

Rushdie's Un-Indian Music: The Ground Beneath Her Feet

by Christopher Rollason, M.A., Ph.D.
rollason@9online.fr

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All quotations from texts not originally published in English are in my own translations; page references for translated passages are to the originals.

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"This book¹ is not a novel about rock'n'roll, but an attempt to respond to the evolution of world culture in the last half-century."
(Salman Rushdie to Le Monde, 1999²)

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PROLOGUE: RUSHDIE - "CAUSE CELEBRE" OR WRITER?

In 1968, from the symbolically radical location of the French capital's rive gauche, no less a critic than Roland Barthes proclaimed the death of the author.³ Following on from the "death of God" announced by Nietzsche close on a century before, the iconoclastic Gallic philosopher laid the "Author-God" to rest,⁴ arguing that the literary text henceforth belonged not to its writer but to its readers, who now had the right to interpret its words multiply and at will: "the birth of the reader comes at the price of the death of the Author".⁵ This gesture ushered in an era of text-centred, anti-intentionist, anti-biographical criticism, the underlying tenet being that the reader's dynamic appropriation and rehandling of the text necessitated no reference whatever to the details of the writer's life.

Twenty-one years later, in Tehran on 14 February 1989, the death of the author, or, at least, of one individual author, was decreed in a rather less symbolic fashion, in the fatwa (religious edict having legal force under Islamic law) signed by Ayatollah Khomeini: "I inform all zealous Muslims of the world that the author of the book entitled The Satanic Verses - which has been compiled, printed, and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet and the Qur'an - and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its contents, are

¹ Salman Rushdie, The Ground Beneath Her Feet (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), ISBN 0-224-04419-2 (hereinafter referred to as GF).

² Rushdie, interview with Bruno Lesprit ("Salman Rushdie, enfant du rock"), Le Monde 1 October 1999 (review section): VI.

³ Roland Barthes, "La mort de l'auteur" [1968], Le bruissement de la langue: Essais critiques IV (Paris: Seuil [Collection Points], 1984).

⁴ Barthes 67.

⁵ *ibid.* 69.

sentenced to death".⁶ Khomeini thus unwittingly countered Barthes' anarchic radicalism with a stern return to tradition. The English translation of his fatwa seems to imply that a text - in this case, Rushdie's novel - has only one meaning ("opposition to Islam") and is "compiled" by its author with a single intention that is totally consonant with that one meaning; and that the author bears full responsibility for his or her text - a responsibility that may light an unfortunate author all the way to dusty death. The Shi'ite cleric's edict unleashed a battle of the books - indeed, a war that involved not two but three texts - The Satanic Verses, the Koran, and his own fatwa. Few observers noticed a certain curious detail - the incontrovertible circumstance that the Ayatollah could not, when he made his ruling, possibly have read The Satanic Verses, a book which then existed only in English, a language in which he could not have handled a complex and allusive postmodernist novel. Similarly, only a minority of the neo-Zhdanovite,⁷ pro-censorship lobby in Britain who subsequently demanded the banning of Rushdie's novel had actually read it - though that small matter did not stop them calling for its suppression in the name of political correctness, in an epidemic of moral absolutism worthy of their Puritan forbears. It appeared that Roland Barthes' notion of an infinitely fecund text, permanently reinterpreted by its readers, was in serious danger of succumbing to a rigid, theocratic notion of a text which, imbued with a single, self-evident, and authorially signified "meaning", manifests itself in identical fashion to all, readers and non-readers alike.

Another decade passed, and while Khomeini was now dead, Salman Rushdie was still alive. Political correctness had continued its advances in the West, but no OECD country, with the predictable exception of Turkey, had banned The Satanic Verses - not even Britain, despite the best efforts of certain politicians on the left.⁸ In 1999, Rushdie published The Ground Beneath Her Feet, a novel in which he quite visibly revisited the theme of the death of the author - this time, by drinking from the wellsprings of Western culture, from the Greco-Roman tradition and the myth of Orpheus, the archetypal poet-musician. For that tale ends with the spilling of a poet's blood: Orpheus is killed by a vengeful band of would-be followers. Such is the mythical destiny around which Rushdie consciously wove his work of fiction, ten years on from the fatwa.

1 - THE GROUND BENEATH HER FEET AND RUSHDIE'S EARLIER WORK

From this point on, I shall return to Barthes, as far as is still possible today, and endeavour to read and interpret The Ground Beneath Her Feet with only secondary or incidental reference to the fatwa or to Rushdie's personal life, although I shall take due account of certain of the author's opinions, as expressed in articles and interviews, as well as of his other literary works. As the French critic Guy Astic stressed in 1996, "the Indo-British writer is not an individual defined by a single work, nor is he just the face of a fatwa [...] we have to examine Salman Rushdie's work as a whole".⁹ I shall take it as axiomatic that a literary text is to be read primarily as text - as a piece of writing that exists in dialogue with

⁶ Ayatollah Khomeini (quoted), Nicholas J. Karolides, Margaret Bald and Dawn B. Sova, 100 Banned Books: Censorship Histories of World Literature (New York: Checkmark Books, 1999) 254. For a slightly different translation of the fatwa text, see Malise Ruthven, A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Rage of Islam (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990) 112.

⁷ For Zhdanov, see George Steiner, "Marxism and the Literary Critic", Language and Silence (1967; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

⁸ For the campaign against The Satanic Verses in Britain, see Ruthven 4; Karolides et al. 249-257; Nicolas Walter, Blasphemy Ancient & Modern (London: Rationalist Press Association, 1990) 82-87; Marc Porée and Alexis Massery, Salman Rushdie (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996) 129-136.

⁹ Guy Astic, "Rushdie, écrivain laïc?", La Règle du Jeu 18 (January 1996) 60.

other texts, as well as with the wider series of texts surrounding it that we know as history - a history that, obviously, does not exclude Khomeini's edict or the PC lobby's burn-it-and-ban-it campaign, but also ranges far deeper and wider in time and place, transcending all such narrow ideological concerns.

The Ground Beneath Her Feet (hereinafter referred to as GF) is based on what might be called a literary-musical conceit: the reader is asked to suspend disbelief and accept the notion that - to quote Rushdie himself, from an interview with the Madrid daily El País - "the world's two most famous rock stars are both Indian".¹⁰ Rushdie's two fictional stars are Ormus Cama, born into an old Bombayite Zoroastrian family in 1937, and Vina Apsara, born in the US in 1944 to an Indian father and a Greek-American mother, raised there till her parents die in 1956, and then sent "home" to India. She and Ormus, then aged nineteen, meet in a Bombay record shop. The two migrate in the 60s to London, where they form the group VTO (the reader never learns what those initials stand for) and achieve stellar success. Ormus writes the lyrics; both sing. The two megastars fall in and out of love, move to the US and go on notching up superplatinum sales worldwide through the 70s and most of the 80s, in VTO until the group breaks up and afterwards as solo artists. After Vina's death in 1989, in an earthquake in Mexico, Ormus carries on, despite increasing psychological instability, until one winter's morning when a crazed woman fan kills him in New York. The whole saga is narrated in the first person by another Bombayite, Rai Merchant, an internationally known photographer of secular Muslim origins who bears within himself a second, secret identity as Vina's occasional non-platonic confidant.

One of the distorting effects of the Satanic Verses controversy has been to cast Rushdie as a writer defined essentially in relation to Islam. This is, in reality, only partially the case if we consider his fictional work as a whole. Shame, certainly, is a novel about Pakistan, and the protagonists of Midnight's Children (hereinafter MC) and The Satanic Verses (hereinafter SV), and, indeed, the narrator of GF, are of Muslim origin, albeit secularised to a greater or lesser degree. However, it is far more illuminative to view Rushdie less as a product of Islam than as the chronicler in fiction of the Indian subcontinent in the twentieth century - and of that subcontinent's relations with the wider world.

Rushdie's fictional production up to and including GF¹¹ may be roughly classified into two modes, magic-realist and fantastic, with the former predominating. His first novel, Grimus (1975), set in the imaginary location of Calf Island, is cast in the fantastic mode throughout, and he revisits that dimension in the central part of Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990) and in the final section of The Moor's Last Sigh (1995; hereinafter "Moor"), whose nominal Spanish setting reads more like an arbitrary dream-world. For the rest, Rushdie's writing is magic-realist with the main emphasis on the realist component, located either wholly or mostly in the Indian subcontinent and with the explicit presence of real, if partially distorted historical events. This is the pattern established in MC (1981) and repeated in Shame (1983), SV (1988), and the first three-quarters of Moor. The subcontinent is narrated, not as a closed-in, autarkic universe, but in its dynamic interaction with the rest of the world - with the West and beyond - from the colonial period through Independence and Partition to the era of globalisation: MC, Shame and Moor all range in chronology from the Raj-era early twentieth century to the actual time of writing, a pattern which is repeated in GF. The action of MC takes in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and while not straying topographically outside the

¹⁰ Rushdie, interview with John Carlin ("El guardaespaldas de Rushdie"), El País Semanal 9 May 1999, <<http://www.elpais.es>>.

¹¹ For Rushdie's fictional production after that novel, see the Coda below.

subcontinent, introduces British and American colonials and expatriates; Shame focuses on Pakistan but includes episodes in Britain; Moor is set in its first three sections in India, again including turn-of-the-century colonials in its cast, before spiralling out at the end to an invented Spain. A somewhat different logic is followed in SV, which, based squarely in the contemporary world and centred on Indian characters, situates the bulk of its action in London, with forays to Bombay and, briefly, to Argentina, while also, crucially, featuring a series of dreams: some located in an Indian village, others - as, notoriously, even the book's non-readers know - set in a simulacrum of the Hejaz in the time of the Prophet; while the short stories collected in East, West (1994), read in order, take the reader from the subcontinent to an Asian émigrés' London. In all Rushdie's fictions other than Grimus and Haroun, invented characters coexist with historical figures; the latter appear either under their own names, or disguised and satirised but still clearly recognisable (the Gandhis in MC, the Bhuttos and Zia Ul-Haq in Shame, Bal Thackray in Moor). All in all, Rushdie's fictional production from MC up to Moor, taken as a whole, may be read as constituting an imaginative model of the Indian subcontinent within twentieth-century history, a latter-day Asian equivalent, albeit on a smaller scale, to what Honoré de Balzac did for nineteenth-century France in his monumental Comédie Humaine.

GF follows the pre-established pattern - up to a point, and with significant divergences. The two protagonists and the narrator are, as before, Indian, or at least half-Indian, while Rushdie pays obeisance to his own previous work by discreet use of the device (again harking back to Balzac) of recurring characters: the Englishman William Methwold, who plays a key part in GF, has walked in from MC, and Homi Catrack, also from that novel, and Aurora Zogoiby, from Moor, are resurrected for bit-parts. In terms of fictional chronology, GF begins, like its predecessors, in the Raj of the early twentieth century; in narrative sequence, however, it opens in 1989, in Guadalajara, Mexico, with the earthquake and Vina's dramatic disappearance, before shifting back, in reverse mode, to the characters' Indian past. The bulk of the novel does, however, approximately observe a linear chronology, with the notable circumstance, new in Rushdie, that halfway through the action moves definitively to the West - to Britain, then the US - with virtually no subsequent revisiting of the subcontinent (Vina, Beatles-like, spends a brief spell in an ashram;¹² a planned tour of India by Ormus falls victim to a government ban¹³). The East-West alternation model of SV is effectively ditched in GF, in favour of a sequential model: the reader watches East being replaced by West as the epicentre.

2 - THE MAP OF BOMBAY

This change in spatial priorities is admitted by Rushdie himself, with specific reference to Bombay, the city which has been so important to his writing in the past. Bombay, or as we now have officially to call it, Mumbai (the recent, ideologically-motivated change of name was actually predicted by Rushdie himself, in his quasi-historical account of the Hindu-particularist "Mumbai's Axis" movement in Moor) has played a part in his work which may be compared to that of Paris in Balzac. MC opens with the narrator, Saleem Sinai, declaring: "I was born in the city of Bombay [...] in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947";¹⁴ SV ends with Saladin Chamcha's return to the Maharashtran metropolis: "He stood at the window of his childhood and looked out at the Arabian Sea";¹⁵ the narrator of Moor,

¹² Rushdie, GF 404-407.

¹³ *ibid.* 555-557.

¹⁴ Rushdie, Midnight's Children (1981; London: Picador, 1982) 9.

¹⁵ Rushdie, The Satanic Verses (London: Viking, 1988) 546.

