

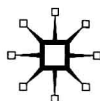
Salman Rushdie

Second Edition

D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke



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To my dear wife, Chinchí and dear sons, Suren and Dilhan

Acknowledgements

I was very pleased to find that the first edition of this book was well received and widely used. But Rushdie's relocation to the USA and his well-publicized reactions to 9/11, along with recent novels set in America, all require a re-evaluation of his oeuvre to date. Three of his works (*Midnight's Children*, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *The Satanic Verses*) have been subject to major theatrical adaptations. There is no comprehensive, up-to-date study of Rushdie currently available. Clearly, there is a need for a second edition. I have revised the original chapters and added new ones to cover the recent phase of Rushdie's writing career. The Conclusion has been altered.

For invaluable assistance in preparing the second edition, I wish to thank Chinchu; Dr Lakshmi de Silva; Nirmali Amarasiri, former Outreach Coordinator of the American Center, Colombo; Mr P. Thambirajah, Chief Librarian, International Centre for Ethnic Studies (Colombo); Mr Daya Dissanayake and Mr D. Suwandarathne.

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D. C. R. A. GOONETILLEKE

Chronology

- 1947 19 June: Salman Rushdie born in Bombay, in the year of Indian Independence from British rule, the only son of Muslim businessman, Anis Ahmed Rushdie, who had received his education at Cambridge, and his wife, Negin. The family includes three daughters.
- 1954 Begins attending Cathedral School, an English Mission school in Bombay.
- 1961 Sent to England for his secondary education, at Rugby School.
- 1964 Family moves to Karachi, Pakistan.
- 1965–68 Reads History at King's College, Cambridge. No longer a believer, develops a historical interest in Islam. Acts with the Cambridge Footlights review. Addicted to cinema.
- 1968 Returns to Pakistan, works briefly in television. Back to London.
- 1968–69 Continues acting at the Oval House, Kennington, London.
- 1969 Gives up acting to work as an advertising copywriter. Stops work to write *The Book of the Pir* (unpublished novel). Takes up copywriting again, on a part-time basis, which permits him to continue writing.
- 1970 Meets Clarissa Luard.
- 1974 Five-month trip to India and Pakistan with Clarissa.
- 1974 February: *Grimus* published. Begins work on *Midnight's Children*. Political involvement with Asian and black groups in London.
- 1976 Marries Clarissa.
- 1979 Son, Zafar, born.
- 1980 Quits advertising to write fiction full-time.
- 1981 *Midnight's Children* published. Wins Booker and James Tait Black prizes and an English-Speaking Union Literary Award.
- 1983 *Shame* published. Shortlisted for the Booker Prize; wins France's Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger. Begins work on *The Satanic Verses*.

- 1984 Travels through Central Australia with the writer Bruce Chatwin. Meets Australian travel writer, Robyn Davidson.
- 1985 Produces documentary film *The Painter and the Pest*.
- 1986 Visits Nicaragua as guest of the Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers. Meets American novelist, Marianne Wiggins.
- 1987 *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* published. The book is dedicated to Robyn Davidson with whom he had become involved. Divorces Clarissa.
- 1988 Marries Marianne Wiggins. Writes and produces *The Riddle of Midnight*, a documentary for Channel 4 television. *The Satanic Verses* published. Shortlisted for the Booker Prize, wins the Whitbread Prize for the Best Novel. Book banned in India, South Africa and other countries, denounced in Pakistan.
- 1989 14 January: public burning of *The Satanic Verses* at a rally in Bradford, England. 14 February: Iran's religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, pronounces his *fatwa* (Rushdie and his publishers and translators sentenced to death for *kufr*); Iran offers a reward for his murder. A bounty of £1.5 million offered by an Iranian Foundation. Rushdie and Wiggins go into hiding under Special Branch police protection. The Rushdie Affair captures international attention. Rushdie support groups formed in England, France and in other countries. August: Wiggins separates from him.
- 1990 *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* published. Wins a Writer's Guild award. Meets Elizabeth West.
- 1991 *Imaginary Homelands: Essays 1981–91* published; concluding section devoted to essays and addresses which convey Rushdie's perspective on his situation. His Italian translator Ettore Capriolo narrowly survives stabbing in Milan. His Japanese translator Hitoshi Igarashi fatally stabbed in Tokyo.
- 1992 *The Wizard of Oz* published in the British Film Institute's Film Classics series.
- 1993 *Midnight's Children* wins Booker of Bookers. Divorced from Marianne Wiggins. His Norwegian publisher William Nygaard is shot dead in Oslo.
- 1994 *East, West*, a collection of short stories, published.
- 1995 *The Moor's Last Sigh* published. Shortlisted for the Booker Prize, wins Whitbread Prize for Best Novel.

- 1996 Awarded the European Union's Aristeion Prize for Literature.
- 1997 Publication of anthology *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947–97*, edited with Elizabeth West. Marries Elizabeth West; their son Milan born.
- 1998 Iranian government officially distances itself from the *fatwa*. Publication of *Salman Rushdie's Haroun and the Sea of Stories* adapted for the theatre by Tim Supple and David Tushingham. Stage adaptation of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* premièred at the Royal National Theatre, London.
- 1999 *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* published. India grants Rushdie a 5-year visa. *The Screenplay of Midnight's Children* published. Rushdie moves to New York. Begins a relationship with Padma Lakshmi. Separated from Elizabeth West.
- 2000 Travels to India with his son Zafar for the Commonwealth Writers Prize ceremony (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* – winner of 1999 Best Novel in the Eurasian region).
- 2001 *Fury* published.
- 2002 *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992–2002* published. Publication of *Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children* adapted for the theatre by Salman Rushdie, Simon Reade and Tim Supple.
- 2003 January: the Royal Shakespeare Company premièrs the stage adaptation of *Midnight's Children* in London. Rushdie becomes President of PEN America. Marriage to Elizabeth West dissolved.
- 2004 Marries Padma Lakshmi.
- 2005 *Shalimar the Clown* published.
- 2007 Knighted by British monarchy. Divorced by Padma Lakshmi.
- 2008 Stage adaptation of *The Satanic Verses* in German by Uwe Eric Laufenberg and Marcus Mislin premièred at Hans-Otto-Theatre in Potsdam. *The Enchantress of Florence* published.

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1

Early Life and Early Works

(Ahmed) Salman Rushdie justifies Wordsworth's view that 'the Child is father of the Man'.¹ Rushdie wrote: '*The Wizard of Oz* (the film, not the book, which I didn't read as a child) was my very first literary influence.² ... When I first saw *The Wizard of Oz* it made a writer of me.'³ The other important literary influence in his childhood was *The Arabian Nights* which was the basis for the stories his father narrated to his children and which surfaces in the flying carpets and metamorphoses of *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and predictably in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990).

Rushdie was born on 19 June 1947, almost two months before India gained Independence from Britain (15 August) and this virtual coincidence inspired the creation of Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* (1981) who was born at the very moment of Independence. Rushdie transforms biography into art. He acknowledges the influence of his father on his chosen vocation. He remembers him as a wonderful teller of tales. Memories of the father shade into the Oz film and into the character of Rashid Khalifa, the father-storyteller in *Haroun*:

The Wizard was right there in Bombay. My father, Anis Ahmed Rushdie was a magical parent of young children, but he was also prone to explosions, thunderous rages, bolts of emotional lightning, puffs of dragon-smoke, and other menaces of the type also practised by Oz, the great and terrible, the first Wizard Deluxe ... It took me half a lifetime to discover that the Great Oz's *apologia pro vita sua* fitted my father equally well – that he, too, was a good man, but a very bad Wizard.⁴

The father was a barrister turned businessman (Saleem Sinai and Saladin Chamcha, the protagonists of *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*, respectively, have businessmen fathers) and the mother, Negin (née Butt) Rushdie, a teacher from Aligarh, in North India. Both had been married earlier (Amina Sinai, Saleem's mother, begins with another name, another husband), were affluent

