

Concepts of Heroism in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*

Durojaiye K. Owofe

Department of English, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji, Ilesha, Osun State, Nigeria

Abstract—Constructing heroism is an intriguing function of the postmodernist novel. It images the power consciousness that defines the abrasive relations between the “centre” and the “periphery”. This has led to the ideologizing of its imaginative construct to confront the supremacist ego of the master narrative. In effect, postcolonial writers like Salman Rushdie try to vitiate the unitary hold of Western bourgeois culture over the fictive paradigm, especially through its homogenizing mentality when, realistically speaking, heterogeneity-consciousness is the heart of inter-cultural harmony. To this end, Rushdie deploys heroic interdiscussivity to counter the conventionality of mono-heroic fiction. Inter-character relevance, therefore, dominates heroic appreciation in his idealistic spectrum. The present essay aims at revealing the extent of this postcolonial manipulation of characterization to revise conventional norms of heroism in the author's *The Moor's Last Sigh*. The combination of the notions of asymmetry and symmetry in building character relationships, coupled with structuralist tenets, is used to conceptualize heroic eminence towards highlighting how heroism may sometimes transcend character prominence. Heroism is, at the end of the analysis, discovered to, in some cases, be a combination of the good, the bad and the ugly in the construction of characters, depending on the creative susceptibilities of a writer.

Index Terms—Heroism, hermeneutics, dialogism, polyphony, binarism

I. INTRODUCTION

Investing characters with heroic potentials has always been an interesting aspect of the novel genre. It is indeed part of the political substructure of the postmodern novel. The postmodernist, nay, postcolonial writer, who longs to disestablish the master perspective so as to spite notions of colonial preponderancy, is deeply cocooned in the burrows of ambivalence. Having become a matter of exigency for the writer to demonstrate a smug release from colonial hegemony, heroism has to be subjected to protean sensibilities. Some of Salman Rushdie's novels are a vintage reflection of this imaginative proclivity. *The Moor's Last Sigh* is not an exception.

As part of character development, Salman Rushdie significantly strikes a near-discordant tune from the orthodoxy that characterizes appreciation of heroic excellence. He explores hermeneutics, a theory of interpretation, to confute traditional concepts of heroic virtue, laying stress on the one hand on the polyphonic function of Bakhtinian dialogism and on the other hand not unappreciative of the essence and prominence of his narrators and other major characters. Essentially, fluidity of critical perception consequently explains how heroism is conceived of in his novel, especially when the ideals of regeneration constitute the thrust of postcolonial cultural feelings. Rushdie's heroic unorthodoxy may be a product of the paradoxical reading of the colonial experience not, as Sanga (2001) puts it “as an adversarial and antagonistic encounter” (p. 79) but that which is conceived “in a considerably more reciprocal arena” (p. 79) whose impact is understood “through a less embattled and perhaps more productive register” (p. 79). Banerjee (2002) opines that this reciprocity stems from “Rushdie's understanding of historiography as a struggle for representation” (p. 9) which manifests in “representations of the cultural difference epitomized by the chutney” (p. 9). Identity contentions, as gleaned from the “chutneyfication” metaphor, take the centre stage in the idealization of heroic sentiments by Salman Rushdie. Booker (1994) ideally argues that Rushdie's fiction consistently embraces contradiction, privileging the plural over the singular, the polyphonic over the monologic. One of the clearest ways in which it does so is through the construction of dual oppositions [...] only to deconstruct those oppositions by demonstrating that the apparent polar opposites are in fact interchangeable and mutually interdependent. (p. 238)

These interchangeability and mutual interdependence invigorate Rushdie's use of paired characters in many instances and obviously give a foretaste of the incertitude that hovers over identifying a heroic “potentate”, possibly mirroring “Stevenson's classic tale of the duality of human nature [in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*], a strong literary paradigm of dualisms” (Booker, 238). For Rushdie, heroic identities image what Booker (1994) describes as “the conflicting selves jostling and joggling” (p. 241) towards an “eternal opposition of inside and outside” (p. 241). It is apparent that dualist perspectives continue to inundate the literary space, particularly to disestablish notions of rigid hierarchical thoughts. Booker (1994) seems to contend that dualist theorising dates back from “from Nietzsche's transvaluation of values through the dialogics of Bakhtin to the deconstructive project of Jacques Derrida” (p. 250). Despite the pliant trope being in the ascendancy, Booker (1994) makes it clear that “one term in a pair is privileged over the other, so that what is “good” becomes defined by its difference from what is “bad”” (p. 250), in which case structuralist dialectics are

engaged ultimately to define character importance. Rushdie, in some of his works, as is evident in this critique, though tries to be slithery in character conspicuousness, makes some characters behave like tritons in the midst of minnows, especially in his pursuit of clear doctrinal convictions.

II. METHODOLOGY

Basically, qualitative methods were deployed to consummate the study as it had no bearing with statistical analysis, textual evaluation being the core of the research concerns. In effect, detailed description and explanation of behavioural proclivities were made in order to provide a vivid explication of the heroic contentions that were at issue. Furthermore, the combination of notions of asymmetry and symmetry in constructing character nexus to theorize heroic eminence was explored. Against the backdrop of these two antipodal notions, binarist signification in structuralist poetics was deployed so as to explode the centre of personality-relevance. This binarism was used to bring to the fore the signifier-signified cleavage with a view to clarifying the asymmetric and symmetric relationships between the characters in their longing for heroic significance.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A. Unconsciously-assisted Heroism in Rushdie's Fiction

