

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of Literary Studies

ISSN: 0256-4718 (Print) 1753-5387 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rjls20

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To cite this article: E. Hilton Hubbard (1999) Love, war and lexicogrammar: Transitivity and characterisation in *the Moor's Last Sigh* , Journal of Literary Studies, 15:3-4, 355-376, DOI: 10.1080/02564719908530236

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02564719908530236

Published online: 22 Oct 2010.

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Love, War and Lexicogrammar: Transitivity and Characterisation in *The Moor's Last Sigh*[1]

E. Hilton Hubbard

Summary

Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) is a zestful piling up of stories, "a final scandalous skein of shaggy-dog yarns", but in this diversity there is also thematic unity, brought about most forcefully through the character of Aurora, the narrator's mother - "most sharp-tongued woman of her generation" - and through the counterpoint of her relationship with her husband, the shadowy Abraham. This paper examines transitivity patterns in certain passages of the novel, showing how these lexicogrammatical features underpin the perception that it is Aurora in particular, but other women too, who dominate the narrative - and the men in their lives. More generally, the paper points out the value of transitivity analysis in explicating reader responses to characters in fiction.

Opsomming

Salman Rushdie se *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) is 'n lewenslustige opeenstapeling van verhale, "a final scandalous skein of shaggy-dog yarns", maar in hierdie diversiteit is daar ook tematiese eenheid, wat op sy kragtigste deur die karakter Aurora, die verteller se moeder - "most sharp-tongued woman of her generation" - teweeggebring word, en deur die kontrapunt van haar verhouding met haar man, die skaduweeagtige Abraham. Hierdie artikel ondersoek transitiwiteitspatrone in sekere passasies van die roman en dui aan hoe hierdie leksikogrammatiese kenmerke *onderliggend* is aan die persepsie dat dit Aurora in die besonder is, maar ook die ander vroue, wat die roman - en die manlike karakters - domineer. Op 'n meer algemene vlak belig hierdie artikel die waarde van transitiwiteitsanalise in die eksplisitering van die leser se respons op karakters in fiksie.

Keywords: linguistic stylistics; systemic functional grammar; transitivity; cline of dynamism; Rushdie.

The narrator of Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), Moraes ("Moor") Zogoiby, sees his story as "A last sigh for a lost world, a tear for its passing. Also, however, a last hurrah, a final, scandalous skein of shaggy-dog yarns ... and a set of rowdy tunes for the wake. A Moor's tale, complete with sound and fury" (p. 4). Love, regret, betrayal and conflict are, indeed, at the heart of the narrative, which, being told by one who has been destined to age at double speed ("No need for supernatural explanations; some cock-up in the DNA will do" (p.145)), proceeds at a headlong pace. Belying its title, then, the novel is more breathless pant than sigh, and its rumbustious energy corroborates the view that Rushdie's magic realism transforms "everyday, mundane actions into something more lively than life" (Casey 1995: 52).

The liveliest by far of all the characters in this zestful work is the narrator's mother, reportedly also Rushdie's own favourite creation: "The story revolves in the first place around one person, around the painter Aurora. For me as a writer, she is the most pleasing character I have ever invented and described" (Doerry & Hage 1996: 155; my translation). It is Aurora's energy that lies at the epicentre of most of the conflict in the novel, be this the tension between the comic and the tragic, the satirical juxtaposition of religions, the internecine "battle of the in-laws" , or the confusion of love and power: "Did we really love her at all in those days, or was it just her long dominance over us, and our passive acceptance of our enslavement, that we mistook for love?" (Rushdie 1995: 91). So in *The Moor's Last Sigh* we have a female holding sway, and this is something of a precedent in Rushdie's oeuvre. It is true that his earlier novel, *Shame*, has been read as an indictment of the oppression of women in Pakistan, and that its narrator is half inclined to believe that the women's stories subsume the men's, but at least one feminist critique of the novel nevertheless sees in it the depiction of "the unchanging subordinate position of Pakistani women, of women as more acted upon than acting, of the futility of opposition, and of the 'otherness'of women" (Grewal 1994: 143).

I hope to show that such a charge could not possibly be levelled at *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and in the process to point up the value to be derived from close analysis of grammatical features - specifically the transitivity system - in the novel for reflecting perceptions that here it is the men who are "more acted upon than acting", while the women dominate the proceedings. Sometimes, this view is expressed quite explicitly. Thus, early in the narration, after Moraes has told of the death of his great-grandfather, Francisco da Gama, who leaves just a "modest allowance" to his wife, Epifania, and control of the lucrative family trading company to their two sons, Aires and Camoens, we read that "[t]he women are now moving to the centre of my little stage. Epifania, Carmen, Belle, and the newly arrived Aurora - they, not the men, were the true protagonists in

the struggle ..." (Rushdie 1995: 33). Appalled that her "useless playboy" sons have inherited virtually all their father's wealth, Epifania summons Carmen, her niece-cum-daughter-in-law, to her boudoir "for a pow-wow" and declares: "From now on, better us ladies should call-o the tune" (p. 33). The immediate context of these statements is the family feud between Epifania and Carmen on the one hand, and Camoens, his wife Belle and daughter Aurora on the other, but they can also be seen more broadly as emblematic of the way gender relations are depicted in the novel.

The major personal conflicts that shape this novel - between Epifania and her husband and sons; between the narrator Moraes's parents, Aurora and Abraham; between Abraham and his mother, Flory Zogoiby; and between Moraes, his mother and his lover, Uma - play themselves out across gender lines. Occasionally, as in some passages that focus on the relationship between Moraes and his mother, there is poignancy to the conflict ("... the closest Rushdie has got to genuine psychological insight, and almost the best things he has written" (Shone 1995: 38)); for the most part, though, the gender battles generate the richest comedy, where the women tend to have the upper hand and the men are at the receiving end.

These power imbalances in the gender conflicts find expression via the usual options open to a narrator. There is explicit description of character, as when Aurora is described thus: "We may perceive her indirectly, in her effects upon others - her bending of other people's light, her gravitational pull that denied us all hope of escape, the decaying orbits of those too weak to withstand her ..." (Rushdie 1995: 136); or as "the most sharp-tongued woman of her generation" (p. 5); while her mother Belle, too, is characterised as one who "had always spoken her mind" (p. 10). Of Abraham, on the other hand, we read for example that for Aurora's sake he is prepared to give up his Jewishness and embrace the Catholic faith: "in this matter too he would surrender to her will" (p.100); and later, more generally, "... his weakness demeaned us all - by which I meant, of course, all men" (p. 169).

Direct description of personality traits as a category of characterisation shades naturally into description of characters' actions and, given that speech is action, from there into the more indirect representation of character through dialogue. Reading this novel one gets the impression that, where there is overt conflict between men and women, that conflict is practically always verbal and that it is mostly the women who are responsible for the "sound and fury" of this "Moor's tale". Through their actions and speech, too, they seem to dominate their environment - and most particularly their menfolk. Unlike the women of *Shame*, who are seen - at least from a gender-political point of view - to be too passive, the main female characters in *The Moor's Last Sigh* come across as

particularly energetic and active. The interesting question here for stylistics is what kind of linguistic features in the text underpin this perception and what kind of analytical framework might be used for describing these features in a relatively objective and quantifiable manner.

A framework that has much to offer is systemic-functional grammar, and specifically the system of transitivity within this model. The relevance of this system for the purposes of this study will be obvious from the following definition:

> [Transitivity] is concerned with a coding of the goings on: who does what in relation to whom/what, where, when, how and why. Thus the analysis is in terms of some PROCESS, its PARTICIPANTS, and the CIRCUMSTANCES pertinent to the Process-Participant configuration.
>
> (Hasan 1988: 63)

The notion of transitivity has been used by a number of linguists to throw more light on the use of language in literary texts. Halliday's analysis of William Golding's *The Inheritors* (Halliday 1971) is the pioneering, and now classic, work in this field. His aim was to show how an analysis based on transitivity could help to distinguish the world-view that characterised the more primitive "people" of the novel on the one hand and the "inheritors", the members of the "tribe", on the other. He finds in passages depicting the "people" that a picture emerges where "people act, but they do not act on things; they move, but they move only themselves, not other objects", and where "a high proportion (exactly half) of the subjects are not people; they are either parts of the body ... or inanimate objects ..., and of the human subjects half again ... are found in clauses which are not clauses of action" (Halliday 1971: 335).

Clearly, this kind of analysis is relevant to the issue of the relative passivity of different fictional characters. Kies (1992) focuses specifically on this question of passivity in his discussion of Orwell's *1984*, adducing fourteen different syntactic devices that he sees as undercutting the degree of "agency" that the central character of the novel is permitted. The approach he uses is loosely based on systemic grammar. A more specific focus on transitivity is found in Kennedy's (1982) discussion of the role it plays in the depiction of the main players in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and Joyce's short story, "Two Gallants", while Hubbard (1994) shows how a transitivity analysis lays bare gender stereotyping in popular (*Mills and Boon*) romances and helps to explicate reader perceptions that in these stories the men are very much action heroes but the women are to a large extent victims of their circumstances - including their own emotions.

Closer examination of the studies just mentioned highlights the prime

relevance, within the system of transitivity, of *participant roles* to our response to fictional characters:

> ... part of the basis of our perception of what a person is like derives from knowing what sort of Participant roles are ascribed to that person.
>
> (Hasan 1988: 65)

In terms of this functional-grammar perspective, animate and inanimate objects (the participants) take up various possible roles relative to the process depicted by the clause. These roles differ in the degree to which the relevant participant is active rather than passive, i.e. what Hasan calls their "effectuality" or "dynamism":

> If we define effectuality - or dynamism - as the quality of being able to affect the world around us, and of bringing change into the surrounding environment, the semantic value of the various ... roles must be seen as distinct.
>
> (Hasan 1989: 45)

Hasan further refines and extends the linguistic stylistic potential of the transitivity system by positing a "cline of dynamism" along which the various participant roles can be ranged, from most active to most passive (Hasan 1989: 46), and this construct informs her stylistic analysis of certain poems (Hasan 1988, 1989).

The participant roles and the cline of dynamism are key features of my analysis of extracts from *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and in order to clarify both concepts, examples of each role, drawn where possible from the parts of the text that were analysed, will now be considered - in order of dynamism, from most to least dynamic (coded accordingly, from 1 to 12).

