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Blend of History, Fantasy, and Fable: A Study of Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*

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Abstract

Unlike conventional historical fiction, postmodern historical fiction presents history in a distinctive and distinctive manner. Novelists depict history and incorporate historical personalities and events that are shown directly in their works. They dismantle and dehistoricize history during this process. The ideas that postmodern novels vigorously reject include the accurate recounting of historical events, the objective treatment of historical personalities, and an effort to convey genuine history. The authors of the novels purposefully alter, make up, and give a whole new version of the past rather than narrating it accurately. This research paper focuses on how Rushdie blurs the line between history and fiction in his well-known novel *The Enchantress of Florence* and what he hopes to accomplish by doing so. This novel makes it clear how fascinated he is with history. Rushdie appears to be firmly bound to the past. He blended folklore and history to create new myths and histories in the novel. In order to free history from positivism and reimagine it, the novelist has merged myth and history, fact and fantasy. His works have been made richer by this blending of the historical and the legendary, as well as the actual and the imaginary, and it has also provided fresh perspectives on how to read and write history.

Keywords: Fantasy, history, imagination, literary devices, myth, postmodern

Introduction

Rushdie's dependence on the past is once again demonstrated in *The Enchantress of Florence*. He used historical facts and folklore in this book to build or reimagine new myths and histories. In order to free history from the constraints of cultural and political hegemony and re-invent it, the novelist chooses to blend myth and history, fact and fiction. The text is made more literary by the blending of fact and fiction as well as the infusion of myth and history, which leaves room for the reader's imagination to run wild. The plot shifts back and forth in time and place, fusing reality and fiction while redefining truth itself via myth and recollections.

The plot of the book, which is set in the 16th century, centres on a young Italian named Mogor Dell Amore's journey to the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar. The Florentine guy goes by the name Nicolle Vespucci and claims to be the long-lost uncle of Akbar, the son of the exiled Mughal princess Qara Koz and the Florentine warrior Antonio Argalia. The novel, which is essentially a blend of imagination and truth, is filled with numerous historical personalities and events that are all woven into a wonderful fictitious fabric.

The work creates a window for a different historical reality by utilising all the traditional postmodern literary methods, including sarcasm, magic realism, parody, and the themes of east and west and the desire for a new world. Rushdie's main goal in fusing myth and history is to revitalise the idea of history as a whole. He calls for the biases of historical objectivity to be eliminated.

Myth promotes the text's fictionality, whereas historical truth supports the claims of the text's impartiality. In the words of A. S. Rao, "Meanings and truths are influenced by their historical position and cannot in principle be set apart from history. The reality of a literary text lies with the reader's imagination" (64). *The Enchantress of Florence* gives emphasis to such imaginative world order.

The book reminds the reader that history is a relative construct that is rife with subjectivity by adopting a historiographical meta-fictional style, purposefully interrupting chronology,

adding supernatural happenings, and including aspects that are obviously historically wrong. According to Padma Malini Sundararaghavan, who is a big proponent of the idea of fictionalized history?

The myths crafted by empire, as also political myths of any era, have the ability to partially or wholly falsify, or shall we say fictionalize history as the facts themselves often suffer mutilation or erasure. Facts are obscured by propaganda, media manipulation and image-building experts who project a picture far removed from reality ^[2].

Despite the splendour of his life, Akbar is a historical character. One of the young Florentines is Niccol Machiavelli, who is the face of political realism in our culture. However, Argalia, Niccol's buddy, takes to the air on the ingenious peacock wings of the author to join Akbar's inner circle before returning to Florence to take up a lost cause. Certain characters were created by other characters: Akbar's fantasies of the Ideal Wife and Ideal Lover - Queen Jodha and Qara Kōz, the Enchantress - were made real by storytellers, painters, and Akbar's all-consuming passion. His people tolerate them because "such occurrences were common at that time, before the real and the unreal were permanently divided and condemned to coexist under separate monarchs and separate laws."

