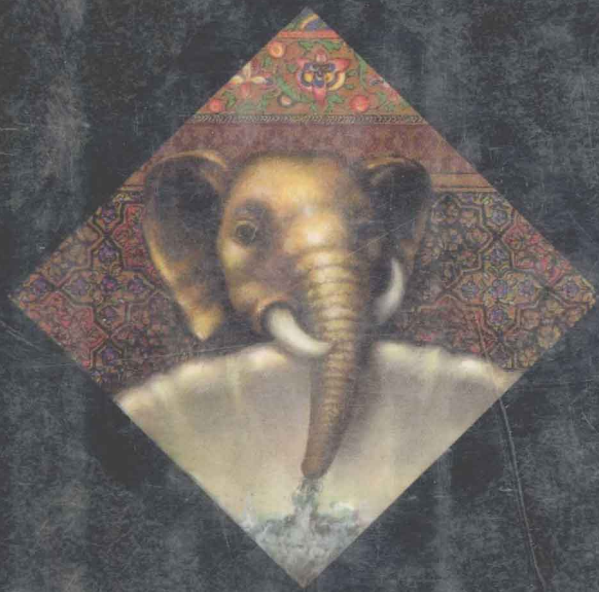
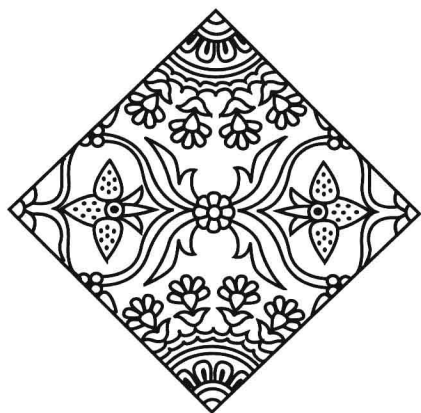


JOHN IRVING



A SON OF
THE CIRCUS

A SON OF THE CIRCUS



John Irving



RANDOM HOUSE
NEW YORK

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

This novel isn't about India. I don't know India. I was there only once, for less than a month. When I was there, I was struck by the country's foreignness; it remains obdurately foreign to me. But long before I went to India, I began to imagine a man who has been born there and has moved away; I imagined a character who keeps coming back again and again. He's compelled to keep returning; yet, with each return trip, his sense of India's foreignness only deepens. India remains unyieldingly foreign, even to him.

My Indian friends said, "Make him an Indian—definitely an Indian but *not* an Indian." They told me that everywhere he goes—including where he lives, outside India—should also strike him as foreign; the point is, he's always the foreigner. "You just have to get the details right," they said.

I went to India at the request of Martin Bell and his wife, Mary Ellen Mark. Martin and Mary Ellen asked me to write a screenplay for them, about the child performers in an Indian circus. I've been working on that screenplay and this novel, simultaneously, for more than four years; as of this writing, I'm revising the screenplay, which is also titled *A Son of the Circus*, although it isn't the same story as the novel. Probably I'll continue to rewrite the screenplay until the film is produced—if the film

is produced. Martin and Mary Ellen took me to India; in a sense, they began *A Son of the Circus*.

I also owe a great deal to those Indian friends who were with me in Bombay in January of 1990—I'm thinking of Ananda Jaisingh, particularly—and to those members of the Great Royal Circus who gave me so much of their time when I was living with the circus in Junagadh. Most of all, I'm indebted to four Indian friends who've read and reread the manuscript; their efforts to overcome my ignorance and a multitude of errors made my writing possible. I want to acknowledge them by name; their importance to *A Son of the Circus* is immeasurable.

My thanks to Dayanita Singh in New Delhi; to Farrokh Chothia in Bombay; to Dr. Abraham Verghese in El Paso, Texas; and to Rita Mathur in Toronto. I would also like to thank my friend Michael Ondaatje, who introduced me to Rohinton Mistry—it was Rohinton who introduced me to Rita. And my friend James Salter has been extremely tolerant and good-humored in allowing me to make mischievous use of several passages from his elegant novel *A Sport and a Pastime*. Thanks, Jim.

As always, I have other writers to thank: my friend Peter Matthiessen, who read the earliest draft and wisely suggested surgery; my friends David Calicchio, Craig Nova, Gail Godwin and Ron Hansen (not to mention his twin brother, Rob) also suffered through earlier drafts. And I'm indebted to Ved Mehta for his advice, through correspondence.

As usual, I have more than one doctor to thank, too. For his careful reading of the penultimate draft, my thanks to Dr. Martin Schwartz in Toronto. In addition, I'm grateful to Dr. Sherwin Nuland in Hamden, Connecticut, and to Dr. Burton Berson in New York; they provided me with the clinical studies of achondroplasia.

The generosity of June Callwood, and of John Flannery—the director of nursing at Casey House in Toronto—is also much appreciated. And over the four years I've been writing *A Son of the Circus*, the work of three assistants has been outstanding: Heather Cochran, Alison Rivers and Allan Reeder. But there's only one reader who's read, or heard aloud, every draft of this story: my wife, Janet. For, literally, the thousands of pages she's endured—not to mention her tolerance of enforced travel—I thank her, with all my love.

Lastly, I want to express my affection for my editor, Harvey Ginsberg, who officially retired before I handed him the 1,094-page manuscript; retired or not, Harvey edited me.

I repeat: I don't "know" India, and *A Son of the Circus* isn't "about"

India. It is, however, a novel set in India—a story about an Indian (but *not* an Indian), for whom India will always remain an unknown and unknowable country. If I've managed to get the details right, my Indian friends deserve the credit.

—J. I.

For Salman

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in New Hampshire, JOHN IRVING is the author of eight novels—among them *The World According to Garp*, *The Cider House Rules*, and *A Prayer for Owen Meany*.

Mr. Irving is married and has three sons; he lives in Vermont and in Toronto.

ABOUT THE TYPE

The text of this book was set in Janson, a misnamed typeface designed in about 1690 by Nicholas Kis, a Hungarian in Amsterdam. In 1919 the matrices became the property of the Stempel Foundry in Frankfurt. It is an old-style book face of excellent clarity and sharpness. Janson serifs are concave and splayed; the contrast between thick and thin strokes is marked.



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