
CULTURE AND ETHICS IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *THE ENCHANTRESS OF FLORENCE*

JOGAMAYA BAYER

Independent Scholar

jogamaya.bayer@gmail.com

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**ABSTRACT**

Salman Rushdie's novel *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) tells the story of a princess of the Mughal dynasty and how her name is effaced from history. The narrative, mixing historical facts with fiction, depicts the princess's perilous journey across continents in her search to find a home. Following Steven Shankman's reading of Emmanuel Levinas, in whose work the primacy of ethics over ontology requires that we take responsibility for the Other, (Shankman, 2010: 15–16), this paper traces the trajectory of Rushdie's text that represents, through the character of Akbar, the primacy of ethics as both before and beyond culture.

KEYWORDS: ethics; proximity; Mughal Empire; religious tolerance; culture of inclusion; transcultural studies; syncretisation

RESUMEN *Cultura y ética en La encantadora de Florencia, de Salman Rushdie*

La novela de Salman Rushdie, *La encantadora de Florencia* (2008), relata cómo se borra de la faz de la historia el nombre de una princesa de la dinastía Mogol. La narrativa, que entremezcla hechos históricos y ficción, describe el peligroso viaje de la princesa por distintos continentes, en búsqueda de algo parecido a un hogar. Siguiendo la lectura que Steven Shankman hace de Emmanuel Levinas, en cuya obra, como la ética prima sobre la ontología, se exige el responsabilizarse del Otro (Shankman, 2010:15-16), este artículo traza la trayectoria del texto de Rushdie que, a través del personaje de Akbar, privilegia la ética por encima de, y antes que, la cultura.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ética; proximidad; imperio Mogol; tolerancia religiosa; cultura de la inclusión; sincretización; estudios de la transculturalidad

In Salman Rushdie's novel *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), the main character traverses and inhabits diverse cultural worlds over the course of her life. Against the tapestry of her encounters with many different cultures, the text demonstrates significant underlying similarities among them, particularly between the Mughal Empire and Renaissance Italy. Because the narrative mixes historical facts with fiction, the ordinary laws of time and space

do not apply and different times and places overlap. Significantly, the text not only goes beyond a single culture. but also defines the existence of something beyond the very concept of culture.

Following Steven Shankman's reading of Emmanuel Levinas, in whose work the primacy of ethics over ontology requires that we take responsibility for the Other, that is, the other person or the neighbour (Shankman, 2010: 15–16), this paper traces the trajectory of Rushdie's text that represents the primacy of ethics as before and beyond culture through the character of Akbar, the Mughal Emperor.

Rushdie depicts Mughal Emperor Akbar as a man given to speculation, who has a penchant for beauty and promotes religious tolerance. He is full of ambivalences: he is a warrior who only wants peace; when looking at the face of a dying opponent, he is filled with compassion and trembles and mourns. He is a barbaric philosopher who longs for a different world where he can forsake the drive for conquest to engage in philosophical discourse (Rushdie, 2008: 33–35). His concern for justice and religious tolerance and his desire to create a culture of inclusion and syncretisation are as foregrounded in the text as his disillusionment with God, whose act of creation he sees as depriving human beings of the right to develop ethics on their own.

One day, a 'yellow haired', young European traveller who calls himself 'Mogor dell'Amore'—the Mughal of Love—arrives at Akbar's court in the capital of Fatehpur Sikri. The stranger declares his intention to meet the emperor personally to provide him with important information. In the subsequent narration, with many detours, digressions and interweaving stories, different places and times overlap. For example, the times of Emperor Akbar (1542–1605) intersect those of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) during Italy's High Renaissance.. The stranger claims to be the child of the unknown Mughal princess Qara Kōz, 'Lady Black Eyes', the fictive sister of the founder of the Mughal Empire, Babar (1483–1530), as she has the occult power to stop time. Qara Kōz is a great beauty who fascinates everyone and is called the Enchantress of Florence because she is said to possess powers of enchantment. She travels from one continent to another and brings different cultures together. Although she is the central character around whom the story is woven, Akbar also plays a significant role in representing ethical consciousness in the novel.

