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Postcolonial Myth in Salman Rushdie's  
*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

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*There the tree rises. Oh pure surpassing!  
Oh Orpheus sings! Oh great tree of sound!  
And all is silent,  
And from this silence arise  
New beginnings, intimations, changings.*  
(Rainer Maria Rilke)

**Abstract**

Postcolonial writers like Salman Rushdie often write back to the "empire" by appropriating myth and allegory. In *The Ground beneath Her Feet*, Rushdie rewrites the mythological story of Orpheus and Eurydice, using katabasis (the trope of the descent into Hell) to comment both on the situation of the postcolonial writer from a personal perspective and to attempt a redefinition of postcolonial migrant identity-formation. Hell has a symbolic function, pointing both to the external context of globalization and migration (which results in the characters' disorientation) and to an interior space which can be interpreted either as a source of unrepressed energies and creativity (in a Romantic vein) or as the space of the abject (in the manner of Julia Kristeva). The article sets out to investigate the complex ways in which the Orphic myth and katabasis are employed to shed light on the psychology of the creative artist and on the re-configuration of identity that becomes the task of the postcolonial migrant subject. The journey into the underworld functions simultaneously as an allegory of artistic creation and identity reconstruction.

**Keywords:** postcolonial myth; katabasis; metanoia; Romantic genius; hybridity; the abject; rock music; transgression

### Introduction

Postcolonial writers have often resorted to myth and fantasy in an attempt to resist hegemonic narratives of colonialism/imperialism and to open up to the oral dimension of local cultures. Taking up the Western myth of the earthly paradise, postcolonial writers from the Caribbean (V.S. Naipaul, Jamaica Kincaid) have exposed the imperialist ideology of ruthless conquest and spoliation that underlay the myth of the paradisiacal islands. On the other hand, African writers like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka and Indian ones like Salman Rushdie have often used indigenous myth and local ritual and tradition as a framing device for narrating alternative histories. Soyinka's depiction of Yoruban cosmology and deities in his novels is, as Nayar remarks, "an effort at decontamination, a process of freeing [his culture] from colonialism's pervasive influence" (234). Similarly, Achebe's use of myth and indigenous oral tradition is a nativist stratagem designed to counteract Western concepts of nation/state while re-configuring national identity from an indigenous perspective. However, Rushdie's use of Indian myth and Indian deities in *Midnight's Children* has a strong anti-foundational, anti-nationalist bias.

One of the functions of myth, outlined by the structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in his ground-breaking essay "The structural study of myth," is to "provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction" (224) and thus circumvent the binary oppositions that form the basis of human language and thought. By its form and structure myth resolves and tempers the oppositions it expresses—and so it may generate a kind of "in-between" third space<sup>1</sup> in which negotiations constantly take place between pairs of opposite meanings. In contrast to ideological narratives of state and nation which introduce hierarchical positions inside binary oppositions, myth does not exclude any aspect of experience: in myth all the levels of meaning are simultaneous (McLuhan 72). Therefore it can provide a model to elude the

imperialist politics of polarity for power-conscious postcolonial writers like Rushdie. He relies heavily on myth and mythology, fantastic narratives, and magic realism. In *Midnight's Children*, Indian mythology serves as an alternative structure for narrating Indian history. The proliferating stories of both Saleem Sinai and the Moor in *The Moor's Last Sigh* remind the reader of Scheherezade and the redeeming/life-giving power of stories, which is the focus of yet another novel, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. The Luciferic fall from the sky of both Saladin and Gibreel in *The Satanic Verses* is reinterpreted in terms of what it means to be a migrant, both from the perspective of the migrant subject and the host culture. In *Fury* the mythical story of Pygmalion is the starting point of a complex meditation on the condition of the artist and the power of the media to subvert creation and transform it into a source of profit. The Western myth of Orpheus and the descent into Hades (katabasis) is appropriated by Rushdie in *The Ground beneath Her Feet* as means of criticizing the destabilizing effects of globalization on art and culture and at the same time of revealing the inner resources of creativity that lie hidden in the artist's unconscious. There is a double katabasis in *The Ground beneath Her Feet*: a descent into the external Hell of capitalism and globalization, which infuses characters with a sense of alienation and a plunge into the depths of the unconscious (a source of unrepressed energy), which help the protagonists find resources for psychic regeneration. In an attempt to overcome "the dismemberment of Orpheus", the phrase used by Ihab Hassan to comment on the fragmentariness of postmodernist literature, Rushdie's novel deploys the Orpheus myth in order to highlight the potential of the migrant/artistic consciousness to articulate alienation, disintegration and displacement into a new identity/creation.

