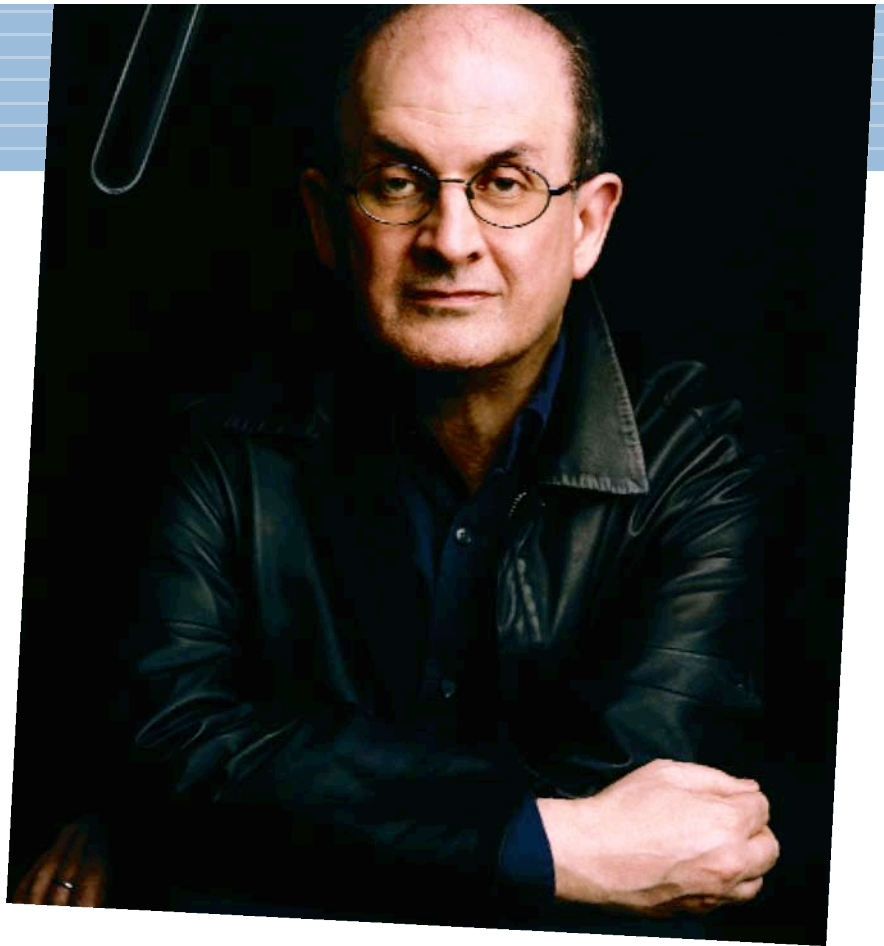


Salman Rushdie

A crash course on the works of a fascinating author

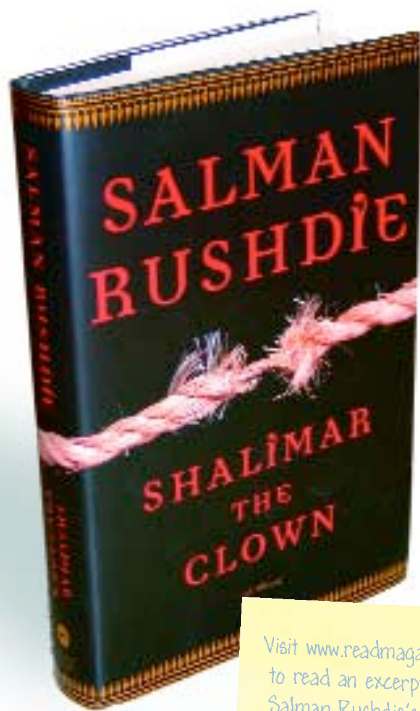
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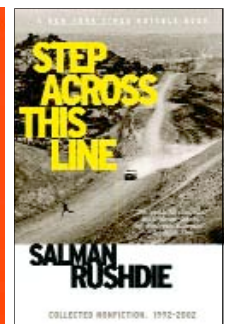
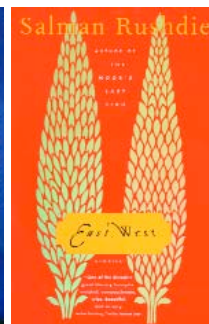
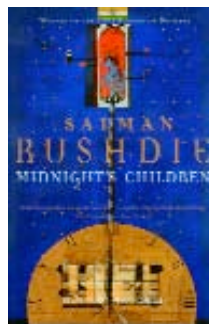


