Roaming, Wandering, Deviation and Error

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Dialogues Between Paradise Lost *and the Novels of Salman Rushdie*

By

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INTRODUCTION

Good literary criticism, the only worthwhile kind, implies an act, a literary signature or counter-signature, an inventive experience of language, in language, an inscription of the act of reading in the field of the text that is read. (Derrida, Acts 52)

The field of literary studies today arguably finds itself informed by a wide array of critical standpoints. Among the most influential trends in critical analysis in recent years, post-colonialism has opened to literary studies new lines of inquiry into the alignments between literature, the political, the cultural and the sphere of criticism. As such, post-colonialism has re-directed much literary analysis, particularly in the field of comparative studies, as well as grounding a wide variety of contemporary writing practices.

Post-colonial critical theory, generally speaking, seeks to uncover and revise those structures of thought underscored by colonialist discourses, structures that, for our purposes here, have informed not only literary texts themselves but also their critical analysis. It is this larger framework opened up to analysis of literary texts that will remain, to a lesser or greater extent, a backdrop in the reading proposed here of a canonical English epic poem like John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the novels of a "post-colonial" writer like Salman Rushdie.

Post-colonial critical thinking and post-colonial literatures, as Rushdie's novels exemplify, challenge the structures of imperial and colonial discourses of difference, identity and subjectivity. For the kind of comparative reading of the texts chosen here, texts situated across the former colonial divide, this challenge and its attending implications become a kind of point of departure. On the one hand, it signals how a historicist paradigm of original/descendant has haunted cultural products like literary texts, a paradigm which is then mapped onto a global context of national literatures emerging from colonial domination, and on the other hand to how this paradigm may be undermined. Following the latter implication, the work of post-colonial critics like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, focusing on dialogism, interdependence and alternative systemisations of knowledge and critical positionings, has in turn helped illustrate how a text such as *Paradise Lost*, occupying as it

does the "centre" of an English literary canon, may be accessed, re-signified and eventually dislodged in its relations to contemporary fiction like Rushdie's.

Paradise Lost is a re-writing of the founding Western myth of the fall of Man. Four centuries after his death, Milton's life, his political affiliations, religious values and his literary references have been exhaustingly discussed, and the poet appears as a formidable influence over those writers who follow him. However, in light of all the critical attention Milton received and continues to receive today, there is still a lack of studies on what these "successors" bring to his work and of how their own work can be seen to dialogue, on an equal footing, with his. Looking at these relations between Milton and his post-colonial "successors" outside a founding or originary paradigm would then not only refine discussions of issues such as literary influence, but would also enrich the field of comparative studies in English literatures.

Thus, what this book proposes is a study of *Paradise Lost* and four novels by Salman Rushdie (*The Satanic Verses*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *Fury* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*). The goal is to provide a more nuanced comparative reading of these texts, a reading that goes beyond the kind of linear or historicist paradigm post-colonial critical theory has denounced. Thus, departing from the problematic signalled by critics like Said, Bhabha and Spivak, the aim is to appropriate Jacques Derrida's term *destinerrance* as an alternative critical approach or path for reading Rushdie's work beside/against Milton's epic. *Destinerrance* here will be understood and employed as proposed not only by Derrida himself but by derridean scholars such as J. Hillis Miller and Luiz Sá. For the latter especially, the term may help to re-think the directions of comparative studies, more precisely of literary influence, bringing it into the processes of intense revision in the field began in the twentieth century towards a more critical view of its objects and its methodology.

It is important to clarify that what is proposed here is a tentative sketch of a critical approach that simply allows us to read Rushdie's appropriations of Milton's epic, appropriations that, while they recover also deviate its renditions of Eden, its rhetoric of transgression and its depiction of its satanic protagonist. In other words, in the afterlife we are arguing is afforded the poet via Rushdie's novels, the discussion undertaken here does not aim at a critical refining of such broad (and arguably problematic) fields as comparative and influence studies. So although influence and its related issues, its *status quaestionis*, remain as a backdrop throughout, we do not specifically propose tackling this problematic in depth. But, nevertheless, as it is a term that is unavoidable

when we look at the tradition of Milton studies, influence will persistently come up here, haunting the text as both the umbrella word for an obsessive-compulsive search for sources or originary semblance that, for critics like Eduardo Coutinho have dominated a large part of comparative studies, but also, via Derrida, as a term that can be placed under erasure.

In a series of essays on Comparative Literature, Coutinho analyses its constitution as a discipline, the theoretical principles that grounded its development and their implications to the literatures produced in Latin America. For the Brazilian critic (and his argument could be extended to other territories that have undergone a process of colonial domination), in Latin America, a territory hampered by a colonialism that is still in place today both economically and culturally, comparative studies, in their beginnings, functioned as yet another element of ratification of this dependence[1]. The intense process of revision which the discipline has undergone in the continent in the last few decades, fuelled by the issues of (post-colonial) cultural difference raised inside the continent itself, would be part of a series of profound changes introduced in comparative literary studies worldwide.