A1 Actor (+ Animate Goal)

The participant role of Actor has been defined as "the 'logical subject' of older terminology, and means the one that does the deed" (Halliday 1985: 103). In terms of the transitivity system, the process in which some participant performs as an Actor is termed a "material process" (Halliday 1985: 103). The most dynamic "deed" is seen as one that directly affects animate participants (as Goals):

> [1] **She** spirited Abraham away....
>
> (Rushdie 1995: 98)

A2 Actor (+ Goal)
This category differs from A1 in that the Goal is usually an inanimate entity, though it includes cases where the Actor acts on his or her own body:

[2] **Aurora** ... stretched her long body for maximum provocation ....
(Rushdie 1995: 100)

S3 Sayer (+ Recipient or Verbiage)
Sayer is seen as a relatively dynamic role, involved in "verbal process" clauses (Halliday 1985: 129), and defined as "anything that puts out a signal, like *the notice* or *my watch*" (Halliday 1985: 129), and it does of course include human speakers, as in:

[3] **Aurora** commanded Abraham that night ....
(Rushdie 1995: 115)

In [3] Abraham is the Recipient (see R12 below), but an alternative or additional role in verbal process clauses is that of Verbiage (i.e. a depiction of what is said, whether in direct or indirect speech forms), as in:

[4] "Here I come, ready or not", **she** whispered.

A4 Actor
This is the standard role found in intransitive clauses, as in:

[5] **The young heiress** leaned closer towards him ....
(p. 69)

In Hasan's (1988, 1989) cline of dynamism this role is categorised as less dynamic than the three roles that follow below but, following Thompson (1996: 79-80), a distinction can be made between the Actor role in intentional processes, such as in [5], and this role in involuntary processes, categorised here on the level Hasan suggests (cf. A8 below).

P5 Phenomenon (+ Senser)
Phenomenon and Senser are the main participants in "mental process" clauses, where the Senser is "the conscious being that is feeling, thinking or seeing", while the Phenomenon is "that which is sensed - felt, thought or seen" (Halliday 1985: 111). The role of Phenomenon is seen as the more dynamic one as it might be said to trigger the relevant mental process:

[6] ... and Abraham without flinching accepted **his fate** ....

(Rushdie 1995: 99)

S6 Sayer

The role of Sayer is seen as less dynamic when there is no overt Recipient or Verbiage, as in:

[7] "My God", **she** burst out ....

(p. 69)

S7 Senser

In [6] above, the Senser role is represented by **Abraham**.

Although we are here working with a cline or continuum, I suggest that one can also divide the full set of roles into two groups, with the seven roles discussed so far, which imply intention and volition, characterisable as inherently active and the remaining seven, illustrated below, as inherently passive.

A8 Actor (involuntary)

This is the role of Actor in involuntary processes, as in:

[8] ... **he** would wake up ....

(p. 57)

B9 Behaver

Behavioural processes are "processes of physiological and psychological behaviour, like breathing, dreaming, smiling, coughing" (Halliday 1985:128). Halliday admits to a certain fuzziness between this category of process and material processes, and hence between the roles of Actor and Behaver (a fuzziness which of course affects all grammars with a strong semantic orientation, but space prevents this issue from being considered further here). Behavioural processes could be seen as less under voluntary control than material processes, and some fairly clear examples include:

[9] ... her ageing husband ..., **mouth** twitching in an embarrassed smile ...

(Rushdie 1995: 99)

C10 Carrier

This is "the entity to which some attribute is ascribed" - a participant in a "relational process" (Halliday 1985: 113):

[10] **Abraham** was tougher than any frog.

(Rushdie 1995: 170)

B11 Beneficiary

The Beneficiary is "the one to whom or for whom the process is said to take place" (Halliday 1985: 32) and this is the standard role of the traditional indirect object, usually expressible with or without a preposition:

[11] She bought a gift for **her husband** / She bought **her husband** a gift.

R12 Recipient

This is the role of the receiving entity in verbal process clauses, exemplified in [3] above, repeated here as [12], by **Abraham**:

[12] Aurora commanded **Abraham** that night ....

(Rushdie 1995: 115)

G13 Goal

As seen in [1] above, reproduced here as [13], the Goal is the role of "the one to which the process is extended" (Halliday 1985: 103):

[13] She spirited **Abraham** away ....

(Rushdie 1995: 98)

C14 Circumstance

The Circumstance role carries in a sense the background information of the clause, describing aspects such as time, manner and place. This role is usually realised within a prepositional phrase, as in:

[14] ... it was upon **him** that Aurora descended ....

(pp. 68-69)

In order to examine the degree of dynamism shown by the two most prominent male and female characters in the novel with respect to one another, all clauses in passages where they were both present and interacting were analysed in terms of their transitivity roles and the cline of dynamism. Extracts 1-3 below exemplify these analyses. The processes of all clauses in which either Aurora or Abraham participate are represented in upper case; Aurora's participant roles are analysed in bold and Abraham's in italics.

Extract 1 (pp. 68-69)

Below these grand personages, at an everyday sort of desk with its own little lamp, SAT the godown's duty manager *[A4]*, and it was upon him *[C14]* that Aurora **[A4]** DESCENDED, **[A2]** upon RECOVERING her composure, **[S3]** to DEMAND an explanation of the pepper shipment's delay....

The sight at close quarters of the most beautiful of the da Gamas and the sole inheritrix of the family crores **[P5]** STRUCK the duty manager *[S7]* like a spear in the heart, **[P5]** RENDERING him *[S7]* temporarily dumb. The young heiress **[A4]** LEANED closer towards him *[C14]*, **[A1]** GRABBED his chin *[G13]* between her thumb and forefinger, **[A1]** TRANSFIXED him *[G13]* with her fiercest glare, and **[S7]** FELL head over heels in love ....