The emperor is also an enchanter. Akbar's new victory city, Sikri, looks like a 'mirage', an 'opium vision'. It seems as if the heat of the sun has weakened the border between what is fanciful and what is real. While the war-torn world is a harsh truth, Sikri is a 'beautiful lie'. In this place, Akbar dreams of conjuring a 'new world, a world beyond religion, region, rank and tribe' (Rushdie, 2008: 27, 43). Nevertheless, he is away most of the time. Whenever the emperor is on his campaigns, there are battles against the armies of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Kabul and Kashmir. Notably, his absence unleashes the noise that is blocked in his presence, and numerous activities are conducted by the city's residents. No city is all palaces, and in Sikri, which is away from the royal residences, stands the real city built of wood, mud, dung brick and stone. It is organised into neighbourhoods according to race and trade. The mud city dwellers enjoy the emperor's absence when he is away on military missions. There is the din of the clustered poor and the noise of construction workers. However, as soon as the emperor returns, the city falls silent. Even the construction work pauses during his short stay in the new capital. Only noises of delight are allowed.

One day, Akbar realises that over-zealous officials are trying to make his stay at home as comfortable as possible, and as a result, people are suffering. He immediately changes the orders, replaces the minister responsible and lets the oppressed subjects know that from now on there will be no restrictions on making noise or pursuing other life activities.

The city burst into joyful clamour. That was the day on which it became clear that a new kind of king was on the throne and that nothing in the world would remain the same. (Rushdie, 2008: 30)

Akbar's willingness to listen to the city residents' grievances demonstrates his sense of justice and desire for proximity with his subjects, that is, he wants to win their love. Levinas describes proximity as a form of relationship that is conceived as a responsibility for the Other; 'it might be called humanity, or subjectivity, or self' (Levinas, 1998: 46). Instead of allowing the subjects to present their grievances, the officials use a language that does not welcome the Other to a dialogue and deflects ethics; they issue orders that people do not understand. Levinas' philosophy shows the dimension of ethics in language by introducing a dichotomy between 'the said' and 'the saying' wherein 'the saying' signifies non-indifference to the Other. Saying is communication and exposure, that is, one discloses and exposes oneself. 'This exposure is the frankness, sincerity, veracity of Saying' (Levinas, 1998: 15, 48, 49). However, the language of the officials consists of 'sai'ds' instead of 'sayings'. The language of the 'said' is impersonal. 'The saying is fixed in a said, is written, becomes a book,

law and science' (Levinas, 1998: 159). For Levinas, the basis of all linguistic significations is a merciful 'saying' that is epitomised in generous hospitality and mercy. Orders (i.e. 'the said') must be 'grounded in the experience of mercy..., in the "saying"' (Shankman, 2010: 50, 53, 95). The experience of mercy is a constituent of the ethical relation that Akbar shows towards not only his subjects but also his opponents.

There are battles against the feudal kings who try to retain their freedom. The king has just returned from one of his military engagements wherein he defeated the rebellious feudal ruler of Surat, and as his army moves towards the little fortress of Cooch Naheen, the prince surrenders and asks for mercy.

'Your time has come,' the emperor assented. 'So tell us truthfully before you go, what sort of paradise do you expect to discover when you have passed through the veil?' The Rana raised his mutilated face and looked the emperor in the eye. 'In Paradise, the words *worship* and *argument* mean the same thing,' he declared. 'The Almighty is not a tyrant. In the house of God, all voices are free to speak as they choose, and that is the form of their devotion'... In spite of his annoyance, Akbar was moved. 'We promise you,' the emperor said, 'that we will build that house of adoration here on earth'. (Rushdie, 2008: 35)

After killing the opponent with his own sword, Akbar retreats to his quarters to tremble and mourn. In the melancholy that falls over him after the battle, he feels ashamed of his descent from his bloodthirsty ancestors Genghis Khan and Timur-e-Lang. He is tired of war (Rushdie, 2008: 34). This feeling of compassion is the commencement of moral consciousness that questions his freedom to kill the Other. He cannot remain deaf to the appeal of the face that imposed itself upon him or forget it without being able to stop holding himself responsible for the agony of his dying opponent.

In a conversation with Philippe Nemo, Levinas explains how the face is exposed and menaced. While inviting us to an act of violence, it also forbids us to kill—'thou shalt not kill'. The relation to the face is ethical because the face is what one cannot kill. For Levinas, the face is the expressive in the Other. The whole human body is represented by a face. 'The face orders and ordains me' (Levinas, 1985: 86–87, 97). However, at the same time, the face of the Other is destitute. In a conversation with Christoph von Wolzogen, Levinas clarifies that by the face he means nakedness, helplessness and exposure to death (Levinas, 2005:136).

