CHAPTER II

GRIMUS
Rushdie's first novel, *Grimus* runs like an epic fantasy of vaulting imagination. It opens with Virgil Jones, "a man devoid of friends and with a tongue rather too large for his mouth" sitting in his rocking chair on a small beach away from the Mediterranean sea. He leads a lonely life and considers himself a great historian. He sees a body flowing in on the incoming tide. He soon brings it ashore in a state of unconsciousness. He and Dolores O'Boole are surprised to see a new body entering the Island.

Flapping Eagle narrates his past. He was an Axona Indian and an orphan. His original name was Joe-Sue. He and his sister Bird-Dog were abandoned by the Axona Race for some peculiar reasons. His sister broke the law by entering the town for the first time. She met one Mr. Sispy, a peddler, who lured her by giving her two bottles - one filled with bright yellow liquid and the other with bright blue liquid. She drank the bright yellow liquid

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2Ibid., p. 12.
and broke the other bottle with blue liquid. She and her brother entered the town and saw many curious things there.

Joe-Sue saw an Eagle sitting on a rock at a shoulder height when he stretched both hands. The bird came peacefully in his grasp and later attacked him and even injured him on his chest. Joe-She fought with it bravely. Bird-Dog observed this incident at a distance and praised the bravery of her brother and called him Flapping Eagle.

In the past Flapping Eagle wandered 'the face of the earth' for over seven centuries. He fell from his yacht and was washed ashore on Calf Island. He learnt that there was a mountain called Calf mountain and the town bearing the name 'K'. The town was full of "reprobates and degraded types;"

Selfish, decadent people that no decent woman would want to be near.  

Flapping Eagle enquired of his sister Bird-Dog and Peddler Sispy. Soon Virgil Jones drew his attention

3Ibid., p. 43.
to the Grimus Effect which

"gets more powerful all the time
To tell the truth, it is just a question of
waiting until its power reaches down here."4

As such Jones felt that it was not advisable to climb the
Calf mountain. Soon he described the inner dimensions of
the Grimus Effect. According to him the Effect can work
upon the mind with devastating effects. The description of
Calf mountain naturally reminds one of the mountains in
Erewhon by Samuel Butler.

Flapping Eagle saw the inhabitants of K who became
immune to Grimus Effect. There was Ignatious Gribb who was
complaining, a compendium of aphorisms. He was introduced to
Elfrida, the pretty child wife of Professor Gribb. She was
more delicate than a porcelain vase.

Another encounter was with Irina Cherkassova whose
husband was a "weak, stultified, barren, empty headed
fool."5 She narrated a serious tale about the hatred of
the countess towards her.

4Ibid., p. 37
5Ibid., p. 145.
Flapping Eagle met Flanch' Tool whose pleasure was being whipped and whose wife was partial to Virgil Jones. Her song was:

"White beard is all my joy
And white beard is my desire, 6
She thus made her husband unhappy by making him very much 'observed' in the town K.

P.S. Moonshy, who distributed the rations in K was equally 'observed' with the revolutionary rhetoric of a communist society. Similarly Sam Pecken Paw was obsessed with the north American counterpart of the Bigfoot.

K in the novel, remains as a Town of obsessions. Every inhabitant there becomes a prey to it and keeps himself or herself shielded from the bizgre effects of the Grimus Whine. In this town awards and incentives have no place. Service is freely received. Whores are never given good remuneration for the supply of hedonistic pleasures.

Flapping Eagle in his search for Bird-Dog and Grimus reached K and was awe-struck at the conditions there. He

forgot his mission for a while. He was charmed by the beauty of a couple of Women and indulged in a 'guilty Love.'

The immutable sameness and dissociation with the Grimus principle were responsible for lurking agony in K. The violation of 'Love' was also a cause for the disorder there. So he incurred the wrath of the inhabitants.

Flapping Eagle wanted to escape from the vengeful inhabitants. Guided by V. Jones he went up to the Calf mountain. He met the mysterious Grimus surrounded by beings who were akin to mummified aves.

Dilip Fernandes rightly explains,

"Grimus is an anagram of Simurg in Persian mythology the bird with reasoning power"\(^7\)

Flapping Eagle came to know that the concept of free will was a delusion there.

Flapping Eagle felt that he was destined to meet and deliver Grimus from his captivity. With the help of Jones

\(^7\)Dilip Fernandes's, "Such Angst, Such loneliness such rootlessness," Gentleman (Feb 1984), p. 104.
he went to the Stone Rose which held the key to the Gate. As the narrator rightly puts it:

The Gate to Grimus is similar to one through which you entered the sea of Calf. Though less crude, impossible to find it unless you know where it is Grimus will certainly know you're coming; he may well try and close the Gate.

