

# On the Verge of Moral and Spiritual Collapse: Challenges of a Post-truth World and Hyperreality in Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte*

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**Abstract** The concept of post-truth in fictional discourse explicates the ways of constructing a new reality—hyperreality. As a postmodern literary text creates a pluralistic ambience, wherein any interpretations are possible, post-truth is of great significance for producing the narratives of hyperreality in textual space. Salman Rushdie's most recent novel, *Quichotte* (2019), is a postmodern reimagining of *Don Quixote* written by Miguel de Cervantes to satire the culture of that time. In *Quichotte*, Rushdie shows a post-truth world on the verge of moral and spiritual collapse to draw attention to the challenges facing contemporary society. The writer cunningly presents the pandemonium of life and volatile identities under the conditions of blurring a line between fact and fiction. In the Age of Anything-Can-Happen, post-truth appears to be a distinguishing feature of creating meanings and writing vanishing reality. Such structural and conceptual characteristics of the novel as inter/hypertextuality, metafictional narration, and the elements of magic realism have been analysed to illustrate how they transform hyperreality in the book. The article primarily focuses on the literary forms of representing the narratives of post-truth and hyperreal identities in Rushdie's novel through a reinterpretation of the most topical concerns of contemporary issues.

**Keywords** vanishing reality; moral issue; metafiction; falsehood; hypertextuality; postmodern narrative

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### Introduction

At the present stage of social evolution, the disappearance of objectivity increasingly blurs the lines between fact and fiction, producing post-truth—the most distinctive feature of creating meanings and narratives in the twenty-first century (Hoydis 32). This concept has become prevalent in epistemological ideologies (Kleeberg 27), metascience (Coady 125), and particularly in public discourse (Cosentino 2; Backström 97; Gil 183; Murray 11; Corner 1100; Lewandowsky et al. 353). Its structure is rapidly alternating and *popularity* directly “competes with logic and evidence as an arbiter of truth” (Hannan 220). According to Balstrup, this indicates that “people are not primarily interested in the truth of the matter” (109).

Emerged in public discourse and chosen by the Oxford English Dictionary as “word of the year” in 2016, the term *post-truth* has come to signify specific post-modern phenomena across the spectrum of human understanding, from media and science to culture and religion. Although the concept of post-truth is principally associated with Western society and culture (Maddalena and Gili 2), it is also affecting multiple parts of the world (Cosentino 4); the assimilation processes occur so Western and Eastern cultures affect each other. This means that post-truth should be considered in the multicultural dimension.

Post-truth can be seen as a symptom of the end of postmodernity, a previous period in the social history of truth. If we keep in mind not the critical aspect of postmodernism but entertaining one, then in this period of time, the truth seems discredited, brought to the level of a game. Post-truth is always participatory. Falsehood is individual, and post-truth is always collective; it correlates with the concept of the social mind as “a system of representations of the forms of public communal procedures” (Shaumyan 21). This is information that you want to believe and that becomes true, even if it is doubtful or clearly wrong so that it corresponds to certain worldviews. The desire to believe comes from the depths of the imaginary, so post-truth is usually associated with constructing identity. Since contemporary culture is obsessed with identity (Trueman), the decline in the level of subjectivity and social

ties and the development of fluid identities aggravate the crisis that finds its expression in post-truth.

From a philosophical perspective, this is actually a kind of revision of Foucauldian *will to knowledge* (Foucault) wherein, in a new light, the emotional, technological and political, intellectual and rational, personal and public are intertwined. The issue is not over that rationality is damaged but that it is subjected to redefining. Habermasian enlightenment rationality is disabled—the time of dark rationality has come (Bauman 10). Those who produce and consume post-truth have logical motives in their own way. But this is no longer the rationality of a transcendental subject. The immediate forerunner of post-truth is a Straussian real truth that is inimical to social order.

Post-truth has become a universal justification for any radical or sometimes insane act because it does not require any explanation other than emotional conviction. In post-truth logic, verity becomes a cultural-historical construct or often a simulacrum. According to Baudrillard, simulacra do not correlate with any reality except their own, the images become simulacra, and reality “dies out.” It is replaced by hyperreality to be “the inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from fantasy of reality, especially in technologically advanced postmodern cultures” (Baofu 11). A world of post-truth is not just a simulated copy of the real world but rather a hyper-version that seeks to surpass it.

These drifts become more pronounced in contemporary fictional discourse. We explore Baudrillard’s hyperreality as an object and medium of the literary consciousness engaged in copying and reconstructing the real. Postmodern fiction creates impressions of reality and takes a challenge of hyperreality, reflecting and overcoming a hyperreal world. Bowell highlights both real and fictional narratives which offer a way of overcoming imaginative resistance but she stresses that “the imaginary is not illusory” (179). Representing postmodern hyperreality as *fictional reality* is what Arva calls “writing the vanishing reality” (72). It is the principal form of artistic vision in postmodernity that appears to be the means of creating and affecting contemporary literary space.

One of the most quintessential works in this respect over the last years is *Quichotte* (2019), shortlisted for the Booker Prize. This new novel by Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie (1947—), a British Indian writer, whose works primarily concerned with the connections and disruptions between Eastern and Western cultures, shifts the emphasis towards a postmodern reinterpretation of the post-truth condition and hyperreal identity. Beautifully plotted, a story within a story, *Quichotte* has won the attention of critics as well as the affection of the readers all over the world.

Inspired by Miguel de Cervantes' classic novel *Don Quixote*, Rushdie entitles the chapters of his *Quichotte* following Cervantes' style. The writer has chosen the French title for his new novel abandoning the traditional English one. As a metafictional novel, *Quichotte* revolves around the story of an Indian American salesman of pharmaceutical products, Ismail Smile, created by a mediocre writer of spy thrillers Sam Du Champ (mostly referred to as Brother in the book). When travelling across the country, Ismail pursues a celebrity television host he has become obsessed with. He has taken the name Quichotte and starts writing letters to her. The lives of this character and the writer are intertwined in the novel. In the course of the trip, they experience acute problems of a post-truth society.