"My God", she **[S6]** BURST OUT when at last the white capitals insisted on being seen, "it isn't disgraceful enough that you *[C10]* HAVEN'T GOT a bean in your pocket or a tongue in your head, you *[C10]* HAD TO BE a Jew as well". And then, aside: "face facts, Aurora. Thinkofy. You've **[S7]** FALLEN FOR a bloody godown Moses *[P5]*".

Pedantic white capitals CORRECTED her **[R12]** (the object of her affections, thunderstruck, moon-struck, dry of mouth, thumping of heart, incipiently fiery of loin, *[C10]* WAS unable to do so, *[G13]* having been DEPRIVED anew of the power of speech by the burgeoning of feelings not usually encouraged in members of staff): Duty Manager Zogoiby's name was not Moses but Abraham.

Extract 1 depicts the first meeting of the narrator's parents and is in terms of transitivity relations and relative dynamism fairly representative of the total data sample of 297 participant roles analysed (147 for Aurora and 150 for Abraham). In this extract, of the 24 relevant participant roles, Aurora features in 12 and Abraham in 12, and the imbalance in the dynamism of the two characters is clear. Thus, in spite of the fact that the account of this meeting has them both falling in love, presumably a reciprocal phenomenon, only Aurora participates as Actor and Sayer in the three most dynamic roles (A1, A2 and S3), and in both clauses where she is an A1-category Actor, the animate Goal (G13) of her actions is Abraham or part of his body ("his chin"). Of the seven essentially passive roles (A8-C14) Aurora participates in only one here - as Recipient (R12), while on the other hand eight of Abraham's 12 roles are essentially passive, with Carrier (C10) and Goal (G13) being most common. Also, two of his nominally active roles are S7s, being those with the lowest dynamism in the active group and very much a borderline category, particularly here, where the metaphorical language ("STRUCK the duty manager *[S7]* like a spear in the heart, **[P5]** RENDERING him *[S7]* temporarily dumb") leaves

no room for intention or volition on Abraham's part.

Extract 2 (pp. 88, 89)

In the perfumed half-light of C-50 Godown No. 1, Aurora da Gama **[A1]** GRABBED Abraham Zogoiby *[G13]* by the chin *[C14]* and **[A4]** LOOKED deep into his eyes *[C14]*... no men, I can't do this stuff. This is my mother and father I'm talking about ....

Way up there near the roof of Godown No.1, Aurora da Gama at the age of fifteen **[A4]** LAY BACK on pepper sacks, **[B9]** BREATHED IN the hot, spice laden air, and **[A1]** WAITED for Abraham *[G13]*. He *[A4]* CAME to her **[C14]**as a man *[A4]* GOES to his doom, trembling but resolute, and it is around here that my words run out, so you will not learn from me the bloody details of what happened when she, and then he, and then they, and after that she, and at which he, and in response to that she, and with that, and in addition, and for a while, and then for a long time, and quietly, and noisily, and at the end of their endurance, and at last, and after that, until ... phew! Boy! Over and done with!

This extract is in some ways more interesting for the light it throws on the character of the narrator than on that of his parents. It is also towards the end something of a comic and stylistic tour de force, with its rhythmically suggestive succession of Actor and then Circumstance roles piled one upon the other, but no overt process. From the point of view of the characters' relative dynamism it is a little ironic, and symptomatic perhaps of the overall picture, that in this last section, just when Abraham could have appeared in dynamic Actor roles - more or less on a par with Aurora - these roles are not analysable because of the absence of processes. As it stands, this extract too shows Aurora as a more active participant, with Abraham in many more of the passive roles.

Extract 3 (p. 100)

Aurora under a white linen bedsheet **[A2]** STRETCHED her long body for maximum provocation; a breast **[A4]** BURST into view, **[A2]** CAUSED a sharp ecclesiastical gasp, and **[A1]** OBLIGED Aires to address his remarks to the Telefunken radiogram ....

The context of Extract 3 is the summoning of Aurora's uncle Aires by a local priest, who has been spying on the fifteen-year-old Aurora and Abraham, the company employee who has become her lover. He leads Aires to Abraham's rooms, where the lovers are discovered. The transitivity relations here, too,

provide much of the high comic effect while highlighting the way in which even a part of Aurora's body can dominate her surroundings.

The three extracts discussed provide some indication of the relationship between Aurora and Abraham and of the role of the transitivity system in explicating reader perceptions about these two characters. Table 1 provides the overall participant role statistics for the relevant passages in the novel as a whole (cf. Appendix for analyses).

