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"The Mind-Forged Manacles": Literary Encounters with Culture, Identity, and Subjectivity in an Age of Globalization

"Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better."
Richard Hooker *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Politie* (in the 1590s)

"It is not necessary to understand things in order to argue about them."
Beaumarchais

"Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to stay in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"
Lewis Carroll *Through the Looking Glass* (1871)

Globalization is being hailed as an end of politics and an escape from the limitations of national states, an inevitable and relatively swift way to higher living standards and greater personal freedom, a way of fulfilling, in the era of post-modernity, the program and promises of modernity. It is also being fiercely attacked as a new menace to humanity, more insidious than the expansion of fascist and communist totalitarian rule and possibly equally, if not more, pernicious. During the last decade or two, the purported positive and negative features of globalization, as well as whether it belongs to the category of historical inevitability or that of self-fulfilling prophecies, have been argued hotly world-wide in an immense number of scholarly and popular publications, debated by all the mass media, and violently fought over in the streets of Seattle, Quebec, and other cities opening their conference halls and hotel spaces to meetings on free trade and other components of globalization, conclaves financed by governments and banks and organized for and by the elected and self-selected political and economic power players of our time. Students of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies are intensely studying phenomena of national identity, the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of cultural identity, as well as questions about the location and

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dislocation of the self and the creation of new, more open spaces both for the individual and society at large.

Definitions of globalization are multifaceted and the debate is frequently a shouting match of people who are wilfully hard of hearing. In his trenchant book *What Is Globalisation?*, the German scholar Ulrich Beck—whose publications on globalization and related matters fill at least one book shelf of their own—is attempting to see the various contentious points of view in a coherent way. He offers the following eight point summary of the features characterizing this phenomenon:

1. The geographical expansion and ever greater density of international trade, as well as the global networking of finance markets and the growing power of transnational corporations.
2. The ongoing revolution of information and communications technology.
3. The universal *demands* for human rights—the (lip service paid to the) principle of democracy.
4. The stream of images from the global cultural industries.
5. The emergence of a postnational, polycentric world politics, in which trans national actors (corporations, non-governmental organizations, United Nations) are growing in power and number alongside governments.
6. The question of world poverty.
7. The issue of global environmental destruction.
8. Transcultural conflict in one and the same place. (11)

In developing his inquiry, Beck looks critically at the provable, often negative, consequences of these trends and their apology by neoliberal ideologues; he also pursues with lucid optimism signs of potential positive opportunities offered by a true globalism, i.e. genuine integration of the world into a new cosmopolitan community offering equal rights and duties to all parts of mankind. He concludes his study with a short chapter "Decline a la Carte: The Brazilialization of Europe." Its opening sentence—"If this New Deal does not happen, if the fatalistic attitudes of postmodernism and neoliberal globalism become a self-fulfilling prophecy, then doom really will be on the agenda." (161)—is followed by a brief dystopian scenario of this brave world of tomorrow, with its distinctive blending of features taken from Jevgenij Ivanovich Zamjatin's *We* (Russian My, 1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's (i.e. Eric Arthur Blair's) *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949).

From an economic and financial point of view there is a strongly perceived tendency that the tiny minority of truly rich people, concentrated in

or migrating among a handful of privileged places, is becoming both in relative and in absolute terms ever more powerful and wealthy (justifying P.B. Shelley's famous saying that "The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer" *[The Defence of Poetry,* written in 1821, published in 1840]). Globalization is making possible things which remained hidden (or minimized) during the stage of the welfare taming of capitalism. Jobs are exported to parts of the world where lesser labour costs, workplace safeguards, concerns for the environment and tax obligations enable transnational corporations to achieve a division of labour in different parts of the world. One of the many editorials in favour of globalization, published by the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, proudly states:

> A banker in Manhattan can come home from [an Italian] lunch, type a few strokes on his computer and send hundreds of millions of dollars fleeing out of the Mexican peso and into Swiss bonds. A pair of Nike runners can be designed in Oregon, manufactured in Shanghai with components from six other countries and sold in a mall in Düsseldorf, all within a few weeks. A teenager in Bangkok can eat lunch at McDonald's over a copy *of Sports Illustrated,* take in *Gladiators* the movies, then go home to battle villains on a Play-Station 2 game that was designed in Tokyo and assembled in Jakarta. *(The Globe and Mail,* Thursday, April 12, 2001, A12)

This picture catches quite well some of the opportunities offered by technology and freer trade (everybody knows that trade is not fully free, nor a level playing field), but it says little about the use of profits or the decision making process, about the sweatshops in Bangladesh or maquiladoras in Mexico, child labour in parts of South-East Asia, the full consequences of Shell's operations in Nigeria's Ogoni land and Talisman's investments in Sudan. Even in the most developed countries of the World, the G7 or G8, there are increasing problems of internal social integration of the rich and the poor, the countrymen of similar ancestry, culture, and language, and of the relative newcomers, let us say the Turks, Albanians or South Slavs of second and third generation living and working in Germany or Switzerland. At a time of increasing demands on the public purse for education, health care, old age pensions, and other forms of solidarity, even such rich countries are facing decreasing revenues from a shrinking tax base which is apparently shifting from corporations to individuals.

