

**MYTHOLOGICAL APPROACH IN RUSHDIE'S GRIMUS****GAIKWAD MAHENDRAKUMAR M.**

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**ABSTRACT**

*As a novelist, Rushdie made his debut with Grimus in 1975. This novel is an exercise in fantastical science fiction. It draws on the 12th-century Sufi poem The Conference of Birds. The title of the novel is an anagram of the name 'Simurg'. It means the immense, all-wise, fabled bird of pre-Islamic Persian mythology. Rushdie's the next novel Midnight's Children won the Booker Prize and brought him international fame. It is written in exuberant style. It is the comic allegory of Indian history. It revolves around the lives of the narrator Saleem Sinai and the 1000 children born after the Declaration of Independence. All of the children are given some magical property. Saleem has a very large nose, which grants him the ability to see 'into the hearts and minds of men.' His chief rival is Shiva. Shiva has the power of war. Saleem, dying in a pickle factory near Bombay, tells his tragic story with special interest in its comical aspects. The work aroused a great deal of controversy in India this happened because of its unflattering portrait of Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay. Sanjay was involved in a controversial sterilization campaign. Midnight's Children took its title from Nehru's speech delivered at the stroke of midnight, 14 August 1947, as India gained its independence from England. The use of myth and history in such works is an interpretative strategy. This is a part of their programmed narratology. In these works, they make the texts embody the past and present. According to Martin Heidegger, the historical and the temporal situation cannot be left out of the purview of hermeneutic work. The past can be grasped only through its relevance to the present. The present is why the text is the embodiment of the past and present experiences and interests. The irreverence of these novelists is deliberate. Their anger is motivated in that they are head on to 'remotivate' the art, culture and literature. The kind of new novel under discussion solely subsists on the 'cultural difference'.*

**INTRODUCTION**



Salman Rushdie is an Anglo-Indian novelist. He uses in his works tales from various genres - fantasy, mythology, religion, oral tradition. His narrative technique has connected his books to magic realism. This magic realism includes such English-language authors as Peter Carey, Angela Carter, E.L. Doctorow, John Fowles, Mark Helprin or Emma Tennant. Rushdie was condemned to death by the former Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini on February 14, 1989, after publishing *Satanic Verses*. Naguib Mahfouz, the winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize in Literature, criticized Khomeini for 'intellectual terrorism'. But later on, he changed his view later and said that Rushdie did not have 'the right to insult anything, especially a prophet or anything considered holy.' Sulman Rushdie's major novels are *Grimus* (1975), *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (1987), *The Satanic Verses* (1988), *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981 - 1991* (1992), *Homeless by Choice* (1992, with R. Jhabvala and V. S. Naipaul), *East, West* (1994), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001), *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992 - 2002* (2002), *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), *Best American Short Stories 2008* (2008, as editor).

Rushdie maintains that 'the history of twentieth century has been written by shop-makers'. To him, the Indian history has been ruthlessly sawed by the British imperialist rulers and their henchmen in India. He seeks to provide a correct view of history through the 'subversive reality'. Then he takes every care to keep at a distance the 'facticited' one. He is aided by the combinative modes of parodic and fantastic even in his combative moods. Rushdie links the biographical account of the individual with the social collective of India in the form of its contemporary history. This has been done through the apt use of myth and history. This is combined on post-modern, open ended lines. His technique is ingenious indeed. He is a real genius in inventing this mode of narration. In this mode of narration, myth is the medium that provides a decent dialogue between the individual and history. His ingenuity and experimentative ability shine forth on every page of the text every inch. The text is a treatise. It is a treatise of contemporary history. This accounts for his extensive use of mythical mode. More than mediations, he resorts to subvertive methods, where the use of myth is concerned. His deft handling of literary situation and recreating the required atmosphere is exemplary.

*Grimus* is a 1975 fantasy and science fiction novel written by Salman Rushdie. Reviews of the book when first published emphasized its science fiction elements.[*Grimus*.] 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'[*Times Online* ] Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* evokes multiple number of feelings at multiple levels. Human nature has a prodigious resilience. Any imbalance leads to a sense of despair, desolation and frustration. A sense of uncertainty and futility prevails. The thirst for a life

giving sap prompts the postmodernist novelists to make a gigantic attempt at depicting the reigning anarchy of the contemporary socio-political scenario in pictures grotesque and incorrigible. The narration in such contexts runs in a surrealistic vein to sustain the grip on the audience. Catherine Belsey in the article “Post Modern Love : Questioning The Metaphysics of Desire” says : “The Fictional problematising of history of our access to the ‘facts’ is so common in recent novels that Linda Hutcheon has coined the term ‘histenographic metafiction’ and treats it as the paradigm case for postmodern fiction.”[Belsey Catherine, 1994 : 688]

His first novel, *Grimus*, is published in 1975. It is a part-science fiction tale. It was generally ignored by the public and literary critics. *Grimus* is often overlooked in any overview of the writer’s oeuvre, perhaps because it lacks the marked sense of geographical and historical context which characterises his later and more acclaimed work. *Grimus*, the tale of Flapping Eagle, the novel’s immortal hero, who travels to Calf Island after seven hundred years of sailing the seas with the hope of regaining his mortality, is a beautiful book; funny and often surprisingly touching. A science fiction based hybrid of religious myth and literary pastiche, *Grimus* has all the simplicity and sense of magic of folktale, and all the complexity of a deeply questioning philosophical novel. *Grimus* introduces in raw form many of the themes developed by Rushdie in his later writing, such as displacement, unstable identity and cultural hybridity. Eagle foreshadows Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of *Midnight’s Children*. He is an outcast from the rest of his native society too. It is because he is literally the offspring of a genetic mismatch between Methwold, the white foreigner, and a native woman: “As for my coloring: the Axona are a dark-skinned race and shortish. As I grew, it became apparent that I was, inexplicably, to be fair-skinned and tallish. This further genetic aberration - whiteness - means they were frightened of me and shied away from contact.”[Rushdie, *Grimus* : 10]

