Muhammad Ali’s words “a worse place than any police station” (Rushdie, 1996, p. 14), Rehana sits at the crook’s desk and lets him check her application form. This seems like a ludicrous rehearsal of the real interview with the English *sahibs*; placed outside, on the side of the dusty road, where other charlatans had also installed their workspaces, the whole scene seems surreal. And, to make

it even more bizarre, Rushdie decides to have Rehana eat some chilli-pakorras wrapped in a newspaper.

These two completely different spaces both become juxtaposed and clash as the charlatans in the shanty-town try to imitate the interview of the *sahibs*, while the *sahibs*, although British, have borrowed the habits of the locals and their complete lack of time consciousness. These two hybridized spaces are separated by both visible and invisible borders; the shanty-town is separated from the Consulate by a dusty compound where the “Tuesday women” are impatiently waiting to be admitted to the visa interview. The whole story is constructed so as to suggest that the intersection of the two worlds would lead to displacement and loss of identity. By deliberately supplying the wrong answers to the immigration officials, Miss Rehana becomes the symbol of the independent woman who defies traditional norms, but who also wants to maintain her authenticity and her cultural heritage.

Chekov and Zulu is a story included in the *East, West* section and it takes its title after two characters in the series *Star Trek* (Zulu being a corruption of Sulu). They are both Sikhs who have been working at India House in England, but Zulu has now disappeared, so Chekov arrives from Delhi to Wembley to find out more information. The characters’ connection with *Star Trek* is completely fake as neither of them has ever seen one episode of the series, “The whole thing was just a legend wafting its way from the US and UK to our lovely hill-station of Dehra Dun”, comments Chekov at some point. (Rushdie, 1996, p. 110)

The action is set in 1984, an onerous year in Indian history marked by the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her own Sikh security guards, which led to violent attacks against the Sikhs. Coincidence or not, Zulu has disappeared without a trace since the assassination and many at the headquarters believe that he was somehow involved with the culprits. Chekov remembers the time they spent together in

England and the fact that, after a period when Zulu had embraced modernity and wore his hair cut, he had reverted to tradition. In one of their conversations Chekov calls Zulu's attention to the fact that India was robbed of all its treasures by the colonists but, being diplomats, they "must never draw attention to such facts; but facts, nevertheless, they remain." (Rushdie, 1996, p. 104) Chekov also points out that "With my natural radicalism I should not have been a diplomat. I should have been a terrorist." (Rushdie, 1996, p. 105)

Later in the story, we find out that Zulu was sent on a mission code-named *Operation Star Trek* to infiltrate the Sikh extremist group thought to be responsible for Indira Gandhi's assassination, which is referred to as *the Klingons*. The chronological order of events is mixed up and the narration alternates between past and present; we are told that Zulu is acting undercover in a secret mission, the author introduces a flashback story about a past dinner party that Chekov hosted where the guests discussed mainly business and not politics. But, over brandy, Chekov ventured in making a gloomy remark: "England has always been a breeding ground for our revolutionists . . . Now that England's status has declined, I suppose it is logical that the quality of the revolutionists she breeds has likewise fallen." (Rushdie, 1996, p. 108)

Three months pass and Zulu makes contact with his wife; he telephones and urges her to pass a message to Chekov to *beam* him *up* because the Klingons "may be smelling things." (Rushdie, 1996, p. 111) When Chekov finally recovers Zulu, the latter is excited to have successfully accomplished his mission and he produces a list of names, which he hands to Chekov, after which he announces his resignation.

In the end, Zulu settles in Bombay where he becomes a successful security business owner, while Chekov continues to advance in his career. The shift from realism to magic comes in the final paragraphs of the story

when Chekov ends up dead in a terrorist attack against Rajiv Gandhi, whom he was accompanying during an election campaign. The narration ends with a description of the Starship *Enterprise* where Chekov finds himself beamed up. The *Enterprise* is eventually destroyed by a Klingon warship.

The magical realism in this story resides in the fact that Chekov and Zulu are not in any way related to the characters in the series; unlike the movie characters who are secondary to the plot, Rushdie's are centrally important characters. They are both of Indian origin although they need to reside in England because of their work. There is a very unlikely and farfetched feeling about the whole story, as the main characters are Indian spies working in England and all their nicknames and operations bear secret codenames related to the *Star Trek* series. *Chekov and Zulu* depicts how globalization can lead to the manipulation and appropriation of cultural norms rather than the consolidation of cultures into a single capitalist society.

5. Conclusion

Salman Rushdie uses magical realism in the short stories included in the *East, West* collection as an essential literary device for postcolonial critique. His short stories challenge dominant colonial narratives, reconfiguring the conceptualization of time and space. Magical realism allows Rushdie to collapse the borders between reality and fantasy, thus configuring a narrative space that intertwines multiple histories and favours the simultaneous coexistence of various perspectives and truths. The linear, rationalist conceptions of time and space specific to colonial discourse are undermined, resulting in the disjointed and complex experiences that characterize postcolonial individuals and highlighting the fragmented and layered postcolonial identity. Through the non-linear and fluid representation of time and space, Rushdie constructs narratives where time is

cyclical and interwoven with the magical, thus allowing for a multitude of perspectives and histories to emerge.

