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City as a Fictional Character in the Postmodern Novel:  
*Alexandria Quartet and The Moor's Last Sigh*

Město jako fiktivní postava v postmoderním románu:  
*Alexandrijský kvartet a Maurův poslední vzdech*

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí bakalářské práce (Supervisor):  
**PhDr. Zdeněk Beran, Ph.D.**

Zpracovala (Author):  
**Dominika Freimannová**

Studijní obor (Subjects):  
**anglistika-amerikanistika / norská studia**

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## Abstract in English

This Bachelor thesis engages with the topic of a portrayal of the city in the postmodern novel which is then studied on the example of two chosen novels: *Alexandria Quartet* by Lawrence Durrell and *The Moor's Last Sigh* by Salman Rushdie. Both novels present the urban space as a female character with a strong influence upon the events and the formation of the protagonist's identity.

The second chapter is dedicated to a theoretical framework which helps to establish what we can understand under the term modernist literature and it traces the basic features such a literature possesses. For this framework I adopted the study of postmodernism presented by the work of Linda Hutcheon, mostly her *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. A special attention is dedicated to the aspects of postmodernism that can be applied on the portrayal of space and the relationship existing between postmodernism and modernism.

The third chapter outlines the basic concepts of space established by modernism. The major concepts dealt with in this thesis are: subjectivity, perspective, palimpsest and myth. As follows from the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, these concepts should be traceable also in postmodern fiction in a transformed state. According to Linda Hutcheon, the basic tool of this transformation is the use of parody which enables installing the concepts and subsequently subverting them in order to question their validity in our processes of creating meaning.

The following chapter presents the particular forms into which the concepts evolved and how they present themselves in postmodern fiction. The subjectivity through which the space was regarded in modernism is dissolved because of the de-centering of the subject of narration. The palimpsest which attempted to find an underlying unity in the modernist text, loses its unifying capability and transforms the resulting image into a hybrid. The explanatory and ordering function of the myth is undermined by postmodern parody and the perspective shifts into the peculiar postmodern position of being simultaneously outside and inside. In this context arises also the question of postcolonial literature.

In chapter five the conclusions about the postmodern transformation of the concepts of space are applied on the two novels. The aim is mainly to observe how specifically the theoretical conclusions present themselves in the respective novels and to draw more general conclusions from the similarities or possible differences of the image of the city. The first part of this chapter argues in what regard the novels can be understood as pieces of postmodern writing and it concludes that *The Moor's Last Sigh*, on the one hand, is more typically postmodern and it encompasses most of the features Hutcheon's work delineates. *Alexandria Quartet*, on the other hand, can be understood

more as a transition between modernism and postmodernism and thus it is possible to trace both modernist and postmodern aspects in it. Because both the cities portrayed in the novels were former British colonies, the relationship of both the authors and also their novels to postcolonial literature is analysed with a stress on the substitution of binary oppositions with the concept of a difference, preferred by postmodernism as a way of problematizing the reader's concepts. The focus then shifts to tracing the concrete transformations of the concepts of metaphor & allegory and palimpsest & hybridity and the way they present themselves in the image of the city. This chapter concludes with discussing the dissolving of subjectivity in the two novels.

The last chapter closes the discussion with the conclusion that both portrayed cities are perceived as women but that they play different feminine roles. While Alexandria is presented as the woman-lover with all the connotations of sex and sensuality, Bombay is mostly interpreted as the woman-mother. Only the relationship of two partners can be dissolved, unlike the mother-son relationship, and thus only the protagonist of *Alexandria Quartet* is capable of leaving the city and starting a new life.

**Key Words:** city, space, postmodernism, postcolonial literature, *Alexandria Quartet*, Lawrence Durrell, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Salman Rushdie, perspective, myth, palimpsest, hybridity, subjectivity, Alexandria, Bombay

## Abstrakt v českém jazyce

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem vyobrazení města v postmoderním románu, které je následně zkoumáno na dvou vybraných románech: Alexandrijském kvartetu Lawrence Durrella a Maurově posledním vzdechu Salmana Rushdieho. První část je věnována teoretickému rámci, ve kterém se snažím o vymezení pojmu postmoderní literatury, a který nastiňuje základní rysy, které tato literatura vykazuje. Tento rámec se opírá o pojem postmodernismu tak, jak jej chápe Linda Hutcheon a to zejména ve své studii *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. Zvláštní pozornost je zde věnována těm aspektům postmodernismu, které jsou aplikovatelné na vyobrazování města a na existenci vztahu mezi postmodernismem a modernismem.

Druhá část nastiňuje základní koncepce prostoru určené modernismem. Hlavní koncepty, kterými se tato práce zabývá jsou: subjektivita, perspektiva, mýtus a palimpsest. Jak vyplývá ze vztahu mezi modernismem a postmodernismem, tyto koncepty by mělo být možné najít v transformované podobě i v postmoderní fikci v transformovaném stavu. Podle Lindy Hutcheon je hlavním prostředkem této transformace využití parodie, která umožňuje navození konceptů a jejich následné podkopání za účelem zpochybnění jejich platnosti v našich významotvorných procesech.

Následující kapitola zkoumá, do jakých forem se dané koncepty vyvinuly a jak se prezentují v postmoderní literatuře. V modernistické tvorbě byl prostor vnímán subjektivně, zatímco v postmoderní tvorbě se tato subjektivita rozpadá, kvůli decentralizaci samotného subjektu vyprávění. Palimpsest, který se v modernistickém textu snažil nalézt pod povrchem ukrytou jednotu, ztrácí svou jednotící schopnost a přeměňuje tak výsledný obraz v hybrid. Vysvětlující funkce mýtu je podkopána postmoderní parodií a perspektivu střídá zvláštní pozice postmodernismu, který je zároveň uvnitř i vně. V tomto kontextu vyvstává také otázka postkoloniální literatury.

V páté kapitole jsou pak závěry předchozí kapitoly aplikovány na dva jmenované romány. Hlavním cílem je prozkoumat, jak konkrétně se v těchto románech prezentované teoretické závěry uplatňují v jednotlivých románech. První část této kapitoly diskutuje, v jakém smyslu je možno daná díla chápat jako postmoderní a dochází k závěru, že Maurův poslední vzdech je typičtěji postmoderní a zahrnuje většinu rysů nastíněných Lindou Hutcheon, zato v Alexandrijském kvartetu že můžeme vysledovat spíše přechod mezi modernismem a postmodernismem a je tedy možné v něm nalézt jak prvky modernistické, tak prvky postmoderní. Jelikož jsou obě v románech vyobrazená města bývalé britské kolonie, analyzuje tato kapitola také vztah obou spisovatelů a jejich děl k postkoloniální literatuře. Zvláštní pozornost je věnována nahrazení binárních protikladů konceptem odlišnosti, který je postmodernismem preferován, protože je možné jeho

prostřednictvím zpochybňovat čtenářovy zavedené pojmy. Poté se pozornost přesouvá na konkrétní prezentaci a přeměnu konceptů metafory/alegorie a palimpsestu/hybridity a na to, jak se tyto koncepty promítají do vyobrazení města. Závěrem se tato kapitola zabývá diskuzí rozpadu subjektivity, jak ji dané dva romány prezentují.

Poslední kapitola uzavírá závěrem, že obě vyobrazená města jsou vnímána jako ženy, ale každá z nich hraje jinou roli. Zatímco Alexandrie je prezentována jako žena-milenka, jejíž konotace jsou smyslové a sexuální, Bombaj je většinou interpretována jako žena-matka. Pouze vztah mezi dvěma partnery lze rozvázat, na rozdíl od vztahu příbuzenského, a tudíž je protagonista *Alexandrijského kvartetu* schopen město opustit a začít nový život.

**Klíčová slova:** město, prostor, postmodernismus, postkoloniální literatura, *Alexandrijský kvartet*, Lawrence Durrell, *Poslední Maurův vzdech*, Salman Rushdie, perspektiva, mýtus, palimpsest, hybridita, subjektivita, Alexandrie, Bombaj

# 1: Introduction

As Gaston Bachelard wrote: "All great, simple images reveal a psychic state. The house, even more than the landscape, is a "psychic state," and even when reproduced as it appears from the outside, it bespeaks intimacy."<sup>1</sup> However, today the majority of us no longer lives in houses with basements underneath them, attics on the top of them and gardens surrounding them, but instead we live in cities. Therefore we also think about cities and we write about cities. When Bachelard uses the model of a house to study the "psychic state" of an individual, he perceives the house itself to be mostly separated from other houses or possibly connected through their basements<sup>2</sup> but as he admits, in a city people live deprived of basements, attics and gardens, consequence of which is that they are also deprived of the intimacy the house was symbolizing for Bachelard.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless the image of the city continues to "reveal a psychic state" and the most obvious place for such revelations is literature. This thesis tries to engage in a study of the image of the city presented by postmodern literature because postmodernism is the state we are in now. Like postmodern characters in novels, we also try to relate to the space around us and in order to make sense of it we use concepts.

Since every character has a personal "psychic state", the image of the city he or she creates is in each and every case unique and therefore it always has to be studied in a connection to the text itself and not merely theoretically. This thesis thus concentrates on two literary works and the portrayal of urban spaces they present in connection to the theoretical framework literary criticism has established about postmodernism in general and about the image of the city in literature. The most fundamental aspect of the city in postmodern literature is that it is not a mere background for the story but, instead, the city disguises itself and, under its different masks, it plays various roles which shape both the characters and the course of the story itself. In doing so, the space becomes one of the characters and the story of the protagonist is no longer distinguishable from that of his city. The relationship between the protagonist and the city is most contradictory; it is filled with both love and hatred at the same time, and characteristic with both clashes and unities. This relationship is simultaneously an identification of the protagonist with the space he or she inhabits, and a constant rebellion against it in his search for breaking of the bond connecting them. Whether it is possible to destroy that bond and what happens once it is destroyed is dependent on the specific

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<sup>1</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) 72.

<sup>2</sup> Bachelard 21.

<sup>3</sup> Bachelard 26-27.

piece of writing. The two literary works studied in this thesis are: *Alexandria Quartet* by Lawrence Durrell and *The Moor's Last Sigh* by Salman Rushdie. While both of them can be understood as postmodern novels, there is a series of differences and the overall attitude to the subject of the city is not identical, however they both share the basic aspects of the function of the city for the novel as a whole. Therefore, this thesis engages in both pointing to the similarities and exploring the differences while attempting to contrast the two specific works with the theory of the concepts of the city and of postmodernism.

The theory of postmodernism constantly faces one problem in various transformations – postmodernism is impossible to clearly define because of its complexity and because of its fundamental questioning and problematizing nature which prevents closure. Without definiteness the study of postmodernism cannot, on the one hand, conclude but merely observe and comment on but, on the other hand, only in the constant openness it is possible to re-evaluate and contextualize what would otherwise be taken for granted. Thus only from such a position can postmodernism fulfil its constituting characteristic of questioning of all concepts. Therefore the image of the city can also be observed and studied but it defies every attempt at its definition because of its complex and anti-totalizing and problematizing nature which prevents firm shape and stability. As Burton Pike observes: "the city as an image can consist only of mirrors or mirages, which constantly refract and reflect shifting lights and angles in time."<sup>4</sup>

The first chapter of this thesis focusses on the problematic issues of defining postmodernism as a literary movement. For this purpose I chose the work of Linda Hutcheon as a framework and the first chapter summarizes her observations about postmodernism with a specific interest for those applicable on space. This chapter also traces the relationship between postmodernism and its predecessor – modernism. The following chapter outlines the basic concepts of space in modernism while chapter four contrasts them with their transformations presented by postmodern literature. The main concepts addressed in this thesis are those of subjectivity, perspective, palimpsest and myth. The connection to postcolonial literature is discussed in more detail in the section dedicated to postmodern perspective. The fifth chapter moves from the theory of postmodernism and of the image of the city to the analysis of the two exemplary novels. At the beginning of this chapter the postmodernity of the works is argued. Subsequently the chapter deals with how are the basic concepts outlined in the previous chapters textualized in the two novels and it concludes with an analysis of the function of those concepts and their transformations in the novels as wholes.