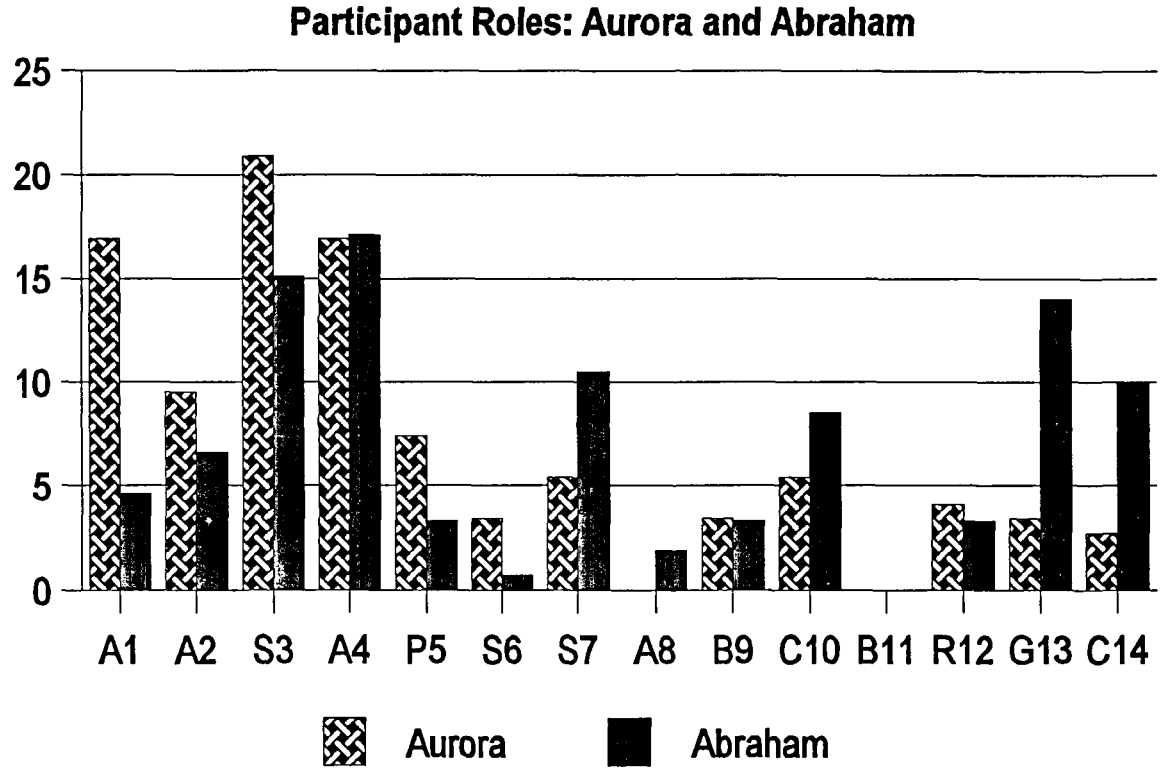
Table 1: Participant Role Statistics for Aurora and Abraham

	Aurora		Abraham	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
A1 - Actor	25	17,0	7	4,6
A2 - Actor	14	9,5	10	6,6
S3 - Sayer	31	21,1	23	15,3
A4 - Actor	25	17,0	26	17,3
P5 - Phenomenon	11	7,5	5	3,3
S6 - Sayer	5	3,4	0	0,7
S7 - Senser	8	5,4	16	10,7
ACTIVE ROLES	**119**	**80,9**	**88**	**58,7**
A8 - Actor	0	0,0	3	1,9
B9 - Behaver	5	3,4	5	3,3
C10 - Carrier	8	5,4	13	8,7
B11 - Beneficiary	0	0,0	0	0,0
R12 - Recipient	6	4,1	5	3,3
G13 - Goal	5	3,4	21	14,0
C14 - Circumstance	4	2,7	15	10,0
PASSIVE ROLES	**28**	**19,1**	**62**	**41,3**
TOTAL ROLES	147		150	

From Table 1 it is readily apparent that the general pattern for the data taken as a whole is much the same as that for the three sample extracts examined above. Aurora features in nearly twice as many of the most dynamic three roles than does Abraham: she it is who acts in transitive clauses and does most of the speaking. More broadly speaking, over 80% of Aurora's roles can be categorised as "active". Less than 60% of Abraham's roles, on the other hand, are active, and he is strongly represented in the passive participant roles of Carrier, Circumstance and particularly Goal.

Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of this complementarity between these two characters.

Figure 1


Participant Roles: Aurora and Abraham
25
20
15
10
5
0
A1
A2
S3
A4
P5
S6
S7
A8
B9
C10
B11
R12
G13
C14
Aurora
Abraham

The point needs to be stressed that the clauses analysed for this study were taken only from those passages in the novel where Aurora and Abraham were both obviously present. In these passages there is no doubt that Aurora is the dominant personality, but in her absence it is true that Abraham does play a more active role. After Aurora's death his thoughts are "I have just begun to live" (p. 317) and it is he, after all, who is responsible for her murder. The women of this novel might be at centre stage, but Abraham works from the wings, as he admits when he sees his son for the last time, after his manipulations have gone awry: "It's all coming apart in my hand. The magic stops working when people start seeing the strings" (p.187). As the narrator himself suggests: "You must judge for yourselves whether Abraham was a potent fellow or im-" (p. 139).

It is indeed one of the paradoxes of the novel that the manipulative Abraham, who arranges the murder of his wife, should be so passive in her presence. But he is, after all, up against a formidable personality. There can be no gainsaying the fact that we perceive Aurora as by far the most energetic and dominating character of all, and we have seen how the lexicogrammatical features analysed underpin these perceptions. In Montgomery's words: "If character is 'the major totalizing force in fiction', then it is important to discover how characters are constructed and on the basis of what kinds of linguistic choices" (1993: 141). The transitivity system provides a very powerful matrix for the exercise of such choices.

Appendix

Passages Analysed

The clauses analysed are taken from all passages of the novel where Aurora and Abraham are obviously present together. Given the focus on the relative dynamism of the two characters, clauses containing negation were not analysed, nor were participant roles of parts of the body in cases where characters acted on or with their own body. Thus in "Aurora under a white linen bedsheet **[A2]** STRETCHED her long body", for example, "her long body" is not analysed here as G13, because it is clear that the character is not passive here and if such cases were counted this would inflate - counterintuitively - the overall number of passive roles of the participants. Where, on the other hand, the body part is being acted on by some other participant, seeing that participant as passive is justified and such cases are analysed (for example, "Aurora **[S3]** SHOUTED, **[A1]** CUPPING his face *[G13]* in her hands").

pp. 68-69

Below these grand personages, at an everyday sort of desk with its own little lamp, SAT the godown's duty manager *[A4]*, and it was upon him *[C14]* that Aurora **[A4]** DESCENDED, **[A2]** upon RECOVERING her composure, **[S3]** to DEMAND an explanation of the pepper shipment's delay. "But what is Uncle thinking?" she **[S6]** CRIED unreasonably, for how could so lowly a worm *[S7]* KNOW the mind of the great Mr Aires himself? ....