### **The artist as a postcolonial *Grentzgaenger***

Salman Rushdie's first novel after the fatwa years, *The Ground beneath Her Feet* chronicles the lives of rock stars Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara and of their star-crossed, tragic love. Rushdie "hybridizes" the mythical story of Orpheus and Eurydice by grafting onto it the contemporary

mythology of rock and roll stardom. He uses popular rock music as a pretext to investigate the contemporary condition of the artist, placed under the multiple tyrannies of audiences, the music industry and the mass-media. The idea of Romantic genius which infuses his portrait of artistic types like Ormus and Vina is at odds with the materialistic, pragmatic outlook that an iconic art-maker is forced to take by the capitalist practices. Since a creative personality develops out of a multiplicity of resources (some of them in conflict) which he/she is able to hybridize by transgressing the narrow boundaries of a single culture, the genius becomes a sort of *Übermensch*, defying restrictions that hold for others. Creativity is construed as a hybrid practice that implies transgression of rules, limits and boundaries: the artist makes his own rules, dispenses with the old and crosses boundaries. As an example of hybridizing genius Rushdie offers the Renaissance artist:

The breakdown of boundaries . . . gave rise during the Renaissance to the modern idea of the genius . . . The Renaissance artist is no longer a worker bee, a mere craftsman dancing to a patron's tune, but polymathic, a master of anatomy, philosophy, mythography, the laws of seeing and perception; an adept of the arcane of deep sight, able to penetrate into the very essences of things. . . . By crossing boundaries, uniting many kinds of knowledge, technical and intellectual, high and low, the modern artist legitimizes the whole project of society.

Such is genius! Leonardo, Michelangelo: they claim kinship with the gods. The opposed destinies of immortality and destruction are theirs. (387)

Rushdie's choice of the popular genre of rock music is not accidental. Ormus' character can be construed as an allegory of the development of rock music. Born as an amalgam of different musical influences, R&B, country, bluegrass, rock music evolved into an influential musical genre in time, due to the potential for resistance that it offered many artists and to the glamour attached to certain rock bands as anti-establishment.<sup>2</sup> In the essay "Rock Music" from *Step across This Line* (2003), Rushdie dwells on the liberating force that rock music successfully unleashed and calls it "a third globalized phenomenon after the two world wars" (301). Yet this power of rock music to rebel against tyranny often backlashes and can destroy the singer: "The music of

freedom frightens people and unleashes all manner of conservative defense mechanisms. So long as Orpheus could raise his voice in song, the Maenads could not kill him." Eventually Ormus too is destroyed, like Orpheus, by the backlashes of his musical success.

Vina's character is similarly built along the lines of the exceptional Romantic hero and the Nabokovian nymph: a child-prodigy with a gift for languages and music who changes into a mature rock goddess and *femme fatale*, devouring lovers while feeling increasingly estranged and solitary after her separation from Ormus. Her name, Vina, alludes to the Indian stringed instrument veena, while her surname Apsara means "nymph" in Sankrit: Apsaras are female deities, the spirits of the clouds and water in Hindu mythology. Thus Rushdie relates the history of a popular Western genre to the Hindu musical tradition in the typical Rushdiesque motif of "East meets West." From this alchemical wedding, or *coincidentia oppositorum*, the new will emerge. The novel becomes that "Third Space of enunciation" which Bhabha theorized in "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences" as the "precondition for the articulation of cultural difference," which, accompanied by the "assimilation of contraries," gives birth to the "occult instability which presages powerful cultural changes" (157).

### **The descent into Hell as an allegory for migration**

An emblematic gesture of transgression, the descent into the underworld of Hades is a journey undertaken by various classical protagonists such as Orpheus in Greek mythology and Dante in *Divina Commedia*. The boundary between the dead and the living is supposed to be immutable and definitive, and so the descent into the realm of the dead becomes a life-changing experience. Before achieving the status of a modern hero-god and ascending to the Elysian fields of eternal glory, the rock artist has to undergo the transformative experience of *katabasis*. Rushdie employs this literary trope to describe both the external, physical journey of the protagonists and an inner experience occurring as a result of their alienation and displacement. As the characters move across the globe, from Bombay to London and then New York, their horizontal movement

towards the West (as a metaphor for the westernization of culture that globalization presupposes) is compared to a vertical descent into capitalist Hell. However, as in Dante's *Divina Commedia*, the journey into the underworld also becomes a life-giving, regenerative and restorative process. Rushdie uses his own experience of katabasis during the long years spent in the underworld of hiding to comment on the condition of the diasporic artist.