In *East, West* Rushdie succeeds in embedding the magical realist elements in the fabric of the everyday life of his characters. This narrative technique allows the author to challenge Western rationalism and its claim to universal truth, proposing instead that reality is subjective, culturally contingent, and open to reinterpretation. The short stories examined in this paper reclaim space and time as both dynamic and contested territories that reflect the realities of a complex and oftentimes paradoxical postcolonial existence. Rushdie's collection of short stories redefines space and time in ways that withstand colonial domination and embrace the plurality of the postcolonial experience.

Rushdie's use of time juxtaposition and discontinuity as a magical realist technique enriches the narrative complexity and depth of his work. His blending of reality and fantastical elements challenges the conventional boundaries of both time and space, allowing readers to explore a series of topics related to displacement and hybridity in an interconnected tapestry of events. Ultimately, Rushdie's innovative storytelling invites a deeper contemplation of the multifaceted nature of reality, making his contributions to contemporary literature both significant and enduring.

References:

Brigg, P. (1994). Salman Rushdie's Novels: The Disorder in the Fantastic Order. In M.D. Fletcher (ed.), *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 173-185

De Riso, G. (2017). Untimely Transitions: Cross-talk and Spatio-temporal Interferences in Salman Rushdie's Early Novels. In *Transnational Subjects: Cultural and Literary Encounters*, pp. 46-59.

Faris, W. (2002). The Question of the Other: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism. Janus Head, pp. 101-119, web. Available at: janushead.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/faris.pdf [Accessed July 22nd, 2024].

Fletcher, M.D. (ed.). (1994). *Reading Rushdie. Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*. Series: Cross/Cultures, Vol. 16, Brill.

Hidalgo Varo, C. (2021). Hybridization, Third Space and Language in Salman Rushdie's Short Story *The Courter*. In *Gaudeamus- Journal of the Association of Young Researchers of Anglophone Studies*, 1 (Summer 2021), pp. 41-58.

Liang, Y. (2020). The Spatial Imperative: The Need to Read Space in Salman Rushdie's Novels. In *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, 43(3), pp. 117-129.

Quayson, A. (2020). Space, Time and Magical Realism. In Warnes, C., Sasser, C.A. (Eds.). *Magical Realism and Literature. Cambridge Critical Concepts*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 80-98.

Rushdie, S. (1996). *East, West*. New York: Vintage Ebooks.

Rushdie, S. (2002). *Step Across This Line. The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. Yale University, February 25 and 26, 2022. Available at: https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/resources/documents/a-to-z/r/rushdie_2002.pdf [Accessed June 15th, 2024].

Sofo, G. (2016). The politics of displacement in Indian English Fiction: Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King*, Rushdie's *East, West* and Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*. In *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 38(2), pp. 29-37.

Suhasini, V. (2008). Re-imagined Chaos and Order in Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. In *Ordre et Chaos*, 12, *Epure*, pp. 253-266.

Vivian, A.D., (2014). Temporal Spaces in García Márquez's, Salih's, and Rushdie's Novels. In *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 16 (3), pp. 2-9.
<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2101>

~~~~~  
**Corina MITRULESCU** is an Assistant Professor of English at the Land Forces Academy of Sibiu, Faculty of Military Sciences, the Department of Applied Social Sciences and Humanities. She holds a doctoral degree in Philology from the University of Alba Iulia, a master's degree in European studies, and a B.A. in History and English Literature. She is a member of *Speculum* Center for the Study of the Imaginary, at the University of Alba Iulia, Romania, and of the *Romanian Associations for American Studies*. She is a Fulbright alumna, and her research interests include modernist literature, gender studies, historical fiction, military discourse and terminology, and media literacy. She authored three books: *Politics and Poetics of Gender in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Case Studies in Romania and the UK* (Berlin: Peter Lang Publishing House, 2022), *Using Story-Telling to Teach English* (Craiova: SITECH, 2022), *American History* (Sibiu: Editura Academiei Forțelor Terestre, 2024) and two workbooks for students: *An Outline of American History: People and Events, Past and Present* (Sibiu: Editura Academiei Forțelor Terestre, 2023), *An Introduction to American Culture* (Sibiu: Editura Academiei Forțelor Terestre, 2023). Her work also includes translations from English into Romanian: *Păcatele familiei Borgia* (Sarah Bower, *Sins of the House of Borgia*, Bucharest: Nemira, 2013) and *Pretorianul* (Simon Scarrow, *Praetorian*, Bucharest: Nemira, 2014).