Researchers emphasise Rushdie's intentions to expose "the post-truth condition where the moorings of reality have been lost" (Majumder and Khuraijam 5). Post-truth is artistically rethought in *Quichotte*; all the events of the novel are viewed through the prism of hyperreality exposing the painful problems of today. The erosion of objectivity becomes a keynote of the book to stress that, in the *Age of Anything-Can-Happen*, facts are often indiscernible from fiction and the conflict between illusion and reality is inevitable: "...the surreal, or even the absurd, now offer the most accurate descriptors of real life" (Rushdie 222)<sup>1</sup>.

The novel is full of the events, images, and topical concerns of contemporary issues. We focus on those of them which Rushdie defines as the main ones: impossible and obsessional love; father-son relationships; Indian immigrants, racism towards them, crooks among them; cyber-spies; science fiction; the intertwining of fictional and 'real' realities, the death of the author; the end of the world; opioid addiction (287). However, *Quichotte* is filled with hidden narratives and tangentially touches on a number of critical issues which need to be solved urgently: political crisis, globalisation, the impact of popular culture, moral principles, climate change, etc.

The almost metaphysical gist of the story is created by a complex intertwining of the intertext, allusions, hints, culture-specific elements, vocabulary, etc., which are analysed in this paper. All these components of the artistic interpretation of reality create the effect of hyperreality and only a knowledgeable reader is able to get to the bottom and understands the author's profound considerations on the troublesome issues of our time. As Bowell argues, fiction and storytelling "have historically provided us with the means both to make sense of our experiences and to countenance possibilities other than the realities of our actual lives" (170).

The study intends to explore the literary forms of representing the narratives of

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1 When referring to Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte* (2019), hereafter only a page number appears.

post-truth and hyperreality through the interpretation of the most topical concerns of contemporary issues in the metafictional *Quichotte* by Salman Rushdie. To appreciate the chosen approaches, the following methodology must be addressed.

### **Methodology**

Problematising the postmodern concept of post-truth and taking it beyond the analysis of mere political discourse contributes to the inclusion of this phenomenon in a critical interdisciplinary context and stimulates the need to clarify the ontological content of post-truth for contemporary culture (Manrique 152). We consider *post-truth* in the literary dimension to bring into correlation its meaning-making characteristics and artistic potential to highlight some key trends in a post-truth culture.

Rendering Cervantes' *Don Quixote* as a source, instead of the original novel, allows Rushdie to subtly ease the reader into a hallucinatory world where the difference between truth and what seems to be true has become ever more blurry. At the same time, fictional narratives are always supposed to be made-up stories, but "fantasy has its own kind of truth" (Levine 125). It has become a new tool for the artistic transformation of reality and an important means of the textual representation of the author's ideas on the post-truth world order marked by a generalised loss of trust in traditional sources of information (Cosentino 5). Post-truth in Rushdie's *Quichotte* appears to be the prism through which the writer examines current issues, creating a communicative space between him and the readers thereby affecting literary space.

Evidence that post-truth today attains the status of a new *truth mode* (Fuller) is the penetration of this phenomenon into contemporary fiction and its explication by literary devices in postmodern text space. It is embodied, in particular, in the narratives of hyperreality. The evolution of postmodern literature is characterised by breaking the traditional canon with its metaphorical reflection of the outer world and forming new aesthetics of a literary work. A pluralistic paradigm of postmodernism (simulacrum aesthetics), based on the poststructuralist concept of *the world as a text*, generates a heterogeneous multiplicity of different culture codes, capable of producing various meanings and narratives (Connor 62). The artistic practice of postmodernism is based on deconstructing cultural intertext and creating hyperreality the basis of which is the syncretism of cultural ambiguity. That is why hyperreality is considered by us to be a specific environment for producing postmodern fictional narratives in Rushdie's *Quichotte*.

Postmodern discourse suggests references, problematises them, and turns them

into simulacra. It must be emphasised that in Baudrillard's postmodern world, what counts as *real* is never more than a simulacral by-product of endless copies and fakes (Greaney 141). In an age where truth is lost to manipulation, a postmodern novel appears to be an artistic space wherein current sociocultural tendencies are manifested and a critical perspective on them is provided.

In such research, it is advisable to use the methodological basis of critical discourse analysis to identify implicit meanings and highlight the linguistic and stylistic features of a postmodern text. As in Rushdie's novel, the literary interpretation of post-truth occurs at the level of narration, generating hyperreal narratives, the methods of deconstruction, intertextual analysis, cultural, semantic, and linguistic-stylistic approaches are also used.

### **Inter/hypertextuality as a Post-truth Narrative Strategy**

Intertextuality and hypertextuality are tightly intertwined in Rushdie's *Quichotte* creating the narratives of hyperreality in the post-truth dimension. In the novel, the world is thought of as unlimited transcoding, allusions, and meanings. The text is understood intertextually as a game of conscious and unconscious borrowings of ideas, quoting, and clichés. On the first pages of the book, the readers get to know the main character—"a traveling man of Indian origin, advancing years, and retreating mental powers, who, on account of his love for mindless television ... watching an excess of it, and had suffered a peculiar form of brain damage as a result" (2). From the beginning, it is clear that the author treats the character with a significant degree of sarcasm.