Among the sceptical analysts of globalization there is also a growing attempt to differentiate between the concepts of genuine globalization and of

Americanization. The suspicion is that in many instances the term globalization (or the French *mondialisation),* which implies mutual influences and interactions, serves as a neutral sounding cover for an Americanization of the world, a further strengthening of US military, financial, economic, cultural, and linguistic dominance, and reshaping of the world according to present and foreseeable future American interests and paradigms. As expressed by Ashcroft *et al.,* "Despite its resolute refusal to perceive itself as 'imperial', and indeed its public stance against the older European doctrines of colonialism up to and after the Second World War, the United States had, in its international policies, eagerly espoused the political domination and economic and cultural control associated with imperialism" (113). Among the more optimistic analysts there is, of course, the belief that the influence of American culture and the American way of life are less an invasion and more a liberation eagerly desired by many people around the globe (see, for instance, Fluck).

The national state is also seen to be caught between the demands of world economy and the desire to preserve (often to enhance) the local individuality. The shocks of globalization are not only economic, of course, but also ecological, informational, cultural, and linguistic. In matters of language, the present second wave of modernity (which is Jürgen Habermas's designation for globalization) has not only a dominant language (English and not Chinese as predicted a century and a half ago by Jules Verne) but the diminished influence and vitality of other great languages, as well as the complete attrition and disappearance of *hundreds* of others (as discussed in recent books, one by David Crystal and one by Daniel Nettie and Suzanne Romaine).[1] Languages, as we know, encode human identities and interpret the world; therefore, their disappearance is similar to an ecological disaster which eliminates whole biological species. In this respect, it is the huge masses of monolingual English, Spanish, and Chinese speakers that are both an anomaly in human history and a clear danger to minority languages today.

Speaking of cultural globalization, one usually thinks first of the dominant spread of Western, most particularly American popular culture in all its forms: from music and movies, to videos, computer games, and literary best-sellers. There is much concern about this phenomenon by representatives of various religions, but also by states such as France and Canada, as well as—usually unsuccessful—financial and other measures which are taken

1 For a particular form of resistance of native languages through the refusal by customers of consumer products with improper labels see Fonda.

against such imports. Stuart Hall considers that "This new kind of globalization is not English, it is American. In cultural terms, the new kind of globalization has to do with a new form of global mass culture" (1991a. 27). It is perhaps less evident that cultural globalization does not have to be a one-way street. Regional musical cultures, for instance, have made themselves heard and accepted in many parts of the world. (To indicate only two examples: a few weeks ago [in 2001], the coveted prize of Eurovision for the year's best song went to Estonia; in February 1997 *Aïsha*, the latest hit by the exiled Algerian 'rat king' Khaled was selected as the best song of the year in France and was for a while at the top of the hit-parade in Egypt, Israel, and conservative Saudi Arabia—it was performed locally in Hebrew, Turkish, and Hindi. Incidentally, it is a song in praise of an Arab girl.) Similar claims could be substantiated for cinema, television, literature, painting and sculpture, and, of course, cuisine, fashions, architecture, even medicine. (We are not only exchanging viruses and microbes faster than ever, but also medical insights. Chinese traditional medicine is taken more seriously in the West, while "the girls who do not get born" are one of the consequences of the simultaneous presence, in certain countries, of modern medical technology and traditional gender attitudes.) This interaction raises questions about the nature and survival of social and cultural identity, which explains why "fjhe most active area of debate in globalization studies therefore appears to be the style and nature of the process by which external and internal forces interact to produce, reproduce and disseminate global culture within local communities" (As hero ft *et al.* 114).

Globalization calls into question the basic premises of traditional nationalism on all levels of social and human behaviour. As defined by Beck,"[i]nternal homogeneity is essentially a creation of state control. All kinds of social practices—production, culture, language, labour market, capital, education—are stamped and standardized, defined and rationalized, by the nation state, but [sic] at least are labelled as national economy, national language, literature, public life, history, and so on" (23). Contemporary economic and human migrations are opening up transnational social spaces and at least the embryo of a transnational civic society. In many parts of the world, in divergent contexts of colonial rule and post-colonial development, migrations have been intensified by wars, economic need, and political preference, creating various degrees of such transnational spaces: in London, Toronto, Vancouver, New York, and Miami, but also in Paris, Berlin, and

Moscow, as well as in whole regions like the Middle East or parts of the USA and Mexico.

The "living together," at close proximity, means that instead of a simple "McDonaldization" of the planet, of cultural homogenization and convergence, there is also a spread of a local, contradictory globalization which creates pluralities and options. Scholars working within the tradition of cultural theory, such as Robertson, Appadurai, Albrow, Featherstone, Lash, Urry, and many others strongly develop this dialectical perspective. Instead of closed societies—with the possible exception of a few small communities, something never fully realized in the past either—the new emergent society, with paradoxes and ambivalence, also involves the process of localization. But this new importance of the local dialectic also means a permanent awareness of alterity and of alternatives. People can now be conscious of alternative life styles and values, and may have at least limited opportunity to adopt change. Instead of insisting exclusively on the inner psychological fragmentation of the human subject, or its complete postmodern negation, which create social situations in which "t]hings fall apart; the centre cannot hold" (W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," written in 1919 and first published in 1921), we are encouraged to look at the positive possibility, already realized by many persons in all walks of life—and not just by comparatists, students of culture, and various professional nomads—to become richer, more individual in our choices, and able to master a variety of codes and roles.

