

## Something to Question: A Reading of Hanif Qurashi's *Something to Tell You*

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### Abstract

This novel seems to offer a particularly challenging cultural discourse on at least two distinct levels. The first is blatantly generic, negotiating the very premises of what constitutes narrative-ness, both conventional and contemporary. It interrogates common or traditionally acceptable tenets of narration, such as the sequence of events or characterization. The second is duly ontological, determining the kind of sentiment enjoyed in reception, which, in this particular case, is defined by the incapacity to find positive fulfilment, embodied as a sense of loss and yearning for solid meaning rather than a sense of fulfilment by familiarity and identification. This paper, in other words, will offer its definitions of "tense" and "being" as two areas of intellectual investigation presented by contemporary narratives, of which this is but an example to interrogate the nature and value of cultural contemporaneity. On the other hand, it will offer its redefinition of the aesthetic and cultural dimensions implied by this novel's particular formal and contextual features. On the one hand, this article discusses narrative as a purely philosophic expression contemplating the whats of human intellectuality whose very nature often assumes forms of inter-connectivity and homogeneity just like any generic narrative. On the other hand, it analyses the narrative in this novel as a contemporary attempt to interrogate conventional

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and modern generic boundaries for ontological and cultural purposes.

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### **1- Why Kureishi's Something to Tell You?**

*Something to Tell You* was first published in 2008 following a long series of screenplays, novels, dramas and short stories. It has received perhaps the least critical attention among all of Kureishi's work, accumulated much acclaim since its early 1980s.

Three other novels were written after this one: *The Last Word* (2014), *The Nothing* (2017) and *What Happened* (2019), all of which seem to offer a sort of re-affirmation of the kind of poetics underlined by *Something to Tell You* insofar as they all seem to negotiate radical concepts of self and existential presuppositions of time and place.

However, this particular novel seems unique, making it genuinely stand within the bulk of Kureishi's work, as varied and graphic as it may be. *Something to Tell You* has started this self-reflexive existential trend in the poetics of his works, which continued after that to the present. It offers a universal negotiation with the self on so many existential levels; the cultural, the political, the psychological, in the sense that it crosses perceived boundaries of identity (England versus Pakistan), of languages (English versus Urdu), of sexual (hetero- versus homo-/bio) even of geographic significance (London versus Karachi). The protagonist's story within the story, recounting his and his sister's trip back to their

motherland, and the many sub-stories that took place henceforth, testify, not just to the continuing of such negotiation, but to the intensity of its disseminative and paradoxical character:

Far from being "spiritual," as Miriam understood it, Karachi was the most materialistic place we had been. Deprivation was the spur. I might have considered my father's friends to be vulgar and shallow, but it was I who was made to feel shabby, like someone who'd stupidly missed a good opportunity in Britain. I was gently mocked by these provincial bourgeois, with my father watching me carefully to see how I coped. What sort of man, half here half there, had I turned out to be? I was an oddity again, as I had been at school. (Kurieshi, 2008, 149)

This "oddity" of being simply "half here, half there" crystalizes the much deeper existential question lingering throughout the whole of this works' narrative discourse about the self, the protagonist/narrator, and the universal cross-national self henceforth. What is "odd" is not belonging to either nation singularly or both collectively, but one and the other simultaneously and paradoxically. What is "odd" is not defining this self in either or both cultural contexts without involving radical interrogations of its political values and their expectations in readership so that Karachi, not London, becomes the most materialistic city the narrator had seen! This identity anxiety is further complicated by the intense psychological tension between sexual ideologies and personal dilemmas of parenthood, marriage, and friendship relations.

Kureishi's life history gives a glimpse of how his poetics came to concentrate on these questions and the reasons behind his philosophical concerns for the nature of time and its role in defining the self. He was born in south London to a Pakistani father (Rafiushan Kureishi) and an English mother, Audrey Buss. His father worked at the Pakistani Embassy in London and descended from a wealthy family. He attended Bromley's College of Technology for his A levels and later received a degree in Philosophy from King's College London (Fischer 2015). His growing up period studying in Bromely's Technical High School in London seems to have formed most of his understanding of culture and life in contemporary suburbia.

The extreme urbanity of his approach to life situations reveals a deeply incarnated rejection of rural or unsophisticated cultural value systems of any denomination. He is, has been, and will always be, *a city boy*, to the very core of his being in almost every possible sense of the word; the Pariah of Suburbia' as once called by the *Daily Telegraph* (Calvin 2012), who exposes "the hidden aspects of the British cultural identity" in its "most un-talked-about form" (Calvin 2012).

This excessive urbanity is why his characters seem always defined by Freudian sexual dimensions justifying the bulk of their life choices and tendencies regardless of their actual sexual orientation. Ajita's objectionable (and doubtful) sexual relationship with her father is but an example, which has defined the entirety of their dramatic weight as such in the focalization currents of the events. This is, of course, coupled with her also graphically depicted sexual relationship to the main character.

The same happens concerning the main character's sister and ex-wife. All characters in the novel, with no exception, are almost entirely shaped by this liberal dimension based on an overwhelming urbanity of perspective governing characterization in this particular novel. In this particular sense, *Something to Tell You* stands unique in the mosaic of Kureishi's variable works. It offers, perhaps, the clearest example of his cultural identity as a twentieth-century urbanely formed male suffering all the recent defeats of traditional masculinity, fatherhood and individuality in a world of celebrated cynical feminism and domineering cultural capitalism.

## **2- Narrative: The Question of Time and Objective Presence.**

It is probably prudent, at first, to discuss what is generally meant by the term "narrative", in its most contemporary conceptualization, being the general field informing this work in order to achieve two crucial goals. The first is to define the philosophical ground upon which the current analysis stands, summarise-able perhaps in terms of questions of *Time* and *Objective Presence* in narration at large, and postmodern narratives in particular. In other words, this paper's attempt to redefine contemporary narratives sees them generally concerned primarily with debunking and undermining conventional narrative concepts of sequence in time, as well as of a consciousness-independent reality or an objective realism.

The second is to clarify the kind of critical aim this paper is after, summarise-able perhaps in the cultural and aesthetic dimensions excavate-able from underneath this work's multiple semiotic structures and layers of reference.

The question then becomes, should narrative be discussed in purely rational terms as a discourse related directly to the nuts and bolts of human intellectuality whose very existential question presumably claim to need some form of order, sequence, regularity or "conviviality" as French theorist Jean-François Lyotard puts it (1984), (modern or postmodern)? Or, should it be discussed, on the other hand, as, indeed, a specialized cultural discourse reflexive only of its structural features, values, dilemmas and critiques?

Better still, in terms of method, the new politics of form, should *narrative* be discussed as the purely aesthetic discourse that naturally offers its reactive incarnations into the human intellectuality with all its moments of pleasure and pain? Or, should narrative, complex as it is, should, the least, be discussed as a combination of all the above questions, concepts and dilemmas?

## **2- 1- Narrative and Reality:**

*We must assume the much greater risk of a specifically philosophical discussion, whose stake is whether, and how, the narrative operation, taken in its full scope, offers a "solution"- not a speculative one, but a poetic one, to the aporias that seemed inseparable from the Augustinian analysis of time. (Ricoeur 1988, 3-4)*

*Narration* differs from other forms of expression in as much as it is principally concerned with event/s ("a telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events" (Baldick 176), which endows it with a particular brand of field complexity. On the one hand, it is basically language, governed, as it were, by whatever

multi-dimensional connections regular speech assumes between mental and sound concepts; signifiers and signifieds (Saussure 15). "A chair," for instance, is both a mental image and a sound concept at the same time. As such, it is self-entangled inside the whole semiotic network of all other signifiers in the English language to form a particular semiotic relationship pointing mentally to that chair; its differed meaning.

All such connections exist, as it were, not in some independently verifiable reality but simply within our differential perceptions or psychology as Saussure preferred to put it (15-16). Narration, by this definition, like any ordinary language, points only to mental constructs utterly detached from any assumed "objective" reality. It is simply a textual approach to a certain number of events existing conceptually in the perceived consciousness. Existing conceptually, that is, under the assumption that reality, however tangibly felt, could never be proven as such outside the specific limitations of each consciousness. The Canadian critic and theorist Linda Hutcheon argues:

Postmodernist reference, then, differs from modernist reference in its overt acknowledgement of the existence, if relative inaccessibility, of the past real (except through discourse). It differs from realist reference in its—again — overt assertion of that relative inaccessibility of any reality that might exist objectively and prior to our knowledge of it. (1988, 146)

Objective reality, or consciousness-independent-reality, or sovereign reality, or realism, or whatever terminology one chooses to represent this concept with, is an utter myth pure and simple.

This is true regardless of the target of such representation: history with a capital H, or histories in plural, or factuality, or eventuality or any other "ality" that might spring to mind. Hutcheon points out:

Above all, the narrative has come to be acknowledged as a human-made structure – never as ‘natural’ or given. Whether it be in historical or fictional representation, the familiar narrative form of beginning, middle, and end implies a structuring process that imparts meaning as well as order. The notion of its ‘end’ suggests both teleology and closure and, of course, both of these are concepts that have come under considerable scrutiny in recent years, in philosophical and literary circles alike. (1989 3)

This particular problem concerning the non-objective nature of reality/events redefines narrative far from facts or even semi-truisms, but only as conceptual representations that are unavoidably human and therefore tentative. In the first place, the narrative then becomes an attempt to claim an existential, if conceptual, presence through linguistic representations of events. This is the first of this paper's redefinitions of the narrative: a problematization of the idea of existence or an aesthetic re-manipulation of its claims.