There are two parallels between Cervantes' *Don Quixote* as a hypertext (Riffaterre 780) and Rushdie's *Quichotte* which produces hyperreality as a kind of virtual reality we live in structured by information and technology, sustained on an amalgamation of the elements that were previously separate (Baudrillard). Each era has its own means to create hyperreality. For Rushdie's character, it is a TV. The man thoughtlessly consumed the information he received from the media which led "to that increasingly prevalent psychological disorder in which the boundary between truth and lies became smudged and indistinct" (3). As time went on, he found himself incapable of distinguishing reality from "reality," and "began to think of himself as a natural citizen (and potential inhabitant) of that imaginary world beyond the screen" (3).

For Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, hyperreality was created through chivalric romances he had read but being confused by "words and phrases the poor gentleman lost his mind" (Cervantes 32). Mr. Ismail Smile even looks like *Don Quixote*, com-

pare: “He was a tall, one might even say an elongated, man, of the sort one encounters in the gaunt paintings of El Greco and the narrow sculptures of Alberto Giacometti...” (4)—“Our gentleman was approximately fifty years old; his complexion was weathered, his flesh scrawny, his face gaunt...” (Cervantes 32). Rushdie’s character fell in love with an Oprah-like talk-show star, “a certain television personality, the beautiful, witty, and adored Miss Salma R” (3), and intended to win her heart, like Don Quixote who “discovered the one he could call his lady! It is believed that in a nearby village there was a very attractive peasant girl with whom he had once been in love, although she, apparently, never knew or noticed” (Cervantes 36).

One of Rushdie’s narrative strategies is a repetition of the same precedent names within a novel which is presented at both the linguistic and cognitive levels, accumulating the characteristics of a stereotype, prototype, metaphor, and intertext, jointly forming the concept of priority that defines a degree of cognitive perception. The novel includes the following fairy-tale anthroponyms: *Dorothy*—“a latter-day Dorothy contemplating a permanent move to Oz” (3); *Bilbo/Frodo*—“Above all he’s Bilbo/Frodo... I see him invisible, slipping the Ring on his finger (88); *Pinocchio*—“I’m thinking Geppetto slash Pinocchio” (91); *a blue fair*—“I don’t even need a blue fairy, but if I find one, I’ll use her, sure” (91); *Rumpelstiltskin* and *Yosemite Sam*—“a smallish man with long red hair and a Zapata mustache who reminded her at times of Rumpelstiltskin from the Brothers Grimm and at other times of Yosemite Sam from Looney Tunes” (111); *the characters of Narnia*—“I’m thinking of the wardrobe that opens up into Narnia. ... and somewhere a benevolent lion waiting to welcome us” (260); *the ugly duckling*—“It stood a little distance away from the statue of Hans Christian Andersen contemplating ... a duckling which was present for familiar literary reasons that need not detain us” (310); *Peter Pan and Wendy*—“The shadow of Peter Pan had escaped at one point also, and had had to be caught and reattached to Peter’s feet by Wendy’s deft and careful needle” (311).

It is also worth mentioning the family ties in the novel play a significant role in both storylines. For the first time, the author writes about family relationships when Mr. Ismail Smile mentions his *artistic father* who influenced his son’s tastes in childhood and indirectly influences the choice of Ismail’s pseudonym for his love letters: “It was a recording of the opera Don Quichotte by Jules Massenet. ... And as for you, it seems you’re a little loosely based yourself” (6). As a result, “the newly named Mr. Quichotte” (7) appeared but “he did not feel that he had earned or merited the honorific Don” (7). The man dreams to be “Lancelot to her Guinevere, and carry her away to Joyous Gard... her verray, parfit, gentil knyght” (6). Metaphorical transferences are one of the elements of Rushdie’s narrative strategies. They create a

special kind of expressiveness and affect the readers to capture their attention. Using *antonomasia*, Rushdie not only names the subject but also characterises it, making the character's intentions and behaviour clear. Imagining himself a knight in love with a beautiful lady, Quichotte plans to take her to his castle.

Driving to meet his true love in his *old gunmetal gray Chevy Cruze*, Quichotte dearly wants a special someone to appear in his life: "How sweet it would be to have a son ... with whom he could discuss matters of topical worldly import and the eternal truths" (13). The problem is that Quichotte has never had a family, and he hides memories of past love affairs, "placing them in a lead-lined casket of forgetting far beneath the bed of the remembering ocean within him, an unmarked sarcophagus impenetrable even by the X-ray vision of a Superman" (14). An integral feature of multicultural fiction is precedent names that are related to the cultural and historical experience of a metropolis. In the above sentence, *the X-ray vision of a Superman* belongs to comics and graphic novels.

Finally, in a magical way, Quichotte's son appeared: "The longed-for son, who looked to be about fifteen years old, materialised in the Cruze's passenger seat" (16). Quichotte compares the appearance of his son with "Athena bursting fully formed from the head of Zeus" (17). Strange metamorphosis occurs in Quichotte's imagination: his son, who "manifested himself in black-and-white" (16) as in a black-and-white movie, seems to him a warrior sent to help his father: "O my warrior Sancho sent by Perseus to help me slay my Medusas and win my Salma's heart, here you are at last" (17). Rushdie appeals to works by ancient authors and ancient heroes creating the illusion of time travel.

Quichotte's imagined son is bound to his father but seeks to know about his mother: "Even God had a mother. ... Even gods had moms. Holy Mary mother of etc. Also Aditi mother of Indra. Also Rhea mother of Zeus" (83). Rushdie appeals to ancient mythology. The content of the novel correlates to the cultural and linguistic competence of the readers.

There is a certain parallel between Quichotte's relationship with his real/not-real son and Brother: "Quichotte noted his son's untamed, rebellious, outlawlike character" (18). But Brother has a real son who vanishes long ago "like a ghost, and must be a young man by now" (22).