The sight at close quarters of the most beautiful of the da Gamas and the sole inheritrix of the family crores **[P5]** STRUCK the duty manager *[S7]* like a spear in the heart, **[P5]** RENDERING him *[S7]* temporarily dumb. The young heiress **[A4]** LEANED closer towards him *[C14]*, **[A1]** GRABBED his chin *[G13]* between her thumb and forefinger, **[A1]** TRANSFIXED him *[G13]* with her fiercest glare, and **[S7]** FELL head over heels in love. By the time the man had *[A2]* CONQUERED his own shyness and *[S3]* STAMMERED OUT the news ... Aurora **[S7]** had REALISED ... she would have to **[A2]** DEFY class and convention by **[A1]** MARRYING this inarticulately handsome family employee *[G13]* at once. "It's like marrying the dratted driver", she **[S3]** SCOLDED herself in blissful misery, and for a moment **[C10]** WAS so preoccupied by the sweet horror of her condition that she **[S7]** did not TAKE IN the name painted on the little block of wood painted on his desk.

"My God", she **[S6]** BURST OUT when at last the white capitals insisted on being seen, "it isn't disgraceful enough that you *[C10]* HAVEN'T GOT a bean in your pocket or a tongue in your head, you *[C10]* HAD TO BE a Jew as well." And then, aside: "Face facts, Aurora. Thinkofy. You've **[S7]** FALLEN FOR a bloody godown Moses" *[P5]*.

Pedantic white capitals CORRECTED her **[R12]** (the object of her affections, thunderstruck, moon-struck, dry of mouth, thumping of heart, incipiently fiery of loin, *[C10]* WAS unable to do so, *[G13]* having been DEPRIVED anew of the power of speech by the burgeoning of feelings not usually encouraged in members of staff): Duty Manager Zogoiby's name was not Moses but Abraham.

p. 88

In the perfumed half-light of C-50 Godown No. 1, Aurora da Gama **[A1]** GRABBED Abraham Zogoiby *[G13]* by the chin *[C14]* and **[A4]** LOOKED deep into his eyes *[C14]* ... no men, I can't do this stuff. This is my mother and father I'm talking about, ...

"I couldn't wait-o", that is how Aurora herself **[S3]** used to TELL it ... while her ageing husband LEANED *[A4]* in a corner in a business suit, mouth *[B9]*

TWITCHING in an embarrassed smile, hands *[B9]* FLAPPING helplessly until at last they *[A4]* SETTLED around my young ears, Aurora **[A2]** DRANK champagne from an opalescent glass like an opening flower and **[C10]** WAS casually explicit about her own deflowering, **[B9]** LAUGHING lightly at her youthful audacity. "By the chin, I **[S6]** SWEAR. I **[A1]** just PULLED AT him *[C14]* and he *[A4]* FOLLOWED, *[A8]* POPPED right up out of his chair like a cork from a bottle, and I **[A1]** LED him *[G13]* on ...."

... by the chin she **[A1]** LED him *[G13]*, and he *[A4]* FOLLOWED, *[A2]* ABANDONING his post, ... he *[A2]* PURSUED his chin, *[A4]* SURRENDERING himself to his fate ....

p. 89

Throughout her life Aurora Zogoiby **[C10]** WAS quite clear about the reason why she **[A1]** LED her duty manager into the murky depths of the godown, and why, **[S3]** MOTIONING *[R12]* him to follow, she **[A2]** CLIMBED a long and bouncy ladder to the highest level of the most remote stacks. **[A2]** RESISTING all efforts at psychological analysis, she **[S3]** angrily REJECTED the theory that in the aftermath of too-many-deaths-in-the-family she **[C10]** had been vulnerable to the charms of an older man, that she **[S7]** had been first HELD, then **[S7]** CAPTURED, by Abraham's look of wounded kindness **[P5]** .... "In the first place", she **[S3]** would ARGUE, to cheers and applause, while Daddy Abraham *[P5]* EARNED my contempt by *[A4]* SKULKING shamefacedly away, "excuse me, but who drewofied whom towards where? Seems to me I **[C10]** WAS the puller, not the pulled. Seems to me that Abie *[C10]* WAS the know-nothing and I **[C10]** WAS one smart fifteen-year-old cookie. And in the second place, I always **[C10]** WAS a sucker for a *heero*, a *loverboy*, a hunk.".

