

Michael R. Reder, ed. *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2000. Pp. xvi, 238. \$18.00 pb.

The apparently inexorable obsession of journalist and literary critic with the life of Salman Rushdie means it is easy to find studies of this prolific, larger-than-life figure. While this interview collection, part of the *Literary Conversations Series*, indicates that Rushdie has in fact spoken extensively both before, during, and after, his period in hiding, "giving over 100 interviews" (vii), it also substantiates a general awareness that despite Rushdie's position at the forefront of contemporary postcolonial literatures, "his writing, like the author himself, is often terribly misjudged by people who, although familiar with his name and situation, have never read a word he has written" (vii). The opportunity to experience Rushdie's unedited voice, interviews re-printed in their entirety as is the series's mandate, is therefore of interest to student, academic and reader alike.

Editor Michael Reder has selected twenty interviews, he claims, as the "most in-depth, literate and wide-ranging" (xii). The scope is certainly broad: the interviews, arranged in strict chronological order, cover 1982-99, encompass every geography, and range from those taken from published studies to those conducted with the popular media. There is stylistic variation: question-response format, narrative accounts, and extensive, and often poetic, prose introductions alongside traditional transcripts. However, it is a little misleading to infer that this is a collection comprised of hidden gems. There is much here that is commonly known, and interviews taken from existing books or re-published from publications such as *Kunapipi* and *Granta* are likely to be available to anybody bar the most casual of enthusiasts.

Reder's introduction — which must be praised as an effective explanation of the series's standard chronology — stresses that "the message of Rushdie's work was also lost . . . by all of the hoopla surrounding his controversial novel" (x) and a clear aim has been to cover the entire spectrum of Rushdie's work. Commentary on Rushdie's writings, both in terms of content and public reception, is extensive and new discoveries are particularly prominent at the extremes of the collection's scope: the unravelling of the relatively new *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* courtesy of Peter Kadzis, and the comments on the relatively unstudied *Grimus* expertly drawn out by John Haffenden. Learning that Rushdie had not read Kundera in 1981 means his acknowledged use of the author in *Shame* two years later allows us to weave a rich tapestry connecting Rushdie to the voices he creates; his comment to Haffenden that "people leak into each other" (46) is equally applicable to his novels: the Imam in a "Kensington flat" (51) left out of *Shame* is later recognizable as the "turbaned Imam" (Rushdie, *Satanic Verses* 205) of *The Satanic Verses*. We see novels foreshadowed: an

interest expressed to Salil Tripathi in 1983 with how “‘Indianness’ changes when it is exported” (27) becomes *The Satanic Verses*; a comment to John Banville in 1993 on how ‘you’re never the same again’ (161) becomes central to *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*: “even if you survive without a scratch . . . it remains” (Rushdie, *Ground* 13). When Rushdie tells John Clement Ball of a “Western experience” (109) intended to follow *The Satanic Verses*, we discover novels that never emerge.

Those more widely interested in postcolonial literature will find a wealth of material. Rushdie’s explanations of his influences and writing method cannot be found in any study, and his discussion of cinematic devices, for instance, in an early interview with Jean Ross, betters any critical appraisal of this aspect of the author’s style to date. There is much here on Indian fiction, and how Rushdie sees the significance of writers he has frequently been associated with, often revealing an antithetical relationship to terms such as magical-realism and post-modernity so often used to describe him. Yet the collection as a whole provides strong defence of highly imaginative writing, however defined, as Rushdie tells Jean-Pierre Durix: “another great tradition in world literature which really hasn’t been discussed in the way the realistic tradition has been” (10).

Rushdie’s “passionate political commitment” (Reder vxi) is expressed in comments not only on India and Pakistan but also on Britain, and the interviews should be of interest to sociologists and historians. Indeed, Rushdie’s politics does reveal an impressive prescience, which might justify Reder’s description of him as “a chronicler of humanity” (xii). Some of this could not be anticipated by the editor. In the wake of the ever-changing relationship between East and West, Rushdie’s hybrid voice, his position on the periphery — recently re-asserted as he commands us: “Don’t let fear rule your life” (Rushdie, *Life* 1) — has renewed relevance, the collection added significance. When seen in relation to 11 September 2001, Rushdie’s comments to Ameena Meer about the difference between fundamentalism and Islam, his discussion with Akbar Ahmed about perception of the West and his warning to Charlie Rose — “if these are the ideas that we care about — freedom, tolerance, living side by side with difference and so on — we must also understand how they can create weakness, and therefore, you know, by understanding that, may give us a way of guarding against that attack, that intolerant, narrow spectrum, vicious attack” (207) — have a distressing poignancy.

Reder’s selection also builds a complex, multi-layered and very human portrait, allowing us to gain some sense of the sweep of Rushdie’s personality, oscillating between anger and conciliation, sorrow and humour. Careful organization displays his contradictions by contrasting events such as public conversion to Islam with retraction in two

highly oppositional discussions. In terms of the fatwa, these personal insights, often obscured by academic arguments, are most revealing, ample evidence here in Rushdie's own words to support his assertion to John Banville that "My life has been wrecked" (161). Unfortunately, the pathos of this fact is somewhat of a stalling point: while Reder may have honourable intentions, a disproportionate percentage of the book is a discussion of exactly that which he wants to avoid, as interviewers after 1988 find it impossible to move towards other issues. This would be excusable if later interviews answer those questions that have been foregrounded, but they don't: we never find out why a paperback *Satanic Verses* was released after earlier interviews suggest its impracticality.

This collection reveals further the complex personality that has made Rushdie such an enigmatic figure. Although dominated by the fatwa, and subject to the repetition that is always inherent in such publications, the interviews manage to cover the wide spectrum of issues surrounding the author: his politics, literary position and, more important than anything, unique and varied body of writing. For this reason, the book should be embraced as a welcome addition to already considerable resources available on both the author and on postcolonial fiction generally. As Reder so rightly acknowledges, what is most valuable about this publication is that "Rushdie is allowed for speak for himself" (xii). In the case of others such opportunity may be insignificant; for the author at issue here it carries a profundity and privilege that makes the book's publication a worthy event.

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Martin Harries. *Scare Quotes from Shakespeare: Marx, Keynes, and the Language of Reenchantment*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000. Pp. 209. \$69.50.

In *Scare Quotes from Shakespeare: Marx, Keynes, and the Language of Reenchantment*, Martin Harries argues "that a particular aspect of modernity, reenchantment, discovers its image in appropriations of supernatural aspects in Shakespeare's plays" (9). As evidence for this contention, he points to the covertly reenchanting elements of "The Eighteenth Brumaire" and *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* by analysing their use of "scare quotes" (simultaneously acknowledging and distancing allusions to supernatural moments) from *Hamlet* and