While studying in England, Quichotte was fond of reading books and imagined himself as one of the heroes mentioned in the literary works: "He's an explorer standing on a mountaintop glacier in Iceland... He's in a submarine called Nautilus... He's a warlord on a mountain on Mars... He's a rebel in a forest memorizing Crime and Punishment..." (87). The lines of the books are firmly



entrenched in the character's head, as a line from *Moby-Dick or, the Whale* by Herman Melville: "From hell's heart I stab at thee" (132), which drives Quichotte's son to suggest that his father, metaphorically speaking, intends to reunite with his beloved "to hunt her down and harpoon her" (129).

Watching movies and series on TV leads to a reassessment of his preferences: "And by the classics I mean, first of all, the show that broke the ground and pointed the way" (93). But gradually television becomes for him a source of truth, or, in fact, post-truth: "Prolonged viewing of this seminal program ... drives home some hard truths to the attentive viewer" (93). The following sentence seems Rushdie's attempt to convey to the readers his own thoughts, putting them on paper: "...all the great texts have to be memorised to survive because all the actual books have been burned; the temperature at which paper catches fire is two hundred and thirty-two point seven eight degrees Celsius, better known as Fahrenheit 451" (87).

Quichotte endeavours to find his love as the characters of the books he read as a child: Jason in the *Argo* heads to find the Golden Fleece, the knight Sir Galahad seeks the Grail, Rama searches for Sita, Mario rescues Princess Toadstool, and Purgatorio finds Beatrice (89).

*Quichotte* alludes to Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. Seven circles of hell first appeared in the New Testament. Aristotle increased the number of circles to nine, and then his idea was picked up by Dante. In Rushdie, the main characters have to pass *seven valleys of purification* (251) to get to New York where Quichotte has to meet his beloved. Thus, the author plots the novel, creating inter/hypertextual space.

### **A Story within a Story: Beyond the Metafictional Mode**

Postmodern literary works, including Rushdie's *Quichotte*, often question their own fictional status and become metafiction. The principles of their construction with different methods and forms are expressed in the metanarrative that occurs in fictional stories exploring the elements of fiction itself (Fludernik 1).

One of the protagonists of Rushdie's *Quichotte*, the writer Brother, is named the same as in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" (Orwell 1). Rushdie's character is an omnipresent figure representing oppressive control over the novel's characters' fate. Brother created the secret world in his book but later: "...he was becoming afraid of it. Maybe he had come too close to certain uncomfortable truths" (27).

In Chapter Two the readers get to know Brother, the author of Chapter One. He was "of Indian origin who had previously written eight modestly (un)successful

spy fictions under the pen name of Sam Du Champ” (20) who had decided to put the story of Quichotte on paper. Metafictional Brother, as Rushdie calls him, and Quichotte had a lot in common: they were about the same age, suffered from physical complaints, and met real and fictional friends and acquaintances, but “If Quichotte had been driven mad by his desire for the people behind the TV screen, then he, Brother, had perhaps also been deranged by proximity to another veiled reality...” (21).

Brother tells Quichotte’s story that is very similar to his own: “If you wanted to say that the bizarre story he was telling, unlike any story he had ever told, had deep roots in personal necessity and pain, then yes, he would concede the point” (216). This is acknowledged by Quichotte’s creator: “Brother, on some days had difficulty remembering which history was his own and which Quichotte’s” (216), and his Sister (who has no name in Rushdie’s novel): “I’m glad to hear you are capable of sending yourself up” (284). Such a mode of narration implicitly involves the elements of a critique of mendacity in a post-truth world and gets *Quichotte* beyond mere metafictional storytelling.

### **Collapsed Minds in a Post-truth World**

*Mass Culture as a Black Hole of Information.* Nowadays the overwhelming majority of people have gained access to arrays of information: “We are more and more ‘wired’ to our interfaces. We react to simulations—to the television news rather than the world, to a computer program rather than social interaction, to email rather than vocal communication” (Murphie and Potts 16). The devil is always in the details; all the information we receive, for example on the Internet, is adapted to consumers. News Feed on Facebook is tailored to the users’ tastes, and Google’s personalised search results do not go beyond a *filter bubble* that lulls critical thinking, and when a post contradicts established beliefs, it gets ignored. The filters influence search results and lead to the creation of the term *Gravitational Black Holes of Information* to illustrate “how difficult it is to break out of the force of the filters” (Holone 299). GBHI generate post-truth that is “little more than the morbid actuality of the post-modern condition” (Kirkpatrick 315).

Mass media like drugs alter a person’s perception of reality, distorting the truth, “the imagined world behind our eyelids can drip its magic into the world we see when we open our eyes” (5). TV influences Quichotte’s imagination of the relationship with his son as if they are the movies’ characters: “Hutch to my Starsky, Spock to my Kirk, Scully to my Mulder, BJ to my Hawkeye, Robin to my Batman! ...” (17). The need to consume information through “Must See TV”

(7) becomes *must have* by means of which it is labelled “what normal is, and at the same time nobody agrees” (130) as “Television is the god that goes on giving” (193). Rushdie uses reality television as a signifier of the problem of truth and lies in American culture. He claims that “television is not reality” (Cole). Creating the chains of precedent names is a feature of Rushdie’s narration. The author mentions twenty-four precedent names including the characters’ names of the following detective, adventure, science fiction and TV series: *Starsky & Hutch* (2004), *Star Trek* (1965–1969), *The X-Files* (1993–2018), *MASH* (1970–1983), *Batman & Robin* (1997), *Key and Peele* (2012–2015), *Frasier* (1993–2004), *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019), *Mad Men* (2007–2015), *El Camino: A Breaking Bad Movie* (2008–2013), *Miami Vice* (1984–1990). A text that includes so many precedent names leads to a communicative loss due to the decoding of such names.

Rushdie creates his novel for the readers who are immersed in digital media products like his main characters. For an average reader, such a literary work becomes a challenge for understanding and adequate perception because the book contains numerous titles of magazines, websites, publishers, shows, visual search engines: *Maxim*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Special Victims Unit* (87-88), *F&SF*, *Astounding*, *Amazing* (93), *The Bachelor* (100), etc. The author highlights the titles in italics to engage the readers’ emotional knowledge.