Early in the paper I alluded to science fiction. Needless to say, afficionados of this kind of writing and of derivative comics and movies have read and seen, for at least a century or so, detailed chilling speculative depictions and warnings about a broad spectrum of global, galactic, even cosmic technocratic trading and military, more or less totalitarian empires. While prophecies of gloom and doom seem to dominate the field,[2] it is possible to look for brighter predictions. Professor Steven Weinberg of the University of Texas at Austin, a winner of the Nobel Prize in physics in 1979 and the USA National Medal of Science in 1991, otherwise a self-confessed avid reader of science fiction, summarized at the beginning of the new millennium for *The Atlantic Monthly* present trends in the depiction of the near and mid-term future into the following scenarios of possible worlds: The free-market Utopia, the best-and-brightest Utopia, the religious Utopia, the green Utopia, the technological Utopia, and the civilized egalitarian capitalist

2 For a nightmarish vision of 2025 concocted by Canadian army planners see Pugliese.

utopia. Although Weinberg chose to look for the positive, all his scenarios are based on principles of globalization and include warnings about its possible misuses.

Among the countless literary works of diverse merit attempting to predict the future, I should like to draw your attention to only one, Jules Verne's ill- fated *Paris au XXe siècle* (Paris in the 20th century). The short novel was written in 1863, at a time when Verne was already working with Hetzel, who would become his life-long friend and promoter of his "Extraordinary voyages to known and unknown worlds." The astute publisher most energetically refused this manuscript considering it to be weak in its narrative and ideologically quite unacceptable (a draft of a letter to that effect has been preserved and published). The manuscript, in Verne's handwriting, was presumed to have been lost, but it was discovered finally in the family's safe, which had been thought to be empty and without a key, and published in 1994, over 130 years after it has been penned.

Verne places his protagonist, the student Michel, in the Paris of 1960, which is a sprawling, radiant city of electricity, cars with internal combustion, fast silent trains running underground and on high over-the-ground structures, able to communicate instantaneously, by a kind of fax electronic message system, with all parts of the world. This new world is dominated by the Chinese language, French is taught in school only to the extent that everybody knows how to write but nobody feels the desire to read. Schools and medicine are privatized, and vast international and national monopolistic corporations act hand in hand with governments which have become their allies, protectors, and often servants. Traditional culture and the arts are disdained, there is a market for mass entertainment, but the main interest of society is in mathematics, technology, and efficiency. Money reigns supreme and most people are serving machines, requiring repetitive, specialized activities, with a particular proliferation of some kind of computer, which demands long hours of mind-numbing inputs and outputs of data. Michel, who stubbornly wants to be a poet, fails miserably in this hostile environment; he dies of despair, hunger, and cold on the slopes of the famous Père-Lachaise cemetery, surrounded by the graves of once venerated and now forgotten artistic and literary greats of France.

This novel confirms, to an amazing extent, Verne's talent to extrapolate from available technological and scientific discoveries future, more perfected developments and usages: all the gadgets, machines, and means of transportation and communication available in this imaginary Paris of the year

1960 can be directly traced back to procedures and principles available in the author's time. The novel shows also, in spite of Hetzel's negative verdict, Verne's visionary powers and his ability to intertwine humour with serious considerations, as well as to transform lengthy enumerations into poetic passages. The ending of the novel, considered by Hetzel to be too bleak and anticlimactic, is in reality a quite deft parody of one of Balzac's most famous scenes. It concerns the recurrent character in the *Comédie humaine* (Human Comedy), Eugene de Rastignac; on the last pages of the novel *Pere Goriot* (Father Goriot, 1834), he proudly looks down on Paris from the same cemetery and decides to conquer the rich city by whatever means are necessary: "A nous deux maintenant!" ("It is now up to the two of us!"—i.e., Paris and himself). What the novel, ignored for over a century, puts most seriously into doubt is the usual critical assumption that the young author had been an unconditional believer in bourgeois capitalist progress, the global program of modernity, and has become more circumspect, even sceptical about the possible uses and misuses of science and technology only in his late novels, written during the years of his personal discontent and decline.

The reclusive and elusive American novelist and short-story writer Thomas Pynchon has been considered from the beginning as a proto-typical post-modernist. Critics have, therefore, mainly analysed his works for formal, non-mimetic experiments and post-modern refusals of "master narratives." Nevertheless, leading recent encyclopaedias of literature (such as the fourth edition of *Benef's Reader's Encyclopedia*, 1996 and *Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of literature*, 1995) characterize his writing respectively as "combining] black humor and fantasy to depict human alienation in the chaos of modern society," and as a "depict[ion] of a world in which humanity is locked in a losing battle with the inanimate powers of technology, a world of human isolation that is both unbearable and impossible to understand."