The appearance of a figure by the name of Qara Koz throughout the book emphasizes the fuzzy line between reality and fiction. The main story Niccolò Vespucci tells Akbar, who was utterly unaware of this secret princess in the history of the Mughals, is about Qara Koz and how she came to be the mistress of Argalia. To fill up the blanks in the history of the Mughals, the foreigner Mogor del Amore tells Emperor Akbar the tale of Qara Koz-Angelica, the lady with black eyes. A glaring departure from conventional historical accounts is the insertion of the story of Qara Koz. According to the narrator, who claims to be the son of this missing princess from the Mughal household: "She was a princess of the true Chaghatrai blood, a direct descendent of Genghis Khan, a member of the house of Timur, and the sister of the first Mughal Emperor of India, whom she called the Beaver" (166). Niccolò Vespucci continues by telling the tale of his mother and asserts "Her name was Angelica and she was a Mughal princess, and the most beautiful woman anyone had ever seen, and an enchantress without compare, a mistress of potions and spells of whose powers all were afraid" (167).

The Middle Eastern and Florence adventures of this magnificent beauty as she wins over the hearts of one brutal conqueror after another, therefore, become the story's main focus. She is every man's lusty fantasy - at once a princess, a slave, and a witch - and she will stop at nothing to please her present ruler and ensure her survival. By contrasting the clearly portrayed and intricate components in the foreground and background to create an aura of mystery and ambiguity, Rushdie creates the persona of Qara Koz along the lines of magic realism. The distinction between reality and fantasy is muddled by her great beauty, which attracts men, and her magical abilities, which she employs to charm others. These attributes transform the ordinary into something amazing. The enigma surrounding the foreigner and his genealogy is partially resolved thanks to these dreams of Akbar and the later explanations offered by Qara Koz, and all the threads of the narrative are brought together. The narrator rewrites his history through the creative reconstruction of the past because he is equipped with a shattered and flawed

understanding of his genealogy and identity. Thus, the narrator's imagination helps to clarify the history of the Mughal rulers.

The stunning young women both historical and imagined in this bright, interesting, and generous novel are all typical figures, seen only in connection to the male. They include beautiful queens and alluring enchantresses, as well as some prostitutes and some argumentative old wives. Although the author never treats women badly, they do not have independent beings. The Enchantress herself has no personality at all and essentially just lives to appease men, turning everyone into puppets of her will. She is described as a "woman who had forged her own life, beyond convention, by the force of her own will alone, a woman like a king" by Akbar. However, in reality, all she does is sell herself to the highest bidder, and he allows her to deceive people into believing she is powerful.

In a wonderful scene, Akbar's mother and wife arrive to help his fictitious wife Jodha free him from the Enchantress's spell, and in doing so, they reconcile with Jodha in a hilarious display of feminine solidarity. However, the Enchantress manifests, Jodha disappears, and the women are ultimately defeated by the man's obsession. In fact, the males in the novel are just as hormonally obsessed as teenagers. All of their bravery, all of their conflict over cities and empires, is really motivated by a simple desire for a bed with a young lady in it. Machiavelli transforms into a disgruntled middle-aged lecher, and his middle-aged wife "waddles" and "quacks" as he obviously looks down upon her. However, after a few pages, all of a sudden, we find ourselves inside her mind; we experience her rage at his betrayal, her wounded pride in being a woman, her unwavering pride in his "dark skeptical genius," and her perplexity at his incapacity to grasp how he diminishes himself by scorning what he possesses that is valuable and respectable. I briefly caught a peek at a completely different novel by a virtually different author. Then it was back to men's potent dreams and the glittering play of fancy.