Besides *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie also treads the slippery surface as to who the heroic arrowhead is in *The Satanic Verses* and *Midnight's Children*. In the former, he deploys what can be termed unconsciously-assisted heroism to validate the importance of other characters like Chamcha apart from Gibreel, the hero-apparent. Gibreel Farishta's domineering and heroic actualities may have been made to reflect a straightforward exegesis: connotative admixture of primary and secondary heroics, the main-and-helper heroic genre answering the author's pursuance of the transcendentalist culture. Gibreel, the substantive hero, is not the immediate owner of the magic instinct that saves him from crash-landing after the *Bostan* tragedy. His falling colleague or, maybe psychological other, Chamcha, is the first recipient of the spiritual saviour before it moves out of him into Gibreel. Rushdie (1988) is also at his wit's end when he asks: "Chamcha willed it and Farishta did what was willed. Which was the miracle worker?" (p. 10) He should even have asked "who was the hero?" Chamcha at that juncture 'was' before relinquishing his status to Gibreel due to his 'realistic' incredulity. Chamcha is believably Gibreel's psychological other because the author, Rushdie, (1988) once referred to the two as "the two men, Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha" (p. 5), when in real sense it is Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. Not putting the word "and" between them, merging the first names with the surnames, and always mentioning "Chamcha", Saladin's surname, but calling "Gibreel", Farishta's first name, say much about the sameness of the two characters. This ambiguous character build valorizes the ambivalent postcolonial identity of South Asian migrants. Needham (1994) countenances that ambivalence for "as a formerly colonised people, most of them already are familiar with and have existed in two cultures simultaneously" (p. 145). Salman Rushdie uses this play on sameness and difference to intensify evangelistically his belief in existential multiplicity.

This unconscious heroic reciprocity could also be found in Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods*, where heroic virtues, though innately extant in the ignorant traveler, who is incognizant of them, are the innate cognition-property of the "invisibles", who deem it important to conscientise and instill in their uninformed and unapprised guest the extraordinary qualities that inhere in invisibility. Owing to their proprietary ownership of invisibility erudition, without the transmission of which the prime heroic entity would have remained vacuous, the candidacy of the collectivity of the "invisibles" is ideal for heroic considerations.

The consciously-assisted heroic variety, the exact reverse of the unconsciously-assisted model, is obtainable in Okri's *The Famished Road* and *Songs of Enchantment*. In these two novels, the preternatural prowess in Azaro has to contend with the heroic, nay, anti-heroic contentions of Madam Koto who, Azaro admits, represents "a colossus in our dreams" (Okri, 1994, p. 36), her damnable and horrifying ability to transfer deaths (part of her hero-reductive agency) notwithstanding. "The chutney's 'disruptive spatiality'" (Banerjee, 2002, p. 9) actually avails her. She helps in furthering the author's enchanting literary extraordinariness with her monstrosly beneficent feminist propaganda, she being "the new Mother of Images" (Okri, p. 143) and helping Azaro out of some difficult situations. In the same vein, the social, moral and political crusades of Black Tyger and Jeremiah the photographer, albeit a support for Azaro on his quest route, say much on their polyphonic input into visions of heroism in these Okri's works. The heroic haziness in *Midnight's Children* is partially an intertextual appropriation of the biblical Joshua-Esau metaphor, in which case heroic grandeur is bestowed on Saleem Sinai through a *faux pas* (Mary Pereira's changeling action) that confines Shiva to the world of poverty in which Vanita and husband Wee Willie Winkie (the genuine parents of Saleem) live. It is appropriate one sees in the Saleem-Shiva issue a paired rivalry as is conceived in *The Moor's Last Sigh* but of a diminished essence due to the wide heroic distance between the two.

B. Structuralist Binarism as Template for Heroic Considerations in *The Moor's Last Sigh*

Underlying heroic acclivities and declivities in a novel is the structural configuration of idiosyncrasies which are perceived through the play on a signifying chain of actions and events that are comprehended with reference to what Culler (1981) puts forward as "signifiers and signifieds [which] are purely relational entities" (p. 45) that are built up

“in a complex network of differences” (p. 45). Importantly, characters with probable heroic propensities are idealized upon (Culler, 1981) “a deconstructive moment” in which each pole of an opposition can be used to show that the other is in error but in which the undecidable dialectic gives rise to no synthesis” (p. 44). Though there may not be a “synthesis” of emotions, structuralist procedures, however, require that there is decidedness in the error-finding dialectic as far as argumentative superiority is concerned. Binarism as a structuralist signifying scheme – the trope in that conclusiveness – is important in appreciating heroism in *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

As a strong character, Aurora Zogoiby's heroic struggles as a signifier are placed beside the “antagonistic” signifying campaigns of Uma Sarasvati, Abraham Zogoiby, Vasco Miranda Moraes Zogoiby and Rahman Fielding. All five characters, except Moraes, consciously and narcissistically long for heroic preeminence, for Girard (1983) submits

people [...] love primarily themselves, and they seek themselves in the objects of their desire. They endow the desired object with a mystery and beauty that really flows from themselves. The superior self radiates enough energy to transfigure commonplace reality into its own image [...] Only when the genuine *otherness* of outside reality breaks through to us does disenchantment occur. (p. 364).

The conflict between one's “private projections” and the “reality” of a disagreeing other underpins the binarist construction of heroism in *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

C. Binarist Connotations in the Aurora-Uma Conflict

“If Menippean satire and the grotesque are associated with a participatory, *ambivalent laughter that enables both affirmation and critique*” (Ball, 2003, p. 119), the Aurora figure in *The Moor's Last Sigh* ideally captures Rushdie's construction of heroism. She represents “the multiple ambivalences and overlappings [sic] among these broadly opposed formulations of satire and the grotesque” (p. 123) which intermingle in Rushdie's novels. With little equivocation, Aurora principally embodies the intermingling as her actions and inactions are centrally contributory to the naturalist and dominantly unnaturalist structuring of the work. This combination of the natural and the unnatural has always inspired postmodernist theorists to conclude that myth and art-as-fantasy are creative coevals, especially in respect of an artist who is slanted in some respects towards (Auden, 1983) “an introverted disposition and has not far to go to become neurotic [...] who is urged on by instinctive needs which are too clamorous; [who] longs to attain to honour, power riches, fame [...]” (p. 120). This has its full figuration in Aurora's psychic contest with the tragic reality, which the da Gama-Zogoiby dynasty represents.