Still according to Coutinho, initially comparative studies were based on a linear, historicist order and on a notion of influence as source survey and analysis[2]. Coutinho's criticism is that this kind of analysis becomes restricted to binary approximations or to the constitution of literary families[3], while the local contexts in which texts were produced were ignored. For the critic, this homogenising discourse, passing over the processes of cultural, economic and political domination inherent in/to literary texts themselves, was built also into the model or form of their study.

To free comparative literary studies from this role of ratifier of a cultural neo-colonialism, Coutinho argues, these principles had to be put into question. In this process, the bases that define the relations established between texts were modified. Now, in comparative studies of literary works,

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[1] Coutinho, *Literatura Comparada*, 11.

[2] Ibid., 15.

[3] Coutinho's discussion of literary families sees them in terms of affiliation and resemblance to an original. Reading intertextual relations via derridean *destinerrance*, although the word embarks notions of destiny and inheritance, constitutes a decisive move beyond such a critical outlook.

> Contrary to what happened before, the second text in the process of comparison is no longer simply indebted to but is also responsible for the revitalisation of the first and the relation between them, instead of one-directional, acquires a sense of reciprocity.[4]

Instead of a continuous time line that attributes to the first text the status of origin or source and to the "successors" that of passive receptacles, what these revisions in comparative studies have ultimately meant is that a dialogue on equal terms can now be established between different literatures.

Coutinho's overview of comparative studies worldwide thus voices the same concerns already put forth by critics like Edward Said. Indeed, his (Said's) is a body of work that has been instrumental in operating the shifting of perspectives Coutinho defends. Ultimately, what Said, followed by Coutinho, wish is to guarantee the kind of transversality that, for both critics, would be essential to a comparative reading of literary works from across the former colonial divide.

This renewed interest in re-orientating the bases of comparative literary studies has also touched discussions of literary influence. Twined since at least the nineteenth century, the historicist paradigm Coutinho critiques as consolidated inside a colonialist cultural framework has also, for him, grounded discussions of literary influence. One of the main problems with this combination of historicism and a particular, consolidated power structure, is that certain authors (for example, the poet John Milton) and certain literary traditions are centralised. In this process, they are also awarded a founding status, beside which what follows comes draped in the epithet of "successor."

It is this view of influence that seems to have dominated, in more or less stressed terms, the field of Milton studies, be it in critical analyses of those authors that inform his poetic project or of those who are, on the other hand, formed inside it.[5] Nowhere is this process of centralisation through the particular, linear notion of influence pointed out by Coutinho more visible than in Harold Bloom's treatise *The Anxiety of Influence.* Bloom's arguably polemic thesis owes a great deal to Milton. It is perhaps for this very reason that the critic so well exemplifies, and concomitantly

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[4] Ibid., 20.

[5] As we seek here to depart from this tendency that has been more or less prevalent in those readings of Milton's work and its influence, we will not detain ourselves on this critical fortune. As a representative of this train of reading, we will mention only Bloom's exemplary work on Miltonic influence.

helps further consolidate, this centralising of Milton's work and the critical tendency of looking at it (and at those other texts with which it may dialogue) in terms of an overreaching power or influence.

Bloom defines literary influence as a struggle between an author and his/her predecessors marked by anxiety. Literature would be defined and would move according to the paralysing sensation each poet feels before the greatness of his predecessor's work, at the moment when he/she realises that everything has already been named by the former. For Bloom, the strong writer is moved by the urge to remove these names and to re-name everything again, a gesture of self-creation in which he/she emerges through *his/her* own work and not from the reading of the predecessor's.

The poet must then appropriate the predecessor through what Bloom calls poetic misprision, a reading of the predecessor's work that is, in fact and always, a misreading.[6] This first step would constitute a detour, an implication that the work is accurate up until a certain point, from which it should have moved precisely in the direction in which the successor moves in an act of creative revision. For the critic, a text is then necessarily about another, and the previous text is responsible for what Bloom calls "poetic incarnation" in the successor writer.

The anguish arising from this sense of being late in relation to the predecessor means that all of the successor's literary imagination is linked to mechanisms of self-preservation and self-definition. And the great predecessor of all modern writers in English, for Bloom, is John Milton. Milton would be a central figure marking all of the writing that followed him because, in Milton, his own predecessor returns commanded by him, by the greatness and power of allusion of his writing. Miltonic rhetoric would correct the predecessor against whom Milton battled, something no other writer would have been able to accomplish in relation to Milton himself.[7] Bloom's own rhetoric thus paints a picture in which the poet towers above his successors as an inescapable central or emanating point of influence.

Thus, the problematic centralising of Milton and of his work operated by Bloom represents a motion couched precisely on the structures of thought post-colonial theory has worked hard to uncover. A further problem with Bloom's reading of *Paradise Lost* in particular is that he sees the entire epic as an allegory precisely of the dilemma he (Bloom) himself describes under his notion of anxiety. And this dilemma, in

[6] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 30.
[7] Ibid., 32.

Bloom's assessment is, of course, played out by Satan, that character who wants to be the creator of himself in defiance to an omnipotent God. Bloom's reading of influence, particularly as it relates to *Paradise Lost*, then seems to function rather as self-fulfilling prophecy.

