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The flight from the enchanter. reflections on Salman Rushdie's Grimus

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Abstract
We live in a disenchanted world. This historical Entzauberung has been linked up with the rise of the bourgeoisie and is described at some length in Karl Marx' and Friedrich Engels' The Communist Manifesto (1848): 'The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations... It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation..." And the rupture with the past and its beliefs — among the latter a belief in the reality of magic — is reflected in numerous ways in nineteenthcentury (bourgeois) literature; but at the same time the process of enlightenment and its consequences are contested, for it turns out to be much more difficult to get rid of this past than presupposed, insofar as it is still at work in the unconscious. The French philosopher Michel de Certeau expresses this paradoxical situation in the following way: 'seeing better', as far as 'the relationship of every Aufklärung to the insights that are either prior to or contemporary with it' is concerned, always represents both 'a scientific necessity and a new way of getting duped without knowing it' (‘une nouvelle manière d'être trompé à son insu’). Whatever you do to escape into a wonderful future or a rational utopia, you cannot escape from the shadow of the father — or from precisely those 'feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations' Marx and Engels refer to at the beginning of their manifesto: Faustus always has to sign a (new) pact with the Devil, who is still the father-substitute of our modern, scientific age, if we are to believe Certeau's interpretation of Freud.
The Flight from the Enchanter. Reflections on Salman Rushdie’s *Grimus*

We live in a disenchanted world. This historical *Entzauberung* has been linked up with the rise of the bourgeoisie and is described at some length in Karl Marx’ and Friedrich Engels’ *The Communist Manifesto* (1848): ‘The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations.... It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation...’¹ And the rupture with the past and its beliefs — among the latter a belief in the reality of *magic* — is reflected in numerous ways in nineteenth-century (bourgeois) literature; but at the same time the process of enlightenment and its consequences are contested, for it turns out to be much more difficult to get rid of this past than presupposed, insofar as it is still at work in the unconscious. The French philosopher Michel de Certeau expresses this paradoxical situation in the following way: ‘seeing better’, as far as ‘the relationship of every *Aufklärung* to the insights that are either prior to or contemporary with it’ is concerned, always represents both ‘a scientific necessity and a new way of getting duped without knowing it’ (‘une nouvelle manière d’être trompé à son insu’).² Whatever you do to escape into a wonderful future or a rational utopia, you cannot escape from the shadow of the father — or from precisely those ‘feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations’ Marx and Engels refer to at the beginning of their manifesto: Faustus always has to sign a (new) pact with the Devil, who is still the *father-substitute* of our modern, scientific age, if we are to believe Certeau’s interpretation of Freud.³

Salman Rushdie’s *Grimus* (1975) is a novel about *magic* and thus the narrative raises precisely the issues hinted at here — the problem(s) of the uses of enchantment (Bettelheim) or the uses of *dizenchantment*. As far as the latter strategy is concerned, the matter may be more complicated
than suggested above, for in a sense it may be said that the magical world of the fairy tale contains the seeds of its own destruction, that it may bring about another kind of ‘disenchantment’, at least if we attempt to read it in the perspective of Walter Benjamin’s famous essay ‘The Storyteller’. According to Benjamin the fairy tale ‘tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which myth had placed upon its chest…. The wisest thing — so the fairy tale taught mankind in olden times, and teaches children to this day — is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits’. Grimus presents a paradoxical solution to the persistence of an enchanted world — resulting from the destructive machinations of an evil magus, the title figure Grimus — insofar as it ends up by getting rid of magic by means of magic. The hero of the novel, the expatriated Amerindian Flapping Eagle, in the end decides to use the magical weapon he has got hold of, the Stone Rose, in order to create a world which contains no Stone Rose: ‘I began to re-create Calf Island, exactly as it was, with one difference: it was to contain no Rose. I had decided that this was a better alternative than physically breaking the Rose.’