Moraes Zogoiby, laments the decline of his once-latitude-dominant home city into shallow sectarianism: "Bombay was central; had always been. [...] now barbarism was standing at our gates. O Bombay! Prima in Indis! Gateway to India! Star of the East with her face to the West!".¹⁶ Of course, other contemporary Indian or "Indo-Anglian" writers as well as Rushdie have centred their fictional imaginings around Bombay-Mumbai: notable examples include Anita Desai's Baumgartner's Bombay (1988), Vikram Chandra's Love and Longing in Bombay (1997), and, indeed, the best-selling Shobha Dé's Bollywood saga Starry Nights (1991). However, the city returns in Rushdie's pages with a special insistence, as the symbol of a specifically Indian version of multiplicity, tolerance and (in the subcontinental sense) cosmopolitanism; as Roshan G. Shahani put it in 1994, "Bombay's infinite variety, its paradoxes and contradictions [...] mirror and account for the heterogeneous presence and the polyphonous voices of the 'Bombay writers'"¹⁷ - among whom Shahani highlights Rushdie, for whom the city "had encapsulated this country's multicultural diversity and its secular ideology".¹⁸ In GF, we find Rushdie re-treading the city's streets - indeed, Rai Merchant's father turns out to be an amateur Bombayologist: "Bombay. Don't ask. I could pass any exam you care to set [...] My father liked digging into place names, so allow me to inform you, just off the top of my head, that Chinchpokli is 'tamarind hollow' and Cumballa Hill is named after the lotus flower and Bhendhi Bazaar is situated where once the ladies'-fingers grew".¹⁹ In the end, however, this evocation of Bombay comes over as a valediction, as the centre of gravity of Rushdie's world shifts (irrevocably?) to the US. Rushdie, indeed, has said as much, in an interview with Laura Miller in the on-line magazine Salon:²⁰ "I think I really have said what I had to say about that city, and I don't want to repeat myself [...] I think I've done it". Whether this apparent abandonment of his subcontinental roots for the glittering surfaces of globalisation makes for a real gain is an open question. Shahani states that "by writing about Bombay, writers like Rushdie have charted anew the cultural map of the world";²¹ it remains to be seen if those who cut loose from India can still keep their bearings, or read that global "cultural map" with their old acuity.

3 - RUSHDIE'S ROCK'N'ROLL UNIVERSE

Throughout GF, Rushdie deploys his customary artillery of literary, historical and intellectual references, from Karl Marx and Charles Baudelaire through to William Faulkner and Jorge Luis Borges, but, at the same time, gives centre stage to a form of popular or mass culture, namely rock music. His reasons for choosing this theme are no doubt multiple. One is that as a long-standing rock'n'roll fan (from the moment when, as a Bombay adolescent, he bought a much-prized copy of Elvis Presley's 45 rpm record "Heartbreak Hotel"²²), he has an expert's knowledge of the field. Another may be, as Carla Power hypothesised in Newsweek, the circumstance that Rushdie can himself be considered "a household name [...] literature's first global celebrity - as famous as a pop star".²³ In addition, there are partial precedents in his earlier work. Specifically subcontinental popular-cultural forms are present in MC, where

¹⁶ Rushdie, The Moor's Last Sigh (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995) 372.

¹⁷ Roshan G. Shahani, "Polyphonous Voices in the City: Bombay's Indian-English Fiction", Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner, eds., Bombay: Mosaic of Modern Culture (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1995) 104-105.

¹⁸ Shahani 110.

¹⁹ Rushdie, GF 60-61.

²⁰ Rushdie, interview with Laura Miller ("A touch of vulgarity"), Salon 16 April 1999.

<<http://www.salonmag.com/books/int/1999/04/16/rushdie/index.html>>.

²¹ Shahani 112.

²² See Rushdie, Le Monde interview; Rushdie, interview with Antoine de Gaudemar ("Star Traque"), Libération 30 September 1999: 48.

²³ Carla Power, "Rock'n'Roll Rushdie", rev. of GF, Newsweek (international edition) 19 April 1999: 71.

Saleem's sister, the "Brass Monkey", becomes, as Jamila Singer, a highly-regarded popular vocalist in post-independence Pakistan, and another of Saleem's relatives works in the Bollywood film world; while in SV, Gibreel Farishta is one of India's greatest celluloid heartthrobs, and, indeed, the all-too-controversial dreams that haunt him when he undergoes psychiatric treatment have the unfortunate star imagining himself playing the lead role in a filmic reinterpretation of the founding years of Islam.

If we step outside the subcontinental mass-cultural orbit and enter that of the West, we discover a fair number of rock-music allusions in Rushdie's writing prior to *GF*. In *Grimus*, one of the main characters is called Bird Dog, after an Everly Brothers hit from 1958: "When I was your age I went into the town, she said, and listened at a window outside an eating-place. There was a singing machine there. It sang about a creature called a bird-dog, clever, fiendish."²⁴ An article of 1990 on the novelist Thomas Pynchon (reprinted in the essay collection *Imaginary Homelands*) features the phrase "days of miracle and wonder", which comes from "The Boy in the Bubble", a song by Paul Simon from his *Graceland* album of 1986.²⁵ In "The Courter", the concluding story of *East, West* (1994), the narrator, an Indian adolescent growing up in London in the 60s, listens avidly to rock'n'roll on the radio, and, in a proleptically ironic detail, confesses: "London, W8 was Sam Cooke's country that summer. Another Saturday night [...] I was down with lonely Sam in the lower depths of the charts [...] How I wish I had someone to talk to,/I'm in an awful way."²⁶; it so happens that Cooke's hit, "Another Saturday Night", returned to the charts in the 70s, in a cover version by Cat Stevens - a Anglo-Greek singer who later abandoned international stardom, converted to the Muslim religion, changed his name to Yusuf Islam and ... became a particularly virulent defender of Khomeini's fatwa.

To mention Cat Stevens in this way is not purely anecdotal, for it is this kind of surprising connection that illuminates the globalised nature of culture today. Rushdie, as an émigré writer with a foot in both Eastern and Western worlds, is himself clearly both product and exponent of that globalisation; and that phenomenon affects, not only (and as is notorious) mass culture, but high culture too. If both high and mass culture now operate on a planetary scale, their inevitable interaction can only become more intricate and more complex. In this context, a prominent aspect of Rushdie's writing in *GF* is his endeavour, on the level of the text, to confer a degree of solidity and credibility on that rock music world which some olympian intellectuals would dismiss as, always and necessarily, innately trivial and insubstantial. Rushdie explained his position to *Le Monde* on 1 October 1999: "Most pop music is purely intended to make money and then disappear. [...] But if you take the other end of pop music, the best of the last forty years [...] you have to take it seriously";²⁷ similarly, in the *Salon* interview he stated: "I wanted to take this [rock'n'roll] world and treat it seriously as a vehicle to examine our life and times".²⁸ With this in view, he adopts two main strategies: the dignification of his subject through the Orpheus myth; and the incorporation of a rock'n'roll sensibility into the texture of his writing, via wholesale quotation from song lyrics.

4 - FROM SONG TEXT TO NOVEL TEXT

²⁴ Rushdie, *Grimus* (1975; London: Paladin, 1989) 18-19.

²⁵ Rushdie, "Thomas Pynchon" (1990), *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (1991; London: Granta, 1992) 352. A second Paul Simon reference occurs in the same essay (353): "Paul Simon's girl in New York City who calls herself the Human Trampoline, bouncing into Graceland" (this is a paraphrase of lines from "Graceland", the title song of Simon's 1986 album of the same name).

²⁶ Rushdie, "The Courter", *East, West* (1994; London: Vintage, 1995) 196-197.

²⁷ Rushdie, *Le Monde* interview: VI.

²⁸ Rushdie, *Salon* interview.

To take the second-named strategy first, a close reading of Rushdie's text reveals a remarkable density of song references. Song titles, album titles, individual lines and phrases from songs: all abound in this book's pages. Some are quoted *au pied de la lettre*, others are reshaped; some are attributed to their historical authors, some are deliberately misattributed, others still are left unflagged. To these real or modified-real song texts should be added the imaginary lyrics of Ormus Cama's songs, extracts from which are "quoted" at length. The heterogeneous nature of these quotations and allusions fits in with Rushdie's general method in GF: throughout, literary texts and authors, historical events, etc, are alluded to with a magpie eclecticism that by no means always recognises the dictatorship of fact. In Rushdie's reordered universe, John and Robert Kennedy are killed together by the same Palestinian gunman;²⁹ Britain's Labour government sends troops out to Vietnam;³⁰ and The Garden of Forking Paths is not an imaginary novel existing only in Borges' story of that name, but a real book, Vina's "favourite nineteenth-century novel".³¹ The same rewriting of history applies to the novel's rock'n'roll world. The song "Feelin' Groovy" is attributed not to the real Paul Simon and Art (Arthur) Garfunkel, but, allusively and absurdly, to an invented duo uniting the real (but female) Carly Simon and the non-existent Guinevere Garfunkel.³² Again, we are told that in a series of "solidarity concerts" held circa 1974 to protest Ormus' threatened deportation from the US, "Dylan, Lennon, [Janis] Joplin, Joni [Mitchell], Country Joe and the Fish turn up to sing for Ormus",³³ although, even had Ormus Cama really existed, one of those artists, Ms Joplin, could hardly have turned up, as she had died of an overdose in 1970.

The song micro-texts that are embedded in Rushdie's macro-text, wherever they stand on the real-to-imaginary spectrum, are clearly offered as an integral part of this novel's global textual project - and, as such, call for detailed elucidation. Their presence is already announced in the book's chapter-headings: chapter 10, "Season of the Witch", takes its title from a 60s song by Donovan, and the title of chapter 13, "Transformer", is also the name of a Lou Reed album from 1972. The rock-generation singer-songwriters whose words or titles are quoted, straight or askew, across Rushdie's text include Paul Simon, Joni Mitchell, Carole King, Randy Newman, Tom Waits and, notably, Bob Dylan (in view of the central issues it raises, I shall consider Rushdie's use of Dylan in a separate section³⁴). To cite examples, the phrase "the hissing of summer lawns"³⁵ is the title of a 1975 album (and song) by Joni Mitchell, while "I feel the earth move under my feet"³⁶ quotes the title and first line of a 1972 song by Carole King. At one moment, Vina and Ormus (accurately) quote, paraphrase and dissect Randy Newman's song "Sail Away", also from 1972.³⁷ At another, Vina puts on a disc: "This is the CD she plays: Raindogs, the honky-tonk blues as reinvented and growled out by Lee Baby Simms. She starts singing along with Simms, long and slow, and the hair rises on my neck. Will I see you again/on a downtown train."³⁸ Here, rock fact and fiction intertwine: the lines Vina sings are slightly misquoted from "Downtown Train", a song which

²⁹ Rushdie, GF 225.

³⁰ *ibid.* 266.

³¹ *ibid.* 351.

³² *ibid.* 267.

³³ *ibid.* 402.

³⁴ see section 7 below.

³⁵ Rushdie, GF 492.

³⁶ *ibid.* 349.

³⁷ *ibid.* 330-331.

³⁸ *ibid.* 459.

indeed appears on an album called Rain Dogs (spelt thus), released in 1985 not by "Lee Baby Simms", but by Tom Waits³⁹.

On occasion, Rushdie steps back in time to raid older songwriting traditions. Vina recalls the blues singer Ma Rainey ("I go back a century to ugly Ma Rainey preaching Trust No Man"⁴⁰) - but gets her chronology wrong, since the historical Rainey flourished in the 1920s; and when Ormus declares: "Like a mole in the ground I will root this mountain down", his words are virtually a direct quotation from the traditional song "I Wish I Was A Mole in the Ground", recorded in 1928 by an obscure Appalachian folk-blues singer, Bascom Lamar Lunsford.⁴¹ The text even once quotes from the repertoire of French-language *chanson*, with a pun ("she was predictably called the pornographer of the phonograph"⁴²) which must have come from Georges Brassens' song of 1958 "Le Pornographe" ("J'suis l'pornographe/Du phonographe/Le polisson/De la chanson" - "I am the pornographer of the phonograph, the rascal of song"). Despite these instances, however, the great majority of Rushdie's song quotations and references are to Anglo-American lyrics of the 60s and 70s.

5 - ORPHEUS REDUX

Nonetheless, if Rushdie's musical vision is largely bound to a particular time, place and genre, he still wishes to claim universality for it: and here his reanimation of the Orpheus myth comes into action. The reader may not object to being reminded of the story, in the refined form which it eventually assumed in the ancient world and which has provided the "Orpheus template" for later generations in the West. Orpheus is the archetypal poet and musician of the Greco-Roman world, begotten by the god Apollo, himself famed for his prowess on the lyre, on Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry. Orpheus' haunting voice and plangent lyre had the power to subjugate nature: as Shakespeare put it centuries later, he "made trees/And the mountains that did freeze/Bow themselves when he did sing".⁴³ Soon after the poet's marriage to Eurydice, his young bride died from a snake-bite as she was fleeing the unwanted advances of Aristaeus, a bee-keeper. The inconsolable Orpheus went down into Hell to get her back, and charmed the powers of the underworld into accepting his outrageous demand, subject to one condition: he must walk out of Hell ahead of her, and must not look back till both of them were safely within the sunlight. He looked back at the very last minute, and lost her forever. Inconsolably mourning his twice-lost bride, he vowed never to touch a woman again. This incurred the wrath of the Maenads, the crazed women devotees of the god Dionysus, and one day, feeling provoked beyond endurance, a band of them seized on the recalcitrant poet and tore him to pieces. They cast his limbs and head into the river; and yet the severed head went on singing. The Muses gathered his remains and buried him; the gods placed his lyre in the stars as a constellation. The martyred poet lived on posthumously into recorded history, as the inspirer of a devotional cult, whose initiates were called the Orphics; at some point in the sixth to fourth centuries BC, there emerged from their circles the "Orphic hymns", a set of panegyrics to the gods which remain extant today.

³⁹ "Lee Baby Simms" is in fact the name of a late-night disc-jockey played by Tom Waits in Jim Jarmusch's 1986 film Down By Law (my thanks to Mark Neumann for this clarification).

⁴⁰ Rushdie, GF 336.

⁴¹ *ibid.* 375.

⁴² *ibid.* 385.

⁴³ Shakespeare, Henry VIII, III-I, 3.

Only two full versions of this legend have come down to us from the ancient world, both by Roman poets - Virgil in the Georgics (29 BC; Book Four),⁴⁴ and, later, Ovid in the Metamorphoses (8 AD; Books Ten and Eleven).⁴⁵ There is a very clear latter-day summary by the American Thomas Bulfinch, in The Age of Fable⁴⁶ (1855), and a more speculative modern synthesis, with analytic commentary, by Robert Graves in The Greek Myths⁴⁷ (1955). I shall use Virgil's version - the one essentially followed by Rushdie - as my reference point. Although Orpheus is most certainly a figure of Greek origin, associated with Thrace, no complete account of his story by an ancient Greek writer has survived; passing references appear in, for instance, Euripides' Alcestis (438 BC)⁴⁸ and Plato's Symposium (c. 370 BC).⁴⁹ Euripides speaks of "the Thracian inscriptions/Written down from the voice of Orpheus";⁵⁰ a handful of these have survived, as have eighty-seven Orphic hymns. This material, all written in Greek, has recently been collected in a French translation, carefully edited by Jacques Lacarrière; only one of the hymns, however, actually mentions the legendary poet's name (as a putative "signature" in the last line⁵¹), and none tells his story. Graves, while underlining Orpheus' status for the ancients as "the most famous poet and musician who ever lived", notes that "Eurydice's death by snake-bite and Orpheus's subsequent failure to bring her back into the sunlight figure only in late myth".⁵² This view is confirmed by Lacarrière, who calls the Eurydice episode as it stands in the Georgics (with Aristaeus and the serpent) a "fable invented by Virgil", adding that "the name of Eurydice, as Orpheus' wife, appears only very late in ancient literature" and noting that "Plato and Euripides knew the myth of Orpheus' descent into hell in search of his wife, but did not name her".⁵³ Virgil's canonic version of the story seems even to be an afterthought - a bypath from the main highway of the Georgics (essentially a poetic treatise on agriculture), an interpolation into a digression which may have been dictated less by literary choices than by political events in the Rome of Augustus.⁵⁴

The Orpheus-Eurydice story, with its long history of reverberation across Western culture, seems then, ironically, to have appeared in its now-familiar form almost by chance.

⁴⁴ Virgil, Georgics [29 BC], trans. into English prose by H. P. Fairclough, Virgil, Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid 1-6 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P. [Loeb Classical Library], 1916; rev. ed. 1999); Géorgiques, trans. into French verse by Jacques Delille [1769], Virgil, Bucoliques. Géorgiques, ed. Florence Dupont (bilingual French/Latin edition) (Paris: Gallimard [Folio], 1997).

⁴⁵ Ovid, Metamorphoses [8 AD], trans. into English prose by Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955) 225-227, 246-248.

⁴⁶ Thomas Bulfinch, The Age of Fable [1855] (London: Dent [Everyman's Library], 1912; repr. 1948) 190-199.

⁴⁷ Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (1955; rev. ed., 2 vols., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), vol. 1, 111-115; see also Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds., The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization (Oxford: OUP, 1998) 504-505.

⁴⁸ Euripides, Alcestis [438 BC], trans. Philip Vellacott, Alcestis/Hippolytus/Iphigenia in Tauris (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953; new ed. 1974), lines 357-362.

⁴⁹ Plato, The Symposium [c. 370 BC], trans. as The Banquet of Plato by Percy Bysshe Shelley [1818], Shelley, Selected Poetry, Prose and Letters (London: Nonesuch Press, 1951) 821-880 (for Orpheus, see 831).

⁵⁰ Euripides, lines 968-969.

⁵¹ Jacques Lacarrière, ed. and trans., Orphée: Hymnes. Discours sacrés (bilingual French/Greek edition) (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1995). Hymn 59 in this volume ("Aux Moires" / "To the Fates") concludes with the line: "Thus ends this ode to the Fates, composed by Orpheus".

⁵² Graves 111, 115.

⁵³ Lacarrière, introduction, 17, 18.

⁵⁴ According to Florence Dupont in her 1997 preface, the second half of the fourth book of the Georgics originally consisted of a panegyric to the general Caius Cornelius Gallus. However, between Virgil's first and second editions, Gallus had committed suicide after falling out of favour with Augustus, and therefore, says Dupont, "Virgil did not hesitate to replace Gallus by Orpheus" (19). This version of the poem's history is, however, disputed by other modern scholars.

Lacarrière does, however, stress Orpheus' key importance to the ancients as the archetype of the artist as initiate, a human in intimate contact with the forces of death and darkness:

What assured Orpheus his glory and eternity in Greece (and later in the West) was [...] the power he was believed to have of exorcising death by his songs, the power that allowed him to descend alive into hell and then return. Having been able to confront and conquer the darkness, he came to symbolise the initiate, the master of the beyond, the messenger of immortality [...] the poems, the music, the message of Orpheus [had the role of] awakening humans, revealing their true selves by opening up before them the path to immortality.⁵⁵

Across Rushdie's text, references to the Orpheus myth come thick and fast, starting with the novel's very title (which suggests the ground trembling beneath Eurydice's feet as she descends into hell) and the holographic lyre on the front dust-jacket of the British edition. Rushdie appears to see his musician protagonists as manifestations of the Orphic principle of the indestructibility of music; in the *El País* interview, he declares: "the myth of Orpheus tells us that you can kill the singer, but not the song".⁵⁶ The Ormus-Vina saga is preceded by an epigraph from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1923) - "Once and for all/it's Orpheus when there's singing";⁵⁷ Virgil's "extraordinary" version of the myth is summarised;⁵⁸ Plato's commentary, too, is paraphrased, with Orpheus seen by Rai Merchant as "the singer with the lyre or, let's say, guitarist - the trickster who uses his music and wiles to cross boundaries";⁵⁹ on stage, after Vina's death, Ormus impersonates Orpheus as part of his act;⁶⁰ even his recording studio in New York is baptised "the Orpheum".⁶¹

Unfortunately, it may be seriously doubted whether very much is achieved by these and the numerous other textual references to the Virgilian myth. The analogy between the Ormus-Vina and Orpheus-Eurydice pairs proves, on closer inspection, to be at best rather forced, and at worst downright vague. Ormus is, certainly, a celebrated musician like Orpheus, but Vina too is a musician - a role which Eurydice is not known to have filled. Vina's earthquake death, however spectacular, scarcely resembles Eurydice's: on her last night in Mexico, she dreams, it is true, of a serpent, but it is the god Quetzalcoatl, "the plumed serpent",⁶² and Raúl Páramo, the ephemeral partner with whom she spends that night, is no Aristaeus-like unwanted admirer, as the relationship, if superficial, is clearly consensual ("she had surrendered herself to this nobody ... had selected him more or less at random from the backstage throng"⁶³), and her intimacy with Ormus is by then over. Ormus, does, for a long time after Vina's decease, do his utmost to deny it, but his refusal to accept reality comes over as a near-pathological delusion, not a hero's endeavour to reverse nature's law ("they could see how hard he was trying to get there, maybe some world through a gash in the air, some variant dimension where Vina was still alive"⁶⁴). His denial of death takes on, with this notion

⁵⁵ Dupont 7.

⁵⁶ Rushdie, *El País* interview.

⁵⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Sonette an Orpheus* (1923); trans. by Charles Dobzynski as *Sonnets à Orphée* (bilingual French/German edition) (Paris: Éditions Messidor, 1989). The passage quoted in Rushdie's epigraph is from Sonnet V, in a translation by M. D. Herter Norton.

⁵⁸ Rushdie, GF 21-22.

⁵⁹ *ibid.* 498.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* 561.

⁶¹ *ibid.* 413 and *passim*.

⁶² *ibid.* 3.

⁶³ *ibid.* 4.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* 560.

of a "variant dimension", a science-fictional aspect which, strangely, has Rushdie returning to the somewhat dubious experimental mode of Grimus ("The pain is caused by one's first experience of the Outer Dimensions. Suddenly universe dissolves, and for a fraction of time you are simply a small bundle of energy adrift in a sea of unimaginably vast forces"⁶⁵). The reader will, however, search in vain for an episode that might approximate to Orpheus' descent into hell and his attempt to undo his consort's death; Ormus heals his wounds with generalised denials, searching for substitute Vinas, and bringing fake Vinas on stage. Finally, the Indian star meets his end, not from a group of frustrated would-be admirers, but from a single demented fan, "a tall dark-skinned woman with red hair gathered above her head like a fountain"⁶⁶: this could perhaps be a solitary Maenad, but the violent death and the assassin's gender still provide only a sketchy and incomplete parallel with the fate of the Thracian bard.

All in all, if Ormus does in any substantive sense resemble Orpheus, it can only be insofar as the text presents him as the artist-initiate, nourishing his creativity at the fount of dark, mysterious forces - a daemonic element which comes to the fore in the paranormal communication which the patient reader is asked to believe Ormus maintains with his dead twin Gayomart, the alleged ghostly inspirer of some of the most celebrated Anglo-American songs of the 60s. This "Gayomart conceit" (as I shall call it), which will be looked at in detail below, will itself prove to be far from unproblematic; the alert reader has no choice but to ask whether Rushdie's vaunted "rewriting" of the Orpheus myth is in the end little more than a forced, arbitrary and far-fetched set of doubtful part-analogies.

6 - ROCK MUSIC MODELS

If the Ormus-Vina musical couple ostensibly derive part of their energy from the Orpheus-Eurydice dyad, the story does not end there: other analogies, far more recent, also populate the narrative. Those addicted to the roman à clef school of criticism have, predictably, had a field day trying to trainspot which Anglophone rock stars Ormus and Vina might be modelled on. In so dense and allusive a text, both can only be composite figures, not fictionalisations of singer X or Y; nonetheless, a brief consideration of possible models does have its interest, as it may help understanding of the precise nature of the cultural hybridation that Rushdie appears to be propounding in this novel.

For a start, neither is modelled on an Indian singer: I shall return to this point below, in the discussion of "world music", but it may be stressed here that only one rock artist of (ultimately) South Asian origin has ever achieved international stardom, and that was the late Freddie Mercury, the lead singer of Queen, who is mentioned in the novel⁶⁷ but whose music Rushdie has explicitly said he detests.⁶⁸ Mercury was, in fact, born Farrokh Bulsara, in Zanzibar in 1946, to parents who were British subjects but had their roots in Bombay's Zoroastrian community, and spent most of his childhood in Bombay before moving to Britain in 1963: this circumstance may, despite Rushdie's views on Queen's music, have provided a hint for the Ormus idea. Reviewers have tended to see Ormus as a hybrid of Presley (a raw talent manipulated by the rock business), Lennon (murdered by a psychopath) and Dylan (poet laureate of modern music).⁶⁹ The Presley factor is certainly of interest, as Ormus' otherworldly, dead-at-birth twin Gayomart uncannily recalls Elvis' own twin brother whom he

⁶⁵ Rushdie, Grimus 244.

⁶⁶ Rushdie, GF 569.

⁶⁷ *ibid.* 517.

⁶⁸ Rushdie, interview with Philippe Manoeuvre ("Mes disques à moi"), Rock & Folk, September 1999: 20.