Treating the whole text of *Paradise Lost* as an allegory of the conflict Bloom himself argues to be at the heart of literary production itself is further problematic because, in the end, Milton's puritanism is inextricable from his poetic production. Any treatment of the story of the fall of man as merely allegorical would be at odds with his entire literary project. It is a reading Bloom falls into because ultimately, ironically also in spite of himself, he gives too much credit to Satan. In other words, he (as many others have done) aligns the character's self-perception to the perception the poem as a whole works to produce. In other words, in *Paradise Lost*, Satan's image of himself and his rebellion against God is one thing and the poem's take on them is another, something Bloom does not seem to take into account.

Bloom's views on literary influence and its operation, although resting on apparently very particular categories, thus still echo a problematic, although today rather outdated, train in comparative literary studies, one which, as Coutinho has suggested, has served, within a (neo)colonial cultural framework, as ratifier of a discourse of cultural dependence grounded on a historic belatedness. We mention his work in particular because it serves to illustrate just how pervasive this paradigm still is, at least as regards Milton studies. Readings such as Bloom's help to confer a kind of founding status on Milton's work, consolidating a notion of its influence as indissociable from the power of Miltonic rhetoric.

Another critic to take issue with the kind of "tradition" Bloom's reading represents is Arthur Nestrovsky. A fundamental problem he highlights in Bloom's work is that it posits that a text ceases to have immanent meaning, that is, the very idea of an individual text disappears. And as for Bloom there are no longer texts, it would follow that there are no longer any authors and, most importantly, no longer any readers, except as interpreters of previous interpretations. For Nestrovsky, Bloom's theory becomes a no-way-out-theory of the impossibility of the act of reading itself.[8]

Whether we agree with Nestrovsky's assessment of Bloom's assertions or not, the consequence of critical positionings such as Bloom's is that they still condemn those authors who follow Milton to being always/already

[8] Nestrovsky, *Ironias*, 113.

his debtors, formed inside his writing. It is true that Bloom confines his discussion to European and North-American writing, but this fact alone demonstrates an unwillingness to look beyond this tradition, which in turn implies a view of its establishment as a kind of literary universe closed in on itself, a notion that writers like Rushdie have attempted to undermine in their literary practice. Bloom's work, contrary to what Rushdie seems to attempt in his fiction, simplifies the processes of constitution of cultural formations, ignoring the flux of peoples and texts opened up by the colonial experience, and persistently sees intertextual relations in a vertical way.

In order to trace the possible articulations/deviations between Milton's epic and Salman Rushdie's fiction, an in-between fiction inhabited by characters in transit, this idea of influence should perhaps be replaced by a more nuanced view of its operation. And here the notion of intertextuality, which could be seen to hover around the critical thinking of figures like Said, may open up a less narrow theoretical point of departure towards the operative term that will concern us here, that is, *destinerrance*.

The idea of intertextuality has perhaps most notoriously been put forward by Jorge Luis Borges and Julia Kristeva. Although it is explored by them in different ways, their remarks may still be placed alongside each other and may open the field of analysis of the relations between *Paradise Lost* and its post-colonial "successors" to more fruitful and less theoretically constricted inquiry. In a brief essay on Kafka and his precursors, Borges reveals a rather more complex approach to comparative reading. In his readings of Kafka, Borges comes to recognise not the influence of previous authors in his work; surprisingly, it is the voice and the habits of Kafka he distinguishes in different texts across different periods. This leads him to say that

> In the critical vocabulary the word *precursor* is indispensable, but it should be purified of any polemic or rivalry. The fact is that every writer *creates* his precursors. Their work changes our conception both of the past and of the future[9].

Borges emphasises not over-determination but reading and reception in thinking (inter)textual relations. For him, the writer is, first and foremost, a

[9] Borges, *Obras Completas*, 90. "En el vocabulário crítico, la palabra *precursor* es indispensable, pero habría que tratar de purificarla de toda connotación de polémica o de rivalidad. El hecho es que cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción dela passado, como há de modificar el futuro."

reader of his predecessor's work. But in Borges this reading is not passive, neither does it submerge the writer in a universe of texts inside which he/she necessarily and inevitably dissolves. Borges re-defines influence in terms of transversality and dialogism, an intertextual play in which notions of first/second, original/descendant no longer hold up because both are simultaneously transformed at the moment of contact.

Instead of an affirmation of a literary tradition in terms of vertical literary affiliations, for Borges (contrary to Bloom) influence is more a creative act. And the role of the critic is to gather these points of contact in an exterior intertext. Influence, for Borges, becomes a dynamic process in which the uses, revisions and the focus (the afterlife) the successor brings to the precursor's work revitalise it, and ultimately inform also our reading of both.

This emphasis on the creative reception of a text in another is also given by Julia Kristeva. Unlike Borges, however, Kristeva openly proposes the term intertextuality to characterise it, which she defines in the following way:

> Any text is constructed as a mosaic of citations, any text is the absorption and the transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality substitutes intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as, at least, double.[10]

Kristeva seems to understand signification as a field of transpositions, making texts necessarily plurivocal. Her notion of intertextuality thus evades the implication of textual relations with source analysis, an implication critical work like Bloom's indirectly endorses. Focusing not on literary texts *in themselves* but on the processes in which all textuality is implicated, Kristeva can then posit signification as process, as something that is not single and complete, but is instead plural, fragmented and, as Borges would have it, creative in the sense of being less derivative.[11]

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[10] Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel, 37.