(Salman had a nanny) and lived in Bombay. Anis's law degree was from Cambridge University and he was proud of his university. He was the kind of man who would bring up his son 'in a very Anglophile and Anglocentric way'.⁵ Salman was sent to a mission school, the Cathedral and John Connon School. The parents were devout Muslims, yet the family was liberal, which Salman contrasts with the attitude of some of the Muslim fundamentalists: 'there was an absolute willingness to discuss anything, there were not these anathemas, these rules, about what you must not talk about'.⁶ In the household, Salman's sister, Sameen, seems virtually a model for Saleem's sister, the Brass Monkey; Salman was the proverbial good child.

After the Partition of India, many of their relatives migrated to Pakistan where the Muslims were in a majority and felt more secure. But the Rushdies decided to remain in Bombay. Salman often revisited his childhood Bombay in his fiction – in *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Haroun* and in *The Moor's Last Sigh* as typifying the rich pluralism threatened by the monolithic narrowness of religious chauvinism – and conjured it up in his mind, stimulated by the inch-high block of Indian silver with the map of an unpartitioned subcontinent (a childhood gift) which he placed like a totem before him as he wrote. His attachment to Bombay is not merely nostalgia but a component of his imagination. His technique of cuts, close-ups, juxtaposition, was influenced by the Bombay talkie (Bombay was 'the world's number-one movie city – "Bollywood" in those days produced more movies per annum than Los Angeles or Tokyo or Hong Kong'⁷) and other movies (he has mentioned the New Wave, Buñuel and Godard⁸) as well as by Sergei Eisenstein's *The Film Sense*.⁹ His first literary effort, a short story titled 'Over the Rainbow', written at the age of ten, was inspired by movies – a children's fantasy, memorable for its boy-hero's encounter with 'a talking pianola whose personality is an improbable hybrid of Judy Garland, Elvis Presley and the "playback singers" of the Hindi movies'.¹⁰

In 1961, at the age of thirteen, Salman was sent to Rugby, the famous English public (in reality, private) school. His father accompanied him to London. What happened between them is uncertain, yet it appears that Anis drank too much (recalled in Ahmed Sinai's pink djinns in *Midnight's Children*) and Salman was relieved to leave for school. A severing had taken place. Thanks to a Kashmiri ancestor, Salman had a pale skin that could have passed for white (like Flapping Eagle in *Grimus* and Saladin Chamcha), but this did

not save him from the 'wog-baiting' of the English schoolboys. His rejection and the racism in the school prodded him to write a short autobiographical novel about Rugby life titled *Terminal Report* that highlighted a conservative conventional type – such as he had been – as the hero who was changed by his experiences into an aggressive radical whenever he encountered racism. It made him think of writing as his vocation, while he himself became like his hero. He said: 'Of course, I knew that racism is not confined to the British. I come from a society where racism is commonplace, between one Indian community and another. But you have to combat racism wherever you find it.'¹¹

At Rugby, a fellow-pupil recalls Rushdie submitting divinity-class essays with fake quotes from a fake authority, Professor I. Q. Gribb (recalled in *Grimus*),¹² but he did perform well academically. He turned down a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford, in order to accept one to King's College, Cambridge.

Salman's choice of home was now problematic. Anis's business had deteriorated, his drinking had got worse and India was less hospitable to Muslims. In 1962, he and his family migrated to England and two years later moved to Karachi – both snap decisions (recalled in the story 'The Courter', in *East, West*). Salman's choice was between Cambridge and Karachi, England and Pakistan. Karachi and Pakistan were to him the antithesis of Bombay and India, which seemed secular, multifarious, tolerant, cordial. On the other hand, Salman had had enough of England.

His father (who died in 1987 – in debt) insisted that he enter Cambridge and he studied there from 1965 to 1968. He believed it was his good fortune to read History, not English. This meant he could select literary books at random and learn from them as a writer. Thus he read Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* 'with a sense of discovery as if it had been written yesterday'.¹³ In his final year, Salman had chosen a special subject: Mohammed and the Rise of Islam. But only five students turned up and the lecturer cancelled the course. Yet Salman persisted and ended up as the only student following the course, coming across the incident of the Satanic Verses then. His persistence suggests a basic sense of cultural identity; the course had no value in the competitive Western society at that time.

He was influenced by the anti-Establishment spirit of the 1960s at Cambridge as elsewhere – the anti-Vietnam War attitude and the hippie style (recalled in *The Satanic Verses*). He neither wrote for the undergraduate magazines, *Varsity* and *Granta*, nor spoke in

Students' Union debates, but was involved in the theatre in the era of Clive James, Germaine Greer and David Hare. A contemporary spoke of Salman's 'radical chic'.¹⁴ He did not study systematically, displayed an interest in the occult (recalled in Omar Khayyam in *Shame* and in 'The Harmony of the Spheres', in *East, West*) and ended up with a 2:2 (Second Class, Lower Division) degree – not surprising in the circumstances, though not commensurate with his abilities.

Salman returned to Karachi, having no real alternative, but refused to take over his father's new business, a towel factory (recalled in Ahmed Sinai and Amina Brand towels in *Midnight's Children*). He tried to work in Pakistan's new television service. He persuaded them to let him produce and act in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, but, prior to the production, he had to go through 'a series of astonishing censorship conferences'. An Albee reference to the disgustingness of pork hamburgers was found offensive. Though Salman argued that it was 'superb anti-pork propaganda', he was told that 'the word pork may not be spoken on Pakistan television'. He had also to delete 'the line about God being a coloured queen who wears a kimono and plucks his eyebrows'.¹⁵ Rushdie appears alienated and contemptuous of his illiterate countrymen, and has no sympathy for the shock or the instinctive shrinking from a birth-on religious taboo experienced by them. At the same time, censorship was a fact – pervasive and stifling.

He escaped to London which offered him far better opportunities for fulfilling his ambition to be a writer. As between Changez and Saladin in *The Satanic Verses*, alienation arose between Salman and his father, who disapproved of his son's hippie-like lifestyle and did not support him, financially or emotionally, in his ambition. To earn, he returned to acting, an immigrant in the fringe theatre circuit, occupying a marginal position, perhaps reflected and burlesqued in Chamcha's job voicing the personality of washing fluid and garlic-flavoured crisps. Salman tried to find employment in the well-known J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, but failed the test (writing a jingle about the merits of car seat belts). Soon afterwards, he was employed by a small agency called Sharp MacManus, but quit it to work on a novel. Finished in 1971, it was titled *The Book of the Pir* and featured a Muslim guru who succeeds in becoming the figurehead president of a corrupt military regime in an unnamed Eastern land. It was written in what the author calls 'sub-Joyce',¹⁶ signifying experimentation with language. Joyce is recalled in 'The Harmony of the Spheres'; Rushdie has also said: 'I think *Ulysses* is

the greatest novel of this century; it has a lot of stories in it, but its impulse is not narrative. I think one can't make that kind of naive return to the world before Joyce.¹⁷ Rushdie's novel was rejected even by literary agents and laid aside.

He went back to advertising and joined Ogilvy & Mather as a copywriter. Copywriting would have tended to make him word-conscious, ready to draw on surprising sources to create effects, and lead him to question the intelligence and integrity of both writer and reader, a questioning which is incorporated into the art of *Midnight's Children*.

He had already met his future wife, Clarissa Luard, in 1970. An acquaintance describes her as a 'very well-bred English-rose type',¹⁸ and, probably, the model for Pamela Lovelace in *The Satanic Verses*, whose name ironically alludes to Samuel Richardson's characters the virtuous Pamela and the rake Lovelace. Clarissa was working with a group that was 'raising consciousness about Biafra',¹⁹ Pamela was into Vietnam, and, later, immigrants. Clarissa's family was upper-middle-class and British. In 1973, Clarissa's mother emigrated to Spain (her father had committed suicide when she was sixteen – both Pamela's parents commit suicide together) and the daughter, Rushdie and a female lodger occupied her Lower Belgrave Street flat, next to what had been the Luard family home. The lodger was Liz Calder who had just assumed duties as an editor at Victor Gollancz. She told Rushdie of the science fiction competition Gollancz had announced as a way of finding new writers. 'He said he would enter the book he was then writing.'²⁰ If so, then, *Grimus* (1975), Rushdie's first published novel, like his characters Saleem Sinai, Omar Khayyam and Moraes Zogoiby, has a plural parentage.

As in *The Book of the Pir*, Rushdie tries to combine the East and the West, to use flawed but useful binaries, but in an entirely new way. His roots are in his Eastern/Islamic background though and the source of *Grimus* is a twelfth-century Sufi narrative poem, Farid-ud-din 'Attar's *The Conference of Birds*, the only novel of Rushdie that originates from another book, that has a purely literary beginning. The poem is described briefly in *Grimus* itself²¹ but more fully elsewhere:

...the closest thing in Persian literature to *Pilgrim's Progress*. The characters are all birds, which is why the central character of *Grimus* is a bird, Flapping Eagle. In the poem twenty-nine birds are persuaded by a hoopoe, a messenger of a bird god, to make

a pilgrimage to the god. They set off and go through allegorical valleys and eventually climb the mountain to meet the god at the top, but at the top they find that there is no god there. The god is called Simurg, and they accuse the hoopoe of bringing them on – oh dear – a wild goose chase. The poem rests on a Persian pun: if you break Simurg into parts – ‘Si’ and ‘murg’ – it can be translated to mean ‘thirty birds’, so that, having gone through the processes of purification and reached the top of the mountain, the birds have become the god.²²

Rushdie adds: ‘Although the plot of *Grimus* is not that of the poem, it has it at its centre, and that gave me something to cling on to. I was trying to take a theme out of eastern philosophy or mythology and transpose it into a western convention.’²³ The theme is chosen arbitrarily, in keeping with Rushdie’s willed intention to be a writer. The Western convention is supplied by Dante’s *Divina Commedia*. Rushdie is the kind of cloven writer produced by migration, inhabiting and addressing both worlds, the East and the West, the world of his mother country and that of his adopted country, belonging wholly to neither one nor the other. The position of the main setting of the novel is significant, an island in the Mediterranean, which straddles the West and the East.

The novel begins on this island when Flapping Eagle floats up to Virgil Jones, an intellectual with ‘a tongue rather too large for his mouth’ (p. 13) and Dolores O’Toole, an ugly hunchbacked grass widow. The book revels in erudition, both Eastern and Western: Jones’s two Christian names are Virgil (recalling the name of the Roman poet) and Chanakya (recalling the name of the ancient Indian sage); the book’s first three epigraphs are from T. S. Eliot, Farid-ud-din ‘Attar and Ted Hughes. Soon the book changes into an explanatory and retrospective narrative, set in the American South West. Flapping Eagle and his sister Bird-Dog are members of an Amerindian tribe, the Axonas. Their relationship reveals that Rushdie was haunted by the figure of a dominant sister from the beginning of his career; he acknowledges his sister as being ‘one of the two most important women’ in his life, the other being his second wife, Marianne Wiggins.²⁴ Eagle is dominated by his elder sister and is, later, literally a ‘sister-fucker’, a term of abuse in *Midnight’s Children*, *Shame* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. It seems to me that the Axonas represent an aspect of American society and Rushdie satirizes it, as when he dwells on the Axona obsession with health

and cleanliness, their credo that 'All that is Unaxona is Unclean' (p. 24) (recalling the era of McCarthyism and the prosecution of un-American activities) and the fact that 'breasted providers (such as Bird-Dog) were anathema to the Axona' (p. 17) (chiding American masculine chauvinism). Rushdie's main target is its conventionality. The gender-bender tendencies of Eagle and Bird-Dog are part of their role as nonconformists. Flapping Eagle (originally Joe-Sue) is at first a hermaphrodite and only later male. Bird-Dog hates cauldrons and cooking, is good at men's work and takes a brave's name. They were ostracized mainly because of Joe-Sue: his confused sex, the circumstances of his birth ('Born-From-Dead' was his formal given name) and his colour (ironically, the prejudice is against his whiteness). Bird-Dog, whose nature it is to adventure beyond the confines of her society, meets an itinerant pedlar Sispy, a guise of Grimus, and is given two kinds of bottle, yellow for the eternity of life and blue for the eternity of death. Joe-Sue refuses to drink any, but Bird-Dog drinks the yellow and follows Sispy as his faithful slave.

When Bird-Dog disappears suddenly, Joe-Sue is more vulnerable and has to shoulder her guilt too. He is, in effect, expelled by his tribe, but he drinks the elixir of life before leaving because, at this stage, he regarded this as lending him an advantage. He travels to the adjoining town, Phoenix, so named because it has risen out of the ashes of a huge fire that had destroyed an earlier and larger city with the same name. Rushdie proceeds to satirize another aspect of American society – the pleasure-seeking, jet-setting section, while considering exile and migration too. Eagle is a minority man, an exile, but this is no factor in his social interaction and progress; his whiteness of skin, as in the case of Rushdie himself, distinguishes him from his compatriots and draws him closer to the dominant race. An affluent white woman, Livia Cramm, picks him up to exploit him for her own pleasure (he becomes her personal gigolo), but, finally and ironically, it is she who suffers and commits not homicide but suicide.

In her will, Livia Cramm leaves her money to Eagle and her yacht to her other consort, Deggle, who offers it to Eagle to get away. His subsequent voyaging and immortality leave him unsatisfied. He wishes to grow old and be human, and seeks Sispy and Bird-Dog – in vain. His yacht sails to its home port, the port of X on the Moorish coast of Morispain (a location that points forward, perhaps, to the last scenes of *The Moor's Last Sigh*), and he meets Deggle again, who advises him about 'making a gate' to Calf Island (p. 36). He

sails in the Mediterranean. It suddenly becomes turbulent and he falls through a hole in the sea, like Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* who fell through a hole, a rabbit-hole in her case.

The structure of the novel is a quest. After Virgil Jones resuscitates Eagle, Eagle forces the reluctant Jones to answer questions regarding Bird-Dog, Sisyphus/Grimus and Calf Island, and, finally, accompany him as a guide in his ascent of Calf Mountain (the dominant and only item of topographical significance on the island) towards Grimus, as the Roman poet Virgil led Dante through Hell and Purgatory towards a vision of God in Paradise. It was Virgil Jones who, while working as a digger of pets' graves, a profession arranged for him by Nicholas Deggle, found the Stone Rose, the instrument for time and dimension travel, and showed it to Deggle and Grimus, a Middle European refugee who had brought him a bird to bury. Grimus takes over the Stone Rose and uses it to create or discover or half-create, half-discover Calf Island. The fact that he cannot quite control his Effect hints that he is not the Creator.

Grimus is or, rather, becomes a kind of wizard. His origins are important:

semi-semitic prisoner of war...the destruction of his human dignity, of his belief in the whole human race; the subsequent burrowing away, away from the world, into books and philosophies and mythologies, until these became his realities,...since he had no regard for his species he did not care what he did to them. They had done enough to him. (p. 243)

From one aspect, Grimus is the (damaged) intellectual.

Rushdie exploits the sci-fi idea of an infinity of Parallel Dimensions. As in the much-anthologized 'By His Boot Straps' (1941) by Robert A. Heinlein, America's greatest writer of science fiction, there are a million possible earths with a million possible histories, all of which do not destroy the existence of pasts or futures one chooses not to enter and exist simultaneously. Calf Island does not exist in one dimension, has existed in another, will exist in a third and does in still another. The Stone Rose is a Gorfic Object and, presumably, has been placed in the pets' graveyard by the Gorfes (an anagram for frogs). The Gorfes are the Orderers of the Universe. They inhabited the planet Thera which winds its way around the star Nus in the Yawy Klim (note the anagrams