Flapping Eagle’s arrival at the town of K in Calf Island does cause havoc. This leads, ultimately, to the destruction of the entire place and most of its inhabitants. The reason for this is Eagle’s desire for change and growth. This had been correctly pointed out by Deggle. This change and growth certainly involves facing up to and accepting the unpleasant side of life, i.e. death. Such a desire can only bring chaos to K, since the town’s survival rests on the fact of its being a ‘petrified.’ The reference to displaced persons is very pertinent. It is because a colonized person is a displaced person. He has, in a sense, been cut off from his own indigenous past, culture, and values. The desire to create the myth of an authentic past and live in it is understandable in the people of K. The people of K, like Eagle, sold themselves into eternal bondage to the man who gave them the promise of eternal life. He is the man who himself is but a pawn in the Gorf’s Divine Game of Order. The only defense against the effect is ‘obsessionalism, single-mindedness, the process of turning human beings into the petrified, simplified men of K.’[ 186]

This novel ends on such a depressing note. If the only way to resist the deleterious effects of colonization is to create an obsessive mythical world to exist in, then this is a world that neither author nor hero can live in. Flapping Eagle has chosen action over stasis, change and decay over stagnant life. He can do only one thing: to destroy K. Such a petrified society only perpetuates the rule of the oppressor. This can be done by refusing to step out of the dialectic of oppression-resistance. Thus, Eagle realizes that he must destroy Grimus in order to destroy the Grimus effect. He must also destroy the Stone Rose for the same. The object devised by the Gorfs to keep one man, in this case, master over the rest of his people. He leaves K in order to achieve to this end. Then he journeys to the top of Calf Mountain. There Grimus is supposed to reside. On the way, he encounters his long-lost sister, Bird-Dog. Bird-Dog is sent by Grimus himself to bring Eagle to him. Flapping Eagle nevertheless accompanies his sister. She is brought into the presence of Grimus. Then he realizes with a shock that his once-independent, spirited sister has become a subservient, 'colonized object': "Bird-Dog stopped and lowered her head ... to Flapping Eagle, the sight off his servile Bird-Dog ... a totally subservient menial, was a shock and an upset. This was not the sister who has foraged for his food, who has raised and protected him. This was a shadow of the Bird-Dog he had known. What had Grimus done to her?" [279]

Grimus is a mouthpiece for the colonial ideology of containment. In this role, he thinks mistakenly that he has created everything in the colony he rules. Therefore, he is in complete control over it and its inhabitants. The inhabitants are reduced to being mere objects. Flapping Eagle refuses to submit to such 'objecthood.' Eagle answers Grimus fearlessly, "existed before you found us." [ 293]. Faced with such a rebellious stance, Grimus nevertheless continues trying to induce Flapping Eagle to give up his grand design of destroying both himself i. e. Grimus and the Stone Rose. He is willing and he is eager to let Flapping Eagle destroy him as long as Eagle will agree to keep and preserve the Rose. Eagle can become a replacement for Grimus. So he continues to rule K. He also continues to rule the rest of Calf Island for the pleasure of the Gorfs. On the other hand, he breaks the Rose. Then all is lost for as Grimus cries out. "The Gorfs made the Rose to link the Dimensions. Break it and you break us." [316] Now a conflict ensues in Flapping Eagle's mind. It is a conflict between that part of him and that part of him to which Grimus's way is tempting. The first part is truly Eagle, the "I-Eagle" part. This is the part he calls the "I-Grimus." The I-Eagle i.e. the "true" part of Flapping Eagle, realizes that "if I chose not to destroy the Rose, I could go back to my own world." [316] Yet he has also "seen too much of the way I-Grimus has ruined lives for the sake of an idea." [317] The only "world" that I-Eagle could return to, if he agreed to Grimus's plan, would be a ruined world.

The Grimus alternative is indeed a "grim" one. Eagle finally chooses to reject it. He succeeds in destroying the Rose. By doing so, he brings destruction upon himself and his world. But by the same token, he liberates himself and K from being objects of amusement in an alien power's game of order. The apocalypse at the end of Grimus foreshadows the much more

horrific one at the end of *Shame*. The world of Calf Mountain was slowly unmaking itself. The message here seems to be... “We must step out of the circle of opposition, the dialectic of power-powerlessness, oppression-rebellion, altogether, i.e. destroy the old status quo, the world as we know it, entirely before the world can be made habitable for all.” The only kind of narrative strategy is capable of conveying the burden of message. This seems to be one in which realism can be diluted through the use of mythical and surrealistic fiction. The wholeness and balance promised by realism are no longer appropriate in a world which has become meaningless. Elfrida is one of the characters in *Grimus*. What such a theory of the novel calls for is the debunking of all representational genres of fiction. These genres construct meaningful scenarios of life. In the end, even the myths of K, Calf Island, and the Gorfic Endimions must be destroyed. This must be done in order to avoid historical petrification and to escape the Gorfic strategy of containment.

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