[11] Despite this "liberation" from source survey, in the aftermath of colonialism a challenge that could be raised to Kristeva's critical maneuver of replacing notions such as (inter)subjectivity for intertextuality is that it ignores the violent processes of constitution of colonial subjectivity, a critical act that, in itself, could be seen to perpetuate this violence. And although the aim here is not to push a post-colonial reading of Rushdie, Milton or influence, this is a difficulty that persists in Kristeva's argument for intertextuality. However, although politically problematic, intertextuality still does (attempt to) unburden cultural products like literary texts

Commenting on Kristeva's definition of intertextuality, Luiz Sá affirms that, by introducing the notion of transposition, she manages to avoid the reduction of intertextuality to traditional notions of influence or simple context study. Sá argues that "relationness" is at the centre of intertextuality, as Kristeva understands it, and of its many networks of interaction. In this space, what follows is that no text can act as a Greater Signifier and dominate another. In Sá's assessment, Kristeva's work means that

> As a galaxy of signifiers and not a structure of signifieds, intertextuality has no beginning and no end. Reversible and accessible through multiple points of entry, in which none dominates another, the codes intertextuality mobilizes reach as far as the eye can see, they are indeterminable. In short, it [intertextuality] is not the comparison of one text to another through simple juxtaposition or phenomenological adding up, intertextuality for Kristeva is rather a different "positioning."[12] (Sá, *Atos* 120)

Kristeva's work with intertextuality, as Sá attests, unburdens it from source analysis and binary textual comparison. In terms of the textual relations explored in this dissertation, Kristeva's work points to how the anxiety rooted in a consciousness of debt described by critics such as Bloom, whose work implies a situating of *Paradise Lost* as the Greater Signifier in relation to writers such as Rushdie, may be turned into a more positive, de-centred, multi-directional dialogism that is constituted as much by difference and deviation as it is by approximation and reference.

Borges and Kristeva move beyond a linear or vertical paradigm in comparative literary analysis, treating the relations between texts as points of contact, departure, crossings and creation. Their theories dissolve the divisions between a centre, with its attending national literary tradition, and its marginal descendants. Their work allows us to see that in the same way there is no true, whole, founding text, there is no single, correct, final

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and their analysis, from a colonialist "mapping". And in this unburdening it becomes relevant as a critical point of departure for the kind of reading attempted here.

[12] Sá, *Atos*, 120. "Como uma galáxia de significantes e não uma estrutura de significados, a intertextualidade não tem começo nem fim. Reversível e acessível via entradas múltiplas, em que nenhuma sobrepuja a outra, os códigos que a intertextualidade mobiliza vão tão longe quanto os olhos podem alcançar, eles são indetermináveis. Em suma, ela não é a comparação de um texto com outro(s) por meio de mera justaposição nem mera contabilidade fenomenológica -, intertextualidade para Kristeva é bem outra posicionalidade."

reading or interpretation. This perspective, in turn, can help dislodge a text like *Paradise Lost* from its position of formidable predecessor, making it only another point in an endless network of appropriations, approximations and distancing/difference.

The perspectives on intertextuality opened by Borges and, especially, by Kristeva, shift the focus from the text as self-contained entity to signification as process, constantly in motion. It is a process in which there is no first and founding text and in which meaning never stands still. In this, their work echoes concerns found also in Jacques Derrida's writings on textuality throughout his prolific career. These concerns are implied in the term coined by Derrida himself, *destinerrance*, a critical positioning that will guide the comparative reading of the epic poem and the novels selected here.

Derridean *destinerrance*, as taken up here, points to the latent impossibility of words, hence also texts, remitting to one single, closed meaning. In Derrida's work, the term expands and problematises the ideas of addressee and of destination, conflating within it the notions of a roaming destiny/destination and roaming *as* destiny/destination. This move allows Derrida to see a fundamental possibility of error/erring[13], misdirection, misreading and deviation underscoring all textuality, a roaming motion that, for him, is an inextricable aspect of language. It is through this perspective that the appropriations of *Paradise Lost* in Rushdie's novels, enacted in terms both of an activating of Edenic imagery, the fall motif and a satanic rhetoric of transgression, but also of their strategic deviation and of the introduction of marked difference, will be read here. This reading unburdens Rushdie from the role of successor (and indeed Milton himself of the role of predecessor), affords *Paradise Lost* an afterlife but also allows Rushdie to respond responsibly to and engage with the particular issues his fiction is concerned with.

To this end, Chapter One will present *destinerrance*, both as it is defined by Derrida himself and as it may be brought to bear on a comparative reading of such diverse texts as *Paradise Lost* and Rushdie's novels. Chapter Two attempts to trace common concerns in Rushdie's fiction and in post-colonial critical thinking. As Rushdie's work has consistently been linked to post-colonialism, and as post-colonial theory

[13] The term "error" will appear connected to *destinerrance* throughout this work. The term is here associated to others, such as errancy and erratic, and to a lack of a definitive *telos*, rather than to the commonplace association to the word "wrong", which would only confirm, by reverse, a teleological positing of the "right/correct" (reading, interpretation, etc.).

has underscored new critical perspectives opened in comparative literary analysis, it will be necessary to situate somewhat these points of contact. Chapter Three presents a reading of the four novels chosen here in their *destinerrant* relations to *Paradise Lost.* Through his *destinerrant* appropriations of the epic, this chapter argues, Rushdie is then able to dialogue with an "English" literary Tradition while at the same time responding to the cultural formations that characterise the (post-colonial) spaces and times his fiction chooses to depict.