Gender-wise, her revulsion against the phallic subject's culture-supported domineering ego she glowingly paints on walls, announcing “the rage of women, the tormented weakness and compromise in the faces of men, and sexual ambivalences of children”. (Rushdie, 1994, p. 124) Complementing her gender feelings, Aurora celebrates on canvas in tragic dimension the loss of Belle her mother within the holistic context of motherhood. Strategically, she locates Queen Isabella, her mother, as the only mother-goddess in the centre of the ceiling, at the point where all the “horn-of-plenty” (p. 61) lines converged, with mother India bearing the face of Belle – a signification of productivity and virility that are traditionally associated with motherliness.

So numinous is her literary orientation that ruminations on fearful creatures and prognoses of tragedies – creatures of her fancy, “like hybrids, half-woman half-tiger, half-man half-snake, sea monsters and mountain ghouls, portraits of the dead, the living and the unborn – which form part of her awe-inspiring universe – populate her artistic world” (Rushdie, 1994, Pp. 59-60). The modernist fatalist experimentation that subsists in her bizarre tragedy-inspired realism is emphasized in the following pseudo-poetic premonitions of dread (Rushdie, 1994):

Bad times are coming, darlings, don't think they won't, and then all ghosts will go to Hell, the night will blot out shadows [...] poor kids are such a bundle, seems like they are deemed to tumble (p. 172).

Viraginous in stature, strength and courage, she encapsulates the absolute individuality of the (Rushdie, 1994) “I am who I am” (p. 88) personality in Abraham's “I am that I am” crime-infested philosophy, as she merges individuality and obduracy with abstruse supernaturalism, with her drawing and paintings throwing up “[...] witches, fire, apocalypse” (p. 115). Aurora, from this discussion, is, beyond doubting, a genius loci of the Cochin, Mumbai and Benengeli environs.

Since (Frye, 1957) “tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape” (p. 207), the mystery art of Aurora Zogoiby appears to be the most palpable thematic medium, albeit there are others, through which the metaphysical idioms of Rushdie's fiction are apprehended. This mystery art does rub off on Abraham Zogoiby “*who found comfort for the loss of what he had touched, through her love, of the transcendent, the transformational, the immense*” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 318) (Emphasis not mine). Moor, her narrator-son, in like manner, also enthuses (Rushdie, 1994): “[...] she was the light of our lives, the excitement of our imaginations, the beloved of our dreams. We loved her even as she destroyed us” (p. 172) – describing in effervescent morphology the irresistible allure of her creativity, which she even attests to in her self-conviction that in spite of her doomsday prophecies, “I would survive on account [...] of my art” (172), with its out-of-this-world connotations, obliquely a justification for Salman Rushdie's magic realist fervor that is heavily loaded with “pessoptimism” (Ball, 115, p. 2003), a rough reference to the good and the bad in Aurora.

Aurora acts out an innate gruesomeness and artistic duplicity that is bequeathed on to her, manifesting Frye's second phase of the tragic concept, one (Frye, 1957) “which corresponds to the youth of the romantic hero [...], the tragedy of innocence in the sense of inexperience” (p. 220), an “inexperience” which is partly an off-shoot of her negative application of Jacques Lacan's (Wright, 1998) “the mirror stage” (p. 102) psychoanalytic postulate. Complementing her

“inexperience” is the fated tragic process of the “violation of *moral law*” (p. 210), she being (Rushdie, 1994) “the most sharp-tongued woman of her generation” (p. 5) and diabolically inclined at the age of thirteen to “wandering barefoot around her grandparents large odorous house” (p. 7). She is also a restless person, the consequence of which is “her nightly affliction” of “bouts of sleeplessness” (p. 7). It is, therefore, not unexpected that a notoriety issues from such insomnia as narrated by Moraes: (Rushdie, 1994) “[...] on these nightly odysseys she would invariably throw open all the windows – first the inner screen-windows whose fine-meshed netting protected the house from midges mosquitoes flies [...]” (p. 7). The accursedness that runs through the plot is partly rooted in this malfeasance.

In her tragic “inexperience”, she rejoices at “the sounds of her hated grandmother’s fury (oaths, breaking china, the impotent slaps of the swatter, the scornful buzzing of insects)” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 7), the result of her (Aurora’s) wicked nights. Her action is a genetic visualisation of the perfect granddaughter “[...] though it never occurred to her to notice that in her broodings there was more than a little of Epifania’s ruthlessness” (p. 8). Aurora is so unfeeling in seeking Epifania’s death that she takes patience to be a virtue in that regard, saying “I’ll just bide-o my time” (p. 8). Because of this, Moraes is doubly sure of the feminine grip on the work’s heroic vision. At a juncture, he acquaints readers at a very early part of the plot that “the women are now moving to the centre of my little stage. Epifania, Carmen, Belle, and the newly arrived Aurora – they, not the men, were the true protagonists in the struggle.” (Rushdie, 1994, p.33) The struggle he adverts to is the catastrophic conflict that the da Gama family plunges into, very tragically concluded in “the battle of the in-laws” (p. 33). Of the women mentioned, Aurora is the most durable as far as the plot is concerned, and, of course, the most commanding and hegemonic. Her artistic life gives that image of commanding prowess while the hegemonic in her is explicable in her willingness to have a totalitarian control of her immediate vicinity, particularly reducing Abraham to a hen-pecked husband on some occasions (Abraham though teaches her a lesson in deviousness). The farrago of Aurora’s brilliance in art and her feelings of prepotency provides the ironic “admixture of heroism” (Frye, 1957, p. 210). This gives her personality a desired tragic “splendor and exhilaration” (p. 210). Against this Aurora’s magnificence, Rushdie establishes the clout of those four characters earlier mentioned, simply to give Aurora a good run for her presumptuousness. Three of these characters succeed in unraveling her fallibility.

