



A CELEBRATION OF *THE PARIS REVIEW*

Salman Rushdie, Philip Gourevitch, and Miranda July

with the Hungry March Band

September 17, 2005

7:00 PM

Celeste Bartos Forum

(music by the Hungry March Band)

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Good evening. My name is Paul Holdengräber and I am the Director of Public Programs, it used to be known as PEP, of which I have some, but now is called LIVE from the New York Public Library. That was the Hungry March Band. The band is here to celebrate not only the New York Public Library—my goal is to make the lions roar—if

this didn't do it, I don't know what will—but it's also to celebrate the renewal, the rejuvenation, the re-creation, the re-imagination of one of the most extraordinary literary journals that will become even more extraordinary under the leadership of Philip Gourevitch—*The Paris Review*.

(applause)

Now a quick word about the Hungry March Band—they self-described themselves as “the band is an ever-evolving musical experiment influenced and inspired from Brooklyn's back yard, with Latin flavor, klezmer sounds, Polish jigs, punk rock noise, hip-hop beats and music of the street, a blazing parade of flesh, blood, steel, brass, and wood, the Hungry March Band is the music of the people.” The lions are indeed roaring. **(applause)**

I recommend that you all join our e-mail list so you can see that not only do we have bands such as this one, not only do we have the pleasure of welcoming Philip Gourevitch and Miranda July, and of course Salman Rushdie, but we will have a number of different events, let me just pass them by in quick succession just to let you know that I in fact do not have a life outside of the Library. **(laughter)** We have—next week we have—what do we have?—we have Richard Posner, it's true, debating the Patriot Act, which is a very important issue for libraries, as you know. He will be debating Geoff Stone. We have Adam Gopnik and Pascal Bruckner, a French author I love very much, who will be speaking about an endless subject, the subject of vulgarity, we could have a whole year on it. We will also have Howard Zinn with Wally Shawn later in the year. We will have, in the Reading Room, Maira Kalman is doing an opera version of *The Elements of Style*. **(laughter)** This is not a joke. Jenny Holzer will be projecting poetry on the walls of the library, and therefore illuminating this venerable extraordinary structure and making

it even more beautiful. Actually, when we did the run dry not long ago of this projection, some people said to me, “what is that building?” You know, this happens in New York, you walk by and you don’t notice, and I told them it was a library and we had some books. **(laughter)** Later on in the year we have David Margolick, a wonderful contributor of *Vanity Fair*, who will be speaking with Jeremy Schaap, the son of Dick Schaap, about Max Schmeling and Joe Louis, a great fight—actually David spent seven years writing about a two-minute fight—and then later in the year, on the twenty-seventh of October, we will have John Hope Franklin with President Clinton talking about race.

Now it gives me great pleasure to introduce very briefly Philip Gourevitch. The first thing that comes to mind is what the *Financial Times* recently said, is that Philip Gourevitch eats red meat, and by that what they meant to say is that he is voracious, that he is capacious, that his tastes are wide ranging, that he will make of this wonderful magazine something even more expansive, and I think he’ll tell you a little bit about his goals for *The Paris Review*. He is the new editor of *The Paris Review*. He’s also, you probably know, a staff writer at the *New Yorker* and author of *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, so it gives me great pleasure to welcome my new friend and colleague, Philip Gourevitch.

(applause)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Thank you, Paul. Thank you, everyone, and thanks for being here. Earlier this year, when the opportunity arose to edit *The Paris Review*, and I was offered the job, somewhere lurking in the back of my mind was that we would bring the Hungry March Band to

a reading. **(laughter)** And mostly because they're great music, and right now it happens to seem even better because they've got a bit of New Orleans in them, and that they bring that with them, and also just to say, "This ain't your grandpa's literary magazine."

We're going to start tonight with Miranda July, reading. Miranda July is a filmmaker, an actress, a performance artist, a dancer, a musical recording artist, and of course a writer of short stories. Her first feature film, *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, was released this year and swept four awards at Cannes, including the Caméra d'Or as well as a special Jury Prize for originality of vision at Sundance, and awards at film festivals in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Newport, and Philadelphia. She directed it, she stars in it, you should see it. Her first story in *The Paris Review*, "Making Love in 2003," appeared in the year of its title, and her most recent story that we published is reprinted in the brand-new anthology, *The Paris Review Book of People with Problems*. It's on sale here later, as is the new issue of the magazine, as are the CDs of the Hungry March Band, as are signed copies of Salman Rushdie's new novel, *Shalimar the Clown*.

Miranda July was born in Vermont, very, very recently, if my mathematics serves me correctly. Please welcome her here tonight. Miranda July.

MIRANDA JULY: All right, well, thank you, Philip and Paul for inviting me here. That's the thing about when you don't live in a city, you don't go to the library 'cause it would be weird to check out books here when I live in LA and there would be all kinds of fines, so it's really great just to be here. Okay, I have to talk a little bit until I get a little less nervous, because otherwise my reading will be weird. Just being really practical here in front of you all. So that band is hard

to go after, 'cause there's so many of them, and they're so much louder than me, **(laughter)** but I'm hungry, too, so all right. This is called "Birthmark."

"On a scale of one to ten, with ten being childbirth, this will be a three." "A three, really?" "Yeah, that's what they say." "What other things are a three?" "Well, five is supposed to be having your jaw reset." "So it's not as bad as that?" "No." "What's two?" "Having your foot run over by a car." **(laughter)** "Wow, so it's worse than that." "Just a little worse, not much." "Okay, well, I'm ready. No, wait, let me adjust my sweater, okay, I'm ready." "All right then, here goes a three." "Right, here we go then."

The laser, which had been described as pure white light, was more like a fist slammed against a countertop, and her body was a cup on this counter, jumping with each slam. It turned out three was just a number, it didn't describe the pain any more than money describes the things it buys. Two thousand dollars for a port-wine stain removed. A kind of birthmark that seems messy and accidental, as if this red area covering one whole cheek were the careless result of too much fun. She spoke to her body like an animal at the vet. "Shhh. It's okay, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry we have to do this to you." This is not unusual. Most people feel that their bodies are innocent of their crimes, like animals or plants. Not that this was a crime. She had waited patiently from the time she was fourteen for aesthetic surgery to get cheap, like computers. 1998 was the year lasers came to the people as good bread. Eat and be full, be finally perfect. Oh, yes, perfect.

She didn't think she would have bothered if she hadn't been what people call "very beautiful except for." This is a special group of citizens, living under special laws. Nobody knows what to

do with them. We mostly want to stare at them like the optical illusion of a vase made out of the silhouette of two people kissing. Now it is a vase, now it could only be two people kissing, oh, but it is so completely a vase. It is both. Can the world sustain such a contradiction? Only this was better. Because as the illusion of prettiness and ugly and horribleness flipped back and forth we flipped with it. Now we were uglier than her, now we were lucky not to *be* her, oh, but then again at this angle she was too lovely to bear. She was both, we were both, and the world continued to spin.

Now began the part of her life where she was just very beautiful except for nothing. Only winners will know what this feels like. Have you ever wanted something very badly and then gotten it? Then you know that winning is many things, but it is never the thing you thought it would be. Poor people who win the lottery do not become rich people. They become poor people who won the lottery. She was a very beautiful person who was missing something very ugly. Her winnings were the absence of something, and this quality hung around her. There was so much potential in the imagined removal of the birthmark. Any fool on the bus could play the game of guessing how perfect she would look without it. Now there was not this game to play, there was just this spent feeling. And she was not an idiot, she could sense it, and the first few months after the surgery, she received many compliments, but they were always coupled with confusion.

“Now you can wear your hair up and show off your face more.” “Yeah, I’m going to try it that way.” “Wait. Say that again.” “I’m going to try it that way. What?” “Your little accent is gone.” “What accent?” “You know, the little Norwegian thing.” **(laughter)** “Norwegian?” “Isn’t your mom Norwegian?” “She’s from Denver.” **(laughter)** “But you have that little bit of an accent,

that little way of saying things.” “I do?” “Well, not anymore, it’s gone now.” **(laughter)** And she felt a real sense of loss, even though she knew she’d never had an accent, it was just the birthmark, which in its density, had lent color even to her voice. She didn’t miss the birthmark, but she missed her Norwegian heritage, **(laughter)** like learning of new relatives after they have died. **(laughter)**

All in all, though, this was minor. Less disruptive than insomnia, but more severe than *déjà vu*. Over time, she knew more and more people who had never known her with a birthmark, and you would assume that these people didn’t feel any haunting absence, because why should they? Her husband was one of these people. You could tell by looking at him. Not that he wouldn’t have married a woman with a port-wine stain, but he wouldn’t have. Most people don’t, and are none the worse for it. Of course, sometimes it would happen that she would see a couple and one of them would have a port-wine stain and the other one would clearly be in love with this person and she would hate her husband a little. Which was ridiculous, because he was innocent, but he wasn’t an idiot, so he would notice.

“Are you being weird?” “No.” “You are.” “Actually, I’m not, I’m just eating my salad.” “I can see them too, you know. I saw them come in.” “Hers is worse than mine. Mine didn’t go down on my neck like that.” “Do you want to try this soup?” “I bet he’s an environmentalist. **(laughter)** Doesn’t he look like one?” “Maybe you should go sit with them.” “Maybe I will.” “I don’t see you moving.” “Did you just finish the soup? I thought we were splitting.” “I offered it to you.” “Well, you can’t have any of this salad, then.” **(laughter)**

It was a small thing, but it was a thing, and things have a way of either dying or growing, and it wasn't dying. Years went by. This thing grew, like a child, microscopically every day, and since they were a team, and all teams want to live, they continuously adjusted their vision to keep its growth invisible. They wordlessly excused each other for not loving each other as much as they had planned. There were empty rooms in the house where they had meant to put their love. And they worked together to fill these rooms with high-end consumer-grade equipment. It was a tight situation. The next sudden move would have to be through the wall.

What happened was this. She was trying to get the lid off a new jar of jam and she was banging it on the counter. This is a well-known tip, a kitchen trick, a bang to loosen the lid. It's not witchery or black magic or anything, it's just a way to release the pressure under the lid. She banged it too hard and the jar broke. She screamed. Her husband came running when he heard the sound. There was red everywhere and in that instant, he saw blood. Hallucinatory clarity. You know for sure. But in the next moment your mind relinquishes control and gives you back to reality. It was jam. Everywhere. She was laughing and picking up the shards of glass out of the strawberry mash. She was laughing at the mess and her face was down, looking at the floor, and her hair was around her face like a curtain, and then she looked up at him and said, "Can you bring the trash can over here?"

And it happened again. For a moment, he thought he saw a port-wine stain on her cheek. It was fiercely red and bigger than he had ever imagined. It was bloodier than even blood, like sick blood, animal blood, the blood racist people think beats inside the people of other races' blood that shouldn't touch my own. And the next moment it was just jam and he laughed and rubbed

the kitchen towel on her cheek, her clean cheek, her port-wine stain. “Honey . . .” “Can you get the trash can?” “Honey.” “What?” “Go look in the mirror.” “What?” “Go look in the mirror.” “Stop talking like that. Why are you talking like that? What?”

He was looking at her cheek, and she instinctively put her hand on the mark and then ran to the bathroom. She was in there for a long time, maybe thirty minutes. You’ve never had thirty minutes like these. She stared at the port-wine stain and she breathed in and she breathed out. It was like being twenty-three again, but she was thirty-eight now. Fifteen years without it, and now, here it was. In exactly the same place. She rubbed her finger around its edges. It came as high as her right eye, over to the edge of her nostril, across her whole cheek to her ear, ending at her jawbone, in purplish red. She wasn’t thinking anything. She wasn’t afraid or disappointed or worried. She was just looking at the stain, the way you would look at yourself fifteen years after your own death. “Oh, you again.” Now it was obvious that it had always been there, just around the corner. She had startled it forward, back into sight.

She looked into its redness, and breathed in, and breathed out, and found herself in a kind of trance. She thought, “I am in a kind of trance.” But she didn’t try and shake out of it. Instead, she shallowed her breathing for fear of waking up. In the trance, there was one sound and one smell and one sight and one sensation and it was the sound and smell and sight and sensation of her port-wine stain and this stain was her, it was her body. She didn’t have to think, because plants don’t have to think about themselves, and weather doesn’t have to think about itself, it just blows around. It was this kind of trance, she was just blowing around. It’s hard to describe it any more than that except to say that it lasted about twenty-five minutes. That is a very, very long time to

just be blowing around. Mostly you waft for a second or two, a half-second, maybe, and then you spend the rest of your life trying to describe it, to regain the perspective. You say, "It was like I was just blowing around," and you wave your arms in the air. But there were no arms like that, and you know it. It's become this long story you tell about this half-second of your life, only for her it was twenty-five minutes. Do you understand? Twenty-five minutes. If it could have lasted forever, she would have gladly lived there. Inside the stain, a red and limbless world.

She came back, like a plane taking off. She was no longer in the stain but looking at it from above. It grew smaller and smaller, until it was just a tiny region in a larger mass, one which this pilot favored, hovered over, but would not touch down on again. She pulled some toilet paper off the roll and blew her nose.

He found himself kneeling. He was waiting for her on his knees. He was worried she would not let him love her with the stain. He had already decided long ago, twenty or thirty minutes ago, that the stain was fine. He had only seen it for a moment, but he was already used to it. It was good. It somehow allowed them to have more. They could have a child now, he thought. There was a loose feeling in the air. The jam was still on the floor and that was okay. He would just kneel here and wait for her to come out and hope that he would be able to tell her about the looseness in a loose way. He wanted to keep the feeling. He hoped she wasn't removing it somehow, the stain. She should keep it and they should have a kid. He could hear her blowing her nose now. Now she was opening the door. He would stay on his knees, just like this. She would see him this way and understand.

(applause)

MIRANDA JULY: Thank you.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: I think I forgot to explain the format earlier this evening, but you're probably catching on. We'll talk a little bit now, we'll take some questions from you. We'll have a break and a little bit of a party and then we'll resume, with Salman Rushdie doing the same sort of situation. Miranda, after—I have to ask you first of all. When you were writing that story, were you at all aware of the Hawthorne story about the birthmark?

MIRANDA JULY: Well, it's a funny thing. This was the first story that I submitted.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: So I got it backward?

MIRANDA JULY: Yeah, but it doesn't matter. **(inaudible)** And I sent it in. And I think I'd only ever had one story published ever before. So this was just, like I'm sure some people here have done, you just send it, you know, and you hope for the best, and when they called me back, they said—well, I was talking to them, and it was in, and I was amazed and I said, you know, the title is kind of boring, "Birthmark," you know, maybe I should change the title. And she was like, "I think it's a nice homage to the Hawthorne story." And I was like, "Great, I think we'll leave it." **(laughter)** I went and looked for the Hawthorne story called "The Birthmark" and pretty much surmised that I wouldn't have gotten in unless I was the kind of person who would write an homage to a Hawthorne story. **(laughter)**

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: We do have an admission test, yeah. Say, how'd you like the Hawthorne story?

MIRANDA JULY: It was pretty good, too, yeah.

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Do you think he owes you a big debt? **(laughter)** You are all those things that I was listing earlier. You've been writing stories but you've also been performing, releasing CDs of songs, your own music, movies. What's fiction to you in that mix?

MIRANDA JULY: I mean, I think fiction was the thing that I always hoped I would be able to do. I actually grew up in publishing, my parents run a publishing company, and I think I was so afraid, actually, that maybe I wasn't a writer, that I did all these very veiled forms of writing. I wrote performances, you know, I wrote all those things that no-one would ever see the actual words, it would have to go through my force of personality first. And then, really not that long ago, when I started really seriously writing stories. Yeah, I was so relieved when I did realize that this was something that I cared about, maybe more than anything, and that I had maybe secretly taught myself a lot through all these other things.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Because, I mean, I guess one of the things that strikes me is in all those other forms, they're all hybrid in a certain way. I mean, you can mix music and storytelling

and physical movement and force of personality and onscreen all of these things can coexist, and fiction, in a sense is, I guess you could say, purer, stricter, it's got to end up on the page and you can't have a soundtrack separately at the same time. Is that—does it feel like a different side of what you want to do comes through there? Or how does it work? I'm curious.

MIRANDA JULY: I mean, I think it's like that—you know, that kind of, that thing you do when you're writing, that kind of focus and the kind of magic that you try to get to, that zone. That's everything, because that's where it begins and ends and that's the whole process, so you're counting so much more on that. That zone is again so important with all of these—you have to have ideas, you have to become inspired, but there's all these other steps. In a way there's less pressure on that. I mean, again, I'm not saying that all the other layers are to fix that, you know, I think sometimes I said, if it doesn't work in the writing, you can add actors. If they don't fix it, you can add the editing, and if that doesn't work, you add music. **(laughter)** But really that's not true. You start with a story, you always start with a story, and if that's not good, you'll never fix it. Yeah, I was thinking about it more and then I realized that then you know that thing that you're doing is everything when you're typing it.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: And you're alone. I would imagine that's also different, that it's not collaborative. Is one a refuge from the other at all?

MIRANDA JULY: Yeah, totally, I'm—right now I'm finishing up a book of short stories and it is a complete refuge from this turn that my life has taken in the last year, in the movie way, and it seems really great. If you can do something and complete it and even send it to someone else—

you know, you could actually never talk to someone **(inaudible)** **(laughter)** through e-mail.
Your whole career that way.

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Every performer's dream. No audience.

MIRANDA JULY: When you were saying, "You're alone when you're doing it." I was also thinking, well, you're *always* alone, you're alone when you're a director, in some ways it feels alone in a less comfortable way.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: It seems like that's a big theme for you, loneliness, is that a fair way of putting it?

MIRANDA JULY: Yes.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: I don't mean to intrude.

MIRANDA JULY: I'm not afraid to say it in front of however many people **(inaudible)**.

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: I mean, it's central in the movie, it's central in your stories in a sense, that sort of trying to get across.

MIRANDA JULY: Yeah, yeah. Well, I'm working on it. **(laughter)** I mean, I guess I realized it's, you know, it's a choice in a way. I think I used to, when I was younger, I would think like, "One day, it won't be like this." Or, "I will have done these things." And now I realize that's not true, and it's kind of, it's a tool and I get something from it, and it's serving me in all different ways, and . . .yeah.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: A lot of that stuff, is one thing I've been struck by is with your music pieces, until your feature film, most of your films were relatively short. Most of your performance pieces are relatively short. The film itself, as features go, is, I think it's an hour and a half, basically. And you're writing short stories. Do you think of yourself—is that a natural inclination of yours or do you feel that you've got novel impulses, do you feel as if you've got longer works in you, or is there something about the short form that kind of appeals to the way you see things?

MIRANDA JULY: I beg to differ. I don't think shortness is a quality particular to me. My performances are as long as everyone else's performances. They're often quite feature-like, with features of—it's not a method. So I guess mostly I would just say I'm learning, you know. I'm kind of—I always consider that I'm—I'm pretty guarded about—I don't take on any more that I know I can do well, you know. My first movie just had me in it playing the different parts. And my third movie I added other people and it got a little bit longer. It's an education and I do think,

you know, I haven't been writing long enough to feel like I could write a novel well. So, in a little time.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: So it is something that you sort of imagine doing at some stage.

MIRANDA JULY: Yeah!

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Do you like—what's it like when you imagine a character, as you say you first started out playing all the parts yourself, and then suddenly there's some other person that you're supposed to direct. Does that change them, do you find yourself rewriting people because of who physically becomes them?

MIRANDA JULY: No, no. Because I cast really for—I mean, when I'm writing, when I'm writing a story or a movie, I'm, you know, because in my performances I'm acting out, I'm acting out dialogue like I just did in the story, I'm doing both parts. So, when I'm writing my movie, I'm performing every part, you know. I probably was seeming very crazy doing all these voices, but I'm kind of just mumbling them. Sometimes I find myself up doing the things in my room. So I know them so well, so when I'm auditioning people, and I'm really just checking—it's like, you know, when they're looking for someone in Customs. **(laughter)** I'm just going through until I can ID them—oh, there they are. You know, just like the picture, you know, so it feels very precise to me and then I'm just that kind of director, I guess, who is just, you know, probably so annoying, because I've already performed all the words, so I know just how I want

them, but it's fine because they're the perfect person for it, so it's not like I have to change them that much.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: And you can tell that with—in your movie, obviously, the children are pretty major roles, and kind of not always strictly childlike roles, a lot of sort of sexuality and isolation that they're depicting. Are children as sort of easily identifiable in that way to you as embodying what you thought they'd do, or are they more surprising?

MIRANDA JULY: Yeah. No, the children especially, because with the children, you don't—you know, when you're casting a six-year-old, you don't fool yourself into thinking like, well maybe he can transform into this part. If they're a very good actor, you have every right to think that they could—

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Act.

MIRANDA JULY: Yeah. So with the children, it's just being very careful that you know, it's close enough to them, although it is amazing to me how, I don't know, somehow they become—not to downplay their performances but, you know, the stuff that's edited it is a lot more crazy with them than the stuff that I did with the older actors.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Let me ask you just before we take a few questions from all these people. What is—if you can sort of define a little bit how a story presents itself to you and you start to see a story as being fiction or film. Are there certain qualities that seem to you—

obviously, this is going to be a short story, this is something about words on a page, rather than getting people up and walking. There's a certain province of your imagination that belongs to fiction.

MIRANDA JULY: Right. Well, I mean, most things aren't movies. You know, a movie is so big and complicated and mostly what I want is to avoid that. So mostly it's a story, you know, and I guess I am, since I've done this movie, though, I've noticed when I write a story occasionally I'll get a little distracted, thinking like, ooh this would look nice, this scene, you know, up on a screen, but I think it's so different, I mean you're—you're knit into a world so much more tightly and what that in your question, what's the difference? No, so I didn't have to answer that.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: No, it wasn't really the difference, but how you know which one it is, or yeah, I guess it's what's the difference to you or what in your own storytelling. If you say that fiction is what you sort of avoided for a long time because it was always to you the hardest or the most desirable thing to be writing, I wondered if what it is that film offers that's separate or what it is about the stories that you choose for fiction that's distinctive.

MIRANDA JULY: I will admit a lot of it is—you're—it's such a different medium in terms of who you reach. I mean, you're having a really different sense of how this is going into the world. When I'm writing a story I'm thinking so little about audience, and I mean, you're wanting to make it work, but with a movie, it is inherently different. It changes the medium, just knowing

that millions of people will see it, I think, for me, because they all come from the same place, there has to be also a practical reason, you know.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: It's interesting because a question I do have is if you're making movies that do reach millions, what's the appeal of, I mean, I see the appeal, but what's the appeal to you of publishing in literary quarterlies, which reach fewer than a million people sometimes? **(laughter)** Is there a kind of freedom in it?

MIRANDA JULY: Right. Well, it's a great form, anyway. I like it a lot. I love to read. I mean, and I also love to perform, which reaches even fewer people, and that has the present moment as its tool, and that's incredible, and, you know, they all just have their own integrity.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Let's take some questions. I think we have time for a couple of them. There are microphones at corners, or the middle of the room on either side, that's the geography. Well, if you can't get up and get to a microphone without knocking people over, you can also raise your hand.

MIRANDA JULY: Yeah.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: You've answered everybody's questions.

Q: (inaudible)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: The question is when even though you cast your characters so very specifically—and sort of waiting to ID them is how you put it—when you were actually filming did they have their own subversive impulses and move in directions different than you had in mind and if so did you discipline them or let them go?

(laughter)

MIRANDA JULY: Of course there was a little bit of that—they're their own people, and you know, thank God—but keep in mind that this was a twenty-four day shoot, big ensemble cast, very low budget, so even though I love to improvise and I knew some of these people would be really good at it, there was kind of the thing of well, either take a risk and spend the ten minutes that we have to do this scene on sort of a wild card, or get what I'd been planning on getting for five years now. **(laughter)** So I dream of having, of being able to do both, it's really just five minutes more, but just not for this movie, and when I know that I have that option, then I will also cast for that, and that will be a great joy.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: In the back, there's a hand up.

Q: (inaudible)

MIRANDA JULY: (inaudible)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: It echoes around a lot, yeah, he did. I think I heard what he was thinking.

MIRANDA JULY: I know.

Q: (inaudible)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Now, I can't hear him. **(laughter)**

Q: Seeing all these people looking at me, I know how you feel right now. What my question is, I saw your movie, *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, and I was very impressed by it and I'm sort of wondering how you came up with the idea to take on this internet phenomenon and how people interact with each other with blogs and internet art and with chat rooms and I'm just wondering what's your take on that phenomenon with reference to what you mentioned earlier about the loneliness—and my voice is breaking, stop it, please—about you know, loneliness of the American life, perhaps, so what is your take on that, and how did you come to that idea.

MIRANDA JULY: Well, I'm always writing very much from myself, so I've never taken on the loneliness of America **(laughter)** and I think the Internet for me was kind of just a very convenient way to get to this thing that was familiar to me, which was that when I was a child I had a real longing to connect with someone outside of the family, outside of my school, I had pen pals. When I was a teenager, I had a prison pen pal. **(laughter)** It's really for like, middle-aged women, but I was a teenage girl writing to this man for years. And that correspondence—to

me, the Internet is sort of like, oh, my god, if I had had access to that, I probably would not be sitting here today. I'd probably be lying in—

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: In prison.

(laughter)

MIRANDA JULY: But I do think it's kind of a perfect reflection—I don't think we're like victims of it, I think it's so much the way we are. Really wanting to have community that comes together, but not all the way together. Like there's no way we can come all the way together on the Internet. For me, it's so perfect for this movie because is about people who both long to connect and stand in their own way. That is what the Internet is for me. I just this morning, I was vowing for the millionth time to check my e-mail once a day, it's destroying my creative life, you know, and yet, this loneliness is a topic that—so, it's very hard. Maybe we, as a group, can solve this.

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: What happened to your prisoner?

MIRANDA JULY: He's still in prison. He's a lifer.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: That's a smart move on your part as a correspondent. **(laughter)** Do you still have the letters?

MIRANDA JULY: I still have the letters. I actually, the first thing I ever made, you know, in a professional sense, was a play I based on this correspondence that I wrote when I was sixteen.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: And when did you stop corresponding with him?

MIRANDA JULY: When I went to college. Yeah, I actually wrote to him and said, "I can't do both." **(laughter)** It was like a weekly, a biweekly thing, you know, it was just like I have to begin my life now, and to his credit, I was his only connection to the outside world, and he hadn't gotten a letter in like fifteen years when he got mine, and it was a real testament to him that he **(inaudible)**.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Have you ever been curious to go visit him?

MIRANDA JULY: I was at the time, you know, kind of. I'm a little worried that he's not alive. So, I think about it.

Q: Where is Salman Rushdie?

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: That's the second half of the program, ma'am. **(laughter)** Is there another question? **(laughter)** He's right over here. He was waiting for you to ask. **(laughter)**

MIRANDA JULY: Wow. That was so rude.

(laughter/applause)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Sir. You're right near the mike, too.

Q: I'd like to know who your major influences as a writer have been.

MIRANDA JULY: I don't have an agent yet.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Major influences. Not an agent. **(laughter)** The acoustics in here are terrible. The question was, who are your major influences as a writer?

MIRANDA JULY: Oh, I was like, how embarrassing that I'm being asked this. **(laughter)** My major influences? Let's see. I guess I mean growing up I read a lot of classic stuff, like Dostoyevsky and D.H. Lawrence and James Baldwin, and Flannery O'Connor, and—kind of a literary upbringing because of my parents. And now, I still read that stuff, but I like Lorrie Moore, Rick Moody, George Saunders, I've been enjoying. Those are a few people.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: How about back there?

Q: First, I'm really happy you're on stage right now.

(Raucous applause)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: And the question?

Q: (inaudible)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: I don't know if people heard that.

MIRANDA JULY: I can just answer.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Go!

MIRANDA JULY: For me the easiest—**(inaudible) (laughter)**—the easiest thing for me—what's in all these mediums—is writing dialogue, so, often I start with that, and then, probably the hardest part—and this is in all the mediums, too—is structure, you can either have this as linear, and if it doesn't, then that's hard work for me. And then, with filmmaking, the hard part is writing the script, but the rest is like really hard labor, you know, but it's not—you're kind of home free, I think—I'm basing this off of one feature, and some short films—but I feel like the rest is on a creative level, relatively kind of fun in a way but just kind of physically, I found it physically just brutalizing, you don't get to sit in a chair, so it's really hard, so yeah.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: One last question, sir.

Q: (inaudible)

MIRANDA JULY: You know, like so many things, I just wrote it, not having any idea why, and then afterwards it was like huh, of course, I had this eye disease as a child, this really bad eye disease for seven years and it went away when I was fourteen, and then it came back when I was twenty-one, all of a sudden, and I had it for about six more years. It was such a crazy thing, to have the thing—I could barely remember it and it was a really important part of who I was and then I could barely remember it, and then now I was dealing with it as an adult, and I really honestly didn't think about that once when I was writing it, I think I wrote that all at one sitting, and when I stopped, I was like, oh, and I just kind of felt—I think a little sad.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Thank you very much. Miranda July! Thank you, Miranda. That was great. Miranda July!

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: There will be a fifteen-minute reception. Please join us all. A fifteen-minute reception.

(MUSIC BY THE HUNGRY MARCH BAND)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Ladies and gentlemen. I have the distinct pleasure of telling you that Salman Rushdie is still here. **(laughter)** He stayed on. He stayed on for you, but he stayed on for the band, and he stayed on because he wanted to hear Miranda July. **(applause)**

I've been here for about a year, and I've had the distinct pleasure also of welcoming Salman Rushdie, who is president of PEN, to the wonderful inauguration of the PEN Festival last April. We had a whole day—if you think that we do a lot of things here at the Library, then you're quite right—a whole day celebration where we had Chico Buarque in conversation with Paul Auster, I remember the Ambassador of Brazil calling me up when we had no more tickets, saying, "But you do understand that Chico Buarque is our Bob Dylan." One learns something every day. And we had another event on catastrophe, with actually Philip Gourevitch and a great celebration of *Don Quixote* and now I think you have not come to hear me give another introduction, and for all of you who have been waiting, I have the distinct pleasure and privilege of welcoming Salman Rushdie.

(applause)

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Thank you. Well, first of all, what about that band? Let's hear it for that band. **(applause)** And secondly, thank you, Miranda, that was a really beautiful story, and ma'am, wherever she is, your intervention was philistine and has no place in a room like this. **(applause)** Okay, now I have to follow that beautiful story by reading some of my shit.

(laughter)

Shalimar the Clown, it's a book about a betrayal of love, really, it's a book about a young man who is a traveling player in a village of traveling players, a tightrope walker, a clown, who falls in love with a young woman who is a dancer in the village, who unfortunately has ambitions, and therefore she makes the mistake, at a certain point in her life, of running off with the American ambassador. **(laughter)** This is, girls, always a mistake, and ends in tears.

The American ambassador, who, in fact, is an unusual man—he starts off, in fact, he is born and raised in Alsace, on the Franco-German border, he is a Resistance war hero. Eventually he moves to America, he becomes a diplomat, he becomes—he's called Max, Ambassador Max Ophuls. I thought I'd read you a bit about when he first comes to India, when he first sort of arrives as ambassador, and then after that when he first goes to Kashmir, where Shalimar the Clown and his wife Boonyi are members of the theater troupe that comes to entertain him, and all sorts of trouble follows that but just this bit is about that first arrival as ambassador, and he's just landed in Delhi and he's having to deal with the problems of India.

The government of India was GOI. The government of Pakistan was GOP. In the aftermath of the Tashkent Peace Conference (TPC) between the two countries during the period of partial political vacuum created by the fatal heart attack of the Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri (LBS) on the day following the signature of the Tashkent Declaration (TD), Max Ophuls launched a major new American initiative. In this interregnum a bitter stalemate between the potentates of the Congress Party ended when the kingmakers Kumaraswami Kamaraj (KK) and Morarji Desai (MD) elevated Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi (IPG) to the premiership in the mistaken belief that she would be their helpless puppet. During this period of savage intraparty

warfare only Presiden Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan rose above the political storm. His national stature and his air of a philosopher-saint gave him unusual influence over all government matters, even though the authors of the Indian constitution had clearly intended the president's role to be largely ceremonial. Max's close friendship with this revered figure (PSK) provided the opening for the so-called Ophuls Plan.

The ambassador's idea was that if he could convince both governments to work together on multilateral projects (GOI/GOP-MP) they could start getting used to interdependence instead of conflict. Mastering the language of unpronounceable acronyms, which was the true lingua franca of the subcontinent's political class, he proposed a fuel exchange program, or FEP: Pakistan would export its gas (PG) to India and India would send its coal (IC) to Pakistan. He further proposed that the two nations cooperative over hydroelectric and irrigation projects (HAIP) in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Tista river system (GBTRS or, colloquially, GABTRIS). He spoke to the Indian government minister for planning and social work (GOIMPSW or MINPLASOC), Ashoka Mehta, and assured him of World Bank support. He encouraged his old pal, the minister for foreign affairs, GOIMFA Swaran Singh, to send out a feeler to his GOP counterparts concerning the possibility of back-channel arms-limitation talks (BALT). Indira Gandhi was settling in as GOIPM, a.k.a MADAM, and Max urged her to move down the path of reconciliation. The result of all his cajoling and bullying was the briefly celebrated Islamabad Joint Statement, the so-called IJOSTAT or GOIGOPJS(ISL)66. **(laughter)** Max received personal messages of congratulation from both POTUS and UNSGUT. **(laughter)** Of late, America had been infected by a Western strain of the South Asian disease of acronymial

initialitis. JFK, RFK, MLK, had gone, but POTUS of course was LBJ and UNSGUT was the secretary general of the United Nations, U Thant.

The ugliness of the bureaucratic terminology, its aggressive uninterest in euphony, marked it out as power speech. Power had no need for prettification, no need to make things easy. By showing its contempt for verbal felicity, it revealed itself as itself, naked and unadorned. The iron fist took off the velvet glove.

Euphoria over the Islamabad Accords proved short-lived. The estranged nations' common fondness for alphabet soup did not mean they had developed a taste for peace. MADAM summoned Max to tell him of her anger of the cancellation of all joint projects. The military back-channel proposals had been for territorial adjustments along the ceasefire line; India might compensate Pakistan for lost strategic areas. Or, if this were not acceptable to Pakistan, India suggested it might agree to accept guarantees of more adequate controls by the UN. Mrs. Gandhi told Max the actual numbers of the war dead on both sides, which were much higher than the published figures. "We can't go on letting our young men perish like this," she said. "And the Pakistanis agree, you know. The generals are furious with Zulfy—GOPMFA Zulfikar Ali Bhutto—"for leading them into a battle over a stretch of icy wasteland. *Quelques arpents de neige*, isn't it." In spite of the two nations' common concerns, there would be no effective moves towards greater cross-border understanding. Two powerful men combined to sabotage the Ophuls Plan. The old Congress grandee Vengalil Krishnan Krishna Menon—the great left-wing orator and wit who had once, at the Security Council, filibustered for eight hours without a prepared text on the subject of India's inalienable right to have and hold Kashmir; who called

himself a “tea-totaller,” because although he consumed no alcohol he drank a total of thirty-six cups of tea a day, **(laughter)** and consequently spoke more rapidly than any man in India; **(laughter)** whose rudeness was legendary; and who was considered an enemy by Indira Gandhi, although he had been her father’s friend—had worked assiduously to sabotage the détente. He had found a willing ally in the home minister Gulzarilal Nanda, who had been caretaker prime minister twice, for a few days each, first after Jawaharlal Nehru’s death and again after Shastri’s, whose resentment of those who got the job for real was bitter and absolute, and whose nose was still out of joint. Together Nanda and Krishna Menon worked hard to build opposition to Ophuls inside the Indian cabinet and parliament, while simultaneously bolstering the Indian Army’s military control over the Kashmir Valley. At that early stage in her career Mrs. Gandhi was obliged to confess that she had allowed herself to be outmaneuvered. “You also, Mr. Ophuls,” she said. “GOIMHA Nanda and VKKM have foxed you, too. Honestly! What a schmuck!” **(laughter)** SCHMUCK? wondered Max. Ah...Sabotage of Cooperative...what?...Harmony-Motivated Undertakings Concerning Kashmir?” **(laughter)** The prime minister of India stroked his arm gently. “It’s not an acronym,” she said. **(laughter)**

Boonyi left Pachigam without her husband because the Americans had only asked Abdullah Noman for a dance act. She had been commanded to give her Anarkali again to dazzle the capital’s grandees on a specially constructed stage in the residence’s central atrium, below a pyramidal lantern. Himl and Gonwati were with her to dance behind and beside her, content with their supporting roles, happy to shine a little in her reflected light. Habib Joo the old dance teacher, was going, too, and a trio of musicians. “Pachigam sending a troupe to New Delhi, to the

American embassy,” Abdullah Norman said happily at the bus stop, embracing each of them.
“What honor you bring on us all.”

Shalimar the clown had come to see her off. When the bus arrived, making its usual devil squawk of a racket and daubed with warnings to motorists and pedestrians alike, Norman climbed onto the roof with her bedroll and made sure everything was safely tied down. When Boonyi said goodbye to him, she knew it was an ending. He understood nothing, did not foresee the breaking of his heart. He loved her too much to suspect her of having a traitorous soul. But he was just a clown, and his love led nowhere, would change nothing, would not take her where it was her destiny to go. As she went up through the door of the bus, she looked back and saw Shalimar the clown standing with her damaged friend Zoon Misri, a vague, drifting presence, half-human, half-phantom, whose place at his side was like a portent of the damage that she, Boonyi, would shortly be inflicting on him. She gave him her best, brightest smile and he lit up in return, as always. This was how she would remember him, his beauty illumined by love. And then the bus set off with a jerk and a rush, and turned the corner and he was gone and she began to prepare for what was about to happen. *What do you want*, the ambassador had asked her. She knew what he wanted. He wanted what men want. But to have an answer to his question was important. To know exactly what she wanted and what she was prepared to offer in return.

When he came to her, she was ready. Edgar Wood, that peculiar young aide, had arranged everything perfectly. The dancing girls were allocated comfortable rooms in the Roosevelt House guest wing. Ed Wood was careful to seek Mrs. Ophuls’s approval of the arrangements. Mrs. Ophuls’s private suite was at the far end of the building—she and the ambassador preferred

not to share a bedroom—and Beaver Wood had hand-picked the marines guarding the route between the distinguished couple’s quarters and also the marines stationed in the corridor outside the dancing girls’ rooms. (After his arrival in New Delhi, the Beaver had made it his first business to establish which members of the embassy security detail he could rely on, the ones who understood that their absolute loyalty lay to the ambassador and not to their Midwestern parents’ conservative moral values or even to God.) It was embassy policy, Wood informed the young women, that in order to ensure their safety the residence’s corridors would be off-limits until breakfast time, even for themselves. Himal and Gonwati made no objection, particularly as their rooms were filled with bolts of fabric, bottles of perfume and necklaces and wrist cuffs made of antique silver and with wicker baskets overflowing with good things to eat and drink. With cries of delight, they rushed towards their gifts. Meanwhile, Habib Joo and his trio of male musicians were taken to a suite of rooms at the Ashoka Hotel, where they made the acquaintance of minibars for the first time in their lives and decided contentedly that their religion made a special blind-eye exception for expenses-paid nights away from home in deluxe five-star hotels.

(laughter)

In her room at Roosevelt House, Boonyi examined no saris, smelled no perfume, ate no bon-bon. Still wearing the clothes of Anrakali, the tight, high scarlet bodice that revealed the slenderness of her midriff and the muscled flatness of her belly, the wide, much-pleated dancer’s skirt in emerald-green silk edged in gold braid, the white tights below it to preserve her modesty when the skirt fanned and flared outwards as she whirled, and the costume jewelry, the “ruby” pendant around her neck, the “golden” nose ring, the braids of fake pearl in her hair, she sat perfectly still on the edge of her bed, staying “in character,” acting the part of a great courtesan waiting for the

heir to the Mughal throne. With her hands folded in her lap she waited without complaint. It was three o'clock in the morning before she heard a single, quiet knock on her door.

He had prepared a declaration, in newly learned Kashmiri, but she put a finger across his lips. How handsome he was, how much his eyes had seen, how much his body knew. "I can speak some little English," she said—not for nothing was she the daughter of Pyarelal Kaul!—and laughed as his whole body relaxed in surprised relief. She had prepared a speech, too, laboring over it in her racing mind as she lay sleepless during the small hours beside her unknowing husband. This was her stage and it was time for her soliloquy. "Please, I want to be a great dancer," she told him. "So I want a great teacher. Also, I want, please to be educated to high standard. And I want a good place to live—please—so that I am not ashamed to receive you there. Finally," and now her voice trembled, "because I will give up much for this, please, sir, I want to hear from your own lips that you will keep me safe."

He was both moved and amused. "I will be guided by you in this," he replied gravely. "*Meh haav tae sae wath*. Please show me the way." Whereupon for an hour they hammered out the treaty of their affiliation as though it were a back-channel negotiation or an international arms deal, (**laughter**) each recognizing a need in the other that complemented their own. Max was actually aroused by the young woman's naked pragmatism. Perhaps her notable openness concerning her ambition foreshadowed an equal openness in lovemaking. He looked forward to discovering if this were so. The negotiation was also pleasing in itself. The details of the "Understanding," as they both elected to call it—though Max privately preferred the term BKN/MO/JSA(C) which more fully summarized the joint statement of accord (classified)

between Boonyi Kaul Noman and himself—were quickly agreed. Just as mutual self-interest was the only real guarantee of a durable accord between nations, so Boonyi's perception that this liaison was her best chance of furthering her own purposes constituted a reliable guarantee of her future seriousness and discretion. That the most delicate clause of the unwritten contract proved not to be an obstacle provided Max with a further necessary guarantee. "And for your part, if I do as you require?" he asked her: the question she had known he would ask, and to which, in her thoughts, her answer had been given, refined and given again a thousand and one times. She looked him in the eyes. "In that case, I will do anything you want, whenever you want it," she replied in immaculate English. "My body will be yours to command and it will be my joy to obey."

Thus all Max's significant requirements were in place: **(laughter)** not only discretion and seriousness but also complete docility, absolute compliance, maximum attentiveness, exceptional eagerness to please and unlimited access, **(laughter)** all fueled by the girl's determination to better herself, to make the leap from the village to the world, to give herself the future she believed she deserved. The clown of a husband was a problem, but she insisted that Max need not concern himself with this aspect of things as it was something she could easily take care of. Everything was acceptable. Edgar Wood, whose forte was anticipation, had already found the apartment, at Type-1 Number-22 Southeast Hira Bagh, two pink rooms with harsh blue-white neon strip lights and no balcony located in a sage-green concrete bunker of an apartment block in a low-rent residential "colony" to the south of the city center. The rooms were on the floor above the purple-faced Odissi dance guru Jayababu—Pandit Jayanta Mudgal—who would be well-paid to teach the girl everything he knew and to be deaf and blind to everything he should not know.

Max and Boonyi actually shook hands on the deal. At the age of fifty-five Ambassador Ophuls was being offered a garden of earthly delights. There was, however, a strangeness. In spite of the cynicism of the Understanding, he felt something that had been asleep for a long time and should not have been awakened begin to stir within himself. Desire was to be expected, for he had rarely been in the presence of so beautiful a woman. But the worm stirring in him lay deeper than desire.

“Don’t do this,” he warned himself. “To fall in love would break the treaty—nothing can come of it but trouble.” But the secret creature within him stretched and yawned, climbed out of its almost-forgotten cellar and rose towards the light. He began to smile a foolish smile whenever he thought of her, to visit her more often than was wise, and to lavish gifts on her. She wanted treasures from the U.S. diplomats’ store: American cheese in a tin, the new ridged American potato chips that looked like miniature plowed fields, (**laughter**) 45-rpm recordings celebrating the joys of surfing and driving fast motorcars, and above all candy bars. Chocolates and sweets, which would be her downfall, entered her life in quantity for the first time. She also craved the women’s fashions of 1966, not the boring Jackie Kennedy pillbox-hat-and-pearls styles but the looks in the magazines she devoured, the Pocahontas headbands, the swirling orange print shift dresses, the fringed leather jackets, the Mondrian squares of St. Laurent, the hoop dresses, the space-age cat suits, the miniskirt, the vinyl, the gloves. She only wore these things in the privacy of the love nest, dressing up eagerly for her lover, giggling at her own daring, allowing him to undress her as he pleased, to take his time, or to rip the clothes roughly off her body and leave them in shreds on the floor. Edgar Wood, given the task of acquiring and later dispensing these gifts, in such a way as to avoid suspicion falling on the ambassador, fulfilled his duties with a growing hostility which Boonyi regally ignored. He got his revenge by insisting on being present

to watch her take the daily contraceptive pills that had been Understood to be essential to the deal.

As a result of Max's unexpected romantic infatuation—and also because Boonyi was every bit as attentive as promised—he failed to sense what she had been silently telling him from the beginning, what she assumed he knew to be a part of their hard-nosed agreement: *Don't ask for my heart, because I am tearing it out, and breaking it into little bits and throwing it away so I will be heartless but you will not know it because I will be the perfect counterfeit of a loving woman and you will receive from me a perfect forgery of love.*

So there were two unspoken clauses in the Understanding, one regarding the giving of love and the other concerning the withholding of it, codicils that were sharply at odds with each other and impossible to reconcile. The result was as Max had foreseen, trouble; the biggest Indo-American diplomatic rumpus in history. But, for a time, the master forger was deceived by the forgery he had bought, both deceived and satisfied, as content to possess it as an art collector who discovers a masterpiece concealed in a mound of garbage, as happy to keep it hidden from view as a collector who can't resist buying what he knows to be stolen property. And that was how it came about that a faithless wife from the village of the traveling players began to influence, to complicate and even to shape, American diplomatic activity regarding the vexed matter of Kashmir.

Thanks.

(applause)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: L and G, SR, WTT? Ladies and Gentlemen, Salman Rushdie, wasn't that terrific? **(laughter)**

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Thanks. Ask a question.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Hm?

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Ask a question.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Ask my question. My question. I know, I guess a lot of us had heard for a long time that you were writing about Kashmir, a home territory for you, and that there was this great Kashmiri novel boiling. How is it that an Alsatian Jew, a Strasbourgian, became—entered the picture and became such a central figure, and not just a figure, but the American ambassador?

SALMAN RUSHDIE: I learned about him quite gradually. The first image I had of the novel was the image of the murder with which it begins, in which Shalimar the clown, the cuckolded husband, is finally avenged upon the man who stole his wife. The book begins with that, so I'm not giving anything away, and then goes back to tell you why. But when I first had that scene of the murder in my head, I didn't—I mean, I knew that Max was the American ambassador. At that point I didn't know much more about him than that, and he gradually revealed his story to

me and the reason why I liked the arrival of Strasbourg in the story was that that is also—that has also been over many hundreds of years, debatable land. It has also been a place where an international frontier has whip-lashed back and forth, across, now French, now German, back again. And in his own lifetime, in World War II, the border had shifted again, and the Nazis had come to take it over, and he had lost his family in the Holocaust, he's a Jew, and he himself had escaped.

So when he comes, later in his life, having become an American, having become a diplomat, having arrived in India as ambassador, he comes with information that helps him understand what it's like to be in another place of debatable frontiers, and what it's like to be in a world where lives are broken and crushed because borderlines move back and forth across the land and armies fight over those borderlines, so it also gave me as his author a way to show a Western context for, you know, for a distant Indian story and the two seemed to balance each other, especially as then, he gets involved in the French Resistance. The French Resistance is an insurgency, which we think of as heroic. He comes to India, and there is an insurgency that begins in Kashmir, which is something that many people did not call heroic, they called it instead terrorist, and well, I don't have to draw the parallel with other insurgencies, **(laughter)** but the thing the book does is not to say "this is good, that is bad," but just simply to try and show that identical actions in different historical contexts inspire different moral judgments, different evaluations of them, and how strange that is, given that exactly the same things are being done in both places, so that, again, gave me a balance in the book, which I liked having, and that's why Strasbourg.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: You say that in some way it makes the Kashmiri situation accessible or identifiable to a Western reader, perhaps. To what extent do you think of your reader now as a Western reader or to what extent are you using Strasbourg to also say to an Indian reader, by the way, this is not a uniquely Indian predicament?

SALMAN RUSHDIE: If I was having this conversation in India I would express it that way round.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Would you say you're trying to make Alsatian Jews accessible to the average Indian reader?

SALMAN RUSHDIE: I'm trying to— **(laughter)**. In a word, yes.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: High time.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Exactly. Why should they not know?

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Sure. One of the things that the reading that you gave just now, also highlights, I think, is just the very first part, and having read a fair amount of cable traffic as a foreign correspondent, I know that this acronym mania is absolutely real and is absurd and comical like that. And there's an element to this where you're—throughout the novel and

throughout your writing elsewhere, also in fiction. You're bringing in real characters, actual presidents, actual secretaries of state, actual prime ministers in India, and you weave in this character, and it almost reads fact-checkably, and then you have wild flights of fancy, supernatural acts, events of magic. Are you suggesting that these two things—what is the relationship between them for you?

SALMAN RUSHDIE: I just like people to experience the fiction or think of the fiction as being of the same order of reality as reality and so when imaginary people bump into real people, in a way, it's kind of arguable which of them is more fictional. And I just like that. It used to be the case in the novel that readers were not prepared for this. That if you were going to have a president in a novel, you'd have to make him up. You know, if you were going to have a prime minister, you couldn't call him Tony Blair, you'd have to call him something else.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Napoleon kept popping up.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Yeah, but what I'm saying is people were less willing than they are now to allow the real world to be presented as it is in what was ostensibly a work of fiction. But my view is since the reason for writing fiction is to say something about the real world, you know, in my view, I mean, why do it otherwise? You know, I'm trying to say something about how I see things, and whether they be little private acts or big historical acts, I'm trying to say, "I think it's like this." If you are trying to talk about the real world, then why shouldn't the real world sometimes intrude? That's—it seems perfectly natural to me. One of the joys of the book, in terms of Max going to India was that of course, he's fictional, and therefore he's not in the

historical record, and I had to make room for him, so I had to push the ambassadorships of John Kenneth Galbraith and Chester Bowles, you know, apart, **(laughter)** in order to insert him in the middle, and then he had to have relationships with LBJ and Walt Rostow, and all these people, which were quite enjoyable to make up, because I wanted to get right what those people would have made of somebody like him. He is, I guess, he has a little bit of Galbraith in him, because Galbraith was very popular in India, and he is a very popular ambassador in India.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Did you do a lot, in the past, obviously, you've written a lot of this history. In your interview in *The Paris Review*—Salman Rushdie is the cover boy of our current issue of *The Paris Review* **(applause)**—in the interview you actually talk about in a sense the early period in your writing career, when you were finding your voice, for lack of a better term, taking various false starts and excursions in other novels, and slowly found your way towards *Midnight's Children* and that in some ways what was the block was learning to write history which now is something that you're very heavily identified and involved with, and, in this book, I gather, you did a lot more straight-out library research than you had in the past.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Library, and talking to people, and Internet, and I mean, all kinds of things, because one of the things I've learned over the years is the places where you make the stupid mistakes are the places where you think you know what you're talking about. That's always where the dumb stuff creeps in. You know, if you think you really know a poem and you don't need to look it up to quote it, **(laughter)** you always misquote it.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: You're busted.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Always. So what I've now learned is that especially the stuff that I think I know a lot about is what I have to ruthlessly check.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: And do you find out all sorts of things?

SALMAN RUSHDIE: I'm always wrong! **(laughter)** Every time I actually look it up there's endless details which are not the way I remembered them. And this time, yeah, I did more research in this book than I've ever done before, and I mean, yes, of course, if I'm writing about Strasbourg and the Nazi occupation, I have to go find out about that. I've been to Strasbourg, but not during the Nazi occupation, so I had to get into that world, but actually I did more research than that about the thing that I thought I knew best, which is what has happened in Kashmir in the last more than half-century and of course there's a moment when research is fantastically liberating, because you realize that you're discovering things that are better than you could make up, you know. **(laughter)** There are things that are like the things that you would wish to make up, except that they are better than what you could make up, and so you just pinch them, and pretend you made them up. **(laughter)**

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: And people think you did.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: And people think you did. For instance, in the Strasbourg section, the Bugatti Racer, the airplane, I mean, I did not make it up.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: You made it fly, though.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: I made it fly, though. I had discovered that—

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: It's not bad with an airplane.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: I had discovered that what happened is that Ettore Bugatti, the head of the Bugatti factory, just before World War II, had become very upset that the world air speed record was held by a German plane, you know, a Messerschmitt, and he decided that he was going to build a plane that was much faster. So he built this thing called the Bugatti Racer and then he was asked to build a military version of it, so he built sort of Mach II version of it which had machine guns mounted, and so on. And everybody believes that actually it would have been faster than that German plane, but before he was ever able to test it, Paris fell, and the Nazis occupied a lot of France, and he—the thing that is right, that is true that I say in the book is that he managed to conceal it from the Nazis throughout the war, they never got it. He didn't conceal it where I say he concealed it, because actually it would have been pretty dumb to conceal it on his family estate, that would have been a good place to find it, but actually in my novel he is stupid enough to do that, **(laughter)** really he hid it somewhere much more tedious and at the end of the war, actually where it is now, it's in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Of course.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: In an aircraft museum.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: But it still hasn't flown. It was carried there.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Never flown except in my novel. But when I discovered this plane, I thought, you know, "Thank you," because I knew that Max had to escape from Strasbourg, he had to escape from the Nazis, **(laughter)** you know, and I'd been studying all the stuff, the normal stuff about the escape routes that the Resistance had set up and so on by which people did escape sometimes—

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Very dull.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: —and then I found this plane and then I thought hooray, you know, here's a novelistic way for him, a magic realist way for him to escape, except that it's completely true, except that it didn't fly.

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Except that it didn't fly. **(laughter)** But leaving aside giving yourself the power of flight, which is not negligible, but I guess one of the questions I want to ask you is here we are in this time that increasingly one reads and hears that we're in a time of nonfiction, the novelist Robert Stone once said to me, he used the phrase "in this post-fiction age," he sounded sort of discouraged about the way that people were—that a lot of good writers were writing nonfiction, as if it were truer than fiction, and I wonder whether there's some sort of a

sense that you have or how you would describe the role of the imagination in trying to respond to reality, to make reality real.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: I think, you know, I mean, actually I'm sorry to hear Bob Stone saying that, because he's one of the novelists who demonstrates the opposite.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Obviously, yeah.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: To read *A Flag for Sunrise* or *Dog Soldiers*—these are books which open up Vietnam and Central America and so on in a way that journalism kind of doesn't, you know, or very rarely does, I mean, book-length journalism sometimes does, but otherwise . . .

(laughter/applause)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Well, no, I would argue that it falls short, that there's something about reality that's very limiting in its own sort of ability to express itself.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: The problem with journalism, isn't it, is that you can't find out enough. First of all, your resources are limited, and secondly people try and stop you finding things out, and thirdly, people lie to you. And it's really hard to find out. For instance, it seems to me very important to know about the people—about suicide bombers, about what kind of people they were. And yet it's almost impossible to have that information.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: No, they exist, interestingly, only in novels.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: There's a thing particularly in such a vexed and disturbing time that the art of the novel can offer, which is exactly what you say, which is the imaginative leap. I mean, research, yes, I did a lot of research, but research will only get you so far, you know, I mean, research gives you the solid ground from which to make the—from which to take the imaginative leap, you know, you feel you've got the firm footing from which to jump, but the jump is the work of art, and if you do it right, then the reader can make the jump with you, and the reader can enter into realities which are not his or her reality and can feel that they are, can feel, can experience them from inside the skin of other people, you know, and I think at a moment like this, when, you know, you switch on the television and there's random explosions from all over the world and atrocity has become almost banal, you know, how do we understand?

And it seems to me therefore, the opposite of the death of the novel is true. In a way—you know, the novel in its heyday, the novel in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, it was a source of information, people would read the novel to get the news. You know, people would read Dickens and they would find out about poorhouses and their abuses, they would find out about schools for poor kids in the north of England, and often scandals would result. You know, I mean *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a famous example of a book that brought the news and actually changed many people's views of slavery, and then, along come all these other news media, and the novel loses its primary function of bringing the news, and now it seems to me it might be getting it back.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: I'm curious about the fact that it feels that way sometimes most excitingly, in, say, the area, well, Philip Roth had that whole series of the Writers of the Other Europe in the early post-Communist period of Eastern European writers or people from explicitly repressive societies, where there isn't that much freedom of information, and the novel becomes this opening space and sometimes I wonder whether it's a curious fact that here we are in this very powerful country, it's something that you talk about also, that America, although it's at the apex of power doesn't have that many novelists grappling with American power, and I'm wondering how you account for that as someone who does take these subjects to heart.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: At the height of the British Empire, no British novelists wrote about the British Empire, it just seemed to be that—if you look at the whole work of Charles Dickens, there's like one and a half characters who have anything to do with the Empire.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: It took a Pole. Conrad.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: The thing about you were saying about fiction and reality, the reason this turned into a novel in many ways, was that in 1987 I was in Kashmir, it was just shortly before the insurgency began, but it was very present, you know, you could feel this great electricity there, and unhappiness, and I met a group of traveling players not unlike the people in the book, and I was there to make a documentary for British television. That was 1987, it was the fortieth anniversary of Indian independence, and I'd been asked to go and make a kind of essay film about India at the age of forty. And as part of it we went to Kashmir and I met, as I say, as part of the research, I met some of these actors, and was taken to their village, and they showed me their

lives, and so on and I was very touched by their story and the problem was, that every time we would turn the camera on they would lie. You know, they would tell us all kinds of horror stories about how their lives were, and then you would turn the camera on, you'd say, tell us about your lives, and they would say, "We are very happy."

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Cameras are terrible that way.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: "We love the Indian army," **(laughter)** and then you'd turn the camera off, and they would say, "No, we fucking don't." **(laughter)** And the problem was we could not get the story on film, and in the end we left the sequence out of the documentary, because the sequence that we had on film was not truthful, you know, and I always—they stuck with me, and the way I've been able to tell their story is this book, you know, because they were not—they were too scared to tell it for themselves.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: To what extent has being confronted by, threatened by, and sucked into, the real world of violent political threat and event with the fatwa, how much has that informed sort of your imagination of these things and how much does it in some way leave you still having to imagine.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Well, nobody killed me—

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Thankfully.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: So I have to imagine that part.

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: You do it pretty well. But the part where you imagine it, you seem to know an awful lot about the security that's required to get from a car to a building.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Believe me, I know so much about the activities of the secret state that, you know, John Le Carré, read it and weep. **(laughter)** I was once in those years I was once invited into this extraordinary edifice on the south bank of the Thames in London, which is where the spies live, and I was asked to address them. They said, "You know, there's a lot of us who would like to hear what you have to say." So I went. They were sort of a hundred people or so, the absolute heads of British intelligence, none of whom would tell me their names.

(laughter) But, you know, it was an extraordinary encounter, very, very, very smart, very, very smart encounter, of the sort of undefended sort that you can't actually have in public, because they wouldn't talk like that in public. And at the end of it, I talked to this woman who was at that time number 2 in British intelligence, she afterwards became number 1. By the way, number 1 is not really called M.

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Right. But she is a woman.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: No, yes, Number 1 is called C, **(laughter)** anyway, C, or as she was at that time, D, awaiting promotion up one letter in the alphabet. **(laughter)** She was a very likeable, you know, kind of upper-class, jolly woman who you might imagine playing field hockey. **(laughter)**

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: My kind of spy.

(laughter)

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Yeah, and I said to her, “You know, I don’t think a lot of left-wing writers have had this close an insight into the workings of the British Secret Service.” And she said, “I’ll tell you something, not a lot of right-wing writers have had this much insight into the workings of the British Secret Service.” **(laughter)** So I know all that shit. **(laughter)** And there’s some very interesting things. For instance, one of the things that I thought was really interesting to discover is the technical difference between the concept of threat and the concept of risk, words which we might casually use interchangeably. You can say that there is a certain level of threat against an individual, and that level of threat, in British intelligence, has seven grades. Grade 1 means somebody is shooting at you. Grade 7 means nothing—

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Having your foot run over by a car.

(laughter)

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Yeah, yeah. **(applause)** And so, you know, when—the Royal Family are all level 2.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Automatically.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Automatically, ex officio, not surprisingly, really, considering the Royal Family. **(laughter)** Anyway, no, I don't wish to be antiroyalist right now, I'll save that for later.

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: It plays better in England anyway.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Yeah, it does play better there, you get big rounds of applause there. Say anything rude about Prince Charles and everybody loves you. Anyway, what was I saying?

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Threat levels and risk levels.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: So, even though the level of threat can be high, the level of risk attached to an individual action can be very low. Such as if the Queen decides to go to the movies in a public theater, and she sneaks in after the lights go down, and she sneaks out before the lights go up, the level of risk associated with that action is almost nil. So that even people with quite high levels of threat against them are able to perform all kinds of actions, ordinary life actions,

because the level of risk attached is low if you do it in a certain way. So this is the kind of way you learn to think. I had to learn to think like that.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: And it affects your imagination, I would imagine.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: I mean, it gets in there. It gets in there. It happened for nine years of my life. Of course it affected my imagination, you know. Of course it got in there and made me think again about all sorts of things, sure.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Going back—and then we’ll open up to questions—I guess the last I have on this fiction/nonfiction theme, let’s say, is the way that, um, I mean, having done a lot of nonfiction writing, I often found that if people ask me, sort of, what can’t you touch? What’s the hardest to get at that fiction has, I would say, love, erotic love, and humor. And being funny, just flat-out funny, about the idiocy of a lot of political power is somehow considered offensive in journalism by the masters of journalism, like it’s considered nonobjective, and it seems to me to be one of the fundamental tools of political novel writing, that there’s often the exposure of hypocrisy, the mockery of power, the ridiculing of edicts and acronyms and so forth, and the other thing is sort of romantic and erotic life, which in your novel, in this novel, certainly seems to be quite often the linchpin behind political passions. The political passions are stirring but what makes, once everything’s stirred up, what makes these two groups that are working against each other go is some small person’s feeling, well, “I’m after that girl, and therefore I’ll restrain my army from stopping the Iron Mullahs,” or “I am one of the Iron Mullahs, and I have my boiling repressions and therefore I’ll act in this way.”

SALMAN RUSHDIE: I just, I think sex is very important to it, I do. I think it screws up all kinds of activities and makes possible, liberates, all kinds of other possibilities in human beings, and yes, people do sometimes attack a village because a girl in it rejected them. It's a terrible thing to say and it is in that sense journalistically true that the Indian Army in Kashmir for a time used rape as a deliberate weapon of subjugation, that they would deliberately go into a village and rape all the women and female children, and that could be provoked by something as slight as a woman from the village saying "fuck off," you know, so I think one of the things that Islamic fundamentalists fear most is the sexuality of women, you know, and what they fear most about societies in which women are not sexually repressed is that, "that could happen to us."

In Kashmir, for example, Kashmiri women hardly ever wore veils. It was not a place in which women were circumscribed in that way. When the jihadists started coming across the border, they would go to villages at night and threaten people. They would say "unless you"—as they would put it—"stop your women walking around naked, we will come here and we will do terrible things to you and to the women," you know, so now you find in Kashmir that there are women walking around veiled, because they have been essentially terrorized, you know, Muslims terrorizing other Muslims. So, yes, I think, you know, you can't rule out that sexual dimension, because it is very central. For instance, Shalimar the clown, somebody whose heart is broken, and somehow that is the trigger that sets him off down a road that ends in him becoming a very violent individual, and I'm not saying it's the only thing that pushes him there—

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: No, it's the convergence of these things, it's the idea that that's as likely to move somebody politically as vice versa.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: The personal and the political, they're all mixed up. It's very difficult to separate. People do not act purely for ideological reasons, or purely for personal reasons. It's not—life isn't like that. People aren't like that, we're not like that. You know, I mean, in Kashmir, some of the people who join the jihadists do so just because they're broke, they need a paycheck. It's a very depressed economy in the valley, and somebody who's giving them even a small amount of money. You know, people these days will kill each other for very small amounts of money. I mean, you know, twenty bucks, you can get a man killed, because of economic desperation, on the one hand, and on the other hand, somehow a loss of our sense of the value of human life. Anyway, I'm being depressing.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Well, let's take some questions, and while you come and please use the microphones and we have time for some questions, and while you line up there, I'll take a second and say again, Salman's novel, signed, is for sale, **(applause)** *The Paris Review* is for sale, the Hungry March Band CD is for sale. Picador's *Paris Review Book of People with Problems* is for sale, and, when we're done taking questions, the bar will be opening, and the reception will continue for a while before you all venture out into the warmth of the night.

Q: (Inaudible)

SALMAN RUSHDIE: What's my take on, you know, Americans?

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: How are we doing? The question is how are we doing?

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Americans, I'm for 'em. **(laughter)** On the whole. I don't know, too big a question.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Can you narrow the question a tiny bit?

Q: (Inaudible)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: All right. You have a question?

Q: I'm wondering why you chose to use or perhaps the right word is appropriate, the name of Max Ophuls for the ambassador.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: I'm glad you asked that question. There's a number of reasons. How long have you got? Are you sitting comfortably? First of all, I hadn't meant to do it. That's the honest confession. When I started to make notes and so on for the book, I wanted a name that was this kind of borderline Franco-German name, and I remember writing down "like Max Ophuls," but obviously it wouldn't be him, because he's a film director. On the other hand, you know, you can call a character Fred Hitchcock, you know, he doesn't own the name. There's no

copyright in names. You could call a novel *The Satanic Verses*, if you felt like it. I wouldn't recommend it.

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: It's been done.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Anyway, so the real thing that happened is that having put it down as a kind of working name, expecting to come up with a better one, I found that the character simply appropriated the name, it got stuck to him, he wanted to be Max, and every time I tried to call him something else, it didn't feel right. So in the end, I thought, oh well, what the hell. Then I made all kinds of self-justifications. One of which is this: that this is a novel in which everybody is unhappy about their name. All the characters dislike their names and choose nicknames or stage names or whatever, they have a kind of bad relationship with their name, except for Max, who is absolutely happy with his name, that is not his name. Not only that, but Max Ophuls the filmmaker wasn't called Max Ophuls, that was a name he took. So I thought, if it was a pseudonym in the first name, it can be my pseudonym. Also, Max, my Max, in the Resistance, is a forger, you know, he forges identities for people, so if he has a forged identity, too, it seemed to me that that was okay. So that's—how many reasons do you need? **(laughter)**

But the real reason is that I couldn't get rid of the name. And it reminded me, actually, on this stage, I remember hearing in the *New Yorker* Festival a couple of years ago, Paul Simon being interviewed by David Remnick, and being asked about the genesis of the song "Graceland," and

he said that he often wrote down “for instance” lyrics, which were not actually anything to do with what the lyric would really be, but just had the right linguistic rhythm, and he said, “I wrote down, I had this sort of riff, this melody and this bass line,” he said, “I wrote down this line and said, I’m going to Graceland,” and he thought, “Well, whoops, that’s not going to be the lyric, because this is an album about music from south Africa and plus I’ve never been to Graceland.” And then he couldn’t get rid of it. The line got stuck to the song and so in the end he went to Graceland, and that’s kind of what happened to me, the thing got stuck to the character, the name got stuck to the character, and everyone except John Updike seems okay with it, **(laughter)** but I have my views on John Updike, don’t ask me.

(laughter)

Q: (Inaudible)

SALMAN RUSHDIE: It’s fiction.

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: We can’t believe it either.

Q: (Inaudible)

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Well, it came about because I was—well, the real genesis of it was stories I would tell my son, my older son, whose middle name is Haroun, and I would tell him—I would often tell him bath time stories instead of bedtime stories and I guess the Sea of Stories came from the bath, really, I thought, bath, sea, you know, **(laughter)** and the idea that you could kind of dip a cup into the bathwater and pretend to sip it and pretend that it contained a story that you would tell, came out of that experience and then it sort of obviously fleshed out. The novel is not just the kind of stuff I used to say at bedtime, at bath time, but the other thing that happened, that what that joined onto was a story I had written and never published, some years previously, which I had written it and I knew there was something wrong with it, and it didn't work and I didn't know what it was and in the end I couldn't make it work and I just put it away. And it was about a war between what one might call the forces of language and the forces of silence, and the armies were called the Armies of Gup, which means “chatter” or “gossip” and the Armies of Chup which means be quiet. In the original story it didn't take place on an imaginary second moon or any of that. It was set in some ancient time and it didn't work, the story. And when I, when Haroun made his leap into this imaginary moon on which the Sea of Stories was I suddenly realized that what was going on on this moon was the battle that I had written about and put in the drawer and forgotten about, and so I pulled it out, and by then of course the whole thing had been given an edge, or put it like this—had been given a villain by what had happened to me, so the character of the villain, the kind of enemy of stories, Kattam-Shud, was closely based on somebody I began to think of as a bit of villain who also was turbaned and bearded...and dead, I'd just point out, don't mess with novelists.

(laughter)

Q: At the PEN conference earlier this year, Michael Ondaatje referred to whom I believe was the wife of the American Ambassador in Sri Lanka, who used to dress up as a clown and be seen driven around in Sri Lanka to different children's parties and both him and Chimamanda Adichie agreed that real characters like that were too extraordinary or perhaps even absurd to use in fiction because no one would buy it. But you seem to be able to do that, time and again, and I wonder if, especially early in your career, if you had to battle against preconceived notions of what is acceptable in fiction versus your imagination into the art of fiction.

SALMAN RUSHDIE: Well, I had to battle all times of things, including, it just took me a very long time to find my way as a writer. I had a lot of false starts. But I remember when I was writing *Midnight's Children*, there was a point where I felt the book kind of came to life and then I felt excited to be working on it, and when I finished it, weird as it is, I remember thinking, "I think this is a pretty good book, you know," but I also, because my work up until that point had not been particularly blessed with success, I remember thinking, "Well, I think it's a good book, but maybe nobody in the world will agree, except close family members." **(laughter)** And I also remember thinking that if they don't agree, if people don't like this book, then it's obvious that I don't really know what a good book is, and maybe I shouldn't waste everybody's time trying to write one. So there was an enormous amount for me riding on that book. Because it is uncompromising. It doesn't back away in the way that you are suggesting, it doesn't try and seek some middle ground, you know, and I guess I was lucky, people thought it was a good book. As a result of that, it in a way freed me. Since then, really, nobody much has tried to tell me how to write, with the exception of the Ayatollah Khomeini, who didn't read it.

(laughter)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: One last question, over here maybe.

Q: My question is more about your creative process. **(inaudible)**

SALMAN RUSHDIE: I feel most creative between about 10:30 and 10:35 in the morning.

(laughter) After that it's over. No, I mean, I really, I think maybe because when I was obliged to work for a living I had to work in an ad agency, and when you work in an ad agency, you have to deliver work on deadline, and it has to be good, or you get fired, it meant that I from a very early age just got rid of the notion of inspiration. I just thought, you just sit there and do your job. So I just do it like a job. I just go to my desk in the morning and do some work. The only thing, really, that I have got in the habit of is the idea of giving it the first energy of the day, before you read the papers, and before you answer emails and etcetera, just do some, go straight to the—I mean, I often go to the desk still in my pajamas, go there and sit there and do some work, and then after I've got something going, I can, you know, wash.

In terms of how a book comes, all I can say to you is that no two books come the same way.

That's one of the—one of the depressing things about being a writer is that you learn very little from experience because what you learn when you're writing a book is hopefully how to solve the problems of that book, and then the next book comes along, and you've got to start all over again solving a different bunch of problems. I have had books where I've had more or less the

whole storyline to start with. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is one of those books, where literally, when I started writing it, more or less the whole story plopped into my head at certain points, and the problem of that book had nothing to do with narrative, it had to do with how to tell the story, what was the tone of voice for the story, the manner of the story, the pitch of the story, how to make it not too childish, not too grown-up, those questions. There have been other books where I've had fragments here and there and I've had to find out how they join up. There have been books I've written from beginning to end, there have been books I've written out of sequence and then had to rearrange. So there's—unfortunately, the sad thing is, there's no rule, or if there is I haven't found it. When I wrote *Fury*, I was really pleased that I wrote it in a year. I mean, I'm notoriously a slow writer, and I thought, Ooh, good, I wrote a book in a year, maybe it means I can write lots more books now," shorter books, more often, I thought that was a good plan, and then the next book took me four years. So I'm afraid I know nothing. I can't help you.

(laughter/applause)

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Thank you.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Miranda July! The Hungry March Band! Philip Gourevitch!
Salman Rushdie! And the reception!

PHILIP GOUREVITCH: Have a drink!

(applause)