Grimus is Salman Rushdie’s first novel, but it has not received the same kind of attention as Midnight’s Children (1981) and Shame (1983). Rushdie himself expresses certain reservations about Grimus: ‘I think Grimus is quite a clever book. But that’s not entirely a compliment. It’s too clever for its own good…’ Uma Parameswaran tends to agree with this judgment and characterizes the story line as ‘a potpourri of Romance and lustful encounters’. Parameswaran makes a number of comparisons between Grimus and Midnight’s Children, and it is true, of course, that an element of magical realism — comparable to what we find in Rushdie’s later works and in Latin American writer’s like Márquez and Asturias — may be discerned in Rushdie’s first novel, even if it is not developed to the same degree as in Midnight’s Children and Shame. However, Grimus is worth studying for its own sake as a formal experiment: a strange blend of mythical or allegorical narrative, fantasy, science fiction, and Menippean satire. According to the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, Menippean satire is characterized by ‘the organic combination within it of free fantasy, symbolism, and — on occasion — the mystical-religious element, with extreme (and from our point of view) crude underworld naturalism…’ This is a fairly exact description of Rushdie’s novel. Or, to quote Benjamin again, Grimus meets ‘the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits’, submitting it to a ritual ‘uncrowning’ or a parodic deconstruction.

Like Midnight’s Children and Shame, Grimus may be said to be based on a
series of 'wrong miracles'—or miracles that go wrong—insofar as the ultimate effects of these miracles turn out to be disastrous to the individual(s) or to the community involved. In *Midnight's Children* all the wondrous gifts of those born within the first hour of India's independence come to nothing, thanks to the diabolical machinations of the arch-villainess of the novel, i.e. the Widow alias Mrs Indira Gandhi. The destructive forces of modern history and, more specifically, India under the emergency and the enforced sterilization programme of the mid-1970s, have brought about this peripety, this disillusionment (or disenchantment) on a grand scale, and 'now fishes could not be multiplied nor base metals transmuted; gone forever, the possibilities of flight and lycanthropy and the originally one-thousand-and-one marvellous promises of a numinous midnight'. In *Shame* the birth of Raza Hyder's and his wife Bilquis' daughter Sufiya Zinobia is characterized as 'the wrong miracle' and a series of catastrophes follow in its wake, insofar as this girl develops into an ogre-like, man-killing monster, whose death is as spectacular as her career as a psychopathic murderer. In terms of the allegorical pattern of the novel Sufiya Zinobia is an embodiment of 'the Beast of shame' whose power 'cannot be held for long within one frame of flesh and blood, because it grows, it feeds and swells, until the vessel bursts...' The monster has become a superhuman, transhistorical force, causing 'a shock-wave that demolishes the house, and after it [comes] the fireball of her burning, rolling outwards to the horizon like the sea, and last of all the cloud, which rises and spreads and hangs over the nothingness of the scene...'. Thus a world ends in style—not with a whimper, but with a big bang! Incidentally, the cloud image of the passage quoted recalls the cloud poisoning the whole planet in M.P. Shiel's classic science-fiction novel about the last man on earth, *The Purple Cloud* (1901).

In *Grimus* a series of miracles take place: a man (Grimus) finds the Elixir of Life—and its counterpart, the Elixir of Death—and afterwards he creates an enchanted island inhabited by human immortals (the Island of Calf); but all these magical feats come to nothing, insofar as the hero of the novel, Flapping Eagle, finally brings about the annihilation of the island, 'its molecules and atoms breaking, dissolving, quietly vanishing into primal, unmade energy' (p. 270). The encounter between Prospero (Grimus) and Caliban (Flapping Eagle) thus leads to a denouement differing in important respects from that of Shakespeare's play. In *The Tempest* a strange sense of irreality permeates the very magical feats performed by Prospero and his supernatural aids:
These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
... the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
... We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.... (IV, i, 148-58)

The father figure in *The Tempest* is at once omnipotent and insubstantial, but at least he remains in control of things to the very end, which is no longer the case in *Grimus*; here the story ends with the fall of the magician.