Grimus played the part of the Creator with his Stone Rose which enabled him, to traverse time and space and materialize things, by a mere flash of thinking. He sometimes felt that he should be relieved by Flapping Eagle. Each of them thought that he was the part of the other.

Flapping Eagle envisaged the reconstruction of Calf Island. But the inhabitants of K failed to relieve in explorative experience like himself. They only experienced monotony and stagnant sameness fostered by Stone Rose. Moreover they could not flap their wings of spiritual explorations. The novel closes with the decision of Flapping Eagle to resurrect Calf Island without Stone Rose.

Grimus, p. 206.
Grimus is a powerful fantasy dealing with the vagaries of various characters.

"It is an epic fantasy of vaulting imagination, full of strangely echoing/mysteries and extraordinary adventure."\(^9\)

There are Gorfs who live on the planet. They are an ingenious race. They feel that they need no science or Art, no job or interest in the Divine Game of order. In the words of the novelist, "Gorfs, though their bodies move with great difficulty, can transport themselves instantly from place to place by a process of a physical disintegration and re-integration, supervised by their disembodied selves."\(^10\)

The inhabitants of Calf Island are mysterious persons whom we do not come across in day to day life. Awards and incentives do not have any place in the town K. Even the distribution of the land is need based. They render free service. They are all "immortals who had found their longevity too burdensome in the outside world, yet had been, unwilling to give it up; with Sisoy's guidance they had come to Calf.

\(^9\) The Illustrated Weekly of India, October, 29, 1983, p. 52.

\(^10\) Grimus, p. 211.
mountain to be with their own kind. This only shows the humorous treatment of this fantasy by Rushdie.

Word-play is one technique which Rushdie employs to make his novel powerful. As Uma Parameswaran says, Word-Play in the novel is functional in some cases. The very title of the novel is an anagram of Simurg, a monstrous bird of Persian legend, imagined as rational, having the power of speech and great age. The mountain Calf is named after the Arabic letter 'Kalf' which has esoteric connotations. The very word 'Gorfs' is an inversion of frogs. 'Nus' is an inverted form of Sun. The Galaxy AWIKILM' is an anagram of Milky Way.

One is amused by the far-fetched word play in Joggel's leave taking Ethiopia which is a synonym of Abyssinia.

The characters in the novel are all fanciful figures. Flapping Eagle, the protagonist of the novel falls through a

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11Grimsz, p. 43.

hole in the sea after making gyrations on the earth for over seven centuries. He becomes an enquirer of reality. He withstands the inner dimensions which almost batter the Calf Island. His contacts with the people of K violate the order of the town. Naturally he incurs their wrath and leaves for the abode of Grimus.

Flapping Eagle meets similar fate in Axona because of his confused sex. Moreover his whiteness was a thing of contempt in the land inhabited by a dark skinned lake. So he was an exile in an isolated community.

Through the employment of Symbolism, the novelist makes his point clear. Flapping Eagle symbolises a realised soul. Calf Island is symbolic of disorder. The people of K represent passivity and monotony. Stone Rose is a symbol of monotonous stagnation. Grimus is symbolic of rational thinking. Flapping Eagle is an adventurer who sets right the muddled Calf island by reseuring it without Stone Rose. Thus through the use of the symbols, Rushdie seems to tell us Gribb's dictum "The sands of Time are steeped in new Beginnings." 

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Rushdie's *Grimus* presents us an apprehended mundane actuality. The epitaph from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

Go, go, go said the bird, human kind cannot bear very much reality.  

reveals to us that there is a need for a search for the real among the temporal and realities. Rushdie fits in a story about the Angel and God which is the most seminal to the novel. In the myth, God wants to be replaced by the angel and the Angel in turn awaits his own deliverer.

Grimus plays the part of a creator with his Stone Rose, which makes him traverse Time and Space. Flapping Eagle feels that the complex effect of derealising of a routine commonsense world together with the evoking of a reality that lies hidden among the unrealities. This is akin to the reality which one finds in the *Four Quartets*:

Yet the enchantment of past and future woven in the weakness of the changing body, protects mankind from heaven and damnation which flesh cannot endure.  

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14 *Four Quartets*, p. 226.

15 Ibid., p. 226.
The reality is sought because it is to confront the spirit with the necessity of supreme decision of the ultimate choice and so give a meaning to life.

Grimus is fraught with the elements of fantasy. "It is a powerful "folk tale" thunderdreams and touching between the fanciful and the real. It is the fanciful that overweighs the real in the novel. In other words the novelist does not maintain a judicious proportion between the two. This he maintains in his second novel Midnight's Children.