⁶⁹ For instance, John Carlin, in the El País interview, sees Ormus "as a composite of Elvis, Dylan and Lennon".

never knew, Jesse Garon Presley who died stillborn (and Elvis himself appears in the novel, metamorphosed into "Jesse Garon Parker"); Lennon, like Ormus, was at one point threatened with expulsion from the US as a subversive element; but the most important of all is the Dylan connection, which I shall examine in detail in the next section.

The case of Vina is actually more problematic: the genius and originality of Presley, Lennon and Dylan is beyond doubt, but Rushdie's fictional diva seems only to have been compared by the reviewers to certain women artists of undoubted commercial projection but zero musical value, whose names are not even worth mentioning. There is repeated stress across the text on the extraordinary quality of Vina's voice ("she was a great river, which could bear us all away"⁷⁰), and it may seem best to conclude that she stands for a female creative principle which has never quite manifested itself in rock music in the shape of a truly talented woman singer as world-famous as Lennon or Presley. Possible models do exist, in the shape of US women singers who have had such a voice: two candidates might be the late Laura Nyro, of Italian-American origin, and the Mexican-American Linda Ronstadt - both remarkably gifted vocalists in full control of their material, and both hyphenated Americans like Vina, but neither of whose trajectories especially resembles hers. Rushdie himself, in the Salon interview,⁷¹ half-suggests Grace Slick, the full-throated lead singer of the 60s group Jefferson Airplane, but again the analogy is not close. A more intriguing possibility surfaces at the beginning of the novel, when, just before the fatal earthquake, the reader learns for the first time of "that celestial voice of hers, that multiple-octave, Yma Sumac stairway to heaven of an instrument".⁷² Yma Sumac was a Peruvian singer who claimed to be a lineally-descended Inca princess and achieved major US and international success in the 50s; as a curious intertextual aside, it may be noted that one of her songs bore the title "Earthquake",⁷³ while one critic of the time wrote of her four-octave voice: "There is no voice like it in the world today [...] It soars into the acoustic stratosphere, or it plumbs sub-contralto depths of pitch with equal ease."⁷⁴ This connection, if developed, could have helped make Vina-the-voice something less of an all-American phenomenon, but, regrettably, Rushdie's text does not - as will be shown below - develop this "world music" dimension to its full potential. For the most part, his Ormus and Vina are stuck firmly within the Anglo-American rock-music mainstream.

7 - "IT AIN'T ME, BABE": RUSHDIE AND BOB DYLAN

One key influence on Rushdie's fictional musician Ormus Cama remains to be considered - and will lead the reader into areas other than rock'n'roll pure and simple. This is the question of the imaginary singer-songwriter's resemblances to Bob Dylan. The Jewish-American Dylan (born Robert Allen Zimmerman in 1941, into a family which had left Odessa - then in Russia, now in Ukraine - in 1875) is, beyond doubt, both the most celebrated and the most talented example of the modern singer-songwriter. Dylan's work eludes the category of songwriting pure and simple, to trespass boldly on the terrain of literature: his close associates have included not just fellow popular musicians but writers like Allen Ginsberg and Sam

⁷⁰ Rushdie, GF 124.

⁷¹ Rushdie, Salon interview.

⁷² Rushdie, GF 8. "Stairway to Heaven" is the title of a 70s song by the heavy-metal group Led Zeppelin.

⁷³ Yma Sumac, "Tumpa (Earthquake)" (written by Moisés Vivanco); issued on Voice of the Xtabay, 1950; CD reissue, The Right Stuff (Hollywood, CA), 0777-7-91217-2-4, 1996.

⁷⁴ Glenn Dillard Gunn, Washington Times-Herald 1950; quoted in liner notes, Voice of the Xtabay.

Shepard, his song texts have been subjected to sustained and detailed literary analysis,⁷⁵ and he is the only practitioner of the singer-songwriter genre to have been proposed (in successive years since 1997) for the Nobel Prize for Literature - a distinction which, indeed, he shares with Salman Rushdie.

In the Salon interview, Rushdie explains that he wanted, in his novel, to honour rock'n'roll by evoking its "best-case portrait: Bob Dylan", declaring:

Dylan is very important to me because I think along with Paul Simon he is probably the greatest songwriter [...] other than Lennon and McCartney [...] of the last many decades. I remember first hearing early Dylan when I was still at boarding school in England and being astonished. I'd never heard anyone write like that in a song, this fantastically impressionistic but also savage writing, which was completely complemented by his phrasing and his voice.⁷⁶

Dylan is certainly one of the models behind Ormus: in the Le Monde interview, to his interlocutor's assertion that "the character of Ormus borrows a lot from Dylan", Rushdie replies: "If you want to invent a rock God, there are only a limited number of models!".⁷⁷ Several references to Dylan appear in Rushdie's work prior to GF, and the songwriter's influence on the novelist has been pointed out in a critical study, the French-language volume Salman Rushdie (1996) by Marc Porée and Alexis Massery.⁷⁸ In The Jaguar Smile, Rushdie's documentary record of his visit to Nicaragua in 1986, he tells how an acquaintance informs him he has visited Mobile, Alabama - upon which, confesses Rushdie, "Dylan started to sing 'Stuck inside of Mobile' in my head" (the reference is to "Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again", a song from Dylan's 1966 album Blonde on Blonde).⁷⁹ Dylan reappears in the 1990 essay on Thomas Pynchon (mentioned earlier with reference to Paul Simon), which contains a direct quotation of the songwriter's celebrated line from 1963: "The answer is blowin' in the wind" (Dylan's song "Blowin' in the Wind", from The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan [1963] will be discussed in detail below).⁸⁰ Most intriguingly, in no less a novel than SV, Saladin Chamcha attends an event at the Brickhall Friends Meeting House, London, at which "a pretty young British Asian woman with a slightly-too-bulbous nose and a dirty, bluesy voice was launching into Bob Dylan's song, I Pity the Poor Immigrant" (the song is from his 1968 album John Wesley Harding).⁸¹

Given these antecedents, it is neither surprising nor fortuitous that the text of Rushdie's rock'n'roll novel should, on close examination, yield up a whole rich vein of Dylan references, citations and quotations (or near-quotations). Dylan's name appears in GF three times, all in the book's American section; in the most significant of these, Ormus' ever-more spectacular shows are described as precursors of "the whole multiple-image videorama which is now the staple fare of stadium rock but in those days gave people the kind of shock Bob Dylan did

⁷⁵ See, notably, the 918-page study by Michael Gray, Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan (London: Cassell, 2000). I have myself published at length on Dylan (from 1998 to the present), in essays collected at the Bob Dylan Critical Corner website <<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/6752/magazine.html>>.

⁷⁶ Rushdie, Salon interview.

⁷⁷ Rushdie, Le Monde interview; for Rushdie on Dylan, see also the Rock & Folk interview.

⁷⁸ See Porée and Massery, 14-15, 115.

⁷⁹ Rushdie, The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey (London: Picador, 1987) 125.

⁸⁰ Rushdie, "Thomas Pynchon", Imaginary Homelands 352.

⁸¹ Rushdie, SV 415. The reading of the song which Rushdie's text goes on to offer is rather dubious, but its discussion would take us outside the scope of this study; whether or not Dylan thought it an honour to have his name mentioned in SV is not recorded.

when he went electric" (this is a historically correct allusion to Dylan's electric performance at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, which famously offended the folk purists).⁸² The two other references are: "Lennon, Dylan, Phil Ramone, Richards, these old men were still the giants along with VTO themselves";⁸³ and the invented benefit concert incident, as already cited in section 4 above.⁸⁴

In addition, the text of GF reveals a good seventeen quotations from/allusions to Dylan's actual song texts, culled from twelve different songs. By no means all are openly sourced by Rushdie/Rai, but they give Dylan, all in all, a denser and more copious textual presence in this novel than any other songwriter can claim. The first, implicit allusion comes as early as the earthquake episode: "It [the town] had acquired the quality of brokenness, had become kin to the great family of the broken: broken plates, broken dolls, broken English, broken promises, broken hearts";⁸⁵ here, Rushdie is echoing Dylan's "Everything is Broken", from his 1989 album *Oh Mercy*: "Broken bottles, broken plates, broken switches, broken gates/Broken dishes, broken parts, streets are filled with broken hearts".

Further Dylan song-references are scattered all across the novel. The 1965 song "Mr Tambourine Man" (from the album *Bringing It All Back Home*) supplies a quintessentially "60s" reference when, in the heady incense-and-patchouli atmosphere of Antoinette Corinth's London boutique, we are told that the owner is, in true psychedelic fashion, "disappearing down the smoke rings of her mind" (Dylan's line actually reads "take me disappearing through the smoke rings of my mind").⁸⁶ "She Belongs To Me", from the same album, supplies the phrase "a walking antique", used to describe the ageing Englishman Methwold as he appears to greet Ormus and his mother at London airport; and, later, the same song's title turns up in the context of Rai's feelings for Vina: "*I am the King of her Underworld*, I could tell him. *She belongs to me.*"⁸⁷ (this song, with its lines: "She's got everything she needs, she's an artist, she don't look back/She can take the dark out of the night-time and paint the daytime black", would also illustrate the motif of Vina as creative/destructive Eurydicean artist, "avatar of the Queen of Darkness").⁸⁸ Another song from the same 1965 album makes its bow when Rai's narrative voice evokes (and slightly misquotes) a line from "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)": "You know the old song. Even the President of the United States sometimes must stand naked" (Dylan actually sings "sometimes must have to stand naked"),⁸⁹ Rai is speaking at the moment of narration, the 1990s - that is, at a time at which Dylan's line from the 60s, which listeners in the 70s had interpreted as prophetic of the Nixon affair, took on, once again, an unexpected new lease of life, not unrelated to certain embarrassments of a personal nature then surrounding the White House's Democratic incumbent.

Elsewhere, Rai posthumously names his ex-lover "Death-Vina, the sad-eyed lady of the broken lands",⁹⁰ in a clear reference to "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands", Dylan's epic song of 1966 (from *Blonde on Blonde*). He later declares that in the late 80s "the times were

⁸² Rushdie, GF 425.

⁸³ *ibid.* 435. The reference to Phil Ramone is a deliberate piece of anti-chronological mystification, as Ramone belongs to the punk generation which followed (and repudiated) the 60s generation symbolised by the other artists ("old men") cited in the passage.

⁸⁴ *ibid.* 402.

⁸⁵ *ibid.* 17.

⁸⁶ *ibid.* 286.

⁸⁷ *ibid.* 269, 500.

⁸⁸ *ibid.* 499.

⁸⁹ *ibid.* 239.

⁹⁰ *ibid.* 491.

not a-changing",⁹¹ ironically reversing the utopian sentiment of Dylan's celebrated song and album title of 1964, "The Times They Are A-Changin'". "With God On Our Side", the protest song from the same year and album in which Dylan attacks the moral self-righteousness of the American empire, is alluded to at the (fictional) moment of British troops being sent to die in Indochina: "But this is not the way soldiers used to sing, marching into battles bellowing hymns, kidding themselves they had god on their side"; and, soon after, appears in its own right in a pirate-radio DJ's patter, as he introduces his next item, the (real) cover version of Dylan's song by the group Manfred Mann: "and for all you night owls and our own dear Mum here's Manfred Mann to promise us that god is on our side".⁹² On perhaps a more basic level, Rai twice associates Vina with a "big brass bed": "Vina ... lying unclothed and overwhelming across my big brass bed"; "making a beeline for my big brass bed"⁹³: this article of furniture is borrowed from Dylan's song of 1969, "Lay Lady Lay" (from Nashville Skyline). Mourning Vina, too, Rushdie's narrator muses: "*For ever young, right? Well, young-looking, anyway*"⁹⁴ (the allusion is to "Forever Young", released on Dylan's 1974 album Planet Waves).

In Ormus Cama's world, too, Dylan's textual shadow hovers. "The Ground Beneath Her Feet", Ormus' song of homage to Vina which gives the novel its name, betrays, in lines 1 and 2 of its fourth stanza ("Go lightly down your darkened way/go lightly underground"), the influence of "It Ain't Me, Babe", from Dylan's 1964 album Another Side of Bob Dylan ("Go lightly from the ledge, babe/Go lightly on the ground").⁹⁵ Meanwhile, the most significant of all the book's Dylan allusions - if not the most conceptually successful - must be those to "Blowin' in the Wind", the song already mentioned above (with reference to Rushdie's Pynchon essay) which is doubtless the Dylan composition best known to the general public. This song's title crops up three times in Rushdie's text,⁹⁶ but the most venturesome instance is in the bizarre "Gayomart episode". This, as already noted, is built around the notion that, in and around 1960, a whole series of what were to become major hit songs in the West were "really" (!!) composed in Bombay by Ormus Cama, acting on the supernatural promptings of his dead twin Gayomart. These "songs from the future", the reader is impudently informed, included two celebrated Dylan numbers, "Like A Rolling Stone" (released on the 1965 album Highway 61 Revisited and also a hit single for its composer),⁹⁷ and "Blowin' in the Wind":

At first Ormus played only the songs he had half learned from Gayomart in his dreams, singing those strange vowel sequences of his that made no sense to anyone, or fitting nonsensical words to them that utterly undermined the mysterious authority of the dream-music [...]. "The dancer is glowing with her sin. The gardener is mowing with a grin [...]". [...] One thousand and one nights later, "Blowin' in the Wind" hit the airwaves in its authentic version [...] and whenever one of Gayomart Cama's melodies burst through from the world of dreams into the real world, those of us who had heard

⁹¹ *ibid.* 435.

