



Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991

Salman Rushdie

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Containing 74 essays written over the last ten years, this book covers a range of subjects including the literature of the perceived masters and of Rushdie's contemporaries, the politics of colonialism and the ironies of culture, film, politicians, the Labour Party, religious fundamentalism in America, racial prejudice and the preciousness of the imagination and of free expression.

Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991 Details

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From Reader Review Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991 for online ebook

Priyanka Sofia says

I haven't finished this, but I couldn't wait to post a short note. This essay collection is sublime. I highly recommend "Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist" to everyone interested in English literature. I won't say more: let Rushdie do the talking here.

Rosa Jamali says

These days I read quite a number of stuff written by my friends those who live abroad , mostly in LA and I see the main theme is struggling the American life. The texts appear in Persian yet you cannot touch it for the settings are quite different and the realtionships are not familiar , a weird sense of Imaginary Homelands! What sounds peculiar in the literature created in an imaginary homeland is the duality you see in the characters , the identity which is shattered , the vision's obscure , void , like a blank sheet with no history or a background;...

James Goldberg says

Nice to get Rushdie's intensity without the filter of fiction. He's an engaging thinker and a great writer--this collection is a great place to go if you're not up to a novel at the moment, but want a little dose of Rushdie. Liked it way better than his short fiction.

Kent Winward says

The rating was more for the uneven nature of the collection which can come when compiling a decade of criticism and essays. Certainly some of the essays are gems and the entire book is well worth reading.

Shuhan Rizwan says

“Many years ago, Kurt Vonnegut asked me if I was serious about writing. I said I was. He then said, if I remember correctly, that there was trouble ahead, that one day I would not have a book to write and I would still have to write a book.

It was a sad, and saddening remark.”

Michael Finocchiaro says

I enjoy reading literary criticism from my favourite authors and this book by Rushdie was great. He is of course quite famous because of the fatwa against him following his publication of *The Satanic Verses* so he does talk about this but also about his diverse literary tastes. He is very erudite and fascinating to read. He talks about Indian politics and censorship and its impact on his life but also includes a treasure chest of book reviews and literary criticism on such authors (also my favourites!) as Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Italo Calvino, Thomas Pynchon, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and many more. I really loved this book of essays and found it wonderfully diverse and full of insight. I can actually thank this book for having exposed me to a few writers that I had never explored before like Vargas Llosa.

Jeruen says

Oh boy, Rushdie can definitely write.

I must say that I am biased: Salman Rushdie has been one of my favorite authors ever since I encountered *The Satanic Verses*. I've always admired a person who would be willing to question everything, and hold nothing sacred. I have followed the whole controversy relatively late, as I was still too young to appreciate the things at stake when the Salman Rushdie affair exploded in the early 1990s. Anyway, I have read about it later, and since I could Rushdie as one of my favorite authors, I tend to get excited when I find my hands on a book of his.

Like this one, which is a collection of essays and criticism that were written between 1981 and 1991. He gathers together plenty of essays, grouped into 12 different topics, ranging from politics in South Asia, to authors from various parts of the world, to the Satanic Verses controversy. And perhaps the thing I appreciate the most with this book is that I can see how a brilliant mind like Rushdie's can critique a book.

The nice thing about this is that I am rather familiar with several of the authors that he critiques. It also provides me an alternative perspective on things, which is always valuable. For example, he apparently hated Umberto Eco's writings: even though I liked it, I can see why he arrived at a different conclusion than mine. The same can be said on our diverging opinions about George Orwell and Henry Miller.

Another thing I liked is that this book provided me with leads on other interesting authors to read. There are authors that I haven't encountered before, such as Italo Calvino, Nuruddin Farah, among others. And reading what Rushdie had to say about these authors made me want to bookmark it for future reading.

Anyway, there might be areas where Rushdie and I do not converge, but the important thing is that divergent ideas is okay. This is his main point especially with the Satanic Verses controversy. Censorship is a negative thing: literature is one area where we can entertain diverging ideas in the privacy of our own head. And to explicitly hinder a particular voice when that voice happens to be different from your own is not going to produce positive results. I always see this in the context of cults, after all, I escaped one. If there are things that are too sacred to question, then how do you know that your belief is indeed strong, when you are afraid to put it to the test by looking at opposing theses?

Of course I liked this book. I give it 5 out of 5 stars. It's not fiction, but it is recommended reading to get a glimpse into the mind of one of the best writers of our time.

See my other book reviews here.

