

Introduction
Rushdie's Contexts – Contextualizing Rushdie
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In *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010), Nobodaddy, the storyteller Rashid's shadow who with every passing day grows stronger until, after Luka's father's death, he becomes the real thing, responds in shock to Luka's suggestion that 'the Fire of Life' is '*just a story*'. In his admonishment of Luka he continues: 'You of all boys should know that Man is the Storytelling animal, and that in stories are his identity, his meaning and his life blood. [. . .] Man alone burns with books.'¹ Here lies perhaps the answer to the question Luka's brother internalizes in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) – '*What's the use of stories that aren't even true?*'² Rushdie's fascination with stories and storytelling as the fabric of what makes us human is a useful starting point for and perhaps a guide through *Salman Rushdie in Context*. Across its chapters, contributors to this volume have sought to engage deeply with the different themes and storytelling contexts of Salman Rushdie's works. In so doing, they have chosen to explore contexts ranging from his aesthetics, his politics, key themes, and critical conceptual engagements. They have also considered the range of his works, from fiction to nonfiction, autobiographical and biographical writing, and focused on the differing genres he works in, from novel to short story, drama, essay, film, and memoir.

The volume charts Rushdie's position as a commentator and chronicler of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries as he maps his own journey from Bombay to London and New York, and engages with the political evolutions and circumstances of the localities he inhabits. In order to achieve this, Rushdie has deployed different forms of artistic expression and attracted much attention in literary circles, literary critical scholarship, and critical theory, considering his work through the prisms of late modernism, cosmopolitanism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism (see Chapters 23–25).

Salman Rushdie started his career as a published writer in 1975. Since then, he has released numerous novels, short stories, and anthologies of

essays and nonfiction. His writing career has spanned six decades in which the world has undergone tremendous changes. Born in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1947, he was sent to Rugby boarding school in 1961, and in 1965 studied history at King's College, Cambridge, where he also developed an interest in the history of Islam. During his time at Cambridge he encountered E. M. Forster, avidly watched films, especially European art-house and world cinema, and acted with the Cambridge Footlights. After a short spell living and working in Pakistan, where his family had moved in 1964, he relocated to London permanently in 1968, initially with ambitions for the theatre, working for a while with Oval House productions.

In 1969, he begins working as an advertising copywriter for agencies such as Sharp McManus, Ogilvy and Mather, and Ayer Barker Hegermann and embarks on his early novelistic writing attempts, including 'The Antagonist', 'Madam Rama', and 'The Book of the Peer'. He is credited with the slogan for cream cakes, 'Naughty. But nice'; with the -bubble suffix to create words such as 'irresistibubble' for Aero chocolate; and with advertisements for the *Daily Mirror*.³ He publishes his first novel, *Grimus*, in 1975. In 1976 he marries Clarissa Luard and in 1979 their son Zafar is born. During the late 1970s and into the 1980s, Rushdie also works for the Camden Race Relations Council.

Midnight's Children is published in 1981 and wins that year's Booker Prize. The novel goes on to win the Booker of Bookers in 1993, marking the book out as the best novel to win the prize on the occasion of the Booker's twenty-fifth anniversary year; on the Booker's fortieth anniversary the novel is voted the 'Best of the Booker' by the public. In 1983, Rushdie publishes his third novel, *Shame*. In 1984, he travels through Australia with the writer Bruce Chatwin and in 1986 is invited by the Sandinistas on a trip to Nicaragua, which he documents in his travelogue *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (1987). In 1988, he divorces Clarissa Luard and marries the American novelist Marianne Wiggins. The documentary *The Riddle of Midnight*, written and presented by Rushdie, is broadcast on Channel 4 television.⁴ *The Satanic Verses* is published that year; after an interview in *India Today*, the book leads to protests in India, Pakistan, and Britain. On 14 February 1989, the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, decrees the fatwa sentencing Rushdie, his publishers, and translators to death, forcing the author to go into hiding and live under 24-hour police protection. The 'Satanic Verses' or 'Rushdie' affair leads to the book being banned in several countries, heated debates around freedom of expression, and the formation of

Introduction: Rushdie's Contexts – Contextualizing Rushdie 3

support groups in the United Kingdom, France, and further afield, such as the Salman Rushdie Defence Committee (see Chapter 2). Diplomatic efforts begin to revoke the fatwa. Rushdie and Marianne Wiggins separate, and they divorce in 1994. For his son Zafar he writes the book *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990). In 1991, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* is released, collecting landmark essays such as ‘Imaginary Homelands’, ‘Outside the Whale’, and ‘The New Empire within Britain’, highlighting Rushdie’s role as a key cultural commentator of the 1980s (see Chapter 4). In 1994, he publishes the short story collection *East, West* and in 1995 he returns to adult long-form fiction with *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. With Elizabeth West he edits *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing, 1947–1997*, the introduction of which sparks controversy among Indian literary critics for his dismissal of non-English Indian writing (see Chapter 23). In 1997, he marries Elizabeth West and their son Milan is born that year. In 1998, the Iranian government at the United Nations General Assembly distances itself from the fatwa, allowing Rushdie to emerge back into public life. The National Theatre stages an adaptation of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (see Chapter 27).