⁹² *ibid.* 266, 281.

⁹³ *ibid.* 322, 500.

⁹⁴ *ibid.* 486.

⁹⁵ *ibid.* 475.

⁹⁶ Soon after Ormus' arrival in Britain, a character declares: "The draft as well ... We're all blowing in *that* wind" (punning on "draft" = military service and draught = gust of wind) (*ibid.* 274); towards the end, Rai says to Vina: "The Pope has just played Mexico City and he even talked about rock'n'roll. *Yes, my children, the answer is indeed blowing in the wind*" (*ibid.* 455).

⁹⁷ *ibid.* 183; in addition, a phrase from "Like A Rolling Stone", "no direction home", is put into the mouth of a character who comments on Vina's death in 1989: "It didn't cross my mind for a minute that she would just set herself down, with no plan for an exit, no direction home, you know?" (*ibid.* 470).

them for the first time in garbled form in a Bombay villa on the old Cuffe Parade were forced to concede the reality of Ormus' magic gift.⁹⁸

This whole conceit as used by Rushdie must be considered as, at best, problematic. It may seem, on the face of it, a liberating gesture to create a reshaped world in which a song like "Blowin' in the Wind" has origins that are not just Orphic, rising up from the depths of the "world of dreams", but Asian too - as if, through the workings of a "magic gift", Indian culture could stake out a claim of authorship in the new global popular culture that came into being in the West in the 60s. However, there is the small question to be considered of the real origins of Dylan's song. The fact is that Dylan based "Blowin' in the Wind" on a nineteenth-century song called "No More Auction Block", in which a fugitive slave who has escaped to Canada celebrates his new-found freedom; in 1978, he explained: "I took it off a song called 'No More Auction Block' - that's a spiritual, and 'Blowin' in the Wind' has the same feeling".⁹⁹ There was, then, already a verified historical input into Dylan's song from a non-WASP source; given which, why did Rushdie feel the need to give it a contrived and fantastical origin in Bombay? The reader is entitled to ask whether the "Gayomart conceit", applied to this and other 60s songs, actually has, in its sheer arbitrariness, the effect of trivialising those songs, instead of underscoring their claims to universal significance.

Beyond the specific textual allusions, the reader is invited to see Ormus the songwriter as some kind of fictional Dylan. His career exhibits certain resemblances to Dylan's: Rushdie's star is removed from public view in 1967 by a near-fatal car crash¹⁰⁰ which recalls Dylan's motorcycle accident of 1966; and, later, he takes obsessively to non-stop touring ("For most of 1994 and 1995 he lived exclusively in the world of the tour [...] Rio, Sydney, London, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Beijing"¹⁰¹), mirroring the "Never Ending Tour" that has occupied a large part of Dylan's energies almost constantly from 1987 to the present. As for Ormus' lyrics, their "perceived anti-establishment contents" are, we are told, expressed through a throng of chaotic images: "street entertainers, card-players, pickpockets, wizards, devils, union men, evil priests, fisherwomen, wrestlers, harlequins, vagabonds, chameleons, whores, eclipses, motorbikes and cheap dark rum".¹⁰² For Rai, "Ormus Cama was the greatest popular singer of all, the one whose genius exceeded all others [...] a golden troubadour the jouncy poetry of whose lyrics could unlock the very gates of Hell; he incarnated the singer and songwriter as shaman and spokesman".¹⁰³

All this seems reasonably close to Dylan, at least to certain phases or facets of his career (the anti-establishment position, the troubadour-shaman-spokesman role); Ormus' images and characters, too, resemble their counterparts in the real Dylan songbook. Dylan's work of 1965-1966, notably, offers vagabonds ("It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" [from Bringing It All Back Home]), an eclipse ("It's Alright, Ma [I'm Only Bleeding]" [from the same album]), a "motorcycle black madonna two-wheeled gipsy queen" ("Gates of Eden" [from the same album]), evil ecclesiastics (the "jealous monk" of "Desolation Row" [from Highway 61 Revisited]), sex industry workers ("Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues" [from the same album]), fishtrucks ("Visions of Johanna" [from Blonde on Blonde]), and even a bottle

⁹⁸ *ibid.* 141.

⁹⁹ Bob Dylan, quoted by John Bauldie, booklet notes, Dylan, The Bootleg Series volumes 1-3 (3-CD set), Columbia, 1991, 6.

¹⁰⁰ Rushdie, GF 307.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* 558-559.

¹⁰² *ibid.* 395, 102.

¹⁰³ *ibid.* 89.

of "Jamaican rum" ("4th Time Around" [from the same album]). Ormus might thus appear to have a goodly part of Dylan in him.

An unfortunate problem occurs, however, when Rushdie's text shifts from the evocation of Ormus' lyrics to their (fictional) reproduction. It is difficult to see how these productions, as given, could possibly be thought to come up to the exacting standards of modern poetic song laid down by Dylan. Two examples of Ormus' alleged compositional gifts, as "quoted" in the text, should suffice: "The earth begins to rock and roll, its music dooms your mortal soul, and there's nothing baby nothing you can do";¹⁰⁴ and again: "Now I know she's kinda crazy and a little too much, but I'm hopin' for the strokin' of her lovin' touch, and I'm really not insistin', but if we were tongue twistin', what a twistin' good time it'd be".¹⁰⁵ Against these specimens, it should be enough to quote two examples of Dylan's songwriting, without further qualitative comment: "When you wake up in the mornin', baby, look inside your mirror/You know I won't be next to you, you know I won't be near/I'd just be curious to know if you can see yourself as clear/As someone who has had you on his mind" ("Mama, You Been On My Mind", 1964);¹⁰⁶ and: "Footprints runnin' 'cross the silver sand/Steps goin' down into tattoo land/I met the sons of darkness and the sons of light/In the bordertowns of despair" ("Dignity", 1989).¹⁰⁷ The reader may justifiably ask whether Rushdie himself really thinks there is any particular merit in Ormus Cama's lyrics, or whether their "reproduction" is, to quote Dylan's words from "Desolation Row", "some kind of joke" (?).

Before closing this section, it may - returning for a moment, at least to some extent - to biographical mode - be interesting to speculate briefly on some of the possible parallels between the careers and, indeed, world-views of Bob Dylan and Salman Rushdie that might help explain or justify the lavishness of the novelist's invocation of the songwriter in the text of GF. One salient factor that links the careers of both is their protean shifts in identity and image. Dylan has, across his musical trajectory, been through any number of metamorphoses, both generically and ideologically. His musical transformations include, famously, that from acoustic folk/blues and then protest folk (early 60s) to electric rock (mid-60s), followed by equally disconcerting forays into country music (late 60s/early 70s) and gospel (late 70s/early 80s), back into traditional acoustic mode (early 90s), and, most recently, into an equally traditionalist electric blues idiom (late 90s). He has thrice been accused of "selling out" by cohorts of followers who deserted him in high dudgeon - when he abandoned acoustic protest folk, when he retreated into the (allegedly conservative) country music genre, and when he confounded his long-term fans by suddenly (and despite both his Jewish roots and his "radical" past) turning to evangelical Christianity¹⁰⁸. Rushdie, too, has operated surprising generic shifts, from pastiche science fiction (Grimus) to epic magic realism (MC), to children's fantasy (Haroun), on into the uneasy fusion of magic-realist and science-fictional conventions that marks GF. He too has had the experience of instantaneously losing previously loyal admirers, when a large section of the PC community dropped him like a hot brick in the wake of the SV controversy, accusing him, as Dylan had been too, of "selling out"

¹⁰⁴ The "rock and roll/mortal soul" rhyme is taken over from a real song, the Dylan-influenced "American Pie" by the singer-songwriter Don McLean (a hit from 1971).

¹⁰⁵ Rushdie, GF 390, 416.

¹⁰⁶ This song, composed in 1964, was first released on The Bootleg Series volumes 1-3 (1991).

¹⁰⁷ This song, composed in 1989, was first released on Greatest Hits III (1994).

¹⁰⁸ Dylan's "born-again Christian" period is generally held to comprise the years 1979-1981 and the three albums Slow Train Coming, Saved and Shot of Love (although the third is arguably by no means an entirely Christian work). Infidels (1983), a work which, though suffused with biblical imagery and often interpreted as "Jewish", marks a return to his earlier cryptic songwriting mode, is usually seen as marking Dylan's emergence from the evangelical interlude.

(in Rushdie's case, of abandoning a supposedly homogeneous and unproblematic "Third World" in favour of an allegedly over-secularist version of "Western values"). Indeed, if we compare that episode to the born-again interlude in Dylan's career, it becomes clear that both Dylan's and Rushdie's artistic vicissitudes - and their audience relationships - have at certain key moments been intimately bound up with religion. In Dylan's case the problem stemmed from his act of embracing one of the three great monotheisms (while having roots in a second of them), whereas in Rushdie's it came from him being charged with apostasy from the third of those same monotheisms.

We may also note the convergence, in both Dylan and Rushdie, of the themes of exile, expatriation and wandering (both, after all, have migrant backgrounds). In "Desolation Row" (the 1965 song already cited), Dylan conjures up the figure of Albert Einstein as exile "with his memories in a trunk"; his song "We Better Talk This Over" (from Street-Legal, 1978) affirms: "I'm exiled, you can't convert me"; and, on another level, his "Never-Ending Tour" constitutes Dylan the performing musician as a latter-day troubadour or wandering minstrel. Rushdie, for his part, has the narrator of Shame (a near-alias for himself) declare of his own crosscultural, diasporic status: "I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*";¹⁰⁹ and he strikingly opens SV with an epigraph, taken from Daniel Defoe, which declares: "Satan, being thus confined to a vagabond, wandering, unsettled condition, is without any certain abode; ... this is certainly part of his punishment, that he is... without any fixed place, or space, allowed him to rest the sole of his foot upon".¹¹⁰ All of this suggests that one of the more surprising hidden themes of GF may, indeed, be that of Salman Rushdie's temperamental kinship with the author of "Blowin' in the Wind".

8 - BOMBAY TO THE WEST - A ONE-WAY TICKET?

Whether or not Ormus and Vina come up to the musical standards of their real Western counterparts, a further question has to be asked concerning Rushdie's claim to have subversively rewritten rock history by inventing two Indian megastars: what, in fact, is Indian about these two - apart from their origins? What, if any, are the specifically Indian elements behind these twain's meteoric careers? The reader will search in vain for any but the most superficial references to any subcontinental musical tradition, be it erudite, folkloric or popular. In SV, Rushdie did include a stray mention of the "hindi-pop" scene in London;¹¹¹ this is probably a reference to British bhangra (an urbanised version of traditional Punjabi dance music), or to the then-budding "techno-Asian" school - but if Rushdie, as he may do, knows anything about either genre, GF finds him keeping that musical knowledge remarkably close to his chest. In recent years in both Britain and the US, fusions of Indian and Western genres have produced interesting and listenable new popular-music hybrids, in the work of artists such as London's Talvin Singh¹¹² and Sheila Chandra,¹¹³ or the Gujarat-born, California-resident female vocalist Shweta Jhaveri,¹¹⁴ such musical hybridation might seem in

¹⁰⁹ Rushdie, Shame 29.

¹¹⁰ Rushdie, SV, epigraph.

¹¹¹ *ibid.* 291.

¹¹² see Talvin Singh, OK, Island/Omni CID 8075/524 559-2, 1998; Pete Lawrence, "Tabla tastemaker", Folk Roots January/February 1999: 22-29.

¹¹³ see Sheila Chandra, Moonsung: A Real World Retrospective, Real World CDR W77, 1999; Ruth Rosselson, "Return of the voice", Folk Roots July 1999: 15-16.

¹¹⁴ see Shweta Jhaveri, Anahita, Intuition Music & Media INT 3509-2, 1998; Ken Hunt, "Khyal Creed", Folk Roots June 1999: 34-35.

tune with Rushdie's own oft-declared belief in cultural mixity and miscegenation,¹¹⁵ but there is precious little evidence of any such synthesis in VTO's arch-Western music.

Vina Apsara's professional name, it is true, designates a South Indian instrument (vina) and a mythical female dancer (apsara); but in the music of VTO's heyday any Asian musical influences are minimal. Ravi Shankar gets a brief, rather superficial allusion, when Ormus names him to an ignorant Briton as an example of a famous Indian;¹¹⁶ but the great Shankar, friend of the Beatles and Yehudi Menuhin, is, as he never ceases to remind the Western press,¹¹⁷ essentially an Indian classical musician who would not qualify as a direct influence on exponents of more demotic genres. Early on, we are told of Vina: "The music of India, from northern sitar ragas to southern Carnatic melodies, always created in her a mood of inexpressible longing. She could listen to recordings of ghazals for hours at a stretch, and was entranced, too, by the complex devotional music of the leading qawwals".¹¹⁸ There is, alas, no input into VTO's music from these early influences. They remain promising hints that are never developed: the ghazal and qawwali genres both straddle the subcontinental classical/popular divide, raising possibilities of ground-breaking hybrids and crossovers, and the most famous qawwal of modern times, Pakistan's Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, actually worked with the British rock musician Peter Gabriel on recordings that fuse devotional tradition with state-of-the-art technology. Jamila Singer from MC¹¹⁹ might have had a word to say here, too, but unfortunately in GF Rushdie seems to have forgotten her legacy. Ormus, very late in his career and after Vina's death, does at last begin to integrate something of his origins into his music, evolving towards a techno-Asian style: "the tabla rhythms and sitar and yes vina riffs pushed through his sequencers along with pure synthesised sound";¹²⁰ but this mutation is little more than a hint, coming as it does so close to the end. VTO's music, and, therefore, the greater part of both Vina's and Ormus' musical production is, from the textual descriptions and the sources and analogies named, clearly a textbook case of mainstream Anglo-American 60s/70s stadium rock, bereft of any "Asian" input other than the two stars' national origins and the piece of trickery that is the "Gayomart conceit".

9 - THE "WORLD MUSIC" ALTERNATIVE

Vina, nonetheless, in the final, solo, stage of her career, does develop artistically, away from mainstream rock and towards something more resembling "world music". Again, though, Rushdie's treatment of a potentially interesting theme proves disappointingly superficial. The term "world music", in the sense that emerged in the late 80s and 90s, deserves some elucidation here. "World music" may be approximately defined as either: traditional-based music from anywhere in the world that makes use of modern recording technology, distribution systems, etc., rather than remaining "ethnic" in a purist sense; or: a fusion of traditional-based musical idioms from more than one culture. Philip Sweeney, compiler of the Virgin Directory of World Music, defines the term as "world popular and roots music from outside the Anglo-American mainstream";¹²¹ Ian Anderson, editor of Folk Roots, the British magazine that has done much to promote the concept, speaks of a form of

¹¹⁵ Rushdie speaks of cultural mixity and "métissage" in "L'entretien d'Arte", interview with Bernard-Henri Lévy, La Règle Du Jeu 13 (May 1994): 28-29.

¹¹⁶ Rushdie, GF 284.

¹¹⁷ See, for instance, Eric Dahan, "Shankar, un grand classique" (interview with Ravi Shankar), Libération 6 July 1999: 30-31.

¹¹⁸ Rushdie, GF 122-123.

¹¹⁹ Cf. section 3 above.

¹²⁰ Rushdie, GF 546.

¹²¹ Philip Sweeney, Virgin Directory of World Music (London: Virgin, 1991) ix.

crosscultural musical dialogue that "has greatly helped international understanding and provoked cultural exchanges".¹²² Outstanding exponents of "world music" in the first sense include Khaled, an Algerian singer based in Paris who performs in both Arabic and French,¹²³ and Senegal's Youssou N'Dour, who has been described as "Africa's most successful musician [...] thanks to [whom] Senegal is becoming more [...] Senegalese",¹²⁴ and has said that "if a Senegalese musician played a synthesiser or an electric guitar, it became a Senegalese instrument".¹²⁵ In the second sense, among the best-known examples are Paul Simon's Graceland album of 1986, made largely in collaboration with South African musicians; and the Buena Vista Social Club project, which has engendered a CD (1997) that has sold over two million copies on the global market, as well as a critically-acclaimed film by Wim Wenders (1999), and involves the Californian guitarist Ry Cooder and an agglomeration of superb Cuban musicians, some of them septuagenarian or even nonagenarian, whom Cooder's musicological researches helped re-emerge from obscurity.¹²⁶ Essentially, the notion of "world music" entails an openness to musical dialogue and cooperation on a footing of cultural equality, whether the collaborators are all from third-world or "exotic" backgrounds or, as in the Buena Vista case, hail from both sides of the first/third world divide.

The world music phenomenon is a viable contemporary alternative to the commercial excesses of today's mass-consumption Anglo-American music, and Rushdie certainly seems to be aware of its existence. His familiarity with Simon's Graceland is clear, since he has, as already noted, quoted elsewhere from one of that album's songs. Rai-the-narrator himself notes that one of the possible meanings of his own name is Algerian rai music, the genre of which Khaled is the best-known exponent: "And in another part of the world, Rai was music. In the home of this music, alas, religious fanatics have lately started killing the musicians. They think the music is an insult to god, who gave us voices but does not wish us to sing, who gave us free will, rai, but prefers us not to be free".¹²⁷ A rai star, Cheb Hasni, was, indeed, assassinated by fundamentalists in Oran, birthplace of the genre, in September 1994,¹²⁸ and the word rai, associated by Rushdie with free will, derives, according to the music critic Ken Hunt, from the Arabic for "opinion".¹²⁹ These narratorial insights, of course, approximate the risks facing Algerian performers to Rushdie's own predicament, but, alas, no more is made of the possible connections by either Rai or Rushdie. Nor can it possibly be said of the novel's Indian stars that they send western listeners back to Indian music, as has happened in reality with Buena Vista Social Club and Cuban music (as Ibrahim Ferrer, one of the Buena Vista artists, has rather bemusedly declared: "There is all this music in America and Europe and they come to Cuba for our sound"¹³⁰). The VTO stars' musical trajectory, from Bombay to New York, is, surely, quite the reverse.

¹²² Ian Anderson, "World wars", Folk Roots March 2000: 39.

¹²³ For Khaled and the rai genre, see Tewfik Hakem, "L'inventaire Khaled-Mami", World March/April 1998: 86-89; Ken Hunt, "Khaled Comfort", Folk Roots October 1999: 26-27, 41.

¹²⁴ Lucy Duran, "The Xippi Trail [Youssou N'Dour]", Folk Roots November 1999: 20.

¹²⁵ Anderson 39.

¹²⁶ Buena Vista Social Club, collective CD produced by Ry Cooder, World Circuit/Nonesuch 79478-2, 1997; Wim Wenders, dir., Buena Vista Social Club, Road Movies, 1999; see Nigel Williamson, "The Bolero Boy [Ibrahim Ferrer]", Folk Roots June 1999: 28-29, and "Ry comments [Ry Cooder]", Folk Roots July 1999: 20-27; cf., for a US perspective, Tom Moon, "The Cuban Invasion", Rolling Stone 2 September 1999: 29, 40.

¹²⁷ Rushdie, GF 19.

¹²⁸ see World March/April 1998: 82.

¹²⁹ see Hunt, "Khaled Comfort" 26. This etymology is confirmed by Sweeney, who explains how young Algerian singers "began to pepper their verses with the phrase 'Ha er-rai' or 'Ya rai', meaning something like 'it's my opinion'" (9).

¹³⁰ Ibrahim Ferrer (quoted), Williamson, "The Bolero Boy" 29.

Both Ormus and Vina do, admittedly, push their later careers somewhat away from mainstream American rock and more in a world-music direction. One of the later incarnations of VTO is characterised by "un-American sounds" added by Ormus: "Cuban horns", "Brazilian drums", "Chilean woodwinds", "African male choruses", and even "the holy passion of the Pakistani qawwals". The very excess of this hyper-eclectic pot-pourri, however, suggests less a tribute to world music than a superficial travesty of it, while the Ormus/Vina vocal combination clearly remains as American as ever: "more Righteous than the Righteous Brothers, Everlier than the Everlys, Supremes than the Supremes".¹³¹ After VTO finally split, Vina, in 1988, tours Latin America, showcasing self-penned songs with a new backing band ("her three demented Brazilian percussionists and her pair of duelling Argentine guitarists who threatened to end each performance with a knife fight").¹³² Here too, the concession to world music does not go beyond the superficial, either on Vina's part (the old VTO hits are still at the heart of her repertoire) or, indeed, Rushdie's: there is no reason why the intentness of Brazilian percussion, with its roots in African ritual, should be dismissed as "demented", while the conceit of "duelling guitarists" (based on a pun on "duel" in the twin senses of musical and physical combat) merely replicates a stereotype of Argentine violence which, while it might be acceptable from a Buenos Aires-born writer like Borges, from Rushdie's pen seems a tired, second-hand cliché. The conclusion seems inevitable that in the writing of this novel Rushdie actually missed a golden opportunity, fluffing the challenge of a sustained literary engagement with the world music phenomenon. We could have had an Indian Buena Vista Social Club; what we got was VTO, playing born-in-the-USA rock'n'roll while laying claim to an Asian "authenticity" that derives from literary sleight-of-hand alone.

10 - RUSHDIE'S NOVEL AND THE CRITICS

The early critical response to Rushdie's rock-generation odyssey was mixed. As a novelist (and not just a cause célèbre), its author had and has, among people who read books, a formidable reputation to live up to. Anita Desai, looking back on MC in 1995, declared: "It was a very ambitious and bold book. And [...] it led to a whole generation of young writers and gave them the confidence they might not have had otherwise. He can be said to have set free the tongues of the younger writers - a tremendous influence upon their work".¹³³ Of SV, considered as a novel, the Franco-Algerian political expert Sami Naïr wrote in 1989: "The interpretation of The Satanic Verses could be multiplied indefinitely: but this novel is so rich that no such reading could exhaust its meaning [...] This is the birth of a great - of a very great writer".¹³⁴

By no means all reviewers found GF up to the standard of Rushdie's earlier fictional production. A representative sample of reviews from various countries suggests an approximately equal three-way breakdown between the eulogistic, the ambivalent and the disappointed or downright hostile. In the first category, Hermione Lee, in the London Observer, praised GF as "a very exciting novel, hugely ambitious and original", full of "true

¹³¹ Rushdie, GF 379.

¹³² *ibid.* 8.

¹³³ Anita Desai, "A Sense of Detail and a Sense of Order: Anita Desai Interviewed by Lalita Pandit", Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit, eds., Literary India: Comparative Studies in Aesthetics, Colonialism and Culture (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 163.

¹³⁴ Sami Naïr, "Comment lire Les Versets Sataniques?", Esprit, October 1989; reprinted in the collective volume Pour Rushdie: Cent intellectuels arabes et musulmans pour la liberté d'expression (Paris: La Découverte/Carrefour des Littératures/Colibri, 1993) 235. This volume in fact consists not of the contributions of 100 authors, but of 99 essays and one musical score (by a Moroccan composer) by a total of 226 names, as one item is a collective letter in support of Rushdie signed by 127 Iranian intellectuals.

Rushdiean boldness" - a book "about the making and the meaning of myths", in which "the Orpheus and Eurydice myth gets turned around and upside down";¹³⁵ while Newsweek's Carla Power lauded it as "a book about the way we live now", remarkable for its "mythic scope, epic stretch and huge intelligence".¹³⁶ In France, Le Monde's reviewer, Raphaëlle Rérolle, read Rushdie's tale as celebrating "the force of dream and imagination" and affirming "music and its power" against "the violence of those who oppose it";¹³⁷ conversely, in Libération Antoine de Gaudemar found it a "metaphoric and finally pessimistic novel", an indictment of our times in which the musical protagonists are "unreal beings, abstract icons, toys in the hands of a ruthless system and a fiercely volatile public opinion".¹³⁸

A more ambivalent note was struck by the Economist, whose reviewer noted the "familiar mix of magical realism, dazzling verbal display, self-conscious fictionality, and allusion", but found the novel rather amorphous: "Designed to mimic the theme of cultural overload in its construction, its narrative shape is on the verge of constant collapse".¹³⁹ Similarly, Time's reviewer, Paul Gray, while praising the "energy, intelligence and allusiveness" of Rushdie's writing, concluded that "the parts of this novel seem greater than the whole".¹⁴⁰ Perhaps most tellingly, in La Quinzaine Littéraire Marc Porée (co-author, as noted above, of a substantial critical study of Rushdie),¹⁴¹ found GF vitiated by a culpable dose of superficiality, deriving from an excessive fixation on the cult of celebrity ("Has he really striven to de-sacralise Islam [...] only to end up legitimating a latter-day version of the sacred?"), and drew attention to the un-Indianness of Ormus and Vina as musicians: "The idea of having Indian rockers as the main characters succeeds only imperfectly [...] the aficionado inevitably imagines these characters in the skin and the features of stars from the English-speaking world", before nonetheless concluding that the book "may be redeemed if we recognise its extreme darkness, the darkness of a world living on the edge".

Adverse views of Rushdie's novel included one from Italy and two from his native South Asian world. The novelist and critic Silvia Albertazzi, in her review in the Italian magazine Pulp, found GF markedly inferior to its author's earlier work, simultaneously over-superficial and over-complex: Rushdie, she complained, has "chosen to break with the methods of the Indian oral tradition - stories grafted on to one another, Chinese box-like, spiralling, to be swallowed all together - in favour of a more linear narrative", while "the novel gets tangled up in its own excess of stimuli, metaphors and sets of symbols, losing, above all, its sense of the link with history - hitherto one of the strongest points of Rushdie's narrative". The same critic concluded that nothing in the text justifies the alleged genius of Ormus and Vina, adding the judgment that "Ormus' song texts are of an exasperating banality beneath their rhetoric".¹⁴² C. J. Wallia, writing on the India Star website, dismissed the book as a "muddled melodramatic novel", objecting to its "repeated inflictions of mindboggling mythological references" and "long pontifical soliloquies on death and art";¹⁴³ while the novelist Pankaj Mishra, in a violent critique first published in the Delhi magazine Outlook, accused Rushdie of producing a novel replete with "cartoon-like simplicities", "empty

¹³⁵ Hermione Lee, rev. of GF, Observer (review section) 28 March 1999: 11.

¹³⁶ Power 71.

¹³⁷ Raphaëlle Rérolle, rev. of GF, Le Monde (review section) 1 October 1999: VI.

¹³⁸ Antoine de Gaudemar, "Rushdie, chaos tectonique", rev. of GF, Libération (review section) 30 September 1999: VII.

¹³⁹ "Boy's toys", rev. of GF, Economist 15 May 1999: 13.

¹⁴⁰ Paul Gray, "Ganja Growing in the Tin", rev. of GF, Time 17 May 1999: 62.

¹⁴¹ Marc Porée, "Rushdiissime", La Quinzaine Littéraire 16-31 October 1999: 5.

¹⁴² Silvia Albertazzi, "Salman Rushdie: *La terra sotto i suoi piedi*", rev. of GF, Pulp 20 (July-August 1999): 29.

¹⁴³ C. J. Wallia, rev. of GF, India Star, 1999 <<http://www.indiastar.com/wallia20.html>>.

bombast", "pseudo-characters" and "non-events", which is not a critique but a symptom of the processes at work in today's world - and of using "secular radicalism" as a pretext for an uncritical and politically suspect eulogy of "American pop culture".¹⁴⁴

From the reviews quoted, whatever their evaluation of Rushdie's novel, there emerges a consensus that one of its key themes is the economic and cultural process that has come to be known as globalisation. The critics also recognised that Rushdie's narrative and stylistic strategies - the use of mythology, the East-to-West sweep of the tale, the multi-layered allusiveness - represent an attempt, successful or otherwise, to create a fiction that will adequately reflect that process of globalisation and offer the reader certain possible responses to it. None of the critics cited, however, looked in detail - as I have tried to do in this study - at those elements in the book (the non-use of the Orpheus myth, the failure to engage creatively with "world music") which fail to satisfy in this respect, and thus cast doubt on the validity and usefulness of Rushdie's social critique; and only Porée drew attention to the un-Indian nature of the novel's music, surely one of its most unsatisfactory paradoxes. Nonetheless, the strictures which Wallia and Mishra laid at the door of Rushdie's actual writing in this novel seem less justified than the more substantive faults identified: the allusive density of the text shows beyond doubt that Rushdie had put an enormous amount of work into this novel, and had enriched it at the textual level with a wealth of ideas and information accumulated from his enormously wide reading and his own very specific interaction with history. Whether all this knowledge and effort gave birth to a genuinely useful fable for our times is another matter.

11 - A KNIFE THAT CUTS BOTH WAYS

Globalisation is a knife that cuts both ways - threatening universal, US-dominated standardisation and the annihilation of cultural diversity, yet also opening up, through the Internet and its limitless resources, unprecedented possibilities of expression, communication and solidarity. The question is whether Rushdie's novel offers an adequate fictional representation of this dynamic contradiction. Certainly, his characters inhabit a world in continual flux, subject to endless shocks and mutations - as symbolised by the earthquake metaphor, and as self-consciously and repeatedly registered in the text: "if the world itself were metamorphosing unpredictably, then nothing could be relied upon any more";¹⁴⁵ "Instability, the modern condition, no longer frightens them; it now feels like possibility".¹⁴⁶ The reader may ask, however, whether Rushdie's Asian protagonists do not end up as largely passive victims of US mass culture - a victimhood disguised only rhetorically, by the box-of-tricks strategy of the "Gayomart conceit". Large parts of the book's second half seem merely to replicate the hollowness of the one-dimensional creations of the entertainment industry, the self-validating procession of surfaces which Rushdie's text itself, in a metalingual flourish of doubtful profundity, calls "that zone of celebrity in which everything except celebrity ceases to signify".¹⁴⁷ It is also disappointing to find the East-West relationship embodied in this novel's narrative structure in such a linear fashion. Instead of East and West alternating, what we get is East in the first half, replaced by West in the second. As far as "Indo-Anglian" writing is concerned, the true continuators of the complex "East-West" narrative structure which Rushdie superbly deployed in SV would appear to be not Rushdie's own later novels,

¹⁴⁴ Pankaj Mishra, "Anatomy of an Anti-Novel", rev. of GF, *Outlook*, 9 April 1999 <http://www.wish.u-net.com/roy/pm_rushd.htm>.

¹⁴⁵ Rushdie, GF 184.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.* 487.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.* 425.

but such works as Vikram Chandra's Red Earth and Pouring Rain (1995)¹⁴⁸ and Amitav Ghosh's The Calcutta Chromosome (1996) - both novels in which a dense, intricate narrative, snaking back and forth in time and place, reflects an awareness of world history and culture in their sheer density which is, sadly, lacking in GF.

In 1994, Rushdie closed the final story of East, West with a proud declaration of neutrality between East and West - a pregnant manifesto of neither-norness and both-andness, of hybridity and cultural miscegenation:

I, too, have ropes around my neck, I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, choose, choose [...] Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoos, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both. Do you hear? I refuse to choose.¹⁴⁹

Five years later, he chose to conclude GF with this vignette of a New York child:

Tara's got hold of the zapper. I've never got used to having the tv on at breakfast, but this is an American kid, she's unstoppable. And today, by some fluke, wherever she travels in the cable multiverse she comes up with Ormus and Vina [...] they're just going to go on singing¹⁵⁰.

Whether this peroration marks Rushdie's final choice of "West" - not just over "East", but, perhaps more significantly, over his earlier, challenging choice of cultural hybridation - whether closing this novel with a child's ersatz journey into the "cable multiverse" means that our novelist has lost the plot, has finally given in to the seductions of transatlantic mass culture - whether he has simply failed to take up the messages of cross-generic or transcultural complexity offered by the likes of Dylan (within his novel) or the new Asian fusion musics (without it) - whether the literal death of the author threatened by the fatwa has led to the spiritual death of the author we once knew: all these were in 1999 (and remained in 2003, when I last updated this essay) unresolved enigmas which only the future, and Rushdie's own writing to come, can answer.

Rushdie's sea of stories has certainly not dried up, but it does seem to have become a trifle shallow. My prediction is that GF will live less as a rock'n'roll epic than as pure text - in the mercurial play of the words on the page, in the allusive density and resourcefulness of Salman Rushdie's protean, spell-weaving, still-alert writing. It is, however, an open question whether a fiction that relies so heavily for its impact on textual scintillation can, ultimately, allow either writer or reader to gain a full, intelligent grasp on the dynamic and dangerous complexities of today's ever-shifting, globalised cultural universe.

APPENDIX - DEVELOPMENTS FROM 2000 TO 2006

The original version of this article was written in 2000 and published in 2001. Faced with the task of updating it (several times, and most recently as at January 2006), I have opted to summarise the most important developments since in this appendix. These developments

¹⁴⁸ On Chandra's novel, see Christopher Rollason, "The Storyteller in the Information Age: Vikram Chandra's Entwining Narratives", Kakatiya Journal of English Studies (Warangal, India), Vol. 20, 2000: 135-157.

¹⁴⁹ Rushdie, "The Courter", East, West 211.

¹⁵⁰ Rushdie, GF 575.

are: 1) the release of the Rushdie-penned song "The Ground Beneath Her Feet" in a recording by the Irish megaband U2; 2) the appearance in 2001 of Rushdie's novel Fury and Bob Dylan's album "Love and Theft"; 3) the publication in 2002 of Step Across This Line, a collection of non-fiction pieces by Rushdie, some of which shed interesting light on The Ground Beneath Her Feet; and 4) the publication in 2005 of a further Rushdie novel, Shalimar the Clown.

1) Summer 2000 saw the release of the soundtrack CD to Wim Wenders' film The Million Dollar Hotel.¹⁵¹ Track 1 of this CD, performed by U2, is entitled "The Ground Beneath Her Feet", and it is, indeed, the Irish group's rendition of one of the lyrics attributed by Salman Rushdie to the imaginary Ormus Cama. The song is credited in the CD booklet to Rushdie, not Cama: "Music by U2. Lyrics by Salman Rushdie. Taken from his book The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999). Produced by Daniel Lanois and Brian Eno". The booklet also includes the song's lyrics, which correspond to those appearing in chapter 12 of Rushdie's novel¹⁵² (cf. Section 7 above), except that the original stanza 3 (out of five) is omitted (the Dylan-influenced stanza 4 remains, becoming stanza 3). The same version of the song was later included on some, but not all, printings of U2's album All That You Can't Leave Behind, released later in 2000. U2's recording of this Rushdie-Cama tribute to Vina Apsara is the first, and so far only, attempt made in the material world to reproduce something of the imagined sound of VTO's music (albeit of course with no woman stand-in for Vina).

The Million Dollar Hotel soundtrack also includes three different versions of "Satellite of Love", a song written by Lou Reed and originally recorded on his 1972 album Transformer - an album which, as it happens, supplies the title for chapter 13 of Rushdie's novel (cf. Section 4 above). Dylan admirers will also note the presence on the CD - as co-producer of the track "The Ground Beneath Her Feet" itself, and also accompanying U2 "on pedal steel" on that same track - of Daniel Lanois, the musician-cum-producer who is linked to Bob Dylan by his highly-regarded production work on the latter's two acclaimed albums Oh Mercy (1989) and Time Out Of Mind (1997).

2) In the autumn of 2000, Salman Rushdie announced his decision to abandon London for a new place of residence, New York City. A year later, in September 2001, he came up with a new novel, Fury. This book is a frenetic narrative of the transcultural confusions of the postmodern intelligentsia. It is set mostly in New York, albeit with flashbacks to India and Britain, excursions into cyberspace, and an episode located in an imaginary Pacific state, "Lilliput-Blefuscus", which, despite its Swiftian name, is clearly a version of Fiji.

The protagonist is an Indian from Bombay, but the subcontinental component is thinner, both quantitatively and qualitatively, than in any novel by Rushdie since Grimus; indeed, the pastiche science-fiction elements in Fury invite comparison with that first novel. These features tend to confirm the impression given by The Ground Beneath Her Feet, of a Rushdie in process of severing his subcontinental ties and increasingly liable to indulge in one-dimensional simulacra of the paranormal.

There are, once again, numerous allusions to modern popular music (although, this time round, without the immediate justification of direct pertinence to the book's themes). Fury contains one clear Dylan reference: the phrase "sly-eyed lady of the Fenlands"¹⁵³ is an

¹⁵¹ Island CID 8094/542 395-2, released 2000; for Wenders, cf. section 9 above.

¹⁵² Rushdie, GF 475.

¹⁵³ Rushdie, Fury 31.

obvious rewrite of the Dylan song-title "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands" which Rushdie had already alluded to in The Ground Beneath Her Feet (cf. Section 7 above). Other Dylan-relevant musical references are to his singer-songwriter compeers Bruce Springsteen, who is cited twice ("American Skin [41 Shots]", "I'm on Fire"¹⁵⁴), and Joni Mitchell, whose song "Big Yellow Taxi" (as it happens, covered by Dylan on his 1970 album Dylan [A Fool Such As I]) is quoted verbatim on two different occasions.¹⁵⁵ The famous calypso singer Harry Belafonte, who helped Dylan launch his career, puts in an appearance,¹⁵⁶ and there is also a mention of Alfred Hitchcock's celebrated film of 1960, Psycho, which inspired Dylan's 1964 song on Another Side of Bob Dylan, "Motorspycho Nitemare".¹⁵⁷

Fury also has some curious features in common with "Love and Theft", the album of Dylan originals which came out, to near-universal public and critical acclaim, at almost the same time. It so happens that Dylan's album was officially released in the US on none other a date than 11 September 2001; Rushdie's novel came out a few weeks earlier, but its British cover uncannily displays a flaming cloud hovering above the Empire State Building. Elements are present in both works that can, with hindsight and if taken only just slightly out of context, be read as eerily predicting the dire events of 9-11.

Dylan's album contains a whole host of lines and phrases across its songs that offer up disconcerting parallels with the shock and horror of its release day: "throwin' knives into the tree" ("Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum"), "sky full of fire, pain pouring down" ("Mississippi"), "set fire to the place as a partin' gift" ("Summer Days"), "coffins droppin' in the street like balloons made out of lead" ("High Water [For Charley Patton]"), "in a red-hot town" ("Po' Boy"), "when I left my home the sky split open wide" ("Honest With Me") - or with the presumed mindset of the adversary: "trustin' their fate to the hands of God" ("Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum"), "some people they ain't human, they ain't got no heart or soul" ("Cry A While") - or, again, with the emotions of the mourners: "Every moment of existence seems like some dirty trick/Happiness can come suddenly and leave just as quick/Any minute of the day, the bubble can burst" ("Sugar Baby") - or, yet again, with the political responses of America's rulers seeking revenge: "Judge says to the High Sheriff, I want him dead or alive/Either one, I don't care" ("High Water") - words which, in the aftermath, can scarcely have failed to conjure up the wraith of Osama bin Laden.

The dozen songs on the album are shot through with images of chaos and war: they tell of decorated captains, war victims, back-stabbers, undertakers, and ominous knocks on the door. One critic wrote in the Village Voice: "Before that fateful Tuesday, 'Love and Theft' could not have been so easily read as Dylan's contribution to the literature of the apocalypse. Now so nakedly he seems revealed, bounding out of the wilderness in high prophetic mode",¹⁵⁸ while an observer in Salon declared of the album: "In post-Sept. 11 America, the inescapably topical is also enveloped in history and myth".¹⁵⁹ Another perceptive commentator, Sean Wilentz, summed up the feelings engendered by the songs as follows: "Then it's September 11, 2001, eerily the date this album was released, and we're inside a dive

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.* 6, 229.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.* 87, 122.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.* 7.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.* 182.

¹⁵⁸ Greg Tate, "Intelligence Data", Village Voice, 26 September-2 October 2001, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0139/tate.php>>.

¹⁵⁹ Ellen Willis, "The new talkin' World War III blues", Salon, 6 October 2001, <http://www.salon.com/ent/music/review/2001/10/06/love_theft/index.html>.

on lower Broadway, and, horribly beyond description, things are blasted and breaking up out there, nothing's standing there. And it's always right now, too, on 'Love and Theft'".¹⁶⁰

Rushdie's novel, meanwhile, includes numerous passages which also seem disturbingly predictive: "Explosions were heard on every side. Human life was now lived in that moment before the fury, when the anger grew, or during - the fury's hour, the time of the beast set free - or in the ruined aftermath of a great violence, when the fury ebbed and chaos abated".¹⁶¹ A Muslim taxi-driver shouts at another motorist: "Islam will cleanse this street ... Islam will purify this whole city ... the inferno of Allah awaits you".¹⁶² The critic Celia M. Wallhead has suggested that, indeed, in certain passages Rushdie "comes very close to foreseeing the attack on the Twin Towers".¹⁶³

This disorienting aspect of Rushdie's novel is one side of the parallel with Dylan's "Love and Theft"; the other side relates to the nature and texture of the writing of both works. Fury contains references to Shakespeare's Othello and F. Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby,¹⁶⁴ both characters who also make their bow on "Love and Theft" (in the songs "Po' Boy", which names Othello and Desdemona, and "Summer Days", which contains a direct quotation from The Great Gatsby). Rushdie's writing in this novel, dense with allusion, quotation and pastiche and drawing at will on the resources of both "high" and "popular" culture, indeed bears some textural similarities to Dylan's on his 2001 album. Indeed, a detailed comparison of the two works could prove illuminating, although I happen to believe that, while "Love and Theft" is certainly [very] good Dylan, it remains an open question whether Fury is good Rushdie.

3) The autumn of 2002 saw the publication of Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002, a 454-page volume of essays by Rushdie which carries on from where his previous collection, Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991, left off. The new collection includes a number of texts which further illuminate the rock music and Dylan connections and/or throw additional light on The Ground Beneath Her Feet.

There are further additions to the storehouse of Rushdie's Dylan quotes. In a piece entitled "Rock Music",¹⁶⁵ originally published in the New York Times in 1999, seeing rock as, in its origins, "the music of freedom", the author affirmatively quotes (and indeed sources) Dylan's celebrated anti-establishment lines from "Subterranean Homesick Blues" (on his 1965 album Bringing It All Back Home), "Don't follow leaders/watch the parking meters". Rushdie comments: "Yet we continue to want to be led, to follow petty warlords and murderous ayatollahs and murderous brutes".¹⁶⁶ On a similar note, in an essay called "The Last Hostage" (originally published in 1993¹⁶⁷), which centres on his own fatwa story, he arraigns "those who think - as Bob Dylan once reminded us - they can do any damn thing because they have god on their side"¹⁶⁸ - here quoting Dylan's "With God On Our Side", the song from the 1964

¹⁶⁰ Sean Wilentz, "American Recordings: On 'Love and Theft' and the Minstrel Boy", 2001, <<http://bobdylan.com/etc/index.html>>.

¹⁶¹ Rushdie, Fury 125.

¹⁶² *ibid.* 65.

¹⁶³ Celia M. Wallhead, "A Myth for Anger, Migration and Creativity in Salman Rushdie's Fury", Atlantic Literary Review (New Delhi), Vol. 2 No. 4, October-December 2001, 201-216 [205].

¹⁶⁴ Rushdie, Fury, 10-11, 82.

¹⁶⁵ Rushdie, Step Across This Line 299-301.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.* 300.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.* 235-249.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.* 236.

album The Times They Are A-Changin') which he also invoked - twice - in The Ground Beneath Her Feet (cf. Section 7 above). In both instances, Rushdie enlists Dylan in the ranks of the world's libertarians - and, indeed, writes with Dylan on his side (though what Bob Dylan might think of being drafted in on Salman Rushdie's side remains unknown)!

One final, rather surprising, curiosity of the Rushdie-Dylan connection may be added. In "Influence", an essay delivered as a lecture at the University of Turin in 1999,¹⁶⁹ Rushdie sings the praises of a historical figure who (like himself) might be considered to suffer from an over-negative reputation, namely the great Renaissance philosopher from Florence, Niccolò Machiavelli. He declares: "If I may make one more tentative step towards the unwritten future, I have for a long time been engaged and fascinated by ... the character of Niccolò Machiavelli ... The demonization of Machiavelli strikes me as one of the most successful acts of slander in European history ... As a fellow-writer who has also learned a thing or two about demonization, I feel it may soon be time to re-evaluate the maligned Florentine".¹⁷⁰ This could even suggest that Rushdie was here half-promising a future novel about the author of The Prince, surely an intriguing prospect. We may here note, at least parenthetically, that Bob Dylan, too, has expressed a certain fellow-feeling for Machiavelli, singling out the Renaissance intellectual more than once as one of his preferred writers. In 1984, Dylan told the London Sunday Times that he had been "reading ... Machiavelli",¹⁷¹ and in an interview published in the 22 November 2001 issue of Rolling Stone, he declared: "We're living in a Machiavellian world, whether we like it or not".¹⁷² Once again, novelist and songwriter converge in unexpected fashion.

Step Across This Line also includes "In the Voodoo Lounge",¹⁷³ an account of a Rolling Stones concert from 1995, "U2",¹⁷⁴ a tribute from 2001 to the author's association with the Irish band who recorded his Ormus Cama song, and "Heavy Threads: Early Adventures in the Rag Trade",¹⁷⁵ a 1994 piece in which Rushdie retails a set of reminiscences of "swinging London" as it was in 1967, which future researchers will no doubt wish to relate to the London passages of his 1999 novel. It is clear, then, from the new volume that Rushdie's rock music connection is alive and well. Meanwhile, across its pages, he offers ample evidence of his continued vitality as a cultural and political commentator, often tapping a vein of indignant eloquence that is rather more convincing than the fictional mode of Fury.

4) In late 2005, Rushdie published a new novel, Shalimar the Clown. This novel was far better received than Fury, and has been seen by some critics as his best book since the fatwa, indeed as even the best thing he has ever written. Its narrative moves backwards and forwards in globalised fashion between Kashmir, the US, France and Britain, and covers a period from the 1930s to the time of writing. It begins with the cold-blooded murder in Los Angeles of Maximilian Ophuls, ex-US ambassador to India, by a Kashmiri terrorist militant calling himself Shalimar the Clown, in a revenge killing for Ophuls' earlier seduction of the Muslim Shalimar's late (Hindu) wife, Boonyi. This is surely Rushdie's best-documented novel: he has meticulously researched everything from Kashmiri theatre and cuisine to the

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.* 69-76.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.* 76.

¹⁷¹ Bob Dylan, "Jesus, who's got time to keep up with the times?!", interview with Mick Brown, Sunday Times, 1 July 1984, "Week in Focus" section: 15. Reproduced at: <<http://www.interferenza.com/bcs/interw/84-july01.htm>>.

¹⁷² Bob Dylan, interview, Rolling Stone, 22 November 2001: 56-69 (65).

¹⁷³ Rushdie, Step Across This Line 95-99.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.* 102-106.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.* 91-94.

details of upper-middle-class life in pre-war Strasbourg to the horrors of death row in California. The historical context is minutely realised, with much "real" detail interpolated.

In the course of the narrative, militant Islamism irrupts into Kashmir, with support from Pakistan. Rushdie, as one might expect, sees this as an unmitigated disaster, but the Indian state comes off as little better as its army imposes vicious "crackdown" tactics in Kashmir. Nor does the West appear as any kind of humane alternative. Indeed, here there is a sharp turnaround from The Ground Beneath Her Feet and Fury, where, as we have seen, Rushdie at times seemed all but given over to US mass-cultural superficiality. Max's seduction of Boonyi appears as cynical exploitation; and the whole Californian police, judicial and prison machinery comes across as no less oppressive and inhuman than the Indian army's methods. The French section focuses on Nazism, Vichy, the Shoah and a highly ambivalent Resistance, and, to say the least, can hardly be read as glorifying the West.

Once again, this novel's text offers a number of Dylan or Dylan-related allusions. The very title, coupled with the book's repeated theme of violence, personal and institutional, suggests the atmosphere of the Highway 61 Revisited album - above all "Desolation Row", where the riot squad jostle the tightrope-walker. To quote the novel's text: "and the best of them is what he was, a star performer in a troupe of travelling players, a comedian of the high wire, an artist, famous in his way, Shalimar the clown"¹⁷⁶ (famous long ago, like Dylan's Einstein from "Desolation Row"?). Elsewhere, it is said of the ageing Ophuls: "He walked as if he were younger than that now"¹⁷⁷ (recalling the refrain of Dylan's "My Back Pages" from 1964). The 1960s, too, are evoked thus: "'the women's fashions of 1966, not the boring Jackie Kennedy pillbox-hat-and-pearls styles but ... the Pocahontas headbands, ... the fringed leather jackets, ... the miniskirts, the vinyl, the gloves"¹⁷⁸ - 1966, year of a vinyl double album by Dylan, Blonde on Blonde, with its songs "Leopard-skin Pillbox Hat" and "Just Like a Woman", the latter with the famous line "with her fog, her amphetamines and her pearls". Finally, in a faux-historical trope recalling The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Dylan's 1960s milieu is evoked when it is (fictitiously) alleged that "Joan Baez made up a song" about the ambassador's inappropriate behaviour¹⁷⁹. Bob Dylan, then, is present on the fringes of this narrative, as one of the multiple influences that make up the eclectic cultural baggage behind Rushdie's harsh but remarkable tale of a globalised epoch where, to quote Bob Dylan himself, "this world is ruled by violence"¹⁸⁰. Meanwhile and at all events, Shalimar the Clown now most certainly appears as remarkable evidence that Salman Rushdie remains, as much as the Bob Dylan whom he in some ways resembles, an essential voice for our times, and one that we ignore at our peril.

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