Under the gaze of the defenceless eyes of the young prince, Akbar is confronted with resistance, as Levinas writes, 'of what has no resistance—the ethical resistance' (Levinas, 1969: 199). Thus, the dying prince's mutilated face appeals to Akbar with its destitution and

nudity, and he cannot ignore the appeal. ‘The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no “interiority” permits avoiding’ (Levinas, 1969: 201). ‘The will is free to assume this responsibility in whatever sense it likes; it is not free to refuse this responsibility itself...’ (Levinas, 1969: 218–219). Levinas states that the being that imposes itself in this manner does not limit but promotes one’s freedom by arousing one’s goodness (Levinas, 1969: 200). For Levinas, responsibility precedes freedom. As ethics precede ontology, so does the Good precede the being, that is, a preoriginal susceptiveness (Levinas, 1998: 122).

In the hours after he has killed the prince, the emperor feels sad and lonely. He cannot tolerate hearing another man speak to him as an equal because he is used to obsequiousness and sycophancy. After an aborted effort to expose himself in a dialogue with his body servant Bhakti Ram Jain, an imperial flatterer who has mastered the formulations of encomia, the dialogue ends in the servant’s fawning. Then, there is nobody for Akbar to talk to because his sycophant interlocutor is only keen to please him by saying what he thinks the emperor would like to hear. Akbar now longs for the proximity of someone who will speak to him as an equal, whom he can talk to as a brother and speak freely while teaching and learning.

Akbar is open to a dialogue with the prince and regrets that he has killed someone who was a man whom he might have loved. His goodness is aroused by the appeal of the prince’s face. He longs for a different world—one in which instead of conquests, he can be occupied by discourse. He feels obligated to keep his promise to the dead Kathiawari prince, and he is not free to refuse this responsibility.

In the heart of his victory city, he would build a house of adoration, a place of disputation where everything could be said to everyone by anyone on any subject, including the nonexistence of God and the abolition of kings. (Rushdie, 2008: 36)

He longs to recover the humility that he once possessed. He is not content with being but is striving to become. Despite all his conquests and sovereignty over a vast kingdom, he is not happy with himself and wonders how he can become the man he wants to be—Akbar, the great one. Here, Akbar shows a sudden ethical awareness of lacking something that makes a king truly great: not power but humility.

Akbar keeps his promise and creates a debating chamber, which is not a permanent building but a temporary dwelling or tent. This is because he believes that ideas are not everlasting; they come and go with time. Therefore, a tent represents ‘the impermanence of the things of

the mind. Argument itself would here be the only God' (Rushdie, 2008: 80). Everyone is free to speak as they like. In his victory city, Sikri, Akbar wants to establish 'a new world beyond religion, region, rank and tribe'—a utopia—as this dream remains unfulfilled and thus the text ends with pessimism (Rushdie, 2008: 43).

Akbar's Sikri demonstrates his susceptibility to fantasies and visions: dreams of syncretism, a culture of inclusion and craving for beauty and perfection on earth. Throughout the text 'dreams' not only bring people together over space and time but also their philosophy and ideals. In his dreams Akbar walks through Florence and is fascinated by the Renaissance city. Akbar was the emperor of dreams. His Sikri was a 'mirage', a beautiful lie. Here Akbar wanted to create a world where plurality and tolerance should prevail. (Rushdie, 2008:27)

The Enchantress of Florence describes how a curse causes the lake to dry up; Sikri is doomed to become barren and Akbar has a foreboding that the future will be a hostile place where people quarrel over God and kill one another. The tone of the novel is depressing in as much as Akbar is forced to leave Sikri as the lake recedes. It reflects the despair of Akbar, for his philosophy of tolerance turns out to be impermanent, and his effort to bring all religions together was in vain. Akbar was a visionary king. But the text seems to suggest that his dreams remained unrealised due to the wars of religion of posterity.

For Akbar, goodness does not lie in ritual or the worship of a deity 'but rather in the error-strewn working out of an individual or collective path' (Rushdie, 2008: 310). While dreaming of harmony, he believes that discord, difference, disobedience, disagreement and irreverence might be the wellsprings of the Good and ultimately lead to unity. However, his vision is to create a culture of inclusion 'in which all races, tribes, clans, faiths and nations would become part of the one grand Mughal synthesis, the one grand syncretisation of the earth' (Rushdie, 2008: 317). Akbar realises the impermanence of ideas—his ideas—and that the future will not be what he hopes for but a hostile place where people kill one another as they quarrel over God. However, Akbar does not give up on his dream. His political vision underlines the necessity of considering dialogue, listening and acknowledging each other; this pursuit of utopia persists and will continue to do so with this encouragement (Shankman, 2010:54).

Conversation offers the possibility to learn from the Other, thereby forming an ethical relation. Significantly, Levinas continues his emphasis on maintaining proximity with the Other through dialogue without amalgamating with the Other. Consequently, Levinas

opposes the privilege of unity and a return to the fusion with unity sought in ancient Greek philosophy (Levinas, 1969: 51–52, 102). He characterises proximity

...as signification, the-one-for-the-other, proximity is not a configuration produced in the soul. It is an immediacy older than the abstractness of nature. Nor is it fusion; it is contact with the other. To be in contact is neither to invest the other and annul his alterity, nor to suppress myself in the other. In contact itself the touching and the touched separate, as though the touched moved off, was always already other, did not have anything common with me. As though its singularity, thus non-anticipatable and consequently not representable, responded only to designation. (Levinas, 1998: 86)

Burggraeve explains what this proximity means:

In this ethical dialogue, or rather encounter, a proximity is realized that does not sublimate but deepens the distance. With this we stumble upon the global design of Levinas's magnum opus 'Totality and Infinity'. There he sketches not only the two poles, the same and the other, but also the relationship between them. He thereby begins to search for a relationship that is a true relationship and that at the same time does not sublimate the separation and the distinction between them. Concretely, he searches for a non-fusional and non-suffocating relationship between the same and the other, for a bond wherein both partners remain separate from each other (TI 8/38; 75/102, cited in Burggraeve, 2014: 11).

Burggraeve underlines that Levinas' philosophy reflects the conviction that plurality does not contain a source of violence; on the contrary, it makes nonviolent discourses possible that can lead to a peaceful relationship between civilisations and religions (Burggraeve, 2014: 10).

In his vision of syncretisation of the earth, notwithstanding its differences and diverse problems, Akbar is willing to involve Mogor dell'Amore in matters concerning state affairs when he finds out that the foreigner is a man with talents. Furthermore, integrating the foreign traveller into the Mughal synthesis would be a step towards the creation of a culture of inclusion.

However, the queens and advisers have reservations and suspicions about Mogor dell'Amore's purposes of visit. Some even think that he might have cast an enchantment on the emperor. However, their actions and opinions do not influence the emperor's attitude towards Mogor; instead, he continues to be compassionate to him. 'He is a homeless man looking for a place in the world', Akbar tells them. 'Loneliness is the wanderer's fate; he is a stranger wherever he goes' (Rushdie, 2008: 202). Akbar feels responsible for the stranger seeking recourse to him. Levinas defines the destitution of a stranger who has

...no other place, is not autochthonous, is uprooted, without a country, not an inhabitant, exposed to the cold and the heat of the seasons. To be reduced to having recourse to me is the homelessness or strangeness of the neighbour. It is incumbent on me. (Levinas, 1998: 91)

His concern for the lonely stranger shows the emperor's humanity. As Mogor continues to increase his presence at the royal court, he attracts not only sympathy but also scepticism, especially when he claims to be Akbar's uncle and reveals his real name, Niccolò Vespucci. Over time, he also discloses his identity as the son of Qara Kōz, the fictive sister of Akbar's grandfather and the founder of the dynasty, Babar (1483–1530). When Babar was besieged by Wormwood Khan, the Uzbek warlord took her with him. She spent years as a captive until Wormwood's conqueror, Shah Ismail of Persia, set her free. However, instead of going back home, Qara Kōz chose to stay with the Persian king who was fascinated by her ravishing beauty. That is why she disappeared from the chronicles of Mughal dynasty. In Mogor's narrative, when an Ottoman Sultan later defeated the Shah, an Italian elite Janissary fighter for the Sultan, Argalia, rescued Qara Kōz and she then accompanied him to Florence. There, he introduced her as a princess coming to Florence 'in the hope of forging a union between the great cultures of Europe and the East knowing she has much to learn from us and believing, too, that she has much to teach' (Rushdie, 2008: 276). The Florentines were so mesmerised by her presence that they believed her to be an enchantress. However, she later incurred the people's wrath and was deemed a witch. As it was an age of witch hunts, she fled from Florence with the help of Argalia's friend, who brought her to safety in the new world where Mogor was born.

In Mogor's fabulous story, Qara Kōz possesses the occult power to stop time and prolong her youth. However, she can only pause time for herself. Akbar develops ambivalent feelings towards Mogor because his incomplete, chronologically problematic tale of himself makes the emperor sceptical about offering him official standing.

In Mogor's narrative, the Renaissance city of Florence plays a central role. One day, as Mogor is describing the enticement of Florence, the emperor falls in a reverie and dreams that he crosses geographical borders, leaves the sandstone palaces of Fatehpur Sikri and walks the streets of the other stone city that Mogor has conjured up in the story. Thus, the Mughal emperor feels a strong sense of kinship with the city's inhabitants by crossing cultural borders and identifying himself with High Renaissance Italy. This feeling of kinship in Akbar's imagination demonstrates the presence of significant underlying similarities between the ideas that engage and shape the cultural life of the Mughal Empire and Renaissance Italy, particularly of Fatehpur Sikri and Florence. Akbar considers that it is the infantilisation of human beings by forcing them to give up their agency and endowing all power to God that

deprives them of the right to form ethical structures themselves. Every human being is responsible for himself and others. Akbar wants to stress that man, not God, is at the centre. Similarly, in Italy, during the Renaissance, renewal, rejuvenation and rebirth were the central conceptions with humans positioned at the centre. Through these parallels, the text brings the two different cultures and times together and weaves the story of Qara Köz.

Meanwhile, as Akbar is daydreaming, in Florence, Machiavelli is also dreaming. He sees an Oriental emperor conversing with a yellow-haired European man. Machiavelli has conjured up these dream-creatures who discuss whether a prince should aspire to love or arouse hatred by being a tyrant—a question that also preoccupies Machiavelli. While the emperor expresses his desire to be loved, the advice of the stranger, who turns out to be Mogor himself, is that love is fickle and only fear endures. Therefore, he should aspire to be feared by the people. This advice complies precisely with Machiavelli's own writings. Niccolò Machiavelli underlines the following in his well-known oeuvre *The Prince*:

Related to this a question arises: whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person it is much safer to be feared than loved, when only one is possible. The reason for this is that in general men are ungrateful, inconstant, false, cowardly, and greedy... Love is preserved by the link of gratefulness, which owing to the weak nature of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a fear of punishment which never fails. Nevertheless, a prince ought to encourage fear in such a way that if he does not win love, he avoids hatred. (Machiavelli, *The Prince*:26)

A ruler should avoid being detested for being mean or cruel. In Machiavelli's writings, fear, hatred and cruelty occupy an important place. He explains how a prince can avoid being hated:

A prince is despised if he is considered changeable, foolish, weak, mean, and uncertain. A prince should avoid these characteristics. In his actions he should try to show greatness, courage, seriousness and strength. (Machiavelli, *The Prince*: 29)

A profuse use of intertextual references by various forms of hidden or half-hidden quoting makes Rushdie's text transgress cultural boundaries. Without being familiar with the content of Machiavelli's writing on the use of power, Akbar cites *The Prince* in a dialogue with Mogor as he underscores the distinction between power and glory:

For it cannot be called skill to kill fellow citizens, to betray friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; by these means one can acquire power, but not glory. (Rushdie, 2008: 211)

These citations of Machiavelli's text bring the ideas of Akbar and Machiavelli together and geographically and historically combine different places and times, namely, Akbar's Mughal India and Machiavelli's Renaissance Italy (Jorissen, 2009: 71).

The emperor is critical of Mogor's advice, which can turn him into a cruel tyrant. Should he act in a manner that will engender hatred? Akbar ascribes much importance to this question. He refuses to be a cruel tyrant who only craves power and is aware of his responsibility to show justice and mercy towards his subjects. He could wield power by conquest. This does not mean that for a tyrant, might is right and that the victor is automatically virtuous. Akbar is aware that the use of power is not always justified, nor does it always denote greatness. For him, the love of his subjects is important, not power over them. Although power plays an important role in Machiavelli's political philosophy, he is against cruelty, but under certain circumstances, he considers it unavoidable: 'Every prince ought to desire to be considered kind and not cruel. Nevertheless, he ought to take care not to misuse this kindness' (Machiavelli, *The Prince*: 26). Machiavelli is realistic and pragmatic because according to his political philosophy, as Osborne summarises, a ruler should not deviate from right conduct if possible, but if necessary, he should be capable of wrongdoing (Osborne, 2017: 10).

A prince ought to have no other aim or thought, nor select anything else for his study, than war and its rules and discipline. This is the sole art that belongs to him who rules, and it is of such force that it not only supports those who are born princes, but it often enables men to rise from a private station to that rank. (Machiavelli, *The Prince*: 23)

Abulad points out that this is exactly what Levinas has in mind when he relates morality with war (Abulad, 2009: 2). Levinas underscores that 'the state of war suspends morality' and that war renders morality derisory (Levinas, 1969: 21). The question of morality plays a subordinate role in Machiavelli's pragmatism.

Akbar's encounter with Machiavelli in their dreams underlines the significance of dialogue and exchange of ideas in a broader context across continents without frontiers or ideological limitations. This is a dream Akbar pursues to 'incorporate into his line—into himself—persons, places, narratives, possibilities from lands yet unknown' (Rushdie, 2008: 317).

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) and Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542–1605) were not contemporaries. However, through the narrator, their lives, especially some of their ideas, are

placed in a shared context. Niccolò Vespucci's fantastic story 'brings together, among other things, Machiavelli's and Akbar's time'.

That is a special kind of comparative culture and cultural history, by mirroring places and times, which in history lay so much afar from themselves, but are made, humanly, so similar in the novel (Jorissen, 2009: 53).

In *The Enchantress of Florence*, we come across this special kind of comparative culture and cultural history. The text not only goes beyond a single culture but also underscores the primacy of ethics as before culture.

Shankman points out,

The term *transcultural* is appealing to me not only because it implies the value, in our studies, of going beyond a single culture however diverse that culture might in fact be. 'Transcultural' also implies the existence of a beyond of the very concept of culture...' (Shankman, 2010:16)

Shankman maintains that ethics, understood by Levinas as preceding culture, can help us evaluate cultural expressions, such as literature. As Levinas writes, 'Morality does not belong to culture: it enables one to judge it...' (Levinas, 1987: 100).

Levinas sought to rethink the relationship between philosophy and ethics. He argues that ethics must precede ontology (the science of 'being'), which is always in danger of betraying ethics. By ethics, Levinas means the face-to-face, concrete encounter with a unique human being for whom I am personally and inescapably responsible. In the current climate of opinion in much of literary and cultural studies, cultures are often blamed for injustices, but we hear nothing or relatively little of the human, of what Levinas insists is my personal responsibility for a unique Other—a responsibility that constitutes my very humanity. (Shankman, 2010: 15–16)

My article traced the trajectory of Rushdie's text that represents the primacy of ethics as before and beyond culture through Akbar's character. Akbar plays a significant role in representing ethical consciousness in the novel. The necessity of considering dialogue, listening and acknowledging each other is central to his political vision. As in the philosophy of Levinas, in Akbar's visions ethics precede ontology and the Good before being (Levinas, 1998: 122). While dreaming of harmony, he believes that discord, difference and disagreement might cause ultimate unity. However, Levinas continues emphasising proximity to the Other without amalgamating with the Other and opposes the privilege of unity and a return to the fusion with unity (Levinas, 1969: 51–52, 102).

The Enchantress of Florence brings together different cultures through the encounters of the novel's main character, Qara Köz, as well as the visit of Mogor, the European traveller, to Akbar's court in Fatehpur Sikri. The text underscores one's ethical responsibility for the

Other, which, in Levinas' words, is a responsibility that constitutes one's very humanity—an aspect that Shankman misses in current literary and cultural studies. Akbar's sense of justice for his subjects whose grievances are ignored by officials, his feeling of remorse for the agony of the dying prince and his concern for the uprooted stranger seeking recourse demonstrate his deep sense of responsibility that constitutes his humanity in the text. Equally significant in this context is his refusal to accept Machiavelli's pragmatic political philosophy as presented to him by the traveller. However, Akbar's dream remained unfulfilled.

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JOGAMAYA BAYER is an independent scholar. She has presented papers at EACLALS (the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies) and other international conferences and has published articles on postcolonial literature and theory. She is the author of *Transgressing Boundaries: Essays on Postcolonial Literature*. London: Roman Books. 2013. Her publications include "The Return of the Prehistoric and the "Deathwish" of the Tribals in Mahasweta Devi's Novella, Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha." *Indi@logs*, Vol 4, April 2017: 95-109. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/indialogs.44>