CHAPTER ONE

DERRIDA'S *DESTINERRANCE* AND THE ROAMING/WANDERING/ERRING OF MILTONIC INFLUENCE

The word – apostrophises – speaks of the words addressed to the singular one, a live interpellation (the man of discourse or writing interrupts the continuous development of the sequence, abruptly turns toward someone, that is, something, addresses himself to you), but the word also speaks of the address to be detoured. (Derrida, Postcard 4)

In a special issue of the *PMLA* dedicated to a discussion of the (im)possible future(s) open to literary criticism in the twenty-first century, Richard Klein puts forth the rather controversial view that this future will necessarily be derridean, or it simply will not be. And even if criticism should find itself exhausted, unable to posit new critical frameworks in which to operate, in short, even if it ceases to be, Klein goes on to argue, it will still have been derridean. Simply because it was Jacques Derrida who first envisioned critically the possibility of a future from which literature – and, *a fortiori*, its criticism – might be absent.[1] Although Klein's overall argument is perhaps an overstatement that runs the risk of over-crediting Derrida, his article, appearing as it does in such an issue of a reference publication like the *PMLA*, still points to how literary criticism, if not in years to come at least as we know it today, simply cannot bypass Derrida's work, even if only to contest it.

Klein's article is another recent example or reminder of just how far Derrida's thinking in general and his critical work have impacted literary criticism since the last century. But for Derrida himself, the space of literature seems to be a curious one, at once the site of an instituted fiction but also "a fictive institute which in principle allows one to say

[1] Klein, "The Future of Literary Criticism, 920.

everything"[2]. Materialised in/through language, undercut by power relations that define so-called high and low brow texts, literary traditions and canons, "literature", for Derrida, poses also a principle of open-endedness he finds very appealing and which perhaps accounts, to some degree, for his prolonged interest in it.

Although his theoretical work continuously engages with the literary, Derrida is quick to clarify that while the phenomenon we call "literature" appeared at a particular moment in European history (a time and place of origin and a constitutive history being two key elements that ground and legitimate all institutionalised forms of discourse), this does not mean that one can identify the literary object in any rigorous way. In other words, it does not mean that there is an essence of "literature" or a measurable degree of literariness to texts. In fact, for Derrida, it means quite the opposite.

> Given the paradoxical structure of this thing called literature, its beginning is its end. It began with a certain relation to its own specificity, its absence of object. The question of its origin was immediately the question of its end. Its history is constructed like the ruin of a monument which basically never existed. It is the history of a ruin, the narrative of a memory which produces the event to be told and which will never have been present. Nothing could be more "historical", but this history can only be thought by changing things, in particular this thesis or hypothesis of the present.[3]

"Literature", for Derrida, designates at once a process of institutionalisation (enacted in academic literary criticism, publishing houses, copyright, book launches, etc.) and a textual universe constituted precisely on the kind of "lack" he foregrounds. The site of an apparent paradox, "literature" can then be seen by Derrida as antithetical to metaphysical notions of historicity and their attending conceptions of presence and subjectivity. "Literature", in a derridean perspective, would rather reveal to the close reader a perpetual, a-static, multi-directional shifting of instances of meaning that would, to an extent, "betray" the drive towards the very institutionalisation that legitimates it precisely as "literature".

Thus, for Derrida, the existence of something like a literary "reality" in itself is and always will remain problematic. Constituted as the ruin of a monument that was never really "there", Derrida argues, the literary text is

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[2] Derrida, *Acts*, 52.
[3] Ibid., 42.

an "improbable", hard to verify event, for no internal criterion can guarantee its essential literariness. If one proceeds to analyse all the elements of a literary work, one will never come across "literature" itself, "only some traits it shares with or borrows, which you can find elsewhere too, in other texts, be it a matter of the language, the meanings or the referents"[4]. And even if consensus allows for an agreement as to the "literary" status of this or that textual phenomenon, this consensus remains precarious, unstable and always subject to revision.

Of course this shiftiness of meaning is not an exclusive characteristic of "literature", one which would separate it from all other forms of discourse (a notion that is dangerously close to positing the kind of essentialism that runs contrary to Derrida's thinking). Rather, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that, for Derrida, literary forms of writing, which in turn call forth literary acts of reading unencumbered by verification of truths and referentiality, are strategically poised so as to bring this shifting motion, constitutive of all discourse and all textuality, to the fore.

Setting aside Derrida's broader discussions of textuality, and suspending for now this problematic surrounding the literary object, what all this suggests is that the forms of writing we have conventionally come to recognise as "literature" are, for Derrida, fundamentally plurivocal, constituted in and by shifting intertextual and power negotiations. This particular brand of or perspective on textual "relationness" put forth in derridean thinking, taking the cue from J. Hillis Miller, could be read under the portmanteau word *destinerrance.* It is this critical perspective that will be explored here in the comparative reading of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the novels of Salman Rushdie.