The swashbuckling Argalia's exploits, which tie the Florentine and the Indian stories together, are full of Rushdie's extravagance and charm (albeit they occasionally slide into facetiousness, as in the case of the four enormous albino Swiss mercenaries with the names Otho, Botho, Clotho, and D' Artagnan). However, Argalia's adventures are less fascinating than Machiavelli's disasters or the thoughts of Emperor Akbar.

The imperial, clever, and likable Akbar played by Rushdie is a wonderful representative of his author. Akbar attempted to unify "all races, tribes, clans, faiths, and nations" in India; it was a tremendous dream, but one that was bound to die along with him. What forces were at work in the late 15th century, when Europe started to break free from the church's hold on ideas, to awaken that emperor's syncretic vision? The emperor speculated that it may have been simpler to define goodness if there had never been a God. It's possible that goodness is found in "the slow, clumsy, error-strewn working out of an individual or collective path" rather than in self-abnegation before an Almighty. He sees harmony as the outcome of conflict rather than its opponent since he is the leader of an absolutist, theocratic society: "Difference, disobedience, disagreement, irreverence, iconoclasm, impudence, even insolence might be the wellsprings of the good."

Akbar serves as the book's moral heart, centre of gravity, and greatest link to the concerns that have preoccupied Rushdie throughout his writing career and personal life. Everything boils down to the issue of duty. The reason Akbar rejects the idea of God is because "his existence deprived humans of the right to form ethical structures on their own." Rarely has the odd idea that we lack morality without religion been rejected with such subdued good humor. Rushdie leaves the fundamentalists who dread him to their rants.

Akbar grimly predicts his failure after being expelled from his magical city when its lake dries up: "All he had labored for, his philosophy and manner of being, would evaporate like water. In contrast to what he had anticipated, the future would instead be "a dry hostile antagonistic place" where people would hate and kill each other "in the great quarrel he had sought to end forever, the quarrel over God - the struggle that our zealots today so fervently seek.

The novel also has another theme: Religion could be rethought, re-examined, remade, and perhaps even discarded; magic was impervious to such assaults. Both Akbar and the Florentines lived passionately in the realm of magic in their own magnificent cities, just as they did in the world of material things. The main distinction between them and us is this. We have divided reality into two independent kingdoms, each with its own set of laws.

Rushdie's narrative, like any serious fantasy, blurs this line by forcing us realists to spend the duration of our reading in the domain of imagination, which is guided by but not restricted to factual observation. We are all emperors or enchantresses in this kingdom of stories, where we make up the laws as we go along. It is the child's world, the ancestral, prescientific universe. Our awareness of the other kingdom we live, daily reality, where the rules of physics cannot be defied and whose administration was outlined by Niccol Machiavelli, gives modern literary fantasy a contradictory intensity, often a tragic depth.

Some claim with pride that science has pushed out the unfathomable, while others lament the loss of magic and call for its "re-enchantment" in the world. However, it is certain that Charles Darwin lived in a world that was as fantastic, as rich in discoveries, as amazing, and as full of profound riddles. Scientists do not disenchant the world; rather, those who believe that it is a god-operated machine with no intrinsic value do. Despite their apparent intellectual incompatibilities, science, and literary fantasy both describe the world. The imagination is active in both modes, searching for meaning. It gains the acceptance of the mind through meticulous attention to detail and coherent reasoning, whether one is describing a beetle or an enchantress. Because it demands believing, religion, which both prescribes and forbids, must avoid their shared experience of imagination. Because of this, the sincere believer must denounce Darwin and Rushdie as "disobedient, irreverent, iconoclastic" rebels against the revealed truth.

The success of Rushdie's lavish, impulsive blending of history with tale may be explained by the necessary compatibility of the realistic and the fantastic imagination. But in the end, it is unquestionably the master artist's touch that gives this book its glitz and strength, comedy and shock, verve, and splendor, defying any explanation. It is a great story chock full of magic and reality. Rushdie

reinvents history in *The Enchantress of Florence* by fusing it with myth, memory, tradition, and other cultural artifacts.

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