## **2- 2- Narrative and Time:**

However, narration most often vehemently presumes not to be just any ordinary language. Instead, it loudly and uncompromisingly claims a "reality" beyond itself as such. This reality, in turn, claims sequences of events, tenses and emotions, which consequently offer wider scopes of mental reference than what any "regular" language



seems capable of. The "chair" in such a reality does not only assume a stable three-dimensional semiotic relationship between sound and mental concepts on the one hand, and all other *different* relationships in the structural nature of the language on the other. Instead, it assumes a broader relationship to a world of narrative connections all conceptually irrelevant to any assumed "objective" reality as well. This is what French theorist Paul Ricoeur argues:

If the notion of temporal experience is worthy of its name, we must not confine ourselves to describing the implicitly temporal aspects of the remodelling of behaviour by narrativity. We need to be more radical and bring to light those experiences where time is thematized, something that cannot be done unless we introduce a third partner into the discussion between historiography and narratology, the phenomenology of time-consciousness. (Ricoeur 1984, 254)

Narration, then, by its very nature, includes several layers of referential connective relationships between concepts infinitely leading to one another in perception with no singular points of origins. Ricoeur defines this as the phenomenon of time-consciousness, the act of understanding based solely on the connectedness made possible by the "the before and after" sequences of time perception.

The linguistic "chair" is thus significant as such and as the narrative component of the contextual set of tenses, events and emotions forming its place in the drama of its narration. This particular narration of this particular "chair", within this particular time and sequence of events, is perceived about personal experience

and individual abilities as a continually growing reality relevant to all other similar realities in the general and continually growing understanding of every other perception in the same language. This process is Ricoeur's definition of time as the skeleton structure of a fundamental narrative reality, which he calls consciousness.

While confined still to certain perceptual limits as language, narration can also offer a much wider span of referential complexity as a story. This paradoxical function is simply because of its unique ability to offer eventualities whose very nature seeks to persuade readers of its probable factuality against all odds. Everyday language does not ordinarily have those odds to fight against, nor does it have such added abilities to aid through them unless it resorts to the narration. However, like language, narration cannot help but be limited to the only realities afforded to it by its singular medium, however uniquely complex.

The French theorist and critic Gérard Genette distinguishes three primary characteristics that define the nature of narration in its long history. In his famous *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method* (1980), he firstly defines narrative as "the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events" (25). The words "event" and "series" seem of particular significance here. A happening or an event is, generally speaking, a set of behaviours connected by several cultural threads in a specific place and time.

Both event and linguistic tense combine in the term *eventuality* to underline a fundamental tenet in the structure of conventional narrativity; that is, its complete dependence on the element of "time". "Time", that is, in whatever form it may take; time as sequence, as linguistic tense, as personnel feature (age), as event

logic of structure or eventuality, as the logic of cultural history (classicism, modernism postmodernism). Most of these forms, and many others, seem to foreground time's linear nature and its priority as the primary logic according to which events are defined, ordered, and perceived.

However, with time, the actual act of writing becomes more or less, for Genette, a mere "faithful transcription of that speech" (25). In and of itself, the writing act is insignificant to the nature of the narrative, for it is fundamentally an oral tradition.

Secondly, Genette defines narration as:

The succession of events, actual or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse, and to their several relations of link-ing, opposition, repetition, etc... "Analysis of narrative" in this sense means the study of a totality of actions and situations taken in themselves, without regard to the medium, linguistic or other, through which knowledge of that totality comes to us." (26)

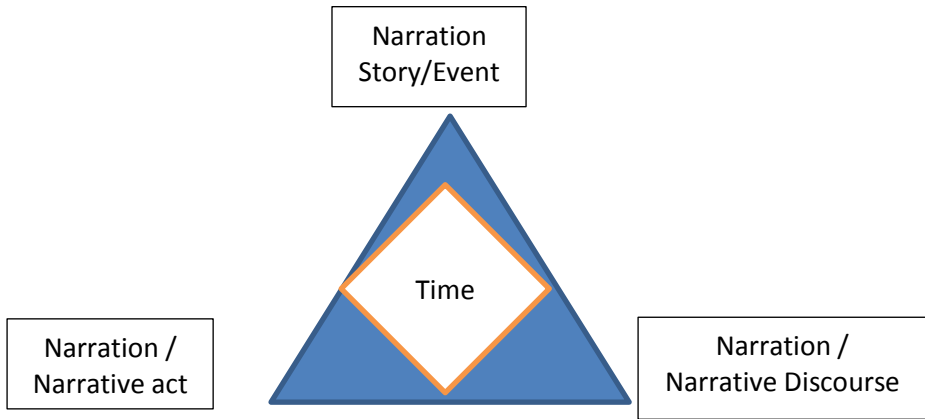
A re-affirmation of this very sequencing nature that defines conventional narrative is hinted at in the first feature. *Narrative*, for Genette, is about events, but not in themselves as such. Instead, it is fundamentally about their "sociality"; their "succession", as he puts it; that is, in other words, their linear structure comprehended as a sequencing logic.

The third, and perhaps most important, feature of conventional narrative for Genette concerns what he terms as "the act of producing" the narrative, "the act of narrating taken in itself" "since the narrative discourse is produced by the action of telling in the

same way that any statement is the product of an act of enunciating" (27). Thus, the act of "telling" itself, for Genette, is the third corner of narration as it should be fully comprehensible as such.

The narration then, for Genette, is a triangle with three basic ideas. At the very top, is the event as defined above; being the pivotal axis around which most narrative components move. The act and the narration discourse represent the two other sides of the base. The act of narration is the text, the actual lines, paragraphs and statements offering the intended telling of the event/s. The discourse is, of course, the general cultural and aesthetic value-systems justifying the text structure and the existence of the event/s. Here are the three terms as defined by Genette himself:

I propose, without insisting on the obvious reasons for my choice of terms, to use the word **story** for the signified or narrative content (even if this content turns out, in a given case, to be low in dramatic intensity or fullness of incident), to use the word **narrative** for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself, and to use the word **narrating** for the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place (28) (**my bolds**)



Generally speaking, then, the narration is a paradoxical combination between these three ideas or characteristics. It is, in other words, an indivisible mixture of the narrating act of a series of events (a story) offering a generalized framework of aesthetic and cultural ideals particular to itself as discourse, all structured around a binding logic of time sequences/ tense-order. This is the second aspect of what defines narrative for this paper.

### 2- 3- Narrative and Language

However, the narrative is simply a linguistic construct, containing whatever complexity and multi-dimensionality language contains. However, it represents in language, by language, some things which it claims goes beyond language itself; a series of events, a truism of some denomination, presumably at least! As such, the narration becomes a multi-dimensional-, multi-layered construct that surpasses the regular referentiality of an ordinary language to point to some other, perhaps more complex, one. This is true, so far as narration is indeed a very particular use of language. French critic and theorist Gerald Prince argues:

The Representation (as product and process, object and act, (structure and structuration) of one or more real or FICTIVE events communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) NARRATORS to one, two, or several (more or less overt) Narrates. Such (possibly interesting) texts as "Elections are constituents of atoms," "Mary is tall and Peter is small"... do not constitute narratives since they do not represent any event. On the other hand, even such possibly uninteresting texts as "The man opened the door," "The goldfish died"...are narratives (1987, 58)

Narrative is a linguistic construct offering the uses and abuses of what may comprise such a construct in terms of complexity and richness, but, more significantly perhaps, in terms of any charged semiotic energy and any core reasoning. This is the third aspect of this papers' definition of the narrative; its paradoxical disavowing linguistic nature. It tells everyone that language will always offer its mishaps and privileges simultaneously. It will always be temporal, synchronic, and relational. However, most significantly, it will permanently disavow any accountability for whatever readers make out of it!

#### **2- 4- Narrative Act, Tense or Verb-Time**

Thus, at its core, narrative language contains and reflects a time-defined essence, a "tense-sequence"; or "a narrative act," in this paper's terms. Narrative acts are, in this sense, inherently different from regular "verbs" of language, in as much as they imply, as mentioned before, the *before* and the *after* organization of dramatic stages. This is what Prince calls "Deixis" and defines as "the general

phenomenon of the occurrence of DEICTICS; the set of references to the situation (inter-locators, time, place) of an utterance" (Prince, 1987, 18). This is, of course, to add to the readership time order, which contains its complexity in the cultural consciousness of reception. Paul Ricoeur argues:

What is ultimately at stake in the case of the structural identity of the narrative function and in that of the truth claim of every narrative work is the temporal character of human experience. The world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world. Alternatively, as will often be repeated in the course of this study: time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience. It is with this primary presupposition that Part I of this work is concerned. (1984, 4)

What this means in no uncertain terms is that time, for Ricoeur, is not only a human construct subject to human understanding and manipulation in language, but, more significantly perhaps, it is in itself, the very fabric of human experience within, or with-out, any narrative. If, for Ricoeur, the narrative contributes to making our life-world, it is most certainly the world this life refers to as experience.

Narrative act, by this definition, is located both within and without the intentionally invented narrative world equally and as forcefully. The intentionally invented fictive world is formed by the several narrative acts depicting its naturally multi-dimensional cross-referential time-sequences and their equally forceful and

complex counterparts in the life-world simultaneously. The play of time-sequence between these two worlds, what Linda Hutcheon calls "Problematization of the real" (Hutcheon, 1988, 145), is the third principle with which this paper redefines the kind of narrative reality presented in postmodern works of narration such as Kureishi's *Something To Tell You*. This is where both the "magical" and the "real" resolutely intertwined, quaint-essentially borderless and radically reflexive of one another (ref).