Scattered throughout Derrida's writing, *destinerrance* is never unequivocally defined but perpetually staged and suggested. In French, the term contains at once the ideas of addressee, destination and of roaming, wandering. *Destinerrance* translates as "roaming destination, or vague destiny, that which roams, wanders, vagabond, inconstant, uncertain, indistinct, confused, uninhabited, unoccupied, derelict"[5], roaming as destiny/destination and also its error, the possibility of misdirection, of deviation. As such, *destinerrance* could be seen to signal more a motif or a positioning rather than a concept to be applied, another notion that runs contrary to Derrida's line of critical thinking. In this way, *destinerrance*

[4] Derrida, *Acts*, 73.
[5] Sá, *Atos de Leitura*, 122.

may constitute, if not a future for literary criticism as Klein would have it, at least a viable place from which to look at textual negotiations that cut across problematic economic, cultural and political divides, such as those produced inside or in the aftermath of European colonialisms.

Understood in this way, derridean *destinerrance*, in its ambivalence to the idea that texts carry in themselves, *a priori*, stable, definitive meaning, which in turn grounds the notion of founding texts and the dynamic of literary indebtedness based on historic belatedness, could help provide a more nuanced look at the shifting textual negotiations between a "text of power" like John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and its post-colonial "successors". Specifically, *destinerrance* may provide a viable critical standpoint from which to assess how the fiction of Salman Rushdie, grounded in a former colonial outpost, in its interpolations of *Paradise Lost* and in its own *destinerrant* wanderings (into the text of this book, for example), deviates, de-contextualizes and re-signifies the epic, curiously providing it with a kind of ghostly afterlife.

It is important to highlight here that, although we propose a discussion of *Paradise Lost* and Rushdie's novels via derridean *destinerrance*, the term itself does present some critical challenges. *Destinerrance*, as both J. Hillis Miller and Derrida himself stress, should not be confused with a critical method or reading tool, in other words, an umbrella words that can simply be applied to a body of texts. This feature, although consistent with Derrida's overall critical standpoints, when coupled with the term's lack of a strict definition and its sheer broadness of scope could, however, make its operability problematic. This issue is indirectly raised by Jonathan Culler in his reading of Klein's article, published in the same issue of *PMLA*. In light of this looseness of definition, and also of Klein's claims as to the place of derridean thinking in the future of literary criticism, Culler asks, "what would it mean to take Derrida as a model for literary criticism of the century or even the next decade?"[6]

According to Culler, literary criticism, which before the 1850s had almost never been interpretive, has increasingly claimed since then the task of telling us what works of literature "really" mean. If the work is what he terms expressive, then criticism elucidates what it expresses, be it "the genius of the author, the spirit of the age, the historical conjuncture, the conflicts of the psyche, the functioning of language itself"[7]. For Culler, this expressive model has opened a vast range of possibilities for literary

[6] Culler, "Critical Paradigms, 909.
[7] Ibid., 906.

criticism, culminating in the efflorescence of criticism seen in the second half of the twentieth century. In a critical climate in which texts are seen to express everything from the ideology of a historical situation to the fundamental negativity of language or the impossibility of literature itself,

> Literary criticism has given itself immense scope, an array of possible "approaches" that may seem to have little to do with one another or even to be antagonistic, though they derive from the same principle – the principle that makes literary criticism fundamentally interpretive yet hostile to the idea that the work has a message but a variety of configurations that the work may express.[8]

For Culler, it is inside this expressive model that not only the appropriations of Derrida's work but also his own critical performances must be placed, however ambivalent those performances may be towards it. Culler's take on what he calls the models of literary criticism may be open to questioning. However, the challenge he poses to using derridean terminology should not be overlooked. Particularly Culler's stressing of the fact that not only does Derrida' work not manage to escape the concerns underlining contemporary critical theory but also that one would be hard put to find in his writings a critical method for literary studies that would ensure its own operability beyond those texts and critical analyses signed by Derrida himself.[9]

In his response to Klein's article, what Culler finds so problematic to appropriations of Derrida's work by literary criticism is precisely its (intentional) lack of a critical narrowing down of its operational terms, among which *destinerrance* would also figure. And although Klein stresses the variety of derridean critical interventions as sufficient grounding for his arguments, Culler goes on to argue, it may be *only* because it is not easy to say exactly what these essays, signed "Jacques Derrida", actually *are* that Derrida might fulfill Klein's prediction as a general model or repertoire of critical possibilities.

A possible response to these challenges facing literary criticism in its appropriations of a derridean critical terminology/perspective is tentatively offered by Culler himself, though not fully embraced by him. For the critic, a redemptive aspect of all of Derrida's prolific critical writing is that it at least attempts to respond to the singularity of the texts he reads, a critical positioning that tries to do justice to the objects Derrida treats.

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Culler, "Critical Paradigms", 909.

While on the one hand, according to Culler, this critical response accounts for what has come to be perceived as a methodological shortcoming in Derrida's work, on the other hand it does signal at the very least an enhanced critical (self) awareness.