Rushdie recalls Brother’s travels as if advancing a film: “He closed his eyes and walked backwards across continents and years, twirling his cane like Raj Kapoor’s imitation-Chaplin tramp, only in reverse” (29). The change in the aesthetic consciousness of society is easily influenced by the media: “I know, these days you prefer the warblings you hear on American Idol or The Voice” (5). Mass media are increasingly replacing real-life communication contributing to the realisation of loneliness: “He wanted to talk to his friends about love, and the lover’s quest on which he was about to embark. The truth was that he had almost no friends anymore” (8). Even the circle of virtual friends is formed by a filter bubble: “On his Facebook page he had “friended” or “been friended by” a small and dwindling group of commercial travelers like himself, as well as an assortment of lonely hearts, braggarts, exhibitionists, and salacious ladies...” (8).

Hucksterism on TV makes viewers think about the questions Brother raises: “He grew up wanting to know the secret ingredient in Coca-Cola, he remembered the secret identities of all superheroes, and what was Victoria’s secret, anyway?” (24). These are not serious issues but rather consumers’ interests in a world where “TV had ruined America’s thinking processes as it had ruined Quichotte’s” (216-217).

Immersion in the virtual world leads to the rise of *new generations*: “The

generation of Netflix-and-chill was less judgmental and looked forward to seeing her on their laptops” (42). Being understood first as “a routinized form of relaxation while binge-viewing Netflix”, *Netflix and chill* has changed its semantic image to be transformed into a teenage code word “hooking up” (Pilipets 5). Later it has emerged as a highly (hetero)sexualised and racially coded communicative phenomenon on *Black Twitter* (Sharma 46). Nowadays, this term is exploited as an Internet slang used as a euphemism for sexual activity, either as part of a romantic partnership, as casual sex, or as a groupie invitation. The perception of the real world becomes distorted and is not analysed: “In their opinion her real migration had been from silver screen to computer screen, not from Bombay/Mumbai to L.A., a migration that made her even more fashionable than before in their eyes” (42-43).

Exploration of any culture expects immersion in it, but mass culture does not set the consumer such a *super-mission*: “a loud, fleshy Ukrainian sub-oligarch who claimed to love Shakespeare (“Have you seen Innokenti Smoktunovsky in Russian film *Gamlet*? No? Disappointing!”), did not understand the play (“But there are not twelve nights in this story! Disappointing!”)” (59). The choice of product for consumption increasingly depends on the cover rather than the content: “...I never looked at a book that didn’t have a gorgeous lady on the cover, preferably deficient in the wardrobe department” (84).

*Political Discourse as the Assault on Truth*. There is no direct mention of politicians in Rushdie’s *Quichotte* but the growing frustration of voters with governments leads to the flourishing of populism. A winner is a politician who appeals to emotions and personal beliefs from the blue screens ignoring objective facts that are becoming less important for shaping public opinion in a post-truth era: “Men who played presidents on TV could become presidents” (6). The author, known for his scepticism about politics and politicians, uses a transparent allusion to the previous president of the USA: “a willful American president”, “who was obsessed by cable news, who pandered to a white supremacist base” (44). Farkas & Schou underline that post-truth worlds may be regarded as “discursive formations or political imaginaries produced, disseminated and adopted throughout the Western world” (2).

As Lewandowsky et al. assert, a post-truth world has developed “as a result of societal mega-trends such as a decline in social capital, growing economic inequality, increased polarization, declining trust in science, and an increasingly fractionated media landscape” (353).

Rushdie touches on the issues of terrorism, 9/11, a period of geopolitical tension between the Soviet Union and the United States, and the Cold War: “Spies were becoming news again. At the end of the Cold War, without the Soviet Union

as an enemy, they felt for a time like old hat, and after 9/11 they looked foolish and unprepared” (44). The writer mentions the new challenges facing society in an era of digital technology when an enemy becomes dangerous not on the battlefield but cyber-terrorists can be “the most significant new foes” (44). According to Korstanje, “technology becomes the touchstone of society, but at the same time its Aquila’s heel” (12).

The author makes it clear that World War III has already started, but it is different from all known confrontations. Hackers are warriors who choose and change sides. This idea is supported by Agent Kyle Kagemusha who claims that “this is the third world war, and the future of the free world, of untwisted social media and un-fixed elections, of facts and law and democracy and freedom as we understand the word, depends on winning it” (230). The novel shows cyberwar that is the assault on truth, the pollution of the real by the unreal, of fact by fiction (230).

Rushdie is convinced that the true world is no longer exists because TV collapses minds and “Normal is Upside-Down Land” (131) but “Normal doesn’t feel so normal...” (131). In a post-truth era, special truth is created, and “every show on every network tells you the same thing: based upon a true story. But that’s not true either. The true story is there’s no true story anymore. There’s no *true* anymore that anyone can agree on” (132).

*On the Verge of the Opioid Epidemic*. Nowadays, the pharmaceutical industry has gained significant development and promotion has played one of the main roles as makes nearly everyone wholeheartedly believes in medicine’s “advertised efficacy” (11). Business owners who are related to medicines production and sales become extremely wealthy people in a short period of time: “Dr. Smile’s pharmaceutical business, always prosperous, had recently catapulted him to billionaire status because of his Georgia laboratories’ perfection of a sublingual spray application of the pain medication fentanyl” (11). In real life, a significant number of people do not find a gap to do a medical check-up, and medicines that bring temporary relief are in the greatest demand: “Spraying the powerful opioid under the tongue brought faster relief to terminal cancer patient... The new spray made it bearable, at least for an hour” (11). The advertisement of medicines is of great importance as some drugs become more popular than others and find a ready market: “...the sublingual spray offered instant gratification in a way that the other popular products did not” (79). Healthy and attractive models are shot in commercial broadcasts that make consumers subconsciously believe in the effectiveness of such healthcare products. It is an element of post-truth: “A beautiful lady who cares for you is the best thing in such cases” (74). Among the ways of publicity, the most effective one is advertis-

ing medicines by celebrities: “She [Salma R] started recommending it on the show. ‘I’m hoping to be the ECT brand ambassador,’ she told her studio audience” (115), by friends’ advice: “Word of mouth was always recognized as the most effective marketing device” (75), self-treatment: “‘I’ve been doing this for so long,’ she said, ‘I’m an expert in self-medication’” (113).