### **2-5- Narrative as a Genre:**

As this paper has argued so far, regular verbs in the language do not necessarily contain narrative acts. Additionally, to contain such acts, they have to be re-contextualized with the experience of time/tense sequencing, which is an inevitable component of the experience. It is evident then that narrativity as a feature is particularly associate-able with the ordering of time, any type of order, modern or postmodern. Even the destabilization of conventional concepts of time, time-linearity, for instance, still implies a re-ordering of time/tense, however paradoxical.

It is pretty evident in such novels as Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962). This work crosses conventional boundaries between poetry and prose (written in poetic form) and events re-ordering (intentionally confusing the past and the present in three different intercrossing storylines of the same events). It also deconstructs character unity; (where the protagonist is characteristically fractured by outside commentators contradictorily redefining his reality). Many more examples could spring to mind offering the



same effects, such as John Fowle's *A Magus* (1963) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969).

In terms of formal distinctions, narrative and non-narrative refers basically to which kind of time/tense-sequence/order would one chooses for verbs in any given syntax, rather than which textual rhythm or which text? The particularity of narrative lies in its complete dependence on the experience of time in whichever form, order, sequence or arrangement it may take; time, that is; as understood so far by the physics of relativity (Calder, 2006, 378).

In summary, the five aspects that define the narrative for this article are:

1) Narrative is a further "problematization" (Hutcheon, 1988, 58) of questions of existence regarding what is accurate, objective, valid and actual. In simpler terms, narration in the contemporary world questions our already temporal and intrinsically tentative definitions of reality.

2) Narrative is composed mainly of events dilated by time in a specific complex sequence which may or may not be readily understandable in linear two-dimensional terms, making the concept of non-narrative itself quite questionable.

3) Narrative offers its presence as primary language regardless of whatever formal particularity it may claim. As such, it has the same tentativeness, and conceptuality language has, despite its attempt to convince its readers of its capacity to refer to a world beyond itself.

4) Narration comprises various connected narrative acts, different from regular verbs, implying tense contextual sequencing.

5) Narrative forms its medium by comparison to other literary registers, offering grounds for further generic debunking by postmodern meta-fictional innovations.

### ***3- Something To Tell You:***

#### ***The Debunking of the Traditional "Narration":***

##### ***3-1 Against Drama: The Plot and Events:***

To begin with, one of *Something to Tell You* 's most apparent narrative features, is its visible lack of a comprehensive plot in the conventional Dostoevskian sense of the word. This lack of conventional plot structure is not naïve or over-simplistic as principle number one above suggests. Rather, it is culturally and aesthetically significant in as much as it reflects inner struggles with identities of self and the other. The stability of such identities are the natural bases for any conventional dramatic impact. There is no comprehensive conventional plot, because there is no stable comprehensive conventional self, settled and contained in whatever form it may be. The absence of a single comprehensive "peak," in a conventional sense of the word, seems quite apparent to the naked eye in this work. "A peak", Prince argues, is "the dynamic interaction amongst narrative parts to impart psychological effect on the reader" (1998, 73). It is, in other words, the gradual complication of events towards a climactic intensity of impactful influence on readership.

Instead, this work offers several equally influential minor plots, climaxes and points of readership impacts, all of which aesthetically entangle and culturally deconstruct one another's paths and logics to the extent where the idea of the plot itself feels unnecessary. At first, readers may feel that they are confronting quite a conventional work of narration, where the narrator Jamal at the beginning of chapter 2, shocks us with the revelation that he may have committed a murder no one knows about:

I live every day with a murder. A real one. Killer, me. There; I've told you. It's out. Now everything is different. Until I put down those words, I had trusted only one other person with the information. If it got around, my career as a mind doctor might be impeded. It wouldn't be good for business. (58)

What is naturally expected after such blatant revelation is simply that this is a murder mystery of some kind, where most events will somehow be relevant to this specific murder, as it were; the very murder comfortably admitted by what seems to be a classic first-person omniscient narrator in no uncertain terms. However, what comes after in the following parts of this work completely frustrates these expectations one by one radically and uncompromisingly to the extent that readers at the end of the novel are never really sure of any definition given at the beginning, including the narrator's very description that it was indeed a "murder" to begin with:

I wish I had told you at the time of the abuse- Jamal- it was so horrible- that I wanted to kill him myself. I thought all the time about how to do it. Where do you buy poison? How much do you put in? Will it be detected? She went

on: “Jamal, do not turn on yourself when it was me. I killed him, my father, by encouraging you to get rid of him. When he was raping me. When he was raping me I wished him dead a million times. (499)

The very person for whom the attack was committed is implicitly depicted here and elsewhere in the novel as a possible culprit, an instigator who might have planned this whole thing from the get-go to get rid of her father for revenge. In chapter 16, the narrative takes a sudden shift to a different storyline of events where the omniscient protagonist Jamal and his sister Maryam embark on a homeland trip back to Pakistan to see their father with a whole series of events depicting the father's new wife, Jamal's new relationship with his cousin, as well as his friendship intricacies with his father's friends and family. The significant liberal mention of the father's sister, the aunt, who happens to be a Professor of English Literature, in the now all-closed Pakistani Humanities' University Departments, is coupled with the sister's new sexual explorations of her newly discovered Pakistani deprived social atmosphere.

Before chapter 14, the concentration shifted focus yet again to depict Henry, the protagonist's best friend, and his life's many complexities and paradoxes. Then again, in chapters 20 and after, another shift affects the protagonist's relationship with his Psychiatrist Taher and friends Valintine and Woolfe. This shift moves us back to the story of the burglary he committed with these two friends in the past. The shifts continue to move the narrative lines to different, if intentionally distracting or deconstructing, directions where it is now detailing the encounter of a famous rock-

singer party whom the protagonist and his sister have managed to meet privately.

The shifts continue moving to reach quite an unexpected, and to the average reader, unessential character: *Bush*, Maryam's loyal friend; and his hallucinations, sexual desires, psychological discontinuities, and insipid musical fascinations. Then, again, still, more forcefully, the focus shifts to the narrator's wife, Josephine and her boyfriend, whom she took after their separation and how the son wishes their return together but manages to hide his desire under many aggressive verbal attacks against his father. Her joining in group sex in a pub where he happened to be watching, is another scene to distract attention and refocus it on the absolute disseminative nature of the identities explored! Another story also materializes in the middle about Karin, the protagonist's friend and her severe struggle with loneliness and her professional life as a TV journalist in tabloid news channels. However, another story is left to linger in the middle of all this about Lisa, Henry's daughter. She had stolen a very expensive painting from her mother's house and went into a brief sexual relationship with the narrator.

This is in addition to many more even smaller storylines and tales about many more interval characters, events and lines of thought. One instance is the mugging story to which the narrator and sister have been exposed once they have arrived in Pakistan. A second example is the story of his writing pornographic tales in chapter 21. A third is a story of attending a football game with his son Ralfi in chapter 26. A fourth is a sick dog whom his sister has arranged to medically euthanize in chapter 40. A fifth is that of his

smacking his son following the son's severe insults. A sixth is that of Allan, Mushtaq's friend, and many more.

Although different storylines, these narrative shifts seem not designed as great twists in some primary current that work toward a clear end, equal distractions of readership expectations. Each of these distractions in itself is worthy of contemplation as a separate dramatic or narrative line. Henry's relationship with Mariam, his literary connections and artistic views, and his psychological peculiarities and preferences all promise a narrative line by itself. It is the same with most characters in this particular novel, even the child Ralfi, with his very complex relationship with his dad and his attempts to reunite his parents without actually pushing them to do so.

All such *potential* dramatic lines serve to remind everyone of the non-essentiality non-centrality of whatever “centre” or “essential” they might have traditionally expected. Here lies the significance of our definitions in the beginning of this article. Postmodern narrative always offers its lines as questions of existence; nothing is in, or by, itself, essential or central, unless via a specifically chosen perspective. Thus, readers will not find a singular, overwhelming climax, but several, almost numerous, intersecting impacts that equal one another and parallel their effects quite intentionally counterbalance any particular preference, any particular choice.

Even the location of the narrative is dismantled or decentralized. At the very beginning of the work, readers might come under the impression that this is a particularly “London” novel. They might sense that is a narrative that seems essentially suburban, in both feel and modality. Every tone or phrase or word cries I am a city boy;

expressing urbanity in its most in-your-face features of liberal cynicism, shouting this is my world, and all that I wish to know:

When I had more time, I liked to walk up through Shepherd's Bush Market, with its rows of chauffeur-driven cars parked alongside Goldhawk Road station. Hijabed Middle Eastern women shopped in the market, where you could buy massive bolts of vivid cloth, crocodile-skin shoes, scratchy underwear and jewellery, "snide" CDs and DVDs, Parrots and Luggage, as well as illuminated 3D pictures of Mecca and Jesus. (one time, in the old city in Marrakech, I was asked if I had seen anything like it before. I could only reply that I'd come all this way just to be reminded of Shepherd's Bush market.) (290)

Then, as readers go along in work, they discover that far from it, the place of focus, London, is both de-framed as the model "city" and debunked as the meaning of civilization:

If he had left us in Britain, it was, he added, as much for our sake as for his. It was apparent we would have more of a change there. What should have happened, he said, was that his family should never have left India for Pakistan. India was where his heart was, where he had belonged, where he and Yasir and his sisters and brothers had grown up, in Bombay and Delhi. (148)

The simultaneity of the storylines in all the tales told offers in, and by, themselves no particular preference. As readers, we cannot select a single line to say with utter confidence: Aha; here lies the significance. All narrative lines offer the parallel potential for the meaning deduction, the keyword here being: *potential*. No

recommended behaviour of a character selected; no preference of ethics offered; no itemization of a particular social theory preferred. Ideas presented pretend to be humane but reflect their innate weaknesses as though to say we are not. Listen to this quote.