Grimus (the magician of the novel) has withdrawn from his own creation in order to live in splendid isolation on a mountain top on Calf Island. He has created a zone which no one can penetrate without his permission. But in the end he dismantles the barrier he has set up, simultaneously trying to transfer his power as well as his identity to the successor he has chosen for himself, Flapping Eagle, who in this way becomes his ‘son’. When Grimus pulls down his own defences, he becomes the object of anger of the inhabitants of K who hold him responsible for every evil that has befallen them from time immemorial and who plan revenge. A lynching party sets out to kill him:

Flann O’Toole, wearing his Napoleon hat, right hand concealed in his buttoned greatcoat, face whisky-red, climbing the steps. At his side, One-Track Peckenpaw, racoon hat jammed on, bearskin coat enveloping his bulk, coiled rope hanging over one shoulder, rifle in hand. And behind them, P.S. Moonshy, a glaring-eyed, unshaven clerk. An unlikely trinity of nemesis nearing its goal.

Grimus stood in the shade of the great ash, beside his home, the particoloured head-dress fluttering in the slight breeze, his birds lining his shoulders, clustered around him on the ground, watching over him from the vast spreading branches. (p. 263)

What follows is, in Freudian terms, a re-enactment of original parri-cide; the killing of the primordial father by the band of united brothers, the brother horde. ‘One day,’ says Freud, ‘the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father, and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually.’ In *Grimus* the title figure is hanged from his own tree, the ‘great ash’ mentioned above, and afterwards the (mythical) tree is set on fire, and ‘around the column of smoke, a great dark cloud of circling,
shrieking birds, swooping and shrieking, pronounced his epitaph’ (p. 265).

Grimus is structured as a quest, as Flapping Eagle’s search for his lost sister and (later) for the above-mentioned magical object, the Stone Rose, an object that has a seminal function in the text insofar as it bridges the gap between this world and a ‘higher’ level of existence, a level where you may affect reality by means of ‘conceptual technology’ and visit other planets and bring back bottles with the Elixir of Life and the Elixir of Death. Actually, a number of different mythological systems intersect — and interact — in the novel. An obvious parallel, in mythological terms, is Dante’s Divine Comedy. The tripartite structure of the novel, and the central position of a figure called Virgil Jones as Flapping Eagle’s ‘guide’ or psychopompos as he is climbing the (purgatorial) mountain of Calf Island, certainly recall Dante’s poem, even if Grimus emerges as a parodic version of that self-same text — for in Grimus there is no successful search for an ultimate or divine truth, even if Flapping Eagle at the end of the novel manages to establish a contact with a higher civilization situated in a different part of the universe, on the planet Thera, viz. the supercivilization of the Gorf’s (‘Thera’ is an obvious anagram for ‘earth’ and ‘Gorf’ for ‘frog’). As Flapping Eagle enters a dangerous stage in his quest and has to undergo a series of mental hardships and trials, comprising hallucinatory experiences, Virgil Jones must ‘go in there, into the dimensions of another man’s mind, more dangerous than even one’s own, and guide him out’ (p. 79, my italics). Later Virgil explains to Flapping Eagle ‘that the topography of this Dimension’ is ‘a series of concentric circles’ (p. 88, my italics), recalling the geometrical shape of Dante’s Hell. As Flapping Eagle finally approaches his destination, the pinnacle where Grimus has built his impregnable fortress and from where he governs his magical realm, Virgil Jones’s function as a guide is taken over by the Amerindian’s sister Bird-Dog, who was originally abducted by Grimus and whom he has now transformed into a mindless tool, a ‘malcontented but totally subserviant menial’ (p. 238). The place is described in terms that recall Dante’s description of the terrestrial paradise and later on, in the Paradise section, the angelic orders and saints of the heavenly abodes: confronted with ‘an inconceivably huge tree, an ash’, Flapping Eagle remembers Virgil Jones’s ‘description of the Ash Yggdrasil, the mother-tree which holds the skies in place. And wondered what monsters were gnawing at its roots’ (p. 240). Bird-Dog is a somewhat surly version of the divine Beatrice, and the angelic orders are replaced by swarms of birds, for ornithology turns out to be Grimus’s predominant passion or obsession.
Calf Island is situated somewhere in the Mediterranean, and it belongs to another cosmic dimension which cannot be reached by ordinary mortals, but only by those upon whom Grimus has bestowed the gift of immortality. But the very position of the island suggests a middle point in terms of the symbolic topography of the novel — the place where East and West, in this case an Oriental (Mohammedan) and an Amerindian mythology and cosmology are confronted with each other. Furthermore, Grimus himself is described in Virgil Jones’s diary as ‘evidently Middle-European, a refugee no doubt’ (p. 222, my italics) and he is thus in a position that bears some resemblance to that of Flapping Eagle: just as Flapping Eagle is an exiled representative of the (lost) civilization of a Native American tribe somewhere in the South West, Grimus is an expatriated European; and his position as a powerful magus turns him into a somewhat dubious, but impressive representative of the technological skills and scientific culture of his own continent — even if he may also be characterized as a Gothic villain and has a number of qualities in common with the mad scientist of many early science-fiction novels.