In 1999, Rushdie publishes *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, his first novel to be substantially set in the United States. He moves to New York at the turn of the millennium, and in 2001, *Fury* is released, its US publication coinciding with the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September. The year 2002 sees the publication of a second collection of columns, essays, and criticism, many of which were previously published in the *Guardian*, *New York Times*, and *New Yorker* – *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction, 1992–2002*. In 2004, he marries Padma Lakshmi after his divorce from Elizabeth West. In 2005, he publishes *Shalimar the Clown*, followed by *The Enchantress of Florence* in 2008. In 2006, Emory University in Atlanta acquires Rushdie’s archive for an undisclosed sum – Rushdie takes up a position as Distinguished Writer in Residence and in 2011 is appointed University Distinguished Professor, a position he holds until 2015 (see Chapter 3). In 2005 he co-founds the PEN World Voices Festival during his tenure as President of PEN America (2004–2006). In 2007 he is knighted for services to literature in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List; Rushdie and Lakshmi divorce. In 2010, he releases a companion volume to *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, *Luka and the Fire of Life*, for his son Milan. In 2012 he publishes his memoir, *Joseph Anton*, on the occasion of which Alan Yentob interviews Rushdie and many close associates for a television special, ‘The Fatwa – Salman’s Story’ for *Imagine* (see Chapter 1).⁵ Deepa Mehta’s film version of *Midnight’s Children*, with

a script by Rushdie, premieres at the Toronto International Film Festival. *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* is published in 2015; Rushdie takes up a new position as Distinguished Writer in Residence at the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute at New York University. In 2017, he publishes *The Golden House* followed in 2019 by *Quichotte*, which is shortlisted for the Booker Prize. In 2021, Rushdie releases a further volume of nonfiction, *Languages of Truth: Essays, 2003–2020*, and embarks on a new venture with the online platform Substack, where he releases a range of fictional and nonfictional writings as well as, in instalments, his novella in forty-nine parts, *The Seventh Wave*. In 2022, Rushdie is made a member of the Order of the Companions of Honour in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for his services to literature and Jonathan Cape announces the publication of his novel, *Victory City* in 2023.

Through his published works and long career as a writer, readers can trace shifting thematic emphases. In *Grimus*, we see Rushdie's emerging concerns with intersecting mythologies, from Amerindian folklore to Sufi tales and the idea of the epic (see Chapter 7). His work has a long-standing concern with the politics of the Indian subcontinent, its path to independence, and a sharp critique of how the promise of a secular, syncretic, democratic idea of India has not been fulfilled – these considerations are most pressingly central in *Midnight's Children*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *The Ground Beneath her Feet*, *Shalimar the Clown*, and *The Golden House* (see Chapter 16). Rushdie's work has focused on Pakistan to a lesser extent, but the successive alternations between democratic, autocratic, and military governments are explored in detail in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *Shalimar the Clown*, as are insurgencies and terrorism (see Chapter 17). Rushdie's investigations of Pakistan's and India's founding myths are bound up with larger questions of history and historiography that seek to reflect on how communities are, in Benedict Anderson's terms, 'imagined' (see Chapter 10). Saleem Sinai describes India as 'a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream'.⁶ Contrastingly, Pakistan in *Shame* is described as 'insufficiently imagined, a picture full of irreconcilable elements', and yet Rushdie also explores the manifold cultural traditions that might form the basis of nationhood (see Chapter 5).⁷

For *Shame*, too, questions of history and historiography are central, yet the novel further extends its arguments into an investigation of the role of religion as a founding principle for a state, as well as considerations of personal faith and the loss of faith, which would turn out to be the narrative driver for *The Satanic Verses*, which marks a major shift in