Talk! Anyone can talk! "Where the fuck is the fucking?" my man in the hotel yelled, rifling hopelessly through the manuscript and finally freisbeeing it across the room. "What is this—Plato? It is certainly not Plato's Retreat!" The line between literature and pornography was uncrossable. Breaking the porno spell was like that moment at a party when the lights came on, and all you saw were haunted faces debris. Now pornography is getting emotional, and straight movies more sexual. It was a strange business being a celibate relationship while thinking of sex continuously. I'd discuss the stories with Karen, and she would suggest ideas, often from her own life. This was where our sexual relationship was, in this talk and in my work (274)

The mingling of reference to explicit sexual desire with cultural components such as literature as "facts" of contemporary life, void of any particular ethical preference or compos, be it religious or logical, offers an implicit but determined choice to break conventional expectations of morality upon which dramatic lines get to be both built and felt. The fundamental values of black and white, which form the basis for dramatic complications, are marginalized and duly debunked on personal pro-individualist liberal hyper marks enveloped with an implicit urban rejection of all things clear. "The moment at the party when the lights came on, and



all you saw were haunted faces" seem to symbolize not just the absence of such compos, but the absence of all other substitutes as well. The modernist sense of alienation and estrangement resulting from self-pitying and self-sublimation is also missing and debunked by the very sense of humour and sarcasm covering the whole monologue from its very beginning. This sarcasm is quite apparent in the contradiction between vulgarity and elitism in vocabularies such as "fucking" and "literature" and the very paradoxical self-reflexive breakage of the humanist modernist world view.

Unlike what Susan Allen Fischer suggests, this is very much about "social identity" rather than about "sexual desire" (Fischer, 2015, 18), for within both, the work suggests; there are no longer any paralyzing ideological boundaries or limits to reverse. This liberty seems true since this work foregrounds its characters' innermost contradictory conflicts, notwithstanding the sexual ones, in the larger, more complex context of human existential dilemmas of *self* and *reality*. For, wherever the perspective lies the chosen significance, and whatever readership assumes, ontological impacts follow. However, it remains vital through all of this that within perspective/readership, there is a choice, not an imposition.

Here there is an apparent reference to the second and fourth principles of postmodern narrativity mentioned above; events being dilated in time as simultaneous presentations of equally, and therefore not particularly, essential details, and as determined cultural commentary and critique. Many critics, such as Luis Frederick Adlam (2003, 10, 14, 19), have associated similar forms of sequence-time-play, multiple defocalized plots and imaginary

narrative lines with sanitizing or neutralizing concepts like *Magic Realism*:

The mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre, skilful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealist description, arcane erudition, the element of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable. (Cudden, 488)

However, in one sense, at least, all fictive events are imaginary and similarly realistic. They generally offer innovative lines weaved in the vocabulary and concepts of the cultural reality spawning such imagination, whether perceived or absolute. In what manner then can we consider this particular way of narrative writing (as opposed to other ways) "imaginative" or "magical"? If done, could it be even possible *then* to consider such imagination or magically also at the same time somehow "realistic"? The term itself does not seem extremely helpful or clarifying in neither its realist nor magical connotations! However, the term serves a purpose; well-structured compartmentalization of seemingly stabilized duality (imagination versus reality, or magical versus realist) that trims off and smoothes over any questioning potential implied in their very presence individually as such. The "real" is itself a philosophical question, as it is obviously known, and by association also the "magical"? As such, what would the coupling of their

dilemmas clarify? What would it serve, except for further complexity and question-ability?

The way in which this work offers a multiplicity of smaller, almost a-dramatic, pseudo-plots undermines any reference to a singular reality be it magic or otherwise. There are too many tales and potential climaxes to belong to one mode alone. Instead, this work follows a writing style of free association from these plots' loose connections to one another and any overall governing dramatic stream or generalized plot. In other words, it allows no homogenous dramatic effects to take hold of the conventional structure of climax and dénouement or into a modernistic symbolic deep structure of loss, multi-layered signification and irony. Examples include Samuel Beckett's dramas (such as *Waiting for Godot* (performed 1954, *Endgame* (1958), *Not I* (1972)), T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) are but very few examples of these modernist registers.

Every time this work starts to narrate an event in a way formally reminiscent of conventional structures; that is; with dramatic lines getting complicated towards a defined climax or toward a modernist symbolic sense of loss and alienation, it turns to deconstruct that very event systematically and disseminate its familiar expect ability quite radically. Thus, for example, here the narrator starts in chapter 3 as follows:

So, I must begin this story-within-a-story. One day a door opened and a girl walked into the room. It was the mid-1970s. The first time I saw Ajita was in our college

classroom, an airless, dry box in the depths of a new building on the Strand, down the street from Trafalgar Square. I was at university in London, reading philosophy and psychology. (46)

Later, in the same chapter, the story shifts to focus on Valentin, the Bulgarian friend who escaped Eastern Europe for the freedom of the West:

Often I asked him to describe his escape from Bulgaria, and he would tell me more details each time. I had heard no other "real-life" story as exciting. He'd done national service and been on the Olympic Cycling team; he could fence and box. He'd conformed so well he was able to become an air steward, one of the few jobs in the Eastern Bloc in which ordinary people were allowed to travel. (48)

The very revelation of the incident itself offers this very aesthetic frustration of expectation at every line of the narrative. So what is claimed for a murder, turns out to be either an unintentional attempt to intimidate an incestual rapist who deserves much worse than he had gotten, or simply an implied conspiracy by the heroin to replace a father? The following is a conversation between the omniscient narrator/protagonist; Jamal, and the victim; his estranged beloved Ajita, years after she came back and years after the supposed murder of her father had been committed:

- "What I feel most of the time is dread," she said, "As though some catastrophe is about to befall me."

- "It has. Do you remember what you told your father did to you?"

- "Why shouldn't I remember that? I do not hate him, He was having a terrible time. It is not your family." (309)

She continues to say:

"My nightmares were not about my father raping me night after night, but about that screaming mob outside the factory, students like us hurling limbs of wood and bricks. They reduced my dad to despair. He was a hardworking man expelled from Africa trying to make everything all right for his family. (310)

No event in this work holds form or definition throughout the whole work. By the very end, as readers, we are not sure whether what happened was indeed a murder or was even a crime in the first place. We are not even sure who instigated such an incident, Jamal and his friends, the daughter: Ajita from behind the scenes, or the corrupt mass media in the capitalist cultural mentality enticing labourers' set-ins! None of the initial portrayals of the incident as a crime seems to remain intact to the end. Instead, the actual incident itself is redefined as an almost entirely different event where the rapist/criminal is now said to be a victim, who is defended by the very person he supposedly victimized! The whole concept of crime and moral deviation becomes as much plastic as malleable to each reader's ethical appreciation and moral codification with this work's continuing redefinition of its events. This plasticity is very accurate with the collapse of the idea of consequence instead of the narrator's initial description of the deed itself.

Initially, the narrator described what he and his friends had done to Ajita's father as a murder; later on, readers discover that it was little more than mere intimidation of the older man to get him to stop raping his daughter seemingly. The narrator is then part *Angel* part *Devil*, both the chivalrous, loyal lover and the criminal intimidator. The father, in the beginning, is seen as a criminal rapist. In the end, he is depicted as also a hard worker who spent his life fending for his living against impossible odds. He, too, is both part *Angel* part *Devil*. So was Wolf, the friend who, in the beginning, helped to defend his friend's raped girlfriend to stop her abusing father, and at the end became himself a blackmailer of that very friend. The same can be said about every character or personality depicted in this novel regardless.

This contradiction is not a simplistic lack of moral compass, but rather an admission of the paradoxical nature of the human condition and the innate vulnerabilities of both its weaknesses and strengths. It is not a marginalization of the moral good, as traditionally acknowledged, but questioning its primordial assumptions as to the only possibility for human progress, a debunking of its unique status; its claim to knowledge. The same goes with the traditional bad and whatever grey areas in between. Why do most postmodern novels offer no conventional plots, is this undermining of conventional morality with its simple, clear-cut definitions of values like the love between a male and a female, loyalty, or even fidelity?

Postmodern narratives challenge modernist unitary form in terms of form versus content, perspective versus language. They do so with such ease of association and simultaneity of expression that

effortlessly undermines and belittles the high-heeled elitism of Master Modernists' works. The reason is surprisingly straightforward; postmodern narratives evoke aesthetics of paradoxicality where no centralized notions of the good or the bad are presumed to be understood, let alone judged and seen as foundational. Being one of a postmodernist dual-world, capitalist half-Westernized half-re-easternized intellectual, the narrator's mindset speaks only of those areas of the human condition most readily available to him. In other words, he embodies the status of the culture at its working peak in terms of language, perspective, desires, and methods of understanding. However, none of the lines presented in this novel advocate homogeneity, harmony, structuredness or conviviality. Instead, what is insisted upon, once and again, is whatever is paradoxical, heterogeneous, differential and disseminative.

Formally, he narrator starts this novel with a heartbreaking confession regarding what appears to be a full-scale murder of his girlfriend's abusive father, which he supposedly committed with the help of his two friends, Wolf and Valentin. Initially, this claim gives the impression that this is a very conventionally structured murder story or something to this effect. However, on a deeper look, it becomes increasingly apparent that this work promises a systematic deconstruction of conventional and modernistic concepts of character, plot and event equally. Every time an event gets to form in a somewhat expected conventional or modernistic symbolic way, the narrative lines get distorted and distracted systematically into other equally interesting storylines about equally curious contents. The murder is soon discovered little more than a confrontation that

has no intent for any particular harm. Its entitlement as *murder* is simply the narrator's psychological self-reflection that informs us of his moral fiber than of his actual action.

