

## The Renaissance Revisited:

### Reading Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*

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This essay seeks to extricate from Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* an idea of the Renaissance that is putatively intrinsic to the age itself and, at the same time, consciously contrived to explain to us our own retrospective empathy with that age. It argues that Rushdie's choice of subject, a semi-historical narrative of travel between the East and the West during the Renaissance which deliberately juxtaposes illustrious epochs and personalities in the two hemispheres, is fairly representative of certain shared habits of thinking among the Westernised intelligentsia. These habits of thinking and the concerns and perspectives that they yield are, as this essay will attempt to show, shared by the world of creative writing and the humanities academia. The kind of writing this essay is referring to is middle-brow in that it is neither wholly arcane nor altogether popular.

The essay does not suggest that the commonalities betray a concerted publishing policy. Nor does it insinuate that everyone writing in our times invariably thinks about the same things, ages, or personages, and in the same manner. There is always in any age a considerable body of writing that is arcane, recondite, non-representative, and irreducible to any singular understanding of contemporary intellectual taste and cultural climate. However, the main argument of this essay does reflect on the two-way process by which cultures of reading are fashioned. Readers of such fiction and non-fiction would include academics inclined to use these texts to posit on or another theory about the narratology, the aesthetics and