The binary placement of Aurora and Uma on antagonistic visceral platforms evinces how each pole in the signifying chain attempts to uproot the other in the heroic dialectic. From the two characters’ self-vitiating and attritive contest, evidence of the differential manipulation of the heroic construct, one is apprised of the “differential diagnosis” that comes into play to valorize the differentials in their anti-social similitude. The fullness of both characters’ moral negativity is exploded through the differentials in their antithetic character design. Between the two human “signifieds” exists a relational friction of idiosyncratic signifiers. They are conjoined existentially in some signifying respects. One, they are both visual artists; two, they excel in their artistry; three, they are both ambitious, in a bid to outshine each other in their chosen vocation; four, their marital lives are questionable; lastly, they want to outhrow each other. Clearly, in the signifying conduit, the author establishes the two in a like and antipodal signification system to institute a tension that will make the heroic struggle interestingly explosive. The last three signifiers intrinsically contain differences that undermine the significating affinities in the first two signifiers. The transgressive presence of contradicting signifiers in a set of similar signifiers the author exploits to create a structural hierarchy and heroic nebulousness between the two characters. Of course, a “synthesis” does not manifest in the author’s hierarchical conclusion as it defies the open-ended *différance* of Derrida. Signification analyses of the work’s denouement reveal the tragic superiority of Aurora’s art.

The anti-humanistic face of structuralism is eminently fructified in the binary articulation of these two female figures. At a juncture in their dog-fight, in different contexts, they use almost the same wording to express their acerbic disgust of each other. Uma says to Moraes that his mother “is currently having not one, not two, but three different love affairs [...]” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 256). Aurora, in like manner, tells Moraes that his Uma is “currently fooling around with not one, not two, but three lovers” (p. 265). Definitely, this phraseology predates its expression by the human duo, after all the two characters emerge from the same moral ambience, and so, manifesting Culler’s postulate (1981), “the idea of [their] personal identity emerges through the discourse of a culture; the “I” is not something given but comes to exist as that which is addressed by and relates to others” (p. 37). By extension, the two characters’ conflict continues to reflect Culler’s (1981) structuralist anti-humanist assumption that “the self is dissolved as its various functions are ascribed to impersonal systems which operate through it” (p. 37). The thinking being is, invariably, held in thrall to “a deeply rooted set of cultural norms and conventions which operate subconsciously” (Culler, 1981, p. 36) below the façade of the human entity. Hence, the semiotic principle “becomes an act of demystification, of exposure” (p. 36). The signification contrarities that are immanent in the feud between Aurora and Uma demystify and expose the failings behind their pontifical posturing.

Essentially, between Uma and Aurora, in line with the suggestion of Hassumani (2002), “heroic binaries are exposed as being inherently hierarchical and therefore violent and they are exploded” (p. 14), done to show how “hierarchies are leveled (or at least an attempt is made) and we end up with relative “truths”” (p. 14). In her artistic conflict with Aurora, Uma’s immediate ego-priority is to revise the heroic hierarchy in her favour, explicating in the process the view of Hassumani (2002) that “the notion of the individual as a centered subject, [as] an “I” is deconstructed, and we end up with a decentered subject, or a subject who is simply a network of desires (which may be conflicting), or a postmodern subject who is defined as a series of subjective positions” (p. 14). These dualist (centered and decentered) realities are foundational to understanding the importance of Uma in the almost-cloudy heroic air of *The Moor’s Last Sigh*.

Uma Sarasvati is clad in heroic contradictions. The contradictions are enabled by a farrago of the good, the bad and the ugly that she is a composite picture of. A stealthy and subterranean performer, she violates the confidence of the Zogoibys and breaches whatever remains of their shredded unity. By the time her incursion gets to a head, Moor is forced to own up to the fact that her ingress is “a defeat for the pluralist philosophy on which we had all been raised” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 272). Enamoured of “her multiple selves, her highly inventive commitment to the infinite malleability of the real, her modernistically provisional sense of truth” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 272), she burrows deep into the psychic and analytical consciousness of the Zogoibys.

What issues thereon is a subtle personality, inspired by self-cultivated zeal to be atop the world of deceit. She presents a pliable perception of herself to her hosts. Minnie is taken in by what she (Minnie) sees erroneously in her (Uma) as the depth and height of spiritual purity, supernal beauty and moral quintessence. To her, “Uma was a woman from whom spirituality seemed to flow like a river, she was abstinent and disciplined, a great soul who saw through to the final unity of all religion, whose differences she was convinced would dissolve under the blessed brilliance of divine light” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 243). It is obvious that Minnie’s new nunship status – she is now Sister Floreas – plays a part in her judgment. An activist with the resolute will to disestablish a criminal order, a secularist with Marxian and feminist convictions, Mynah (Philominah) believes Uma is “hard as nails” (p. 243). Business and financial considerations dictate Abraham’s analysis of Uma’s behaviour. What he divines is Rushdie’s proposition (1994) that her “razor-sharp financial brain, and her mastery of the very latest in modern deal-making and takeover theory” (p. 243). Still under the spell of dead Ina’s musical effulgence, Jamshed Cashondeliveri’s opinion is that Uma is “the living reincarnation of gorgeous departed Ina. [...] she is like Ina with a singing voice, and also brains” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 243). Uma, in an unseemly manner, is a confirmation of the philosophical belief of Engblom (1994) that such a personality “resists ideological synthesis or closure” (p. 298), defying “any finalized ‘truth’” (p. 298). She, against that awareness, demonstrates heroic pretension in poststructuralist presumptuousness.

