

Conflation of history, fantasy and fable: A study of Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie, a British-Indian novelist and essayist, who combines magical and realistic details in his fiction and non-fiction, can be compared with English authors like E. L. Doctorow, Angela Carter, John Fowles, Peter Carey, Mark Helprin or Emma Tennant. His prose synthesizes imagery, ideas, and patterns of sound and sense. His literary works prove the versatility of his literary talent and his universal interest in probing the possibilities for a mutual understanding of cultures as different as those in the East and in the West. *The Enchantress of Florence* is Rushdie's tenth novel published in 2008. The story of the novel is set against the background of Europe and the Orientals in the 16th century. The novel seems to be historically accurate but conceived fictionally. It is rich in presenting minute details of the respective era, which is stylistically opulent. The influences on the novel could be compared with the writers like- Italo Calvino (*Invisible Cities, if on a winter's Night a Traveler*), John Barth (*Giles Goat-Boy, Chemera*) and Gabriel Gracia Marquez (*On Hundred Years of Solitude, The Autumn of the Patriarch*). The novel concentrates upon the history of Mughal Era and Renaissance age; relationship between East and West; fantasy and fables; cross-cultural storytelling and journeying etc. Rushdie, like Garcia Marquez, intertwines actual historical characters and events within a story full of history, fantasy and fables. Moreover, the novel primarily concentrates on the mutual suspicion and mistrust between East (India's Mughal Empire) and West (Renaissance Florence), Ottoman Empires, the earlier Mongols etc.

Keywords: Magic Realism, East and West, Orientals, History, Fantasy, Fables, Mughal era, Renaissance, Cross-cultural, Journeying, Mutual suspicion and Mistrust

Introduction

"History does not repeat itself, but move forward and that man is capable of change" (EF 43).

Salman Rushdie, a British-Indian novelist and essayist, who combines magical and realistic details in his fiction and non-fiction, can be compared with English authors like E. L. Doctorow, Angela Carter, John Fowles, Peter Carey, Mark Helprin or Emma Tennant. His prose synthesizes imagery, ideas, and patterns of sound and sense. His literary works prove the versatility of his literary talent and his universal interest in probing the possibilities for a mutual understanding of cultures as different as those in the East and in the West. *The Enchantress of Florence* is Rushdie's tenth novel published in 2008. The story of the novel is set against the background of Europe and the Orientals in the 16th century. The novel seems to be historically accurate but conceived fictionally. It is rich in presenting minute details of the respective era, which is stylistically opulent. The influences on the novel could be compared with the writers like- Italo Calvino (*Invisible Cities, if on a winter's Night a Traveler*), John Barth (*Giles Goat-Boy, Chemera*) and Gabriel Gracia Marquez (*On Hundred Years of Solitude, The Autumn of the Patriarch*). The novel concentrates upon the history of Mughal Era and Renaissance age; relationship between East and West; fantasy and fables; cross-cultural storytelling and journeying etc. "The novel seeks sanctuary in the mirror of history- in this case, a mirror veiled in gauzy multiculturalism platitudes" (Newman 675). Rushdie, like Garcia Marquez, intertwines actual historical characters and events within a story full of history, fantasy and fables. Rushdie's tales are filled with various genres like history, myths, fantasy, fables, religion, and so on. Justin Newman

indicates that, "despite its preening, *The Enchantress of Florence* proves an essential book; in its strongest moments, *The Enchantress of Florence* repudiates linear, Eurocentric histories of the Renaissance and conjures in their stead place in a synchronous world of the parallel realities" (675). As a master of magical realism, Rushdie has cleverly crafted real historical events into fiction so that the readers could perceive his work totally an authentic document. P. Suneetha deftly incorporates that "Rushdie in *The Enchantress of Florence* makes a peripheral account of the historical details of the age of Renaissance and also of the age of the Mughals. He distinguishes himself from the regular historical novelists like Scott as he asserts almost categorically that dogmatic religion as a force in the world is often divisive, a source of conflict, a barrier to progress, and socially oppressive. It appears he is interested in *geschichtlich* (what applies to the present) than in *historisch* (what we know about the past), based primarily upon documents" (9). The documentation of history in the fictional work becomes unique in Rushdie's style. Rushdie's present novel, according to O. P. Mathur, "alternates between the Mughal Empire under Akbar and the Renaissance Italy of Machiavelli, linking the two via the appearance of a Florentine wanderer, Moger dell' Amore, at Akbar's Court in Fatehpur Sikri and the presence of Qara Koz, a Mughal princess with magical powers in Florence. The novel is marked by his command over a rich variety of events, backgrounds, characters, narrative, strategies, styles and his remarkable knowledge of the two entirely different cultures. Behind a bewildering maze of characters and events, with their interconnections, so challenging and apparently incomprehensible, there are underlying strands organically uniting them. The most important of them are the idealistic

Akbar and the enchantress Qara Koz, with unmatched beauty and magical powers. With his multi-faceted philosophy, Akbar is the moral centre of the novel; sometimes a spokesman of the cosmopolitan message of Salman Rushdie” (6-7). Moreover, the novel primarily concentrates on the mutual suspicion and mistrust between East (India’s Mughal Empire) and West (Renaissance Florence), Ottoman Empires, the earlier Mongols etc. Salman Rushdie knows the importance of history and avers, “The past was a light that if properly directed could illuminate the present more brightly than any contemporary lamp” (EF 315). A. S. Rao authenticates the point: “Meanings and truths are influenced by their historical position and cannot in principle be set apart from history. The reality of a literary text lies with the reader’s imagination” (Rao 2).

Rushdie, with the help of imaginative energy and new possibilities of understanding, weaves together the several narratives of the novel by a common thread. The novel is primarily divided in to three parts. To begin with, it is the story of Akbar, the Mughal emperor. The action circles around historical figures and episodes in the Court of Akbar-the-Great in Fatehpur Sikri, around 1584-85. Secondly, it is the story of three friends, Niccolo, Ago and Argelia, growing up in Renaissance Florence. Argelia is orphaned at the age of nine. He leaves Florence to fight alongside a liberator, Andrea Doria and his band of Gold. Niccolo works hard for success and comes to learn the hard way about the ugly side of power and authority; how quickly your life and your reputation and status can be taken from you. Ago becomes more and more of a homebody, immersing himself in the city as it becomes his world and his life, while Niccolo is cast out as the Medici regain power after the Republicans lose it. Finally, it is the story of the enchantress Qara Koz, a product of Rushdie’s poetic imagination. Qara Koz is a mysterious woman, a great beauty believed to possess the powers of enchantment and sorcery, attempting to command her own destiny in a man’s world. The Enchantress was inspired by the Renaissance poem *Orlando Furioso*. Weaving together the three threads, one does not only come across historical events and personages but also encounters with invented happenings and characters, magic and fairytale elements etc. Akbar is an important character of the present as the enchantress Qara Koz is of the past. Tim Adams slightly observes: “It is Rushdie’s contention that there was, by the end of the sixteenth century, not one Renaissance but two” (7). The different historical details, fantasy, fancy and fables are represented fascinatingly through various real and imaginary characters in the novel.

Fatehpur Sikri and Florence

Salman Rushdie has conferred a fascinating description of Fatehpur Sikri, which was built during the second half of the 16th century by Emperor Akbar. Fatehpur Sikri (the city of victory) was the capital of the Mughal Empire for about 10 years. The complex of monuments and temples, all in a uniform architectural style, includes one of the largest mosques in India, the Jama Masjid. According to Sastri and Srinivashachari, “Akbar revered Muslim saints. He met Shaikh Salim at Sikri, a village near Agra. In accordance with Salim’s assurance, Akbar’s eldest son was born in 1560 and was named Salim after the saint. Next year his second son Murad was born. As a mark of gratitude to Shaikh Salim Akbar built a splendid city at Sikri and named it Fatehpur Sikri” (465). Rushdie’s portrayal of Sikri’s palace shows the artistic zenith

of Mughal age:

... bright silks flying like banners from red palace windows ... simmering in the heat like an opium vision ... strutting peacocks and dancing girls ... The emperor ... was the enchanter. ... a new world, a world beyond religion, region, rank and tribe. The most beautiful women in the world ... The most brilliant talents in the land ... the nine stars, the nine most brilliant of the most brilliant, and with their help there was nothing he could not accomplish The songs of Tansen ... The poems of Faizi ... The governance of Raja Man Singh and the financial skills of Raja Todar Mal meant the empire’s business was in the best of hands. And then there was Birbal, the best of the nine who were the best of the best... his first minister and first friend. (EF 53-54)

Rushdie brilliantly describes the charm of the new ‘victory city’ of Akbar. “No city is all palaces. The real city, built of wood and mud and dung and brick as well as stone, huddled beneath the walls of the mighty red stone plinth upon which the royal residences stood... the place of bangles and clothes... (EF 35-36). There is also a comparison between Sikri and Florence or Venice or Rome:

The road to the city wall rose quickly up the hillside... Plainly it was one of the grand cities of the world, larger, it seemed to his eye, than Florence or Venice or Rome, larger than any town the traveler had ever seen... As the light failed the city seemed to grow He had crossed the world to do so, and he would. (EF 10)

The narrator has also presented the life of Sikri and Florence. It seems that the artistic and cultural summit of the two great worlds finds an echo in Rushdie’s descriptions. The novelist tends to ferry across two great cities. Peacocks danced on the morning stones of Sikri and in the distance the great lake shimmered like a ghost. Overall, Fatehpur Sikri was the most desired place to inhabit in the East. Rushdie is very much cautious about the importance of water. The scarcity of water may lead to the devastation of kingdoms. The traveler thought, “Without water we are nothing.... even an emperor, denied water, and would swiftly turn to dust. Water is the real monarch and we are all its slaves” (EF 436). It is historically true that Akbar did remove capital from Fatehpur Sikri either because of the danger of invasions from the north-west (Afghanistan and Persia) or because of the scarcity of water in Fatehpur Sikri, where there was no permanent source of supply of sufficient water, ‘Anup Talao’ being a private tank of the Akbar. Rushdie has beautifully fictionalized this scarcity of water into a splendid lake drying up on account of a curse. This marked the destruction of Fatehpur Sikri: “... slowly, moment by moment-... the water was receding.... ‘The lake is leaving us’, ... without the lake the citizens would have nothing to drink, nothing to wash or cook with, and their children would soon die... without the lake the city was a parched and shriveled husk. The water continued to drain away. The death of the lake was the death of the Sikri as well”. (EF 436)

Here, in the novel Rushdie also gives the reason of drying the lake in his own style, conflating fantasy and fables. Somehow the revenge of Moger’dell Amore, the rejected Mughal of love, is petty: his departure coincides with the drying up of the golden lake that conferred greatness to the city of Sikri.

Niccolo claimed the crossing of the two opposing realms: imagination and reality; Akbar proclaimed the two existences, yet not their overlapping. Akbar's refusal is punished by the drying up of the lake, which translated symbolically, means, the annihilation of imagination, of the fantasy realms. "If that is your lesson for me, Mughal of love", he silently addressed the departed foreigner, "then the title you gave to yourself is false, for in this version of the world there is no love to be found anywhere" (EF 440). The incident indicates the impermanence of things, of the suddenness with which a change can overtake even the most potent of people and mightiest of men.

Similarly, Rushdie's presents Florence as an Eden of libertarian-or libertine-sensuality: "Imagine a pair of women's lips," says the traveler, "puckering for a kiss. That is the city of Florence...with the Arno flowing through between." And under the fictive Enchantress the city briefly becomes the New Jerusalem: her "womanly powers" create "a benevolent haze which filled the thoughts of Florentines with images of parental, filial, carnal and divine love. ... subtle perfumes of reconciliation and harmony filled the air, people worked harder and more productively, the quality of family life improved, the birth rate rose and all the churches were full" (EF 176). Florence (Italian *Firenze*, *Florentia* and *Fiorenza*), is the capital city of the Italian region of Tuscany. During the Renaissance, it was at the height of its artistic, literary and scientific accomplishments. The city is also known as the 'cradle of Renaissance'. It has monuments, churches and buildings, majesty of higher sovereigns. It is known for its beauty, valor, and for love. Besides the Medici family, a few individuals of unusual insight like Niccolo Machiavelli, Amerigo Vespucci, and Leonardo da Vinci etc. had contributed to the growth of the city. The Medici family contributed a lot to make Florence the cultural centre of the Europe. Savestro de Medici, Giovanni Bicci de Medici, Cosimo de Medici ruled Florence and made efforts for the growth of artists and sculptors. They contributed a lot in building Churches, construction of big libraries, foundation of Platonic academy etc. They also supported the great artists like Donatello, Michelangelo and Raphael. Moreover, they promoted literature and arts. Lorezo, a poet, writer, philosopher, statesman, politician and banker played a key role in Italian politics. Rushdie uses the names of Medici family who contributed to the rebirth of learning in Europe. Fatehpur Sikri and Renaissance Florence are brought noisily, nastily and splendidly back to life. Rushdie's portrayal of Florence pales in comparison with his depiction of Mughal Court society of Fatehpur Sikri. Moreover, the culture of East and West set in Fatehpur Sikri and Florence, take on a similar blended polarity in Akbar as he listens to the tales. Each culture becomes the dream of the other and the two cultures create an opportunity for exhilarating exchanges of perspective.

Akbar-the-Great and Mughal Court

Akbar was "a true emperor and a brooding philosopher king, with his ambition to find the religion of man, trying to unite the two desperate geographies of Florence and the Mughal city of Fatehpur Sikri, under the philosophical awakening of the Renaissance. He is imperial, Majestic, Intelligent and very likely an authentic spokesman for the novelist" (Suneetha 11). In the historical record, Abul Fath Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar also known as 'Shahanshah Akbar-e-Azam' or 'Akbar

the Great' was the third Mughal Emperor. He was of Timurid descent; the son of Emperor Humayun, and the grandson of the memorable Mughal Emperor Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, the ruler who founded the Mughal dynasty in India. At the end of his reign in 1605 the Mughal Empire covered most of the northern and central India. His father was Humayun, whose value portrait is not exactly favorable and who experiences the loss of his empire and then its short- term recovery. Defeat was associated with his father Humayun: "... smoked too much opium, lost his empire, only got it back after he pretended to become a *Shiite* (and gave away the Koh-i-noor diamond) so that the King of Persia would give him army to fight with, and then died by falling down a flight of library stairs almost immediately after he regained his throne. Akbar didn't know his father. He himself had been born in Sind, after Humayun's defeat at Chausa, when Sher Shah Suri became the king Humayun should have been but wasn't capable of being, and then off the deposed emperor scurried to Persia, abandoning his son. His fourteen- month-old son who was found and raised by his father's brother and enemy, Uncle Askari of Kandahar, wild man uncle Askari who would have killed Akbar himself if he could ever have got close enough, which he didn't, because his wife was always in the way". (EF 46)

Akbar was a contemporary of Elizabeth I, but reined over 10 times as many subjects. He was a lover of art, history, music and poetry. He was intellectually curious and religiously tolerant. Akbar encouraged the dialogue between Muslims, Hindus and Christians. Rushdie's Akbar has women, wealth and power beyond compare. He is "the Grand Mughal, the dusty, battle-weary, victorious, pensive, incipiently overweight, disenchanted, mustachioed, poetic, over-sexed, and absolute emperor, who seemed altogether too magnificent, too world encompassing, and, in sum, too much to be a single human person..." (EF 37-38). Akbar was a "mighty specimen of a man, huge and strong. As a boy he had killed a tigress with his bare hands ... a Muslim vegetarian, a warrior who wanted only peace, a philosopher-king: a contradiction in terms. Such was the greatest ruler the land had ever known" (EF 41). Akbar insists that he is not a tyrant and that he believes that "In the House of God all voices are free to speak as they choose and that is their form of devotion" (EF 44). Yet he executes the grandson of an old enemy, Rana of Cooch Naheen. O.P. Mathur is in the opinion that "Akbar's killing of the young Rana of Cooch Nahin has ironical connotations. His remark, "In the house of God all voices are free to speak, and that is their form of devotion," at this Akbar both promises to build that house of adoration and also chops off the Rana's head crying "Allahu Akbar", by interpreting it 'Akbar is God' suggesting perhaps that his puzzling behaviour, like the way of divinity, are inscrutably self-contradictory" (2). In the hours after he killed Rana, the Emperor was possessed by his familiar demon of loneliness. "Whenever a man spoke to him as an equal it drove him crazy, and this was a fault, he understand that, an angry king was like a god who made mistakes" (EF 44). Then Akbar begins to think that everyone is regarding him as mad "The king is mad ... everyone said that. His soldiers, his people, his wives ..." (EF 45). And so calls a 'professional' sycophant Bhakti Ram Jain whose flattery makes him feel better. All this shows that Akbar "was not content with being. He was striving to become" (EF 45). O. P. Mathur rightly observes, "In so many ways the novelist describes the incongruous features of Akbar's personality blending both the

humorous outside and the seriousness within" (2). It seems that Rushdie's core insight is that "the religious bigotry and fundamentalism of modern times must be understood with reference to the state system in the past" (Suneetha 11). Akbar had a multifaceted personality which brought whole of Indian subcontinent under his reign.

Jodha

A being created by Akbar's all-powerful fancy, *Khayal*, whom Akbar believes to be real while "it was the real queens who were the phantoms" (EF 33). Her paintings are made and "the whole court knew Jodha to be real... an imaginary wife, dreamed up by Akbar in the way that lonely children dream up imaginary friends.... He gave her a name, Jodha, and no man dared gainsay him.... all acknowledged not only her existence but also her beauty, her wisdom, the grace of her movements and the softness of her voice... Akbar and Jodha Bai.... The love story of the age" (EF 34). Rushdie's portraying of her character imaginary serves two purposes in the novel: first, with the character of Jodha Bai, Akbar's fancy come alive and second, Rushdie, somehow, solves the problem of the controversy over her identity.

The fact, however, is that "the limitless beauty of the imaginary queen came from one consort, her Hindu religion from another, and her uncountable wealth from yet a third. Her temperament, however, was Akbar's own creation" (EF 57). Belief in magic and necromancy is dynastic, the last being Babar's sacrificing himself to save his son Humayun's life. But all the same, "The creation of a real life from a dream was a super human act" (EF 58), only one man achieving it "by a pure act of will" (EF 59). She is "both his wife and his child....The sorceress of herself... the scholar of his need. She knew everything" (EF 62). At the same time, Jodha too is something of a sorceress herself. When she feels that "Akbar's spell had almost broken", "she poured all the force of her eyes into his and he came back to her" instead of flattering him, she tells him that he is looking old and immediately thereafter "dropping the thin silk veil, she unleashed the beauty she had kept hidden and he was lost" (EF 64). Rushdie goes on to add "she was adept at the seven types of unguiculation, which is to say the art of using the nails to enhance the act of love" and she could leave the marks of her nails on the different, even the private, parts of Akbar's body, for instance on his breast she could make the "Peacock's foot" with her specially sharpened nails- "marks resembling the trails left by a peacock as it walks through mud" (EF 64-65). But she soon finds a change in him: he never again refers to himself in the singular and used the plural 'we' "even in the judgment of the woman who loved him, and plural he would remain" (EF 65). Thereafter he is never singular even in his love for her, and she realizes that her existence is over. His imaginary queen Jodha most often distracts his thoughts-"her sharp tongue, her beauty, her sexual expertise...she was his masterpiece...., a dream made flesh, a traveler from the world of *khayal*, fancy, whom he had brought across the frontier of the real" (EF 388). History witnesses that to gain political supremacy, Akbar had married Rajput princess but Rushdie instead of giving historical details symbolizes the imaginary princess as a true soulmate of Akbar.

Akbar's favorite minister, Birbal is another historical figure in the novel. Birbal had begun his life as a poor Brahmin boy called Mahesh Das, and it was Akbar who had brought him to the Mughal court. "His pure intellectuality, his quaint humor,

and cynical outlook on life, seem to have given Akbar the never tonic, which as a dreamer, he appears to have needed" (Sastri and Srinivashachari 465). The tuning between Akbar and Birbal is so melodious. Rushdie figures him the greatest wit on the earth. The humorous anecdotes taken from the folk tales enriches Rushdie's novel *The Enchantress of Florence*. Abul Fazl was one of the Nine Stars in Akbar's court. He was a historian, spymaster, brightest of the Nine Stars, and second closet confident of the most frightening man in the world. "Abul Fazl 'Allami' was the son of Sheikh Mubarak, who emigrated from Sind to Hindustan and before the age of twenty he had obtained the reputation of being a deep and critical scholar" (Elliot 3). There is also a lovely account of Daswanth, the royal painter of the Mughal court. His father was one of the emperor's palanquin bearers. Dashwanth falls in love with the legendary princess he has been commissioned to paint. He becomes so obsessed with his subject that he appears into the border of one of his pictures of her. It's an enchanting fable that displays Rushdie's gift for magical realism. The other gem in Akbar's court was the great musician Tansen, famous for his raga-Deepak: "Tansen had gone so far as to create a raga in the two courtesan's honor, the raga Deepak, so called because when he played it for the first time in the House of *Skanda* the sorcery of the melody made unlit lamps burst into flame" (EF 192). Salim is also a historical figure in the novel. Salim was Akbar's favorite son, and his most likely assassin. Rushdie has splendidly expressed the darkness in Salim, the crown prince: "... an only fourteen already so expert an archer that the rules of the sports were being rewritten to accommodate him ... Look at their eyes: They were already drunk, drunk in ... the fools... these were princes of blood and no servant dared gain say them.... Salim's opium habit and nightly feats of perverted lechery...." (EF 69-70)

Akbar always dominated the life of his sons. His son Salim was a tough and cruel prince like his father. Salim was already dreaming up ingenious methods of killing people which shows the degradation of moral values in the royal household. But the emperor knows the truth that if there was darkness in prince Salim, then it had been inherited from the King of Kings himself. As a result Akbar always anticipated, "When he was gone these three brothers would fight like dogs in the street over the meaty bone of his power...Salim leading a rebellion against him, and failing like the puny runt he was... *he did not trust his sons* (EF 71-72). Akbar always wished to trust his sons like Birbal, Jodha, Abul Fazl and Todar Mal. But he always kept the boys under close surveillance. He dreamed of relying on them so that they could be the strong supporters of his old age. But he knew the history of his blood, that trustworthiness was not his people's habit. The emperor now knows the eternal truth that "*the world was not to be relied on ... The world is a bridge. Pass over it but builds no house upon it*" (EF 72). Akbar was wretchedly miserable after the death of Birbal. He suspected that the Crown Prince had somehow been involved but was never able to prove it. Birbal's body was never found. Eight thousand men of Akbar were slaughtered. The emperor is deeply involved in Birbal's thoughts. He wrote a verse in Birbal's honour, "You gave the helpless whatever you could, Birbal. Now I am helpless, but you have nothing left for me" (EF 398). Akbar here wrote in the first person. It looks like "a man singing a lament for his beloved" (EF 398). Akbar saw voids everywhere in the palaces of Sikri. After the death of Abul Fazl and Tansen, the emperor became stern. He

took the death of Tansen as “the music of life was stilled” (EF 432). The emperor was lonely without his so called stars or jewels of his court.

Qara Koz

Qara Koz is a magically beautiful “hidden princess” (EF 369) and a connecting link between the two cities- the hedonistic Mughal capital and the equally sensual city of Florence. She is said to be a “descendant of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan” (EF 369) claimed by the traveler to be his mother. She is very beautiful and could be called as the goddess of beauty and known as “Lady Dark Eyes” or the “Enchantress of Florence” is introduced by the traveller in the Mughal Court. “...bore enchanted weapons... the most beautiful woman in the world, and an enchantress beyond compare” (EF 139). This paragon of enchantment first appears in a magic mirror owned by the sinister Medici family as a vision of unbearably beauty. She seems to be a visitor from another world. She is meant for places.

...brought men running from the fields, and women from their kitchens... Woodcutters came from the forests and the butcher Gabburra’s son from the slaughter house with bloody hands and potters left their kilns...personal brilliance, with mesmeric, fantasy-inducing effects. (EF 306-307)

When the question of traveller’s mother arises in the Mughal court the queen mother, Hamida Bano authenticating her identity, found herself saying, “the hidden princess truly was a supreme enchantress, and learned the occult secrets of eternal youth ... even though she was almost seventy years old” (EF 141). Somehow, this Mughal princess who has never been educated, has learned to speak perfect Florentine Italian, as her lover Argelia announces to all of Florence, “in the hope of forging a union between the great cultures of Europe and the East, knowing that she has much to learn from us and believing, too, that she has much to teach” (EF 242). Qara Koz is an important object of focus in Vespucci’s tales. Akbar thinks that “he was bent on the sounds of the future and she was an echo from the distant past ... a dangerous sorceress who would drag him background in time, and consistently backwards in every way in his ideas, his beliefs, his hopes ... she would be bad for him (EF 308). He also has the conception that she had been sent by an enemy, perhaps Niccolo Vespucci to do this “by planting the scarlet woman, this deracinated renegade in his mind ... who could defeat him from within himself” (EF 308). On the other side, in dilemma, Akbar thinks that Qara Koz is not bad for him. He takes her “a new dream for him ... a woman who had forged her own life, beyond convention, by the force of her will alone, a woman like a king” (EF 309). He also observes “the evidence of the interference of faith in human affairs” which “was scattered all around him” (EF 309).

Qara Koz’s character in the novel solves two purposes- first, she is a link between the two empires of East and West, and second, she acts as a symbol of history, fantasy and fables in the novel. According to Christopher Rollason, “The magical powers of Qara Koz recall similarly gifted women figures from other magic realist novels Sierva Maria in Gabriel Gracia Marquez’s *Delamoryotros Demonios*, *Of Love and other Demons* or Blimunda in Jose Saramago’s *Memorial do Convento/ Baltasar and Blimunda*. Moger dell Amore’s

conversations with Akbar may remind the reader of the similar exchanges between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan in Italo Calvino’s *Le Citta Invisibili/Invisible Cities*, while the emperor’s love relationship with his (at least in the novel) imaginary wife Jodha echoes Adolfo Bioy Asares’ *La Invencion de Morel/The Invention of Morel*, whose narrator falls in love with a computer-generated woman” (240). Jodha and Qara Koz are different to one another. While Jodha can be called a dream of Akbar vivified at least in his imagination, Qara Koz is entirely different- an enchantress. Rushdie splendidly describes the magical powers of Qara Koz. The story of the sorceress (Qara Koz) had spread as enchantress of heart, and the old princess Gulbadan’s opinion of her as “a free-spirited adventures” with an “irreverent, even blasphemous gaiety” (EF 199) is not entirely unjustified, for “her power over men was so great that perhaps even she did not at first know the force of her enchantments” as Vespucci tells Akbar (EF 216). Rushdie proves his mastery over the depiction of dreams, fantasy and fables through the detailed account of Jodha and Qara Koz.

In Renaissance Florence, there are many historical figures that Rushdie portrait in the novel, including Machiavelli and Pope Leo X. Pope Leo X, a historical figure who raised the church and made the capital of Christendom the centre of culture and created special projects to engage the outstanding talents of artists like Raphael. He restored all churches, reformed the Roman University and made Raphael, the custodian of the classical antiquities of Rome and vicinity. So the novelist derives pleasure in recreating this noble character. Machiavelli is the other historical figure who appears in the novel. Machiavelli is one of the characters in history whom Rushdie gave a new life in the novel. Machiavelli was an Italian philosopher, humanist and writer, a true republican, travelling diplomat and founder of the Florentine militia, based in Florence during the Renaissance. In many ways he was an admirable figure and so Rushdie brought him to life since in reality he seems to have been a rather dark figure. Both Machiavelli and Akbar question the arrangement of their societies. Machiavelli does so through politics and writing; Akbar who cannot read or write by example and decree. Though his role in the novel is a minor and muted one, Machiavelli emerges as the novel’s most intriguing character. Rushdie has given him a distinctly contemporary personality and keeps him, for the most part, free of the distracting romance plot with its typically inflated and jocose prose. An old man of forty-four, Machiavelli too falls under the predictably hypnotic spell of Qara Koz and experiences a temporary respite from his gloom: when the Mughal princess departs Florence, his depression returns and he died in 1527. Rushdie’s portrait of Machiavelli as a sexually adventurous Florentine youth is substantiated by Maurizio Vioris’s biography *Niccolo’s Smile*.

The story moves back and forth in time and space, blending fact and fiction, fantasy and fable using the memoirs for the subversion or delineation of truth, and as alternate historical reality. Historically related facts about Akbar shifting his capital from Fatehpur Sikri to Agra are wrapped in a fable by the writer. By the novel’s end the barren Mughal princess Qara Koz, has been absorbed into the Emperor Akbar’s *Khayal*, “his god-like, omnipotent fancy” having taken the place of his fantasy-queen Jodha. Even the most extraordinary female in the history of mankind is finally just a man’s fancy, as Qara