Way up there near the roof of Godown No. 1, Aurora da Gama at the age of fifteen **[A4]** LAY BACK on pepper sacks, **[B9]** BREATHED IN the hot, spice laden air, and **[A1]** WAITED for Abraham *[G13]*. He *[A4]* CAME to her **[C14]** as a man *[A4]* GOES to his doom, trembling but resolute, and it is around here that my words run out ....

p. 90

Abraham [S7] and Aurora **[S7]** FELL IN pepper LOVE, up there on the Malabar Gold. They *[A4]* **[A4]** CAME down from those high stacks with more than their clothes smelling of spice. So passionately had they *[A1]* **[A1]** FED upon one another, *[C14]* **[C14]**, so profoundly had sweat and blood and the secretions of their bodies *[A4]* **[A4]** MINGLED, ... so intimately had they *[A4]*

[A4] CONJOINED ... that, for ever after, they *[B9]* [B9] SWEATED pepper 'n' spices sweat, and their bodily fluids, too, *[P5]* [P5] SMELLED and even *[P5]* [P5] TASTED of what had been crushed into their skins, what had mingled with their love-waters, what had been BREATHED in *[B9]* [B9] ....

"Eer since then, let me [S3] TELL you I [A1] have had to KEEP-O old Abie *[G13]* here away from the kitchen, because that stink of grinding spices, my *dears*, it MAKES *[G13]* him *[A2]* paw the ground. SPEAKING [S6] for myself, however, I [A4] TUBBOFY, I [A4] SCRUBBOFY, I [A4] BRUSH, I [A4] GROOM, I [A2] FILL-O the room with fine perfume, and that is why, as all can see, I'M [C10] just as sweet as I [C10] can BE."

p. 91

"From now on I *[A1]* will always LOOK AFTER you [G13]", my father *[S3]* TOLD my mother [R12] after the first time they *[A4]* [A4] MADE LOVE. But she [C10] WAS beginning to be an artist, she ANSWERED [S3], and so "the most important part of me *[G13]*, I [A1] can TAKE CARE OF by myself".

"Then", SAID Abraham *[S3]* humbly, "I *[A1]* will LOOK AFTER the less important part [G13], ..."

p. 96

Aurora, with lace-covered head, and [P5] SMELLING strongly of sex and pepper, [A1] AWAITED her lover *[G13]* by Vasco's tomb;

p. 97

Abraham *[A4]* ARRIVED in a rush, and all but *[A4]* RAN to Vasco's tomb. When Aurora [A1] CLASPED his hands *[G13]* between her own ....

pp. 98-101

But he *[A1]* had LEFT his mother for an even tougher cookie [C14]; Aurora [A4] TOOK CHARGE at once. She [A1] SPIRITED Abraham *[G13]* AWAY and [A1] INSTALLED him *[G13]* in the refurbished Western-style Corbusier folly on Cabral Island. "Unfortunately you *[C10]* ARE too tall and broad in the shoulder", she [S3] TOLD him *[R12]*, "so my poor dead Daddy's little suits won't FITTO on you *[C14]*. Tonight, but, you will not require suits".

... after the fifteen-years-young spice-trade heiress [A4] ENTERED the bedchamber of her lover *[C14]* ... that for a moment the awestruck Abraham

[S7] THOUGHT she **[A4]** was FLYING;

after their second spice-fragrant love-making, in which the older man *[S7]* SURRENDERED completely to the will of the younger woman **[P5]**, as though his ability to make choices had been exhausted by the consequences of the act of choosing her;

after Aurora **[S3]** MURMURED her secrets in his ear **[C14]**, *because for many years I* **[S3]** *have CONFESSED only to a hole, but now, my husband, I* **[S3]** *can TELL you everything* ... and Abraham without flinching *[S7]* ACCEPTED his fate; banished from the fellowship of his own people, he *[S7]* TOOK UPON HIMSELF the matriarch's last malediction, which Epifania whispered into Aurora's ear and whose sweet poison the young woman now **[A1]** dropped into his *[C14]*: *a house divided against itself cannot stand*, that's what she **[S3]** SAID ....

after Abraham *[S3]* COMFORTED Aurora **[G13]** by *[S3]* VOWING to *[A2]* DISPROVE the curse, to *[A4]* STAND beside her **[C14]** ....

and after he *[S3]* SAID, yes, to *[A1]* MARRY her **[G13]** he *[A4]* would TAKE the great step, he *[S7]* would ACCEPT instruction and *[A4]* ENTER the Church of Rome, and in the presence of her naked body **[P5]** which INSPIRED in him *[S7]* a kind of religious awe the thing did not seem so difficult to say, in this matter too he *[S7]* would SURRENDER to her will **[P5]**, her cultural conventions **[P5]**, even though she *[C10]* HAD less faith than a mosquito ....

Aurora under a white linen bedsheet **[A2]** STRETCHED her long body for maximum provocation; a breast **[A4]** BURST into view, **[A2]** CAUSED a sharp ecclesiastical gasp, and **[A1]** OBLIGED Aires to address his remarks to the Telefunken radiogram ....

Aires ORDERED Abraham *[R12]* to dress and leave; Aurora COUNTERMANDED **[S3]** the order. Aires threatened the lovers with police intervention; Aurora **[S3]** REPLIED, "And, Aires-uncle, is there nothing for you to fear from the cops?" .... Aurora **[A4]** ROLLED over to Abraham *[C14]*, who *[A2]* had COVERED his face with his hands. "Here I **[A4]** COME, ready or not", she **[S3]** WHISPERED. "Mister, here COMES the bride [A4]."