The inner katabasis is accompanied by metanoia (etymologically a process of changing one's mind, of embracing thoughts beyond the subject's limitations or current thought patterns<sup>3</sup>). Metanoia refers to a profound shift of outlook, a change of direction and of a subject's view of reality. If in a religious context the term metanoia is typically understood as repentance and spiritual conversion (as experienced by Saint Augustine), in Carl Jung's psychology, metanoia is used to refer to a spontaneous healing of the psyche after psychotic breakdowns. Jung contended, contra Freud – that episodes of psychotic breakdown were not to be thwarted, as the psyche was capable afterwards of re-stabilizing itself (*Symbols of Transformation* 376). Thus, the trip into the inner underworld of chaos and conflicts leads to metanoia, the regenerative moment of the psyche, just as Dante's journey into the Inferno infused him with the energy of universal love, the 'love that moves the sun and the other stars'.

Katabasis is a literary trope that opens the way for the protagonists' metanoia, a psychic healing process that helps the subject deal with the debilitating effects of globalization on the human psyche. The combined effects of modernization, globalization and migrancy render the postcolonial subject incapable to orient himself. The relativization of value systems makes moral and political orientation an increasingly difficult task, forcing the subject to live with uncertainties in a "liquid"<sup>4</sup> world. In a chapter called *Disorientations*, Rushdie appropriates the etymology of the term in order to define the situation of the postcolonial migrant going west: "Disorientation is loss of the East. Ask any navigator: the East is what you sail by. Lose the east and you lose your bearings, your certainties, your knowledge of what is and what may be, perhaps even your life" (176).

Whereas culturally and artistically hybridity has positive consequences by generating “newness” and contesting restrictive notions of identity, at the micro-level of the individual its antagonistic and irreconcilable meanings cannot offer a unified matrix for the psychic integration of opposites that the self requires. How can the subject face the proliferation of meanings in the absence of a psychic means of counterbalancing the disabling effects of “the war of meanings”? Rushdie’s recourse to myth as the narrative that does not exclude anything helps to integrate both the creative potential of hybridity (as a textual and cultural practice), its negative effects on the fragile human psyche (the war of meanings), and the strategies of overcoming fragmentation and fluidity used by the characters in order to maintain a modicum of wholeness. As Rai states, “The world is irreconcilable, it doesn’t add up, but if we cannot agree with ourselves that it does, we can’t make judgments or choices. We can’t live” (351).

As Ormus and Rai go West they suffer from disorientation. Their inner sense of uncertainty is mirrored by the external instability of the ground beneath their feet – the earthquakes that shake the fictional world and finally swallow Vina. Ormus’ disorientation is both literal and metaphorical: a physical loss of the East, of native Bombay as he moves westwards in search of Vina, and a spiritual loss of his roots and of his twin brother’s ghost, an inspirational figure who introduces him to the invisible world of music. Ormus’ artistic imperative “Life is elsewhere. Cross frontiers. Fly away” (377), while seemingly echoing the hybridizing, transgressive logic of cultural globalization, is strongly at odds with the materialistic drives of London and New York’s “pleasure islands”. The mixture of faiths and religions that arises from the encounter of different cultures gives birth to a New Age philosophy which ultimately serves as the underlying ideology for the capitalist will to profit. While the success of VTO changes Ormus into a rock star, he becomes a recluse. He chooses again the path of exile, this time an inner one: “He retreats into high-rise heaven and watches the city float in space. This celestial Manhattan is what he loves. Against this backcloth of noble silence he will set his pet sounds. . . . His agony will emerge as music” (387). In this respect, Ormus stands for the post-colonial deracinated

subject, incapable of growing roots in any definite place and building his home in the third space of music. He is the embodiment of the “new man” produced by the changing historical and economic conditions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, described by Rushdie in “The Location of Brazil”:

The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves – because they are so defined by others – by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. (124)

### **Hell as the space of abjection and metamorphosis**

In the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the novel, a description of a modern toy functions as a metaphor for the change that contemporary postcolonial migrants have to undergo once they have uprooted themselves, once they have lost the East. The toy is a transformer, a device made up of small Lego-like pieces that can be arranged to change shape from car to robot or vice versa. By “pulling the car apart”, deconstructing it and then clicking it together in “new, unforeseeable configurations”, the boy manages to find the “secrets of this metamorphic riddle” (346) and bring into being the monster-robot. Yet, more than once, until the boy is able to figure out how he can transform the car into a robot, the toy lies on the table “unfinished, trapped in an unreadable transitional phase” (346). This process is apt to describe the de-construction and re-construction of identity that a migrant is forced to undertake and the failures that reduce the individual to a formless being in an “unreadable transitional phase”. The moment of katabasis is part of this transitional phase, where the descent into Hell is linked to the difficulty of re-constructing identity and the experience of metanoia serves as both the terminal point of this phase and the beginning of a new configuration of selfhood. As more often than not the re-construction of identity presupposes the self’s integration of otherness, of what contradicts and dissolves it, the transitional stage between the old and new self is marked by abjection and ambiguity. Because the abjection of transitional stages is seen as a necessary step in every project of re-

constructing identity, Rushdie's prose is suffused with both the images and the rhetoric of abjection.

Hell functions as a leading metaphor of the abject, the space of abjection par excellence: the underworld of Hades is the extension in reality of the deep substrata of the psyche, and the limits between consciousness and the unconscious, the earth and the underworld have become porous and unstable – the earth is continuously shaken by earthquakes, which fissure its skin and finally suck Vina in. The abject is what culture and the symbolic order try to overcome and exclude: a space of ambiguity, where everything can suddenly turn into its opposite. It is to be regarded as such because the space of abjection as the space of outsideness has become the characteristic of many millions of people who migrate from one place to another and find themselves estranged from their former identities and rejected by the host culture. Sir Darius Xerxes Cama and William Methwold, in an attempt to unite the East and the West under the concept of Aryan cultures defined by three functions – religious sovereignty, physical force and fertility – discover the necessity of adding a fourth. This fourth dimension of outsideness is described by Sir Darius in terms of Kristeva's definition of the abject as "that which is beyond the pale, above the fray, beneath notice" (42) embodied in "outcasts, lepers, pariahs, exiles, enemies, spooks, paradoxes" (43). William Methwold, as the characteristic voice of British imperialism, rejects Sir Darius' proposition, arguing against it in the colonizer's language of hegemony and exclusion:

If there are people like that, Methwold offered, aren't they well, rare avis? Few and far between? Does one really need a fourth concept to explain them? Aren't they, well, like waste paper, and all the stuff one puts in the bin? Aren't they simply surplus to requirements? Not wanted on the voyage? Don't we just cross them off the list? Cut them? Blackball them out of the club? (43)

Ormus' brothers, Virus and Cyrus, are both embodiments of the abject, people who cannot integrate into society and are left out as a consequence: Virus, kicked in the head by his own father by mistake during a golf championship, retreats into an unbreakable silence; while Cyrus, enraged by Ormus' musical genius, attempts to murder him and

transforms into a serial killer literally thrown in the bin, the loony bin, from where he escapes in order to kill his father and the whole domestic staff. Shiva, the Indian god of creation and destruction is another metaphor of the abject: as he creates the world by his sacred dance, it might be said the whole world is a creation of abjection, an ambiguous place shaken by earthquakes. Calamities, catastrophes are the meeting point of opposites, the areas where things suddenly turn into their opposites: life into death, absurdity into meaning. They are combat zones, where

There is no structure, the form of things changes all the time. Safety, danger, control, panic, these and other labels constantly attach and detach themselves from places and people. When you emerge from such a space it stays with you, its otherness randomly imposes itself on the apparent stability of your peaceful home-town streets. What-if becomes the truth, you imagine buildings exploding in Grammercy Park, you see craters appear in the middle of Washington Square, and women carrying shopping bags drop dead on Delancey Street, bee-stung by sniper fire. (420)

This liminal space of abjection is the space of the migrant, a combat zone between the old and the new, East and West, tradition and regeneration. The transition from one identity to another is symbolized by the membrane in the sky, which the three protagonists, Ormus, Vina and Rai are forced to cross during their plane journey. The crossing of the frontier is a transgressing as well as a transforming experience:

Ormus, Vina and I: three of us came West and passed through the transforming membrane in the sky. Ormus, the youthful proselytizer of the here and now, the sensualist, the great lover, the material man, the poet of the actual, saw visions of the other world and was transformed into an oracle, a ten-year monk and an Art Deco-rated recluse. (418)

Ormus undergoes a metamorphosis and a metanoia as he crosses the membrane in the sky, the border point between East and West: when the plane which carries him from Bombay to London is flying over the Bosphorus, over Istanbul, Byzantium (where East meets West), Ormus is transformed into another person. Crossing “a stretchy translucent

membrane across the sky, an ectoplasmic barrier, a Wall” (253), he has a mystical experience that changes him into a different person:

And as he passes that unseen frontier he sees the tear in the sky, and for a terror stricken instant glimpses miracles through the gash, visions for which he can find no words, the mysteries at the heart of things, Eleusinian, unspeakable, bright. He intuits that every bone in his body is being irradiated by something pouring through the sky-rip, a mutation is occurring at the level of the cell, of the gene, of the particle. The person who arrives won't be the one who left, of not quite. He has crossed a time zone, moved from the eternal past of early life into the constant now of adulthood, the tense of presence, which will become a different type of preterite, the past of absence, when he dies. (254)

Apart from mythical and mystical echoes, this experience is rendered as the normal passage from childhood to adulthood, accompanied by great transformations. While the sky stands for the super-ego, the Law of the Father that dictates to the conscience of the child, the gash/rip into the sky reveals to the child the invisible workings of the unconscious, whose secret desires and instincts make up the id. The child becomes an adult only when he proves able to perceive this gash in the sky, the gaps in the Law's authority that can enable him to gain access to the deepest recesses of his being and acknowledge the unconscious forces moving him. The passage reveals a very Derridean interpretation of the relationship between the human being and the Law. In a commentary on Kafka's parable *Before the Law*,<sup>5</sup> Derrida argues that the meaning/purpose of the Law, as given by God the Father, is not to be obeyed, but to be transgressed.<sup>6</sup> Kafka's parable features a man who stands before a door. The only time he has courage to open it, he is rebuked by the door keeper. Waiting near that door, he sees the door keeper finally locking it – and finds out that the door was just for him to open. By not having the courage to break open the door, in spite of the door keeper's admonishing, the man has lost all chance of salvation. This, Derrida concludes, is the purpose and meaning of all law: to frighten us and at the same time to determine us to transgress it. By transgressing the Law, the human being gains either knowledge and salvation (Kafka), or independence and a new identity (Rushdie). This is in line with Rushdie's philosophy of border-crossing, which understands transgression as a positive and creative gesture. The

metanoic moment of inner transformation occurs, as in Jung's case, when the human being starts questioning the authority of the Law/the Father/Culture and appeals instead to its own hidden resources. It is a stage of either spiritual/artistic growth or newly acquired maturity.

### **The descent into Hades as an allegory of creation and postcolonial identity-formation**

If metamorphosis is the condition of the migrant, katabasis- the descent into Hades (understood here as the unconscious or as Blake's Hell, a source of unrepressed energies) is the mark of the artist. Ormus, Vina and Rai undertake this journey into the underworld not just once, but several times. Katabasis occurs as a consequence of the characters' disorientation (which temporarily annihilates the tyrannical control of reason), their loss of certainties and resembles "the carpet whipped out from under us to reveal a chasm where the floor should have been" (313). Ormus' first experience of katabasis occurs in his childhood: while he is singing in his sleep "so sweetly that the birds had woken, thinking the dawn had come" (46), his brother Cyrus, driven mad by the joy in life, the optimism and hope of his melody, grabs a pillow and tries to smother him. Following this incident "Ormus Cama did not sing again for fourteen years. Not a ditty, not a warble, not a note. Not until Vina Apsara set his music free" (47). After a car accident Ormus lies comatose until he is awoken by Vina's voice. It is Vina who plays Orpheus' role this time, bringing Ormus-Eurydice back to music and life.

When Vina dies in the earthquake, Ormus tries to keep her alive in songs, in what Rai calls his "alternative reality". Vina's death triggers Ormus' final experience of katabasis. His descent into the Hell of drugs, fake spiritual healers and Vina impersonators leaves a deep mark on his physical appearance: "He looks terrible; his hair is almost white, and thinning. His skin is gray and ill. There was never any surplus weight on him, but he has lost a lot of pounds. He looks old. He is just fifty-two" (475). He briefly comes back to life when he finds out about Mira Celano, one of Vina's look-alikes, with whom he recreates VTO and starts giving concerts again. But Mira is a strong personality and imposes her own

performing style, giving up her imitation of Vina when she achieves success. After this disappointment, Ormus becomes more and more of a recluse, and one day he is shot dead by a crazy fan, dressed up as Vina.

The katabasis experience is different for Rai. As Vina's secret lover, he often questions Ormus and Vina's relationship. Yet in the end he acknowledges that while he found a replacement for Vina, Ormus remained loyal to his dead wife. In the first chapter Rai explains that "what I mean by love and what Ormus Cama, for example, meant by the same word were two different things" (15). Whereas for him love was "the leisurely inward spiral of desire", for Ormus "it was just a matter of life and death. Love was for life, and endured beyond death. Love was Vina, and beyond Vina there was nothing but the void" (15). For Rai, Vina constitutes a finite object of desire, in which psychic investment is terminated with the accident of her death. Ormus, on the other hand, desires Vina (in Lacanian terms an "object petit a" – the object of unattainable desire) unto infinity, and his infinite desire is simultaneously the source of a permanent frustration and the means through which a volcanic energy is released into song. Rushdie identifies Ormus with the artistic type (the genius) whose creativity stems from an investment in infinite objects of desire such as love and music. Rushdie's choice of the protagonist's last name seems to support this interpretation: Cama is the alternative spelling of the Indian god of love and desire – Kama (which is Sanskrit for "longing").

Ormus and Rai experience distinct types of katabases. Ormus' descent into Hell at the end of the novel, as an act of love for Vina, is without return. His gesture is final, complete – construed as the only possibility to be together with his beloved. In contrast, Rai's descents as a photographer into the Hell of war and combat are furtive; moreover, a chameleonic gift of rendering himself invisible allows him a safe return:

Long ago I developed a knack for invisibility. . . . On many occasions this gift of dematerialization has saved my life. . . . I just smile my self-deprecating smile and shrink into insignificance. By my manner I persuade the sniper I do not merit his bullet, my way of carrying myself convinces the warlord to keep his axe clean. I make them understand I'm not worthy of their violence. (14-15)

Vina's literal katabasis – during an earthquake, the ground opens to swallow her up – occurs following her willed separation from Ormus and her loss of orientation. When she goes on her last tour to Mexico, Rai remarks that: “without Him, for the first time in years . . . she was disoriented and off balance most of the time” (5).

Her tragic death makes Rai understand her as “an unfinished song abandoned at the bridge, deprived of the right to follow her life's verses to their final, fulfilling rhyme” (5) – and yet it is her death, followed by Ormus', that reunites the two lovers after Vina had decided to end the relationship. Whereas an inner katabasis is characteristic of artistic genius, the literal descent into the underworld is the narrative means by which the love of Ormus and Vina is rendered eternal and whereby they achieve godly status. Their descent into the underworld is at once a proof of their superhuman status as artists and an incentive for ordinary mortals like Rai to pick up the loose threads of their life.

In trying to explain the appeal of music and artists like Ormus and Vina, Rai stumbles upon an explanation that sheds light on the experience of katabasis. He alludes to the insufficiency of ordinary life and the fact that “we are creatures in search of exaltation” (19). Music and art are a way of bridging over the gap between our real and ideal selves: “Song shows us a world that is worthy of our yearning, it shows us our selves as they might be, if we were worthy of the world” (20). Art brings about reconciliation between the self and the world, between subject and object. It is one of the mysteries that hold the keys “to the unseen”, an occasion “when the bolts of the universe fly open and we are given a glimpse of what is hidden; an eff of the ineffable” (20). This description is similar to Ormus' mystical experience when passing through the membrane in the sky, and the hidden/the invisible can also be interpreted as an allusion to the contents of the unconscious. Art is just another way of “opening the doors of perception,” allowing entrance into the hidden depths of our being and expressing them. Not only for Ormus, for Vina, too, music “offered the tantalizing possibility of being borne on the waves of sound through the curtain of maya that supposedly limits our knowing, through the gates of perception to the divine melody beyond” (123). “Opening the doors of perception” is the pet phrase belonging to singer and poet Jim

Morrison (vocalist of The Doors, a rock band of the 60s) often reproduced in the novel – and an indication of what Ormus’ artistic project consists of. Jim Morrison baptized his band The Doors on the basis of a quotation<sup>7</sup> which he (mistakenly or intentionally) attributed to Rimbaud. For Morrison, music was a way of getting in touch with one’s hidden spirit, forging a link between the visible and the invisible, and his story somewhat resembles that of Ormus and Vina’s. In an inverted version, after Morrison died of a heroin overdose at the age of 27, his lover Pam followed him three years later, also finding her death by a heroin overdose.

If art is a means of touching the hidden depths of the psyche and bringing them to light in song, then the artistic project is on the whole a form of katabasis: a descent into the dark underworld of the psyche, where all manner of demons (the word genius is incidentally a Latin translation of the Greek daimon) reside and ask to be redeemed. The power that brings this dark content to light is infinite desire – and it is no wonder that the strength of Ormus’ love makes him the better, the consummate artist. By comparison, Rai is a fake – later in the novel he also acknowledges that. He is a scam artist like Pilo Doodwallah, whose fraudulent business he exposes by stealing a dead photographer’s film. His reputation as a great photographer is established on another’s work: “Now I’ve removed my mask, and you can see what I really am. In this quaking, unreliable time, I have built my house – morally speaking – upon shifting Indian sands. *Terra infirma*” (244).

Subjected to what Rushdie calls the “centrifugal” forces of economic and cultural globalization, the human being, in order to survive, opposes this fragmentation by the “centripetal” force of katabasis and metanoia. These are psychic processes that allow subjects to journey down into the underworld of the psyche and by imposing order on the chaos within in creation, resist the pulverizing impact of external factors.

### **Conclusion**

Rushdie’s strategy of opposing the psychic fragmentation brought about by globalization is far from original. In “Civilization in Transition” Jung

wrote the following lines about the modern individual: “Thanks to industrialization, large portions of the population were uprooted and were herded together in large centers. This new form of existence – with its . . . social dependence on the fluctuation of markets and wages – produced an individual who was unstable, insecure, and suggestible” (133). Jung’s solution in these conditions was that the human individual should strive to achieve a metanoia, a fundamental change of consciousness. This metanoia included a greater awareness of the power and wisdom of the psyche as the source of our being. He claimed that “the psyche is the indispensable instrument in the reorganization of a civilized community” (146). In a similar fashion, what Rushdie dramatizes in his fiction is the Jungian distrust of mass-mindedness, suggesting instead a reliance on the inner resources of creation, transformation and regeneration.

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<sup>1</sup> The third space is an important concept in postcolonial theory. Homi Bhabha, in the introduction to “The Location of Culture” defined it as a hybrid space where postcolonial identity is negotiated, at the intersections of race, gender and class.

<sup>2</sup> The Woodstock festival in the US (1969), subsequently dubbed “the summer of love”, gathered together an impressive number of rock singers and bands, all united in a common campaign against the war in Vietnam. Rock as a counter-establishment movement coincided with the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. and the reaction of the African American community against the white-dominated American society. In communist Eastern Europe, the arrest of the Plastic People of the Universe, a Czech underground rock band led to the preparation and signing of the Charter 77, a civic movement that played an important part in the 1989 Velvet Revolution. Contemporary rock bands like Rammstein (Germany) wrote songs against the perceived Americanization and “macdonaldization” of society (*America*), South American trashy soaps (*Te Quiero Puta*), the beauty industry (*Morgenstern*) and other phenomena generated by the profit-oriented capitalist ideology.

<sup>3</sup> Metanoia is coined from meta- (a prefix of Greek origin meaning beyond, surpassing or transcending) and nous (intellect, mind).

<sup>4</sup> In *Liquid Modernity*, Zygmunt Bauman considers that the present age is best described by the adjectives “fluid” and “liquid” and argues that modernity was since its inception a process of “liquefaction” (2-3).

<sup>5</sup> This parable appears in *The Trial*.

<sup>6</sup> This interpretation is not given in Derrida’s essay on Kafka’s parable (“Devant la Loi”) but in a later essay entitled “Des Tours de Babel”.

<sup>7</sup> The quote is actually taken from William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite." Aldous Huxley wrote a novel *The Doors* based on the same quotation from Blake in 1954.

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