



## Love, Loss, Rock and Roll

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### Abstract

**Aim:** *The paper, entitled Love, Loss, Rock, and Roll is focused on the iconic author, Salman Rushdie's novel The Ground Beneath her Feet. The book presents the incredible worlds of the protagonists, Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara, both having acquired legendary, God-like status in the sphere of rock and roll music. Their love story is as much a tale of music and romance, as it is of loss and separation.*

**Methodology and approach:** *The paper illustrates how Rushdie qualifies for belonging to the postmodern literary canon. The novel points out many features which establish him as a postmodern literary artist, one of the foremost of those being that he never takes his art too seriously. Nevertheless, he constructs an enchanting love story that combines not only passion and music, vigor and vitality, but also suffering and mythology.*

**Outcome:** *The novel opened on the 14th of February- Valentine's Day, in 1989, and the heroine, Vina, who is, by then, an aging rock goddess, is swallowed by an earthquake, and further washed down by a tequila chaser as a local distillery in Mexico, where she has gone for a concert, is destroyed. Incidentally, it was on the same date, earlier, when Rushdie's world had fallen apart, following Ayatollah Khomeini's announcement of his death sentence. This fatwa shook up his life just like the earthquake which killed Vina. But the book does for Rushdie as well as the readers what the mythical Orpheus did- it converts sorrow into happiness through the power of music and of love.*

**Conclusion and Suggestion:** *The novel is a rich, all-encompassing work, including religion, race, myth, culture, wisdom, and life. These are woven into a modern myth, akin to that of Orpheus and Eurydice. It gives the message that true love may be human, yet it transforms itself, reaching for the divine.*

**Keywords:** Legendary, Separation, Postmodern, Canon, Mythology, Race and Culture.

#### **Volume 2 Issue 1 Winter Edition 2022**

**Paper Type:** Research Article

**Article History: Received: February 20, 2022. Revised: March 10, 2022.**

**Accepted: March 18, 2022.**

The paper can be accessed online at: [www.literaryherm.org](http://www.literaryherm.org)

The iconic Salman Rushdie's novels illustrate a distinctly Indian modification of postmodernist fictional narratives being written in the West. He deals with entirely new themes. He even employs the myth as a novel fictional technique in his works. He writes "histories" in his fiction, writing them through the

imaginative form of fiction. Rushdie tries to protect and preserve the history of his times by offering his version of it, this one is different from the original.

The novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* presents the story of an intense love that is temporarily lost. It is a beautifully written account of the lives of two God-like rock stars, Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama. The novel has an unexpected intersection of tragic lives. Though it is a love story, one of its strange characteristics is that the lovers constantly invent techniques that keep them apart rather than together.

There are no rigid qualifications for canonization and whether the works of an author will be canonized or not remains a subjective decision. Through my paper, I propose to present Rushdie as a major part of the postmodern literary canon. I will be analyzing his novel, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, (published in 1999), and presenting features that establish him as a postmodernist, and therefore a rightful entrant in the postmodern canon.

In the literary context, the term ‘canon’ is beset with dangers. Derived from the Greek term for ‘ruler’, as in ‘yardstick’, ‘canon’ was used to describe the ‘official’ books of the Bible. Today, it is a group of literary works considered most important of a particular period or place. Therefore authors who are most widely read and studied, such as Shakespeare, Melville, Hardy, Jane Austen, and now, Rushdie, are accepted as canonical.

Salman Rushdie has ‘decolonized’ Indian writing in English in the complete, true sense of the word. Through him, Indian writing in English seems to have entered adulthood. He has brought about changes in terms of both theme and technique. A deep study of his works shows how he qualifies as a postmodernist. A definition provided by James Morley states that postmodernist writing is writing after 1945. Another definition says that it highlights the multiplication of

voices, questions and conflicts that has shattered the placid unanimity of the great tradition.

It is a certain kind of contemporary *avant-garde* art that is said to be neither antimodernist nor modernist, but postmodernist; it continues the modernist critique of traditional, mimetic art and shares the modernist commitment to innovation, but pursues these aims by methods of its own. Postmodernism has established itself as an *écriture*, in Barth's sense of the word, a mode of writing shared by several writers in a given period, most plausibly in the French *Nouveau Roman* and in the American fiction of about the last 30 years.

Rushdie's novels illustrate a distinctly Indian modification of postmodernist fictional narratives being written in the West. He deals with entirely new themes. He even employs the myth as a novel fictional technique in his works. He writes "histories" in his fiction, writing them through the imaginative form of fiction. Rushdie tries to protect and preserve the history of his times by offering his version of it, this one is different from the original.

Being a postmodernist, we see how Rushdie does not take art 'too' seriously and indulges in his love for music by taking the reader on a magical mystery tour of the world during periods reigned by different musical trends. London is presented in the swinging 60s and New York in the 70s and 80s. But the writer never moves away from Bombay and the fragrant Arabian Sea. The role of music is extremely important in the lives of the two central characters. Both of them want to become famous singers and it is this ambition which draws them closer together. They reach staggering heights of fame and popularity:

The minute Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara opened their mouths and began to sing, everybody just stopped thinking about anything else. When they had finished, the audience was cheering wildly.  
(G.B.F. p.151)

Rock and roll music is the major theme of the novel. More essentially, the novel deals with the power of song and the force it exerts in the lives of people and the world. It gives the message that this music has its direct route to the hearts of the listeners and even defines their lives as they were at the time when they heard these songs. The author said in *The Hindu*:

In that sense it was the world's first globalized cultural phenomenon, when the world was not yet globalized, it was very hard for this material to enter into our consciousness and yet with the incredible speed it spread into every corner of the world....( *A Columbus...*, 1999 p.V)

The writer tries to explore how rock-and-roll music, from one part of the world, could appeal to even the most distant parts of the globe. In all probability, the character of Ormus has been inspired by Freddie Mercury, the star of the musical band Queen. Combining fact with fiction he has created the Parsi Ormus, based on the real-life Freddie who was Faroukh Balsara. Faroukh's parents were also Parsees. He was born in Zanzibar but went to school in Bombay, not far from Rushdie's school, and more or less in the same period. He was Asian, but never really stressed the fact.

The postmodernist Rushdie combines many facts of history with his vivid imagination. The narrator, Rai, is supposed to be a normal, unblemished person. But in some ways, he is rather abnormal. The world he lives in and reports on is not the same as the one the reader inhabits. The postmodernist creates a world in which Kennedy is not assassinated in 1963 and the Watergate episode is only a figment of imagination in the narrator's world. According to him, it is the British and not the Americans who are engaged in a war in Indo-China. In the book, through a bizarre combination of fact and fiction, all three Gandhis (who have

died unnatural deaths) are killed together, though the assassination is carried out by Sikh bodyguards. That is why a comment about the book says:

The Ground Beneath Her Feet is epic in scope, incomparable in heart, and filled with enough ironic laughter for two books. (*January Magazine*).

The narrator, Rai, whose real name is Umeed Merchant, is a character in the novel. He is close to both Vina and Ormus and is a photographer by profession. He is also one of the 'midnight's children'! This postmodernist, self-conscious narrator reflects in his narrative voice on the action of the book and also on the world that he finds himself. The photographer's narrator is not a mere recording eye. Keeping an eye on the camera should mean erasing himself from the scene. But he always pushes himself into it and even tries to wreck the story. The author also gets a chance to discuss the nature of representation as the narrator is a photographer.

The voice of the narrator opens up a whole new kind of discourse and a new way of talking and writing. In this novel, the story is important. But the voice in which it is told is equally important. Only a postmodernist could have written such a book. Only Rushdie has that peculiar and idiosyncratic energy.

Postmodernists often use the mythic mode in their writings. This is a Western novel with a Greek myth theme. Even the cover of the book hints at its mythical quality. It has a neon-light sculpture of a lyre, suggesting that the novel is going to be an allegory involving the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. From another perspective, we can also view the Trinity from the Hindu pantheon, of the God-like central characters.

Ancient Greek stories mention Orpheus as a talented musician who played the lyre beautifully and his music was loved by everyone. Even trees and animals circled him when he sang. He lost his lady love and went to Hades, the God of the

underworld to get her back. After he was refused, he unslung his lyre and sang and even Hades was moved. He granted that the shade of Eurydice would follow her husband to the light above and would reunite with him once they were out in the open. One can easily draw parallels from this Greek myth. Ormus' music, in a similar manner, is part of the text, throughout the book.

The book came at a time when India was developing its weapons of mass destruction. In typical postmodern style, Rushdie comes up with the idea of natural calamities, like earthquakes, which are weapons of mass destruction, though of a different sort, offered by him. The book gives the message that nothing can be taken for granted and that things can change suddenly.

I end my article with the following lines from this exciting and hugely ambitious novel: Death is more than love or is it. Art is more than love or is it. Love is more than death and art, or not. This is the subject. This subject. (G.B.F. 221p)

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