Jon Stout says

In this collection of essays from the 80's, Salman Rushdie reviews authors, past and present, and political issues, foreign and domestic. Since Rushdie is originally Indian, now British, "foreign" and "domestic" take on shifting meanings. He observes that "Commonwealth Literature" is marginalized in England, but argues that the English language in India and in other post-colonial lands has taken on a life of its own, often appropriating British values and using them to better effect than the British did.

He says that even though the British Empire is no longer, the British have reconstituted the Empire within England. Former subject peoples from India, the Caribbean, Africa and elsewhere have migrated to England, and Rushdie notes that they are treated as outsiders, even after having been in England for generations. Zadie Smith, another writer with a colonial heritage, writes about the same issues, but always with a relentlessly upbeat and striving take on them. Rushdie takes a more Olympian and pessimistic view of the same struggles.

On a completely different topic, Rushdie offers his opinion of Rudyard Kipling, which compares nicely with the opinions of Edward Said, the author of Orientalism, and of Wendy Doniger, the author of The Hindus. Edward Said argued that Kipling took for granted the colonial assumptions with regard to India, notwithstanding his obvious love for India. Doniger argued that many of the British, including Kipling, appreciated what was good about India, notwithstanding negative interactions as well.

Rushdie's take is that there were two Kiplings, "Ruddy Baba" and "Kipling Sahib," the bazaar boy and the colonial Brit. They battle each other, like Jekyll and Hyde, in the novel *Kim*, and in other stories, and sometimes Ruddy Baba prevails in spite of Kipling Sahib. This is a charming personal interpretation of the struggle of values in Kipling, and allows us to love the Ruddy Baba while questioning the Kipling Sahib.

Rushdie has obviously suffered from his treatment over The Satanic Verses (only three years past in the concluding essay). This leads him to discuss the relations among religion, politics and literature with particular insight, and to defend himself in a way which makes me want to return to the book.

His interactions with authors comparable to himself (as magical realists and as national narrators), such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Gunter Grass, are especially revealing. Rushdie always reminds me that intercultural boundaries are where the action is, whether it is in the immigrant experience or in the adjustment to changing times. Reading about making a life in a foreign land is my best guide to making my own life in an unknown future.

Elena Sala says

IMAGINARY HOMELANDS is a collection of reviews, articles, interviews and papers written during the years 1981 to 1991. They cover a wide range of subjects, including political, social and literary topics. However, Rushdie's main concern is the cultural plight of the migrant, so there are several pieces on this subject.

Rushdie's writing is usually attractive, provocative and incisive. I love the way he writes about literature. Nevertheless, I found the three concluding pieces, published in 1990, so moving and sad, that I almost forgot how witty and passionate his writing can be. In these essays he writes eloquently about the fanatical and

politically motivated reaction to THE SATANIC VERSES in parts of the Islamic world. I wasn't aware that one of the book's translators had been killed. Not to mention the attacks other translators, bookstore assistants and publishers suffered as well.

This collection celebrates literature, the imagination and the right of free expression in Rushdie's inimitable way. Some essays may be a bit dated but his insights on racial prejudice and religious fundamentalism are still worth reading.

Bookdragon Sean says

Rushdie is a great writer to study due to the controversy that surrounds his work. How many writers can say they went into hiding because of public death threats? Not many.

Some believe that he wrote *The Satanic Verses* for attention and more fame. Some believe that he purposefully, and maliciously, slandered Islam so his book would sell. I don't believe that. His work was taken the wrong way. Rushdie meant no harm. He just had a story to tell and perhaps the world (or at least part of it) was not quite ready for it.

What I've noticed with Rushdie is how he tries so very, very, hard to make his books relevant. He addresses current affairs and problems over identity in a world that is becoming globalised. As harsh as it may sound, I believe as he has got older he has become less relevant. His newer books don't sell anymore and his words do not carry the power they once did. Perhaps he used up his creative spark too early or perhaps he simply grew tired. Whatever the case may be, the Rushdie that writes today is not as good as the one who was active in the eighties.

Here are essays and criticisms that he wrote on all manner of things when he was at his peak. He comments on his own novels, on the politics and religions of India along with stating his opinion regarding other writers such as Ishiguro and Marquez. There are some real juicy pieces. I always find it a little inspiring hearing how a man (who is already a great writer at this point) engages with other writes that the reading public also admire (that I admire). There was a little piece on Stephen Hawking too, which shows how beneficial it is for a writer to read widely. *A Brief History of Time* clearly influenced Rushdie intellectually.

This will be of great interest to those who are studying Rushdie or perhaps wish to write on him, like I was, though for those looking for a more engaging read I recommend *Joseph Anton*. It's his autobiography and it reveals much about his creative process as a writer. I'll be reviewing that one soon too. For the right reader though, there is some great bits in here.