Introduction: Rushdie's Contexts – Contextualizing Rushdie 5

Rushdie's works away from the subcontinent towards considerations of transnational migration (see Chapter 13). In *Shame* already, Rushdie talks about migration as 'the anti-myths of gravity and belonging'.⁸ In his fourth novel, these anti-myths are variously explored, on the one hand, in relation to absolute faith and its loss and, on the other, the hostile environment of racist exclusion and demonization of migrants in 1980s Britain – as the protagonists of the novel tumble down from the sky along with the wreckage of the blown-up airliner on which they both travelled, 'there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, *land, belonging, home*' (see Chapter 9).⁹ Rushdie's subsequent fiction published in the 1990s would continue to revolve around these themes. Most keenly, *East, West* maps these questions across its three sections, and although many of its short stories were published individually in journals and magazines, thematic links – especially around the question of home, home-making, the loss of home, the yearning for home, and homesickness – are powerfully traced within them (see Chapter 15). Indeed, in an interview with the *Bookseller* in 1994, he states that 'the most important part of the title was the comma. Because it seems to me that I am that comma – or at least that I live in the comma.'¹⁰

The Moor's Last Sigh marked a significant reengagement with subcontinental politics for Rushdie in his examination of the rise of an exclusionist Hindu ethno-nationalism in Bombay, taking India's most marginal communities as its starting point out of which he generates a palimpsestic epic that seeks to defend secular syncretism against the 'plague-spores of communal fanaticism'.¹¹ The novel can be read as a companion volume to *Midnight's Children*, extending and further commenting on how rapacious capitalism and divisive communal politics breed violence and unleash destruction, marked by the novel's culmination in the retelling of the 1992 Bombay riots and 1993 bomb blasts (see Chapter 11). As the protagonist-narrator states, 'We have chopped away our own legs, we engineered our own fall. And now can only weep, at the last, for what we were too enfeebled, too corrupt, too little, too contemptible to defend.'¹² While many consider the novel as Rushdie's last major engagement with India and Indian politics, ending in a final cry of despair, he has continued to do so episodically in fiction and nonfiction – for example, the early sections of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* consider Bombay of the 1950s and 1960s, *Shalimar the Clown* is substantially set in Kashmir, *The Enchantress of Florence* is a historical novel set during the early modern

period at the court of the Mughal Emperor Akbar and in Renaissance Florence.

It is striking, however, that in the second decade of the twenty-first century, Rushdie has not substantially set a novel on the subcontinent. Instead, since the publication of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and his move to the United States in 2000, New York and the circumstances of life in the United States have taken on a much more central role in his writing. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* marks the transition, a metamorphosis, having ‘passed through a membrane in the sky and [. . . been] transformed by the experience’.¹³ Experiences of dislocation and making home and remaking home are central to much of Rushdie’s fiction published after 2000 (see Chapter 14) – *Fury* investigates this in relation to Malik Solanka and his move from London to New York; in *Shalimar the Clown* this is explored through the lens of the diplomat Maximilian Ophuls and his daughter Kashmira; *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* considers this in relation to the gardener Geronimo Manezes; *The Golden House* in relation to Nero Golden and his sons; and *Quichotte* in relation to the middlebrow thriller writer Sam Du Champ and television-obsessed travelling salesman Quichotte. The origin story of these characters links them back to Bombay/Mumbai in its various iterations (see Chapter 18). These significant shifts in emphases have also allowed Rushdie to work into his plots wider comparative trajectories that seek to investigate different scales and their ‘derangement’ and draw comparisons between the increasingly encroaching populist nationalisms and alternative realities they generate in local, regional, national, and global contexts (see Chapter 6). Rushdie himself has commented on this, arguing that the subject of his writing is ‘worlds in collision. How do you make people see that everyone’s story is now a part of everyone else’s story?’ (see Chapters 21 and 22).¹⁴ This preoccupation with interconnecting lived experiences and interconnected story worlds is a clear hallmark of his writing in terms not just of subject matter and theme but also of genre, fusing a range of styles and drawing on the modalities of different cultural forms, such as advertising, cinema, music, painting, photography, and television, which chapters in this volume chart (see Chapters 8 and 20). As Rushdie has outlined in a conversation with Marlon James,

I’ve never really made a high-culture/low-culture distinction. And I don’t think like that. I just think it’s all culture. [. . .] The novel is not an ivory tower form, was not about high culture. It’s about how people really are and what are they really thinking about, what is the music in their heads, and what is the slang they use. If you don’t know how people actually live and

Introduction: Rushdie's Contexts – Contextualizing Rushdie 7

what is that stuff in their heads that they are thinking about, you can't make them believable. I've never thought that one thing is good and the other thing is bad.¹⁵

In this respect, culture in all its forms is reflective of the world humans inhabit and further emphasizes the importance of storytelling to our understanding of our own place in the world, forming part of a wider sense-making exercise of how we relate to each other (see Chapter 19).