This concurrence of diverse views, conclusions from vocational and emotive hues, encourages the fluvial disposition of Uma to temporarily prevail over the Zogoiby’s. Equally self-assuming like Aurora, she tells Moraes (Rushdie, 1994): “[...] I am the goddess who knows your secret heart and I will surely give you everything you want, and more. [...] *And then until death I will be your mirror, your self’s other self, your equal, your empress and your slave*” (p. 248). (Emphasis not mine). She identifies in him a lack of solution, if psychological, to the puzzle that is his medical defect, and sees in herself, of course, a companionship for him. The narrator’s mother warns him: “That girl of yours is the most ambitious person I ever met” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 262). The evil genius in Uma does not waste time in discovering that Aurora has thrown down the gauntlet. Picking it up, Uma silently tells Moor metaphorically: “so, if this is a racecourse then I want to race” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 244). They were in a racecourse when those exchanges took place. The coast becomes clear for accusations, counter-accusations and dark revelations. Aurora unearths scandals about her, positing that the only light side of the stories is her artistic gift, (Rushdie, 1994) “a talent for acting that [even] had been pushed to the point of insanity and beyond” (p. 266). Hers is perhaps a case of genius being coeval with madness. As the accusations and responses grow in number, the relationship between Aurora and Uma becomes messier. Being rhetoricized into believing Uma’s stories about Aurora’s omnivorous sexual life, Moraes is pensive at her mother’s “complex secret life” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 257) for “she had started to be a little paranoid, to worry about being followed” (p. 257). This is a peep into her “self-alienated consciousness [that is nurtured toward] authenticity of identification” (Barret, 1983, p. 87). Through these disclosures, the layers of selves in Aurora are uncurtained. Her son appears not to be confused about this, concluding that “her work looked rather like a distraction from the harsh realities of her character; like a gallant coat laid over the filthy mud-puddle of her soul” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 257).

With a blossoming artistic image, Uma is made a guest at many fora on art. A depressed Aurora has no choice but to acknowledge her rival’s dexterity. At one of the soirees, she contends that “To genius [...] everything must be given” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 253). However, beneath this plaudit, the rivalry is seething, spilling scandals over scandals. Aurora warns her son about Uma’s deceptive “powers of attraction, and the persuasiveness of her performances” [...] (p. 267). She counsels him, albeit selfishly: “You must break her magic spell [...] or you are done for [...]” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 267). Despite all these, the charm of Uma over Moraes is so strong that the latter finds himself in a quandary as to what to believe – Uma’s stories about Aurora’s crudities or the reverse –, bearing in mind that he could lose his mother forever if he glued himself to Uma. He, at the same time, feels that he could be unhappy forever if his only hope of being happy – a partner – is dismissed, taking into account his fear of brevity of life. Happening almost at the same time is the coming down from glory of Aurora’s art. Some of her works on exhibition at a gala “would come close to being destroyed” as newspaper reviews see her as “a ‘society artist’, out of tune with, and even ‘deleterious’ to the temper of the age” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 261). Conversely, the authorial voice of Rushdie (1994) appreciates Uma’s sculpted work on display elsewhere, entitled *Alterations/Reclamations of the Essence of Motherhood in the Post-Secularist Epoch*, a hit in Germany a year before, as one that captivates art critics, to the extent that those who have chastised Aurora see “Uma as Indian art’s new star” (p. 262). Aurora is visibly sad. Uma’s world of deceit crashes with her death, a contrived misadventure into suicide, one founded on a phoney declaration of her love for the narrator – a subterranean pursuit of glory that is announced through invidiousness.

D. Aurora’s Overt Heroic Pretensions Contrasted with Abraham’s Covert Heroic Machinations

Between Aurora and Abraham, phallic, feminist and economic signifiers seem to generate the “binarist” conflict. Aurora’s overbearing presence in the life of Abraham suggestively makes the latter uncomfortable in the marital union but, due to his ideal of invisibility, he does not show it; he secretly plans to take her out of circulation. The wealthy background of Aurora, which makes Abraham, coupled with an inborn feminist sensibility, is the signifier of power that speaks for her belligerent signified in the feud. Abraham, though behaves like a hen-pecked husband, is silently furious at Aurora’s overpowering feminist braggadocio. This silent fury – a counter-signifier to Aurora’s econo-feminist edge – he nurtures, packed in which is vendetta with deadly venom. He succeeds through his ideology of concealment in eliminating her.

Unlike Aurora, however, his legacy is more revolting than laudatory. Farhad Idris sees Abraham Zogoiby as being representative of a Fanonian conception of the travesty of the European bourgeoisie. Idris (1999) asserts that

Unlike the European bourgeoisie, however, [he argues] the new postcolonial bourgeoisie class comes to power not through a long process of economic, political and cultural revolution but through a process of mimicry and replacement in which the Indian bourgeoisie have been carefully prepared to step into the shoes of their colonial predecessors. (p. 155)

In other words, Abraham, probably aware of the heroic values of the European bourgeois revolution, attempts to be a hero in the Indian bourgeois context, but he is oblivious of “Fanon’s assertion that ‘In underdeveloped countries, ... no true bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster [the European bourgeoisie may also be reprehensible in this light]’” (Idris, 1999, p. 156). His behaviour parallels Fanon’s postulate as he resides on the fringes of heroism, though he looms large in the general heroic conception of the novel. He salutarily leads the way verbally to Vasco Miranda’s residence for Moraes to invade. His lawlessness, however, magnifies a contradictory confirmation of his obsession with heroic standpoints. His criminal life – especially his deep involvement in the murder of his wife, Aurora, and daughters, Mynah and Minnie – confines him interpretatively to the edges and margin of heroic fame. His notoriety as “the biggest dada of them all” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 331) illuminates his infamy as “a natural commander, a born negotiator, the deal-maker of deal-makers [who] gambled for the highest stakes; had even been willing, as a young man, to wager his unborn son” (p. 331). All these enable him to establish the Khazana Bank International, a huge business monstrosity. Rushdie (1994) intimates readers that “nine-tenths of [the business] was submerged below the surface of things” (p. 341). A clever manipulator of men, Abraham outlasts Raman Fielding or Mainduck – another big fraudster, whose serpentine machination confuses his “religious-nationalist agenda” (p.337) with his “Bombay-for-the-Mahrattas” (p. 337) political war – in the battle of rogue-wits. The seven letters in Abraham’s name is actually a crude realization of its salutary manifestation in the biblical Abraham. He is eliminated in a “Samsonian”, apocalyptic attack on Bombay – putatively a heroic demonstration, the Abraham Zogoiby model.

E. Vasco’s Envy-filled Campaign against Aurora’s Grand Image

Unlike her relationship with Uma and Abraham, Aurora does not deliberately confront Vasco Miranda. In fact, it is the other way round; and the conflict is laced with contradictions as inspired by Vasco’s ambivalent intrusion into the Zogoibys. Aurora and Vasco are symbolic representatives of high art. Vasco, indeed, ironically improves Aurora’s artistry by advising her to abandon mimetic, mundane drawing. From the art collaboration grows their differences. Goaded by being humiliated out of the home of the Zogoibys, and, unknown to Aurora, locked up in a superiority contest with her, Vasco builds up a signification discourse in amplifying how the politics of heroism is played out in the novel.

Unlike Vasco, Aurora’s genius is a natural combining of the child prodigy with a passion for the preternatural, as “even as a child she never drew childishly; that her figures and landscapes were adult from the first. This was a myth she did nothing to discourage; indeed she may have even fostered it, by backdating certain drawings and destroying other pieces of juvenalia (Rushdie, 1994, p. 45). She thus has the gift to recreate the realism landscape with “that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude” (Roget, 1817, p. 405) with which in her surreal cocoon, she nurtures a deadly but visionary image of art as an instrument of self-fulfillment. She is armed with “an obscure but profound impulse to revolt against the conventions established in [her] own day, in order to rediscover convention on a deeper level” (Frye, 1981, p.132). Through metaphors which define the “ways in which we develop our prejudices and biases”, (Sanga, 2001, p. 2) she sustains her reality. She has indeed learnt “how to whirl-up a whirlwind, how to hurry-up a hurricane [...] How to dance up a storm” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 125). She is an articulation of Frye’s discovery in fiction of “two main tendencies, a “comic” tendency to integrate the hero with his society, and a “tragic” tendency to isolate him” (Frye, 1971, P. 54). Evidencing this is her fractious unpredictability, which reveals how “she crosses several important boundaries having to do with religion, class and even social mores [...]” (Hassumani, 2002, p. 118).

The acme of her illustrious but damning art career – the uncompleted *The Moor’s Last Sigh* – catches the fancy of her supernatural rival, Vasco Miranda, so much that he replicates its theme, but with inward concern that he has not discovered the secret of Aurora’s genius. It is an apprehension he nurses till he dies after he kills Aoi, whose dying is conceived of in this gripping imagery, actuated by a Miranda-inspired “Aurora-phobia” (Rushdie, 1994): “A hole appeared in the canvas, over Aurora’s heart; but it was Aoi Ue’s breast that had been pierced [...] her blood pumped through the wound in my living mother’s chest” (p. 431). This description is an animist construction of Miranda’s psychological contentment in avenging his ejection from *Elephanta* and more notably the envy-filled destruction of an art work he reasons is nonpareil in articulation. She remains legendary to the existence of Abraham and Vasco Miranda,

who in the aftermath of her death “became recluses, Abraham in his high tower and Vasco in his [...]” (p. 328) but both residing in the lower depths of her artistic conceptualisation.

Against this artistic acclaim of Aurora, Vasco’s heroic pretensions are constructed. The exponent of “an Epico-mythica-Tragic-Comico-Super-Sexy-High-Masala-Art” (Rushdie, 1994, Pp. 148&149), Vasco Miranda contributes to the anti-mimetic build of the novel. He upturns the rules of the English language – aided by structuralist conventionality argument –, and argues that “if the opposed answer-and-question pairs *there/where*, *then/when*, *that/what*, *thither/whither*, *thence/whence* all existed, then, [...] every *this* must also have its *whis*, every *these* its *whese*, every *those* its *whoase*” (P. 151) (Emphasis not mine). Being a painter of enigmatic proportions like Aurora, he makes Moor learn how a super-hero yearns for normality from the walls and gives one a precognition of the death-like consequences of Aurora’s characterization and holds self-same anti-Christian views like her. With the mergence of “a presence and an absence [...] A fullness and an emptiness” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 158), Vasco aligns himself with poststructuralist open-endedness and gives a picture of the theoretical thought on contradictions and existential struggle in mythic literature. The height of his artistic collaboration with Aurora is the fabulous disclosure of the person responsible for the death of the latter. He tells Moraes (Rushdie, 1994): “If she was killed, she said, she wanted the murderer brought to book. So she had concealed his portrait under her work in progress. Get the picture X-rayed, she said to me, and you will see my killer’s face” (p. 416). With these theoretical manifestations and revelation, Vasco Miranda could also lay claim to evincing some aspects of heroism.

