

Step Across This Line by Salman Rushdie.
Collected non-fiction 1992-2002. Jonathan Cape, 2003.

For many, the name of Salman Rushdie will always be associated with his (in) famous book *The Satanic Verses*, following which he was condemned to death in a ruling from the late Imam of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini. Rushdie became a cause celebre, supported by the free-thinking and liberal minded intelligentsia to the same degree by which he was excoriated by those who deemed him guilty of blasphemy.

Step Across This Line is a valuable reminder that the Rushdie of contentious fiction is also a superb writer of non-fiction, an astute and witty observer of the foibles of the world he inhabits, and a shrewd analyst of events and individuals, including himself.

This collection of a decade's worth of essays, articles, and the occasional speech starts with a wonderful and wholly unexpected discourse on the *Wizard of Oz* and ranges through such subjects as rock music, football, the death of Princess Diana and his beloved India. The second half of the book, entitled *Messages From The Plague Years*, follows the Khomeini fatwa, and echoes the shock, pain and courage felt by the author in their aftermath.

This is a far from predictable anthology by a master writer, and some of the passages are so rich that they deserve reading several times. Of all the passages, those following the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 are especially memorable, but for me the most powerful and touching is his letter of November 1997 to the Six Billionth World Citizen. Its message will stay with you for a long time.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh