CHAPTER II

GRIMUS: REHEARSING VOICES
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To i-Grimus ideas, discoveries, learning, these were all-important. I-Eagle saw centuries of wretched wandering that preceded my arrival, saw the people of K reduced to a blind philosophy of pure survival, clutching obsessively at the shreds of their individuality, knowing within themselves that they were powerless to alter the circumstances in which they lived.

(Grimus 251)

Rushdie’s first published novel *Grimus* is a powerful fantasy of vaulting imagination that shows clearly what Rushdie is up to in his later works; it is not about a hypothetical future, but, in fact, about the world, about here and now. The inventive wit of the narrative dramatizes the spiritual crisis of the narrator as well as the novelist’s—the crisis of any decolonized modern mind, looking for ‘roots’, language, form, and ideas through which the disjointed experiences of formerly colonized and disadvantaged people might find full expression. The novel functions ambitiously at multiple layers to focus on the author’s aesthetic imagination, seeking ways of constructing identity even by producing fantasies of a lurid past and, asking what sort of signifying purposes determines these connectivities.

-48-
The novel reads like a convoluted fable about human condition in exile, more particularly, about the migrant's need for a myth. Denied of his roots, his original language and the social norms that he grew up with, the migrant has to reconstruct his identity with all its apparent contradictions and confluences. In the novel Rushdie expresses his art of mythical transposition by making his exiled hero an Amerindian. The political content of this reference is submerged in a way it would not be in his later fiction. Born in the environs of 'Phoenix', Flapping Eagle represents a reincarnation of the nonconformist in an intolerant land—the Amerindians as much as the Indians are bound together in Rushdie's mind negatively. Thus, while the migrant-protagonist Flapping Eagle makes desperate efforts in the novel to find out a new 'home' where the mind would be fuller, richer and much more satisfying, the novelist, who has a pathological distaste for the monologic, the rigid, the essential and the authoritarian, seeks to celebrate uncertainty, pluralism and diversity.

The centre of the narrative strategy lies in the growing consciousness of the narrator-protagonist who, like his creator, migrates over history and culture, seeking to connect through his differently acquired identities. Mixing memory and desire, reality and vision, he longs for links, bridges or something that allows one to share the plural and partial nature of his identity that straddles not in just one but in many cultures. There comes a sort of a realization in the novel, which appears not very much different from the final words of Moraes Zogoiby in *The Moor's Last Sigh*—"our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self"; thus the authorial incursions in *Grimus*:

There are a million possible earths with million possible histories all of which actually exist simultaneously. In
Rushdie's narrative world is intrinsically based on the quest-motif of his protagonists whose consciousness becomes the principal focal point through which the reader can get some understanding of the novelist's ideological mapping. However, the quest-motif of the protagonist is relentlessly related to the past of his life. The problematic relation of Flapping Eagle with his community at in Amerindia as well as with the inhabitants of Calf Island symbolizes a journey from acculturation to self-actualization. Like a true migrant he understands the in-betweenness of his identity, and learns to make peace with both the worlds simultaneously. Few works in Indian English novel, since G. V. Desani's *All about H. Hatterr*, have codified the feeling of being neither here nor there as this artful memory novel has been out to tell about the migrant's predicament, his double unbelongingness. The central consciousness of the narrator, arising from the existential problematic of a rootless life, for instance, has been amply substantiated by the authorial intrusion in the novel:

> It is the natural condition of exile — putting down roots in memories. Flapping Eagle knew he would have to learn these pasts, make them his own, so that the community could make him theirs. He entered K in search of history. (107)

Like most fable, this epic fantasy is cast in the form of an odyssey for the protagonist to seek an ultimate reality among the mundane and temporal, taking also as its main subject the nature of history and reality. A profound historical
sense, simultaneously conceiving events and comprehending their essential human significance, has provided the mainstay of the author to build up his worldview. For, he feels that while individual story does not make sense unless seen against the background of a racial or national history, neither does national history make sense unless seen in the form of individual story. However, as the postmodernist concern of the novel that humankind is unable to experience reality in totality, that meaning is endlessly deferred and differed, the worldview appears to be moving in the direction of a permanent quest for meaning in life, which has been projected in one of its four epitaphs: “The sands of Time are steeped in new Beginnings.”

Rushdie puts the onus of the quest on Flapping Eagle, a migrant who becomes weary of immortality conferred on him some seven hundred years ago and sets out on a venture to analyze and appreciate the plural and partial nature of his true identity. He spins very successfully a mischievous candour around the reconstructed story of his renegade Red Indian protagonist, which seems scrupulous and susceptible to historical facts. The narrator-hero seems to be probing slowly but painfully through distasteful memories of his own whoring past, trying to unwind solutions to his various conundrums. Having his roots in the sociohistorical process of colonization and decolonization, Flapping Eagle goes on to tell about his ‘cosmopolitan experience’ and the way it has established connectivity among the wider experiences of the world.

By foregrounding the politico-cultural and historical issues that intimately connect his identity with the entire subcontinental psyche of Amerindia, the narrator seems to be striving for the ultimate realization of his fictional values. The novel dramatizes the protagonist’s quest-motif at two levels: at a personal or domestic level he narrates the history of his tribe to identify his own ‘rootedness’ in its socio-cultural matrix and, his own
story of the traumas of transmigration during the search for his missing sister Bird Dog; at a higher symbolic level his ultimate search for, and encounter with, Grimus suggests a spiritual duel within the 'self'. As the novel progresses it becomes increasingly clear that it is not a duel with his alter ego but the self with whom he has to battle incessantly in order to realize the infinite human potential for growth and maturity, transgressing the limitations of death. Eagle's quest is directed towards seeking an explanation and method for the ultimate meaning of his hyphenated identity; his ultimate knowledge comes through his guide Virgil Jones:

We create our own universe; each man his own universe...The only thing that stays constant in the shifts between the dimensions is one's own consciousness. Cultivate your consciousness, Mr Eagle, that's the way out. (72)

However, man is very much scared of his own mind; he often fails to muster his variously generated knowledge to give shape a well-balanced consciousness. This satirical implication has been symbolically suggested in another epitaph of the novel: "Go, go, go, said the bird; human kind / Cannot bear very much reality." Taking cue from the Four Quartets, Rushdie here fits in a fable about the angel and God: in the myth God wants to be replaced by the angel and the angel, in turn, awaits his own deliverer. In the novel Grimus plays the part of a creator with his Stone Rose, and Flapping Eagle feels the complex effect of derealizing a routine commonsense world together with the evoking of realities that lie hidden among the unrealities. That reality is sought, notwithstanding how much evasive it might be, because it is to confront the spirit with the necessity of supreme decision of the ultimate choice and to give some kind of meaning to life.

—52—
Allegory and satire provide a crucial context in *Grimus*; alchemical pattern provide another. Whereas the allegorical and satirical elements reveal a local, political dimension in the text, the alchemical context, however, reveals an overarching, universal dimension. Using the alchemical pattern of death and rebirth in its own peculiar fashion, Rushdie has very artfully presented an elaborate statement on the equivocations and contradictions of the cross-cultural life—hopefulness turning into obscurity and darkness but is followed by new expectations. One can understand the emigrant Rushdie attributing his eagerness to foreground his Occidental cultural rooting in the novel through its central myth 'Simrug'—a huge bird having defied death and possessing all the knowledges of the ages. It is not just a cryptic metaphor for the sorrows of transmigration—destruction of the old identity and simultaneously reconstruction of identity—but an aesthetic imagination on the part of the artist to make the novel a volatile playground where Eastern and Western literary sources can mix together uneasily, and sometimes inexplicably.

These explicit motifs, concerning death and rebirth, gravity and lightness, purity and hybridity, however, are not always of a thematic or configurative kind. They are scattered about the fictional level of the novel, can easily escape attention, but can speak volumes on Rushdie's own imaginative thought on migration and transculturation. The following passage, for instance, describes Rushdie's own experience as a young Indian author among the English:

He was the shifting sands and the ebbing tide. He was moody as the sky, circular as the seasons, nameless as glass. He was Chameleon, changeling, all things to all men and nothing to any man. He was all of them and none of them. (31)
As the kind of a cloven writer produced by migration, Rushdie tries to combine the East and the West in *Grimus* by taking a theme out of eastern philosophy or mythology and transposing it in to a western convention. The western convention is modelled upon the spirit and style of the quest motif of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, while the eastern background is provided by the twelfth-century Sufi narrative poem *The Conference of Birds* of Farid-ud-din ‘Attar. The artful novel, moreover, spills over other areas like allegory, political satire, absurd drama, and cowboy film not simply to reassert its plural parentage but its plural and partial meaning too. This amply defends Rushdie against his critics who charge that he has appropriated Western narrative forms at the cost of age-old Eastern tradition. The concealed world of alchemical signs in his work, however, points to a far older tradition that has brought together cultures from East and West and that moreover works against the experience of disruption.