However, he breaches the frontiers of heroic positivity through the unenviable task he is made to perform in the tragic flow of events. He is haunted by the ignominy and his artistic incapacity to obliterate his “inadequacy, his failure to approach Aurora’s heights” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 430). Because of this, psychopathic desires develop in him. He makes infertile attempts to equal Aurora’s mental beauty in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. His mad urge for greatness at all costs goads him to make Aurora the nodular point of his art in his painting, which he calls *Last Sultan of Granada, seen Departing from the Alhambra or The Moor’s Last Sigh*. He builds a maze of horror around himself, which is activated to mesmerise an already spell-bound victim through a menacing music that is awesomely exceptional in its “ululations of indeterminate gender, computer-generated whines and bangs” (Rushdie, 1994, Pp. 409&410). Definedly explained by Rushdie (1994) as “the vilest of dins”, it is “an unearthly, tortured or rather torturing-noise, sadistic, dispassionate, aloof” (p. 413) – all the qualifiers being an eerie ushering of Miranda into his wonder world of awe. His extinction is not a deviation from the tragedy in which his life is immersed, and he is choked to death by the mythic “needle” that lodges in his entrails (he has a premonition of this), after he has shot Aoi Ue to death.

F. Aurora’s Maternal Cloud over Moraes’ Unenthusiastic Heroism

Of all Aurora’s binary others, only his son, Moraes, does not constitute an antagonistic pole in the structuralist understanding of their heroic relationship. He is not, unlike others, a narcissistic symbol of Girard’s (1983) conceptualisation as “blissful autonomy” or “self-sufficiency” (p. 365). Therefore, he does not present a minatory counter-position to Aurora’s self-aggrandizement. His heroic preeminence lies in his first person narratorial sinews, which impulse empowers him to have pre-eminence over the movement of the plot; second, the unearthly conceptualisation of his physique is an added impetus to the magic strength of the work; third and most importantly, he is instrumental in unknitting the riddles behind the person that killed his mother, the whereabouts of some of Aurora’s stolen paintings and the discovery of Aurora’s unfinished masterpiece painting, “The Moor’s Last Sigh”, “the best part of what remained” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 415) of her; all these coming to light because Moraes is able to breach Vasco Miranda’s Benengeli fort to make the reader come to terms with the startling, suspense-filled denouement that explains the da Gama-Zogoiby tragedy.

Moor’s unconscious will to be prominent and Aurora’s desire to artistically play with his deformity so as to lighten its psychological weight, coupled with her sadistic urge to wreak vengeance on him for the sins of Uma, notably pit them against each other in the heroic ring. In this heroic context, a manic-depressed Aurora, assisted by the inconstancy in bipolar disorder, turns his child into an object-signifier of repression, deriving from their filial relationship, which is an offshoot of her troubled marital union with Abraham.

The convergence of psychological moments of depression and mania is Aurora’s signifying route towards putting Moor under her control. Under the grip of these oscillating psychological impairments, Aurora makes her art a redemptive promise and the tragic *aide memoir* of Moor’s life; she finds cathartic sustenance in her *Moor* series. Moraes, from Rushdie’s (1994) creative reasoning, discerns Aurora’s “profound and selfless passion”, “*self-aggrandisement* [sic]”, “determination to transcend and redeem [...] imperfections through art” and “tragedy disguised as fantasy” in the mythomaniac gem she calls “*A Light to Lighten the Darkness*” (p. 220). Etymologically based on the misbegotten birth of Moraes Zogoiby, her son, Aurora embarks on this project as a psychic redress for an assumed penal measure on her. The Moor comments that it “was a sign of love [...] she painted me into immortality, giving me the gift of being a part of what would persist of her” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 221).

Aurora, to kill the monstrous image of Moor’s life, leans on the function of art as psychotherapy. Her drawing, *Courtship*, she uses to represent a renewed Moraes, whose “hand was transformed into a series of miracles” (Rushdie, 1994, p. 224) – an Aurora wish after the reality of a deformed personality, a fancy she implants in *Moor and Tussy*, (p. 224), a lovers’ fiction in which the tragic paradigm of Moraes’ ageing misnomer is left to dwell in the realm of euphemism. The fictive ambivalence is rekindled in *To Die Upon a Kiss*, (p. 224) a replicated Shakespearean tragic

error of a murdered Desdemona, now Aurora, and a stabbed Othello (Moor). Aurora's obsession with the Moor symbol gradually wears a more surreal imagining with the prophetic vanquishing of Vasco Miranda's Alhambra invincibility myth, with Moraes as the conqueror. Like a conjuror, a fluvial picture, "the dividing line between two worlds" (Rushdie, 1994, p. 226) and its fluid boundary-less features, where water creatures intermingle with land characters, a "place where worlds collide, flow in and out of one another" (p. 226), inhabit her foreboding.