Though Salman Rushdie is one of the world's most celebrated writers, it's easy to feel intimidated by the sheer heft and breadth of his work. But if you've never read Rushdie, and know him only as the man who directed Renée Zellweger and Hugh Grant to the toilets in *Bridget Jones' Diary*, you don't know what you're missing. His work draws on nothing less than the world for his setting, and history and mythology for his inspirations. Call him political, post-colonial, or a pop-culture guru, at his core, he is simply a master storyteller and one of the funniest writers alive. If you like reading writers as diverse as John Irving, Angela Carter, Charles Dickens, David Mitchell, Zadie Smith, Gabriel García Márquez or Saul Bellow, then Rushdie is right up your bookshelf alley. Here's a quick primer to get you started.

There is no better place to start than with his latest. *Shalimar the Clown* is the story of four people—one of whom is murdered—and how



Visit www.readmagazine.ca to read an excerpt from Salman Rushdie's latest novel, *Shalimar the Clown*.



their separate stories connect through several locations from Kashmir to California, and several decades from Nazi-occupied Europe to the world of modern terrorism. He employs intriguing parallel narratives to highlight the cultural and political tug-of-wars taking place in Alsace-Lorraine and Kashmir, and then brings us right into our contemporary world with the beautiful, fiesty Kashmiri—or is it India? This novel is more fast-paced, more gripping than any of his previous work.

Midnight's Children not only won the Booker Prize in 1981, but it was also awarded the “Booker of Bookers” in 1993 and is one of Rushdie’s best. It is the story of Saleem Sinai, one of 1,001 children born on the midnight of India’s independence. He has an extraordinary sense of smell, and his life parallels the events of his country. This is a family saga, a political allegory, a great example of magic realism for fans of Rushdie doing what he does best—writing a page-turning story.

Short stories are always a great introduction to an author’s style. Rushdie’s *East, West* is a very funny collection of stories that show the roles culture plays in connecting—or alienating—different people. From a re-telling of Yorrick’s life, which puts a different spin on *Hamlet*, to a fast-paced auction house where Dorothy’s ruby slippers are on the block, to a touching friendship between an Indian ayah and a Slavic porter based on a love of “The Flintstones,” these stories are quirky, poignant and utterly unpredictable.

Rushdie is also a wonderful essayist. In his collection *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002*, he covers everything from his love of *The Wizard of Oz* (the film he credits with having “made a writer of me”), to his obsessions with soccer, to hanging out with U2, to the influences on his work by artists as diverse as Italo Calvino, Suetonius and Federico Fellini. He also describes his experiences living under the Iranian fatwa and his response to militant Islam.

Rushdie has a fascination with pop culture and loves finding creative and humorous ways to incorporate it into his fiction. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury* are great examples of this and make perfect reading for any teenager hooked on music or television. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, (yes, the U2 song originates from this novel), Rushdie retells the mythical story of Orpheus and Eurydice using two modern-day characters who form a band that becomes the most popular musical group in the world. In *Fury*, Malik Solinka, a Cambridge professor and doll lover, produces a late-night television show starring a doll he has created called Little Brain, who meets all of the world’s great thinkers. The show becomes a hit, but when Solly finds himself almost killing his wife one night, he flees to New York, filled with fury and modern angst, and worried he has become a serial killer. It sounds macabre, but at its heart this novel is really a satire on celebrity culture and globalization.

On the more serious side is Rushdie’s most infamous novel, *The Satanic Verses*, which opens with a hijacked plane exploding over the English Channel. Two men survive: Gibreel Farishta, the biggest movie star in India, and Saladin Chamcha, an anglophile and man of a thousand voices, and they quickly become symbols of Good and Evil. But which is which? This glorious imaginative novel, full of Indian mythology, resulted in a much-publicized fatwa being issued against Rushdie and sparked censorship debates around the world.

Also check out his first novel, *Grimus*, about a young Indian man struggling with immortality; *Shame*, about two men and their families, set in a country that is “not quite Pakistan”; and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, about a compulsive storyteller’s journey from India to Spain. **R**

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