Rushdie's works have in varying degrees charted the moment of late capitalism, of greater global interconnections and connectivity, characterized by his own journeys from Bombay to London and New York, which he also charts through his characters (see Chapter 12). Yet as Rushdie's global literary profile increased across the decades, it also coincided with a large-scale consolidation of the publishing industry – the advent of a new Rushdie book is now a major publishing event, and through his publishers, Penguin Random House, a transglobal publishing conglomerate owned by the German Bertelsmann Group, since the publication of his memoir *Joseph Anton* in 2012, his works are launched in English and translation on the same date in different territories across a range of platforms (see Chapter 26).

Salman Rushdie in Context charts the writing career of Salman Rushdie and offers critical engagements with key aspects of his work, some thus far little explored. It also offers a wider critical lens on audience and readerships, adaptive processes, as well as his writerly life, biography, and autobiography through the critical lens of archival studies and life writing. To this end the volume is structured in five parts, focusing on the life and public persona of the writer in Part I, literary and creative contexts of his work in Part II, historical and cultural contexts in Part III, critical theoretical contexts in Part IV, and reception, criticism, and adaptation in Part V. Through these thematic blocks, the book seeks to highlight the multiple dimensions of Rushdie's works, the different interpretative lenses that they elicit, and the contrasting evaluations and readings this can yield. The book has brought together a range of scholarly voices from a wide variety of backgrounds and locations to tease out the interdisciplinary nature of Rushdie's oeuvre to highlight different reading practices through which his works can be engaged. I hope that these perspectives will reveal new aspects and also help open further pathways to critical inquiry of this key writer of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries and his explorations of the human condition through the power of storytelling. As Rushdie says, 'the wonder tale tells us truths about ourselves that are often unpalatable; it exposes bigotry, explores the libido, brings our deepest fears to

light. [. . .] And in many of these adventures [. . .] it is children who grow into heroes [. . .] the children we were, the children who are still within us, the children who understand wonderland, who know the truth about stories, save the adults who have forgotten those truths'.¹⁶

Addendum

This introduction was written before the news broke of the attack on Salman Rushdie at Chautauqua in western New York state. Consequently, a discussion of the events of 12 August 2022 and their fallout lies beyond the scope of *Salman Rushdie in Context*, which was at an advanced stage of production. The chapters in this collection are testament to the many facets of Salman Rushdie's wide-ranging body of work and his power of imagination, and it is sincerely wished that *Haroun's* Iff the Water Genie will continue to work his magic to supply Rushdie with the Story Waters from 'the Ocean of the Streams of Story' and fuel his storytelling.¹⁷

A major aim of this book is to introduce readers to the variety and complexity of Rushdie's writing to open up new critical paradigms through which his work can be examined. Through that process, I hope to highlight to readers that discussions of Rushdie transcend the '*Satanic Verses* affair' and that he needs to be considered in larger networked contexts. In this respect, these essays seek to contribute to debates and conversations about Rushdie's fiction and nonfiction to help us, as Rushdie has put it so powerfully, 'make a new imaginative relationship with the world'.¹⁸

Notes

- 1 Salman Rushdie, *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010; London: Vintage, 2011), 34.
- 2 Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990; London: Granta/Penguin, 1991), 20 (original italics).
- 3 Grainne Rothery, 'Salman Rushdie: A Writer's Tale', *Business & Leadership*, 6 November 2008, www.businessandleadership.com/marketing/item/11676-a-writers-tale/. See also Salman Rushdie, 'Another Writer's Beginnings', in *Languages of Truth: Essays, 2003–2020* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2021), 62–82; 75.
- 4 An abbreviated version of the script is published in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991*, 1st ed. (London: Granta/Penguin, 1991), 26–33.

Introduction: Rushdie's Contexts – Contextualizing Rushdie 9

- 5 Jill Nicholls (dir.), 'The Fatwa – Salman's Story', *Imagine* (BBC One, 2012), www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01mykqk.
- 6 Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981; London: Vintage, 2008), 150.
- 7 Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (1983; London: Vintage, 1995), 87 (original italics).
- 8 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 9 Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (1988; London: Vintage, 1998), 4 (original italics).
- 10 Michael Reder, ed., *Conversations with Salman Rushdie* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 163.
- 11 Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995; London: Vintage, 1996), 208.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 372–3.
- 13 Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999; London: Vintage, 2000), 461.
- 14 Jack Livings, 'Salman Rushdie: The Art of Fiction No. 186', *Paris Review* (2005): 107–43; 110.
- 15 Marlon James and Salman Rushdie, 'Salman Rushdie and Marlon James Discuss Language, Reality, and Nostalgia', *PEN Out Loud*, 20 September 2019, <https://pen.org/salman-rushdie-marlon-james-pen-out-loud-transcript/>.
- 16 Rushdie, *Languages of Truth*, 28–9.
- 17 Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990; London: Grant/Penguin, 1991), 58–9.
- 18 Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 125.

PART I

Life