

I have been interrupted by Padma, who brought me my dinner and then withheld it, blackmailing me: 'So if you're going to spend all your time wrecking your eyes with that scribbling, at least you must read it to me.' I have been singing for my supper-but perhaps our Padma will be useful, because it's impossible to stop her being a critic. She is particularly angry with my remarks about her name. 'What do you know, city boy?' she cried-hand slicing the air. 'In my village there is no shame in being named for the Dung Goddess. Write at once that you are wrong, completely.' In accordance with my lotus's wishes, I insert, forthwith, a brief paean to Dung.

Dung, that fertilizes and causes the crops to grow! Dung, which is patted into thin chapati-like cakes when still fresh and moist, and is sold to the village builders, who use it to secure and strengthen the walls of kachcha buildings made of mud! Dung, whose arrival from the nether end of cattle goes a long way towards explaining their divine and sacred status! Oh, yes, I was wrong, I admit I was prejudiced, no doubt because its unfortunate odours do have a way of offending my sensitive nose-how wonderful, how ineffably lovely it must be to be named for the Purveyor of Dung!

... On April 6th, 1919, the holy city of Amritsar smelled (gloriously, Padma, celestially!) of excrement. And perhaps the (beauteous!) reek did not offend the Nose on my grandfather's face-after all, Kashmir! peasants used it, as described above, for a kind of plaster. Even in Srinagar, hawkers with barrows of round dung-cakes were not an uncommon sight. But then the stuff was drying, muted, useful. Amritsar dung was fresh and (worse) redundant. Nor was it all bovine. It issued from the rumps of the horses between the shafts of the city's many tongas, ikkas and gharries; and mules and men and dogs attended nature's calls, mingling in a brotherhood of shit. But there were cows, too: sacred kine roaming the dusty streets, each patrolling its own territory, staking its claims in excrement. And flies! Public Enemy Number One, buzzing gaily from turd to steaming turd, celebrated and cross-pollinated these freely-given offerings. The city swarmed about, too, mirroring the motion of the flies. Doctor Aziz looked down from his hotel window on to this scene as a Jain in a face-mask walked past, brushing the pavement before him with a twig-broom, to avoid stepping on an ant, or even a fly. Spicy sweet fumes rose from a street-snack barrow. 'Hot pakoras, pakoras hot!' A white woman was buying silks from a shop across the street and men in turbans were ogling her. Naseem-now Naseem Aziz-had a sharp headache; it was the first time she'd ever repeated an illness, but life outside her quiet valley had come as something of a shock to her. There was a jug of fresh lime water by her bed, emptying rapidly. Aziz stood at the window, inhaling the city. The spire of the Golden Temple gleamed in the sun. But his nose itched: something was not right here.

Close-up of my grandfather's right hand: nails knuckles fingers all somehow bigger than you'd expect. Clumps of red hair on the outside edges. Thumb and forefinger pressed together, separated only by a thickness of paper. In short: my grandfather was holding a pamphlet. It had been inserted into his hand (we cut to a long-shot-nobody from Bombay should be without a basic film vocabulary) as he entered the hotel foyer. Scurrying of urchin through revolving door, leaflets falling in his wake, as the chaprassi gives chase. Mad revolutions in the doorway, roundandround; until chaprassi-hand demands a close-up, too, because it is pressing thumb to forefinger, the two separated only by the thickness of urchin-ear. Ejection of juvenile disseminator of gutter-tracts; but still my grandfather retained the message. Now, looking out of his window, he sees it echoed on a wall opposite; and there, on the minaret of a mosque; and in the large black type of newsprint under a hawker's arm. Leaflet newspaper mosque and wall are crying: Hartal! Which is to say, literally speaking, a day of mourning, of stillness, of silence.

**Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981)**