According to several Native American myths evil enters the world through the intervention of an evil sorcerer, who starts messing things up, creating new beings of his own, etc., etc. In the Walam Olum, the creation myth and poetic record of the history of the Delawares, the work of the great Manito is (partially) spoilt by the activities of ‘an evil Manito’ who ‘made evil beings only, monsters’. And in the Walam Olum there are also references to ‘an evil being, a mighty magician’, who brought countless evils (badness, quarrelling, unhappiness, bad weather, sickness, death) with him when he came to earth. In Grimus the doings of the ‘mighty magician’, the possessor of the Stone Rose, bring about the expulsion of Flapping Eagle and his sister from their native country (tribe), and the world created by Grimus (Calf Island) is clearly also a fallen world compared to the supercivilization of the Gorfs from whom Grimus has stolen the Stone Rose (or at least he is using the Rose against their rules, when he is employing it for his own private purposes, for it ‘was never intended to be a tool for interendimions [i.e. interdimensional] travel. Nor a magical box for the production of food’, p. 262).

Furthermore, Flapping Eagle may be compared to a number of characters in modern Native American prose narratives. He is an exile inside an alien (white) culture, unable to find his own cultural roots and identity and at the same time incapable of adapting himself to the norms and values of Western consumer culture. Many of these fictional characters are trapped in a vicious circle and tend to exhibit self-destructive traits, but Flapping Eagle’s final destruction of the island — which
entails his own death — must rather be interpreted as his voluntary self-sacrifice, i.e. in the end he is willing to embrace death in order to bring Grimus’s evil scheme to an end, to break the circle. In some respects Flapping Eagle may be compared to the hero of a modern Native American tale, Russell Bates’s ‘Rite of Encounter’, who in the end prefers to starve himself to death in order to save his people from contamination with the white man’s diseases (in this case black smallpox).  

The life of the Axonas, the imaginary Amerindian tribe to which Flapping Eagle and his sister Bird-Dog belong, is narrowly circumscribed by rules, prescriptions, and taboos. And both Flapping Eagle and Bird-Dog are regarded as outsiders or pariahs from the very outset, because they are orphans, because their childhood and adolescence are accompanied by ill omens, and finally because they break the rules of the tribe. Their people are leading their lives in total seclusion from the rest of the world on a ‘plateau’, somewhere in the American South West, and when Flapping Eagle is finally expelled and descends into the lower regions of the plains below, he reaches a town called Phoenix, which ‘had arisen from the ashes of a great fire which had completely destroyed the earlier and much larger city also called Phoenix’ (p. 24). This gives us a hint as to the whereabouts of the Axonas, for the place must be Phoenix, Arizona, and the time consequently the near or remote future.

When Flapping Eagle leaves the plateau immediately after his sister’s departure — she has left with an itinerant peddler, Sispy, whose sibilant name is an alias for Grimus — he, like his sister, has drunk the Elixir of Life and thus become one of the immortals. His descent from the heights may be described as a kind of descensus ad inferos, for after his expulsion he has to wander over the surface of the earth in the footsteps of Ahasvérus (the Wandering Jew) for a period of seven hundred and forty-three years, four months, and three days, before he finally manages to reach Calf Island. When he arrives at Calf Island he has lived ‘for a total of seven hundred and seventy-seven years, seven months and seven days’ (p. 38). Whatever one may think of numerical symbolism, this seems to be a great day in his life!

The search for the elixir that bestows immortality upon human beings may also be found in Oriental (Mohammedan) folklore. According to Idries Shah ‘Many stories have been handed down in the East relating to the search for the Elixir of Life, by which immortality could be secured’, and Sispy-Grimus has many features in common with the itinerant sorcerers of numerous legendary traditions in the Middle East. At the same time it must be remembered, of course, that the theme of immor-

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tality is well-known in Western literature from Hoffmann’s *The Devil’s Elixirs* (1816) and other Romantic versions of the legend of the Wandering Jew to Borges and modern Latin American magical realism. As far away as China the search for immortality has made its appearance in legend and history, for instance in the account of the First Emperor, who ‘grew so obsessed with desire’ to find the fungus of immortality in the Isles of the Blest ‘that he became an easy dupe in the hands of Taoist adventurers, who imposed upon his credulity to further their own ambitious designs...’ In *Grimus* the legendary notion of the Islands of the Blessed — well-known from Western as well as Eastern folklore — becomes Calf Island; but at the same time the search for immortality is coupled with a strong death urge on the part of the hero (Flapping Eagle).

The name of the island in *Grimus* as well as that of the title-figure contains a number of punning references to themes and concepts associated with Mohammedan and, in particular, with Sufi philosophy and cosmology. Actually, the novel tends to explore — and explain — its own puns, i.e. it contains a number of hermeneutical passages where the text is operating on a metafictional level. This is the case, for instance, when Grimus himself refers to the ‘myth of the Mountain of Kâf’, the mountain where the mythical Simurg, the ‘Great Bird’ of Mohammedan legend, is reported to live: ‘There is a Sufi poem in which thirty birds set out to find the Simurg on the mountain where he lives. When they reach the peak, they find that they themselves are, or rather have become, the Simurg. The name, you see, means Thirty Birds’ (p. 223). The poem referred to here is Farid ud-din Attar’s *The Conference of Birds (Mantiq Utta‘ir)*, probably composed in the second half of the twelfth century A.D., and quoted by Rushdie himself at the beginning of *Grimus* (p. 7). *Grimus* has planned to model the relationship between himself and Flapping Eagle on the perfect relationship between the One Bird (the Simurg) and the thirty birds, but Grimus fails to carry out his scheme because Flapping Eagle refuses to play the role foreseen for him by his adversary. Rushdie’s novel thus represents a degraded or down-graded or ironic version of the myth of the Simurg and the mountain of Kâf. In Farid ud-din Attar’s poem we find an allegorical expression of Sufi teachings concerning the perfect relationship between man and God, but in *Grimus* the divine being has been replaced by a would-be demiurge who is incapable of upholding the artificial world he has created.

According to *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* ‘some exegetes of the Qur’ān interpret the letter kāf, which stands at the head of Sura L, as referring to the mountain Kāf...’, and Annemarie Schimmel in her study *Mystical
Dimensions of Islam (1975) notices the fondness of poets and mystics for ‘expressing their ideas by playing with the first letters of those concepts of which they wanted to convey the deeper meaning to their readers...’, and concerning the letter q (qaf) she emphasizes that it is also ‘the mythical mountain that surrounds the world, on which the Simurgh ... has its dwelling place...’ Q is also associated with qurb (proximity) and with quanāt (contentment): ‘the perfect Sufi lives, like the mythological bird, in the Mount Qāf of quanāt...’ Thus the religious concepts are given a parodic twist in Rushdie’s novel, and there is an obvious lack of proportion, an incongruity, between the mythical framework on the one hand and the level of the human characters in Rushdie’s novel on the other.

The disappearance of the Stone Rose at the end of Grimus and the consequences of that event may recall the destruction of the Ring in the crater of Mount Doom at the end of Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings (1954-55). But apart from such fantasy elements there are also a number of science-fiction elements in the novel. The Stone Rose recalls the black monolith(s) in Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey, and the idea of a superior civilization observing our own is present in a great many modern science-fiction texts from Anna Kavan’s Ice to Doris Lessing’s Briefing for a Descent into Hell and her Canopus in Argos series. But there is an even closer resemblance between Rushdie’s Grimus and another science-fiction novel: Angela Carter’s The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffmann (1972, American title: The War of Dreams). The title may refer to the author of The Devil’s Elixirs or to the discoverer of LSD, Albert Hoffmann, both of them disturbing figures and both of them explorers of powerful and potentially dangerous forces lodged in the unconscious. Doctor Hoffmann in Angela Carter’s novel, like the title-figure of Grimus, possesses a diabolical power over the minds of others. Grimus misuses the Stone Rose and Doctor Hoffmann is capable of creating powerful illusions, of disrupting the very sense of reality: ‘I lived in the city when our adversary, the diabolical Dr Hoffmann, filled it with mirages in order to drive us all mad...’ In Rushdie’s novel there are several references to ‘the Grimus effect’, and in Angela Carter’s novel there is correspondingly a ‘Hoffmann effect’ (p. 3). Sexuality plays a seminal role in both novels: in Grimus the whole-sale destruction of the island at the end is accompanied by an outburst of sexual energy, as Flapping Eagle and the ex-prostitute Media are ‘[writhing] upon their bed’ (p. 271), and in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffmann the mad scientist (Dr Hoffmann) by means of his ingenious ‘desire machines’ manipulates human sexuality on a large scale for his own sinister purposes, i.e. in order to destroy the reality principle and create a psychotic state of mind.
in his fellow human beings (pp. 243 ff.). Furthermore, in both novels the 
carnivalistic atmosphere of market places and fun fairs plays a seminal 
role: in *Grimus* by virtue of the title-figure’s merging with the itinerant 
peddler Sispy, in Angela Carter’s novel through the introduction of a 
peep-show proprietor who turns out to be Dr Hoffmann’s former 
professor. To quote Mikhail Bakhtin once more: ‘Truth’s earthly adven-
tures take place on highroads, in brothels, dens of thieves, taverns, 
market places, prisons, and at secret cults’ erotic orgies.... The man of 
an idea — the wise man — is confronted with the extreme expression of 
worldly evil, depravity, baseness and vulgarity.’ This is precisely the 
narrative strategy that is characteristic of Angela Carter’s as well as 
Rushdie’s novel.

From what has been said in the foregoing it is obvious that *Grimus* 
brings a whole series of different codes — associated with a number of 
literary genres and conventions — into play. The text is characterized by 
its very heterogeneity, its refusal to adhere to any one particular semiotic 
code, any one narratological scheme. This predilection for code switching 
— to use a term applied by the historian Peter Burke to the World of 
Carnival — is characteristic of one particular genre, marked by its lack 
of homogeneity and its ability to incorporate and assimilate to its own 
purposes a number of other genres. The genre in question is the 
Menippean satire.

According to Northrop Frye the Menippean satire ‘deals less with 
people as such than with mental attitudes. Pedants, bigots, cranks, 
parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional 
men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approach to 
life as distinct from their social behaviour...’ The citizens of the town of 
K on Calf Island in Rushdie’s *Grimus* may be said to belong to the above-
mentioned company of pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, etc.; furthermore, 
what characterizes them is their narrow adherence to one predomi-
nant passion or ‘prime interest’: ‘We in K,’ explains one of the charac-
ters, ‘...like to think of ourselves as complete men. Most, or actually all 
of us have a special area of interest to call our own...’ (p. 130). According 
to Frye the *philosophus gloriosus* is a recurring figure in the Menippean 
satire, and in *Grimus* this function is performed by the local philosopher 
and pillar of society, Ignatius Q. Gribb, whose ‘all-quotable philosophy’ 
cannot be taken as a serious contribution to Western thought, but is 
rather a series of disconnected observations and trivial *bonmots* decked out 
in a pompous language. When Gribb dies all of a sudden — from the 
emotional shock incurred when his wife transfers her love from him to 
Flapping Eagle — the whole community of K immediately begins to fall 
to pieces.
Mikhail Bakhtin stresses, among other elements, the predilection for ‘scandalous scenes and scenes of eccentric behaviour’ as well as a ‘crude underworld naturalism’ (cf. above) as characteristic of the Menippean satire — a genre that has survived from antiquity (the age of Lucian, Petronius, and Apuleius) to the present day.\(^\text{30}\) In Grimus the middle section of the novel with its presentation of low-life scenes in Flann O’Toole’s bar room (the ‘Elbaroom’) and the town’s brothel, punningly called the House of the Rising Son, is in accordance with the above-mentioned conventions. Philosophical universalism, ultimate questions, and a metaphysical quest are thus combined with underworld naturalism, and Flapping Eagle’s sexual adventures or ‘lustful encounters’ (Parameswaran) also contribute to the intellectual ‘meaning’ of the novel (cf. the function of the last sexual scene). Furthermore, Bakhtin identifies a ‘tri-levelled construction’, consisting of Olympus, earth, and nether world, as characteristic of the Menippean satire. In Grimus this tri-levelled structure may be found on Calf Island, which consists of three levels: the beach with Virgil Jones’s house, the town of K, and the mountain top with Grimushome, corresponding more or less accurately to the above-mentioned cosmic levels.\(^\text{31}\)

In Grimus the clash between different systems of values and between the people of the third world and their European colonizers is largely carried out in metaphorical terms, as part of a literary experiment with time, space, and language (cf. Rushdie’s fondness for puns). In Rushdie’s later novels, however, the outsider (Saleem, Sufiya Zinobia) is placed within a narrowly circumscribed historical space, i.e. the space ‘left’ by the Europeans (the English) when India and Pakistan obtained their independence. In Grimus the hero belongs to another despised minority: the Amerindians, and his fight for recognition in K as well as his final battle with Grimus may be regarded as various stages in an ideological quest. The town of K represents European mediocrity and middle-class self-complacency, and it turns out to be impossible for Flapping Eagle to become integrated into this narrow-minded, prejudiced and profoundly racist community. Grimus, on the other hand, represents the (patriarchal) centre of power of this sham society — a particularly vicious embodiment of the Zeitgeist, it might be argued. The attempts on the part of the citizens of K to flee from the enchanter by simply denying his existence turn out to be futile, and when the fall of the magician in the end brings about disenchantment, it is not only a false civilization, but a complete human world that is annihilated.
NOTES

3. Certeau comments on Sigmund Freud's 'A Neurosis of Demoniacal Possession in the Seventeenth Century' (1923). Cf. also on the case-story taken up by Freud — the story of the painter Christoph Haizmann and his compact with the Devil — Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter's *Schizophrenia 1677* (Dawson & Sons Ltd., 1956).
12. Ibid., p. 286.
13. Cf. M.P. Shiel, *The Purple C/W* (Warner Paperback Library, 1973). In the above-mentioned interview Rushdie expresses his interest in science fiction as a genre: '...I was taken with the liberty to discuss ideas that science fiction can give you' (p. 25).
17. Ibid., pp. 343-52.
24. Ibid., p. 421.
25. Of course, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* is called 'Inner-space fiction' by Lessing herself, 'For there is never anywhere to go but in' (title-page).
27. Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit., p. 94.
30. Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit., pp. 96, 94.
31. Ibid., p. 95. It may be added that Rushdie's already mentioned predilection for punning is in accordance with the *parodic* trend in the Menippean satire (cf. Bakhtin, p. 97). *Grimus* is an obvious anagram for *Simurg*, but it may also contain a punning reference to *grimoire*, a manual for magicians!

Prabhu S. Guptara

THE MOONIES

Cheesy grins
even when embarrassed
or enraged

answering
logical questions
by intuition

believing in an earthly salvation
by faith in the Reverend Moon

always in little frightened groups,
making dutiful forays into the crooked world,