In detailed studies, literary critics are also increasingly inclined to find in Pynchon's works predictions and echoes, albeit fragmented, of the post-modern, globalized world, as well as traces of his personal experiences as engineer in Seattle, working within the American and international military-industrial complex. In any case, his novels, variously categorized as encyclopaedic and satirical, contain floods of factual detail: physics and electronics, history, cybernetics, information theory, mathematics, and so on, embedded in narratives which render irrelevant distinctions between true and false. In his second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Pynchon describes the strange quest of Oedipa Mass to discover the mysterious, sinister, and

conspiratorial Tristero System of communications — suggestive of the present world wide web—in a futuristic world of closed societies. In his acknowledged master piece, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), which won the National Book Award for fiction in 1974, Pynchon again indulges in the idea of conspiracies, with hundreds of pages filled with descriptions of paranoid fantasies, grotesque imagery, and esoteric mathematical language.

The apparent topic of the sprawling narrative is the secret development and deployment of a rocket by the Nazis near the end of World War II and the bizarre adventures of the American Lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop who works in London for Allied intelligence. The novel's time period, approximately from September 1944 to early autumn 1945, is recounted with numerous analepses of various dates and a prolepsis to Nixon's USA of approximately 1970. Both time and space are subjected in the novel to chance and contingency. Agents of "the Firm," a clandestine military organization and an international cartel of sorts, are investigating an apparent connection between Slothrop's erections and the targeting of incoming V-2 rockets. As the multiple threads of the narrative develop, intertwine, and separate, the impression is created that both Slothrop's personal life, beginning with his subjection as a child to experiments conducted by a Harvard professor who is now a Nazi rocket scientist, and the activities and interests of hidden powers connect the two shores of the Atlantic and the ostensibly warring parties in some deeper confluence of character and solidarity.

Slothrop's quest for the truth about the mysterious Rocket 00000 and the powerful forces fostering or inhibiting his search, leads him on a nightmarish journey of either historic discovery or profound paranoia—depending on his own and the reader's interpretation of the "text." The psychological interpretation uses the metaphor of paranoia to link all disparate elements of the narrative into a grand, unidentifiable though existing pattern or conspiracy. *Gravity's Rainbow* allows at the same time for an alternative vision of history, which raises ontological doubts; it stresses plurality and offers multiple histories representing cultural narratives which are rejected by official History. Thus Pynchon provides a voice to the Hereros, Kirghiz, children, homosexuals, etc. including the Otukunguruas who, devastated by their encounter with European civilization, choose cultural suicide as their response to the determinism seemingly inherent in history. For Western culture is shown in its social and historical development to advance inexorably to the V2 rocket, that is the embodiment of technological advancement and random death. (Most ironically, *Gravity's Rainbow* begins with a life-confirming motto

by Werner von Braun, the main engineer of the German and later American rocket programs.)

"Forget frontiers now. Forget subdivisions. There aren't any" (342). The novel ranges in space from London to Kazakstan geographically, and historically from 17th century Mauritius through 20th century south west Africa to Europe in 1945, and particularly to the "Zone" of the recently capitulated German Third Reich. "In its geographic and cultural formlessness, the 'Zone' is the postmodern space par excellence" (Morris, 236): morally and ethically there are no surviving imperatives, and the nationalities are on the move—Volksdeutsch, Poles, Estonians, Sudetens and east Prussians, Czechs and Slovaks, Croats and Serbs, Tosks and Ghegs, Macedonians, Magyars, Vlachs, Circassians, Spaniels, Bulgars, Gypsies... (Gravity's Rainbow, 640) "There are no zones,... no zones but the Zone" (388).

Pynchon's novel partakes of the narrative conventions associated with historical reportage, romance, comic books, film, scientific theorems, jokes, songs, drug induced dreams, etc. to achieve the fullest representation of the chaotic and multifaceted plot. The few characters who do posses individuality, are represented with unconfirmed social and existential status, perpetually changing, fragmented, multiple, and often obsessed with ontological questions. Besides being a vehicle for the physical and metaphoric representation of reality, character is also a tool in the representation of language. In the true spirit of Bakhtinian "heteroglot eras," Pynchon uses a wide variety of sociolects, languages, and their regional variants: the reader has to struggle with Kirghiz, Japanese, German, Dutch, Herero, French, and Russian. In addition to received pronunciation in English there are regional and ethnic variants: Afro-American English, the English spoken by Hungarians, American "red-necks," etc. The characters in the Zone, with their multitude of socio-ideological voices, the special lingos of film, folk-tales, music, lyric poetry, pornography, limericks and songs represent the heteroglossia of the post-modern era. Simultaneously, with the proliferation of languages, the novel represents the potential for a proliferation of realities.

In hindsight, critics have concluded that "on several levels simultaneously the novel is a chart of the modern world's suicidal 'progress' toward utter devastation." This harmonizes quite well, at least in my understanding, to an important observation made by Ibn Hassan about post-modernism: "Postmodernism may be a response, direct or oblique, to the Unimaginable which Modernism glimpses only in its most prophetic moments. Certainly it is not the Dehumanization of the Arts that concerns us now; it is rather the

Denaturalization of the planet and the End of Man. We are, I believe, inhabitants of another Time and another Space, and we no longer know what response is adequate to our reality" (91).

Salman Rashdie's *The Satanic Verses* became "the Rushdie affair" shortly before its publication by Penguin Books in 1988 and the novel has remained the focal point of much controversy about the ostensible and hidden meanings of its extremely complex, post-modern narrative, about an author's responsibility for reactions provoked by his writing, about attempts by a religion to impose its standards of thinking and behaving on people living elsewhere, under foreign jurisdiction, and about the thorny question of Western perceptions and depictions of the Muslim world and Islamic reactions to these attitudes and, more specifically, to Western modernity. Inevitably, therefore, much attention has been paid to the secular, questioning, and perhaps blasphemous treatment (or parody?) of Mohammad's teachings, his wives, and his human behaviour, as expressed in the long dream sequences of one of the protagonists, but also touched upon in other parts of the book. The post-modern fabric of the multi-layered and fragmented narrative, usually overlooked by the more resolute condemnations of the novel, has otherwise been thoroughly analysed from the point of view of narratology and of inquiries into the post-modern ideology itself. Because of the post-modernist, ostensible refusal of assumptions about language's relation to realities external to itself and its refusal of unambiguous meaning, critical attempts to read into the novel a picture of the post-modern condition of the present world are rare. Knowing as we do now that post-modern writing has not completely escaped all forms of referentiality, even if its practice has little to do with traditional mimesis and realistic or modernist explorations of society and psychology, we can unabashedly look in *The Satanic Verses* for echoes of contemporary conditions of existence in globalized societies. Salman Rushdie has proposed himself a reading of the novel according to which

> *The Satanic Verses is* the story of two painfully divided selves. In the case of one, Saladin Chamcha, the division is secular and societal: he is torn, to put it plainly, between Bombay and London, between East and West. In the other, Gibreel Farishta, the division is spiritual, a rift in the soul. He has lost his faith and is strung out between his immense need to believe and his inability to do so. The novel is 'about' their quest for wholeness. ("In Good Faith," 7)

Being a story of stories, five of its nine chapters are set in the contemporary world and deal with the fate of immigrants in Thatcherite Britain and natives

in a Bombay which imitates Hollywood; alternating between them are four chapters which explore the conflict between the sacred and profane modes of existence by recounting Gibreel Farishta's increasingly perturbed dreams.

The very beginning of the novel introduces the two protagonists. As summarized on the dust-jacket, "... a hijacked jumbo jet blows apart high above the English Channel. ... two figures fall towards the sea: Gibreel Farishta, India's legendary movie star, and Saladin Chamcha, the man of the thousand voices, self-made self and Anglophile supreme. ... Their survival is a miracle, but an ambiguous one, as Gibreel acquires a halo, while, to Saladin's dismay, his own legs grow hairier, his feet turn into hooves, and hornlike appendages appear at his temples." Quite literally, both exhibit demonic signs, in the original Greek meaning of the word *daimon* (deity): Gibreel, in his irresistible dreams first becomes an embodiment of the angel Gabriel, but is gradually transformed into a satanic figure and the angel of death; Chamcha is the surreal visual metaphor of the degrading demonization to which the West is subjecting the Orient, even when it attempts to ape it.

Chamcha is a secular man, although an Indian of Muslim birth. He is an actor who has become successful by doing voices for commercials and by starring in heavy make-up in a TV show with the portentous name "The Alien Nation." His success has entailed a complete divorce from his cultural and ethnic roots, an alienation from a vital part of his identity. Chamcha's crises come when his agent tells him that he is no longer saleable and when he learns that his father is dying. He begins to reconcile himself with parts of his identity which he had long denied: he learns to love his father and, for the first time in his life, loves an Indian woman. He is now ready to acknowledge that he is an immigrant, rather than the Englishman he fancied himself to be and participates in immigrant and Indian life. The arduous way, which brings him closer to his cultural and personal roots, leads him through varied experiences with other Indians at home and abroad, those who resist acculturation and those who have submitted to various degrees of hybridisation, as well as to surreally and satirically imagined but clearly recognisable manifestations of British racism, which include the startlingly bizarre bestiary of the detention centre for immigrants.

Gibreel's main quest is for religious certainty, amid his own inability to overcome doubt and have faith in any God. It fails dismally and seen in secular medical terms, his madness has been diagnosed as "paranoiac schizophrenia." Although his problems seem to be mainly existential, they are also shaped by his extremely successful and pampered life-style in India's

"Bollywood." He grew up in great poverty and drudgery, strongly believing in "Gods, angels, demons, djinns." (22) Now a film actor, he is obliged to be authentically multiple and in-authentically one. The mixture of Indian and Western influences, his playing of Hindu deities amid a modern, cosmopolitan environment, the material rewards he is reaping and the adulation by fans, have all distanced him from his modest class origins, original cultural background and the morals and beliefs taught by the religion of his ancestors. He cannot believe in any thing, any more. His flight, in both senses of this word, to England deepens the crises, without permitting a satisfactory resolution of the inner and external conflicts. He remains a haunted man, haunted by his personal past but also by the past of Islam and of his origins. The plight of Indian, Black and other immigrants in the United Kingdom has attracted Rushdie's attention well before *The Satanic Verses.* Drawing in part on his own experiences of a rich foreign youth in elite British schools and on later observations about the lower and middle classes, observations made while working, living, and writing in England, he deplored, albeit in a secular vain, the difficulties, humiliations, and, in part at least, inevitable cultural deformations of immigrant life. In an essay broadcast on Channel 4 in 1980, entitled "The New Empire Within Britain" (re-published in *Imaginary Homelands* in 1991), he acerbically wrote that since Britain was no longer able to export governments, it had chosen to import a new Empire, "a new community of subject peoples," who are now given the same shabby treatment that was meted out by the colonizers. Polemically referring to Margaret Thatcher's speeches, Rushdie stated:

> ...the word immigrant means "black immigrant"; the myth of "swamping" lingers on and even British-born blacks are thought of as people whose real "home" is elsewhere. Immigration is a problem only if you are worried about blacks; that is, if your whole approach to the question is one of racial prejudice. (132)

The writer's earlier position as a defender of minorities contributed greatly to his extra-textual troubles after the outbreak of "the Rushdie affair" and the fatal *fatwa* by the Ayatollah Khomeini. Scholars have documented in a detailed way how the Western and Muslim communities have reacted to his presumed treachery and sacrilegious mocking of Islam in the depiction of Mahound, the oasis of Yathrib, and the town of Jahilia (standing respectively for Mohammed, Medina and Mecca). In addition to the open confrontation of two fundamentally opposed world views, and innumerable positions between the antipodes, researchers have found that both sides in the

argument, conveniently labelled the West and the East, were quite internally divided according to class, gender, education, and religious convictions. (May it be mentioned in passing that many of the attackers and defenders had not read the novel itself nor shown understanding or care for the narrative conventions of post-modern writing.) What is of particular importance in our context is the fact that these virulent and sometimes deadly conflicts also reflected two social facts of contemporary life: the general awareness of Western "Orientalist" attitudes and the almost immediate spreading of media news and rumours in Kashmir, Pakistan, Iran, and throughout the Islamic world, on one hand, and the large number of Muslims, of various backgrounds and in various stations in society, in the United Kingdom. The intensity and scope of "the Rushdie affair" are directly related to these factors, which are—instant communication and racially, culturally, and religiously non-homogeneous societies—otherwise perceived as part of the globalization process. In any case, like Milton and all poets, Rushdie found himself, if I may quote Blake again, "...of the Devil's party without knowing it" (Note to "The Voice of the Devil," *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell).*

The last novel I have time to draw attention to, albeit very briefly, is a work by Jose Saramago, who was born in Portugal in 1922. The first Portuguese writer to win the Nobel Prize, Saramago now lives in the Canary Islands. His numerous novels are concerned with real and imagined history: they range from a controversial satirical narrative of the creation of Christianity (*O Evangelho secundo Jesus Cristo*, 1991. English tr. The Gospel According to Jesus Christ, 1994), ironical evocations of the Inquisition, the Renaissance and Baroque periods of Portuguese history (for example in *Memorial do covento*, \ 982, English tr. Baltasar and Blimunda, 1987), to sustained criticism of the Salazar dictatorship (for instance in *O Ano da morte de Eicardo Reiss*, 1984, English tr. The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reiss, 1990) and the mythical invocation of the insularity of the Iberian Peninsula *(A Jaganda de pedra*, 1986, English tr. The Stone Raft, 1996). The Swedish Academy's citation called his novels "parables sustained by imagination, compassion and irony."

Blindness (Ensaio sobre a cegueira: romance—1995, English tr. 1997) is a depiction of an unnamed contemporary capital city in which every person but one becomes blind; at the end of the narrative, all those who have survived the catastrophe regain their eye sight, but the woman who is the only sighted person throughout the novel may seem to lose her vision. This blindness is

not black darkness, but an impenetrably dense white fog.[3] The novel has been praised, for instance, by Harold Bloom, as the author's "most surprising and disturbing book," "told with compassion, humour, and lyricism," which "explores loss and disorientation in the modern world," "a novel that will endure" (reproduced in the American edition of 1999).

In this novel *(romance)*, which declares itself to be "An Essay about Blindness" *(En Ensaio sobre a cegueira)*, Saramago tells the story of a mysterious epidemic of blindness, which seems to be highly contagious and almost instantaneous in its effect. In a method which emulates Kafka and Borges, he explores in a matter of fact and logical way a surreal premise. Soon enough, this blindness leads to the total collapse of civic and military order, and to the abandonment of any pretence of civilized communal living. Just after becoming completely hopeless, the situation is reversed as abruptly and without causal explanation as it has begun. One interpretation of this parable—I would prefer this term to that of allegory proposed on the cover of the American edition—is offered within the text, in the penultimate paragraph:

> Why did we become blind, I don't know, perhaps one day we'll find out, Do you want me to tell you what I think, Yes, do, I don't think we did go blind, I think we are blind, Blind but seeing, Blind people who can see, but do not see. (1042)

The impression that the author is exploring loss and disorientation in the contemporary world is strengthened by two scenes described in the concluding chapter. During their blind errancy through a semi-deserted,

3 Is it too far fetched to remind the reader that Northrop Frye found in the New Testament use of the Hebrew word *hebel* (e.g. in James 4:14) "a metaphorical kernel of fog, mist, or vapor ... the root meaning of the Vulgate's *vanitas* but less associated with conceit and "more like the *sbunyata* or Void' of Buddhist thought: the world as everything within nothingness. As nothing is certain or permanent in the world, nothing either real or unreal, the secret of wisdom is detachment without withdrawal." (123) Other, rather random, possibilities of intertexuality could be the Old Norse (Germanic) mythology in which *Niflheim*, the realm of fog, is the worst part of the world, and a detail in the last play by the provocative late French author Bernard-Marie Kortes in which the eponymous protagonist, Roberto Zucco, states that the word will end in "a fog": "Quand tout sera detruit, qu'un brouillard de fin du monde recouvrira la terre..." (When everything is destroyed, when a fog of the end of the world covers the Earth..."—*Roberto Zucco: suivi de Tabataba.* Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1990.37).

dilapidated city, the protagonists of the story stumble upon two public spaces. In the first square, other blind people debate problems of social institutions and everyday life, the profane issues of life; in the second, there are raging polemics about metaphysical, spiritual and religious dimensions of being. Both agonistic deliberations are shown to be futile, unable to explain either the ability to see or this new, sudden cecity. Although employing ambiguous narrative voices and shifting focalizations, Saramago remains indebted to late modernism in his narrative technique and ideology. Against post-modern preferences for pluralities and particularities, his narrative seems to show that in crises situations humans revert to primitive, anthropological constants of need and desire, fear and love, courage and abject villainy, so that what distinguishes them pales before the commonalities. Where he joins post-modernism and science fiction is in the novel's insistence on the fragility of contemporary technological civilization and the fact that we may all be prisoners of "The mind-forg'd manacles" (William Blake, "London," st. 2, *Songs of Experience).*

I intended to offer a few glimpses on literatures which have—at least for the last fifty years—shown preoccupation with colonial and post-colonial contacts and clashes of culture. Time and space oblige me to reserve this development for some other occasion. Still, I would like to mention, for the record, that Sub-Saharan fiction and drama, in English, French, Portuguese, Afrikaans, and, more rarely, in the native languages (e.g., Swahili), have explored quite systematically the consequences of the whole range of spiritual and practical changes and conflicts induced in traditional, tribal, and oral societies by Western influences in technology and medicine, state organization (based on the model of the European nation states), language and literacy. In this context, one could quote all canonized names of African literature—from Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Wole Soyinka, to Camara Laye, Ousmane Sembene, Mongo Beti, and Ahmadou Kourama. There is similar preoccupation with the problem of (imported) modernity and the (native) tradition in writings in French and Arabic, originating in North Africa, in the countries of the Maghreb, as well as in Egypt. Without undue generalization, it is possible to perceive in these novels and plays a common pattern, which is one of concern and worry. Open to the humour of many of the situations of conflict, the authors seem to be equally aware of the personal anguish and social upheaval which result from the process of modernity and, more recently, that of post-modernity.

The case of Latin American literatures and those of the Caribbean is distinct. While there are, in spite of significant personal and regional differences, certain common concerns, they are not limited to the dialectics of modern and traditional, imported and local, but take into account the fact that these societies and cultures, at least in the post-Columbian period, are of themselves multi-racial and multi-cultural, and, therefore, subjected to centuries of creolization *(metissao).* Probably for this reason, while alert to the vicissitudes of cultural contacts and the clash between traditional and modern ways of living, working, and thinking, many writers are quite aware of the possibility that phenomena of hybridisation—as in the sphere of animal and plant genetics—may result in greater strength and fruitful diversity. After all, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, in *Cien años de soledad* (One Hundred Years of Solitude, 1967) and other narratives, regardless of the catastrophe created by the arrival of the gringos, does not present the relative isolation of Macondo as a blessing and example to follow into the future. Throughout the Americas, including the USA and Canada, there is a lively exploration of the problematized, multiple self in autobiographical and pseudo-autobiographical writing.