The use of opioids is not a problem just in contemporary society. Grandma of Quichotte’s beloved, Miss Salma R, had “...a fondness for recreational and mind-soothing painkillers” (35), and died “by suicide (an overdose of sleeping pills)” (36). After a divorce, her father spent “the remainder of his days in a happy opium haze” (38). Her mother died of a drug overdose: “Miss Salma R was the one who found her mother in what had formerly been Dina’s bedroom, cold and overdosed” (39).

Miss Salma R condescended to Quichotte’s letters. She suspected that the man was mentally ill, but he was not alienated by the woman as she felt sorry for him because she was herself all “too familiar with the battle against mental illness, being a third-generation sufferer herself” (109). For many years she took pills to handle *manic depression*: “The meds had controlled the monster within, just about, but there were bad moments...” (109). She became addicted and can’t do without “those pals, doll” (109).

What causes the opioid crisis? A banal aspiration of one to make money and others to get rid of problems, even for a short time. Dr. R. K. Smile “when he was just starting out in the pharma business” (73), in India in a Bombay street was given a business card with notes: “Are you alcoholic?... We can help. Call this number for liquor homedelivery” (73). He supposed it to be an *Excellent business model* to succeed in business: “SPI had followed the excellent business model with great success, sending its products in impressively large quantities even to very small towns” (73). The author ambivalently hints at doctors who violate the oath of Hippocrates and seek extra profits: “And these were tough doctors, ready to receive these substantial sums in return for prescribing InSmile™ off-label, willing to recommend doing so to other doctors, and able to take any heat that followed” (76) and “...the pharmacies handed out the painkillers, no problem” (112). Large medical corporations and their owners can easily atone for past crimes in the *Age of Anything-Can-Happen*. They only need fix up with financial aid “museums, concert halls, fish tanks, parks, then you will be too too respected by so so many people and all this noise will go” (77). The author uses repetition of *too* and *so* to add expressiveness to the sentence as the occasional elements become emotionally significant due to their visual emphasis.

*Social and Ethical Issues Facing Contemporary Society.* One of the dangers faced by humanity nowadays is *racism*. This political ideology is considered in the dual dimension: the persuasion of some races or ethnic groups, and unwillingness to be assimilated into another social environment caused by subconscious fears to be unwanted or incomprehensible by foreign cultures. When Quichotte and his real/not-real son Sancho went out to New York, they bumped into cruel and racist beliefs: “You got a bad foreign look to you” (125). Sancho watches a world full of hatred on TV channels in cheap hotels. He hears *white Americans’* screaming: “*We are Beavis and Butt-Head on ’roids. We drink Roundup from the can. ... We’re America. ... Immigrants raping our women every day. We need Space Force because Space ISIS*” (131).

Stereotyped thinking leads to the distortion of real-life pictures. Quichotte with his son met a woman who showed her prejudice against them: “You look like you come from a country on that no-entry list. You hitch a ride with a Mexican? What you lookin’ for in America? What’s your purpose?” (125). Quichotte compares racist behaviour to the issue of accusation and punishment for witchcraft in ancient times, which often ended in lynching: “...when a woman was accused of witchcraft, the proofs were that she had a ‘familiar,’ usually a cat, plus a broomstick and a third nipple for the Devil to suck on. ... The proof was in every home and on every woman’s body and therefore all women so accused were automatically guilty” (126). *Automatically guilty* implies that appearance for a certain group of people is a sign to accuse without evidence. In Tulsa, skin colour actualises aggressive attacks on the father and son and becomes the cause of racial discrimination: “You look like somebody rubbed shit in your faces so deep you can’t wash it off” (126).

The ideology of racism flourishes on prejudices and stereotypes which force people to hide their identity: “...the name on the books veiled his ethnic identity, just as Freddie Mercury veiled the Parsi Indian singer Farrokh Bulsara. This was not because the ... man was ashamed of his race but because he did not want to be prejudged” (24).

It is a painful problem for Rushdie, especially those aspects that affect the people of his affiliation: “*In United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923) the Supreme Court argued that the racial difference between Indians and whites was so great that the “great body of our people” would reject assimilation with Indians” (25). The unjust treatment of the people of different races finds a sarcastic response: “Twenty-three years later the Luce-Celler Act permitted just one hundred Indians a year to come to America and gain citizenship (thanks a lot)” (25).

Rushdie notes that racism has no boundaries: black citizens were regularly

killed by white policemen or arrested in hotel lobbies for no crime, children were murdered in schools because of a constitutional gap, and “a man was lynched by sacred-cow fanatics for the crime of having what they thought was beef in his kitchen, and an eight-year-old girl from a Muslim family was raped and killed in a Hindu temple to teach the Muslim population a lesson” (53).

In America, Sancho “saw three figures dressed all in white including white pointed hoods” (206-207) which is a hint of Ku Klux Klan. The guy could not believe his eyes as “that was impossible. This was New York. The Klan wasn’t here at all, let alone wearing couture hoods on Madison” (207). The writer indicates the historical fact that the group originated and mainly existed after the Civil War in South America after its defeat. In modern literature, “the interplay of real (historical) and fictional events is so subtle that they are even difficult to be distinguished from each other” (Bezrukov and Bohovyk, 271).

Racial diversity often makes people who find themselves in a foreign environment support each other even if they do not know each other. Salma has “a special soft spot for the stories of recent immigrants” and sometimes shows them “in a special feature called ‘Immigreat!’” (48). Rushdie uses a pun for the name of the column to combine the two words *immigrant* and *great* created by metathesis influencing the sounds and meaning of the name and indicates his sympathy for people who leave their country under different circumstances. Dr. R. K. Smile, Quichotte’s cousin, as well becomes “a benefactor of the best Atlanta Indian newspaper and website, named *Rajdhani*, ‘Capital!’” (67). The author uses the exotic language unit *Rajdhani* in combination with its translation. Dr. R. K. Smile helps those of the same affiliation: “a donor to most of the proliferating community associations in the city, groupings of people by their state of origin back home, but also by language..., caste, subcaste, religion, and preferred house deities...” (67). Dr. Smile helped religious organisations but noted that he “was not a deeply religious man himself” (67).

Rushdie touches on the painful issues of *paedophilia* and *homophobia*. He describes the relationship between Salma and her grandfather Babajan who harassed her as a child: “...he emerged from a shadow grinning like a demon, took hold of both her wrists, pulled her toward him, and kissed her with great force, twice, the second time, as has been said, with his tongue” (163). Little Salma’s grandmother and mother knew about the old man’s perversion but none of them seriously prevented Grandpa from spoiling the little one: “...neither Salma’s mother Anisa nor her grandmother Dina could have been unaware of Babajan’s proclivities. If Anisa as a child had been his victim, too, the mother before the daughter, she never explicitly revealed it to anyone” (167). The relationship with her grandfather has become



a painful memory for a woman since “when you are twelve years old and utterly devoid of the psychological equipment you need to handle it is even worse” (168). The little one addresses her mother and grandmother with words of despair: “You both knew,” she said to them. “You always knew” (169). But women are embarrassed to talk about domestic violence for fear of condemnation: “*There is grave danger to family member or members, but we hide them. We think of them as our shame, and we conceal*” (167).

The moral challenge in the novel indicates the level of hatred in the aggression of society towards those who are labelled as *others*. Rushdie portrays homophobes who react inadequately even to the fortuitous spectrum: “The drunk woman ... was trying to smash the rainbow with her feet and swearing profusely as she did so, unleashing a torrent, a *drool*, of homophobic abuse” (206). Homophobia is based on hatred of others. Homophobes are ready to humiliate, call them names, beat them, and restrict their rights to make people live by the homophobes’ rules.

Background also matters so Rushdie touches on the issues of multiculturalism. Quichotte is a multicultural identity. The importance and rapid expansion of global English-language literature in the second half of the twentieth century is noted by many researchers of modern English. Crystal calls this phenomenon the most significant in the history of language: “The most notable development in the twentieth-century use of nonstandard English was the extension and flowering of the global literature ... chiefly in those regions which became part of the British Commonwealth” (502). Along with British and American literature, English-language literature includes *new literatures in English* represented by the works of multilingual writers from the former colonies of the British Empire (Boehmer 3). The term *multicultural literature* may also be used in this context (Cai 212). Rushdie is included in the list of such writers. His narrative strategies certainly could not be formed without a cultural component such as the names and traditions of celebrating the festivals of India: “He played Holi with the Bhojpuri-speaking descendants of Indian indentured laborers in Mauritius and celebrated Bakr Eid with shawl weavers in the high mountain village of Aru near the Kolahoi glacier in Kashmir” (9). The novel also contains a significant number of names of dishes that are attributed to the vocabulary with a national culture component: kulfi (85)—traditional Indian ice cream; huevos rancheros (139)—a typical breakfast served at Mexican farms; chicken Kiev (295)—a popular Ukrainian dish, etc.

The writer’s style traditionally includes exotic language units that denote culture-specific elements and create a non-national language environment. Novels about the life of Indians in both colonial and postcolonial India as well as about the

life of Indian diasporas in Britain and the United States are characterised by using borrowings from the languages of South Asia: Persian: “Come and have a **biryani** with my wife and myself” (12); Hindi: “That culture- and love-blessed **boho** in fancy” (32); Arabic and Sanskrit: “Anisa had “been shown the power of Muslim **kismet** and of Hindu **karma**, both of which exact bitter poetic justice upon traitors and wrongdoers” (38).

*Environmental Crisis: Climate Change in the Context of Post-truth.* Consumers of information get used to the titles of articles that include obvious nonsense, the details are not checked, and the proof is not needed which leads to creating hyperreality. Scientists are struggling to describe this *brave new world* where spectacular falsehood is better than boring truth. This way post-truth is created. People try to stay away from bad news because living in our times leads to nervous tension.

The real trouble that people face in a post-truth world is climate change. When the not-real son asks Quichotte if the world ends, he replies: “Obviously... One by one, very quietly, the stars will start going out” (88). People are trying to find a way to escape if the inevitability of the planet’s disappearance becomes real so they are looking for ways to survive in parallel worlds: “If our universe crumbled into space dust, might we not rescue ourselves by traveling in new kinds of vessels that could jump toward an alternative universe that was still stable?” (203). The celebrated American scientist Evel Cent claims: “*My dream! A new! Home! For Humanity!*” (203). He seeks a way to save humanity from the end of the world and declares: “Once I’ve built the transfer machines, we can escape to safety” (260). We believe that Rushdie while creating his character was inspired by Elon Musk’s idea of travelling to Mars because “we aren’t too far from a breakthrough in the science” (261).

In the novel, a lot of times the threat “of the coming disintegration of the universe and the need to survive by escaping into one or more neighbor Earths” (261) is mentioned. Despite the reports of natural disasters, not considering them a real threat: “The growing world environmental crisis, the instability in reality which was finally grabbing the attention of politicians and scientists, even of the (many) politicians and (very few) scientists who had traditionally dismissed environmental issues as fake” (329). This is due to the fact that “people had grown used to the arrival of the incredible in the midst of the everyday” (329).

### **Magic Realism Writes Hyperreality**

Rushdie uses the magic of the story when describing a wild ride across the country

on the verge of moral and spiritual collapse. Although magic realism continues to occupy “a dangerously unanchored position” (Faris 16) between fact and fiction, history and myth, realism and magic, it appears to be a source of new narratives, in particular in postcolonial writing where “the magical is a reflection of culture” (Luburić-Cvijanović 72).

The key point in creating literary works is imagination: “...the imaginings of creative people could spill over beyond the boundaries of the works themselves, that they possessed the power to enter and transform and even improve the real world” (31). The author uses his own rules which are reproduced in the novel: “There were no rules anymore. And in the Age of Anything-Can-Happen, well, anything could happen” (6). Rushdie seems to lack the principles of realism to reflect reality. The author creates his own literature including fantastic themes and the elements of magic reality—utopianism and quixotism. The novel is a vivid illustration of an era wherein reality is sometimes difficult to distinguish from fiction as magic realism “writes the hyperreal, the constantly vanishing real” (Arva 81).

In his allegorical novel, Rushdie skilfully combines magic realism and Indian culture to explore the history, politics, and religious concerns. We believe that the magic in the writer’s works comes from a sincere belief in the magic of real life, and behind this magic, there are some implications to decode for revealing the true meanings. Rushdie describes the transformation of Americans into ignorant racists, comparing them to the mastodons on the streets of Berenger: “The mastodons refuse to believe that they have turned into horrible, surrealistic mutants, and they become hostile and aggressive, they take their children out of school, and have contempt for education” (183).

One of the main features of Rushdie’s *Quichotte* is an appeal to magical literature among which we have found the following elements of magic realism:

1) The combination of the real and fantastic, every-day and mythical, real and imaginary, mysterious, wild and calm, sensual and rationale: “At 11:11 P.M. precisely he snapped seven wishbones while fire rained down from the skies from the direction of the constellation Perseus—Perseus the warrior, Zeus and Danaë’s son, the Gorgons layer!—and the miracle occurred” (16)—against the background of the American reality, the author places a not-real image of not-real son Sancho.

2) The category of time to identify its subjectivity and relativity: “Time had passed, it was hard to know how much time, because time was strange now, stretching, compressing, unreliable. A week could be a month long. A lifetime could pass in a day” (369)—a personal perception of time.

3) The rejection of the psychological motivation of people’s actions: “A wom-

an might fall in love with a piglet, or a man start living with an owl” (6).

4) Depicting a space which does not coincide with the real geographical or historical one: “the clocks gave up arguing and stopped trying to run the hours in the normal fashion, so that when people looked in their direction..., the clocks showed them whatever time they wanted it to be” (47)—time ceases to be a constant value and changes according to the desires and needs in society. The characters travel through *seven valleys* to reach their goal. Only after overcoming the third one do they feel that “the random spatial and temporal dislocations stopped” (151).

Despite the fact that the writer depicts real life, this reality is mythologised. The characters’ worldviews are intertwined with various myths and legends that affect their destinies and help the readers predict possible events in hyperreality.

### Conclusion

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in the history of human development and forms of its cultural activities, the postmodern worldview continues to dominate. The evolution of artistic consciousness has formalised a drastic change in worldview paradigm, its break with previous trends in art. Nowadays, there is a long process of searching for new forms of artistic expression which is reflected in postmodern discourse. One of the pivotal elements of this process is the concept of post-truth which penetrates fiction from public discourse in a world of total diversity to become a key means of explicating the author’s intentions and creating the narratives of hyperreality. Becoming the principal form of artistic vision, hyperreality appears in postmodern fiction to transform the contemporary literary landscape.

Clear evidence of the abovementioned is Rushdie’s *Quichotte* which tackles everything from the impact of mass culture on society and climate change to the rise of white supremacy and the opioid crisis in a post-truth age. Appealing to this category helps the writer build the plot in such a way as to express the most acute problems in the literary text. Inter- and hypertextual connections within the novel immerse the readers in a hyperreal world creating a feeling of complete confusion and inability to distinguish the real from illusory, the erosion of objectivity. Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* as the hypertext for *Quichotte* also helps Rushdie fade the line between truth and what seems to be true.

In the novel, the plot intertwines the storylines of two families, fiction with reality which eventually also becomes fiction since *Quichotte* is a fiction by the writer Brother, and Brother is a fiction by Rushdie. The main character’s maniacal obsession with the consumption of television products becomes the basis for

depicting altered reality both in his head and in the world around him. Hyperreality in this case appears to be a basis for generating both real and fictional narratives turning the novel into a combination of hidden and obvious facts, events, images, meanings, and reflections.

Rushdie's *Quichotte* is based on the following elements: inter/hypertextuality, the magical nature of the presented situations, and the structure of the novel. They create a sarcastic ambience in the novel and a mixture of magic realism with national identity. Rushdie addresses his novel primarily to connoisseurs of postmodern performance with refined literary associations combining the methods of intellectual metafiction with entertainment. Nevertheless, the writer has managed to draw attention to the most pressing issues for a society of hyperreality in a post-truth world on the verge of moral and spiritual collapse.

Representing the concept of post-truth in fictional discourse contributes to the expansion of the artistic potential of this phenomenon in the cultural dimension. The underexplored novel by Rushdie is scrutinised as a literary basis for highlighting the key strategies of creating the narratives of hyperreality in the context of the challenges in a post-truth society.

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