Abraham Zogoiby *[A2]* COVERED his face that night in August 1939 because he *[S7]* had been ASSAILED by fear .... He had *[S3]* PROMISED Aurora **[R12]** looking-after, and he *[C10]* would BE as good as his word.

p. 106

Aurora **[S3]**, at her most imperious, DEMANDED to know where he'D BEEN *[C10]*. In reply he *[A4]* POINTED at the departing boat and *[A2]* MADE, for the first of many times in their life together, the sign that meant *don't ask*: he

[A2] DREW an imaginary needle and thread through his lips, as if to sew them shut. "I *[S3]* TOLD you [R12]", he SAID *[S3]*, "that I *[A1]* would TAKE CARE of the unimportant things: but to do it, sometimes I *[A4]* must GO quietly to Thread-Needle Street".

p. 107

Don't ask, his lip-stitching fingers WARNED *[S3]*; and Aurora **[A2]**, my empress of a mother PUT UP her hands, **[A2]** BROUGHT them together for a little round of applause, and asked no more. "I **[S7]** always WANTED a magician", was all she **[S3]** SAID. "Looks like I **[A1]** FOUND one after all."

p. 115

"Tell your mother", Aurora **[S3]** COMMANDED Abraham that night, "that there will be no children born in this house while she remains alive". She **[A1]** MOVED him *[G13]* out of her bedroom. "You *[A2]* DO your work and I'll **[A2]** DO mine", she SAID **[S3]** ....

For several nights Abraham MEWLED *[S6]* piteously at her locked door, but was not admitted. At length, Cyrano-fashion, he **[A1]** HIRED a local accordionist and ballad-singer who SERENADED her **[R12]** in the courtyard below her window, while he, Abraham *[A4]*, STOOD idiotically beside the music-man and *[S3]* MOUTHED the words of the old love-songs. Aurora **[A2]** OPENED her shutters and **[A2]** THREW flowers; then the water from the flower-vase; and finally the vase itself. All three scored direct hits. The vase, a heavy piece of stoneware, STRUCK Abraham *[G13]* on the left ankle, breaking it.

pp. 119-120

On the day they **[A4]** *[A4]* MOVED in, she **[A4]** WENT to the look-out point ... and at the top of her voice she **[S6]** OUT-SCREAMED the wheeling *chils* for joy.

Abraham shyly *[A4]* WAITED some yards back, hands clasped before him, *[P5]* LOOKING for all the world like the duty manager he once *[C10]* WAS. "I *[S7]* HOPE so that the new locale will prove beneficial to your creative process", he *[S3]* SAID with painful formality. Aurora **[A4]** CAME running towards him *[C14]* and **[A4]** LEAPT into his arms *[C14]*.

"Creative process you'RE AFTER *[S7]*, is it?" she **[S3]** DEMANDED, **[A4]** LOOKING at him *[C14]* as she had not looked for years. "Then come on, mister, let's go indoors and create."

pp. 139-140

"Stop sulking, Abie", Aurora **[S3]** COMMANDED .... Abraham *[S3]* PROTESTED again: "People will confuse", he *[S3]* SAID plaintively .... Aurora **[B9]** SHRUGGED. "Ina was a ten-pound baby, the little so-an-so", she **[S3]** REMINDED Abraham *[R12]*.

p. 141

Aurora **[A1]** CAUGHT him *[G13]* before he FELL *[A8]*. An old mushroom-selling crone had appeared beside them and helped Aurora **[A1]** SIT Abraham *[G13]* down with his back against the rock ....

"Don't croak-o, damn it", Aurora **[S3]** SHOUTED, **[A1]** CUPPING his face *[G13]* in her hands. "Breathe! You are not allowed to die". And Abraham, *[S7]* OBEYING her **[P5]** as always, *[A4]* SURVIVED. The breathing *[B9]* EASED, the eyes *[B9]* CLEARED and he *[A4]* RESTED for long minutes with bowed head ....

"You see the problems of being an old father", fifty-three-year-old Abraham *[S3]* MUTTERED to Aurora **[R12]** before their daughters came into earshot. "See how fast they are growing, and how fast I *[A8]* AM CRACKING UP, too ...."

Aurora **[A1]** MADE herself **[S3]** SPEAK lightly as the worried children arrived. "You-tho *[C10]* will BE around for ever", she **[S3]** TOLD Abraham. *[R12]*. "I'VE GOT *[C10]* no worries about you" [C14].

Aurora **[A4]** WHIRLED around.

p. 146

"Get that woman out of here, Abie", my mother **[S3]** ROARED from her bed ....

p. 183-184

When Aurora **[S3]** ASKED him *[R12]* over breakfast why he was *[A4]* GOING into the baby-bottom business, he *[S3]* CITED the twin advantages of a protectionist economy ... and a population explosion .... He *[S3]* SPOKE enthusiastically of the product's global potential, *[S3]* CHARACTERISING India ... and *[S3]* SUGGESTED that many other Third World countries would leap at the chance .... By the time he had *[S7]* BEGUN TO SPECULATE ... Aurora **[A4]** had STOPPED LISTENING. When he *[S3]* BEGAN TO SING

the advertising jingle with which he *[S7]* PROPOSED TO LAUNCH his new wheeze, with lyrics personally composed by himself and set to the maddening tune of *Bobby Shafto*, my mother **[A2]** COVERED her ears.

"Baby Softo, sing it louder,/Softo-pofto talcum powder", CAROLLED Abraham *[S3]*.

"Talcum you can make or not make", CRIED Aurora **[S3]** ....

p. 278

"From this moment on", SAID Aurora Zogoiby **[S3]** "you are no longer our son ...."

"I *[A1]* SUPPORT your mother **[G13]** fully", SAID Abraham Zogoiby *[S3]*.

Note

1. This paper is a revised version of one delivered at the Poetics and Linguistics Association Conference at the University of Potchefstroom in March 1999.

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