The fantasy epic opens in *medias res* on Calf Island in the Mediterranean Sea, which “draws its own kind to itself” (16); Flapping Eagle floats up to Virgil Jones, an intellectual devoid of friends but very much like Rushdie has “a tongue rather too large for his mouth” (13). Virgil represents the scientific spirit in all its vitality and necessity and finds that with sufficient imagination one could “create” and “recreate” worlds (75). His quest for the progress of human mind lies in appreciating and harmonizing all aspects and attributes, which he calls “Inner Dimensions”, into a settled system of feelings and attitudes. One is not expected to miss the symbolic overtures here: one, the position of the main setting of the novel is Calf Island that spans over the Mediterranean which straddles the East and the West, linking and yet separating both the worlds; two, Jones carries two names—Virgil, recalling the immortal Roman poet and Chanakya, the ancient sage-politician from India—to assert the plural perception and personality of an awakened soul who later guides Flapping Eagle in his spiritual
quest for meaning in life; and three, the setting has oblique reference to Rushdie himself who has been produced by migration, inhabiting and addressing issues of both the worlds—the East and the West—belonging particularly to neither.

The narrative soon turns back to an explanatory or rather retrospective when Flapping Eagle tells the history of his community of Axona, revealing intellectual positions rather than giving a taste for what-happen-next. He relates the mythical past of his tribe to the contemporary alien world of his own, conceiving events and simultaneously comprehending their essential human significance. With an opening allusion to the mythical Simrug, he says that he had been originally named as Joe-Sue or Born—From—Dead at birth and, had remained for quite sometime under the care of his big, competent, manly sister Bird Dog. But they were both shunned by their community for violating its laws forbidding contact with the outside world: "The god Axona had only two laws: he liked the Axona to chant to him as often as possible... and he instructed the Axona to be a race apart and have no doings with the wicked world" (16). The religion of Axona not only mirrors the strict rituals and hypocrisy found in different religions but also reveals Rushdie's satiric views on the constricting effects of a univalent culture. Bird Dog's open rebel against the racial prejudices and the confines and age-old conventions of her tribe, in this context, bears a metaphoric implication as she learns the language of, and develops a distinct affinity for, the outside world. Hers is a minority aspiration for emancipation and empowerment, an assertion of identity and free choice, which are anathema to the Axona majority. That a community of bigots repudiates those who are open to foreign influences is actually a recurring motif in Rushdie's novels; however, Eagle and his sister's ultimate ostracize comes though a prejudice deep-rooted in the communal consciousness of the Axonas. For, Flapping Eagle happens to be a "hermaphrodite with confused sex", and a "fair-skinned and tallish" figure—as Rushdie elsewhere describes himself—among the "dark-skinned
and shortish" race of Axonas (18). The protagonist's growing consciousness of being "an exile in an isolated community" (18) seems not only of particular significance in reference to the caste-ridden half-made societies of the Third World but speaks volumes about the prejudices against the coloured people around the world:

As I grew, the disapproval became more and more overt. Conversation would stop at the water well when I approached. Shoulders grew cold when Bird Dog passed. Noses tilted in to the air, the Axona ostracize as far as they could. They could not expel us; we had committed no crime. But they didn't have to like us, so they didn't 't. (17)

Scorned by the tribes people for his 'shameful' origin, the narrator develops unconsciously a defensive 'shamelessness' that provides him with necessary boldness later on to cross from one ocean to the other. Being minority within a minority community, he and his sister provide psychological support to each other for a stable relationship that could eventually plug the void of the inner chamber created by the systematic social ostracism. However, when that inside- the- belly security is gone, for Bird Dog elopes with Sispy the peddler, he decides to give himself "the advantage of living in the outside" (19), a possible opportunity to reconstruct his badly damaged identity. Thus, Flapping Eagle's flight from Amerindia, his migration from his communal history, may be seen at one level as man's search for 'order' amidst 'chaos' in life. He has "distasteful memories of his own whoring past" (153), and finally flees home not simply out of principle but because he is forced to. At another level, his flight may be linked to his creator's "chameleon adaptability, the symbiotic expertise" (153) that helped him migrate from India to Britain in search of a new identity. The
weaving of the imaginative bridge between the authorial self and the protagonist's self helps quite handsomely to build the narrative backdrop of the novel, which continuously hints at Rushdie's technique of examining the related themes of 'honour' and 'shame', 'shame' and 'shamelessness' as socio-cultural constructs that reappear more meticulously in his later novels.

As the novel progresses one tends to feel that Rushdie weaves together these seemingly unconnected realities into a coherent whole. The narrator performs an integral role in this construction and gives the reader a sense of clarity and continuity by revealing the author's reasons for the endless myriad of images within the novel, without such a friend the reader would be hopelessly lost. The protagonist's flight is an ultimate representation of an imagining spirit; it is not an escapist's flight from reality, not a 'shameful' act at all, but the power of dream worlds to oppose dark reality. For, the world of imagination is a place into which the long arm of the law is unable to reach. The protagonist's quest-motif as such is basically an imaginative act of reconstructing better maps of reality:

Stripped of his past, forsaking the language of his ancestors for the language of the archipelagos of the world, forsaking the ways of his ancestors for those of the places he drifted to, forsaking any hope of ideals in the face of the changing and contradicting ideals he encountered... he lived and did it so skillfully, with such natural aptitude, that the men he encountered thought he was thus of his own free will and liked him for it. (32)
One gets here a glimpse of Rushdie's idea on migrancy supplemented by the postmodernist concept of 'uprooting' as a defensive mechanism. The terror of an inner fragmentation as a result of socio-cultural disconnection was much in vogue till the days of high modernism. But for Rushdie and other postmodernists migrancy is only an ontological condition of all humankind. The myth of 'ontological unbecomingness'—felt experience of the modern nomads like Rushdie— is no longer a source of terror to them. On the contrary, the experience of loss of a 'home' and a 'history' has given rise to an enabling prospect of drawing multiple roots from various sources. The myth of 'ontological unbelongingness', in turn, has been replaced by another larger myth of 'excess of belongingness': not that the migrant belongs nowhere, but that he belongs to too many places at the same time. This is the position Rushdie tries to maintain more emphatically in his later novels, especially in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. One can fruitfully understand Rushdie's quest for identity by examining the theme of 'double identity', 'divided selves' and the 'shadow figures' in his novels and in his personality, and the benefits that his protagonists reap from being migrants.

From this point of view, Flapping Eagle's flight to the adjoining town Phoenix—so named because "it has risen from the ashes of a great fire which had completely destroyed the earlier and larger city also called Phoenix" (24)—appears metaphoric, for the migrant writer not only mixes fantasy and naturalism but also employs all of the radically disjunctive techniques of modernism and postmodernism to create fictional worlds that are nonetheless linked in a thousand ways to the world as we experience it. By examining the life of the migrant, Rushdie explores the universal mystery of being born and the puzzle of who one is. He not only manages to turn the Phoenix myth to speak about loss and regain of a history, but also presents the death and rebirth theme with all seriousness in the trajectory of Eagle's search for, and his ultimate encounter
with, Grimus who is not quite his alter-ego but his own self with whom he has to grapple in order to realize the infinite possibility and power of resurrection and reconstruction. Rushdie’s borrowing the Simrug myth from the Sufi narrative poem *The Conference of Birds* also fabulously contributes to build up the life, death, and rebirth theme; he admits his indebtedness in the novel:

"It is not his real name, Grimus. He changed it from something unpronounceable when he arrived in this country some thirty years ago. True to himself, his adopted name is derived anagrammatically from a mythical bird Simrug. The Simrug is the Great Bird. It is vast, all-powerful and singular. It is the sum off all other birds. There is a Sufi poem in which thirty birds set out to find the Simrug on the mountain where he lives. When they reach the peak, they find that they themselves are, or rather have become, the Simrug. The name, you see, means Thirty Birds. Si, thirty. Murg, birds. Fascinating. Fascinating. The myth of the Mountain of Kaf. (209)"

In fact, Rushdie’s alchemical motifs, allusions, symbolism and even names and numbers, create deep structures below the mimetic multiplicity of the novel and helps understand its intentionality. His protagonist finds himself “an adaptable sort of man, more a chameleon than an eagle" (25). His “fair skin with a hint of dark" (25), non-too-tall figure, as in the case of Rushdie himself, enables him to be "moody as the sky, circular as the seasons, nameless as glass" (31). All these never appear to hinting at ‘shame’ disapprovingly any way, but as an advantage, a possible source of ‘honour’— the search for multiple
rooting among various cultures at various places. He recounts this trait enthusiastically:

Several times he changed the name he gave to people.
His face was such, his skin was such, that in many places he could pass for locals; and pass he did, using what had once been his curse to his advantage. (32)

In twenty-five years as he remains a personal gigolo of Livia Cramm in Phoenix, Flapping Eagle becomes consciousness-stricken that he has so long been "a nod of agreement, a bow of acquiescence" to countries and customs—"a grin without a face" (33). It is suggested that life is rendered meaningless by old age and death. His "gift of immortality" has ironically reduced the possibility of maturity, of dying and renewing his self. Hence he develops distaste for, and deliverance from, his burdensome "dizzy, peripheral existence" (36)—a theme more professedly pronounced in novels like *Shame* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Therefore, after Livia's suicide he takes her yacht and sets out in an unknown voyage, pushing off from the edges of consciousness into the mystery of pure fantasy. As he sails through the Mediterranean, the sea suddenly turns violent he falls through a hole, like Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*, into another sea that is "not-quite Mediterranean" (37); after several centuries of wandering he is at last carried towards his would-be guide Virgil Jones in a mysterious land called Calf Island.

The town of K was, in fact, created by Grimus; he had taken possession over the Stone Rose and used it to create or half create Calf Island. The town has remained immutably same, monotonously oblivious, and sadistically sorrowful all along; "There the past sat locked, unchanged, unchangeable" (51). Besides, Grimus had not only chosen its inhabitants but also made them
immortal, servile and sterile; they are all “reprobates and degraded types”, mysterious people imposed with immortality “who had found their longevity too burdensome in the outside world, yet have been unwilling to give it up” (43). The inhabitants are all obsessed with material satisfaction, or as Virgil Jones comments on them —“They practised their eyes-to-the-ground life for so long, it became second nature”— they fail to look up and flap their wings for self-explorations or spiritual upliftment. That Flapping Eagle’s discovery is just that kind of an allegorical knowledge is borne out by the discovery that a starstruck young emigrant from India, coming to the English metropolis, would naturally make after experiencing its decay.

Flapping Eagle finds the petrified condition in K rather claustrophobic, primarily because the concept of free will is a delusion there and, violation of ‘love’ remains another cause for its spiritual disorder; it remains “a gigantic blind alley” (85). There is, in fact, little scope for diversity or plurality that Eagle or Rushdie value so much. However, the condition of K suits handsomely to the fascist intension of Grimus who plays the part of the Creator with the Stone Rose whose knowledge has removed him from “the pains and torments of the world” and whose “effect has stunned and deformed the lives of the people of K” (236). For, a power-crazy fascist needs an internally consistent, unambiguous ethical system that would not only allow him to organize the lives of others exactly as he wishes but would permit him to preserve his authority permanently not only to dehumanize but to “reduce all other lives to the same level of unreality as his own” (237). The image of Grimus as the authoritarian personality is the reason why Flapping Eagle or his creator disapproves of his bid to immortalize himself through Eagle’s transformation. Moreover, the insistent recurrence of the fascists—Grimus, Shiva, the witch, Fielding/ Mainduck and others—in his novels points to Rushdie’s increasing concern for the havoc they can play by posing a counterpoint not only to the translated men and women with infinitely
varied shades but also to the syncretic and hybrid culture of a multi-ethnic nation.

Jams Harrison in his book on Rushdie argues that the social structure as operating in K seems to be communism in its ideal stage, where one serves another for no return other than being able to benefit from everyone else's labours; awards and incentives have no place; service is freely received; whores are never paid good remuneration for the hedonistic pleasure they provide. But K is in fact radically different from the Marxist ideal; the State has not withered and all men are not equal, rather a hierarchy is quite discernible every now and then. Count Aleksandr Cherkassov, the chief of the town, is very much a figurehead, yet makes his presence felt as in authority. Ignatius Gribb is respected as the town intellectual. Moonshy himself is the quartermaster and in charge of the stores, yet he feels that the State is not ideal, hence, turns an agitator. Moreover, the impression produced by the society of K is not that of a positive ideal, not at all progressive Marxist or otherwise, but regressive and negative. The inhabitants act out their roles mechanically and this is unending. Rushdie's disapproval of the mechanical obsessionalism of K comes at several occasions, for one instance, his parodying two-time Peckenpaw is quite significant: "Obsessionalism, single-mindedness, the process of turning human beings into the petrified, Simplified Men of K, was a defence against the Grimus effect" (149).

Grimus's origins are, moreover, important to understand his dilemma and his problematic relation with his surrogated people of K, his genesis is described thus:

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

As an “uprooted Middle European, a refugee and a damaged intellectual” (208), Grimus seems to be in need of a cultural system that would give him an internally consistent, unambiguous ethical order to shield him from any form of separation or that would give him the satisfaction of continuity with his essential identity. Hence he had conceptualized and “remade Calf Island and its dwellers” with the selective strokes of an artist as if they were “unmade clay” (233); and now, he wants to confer immortality on him by passing his selfhood to his double, Flapping Eagle. But as the concept of origin, homogeneity or authenticity has become an impossible construct vis-à-vis the hotchpotch culture of postmodern world, Grimus’s problem, it seems, lies in his rigid mental framework, valorizing a monologic and essentialist stand that not only fails him to recognize benefits of hybridity, plurality or diversity but also leaves him to feel like a failed intellectual or a frustrated artist who becomes a perverted power-crazy dictator. However, his scheme was stubbornly challenged not merely by the inhabitants of K, but also by the other two founders of Calf Island—Nicholas Deggle and, Virgil Jones who was exiled for attempting to break the Stone Rose, and now by Flapping Eagle who decides to reconstruct Calf Island without the Stone Rose.

His journey at the lower levels in K, guided by Virgil Jones, is symbolic of an interior journey into man’s earthly aspirations, his experience of satisfaction in controlling himself and others. In the town of K, it is demonstrated that eternity has not enabled man to transcend his frailties: the Two-Time Kid contrives to
indulge his unrewarding sensuality; the scholar, I. Q. Gribb cannot get beyond his mediocrity—his Universal Philosophy is simple cliché; Irina Cherkassov's son Alexei cannot, and never will, mature. The inhabitants protect themselves from Grimus and his Effect by denying his existence. The suggestion is that human beings shield themselves from the awareness of self and of God by immersing themselves totally in mechanical life, drink and sex.

One encounters many Biblical allusions in the novel to suggest that Grimus is the Christian God, competing with his 'Other'—Deggle. While Deggle is said to be a magician, and black magic is associated with the Devil, he has been "expelled" (216) from the town of K, which is only a parody of the Garden of Eden. Rushdie seems to be holding to his ideological position by parodying the authoritarian viewpoint of the Bible. For, Grimus argues that "free will really is an illusion" and "free will" has been an obsessive subject of theological dispute (239). It becomes increasingly apparent that Rushdie invests his narrative with a peculiar universality by his use of myth and allusion. Besides Attar and Dante, Norse myth is also used profusely. Deggle calls himself 'Lokki' who is none other than the God of Evil, mischief-maker, and source of disharmony. Livia Cramm, who attempts to strangle Eagle and dies herself, is identified by Deggle as "la Femme-Crampon! The clutching woman... the Viellarde herself" (29). Thor, the strongest of the Gods, wrestled with a skinny old hag but could not overcome her. She was Elli, Old Age itself. Moreover, it may be argued that the structure of the novel is modelled upon the medieval knightly quest for the Grail mystery. After Virgil Jones resuscitates Eagle, Eagle forces the reluctant Jones to answer questions regarding Bird-Dog, Grimus and Calf Island, and, finally, to accompany him as a guide in his ascent of Calf Mountain towards Grimus, as Virgil led Dante through Hell and Purgatory for a vision of God in Paradise.
**Grimus** prefigures with unusual clarity in Rushdie's major interests; he provides evidence of his eventual practice—an underlying attachment to Indian culture and multiple overlapping of various national myths. There are allusions to Hindu iconography. When a tremor shakes Calf Island, Dolores tells Virgil: "The Great Turtle moved" (50). According to Hindu mythology, the turtle is an avatar of the god Vishnu. Moreover, Calf Mountain is described in passing at one point as being "rather like a giant lingam weltering in the yoni that is Sea" (56). The 'lingam' and the 'yoni' are respectively phallic and vulva, representing the Hindu god Shiva and his heavenly consort Parvati. Rushdie's allusion to this iconography appears appropriate at this point given to Flapping Eagle's hermaphroditic past and the sterility of the immortals on Calf. Besides, there is also a submerged reference to Shiva, who is a fertility god as well as a destroyer; Jones explains that in Amerindian mythology the Eagle is the symbol of the Destroyer: "The Eagle has an interesting significance in Amerindian mythology... it is the symbol of the Destroyer?" (46). Thus either the Indian expatriate writer fertilizes the barren cultural landscape of England or threatens to destroy its former supremacy.

One also finds, like Mujeebuddin Syed, Islamic allusions abundantly present in the novel to enrich its narrative multiplicity: the Prophet's flight with Gabriel to Heaven and his meeting with God provides, an important subtext of the novel. The mythology and allusion are at the service of parody; the pun on Calf and the Quranic Qaf, in fact, suggests the final Day of Judgment when God shall ask Hell, "Are you full?" and Hell will answer, "Are there more?" Moreover, the word 'qaf' smacks of inferno, as one will get its prototype in the Pakistani town of Q later in *Shame*.

The journey to Qaf's summit is a mental one once again: "Analysts of the mythical mountain of Qaf have called it a model for the structure and workings..."
of the human mind" (292). On another level, the paradoxical inversion of these solipsistic wanderings, this "borrowing away, away from the world, into books and philosophies and mythologies, until these became realities" (307), is actually a chance to create a world — an opportunity that the author describes as 'conceptualism'. The consequence of Rushdie's exile, the bridge he forms between isolated Axonas and deserted Qaf's, his ability to reintroduce foreign myths out of context and substitute parts of them with their alien others — all these give him a decided advantage as a participant of multicultural mélange. Thus, the powers conferred by the stone rose at the point Flapping Eagle reaches his goal, allows him to "enter into, and become, a thousand thousand other people, live an infinity of lives, and acquire the wisdom and power to shape his own" (316).

But Eagle's journey to the higher levels of Calf Mountain without Virgil Jones appears another parodic portrayal of man's spiritual aspirations that remain ever unsatisfied. Whereas Dante's companion at the higher levels was the pure and beautiful Beatrice, that of Eagle's is a whore, Media. Beatrice leads Dante, but it is Eagle who leads Media. Through the parodic representation of themes and characters Rushdie tries to subvert the very idea of certainty that the novel seems to have been floating all throughout. At the beginning of the novel the name Simurg as well as the aim of Attar's narrative poem has been reversed — the birds fuse into Simurg while Grimus wants Eagle to fuse with him — which is part of Rushdie's technique of subverting meaning. At first hints are given that Grimus is God or, at least, a Demiurge or secondary creator who is out there for 'controlling' and 'ordering' Calf Island that stinks amidst chaos and disorder. But these hints are either trivialized or negated to cover everything under the shroud of mystery. At one point Virgil tells Eagle, "Grimus is in possession of a stupendous piece of knowledge" (189), at another he points out that Grimus "can't control its Effect" and he is "only a man" (192).
Moreover, the reader's first view of Grimus is deliberately unimpressive – he is “knitting” (228), and he does not proceed to acquire any kind of exceptional stature. In contrast, Flapping Eagle, who cuts a very sorry figure right from the beginning, is able to carry his ‘dreaming self’ to ultimately recreate Calf Island without the Stone Rose. The concluding scene and words of the novel are not insignificant: while the world of Grimus is slowly dissolving Eagle is seen mating with Media, a satiric confession no doubt, but symbolizing an ‘act of love’ that unmakes the rigid framework of Grimus, and also suggesting that when there is birth there is death and without death there can be no rebirth; reconstruction begins with destruction.

As Uma Parameswaran has rightly observed, Rushdie actually subverts feminism in the novel. At the beginning, Joe-Sue or Flapping Eagle and Bird-Dog crossed frontiers of gender. Dolores O’Toole, although “separated from her husband but not from her desires”, is tuned to sing dolefully “whitebeard is all my love and whitebeard is my desire” (15). Her rocking chair, while highlighting the repressed female side of the social context, also shows a repression of suffering self. Elfrida and Irina conform to the conventional dichotomy of the innocent and the whore. Elfrida wishes to be faithful to her husband, while Irina has been a whore since seventeen. When Eagle combines the two categories to utter the word Elfrina (172), he reduces both and worse follows: the innocent Elfrida ends up as a whore, a professional in the town brothel. Moreover, there are ironic suggestions that Grimus also attracts women like Liv and Bird Dog, but he remains indifferent to them. He remains celibate, sterile, and at best a misogynist. There are passages where readers get ample hint at that; for instance, Virgil speaks about his cuckold wife Liv:

I was obliged to watch the degrading spectacle of my wife pleading, begging Grimus to take her with him.
Misogynist that he is, he refused. I found myself feeling angry with him for this, this, insult to my wife.

Grimus takes Bird Dog up to the Mountain of K instead of Liv, for "He wants a servant, not a mistress. The doting Axona will be a good servant, I except. She thinks of him as a demi-god" (217). Liv's fury is obvious, she decides to avenge upon her 'shame': during the sex act she asserts her mastery over Eagle by getting off him just before he comes. But it later turns out that she is the tool, the mere instrument, of Grimus in acting so; Grimus, through his mouthpiece, the hypnotized Bird-Dog, thanks Liv for breaking down the last barrier to the much-awaited meeting between Grimus' and Eagle — his masculinity.