Thus, Derrida's critical performances, Culler argues, remain partly consonant with the notions underscoring the field of contemporary literary criticism he identifies, and according to which one of the tasks of criticism is to celebrate the uniqueness of each literary work. What distinguishes Derrida's critical work is that, for him, this singularity is necessarily divided. Stressing this aspect of singularity as opposed to a traditional notion of uniqueness, "Derrida never claims to offer a reading of a text as an organic self-contained whole but rather undertakes to write 'a text which, in the face of the event of another's text, tries to respond or to countersign'" [10] it. Although far from embracing a derridean critical perspective unreservedly, Culler nevertheless still attempts to qualify the methodological critiques aimed at it. However, he stresses, as this derridean critical move remains a tall order to follow, Derrida's critical writing and his overall conceptions of textuality and language, although impactful and highly relevant, are not likely to be seen in the future as a model for literary studies in general.

Culler's questioning of derridean thinking, highlighting the methodological difficulties posed by its slippery use of terminology and the problematic position occupied by his critical work, poised between an underlying dominant critical mode and an ambivalent stance towards it, re-launches the major critiques directed at the body of Derrida's work. What could be argued in turn, however, is that this questioning, although it does raise issues that should not be bypassed when one attempts to read it, should itself be qualified. Culler continuously faults Derrida for his lack of a more consistent critical methodology. What this fault-finding seems to ignore is that this is not an oversight or shortcoming on Derrida's part, but rather a stance that is consistent with the entire framework of derridean thinking, a framework that rests precisely on a critique of the forms and categories of thought that make applicable critical methodologies possible (even compulsory). As for the problematic position derridean theory occupies within the general climates of literary criticism, at least in Culler's view, it is a problematic that has never been overlooked by Derrida but fully acknowledged and negotiated. In other words, Derrida never seeks to problematise theory and its attending issues outside the

[10] Ibid.

scope of theory itself, but rather seeks to make it, in his writings on particular literary texts, question itself more attentively.

That said, the challenges posed by terms such as *destinerrance* and their appropriation in critical debates surrounding literary texts persist. If we take J. Hillis Miller's view that, rather than a concept, *destinerrance* refers more to a motif spanning all of Derrida's work, one could then ask just how valuable is it as a tool for reading literary texts and the complex web of textual negotiations they weave? This, along with the questions posed by critics like Culler, are all issues that must at least be acknowledged and that remain as a backdrop to the reading of *destinerrance* enacted here, even if we do not pretend to hope to answer them fully. Rather, in a more derridean move, what we attempt is a more "localised" answer. In the case of *Paradise Lost* and Rushdie's novels, *destinerrance* can help to open up a critical path that points to another logic of allusion operating in Rushdie's work. In other words, allusion to or appropriation of a Christian epic tradition that has largely been overlooked in critical approaches to his writing in favour of those terms that are more easily readable: cosmopolitanism, hybridity, mimicry, etc. It is through this logic of deviating allusions opened up by *destinerrance* that Milton's text, surprisingly, can still be seen to come across to us, twenty-first century readers, negotiated via/in Rushdie's particular (mis)readings of it.

In other words, the appropriation of derridean *destinerrance* enacted here to read the work of Milton and Rushdie alongside/against each other does not attempt to answer the broad challenges posed to Derrida's work. It does not seek to posit *destinerrance* as an applicable reading tool in literary studies in general as Klein would have it, neither does it intend to represent a thorough and exhaustive reading of that work (Derrida's) itself. Rather, the aim is merely to activate Derrida's term in a reading, itself also *destinerrant*, of those points of contact between Rushdie's work and Milton's epic. And, further, to discuss how, in the novels, *destinerrant* deviations of *Paradise Lost* can be constitutive (among others) of the kind of ambivalent, shifting and contemporary brand of fiction Rushdie produces.

But even if it is not the purpose here to make overarching statements about Derrida's work in general or to offer a critical commentary that spans all of that work, once we start to trace the workings of derridean *destinerrance*, it is possible to say, with Derek Atttridge that its implications can be spotted everywhere. In his assessment of Derrida's work on literature, Attridge argues, against the transcendentalising and universalising tendency of literary criticisms in general, Derrida tries to do

justice to the literary text as radically situated – written and read and re-read at particular times and places – in short, as possessing a singularity (each time) that can never be reduced by criticism or theoretical contemplation. This means that

> For Derrida the literary text is not, therefore, a verbal icon or a hermetically sealed space; it is not the site of a rich plenitude of meaning but rather a kind of emptying out of meaning that remains potently meaningful; it does not possess a core of uniqueness that survives mutability, but rather a repeatable singularity that depends on an openness to new contexts and therefore on its difference each time it is repeated. Derrida's writings on literary texts are therefore not commentaries in any conventional sense, not criticism, not interpretation. They do not attempt to place, or master, or exhaust, or translate or penetrate the literary work […] Like all valuable readings of literature, they seek to make the text strange (or perhaps strangely familiar), offering not a reduced and simplified version of the text but one which operates at its own level of difficulty.[11]

For Derrida, there would thus be a divided singularity linked to a principle of iterability operating in literary texts which undermines abstractionisms and the truth-seeking of, say, philosophical texts in their particular engagement with language. A corollary of this repetition in difference that is a feature of the literary text is that it becomes open to accidents. In other words, neither the text itself nor its author can set limits to the ways in which it will be read, nor can the accidents (deviations, roaming, wandering) which "befall" it simply be separated from some essence these accidents would unfortunately betray[12]. In Attridge's assessment of Derrida's work, these features of iterability, difference and contextuality, which in turn allow Derrida to see texts as events of language rather than self-contained purveyors of a meaning that is finally arrested in a referent, imply the workings of *destinerrance*.

