

Salman Rushdie

CONTEMPORARY WORLD WRITERS



ANDREW TEVERSON

Salman Rushdie

ANDREW TEVERSON

Manchester University Press

Manchester and New York

distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave

Copyright © Andrew Teverson 2007

The right of Andrew Teverson to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Published by Manchester University Press
Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9NR, UK
and Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA
www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk

Distributed exclusively in the USA by
Palgrave, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA

Distributed exclusively in Canada by
ubc Press, University of British Columbia, 2029 West Mall,
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for

ISBN 978 0 7190 7050 1 *hardback*
ISBN 978 0 7190 7051 8 *paperback*

First published 2007

16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Typeset in Aldus
by Koinonia, Manchester
Printed in Great Britain
by CPI, Bath

For Simone, Dominic and Tristan, with love

I refuse to see literature as a purely aesthetic enterprise ... the use of form is not purely technical. It has meaning. You change the way in which you write and you change the things it's possible for you to say and therefore what is possible to think and therefore what is possible to do. So to shift forms is to act in all those ways. (Salman Rushdie, 1983, SRI, 49)

Series editor's foreword

Contemporary World Writers is an innovative series of authoritative introductions to a range of culturally diverse contemporary writers from outside Britain and the United States or from 'minority' backgrounds within Britain or the United States. In addition to providing comprehensive general introductions, books in the series also argue stimulating original theses, often but not always related to contemporary debates in post-colonial studies.

The series locates individual writers within their specific cultural contexts, while recognising that such contexts are themselves invariably a complex mixture of hybridised influences. It aims to counter tendencies to appropriate the writers discussed into the canon of English or American literature or to regard them as 'other'.

Each volume includes a chronology of the writer's life, an introductory section on formative contexts and intertexts, discussion of all the writer's major works, a bibliography of primary and secondary works and an index. Issues of racial, national and cultural identity are explored, as are gender and sexuality. Books in the series also examine writers' use of genre, particularly ways in which Western genres are adapted or subverted and 'traditional' local forms are reworked in a contemporary context.

Contemporary World Writers aims to bring together the theoretical impulse which currently dominates post-colonial studies and closely argued readings of particular authors' works, and by so doing to avoid the danger of appropriating the specifics of particular texts into the hegemony of totalising theories.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Bart Moore-Gilbert and Robert Clark for their support and advice at all stages of this project; without their valued input this book would not exist. I am also grateful to all those who commented on sections of the work in progress, particularly John Thieme, my series editor, and Margaret Coxall, who read most of the draft manuscript and who distracted me by noticing Rushdie's fascination with nipples. Thanks must also go to a small but invaluable band of fellows: to Christopher Warne for keeping me company with his book on Aristotle, to Anna Johnson for parachuting in from Tasmania with 'tales from the archives', to Mum and John for their unfailing confidence, to Max Coxall for his unhesitating generosity, to Brenda and Andrew for consistently finding exquisite holiday locations for me to work in, to Marie and Michael for finding argumentative friends with strong opinions about Rushdie, to Jade and May for entertaining Dom, and to Ada for 'not annoying Tev' with a butterfly net in the early stages. My supreme thanks is reserved for Simone, Dominic and Tristan. The latter two were forced to share their first months and years with this book and so deserve some recompense. The former has made everything possible by supplying generous quantities of patience, encouragement, intellectual inspiration, emotional reinforcement and red wine. This book is for them.

Quotations from *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* by Salman Rushdie, copyright © 1991 by Salman Rushdie, are used by permission of Penguin Books Ltd, and Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. Quotations from *Salman Rushdie Interviews: A Sourcebook of His Ideas*, ed. Pradyumna S. Chauhan, copyright © 2001 by Pradyumna S. Chauhan, are reproduced with permission of Greenwood Publishing Group,

Inc., Westport, CT. Lines from Sujata Bhatt's 'A Different History', *Brunizem* copyright © 1988 Sujata Bhatt are reproduced with permission of Carcanet Press.

Abbreviations

CSR	<i>Conversations with Salman Rushdie</i> (ed. Michael Reder)
EW	<i>East, West</i>
F	<i>Fury</i>
G	<i>Grimus</i>
GBF	<i>The Ground Beneath Her Feet</i>
HSS	<i>Haroun and the Sea of Stories</i>
IHL	<i>Imaginary Homelands</i>
JS	<i>The Jaguar Smile</i>
MC	<i>Midnight's Children</i>
MLS	<i>The Moor's Last Sigh</i>
S	<i>Shame</i>
SAL	<i>Step Across This Line</i>
SC	<i>Shalimar the Clown</i>
SRI	<i>Salman Rushdie Interviews</i> (ed. Pradyumna Chauhan)
SV	<i>The Satanic Verses</i>

Chronology

- 19 June 1947 Ahmed Salman Rushdie born in Bombay (now Mumbai) to Anis Ahmed Rushdie and Negin Rushdie (née Butt). His early education is at the Cathedral and John Connon School for Boys.
- 1961–5 Attends Rugby School in England.
- 1964 Rushdie's family moves to Karachi, Pakistan. Rushdie remains in England.
- 1965–8 Reads history at King's College, Cambridge.
- 1968 Lives briefly in Pakistan, working for the television service in Karachi.
- 1968–81 After a brief flirtation with acting, works in London as an advertising copywriter. This supports his early writing career.
- 1975 *Grimus* is published by Victor Gollancz.
- 1976 Marries Clarissa Luard.
- 1979 Son Zafar born.
- 1981 *Midnight's Children* is published by Jonathan Cape. It wins the Booker Prize for Fiction and the James Tait Black Prize.
- 1983 *Shame* is published by Jonathan Cape. It wins the French *Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger*.
- 1984–85 Travelling in Australia with Bruce Chatwin. Begins a relationship with Robyn Davidson. Separated from Clarissa.
- 1986 Visits Nicaragua as a guest of the Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers.
- 1987 The travelogue *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* is published by Jonathan Cape.
- 1988 Marries Marianne Wiggins. *The Satanic Verses* is published by Viking/Penguin. It is awarded the Whitbread Prize for

- Best Novel. Some Muslim groups begin to protest against the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in the novel and it is banned in several countries including India. Muslim demonstrations against *The Satanic Verses* take place in Bolton and copies are publicly burned.
- Jan–Feb. 1989 There are further protests and book burnings in Bradford and London. Five demonstrators are killed by police in Pakistan during an attack on the American Cultural Centre in Islamabad.
- 14 Feb. 1989 The Ayatollah Khomeini issues a *fatwa* that demands the execution of Rushdie and his publishers. The following day the Iranian cleric, Hassan Sanei, offers a reward for Rushdie's murder. Rushdie goes into hiding with Marianne Wiggins, but Wiggins soon leaves him.
- 1990 *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is published by Granta. It wins the Writer's Guild Award.
- 1991 The essay collection *Imaginary Homelands* is published by Granta.
- 1992 The British Film Institute pamphlet *The Wizard of Oz* is published.
- 1993 *Midnight's Children* wins the 'Booker of Bookers' – a special award for the best winner in the twenty-five year history of the prize.
- 1994 The short story collection *East, West* is published by Jonathan Cape.
- 1995 *The Moor's Last Sigh* is published by Jonathan Cape. It wins the Whitbread Novel of the Year Award.
- 1997 Marries Elizabeth West. Son Milan born.
- 24 Sept. 1998 After extended diplomatic negotiations, Iran's Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi, announces that Iran does not intend to pursue the death sentence imposed by Khomeini and disassociates his government from the reward. Rushdie begins to conduct a more high-profile public life, though the threat is not entirely removed.
- 1999 *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is published by Henry Holt. Rushdie moves to New York and begins a relationship with Padma Lakshmi. Separated from Elizabeth West.
- 2001 *Fury* is published by Jonathan Cape.
- 2002 The essay collection *Step Across This Line* is published by Jonathan Cape.

- 2004 Marriage to Padma Lakshmi.
- 2005 *Shalimar the Clown* is published by Jonathan Cape.
- 2006 Collaborates with the sculptor Anish Kapoor on a work to
 be exhibited at The Lisson Gallery, London.

Contents

SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD	ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xiii
CHRONOLOGY	xv

Part I Contexts and intertexts

1 Introduction	3
2 Political and intellectual contexts	11
3 Writing in English	30
4 Intertextuality, influence and the postmodern	55
5 Biographical contexts	67

Part II Novels and criticism

6 From science fiction to history: <i>Grimus</i> and <i>Midnight's Children</i>	111
7 Tragedy in <i>Shame</i>	136
8 Satire in <i>The Satanic Verses</i>	145
9 Pessoptimistic fictions: <i>Haroun and the Sea of Stories</i> and <i>The Moor's Last Sigh</i>	160
10 The pop novel in the age of globalisation: <i>The Ground Beneath Her Feet</i> and <i>Fury</i>	176
11 Critical overview and conclusion	195
Afterword: <i>Shalimar the Clown</i>	217

NOTES	227
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	251
INDEX	255

PART I

Contexts and intertexts

Introduction

For every text, a context. (Salman Rushdie, 1984, IHL, 92)

It is not hard to establish Salman Rushdie's fame: his novels have sold in their millions and been translated into multiple languages; the MLA international bibliography lists over seven hundred journal articles and book chapters written about his fiction; and there are currently in excess of thirty published monographs on various aspects of his life and work. Rushdie himself makes regular appearances at major international conferences and literary events, he gives frequent interviews and lectures, he is the subject of a number of documentaries and has appeared in films – both as a performer (a comical cameo in *Bridget Jones's Diary* in 2001) and as a character (a cartoon villain in the propaganda piece *International Guerrillas*).¹ His works have also enjoyed an extended life in other media: stage shows and musicals have been made based upon his novels, Bono from U2 has written a song using lyrics from *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), and a film based on one of his short stories entitled *The Firebird's Nest* is planned by the director Apoorva Lakhia. Perhaps most revealingly, the name of Salman Rushdie has become so familiar internationally that even those who do not generally read literary fiction have heard of him and know something about the subjects concerning which he writes.

Whilst Rushdie's prominence as a writer is everywhere apparent, however, it is harder to establish what it is precisely that he is famous for – his writings, or the 1989 *fatwa* in which

the Ayatollah Khomeini demanded his execution for blasphemy. It is almost certainly the case that, had the threat to Rushdie's life not made him headline news in the late 1980s, 746,949 copies of *The Satanic Verses* (1988) would not have sold in 1989, and tabloid newspapers would not now make Rushdie's complicated love life the subject of double-page 'exclusives'. As Rushdie is quick to point out, however, he was already a well-known writer long before the passage of the Ayatollah's headline-grabbing decree, albeit for different and somewhat quieter (though not always uncontentious) reasons. By 1989 Rushdie had published three novels, the latter two of which, *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983), had been widely applauded by the literary world. Rushdie had also, already, been the revered object of some of the media's most superlative praise, gleaning journalistic sound-bites for himself that may still be seen gracing the covers of his novels. In both the countries that Rushdie claimed as home in the early 1980s, moreover, *Midnight's Children* had, long before the *fatwa*, been greeted not only as a work of startling originality but as one that was destined to become a landmark text in the emergent counter-canon of 'post-colonial' (then 'commonwealth') fiction. In Delhi Anita Desai, upon attending a reading of Rushdie's fiction, remembers thinking that she was listening to 'the voice of a new age'.² Likewise, in London, the award of the Booker Prize to *Midnight's Children* in 1981 led Rushdie's near contemporary Kazuo Ishiguro, later a winner of the Booker Prize himself for *The Remains of the Day* (1989), to conclude that the publication of this novel represented 'a real symbolic moment', a 'milestone' for English-language authors living in Britain whose origins were not British. 'It so happened that around this time I brought out *A Pale View of Hills*', Ishiguro recalls. 'Usually first novels disappear ... without a trace. Yet I received a lot of attention, got lots of coverage, and did a lot of interviews.' The reason: 'everyone was suddenly looking for other Rushdies'.³

A novel that had such an impact on the literary world, it is safe to assume, would have ensured, *fatwa* or no *fatwa*, that its author remained studied in universities, negotiated by other