In Canada, the last of these sweeping examples that I am offering, there are at least three persistent literary themes which concern our topic: first, the relations between the native Inuit and North American Indians with the white colonizers and settlers; second, the immigration experience of the various groups—initially predominantly from Europe and, to a much more modest extent, from East Asia, now from most parts of the world; third, the more recent topic of the ever more rapidly changing demography of a society which has become, too a great extent, truly multi-cultural, albeit within a still strongly vertical mosaic. The experiences of the immigrants depicted in literature reflect the fact that over time there have been significant shifts in the educational and other assets of the newcomers and therefore altered opportunities for insertion into society. A startling, but not unique, example is the difference between the economic and human plight of early Chinese and Japanese labourers, who were not only exploited but also discriminated against by force of law, and the relatively smooth social success of today's immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China. Often well-educated and sometimes well-healed, they are now frequently accepted—in the first and not only second or third generation—as a natural part of the country's elite. In literary terms, there was in the beginning a long period of attempts to document and problematize the immigrant experience, including painful

identity crises, of settlers belonging to the various majority and minority groups, such as the English, Scottish, Irish, French, Ukrainian, Jewish, German, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and others. Writing in their mother tongue, or in English or French, writers belonging to that earlier period usually emulated in their writing older, realist and naturalist paradigms, with gradual increased use of moderately modernist techniques and attitudes. Today, immigrant writers from the whole spectrum of the Canadian ethnic mosaic— from Blacks and Creoles from the Caribbean to the Chinese and others who came from South-East Asia— examine not only the traditional tribulations of being in a new and different environment, climate, geography, and culture, but also the new internal and external psychological and social problems (and advantages) of a largely post-modern, post-industrial, globalized, and resolutely heteroglossic society. Writers belonging to the mainstream Quebec literature, like Michel Tremblay, and those representing recent immigrants, like Nino Ricci, use in their novels and plays the phenomenon of diglossia and triglossia; Betty Quan's play *Mother Tongue,* for example, written in 1996 and performed a few weeks ago in Toronto, depicts cultural contacts and conflicts which go beyond words, using various English sociolects, Cantonese, and American sign language.

Let us conclude with two foot notes to Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's praised concept of nomadic existence as a distinct mode of being in contemporary, post-modern, globalized times. The first concerns the now flourishing Fondation (Foundation) Cartier in Montparnasse, in Paris, dedicated to contemporary art. The highbrow art world is infiltrated there by DJs and electronic music during the eagerly attended and aptly named Soiree Nomades given by the Foundation. The second concerns glossy publicity and rhapsodic reports published in all leading newspapers and magazines of the Western world about the floating condominium, Residensea's The World. This is the first ship designated as a luxury condominium; for between US$ two million and US$ six million folks can actually own one of the 110 penthouse-sized and individually decorated apartments. There are also 88 guest cabins available for non-owners which can be booked for globe-circling itineraries at about US$ 1,200 per day. The ship will be managed by upscale Silversea Cruises and will leave Europe on its first trip in December of this year, heading to Rio de Janeiro for Carnival. Owners will have a vote on the itineraries, although the company has the final say. The ship has the most luxurious amenities, a Swiss spa, a jewellery store and a casino, theatres for evening entertainment and four restaurants for passengers who do not want

to cook, while others will have their chef with them, to prepare food in their own kitchen. Now let us compare in our mind's eye for a moment this kind of nomadic life exemplified by the Fondation Cartier and Residensea's The World with that, inevitably more common, of political and economic refugees, of expats of all kinds, and of people who have been displaced, in their own country, because of new economic realities... The two cases seem to embody, in stark contrast, two of the faces of globalization: as always at times of historical transformation, humans are faced with previously unheard-of opportunities, but also with new dangers and hardships.

Already at the time of the industrial revolution, William Blake evoked in the early 1790s London as a nightmarish city in which the minds are in chains and individuals imprisoned, while all the streets and even the river Thames have been given royal charters to be used for business and trade:

> I wander thro' each charter'd street Near
> where the charter'd Tames does flow, And
> mark in every face I meet Marks of
> weakness, marks of woe.
>
> In every cry of every Man,
> In every Infant's cry of fear,
> In every voice, in every ban
> The Mind forg'd manacles I hear. ("London," *Songs of Experience)*

This eternal division into the rich and poor could make any country into two nations (an idea already explored by Benjamin Disraely, the later prime minister, in his novel *Sybil* [1845]); a similar fear is also expressed in some haunting verses by the modernist Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, not otherwise known for social activism. In a mythical image, he describes the two destinies and their fatal interaction:

> Manche freilich müssen drunten sterben,
> Wo die schweren Ruder der Schiffe streifen,
> Andre wohnen bei dem Steuer droben,
> Kennen Vogelflug und die Lander der Sterne.
> Doch ein Schatten fallt von jenen Leben
> In die anderen Leben hiniiber,
> Und die leichten sind an die schweren

> Wie an Luft und Erde gebunden.
> ("Manche freilich...")
> ("While some, it is true, have to die down there where the heavy oars of the galleys scour, others live aloft by the helm, know the flight of birds and the countries of the stars.... But a shadow falls from those lives across into the other lives, and the light ones are bound to the heavy ones as much as to air and earth.")

To be beneficial, to improve the quality of life and the standards of human rights, globalization must satisfy the needs of the vast majority of individuals and collectivities in the world, otherwise it will become, at best, a distorted, expanded image of American society, at worst, the realization of the most harrowing dystopia imagined by poets and writers.

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