Catherine Cundy argues that Rushdie uses the male construction of the 'tart with a heart' while depicting the brothel (135), and accuses him of being a male chauvinist. However, it seems that the brothel of K is like those found in cowboy towns, brothels which the cowboys visit for relaxation and pleasure, hence a stereotype. The goddess Axona turns out to be another stereotype, an old witch. She is raped by Eagle, symbolizing the rejection of control and confinement and desecration of authority. The techniques of parody and subversion purport Rushdie's viewpoint toward a wholesale rejection of the conventional rigidity, restraints and taboos that he or his narrator finds too burdensome to carry. Rushdie also lays his hand in mixing up alternative methods of 'showing' and 'telling'—showing how the characters speak or act for themselves, and intrusively telling how they just do these things, which also stupefies and sickens the reader's imagination. The usual ground rules are subverted: the novel is narrated with a passion for narrating rather than for clarifying any meaning; the unities of time, place and character are made
unstable; the narrative fluctuates uncertainly between first and third person; ordinary notions of fictional realism are subverted with much parodic implication.

In fact, Rushdie’s use of parody, one understands, need not necessarily be depthless or trivial. It can lead to a vision of inter-connectedness casting its own light on the socio-political context, and more importantly, on his worldview. He uses this technique to present his point of view is by concocting bizarre symbols and employing functional wordplay to richly supplement the suggestiveness of his images and allusions. While one is amused to find the suggested anagrams or reordering of the words ‘frog’, ‘earth’, ‘sun’ and ‘milk way’, one looks in askance to grasp Rushdie’s idea of infinity. He takes the cue from Heinlein’s *By His Boot Straps* that explores the imagery of ‘parallel dimensions’ as a million possible earths with a million possible histories, all of which do not destroy the existence of pasts or futures. But Calf Island is a perfect anathema to the suggested multiplicity and diversity of Heinlein’s book; it is utopia’s dark opposite ‘dystopia’, a closed cage where free will is just next to impossible. The preservation and perpetuation of Calf Island, where eternity, halting of time, and mortality have merely created a hell of unending patterns of symmetrical thought and behaviour is, in fact, a denial of the very basis of human progress— freedom and imagination. This provides a perfect prelude to the decisive moment for Flapping Eagle to destroy the island and construct it anew.

The satiric mode of the novel suggests parallelism to the Menippean satire that internally readjusts inserted genres like the fantastic and the adventurous to project what Bakhtin proposes— “a purely ideational and philosophical end”, through parody and objectification. In *Grimus* science fiction has been the most prominent of the genres, but not in its usual guise. A science fiction normally makes one and only one assumption about its narrative world
that violates our knowledge about our own world and then extrapolates the whole narrative world from that difference. But *Grimus* is different as it makes ideational and philosophical statements by intimately connecting truth with the simplest, most sensual, earthy reality as well as the highest levels of thought. The heterogeneous genres in the novel include Absurd Drama— used for rendering the seemingly romantic life of Virgil and Dolores, crude slum naturalism to describe the bar and brothel scenes, and the cowboy film, all the parts fitting in neatly but seemingly without a continuous narrative flow. The presence of inserted genres not only reinforces the multi-styled and multi-toned nature of the Menippea, but also corroborates Walter Allen's observation that like most of the contemporary novels, *Grimus* reflects not just the external features of the age but its inner face and the promptings and conflicts which sway it.

But it is no coincidence that Rushdie, who was searching for a literary technique in which he could tell about the peripheral nature of his migrant protagonists as well as his own hyphenated identity, found 'magic-realism', which combines the much sought after polyphones with elements of the surreal to describe calamitous events that exceed the grasp of normal description. In fact, Rushdie introduces hallucinatory devices of magic-realism in order to capture, metaphorically, the sweep and chaos of contemporary reality and its resemblance to a dream or nightmare. The protagonist's bizarre adventures, the novel's numerous dream sequences, the convolutions of its plot, the melodramatic effusions— all are meant, in some heightened way, to give the reader a sense of just how fantastic recent history has become. Only in his later novels Rushdie paints more convincingly and more succinctly a complex picture of historical contemporaniety and ahistorical imagination. The transactions between the extraordinary and the mundane in the fiction are not merely a literary technique, but also a mirror of a reality in which the fantastic is frequently part of everyday life, a reality through which the migrant rediscovers
ways in which a ‘home’ and a ‘history’ or ‘wholeness’ is constructed. In other words, *Grimus* testifies Rushdie’s sincere, but sometimes inchoate, attempts to explore cross-culturalism; his I. Q. Gribb seems to be voicing in same way as the novelist would have loved to say about his true identity or racial memory thus:

I became engrossed in the notion of race memory; the sediments of highly concentrated knowledge that passes down the ages, constantly being added to and subtracted from….I have achieved the ultimate harmony: the combination of the most profound thoughts of the race, tested by time, and the cadences that give those thoughts coherence and, even more important, popularity. I am taking the intellectual back to the people. (136)
NOTES AND REFERENCES