Here, the narrative frustrates expectations of the nature of the event, which is the "murder"; what it is, and its moral and legal consequences. It is as if the work is telling its readers that most events are not only unlike what they are told by nature, but most likely, our definition of their repercussions are inaccurate, perhaps even downright wrong. The following is a significant dialogue between the narrator/protagonist and his former/present girlfriend in chapter 45 that seems to summarize this disseminative method of the concept of event:

- Does Mushtaq know?
- " I have decided not to tell him. He gets so angry."
- "will he get to know?"
- "How would it make his life better to hear how I suffered than and what you went through? He'd just feel guilty. He likes you so much, Jamal. You helped him as a kid."
- "Will you tell him about your father and the abuse?" (499)

Rather than offering a traditional climactic complication and denouement, this particular storyline frustrates its very expected plot structure by offering instead a total indifference on the part of characters and an almost total absence of dramatic complication. The same happens in terms of the narrator's love story with and his beloved Ajita, another major event in this novel. In the beginning,



the narrator/protagonist Jamal spent several pages describing in great detail the love relationship that he enjoyed with his girlfriend and how much he suffered in her absence, to the extent that readers might think this to be a love story. However, after many chapters detailing so many other main storylines, the reader might expect that all his problems will be finished when the narrator/protagonist reunites with his old beloved. What happens, however, is entirely different on so many grounds. The reunion has no real impact on any of the events motivating the many storylines in this work. The protagonist chose his estranged wife over his returned beloved, the very wife whom he saw earlier on engaging in scandalous sexual activities. Nevertheless, he is not offering any harmony of character or conventionality in moral codes. In the middle of such an event, the coming back of his old beloved, he thought:

I considered visiting the goddess, but wasn't in the mood. I was aware of how lonely I was, how far away I was from other people. Moreover, I thought I wanted to be in love again. (499)

Even this “love” event which seemed, at first glance, to envelop the whole work, turns out to be completely evacuated from any conventional plot dynamics in terms of entangled conspiring actions and emotions. It offers no peak of emotions, no cross-currents of thoughts between characters and events and no real dramatic impact. The characters themselves seem indifferent to the event, more deliberately but naturally detached and unconcerned. There is simply no anti-plot but no plot either. Instead, the event of the beloved’s return is offered as a means with which the work as a whole disseminates and systematically undermines conventional

(and modern) narrative structures like plot and event (or their modernist symbolist substitute) along with readership aesthetic expectations.

The same applies to most events presented in this work. For example, the dramatic event of seeing the narrator's/protagonist's wife sleeping with strangers is wholly tamed and made insignificant by Jamal's return to her without the slightest mention of this event! The-going-to-the-homeland-story similarly promised enough dramatic potential for much further development and complication. Nevertheless, its impact gets neutralized and systematically dismantled by the reactions of the protagonist's people and their views of life in Britain. Even the love relationship with the cousin, which had the utmost potential for intensified dramatic influence, is wholly tamed; its dramatic potentials gradually ground so that at the end, when Jamal meets her and her new husband in London, readers observe an icy, almost non-existent relationship. The real significance of this reunion seems to have been designed to make sure the characters' mature demeanour lets down any potential conventional development of emotions. Even the much smaller stories like Karin's cancer are neutralized by the overall psychological state surrounding her desire for a sexual partner. In short, no event retains any of its conventional nature as such. Much more significantly, none of these events retain any sort of modernistic symbolic potential in its definition as such, and therefore, do not ever promise by its lacks a world of meaning beyond its immediate presence. There are no further symbolic diggings to be made by readers who are enticed to further look for "deeper" significances pointed at by the "genius" of the author.

Events are paradoxical in their admission of lacks, dramatic underdevelopment, and frustration with aesthetic identification, but never fake or superficial or monolithic. Their lacks are impressively accurate, that is all.

Generally speaking, there seldom existed any dramatic complications that centralize a storyline, or a set of storylines, as *the* main, or even sufficiently the main one. Instead, conventional dramatic context is disseminated; its possible modernistic alternatives deconstructed through the taming of consequences and mundanitization of the results. Accordingly, any expectation of centrality of particular significance is neutralized and duly subdued for the sheer number of storylines, their means of expression, and their specific mechanisms of teleology.

For example, the actual presence of all these stories; of the departed beloved (Ajita), her father that was supposedly murdered, the friend who has turned into an extortionist (Wolf), the journey to the homeland (Pakistan), the narcissistic genius/artist friend, the lonely sexually-vulgar wife, the noble but wild sister, the idealist friend's daughter, the absent father, the loyal sister's friend (Bushy), the psychoanalyst, the expensive stolen painting, the offensive but very loving son (Rafi), act simply as a challenge to the singularity of any one of them. They are all offered with equal stress and denotation to neutralize the concept of centrality, both within each of them as particularly significant in themselves and for the whole work as especially central to any assumed comprehensive dramatic structure. Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon comments on this sort of fluidity of structure in postmodern discourse as follows:

Postmodernism is the *process* of making the *product*; it is *absence* within *presence*, it is *dispersal* that needs *centring* in order to *be* dispersal; it is the *idiolect* that wants to be, but knows it cannot be, the *master code*; it is *immanence* denying yearning for *transcendence* yet. In other words, the postmodern partakes of a logic of "both/and," not one of "either/or." (1988, 49)

The question that seems to impose itself here is relatively simple. Why would the implied author of this substantial work offer all such storylines in 520 pages and 48 chapters while deliberately taking away their artistic functionality by profoundly neutralizing their dramatic and symbolic potentials?

It is not the achievement of this work in particular, and most of its postmodern counterparts at large, to re-challenge pre-modern narratives' ideals and practices. Previous modernist works had successfully resisted almost all aspects of conventional narration, from characterization to setting, in good ways decades ago. If that is all this work has hoped to accomplish, then it has not hoped for much at all. Some of the modernist works mentioned above in this same article have done precisely that and, some would say, much more. Other examples might include *Night and Day* (1919), *Jacob's Room* (1922) by Virginia Woolf or *A Farewell to Arms* (1926) by Ernest Hemingway.

The American theorist and critic John Barth describe this particular type of contemporary narrative explicitly in his now very famous article *The Literature of Replenishment* (1984):

the radical disruption of the linear flow of narrative;  
the frustration of conventional expectations concerning

unity and coherence of plot and character and the cause and effect development thereof; the deployment of ironic and ambiguous juxtapositions to call into question the moral and philosophical meaning of literary action; the adoption of a tone of epistemological self-mockery aimed at naive pretensions of bourgeois rationality; the opposition of inward consciousness to rational, public, objective discourse; and an inclination to subjective distortion to point up the evanescence of the social world of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. (1984, 199)

This type of ironic inwardness is precisely in full swing in this work from beginning to end. To begin with, it offers a systematic dismantling of conventional concepts of plot and event by deliberately installing lack of any ascending dramatic complication or emotional consequence as shown above. There is not a single story in this narrative that offers enough entanglement to allow for a climax, nor enough emotional weight to allow for a comprehensive wholesome event. Events remain, as principle no three above suggests, tentative, not final or stable or completed. As readers, we never really know if it were murder or a simple accident, a love story or a purely physical act, an act of marital infidelity or a simple venting of one's inner psychological agonies. As readers, we are not sure of the nature of events themselves simply because of how dilated they become throughout the work's timelines. Events are thus designed vulnerable to readership plasticity by their very nature. Critic Erica Wagner comments:

If the novel's plot could be said to have an engine, it is that chestnut, the past returning to haunt him. Jamal's

past reappears in the of-course-still-lovely form of Ajita, long-lost love of his young manhood, who vanished the night after he and two friends did not (after all, exactly, not really) kill her father after Ajita had revealed to Jamal that her father was raping her night after night. One of the friends, who also reappears in order to blackmail the theoretically respectable Jamal, happens to be named Wolf, allowing Kureishi to jest that his narrator "had not succeeded in keeping the Wolf from the door." (2008, 23)

No exceptions are found even in the events that carry the most promise for emotional distress, ascendance, and complexity. For example, Jamal and his sister Mariam were exposed to an armed robbery once they stepped foot in Pakistan. Such an incident carries a grand promise for a vast amount of eventual complexity. However, it ends up in an entirely tame and un-consequential manner where the culprits returned Jamal and his sister home unharmed once they knew that they had nothing of value, just like that! An armed robbery turned into absolutely nothing of consequence for absolutely no reason whatsoever! As readers, we ask how; and why? As readers, we interrogate the aesthetic significance of such an inert event which does not impact anything really, but is present to distract attention and dilate focus on parallel lines of eventualities and potential expectations?

While telling this story, a detailed description of the amount of poverty suffered by people there was stressed upon, as if it were the real purpose of the whole story, to begin with, inserting a historical statement of social reality. This also frustrates linear readership

expectations more tuned to the specifics of son father relationship rather than the social reality of their Pakistani homeland. Here is another form of “distortion” of “narrative flow” not only in terms of sequencing/linearity; time relative to events, but in terms of what are these events themselves and how they might relate to one another.

This is very telling in terms of this article’s definition of narrative, the no 2 and 4 principles in particular. Events dilated by time and regulated by some connections form the backbone of what we know as narrative linearity; sequencing. As Barth points out, postmodern narratives differ from this in as much as it offers its time-dilation three-dimensionally. If we were to move Pakistan, or the stolen painting, or the Karn's stories from their original places to any other chapter, what would happen to the overall structure of this work? What if we offer a completely different order of most of the stories presented in this work? Would the general effect of this work change or alter in any significant way? Probably, but not in the way that makes any particular linear sequence of events in itself the "correct" one! This is the whole point of a postmodern innovation of three-dimensional narrativity; its plasticity and, therefore, malleability, in readership, making it much more accurate and closer to the human condition.