Shameema says

Salman Rushdie could write about a slice of bread and make it sound interesting. This is an amazing feat, to be able to demonstrate novelty in the mundane, accomplished only by virtue of an astonishing writing talent and a fiercely thoughtful mind.

Of course when I finally read a compilation of Rushdie's essays from the eighties, this fact is propounded by manifolds. Here we have beliefs and not just make-beliefs as the author himself points out in one of his defenses of *The Satanic Verses*(included in this volume), as the novel is frequently aimed at achieving.

I will refrain from calling this collection eclectic because the writings have a careful pattern. Most of them

are to do with identity, religion, the migrant experience. There is a section in the middle where he reviews a good number of books and their authors and ultimately finishing with the book that brought him notoriety and fame and heartbreak and affirmation.

To be honest, this is my special interest so I greatly appreciated reading the pieces on migration and identity politics. He is lucid in his identification of the dark underbelly of post colonial Britain dealing with masses of its ex colonial subjects proliferating it's social binds and embracing home the colonial subjugators who have been driven out from different corners of the world. Rushdie is ingenuous in identifying his integration into their world is due to his freakish white complexion, social class and English English accent and not the famous English senses of tolerance.

It is not all anger though. He ruminates ruefully about the homeland that he and by choice all migrants leave behind. The messy ocean that he creates on the pages of his novels is the sea that was underneath his bedroom window in his childhood Bombay and it is the same sea that he carries with him wherever he goes. It is difficult to remember a more sublime description of the immigrant experience of alienation and discovery, of the power memory and perceptions.

It is important to note this volume contains four or five essays of then contemporary India and Pakistan and the volatile socio-political circumstances, the censorship and the autocratic tendencies, that perhaps contributed to people of certain aptitudes leaving their homeland. I believe these are great for contextualizing a certain period in history, especially for someone with subcontinental origins.

I have tried hard to be concise but I cannot finish without mentioning the interview with Edward Said, Rushdie's convictions on Satyajit Ray's films and their acceptability, a scathing review of VS Naipaul's among the believers (which I will read now) and a most ghastly account of a conference of Commonwealth writers, if ever there was a thing as such.

I have thoroughly enjoyed his musings on religion, the one abiding factor that he has not been blessed to escape in his lifetime, even though he is vehemently irreligious and irreverent to it.

Most of all I recommend this book because of the age old maxim, good books bring you more good books.

Sakshi says

The idea of Imaginary Homelands is that of a commentary documenting different living conditions in various parts of our world, looking at each continent from its writer's construct. My contention is that it was largely from the iconoclast Rushdie's hard-bitten lens. Apart from 'Outside the Whale' which is a brilliant complete critical essay, there isn't much to admire here. Some occasional astoundingly honest remarks on things in general and the excellent writing keep it alive.

For the essay refer here:

Outside the Whale

Indiabookstore says

“The word 'translation' comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men.” Salman Rushdie compares migration to translation- some things get carried across while others are left behind. Rushdie himself has been in the unique position of forever being the migrant, a Muslim in India, an Indian in Pakistan and a brown man in Britain. All his writing is a derivative, in some form or another, of his position as a migrant. It is the gap between the carrying forward and the leaving behind that makes his writing intriguing as well as controversial.

“Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools.”

Imaginary Homelands is a collection of Rushdie’s essays, seminar papers, articles, reviews published over a decade of his literary life time, 1981-1991. Like any collection of essays it is wide ranging, from the popular to the obscure. The essays deal with varying political, social and literary topics. The reaction to such a book can only be personal and subjective. It is not a story that can be discussed with some degree of detachment. Reading Imaginary Homelands is being engaged in a personal conversation by the author. Rushdie steers the conversation from within the pages while enthralling and vexing the reader in equal measure. There is a greater possibility of the reader being provoked into disagreeing with the author. Rushdie is that kind of a writer. But the greatest power of any book lies in provocation; that which leads to disagreement promotes thought...

For the full review, visit [IndiaBookStore](#).

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I'll keep repeating, "for God's sake, open the universe a little more!"
Rushdie is one of his kind, as I have been knowing him long time ago :) and no more is there to be said.

Nate says

Can somebody say, "self-absorbed"?

Salman Rushdie is the intellectual par excellence, but it seems that he strains a bit too far on this one, writing essays on everything from Edward Said to the movie *Brazil* to Maurice Sendak.

I liked a lot of his essays, and I think he's got an amazing, penetrating mind that is able to make perceptive and sharp commentaries on a variety of subjects, but it seems his ego outweighs his mind, and some essays just appear to be a test of how far his intellectual reach can stretch.