Each "event of language" or text, in the derided critical framework, would, in turn, call forth certain responsible responses in its reader every time it is taken up and read. And each response, like the literary text itself, is situated in a particular context and is itself also iterable, but only as an iteration that is always produced in and, at the same time, productive of, a difference, a slippage. These iterations, or as Attridge says, the accidents that befall the text and that Derrida refers to under the name of

[11] Attridge, *Acts*, 17.
[12] Ibid., 22.

destinerrance, are thus constitutive of the broad network of signification, permanently in construction, inescapably plurivocal, that he understands as textuality.

Attridge's comments on Derrida's critical interpolations of the literary texts he reads suggest the extent to which Derrida is constantly aware of the workings of *destinerrance* and also how he attempts to play them up in his own strategies of reading (strategies that, as Attridge attests, can only be approached as slippage, in terms of what they are *not*, not commentary, not interpretation, not criticism). Taking up *destinerrance* to read Milton and Rushdie, this book attempts to perform the same critical move. In other words, it does not to propose a final, exhaustive interpretation of *Paradise Lost* and of Rushdie's work, a fleshing out of what these texts mean or try to say. Rather, the aim is to intercept these texts at the points in which they activate certain discourses and use a specific imagery to understand how a contemporary novelist like Salman Rushdie can be seen to respond responsibly to Milton's epic. This response, however, is only possible if it is constitutive of a difference and if *Paradise Lost* itself is always/already open to this coming of an other. In other words, if the epic, like all texts, is itself always/already roaming, always/already *destinerrant*.

Attridge's reading of Derrida's critical work highlights just how much *destinerrance* is both implied and implicated in it. But it is another Derrida critic, J. Hillis Miller, whose work will be more instrumental to understanding the term's place within derridean critical thinking. Miller takes *destinerrance* as a key term for entering Derrida's work, seeing it as a motif that persistently haunts all of Derrida's thinking. In an article dedicated to elucidating its place within derridean criticism, Miller starts off asking the question: what is destined to happen to the corpus of Derrida's works? What fate will befall them? For the critic, Derrida himself had already put the reasons he had for worrying about what would happen to his legacy after his death precisely under the aegis of that striking neologism, *destinerrance*[13]. For Miller, the concern is justified for, if *destinerrance* signals the ongoing, inescapable shiftiness of meaning, it seals the "fate" of texts to roaming and erring once their authors are no longer present to (attempt to) authorise their interpretations. It is to this fate that Derrida himself knew he must relinquish his own texts.

But, Miller asks, just what is *destinerrance*? Although the critic also acknowledges that, much like all derridean terminology, it

[13] Miller, "Derrida's Destinerrance", 893.

resists definition on strict terms (what is it?), a possible answer he offers is that

> It is a motif, or, better still, spatio-temporal figure, that connects intimately with the other salient spatio-temporal figures in Derrida's work. I call *destinerrance* spatio-temporal because, like most of Derrida's key terms, it is a spatio-temporal figure for time. It names a fatal possibility of erring by not reaching a predefined temporal goal in terms of wandering away from a predefined spatial goal.[14] (893)

Miller thus attempts to describe *destinerrance* not in terms of a pinning down, of a "what is", but of its functioning and its implications. His "definition" of the term as a wandering spatio-temporal figure or motif not only helps to provide a critical framing of the term that makes it operable in a reading of literary texts outside of Derrida's own writings, but it is also coherent with Derrida's critique of methodologies that operate inside what he calls the logic of presence that dominates most academic fields today.

One of the key words in Miller's discussion of *destinerrance* would be "fatal", the fatal possibility of erring because erring (both as wandering and as possibility of mistaken interpretation) is inevitable, it is built into the very fabric of language and of signs themselves. Fatal because it kills off all expectations of whole, complete meaning being communicated by a subject to another or of a message unequivocally passed on in a text. Looking back to the texts that specifically concern us here, this fatality of (inter)textuality ultimately means that notions such as historicity and historic belatedness go out the window and we may begin to look at the negotiations of *Paradise Lost* and its contemporary "successor" texts outside of a predecessor/successor, center/margin paradigm.

But although he provides a critical framing of *destinerrance* and links the term to Derrida's concerns with the afterlife of his own work, Miller still acknowledges, along with Culler, some difficulty in tracing its workings beyond mere suggestion or implication.

> I have not yet found, in the labyrinth of Derrida's writings […] the place where the word appears for the first time, with full explanation […] Perhaps no such origin for the word exists. Perhaps the word itself is the consequence of a *destinerrance*, a wandering from locus to locus that to

[14] Ibid.