### **3-2 Characters, Characterization & Caricaturization**

Almost precisely as both the plot and events are presented in this narrative, characters give a first impression of being structurally regular and promise simple identification in readership. It appears so at the very first lines of this work where the omniscient first-

person narrator, Jamal, informs readers of his occupation and describes the setting of his storylines. Nevertheless, as the narrative lines shift from one story to another, readers start to confront increasingly differentiating character features with deeper and more complex psychological connotations and heterogeneities. For example, the psychoanalyst who is supposed to be solidly grounded in some rooted common morality as an ethical benchmark grounding his job's market value is the very character who pays regular visits to a prostitute he names; "the goddess of love"! A hidden side of his personality presented not so much in parodying conventional moral codes but in underlining the complexity of human needs.

Again, this is a character in which almost nothing is entirely harmonious or easy to combine. It carries within itself as many paradoxical, even contradictory, aspects as one can probably think. The love relationship with Ajita, which his character convinced readers is of the highest calibre, is itself set aside and ignored by a trip to Pakistan, another relationship with a cousin, and many other sexual encounters, public and private, welcomed by the very devoted lover readers thought he is. At the end of the novel, where the estranged lover returns, Ajita, Jamal's reaction seems to undermine any essential assumption readers might have made regarding the initial depth of their love relationship. Ajita's reaction to Jamal in chapter 45, when saying that their relationship from the beginning was bound to be "friendship", rather than "love" following her own choice of actually sleeping with Jamal's old friend, then blackmailer; Wolf redefines their whole relationship



from the start and dilates any readership expectations of regular reconciliation or comic reliefs.

All traditional morality from love to loyalty and from friendship to fatherhood seems to be under philosophical scrutiny in response to individualist human conditions; quite convincing human conditions. However, the focus does not seem to be on redefining such codes or re-understanding their ethical dilemmas or political consequences as much as it is to recount a multiplicity of perspectives in every character presented. This plurality of perspectives, as paradoxical and sometimes even contradictory, focuses on this kind of characterization. By offering behaviours that seem very heterogeneous, almost bipolar, characters like Jamal, Ajita, Mariam, Henry, Wolf, and others prevent stability of meaning and underline astaticism of significance.

It is probably safe to say that there are not two but several faces or masks to each of the main characters presented in this work. This multiplicity of features does not simply indicate the difference between flat and deep characters or between two- and three-dimensional personalities! Instead, it indicates the conglomerate among entirely different sets of features, each of which could, in principle, create an independently verifiable personality or mask. Moreover, each of these masks carries a whole set of behavioural potentials on its own merits as independently as imagined.

With regards to the character of Jamal, for example, there are many Jamals. One would be Jamal: *the student*, in his life complete with a loving girlfriend, a couple of good friends and some problems to entice action and encourage personal development. As a character, there are enough features here to comprehensively and

satisfactorily back up the rest of the narrative lines toward any conventionally selected end. A character like this would be quite easily identified with; a delicate student who is in love with a great girlfriend who loves him dearly but has some personal problems and issues which can be used for motives of further development. The presence of the two other friends could also add further depth to the events of the story and the complications of its narrative lines.

Nevertheless, there is another slightly different Jamal, capable of serious violence against an older man. A person who is most comfortable in the company of a prostitute! Here, as readers, we might be slightly thrown off balance by assuming that this is only a remote part of a straightforward chap with much to endure in his life. Instead, readers might confront the combination between these two Jamals: the delicate student who studies social sciences and reads philosophy, and the one who commits violence and enjoys the company of prostitutes.

There is, however, a third Jamal, the father, who has a vast amount of fatherly tolerance for his son's offensive slang and an equal amount of forgiveness for his wife's public sexual parades. A fourth intellectual, Jamal; who discusses moral issues as though he is Kant and feels very liberal about other people's choices and preferences. Jamal, the psychoanalyst, is another character with a different set of features, attending his patients with care, concerning himself with their psychological needs and flaws while keeping their thoughts and emotions very secret by holding excellent ethical and professional standards!

Generally speaking, Jamal, the delicate lover, the psychoanalyst, the prostitute customer, the academic, the son of an estranged

father, the cousin lover, the father of the bad-mouthing son, the separated husband of a sexually deprived wife, the brother of a wild sister and the friend of people who ended up extorting him after sleeping with his ex-lover. The list might extend for quite a bit.

The same multiplicity of facets can also be found in many other characters in this narrative and the same form of characterization. For example, Ajita, the student who is in love with her boyfriend, and is a victim of a heinous crime committed by her father, is different from Ajita, who has become Wolf's woman and feels still attracted to her old boyfriend. A different, more vengeful Ajita seems to have wanted her father dead and must have imagined some of what had happened.

The contrast between the loyal friend Wolf at the beginning of the narrative, who walks miles through defending the honour of his body's girlfriend, and the extortionist Wolf at the end who conjures up stories to con his friend out of money needs no further underlining. Henry, the sister's boyfriend, is just about everything together at the same time: artist, thinker, political activist, innovator, dope smoker, hedonist, but also a father, a sexual Flandres, to name but a few of his many personalities.

Whatever threads thought possible to connect all such sets of traits/features or mindsets into a single personality through a characterization process (principle three above) seem to be at least extremely paradoxical. This is one of the significant statements of postmodern cultural discourse at large; no two-dimensional moralities, views, or aspects of life are condoned at any level under any assumption. Instead, all views of life are complex, multi-

dimensional, paradoxical, but most of all not simplistic or superficial.

Another equally significant aspect of the characterization process is the anti-seriousness of all characters and their actions. A deeply embedded sense of play and irony underlies most of this narrative's references to almost all traditionally acknowledged moral canons or ethical beliefs. For example, readers will not find one character in this work who seems to be committing some form of minor legal infringement or crime of some description for pleasure. For example, they all seem to smoke dope and use drugs of some denomination! Most of them are into irregular sexual practices and have had plenty of sexual partners for pleasure, including prostitutes. What seems most significant here is that the narrative does not present such infringements as such. On the contrary, they are presented with such disavowing regularity of phraseology and tone that the mere idea of their contradictory presence becomes ironic! This is the main character; Jamal, in a monologue about his prostitute:

I thought with a whore you pay for the right not to speak, not to have to give the most valuable thing, your words – to the woman.

She said, “You’re eager, good little fucker- for an Englishman”

- “Thanks,” I murmured, mostly to myself,  
“Wanna hear a joke,”

- “Oh Yes!”

Her bright face was near mine, listening. All I wanted was to make her laugh. It occurred to me that I wanted my wife to be a whore, and my whores to be my partners.

- I said, " a prostitute and a psychoanalyst spent the afternoon together. In the end, each turns to the other and says: "That is three hundred pounds, please!" (337)

What seems most chauvinistic from a purely masculine point of view is also equally ironic and, in a sense, also playful and implicitly self-critical. What purports to be a profound characterization of multi-faceted and multi-dimensional personalities proves equally to be an ironic caricaturization, one that does not lack playfulness. Listen to this commentary about Henry's character:

Mariam knew Henry would never take her opinions seriously, but she was not afraid of him or his pomposity. It was said of Henry, and particularly of his work, that you had to praise him until you blushed and then build from there. Mariam was not a praiser; she did not see the need for it. She even liked to needle him. One time in the foyer, after an Ibsen or Molière, or maybe it was opera, she announced that the piece was too long. Everyone in the vicinity held their breath until he said through his grey beard, in his deep voice, "That, I'm afraid, is exactly the time it took to get from the beginning to the end!"

"Well, they could have been closer together, that's all I am saying" was Mariam's reply.

Now there is something going on between the two of them – who are much closer than before. (16-7),

Here, the mimetic commentary of the narrator on the conversation between the characters of Henry and Mariam, ironizes their whole confrontation by exposing their implicit presuppositions about one another. Mariam is the less cultured, more courageous down-to-earth bohemian individual who fearlessly voices her opinion, while Henry is the elitist cultured artist who fancies the role of master educator and genius innovator. The dynamics of the irony offers all negative aspects of each character simultaneously, with totally implicit justifying logics and histories. For instance, it allows Mariam to foreground her satire on one of the most celebrated works of drama, regardless of its title, with absolutely no reverence to any supposedly high-cultured aesthetic or intellectual values offered. From her perspective, her ironizing commentary, potent as it may be, is entirely deserved! In the capitalist reality of excessively obscene wealth and poverty, who in their right mind should spend that much time watching an opera, much less a Molière? The same applies to the character of Henry who; in his high tower of intellectual sophistication, sees absolutely no need for any form of revolutionary stance against such masterpieces except, perhaps, on the contrary, to learn from them, and to enjoy the learning even; being himself also one of their kind's Master-innovators/educators! The clash between these suppositions is further ironed by the commentary of the witness/narrator who seems, himself, to mock the very contrast he has built by repeating in playful satire what is stated by both the characters: "who are much closer than before", in a decidedly ironic tone!

Here is the kind of caricaturization used by Kureishi in his characterization of his personalities in this narrative. It is not a

simple parody or a playful mockery, much less a rigorous seriousness. Instead, as is obvious, it combines all such aspects simultaneously in a kind of tentative paradoxicality in which characters offer multiple, if opposing, features through ideological openness and psychological individualism. Commenting on the work of both Julie Dash and Hanif Kureishi, critic Luis Frederick Aldama argues:

Their magicoreels functions on two levels: first, to foreground their own artificiality in their engagement with the overshadowed mimesis-as-play genre; in this spirit, they dialogically mimic, mock, and confront the diametric fixing of hierarchy between the playful and the serious with the constructed generic order. Second, to tell the stories that richly texture the experience (histories and cultures) of the realities of their characters (44)

This form of "fixing of hierarchy between the playful and the serious" particularizes Kureishi's apparent concern for focusing on features that caricature the personality without running the risk of actually rejecting it. Henry's elitism is not rejected, nor, in one sense at least, radically critiqued, but only slightly mocked and slightly justified while equally understood and generally accepted. The same applies to Henry's opposite, Mariam. Her bohemianism is never radically rejected, nor radically condoned, or radically justified, but is equally understood and generally accepted. Nevertheless, both Henry and Mariam are presented by the narrative as lovers, holding a great connection to one another, which is another more profound form of the irony of the whole question of personality difference and its impact on emotional relationships,

particularly when it comes to sexual chemistry. In this particular sense of non-radicality, the characterization of Kureishi's characters turns into a caricaturization, not a simple parodying, mimicry or mockery.

When principle no five above spoke about the *narrative* being “its own medium” of expression compared to other literary registers like poetry or essay-writing, it attempts to particularly highlight its ability to offer a unique experience in language. No other medium can offer characterization in action while both critique its previous conventions and offer its new methods and forms. Caricaturization of this particular paradoxical type still encompasses characterization in the most conventional sense of the word; and more. Henry and Mariam are both also perceived as whole characters in the traditional sense of the word. They are both described in familiar terms for readers, like physical features or occupations related to the narrator/protagonist.

Nevertheless, what is familiar in their characters is redefined and re-contextualized by what is not; their sexuality, revolutionary politics, personal views of love and life, their histories and their likes. Kureishi's caricaturization offers what is familiar in regular characterization, redefines that through its contrast, then redefines both on a third more sophisticated level without totally undermining either. There are no pretences here, no attempts to sugar-coat the human condition; smooth down its rough protruding edges and random growths. Instead, the irony of its survival in today's capitalist social conditions is neither celebrated nor mourned, neither totally understood nor completely veiled, but is almost always attempted, and then, a complete stop. There are no fantastic



illuminations here; no Ahas,! About the who (es), the what(s) and the social conditions. The implied author does not seem to be offering great discoveries about anything, and he knows it and does not pretend otherwise, only that he is "attempting" a "form" for it. This form might, and it is always might, be suitable.

### **3-3. Narrative Tense; Psychological Tense, and the Critique of Linearity**

The overall narrative line of this particular work seems, at first sight, to follow a conventional linear structure from beginning to end. It follows a prominent biographical ascending lineage from youth to late middle age of the first-person omniscient protagonist/narrator Jamal, passing through various random periods of his adulthood. Like most aspects discussed so far, events, plot formation and characterization, the narrative timeline appears at first wholesome in a very structured, well-defined sense. However, at a slightly deeper look, readers might observe that this timeline is, in fact, radically dispersed into at least three different directions.

The first is psychological or inward direction. Readers would most probably observe that most actions presented in this work are fundamentally psychological. Jamal's decision to defend his girlfriend, Mariam's bohemianism, Wolf's blackmailing behaviour, Ajita's hate of her father, Mushtaq's inert personality, Valentin political history in the eastern block, Lisa's theft of her mother's painting are few examples.

Each of these actions, and many more apparent consequences in the narrative, appear entirely formed and justified on psychological grounds. This inward direction of the time flow, pointing wholly inside characters, shifts focus to what is within rather than

progressing after that. The narrative does not follow an event or a chain of events along the living lineage of the omniscient narrator/protagonist. On the contrary, the time focus changes locales as, and when, the psychological need arises without any warning sometimes. Narration shifts from the narrator's mother to his sister, past and present, in no pre-determined order or seeming symbolic structure. The aim seems mostly to do away with the linearity of the time flow itself regardless of its actual super-structure. So far as the general outline of the whole narrative clarifies a biographical line of time low, the narrator seems not concerned about what order (or disorder) of actions (or events) happening. Simultaneity is probably the primary method of dispersal of the time flow. It could easily be said that, for example, chapter 10, talking about the narrator's mother, could be re-positioned as chapter 4, 15, or even 20, with no apparent significant deviation in the overall register of the time structure. The same can equally be said with most stories in this work. Readers would mostly guess the exact spot of history any event must have happened; that is how randomly dispersed, and psychologically rooted most events are presented.

Aesthetically speaking, this distractive method of events' formation and distribution seems to challenge the value of linearity in our perception of the time flow. It shifts the burden of responsibility for structuring the narrative entirely on the psychological status of the narrator. As such, any randomness, disorder, irregularity or disarray of any description whatsoever is almost always already justified by their origins in the narrator's psyche. With all its contemporary contradictions and irregularities, the narrator's psyche is thus the only capable medium through

which the geography of the timeline might be both seen and understood. Its logic, mannerism, peculiarities and so on become the underlying philosophy of time-structuring for events and actions. There becomes no need for any external system of time architecture, linear or any other, but only whatever the various selves would and do, offer as their own. The French theorist and critic Roland Barthes argues:

What must be destroyed is duration, that is, the ineffable binding force running through existence: for order, whether it be that of poetic flow or of narrative signs, that of terror or plausibility, is always a murder in intension. Nevertheless, what reconquers the writer is duration, for it is impossible to develop a negative within time without elaborating a positive art, an order that must be destroyed anew. So that the greater modern works linger as long as possible in a sort of miraculous stasis on the threshold of literature in this anticipatory state in which the breadth of life is given, stretched but not yet destroyed by this crowning phase; an order of signs. (Barthes 38-9)

In one sense at least, the whole of the time structure seems to marginalize what Barthes points out as "duration". The method of structuring proliferating throughout the various aspects and sides in this work from events to the plot and from characterization to language seems to foreground only one aspect, which might be termed as *indifference* to what used to be seen before as "good forms". These imply the well-constructed, internally harmonious, well-balanced language equations that present acceptable easily-

identified-with personalities, well-defined comforting plots and overtly relate-able events. "Good forms" also indicate the opposite equations that present symbolic substitutions for all such aspects in their correct balancing places, making for their lacks and compensating for their absences.

Most modernist "masterpieces" from Pound's *The Cantoes* (1962), and Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), to Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* (1913) and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), offer tangible examples of such lacks, or negative "good forms".

Nothing is genuinely absent in postmodern works like *Something To Tell You*; therefore, nothing is replaced. What is challenged is the assumption of universality, of canonical absolutism, rather than of any particular aspect or set of aspects. Here, there is a dispersal of the timeline. In other words, there is total indifference toward the "before and after" sequencing apparatus with which "duration" holds the "integrity" of its claim to stable pointedness. It is a deliberately installed ironic indifference that dismantles the need for durations as a foundation in narration on psychological grounds for aesthetic and cultural gains. Instead, each character's inner psychological composition becomes by itself grounds for dismantling imposed structures of superficial balance and false harmony.

Of course, the first of such gains would be undermining any truth-value in the imposition of forms that claim rights of representation of the human condition. Indifference ironies, the multiplicity of facets and the plurality of directions and possibilities are mechanisms with which postmodern narratives like *Something*

*to Tell You* work to demystify older (modern and pre-modern) hegemony of forms. All forms that claim significance solely on internal balance and conviviality are intrinsically hegemonic and particularly ill-representative of the human condition. Aesthetic plurality, ontological democracy if one likes to name it, which encompasses, rather than excludes, most probable registers equally, is another second aspect of what is gained by these mechanisms. All forms have the right to exist and to be interpreted and weighed accordingly. As mentioned above, each of the main characters in this work seems interpretable, in one sense at least, from a regular point of view. As is quite apparent now, the same applies to most aspects of this work. No event in the whole novel gets finalized or comically relieved to allow for any form of closure; no character seems disentangled enough to allow the stability of features; no structure of beginning and end holds the balance, and no value-judgment seem rooted or centralized to offer a tangible ideology or medium of social scaling. All have different probabilities, and all are equally tentative.

This plasticity, then, is not a simple challenge to conventional or modern narrative ideas and practices. Nor is it, by the same token, a blind inclusion of their canonical presuppositions. Instead, this kind of postmodern literary discourse offers inclusivity instead of exclusivity, where all aspects have their places in a general mosaic that extends without end. Many conventional and modern structural elements of narrativity are offered within the context of their very redefinition in this same work. At first sight, as we have seen so far, readers will find conventional aspects such as plot, events, characters with which they are most familiar. This is a

commercially successful work, with all the familiar aspects that might make literature popular.

However, as indicated above, readers will soon discover that, with a deeper look, those features claim to reality and their familiar monopoly over-representation of the human condition are fiercely interrogated and their very nature thereby wholly redefined. At first sight, characters are presented as regular constructs with ordinary expectations, relations and behaviours. At increasingly more profound levels, readers begin to discover that those very characters are at least multi-dimensional, extremely paradoxical, almost ineffably plural in their complexity that any simplistic treatment of their behaviour would be unconvincing.

The same applies to other narrative aspects such as plot, events, timelines. Nothing is flat, apparent, or utterly transparent but is almost always more profound than meets the eye. With his vanity and love of praise, a character like Henry, readers should imagine him relatively shallow. However, the work comes to surprise us all at every level of our encounter with this particular character to discover yet another depth to his true multitude of personalities. Henry is a very successful play-write and director with admirable management qualities and a loving father with a philosophy of parenting and a way of life. Additionally, he is a compassionate human being with many strengths and weaknesses and a liberal intellectual with fiercely sharp social and artistic insights. Here is how the omniscient narrator speaks of him:

Henry was different at work; I'd heard he'd been a bully, particularly with women, but he seemed to have grown out of that. In the rehearsal room, I was impressed

by his assurance and intense concentration, by his concern for the actors and his interest in their ideas, as well as his firmness when he wanted something. I saw that this was where he was meant to be, what he was alive for. But it also made me wonder why this self, so alert and vibrant, was separated from the anxious, daily self which I knew.

(Kureishi, 2008.)

This multiplicity, or rather plurality of facets and directions, seems to colour just about every aspect of this work's structure. We find multiple plots, personnel, directions of the timeline, sides to the same event, definitions of the same values, and perspectives of the exact needs. Plurality, as opposed to pointed singularity, is what this type of postmodern narrativity mounts for a challenge against hegemonic forms of representation that claim singular access to reality and the truth. The cultural message seems to be that each human being is a multitude of complexities that might be interpretable from many perspectives and is quintessentially irreducible to any neat, easily digestible figurine for identification and capitalistic commodification.

### **3-4- The Aesthetics of Heterogeneity, Disharmony!**

What seems most surprising in postmodern works of this kind is their relative commercial success; their appeal to the public. While there are many levels of challenge upon which they seem to mount their critique of conventional narrative aspects, their inclusion of these very aspects themselves seems to serve them differently! The question then becomes; how could these sorts of narrative

challenges achieve appeal to the public while managing to resist and undermine the very aspects that form their appeal, to begin with?

Canadian critic and theorist Linda Hutcheon argues.

Postmodernism ... takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or 'highlight,' and to subvert, or 'subvert,' and the mode is therefore a 'knowing' and an ironic – or even 'ironic' – one. Postmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. (Hutcheon, 1989, 2)

Such aesthetics advocate an attempt to demystify inherited models of thought by exposing their inherent reductive selectivity, hegemonic exclusivity, and claims to realism. In this very particular sense, leaning towards multiplicity and plurality serves as a double-edged sword.

On the one hand, it offers seemingly familiar literary aspects of structure in characters and events to achieve public identification and unsophisticated commercial appeal. This appeal allows, in turn, an initial breathing room necessary for readership contemplation and questioning. More significantly, it offers a statement of worthiness or merit, being quite capable of that which it wishes to critique and surpass. Any discourse that does not represent the very



logic it aims to debunk and overcome as part of its own platform will naturally be accused of being unworthy of such confrontation or critique. As such, one of the fundamental steps that would qualify any discourse for the responsibility of actually taking on another set of ideals in any given structure or form is naturally its ability to reproduce or represent those very ideals in this exact form.

On the other hand, this multiplicity offers many parallels and alternatives that, by their very nature, critique and undermine the limitedness of prior literary aspects and their claim to reality. If we could claim that conventional models of thought endeavoured to present literary instances in which characters, events and their connections throughout their timeline are modelled after harmonious, well-balanced wholes regulated by commonsensical logics claiming un-negotiable status. It is then possible to claim that such models have, in essence, offered extremely deformed purges that are far removed from any approach to the sophisticated paradoxicality of man's more authentic being. They offered, in fact, very manufactured and inherently shallow accounts of humanity, particularly with regards to the more conflicted sides of culture such as sex, religion and politics.

Then comes the modern literary models of thought, which endeavoured to present instances in which characters, events and their connections throughout their timeline are modelled after forms characterized by complexity, symbolism, deep irony and multi-layered sophistication. Works of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Louse Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and many others have attempted to expose conventional formal balance, order and harmony for what they are;

oppressive imposition of basically unauthentic structures that do not speak of man or reality, but falsify them for superficial mystical reasons. Such works attempt to substitute conventional values by presenting their unique forms of balance, harmony and order, compensating for conventional shallowness with modern ambiguity, multi-layered referentiality and three-dimensional symbolism. However, this is what they have ended up doing, compensating for one form of reduction with another, substituting one form of falsification for another. Modernists ambiguities, complex historical and mythological references, and highly unfamiliar linguistic equations and phraseologies have replaced the same un-negotiable claim to truth and collective reality as the pre-modern literary models. If that may be of concern at all, the difference between the two models would perhaps be in the degree of perceived sophistication; the keyword here is "perceived".

This kind of postmodern novel excludes, and radically rejects, almost nothing. These works' primary concern is with questioning all such models without completely negating any of them. When presenting a multiplicity of facets to the same character, for example, the novel offers all such traits for readership to contemplate as equal possibilities of identification and, more significantly, of critique to any reductiveness of approach or claim absolutism. By inclusion, rather than exclusion, plurality rather than selectiveness, this type of narrative approach achieves both presentations of previous ideals and practices and resistance of their disadvantages simultaneously; that is, their claim to a priori status. Who among us, for instance, can recall and vehemently re-tell his/her past accurately as it has happened? If s/he could do this,

very doubtfully, how certain could s/he be of the truthfulness of his/her memory or narratives? If s/he happens to be confident that what s/he says is the absolute truth, and no other, how could s/he be certain that what is being perceived/understood/interpreted is that very truth expressed, much less, intended? How does any form of knowledge of any denomination get transferred un-affected by the transmission medium, context and perceiver? Who is innocent here; the narrative, the medium, the perceiver, the context?

This plurality of facets, heterogeneity of features, and indifference to timeline structures or continuities imply these fundamentally aesthetic questions. It is also the type of questions suggested before readership for contemplation and questioning. Ajita, the beloved heroin mentioned all across the novel's events, comes at the very end (chapter 45) to tell the omniscient narrator/protagonist what indicates that if they had stayed together, they would have eventually separated and remained friends rather than lovers. This is a questioning of one of the most stressed facts offered by this narrative. The yearning for the long lost beloved that readers have witnessed now and then across the whole narrative is under great suspicion. The affair itself gets radically questioned; its roots are scrutinized and finally redefined in the grey area, like any other events and aspects of this work. Henry's relationship to Mariam, the cultured, very sophisticated creative mind with the bohemian extremely vulgar and materialistic personality, is it a sexual relationship or more? How could it possibly be when their differences are as significant as this? Or is it because of such a difference that the relationship is strong? Are relationships based on similarities or differences? How about the crime that this work

started by underlining in its very beginning; is it still, from our point of view, now a murder crime? Can we, as readers, with any degree of certainty, tell? Who, then, are the culprits, the protagonist and his friends, or Ajita's father? What is the crime to start with? Is it the death of the father? Is it the raping of the daughter? Which of them is the truer crime? Which of them deserves punishment? Which of them got the punishment it deserved?

The work does not present answers, nor by the same token, stable events, characters, timelines, sequences, but only plastic approaches to tentative perspectives that do not attempt to claim realism. It leaves just about all its doors open, compromised and unrooted, because, unlike modern intellectual models, it seeks no substitute, only questions, no alternatives, only choices. It does not pretend to know the facts behind things, the truths about things, but only the questions afterwards. Its end asserts this status of openness—no psychological impasse. Wolf, the character that promises to achieve most complexity of events, suddenly dies; that is it, no climax, no grand finale, no comic reliefs; nothing! Ajita's typical redefinition of her relationship with the protagonist is destined to fail; any potential climaxes that could spring in the readership mind are made inert. So, in readership, there is no need to imagine any form of eventual climactic structures past or present, imagined or factual, in this work. Happenstance is reality's logic that disappoints and frustrates neat structures of imposed hierarchies and suppressed chaos. Chance and the unexpected reactivity and change of the human condition cannot be neatly packaged or smoothly compartmentalized for consumption without smoothing down its better differential edges and deeper paradoxical corners.

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ثمة ما يسأل عنه:

قراءة في رواية "ثمة ما أقول لكم" لحنيف قريشي

### ملخص

تقدم رواية "ثمة ما أقول لكم" التي نشرت عام ٢٠٠٨ لمبدعها الإنجليزي ذو الأصول الباكستانية "حنيف قريشي" خطابًا ثقافيًا متحدثًا في العموم على مستويين مختلفين: الأول هو مستوي النوع الأدبي المحض الذي عبره تُسائلُ هذه الرواية ما يمكن أن يُمثلَ سردًا من الأساس، حديثه وقديمه، على حدٍ سواء، أي أنها تتحاور وتتحرى بشكلٍ واضحٍ مع المفهوم والمقبول عامة من القواعد التقليدية للحكي الروائي، من مثل تعاقب الأحداث، أو التشخيص. المستوي الثاني هو جمالي في كنهه يتعامل مع الحاسة التي تسعى الرواية استفزازها جماليًا في الاستقبال والتي يمكن في هذه الحالة صياغتها بالعجز عن الإتيان بأي إشباع إيجابي يُجسدُ في اللغة إحساس الفقد بدلًا من إحساس الإشباع الناجم من نجاح التقمص والتماهي. بعبارة أخرى، يقدم هذا البحث تعريفه الخاص عن "الزمن" و"الكيونة" كمنطقتين للتساؤل يقدمهما السرد المعاصر بشكل عام وهذه الرواية بشكل خاص كجزءٍ من التساؤل الأكبر عن طبيعة وقيمة المعاصرة الثقافية. ومن جانبٍ آخر، يقدم هذا البحث تعريفًا آخرًا للأبعاد الجمالية والثقافية التي تُقدمها الملامح الشكلية والسياقية والتماسات الفلسفية في هذا العمل. هذا البحث من جهة أولى إذا يناقش ماهية السرد كتعبيرٍ فلسفيٍّ خالصٍ متأملٍ لماهياتِ التعقل الأنساني التي تسعى طبيعته أحيانًا للترابط والانسجام الداخلي كأبي سردٍ (حدثي أو ما-بعد-حدثي). من جهة ثانية يقدم هذا البحث تحليلًا للسرد في هذه الرواية تحديدًا كنموذج تطبيقي يعرف كيفية مقاومة السرد المعاصر الحدود التقليدية للسرد التقليدي والحدثي لخدمة أهداف ثقافية وجمالية.

كلمات مفتاحية: السرد ما-بعد-الحدثي، السرد ما-بعد-الكونيالية، ثمة ما أقول لكم، حنيف قريشي.