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<sup>4</sup> Burton Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1981) 136.

## 2: Framework and Theory

### 2.1: Framework: Linda Hutcheon's Study

Considering the fact that most postmodern novels are set in urban spaces and, at least to a certain degree, thematize their own settings, it is remarkable how little the literary science has established about postmodern depiction of the cityscape so far. However, such a more or less unified description or even a definition would be more than useful for both the reader and the scholar who wish to engage with postmodern writing because, as J. Hillis Miller mentions in his *Topographies*: "The landscape is an essential determinant of that action. No account of a novel would be complete without a careful interpretation of the function of landscape (or cityscape) within it."<sup>5</sup> This lack of a definition of the postmodern city in literature can most likely be attributed to the prevailing impossibility to either fully describe or to satisfactorily define any aspect of postmodernism and what we now consider postmodern literature. This difficulty can be exemplified on the unclear term "postmodern" and, as one can observe, there continue fierce debates on the topic of what postmodernism in fact is. The attempts on a definition given by various scholars and critics are often sharply contrasting each other or even contradicting the key points of every such definition.<sup>6</sup> Most of the studies of postmodernism could be described as either detracting or defending the phenomenon and thus their argumentation is usually used to serve only the respective purpose. The impossibility of a definition comes from the nature of postmodernism itself and from its specific goal which, according to Linda Hutcheon, is to question and demystify all the existing concepts applied in our reason-making processes, and to reveal them as only our constructs. On the basis of this characteristic, postmodernism defies our attempts to transform it into such a construct, to conceptualize it and thus limit it by its own closed and definite definition.

The work of Linda Hutcheon, especially her book *A poetics of Postmodernism*, but also *Politics of Postmodernism* and *The Narcissistic Narrative*, is unique in her attempt to work both theoretically and practically on the examples of works now considered to be postmodern. Hutcheon also prefers to observe the features of postmodernism rather than to judge it as a whole, distancing thus her point of view from those scholars and critics who tempt to study this phenomenon with the bias of either their condemnation or acclaim of it. She concludes that

[postmodernism] tries to problematize and, thereby, to make us question. But it does not

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<sup>5</sup> J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford University Press, 1995) 16.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Hutcheon distances her work from the detractors such as Terry Eagleton or Charles Newman but also mere theoreticians such as Susan Rubin Suleiman or Susan Sontag.

offer answers. It cannot, without betraying its anti-totalizing ideology. Yet both the detractors and promoters of postmodernism have found answers, because the paradoxes of postmodern do allow for answers – though only if you ignore the other half of the paradox.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore I decided to use her general observations about the philosophy, poetics and techniques of postmodernism as a starting point and as a framework for the purposes of this thesis. I will try to apply her findings or possible conclusions to the image of the city which is not specifically elaborated in her own work. Even though she dedicates a big part of her "*critical* attention" to postmodern architecture and even uses it as a model for her own work, which is mostly concerned with postmodernism in literature<sup>8</sup>, she does not provide a specific study of the image of the city in postmodern literature.

## 2.2: Theory of Postmodernism

For the purposes of her work, Hutcheon uses what she calls "historiographic metafiction" and she defines such fiction as: "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages".<sup>9</sup> As we understand from this term itself, the above all important for Hutcheon is the relationship between postmodern fiction and history and the metafictional form of those novels. From various characteristics of postmodern writing which Hutcheon traces throughout her work, I shall mention only those that are applicable on the image of the city as well, or those that are useful for better understanding of why postmodernism creates specifically such an image. Because Hutcheon concentrates most of her attention on the time and history in postmodern thinking and writing, the spatial aspect remains secondary in her work. This hierarchy responds to Burton Pike's assertion that time is much more of a dominating concept in Western society while space is only expressed through time<sup>10</sup> and that "[i]n our modern Western cities we live in space but think in time."<sup>11</sup> Therefore "the image of the city in a literary work occupies a peculiar position. Since its conceptual as well as its empirical referent is a physical object in space, the word-city is an inherently spatial image. But this unavoidable association with spatiality conflicts in modern literature with the

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<sup>7</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1988) 231.

<sup>8</sup> Hutcheon ix.

<sup>9</sup> Hutcheon 5.

<sup>10</sup> Pike 118-119.

<sup>11</sup> Pike 135.

dominating convention of time."<sup>12</sup>

According to Hutcheon, the most important feature of postmodernism is that it shows and points to contradictions but refuses to resolve them.<sup>13</sup> These contradictions are often embedded in our concepts through which we try to establish meaning and which the postmodern fiction first constructs and thus consequently works within, but which it at the same time questions and subverts. This questioning of concepts is based on the admittance that the concepts themselves are only provisional and unstable and that the meaning we derive from such concepts is therefore inevitably also provisional and illusory.<sup>14</sup> As Burton Pike concludes from the work of Wohl and Strauss: "The city is, on the one hand, incomprehensible to its inhabitants; as a whole 'it is inaccessible to the imagination unless it can be reduced and simplified'"<sup>15</sup> and thus the only possible way of comprehending the space around us is to use simplifying concepts. Such concepts are also applied on the urban space – the city. The device that postmodernism uses to point to these concepts and to make us question their validity is parody which is redefined by Hutcheon as "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity".<sup>16</sup> According to her, parody also "seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak *to* a discourse from *within* it, but without being totally recuperated by it."<sup>17</sup> Therefore Hutcheon argues that parody should be understood as the "perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies."<sup>18</sup> From that we can assume that in order to study the image of the city which postmodern fiction presents to us, we must first establish the concepts related to the space and their portrayal in literature, and then trace specifically how postmodernism, questions them and with what effect. According to Hutcheon's observations of postmodernism we should be able to locate parody as a frequently used tool.

The most relevant concept which is questioned in regard to space is the concept of a centre and its negative counterpart, the margin, or the related concept of binary oppositions "inside" and "outside," which postulates the question of perspective from which to observe the space itself. With that comes also the concept of borders and of form which both manifest in space and should be thus

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<sup>12</sup> Pike 120.

<sup>13</sup> Hutcheon x.

<sup>14</sup> Theo D'Haen, "Postmodernism in American Fiction and Art," *Approaching Postmodernism*, eds. Douwe Fokkema and Hans Bertens (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, Pa: John Benjamins, 1986) 225 as summarized by Hutcheon 7.

<sup>15</sup> Pike 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> Hutcheon 26.

<sup>17</sup> Hutcheon 35.

<sup>18</sup> Hutcheon 11.

dealt with in postmodern fiction. Another problematized concept appears to be our capability or even general possibility of relating to reality, which manifested itself in literature either in assumed objectivity which was the ultimate goal of realism, or in subjectivity which seemed to dominate modernism afterwards as a counter reaction. Since the modernist concept of perceiving reality already admitted objectivity to be impossible to achieve, it is the modernist subjectivity what postmodernism calls into question. As Linda Hutcheon asserts: "What postmodernism does is to denaturalize both realism's transparency and modernism's reflexive response, while retaining (in its typically complicitously critical way) the historically attested power of both."<sup>19</sup>

All of these concepts are addressed by postmodernism and only together they create the specific and complex image of the city, but for the purpose of this thesis I will deal with each of the aspects separately trying to delineate the concept, show its origins and function and subsequently trace its presence or its transformation in the chosen postmodern novels. Since a fragment is the most prominent aspect of any postmodern work, a study of such a work can thus also work only with fragments and must be to a certain extent fragmentary. However appealing is the idea of a neatly unified description of the city depiction in a postmodern novel, it is impossible, and arguably also undesirable, to conclude a work about postmodernism with such a definite description because it would inevitably become yet another concept and would thus principally go against the most fundamental characteristic trait of postmodernism, against the "anti-totalizing ideology."<sup>20</sup>

### **2.3: Postmodern Relationship to Modernism**

While new tendencies in literature have always proclaimed their poetics to be a rupture from the past and they formed their aesthetics in negation or in opposition to the previous trends in art, postmodernism does not attempt to do so. As Hutcheon points out: "Because it is contradictory and works within the systems it attempts to subvert, postmodernism can probably not be considered a new paradigm."<sup>21</sup> As its very name suggests, postmodernism comes after modernism but as it retains the word "modernism" in its name, it also retains aspects of modernist writing which it only modifies. As Patricia Waugh concluded: "Postmodernism again appears to be an intensification of aspects of modern Western thought rather than a radical break with them."<sup>22</sup> Thus modernist concepts should be the first ones to observe and study, as they should also be the first ones to be either "intensified," as Waugh suggests, or called into question by postmodernism, as argues Linda

<sup>19</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London; New York: Routledge, 1989) 34-35.

<sup>20</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 231.

<sup>21</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 4.

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Waugh, *Practising Postmodernism Reading Modernism* (NY: St Martin's Press Inc., 1992) 12.

Hutcheon. From today perspective, it is much easier to assert conclusions about modernism for several reasons. First of all, modernism had a clear and proclaimed poetic programme which it exemplified in fiction and this programme was created in opposition to the preceding realism in order to present reality in a truer way which was believed to better correspond to how an individual perceives the world. This poetics thus attempted to create new and revolutionary art. Second of all, modernism was very serious about both the role of literature and about its capacities for achieving its goals through innovation.<sup>23</sup> Last but not least of the reasons is, that with the end of modernity and emergence of the stage we are in now, the post- stage, came the end of modernism as a literary movement. This closure of a period offered us as observers a very much needed perspective from which we can now study modernism as an already past phenomenon which it is possible to address from the outside while attaining some distance from it. Postmodernism does not offer this perspective at this point and, as I should attempt to argue later on, it might never do so because of its very nature. Therefore it is considered more of a transitional stage and its understanding might thus lead to emergence of a new poetics and new literary forms.

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<sup>23</sup> David Mikics, *A New Handbook of Literary Terms* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2007) 241.

### 3: Modernist Concepts of Space

From the relationship between modernism and postmodernism it is apparent that studying the latter is not possible without first addressing what temporally preceded it. Since the topic concerned is the depiction of space in literature, I have to at least briefly outline the modernist portrayal and because postmodernism works predominantly with concepts, as clearly follows from the work of Linda Hutcheon, the study of modernist concepts of the space is inevitable.

#### 3.1: Subjectivity

In reaction to the search for an objective representation which was a typical and constituting element of the realist fiction, and also in reaction to the overall modernization of the society, modernism admitted the impossibility of objectivity and therefore abandoned it in a search for a subjective and thus truer representation of the modern reality. Therefore also the space started to be mediated subjectively through the narrating consciousness and itself even became, as Raymond Williams asserts, "the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness."<sup>24</sup> By stating that: "The city, it seemed, was what man had made without God."<sup>25</sup> Raymond Williams also suggests that the city, or at least the modernist image of it, was purely of a human creation and was therefore a part of the modern concept of the metropolis as the "centres of economic, political and cultural power."<sup>26</sup> However the modern man might have been the maker of his city, his prevailing pessimism about the effects of modernity on the human consciousness presented itself in the general sense of "closure, breakdown, failure and frustration".<sup>27</sup> As Burton Pike observes: "Cities were places of witness to the growing loss of shared conventions and values, with consequent weakening of the social fabric" which led to the "radical reduction in the power and grasp of the fictive hero"<sup>28</sup> and subsequently the "city in literature came to represent increasingly the feeling that modern culture was hollow."<sup>29</sup> Therefore many of the modernist characters dreamed of escaping the urban space as is apparent for example in Joyce's *Dubliners* or Woolf's *The Waves*. However, modernist art simultaneously expressed the belief that "[b]ehind this ebbing of vitality from urban life in literature

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<sup>24</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985) 239.

<sup>25</sup> Williams 240.

<sup>26</sup> Williams 279.

<sup>27</sup> Raymond Williams, "The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism," *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art*, eds. Edward Timms and David Kelley (Manchester University Press, 1985) 23.

<sup>28</sup> Pike 100.

<sup>29</sup> Pike 106.

is the idea, frequently present only by implication, that a new, vital culture must arise to replace the old one."<sup>30</sup>

As the city space in modernism is always perceived through or at least related to the psyche of the protagonist and his consciousness, it is apparently connected to psychoanalysis which can, and often is, used to study and explain both the protagonist but through him also the entire world which he or she is relating to. This world, in our case this space, thus in modernism only exists and can be made sense of in connection to the narrating self, however mysterious and buried in the unconscious this explanation might be. This use of psychoanalysis responds to the overtly expressed modernist wish and need for understanding and making sense of the perceived but difficult to interpret reality. This interpretation can only be attained through applying explanatory and simplifying concepts. The existence of such an external reality is, however, not questioned by modernism; the difficulty lies solely in the matter of how to describe it, what perspective we can use and what sense of it we can thus make.

### **3.2: Perspective**

The escape the isolated modernist characters longed for is rarely realized in modernist fiction but in those cases where it is, it provides the "escaped" character with a gain of easier and subsequently happier life outside the modern society and outside the modern metropolis which typically presents itself with a feeling of a paralysis, as for example in the works of James Joyce or in the idealization of the connection between man and nature which expresses D. H. Lawrence. The border between the city or the metropolis and the country is very firm and places all characters either within the border of the city, thus inside, or outside of it, thus outside of the centre and into the margin. This sense of being somehow outside as an "isolated observer"<sup>31</sup> is inherent to most modernist narrators and it singles them out of the masses they observe and to which they usually feel to be superior, as Burton Pike asserts: "The protagonists are excluded from these communities and feel their exclusion, although at the same time they may reject the communities as inferior or ignorant"<sup>32</sup>. This feeling creates the often mentioned notion of élitism of modernist art.<sup>33</sup> Modernist art attempted to create a pure form and the search for it was the most important goal of art. Such a perfect form could never be accessible to masses, therefore the modernist artist and with him also the modernist

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<sup>30</sup> Pike 109.

<sup>31</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, 240.

<sup>32</sup> Pike 101.

<sup>33</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) viii cited in Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 49.

protagonist does not wish to be a part of a community and prefers his isolation.

With the process of urbanization the literary production also shifted to big cities and the authors address the city as the only place where things can be made to happen. This is mirrored also in the modernist obsession with urban settings and the belief that urban experience is helpful, if not inevitable, in the search for artistic identity, and that it is a source of authorial inspiration. Even when modernist protagonists seem to be desperate and often wishing to escape the consequences of urban life, the experience of the city seems to be one of the strongest factors which help those protagonists to impose rather than to restore order on their difficult reality through narrating and through writing and thus creating. The city is therefore portrayed as the cultural centre and without it the entire modernist experience could not take place and thus could not be addressed in literature. In this sense, modernist fiction perceives the contemporary reality as breaking down and lacking cultural values but simultaneously it expresses "a wishful call to continuity beneath the fragmented echoing."<sup>34</sup>

### **3.3: Palimpsest**

As Britannica defines the term, palimpsest is "manuscript in roll or codex form carrying a text erased, or partly erased, underneath an apparent additional text. The underlying text is said to be 'in palimpsest,' and even though the parchment or other surface is much abraded, the older text is recoverable".<sup>35</sup> Thus the older layers are covered by newer ones and uncovering of the hidden layers means uncovering the older meanings. In the cityscape the parchment is substituted by the urban fabric that spreads itself around the characters and in which they are trying to orient through relating to the space and its signs. The underlying layers may present themselves in the monuments left by the previous ages or simply in signs referring to the past which might have been displaced by the present surroundings, partly destroyed in the course of time, or simply bringing with itself new meanings. Understanding space as a palimpsest thus brings with itself the substitution of the spatial signs with their temporal meanings. While wandering in the urban landscape, the modernist protagonist reads the signs, the monuments and the echoes around him, as for example in Eliot's *The Waste Land* or in the journey of Leopold Bloom through Dublin in Joyce's *Ulysses*. In both the texts, and arguably in modernism in general, the layers of the palimpsest present themselves only in fragments, but it is the task of the protagonist to connect the fragments, to locate a hierarchy which

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<sup>34</sup> Hutcheon 11.

<sup>35</sup> "Palimpsest," *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1985 ed.

corresponds to the underlying concept and which provides explanations and grants the narrator a grasp over the surrounding space. James Gifford calls this "the modernist drive for (even if failure to achieve) wholeness from fragmentation"<sup>36</sup> and the modernist wholeness presents itself in the concept of a circle and in the cyclical nature of modernist texts which can only be read and read again.<sup>37</sup> When modernist texts allude to older literature it is only in order to create their own depth in a transformation of the old cultural values and in a search for their own substance.<sup>38</sup>

### 3.4: Myth

One of the possible linking concepts which are capable of unifying the "fragmented echoing" is the myth and its use has been observed in modernist fiction many times.<sup>39</sup> As David Mikics concludes from the work of Lévi-Strauss: "myths are the building blocks or governing thought structures of collective human existence" and they "are based on oppositions".<sup>40</sup> Modernist literature uses myth as a unifying concept that connects all the seemingly unconnected and meaningless parts together, creates a whole and thus places us (both the narrator and the reader) inside a safe, defined and through a myth understandable world to which we can easily, though subjectively, relate. Already in the oldest myths, such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, we can read about the city<sup>41</sup>, in this case the city of Uruk, walls of which are reported by the epic to be built by the king Gilgamesh. By this very act the mythical figure gives the city a form and within its walls encloses the order, while outside these walls remains the ungraspable chaos. Thus the city is meant to symbolize order where good and reasonable deeds are to take place. This mythical act of conquering chaos and bringing order into the human society is what all the myths are subsequently used for as meaning-making concepts. As Martin Hilský points out on the example of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, modernist literature can be understood as an attempt to overcome the vast emptiness of the world in restoring a unity of all existence. This unity presents itself in the underlying structure of the myth according to which the modernist texts are built and which they transform and contrast with the modern experience as for example in paralleling the journey of *Odyssey* with a single, seemingly meaningless day of Leopold Bloom wandering around Dublin in *Ulysses*. This parallel not only connects the fragmentary

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<sup>36</sup> James Gifford, "Real and Unreal Cities: The Modernist Origins of Durrell's Alexandria," *Durrell and the City*, ed. Donald P. Kaczvinsky (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012) 25.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Hilský, *Modernist* (Torst, 1995) 30.

<sup>38</sup> Hilský, 245.

<sup>39</sup> Mikics 191.

<sup>40</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* and "The Structural Study of Myth," *Structural Anthropology* cited in Mikics 195.

<sup>41</sup> Pike 3.

experiences but it also provides them with a deeper and more fundamental significance.

All the mentioned concepts fulfil the same function – they help the protagonist to order his experiences and they endow those fragmented experiences with a meaning. In modernist fiction, the underlying unity is very often not successfully abstracted from the fragments, but that in no respect shatters the modernist confidence in the existence of a unity. Even if the culture around the protagonist is hollow and lacking in value, the protagonist can be nevertheless sure of himself as a subject and from that position it is possible for him to endlessly engage in the process of searching for the unity outside, whether through a myth or through exploring the hidden layers of the palimpsest.

## 4: Postmodern Transformation of the Concepts of Space

While modernism aimed at originality and the main goal of art was to achieve a pure form, postmodernism admits the impossibility of originality, acknowledges that everything has already been here before and nothing entirely new can be created. Therefore postmodernism transforms the modernist mythical cycle and instead of innovation it hails the recycling of existent forms.<sup>42</sup> In doing so, it places those forms into new contexts and thus derives new meanings.

### 4.1: Subjectivity

As outlined in the previous chapter, modernism used subjectivity as the main standpoint from which the reality around was perceived and through which it was also mediated but postmodernism problematizes the very concept of that subjectivity. That does not mean that postmodernism tries to destroy either subjectivity or the subject itself but, as Hutcheon concludes from the works of Derrida, Foucault and Lacan, it presents a "de-centering of the concept of the subject".<sup>43</sup> Instead of destroyed, the subject is situated through the recognition of its differences of sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity and many others. Hutcheon continues to argue, that in postmodern literature, instead of "anonymity, we find over-assertive and problematizing subjectivity, on the one hand, and, on the other, a pluralizing multivalency of points of view"<sup>44</sup> as a way of dealing with the de-centered position of the subject. Hutcheon concludes that "[t]his does not deny subjectivity; but it does challenge the traditional notion of its unity and function. The totalizing power of narrative, of history, and of our notions of the subject is subverted".<sup>45</sup> While Hutcheon, again, focusses mainly on history, her conclusions can be applied on the depiction of space which is in postmodern novel still presented from the perspective of the subject, but his or her interpretations of it are problematic, forced upon the reader and, eventually, they reveal their illusory nature to the reader when the space gradually dissolves into fragments.

### 4.2: Postmodern Palimpsest, Labyrinth and Hybrid

When the protagonist witnesses the breakdown of his surroundings, he attempts to read it is a

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<sup>42</sup> Hilský, 247.

<sup>43</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 150.

<sup>44</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 161.

<sup>45</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 164.

palimpsest. This concept, as I already mentioned, was present in modernist interpretation of the space as well, however the final image is different. Postmodern palimpsest is not held together by a unifying concept such as the myth or a map according to which the different parts could be located in relationship to one another or, as David Harvey quotes from Pfeil, postmodern space becomes "a discontinuous terrain of heterogeneous discourses [...] a chaos different from that of the classic texts of high modernism precisely insofar as it is not recontained or recuperated within an overarching mythic framework."<sup>46</sup> The memory which seemed to give meanings and subjective notions towards separated places also fails when characters understand its unreliability and the substitution of the spatial with the temporal is no longer possible. The space thus becomes fragmented and the narrator perceives it as a labyrinth. As Richard Lehan asserts "the postmodern city suggests the labyrinth where experience is cut off from memory and memory from signification in a landscape of paranoia that defies repetition and fixity."<sup>47</sup> Without a unifying concept the palimpsest becomes only a sum of infinite possibilities which the characters try to interpret, but without the underlying explanatory cause, every restoration of a layer underneath points to yet another hidden layer. As the different layers of the city palimpsest are not subordinate to a single overarching idea in postmodernism, the boundaries between the layers start losing their edges and inevitably melt together. The result is not a unified image of the space but a hybrid which attempts to incorporate in itself all the contesting and contradictory elements of all its layers, usually without much success and it results in the final breakdown of either the space, the narrator or the narration itself.

### **4.3: Myth and Allegory**

Postmodernism cannot destroy the concept of myth because, as pointed out by Lévi-Strauss, it is a concept used in our everyday meaning-making processes. However, postmodernism and postmodern literature are aware of the illusory nature of the unity which is achieved through that myth and so instead of destroying the myth, postmodernism questions it and most importantly it questions the validity of the meaning created through myth. It does so by inverting and subverting the myth, often using parody, with the effect of revealing the structure of the myth and thus revealing the fact, that we or the narrator are desperately trying to fit reality into this concept, into the myth structure. This leads only to frustration because it is impossible, but what postmodernism is interested in, is the constant "need to see patterns which may easily turn into the tendency to

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<sup>46</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Blackwell Publishing, 1990) 316-317.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Lehan, "Urban Signs and Urban Literature: Literary Form and Historical Process," *New Literary History*, vol. 18, no. 1, Studies in Historical Change (Autumn, 1986) 110.

suspect plots" and as Tony Tanner continues "their significance may reside not so much in their verifiable applicability as in the human compulsion to formulate them."<sup>48</sup>

Apart from myth literature uses also the concept of an allegory. David Mikics defines a literary allegory as follows: "Allegories turn abstract concepts or features into characters. [...] allegories just as easily transform people and places into conceptual entities"<sup>49</sup> As he also points out, allegories want to be discovered and interpreted and so the postmodern authors leave many clues and symbols pointing the reader's attention to those concepts, but only to subsequently abuse the allegorical explanations and ridiculing them through parody The protagonists themselves often attempt to interpret reality as an allegory and their lives as governed by myths and metaphors. Those interpretations are subsequently forced upon the reader as well. The function of an allegory is similar to myth in that it points to a meaning behind something seemingly meaningless and thus allegory is nothing but a concept. Since postmodernism disrupts concepts, it often violates allegories by inverting them, parodying them and thus depriving them of their ability to provide the reader with additional meanings. In doing so, the reader is again and again reminded that "any meaning that exists is of our own creation."<sup>50</sup>

#### **4.4: Perspective**

As Linda Hutcheon asserts the specific situation of the postmodern protagonist or the postmodern narrator lies in the duality of his or her position in regard to the object of the narration. These narrators are what she calls "ex-centered"<sup>51</sup> because they are somehow excluded from both the literary canon and from their own narrative. Therefore they are at the same time within and outside their story.<sup>52</sup> Only from this position it is possible for such a narrator "to critique the inside from both the outside and the inside"<sup>53</sup> and thus question not only the concepts of inside and outside but also the concept of the borders separating those two from one another. While the modernist protagonist dreamed of escaping and gained peace in his exile, the postmodern often finds himself in an exile, but even then he gains no distance from the space he wished to leave and he is captured inside the labyrinth at least in his thoughts. Thus the postmodern novel questions the very possibility of escaping and freeing oneself from the power the urban space seems to possess. The

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<sup>48</sup> Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1976) 153.

<sup>49</sup> Mikics 8.

<sup>50</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 43.

<sup>51</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 12.

<sup>52</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 21.

<sup>53</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 69.

anxiety caused by the urban space which the protagonist fails to order, forces the protagonist into his or her narration, the goal of which is to establish one's position in regard to the space around. However, since the protagonist remains both inside and outside, he can never fully master or grasp the space without using concepts which he or she self-consciously understands to be mere human creations.

#### 4.4.1: Postcolonial Literature

Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the progressing industrialization brought with itself the mechanization and dehumanization of urban areas which started being pictured in scientific terms that replaced the emotional and rather sensual language of romanticism and as the majority of the population moved into the expanding cities, also the focus and thus the setting of fiction moved from the country to the city. This polarity of city versus country was later relocated yet again with the emergence of European empires and the traditional concept subsequently evolved into the binary opposition of the imperial "developed" centre in the metropolis versus the marginalized "underdeveloped" colony. This process was characteristic with its "penetration, transformation and subjugation of 'the country' by 'the city'."<sup>54</sup> The tension between the centre and the margin is an important issue of postmodern literature and in this context it is connected to the breakdown of the empires and the emergence of postcolonial literature.<sup>55</sup>

The imperial past also brought with itself the binary opposition of foreign as opposed to native which apply not only to people and their cultures but also to questions of literary or more broadly artistic canon and its continuity or rupture with it as with a "foreign" and unwelcome superficially inflicted element. After the collapse of the European empires there always remains the question of what to retain from the possible progress or change undergone during the oppression, and even more importantly, what and how to remember from the past before this foreign rule. This question inevitably brings with itself the problem of relating to the past in general and, specifically in postcolonial culture, the problem of rewriting or rethinking the past. Since people as same as cultures are products of their past, the postcolonial reality faces the problem of becoming a hybrid because the postcolonial man cannot easily relate to the "original" culture, meaning the one that preceded colonialism, because of the huge time gap and also because his position is inevitably different from that of his ancestors, but simultaneously he cannot relate to the Western culture of the colonizer partly because of his need to distance himself from it but partly because he is not regarded

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<sup>54</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, 286.

<sup>55</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 72.

as a member of it by the Western culture itself. Thus the postcolonial literature attempts to deal with the problematic issues of establishing an identity in a world filled with concepts such as "we" and "them" and "native" versus "foreign" which can be considered to mirror the same concepts the Western culture used to culturally subjugate its colonies. The postcolonial literature in a postmodern form, which is only one possible result of the problematic postcolonial situation, attempts to question the very concepts by showing them to be interchangeable, depending on the perspective of the observer. It is, however, important to assert already at this point, that what postmodernism aims at is to question a concept, to expose its functioning and to challenge its validity, but it does not attempt to destroy such a concept or express the wish for its complete disappearance.<sup>56</sup> As Hutcheon concludes from the work of D'Haen: "Postmodernist contradictory art still installs that order, but it then uses it to demystify our everyday processes of structuring chaos, of imparting or assigning meaning"<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 41.

<sup>57</sup> D'Haen 225 in Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 7.

## 5: Postmodern Image of the City in Durrell and Rushdie

In the following chapter I will try to trace the postmodern image of the city in the two novels I chose as examples, *The Moor's Last Sigh* by Salman Rushdie and Lawrence Durrell's four novels of *Alexandria Quartet* and contrast this image with the theory delineated in the previous chapter. The choice of these two specific pieces of fiction has one advantage: while both the novels share many aspects, they show two different, though from our point of view related, urban spaces and they deal with those cityscapes in diverse ways, while still allowing for a comparison and more general observations. Some of the most important similarities are that both novels have a male protagonist who functions also as the narrator, they both have a framing narrative which encapsulates the main part of the story which is thus told in retrospective. Most importantly, of course, they both have a predominantly urban setting which is thematized and plays an important role in the novels as wholes, by which I mean that those two novels would not present the same picture if relocated, because they would lose their frame of reference and their context. However, Linda Stump Rashidi argues the very opposite in the case of Durrell's Alexandria, claiming that "the Alexandria of the *Quartet* is an inner space that could be almost anywhere."<sup>58</sup> She interprets the city purely as a metaphor which could be made to work in other spaces just as well, but the situation of the pre-war Alexandria which is, to certain extent, also Durrell's Alexandria, was so specific in its cosmopolitan and multicultural character of "[f]ive races, five languages, a dozen creeds: five fleets turning through their greasy reflections behind the harbour bar"<sup>59</sup> that it is not possible to relocate the entire *Quartet* "almost anywhere". I would instead argue that despite its inaccuracies<sup>60</sup> the space of Alexandria plays too important and too complex of a role to be simplified into a mere metaphor. There are arguably other cosmopolitan spaces with similar genius loci, but Durrell incorporates specific historical events and links to the extratextual reality of Alexandria in the texts, and deprived of all those, the novels would be completely different texts, parts of a different context and thus would not be merely relocated, but completely rewritten.

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<sup>58</sup> Linda Stump Rashidi, "Durrell's City as Interior Space: 'The City begins and Ends in Us'," *Durrell and the City*, ed. Donald P. Kaczvinsky (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012) 32.

<sup>59</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Justine* (NY: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1957) 14.

<sup>60</sup> Pointed out for example in John Rodenbeck, "Alexandria in Cavafy, Durrell and Tsirkas," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 21, The Lyrical Phenomenon (2001) 146.

## 5.1: Postmodernity

### 5.1.1: In *Alexandria Quartet*

I have already argued that postmodernism should be understood more as a continuation of modernism than a radical break from it in the sense that it uses its concepts but it also subverts them and thus denies them their unifying validity. In this sense it is easier to understand why Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* can be considered both a modernist and a postmodern work. As for example James Gifford concludes when studying city in Durrell's writing: "Durrell is, in this way, a key author bridging late modernist tropes of the city, and he negotiates the shifting trends between the early and late literary movements of the twentieth century."<sup>61</sup> Gifford in this regard argues, that "[Durrell's] work does not comfortably fit in the established modes of literary modernism nor the predominant critical trends of the latter decades of the century: psychoanalytic criticism and postcolonial theory"<sup>62</sup> and thus his fiction should be understood as a transition from late modernism to postmodernism and it is therefore possible to find in it traces of both.

Gifford contrasts modernist fiction such as Eliot's *The Waste Land* with *Alexandria Quartet* observing that while Eliot layers meanings and cultural allusions upon one another, the main concern is the modernist search for a unity, wish for a unifying concept underlying all the fragmentary pieces, from which also stems the already mentioned modernist belief in the emergence of a new culture from the ruins of the old one.<sup>63</sup> From Durrell's decaying depiction of Alexandria, facing the end of the British Empire as well as World War II, the reader senses neither hope for an improvement nor a sense of a new beginning which could come after death, as in the cyclical myth of death and rebirth that is the underlying structure of Eliot's *The Waste Land*.<sup>64</sup> Durrell's Alexandria is, however, not moving towards its renewal but towards its decay, even though some of the characters, namely Darley and Clea, seem to be able to leave the ruins of the city displaced by the experience of the World War II, and start a new life in a different place.

As already mentioned before, the modernist city is more of a projection of the protagonist's mind, thoughts, emotions and also his subconscious, than a mere background for the action. It mirrors his response to the world and however labyrinthine, it either reveals its structure at some point or the structure hidden beneath is suspected. In this sense, Alexandria in the *Quartet* is also a response to Darley's and other characters' psyches. Because most characters lack a purpose in life

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<sup>61</sup> Gifford 13-14.

<sup>62</sup> Gifford 14.

<sup>63</sup> Pike 109.

<sup>64</sup> David Spurr, "Myths of Anthropology: Eliot, Joyce, Lévi-Bruhl," *PMLA*, vol. 109, no. 2 (Mar. 1994): 271.

and often also lack values and moral principles, they project all of these on the city, they perceive it as an embodiment of a will stronger than their own and thus they create an excuse for their passivity and their inaction. The sensual experience attacking all their senses appears to be the cause of the sexual and purely physical acts of the characters themselves. Those acts mostly lack a real emotional background and therefore the Alexandrians often hurt the objects of their passions.

Each and every one of the characters seems to have his or her own version of the city but they all are overwhelmed by it, they fail at making sense of it and thus they appear to be incapable of living and creating. The only creative character who also appears to be the only one capable of a true emotion, when choosing a death rather than abandoning his incestuous feelings for his sister, is Pursewarden. His creative powers come from the fact that he as the only one sees the city as less of a personal projection: "Alexandria, princess and whore. The royal city and the *anus mundi*. She would never change so long as the races continued to seethe here like must in a vat".<sup>65</sup> In this description he admits the inescapable multitude of the city which defies any unification and points to the constituting element of Alexandria – the contradiction which cannot be resolved. He is, however, only capable of such perception thanks to his irony and the constant parodying of both the city and the characters, but self-reflexively also of himself:

This amiable quibble allows me just the split second I need to jot down the salient points for my self-portrait on a rather ragged cuff. [...] Item one. 'Like all fat men I tend to be my own hero.' Item two. 'Like all young men I set out to be a genius, but mercifully laughter intervened.' Item three. 'I always hoped to achieve the Elephant's Eye view.' Item four. 'I realized that to become an artist one must shed the whole complex of egotisms which led to the choice of self-expression as the only means of growth! This because it is impossible I call The Whole Joke!'<sup>66</sup>

In this sense his character, a model for Darley himself, points in the direction of the inevitable development, hence towards postmodernism.

### **5.1.2: In *The Moor's Last Sigh***

A similar situation appears in Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* only taken the one step further. While Darley (and Clea) are given another chance at the end of the *Quartet* and the start of their new life outside the old space is meant as a spark of hope emerging from the decaying ruins of Alexandria, Moor, the protagonist of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, is not that lucky and his ending is not nearly as

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<sup>65</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Clea*. (NY: Penguin Books, 1991) 63.

<sup>66</sup> Durrell, *Clea*, 128.

optimistic. Although his interpretation of the space around him is reminiscent of Darley's because he also interprets it as a limiting force that predetermines his own fate, he lacks the modernist remains of seriousness and the heroism he ascribes to himself plays out without the desired tragic effect. Quite on the contrary, he proves to fail and his passivity reveals itself in its ridiculousness denying him another chance at living.

In the case of Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* it is easier to define the text as postmodern. Even though the very term postmodern brings with itself many uncertainties and, as I have already argued in the first chapter, and it is difficult or impossible to clearly define its borders, the novel contains most of the characteristics observed by Linda Hutcheon. Salman Rushdie is the prototypical writer of the margin who challenges the monolithic literary canon, his works in general, and *The Moor's Last Sigh* in particular, are "fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political",<sup>67</sup> they cross boundaries between genres. In the case of *The Moor's Last Sigh* they are the genres of a detective story of searching for Aurora's murderer, of fairy tale or a love story of Moor's parents and of heroic epic of Moor as a hero or a tragic hero, all of which are subverted through parody and questioned as concepts. Hutcheon's description of a postmodern work can be just as well applied on *The Moor's Last Sigh*; it "attempts to be historically aware, hybrid and inclusive."<sup>68</sup> Also the space in Rushdie's fiction bears much more significantly the shapelessness which brings with itself the "de-mythification" as studied for example by Burton Pike.<sup>69</sup>

## 5.2: Perspective

### 5.2.1: Postcoloniality: Otherness versus Postmodern Difference

The novels are set in Alexandria, Egypt and in Bombay, India so from our Western or possibly European point of view they are located "outside" Europe, in the sense that they both are outside of what we regard as our own culture. While *Alexandria Quartet* is set in the time when Egypt was under the declining British rule, *The Moor's Last Sigh* is mostly concerned with the time after the Indian independence in 1947 and the subsequent Partition. However, the Indian identity as presented by Rushdie is in close connection to the former British rule. Therefore the contrast between "the British" and "the other" instantly arises in the Western reader's mind but the concept of the "other" is problematized in postmodern fiction and specifically in the work of Salman Rushdie.

<sup>67</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 4.

<sup>68</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 30.

<sup>69</sup> Pike 130.

While both settings of the novels are perceived as distant, a contemporary reader still notices many similarities corresponding to his or her own environment and culture, making thus the distancing "otherness" impossible to maintain. Postmodernism introduces instead the disturbing "difference" which can be neither identified with nor distanced from.<sup>70</sup> As Hutcheon argues: "The postmodern attempts to negotiate the space between centres and margins in ways that acknowledge difference and its challenge to any supposedly monolithic culture".<sup>71</sup> In this sense, Rushdie's postcolonial novel and Durrell's work depicting the decline of colonialism not only show places which are different yet similar, but in doing so, they both point to the concepts according to which the reader perceives the spaces themselves.

When reading the two chosen novels, the Western reader might, on the one hand, feel distanced from all the colours and smells, generally all the sensuous attacks with which both Alexandria and Bombay present themselves to the narrator, and possibly also from the presentation of various nations and religions constantly interacting with each other, because however multicultural Europe is becoming in recent years, the still prevailing monolithic view of a unified European culture seems to contrast the multitude of Bombay and cosmopolitan Alexandria. However, the reader instantly recognizes the expanding influences of the Western lifestyle, consumerism and secularisation and the effects of globalization on the East. The overall corruption and passivity of politicians, destructive individualism and the lack of care for others are all very well known to both the inhabitant of either Alexandria or Bombay, and to every member of the Western society, however superior that society might see itself.

### **5.2.2: Centre and Margin**

As Linda Hutcheon suggests "both France and Britain had former colonial empires, with strong centralized cultures that are now being upset by their own history, as Arab, African, East and West Indian voices demand to be heard. In their postmodern forms these voices are particularly contradictory and contesting."<sup>72</sup> After losing the what the West perceived as the cultural "centre," the postcolonial cultures must re-evaluate their own status in regard to both the culture preceding the time of colonialism, but also in regard to the culture of the colonizer which inevitably left its traces. Thus the cultures perceive themselves often as hybrids and they strive to establish a firm cultural identity.

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<sup>70</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 6, 62.

<sup>71</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 198.

<sup>72</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 72.

Both the authors were born in India but their relationship to the British Empire is quite the opposite. What they nevertheless share is that they both write for the same audience, only from different standpoints. Lawrence Durrell spent most of his life in British colonies but he never stopped being a British citizen, although living outside Britain, and he even served the British interests when working for the British Information Office during his wartime forced exile in Egypt.<sup>73</sup> His prose, especially *Alexandria Quartet*, betrays his somewhat imperialistic attitude towards the British colony of Egypt but his depiction is more orientalizing than purely that of imperialistic superiority.

Salman Rushdie was born in India as an Indian, however difficult it is to establish what Indian in this context means, but moved to Britain to study and to work. Even though the Indian subcontinent remained the main focus of his writing, at least in the earlier fictions, Rushdie consciously writes for the Western readership and thus works with the Western concepts of the East. His very persona becomes the embodiment of what Linda Hutcheon considers to be postmodernism in the sense, that he can be considered to be a representative of the "margin", while simultaneously continuing and disrupting the Western literary canon. Since it is not possible to firmly place him into one of the canons, interpreting his work exposes and contextualizes the concepts of Western versus Eastern/Oriental and "[t]he very form of the texts themselves constantly reminds the reader of his/her own ethnocentric biases because these are encoded in the very words being read."<sup>74</sup> Rushdie is not in between the two canons or in between the former ruler and the former colony, but his position is specific in occupying both the spaces simultaneously and parodying both from the perspective of the other.

Durrell has been repeatedly accused of promoting imperialism in his *Quartet*<sup>75</sup> but it seems to be rather undermined when the reader watches Darley, Pursewarden and Mountolive – the main representatives of the colonizing Britain – being constantly ridiculed, mocked and failing at all their respective goals and responsibilities. In the words of Donald P. Kaczvinsky "Durrell, in the *Quartet*, recorded the decline of those imperial pursuits while also endorsing and in some ways promoting a Western vision of the Orient."<sup>76</sup> This supposed promotion of "western vision of the Orient" can be attributed to the fact that Darley, the protagonist of Durrell's work is presented to "remain very British in spite of [his] daily contact with the local people" and he is thus only "an observer of a

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<sup>73</sup> Michael Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, (Yale University Press, 2004) 211.

<sup>74</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 72.

<sup>75</sup> Donald P. Kaczvinsky, "Introduction," *Durrell and the City*, ed. Donald P. Kaczvinsky (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012) xviii.

<sup>76</sup> Kaczvinsky xii.

foreign culture"<sup>77</sup> and in that sense he is closer to the modernist "isolated observer".<sup>78</sup> It is, however, out of place to condemn Durrell's portrayal as inaccurate because the narrator himself points to the fact that the image of the city is purely subjective as in: "The city, half-imagined (yet wholly real), begins and ends in us, roots lodged in our memory."<sup>79</sup>

In dealing with the binary oppositions of "native" versus "foreign," postmodern literature self-consciously concludes that those concepts are no longer applicable, because there is no clear-cut boundary between them. In the portrayal of Bombay in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the city encompasses in itself the ancient Hindu Temples and Jewish synagogues together with the skyscrapers of the new trade centres and the "invisible buildings" Moor's father Abraham builds and from which he profits financially. Their invisibility parallels how money and economy are becoming invisible and imaginary, yet they remain extremely powerful. To distinguish which of them are products of the original or "native" culture and which are imported and "foreign" is no longer possible and fully dependent on the perspective of the observer, and only together they create the new structure of the city itself. In *Alexandria Quartet* the place-names refer to both the ancient rulers and European "discoverers", while merging with the modern hotels and business places. As Rashidi asserts: "Alexandria is a city where past and present merge, where ancient customs emerge in new forms, where timelessness exists not in the sense of unchanging but in the sense of eternal."<sup>80</sup>

In depicting a space outside Europe, the two novels can work with the biases and concepts of the Western reader. They can simultaneously point to the difference, yet similarity of that space, and to the more general difficulty of relating to any space while being conscious of the constructed concepts involved in that very process. The background of the two authors and the context of the two specific novels also contrast a self-imposed exile with an inevitable exile or the motive of a reversible exile and an exile from which there is no return, both of which are reflected and thematized in *Alexandrian Quartet* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*

### 5.2.3: Exile

Both Moor and Darley narrate their stories from an exile. As I argued earlier, modernism draws its inspiration from the urban space and it is through the space the texts are articulated. In the two

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<sup>77</sup> Chaylan 60.

<sup>78</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, 240.

<sup>79</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Balthazar* (NY: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1960) 13.

<sup>80</sup> Rashidi 40.

exemplary novels the city is also the inspiring element and the setting of the plot, but the control the city is exercising over the protagonists is so strong, that the articulation of the narration is impossible within the city. Darley wishes to be a writer but as long as he lives in Alexandria, he is incapable of writing and his artistic abilities are only awoken in his exile on a remote Greek island where he is finally capable of self-reflection. For Moor, narrating a story equals living his life and analogically to the situation in *Alexandria Quartet*, his narration also comes only in his Spanish exile. The motive of a narration equalling living itself is a parodic allusion to *The Arabian Nights* in that Moor can only live for as long as his writing manages to entertain Vasco Miranda who is holding him captive. Unlike the narrator of *The Arabian Nights* who wins her life and love through her narrations, Moor's allusion to this text is purely parodic. The paradox of both narrators lies in the fact that they believe to have escaped the power of the city but their physical distance from it does not release the mental limitations they were both ascribing to the city and their narrations are thus overly concerned with it. The entire concept of an exile is therefore questioned and both narrators ask themselves why they are incapable of leaving the city in their thoughts:

Why must I return to it night after night, writing here by the fire of carob-wood while the Aegan wind clutches at this island house, clutching and releasing it, bending back the cypresses like bows? Have I not said enough about Alexandria? Am I to be reinfected once more by the dream of it and the memory of its inhabitants?<sup>81</sup>

Their exile is only illusory and so is the distance they believe they have gained from their cities and therefore they attempt the impossible, to free themselves by narrating about it because "only by narrativizing the past will we accept it as 'true.'"<sup>82</sup>

However, the outcome of their narration and attempted self-reflection differs. Moor's accelerated lifetime runs out when he finishes his story and the actual time of the novel creates a cycle which started at its very end and thus it cannot move forward. The first three novels of *Alexandria Quartet* are imprisoned on the atemporal island but the final novel where Darley returns to Alexandria breaks from the atemporality and moves forward along the linear time line. Darley is thus liberated from both the city and the past and once he starts acting upon his own free will he is capable of decisions and he leaves the city. Moor wishes to be the tragic hero in order to find the underlying cause of his life but fails even at dying a heroic death when offered the chance to save Aoi. He thus remains the parodic attempt at heroism. For Darley, living and becoming an artist is fulfilling enough and it gives Darley's life meaning without striving for the heroic. Quite on the contrary, he prefers the simple life outside the city and perceives himself, as others also perceive

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<sup>81</sup> Durrell, *Balthazar* 13-14?

<sup>82</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 143.

him, as the common, ordinary man.

### 5.3: Metaphor and Allegory

What is common for both novels is that they use the space as a metaphor or maybe rather as an allegory, but as I shall demonstrate, they use and abuse this mythical way of interpretation in order to expose them as our, and also the narrator's, provisional concepts applied on the space which seems to be controlling the characters and sometimes even threatening their lives as in *The Moor's Last Sigh* when Bombay explodes. The experience of both the cityscapes of Alexandria and Bombay are perceived mostly through the senses which only register the surface but grant no understanding of the content. Darley recollects the "feeling through the hot pavements the rhythms of Alexandria transmitted upwards into bodies which could only interpret them as famished kisses, or endearments uttered in voices hoarse with wonder"<sup>83</sup> pointing thus to the sexual connotations the city holds for him. Moor explains that "[i]n Bombay you live crushed in this crazy crowd, you are deafened by its blaring horns of plenty"<sup>84</sup> identifying himself with the mass as only one of plenty. As they both fail to grasp their surroundings, they attempt to interpret them as female characters and thus they perceive them as related to the important women surrounding them. This relationship is in each novel different and therefore making use of a different myth or allegory which are, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, subsequently subverted. Perceiving the European cities more often as masculine, as is for example Paris in Baudelaire,<sup>85</sup> contrasts with the postmodern preference for portraying at least oriental cities as feminine as in Durrell, Rushdie or Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*.<sup>86</sup>

#### 5.3.1: In The Moor's Last Sigh

As James W. Earl already pointed out: "An important example of such allegory [...] is the way female characters in Indian novels so often symbolize the sufferings of India — the allegory of Mother India."<sup>87</sup> It has been stated by Goonetilleke that in *The Moor's Last Sigh* the whole of India is embodied by the city of Bombay<sup>88</sup> and Rushdie most ironically plays out the typically Indian

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<sup>83</sup> Durrell, *Justine* 229.

<sup>84</sup> Rushdie 128.

<sup>85</sup> Pike 77.

<sup>86</sup> Pike 127.

<sup>87</sup> James W. Earl, "How to Read an Indian Novel," *Literary Imagination*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2007: 113.

<sup>88</sup> D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, *Salman Rushdie* (Macmillian Press Ltd., 1998) 136.

allegory scheme but turned inside-out. The city of Bombay is indeed the mother city of which Moor claims to be the true child<sup>89</sup> but this mother-city is exactly like his own mother, Aurora – they both seem to devour their offspring. As Aurora says: "We all eat children, [...] If not other people's, then our own"<sup>90</sup> and later on Moor contemplates on the relationship between him as the child and India as the mother: "it was Mother India herself, Mother India with her garishness and her inexhaustible motion, Mother India who loved and betrayed and ate and destroyed and again loved her children, and with whom the children's passionate conjoining and eternal quarrel stretched long beyond the grave".<sup>91</sup> Moor thus believes to be controlled and limited by this dependent relationship between him and the city: "Like the city itself, Bombay of my joys and sorrows, I mushroomed into a huge urbane sprawl of a fellow, I expended without time for proper planning, without any pauses to learn from my experiences or my mistakes or my contemporaries, without time for reflection."<sup>92</sup> The inverted allegory of mother India continues in the vivid section where the protagonist is put into prison, and thus is finally swallowed by the city. The allusion to Dante and his *Inferno* is hard to miss and it is already hinted on previously in the novel when Moor insists on his previous life to be taking place in Paradise<sup>93</sup> as also discussed by Goonetilleke.<sup>94</sup> Moor is taken into a prison because he is suspected of being involved in his father's illegal business, after he supposedly killed his girlfriend Uma. The guard of the prison tells him at the entrance: "You are in Bombay Central lock-up. It is the stomach, the intestine of the city. So naturally there is much of shit."<sup>95</sup> Being swallowed by the city, he suffers with no explanation accepting the fate his mother-city forced upon him. The final part is the explosion at the end of Moor's Bombay phase which can be according to this allegory interpreted as the final defecation by which the city expels him from her, paralleling thus his expulsion from the parental house by his actual mother Aurora. Rushdie here installs an allegory, a possible mythical interpretation into the text, but subverts it through parodying the supposed concept of, in this case, a loving mother that suffers for her children, as the original allegory would have it, and transforms it by parodying this allegory, reversing the roles, and letting the child suffer instead of the mother-Bombay, while she is happily feasting on the flesh of her children.

The connection between him and the city also explains his particular condition of fast ageing and also of his club-like hand which are interpreted as mere reflections of the state and the shape of

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<sup>89</sup> Rushdie 185.

<sup>90</sup> Rushdie 125.

<sup>91</sup> Rushdie 60-61.

<sup>92</sup> Rushdie 161-162.

<sup>93</sup> Rushdie 126.

<sup>94</sup> Goonetilleke 142.

<sup>95</sup> Rushdie 287.

the city itself. It is apparent from exclamations such as "if our Bombay was my personal not-Raj-but-Lilly-putana, then my great size was indeed succeeding in tying me down"<sup>96</sup> that because of his strange condition he is willing to apply any possible explanatory concept available in order to accept his life as it is, thus the supposed connection gives him as a character the very much needed notion of heroism, because all heroes are allowed to be special and are therefore not considered to be freaks as he would otherwise be. However, Moor's heroism is parodied because he does not achieve anything in his rebellion against the mother who rejected him, and his strongest weapon, his fist, is used only to subjugate innocent demonstrators whom he does not know and whose unfortunate fate does not concern him. Moor thus becomes a typical postmodern anti-hero as follows from Alan Wilde: "Modernism [...] reaches toward the heroic in the intensity of its desire and of its disillusion. Postmodernism, skeptical of such efforts, presents itself as deliberately, consciously antiheroic."<sup>97</sup>

The reader is constantly manipulated by the narrator into interpreting the space through the allegorical concept, because that is what the protagonist himself is doing in his search for some meaning in his otherwise senseless life. Only towards the end does the reader gradually realize that this allegorical cluster was only forced upon the reality by the protagonist but that the reality cannot attest to it, and that the city has, in fact, not eaten Moor but only served him as an excuse for his incapability to act, to attain a free will of his own. The lack of a free will is, according to the manipulative interpretation of Moor, caused by him not living his personal life but merely fulfilling the role his mother-city has ascribed him: "A tragedy was taking place all right, a national tragedy on a grand scale, but those of us who played our parts were – let me put it bluntly – clowns."<sup>98</sup> Typically for postmodernism, the protagonist himself reveals the parodic and anti-heroic nature of his own character but the newly gained knowledge comes only too late to provide any improvement or to give the protagonist another chance at living.

### **5.3.2: In *Alexandria Quartet***

Similarly to Moor, Darley perceives his life only as a role in a play staged by the city itself, therefore beyond his grasp and scope of his responsibility: "the scenario had already been devised somewhere, the actors chosen, the timing rehearsed down to the last detail in the mind of that invisible author – which perhaps would prove to be only the city itself: the Alexandria of the human

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<sup>96</sup> Rushdie 188.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Mikics 241.

<sup>98</sup> Rushdie 352.

estate."<sup>99</sup> As Donald P. Kaczvinsky suggests "Durrell adopted the metaphor of an ancient city as a means to explore the myths that underlay human existence."<sup>100</sup> This metaphor replaces the modernist myth or an allegory used by Rushdie, but functions in a similar way, thus attempting to install a concept through which a meaning can be derived from the reality. In this metaphor "Alexandria, immediately becomes the active character, using "us" like passive plants. Alexandria is not simply a place, but a living organism that Darley sees as the culprit, responsible for the conflicts that he is now recovering from."<sup>101</sup>

In this aspect Darley and Moor are alike. They both perceive the city through a woman and they both feel to be limited and threatened by that woman, used by a stronger force and incapable of action as a consequence of that relationship. However, the difference lies in the nature of that relationship. For Moor, on the one hand, it is his mother, the artist, who uses him in her art as a substitution for her lack of maternal affections and therefore the bond between them cannot be broken and he remains sure of his fate being inescapable. Darley, on the other hand, interprets the city through his lovers and thus the relationship is more that of partners and, arguably, breakable. They both feel urged to relate to the space around through a concept because, as Burton Pike asserts, it is "the basic biologic need of any living organism to be able to orient itself spatially in relation to its surroundings in order to insure its own survival."<sup>102</sup> When this concept proves itself to be illusory, the still modernist Darley, on the one hand, takes action and through his self-reflection manages a new hopeful start, even though his city seems to be striving towards its destruction. The inescapably postmodern Moor, on the other hand, breathes out his last breath with the last sentence of his narration, unlike the city he identified himself with, which speaks through his fiancé, Nadia Wadia, after the explosions:

So I asked myself, Nadia Wadia, is it the end for you? Is it curtains? And for some time I thought, achha, yes, it's all over, khalaas. But then I was asking myself, Nadia Wadia, what you talking, men? At twenty-three to say that whole of life is funtoosh? What pagalpan, what nonsense, Nadia Wadia! Girl, get a grip, OK? The city will survive. New towers will rise. Better days will come. Now I am saying it every day. Nadia Wadia, the future beckons. Harken to its call.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Durrell, *Clea* 223.

<sup>100</sup> Kaczvinsky xi.

<sup>101</sup> Rashidi 33.

<sup>102</sup> Pike 120.

<sup>103</sup> Rushdie 376-377.

## 5.4: Palimpsest and Hybridity

### 5.4.1: Alexandria as a Mosaic

While the space is fragmentary also in modernism and the concept of a palimpsest is also used already then, the postmodern result differs. The modernist palimpsest searches a unity and even if it does not find it, it believes in its possibility. Postmodernism admits the impossibility of such a unity and pictures reality crumbling down into always smaller pieces which point into all possible directions without any hierarchy. The narrator of *Alexandria Quartet* describes his own writing as a palimpsest.<sup>104</sup> James Gifford points out that the "compiled layers 'bleed through' into each other" which "suggests interaction and overlap".<sup>105</sup> When Gifford contrasts Eliot's city palimpsest with Durrell's he finds the major difference in that Eliot's palimpsest is united in its acceptance of time and causality and thus places all parts firmly, while "Durrell's narrative palimpsest of entangled and *atemporal* overlapping narrative moments is uneasy with the city as palimpsest, which is densely tied to time" and the "narrative recurrence is cumulative, layering material and accreting meaning as with the palimpsest, yet without strict sense of chronology."<sup>106</sup> The different layers thus lack any sort of a hierarchy and are only uncovered in the order Darley randomly chooses, and thus they do not create any unity such as in Eliot. Hence the protagonist of *Alexandria Quartet* finds new and new voices recording their versions of Alexandria only to finally conclude:

I had set out once to store, to codify, to annotate the past before it was utterly lost — that at least was a task I had set myself. I had failed in it (perhaps it was hopeless?) for no sooner had I embalmed one aspect of it in words than the intrusion of new knowledge disrupted the frame of reference, everything flew asunder, only to reassemble again in unforeseen, unpredictable patterns....<sup>107</sup>

As he abandons the objectivity he assumed as an author in the first novel, at the beginning of the last novel Darley is finally capable of admitting the multiplicity without a single unifying concept because he admits the search for it to be "hopeless." In this sense the fourth novel brings the palimpsest from the modernist search for a unity closer to the postmodern acceptance of multitude without structure.

Both Justine and the city are interpreted by Darley as interconnected. What he perceives as the main similarity is their hybridity as he exclaims regarding Justine: "[I] knew her for a true child

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<sup>104</sup> Durrell, *Balthazar* 183.

<sup>105</sup> Gifford 15.

<sup>106</sup> Gifford 15.

<sup>107</sup> Durrell, *Clea* 11.

of Alexandria; which is neither Greek, Syrian nor Egyptian, but a hybrid: a joint."<sup>108</sup> However as we understand from the *Quartet* but also from Kaczvinsky, the different groups never melted together in Alexandria.<sup>109</sup> They stayed separated but interacted with each other creating a similarly mosaic picture as the novels themselves present, thanks to the narrative strategy of layering without either chronology or hierarchy. While the first novel is narrated from Darley's point of view as a recording of his memories, the following novels challenge the validity of his memories while they do not present a coherent account of the past events which could fully replace Darley's version, rather they interact with each other as suggests Gifford. As Linda Hutcheon argues in this context: "History is [...] being rethought – as a human construct" while "its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality."<sup>110</sup> The *Quartet* questions not only the validity of Darley's memories or his depiction of events that he narrated in the first book, but any possible unitary image of the past events or of Alexandria as a space. Every narrator throughout the four novels has his or her own relationship to the city, each of them interprets things according to his or her life philosophy and standpoint but they can only communicate their impressions and thoughts through a narration which is both a text and always already an interpretation on both the narrator's and the reader's side. When Darley says in *Balthazar* in response to the commentary Balthazar provided his manuscript with: "Perhaps then the destruction of my private Alexandria was necessary ("the artifact of a true work of art never shows a plane surface"); perhaps buried in all this there lies the germ and substance of a truth"<sup>111</sup> he still does not understand that there is no such "truth." Instead, his writing presents "a pluralist (and perhaps troubling) view of historiography as consisting of different but equally meaningful constructions of past reality – or rather, of the textualized remains [...] of that past."<sup>112</sup> The city thus becomes the mosaic of the different versions which influence and interact with each other.

As the city is located at the shore with its harbour facing the endless waters, it is simultaneously surrounded by the desert in the opposite direction. Those two opposites contribute to the duality which is inherent to Alexandria and is multiplied by the many races and religions residing in it. Each of those influences shapes the city differently. The result is the hybrid which is neither fully African, though on the African continent, nor European, though under the British rule, but not even Arabic, which it would later become. Instead it is the palimpsest of the various cultural influences:

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<sup>108</sup> Durrell, *Justine* 27.

<sup>109</sup> Kaczvinsky xiii

<sup>110</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 16.

<sup>111</sup> Durrell, *Balthazar* 226.

<sup>112</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 96.

Joined in this fortuitous way by the city's own act of will, isolated on a slate promontory over the sea, backed only by the moonstone mirror of Mareotis, the salt lake, and its further forever of ragged desert [...] The communities still live and communicate – Turks with Jews, Arabs and Copts and Syrians with Armenians and Italians and Greeks. The shudders of monetary transactions ripple through them like wind in a wheatfield; ceremonies, marriages and pacts join and divide them. Even the place-names on the old tram-routes with their sandy grooves of rail echo the unforgotten names of their founders – and the names of the dead captains who first landed here, from Alexander to Amr; founders of this anarchy of flesh and fever, of money-love and mysticism. Where else on earth will you find such a mixture?<sup>113</sup>

Since the place is "such a mixture," Darley fails to relate to it. The "place-names on the old tram-routes" connect the past of Alexandria with its present, but they remain only names, thus abstract. In another section the narrator also presents numerous names but they do not help to create an imaginary map of Alexandria which would give the image of the city a stable form. Rather they stay a labyrinth in which the narrator "loses the reader in a maze of disconnected topographic references"<sup>114</sup>:

It is as if the whole city had crashed about my ears: I walk slowly to the flat, aimlessly as survivors must walk about the streets of their native city after an earthquake, surprised to find how much that had been familiar has changed, Rue Piroua, Rue de France, the Terbana Mosque (cupboard smelling of apples), Rue Sidi Abou El Abbas (water-ices and coffee), Anfouchi, Ras El Tin (Cape of Figs), Ikingi Mariut (gathering wild flowers together, convinced she cannot love me), equestrian statue of Mohammed Ali in the square.... General Earle's comical little bust, killed Sudan 1885.... An evening multitudinous with swallows ... the tombs at Kom El Shugafa, darkness and damp soil, both terrified by the darkness.... Rue Fuad as the old Canopic Way, once Rue Rosette [...] At last I can stand it no longer, and I throw down the manuscript in the fireplace, crying out: "What are they worth, since you understand nothing, these pages written from a heart pierced to the quick?"<sup>115</sup>

Not only are all the names and places displaced and deprived of their references but they also point to how much Darley connects his city with Justine. The earthquake he is referring to is the disappearance of Justine and the places he mentions are all connected to his memories of her. As

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<sup>113</sup> Durrell, *Balthazar* 151.

<sup>114</sup> Alexandre-Garner and Keller-Privat, 71.

<sup>115</sup> Durrell, *Justine* 220.

Alexandre-Garner and Keller-Privat observe: "Streets and squares only exist inasmuch as they are linked to the regretted past and the reader wanders in vain when trying to rebuild Darley's actual route."<sup>116</sup>

The connection between Alexandria and Justine is constantly hinted on and among other things they share what Purserwarden observes as: "Justine and her city are alike in that they both have a strong flavour without having any real character."<sup>117</sup> While they both have many different facets, they do not contain any core and their personality stays in a constant flux. Louis Fraiberg concludes from Justine's lack of a centre that she is not an interesting character<sup>118</sup> but I believe that the lack of a firm, once and for all established centre, is exactly what makes Justine an interesting and irresistible character for Darley. He fails to find her core and fails to locate the centre of the space that he attempts to interpret through her. This search for a centre is futile because, as Alexandre-Garner and Keller-Privat explain, "the very heart of the city is a tomb [...] an irrecoverable heart that archaeologists have always failed to discover, just as the text fails to identify and circumscribe the heart of the city."<sup>119</sup> Without a centre to orient around, the city becomes shapeless: "We allowed ourselves to be dropped on the Corniche and walked together the rest of the way by a brilliant bullying moonlight, watching the old city dissolve and reassemble in the graphs of evening mist".<sup>120</sup> Being in a constant state of "dissolving and reassembling" the city is impossible to grasp and to firmly relate to because "shape is the means by which we recognize things in the world of space" and subsequently the "[r]ecognition of shape is vital to the identification of cities."<sup>121</sup> However, as David Harvey states, "the metropolis is impossible to command except in bits and pieces"<sup>122</sup> and in this way the city is comprehensible to Darley. He perceives it as a mass of "bits and pieces" to all of which he can relate individually and thus he creates a mosaic image of the city which, however, has no distinct shape, no clear-cut border and no centre, only the separated parts connected to his and others' memories.

#### **5.4.2: Bombay as a Hybrid**

The motive of layering and subsequent restoring of hidden images is a constant motive in Rushdie's fiction and understandably so because he understands India as a country of a palimpsest and since

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<sup>116</sup> Alexandre-Garner and Keller-Privat 72.

<sup>117</sup> Durrell, *Justine* 139.

<sup>118</sup> Louis Fraiberg, "Durrell's Dissonant Quartet," *Contemporary British Novelists*, ed. Charles Shapiro (Southern Illinois University Press, 1965) 16.

<sup>119</sup> Alexandre-Garner and Keller-Privat 65.

<sup>120</sup> Durrell, *Justine* 157.

<sup>121</sup> Pike 129.

<sup>122</sup> Harvey 66.

most of his works take place there, most of his characters have to deal with their personalities and identities being also in a way a palimpsest. As Moor himself suggests: "The city itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World beneath Over World, black market beneath white; [...] How could any of us have escaped that deadly layering?"<sup>123</sup> Palimpsest also plays important roles in the story of *The Moor's Last Sigh*. The last of Aurora's paintings, "The Moor's Last Sigh," not only gives a name to the whole novel, but it also contains the portrait of her murderer underneath the visible painting. The other actual palimpsest is the portrait of the pregnant Aurora which was subsequently turned into Vasco Miranda's self-portrait as the last Moorish Emperor Boabdil when leaving Spain after being defeated by the Catholics. Just as Moor uncovers more and more layers in his narration, his fellow prisoner, Aoi, is removing one painting to reveal another underneath. Both their lives are dependant on their uncovering of the layers and once they have finished, they will be killed.

The "lost mother below"<sup>124</sup> is covered in the subsequent layers forming together the "palimpsest" but the narrator is not able to distinguish the layers one from another and is thus overwhelmed by the endless multiplicity of the space and the signs: "West Bombay was central; all rivers flowed into its human sea. It was an ocean of stories; we were all its narrators, and everybody talked at once."<sup>125</sup> Moor distinguishes the signs left by different cultures, all the "narrators" that were there before him and he alludes to them in his narration, but as Richard Lehan interprets from Barthes' work "the city becomes a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds: 'the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable'"<sup>126</sup> and Moor misinterprets them creating false illusory connections and explanations.

The hybridity of Bombay is mentioned explicitly and repeatedly. In its hybridity the city mirrors the protagonist; his roots and combined heritage are meant to correspond to the origins and different historical layers of Bombay and analogically the whole of India. They are both portrayed as a conglomerate of native Indians, the first Portuguese "discoverers," half Jewish half Moorish refugees from Spain, Catholics mixed with Hindu and interacting with Muslims, all of whom had to bow down before the English and subsequently establish their own identity as Indians after the liberation of India and separation of Kashmir and Pakistan. As Moor himself says:

Bombay was central, had been so from the moment of its creation: the bastard child of a Portuguese-English wedding, and yet the most Indian of Indian cities. In Bombay all

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<sup>123</sup> Rushdie 184.

<sup>124</sup> Rushdie 185.

<sup>125</sup> Rushdie 350.

<sup>126</sup> Lehan 110.

Indias met and merged. In Bombay, too, all-India met what-was-not-India, what came across the black water to flow into our veins.<sup>127</sup>

On this level the narrator identifies his own fate, his peculiar growing deformation and his personal hybridity with the city's layers and he uses this analogy to explain his own failure as in:

How, trapped as we were in the hundred per cent fakery of the real, in the fancy-dress, weeping-Arab kitsch of the superficial, could we have penetrated to the full, sensual truth of the lost mother below? How could have we lived authentic lives? How could we have failed to be grotesque?<sup>128</sup>

He perceives the city as his world and after the explosions this world ends: "There was nothing holding me to Bombay any more. It was no longer my Bombay, no longer special, no longer the city of mixed-up, mongrel joy. Something had ended (the world?) and what remained, I didn't know."<sup>129</sup>

Rushdie manages to parallel the city with several characters at once. As I have already argued, there is an allegorical connection between Bombay and Aurora through the myth of the Mother India, and simultaneously the rapid expansion of the city "without time for proper planning"<sup>130</sup> is perceived as analogous to the life of Moor himself and is used as an explanation for his unfortunate fate. However, there is even a third parallel, a third character that mirrors another aspect of the city – the impossible to penetrate and destructive multitude which is the most prominent aspect of Moor's one and only love, Uma Sarasvati. Everybody, except for Aurora, is mesmerised by Uma because of her ability to be exactly what they wish her to be, thus her personality is in constant change encompassing whatever wishes the other characters have. She functions as a sort of a mirror, creating thus painful tensions in the Zogoiby family. Her menace is not only destructive but it proves to be self-destructive as well when she accidentally swallows a pill she prepared for Moor. Her origins and true intentions are never revealed neither to Moor, nor to the reader, and Uma remains a destructive image of multiplicity without a core, without a real character or personality and she is eventually condemned even by Moor himself, despite all his love for her, when he understands that she was the true reason of Aurora's rejection.

The connection between Aurora and Uma is not only of two rival artists whose art represents the Indian competition between secularization and religious fanaticism as Goonetilleke observes.<sup>131</sup> Already on the first page of the novel, Moor introduces the reader into the tension but

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<sup>127</sup> Rushdie 350.

<sup>128</sup> Rushdie 184-185.

<sup>129</sup> Rushdie 376.

<sup>130</sup> Rushdie 162.

<sup>131</sup> Goonetilleke 141.

also the resemblance of the two most important women of his life, hinting thus on the psychoanalytical, namely Oedipal connotations: "'Amrika' and 'Moskva', somebody once called them, Aurora my mother and Uma my love, nicknaming them for the two great super-powers; and people said they looked alike but I never saw it, couldn't see it at all."<sup>132</sup> In this passage, Moor shows not only that they are opposing each other exactly because they are so similar, but also that he fails to understand this tension based on a connection. Since Bombay incorporates in itself all three of these paralleled characters, it is inevitably filled with contradictory notions between the secularization, symbolized by Aurora's art, and (often politically abused) religion, symbolized by Uma's art. The city embodies also the contrast between the loving son, who loves his mother-city despite all the pain she causes him, and the careless mother who devours the flesh of her child in order to grow and prosper, which is paralleled by Aurora's use or possible abuse of her deformed son in her artistic creation. While Aurora becomes a famous social figure and a national artist, her son, the source of her inspiration, is discarded, used up and exiled to die in the country from which his Jewish ancestors originally fled.

## 5.5: Subjectivity

Following Hutcheon's observations it is apparent that not only concepts but even narrators reveal themselves to be "provisional and limited."<sup>133</sup> She observes that

historiographic metafiction appear to privilege two modes of narration, both of which problematize the entire notion of subjectivity: multiple points of view [...] or an overtly controlling narrator[...]. In neither, however, do we find a subject confident of his/her ability to know the past with any certainty.<sup>134</sup>

*The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Alexandria Quartet* exemplify both of those modes. The first one presents an "overt, deliberately manipulative narrator"<sup>135</sup> in the character of Moor who forces his explanations and interpretations on the reader while ignoring their implausibility. When Moor exclaims: "O Beautifiers of the City, did you not see that what was beautiful in Bomaby was that it belonged to nobody, and to all? Did you not see the everyday live-and-let-live miracles thronging its overcrowded streets?"<sup>136</sup> he denies the objective superiority of his own portrayal of Bombay and he sees the city in her multitude as an ocean of stories. However, his subjectivity is undermined by

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<sup>132</sup> Rushdie 3

<sup>133</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 11.

<sup>134</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 117.

<sup>135</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 160.

<sup>136</sup> Rushdie 350-351.

his ex-centricity and he fails at establishing himself as a subject and remains only the hybrid of all the influences which are forming him from the outside. Because there is no force coming from inside him, he does not shape his environment and thus has no control over it. In his frantic search for a proof that he in fact is the tragic hero, he misinterprets the signs and ends up in a trap. As Vasco Miranda accuses him: "Zogoibys always say they know everything! But you know nothing!"<sup>137</sup> Moor thus terminates his journey where it began with the Reconquista and expulsion of his ancestors. As they were forced into an Indian exile, he is forced into his Spanish exile and thus he embraces his Jewish heritage and becomes the Jew he believes he was supposed to be. Moor then contemplates on his position in Spain: "I had reached an anti-Jerusalem: not a home, but an away. A place that did not bind, but dissolved."<sup>138</sup> Being a character without a home who does not belong anywhere, he becomes united with the space in that he also dissolves and dies.

*Alexandria Quartet* uses "no one single perspective but myriad voices"<sup>139</sup> in the many narrators and writers of manuscripts, letters and diaries, such as Darley, Pursewarden, Balthazar or Leila, just to mention a few. As already Alan W. Friedman commented: "virtually everything in the *Quartet* is secondary, indirect and retrospective, reflected through endless mirrors and memory rather than experienced directly"<sup>140</sup> and thus the many interpretations applied in every each recount, narration or reflection rule out both realistic objectivity and modernist subjectivity. The first novel, *Justine*, narrated from Darley's point of view assumes his subjective position as the standpoint through which events are narrated and also interpreted, while the second novel, *Balthazar*, adds a new perspective which begins the destruction of Darley's subjectivity. The third novel, *Mountolive*, is the only text narrated in the third person by an external narrator. This mode of narration is traditionally perceived as a guarantee of an objectively accurate literary presentation, but in the context of the two previous novels, narrated through two various subjective points of view, it is no longer possible for the reader to interpret the narrator of *Mountolive* as an omniscient narrator.

When Darley says:

When you are in love with one of its inhabitants a city can become a world. A whole new geography of Alexandria was born through Clea, reviving old meanings, renewing ambiences half forgotten, laying down like a rich wash of colour a new history, a new biography to replace the old one.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Rushdie 416.

<sup>138</sup> Rushdie 388.

<sup>139</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 160.

<sup>140</sup> Allan W. Friedman, "Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*: 50 Years Later," *Durrell and the City*, ed. Donald P. Kaczvinsky (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012) 172.

<sup>141</sup> Durrell, *Clea* 228-229.

he admits that every new person brings in both a new narrated story and a new vision of the city, while all the previous portrayals are undermined but not destroyed and thus all the images coexist simultaneously. Darley's subjectivity disintegrates into the numerous voices piling portrayal upon portrayal and the image of the city crumbles down paralleling the crumbling of the supposed truth of the past Darley tried to record in the first novel. Thus "the reader feels he is witnessing the slow breaking down of the city's body, as if Alexandria were not merely made of dust and brick, but also borrowed its essence from its characters' human nature".<sup>142</sup>

Therefore the image of the space these novels present is nothing like the modernist one which Raymond Williams comments on saying: "The forces of the action have become internal and in a way there is no longer a city, there is only a man walking through it."<sup>143</sup> Instead, the postmodern narrators of Moor and Darley perceive the reality more as if there no longer was a man, only a city living through the man. The narrators are aware of the external cities of Alexandria and Bombay existing the the extratextual reality, but also of their narrations being incapable of presenting a coherent image of them which would not be only a part of a construct or a multiplicity of different accounts which are only a mass of "equally meaningful constructions".<sup>144</sup>

The pluralistic aspect of postmodernism replaces the notion of élitism inherent to modernist fiction and the isolated observer, still partly present in *Alexandria Quartet* is in *The Moor's Last Sigh* replaced by a sense of being a part of the mass not standing outside it. However, the protagonists' story is equally accurate as any other. If all the presented images of the city are also equal, the narrator cannot but admit that his own image is, on the one hand, only a construct of his own creation, but that, on the other hand, he cannot survive without such a construct. He is thus left with the construct knowing, that it is a mere construct, but he can benefit from that knowledge.

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<sup>142</sup> Alexandre-Garner and Keller-Privat 65.

<sup>143</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City* 243.

<sup>144</sup> Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism* 96.

## 6: Conclusion

It is possible to conclude, that the postmodern city is perceived by the protagonists as a strong and often limiting power which not only forms the characters and their identity, but seems to usurp their capabilities of taking action or attaining a free will of their own. On the examples of *Alexandria Quartet* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* it is apparent that the city is interpreted as a woman, which can be attributed to both the protagonists being men, or to the sensual nature of the oriental cities themselves. However, the connotations of the city as a mother and the city as a lover differ. While the city as a mother connotes maternal love (or possibly a lack of it) and the eternal bond of blood relations, the city as a lover brings with itself the connotations of sex and a possibility of equality of the partners which should be strived for. Eventually, at the very end of the last novel, Darley's vision of Alexandria has altered and he only returns to her in his thoughts once saying: "I feel it fade inside me, in my thoughts, like some valedictory mirage – like the sad history of some great queen whose fortunes have foundered among the ruins of armies and the sands of time!"<sup>145</sup> In this last remark he alludes to the ancient ruler Cleopatra and the end of Egypt after being conquered by the Romans, which parallels the modern history of the World War II, during which the story takes place. It is only after the destructive experience of the war when the city transforms for the protagonist and he and Clea leave it, since "[i]t has become stale and profitless"<sup>146</sup> for them both as artists and as human beings. Even though their story of Alexandria ends, they travel towards France only to begin a new story in a new city.

The open and hopeful ending of *Alexandria Quartet* contrasts with the finished cycle of *The Moor's Last Sigh*. The supposed parental connection to Bombay predestines Moor's entire life when he inherits her irreconcilable contradictions, fails to understand her self-destructive multitude shared with Uma and perceives himself as a victim of her indifference towards the fate of her children. Even at the very end of his life Moor says: "Yes, mother, you had the last word on that subject, too: as about everything. [...] *Here I stand. Couldn't've done it differently.*"<sup>147</sup> Yet the reader cannot fail to notice his unreliability and is once more reminded of it by one of the poster signs upon Moor's arrival in Spain: "Everything in life is so diverse, so opposed, so obscure, that we cannot be certain of any truth".<sup>148</sup> Only through acceptance of this statement, which summarizes the most fundamental message of postmodernism, it is possible for the postmodern protagonist to

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<sup>145</sup> Durrell *Clea* 276.

<sup>146</sup> Durrell *Clea* 279.

<sup>147</sup> Rushdie 3.

<sup>148</sup> Rushdie 386.

embrace his fate and profit from the endless possibilities it offers.

As the protagonist of the postmodern novel loses the assurance of knowing his own position because of the de-centering of him as a subject, it becomes more problematic not only to establish his own identity, but also to relate to the space he inhabits, to relate to the postmodern city which is shapeless, confusing, labyrinthine and inescapable. The destabilization which inevitably results from his problematized subjectivity forces him to attempt to relate to the space through different concepts. Therefore he tries to read the city as a palimpsest but the uncovered meanings only harbour new meanings and the process of restorations is endless and cyclical. The myth functioning as a unification in modernism does not help the protagonist either, because it inverts or proves to be illusory, and the reality does not attest to the mythical structure. In a search for a cause of his unfortunate fate the protagonist reaches towards the tragic in order to place the cause of his sufferings outside of himself; he blames his misfortunes on the city and perceives himself as a mere victim, but even this illusory concept is exposed when the protagonist reveals his own anti-heroic nature and his life thus becomes a mere parody of tragedy. The only choice he can make is either to embrace his life deprived of a concept granting it a deeper meaning, or dying in his illusion. This illusion is, however, obviously false as it is in the last scene of *The Moor's Last Sigh* when Moor says: "*I'll lay me down upon this stone, lay my head beneath these letters R I P, and close my eyes, according to our family's old practise of falling asleep in times of trouble, and hope to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time.*"<sup>149</sup>

When the protagonist accepts the reality to be a construct derived from his concepts, he can question the meanings abstracted and re-evaluate them. This acknowledgement does not have to lead towards the destruction of any meaning, quite on the contrary, it can lead towards a truer life, as in the case of Darley, exactly through the acceptance of the meaning being only a mere construct. As psychology teaches us, the first step in solving a problem is recognizing what the problem is, thus the only way forward, outlined by postmodernism, is to recognize our concepts, accept them as inevitable and benefit from our knowledge and our capability of questioning them. As Linda Hutcheon argues: "If we accept that all is provisional and historically conditioned, we will not stop thinking, as some fear; in fact, that acceptance will guarantee that we never stop thinking – and rethinking."<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Rushdie 434.

<sup>150</sup> Hutcheon *A poetics of Postmodernism* 53.

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