Unfortunately, her ironic masterdom over the tragic trajectory creates a fine line between love and hate. She goes beyond human limits to exact vengeance from his son for falling in love with Uma. Moraes expounds how the artistic cudgel of his mother's capricious and erratic individuality is unsparing of his misadventure with Uma through Rushdie's (1994) revelation:

And the Moor-figure: alone now, motherless, [...] sank into immorality, and was shown as a creature of shadows, degraded in tableaux of debauchery and crime [losing], in these last pictures, his previous metaphorical rôle as a unifier of opposites, a standard-bearer of pluralism, ceasing to stand as a symbol [...] of the new nation, and being transformed, instead, into a semi-allegorical figure of decay. (p. 303)

Moor describes the degradation his mother subjected him to through the prison authorities at "Bombay Central": I was becoming nobody, nothing; [...] I was scum (Rushdie, 1994, p. 288). He is too sure of Aurora's profound complicity in his "bitter turmoil" (p. 288):

[...] and mostly I blamed my mother, to whom my father never could say no – For what kind of mother would set out on such flimsy provocation, to destroy her child, her only son? (p. 288).

The same Aurora has earlier fended off an attack against the unborn Moor from Flory, Abraham's mother, when Abraham traded off his unborn Moor over a debt he owed his mother, for which the only payment was his first boy-child. Aurora, on being informed by Flory Zogoiby of this "deal", comes up against Abraham with this affront: "Tell your mother, [...] that there will be no children born in this house while I am still alive [...] You do your work and I'll do mine [...] But the work Flory is waiting for, that she will never see" (Rushdie, 1994, p. 115).

To have unleashed such turpitude on a child she has been very much possessive of, even in pre-conception, is indicative of a woman with wavy emotions. Moor's animal depiction of his mother's loathsome hostility to him is a haunting projection of a personality with extreme faces of the two affective dispositions of love and hate, comparing his mother's wickedness to "an age of monsters" (Rushdie, 1994, p. 288), wishing she had pulverized him as a baby.

Aurora's pliant consciousness, however, gives birth to a change in her attitude to Moraes. The painting found on her easel after her passing, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, her last work, indicates it much. In it, she restores his (Moor's) humanity. As evidence of the change,

there was no abstract harlequine, no junkyard collage. It was a portrait of her son, lost in limbo like a wandering shade; a portrait of a soul in Hell. And behind him his mother, no longer in a separate panel, but re-united with the tormented Sultan. (Rushdie, 1994, p. 315)

Rushdie (1994) sheds light on her son's exasperation at Aurora's belated intention to right a maternal wrong. To her son, "it was an apology that came too late, an act of forgiveness from which I could no longer profit. I had lost her, and the picture only intensified the pain of her loss" (Pp. 315&316).

G. Fielding's Triumphalist-control-of-Mumbai Disdain for Aurora

Rahman Fielding's abrasive duel with Aurora, though lean in the heroic horizon of the novel, magnifies the power underpinnings that announce the contest for superiority in the Mumbai face of the plot. Like Vasco Miranda, Fielding is the fount of the friction. He is pained not only by the boldness in her femininity but also by her growing artistic fame. Exploiting the negative muscularity of his Bombay "lordship", he entwines himself to Aurora's popularity for self-preservation and with the ultimate purpose to prove his masculinity over her. Mainduck's passion is to deploy politics as a Machiavellian weapon to render Aurora insignificant in the eyes of Bombayites; it is a matter of envying a feminine irrepressible and confident pursuit of identity. Moraes is not unconvinced about Mainduck's bravado in respect of pruning his mother: "[...] powerful women scare men off, and there were few Bombay males who would have dared to woo her. That explained Mainduck. Coarse, physically strong, ruthless, he was one of the few men in the city for whom Aurora would hold no terrors" (Rushdie, 1994, p. 257). As a reminder, Aurora has to have recourse to human spirits to stave off a planned attack by Mainduck's Mumbai's Axis on Kekoo Mody's gallery during the saga of Aurora's "The kissing of Abbas Alli Baig" (Rushdie, 1994, p. 233) painting showdown with Fielding. She negotiates a bribe with him for that purpose. Despite Aurora's grip on the plot, those two incidents explain Mainduck's self-conviction that the Aurora supremacist figure is not without blemish. However, these excremental qualifiers: "that MA bastard Mainduck" (p. 256) and "this gutter-creature of real potency, this savage, this walking slum" (p. 257), descriptions of Fielding's overly crude moral, religionist and political life, take him off the author's ideological exhortation. Despite doing so much to invalidate Aurora's growing preponderance, Fielding errs in seeing in women weak vessels who should submit to the phallic ego. His comeuppance: Aurora is one of the two women who are indirectly responsible for his death.

IV. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS



Durojaiye K. Owoeye holds some academic degrees. They are: B.A. (English Studies), Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun-State, Nigeria, 1994; M.A. (Literature-in-English), Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun-State, Nigeria, 2001; M.A. (Communication and Language Arts) University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo-State, Nigeria, 2002; M.Phil (Literature-in-English) Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun-State, Nigeria, 2005; Ph.D (Literature-in-English) Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun-State, Nigeria, 2011. His research interests are the novel genre, literary theory and comparative literature.

He is a lecturer at Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji, Osun State, Nigeria. He had earlier taught at Covenant University, Ota, Ogun-State, Nigeria (2005-2008). His lecturing experience traverses the three literary genres. He has academic publications in local and international media. Some of them are:

1. Owoeye, D. (2007). The literacy question and indigeneity through cultural folklorism for educational advancement. In Adoo-Adeku, K. & Andema, S. (eds.), *Literacy for development in Africa: some issues and concerns*. Legon: Ghana Reading Association, 183-190.

2. Owoeye, D. (2012). Norms of ambivalence in setting, plot and point-of-view in the anti- realist world of Salman Rushdie and Ben Okri. *International Journal of Linguistics and English Literature*. (IJALEL). 1.6, 210-221.

3. Owoeye, D. (2012). Eclectic considerations in the communication ideology of Salman Rushdie. *World Journal of English Language* (WJEL). 2.4, 76-86.

Dr. Owoeye is a member of Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN).