CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Anglo-Indian author Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born on 19th June 1947 is a British Indian novelist and essayist. His second novel, Midnight's Children (1981), won the Booker Prize in 1981. Much of his fiction is set on the Indian subcontinent. He is said to combine magical realism with historical fiction; his work is concerned with the many connections, disruptions and migrations between East and West. His fourth novel, The Satanic Verses (1988), was the centre of a major controversy, provoking protests from Muslims in several countries, some violent. Death threats were made against him, including a fatwā issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of Iran, on 14 February 1989. Rushdie was appointed Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France in January 1999.[5] In June 2007, Queen Elizabeth II knighted him for his services to literature.[6] In 2008, The Times ranked him thirteenth on its list of the fifty greatest British writers since 1945. Since 2000, Rushdie has lived in the United States, where he has worked at Emory University and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2012, he published Joseph Anton: A Memoir, an account of his life in the wake of the controversy over The Satanic Verses.

EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY BACKGROUND:

The son of Anis Ahmed Rushdie, a University of Cambridge-educated lawyer turned businessman, and Negin Bhatt, a teacher; Rushdie was born in Bombay,
India, into a Muslim family of Kashmiri descent. Rushdie has three sisters.[10] He wrote in his 2012 memoir that his father adopted the name Rushdie in honour of Averroes (Ibn Rushd). He was educated at Cathedral and John Connon School in Mumbai, Rugby School, and King's College, University of Cambridge, where he studied history.

Rushdie's first career was as a copywriter, working for the advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather, where he came up with irresistible bubble for Aero and Naughty but Nice for cream cakes, and for the agency Ayer Barker, for whom he wrote the memorable line That'll do nicely for American Express. It was while he was at Ogilvy that he wrote *Midnight's Children*, before becoming a full-time writer.[12][13][14] John Hegarty of Bartle Bogle Hegarty has criticised Rushdie for not referring to his copywriting past frequently enough, although conceding.

**MAJOR LITERARY WORKS:**

His first novel, *Grimus* (1975), a part-science fiction tale, was generally ignored by the public and literary critics. His next novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), catapulted him to literary notability. This work won the 1981 Booker Prize and, in 1993 and 2008, was awarded the Best of the Bookers as the best novel to have received the prize during its first 25 and 40 years. *Midnight's Children* follows the life of a child, born at the stroke of midnight as India gained its independence, who is endowed with special powers and a connection to other children born at the dawn of a new and tumultuous age in the history of the Indian sub-continent and the birth of the modern nation of India. The character of Saleem Sinai has been compared to
Rushdie. However, the author has refuted the idea of having written any of his characters as autobiographical, stating, "People assume that because certain things in the character are drawn from your own experience, it just becomes you. In that sense, I've never felt that I've written an autobiographical character."

After *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie wrote *Shame* (1983), in which he depicts the political turmoil in Pakistan, basing his characters on Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq. *Shame* won France's Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger (Best Foreign Book) and was a close runner-up for the Booker Prize. Both these works of postcolonial literature are characterised by a style of magic realism and the immigrant outlook that Rushdie is very conscious of as a member of the Indian Diaspora.

Rushdie wrote a non-fiction book about Nicaragua in 1987 called *The Jaguar Smile*. This book has a political focus and is based on his first-hand experiences and research at the scene of Sandinista political experiments. His most controversial work, *The Satanic Verses*, was published in 1988. In addition to books, Rushdie has published many short stories, including those collected in *East, West* (1994).

*The Moor's Last Sigh*, a family epic ranging over some 100 years of India's history was published in 1995. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) presents an alternative history of modern rock music. The song of the same name by U2 is one of many song lyrics included in the book; hence Rushdie is credited as the lyricist. He also wrote *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* in 1990. Rushdie has had a string of commercially successful and critically acclaimed novels. His 2005 novel *Shalimar the
Clown received, in India, the prestigious Hutch Crossword Book Award, and was, in Britain, a finalist for the Whitbread Book Awards. It was shortlisted for the 2007 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. In his 2002 non-fiction collection Step Across This Line, he professes his admiration for the Italian writer Italo Calvino and the American writer Thomas Pynchon, among others. His early influences included Jorge Luis Borges, Mikhail Bulgakov, Lewis Carroll, Günter Grass, and James Joyce. Rushdie was a personal friend of Angela Carter's and praised her highly in the foreword for her collection Burning Your Boats.

His novel Luka and the Fire of Life was published in November 2010. Earlier that year, he announced that he was writing his memoirs, entitled Joseph Anton: A Memoir, which was published in September 2012. In 2012, Salman Rushdie became one of the first major authors to embrace Booktrack, when he published his short story In the South on the platform. Rushdie has quietly mentored younger Indian (and ethnic-Indian) writers, influenced an entire generation of Indo-Anglian writers, and is an influential writer in postcolonial literature in general.

He has received many plaudits for his writings, including the European Union's Aristeion Prize for Literature, the Premio Grinzane Cavour (Italy), and the Writer of the Year Award in Germany and many of literature's highest honours. Rushdie was the President of PEN American Center from 2004 to 2006 and founder of the PEN World Voices Festival.

He opposed the British government's introduction of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act, something he writes about in his contribution to Free Expression Is No
Offence, a collection of essays by several writers, published by Penguin in November 2005. In 2007 he began a five-year term as Distinguished Writer in Residence at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, where he has also deposited his archives. In May 2008 he was elected a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Though he enjoys writing, Salman Rushdie says that he would have become an actor if his writing career had not been successful. Even from early childhood, he dreamed of appearing in Hollywood movies (which he later realised in his frequent cameo appearances). Rushdie includes fictional television and movie characters in some of his writings. He had a cameo appearance in the film Bridget Jones’s Diary based on the book of the same name, which is itself full of literary in-jokes. On 12 May 2006, Rushdie was a guest host on The Charlie Rose Show, where he interviewed Indo-Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta, whose 2005 film, Water, faced violent protests. He appears in the role of Helen Hunt’s obstetrician-gynecologist in the film adaptation (Hunt’s directorial debut) of Elinor Lipman’s novel Then She Found Me. In September 2008, and again in March 2009, he appeared as a panellist on the HBO program Real Time with Bill Maher. Rushdie has said that he was approached for a cameo in Talladega Nights:

"They had this idea, just one shot in which three very, very unlikely people were seen as NASCAR drivers. And I think they approached Julian Schnabel, Lou Reed, and me. We were all supposed to be wearing the uniforms and the helmet, walking in slow motion with the heat haze." (5)
In the end their schedules didn't allow for it. Rushdie is currently collaborating on the screenplay for the cinematic adaptation of his novel *Midnight's Children* with director Deepa Mehta. The film will be called *Midnight's Children*. Seema Biswas, Shabana Azmi, Nandita Das, and Irrfan Khan are confirmed as participating in the film. Production began in September 2010; the film will be released on 26 October 2012. Rushdie announced in June 2011 that he had written the first draft of a script for a new television series for the US cable network Showtime, a project on which he will also serve as an executive producer. The new series, to be called *The Next People*, will be, according to Rushdie, "a sort of paranoid science-fiction series, people disappearing and being replaced by other people." The idea of a television series was suggested by his US agents, said Rushdie, who felt that television would allow him more creative control than feature film. *The Next People* is being made by the British film production company Working Title, the firm behind such projects as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Shaun of the Dead*.

Rushdie is a member of the advisory board of The Lunchbox Fund,[35] a non-profit organisation which provides daily meals to students of township schools in Soweto of South Africa. He is also a member of the advisory board of the Secular Coalition for America, an advocacy group representing the interests of atheistic and humanistic Americans in Washington, D.C. In November 2010 he became a founding patron of Ralston College, a new liberal arts college that has adopted as its motto a Latin translation of a phrase from an address he gave at Columbia University.
in 1991 to mark the two-hundredth anniversary of the first amendment to the US Constitution.

He took on Facebook over the use of his name in 2011. He won. Rushdie had asked to use his middle name Salman, which he is most recognised by. He described his online identity crisis in a series of messages posted on Twitter, among them. The publication of *The Satanic Verses* in September 1988 caused immediate controversy in the Islamic world because of what was perceived as an irreverent depiction of the prophet Muhammad. The title refers to a disputed Muslim tradition that is related in the book. According to this tradition, Muhammad (Mahound in the book) added verses (*sura*) to the Qur'an accepting three goddesses who used to be worshipped in Mecca as divine beings. According to the legend, Muhammad later revoked the verses, saying the devil tempted him to utter these lines to appease the Meccans (hence the Satanic verses). However, the narrator reveals to the reader that these disputed verses were actually from the mouth of the Archangel Gibreel. The book was banned in many countries with large Muslim communities. (India, Bangladesh, Sudan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Thailand, Tanzania, Indonesia, Singapore, Venezuela, and Pakistan.)

On 14 February 1989, a *fatwā* requiring Rushdie's execution was proclaimed on Radio Tehran by Ayatollah Khomeini, the spiritual leader of Iran at the time, calling the book *blasphemous* against Islam A bounty was offered for Rushdie's death, and he was thus forced to live under police protection for several years. On 7 March 1989, the United Kingdom and Iran broke diplomatic relations over the
Rushdie controversy. The publication of the book and the fatwā sparked violence around the world, with bookstores firebombed.

Muslim communities in several nations in the West held public rallies, burning copies of the book. Several people associated with translating or publishing the book were attacked, seriously injured, and even killed. Many more people died in riots in some countries. Despite the danger posed by the fatwā, Rushdie made a public appearance at London's Wembley Stadium on 11 August 1993 during a concert by U2. In 2010, U2 bassist Adam Clayton recalled that “Bono had been calling Salman Rushdie from the stage every night on the Zoo TV tour. When we played Wembley, Salman showed up in person and the stadium erupted. You [could] tell from [drummer] Larry Mullen, Jr.’s face that we weren't expecting it. Salman was a regular visitor after that. He had a backstage pass and he used it as often as possible. For a man who was supposed to be in hiding, it was remarkably easy to see him around the place."

On 24 September 1998, as a precondition to the restoration of diplomatic relations with Britain, the Iranian government, then headed by Mohammad Khatami, gave a public commitment that it would "neither support nor hinder assassination operations on Rushdie." Hardliners in Iran have continued to reaffirm the death sentence. In early 2005, Khomeini's fatwā was reaffirmed by Iran's current spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in a message to Muslim pilgrims making the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Additionally, the Revolutionary Guards declared that the death sentence on him is still valid. Iran rejected requests to withdraw the fatwā on the
basis that only the person who issued it may withdraw it, and the person who issued it - Ayatollah Khomeini - has been dead since 1989. Rushdie has reported that he still receives a sort of Valentine's card from Iran each year on 14 February letting him know the country has not forgotten the vow to kill him. He said, "It's reached the point where it's a piece of rhetoric rather than a real threat." Despite the threats on Rushdie, he publicly said that his family had never been threatened and that his mother, who lived in Pakistan during the later years of her life even received outpourings of support.

A former bodyguard to Rushdie, Ron Evans, planned to publish a book recounting the behaviour of the author during the time he was in hiding. Evans claimed that Rushdie tried to profit financially from the fatwa and was suicidal, but Rushdie dismissed the book as a bunch of lies and took legal action against Evans, his co-author and their publisher. On 26 August 2008, Rushdie received an apology at the High Court in London from all three parties. A memoir of his years of hiding, *Joseph Anton*, was released on 18 September 2012. Joseph Anton was Rushdie's secret alias. In February 1997, Ayatollah Hasan Sane'i, leader of the bonyad panzdah-e khordad (Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation), reported that the blood money offered by the foundation for the assassination of Rushdie would be increased from $2 million to $2.5 million. Then a semi-official religious foundation in Iran increased the reward it had offered for the killing of Rushdie from $2.8 million to $3.3 million dollars.
On 3 August 1989, while Mustafa Mahmoud Mazeh was priming a book bomb loaded with RDX explosive in a hotel in Paddington, Central London, the bomb exploded prematurely, destroying two floors of the hotel and killing Mazeh. A previously unknown Lebanese group, the Organization of the Mujahidin of Islam, said he died preparing an attack "on the apostate Rushdie". There is a shrine in Tehran's Behesht-e Zahra cemetery for Mustafa Mahmoud Mazeh that says he was "Martyred in London, 3 August 1989. The first martyr to die on a mission to kill Salman Rushdie Mazeh's mother was invited to relocate to Iran, and the Islamic World Movement of Martyrs' Commemoration built his shrine in the cemetery that holds thousands of Iranian soldiers slain in the Iran-Iraq War. During the 2006 Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah declared that

"If there had been a Muslim to carry out Imam Khomeini's *fatwā* against the renegade Salman Rushdie, this rabble who insult our Prophet Mohammed in Denmark, Norway and France would not have dared to do so. I am sure there are millions of Muslims who are ready to give their lives to defend our prophet's honour and we have to be ready to do anything for that." (23)

James Phillips of the Heritage Foundation testified before the United States Congress that a March 1989 explosion in Britain was a Hezbollah attempt to assassinate Rushdie that failed when a bomb exploded prematurely, killing a Hezbollah terrorist in London. In 1990, soon after the publication of *The Satanic
Verses, a Pakistani film entitled *International Gorillay* (*International Guerillas*) was released that depicted Rushdie as plotting to cause the downfall of Pakistan by opening a chain of casinos and discos in the country. The film was popular with Pakistani audiences, and it "presents Rushdie as a Rambo-like figure pursued by four Pakistani guerrillas." The British Board of Film Classification refused to allow it a certificate, as "it was felt that the portrayal of Rushdie might qualify as criminal libel, causing a breach of the peace as opposed to merely tarnishing his reputation." (3) This effectively prevented the release of the film in Britain. Two months later, however, Rushdie himself wrote to the board, saying that while he thought the film "a distorted, incompetent piece of trash", he would not sue if it were released. He later said, "If that film had been banned, it would have become the hottest video in town: everyone would have seen it". While the film was a great hit in Pakistan, it went virtually unnoticed elsewhere.

Rushdie was due to appear at the Jaipur Literature Festival in January 2012. However, he later cancelled, and indeed cancelled his complete tour of India citing a possible threat to his life as the primary reason. He investigated police reports that paid assassins had been hired to kill him and suggested the police might be lying. Meanwhile, the police, on the advice of officials, sought Ruchir Joshi, Jeet Thayil, Hari Kunzru and Amitava Kumar. They fled from Jaipur after reading excerpts from *The Satanic Verses* at the Jaipur Literature Festival. In India the import of the book is banned via customs. However, reading from an existing copy of the book is not illegal. A proposed video link session between Rushdie and the Jaipur Literature
Festival was cancelled at the last minute after the government pressured the festival to stop it. Rushdie returned to India to address a conference in Delhi on 16 March 2012. Rushdie was knighted for services to literature in the Queen's Birthday Honours on 16 June 2007. He remarked, "I am thrilled and humbled to receive this great honour, and am very grateful that my work has been recognised in this way." (3) In response to his knighthood, many nations with Muslim majorities protested. Parliamentarians of several of these countries condemned the action, and Iran and Pakistan called in their British envoys to protest formally.

Controversial condemnation issued by Pakistan's Religious Affairs Minister Muhammad Ijaz-ul-Haq was in turn rebuffed by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Ironically, their respective fathers Zia-ul-Haq and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had been earlier portrayed in Rushdie's novel *Shame*. Mass demonstrations against Rushdie's knighthood took place in Pakistan and Malaysia. Several called publicly for his death. Some non-Muslims expressed disappointment at Rushdie's knighthood, claiming that the writer did not merit such an honour and there were several other writers who deserved the knighthood more than Rushdie. Al-Qaeda condemned the Rushdie honour. The Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is quoted as saying in an audio recording that Britain's award for Indian-born Rushdie was "an insult to Islam", and it was planning "a very precise response." (5)

**HIS RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL BELIEFS:**

Rushdie came from a Muslim family though he is an atheist now. In 1990, in the hope that it would reduce the threat of Muslims acting on the fatwa to kill him, he
issued a statement claiming he had renewed his Muslim faith, had repudiated the
attacks on Islam made by characters in his novel and was committed to working for
better understanding of the religion across the world. However, Rushdie later said
that he was only pretending. His books often focus on the role of religion in society
and conflicts between faiths and between the religious and those of no faith. Rushdie
advocates the application of higher criticism, pioneered during the late 19th century.
Rushdie called for a reform in Islam in a guest opinion piece printed in The
Washington Post and The Times in mid-August 2005:

“What is needed is a move beyond tradition, nothing less than a reform
movement to bring the core concepts of Islam into the modern age, a
Muslim Reformation to combat not only the jihadist ideologues but also
the dusty, stifling seminars of the traditionalists, throwing open the
windows to let in much-needed fresh air. It is high time; for starters,
that Muslims were able to study the revelation of their religion as an
event inside history, not supernaturally above it. Broad-mindedness is
related to tolerance; open-mindedness is the sibling of peace.”

Rushdie supported the 1999 NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of
Yugoslavia, leading the leftist Tariq Ali to label Rushdie and other warrior writers as
the belligerent He was supportive of the US-led campaign to remove the Taliban in
Afghanistan, which began in 2001, but was a vocal critic of the 2003 war in Iraq. He
has stated that while there was a case to be made for the removal of Saddam
Hussein, US unilateral military intervention was unjustifiable. In the wake of the
Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy in March 2006—which many
considered an echo of the death threats and fatwā that followed publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1989-Rushdie signed the manifesto *Together Facing the New Totalitarianism*, a statement warning of the dangers of religious extremism. The Manifesto was published in the left-leaning French weekly *Charlie Hebdo* in March 2006.

In 2006, Rushdie stated that he supported comments by the then-Leader of the House of Commons Jack Straw, who criticised the wearing of the niqab (a veil that covers all of the face except the eyes). Rushdie stated that his three sisters would never wear the veil. He said, "I think the battle against the veil has been a long and continuing battle against the limitation of women, so in that sense I'm completely on Straw's side." The Marxist Catholic critic Terry Eagleton, a former admirer of Rushdie's work, attacked him for his positions, saying he cheered on the Pentagon's criminal ventures in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, Eagleton subsequently apologised for having misrepresented Rushdie's views. At an appearance at 92nd Street Y, Rushdie expressed his view on copyright when answering a question whether he had considered copyright law a barrier or impediment to free speech.

“No. But that's because I write for a living, [laughs] and I have no other source of income, and I naively believe that stuff that I create belongs to me, and that if you want it you might have to give me some cash. My view is I do this for a living. The thing wouldn't exist if I didn't make it and so it belongs to me and don't steal it. You know. It's my stuff.”
When Amnesty International (AI) suspended human rights activist Gita Sahgal for saying to the press that she thought AI should distance itself from Moazzam Begg and his organisation, Rushdie said:

“Amnesty ... has done its reputation incalculable damage by allying itself with Moazzam Begg and his group Cageprisoners, and holding them up as human rights advocates. It looks very much as if Amnesty's leadership is suffering from a kind of moral bankruptcy, and has lost the ability to distinguish right from wrong. It has greatly compounded its error by suspending the redoubtable Gita Sahgal for the crime of going public with her concerns. Gita Sahgal is a woman of immense integrity and distinction...It is people like Gita Sahgal who are the true voices of the human rights movement; Amnesty and Begg have revealed, by their statements and actions, that they deserve our contempt.”

Rushdie is a supporter of gun control, blaming a shooting at a Colorado cinema in July 2012 on the American right to keep and bear arms. Rushdie has been married four times. He was married to his first wife Clarissa Luard from 1976 to 1987 and fathered a son, Zafar (born 1980). His second wife was the American novelist Marianne Wiggins; they were married in 1988 and divorced in 1993. His third wife, from 1997 to 2004, was Elizabeth West; they have a son, Milan (born 1999). In 2004, he married the Indian American Padma Lakshmi, an actress, model, and host of the American reality-television show Top Chef. The marriage ended on 2 July 2007; with Lakshmi’s indicating it was her desire to end it. In 2008, the Bollywood
press romantically linked him to his friend, Indian model Riya Sen. In response to the media speculation about their relationship, she simply stated:

"I think when you are Salman Rushdie; you must get bored with people who always want to talk to you about literature."

In 1999, Rushdie had an operation to correct patois, a tendon condition that causes drooping eyelids and that, according to him, was making it increasingly difficult for him to open his eyes. "If I hadn't had an operation, in a couple of years from now I wouldn't have been able to open my eyes at all," he said. Since 2000, Rushdie has "lived mostly near Union Square" in New York City.

**HIS LITERARY CAREER:**

*Grimus* is a 1975 fantasy and science fiction novel by Salman Rushdie. It was his literary debut. The story loosely follows Flapping Eagle, a young Indian who receives the gift of immortality after drinking a magic fluid. After drinking the fluid, Flapping Eagle wanders the earth for 777 years 7 months and 7 days, searching for his immortal sister and exploring identities before falling through a hole in the Mediterranean Sea. He arrives in a parallel dimension at the mystical Calf Island where those immortals who have tired of the world but are reluctant to give up their immortality exist in a static community under a subtle and sinister authority.

Published in 1975, *Grimus* was Salman Rushdie's first published novel. To a large extent it has been disparaged by academic critics; though Peter Kemp's comment is particularly vitriolic, it does give an idea of the novel's initial reception.
His first novel, *Grimus* (1975), a ramshackle surreal saga based on a 12th-century Sufi poem and copiously encrusted with mythic and literary allusion, nosedived into oblivion amid almost universal critical derision. Amongst other influences Rushdie incorporates Sufi, Hindu, Christian and Norse mythologies alongside pre- and post-modernist literature into his construction of character and narrative form.

*Grimus* was created with the intention of competing for Rushdie’s then publisher, Victor Gollancz Ltd.’s ‘Science Fiction Prize.’ As an intended work of science fiction it is comparable to David Lindsay’s *Voyage to Arcturus* in that there is very little actual science fiction. Rather inter-dimensional/interstellar travelling provides a narrative framework that loosely accords to the bildungsroman narrative form in order to allegorically encounter and investigate multiple social ideologies whilst in a search for a coherent centre of identity. It can be seen as growing out of and extending the techniques and the literary traditions identified with Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, or Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*, in that its journey traverses both outer and inner dimensions, exploring both cultural ideologies and the ambivalent effects that they have on one’s psychological being.

Like much of Rushdie's work, *Grimus* undermines the concept of a ‘pure culture’ by demonstrating the impossibility of any culture, philosophy or weltanschauung existing in sterile isolation. This profoundly post-structuralist approach gains overt expression, for example, in Virgil’s comment on the limitations of aesthetic theories that attempt to suppress their own contingencies; ‘Any intellect which confines itself to mere structuralism is bound to rest trapped in its own webs.'
Your words serve only to spin cocoons around your own irrelevance.' (91) Further, in *Grimus* the habits that communities adopt to prevent themselves from acknowledging multiplicity gain allegorical representation in the Way of K.

The Way of K may be seen as Rushdie probing the Rousseau-influenced theories of man and society that influenced much post-18th century Western travel writing and the modernist influenced literature of 1930s England in particular. In light of this, we can see Rushdie as having produced what Linda Hutcheon terms a 'histiographic novel.'[^2] That is, novels that explore and undermine concepts of stable cultural origins of identity.

Like his later work *Midnight's Children*, with *Grimus* Rushdie draws attention to the provisional status of his text’s ‘truth’ and thus the provisional status of any received account of reality, by using meta-texts that foreground the unnaturalness and bias of the text’s construction as an entity. For example, Grimus’s epilogue includes a quotation from one of its own characters. Thus, the text revolves around the ‘symptoms of blindness which mark its conceptual limits’ rather than the direct expression of didactic insights.

Rushdie has argued that ‘one of the things that have happened in the 20th century is a colossal fragmentation reality.’[^4] Hence, like Gabriel García Márquez, *Grimus* incorporates Magic Realism in order to transgress distinctions of genres, which mirrors ‘the state of confusion and alienation that defines postcolonial societies and individuals.’ One of *Grimus*’s structural devices draws upon Farid Ud 'Din Attar's *The Conference of the Birds* an allegorical poem that argues ‘God' to be
the transcendental totality of life and reality rather than an entity external to reality. This is a fundamental aspect of Sufism, and Rushdie's use of it prefigures his exploration of the relation of religion to reality in *The Satanic Verses, Shame, East West* and a number of his non-fiction works. Both narratives build towards the revelation of the 'truth' which waits atop of the Mountain Qâf. The footnote in Virgil's diaries 'explains' the use of 'K' rather than 'Q', which both overtly draws attention to the narrative as a construction, the effects of which are discussed above, and in a quite dark irony prefigures the 'Rushdie Affair' when it states that 'A purist would not forgive me, but there it is.' (209) The Dante *Comedia* provides the structure for Grimus’s exploration of inner dimensions. i.e. a journey through concentric circles and a crossing of a river in order to arrive at the most terrifying, central region. Hence, Flapping Eagle’s realization as:

‘He was climbing a mountain into the depths of an inferno plunging deep into myself’ and his mistaking of Virgil Jones for ‘a demon’ manifest as part of ‘some infernal torture.’ (69)

This manipulation of the Inferno trope, so that it acts to reveal psychological rather than empirical reality, blurs the boundaries dividing internal and external realities, which is a fundamental conceit to the novel and Rushdie's works as a whole. Whilst the basing of Calf Island on a merger of Eastern and Western references (i.e. Dante’s Mount Purgatory and Attar’s Qâf Mountain) is emblematic of Rushdie’s locating of post-colonial identity in an eclectic coalescence of cultures.
Kathryn Hume argues that one of Rushdie’s most effective techniques for emphasizing problematic dualistic thinking is the pairing of characters. However, with *Grimus*’s lack of initial commercial success and the furore over *The Satanic Verses*, most critics have overlooked the far more interesting exploration of religious tropes embodied in the pairing of Grimus and Flapping Eagle. *Grimus* representing the godhead of Islam/Sufism whilst Flapping Eagle represents Hinduism’s Shiva. As is typical of Rushdie the divisions of characteristics distinguishing the polarities of this pair are traumatized and blurred as these characters are structurally and literally paired, blended and unified within the text. Reviews of the book when first it was published emphasized its science fiction elements. The science fiction author Brian Aldiss has claimed that he, Kingsley Amis and Arthur C. Clarke served on a science fiction book prize jury at the time which identified *Grimus* as the best candidate for a science fiction book of the year award, but this prize was refused by the publishers who did not want the book to be classified as science fiction for marketing reasons’. 

*Midnight’s Children* (1980) deals with India’s transition from British colonialism to independence and the partition of British India. It is considered an example of postcolonial literature and magical realism. The story is told by its chief protagonist, Saleem Sinai, and is set in the context of actual historical events as with historical fiction. *Midnight’s Children* won both the Booker Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1981 although it was first published in late 1980, a series of delays, including a strike by dock-workers, delayed distribution of the novel. It was awarded the ‘Booker of Bookers’ Prize and the best all-time prize winners in 1993.
and 2008 to celebrate the Booker Prize 25th and 40th anniversary. In 2003, the novel was listed on the BBC's survey The Big Read. It was also added to the list of Great Books of the 20th Century, published by Penguin Books.

*The Satanic Verses (1989)* is a magical realist epic with three major plotlines. The first of these plotlines follows two Indian actors, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, after they miraculously survive a plane crash over the English Channel. The Satanic Verses is a magical realist epic with three major plotlines. The first of these plotlines follows two Indian actors, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, after they miraculously survive a plane crash over the English Channel. The second and third plotlines are elaborate descriptions of dreams that Gibreel has after the crash. One focuses on the Muslim prophet Mahound (based on Mohammed), as he wrestles with his faith to found a new religion.

Another follows Ayesha, a prophet who leads the people of her village on a futile pilgrimage. Rushdie draws on a variety of influences, including Islamic history and theology, Bollywood cinema, and immigration politics. *The Satanic Verses* is Salman Rushdie’s fourth novel. When it was published in 1988, the author was already well-known and critically respected. His novel *Midnight’s Children*, published eight years before, had won the Booker Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, and was a bestseller. So when *The Satanic Verses* was published, it was poised to garner plenty of attention from critics and the public at large. And attract attention it did. Some Muslim clerics and literary critics found Rushdie’s use of Islamic theology very offensive. The main point of contention was his exploration of
the ‘satanic verses,’ a series of possibly apocryphal verses in the Qur'an, in which Mohammed seems to recognize ‘Allah’s daughters’ three female demigods. The story generally goes that Satan tricked Mohammed into recognizing the goddesses, but Mohammed retracted what he had said once he realized he had been fooled. However, this piece of Islamic history is extremely controversial, and some Muslim scholars argue that it never happened at all.

Several countries with Muslim populations, including India, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and South Africa, banned *The Satanic Verses*, although the censorship often ended up becoming as controversial as the book itself. In February 1989, the Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini declared a fatwa on Rushdie - that is, a call for his murder. As a result, the United Kingdom - where Rushdie is a citizen - severed its diplomatic relations with Iran. Rushdie successfully went into hiding, a period of his life that he chronicles in his 2012 memoir, *Joseph Anton*. However, the Italian and Japanese translators of the novel, as well as its Norwegian publisher, were violently attacked; the Japanese translator, Hitoshi Igarashi, died of his wounds. In later years, both sides made attempts to resolve the conflict.

The Iranians promised to retract the fatwa in order to improve their relationship with the United Kingdom. For his part, Rushdie made an official apology to Muslims, and even converted to Islam a year after the book’s publication. However, none of these attempts were long-lasting. Rushdie stopped being a Muslim shortly after his conversion, and Iran eventually reaffirmed the fatwa. The novel
remains controversial to this day, although it has also been recognized for its stylistic
virtuosity, and is studied by many scholars of postcolonial literature.

**The Moor’s Last Sigh (1995)**  
Booker Prize-winning author Salman Rushdie combines a ferociously witty family saga with a surreally imagined and sometimes blasphemous chronicle of modern India and flavors the mixture with peppery soliloquies on art, ethnicity, religious fanaticism, and the terrifying power of love. Moraes ‘Moor’ Zogoiby, the last surviving scion of a dynasty of Cochinese spice merchants and crime lords, is also a compulsive storyteller and an exile. As he travels a route that takes him from India to Spain, he leaves behind a tale of mad passions and volcanic family hatreds, of titanic matriarchs and their mesmerized offspring, of premature deaths and curses that strike beyond the grave. In a careful and calculated manner, The Moor’s Last Sigh leaps across four generations of a rich and demented Indian family, weaving an exquisitely-crafted tapestry of murder and suicide, atheism and asceticism, affection and adultery.

The first person narrator of this cynical yet mischievous book is Moraes Zogoiby, aka ‘Moor,’ who, seemingly unaffected by his asthma, spins his tale sitting atop a tombstone within sight of the Alhambra in Spain and pursued by a policeman named-like the holy city of Islam-Medina. The centerpiece of this captivating and gorgeous novel is Moor's highly dysfunctional family, a Grand Guignol of good and evil, the deformations of the spirit wrought by love withered or love withheld and the beauty and violence of art, all representative of the tortured history of twentieth century India. Moor, himself, is the champion of miscegenation and cultural melange,
bastards and cross-breeds. Standing six and one-half feet tall, Moor has a withered right hand and, like India, he grows too fast, twice the rate of a normal human being. A thirty-six year old elderly man, still in love with a deceitful (and deceased) woman, Moor exhibits the body of a none-too-healthy seventy-two year old. His bloodline, too, is as crowded and diverse as India, herself.

Moor is the son of Abraham Zogoiby, a South Indian Jew who is probably the illegitimate descendant of Boabdil, the last Muslim Sultan of Granada and the celebrated artist, Aurora da Gama, a Christian claiming descent from the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama. Abraham and Aurora's love first carries them to the dizzying, hyperbolic heights of fame and power and then plunges them into depths reminiscent of Lucifer's expulsion from Paradise. The blood of the Zogoiby family is indeed tainted--with murder, adultery and lies--and they, in turn, infect everyone they encounter.

A tragic figure, Moor nevertheless reveals a wickedly comic streak, as Rushdie combines high art with gaudy jags that refer to the pop cultures of India, America and Britain. Although most Rushdie readers are well-versed in multi-cultural sociology, even the most erudite may have to struggle with this book's obscure, inside jokes and satire. Disorientation also can occur as Rushdie leaps across time zones, from present to recent past to near future to ancient history. These time shifts, however, play an integral role in explaining each of Moor's vignettes and relating their importance to the story as a whole. Among the many dualities threading their way through The Moor's Last Sigh, is the one of good art versus bad. The
book's title actually refers to two paintings entitled, *The Moor's Last Sigh*. One is painted by Aurora, the other by her one-time-admirer-turned-nemesis, Vasco Miranda. Aurora's work is a masterpiece, the last in a series of allegorical paintings in which her son serves as subject. It becomes the symbol that finally gives Moor the humanity he so desires. Miranda's, on the other hand, is a sentimental kitsch of Sultan Boabdil's final departure from Granada. Which one best typifies Moor? In a sense, both do.

The narrative, as can be expected from a Rushdie novel, is filmy but faultless: a magical mixture of fact and fable, fantasy and absurdity, comedy and tragedy. Despite its brilliant touches of comedy, the tone remains dark, solemn and sober. Peopled with a wide range of characters, even when parodic and allegorical, they retain their essential humanness. In the end, Rushdie really does paint Moor as a prophet, though one whose messianic calling looks not to the arrival of God but of the better self in all of us, the reconciliation of our mongrel ethics and spirituality. A timely and compelling novel full of contradictions and complexities, *The Moor's Last Sigh* begs the reader to look beyond its impeccably composed plot to the discordant richness that typifies postcolonial India today. *The Moor's Last Sigh* begins promisingly set in the rich cultural melting pot that was Portugese India. Rushdie has made it a habit to analyse India in bits and pieces, one at a time with each novel. It is now the turn of the Malabar and one of the earliest roots of colonial India that has come to deserve his attention. The focal point of the story is Moraes Zogoiby, the nodal leaf of the da Gama-Zogoiby family tree, with enough colours in his blood to
make a rainbow pale in contrast. It seems to be a faithful allusion to India's "royal family apparent" the Nehru-Gandhi clan, members of whom are frequently and rather brusquely alluded to. Getting through the first 150 pages is a joy ride. For those who perceive the intricacies of Indian history, the allusions are stark and vivid.

As any experienced reader might expect, Rushdie chips in with his now-branded magic realism with references to the supernatural, the unknown, the ambiguous, the pathetic fallacies, and the coincidences with his bewitching word play. The story meanders, twists, turns and sometimes cascades in typical Rushdie style, as the scene cuts to Cochin, then to Bombay (Rushdie's Oedipus Complex) and finally to Andalusia. You meet more startling characters, expose more personalities, descend to the dark dungeons of humanity, and gain an insight into the secretive, alternative world that deceives and betrays the posh, exterior facade. Again, characteristic to Rushdie is the hapless narrator, the insecure, victimised, ugly, yet omniscient incarnate who speaks to you in the first person. Rarely, would you feel a Rushdian character very simple to comprehend. Uma Saraswati, Moraes's lover, Abraham Zogoiby, his father, Aurora, his mother, his sisters, his grandparents, his grand-uncles all intricately woven and presented in a picture so complex that you feel that years of translucent history cannot have mystified simple lives so much. Rushdie's genius in exploring human values and emotions is evident and only to be expected. But, as you go panting and wanting more and more of it, the denouement comes too quickly and too abruptly. The demystification that you wait
for so long, never takes off. Rushdie takes the easier route to deal with the problem by destruction and it is this tried and tested Bollywood formula that wrecks the boat.

It was my experience of "a burning head and a parched tongue." If this is what Rushdie wanted you to know, well, that is another twist, but a very unconvincing one. Maybe the sea hath dried up? That being my initial peeve with the work, I realised later that this is not his only pitfall. Rushdie, with this novel might stand accused (not without reason) of being stereotypic. You come across too many things (sometimes one per page) that remind you of an earlier occurence somewhere in another of his works.

The techniques and formulae are pretty old. Self-plagiarism is an excuse that a creator of Rushdie's stature cannot afford with his readers. This was the fourth work of Rushdie I set my hands on, having already read *The Midnight's Children*, *Haroun and The Sea of Stories* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Having thoroughly enjoyed the other three; I felt Rushdie flatters to deceive in this one. Beginners to Rushdie - this is one book you can afford to skip. Old wines are in the cellar. Check them out first.

**The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999)** this book is Salman Rushdie's sixth novel. Published in 1999, it is a variation on the Orpheus/Eurydice myth with rock music replacing Orpheus' lyre. The myth works as a red thread from which the author sometimes strays, but to which he attaches an endless series of references. The book, while at its core detailing the love of two men, Ormus Cama and Umeed 'Rai’ Merchant (the narrator of the story), for the same woman, Vina Apsara,
provides a background and alternate history to the entire 1950s-1990s period of the growth of rock music. The minor characters of the story are particularly interesting, as they provide the most vivid portraits of the cultures and backgrounds that come into play in the story. Defined by Toni Morrison as a global novel, the book sets itself in the wide frame of Western and post-colonial culture, through the multilingualism of its characters, the mixture of East and West and the great number of references that span from Greek mythology, European philosophy and contemporaries such as Milan Kundera and the stars of rock’n roll.

The title is taken from a song from the novel, composed by Ormus Cama after Vina's death. The lyrics to the song, with minor changes, were adapted and recorded by U2. The song was used in the film The Million Dollar Hotel, and the promotional music video featured Rushdie in a cameo appearance. The character of Ormus Cama seems to be heavily inspired by John Lennon and Elvis Presley. While Lennon appears in the book as a separate character, several of Ormus' traits (especially his love of making bread at home) seem to be inspired from him. Ormus' death - immediately outside his apartment building, shot at close range with a small pistol is also very similar to Lennon's. Also, Lennon's last words are said to be yes, when a police officer asked him if he knew who he was on the way to the hospital.

Ormus' last words were 'Yes. Yes, mother, I know, when asked the same question'. As a kind of bookend, Ormus has a similar birth to that of Elvis, who had a twin brother born dead, and possibly also of Austrian singer/songwriter Falco who was a sole survivor of triplets and began showing enormous musical talent as a
toddler. Rushdie also describes Ormus in physical terms that could describe Elvis, particularly the erotic power of his pelvic gyrations. Rushdie also stated that Ormus Cama was loosely based on Freddie Mercury, who was also a famous Parsi rock star. Rushdie re-introduces characters from his previous novels, including Homi Catrack and William Methwold from *Midnight's Children*, S.S. Sisodia from *The Satanic Verses*, and Aurora Zogoiby from *The Moor's Last Sigh*, as well as settings such as Warden Road and Everest Villas. The man introducing Umeed to the agency is M. Hulot, a character which seems to be based on Jacques Tati's character from the movie *Les Vacances de M. Hulot*.

The novel is set in a fictional world parallel to ours, but Rushdie doesn't reveal that until the second half of the book. Thus, there are several untrue historic facts used in setting of the novel. In the novel, American president John F. Kennedy survives the Dallas assassination but is shot alongside his brother Robert Kennedy later on; the Watergate scandal is represented as a novel starring a fictional president Richard Nixon. Rushdie also deliberately miscredits some classic rock songs, such as The Rolling Stones' (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction, which he credits to John Lennon, or Roy Orbison's *Pretty Woman* which he credits to *The Kinks*. The character named Jesse Garon Parker represents Elvis Presley in every way, while who are presented under their original name *The High Numbers*. In his description of the contribution of Vina's voice to the duet, he compares it to that of Guinevere Garfunkel to Carly Simon's Bridge over Troubled Waters, where the names of the singers hint at Art Garfunkel and Paul Simon.
The novel has been turned into a major performance work combining music and film that premiered at the inaugural Manchester International Festival in England on 29 June 2007. Composed by Victoria Borisova-Ollas and featuring a film directed by Mike Figgis (Leaving Las Vegas, Internal Affairs), the tale of two star-crossed lovers was performed by the Hallé orchestra, conducted by its music director Mark Elder and Alan Rickman as the narrator, with Tehmina Sunny in the role of Vina. In this remaking of the myth of Orpheus, Rushdie tells the story of Vina Apsara, a pop star, and Ormus Cama, an extraordinary songwriter and musician, who captivate and change the world through their music and their romance.

Beginning in Bombay in the fifties, moving to London in the sixties, and New York for the last quarter century, the novel pulsates with a half-century of music and celebrates the power rock 'n' roll. The ground shifts repeatedly beneath the reader's feet during the course of Salman Rushdie's sixth novel, a riff on the Orpheus and Eurydice myth set in the high-octane world of rock & roll. Readers get their first clues early on that the universe Rushdie is creating here is not quite the one we know: Jesse Aron Parker, for example, wrote Heartbreak Hotel, Carly Simon and Guinevere Garfunkel sang Bridge over Troubled Water; and Shirley Jones and Gordon McRae starred in South Pacific. And as the novel progresses, Rushdie adds unmistakable elements of science fiction to his already patented magical realism, with occasionally uneven results. Rushdie's cunning musician is Ormus Cama, the Bombay-born founder of the most popular group in the world.
Ormus's Eurydice is Vina Apsara, the daughter of a Greek American woman and an Indian father who abandoned the family. What these two shares, besides amazing musical talent, is a decidedly twisted family life: Ormus's twin brother died at birth and communicates to him from the other side; his older brothers, also twins, are, respectively, brain-damaged and a serial killer. Vina, on the other hand, grew up in rural West Virginia where she returned home one day to find her stepfather and sisters shot to death and her mother hanging from a rafter in the barn. No wonder these two believe they were made for each other. Narrated by Rai Merchant, a childhood friend of Vina and Ormus, The Ground Beneath Her Feet begins with a terrible earthquake in 1989 that swallows Vina whole, then moves back in time to chronicle the tangled histories of all the main characters and a host of minor ones as well. Rushdie's canvas is huge, stretching from India to London to New York and beyond-and there's plenty of room for him to punctuate this epic tale with pointed commentary on his own situation: Muslim-born Rai, for example, remarks:

"My parents gave me the gift of irreligion, of growing up without bothering to ask people what gods they held dear.... You may argue that the gift was a poisoned chalice, but even if so, that's a cup from which I'd happily drink again." (98)

Despite earthquakes, heartbreaks, and a rip in the time-space continuum, The Ground Beneath Her Feet may be the most optimistic, accessible novel Rushdie has yet written. This is the story of Vina Aspara, a woman doomed to a life of fame and tragedy. Two men spend their lives loving her: Ormus, who becomes her partner
in a band that breaks all pop music records, and Rai, who has loved her since childhood. Vina lives an unsteady life, never settling on one place or one man. The narrator, Rai, shifts among times and places frequently, often foreshadowing things to come and then going back to tell how it all came to pass. Rushdie is not writing to be heard; his allusions to mythology and pop culture are frequent and complex, inviting contemplation and consideration. This, combined with the multitude of characters and histories, makes the book difficult to follow while driving in heavy traffic or washing dishes. Nonetheless, Stephen Crossley’s reading is superb, making the frequent long stretches of exposition, description, and Rai’s musings on the state of the universe, which might be tedious to many readers in print, sparkle. He does a fair job of bringing the characters to life and distinguishing among their many voices. Generous pauses between scenes, which might be annoying in a less dense work, are welcome moments for reflection.

This is cerebral literary fiction and a worthy book by an important author in a format many might find less intimidating than print; recommended. Adrienne Furness, Genesee Community Coll. On St. Valentine’s Day, 1989, the last day of her life, the legendary popular singer Vina Apsara woke sobbing from a dream of human sacrifice in which she had been the intended victim. Bare-torsoed men resembling the actor Christopher Plummer had been gripping her by the wrists and ankles. Her body was splayed out, naked and writhing, over a polished stone bearing the graven image of the snakebird Quetzalcoatl. The open mouth of the plumed serpent surrounded a dark hollow scooped out of the stone, and although her own mouth
was stretched wide by her screams the only noise she could hear was the popping of flashbulbs; but before they could slit her throat, before her lifeblood could bubble into that terrible cup, she awoke at noon in the city of Guadalajara, Mexico, in an unfamiliar bed with a half-dead stranger by her side, a naked mestizo male in his early twenties, identified in the interminable press coverage that followed the catastrophe as Raúl Páramo, the playboy heir of a well-known local construction baron, one of whose corporations owned the hotel.

She had been perspiring heavily and the sodden bed sheets stank of the meaningless misery of the nocturnal encounter. Raúl Páramo was unconscious, white-lipped, and his body was galvanized, every few moments, by spasms which Vina recognized as being identical to her own dream writhing. After a few moments he began to make frightful noises deep in his windpipe, as if someone were slitting his throat, as if his blood were flowing out through the scarlet smile of an invisible wound into a phantom goblet. Vina, panicking, leapt from the bed, snatched up her clothes, the leather pants and gold-sequined bustier in which she had made her final exit, the night before, from the stage of the city's convention centre. Contemptuously, despairingly, she had surrendered herself to this nobody, this boy less than half her age, she had selected him more or less at random from the backstage throng, the lounge lizards, the slick, flower-bearing suitors, the industrial magnates, the aristocrat, the drug under lords, the tequila princes, all with limousines and champagne and cocaine and maybe even diamonds to bestow upon the evening's star. The man had begun to introduce himself, to smarten and brown, but she didn't
want to know his name or the size of his bank balance. She had picked him like a flower and now she wanted him between her teeth, she had ordered him like a take home meal and now she alarmed him by the ferocity of her appetites, because she began to feast upon him the moment the door of the limo was closed, before the chauffeur had time to raise the partition that gave the passengers their privacy.

**Shalimar The Clown (2005)** This is the story of Maximilian Ophuls, America's counterterrorism chief, one of the makers of the modern world; his Kashmiri Muslim driver and subsequent killer, a mysterious figure who calls himself Shalimar the clown; Max's illegitimate daughter India; and a woman who links them, whose revelation finally explains them all. It is an epic narrative that moves from California to Kashmir, France, and England, and back to California again. Along the way there are tales of princesses lured from their homes by demons, legends of kings forced to defend their kingdoms against evil. And there is always love, gained and lost, uncommonly beautiful and mortally dangerous. The New York Times Book Review can be quoted as:

“A commanding story . . . a harrowing climax . . . Revenge is an ancient and powerful engine of narrative. Absorbing . . . Everywhere [Rushdie] takes us there is both love and war, in strange and terrifying combinations, painted in swaying, swirling, world-eating prose that annihilates the borders between East and West, love and hate, private lives and the history they make.” (56)
Salman Rushdie is our world's greatest living novelist and *Shalimar the Clown*, quite simply put, is one of his greatest creations. Heart-rending, heart-breaking, filled with fury and indignation, love and the hope of reconciliation, political diatribe and aesthetic redemption, *Shalimar* reads like no other contemporary work. Passages of marvelous beauty (particularly of the early love between Shalimar and Boonyi, two of the novel's central characters), of the triumph of art over ideology (particularly Bombur Yambarzal's humorous and heroic deflation of the humorless and despicable mullah, Bulbul Fakh), and of the unmitigated horrors of war (particularly the destruction of the once near-utopian village of Pachigam, perhaps one of the most tragic passages in modern literature) confront readers at nearly every turn. This is one of the most densely populated (in the sense of characterization as well as ideas) novels of recent years, perhaps even more apocalyptically epic in scope than Rushdie's own *Midnight's Children*. Most important of all, Rushdie proves (once again) that politics and literature can be mutually enriching as well as informative; that art can teach more profoundly than any ideology (religious or political); and that hope and beauty in the midst of the very worst of human-made atrocities will find a way (sometimes) to persevere.

This is a difficult, angry novel; but make no mistake, it will reward the patient (and thoughtful) reader with a profoundly moving experience. Indeed, Rushdie reminds us all why the novel remains one of the most pertinent and potent of today's artistic venues. The focus of this novel is extremism. It tells the tale of two Kashmiri villages whose inhabitants gradually get caught up in communal violence. As we
know from Yugoslavia, hatred takes on especially horrific manifestations when neighbors turn against each other. The neighbors to whom Rushdie introduces us are memorable and emblematic characters, especially his protagonists, the Hindu dancer Boonyi Kaul and her childhood sweetheart, Shalimar the clown, son of a Muslim family. Their passion becomes a marriage solemnized by both Hindu and Muslim rites, but as conflict heats up, Boonyi seduces the American ambassador. The resulting transformation of Shalimar into a terrorist is easily the most impressive achievement of the book, and here one must congratulate Rushdie for having made artistic capital out of his own suffering, for the years he spent under police protection, hunted by zealots, have been poured into the novel in ways which ring hideously true. Bit by bit, Shalimar becomes a figure of supernatural menace. The life of the ambassador, Max Ophuls, is also brilliantly invented. In a series of highly effective set pieces—Nazi-occupied Strasbourg, where he failed to persuade his principled parents to save the books they published, not to mention themselves, from the flames the family was Jewish; southern France, where his exploits on behalf of the Resistance were so colorful. Shalimar's destiny now for the novel's defects: Rushdie's female characters are generally less plausible than the male ones. When he is describing Kashmir's good old days of communal tolerance, he too frequently takes refuge in slapstick. His depiction of Los Angeles relies so much on references to popular culture that the place becomes a superficial parody of itself. In terms of technique, Rushdie's most irritating tic is the sermonistic parallelism or repetition, but the novel's best passages prove him capable of great style. Never mind these flaws.
*Shalimar the Clown* is a powerful parable about the willing and unwilling subversion of multiculturalism. And for those readers who even in this post-September-eleventh continue to cling to American narcissism, the parable grows more urgently pointed: Ophuls and Boonyi conceive a daughter, who is taken away at birth and in due time becomes a beautiful, troubled, privileged ignoramus in Los Angeles. About Shalimar the clown, her mother's husband, she doesn't have a clue. Is that her fault? Is it our fault that we never paid much attention to the rest of the world? But one day, without any warning, two planes smashed into the Twin Towers, and now (wake up and run!) Shalimar the clown has arrived in Los Angeles. *(On sale Sept. 6)* Vollmann's most recent novel is *Europe Central* (Viking).

Like some of the post 9/11 literature, *Shalimar* delves deep into the roots of terrorism and explores the turmoil generated by different faiths and cultures attempting to coexist. How can nations, Rushdie asks, go from near-peaceful ethnic and religious acceptance to violent conflict within a mere generation? Critics agree that Rushdie has brilliantly unraveled the construction of terrorists: some of them fight for ideas; others fight to fulfill vows or, if they are men, to reclaim their wives. *Shalimar* is at once a political thriller, folk tale, slapstick comedy, wartime adventure, and work of science fiction, pop culture, and magical realism. In shimmering (if sometimes baroque) language, Rushdie invokes clever satire and imaginative wordplay. Yet, despite its diverse genres and styles, Shalimar is, at heart, a story of love, honor, and revenge-and the global consequences of such emotions and actions. Critics particularly praised Rushdie's shocking description of Shalimar's
transformation into a cold-blooded Islamic terrorist, from his participation in training camps to forced humiliations before Taliban leaders. Similarly, wrenching descriptions of pre- and post-war Kashmir, his homage to a paradise lost, confirm Rushdie’s brilliant powers of observation and keen social insight. Some reviewers felt that some characters lacked psychological depth or complete plausibility, or were too allegorical, but most described Shalimar as convincingly real too real, even. In the 21st century, Shalimar’s painful, terrifying themes are both fantastical and devastatingly real. To evidence otherwise, Rushdie offers a note of cautious optimism: people can work out their differences if left alone by ideologues or fanatics. Shalimar provides a timely, ultimately idealistic, message for our times.

**The Enchantress of Florence (2008)** this is the story of a mysterious woman, a great beauty believed to possess the powers of enchantment and sorcery, attempting to command her own destiny in a man’s world. It is the story of two cities at the height of their powers—the hedonistic Mughal capital, in which the brilliant emperor Akbar the Great wrestles daily with questions of belief, desire, and the treachery of his sons, and the equally sensual city of Florence during the High Renaissance, where Niccolò Machiavelli takes a starring role as he learns, the hard way, about the true brutality of power. Profoundly moving and completely absorbing, The Enchantress of Florence is a dazzling book full of wonders by one of the world’s most important living writers. Renaissance Florence’s artistic zenith and Mughal India’s cultural summit reached the following century, at Emperor Akbar’s court in Sikri are the twin beacons of Rushdie’s ingenious latest, a dense but sparkling return
to form. The connecting link between the two cities and epochs is the magically beautiful hidden princess, Qara Köz, so gorgeous that her uncovered face makes battle-hardened warriors drop to their knees. Her story underlies the book's circuitous journey. A mysterious yellow-haired man in a multicolored coat steps off a rented bullock cart and walks into 16th century Sikri: he speaks excellent Persian, has a stock of conjurer's tricks and claims to be Akbar's uncle. He carries with him a letter from Queen Elizabeth I, which he translates for Akbar with vast incorrectness. But it is the story of Akbar's great-aunt, Qara Köz that the man (her putative son) has come to the court to tell. The tale dates to the time of Akbar's grandfather, Babar (Qara Köz's brother), and it involves her relationship with the Persian Shah. In the Shah's employ is Janissary general Nino Argalia, an Italian convert to Islam, whose own story takes the narrative to Renaissance Florence. Rushdie eventually presents an extended portrait of Florence through the eyes of Niccolò Machiavelli and Ago Vespucci, cousin of the more famous Amerigo. Rushdie's portrayal of Florence pales in comparison with his depiction of Mughal court society, but it brings Rushdie to his real fascination here: the multitudinous, capillary connections between East and West, a secret history of interchanges that's disguised by standard histories in which West discovers East. Along the novel's roundabout way, Qara Köz does seem more alive as a sexual obsession in the tales swapped by various men than as her own person. Genial Akbar, however, emerges as the most fascinating character in the book. Chuang Tzu tells of a man who dreams of being a butterfly and, on waking up, wonders whether he is now a butterfly dreaming he is a man. In Rushdie's version of
the West and East, the two cultures take on a similar blended polarity in Akbar as he listens to the tales. Each culture becomes the dream of the other. Despite his liking for fairy tale and fantasy, Salman Rushdie is usually, and rightly, perceived as a Serious Nobel Prize-Worthy Writer. So it may come as a surprise that he has produced a book that is the equivalent of a summer fling. Set during the 16th century, The Enchantress of Florence is altogether ramshackle as a novel -- oddly structured, blithely mixing history and legend and distinctly minor compared to such masterworks as The Moor's Last Sigh and Midnight's Children and it is really not a novel at all. It is a romance, and only a dry-hearted critic would dwell on the flaws in so delightful an homage to Renaissance magic and wonder.

In these languid, languorous pages, the Emperor Akbar the Great dreams his ideal mistress into existence, a Florentine orphan rises to become the military champion of Islam, and a black-eyed beauty casts a spell on every man who sees her. Other characters include Machiavelli and Botticelli, Amerigo Vespucci, Adm. Andrea Doria and Vlad the Impaler (a.k.a. Dracula), not to discount various Medicis and the principal members of the Mughal court of Sikri, India. The action itself covers half the known world: the seacoast of Africa, the Indian subcontinent, the battlefields of the Middle East, Renaissance Italy and the newly discovered New World. Yet whatever the locale, The Enchantress of Florence is bathed throughout in Mediterranean sunlight and Oriental sensuousness. Its atmosphere derives from the Italian Renaissance epic, especially Ariosto's magic-filled Orlando Furioso, and from such latter-day reveries of Eastern splendor as Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities (which
features Marco Polo and Akbar's grandfather Kublai Khan). Here, then, is a gorgeous 16th century that never quite was, except in operas, masques and ballets. In such a world, a spying eunuch named Umar the Ayyar can move invisibly through crowds and "see everything, including some things that hadn't happened yet. For The Enchantress of Florence celebrates a vanished world before the real and unreal were segregated forever and doomed to live apart under different monarchs and separate legal systems.

The first third of Rushdie's romance focuses on an enigmatic rogue of many names as he makes his way to the court of Akbar the Great in India. Much earlier, this Uccello, this Mogor dell'Amore, set forth "to see the world, taking ship hither and yon, sometimes as a member of the crew, on other occasions as a carefree stowaway, learned many languages, acquired a wide variety of skills, not all of them within the boundaries of the law, and accumulated his own tales to tell, tales of escapes from cannibalism in Sumatra and of the egg-sized pearls of Brunei and of fleeing from the Great Turk up the Volga to Moscow in winter and of crossing the Red Sea in a dhow held together with string. But about himself this mysterious voyager "would only say to the men and women he met on his voyages that his story was stranger by far than any of these tales. After he reaches Sikri, the capital city by the golden lake, Mogor dell Amore risks his life to ingratiate himself with the Emperor—but for what purpose? In due course, he does unfold a fantastic tale about his ancestry and about a secret Mughal princess named Qara Köz. The latter two-thirds of the novel take up this wondrous beauty's adventures in the Middle East and
Florence, as Qara Köz eventually renamed Angelica conquers the heart of one bloody conqueror after another. She is every man's lubricious dream, at once princess, slave and witch, and willing to do whatever it takes to please her current lord and to survive. Her sole companion is a servant girl called the Mirror, only a tad less beautiful than her mistress, and the sharer of her bed. In many ways The Enchantress of Florence is a dream of fair women, a portrait gallery of heartbreaking beauty. In Italy, for instance, there is Simonetta Vespucci (the model for Botticelli's "Birth of Venus") as well as the courtesan Alessandra Fiorentina:

"He caught a glimpse through an idly open door of La Fiorentina in her private sanctum, reclining on a gilded chaise in the midst of a small group of the city's very finest men, and idly permitting her patron Francesco del Nero to kiss her left breast while a little hairy white lapdog licked at her right nipple, and in that instant he was done for, and knew that she was the only woman for him."

But the Italians are rivaled, even surpassed, by the Indian sirens. Khanzada Begum is universally acknowledged at least by all her servants and courtiers as the most beautiful woman in the world, until Qara Köz, i.e. Black Eyes, is born. From that day forward, Khanzada noticed a change in the timbre of her daily adoration, which began to contain a higher level of insincerity than was acceptable." And then there's Jodha, the Emperor's fantasy come to life. Among her myriad erotic skills, she is consummately adept at "the seven types of un geniculation, which is to say the art of using the nails to enhance the act of love. (Rushdie cites examples of the seven
types, all clearly derived from the Kama Sutra book two, chapter four, if you're interested.) As Jodha says, "When a boy dreams up a woman he gives her big breasts and a small brain. . . . When a king imagines a wife he dreams of me."(35)

While *The Enchantress of Florence* mainly lingers in the memory as a paean to the power of beauty, it is also a meditation on power, tout court. The world can turn against beauty, just as it can turn against intelligence or spiritual conviction or noble ideals. Machiavelli -- soon to write *The Prince* warns the Mughal princess:

"This is Florence, my lady, and you will live well here, for Florentines know how to live well. But if you are sensible, you will always know where the back door is. You will plan your escape route and keep it in good working order. For when the Arno floods all those without boats are drowned."(45)

But what should one do with power? Akbar the Great begins to wonder about the nature of his sovereignty and about the self, the universe, religion and the growing interaction between East and West:

"Was foreignness itself a thing to be embraced as a revitalizing force bestowing bounty and success upon its adherents, or did it adulterate something essential in the individual and the society as a whole, did it initiate a process of decay which would end in an alienated, inauthentic death?" (50)

Akbar, in fact, daydreams of universal harmony on Earth but sadly recognizes that all his power can never make it happen:
"Once he was gone, all he had thought, all he had worked to make, his philosophy and way of being, all that would evaporate like water. The future would not be what he hoped for, but a dry hostile antagonistic place where people would survive as best they could and hate their neighbors and smash their places of worship and kill one another once again in the renewed heat of the great quarrel he had sought to end forever, the quarrel over God. In the future it was harshness, not civilization that would rule." (57)

Such sentiments point at the 21st century, and may jar as a result, but they are just one aspect of this dream-like pageant of a book, with its cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces. Rushdie risks bathos, for instance, when he refers to "The Great Uzbek Anti-Shiite Potato and Sturgeon Curse." He calls four albino giants Otho, Botho, Clotho and D'Artagnan, recalling by turns a Roman Emperor, a German family name, the Fate who cuts the thread of life and a would-be Musketeer. In this case, you feel that he's just being silly. No matter. At least for the summer ahead, The Enchantress of Florence will certainly live up to the romantic promise of its title. As Akbar himself reflects, "Witchcraft requires no potions, familiar spirits, or magic wands. Language upon a silvered tongue affords enchantment enough."(59)

In the day's last light the glowing lake below the palace-city looked like a sea of molten gold. A traveler coming this way at sunset this traveler, coming this way, now, along the lakeshore road—might believe himself to be approaching the throne of a monarch so fabulously wealthy that he could allow a portion of his treasure to be poured into a giant hollow in the earth to dazzle and awe his guests. And as big as
the lake of gold was, it must be only a drop drawn from the sea of the larger fortune
the traveler's imagination could not begin to grasp the size of that mother-ocean! Nor
were there guards at the golden water's edge; was the king so generous, then, that
he allowed all his subjects, and perhaps even strangers and visitors like the traveler
himself, without hindrance to draw up liquid bounty from the lake? That would indeed
be a prince among men, a veritable Prester John, whose lost kingdom of song and
fable contained impossible wonders. Perhaps (the traveler surmised) the fountain of
eternal youth lay within the city walls—perhaps even the legendary doorway to
Paradise on Earth was somewhere close at hand? But then the sun fell below the
horizon, the gold sank beneath the water's surface, and was lost. Mermaids and
serpents would guard it until the return of daylight. Until then, water itself would be
the only treasure on offer, a gift the thirsty traveler gratefully accepted.

The stranger rode in a bullock-cart, but instead of being seated on the rough
cushions therein he stood up like a god, holding on to the rail of the cart's latticework
wooden frame with one insouciant hand. A bullock-cart ride was far from smooth, the
two-wheeled cart tossing and jerking to the rhythm of the animal's hoofs, and
subject, too, to the vagaries of the highway beneath its wheels. A standing man
might easily fall and break his neck. Nevertheless the traveler stood, looking
careless and content. The driver had long ago given up shouting at him, at first
taking the foreigner for a fool if he wanted to die on the road, let him do so, for no
man in this country would be sorry! Quickly, however, the driver's scorn had given
way to a grudging admiration. The man might indeed be foolish, one could go so far
as to say that he had a fool's overly pretty face and wore a fool's unsuitable clothes a coat of colored leather lozenges, in such heat but his balance was immaculate, to be wondered at. The bullock plodded forward, the cart's wheels hit potholes and rocks, yet the standing man barely swayed, and managed, somehow, to be graceful. A graceful fool, the driver thought, or perhaps no fool at all. Perhaps someone to be reckoned with if he had a fault, it was that of ostentation, of seeking to be not only himself but a performance of himself as well, and, the driver thought, around here everybody is a little bit that way too, so maybe this man is not so foreign to us after all. When the passenger mentioned his thirst the driver found himself going to the water's edge to fetch the fellow a drink in a cup made of a hollowed and varnished gourd, and holding it up for the stranger to take, for all the world as if he were an aristocrat worthy of service.

"You just stand there like a grandee and I jump and scurry at your bidding," the driver said, frowning. "I don't know why I'm treating you so well. Who gave you the right to command me? What are you, anyway? Not a nobleman, that's for sure, or you wouldn't be in this cart. And yet you have airs about you. So you're probably some kind of a rogue." The other drank deeply from the gourd. The water ran down from the edges of his mouth and hung on his shaven chin like a liquid beard. At length he handed back the empty gourd, gave a sigh of satisfaction, and wiped the beard away. "What am I?" he said, as if speaking to him, but using the driver's own language. "I'm a man with a secret, that's what—a secret which only the emperor's ears may hear." The driver felt reassured: the fellow was a fool after all. There
was no need to treat him with respect. "Keep your secret," he said. "Secrets are for children, and spies." (75-76)

The stranger got down from the cart outside the caravanserai, where all journeys ended and began. He was surprisingly tall and carried a carpetbag. And for sorcerers, he told the driver of the bullock-cart. In the caravanserai all was bustle and hum. Animals were cared for, horses, camels, bullocks, asses, goats, while other, untamable animals ran wild: screechy monkeys, dogs that were no man's pets. Shrieking parrots exploded like green fireworks in the sky. Blacksmiths were at work, and carpenters, and in chandleries on all four sides of the enormous square men planned their journeys, stocking up on groceries, candles, oil, soap, and ropes. Turbaned coolies in red shirts and dhotis ran ceaselessly hither and yon with bundles of improbable size and weight upon their heads. There was, in general, much loading and unloading of goods. Beds for the night were to be cheaply had here, wood-frame rope beds covered with spiky horsehair mattresses, standing in military ranks upon the roofs of the single-story buildings surrounding the enormous courtyard of the caravanserai, beds where a man might lie and look up at the heavens and imagine himself divine. Beyond, to the west, lay the murmuring camps of the emperor's regiments, lately returned from the wars. The army was not permitted to enter the zone of the palaces but had to stay here at the foot of the royal hill. An unemployed army, recently home from battle, was to be treated with caution. The stranger thought of ancient Rome. An emperor trusted no soldiers except his
praetorian guard. The traveler knew that the question of trust was one he would have
to answer convincingly. If he did not he would quickly die.

Not far from the caravanserai, a tower studded with elephant tusks marked
the way to the palace gate. All elephants belonged to the emperor, and by spiking a
tower with their teeth he was demonstrating his power. Beware! the tower said. You
are entering the realm of the Elephant King, a sovereign so rich in pachyderms that
he can waste the gnashes of a thousand of the beasts just to decorate me. In the
tower’s display of might the traveler recognized the same quality of flamboyance that
burned upon his own forehead like a flame, or a mark of the Devil; but the maker of
the tower had transformed into strength that quality which, in the traveler, was often
seen as a weakness. Is power the only justification for an extrovert personality? the
traveler asked himself, and could not answer, but found himself hoping that beauty
might be another such excuse, for he was certainly beautiful, and knew that his looks
had a power of their own.

Beyond the tower of the teeth stood a great well and above it a mass of
incomprehensibly complex waterworks machinery that served the many-cupolaed
palace on the hill. Without water we are nothing, the traveler thought. Even an
emperor, denied water, would swiftly turn to dust. Water is the real monarch and we
are all its slaves. Once at home in Florence he had met a man who could make
water disappears. The conjuror filled a jug to the brim, muttered magic words, turned
the jug over and, instead of liquid, fabric spilled forth, a torrent of colored silken
scarves. It was a trick, of course, and before that day was done he, the traveler, had
coaxed the fellow’s secret out of him, and had hidden it among his own mysteries. He was a man of many secrets, but only one was fit for a king.

The road to the city wall rose quickly up the hillside and as he rose with it he saw the size of the place at which he had arrived. Plainly it was one of the grand cities of the world, larger, it seemed to his eye, than Florence or Venice or Rome, larger than any town the traveler had ever seen. He had visited London once; it too was a lesser metropolis than this. As the light failed the city seemed to grow. Dense neighborhoods huddled outside the walls, muezzins called from their minarets, and in the distance he could see the lights of large estates. Fires began to burn in the twilight, like warnings. From the black bowl of the sky came the answering fires of the stars. As if the earth and the heavens were armies preparing for battle, he thought. As if their encampments lie quiet at night and await the war of the day to come. And in all these warrens of streets and in all those houses of the mighty, beyond, on the plains, there was not one man who had heard his name, not one who would readily believe the tale he had to tell. Yet he had to tell it. He had crossed the world to do so, and he would.

He walked with long strides and attracted many curious glances, on account of his yellow hair as well as his height, his long and admittedly dirty yellow hair flowing down around his face like the golden water of the lake. The path sloped upward past the tower of the teeth toward a stone gate upon which two elephants in bas-relief stood facing each other. Through this gate, which was open, came the noises of human beings at play, eating, drinking, carousing. There were soldiers on
duty at the Hatyapul gate but their stances were relaxed. The real barriers lay ahead. This was a public place, a place for meetings, purchases, and pleasure. Men hurried past the traveler, driven by hungers and thirsts. On both sides of the flagstoned road between the outer gate and the inner were hostelries, saloons, food stalls, and hawkers of all kinds. Here was the eternal business of buying and being bought. Cloths, utensils, baubles, weapons, rum the main market lay beyond the city's lesser, southern gate.

*Luka and the Fire of Life (2010)* Rushdie unleashes his imagination on an alternate world informed by the surreal logic of video games, but the author's entertaining wordplay and lighter-than-air fantasies don't amount to more than a clever pastiche. A sequel of sorts to *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, this outing finds Haroun's younger brother, Luka, on a mission to save his father, guided, ironically, by Nobodaddy, a holograph-like copy of his father intent on claiming the old man's life. Along the way, they're joined by a collection of creatures, including a dog named Bear, a bear named Dog, hybrid bird-elephant beasts, and a princess with a flying carpet. As with video games, Luka stores up extra lives, proceeds to the next level after beating big baddies, and uses his wits to overcome bottomless chasms and trash-dropping otters. Rushdie makes good use of nobody, and his world occasionally brims with allegory the colony of rats called the respect orate of I brings the Tea Party to mind), but this is essentially a fun tale for younger readers, not the novel Rushdie's adult fans have been waiting for. (54) There was once, in the city of Kahani, in the land of Alifbay, a boy named Luka who had two pets, a bear named
Dog and a dog named Bear, which meant that whenever he called out, ‘Dog’ the bear waddled up amiably on his hind legs, and when he shouted, ‘Bear!’ the dog bounded toward him, wagging his tail. Dog, the brown bear, could be a little gruff and bearish at times, but he was an expert dancer, able to get up onto his hind legs and perform with subtlety and grace the waltz, the polka, the rhumba, the wah-watusi, and the twist, as well as dances from nearer home, the pounding bhangra, the twirling ghoomar (for which he wore a wide mirror-worked skirt), the warrior dances known as the spaw and the thang-ta, and the peacock dance of the south. Bear, the dog, was a chocolate Labrador, and a gentle, friendly dog, though sometimes a bit excitable and nervous; he absolutely could not dance, having, as the saying goes, four left feet, but to make up for his clumsiness he possessed the gift of perfect pitch, so he could sing up a storm, howling out the melodies of the most popular songs of the day, and never going out of tune. Bear, the dog, and Dog, the bear, quickly became much more than Luka’s pets. They turned into his closest allies and most loyal protectors, so fierce in his defense that nobody would ever have dreamed of bullying him when they were nearby, not even his appalling classmate Ratshit, whose behavior was usually out of control.

This is how Luka came to have such unusual companions. One fine day when he was twelve years old, the circus came to town—and not just any circus, but the GROF, or Great Rings of Fire, itself; the most celebrated circus in all of Alifbay, "featuring the Famous Incredible Fire Illusion."(52) So Luka was at first bitterly disappointed when his father, the storyteller Rashid Khalifa, told him they would not
be going to the show. "Unkind to animals," Rashid explained. "Once it may have had its glory days but these days the GROF has fallen far from Grace." The Lioness had tooth decay, Rashid told Luka, and the Tigress was blind and the Elephants were hungry and the rest of the circus menagerie was just plain miserable. The Ringmaster of the Great Rings of Fire was the terrifying and enormous Captain Aag, a.k.a. Grandmaster Flame. The animals were so scared of the crack of his whip that the Lioness with toothache and the blind Tigress continued to jump through hoops and play dead and the skinny Elephants still made Pachyderm Pyramids for fear of angering him, for Aag was a man who was quick to anger and slow to laugh. And even when he put his cigar-smoking head into the Lioness's yawning mouth, she was too scared to bite it off just in case it decided to kill her from inside her belly.

Rashid was walking Luka home from school, wearing, as usual, one of his brightly colored bush shirts (this one was vermilion) and his beloved, battered Panama hat, and listening to the story of Luka's day. Luka had forgotten the name of the tip of South America and had labeled it Hawaii in a geography test. However, he had remembered the name of his country's first president and spelled it correctly in a history test. He had been smacked on the side of the head by Ratshit's hockey stick during games. On the other hand, he had scored two goals in the match and defeated his enemy's team. He had also finally got the hang of snapping his fingers properly, so that they made a satisfying cracking noise.
So there were pluses and minuses. Not a bad day overall; but it was about to become a very important day indeed, because this was the day they saw the circus parade going by on its way to raise its Big Top near the banks of the mighty Silsila. The Silsila was the wide, lazy, ugly river with mud-colored water that flowed through the city not far from their home. The sight of the droopy cockatoos in their cages and the sad dromedaries’ humphing along the street touched Luka's generous young heart. But saddest of all, he thought, was the cage in which a mournful dog and a doleful bear stared wretchedly all about. Bringing up the rear of the cavalcade was Captain Aag with his pirate’s hard black eyes and his barbarian’s untamed beard. All of a sudden Luka became angry (and he was a boy who was slow to anger and quick to laugh). When Grandmaster Flame was right in front of him Luka shouted out at the top of his voice, ‘May your animals stop obeying your commands and your rings of fire eat up your stupid tent.’ (62)

Now it so happened that the moment when Luka shouted out in anger was one of those rare instants when by some inexplicable accident all the noises of the universe fall silent at the same time, the cars stop honking, the scooters stop phu-tphuttering, the birds stop squawking in the trees, and everyone stops talking at once, and in that magical hush Luka's voice rang out as clearly as a gunshot, and his words expanded until they filled the sky, and perhaps even found their way to the invisible home of the Fates, who, according to some people, rule the world. Captain Aag winced as if somebody had slapped him on the face, and then he stared straight into Luka's eyes, giving him a look of such blazing hatred that the young boy was
almost knocked off his feet. Then the world started making its usual racket again, and the circus parade moved on, and Luka and Rashid went home for dinner. But Luka's words were still out there in the air, doing their secret business. That night it was reported on the TV news that, in an astonishing development, the animals of the GROF circus had unanimously refused to perform.

In a crowded tent, and to the amazement of costumed clowns and plainclothes customers alike, they rebelled against their master in an unprecedented act of defiance. Grandmaster Flame stood in the center ring of the three Great Rings of Fire, bellowing orders and cracking his whip, but when he saw all the animals beginning to walk calmly and slowly toward him, in step, as if they were an army, closing in on him from all directions until they formed an animal circle of rage, his nerve cracked and he fell to his knees, weeping and whimpering and begging for his life. The audience began to boo and throw fruit and cushions, and then harder objects, stones, for example, and walnuts, and telephone directories turned and fled. The animals parted ranks and let him through, and he ran away crying like a baby.

That was the first amazing thing. The second took place later that night. A noise started up around midnight, a noise like the rustling and crackling of a billion autumn leaves, or maybe even a billion, a noise that spread all the way from the Big Top by the banks of the Silsila to Luka's bedroom, and woke him up. When he looked out his bedroom window he saw that the great tent was on fire, burning brightly in the field by the river's edge. The Great Rings of Fire were ablaze; and it was not an illusion.
Luka's curse had worked and the third amazing thing happened the next morning. A dog with a tag on its collar reading Bear and a bear with a tag on its collar reading Dog showed up at Luka's door—afterward Luka would wonder exactly how they had found their way there—and Dog, the bear, began to twirl and jig enthusiastically while Bear, the dog, yowled out a foot-tapping melody. Luka and his father, Rashid Khalifa, and his mother, Soraya, and his older brother, Haroun, gathered at the door of their house to watch, while from her verandah their neighbor Miss Oneeta shouted, ‘Have a care! When animals begin to sing and dance, then plainly some witchy business is afoot!’ But Soraya Khalifa laughed.

"The animals are celebrating their freedom, she said. ‘Then Rashid adopted a grave expression, and told his wife about Luka's curse. ‘It seems to me,’ he opined, "that if any witchy business has been done it is our young Luka who has done it, and these good creatures have come to thank him." (70)

The other circus animals had escaped into the Wild and were never seen again, but the dog and the bear had plainly come to stay. They had even brought their own snacks. The bear was carrying a bucket of fish, and the dog wore a little coat with a pocket full of bones.

"Why not, after all?" cried Rashid Khalifa gaily. "My storytelling performances could do with a little help. Nothing like a dog-and-bear song-and-dance act to get an audience's attention." So it was settled, and later that day it was Luka's brother, Haroun, who had the last word. "I knew it would happen soon," he said. "You've reached the age
at which people in this family cross the border into the magical world. It’s your turn for an adventure—yes, it’s finally here!—and it certainly looks like you’ve started something now. But be careful. Cursing is a dangerous power. I was never able to do anything so, well and dark.”(72-73)

By contrast, Luka’s biggest adventures to date had taken place during the Great Playground Wars at school, in which he had led his gang, the Intergalactic Penguins Team, to a famous victory over the Imperial Highness Army led by his hated rival Adi Ratshit. Red Bottom, winning the day with a daring aerial attack involving paper planes loaded with itching powder. It had been extremely satisfying to watch Ratshit jump into the playground pond to calm down the itch that had spread all over his body; but Luka knew that, compared to Haroun’s achievements, his really didn’t amount to very much at all. Haroun, for his part, knew about Luka’s desire for a real adventure, preferably one involving improbable creatures and travel to other planets.
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