

Corso di Laurea (Vecchio Ordinamento, ante D.M. 509/1999)  
in Lingue e Letterature Straniere

Tesi di Laurea

Titolo

**The Rushdie Affair: an hypothesis of reading in the light  
of the publication of Salman Rushdie's memoir *Joseph  
Anton***

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Anno Accademico

2013 / 2014

*A mio padre*

*che è il mio passato e il mio presente*

*A Jacopo*

*che è il mio presente e il mio futuro*

*A tutti coloro che non hanno mai smesso di credere in me*

*anche nei momenti in cui io stessa avevo smesso di crederci*

*... E un po' anche a me stessa*

*per tutto quello che è stato e che sarà*

## **RINGRAZIAMENTI**

Desidero ringraziare innanzitutto il mio relatore per avermi permesso di approfondire un argomento che da tempo destava il mio interesse personale.

Desidero ringraziare il personale della Biblioteca di Area Linguistica BALI di Palazzo Cosulich per l'aiuto ricevuto in merito alla ricerca della bibliografia, nonché il personale della segreteria didattica e i tanti professori e colleghi che ho incontrato nel mio lungo e tortuoso percorso di studi che mi hanno sostenuto nel perseguimento di questo mio obiettivo.

Desidero inoltre ringraziare la mia famiglia che ha rispettato la mia scelta di voler continuare gli studi nonostante il tempo trascorso inesorabilmente. Ringrazio mia cugina Silvia per il sostegno ricevuto nei momenti più difficili e per l'aiuto che mi ha dato nel disbrigo di alcune pratiche burocratiche.

Ringrazio sentitamente i colleghi di lavoro che mi hanno sempre sostenuto e spinto a non mollare nei momenti in cui la stanchezza si faceva sentire maggiormente. Il mio pensiero va soprattutto ad Emanuele, che mi ha permesso di vedere e di discutere della mia tesi in un'ottica diversa, nuova, forse più attinente al suo percorso di studi che al mio, ma che in ogni caso si è rivelata essere un ottimo stimolo ad aprire la mente e a non vedere sempre le cose in un'unica direzione. Un particolare ringraziamento per il grande sostegno ricevuto va anche

ad Elisa, Debora, Nicola, Lucia, Azzurra, Laura, Barbara, Silvia, Sandro e ai tanti colleghi che mi hanno sostenuto in questi anni passati fianco a fianco in tante situazioni.

Ringrazio i tanti amici che mi hanno incoraggiata, sostenuta, ma anche sopportata nei miei momenti no, e che hanno sempre gioito con me per ogni mio piccolo passo avanti.

Ringrazio gli amici di ogni giorno, gli amici di Facebook e gli amici di Twitter, in taluni casi ancora solo virtuali, ma per me ugualmente molto reali. Fra di essi, in nome della nostra pluridecennale amicizia, ringrazio Lara, Silvia, Erica, e i tanti che in questo momento sicuramente sto dimenticando. Non posso però dimenticare Raffaele, Monique, Emiliano e Maurizio, ma anche la dolce Georgia che, dal Regno Unito, ha passato lunghe serate a conversare con me su Twitter per aiutarmi a rendere più fluido il mio inglese. Ringrazio Giovanni che mi ha aiutato tanto nell'impaginazione della tesi, la dolce Nancy, Giuseppe, Cristiana, Cristina, Ketty, Rossella e tutto il favoloso gruppo dedicato agli Spandau Ballet, gruppo musicale della mia adolescenza i cui componenti ringrazio uno per uno, per come mi è possibile, per essere stato l'inconsapevole ispirazione della mia passione per la cultura e la lingua inglesi. Come dimenticare, infine, il grande sostegno ricevuto su Twitter dai ragazzi di Radio Ca'Foscari? Grazie ragazzi, grazie davvero a tutti!

Un ringraziamento speciale va ad Andrea, senza la cui spinta propulsiva non sarei mai stata capace di trovare la forza di arrivare a questo giorno.

Grazie veramente a tutti, con tutto il mio cuore.

## ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines *The Satanic Verses* Affair in the light of the recent publication of Salman Rushdie's memoir *Joseph Anton*, trying to offer an hypothesis of reading of the controversial Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*.

Firstly, after an introductory part on Salman Rushdie's biography and a summary on the events narrated in the book object of my analysis, I try to focus on the context in which Rushdie lives and causes him to write the book, then I review the events related to the publication and the diffusion of *The Satanic Verses* with particular reference to the case of Italy.

Secondly, I focus on the narrative characteristics of the text including the title, the construction of the text, the main characters and the point of view. Subsequently my discussion goes on with the analysis of the novel in relation to the author, the context and the main themes treated (particularly blasphemy and migration) trying to focus on my personal interpretation in the light of all the analysis.

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## INTRODUCTION

On 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012 Salman Rushdie published his memoir *Joseph Anton* dedicated to the thirteen years, one month and thirteen days, since 14<sup>th</sup> February 1989 to 27<sup>th</sup> March 2002, that he lived under protection, due to a death sentence (*fatwa*) issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran for the publication of his book *The Satanic Verses*, considered blasphemous.

The *fatwa* was issued on Rushdie, on his publisher, the translators and, generally, on all the people involved in the publication of the book.

Joseph Anton was the name that Rushdie chose for himself for his life under protection, due to his admiration for, respectively, Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov<sup>1</sup>. In particular these two authors could clearly explain the situation in which Rushdie was: Conrad wrote spy stories, but in particular the novel *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* which is the story of a sea voyage. The protagonist of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* gets on board even though he is suffering from tuberculosis. A passenger asks him why he put on the road even though he knew he was sick and he replies "I must live until I die", which is not only a sentence

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<sup>1</sup> "Salman Rushdie: The Satanic Consequences." Interview. *Exberliner*. Iomauna Media GmbH, 8 Nov. 2013. Web. 30 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.exberliner.com/culture/salman-rushdie-i-must-live-until-i-die/>>

that recurs at the beginning and towards the end of *The Satanic Verses* but also the key concept embodying the perspective from which the novel was written.

In writing *Joseph Anton*, Salman Rushdie refers to all the private and public events that have taken place over time following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, on 26 September 1988.

The wider protest movements spread all over the world, took place at the hands of Islamic fundamentalists who regarded Rushdie's novel as a blasphemous book, offensive to their religious beliefs because it ridiculed many aspects of the Qur'an, the sacred book of Islam.

On 14<sup>th</sup> February 1989 Rushdie received a call from a BBC journalist who informed him of the death sentence issued on him by the Iranian leader. Since then, Rushdie has spent his time in lectures, discussions and interviews to explain that his intention was not to write a book making fun of the religion of Islam, being himself a Muslim, but to take a cue from some elements of the Muslim religion in order to write a novel, claiming the possibility, usually accorded to writers, to enjoy freedom of expression. also in terms of choice of the subject matter dealt with in the narrative.

This was not enough to make sure that his life and that of his family did not suffer an abrupt change for more than thirteen years.

Many writers devoted themselves to his defense, claiming the right to freedom of expression as an inviolable human right.

Comments and opinions on *The Satanic Verses* spread in many intellectual circles, sometimes in favor, but in majority against the book. Among them most



commentators admitted that they had not read the book, but to base their opinion on reviews appeared in newspapers or magazines. Who was against the book challenged mostly the unequal treatment designed to Islamic religion and its most representative figures, for the irreverence with which they are described.

Anyway it is important to mention also Feroza Jussawalla, who attempted a different interpretation of *The Satanic Verses* on the basis of the past of India as British colony and as part of the Mughal Empire from Persia.

Rushdie's language was the Persian Urdu and he was influenced by the Islamic religion for the form and content of his writings, as they have an Indian-Muslim background. According to Indo-Mughal tradition, love for the beloved is expressed in the form of lyric poetry (*dastan-e-dilruba*) or in a narrative form (*dastan*). For *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie chose the *qissa*, the story of legendary adventures in the form of *dastan*, but *The Satanic Verses* comes to be in the form of *dastan-e-dilruba*. Feroza Jussawalla asserts that:

"[...] it is not the "rejection of Islam" - the beloved - [...] that Rushdie represents as much as love for the Islam - the religion - of the subcontinental soil, where it flourished under the Mughals and came into question at the end of Mughal dominance, where it was and is practiced in an atmosphere of mixing and merging."<sup>2</sup>

Rushdie's choice to use the Persian poetic form was misinterpreted, for example by Franz Fanon who saw this choice as a gimmick to hit the sensitivity of the Mughal and British colonizers, but also by Sara Suleri who saw this choice

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<sup>2</sup> Jussawalla, Feroza "Rushdie's *Dastan-e-Dilruba: The Satanic Verses* as a Love Letter to Islam" *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*. Ed. M. Keith Booker. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999. 82.

as an obsessive attitude toward Islam; in fact Rushdie considered himself as a writer who defend Islam, but it is an Islam that he did not know, a secularized Islam, so when the *fatwa* was issued on him, he did not understand the reasons why the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini condemned him to death.

In addition the form of the novel, what is important for my thesis is the interpretation that Rushdie gives about the text of *The Satanic Verses*.

Very recently, in his memoir *Joseph Anton*, published in September, 2012, in an attempt to give his personal interpretation and explanation of *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie makes reference to the act of migration and says "So if this novel is a novel about migration it must be that act of putting in question."<sup>3</sup>

My thesis stems from this statement, that is from the analysis of the several aspects of the text to find the appropriate grounds for the interpretation of *The Satanic Verses* as a text on migration.

Looking at the course of history, the characters, the places, the language used, any narrative techniques, the point of view adopted and any other relevant matters of the text, I try to find all the appropriate justifications for this type of interpretation, that is all the elements that help to consider *The Satanic Verses* a text on migration.

The first general part is dedicated to the context in which Rushdie writes his book.

The second part dedicated to Rushdie's biography, integrated with the events that have taken place in the world following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, and to the exposition of the plot.

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<sup>3</sup> Rushdie, Salman. *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2012. 72.

The third part is dedicated to the Rushdie Affair, or the so-called Satanic Verses Affair in consideration of a greater emphasis on the author and on his work, but not so much to the succession of the events already seen in the biography of Salman Rushdie as highly integrated with his private life; rather, it is dedicated to the debate that was created among the writers, in political and intellectual circles on freedom of expression and censorship, with reference also to the case of Italy.

The last part before the conclusion is dedicated to the discussion of my personal interpretation of the book that, as I said before, I have analyzed assuming that Rushdie himself states in his memoir *Joseph Anton* that *The Satanic Verses* is simply a novel about migration.

After an introductory part on *The Satanic Verses* and the different interpretations of the text, the following parts are dedicated to the different aspects of the novel. From the main characters, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, the discourse unfolds on the other characters, secondary but not least similarly prominent, and then an analysis of all arguments related to the movement of the characters in the scene, their evolution or involution, always doing greater reference to the two main characters of the novel.

What prompted me to address the topic of my thesis was, following the publication of the memoir *Joseph Anton* and subsequent resumption of debates on the novel *The Satanic Verses*, my personal interest to understand if the *fatwa* issued on Rushdie and all subsequent events were due to a correct interpretation of the novel. The possibility of consulting Rushdie's memoir on the years of *fatwa*

gave a great support to the discussion of my thesis, firstly because it was just reading it that the desire to deepen the reading of *The Satanic Verses*, one of the most controversial books ever written, arose in me, and consequently figure out whether the interpretation given in the memoir could be supported by concrete data. Rushdie's memoir was very useful to me in order to summarize the facts etched in Rushdie's memory, to better understand his emotions due to the *fatwa* issued on him and the point of view of the writer by his own words.

I think it could be considered unusual the fact of using the memoir of an author's life to comment on one of his previous books and, in addition, I think this could be considered the strength of my thesis. At the same time, however, as I stated before I believe that the use of the memoir to analyse Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was a good starting point to challenge the text that unfolds the Rushdie Affair and try to figure out whether Rushdie's interpretation of *The Satanic Verses* is correct, or at least realistic.

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was immediately interpreted by the various Muslim communities in the world as a direct attack on Islam and in particular on the Prophet Muhammad, sacred figure of Islam. Islam represents not only their religion, but also a set of precepts which are the basis of their conception of life: a real “way of life”.

This was the most well-known interpretation of *The Satanic Verses*, provoking the worst personal consequences not only on the author's personal life because of the *fatwa* issued on him, but also on his work as a writer. The riots and protests that took place since the publication of *The Satanic Verses* shocked the

Eastern and Western world for all tragic events happened during the years after September 1988 until the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2002, the day on which the *fatwa* issued on Rushdie was retired.

A second interpretation of *The Satanic Verses* is directly linked to the past of India as colony conquered mainly by the United Kingdom, but also by Persia. The Persian occupation took place during the post-Mughal period; Rushdie grew up in this environment and learned the Urdu language. The Indian-Muslim background, between Hinduism and Islamism, influenced not only some of the characters and facts described in *The Satanic Verses* but also the form and contents of the novel; in fact it took the form of a *dastan-e-dilruba*, that is to say a love song for the beloved.

A third interpretation of the book is linked to the publication of Rushdie's last book, his memoir *Joseph Anton*, on the years he lived after the issue of *fatwa* by Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini until the *fatwa* was retired in 2002. In his memoir, as mentioned before, he states that his novel *The Satanic Verses* is a book on migration. Undoubtedly, taking as a starting point for my thesis statement an interpretation expressed by the author of the novel that I am going to analyze can be considered a weakness of my argument because, in some way, it is logical to think that the author of a text addresses his readers to his own interpretation, his own way of perceiving things and, however, towards the best possible interpretation of his work; however, I tried to be as objective as possible in the analysis of the characteristics of the novel, in order to trace the elements able to confirm, or refute if necessary, the thesis examined.

## 1. THE CONTEXT

When in September 1988 Rushdie published his novel *The Satanic Verses* he was living in London since 1961 when, at the age of fourteen, he was sent to study in London by his father Anis. It was almost the end of the third, and last, political mandate of Margaret Thatcher as British Prime Minister, the first woman who held this role in United Kingdom, from May 1979 to November 1990.

Two years before Rushdie's arrival in London, Margaret Thatcher, leader of the Conservative Party, was a member of Parliament. She was also Education Secretary and Cabinet Minister from 1970 to 1974, Leader of the Opposition from 1975 to 1979, and became Prime Minister in 1979 for three consecutive mandates. Therefore, it is reasonable to affirm that the political figure of Thatcher influenced him greatly in his activity as writer to the point that Salman Rushdie, active opponent of Thatcher's policy choices, pilloried her in his fourth novel using titles like 'Mrs. Torture' and 'Maggie the Bitch'.

Throughout all her mandate Margaret Thatcher was very determined and energetic: she profoundly changed the structure of political parties, transformed the domestic and foreign policy, then she assumed the role and the attitude of a

true "Iron Lady" of the British government to the point that the period covered by her government is still called 'Thatcherism', in the name of his stubborn personality. During the eleven years of his mandate, Margaret Thatcher dismantled the British coal industry, destroyed the manufacturing sector, closed factories and increased unemployment. She also encouraged the development of irresponsible finance and was also considered guilty of the abnormal increase of the cost of housing. What is even more serious, she was accused of dismantling the welfare state, establishing fee-paying schools and private health care. The effects of the crisis caused by his conservative politics took root, even if unevenly, across all the country which saw increase public spending mainly for the payment of unemployment benefits.

It was living in this context that Salman Rushdie, in some way, planned the contents of *The Satanic Verses*.

He was an author of international stature also before the publication of the book, even though his life and experience was profoundly scarred by the sentence to death launched by the Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini for the publication of the book. This fact firstly diverted attention from important Indo-English writers like Mulk Ray Anand, Manohar Malgonkar and R. K. Narayan; secondly it obscured the fact that his work was linked to Indian cultural tradition as much as the English one; thirdly, Rushdie became a prominent figure in the West in particular because of the *fatwa*: he won the Booker Prize for fiction in 1981 for the publication of the novel *Midnight's Children*, but in February 1989 he became the victim of a *fatwa* after the publication, some months before, at the end of

September 1988, of his work *The Satanic Verses* and this fact greatly increased its notoriety.

As M. Keith Booker confirms<sup>4</sup>, "[...] it should be noted that 63 of the 93 items on *Midnight's Children* were published from 1989 onward, indicating a significant increase in critical attention to his novel after the controversy surrounding *The Satanic Verses*."

Anyway, it cannot be denied that his work arose a political attention linked to the growing interest towards multiculturalism and postcolonialism, in terms of tradition, but above all, in Homi Bhabha and Sara Suleri's opinion, towards the matter of hybridity.

Salman Rushdie was part of a group called "Third-World Cosmopolitans", together with Mario Vargas Llosa, Isabel Allende, Gabriel García Marquez, Derek Walcott and others writers, and he could be plainly considered worthy representative of what they collectively represent: the "Third-World Cosmopolitans" writers were the Western interpreters of the Third World. They usually came from Third World countries but looked at the Third World nations with a Western eye because they did not live in their original country, but in the large cities of the First World.

As "Third-World Cosmopolitan", Rushdie's merit is to have created, by his writings, an entire Third-World system, describing its characteristics, its qualities but also its absurdities. So, logically speaking, in his *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: myths of the Nation*, Timothy Brennan affirms the importance of

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<sup>4</sup> Booker, M. Keith "Salman Rushdie: The Development of a Literary Reputation." *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*. Ed. M. Keith Booker. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999. 6.



Rushdie both for Western studies and Postcolonial ones.

At the end of the Second World War, with the progressive decay of the great world empires, big debates over nationalism spread all over Europe. The most important one was between Tom Nairn, the Belgian scholar Armand Mattelart and Paul Ricoeur. They collectively consider nationalism an ideology inspired by contrasting elements, as it is at the same time friendly and bellicose due to the necessity to create not only a welcoming nation but also capable to repress independence.

The terms 'nation' and 'nationalism' were used in particular in Third-World fiction. Michel Foucault defines the 'nation' a 'discursive formation' that is “a gestative political structure which the Third-World artist very often is either consciously building or suffering the lack of”<sup>5</sup>.

After the Second World War English society sustained migration from the Third-World countries to the center of the Empire, a sort of 'colonialism in reverse'<sup>6</sup> from Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean to England, but also from Latin America to North America. In these contexts literature was part of the birth and evolution of modern nations together with the spread of new media, the newspaper and the novel; for that initial moment the nations still represented an imaginary construct depending on a set of cultural fictions in which the novel, but also all imaginative literature, played a very important role together with newspaper. Novel facilitated the reception of new languages and cultures, offering a common ground for people now forced to live in relationship with one another.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

A new sense of unity spread over the population.

Similarly, novel allowed the transformation of the vernaculars in national languages standardising them, and the creation of national economies giving the possibility to all the nations to play a role in an international context, with the even more clear intention to become independent from the European centres. Novels became documents apt to prove national consciousness and communal life inside every single nation of the Third-World, but at the same time the novelist was driven into a kind of exile because he talked about Third-World nations, people and themes of the context in which he was born but he lived in Europe, above all in the city of London. This was the particular condition of Cosmopolitan writers like Salman Rushdie. They considered their settle down in London, Paris or New York as “a rite of passage 'civilising' themselves before returning to high-level positions in the home intelligentsia<sup>7</sup>.” In the European literary marketplace Cosmopolitan writers found the demand for Third-World themes, becoming openly pedagogic, and at the same time they themselves captured a new world reality and tried to correlate these two worlds, showing to the First World what they obstinately refuse to see by adopting imaginative literature, symbols and popular myths. The most important myth was represented by the 'nation' which is an idea, a fictive representation and not a reality, and it has a composite nature, similar to that represented by the novel which becomes a cosmopolitan means apt to symbolize the singular nation in an international context.

The nation, in terms of nation-state, was not only determined by the European explorations but also by the separation of the singular Third-World

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 34

nation from Europe, like a sort of exile from motherland. Colonial novel here represented a document apt to testify national consciousness, but in Third-World writings, especially in Rushdie's and Vargas Llosa's, the concepts of nation and exile were mixed together to represent a recognition of an alienation from nationhood debunked from a European place.

As for Third-World fiction, the most important theme was politics, which represented a novelty in the Western marketplace and gave Third-World Cosmopolitans the opportunity to find in European metropolis a more receptive audience, polyglot and interracial, and at the same time this audience offered them a new perspective of the world, like in a sort of interchange between them.

Third-World writers took inspiration from the Italian politician and philosopher Antonio Gramsci and his vision of Italy like a country colonised at the same time by the State and the Church, a forced unity of distinct cultures. So, for Gramsci colonization could simultaneously be national, namely acted by a little part of population on another wider part, international, acted by a state on another, but also residential, and cosmopolitans, even if they want to create something separate from the empire, were still dominated by “a superficial or 'pictoresque' attachment to a cultural miscellany based on empire<sup>8</sup>.”

With their migration towards metropolitan cities like New York, London and Paris, Third-World Cosmopolitans created a national mythos of their country of origin and confronted themselves on the theme of decolonisation, with a literature that tried to destroy the national sovereignty and a literature that tried to question whether independence was the right aspiration; the result was the

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 49

valorisation of people and their national culture with opportunities of self-realisation.

The French philosopher Franz Fanon, looking at Gramsci's vision, turned his attention to the Third-World intelligentsias, distinguishing three stages in their evolution. His Theory of Stages considered a first stage of assimilation, a second stage of remembering who one is and a third stage called 'fighting phase', in which one turns towards the 'people' so that it is possible to learn how to move forward with them, although in Fanon flew towards exoticism. Consequently, new artistic forms evolved through the various stages of this process, and in particular humour, allegory and the so-called 'literature of combat'. This form, typical of Rushdie's writings, reflected hybridity, linguistic and racial conflicts, but also a hymn to national consciousness as different people fighting for a unitarian nation, and allowed Rushdie to assume the attitude of a 'serious novelist'<sup>9</sup> who used a social code accepted in all the First-World.

According to the other Third-World Cosmopolitans, Rushdie was influenced in particular by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and Günter Grass with his novel *The Tin Drum* (1959). They resembled each other in the same way of describing reality, that is to say magic elements in a foreground where the background is made up by realistic environment: the so called "magic realism".

Anyway Rushdie was primarily an Indo-English writer. Indo-English writers were very important in the context of postcolonial literature because they had been trying to overcome the cultural barriers more than other postcolonial

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

writers around the World. This aim would be surely achieved and overcome by his writing *The Satanic Verses*.

As said before, *The Satanic Verses* was published in 1988. Rushdie lived in London, a cozy place but hostile, in particular after the fatwa issued by Iranian's Ayatollah Khomeini on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1989.

In 2000, twelve years after the publication of the book, Rushdie settled in New York, in a country that he considered more open, more comfortable, but he owed a lot to the English tradition; in fact he took inspiration by the Eighteenth Century writers Laurence Sterne, who published his *Tristram Shandy* in 1759, from which Rushdie acquired his freedom of blending styles, genres and registers, and Henry Fielding, whose *Tom Jones* was published in 1767. Anyway, Rushdie was particularly grateful to Charles Dickens from whom he inherited his taste for naturalistic backgrounds and surreal foregrounds at the base of his magical realism. Dickensian influence was visible also on the general style of his works and the key passages of his novels.

In general he took inspiration from English tradition for the technique named, in Keith Booker's words, "encyclopedic allusiveness", referring to several cultures and traditions. At the same time, referring to Defoe and Richardson's works, he considered the novel the most suitable form to dramatically represent an incident and moral reflection on it. Walter Allen, in this case, talked about 'pure novel'<sup>10</sup> underlining the attention of the author to the formal aspects of the text. As 'pure novelist' Rushdie preferred the epic, the fantastic, the domestic setting, the

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<sup>10</sup> Allen, Walter *In the English Novel: A Short Critical History*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958, pp. 108-109.

use of puns adopting different languages and questioning about the signs and their significance, the creation of a link between the reader and the principal character by the narrator. All this, and much more, is detectable in the narrative construction of *The Satanic Verses*, but also in *Midnight's Children*, published in 1980.

Not only Rushdie with his *Midnight's Children*, but also Indo-English novelists in general, tried to overcome larger cultural barriers more broadly than those of other post-colonial novelists at the point that Indo-English novels became popular in Western intellectual circle long before than any anti-colonial struggle. The novels became, therefore, not only a way to describe Indo-English tradition, but also a means used by writers to express their concerns about Third-World colonialism, to the point that Eastern writers were subsequently seen by Western colonizing countries as collaborators in the process of independence of the Third-World. But Rushdie writing was not only limited to simple descriptions; it also took on a social role because it integrated literary style with theoretical comments, disguising his opinion between the lines and preventing the reader to be gripped by the story and get lost. His social function, common feature of all Cosmopolitans writers, was deeply linked to his intermediary role between Third-World countries, where he came from, and First-World countries, Europe in particular, where he lived.

Three years after the publication of *Midnight's Children*, in 1980, Rushdie published the novel *Shame*, shifting its focus from India, submitted to the British dominion, to Pakistan. It is clear, than, that Rushdie had a project on his novels since 1975, when he wrote *Grimus* settling all the events in a cosmopolitan

context; infact in 1988 he published his fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*, settling it mainly in England.

*The Satanic Verses* is universally known as the novel that, more than any other, had wide resonance throughout the Islamic and the Western world: the so-called 'Satanic Verses Affair' or 'Rushdie Affair'. It was not the first time that a literary work was considered treacherous for Islamic society: years before, in 1908, the Urdu poet Muhammad Iqbal published a collection of poems and, inside this collection, the poem *Shikwah (Complaint)* accused God of infidelity.

The publication of *The Satanic Verses* provoked many protests both in India and Pakistan, but gradually created tensions in several countries. This happened despite the fact that, as in any other religion, not all Muslims could be considered orthodox Muslims, and therefore not all Muslims felt offended by Rushdie's novel. Rushdie was very well-known as writers in all the Middle East because his previous novels had the merit of making Western readers know the history and customs of India. The knowledge of Indian traditions and mentality could make him predict all the negative reactions occurred after the publication of the book, seen mostly as a parody of the life of the Prophet Muhammad described in the Qur'an, the holy book of the Muslims.

The *fatwa* issued on Rushdie on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1989 by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was only the result of a quantity of protest movements spreading in India and Pakistan as well as in England, in the cities of London, Bradford and Birmingham, in order to complain mainly about the fact that in *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie portrayed the Prophet, well knowing that it was forbidden because

Muhammad feared the possibility to be worshipped for his physical presence instead of considering the Prophet only the messenger of Allah and focus his own attention on following the precepts of the Qur'an.

It is necessary, however, to consider that the interpretation of *The Satanic Verses* as a novel against Muslim was only one of the interpretations that could be given to this work, and was probably the most immediate one. Other interpretations that it is necessary to consider now, twelve years after the end of the fatwa, concern more directly with the context of the Country where Rushdie born and lived his youth and the context of England, where he lived from 1961 to 2000.

In 2000 he decided to settle permanently in New York, a city that he considered more open and welcoming.



## **2. SALMAN RUSHDIE AND *THE SATANIC VERSES***

### **2.1. Salman Rushdie Biography**

The life and literary works of Salman Rushdie are inextricably linked to both his personal life and political life of the countries in which he resides, India and UK. This is true in particular for the novel representing the object of my thesis, *The Satanic Verses*, so I decided to tell his life taking into account the socio-political events that took place in those years and that somehow shaped his writings. Most of these events have been mentioned by the author in his recent memoir *Joseph Anton*, published on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012. As to his private life, Rushdie married four times but I decided to name only two of them, the first and the third, which are the respective mothers of his beloved children, Zafar and Milan. I have also reported other and more recent public events in some way linked to the publication of *The Satanic Verses*; they come from my direct knowledge as they have been broadcasted by mass media.

Salman Rushdie was born on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1947 in Bombay (now Mumbai), India, which was a colony of the British Empire but gained independence on 15 August 1947, two months after his birth.

Son of a wealthy family, at the age of fourteen Rushdie was sent to Rugby School in England by his father Anis. Only a few years after Rushdie's parents moved to Karachi in Pakistan joining the Muslim exodus, due to a war between India and Pakistan. In England, school time was always very difficult for Rushdie, from Rugby School to King's College, because he was always victim of British racialism. However, in 1968 Rushdie graduated at King's College, Cambridge, where he studied History. The topic of the course he attended during the last academic year 1967-1968 was "Muhammad, Islam and the Rise of the Early Caliphate". After degree, his first work experience was carried out as a freelance writer at an advertising agency.

On December 26, 1969 he met Clarissa Mary Luard who later became his first wife and mother of his first son, Zafar, born in 1979. They divorced in 1984.

In 1975 Rushdie published his first novel, *Grimus*, and in 1981 he published his second novel *Midnight's Children* and won the Booker Prize for Fiction.

In 1982 the actor Amitabh Bachchan, the biggest star of the Bombay cinema, suffered a near-fatal injury to his spleen while doing his own film stunts in Bangalore. Rushdie will probably take inspiration from this fact for the figure of Gibreel in *The Satanic Verses*.

In 1983 Rushdie published his third novel *Shame*, which was awarded a prize in Iran; it had been published in Farsi without his knowledge, and Rushdie never received the prize. In February of the same year thirty-eight Shia Muslims, followers of a man named Sayyad Willayat Hussain Shah, were convinced by him

that God would part the waters of the Arabian Sea at his request, so that they could make a pilgrimage across the ocean floor to the holy city of Karbala in Iraq. They followed him into the waters and many of them were drowned. Some of those survived claimed, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, to have witnessed the miracle. This represents another inspiration for the story of *The Satanic Verses*, together with the situation of immigrant London in the Age of Thatcher, becoming “The City Visible but Unseen”, and the Norman ships on 1066.

In 1984, year of the assassination of Indira Gandhi, Rushdie probably began to understand how to write *The Satanic Verses*. on the fly home from an Australian journey. In June of the following year the Air India Flight 182, the Emperor, was blown up by Sikh terrorists fighting to carve an independent State out of the Indian Punjab. The plane fell into the Atlantic Ocean to the south of Ireland. This probably represented another inspiration for the beginning of *The Satanic Verses*.

In January 1986 Rushdie was invited to attend a gathering of writers, the 48<sup>th</sup> Congress of International PEN in New York. During one of the sessions he was dragged into the heavyweight prize-fight between Saul Bellow and Günter Grass. Back in London he remembered an invitation to Nicaragua, so the following July he flew to Managua. On his period in Nicaragua Rushdie wrote *The Jaguar Smile*, a short book published in 1987. On 11<sup>st</sup> November Salman Rushdie's father died; Rushdie was so attached to his father to the point that, probably, the death of t Saladin Chamcha's father, one of the protagonists of *The Satanic Verses*, was inspired by the loss of their father.

On 15<sup>th</sup> March 1988 English-language publication rights to the unpublished book *The Satanic Verses* were sold to Viking and on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1988 a review of the yet-unpublished *The Satanic Verses* was published by London's Sunday Times. The book was published in London the following day by the publisher Viking Penguin.

On 6<sup>th</sup> October 1988 Rushdie's friend Salman Haidar, who was deputy high commissioner of India in London, called the writer to tell him formally on behalf of his government that *The Satanic Verses* had been banned in India by Syed Shahabuddin, the Indian MP of Rajiv Gandhi's weak government, because he considered *The Satanic Verses* a blasphemous book but declared hadn't read it. Some days later Rushdie wrote an open letter to Rajiv Gandhi in relation to the ban of his book in India and in the same year the book was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, but the prize went to Keri Hulme's Maori epic *The Bone People* and soon Rushdie's book was banned but won the Whitbread Prize for Best Novel.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1988 the grand Sheikh of al-Azhar el-Haq Ali Gard el-Haq, an eminence of Islamic theology, declared *The Satanic Verses* a blasphemous book and called on British Muslims to bring legal actions against the author. At the end of December there was a bomb scare at the Penguin offices and only two weeks later a thousand people in Bradford nailed a copy of *The Satanic Verses* to a piece of wood and set it on fire. WH Smith, Britain's biggest chain of booksellers, took *The Satanic Verses* off his shelves in all 430 of his shops. In the end of January perhaps eight thousand Muslims marched through the streets of London to gather in Hyde Park.

On 14<sup>th</sup> February 1989 Iran's Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini sentenced Salman Rushdie to death for, in Khomeini's view, blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad in *The Satanic Verses*. One day later Rushdie went into hiding with his family.

On 16<sup>th</sup> February 1989, a couple of days after the fatwa, Rushdie's Italian publisher, Mondadori, published the Italian edition of the book thanks to the determination of the editorial director Giancarlo Bonacina and his staff.

On 22<sup>th</sup> February 1989, the day the novel was published in America, the Association of American Publishers, The American Book-Sellers' Association and the American Library Association published also a full-page advertisement in The New York Times to inform the public that the book was available throughout the Contry, in the spirit of free expression.

On 5<sup>th</sup> March 1989 a Mondadori bookshop was set on fire in Padua and, in the same period, a group of Muslims threatened to destroy the monument to Dante who, in his Divine Comedy wrote about the Prophet by inserting him in the group of traitors.

On 29<sup>th</sup> March 1989 in Belgium the mullah who was said to be the “spiritual leader” of the country's Muslims, the Saudi National Abdullah Ahdal, and his Tunisian deputy Salim Bahri were killed for saying that, whatever Khomeini had said for Iranian consumption, in Europe there was freedom of expression.

On 8<sup>th</sup> December 1989 Alberto Vitale, chairman of Random House Inc., declared that he had underestimated the danger and backed out of deal in order to

the publication of the book. The atmosphere of fear widespread all over England, at a point that on 15<sup>th</sup> December four Iranian men were arrested in Manchester, suspected of being members of a hit squad.

In February 1990 Rushdie's essays "In Good Faith" and "Is Nothing Sacred?" became public.

In March Edward Said told Rushdie he had talked to Arafat about his case and he had replied "Of course I support him, but the Muslims in the intifada... What can I do?", therefore without giving so much attention to Rushdie's case and support to him.

In April 1990 Rushdie finished his children's book *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, but two months later he called his publisher to insist that the book should be rewritten to change the setting because the 'Valley of K.' was obviously Kashmir, and Kashmir was a high contentious place because wars had been fought over it and Islamic jihadists were active there.

One month later the British Board of Film Classification refused *International Gorillay* a certificate, on the fairly self-evident grounds that it was libellous; it was a Pakistani film, produced by Sajjad Gul, who told the story of a group of local heroes who vowed to find and kill an author called 'Salman Rushdie'. The quest for 'Rushdie' formed the main action of the film and 'his' death was the film's version of a happy ending.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1990 Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and as war with Iraq approached the British Foreign Office began to rush to repair relations with Iran. In the same period a public library in Rochdale, Lancashire, was firebombed.

In September 1990 the Italian foreign minister Gianni de Michelis announced that Europe and Iran were 'close' to an exchange of letters which would 'lift the *fatwa*' and make it possible to normalise relations. The children's book *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* was published. Iran and United Kingdom renewed partial diplomatic relations.

In February 1991 a phone call informed Rushdie that the *fatwa* had been renewed, just when paperback editions of *The Satanic Verses* were published in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1991 Ettore Capriolo, the recently passed away Italian translator of *The Satanic Verses*, was stabbed in his apartment in Milan and fortunately he survived. Nine days later Hitoshi Igarashi, the Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses*, was murdered. He had been stabbed several times outside his office at Tsukuba University, northeast of Tokio.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1991 the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, decided to attack *The Satanic Verses* and his author because the novel was an 'outrageous slur' on the Prophet Muhammad.

On 26<sup>th</sup> February 1993 the World Trade Center in New York was bombed by a group lead by Kuwaiti man called Ramzi Yousef. Six people died, over a thousand were injured, but the towers did not fall. That same year Rushdie had a meeting with John Major, at his office in House of Commons. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July thirty-seven people died in the flames of the Madimax Hotel in Sivas (Anatolia). Rushdie's Turkish translator Aziz Nesin was there and fortunately he survived.

On 11<sup>st</sup> October 1993 Rushdie's Norwegian publisher William Nygaard was shot outside his home in Oslo. Although the crime has never been solved,

most people - including Nygaard – linked the incident to the *fatwa*. That same year Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* was judged to be the Booker of Bookers, the best novel to have won the Booker Prize for Fiction in the award's 25-year history.

In 1994 one of grand Sheikh of al-Azhar's followers, recognizing a *fatwa* in his words, stabbed Naguib Mahfouz in the neck, but fortunately he survived.

In 1995 Rushdie published *The Moor's Last Sigh*, shortlisted for the Booker Prize, but *The Satanic Verses* remained banned. On March 10 the University of Turin gave Rushdie an honorary degree, the same day that Iranian President Khatami was on an official visit to Italy. Lamberto Dini, Minister of Foreign Affairs, did not agree about it and refused to meet Rushdie who solicited support from Italy, which was in that moment the chairing country of the European Union. The Radical Party proposed to award honorary citizenship for the city of Rome to Rushdie, but the mayor Francesco Rutelli refused, feared as he was about the consequences of this act.

On 19<sup>th</sup> March Rushdie took the Eurostar to Paris to see a group of courageous French Muslims who had signed a declaration in his support. The next day he meet all the leading French political figures sauf Mitterand: the preident-in-waiting Jacques Chirac, the prime minister Edouard Balladour and Alain Juppé.

In 1997 Rushdie married Elizabeth West.

In 1999 Rushdie published his novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. In addition, as to private life, he and his third wife Elizabeth became parents of Milan.



In 2000 Rushdie leaved United Kingdom and moved to New York.

September 11, 2001 should be remembered for the attack on the Twin Towers in New York.

On 27<sup>th</sup> March 2002 the *fatwa* issued on Rushdie was retired and he became a free man.

In 2004 a short film dealing with oppression and abuse on women, 'Submission', was spread on the Web by Dutch movie maker Theo van Gogh, killed some time later.

In 2005 Rushdie published his novel *Shalimar the Clown*, inspired to a period that Rushdie spent in Kahsmir with a group of travelling players who performed 'clown stories'. On 30<sup>th</sup> September twelve editorial cartoons, drawn by Kurt Westergaard and depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammad were published by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten. On 1<sup>st</sup> February 2006 these cartoons were published by the French newspaper France Soir and the editor of the newspaper was immediately fired. Two weeks later, the Italian Minister for Institutional Reforms Roberto Calderoli gave an interview about the cartoons published in the Jillands-Posten, wearing a T-shirt depicting the cartoons published in France Soir.

Years later, in July 2007, the Swedish artist Lars Vilks published some drawings depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammad as a 'roundabout dog'.

On 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012 Rushdie published his memoir *Joseph Anton*.

## **2.2. The Plot of "*The Satanic Verses*"**

### *PART I "THE ANGEL GIBREEL"*

The jumbo jet Bostan explodes over the English Channel. Two passengers fall down to the water and survive: Gibreel Farishta, a well-known Bollywood actor, and Saladin Chamcha, a voice actor.

Gibreel, whose complete name was Gibreel Farishta, had an hard youth: when he was a teenager he started working as a delivery boy. When his parents died he was put into the hands of a family who wanted him to become an actor. Just before the his flight he had a bout of mental illness. He healed but lost his faith in God. After his recovery he felt in love with Alleluia Cone, an English mountain climber, and followed her to London. At the same time his former lover Rekha Merchant, out of jealousy, committed suicide and her ghost persecuted Gibreel for the rest of the novel.

Saladin, whose complete name was Salahuddin Chamchawala, grew up in Bombay where, when he was a child, he was molested by an older man and had a difficult relationship with his father Changez. He was sent to a boarding school to London by his father who remarried with a woman who had the same name of Saladin's mother, Nasreen. In London Saladin worked as a voice actor and married a white woman, Pamela Lovelace. He returned to India to perform in a play and started a relationship with Zeeny Vakil and left her when he decided to

return to London.

The flight was hijacked by four Sikh nationalists who detained the passengers for 111 days, then they left again for London but when they were on the English Channel they fought among themselves and detonated the plane. Gibreel and Farishta fell from the airplane towards the coast. During the fall Gibreel had a vision which introduces a series of episodes representing the retelling of the early history of Islam.

## *PART II "MAHOUND"*

Starting from this section of the novel, "Mahound", every even section represents the retelling of Islamic history ("Mahound", "Ayesha", "Return to Jahilia", "The Parting of the Arabian Sea"), whereas the odd sections represent the history of Gibreel and Saladin.

Mahound is an analog for Mohammed and he is a businessman who starts a new religion called Submission in the city of Jahilia. Submission is a monotheistic religion facing in a polytheistic culture, so Mahound faces opposition by Abu Simbel who hires the poet Baal who has to write verses in order to contrast Mahound. Abu Simbel offers protection for Mahound if he acknowledges three of Jahilia's most important goddesses, beyond Allah.

Mahound climbs a mountain to consult Gibreel who let Mahound acknowledge the existence of "Allah's daughters", but he soon affirms that the revelation comes from Satan, not God, so he retreats his first proclamation. Mahound and the other devotees to Submission flee to the city of Yathrib.

### *PART III "ELLOWEN DEEOWEN"*

During their fall Gibreel and Saladin undergo a transformation: they take personalities and physical characteristics respectively of the Archangel Gabriel and Satan. Once on the coast they meet Rosa Diamond, but at the same time someone reports them to the police as illegal immigrants. The police arrive and arrest Gibreel, who is turning into a goat, but not Gibreel because he is dressed in Rosa's husband's clothing.

Gibreel and Rosa become friends. Saladin is taken to London by the police, who refuses to believe he is an English citizen because he is transforming into a goat, so Saladin is closed into an hospital where all his other fellow patients undergo the same kind of transformation. Saladin and the others escape from the hospital.

Once out of the hospital, Saladin calls Pamela, but his rival Jumpy Joshi answer the phone. Pamela cannot believe Saladin is out of the hospital but he arrives and surprise them. Gibreel is on a train to London.

### *PART IV "AYESHA"*

This part of the novel describes two Gibreel's dreams. In the first dream, an Imam asks Gibreel to help him to reconquer his homeland named Desh, corresponding to Iran, fighting against the goddess Al-lat. Gibreel kills her and the Imam and becomes the only leader of Desh. The second dream is set in the rural

city of Titlipur where a landowner, Mirza Saeed Akhtar and his wife Mishal are trying to have a baby. They find and adopt an itinerant toymaker, Ayesha, after finding her in their garden eating butterflies. Ayesha grows up beautiful and Mirza Saeed tries unsuccessfully to make her fall in love with him. They become close one day, when Ayesha's hair turn white and her dress turn into butterflies, and she asserts that she has lain with the archangel Gibreel. Soon after that, Ayesha diagnoses Mishal with a terminal breast cancer and make a prophecy: Mishal will heal if the entire village makes a pilgrimage to Mecca on foot. This is an impossible endeavour because the Arabian Sea separates Titlipur and Mecca, but she convinces the village to follow her because she confirms that the archangel will part the sea for their passage. Mirza Saeed is skeptical but follows Ayesha and the villains in his Mercedes, in order to help his wife if needed.

#### *PART V "A CITY VISIBLE BUT UNSEEN"*

Despite their romantic rivalry, Jumpy Joshi helps Saladin to hide in the hotel of the Sulfyans. Saladin learns that his colleague Mimi Mamoulian is dating the scam artist Billy Battuta, and at the same time that he has lost his job as a voice actor on a television show about aliens. Saladin grows and, becoming too large to stay with the Sulfyans, they accompany him in a basement of a nightclub. Saladin is full of hatred for Gibreel, and the rage he feels transform Saladin back into a human.

Gibreel tries to renew his relation with Alleluia, but he has a vision : an angel orders him to spread the word of God through London. He consents and go

through the city where everyone on the street thinks him insane. Here he has an initial success with Orphia Phillips, a ticket seller, but when he tries to find a solution to her romantic woes, he worsens her situation. So frustrated, he walks into the traffic where a car driven by Sisodia hits him. Sisodia brings Gibreel to Alleluia's home and they make him to be treated for schizophrenia. When Gibreel feels better, Sisodia offers him a film role as the angel Gibreel. To promote the film, Gibreel participates to a show in London, but once on the stage he levitates into the air and disappears. When he wakes up, he finds himself in Alleluia's home.

#### *PART VI "RETURN TO JAHILIA"*

This part takes up again the Jahilia plot line twenty-five years after the end of part II, "Mahound". Submission has scattered in Yathrib and Mahound has become more powerful so he tries to make an attempt at converting Jahilia, but his disciple Salman has lost his faith and, fearing to be punished, he goes to Jahilia and express his doubts to the poet Baal. Mahound converts most of Jahilia inhabitants, establishes a theocracy and persecutes dissenters. Baal goes into hiding in a brothel called The Curtain and here he convinces the prostitutes to take the identities of Mahound's twelve wives. One day Salman decides to go away from the brothel and soon after that all the employees of the brothel are arrested and executed.

Mahound dies after a vision of the goddess Al-Lat, repudiated by himself in part II.

*PART VII "THE ANGEL AZRAEEL"*

Saladin's wife Pamela becomes pregnant by Jumpy Joshi. In the same time a black activist, Dr. Uhuru Simba, is arrested in order to be falsely accused to be a serial killer. His arrest infuriates the immigrants who begin to demonstrate. Saladin and Jumpy Joshi have a meeting on Simba's case, but during the meeting Saladin has a vision of the Angel Azrael, Gibreel's lieutenant, coming down to kill him. Saladin realizes that something has changed in himself, he succumbs to evil and decides to kill Gibreel. He has the opportunity to do this at a party organized by Billy and Mamoulian, held on a set of a film adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*.

For some reasons, Saladin is not able to kill Gibreel but he exacerbates Gibreel's mental illness making him believe that Alleluia is unfaithful. Dr. Uhuru Simba dies in prison under suspicious circumstances which convince the immigrant community to riot. Notwithstanding Dr. Uhuru Simba's declaration of innocence, the riots go on and intensify. Jumpy and Pamela die in a fire and a second fire becomes a point of confrontation between Saladin and Gibreel, where he realizes that Alleluia is innocent, so he follows Saladin in order to kill him but, at last, he decides to let him free.

*PART VIII "THE PARTING OF THE ARABIAN SEA"*

This part resumes the Titlipur plot. Ayesha's employer, Sri Srinivas, decides

to join the pilgrimage when he sees all the butterflies following them, but soon pilgrims begin to die. Ayesha orders to let the corpses along the street instead of burning them. Mirza Saeed tries to convince the villagers to turn back but they mostly ignore him.

When the group arrives at the seaside suburb of Sarang, a violent mob awaits them, but at the same time the rain disperses the mob and pilgrims are safe.

Ayesha orders an abandoned baby being stoned to death, but this horrifies the pilgrims who loose faith in her. Anyway they follow Ayesha to the beach where the butterflies take the shape of the Archangel Gibreel. This restores their faith, they walk into the water and begin to drown. The doubters make the same but they awake in a hospital. The pilgrims confirm the vision of the sea part underwater, but not Mirza, who returns at home. As he is dying, he has a vision of Ayesha and opens his heart to her: the sea parts and they walk to Mecca together.

#### *PART IX "A WONDERFUL LAMP"*

Saladin returns to India because his father Changez is dying. Here he takes care of him and reconciles with his stepmother Nasreen the Second. When his father dies, Saladin has a transformation: he changes his name back to Salahuddin Chamchawala, his real name, and returns to the origin.

Gibreel returns to India after the flop of two films on Jahilia and Titlipur. S. S. Sisodia brings Alleluia to Gibreel's house and tries to reconcile them in order to make him regain his cinematic fame. Tortured by Saladin's prank calls, Gibreel kills S. S. Sisodia and Alleluia, goes to Saladin, confess what he has done and



kills himself. Saladin leaves the house with Zeeny.

### **3. THE RUSHDIE AFFAIR**

On 14<sup>th</sup> February 1989 Salman Rushdie received a phone call by a BBC journalist who informed him that a *fatwa*, a death sentence, had been issued on him by Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini through Syed Shahabuddin who was the Indian MP of Rajiv Gandhi, for the publication of his book *The Satanic Verses* because they considered it a blasphemous book, an affront to the Prophet and all Muslim people.

The sentence radically changed his life because he was placed under protection regime from 15<sup>th</sup> February 1989 until 27<sup>th</sup> March 2002, when the *fatwa* was retired. However, the *fatwa* also changed the lives of his relatives and many other people involved in the publication of the novel.

The book was officially published on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1988, but the day before a review of it was publicized by London's Sunday Times.

Much appreciated for the style, as Rushdie was already a very famous and appreciated writer, it was not for the content; in fact at the beginning of the month of October Salman Haidar, Rushdie's friend and deputy high commissioner of India in London, called his friend to tell him on behalf of Indian Government that *The Satanic Verses* had been banned in India by Syed Shahabuddin, the Indian MP

of Rajiv Gandhi: he read the first review of the book and the first interview of its author on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1988 on the an Indian English-language weekly magazine *India Today* and immediately considered *The Satanic Verses* a blasphemous book, but soon declared that he had not read it; in fact he decided to ban it only on the basis of some extracts published in the magazine. Anyway, his decision to ban Rushdie's novel increased the popularity of *The Satanic Verses*.

In banning the novel, Shahabuddin proposed himself as the defender of the Islamic faith and devotee, offended by Rushdie's words on their Prophet Muhammad. He claimed the possibility of applying a fine or imprisonment as a penalty, but not the death, and took the opportunity to underline the respect of Muslim people for other religions.

Three days after Rushdie published an open letter to Indian Prime Minister regarding the ban of his book. At that moment, he began a long series of attempts to prove that the book he had written was not an act of rebellion against the Islamic religion because he and his family were Muslim though not particularly practitioners, but a mere fantasy tale inspired by his cultural background.

However, the situation worsened: on 22<sup>th</sup> November 1988 the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar, an eminence of Islamic theology, declared the book blasphemous and Muslims led the British to take legal actions against the author. Ten days later a demonstration against the book and his author was organized in Bradford, Yorkshire city with Britain's largest Muslim population. At the end of the month there was a bomb scare at the Penguin offices. In January, the situation worsened further: on 14<sup>th</sup> January a thousand people in Bradford nailed a copy of

the book to a piece of wood and set it on fire and the day after WH Smith, Britain's biggest chain of booksellers, took *The Satanic Verses* off its shelves in all 430 of its shops.

Two days after the sentence of death issued on Rushdie, his Italian publisher, Mondadori, published the Italian edition of *The Satanic Verses*, thanks to the determination of the editorial director Giancarlo Bonacina and his staff, despite the increasing diffusion of Muslim protest movements.

On 22<sup>th</sup> February 1989, the day the novel was published in America, the Association of American Publishers, the American Book-Sellers' Association and the American Library Association published also a full-page advertisement in The New York Times to inform the public that, in order to respect the spirit of free expression, the book was available throughout the country.

On 5<sup>th</sup> March 1989 a Mondadori bookshop was set on fire in Padua. Some days later a group of Muslims in Ravenna threatened to blow up the monument to Dante who, in his Divine Comedy, wrote about the Prophet Mohammed, described as a person consigned to the ninth pit of hell, fraying among traitors.

Towards the end of the month in Belgium the mullah who was said to be the “spiritual leader” of the country's Muslims, the Saudi National Abdullah Ahdal and his Tunisian deputy Salim Bahri were killed for stating that, beyond the precepts of Ayatollah Khomeini, in Europe there was freedom of expression.

At the end of the year, in December 1989, Alberto Vitale, chairman of Random House Inc., declared that he had underestimated the danger and backed out of deal. One week later four Iranian men were arrested in Manchester,

suspected of being members of a hit squad.

In a little bit more than one year from the publication of *The Satanic Verses* the international atmosphere was absolutely worse, to the point that Rushdie published the essays “In Good Faith” and “Is Nothing Sacred” in order to try to explain that he wrote *The Satanic Verses* entirely in good faith, without intention to offend Islamic religion, his own religion, but writing with the freedom of expression typical of the modern writers.

At the beginning of 1990 the Iranian Ayatollah Khamenei renewed the death order and Palestine, in the person of its leader Yasser Arafat, refused to support the cause of Rushdie. In the end of July the British Board of Film Classification refused to the film *International Gorillay* a certificate, because it was considered libellous; it was a Pakistani film, produced by Sajjad Gul, who told the story of a group of local heroes who vowed to find and kill an author called 'Salman Rushdie'; this was the main action of the film and 'his' death was the film's version of a happy ending. In September the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs Gianni de Michelis announced that Europe and Iran were 'close' to an exchange of letters which would 'lift the fatwa' and make it possible to normalise relations.

On February 1991 the *fatwa* was renown, the danger to Rushdie further increased but, despite this, the British Government remained silent and, in the following months, paperback editions of *The Satanic Verses* were published in the Netherlands, in Denmark and Germany. In the month of July Ettore Capriolo, the Italian translator of *The Satanic Verses* passed away at the end of January 2012,

was stabbed in his apartment in Milan by an Iranian man who asserted that he needed a translation for the Iranian embassy and asked him about Salman Rushdie, but fortunately he survived. Nine days later Hitoshi Igarashi, the Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses*, was murdered. He had been stabbed several times outside his office at Tsukuba University, northeast of Tokyo.

Towards the end of November 1991 the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, attacked *The Satanic Verses* and his author because he considered the book an act of defamation against the Prophet Muhammad.

In 1993 the wave of protests came to the World Trade Center in New York, bombed by a group lead by a Kuwaiti man called Ramzi Yousef. Six people died, over a thousand were injured, but towers did not fall. Notwithstanding a meeting Rushdie had with John Major at his office in House of Commons in London, the protest movements went on and the following July, in Sivas (Anatolia), thirty-seven people died in the flames of the Madimax Hotel; between them there was also the Turkish translator of *The Satanic Verses*, Aziz Nesin, but fortunately he survived. On October of the same year the Norwegian publisher of *The Satanic Verses*, William Nygaard, was shot three times outside his home in Dagaliveien in Oslo; although the crime was never solved, most people linked it to the *fatwa*.

On 19<sup>th</sup> May 1995 Rushdie went to Paris to have a meeting with all the leading French political figures sauf Mitterand: the president-in-waiting Jacques Chirac, the Prime Minister Edouard Balladour and Alain Juppé. In that occasion Rushdie met also a group of courageous French Muslims who had signed a declaration in his support. During that same year Lamberto Dini, Italian Prime

Minister during the six-month presidency of the European Union, was in vain urged by Rushdie to a meeting to support his cause and the Radical Party proposed similarly in vain to give Rushdie the honorary citizenship of the city of Rome, but the Mayor Rutelli refused for fear of the consequences for an act he considered not so pondered.

On 10<sup>th</sup> March 1999 the University of Turin awarded Rushdie the honorary degree; during the same day that Iranian President Khatami was on an official visit in Italy.

Two and a half years later, on 11 September 2001, it happened the well-known attack to the Twin Towers in New York City. It is a fact not yet clear, more probably not linked with the *fatwa* issued on Rushdie, but I personally think that it symbolically represents the apex of what society risks by pursuing his desire of globalization.

Only six months later, on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2002, the *fatwa* on Rushdie was retired and he became a free man.

After this simple summary of facts, focused in particular on the reaction of the European countries to the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, I want to reflect on the attitude of Italy about the Rushdie Affair.

As for Italy, what I wish to emphasize is that in our country *The Satanic Verses* did not generally enjoyed critical success because, like in other countries, Italian intellectuals declared that they had not read the book even though everyone wanted to talk about it and give their opinion on the content of the novel. Among Italian intellectuals it was possible to notice the absence of Muslim opinions, but

the prominence of Catholic and secularist commentators: the Catholic anti-Islamic Carlo Sgorlon who considered Islam a religion opposed to any form of progress; the secular snob Alberto Arbasino that appealed to the Islamic persecutions suffered by Italians in their past; the super secular Paolo Flores D'Arcais and Alfonso Berardinelli who feared the risk of compaction between the Islamic fundamentalists with the possibility of disagreements with the other religions; the secular revisionist Sergio Romano who considered *The Satanic Verses* a form of literary trade of religious ideas; finally the so-called *vox-populi* who considered Rushdie a writer able to get exposure by speculating on its status as convicted by a *fatwa*. What characterizes the reactions to the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in Italy is a general attitude of snobbery towards the best sellers, the inability to understand the themes of the novel and the irony used by Rushdie in his writings because of a different way of perceiving them.

The Vatican, with Pope John Paul II, through the newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* declared that *The Satanic Verses* could reasonably be considered blasphemous but, on the other hand, condemned the death sentence issued on Rushdie and the general attitude of Muslims towards him, then claiming the sacredness of life as more important than the sanctity of religious consciousness because attitudes of hatred towards a person offend God first of all and therefore are absolutely condemned by Catholic Church.

However, a little bit later the Catholic Church chose to watch in a detached way the Rushdie Affair because of its role as universal representative of Christianity, driven by the intention not to create friction with the representatives



of the Islamic religion.

For his part, what Rushdie claimed more than anything else is the fact that, even though he and his family had never been particularly religious, Islam was important in his life; he tried to claim the fact that his *Verses* are based on historical facts, but the vision he gives about them in the novel is his only personal vision, and there may certainly be others.

Islam is a religion, but as said, it has to be considered also a way of life, a series of behavioral precepts issued in order to purify those who follow them from attitude of modernity of the West; so the novel in general, and *The Satanic Verses* in particular, is usually seen by Muslims as a means to challenge Islamic values.

The case of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is very particular not only because of its banning and consequent protests spreaded all over the world, but also in consequence of the *fatwa* issued on Rushdie for thirteen years, one month and thirteen days, on the basis of misreading, nonreading or simple reviews of the book, which seems not to be read.

The most immediate offending feature is represented by the title "*The Satanic Verses*" which refer to two verses of the Qur'an, part of the fifty-third sura "The Star", inspired by Satan and describing three goddess, Allāt, Uzzā e Manāt. Islam is a monotheistic religion, so any statement making reference to polytheism was considered blasphemous. According to the text of *The Satanic Verses* it was Salman the Scribe, or Salman the Persian, who introduced wrong elements on the transcription of the Qur'an because inspired by Satan.

The second offending feature is represented by the figure of Mahound, a

derogatory term used in the Middle Ages to indicate the Prophet that implied Muhammad was some kind of false deity; he was also a figure described in a physically way contrary to the dictates of Islamic religion, according to which the figure of the Prophet cannot be represented, and even described, in its physical characteristics.

The third offending feature of the text is represented by the episode of The Curtain, a brothel where there are twelve prostitutes with the same names as the Prophet's wives.

In addition, other characters have offending names or have a behaviour that clashes with the sanctity of their name. These are in particular the main protagonists Saladin and Gibreel, but also Ayesha: the character named Saladin represents an Islamic hero, Gibreel represents the angel Gibreel which is also part of Catholicism, but in Rushdie's novel Saladin and Gibreel are two Bollywood actors; lastly, Ayesha who is the name of one of the wives of Muhammad and is represented by the novel as an Indian fanatic girl.

Excluding the section on the re-reading of Koranic Satanic Verses, the most offending passages of the book are the chapters entitled "Jahilia" and "Return to Jahilia", where "Jahilia" means "Ignorance" and represents in the novel the sacred Muslim city of Mecca.

After the declaration of *fatwa* issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini, a big debate on freedom of expression widespread in all intellectual and religious contexts. In particular the right of freedom of expression and opinion was claimed by the World Writer's Statement<sup>11</sup> (1989), signed by the Italian Giovanni

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<sup>11</sup> Appignanesi, Lisa, and Sara Maitland. *The Rushdie File*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1990.

Giovannini and many other writers as Samuel Beckett, Anita Desai, Nadine Gordimer, Carlos Fuentes, Graham Greene, Philip Roth, Kazuo Ishiguro and Edward Said, who stated that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights contemplated not only the freedom of opinion, but also the freedom of expressing his own opinion.

One of the most fervent defenses in favor of Rushdie was that of Carlos Fuentes, who wrote the essay "Words Apart", published in *The Guardian* February 24, 1989<sup>12</sup>: he was inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin in saying that the novel is a modern form of communication which does not possess the absolute truth but stimulates the search for truth, or rather a truth, because absolute truths do not exist in any case.

Timoty Brennan was convinced that the reaction of the Islamic world toward Rushdie had to do with his position of 'insider' and 'outsider' at the same time. If Rushdie had not been so well known in the Middle East as a writer, his opinions would not have been considered so important and offensive. What he wrote showed that he was very familiar with the Islamic world and this worsened even further its position as the author blasphemous.<sup>13</sup>

Aamir Mufti confirms in his essay "Reading the Rushdie Affair: 'Islam,' Cultural Politics, Form"<sup>14</sup> that Islam could not stand that the contents of the Qur'an and, in general, its dogmas were described or interpreted in a different manner

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109-12.

<sup>12</sup> Mishra, Vijay "Postcolonial Differend: Diasporic Narratives of Salman Rushdie" *Salman Rushdie*, Ed. H. Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003. 91.

<sup>13</sup> Brennan, Timothy. *Salman Rushdie and The Third World: Myths of The Nation*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989. 143-144.

<sup>14</sup> Mufti, Aamir R. "Reading the Rushdie Affair: "Islam," Cultural Politics, Form" *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*. Ed. M. Keith Booker. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999. 51-77.

compared to the way used in the Holy Book of Islam. The reaction of the Islamic World, but in particular of the Indian government, towards *The Satanic Verses* was due to the large attention towards all mass media, able to reach the population very quickly and sharply in order to spread cultural and political ideals completely different from the Muslim laws; in addition, the contents of *The Satanic Verses* were spread through representations of popular cinema or hearsay. In brief, because of this large diffusion, the novel was seen by Indian Government as an act of "literary colonialism"<sup>15</sup> and those who do not feel offended by the novel ceased to be Muslims.

Many sections of the novel postulated doubt instead of faith, precisely because of the reasons just explained, and this undermined all Islam.

The controversy about the content of *The Satanic Verses* fueled the debate on freedom of expression, especially after the censorship of the novel in many countries, first of all India, despite being the writer's motherland.

The most fervent opponent of Rushdie was Feroza Jussawalla, who considered *The Satanic Verses* a book written only for the purpose to denigrate Islam through the use of myth.

Aamir R. Mufti connected to this view by stating that, on the other hand, fundamentalism critique society not only from a cultural point of view for its modern Western forms, but also from the political point of view because of its neo-colonial structures of domination and exploitation representing a violation of the principles established by Muhammad and his followers. Fundamentalism, then, fights against the West, its influences on Eastern society, the artificiality of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 63.

modernity and all that it represents; it rejects the idea of a secular intellectual life experience and denies those who are not offended by the content of *The Satanic Verses*. It is certain that, however, the novel provoked not only a broad public debate but also the danger to recognize an anti-religious point of view, but I agree with Mufti when, quoting Sara Suleri, he states that “[...] the effect of this disloyalty is not to replace belief with the final certitude of disbelief. It is, rather, to posit doubt as “the opposite faith” [...]”<sup>16</sup>, opposed to religious fundamentalism.

Homi Bhabha, however, through his essay *Unpacking my library ... Again*, opposed to the negative view of Jussawalla, a vision based on the contrast between Islamic fundamentalism and secularism, so on a large self-awareness and free choice as one of the characteristics of the individual. Bhabha believed that it was necessary to secularize the readers to make sure that the writer has the greatest freedom of expression in his writing. Furthermore, the fact that Islam and the West remain steady in their positions of fundamentalism for Islam and freedom of expression for the West made author's life a precarious one: keeping tradition corresponded to the area of comfort, while writing, or better translating reality in a cultural way, meant that the writer has a responsibility and that the threat of mistranslation cultural dilemma of every migrant, was constantly lurking.

Richard Webster, for its part, stated that freedom without responsibility could be a great danger, especially in the case that this freedom was exercised to the detriment of the community. The freedom of expression is not exactly corresponding to the freedom to offend, and both do not match to an attitude of

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<sup>16</sup> Mufti, Aamir R. "Reading the Rushdie Affair: "Islam," Cultural Politics, Form" Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie. Ed. M. Keith Booker. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999. 65.

acceptance and respect of the community to which one belongs or with which it comes into contact.

Going back for a moment to the facts, the group Article 19, dealing freedom of expression, founded the International Committee for the defence of Salman Rushdie and a group of women animated by the slogan "Rushdie's right to write is our to dissent" founded the movement Women against Fundamentalism.

Rushdie tried to defend his work as a writer in his essay *In Good Faith* stating that, being a work of art, the Muslims got wrong on reading *The Satanic Verses* literally, but it was necessary to understand it as any work of art. Moreover he said that the human condition was a condition of doubt, without any religious certainty and therefore without any possibility of blasphemy. In addition, in his essay *Why I have Embraced Islam* he stated that his novel was simply about what could happen to a person who loses his faith.

Anyway, the most heated dispute about freedom of expression, based on the poem *A slumber did my spirit seal* written by Wordsworth, took place between M. H. Abrams and J. Hillis Miller.

Abrams considered as mechanism of primary importance the literal reading of the texts, or the so-called *under-reading*; on the contrary Miller, influenced by Paul de Man and his essay *Semiotics and Rhetoric*, considered important a way of reading based on the analysis, interpretation and deconstruction of the text, or the so-called *over-reading* after the first step of *under-reading*.

Rushdie was inspired by this dispute to assert that his novel, after a literal

reading, necessarily needed *over-reading* to understand that his book was not a book consciously blasphemous, but that the impression of blasphemy derived from the interior crisis of the protagonists. It was necessary an effort of dialogue between East and West in full compliance with their differences. At the same time Rushdie claimed for himself the opportunity to express himself freely in his writings, without conditions, as a prerogative of the art and also of the literature. On the other hand it is necessary to consider that the main difference between an Eastern and a Western reader is the following: while the Western reader reads, interprets and revises the text, the Eastern reader takes literally what he reads.

Living in London but coming from the Eastern world, Rushdie should be well aware of the implications of a certain kind of writing and the sensitivity of the topics mentioned, but he does not seem to be conscious about this, to the point that he will spend more than two decades of her life to claim the fact that his only aim was writing without the intention to offend, but with the possibility of appealing to fantasy and imagination like any other writer around the world.

## **4. *THE SATANIC VERSES*: AN HYPOTHESIS OF READING**

The story begins with a fall. In short, the jumbo jet Bostan explodes over the English Channel and two passengers, Gibreel and Saladin, fall rapidly onto the sea. Shortly before the flight Gibreel has a bout with mental illness; he recovers but loses his faith in God. During the fall from the airplane Gibreel has the first of several elaborate visions, introducing the Jahilia subplot formed by all the even chapters of the novel, describing some aspects of Islamic culture in a fictional way. Gibreel and Saladin undergo a transformation during the fall: they respectively acquire the appearance of the archangel Gabriel and Satan so, as in a sort of medieval morality play, the novel takes the form of a struggle between Good and Evil. Towards the end of the novel Saladin learns that his father is dying so he goes back to India to take care of him in the last moments of his life. After his father's death, Saladin changes his name back to his real name, Salauddin Chamchawala. As for Gibreel, he goes back in India but ends up killing himself.

The text is divided in nine chapters: the odd chapters have to do with the present of the 80s and they deal in particular with the events happening to the



main protagonists, the Bollywood actor Gibreel Farishta and the voice actor Saladin Chamchawala, and take place in London, Argentina and India; the even chapters represent the fictional retelling of several aspects of Islamic culture.

The title of the novel refers to two satanic verses in the tradition of Qur'an, which are part of the fifty-third sura "The Star" and are considered as inspired by Satan because they allow prayers to three Pagan goddess, Uzza, Allāt and Manāt. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this is one of the reasons why Rushdie was accused of blasphemy by Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini.

The second offending feature is represented by the figure of Mahound, a term used in the Middle Ages to indicate the Prophet that implied Muhammad was some kind of false deity; he was also a figure described in a physically way contrary to the dogmas of Islamic religion, because the figure of the Prophet cannot be represented, and even described, in its physical characteristics.

The third offending feature of the text is represented by the episode of The Curtain, a brothel where there are twelve prostitutes with the same names as the Prophet's wives.

In addition, some characters have offending names or have a behavior that clashes with the sanctity of their name. These are in particular the main protagonists Saladin and Gibreel, but also Ayesha: the character named Saladin represents an Islamic hero, Gibreel represents the angel Gibreel which is also part of Catholicism, but in Rushdie's novel Saladin and Gibreel are two Bollywood actors; lastly, Ayesha, who is the name of one of the wives of Muhammad and is represented by the novel as an Indian fanatic girl.

Lastly, excluding the section on re-reading of Satanic Verses of the Qur'an, the most offending passages of the book are the chapters entitled "Jahilia" and "Return to Jahilia", where "Jahilia" means "Ignorance" and represents in the novel the city of Mecca.

On 14<sup>th</sup> February 1989 Salman Rushdie, who was living in London, received a phone call by a BBC journalist who informed him that a *fatwa* had been issued to him by the Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini due to the recent publication of his book *The Satanic Verses*, considered blasphemous by the Iranian leader and his government who believed that Rushdie was making fun of the precepts of Islam. The issue of *fatwa*, suggested by the Indian politician Syed Shahabuddin, completely changed his life because he had to submit to a protection regime that lasted for more than thirteen years, until 27<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

The diffusion of pieces of the novel through newspapers, magazines or theater performances, lighted both the Islamic world and the West. Shortly after the publication of the novel, in December 1988 and January 1989, demonstrations against *The Satanic Verses* and his author spread all over the country. Many bookstores took the book off his shelves, but this was not enough for Khomeini who issued the *fatwa* against Rushdie on Valentine's Day 1989.

The *fatwa* was issued not only on Rushdie, but also on all the people involved in the publication of the novel. Those who most of all suffered in a direct and personal way the sentence were translators and publishers. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1991 Ettore Capriolo, the recently passed away Italian translator of *The Satanic Verses*, was stabbed in his apartment in Milan but fortunately he survived; nine days later,

on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1991, Hitoshi Igarashi, the Japanese translator of the book, was murdered outside his office at Tsukuba University, north-east of Tokyo. One year later, on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1993 thirty-seven people died in the flames of the Madimax Hotel in Sivas (Anatolia); between them, the Turkish translator of *The Satanic Verses* Aziz Nesin fortunately survived. The following autumn, on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1993 the Norwegian publisher William Nygaard was shot three times outside his home in Dagaliveien (Oslo).

Due to the increasing number of riots and demonstrations all over the World, the United Kingdom, through the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who was leader of the Conservative Party, began a policy of expulsion against immigrants that had moved from Third World countries to London and other large cities of the First World.

At the same time, the day after the *fatwa*, Rushdie and his family were placed under protection regime. He reported the years he lived under the danger of execution of *fatwa* on his more recent book, the memoir *Joseph Anton*, published on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

Soon after the declaration of fatwa, on February 1989 the PEN American Center, chaired by Susan Sontag, organised a convention in order to support Rushdie and the cause of free expression. The right of freedom of expression and opinion was claimed by the World Writer's Statement, signed by the Italian Giovanni Giovannini and many other writers as Samuel Beckett, Anita Desai, Nadine Gordimer, Carlos Fuentes, Graham Greene, Philip Roth, Kazuo Ishiguro and Edward Said, who stated that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

contemplated not only the freedom of opinion but also the freedom of expressing his own opinion.

However, all initiatives in defense of Rushdie did not stop the whirlwind of events of the Muslim people strongly opposed the publication of the book. All the attempts to explain that the text of *The Satanic Verses* needs over-reading, a reading that is not literal but interpretive and so able to find the deeper meaning of the text, were not sufficient to stop violence.

Although she was a fervent opponent of Rushdie who accused him of using the myth to denigrate Islam, only Professor Feroza Jussawalla diverged from the common opinion to assert in her essay “Rushdie's Dastan-e-Dilruba: The Satanic Verses as Rushdie's Love letter to Islam” that the form of *The Satanic Verses* is directly linked to the context in which Rushdie grows.

During the past, India was colonized not only by the British, and European people in general, but also by the Persians of the post-Mughal period who spread in India the Urdu language; in addition the Persians influenced Indian people by a religious point of view, with the spread of Islamic culture. This has an impact both on the shape of Rushdie's writings and on their content; in fact the Indian – Muslim background gives Rushdie the possibility of creating particular characters and taking inspiration from historical facts in order to write *The Satanic Verses*.

In Indo-Mughal tradition, love for his own Hindi or Islamic religion is expressed in forms used to express love for the beloved person:

- the *dastan-e-dilruba*, which is a love song;
- the *dastan*, which is a long prose delivered to the beloved as a complaint.

Rushdie writes *The Satanic Verses* in the form of a *dastan*. Through the story, he tries to appropriate of Mughal and English sensibility, without realizing that he becomes only a victim of cross – cultural misunderstanding because he writes about a tradition in which Muslims, dominant cultural group in India since Independence from Commonwealth in 1947, do not recognize themselves and Westerners do not fully understand. Rushdie depicts Islam being inspired in particular by the government of Jawaharlal Nehru, without realizing that Islam in India is now something very different from what he knows, so when the Iranian leader Khomeini issues on him the *fatwa* he does not fully understand the severity of the sentence. He believes simply to have joined the ranks of Islamist groups of Indians, converted from Hinduism to Islamism, who re-tell the story of Islam by choosing their own favorite martyr.

In this context Rushdie knows *The Arabian Nights* and the *qissa*, a tale of legendary adventures in the form of *dastan* that, in the case of *The Satanic Verses*, he adopts in order to express Rushdie's love for Muslim high culture and his project of re-tell some passages of the Qu'ran.

Initially spread in oral form, the *dastan* acquired written form only in the second half of the nineteenth century and only in the middle of the eighteenth century it became what we know: a narrative telling the story of the Prophet in the form of a tale in a frame tale, focused largely on the period after British colonialism and rich of magical elements he borrows not only from Dickens through the juxtaposition of naturalistic backgrounds and surreal foregrounds, the so-called magic realism, but also from the form of *dastan* itself for its orientation

to the past.

A third hypothesis of reading is offered directly by Rushdie. On 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012 he published his memoir *Joseph Anton* where he describes the years under protection after the *fatwa* issued on him from 14<sup>th</sup> February 1989 to 27<sup>th</sup> March 2002, when the sentence was retired; thirteen years that he describes in 633 pages in a third-person writing, by introducing the figure of Joseph Anton, the name he chose to adopt during the years he lived under protection, due to the name of his two favorite writers, Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov.

On page 72 of the memoir Rushdie writes:

He was flying over India now, still making notes. He remembered hearing an Indian politician on TV talking about the British prime minister and being unable to pronounce her name properly. 'Mrs Torture,', he kept saying . 'Mrs Margaret Torture.' This was unaccountably funny even though - perhaps *because* - Margareth Thatcher was obviously not a torturer. If this was to be a novel about Mrs T.'s London, maybe there was room - *comic* room - for this variant of her name.

'The act of migration,' he wrote, 'puts into crisis everything about the migrating individual or group, everything about identity and selfhood and culture and belief. So if this is a novel about migration it must be that act of putting in question. It must perform the crisis it describes.'

He wrote: 'How does newness enter the world?'

And he wrote: 'The satanic verses'.

This piece is a clear reference to his book *The Satanic Verses* and, in my opinion, to the interpretation that Rushdie intended to do about his most

controversial book, that is to say a book on migration. This struck my curiosity at the point that, on the basis of my reading, my purpose is trying to find in *The Satanic Verses* the elements apt to justify the claim.

In the following pages, a narrative analysis of the novel and an analysis of the issues raised in the novel leading, finally, to my personal hypothesis of reading.

## **4.1. *The Satanic Verses*: A Narrative Analysis**

### **4.1.1. The Main Characters: Saladin and Gibreel**

*The Satanic Verses* begins with a fall: Saladin, born Salahuddin Chamchawala, and Gibreel, born Gibreel Farishta, plummet down from the sky to the English coast after that the plane in which they travel from their motherland, India, to United Kingdom has been hijacked by a group of rebels. This is the onset and presentation together of the two main characters in *The Satanic Verses*, who will guide the course of events narrated in a text but, due to the large number of characters in action in the various sections, it can be rightly considered a choral novel.

Besides Saladin and Gibreel, there are also several secondary female characters, yet significant to the plot, but above all another character that can be defined as the "narrative voice", assuming a metanarrative position and a

metafictional function: the "narrative voice" appears like the real author of the book, a sort of director leading and shaping events, but at the same time he appears like the first person narrator, namely "Salman Rushdie", and a character assuming the name and appearance of Baal, Gibreel and Saladin, but above all the scribe Salman Farsi, the author of the *satanic verses* inside Rushdie's novel.

The figure of the writer is very important to understand both the narrative structure and the deeper meaning of *The Satanic Verses*: the writer is at the same time the narrator of events and the author, in a traditional and postmodern sense. The author is the person who gives shape to the characters, who builds the places, the history, which invents and moves his characters depending on how the events goes on; he is very different from the post-modern writer who, excluded from the text he himself writes, born with it.

In *The Satanic Verses* the question of the figure of the narrator, the narrator's identification with his text and the discussion on its role in the text, dominates the novel but it is not solved: the novel is written entirely in the third person and only for two lines, the narrator goes to the first person, wondering and asking "*Who am I?*" and "*Who else is there?*"<sup>17</sup>. The use of the first-person narrator, even if only for two lines, and the inclusion of these two questions allows the narrator to relieve himself of his responsibility for the control of the narrative. Typical of post-modern writings, the narrator of *The Satanic Verses* takes a partial and limited point of view both in the third in the first person: he is a semi-omniscient narrator who doubts his abilities and constantly puts in question its

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<sup>17</sup> *The Satanic Verses*, 4.



role, questioning and then engaging the reader on these issues.

Going back to the main characters of the novel, Gibreel and Saladin, they are respectively a Bollywood actor and a Bollywood voice actor.

As I said before, they respectively assume the names Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha: not real names, but imposed professional alias not decided by them. In *The Satanic Verses* Gibreel represents the Archangel Gibreel of the Catholic religious tradition, while Saladin represents a historical character of the Arabic tradition.

In the course of the novel they suffer both physical and psychological change, reflected in the names they assume from time to time: Gibreel becomes the archangel Gabriel, while Saladin becomes Salad baba, old Chumch and Spoono. It is important to notice also that, in the case of Gibreel, he has a so wide mental disorder that his psychological condition leads him to use his real name, Ismail Najmuddin.

Once they are in the English soil, Saladin seeks in any way to change his identity, trying to take on the behaviour, the voice and the appearance of a typical Londoner. He also married an English woman, Pamela Lovelace. His new "self" will begin to falter on his return to India to visit his dying father to the point that the first thing he loses is represented by his voice; he cannot longer recognize himself. On the contrary Gibreel tries to retain his Indian identity. This process of change for Saladin and conservation of the self for Gibreel becomes clear when he is rewarded by a halo that accompanies him for most of the novel, while Saladin is

punished by the horns and with a hoof; in this way they become material representation of good and evil and, lastly, of God and Devil.

As for their names, in United Kingdom they acquire nicknames chosen by other people: Saladin is called "Brown Uncle Tom"<sup>18</sup>, while, as said before, the film star Gibreel acquires his real name "Ismail Najmuddin": Ismail is the child involved in the sacrifice of Prophet Ibrahim, "Najmuddin" stands for "the star of the faith". Gibreel shows an attitude more and more pathological: his several selves are increasingly more divided, more and more different from each other. These plural and hybrid identities intensify in other characters who, in the progress of events, acquire new names, as if taking on a new name they could find a new identity more suitable to the moment they are experiencing; this is the case, for example, of the twelve prostitutes of the brothel The Curtain who assume everyone a different name, corresponding to each of the names of the Prophet's wives.

In short, names are important attributes of the different characters of the novel. Anyway, anonymity too plays a very important role: the loss of name corresponds to the amputation of one's identity, an assertion of historicity and a break with the past. There are several examples of anonymity in *The Satanic Verses*: the poet Baal, for example, refuses to change his name and in this way he comes to know the consequences of anonymity; Saladin himself dreams an anonymous woman as if he had no time to give a name to the characters that populate his dreams. Having a name means to have an identity, his own origins,

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<sup>18</sup> *The Satanic Verses*, 267

his own history. The same happens for namesakes and synonyms.

The name issue is inextricably linked to the onset and conclusion of the novel, as well as the figure of Gibreel and in some way also to that of the author Salman Rushdie.

At the beginning of the novel, on page 3, Rushdie writes:

"To be born again," sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling from the heavens "first you have to die."

At the end, on page 547, he writes:

"If the old refused to die, the new could not be born".

Gibreel represents something about Salman Rushdie when he sings and when, in the end, he commits suicide: he "rush - (to) - die". He represents, in some way, the prophetic value of the novel, the material demonstration of what was going to happen and what would have happened to the author if his death sentence after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* was brought to fruition: he was going to die in a rush or he would have died in a rush. In addition, it is also an echo to Michel Foucault's essay *What is an Author?* Writing has always been considered as a means of warding off death, to aspire to immortality, but now it is inextricably linked to the idea of sacrifice, the sacrifice of its author who can be killed for what he writes. The writer is so driven to make more and more weak its presence in what he writes, gradually becoming the figure of a dead man. This happens in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, that becomes a jumble of small stories, even contradictory to each other, that can be inserted into the narrative in order to

create a wide narrative built on them. Through the process of translation, the name defines not only a single and well defined individual, but also becomes the representation of a set of personal features that can be inserted, through the subject endowed with given characteristics, in other contexts; in this way he becomes a reference in any story in which he is inserted and depicted. *The Satanic Verses* represent the failure of the process of "reading" as a result of the lack of differentiation between the materiality of the signifier and the materiality of the meaning that the signifier brings with itself. This failure leads directly to what is known as the Rushdie Affair.

In his essay, Foucault writes about the relation between writing and death. He states that, in the modern world, writing represents a sacrifice of life, so that the work of art possesses the right to pronounce the death sentence, the same death sentence which is only the beginning of the Rushdie Affair, which divides public opinion in Rushdie's accusers and defenders: on the one hand, as a westernized migrant, Rushdie was accused of "Orientalism"; on the other his defenders see him like an open-minded man and artist.

Rushdie has the merit of having disrupted the connections between the literary context and the political one, between true facts and fiction, between Self and Other, between life and death. However, it is just his writing that has become a sacrifice of his own life because it cancels the signs of his particular individuality.

Coming back to the issue of identity, it is reasonably possible to state that Rushdie perceives identity in a double sense, a personal identity and a social one.

It is an identity deconstructed in the traditional sense. It is an identity which comes in contact with other totally different identities in a process of hybridity, anything but simple.

Personal identity is the result of a personal independent process, carried out in order to lead a continuous existence and have a coherent personal vision of himself.

Social identity presupposes, however, the identification of an individual with another or with a group of other individuals, the acceptance of their values, which is sometimes included in personal identity. As for Postmodernism, personal identity is part of social identity and it is a fluid entity, unstable, adaptable: it requires continuous negotiations. In this process the family and the places of origin or in which everyone lives have fundamental importance in the construction of personal identity: every case is dominated by conflicts. This happens also in the case of Saladin and Gibreel who acquire, in every situation involving their own family and every time they go to United Kingdom or come back home in India, a new identity. They are migrants and they have to build their own identity in relation to totally different social identities around them, in a totally different social context where they perceive the distance between them and the Others; they have to understand how to relate to the social context in which they are located. In a situation like this, when Saladin and Gibreel plummet from the sky to the English coast, unlike Saladin, Gibreel decided not to adapt to the

English society. They become Good and Evil: Gibreel suffers from halitosis, loses his girlfriend, his job and commits suicide, while Saladin reconciles with his dying father and his girlfriend: he becomes culturally hybrid, he gains the *third space* leaving something owing to his old self and acquiring something new. A new process of negotiation take place, a process which identifies migrants as "translated men": something can be lost in translation but something can also be gained; this process gives rise to fragmented, discontinuous identities that everyone has to learn to accept about himself because his multiple identities are the result of his own past experience.

The moment in which Gibreel, but Saladin in particular, plummet from the sky to the English coast, they experience a death, an event which, after many hijinks, will bring Gibreel to his suicide and Saladin to recover his relationship with his father and the links with his own origins.

Having moved to London to study, Saladin becomes a true Englishman, marries an English woman, Pamela Lovelace, but then separates. The end of his marriage, his disappointment for the European experience brings him to go back home from London to Bombay in search of his origins, in order to find a new inner balance.

Saladin's European experience, as negative as it is, becomes the reason for Rushdie's subversion of the typical *bildungsroman*<sup>19</sup>. The *bildungsroman* is a form of the novel focusing on the moral and psychological growth of the protagonist

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<sup>19</sup> Bassi, Shaul "The (Un)Making of Saladin Chamcha: Rushdie's Subversion of the Bildungsroman" *Salman Rushdie: New Critical Insights*. Vol. 1. New Delhi: Atlantic & Distributors, 2003. 72-86.

from youth to adulthood. In *The Satanic Verses* it is subverted by a series of deformations, in order to demonstrate that the canons of the *bildungsroman* cannot be applied to the post-colonial reality.

First of all, *The Satanic Verses*, like many other postcolonial novels, beginning with the death of the character or with something that looks like his death, then he takes a path that leads him to his rebirth. The postcolonial hero is linked to History, while in the *bildungsroman* History is only a fading background. He is mobile: he moves to escape war and persecution, he loses the ability to decide his fate, while the hero of the *bildungsroman* moves to travel or to embark on adventures. He is not recognized as citizen by the Law, because of his ethnic diversity.

Saladin undergoes a metamorphosis, especially physics, which represents the vulnerability of the body in front of the disciplinary power of the state. He becomes the antagonist of himself, an antagonist that in the classic novel comes from outside to break the social order, but in the case of *The Satanic Verses* and the figure of Saladin the antagonist comes from himself: he had dreamed of becoming a hero, but in reality he becomes the antagonist of the society that he himself has idealized and in this way he comes to break the social order.

As to the narrator of the novel, the traditional Victorian narrator is an omniscient storyteller who offers moral judgments on his characters. In *The Satanic Verses* he is only apparently aware of his identity; in fact in the course of the novel, he reveals himself by asking who he is, what its role is.

All these issues are concentrated in the largest and most important theme of identity conceived not only as a personal and interior feature, but also in relation to other identities, the society, through the important instrument of the language.

What characterizes Rushdie's characters, Saladin and Gibreel in particular, is the use of satire considered to be the true essence of responsible art. Rushdie has an Islamic cultural background, who is no stranger to satire. He perceives the opportunity of satirizing any kind of orthodoxy, even from the religious point of view; the intention is not to offend, but tease playfully and express dissent against injustice and coercion. The satire adopted by Rushdie has a realistic component; it is called by Mikhail Bakhtin "menippean grotesque", which represents the intermingling between Menippean satire and grotesque realism and can be associated to the act of laughing, which represents both a statement and a critic.

As in Bakhtin, Rushdie's novels come out from the tension between a negative, pessimistic form of satire, a verbal aggression that ridicules some aspects of reality, and the menippean grotesque which is at the same time renewal of the world and the act of awareness and changing by the character, in particular, as for *The Satanic Verses*, by Saladin Chamchawala.

In *The Satanic Verses* Saladin and Gibreel experience the full range of possibilities of the carnival, both official as the brutality of the racist English



police and unofficial as the uprisings near to the Club Hot Wax; these experiences have anyway the purpose of a social change, that is to say a sort of newness and rebirth. This happens in particular for the body which undergoes a process of metamorphosis related to multiple and hybrid identities that Rushdie describes for each character.

Regarding the subject of satire, the most important theorists in relation to the satire and the grotesque are the German scholar Wolfgang Kayser and Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>20</sup>

For Khaiser the grotesque is based on the observation of the world chaos that is both horrible and ridiculous. It is then possible to choose whether to see it as it is in reality or externally, as something distorted.

Bakhtin see satire and grotesque in a positive way because he believes that satire and grotesque are able to offer not only a new personal self-awareness, but a renewal and regeneration of the world. Rushdie's vision of the world is similar to that expressed by Bakhtin, but it is inserted in a new social and cultural context.

Between other minor critics, Catherine Cundy<sup>21</sup> agree with Bakhtin in considering *The Satanic Verses* an example of Menippean satire mixed to the theme of change and renewal, in which this renewal, seen by Keith Booker<sup>22</sup> as an "urban renewal", is imposed by a general challenge to the ordinariness of things. In Booker's opinion Rushdie's Menippean grotesque has to be read with particular

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<sup>20</sup> Ball, John Clement. "Pessimism: Satire and the Menippean Grotesque in Salman Rushdie's Novels." *Satire and the Postcolonial Novel: V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 121-123.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 147

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 150

attention to the character of Saladin who is seen by Northrop Frye<sup>23</sup> in his "The Great Code" as a character typical of the English Renaissance and Restoration.

#### **4.1.2. The Female Characters and the Family**

Women are very important after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* because almost all feminist groups have organised a lot of productive debates and political initiatives after the *fatwa*, refusing to condemn the novel.

Women's role is also important in *The Satanic Verses'* plot as in all Rushdie's novels: women are capable of attacking male power and invading it in order to ask to be included in society. They stop and overshadow male stories or reflect them in a new light getting back, in the end, to be themselves. They have their own creativity, due to their marginal position, and have the ability not only to determine the construction of their post-colonial artistic identity but also to determine the construction of the events.

In Rushdie's fiction women usually represent both a sort of feminist revision and the emblem of post-colonial resistance, but if on the one hand he uses the female figure to represent a story or a post-colonial situation, on the other hand he makes an attempt to the feminist project in questioning patriarchal norms through social injustices against women. In this way on the one hand his staunch feminism becomes even more ambivalent and complicated, but on the the other hand the use of stereotypes abounds: male stories abound of themes, contents and subjects; conversely, female stories are characterized by absence of form, but this

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 151

is not a lack on Rushdie's writing because female stories represent an alternative way to reflect on male stories, something that is not necessary, but useful to the narrative.

When referring to Rushdie's use of female figures in his narrative, Gavatri Spivak states that the author's feminism is an "honorable failure"<sup>24</sup> due to his efforts to insert female characters in the novel. Harveen Mann<sup>25</sup>, for his part, is driven to the conclusion that Rushdie introduces female figures within the narrative as a challenge to the Islamic tradition, strongly adverse to the female figure, but describing women as figures endowed with a strong eroticism not only confirms the reasons that lead Muslims to relegate the female figure in hidden locations.

Sara Suleri<sup>26</sup> goes further by stating that Rushdie intends to deal with Islam in a feminine perspective; in particular, this happens with the character of Ayesha who represents the Islamic prophet in contemporary India.

In *The Satanic Verses* the main female characters are Ayesha and Zeeny Vakil, emblems of Rushdie's principal narrative project.

Ayesha is the young girl of the village of Titlipur who, surrounded by butterflies that sometimes she swallows, in the name of Gibreel leads the villagers in a pilgrimage on foot to the Arabian Sea and then to Mecca in order to save Mishal who is suffering from breast cancer. She represents the strength of a

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<sup>24</sup> Hai, Ambreen "Marching from the Peripheries: Rushdie's Feminized Artistry and Ambivalent Feminism" *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*. Ed. M. Keith Booker. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999. 35

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*

feminist review, the possibility of salvation of Islam through the pursuit of a secure future for migrants, a future of reconstruction through the pursuit of a secure future for migrants, which, however, leads to an ambiguous ending because most of his followers drowned in the sea.

Zeeny Vakil is an Indian writer whose philosophy represents Rushdie's vision on cultural hybridity and migration. She rejects the idea of a society pure, uncontaminated by the identities of other social groups, because she is convinced that history and modern societies represent the result of the mixture between individuals and their own singular experiences. As character, Zeeny represents Saladin's evolution, his failures and the lesson that, in the end, he understands about his own life experience: towards the end of the novel he goes back to visit his dying father, but, after his death, he moves to Zeeny's house.

However, there are other female characters that, even if they have secondary importance in the narrative, have a specific role. First of all Mishal, wife of the landowner Mirza Saeed, is used by Rushdie to represent, together with Ayesha, the relationship between the writer and his readers: Ayesha is the personification of the writer, Rushdie himself, who invites his readers, represented by Mishal, to be more open and receptive, to open their horizons and cancel or at least reduce the distance between themselves and others in order to implement a revision of themselves and their own history that leads to salvation.

Many other women are represented in *The Satanic Verses*: between them it is important to mention Pamela, the English wife of Saladin, who is the physical representation of the troubled city of London, and finally Mimi Mamoulian, a

Jewish voice actress in London who, at the beginning of the novel, has a relationship with Saladin but decides to leave him because of their different religion.

Rushdie shows himself avowedly feminist in the course of the narrative, emphasizing the misogyny of the male characters both in Islamic and Judeo-Christian tradition. In the previous novel, *Shame*, Rushdie had described frustrated women; on the contrary, on the following novel *The Satanic Verses* they are independent, voracious women, especially from a sexual point of view. Conversely, he describes old women like Rosa Diamond, an old woman who sees Saladin and Gibreel just fallen on the British beach after the plane crash, as monstrous and sick beings who threaten male virility and male political power.

In Rushdie's novels women are largely described in terms of the relationship between husband and wife or parents and children; the writer believes that these descriptions represent a feminine way to remedy the state of oppression of women in Pakistan, but dealing with subjects such as women and family ties is also a ploy to create an allegory of post-colonial nation. The nation becomes a macrocosm and the family is its corresponding microcosm.

In this context the "idea of home"<sup>27</sup> and the ideas of filiation - linked to the realm of nature and life - and affiliation - linked to culture and society - become key concepts for understanding the principal characters of *The Satanic Verses*, Saladin and Gibreel, thrown out of their intricate filiative unit and obliged to create new affiliative links without the help of their family, therefore more closely

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<sup>27</sup> Yaqin, Amina "Family and Gender in Rushdie's writing" *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. 61-74.

linked to the concept of gender and sexuality.

A large debate spread over these concepts in Rushdie's writings<sup>28</sup>: Inderpal Grewal points out Rushdie's attempt to deal with the masculine and feminine genders equally, but he states that it is the narration itself to debunk the author because he does not show participation in women's lives. For its part, Catherine Cundy believes that the project to include female characters in the text clashes with the way in which Rushdie represents female characters. Jenny Sharpe, however, believes that Rushdie goes wrong in regarding violence as a male prerogative, and silence, submission, as a female prerogative; she believes that this is a stereotype because organizations of black women with the aim of reforming society, claiming more attention and participation of women in social and political life, are spreading all over England.

Rushdie denounces the fact that India and Pakistan, two macrocosm, are dominated by a culture based on the code of honor and shame: he adopts families as a microcosm representing nation, the macrocosm, to criticize the nation itself which considers women important for their intrinsic ability to give life and then create the very identity of the nation, but at the same time he denounces that the nation forces women inside their own house. In his novels he describes women as modern, independent subjects, not relegated to the home, but not free.

#### **4.1.3 The Language: The English Vernacular**

After the Independence, gained in 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru, just

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

become Prime Minister of the Indian Government, planned the construction of a common linguistic register in India represented by British English so that the English could serve as glue between all the languages and dialects widespread throughout the Indian nation.

In the case of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, published forty-one years after the independence of India, the language used by the characters in is the Indian vernacular, an hybrid English formed by the mixing of British English, which continues to represent the 'lingua franca' of bureaucracy despite the gained independence from the motherland, and the languages and dialects of India.

The debate between English and vernacular Indian languages began between Twenties and Thirties and continued afterwards, dominating the critical debate on the Indian novel. For fifty years, from Thirties to Eighties, Indian novelists continued to use the Standard British English, then every writer created his own personal English on the basis of his own experience in the world. In his essay "An Invitation to Indian Postmodernity: Rushdie's English Vernacular as Situated Cultural Hybridity"<sup>29</sup> Bishnupriya Ghosh quotes Pnina Werbner who, by referring to Homi Bhabha, enunciates the differentiation between "cultural diversity" and "cultural difference": the concept of "cultural diversity" implies recognition of pre-existing content and cultural customs, the concept of "cultural difference" presupposes cultural authority and is embodied in an attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy created when there is a need to differentiate themselves. This difference is the basis of the concept of

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<sup>29</sup> Ghosh, Bishnupriya "An Invitation to Indian Postmodernity: Rushdie's English Vernacular as Situated Cultural Hybridity" *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*. Ed. M. Keith Booker. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999. 133-134.

"multiculturalism".

Rushdie supports the scholar Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of language<sup>30</sup>, considering it a process in constant evolution, especially in the case of the encounter between people of different backgrounds and culture. It is for this reason that Rushdie decides to adopt the use of the vernacular language in his texts, differentiating himself, for example, by G. V. Desani who in order to write *All About H. Hatterr* builds his own vocabulary with the help of different dictionaries, thus emphasizing his attention to the purity of the language. Rushdie believes that English, as foreign language, has more resonance for older generations, and that in India the debate is more between Hindi and other local languages than between all local languages and English, which remains the language of bureaucracy. So, the language used in *The Satanic Verses* becomes a mixing between Hindi, British and British English slang, Urdu and Persian. Terms referred to everyday life like "hamrazada", Hindi word for "bastard", or "purdah", the practice of excluding women from political and everyday life which is typical in some countries in the Middle East, are given in the text with the original meaning they have in the language they come from.

#### **4.1.4. The Cinema**

On reading *The Satanic Verses* it is possible to notice that, throughout the text, there are clear references to the film industry, not only for the large number of films mentioned, but also for the point of view undertaken by the narrator:

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<sup>30</sup> Sanga, Jaina C. *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy and Globalization*. Westport: Greenwood, 2001. 6.



Rushdie refers in particular to Bollywood and Bombay cinema. His interest in cinema was so great that in 1992 he would have honored it with *The Wizard of Oz*, an essay he wrote about the great classic of world cinema representing his first literary influence.

In 1957, when he was only ten years old, Rushdie saw two films that would have had much influence on him and on his writing: at the Metro Cinema in Mumbai he saw *Shree 420* ('Mr. 420', 1955) and *Funtoosh* ('The Madhatter', 1956). In the following years he saw many others movies that were all black and white films, so he recalled the impact that a "one reel colour sequence"<sup>31</sup> could have on the audience, like in "Mother India", produced by Mehboob Khan in 1957, where the colour sequence is related to the dance of a courtesan: it appears to be an expedient very suitable to emphasize the key moments of the plot.

The origins of Bollywood cinema can be traced back to the Seventies. Its name comes from the mingling of Bombay and Hollywood: Bombay cinema was founded in 1931 and until 2006, when his name was already Bollywood, it produced ten thousand movies. As described in *Screen*, an important film magazine, Bollywood represents the attempt of a process of globalization between the words 'Tollywood', representing the film industry of Calcutta, and 'Mollywood', representing the film industry in Madras.

Conceived as a bit exotic fad, Bollywood cinema has become a global phenomenon to the point that in the 90s it has become the main cultural form in the Indian diaspora so as to be considered indispensable in British cultural

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<sup>31</sup> Mishra, Vijay. "Rushdie and Bollywood Cinema" *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. 12

productions designed to understand the way in which Indians of the mother country and the colonies conceive their daily lives.

In Rushdie's texts Bollywood cinema is an imperative cultural form to represent and understand the diaspora: mixed together, his written texts and cinema give Rushdie a context through which it is possible to represent a national allegory, an entire world and its specific features. History represented in his text is filtered by an historical consciousness that gives his own reading of the events and the use of montage becomes important to represent the narrator's wavering point of view, ranging between interior monologue and stream of consciousness.

In the text of *The Satanic Verses* cinema plays an important role not only because the main protagonists, Gibreel and Saladin, are respectively an actor and a voice actor, but also for frequent references to films, the use of cinematic language, the use of cinematic narrative strategies, the attempt to link separate stories through references to movies and comments on them, the description of Gibreel's dreams as an artificial reality such as movies.

The novel begins with a fall: Saladin and Gibreel plummet down from the jumbo jet "Bostan" which, after being hijacked, explodes over the English Channel. It is a distorted cinematic image because it is in two dimensions, a vertical dimension from top to bottom, a relative perspective underlined by the use of the second person adopted by the narrator who urges the reader to use the vision in two dimensions as if he were using a camera. In this way he shapes the narrative by linking together scenes that take place in different spaces and times, pushes the reader to assume a certain point of view and not only he ties together

the elements of a scene, but also several scenes in which the same elements recur by the technique of fading, a scene change characterized by a fade of the image of the first scene to the second. In the progress of events it is possible to note the distinction between "camera eye" and "narrator eye": in the first case it corresponds with seeing an objective reality as it is, things as they objectively are, so if there is no light there is no possibility to see anything, in the second case it is the narrator who sees with his own eyes and he is an active, not a passive, narrator because he asks questions about what he sees and the reader can perceive about the scene.

The use of technology may represent a risk of manipulation carried out by the author, but Rushdie uses it in order to engage the reader and push him to question himself about and despite what he sees. It is a way to make the reader understand that reality is not an univocal concept, an univocal vision of things, but on the contrary it can be seen in many different perspectives which are equally right, equally considerable.

#### **4.2. *The Satanic Verses*: Themes**

At first reading the themes that stand out more in the narrative are linked to religion, to mental illness and racism.

Soon at the beginning of the novel it is possible to notice the physical transformation, like a sort of reincarnation, of Saladin and Gibreel who take the

appearance of a devil and an angel. Physical transformation usually corresponds to a psychological, interior transformation. Other aspects of the plot linked to the theme of religion are several references to faith and doubt, the figure of Ayesha and her miracles, but it is possible to notice that all the even sections of the text are dedicated to an aspect of Islamic religion, such as the figure of Mohammed, the city of Jahilia which represents Mecca and the parting of the Arabian Sea. The title itself of the entire novel has to do with religion because it refers to two verses of the Qur'an, part of the fifty-third sura "The Star", inspired by Satan and describing three goddesses, Allāt, Uzzā e Manāt. Islam is a monotheistic religion, so any statement making reference to polytheism was considered blasphemous. According to the text of *The Satanic Verses* it was Salman the Scribe, or Salman the Persian, who introduced wrong elements on the transcription of the Qur'an because inspired by Satan. These facts are entirely reported on the novel.

The theme of mental illness is associated in particular to Gibreel, but also to Ayesha, and is used to explain dreams and supernatural phenomena which are parts of human life, as much as reality.

The theme of love, however, is related to Saladin that, in the apex of his experience after leaving the homeland to move to England and groped to realize himself, he returned to India from his ailing father and reconciles with him before of his death; at the same time he is reconciled with his multiple personalities, accepting its past, its origins, and doing so much space to a new future.

The theme of racism is underlined in several moments, but in particular during riots or when Saladin is arrested as illegal immigrant and beaten up by the

police. He is taken to a prison where he meets other immigrants who have monstrous appearance, as if they had undergone a metamorphosis.

At a deeper level of analysis it is possible to observe the following issues, which I am going to discuss in detail: migration, translation, hybridity and blasphemy.

#### **4.2.1. Migration**

In his essay entitled *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors* Jaina C. Sanga gives us a definition of migration. He takes into account Stephen's Castle and Mark Miller's essay *The Age of Migration* by defining migration "as a process involving the movement of both people and their social, cultural and political ideals from their countries of birth to other countries."<sup>32</sup> This process and the resulting feeling of exile has not been perceived in the same way by people in all countries, and in Rushdie's opinion this is due not so much to the distance from native country as to the psychological and cultural issues that underlie the migration process: the migrant perceives himself in a double way, as an insider and an outsider at the same time. In his essay entitled *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors* Jaina C. Sanga gives us a definition of migration. He takes into account Stephen's Castle and Mark Miller's essay *The Age of Migration* by defining migration "as a process involving the movement of both people and their social, cultural and political ideals from their countries of birth to other countries."<sup>33</sup> This process and the resulting feeling of exile has not been perceived

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<sup>32</sup> Sanga, Jaina C. *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy and Globalization*. Westport: Greenwood, 2001. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Sanga, Jaina C. *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity,*

in the same way by people in all countries, and in Rushdie's opinion this is due not so much to the distance from native country as to the psychological and cultural issues that underlie the migration process: the migrant perceives himself in a double way, as an insider and an outsider.

In his novels, Rushdie takes the position<sup>34</sup> of an Eastern intellectual who, finding himself in a Western reality, rewrites it according to his own life experience and perceptions, making use of his memories and imagination, but taking into account the themes of colonialism, post-colonialism and consequently, through his doubts, infringing the nationalist myth. The result is migrants' fragmented identity: they suffer a physical alienation, a constant process of obscuring their identity and the imposition of a new identity, like a sort of fragmentation their own identity, but despite this they constantly try to put together their different worlds - the one in which they born and the one in which they landed - in order to be able to find their own real, complex identity.

Talking about the crisis experienced by the migrant in Rushdie's novels, Jaina C. Sanga states that "It's not the traditional identity crisis of not knowing where you come from. The problem is that you come from too many places,"<sup>35</sup> so every place is yours "home", but at the same time it is also a place where you do not belong, a place where you are and you feel strange because, through migrations from a place to another, from a nation to another, nations become a large number of diasporic identities. Anyway this process gives new life to

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*Blasphemy and Globalization*. Westport: Greenwood, 2001. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Homi Bhabha defines it "interstitial space". Sanga, Jaina C. *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy and Globalization*. Westport: Greenwood, 2001. 16.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

multiculturalism and post-colonialism of which the diaspora is at the same time cause and effect.

The diaspora referred by Rushdie is the diaspora of the sixties, particularly 1963, which created a new distribution of the population from the so-called third space to several European countries. In particular, in his novel *The Satanic Verses* he depicts the Indian and Pakistani diaspora in UK and the desire of the Indian and Pakistani people to regain their lost a sense of unity just in the places where they have established themselves. With the growth of the immigrant population, the British Government becomes more and more hostile to immigrants and loses political consensus between them, who become unassimilable and gain the margins of political and everyday life. In *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie depicts a sort of second exile: at the age of fourteen, in 1961, Rushdie was sent by his father Anis to London to study; some years later, in 1965, his parents moved to Karachi in Pakistan joining the Muslim exodus, a sort of exile due to a war between India and Pakistan; in UK Indian people who moved to European Countries found the same hostile climate that they had found in their exodus during the war in the mid-Sixties. In this context *The Satanic Verses* becomes a hybrid of themes, a set of oppositions that only "untranslated men", in their context of diaspora and marginality, can retrieve by recovering a lost harmony which is part of their past. This recover of the past is, unexpectedly, only possible through modern technologies like films, tapes, and so on, that provide the possibility to retain in some way fragments of the past.

#### **4.2.2. Translation**

Language is the boundary that separates oneself from the other. By the use of language, the translation process makes possible to reformulate one's cultural, social and political identity so that it becomes more understandable to others; in addition, it determines also the possibility of transposing a concept, an idea, in more than one context in order to focus the concept in the best way for every context, so the result is an addition, a deepening of the significance of every single translated word and an improvement of the language.

As underlined in the previous paragraph, in his novels Rushdie tries to adopt the colonial English adapting it to the Indian multicultural context deriving from the intermingling of several populations and consequently of their own languages; the result is an English very different from British English because of the influence of Indian local languages.

British imperialism in India began in the course of XVII century, but only in 1835, through Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education, English education became compulsory in India. It was in this context that the concept of "Otherness" spreaded: the "Other" was represented by all the natives, all the colonized people unable to adapt themselves to all the established rules.

#### **4.2.3. Hybridity**

Jaina C. Sanga defines hybridity as "the mixture produced when two or more elements are fused together"<sup>36</sup>, so it represents something very different from the concept of "purenness". It is directly linked to postcolonial writings, which try

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 75.



to represent a new national reality independent from Western context through the development and the intermingling of new indigenous literary forms; anyway it is impossible not to consider the consequences of colonisation and the interaction between coloniser and native, also from a literary point of view. Rushdie's writings in general, and *The Satanic Verses* in particular, well represent this literary interaction because of the interposition of different literary tradition: Eastern and Western literary traditions match together to form a fiction based on some characters of British novels but settled and integrated in a realistic contemporary postcolonial context.

Jaina C. Sanga considers Rushdie's conception of hybridity as a point of view based on Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity in *The Location of Culture*:

"For Bhabha, hybridity represents an ambivalent space that is not necessarily the resolution of conflict between two cultures, but an area of tension that is created by the splitting of different aspects within different cultures. [...]"<sup>37</sup>

"Englishness" as it can be conceived in India is very different from the kind of "Englishness" as it can be considered in England. Hybridity is something going beyond this two points of view, something besides them: it is, in Bhabha's words, a *third space*<sup>38</sup> in which, those who belong to it, acquire their own individuality resulting from of Eastern and Western influences mixed together and from their own personal experience in life. Anyway hybridity implies a sensation of doubleness, as if each character was a mixture of two different individualities,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 82.

two different sensitivities, two different visions of the things of life, with a constant feeling of uncertainty.

In order to celebrate hybridity, Rushdie adopts in *The Satanic Verses* different discursive registers and appoints a wide range of movies, television shows and documentaries, both from Western and Eastern tradition, but, in particular, he makes Gibreel sing a song on hybridity since the moment in which he and Saladin throw themselves down from the hijacked plane to the English coast.

#### **4.2.4. Blasphemy**

Jaina C. Sanga defines blasphemy as "[...] the act of saying the unsayable and, by extension, thinking the unthinkable.[...]"<sup>39</sup> Blasphemy is the result of the alteration of any images and concepts usually considered and constructed as untouchable and unchangeable. It can be both religious and secular as in the case of European literary tradition and Postcolonial fiction, which have the tendency to adapt the concepts they express in relation to their audience or readers without attention or respect for any ideological radicalism.

As seen in the section devoted to the *The Satanic Verses* Affair, the accuse of blasphemy struck Rushdie too, in relation to the publication of *The Satanic Verses* and their content rich of reworkings of the Islamic culture, often inspired by other traditions - such as the use of the name Mahound, an offensive appellation used by Medieval writers to refer to the Prophet of the Islamic religion - or totally invented and offensive as the brothel scene with the poet Baal,

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 108.

representing the Prophet, and twelve whores representing the twelve wives of the Prophet. Rushdie's strategy is to break up with a series of traditional precepts of the past and reproduce them in a different light, more appropriate to the contemporary ideological context, both cultural and political. In this process it is the act of translation that becomes the act of blaspheming, because of its reproduction of sacred Islamic precepts into something fictional, also with reference with the choice of the form of the novel, removing sacredness to the Qu'ran which is usually expressed in the form of a poem.

#### **4.3. *The Satanic Verses*: My Hypothesis of Reading**

Rushdie published his book 'The Satanic Verses' on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1988 but a foretaste of the novel appeared shortly before in the weekly magazine *India Today*. Since then alternated a series of events which are still remembered as "The Rushdie Affair," which changed Rushdie's life, whose book was considered blasphemous by Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who expressed a fatwa not only against the writer but also against those who were involved in the publication of the novel declaring it blasphemous as it was making fun of the tenets of the Islamic religion.

Struck by the fatwa, for several years Rushdie tried in many ways to make it clear that he did not intend to write a book offensive to Islam, then based on his Indian origins even though he lived in the UK since his childhood, but that he had taken inspirations from his Indo-Islamic origins for a work of art that, in his

opinion, had to be considered a mere work of fiction with no intent to offend not only the Islamic religion, but also his own Indian ancestry.

From a literary, written point of view, three years after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, Rushdie published his collection of essays *Imaginary Homelands* in which, on page 394 in the essay "In Good Faith", he stated:

If *The Satanic Verses* is nothing, it is a migrant's eye view of the world. [...] that is the migrant condition and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity."

More recently, at the end of September 2012 with the publication of his memoir *Joseph Anton*, writing about his memories about the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, at page 72 of his memoir he stated again:

"The act of migration [...] puts into crisis everything about the migrating individual or group, everything about identity and selfhood and culture and belief. So if this is a novel about migration it must be that act of putting in question. It must perform the crisis it describes."

What I want to do with my thesis is finding in the text of *The Satanic Verses* the reasons that lead Rushdie to state that his more controversial book is a book on migration, and I want to do this by using also, in some way, as a means of analysis his memoir *Joseph Anton*.

Being aware of the events that occurred following the publication of *The*

*Satanic Verses* it is possible to realize immediately that, in his memoir, Rushdie writes about himself in the third person and, with himself, about all that happened after the declaration of the fatwa by the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini; then it is possible to find a very strong correspondence between two sentences at the beginning and towards the end of the *Verses* and a statement inside the memoir.

At page 3 of *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie writes:

"To be born again," sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling from the heavens "first you have to die"

Towards the end of the novel, at page 547, by returning to the concept of page 3 he writes:

"If the old refused to die, the new could not be born."

In his memoir, however, he takes this concept when he tells about the choice of the name to be used to conceal himself, as a result of the imposition of the protection scheme by the British Police. At page 165, once chosen his new name, he states:

'Joseph Anton,' he told himself, 'you must live until you die'.

In my point of view this statement inextricably links *The Satanic Verses* with Rushdie's experience and personal life, with particular attention to the

correspondence between the singular evolution of the two main characters of the novel and the author's life.

The key point for a correct interpretation of *The Satanic Verses* is given, therefore, by the analysis of the two main characters, Saladin and Gibreel but, first of all from the analysis of historical, social and political environment in which Rushdie writes and publishes his novel.

When he was 16 years old Rushdie was sent to United Kingdom by his father Anis, who wanted him to study in an European Country and probably protect him from those years of fierce clashes between India and newborn Pakistan culminating in 1965 with the Indo-Pakistan war, and consequently the moving of his family in Karachi, Pakistan.

In London, Rushdie was often at odds with the political attitude of Margaret Thatcher who was the nation's premier since 1979 and then during the Eighties; in particular, Rushdie challenged the government's attitude towards immigrants who, from Third World countries, India in particular, moved to Europe and America. This led the British Government to enact, in 1981, the British National Act which protected British citizenship compared to the large waves of immigration of those years.

In their book *The Age of Migration*, Stephen Castles and Mark Miller defines migration as "a process involving the movement of both people and their social, cultural and political ideals from their countries of birth to other countries."<sup>40</sup> It is strongly linked to the the idea of "home", represented by the

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<sup>40</sup> Sanga, Jaina C. *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy and Globalization*. Westport: Greenwood, 2001. 14.

condition of "living here and belonging elsewhere"<sup>41</sup>. In Rushdie's fiction the "home" is not a homogeneous entity, but rather multifaceted and contradictory as it can be a nation rich of diasporic identities. It is, then, a multicultural reality of which migration or diaspora are both cause and effect.

The effects of migration have not been perceived in the same ways in all countries: they are largely different from country to country, but in Rushdie's opinion they do not depend on the distance between the country of origin and the country of arrive and subsequent setting; more specifically they depend on the cultural and psychological implications that the process of migration, encounter and confrontation with a new country causes. The migrant's most important perception is the fact of being settled in a place, but perceiving that he belongs to another place, another context and, in the end, to another country. This results is a broad appeal to imagination and the subsequent construction of a reality perceived as alternative to the reality experienced in everyday life, as if the migrant felt himself broadly detached from the surrounding reality. The migrant perceives himself like a fragmented being, formed by two or more different world that he has to put together in order to find his real identity. This can be done with the language, representing the means through which identity can be created and maintained, but during the process of migration the language collects some of the features of the new culture and new language with which it comes in contact; in this way the migrant perceives himself not only as a jumble of opposing notions, but also as he would be in a particular position, in a in-between zone which places him at the same time in opposing positions: between the Self and the Other or for

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<sup>41</sup>Bloom, Harold. *Salman Rushdie*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003. 63.

example in a space between postempire and postcolony.

In *The Satanic Verses* the migrant identity resides outside the national boundaries; anyway it is the result of the break between the Western metropolies and the peripheries. The book gives an account of the endless possibilities of the process of migration through the world.

As seen, *The Satanic Verses* begins with a fall: the jumbo jet Bostan explodes in the sky over the English Channel and two Indian passengers, Saladin and Gibreel which are respectively an actor and a voice actor, jump from the plane and land in the English soil. The English coast is not a destination, a place of arrival, but rather a place of beginning of their evolution through the events described in the novel: different as they are, they undertake two distinct kind of evolution with, in the end, opposite results.

Once landed, they immediately try to get in touch with the population and integrate.

Rosa Diamond, an old English lady, helps them on the beach and welcomes them into her home. As if to emphasize the difference between a migrant and a local, they soon acquire the physical appearance of an angel, in the case of Gibreel, and a satan in the case of Saladin. In order to try to better mingle to the English population they take new Western clothes in the old woman's house. At the same time, someone notices their presence and reports them to the police as illegal immigrants. The police, formed by a second generation of migrants with dark skin, conducts them to an hospital due to his new appearance, but they run away from there, and thus begins their wandering in the British soil.



Hence things goes on in a very different way for each one of them: Saladin tries to assume a complete English appearance and, in order to better integrate, he marries Pamela Lovelace, a typical English woman; on the contrary, Gibreel maintains his angelical aspect. Someway Saladin and Gibreel and not only their initial debut as castaways who land in the English soil but also in the quality of good and evil, they seems to take inspiration from the characters described in Milton's Paradise Lost, each of them representing a character, or better to say an aspect, of Christian theology.

Saladin and Gibreel are two different entities in opposition between them. Saladin tries to become a perfect Englishman, but in the end he doubts about his previous certainties as his position in a perfect balance between his Englishness and his Indianness becomes more and more visible. He will be able to riconcile his opposed identities towards the end of the novel on his return to India to visit his dying father. Gibreel, on the contrary, has a multifaceted identity, subject to constant urges from the surrounding reality and the dreams dominating his mind which are described in half of the chapters of the novel. He is progressively separated by his former self and incapable to recover his first identity, therefore his evolutionary process can be considered a failure because he does not recover his former self, his origins.

Although Saladin and Gibreel represent the main emblem of the migration process about which Rushdie wants to give an account, in the progress of the novel there are many other aspects that are related in some way to the process of migration: not only the numerous movements of the characters, so for example the

pilgrimage of Ayesha and his followers towards Mecca or Saladin's travel to India in order to see his dying father, but also Rushdie's use of the particular mechanism of the camera, as if the writer and the reader were inside a cinema, as the camera was constantly moving in the scene giving a two dimensional view of things, showing a part of the scene and excluding the rest, as if what is not visible by the eye of the camera does not really happen.

The use of the camera to watch the scene with a critical eye is echoed by Rushdie in his memoir *Joseph Anton*, but in a different way that is the use of the third person singular to talk about a character, Joseph Anton, who represents himself; in fact the progress of events is absolutely identical to the progress of his own personal life.

## CONCLUSION

*The Satanic Verses* was one of the most controversial, but acclaimed novels ever written since 1988, year of its publication. Indeed, it can be said that disputes began before its publication as a book because a review of the novel was published on the day before. Protest movements quickly spread in all the Eastern and Western countries as a result of the reviews published in newspapers, of representations in popular films, rumors and hearsay.

The main aim of my thesis was to examine *The Satanic Verses* in the light of a claim that Rushdie does on his last work, the memoir *Joseph Anton* published in September 2012, about the book he wrote twenty-four years before, *The Satanic Verses*, which radically changed his life in the following years until 27 March 2002 because of a *fatwa* issued on him by the Iranian leader Khomeini. As I mentioned in the introduction, on page 72 of his memoir Rushdie states that *The Satanic Verses* is a book about migration. My dissertation was built on this statement, as well as by the memory and deepening of the events that have taken place during the years following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.

After recalling the events that have taken place as a result of the declaration of death sentence issued on Rushdie and all those involved in the

publication of the book, I examined every single narrative aspect of the novel. I conducted my analysis by relating the opinions of essayists interested in the analysis and understanding of *The Satanic Verses*.

My research led me to distinguish many different aspects of postcolonial literature, among which the most predominant are the issues of migration and hybridity linked to one another through a further aspect of the translation, which is the very condition of the migrant living in a foreign land, in contact with people he does not know, with a different code of conduct and a different language. The migrant can choose whether to build a new image of himself to try to be part of the population of the foreign land or forever lose his identity. In the case of the main protagonists of *The Satanic Verses*, Gibreel finally loses its identity because he refuses any kind of translation, he refuses to come into contact with the Other, to integrate, while maintaining respect for its individuality, its origins and traditions and those of the Other. On the other hand Saladin manages to recover himself and his origins back to the bedside of his dying father. Literally thrown in England, a land that Saladin and Gibreel don't know, they found that this land is often inhospitable for the people who, like them, come from other countries: this fact gives rise to a great deal of questioning at all levels, particularly in a religious point of view. Brennan states that "*The Satanic Verses* is an immigrant theodicy"<sup>42</sup> inspired to Iqbal, an Urdu poet often compared to Milton, and in particular to his *Jibreel-O-Iblees*, a dialogue between the archangel Gabriel and Satan on repentance and forgiveness. As in a fight between Gabriel and Satan, between

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<sup>42</sup> Brennan, Timothy. *Salman Rushdie and The Third World: Myths of The Nation*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989. 151

God and Devil, *The Satanic Verses* deals with the colonial Rushdie's metropolitan half: thrown from his motherland to UK, his Eastern self has to communicate almost obligatorily to his new Western part and the new Western context in which he finds himself. To do that he uses a new language, British English, and deals with Western themes without never forgetting his Eastern origins and his Eastern background that he translates for his Western readers, but at the same time he denounces the bad treatment of immigrants in the West, especially from the central government in the person of the Prime Minister Margareth Thatcher and his politics against immigration, intended to seek a form of purification by the many migrants who inhabit the British soil.

Despite I am convinced that my research has led me to confirm my hypothesis, the fact that *The Satanic Verses* is a book on migration, it cannot be denied neither the Muslim vision of *The Satanic Verses* as blasphemous book because it mocks Islam in many respects, both religious and social, nor the interpretation the Feroza Jussawalla who considered the text a Rushdie's love letter to Islam inspired by the Persian tradition of Indo-Mughal *dastan-e-dilruba* which is a love song written by the lover - Salman Rushdie - for the beloved religion - that, for Rushdie, represents his own origins. I want to remember that the Mughal period was a long period, between 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, which had influence on Hindi, Bengali and Urdu literature, particularly in the northern of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

In my analysis of *The Satanic Verses* I deliberately focused only on a literary and thematic interpretation on the basis of a Rushdie's statement on his

memoir *Joseph Anton*, anyway omitting any other further personal in-depth analysis on the other interpretations. Despite this, my interpretation of the text was carried on trying to take an impartial position that made me look at the issues of *The Satanic Verses* in a literary way, linked to the themes debated. However, it is undeniable that the text can be read from the dual religious and literary aspects. These aspects can, and probably should co-exist because the text could be fully interpreted. Once again, then, the thesis of hybridity is confirmed as part of migration through translation, but the interpretation of *The Satanic Verses* as a blasphemous text cannot be denied and I do not want to deny it, in respect of the position I have tried to assume by carrying out my analysis of the text. Not only the themes of migration, translation and hybridity, but also the theme of blasphemy, are in some way very important for the modern era after the 1950s because they place the West in general, and Europe in particular, in a predominant position, so able to broadcast his influence all around the World. In a climate of overall progress, under the pretext and the illusion of a global advancement, colonialism gives way to a modern form of imperialism by creating interdependency between all the modern European and non-European Countries: this new form of colonialism is represented by globalization<sup>43</sup>.

In conclusion, my analysis and position, as unbiased but honest as possible, strengthen my conviction about the necessity of freedom of expression, which should be a feature of the whole Western and Eastern society: any artistic creativity, not only the literary one, should not be limited by any other belief or

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<sup>43</sup> Sanga, Jaina C. *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy and Globalization*. Westport: Greenwood, 2001. 140.

creed, but at the same time creativity should be always used in respect of worldwide people, taken in their globality and complexity. Anyway, any work of art should be created and, therefore, therefore studied by taking into consideration his author's life and his social and cultural background.

I hope that my dissertation has emphasized the richness of contents and themes of *The Satanic Verses*, which is a representative example of magical realism and even today, in my opinion, can be considered as one of the greatest examples of the consequences of globalization, but at the same time a useful tool to reflect on the fact that the past, as negative as it has been, must not be forgotten, but kept and observed as a reference point for a future in which the same past mistakes should not be repeated. At the same time I think that any further study should be undertaken in order to understand the social, but above all the theological aspects of the book and of the whole affair from the point of view of the relationship between Muslim religion with the other most important European religions, particularly Catholic one, in the light of all recent events in the Middle East, based on intolerance and non-acceptance of differences between people. It is a skill that I do not possess, but I hope that this will be investigated in the future.

Finally, leaving aside any critical evaluation, I personally appreciate this novel, especially with regard to the scenes that have to do with the tragedy of immigration which, in London, turns Saladin and other immigrants in bestial beings or, in other words, victims of prejudice that takes away their humanity and subject them to exploitation by those who are not interested in understanding their personalities, their stories, or the reasons for some of their attitudes. In general, I

would like to add that my totally personal appreciation goes to the description and evolution, from the beginning to the end of the novel, of the the two principal characters Saladin and Gibreel, in particular for their own feelings of doubleness, their being disrupted, sometimes unrecognizable to the other parts of themselves, as if within the same person inhabit more people, more ways of looking at things and more ways to tackle them, to the point that any decision to be taken is a struggle against different parts of himself. This is an attitude that sometimes corresponds exactly to the way I feel and do, probably because of my physical disability as if I was torn between my being a person like everyone else, but at the same time I had to force myself to recognize my disability to be able to deal with it and all things of life as better as possible.



## **APPENDIX**



Salman Rushdie holding a copy of his book *The Satanic Verses*.  
Photograph: Graham Turner for The Guardian, Saturday 14th February 2009



A demonstration against *The Satanic Verses*, in Bradford, England, in 1989. Photograph: Sipa Press/Rex Features for The Guardian, Friday 14th September 2012



Anti-Salman Rushdie demonstrations in New York. Photograph: Rex Features for The Telegraph, Sunday 16th September 2012



1

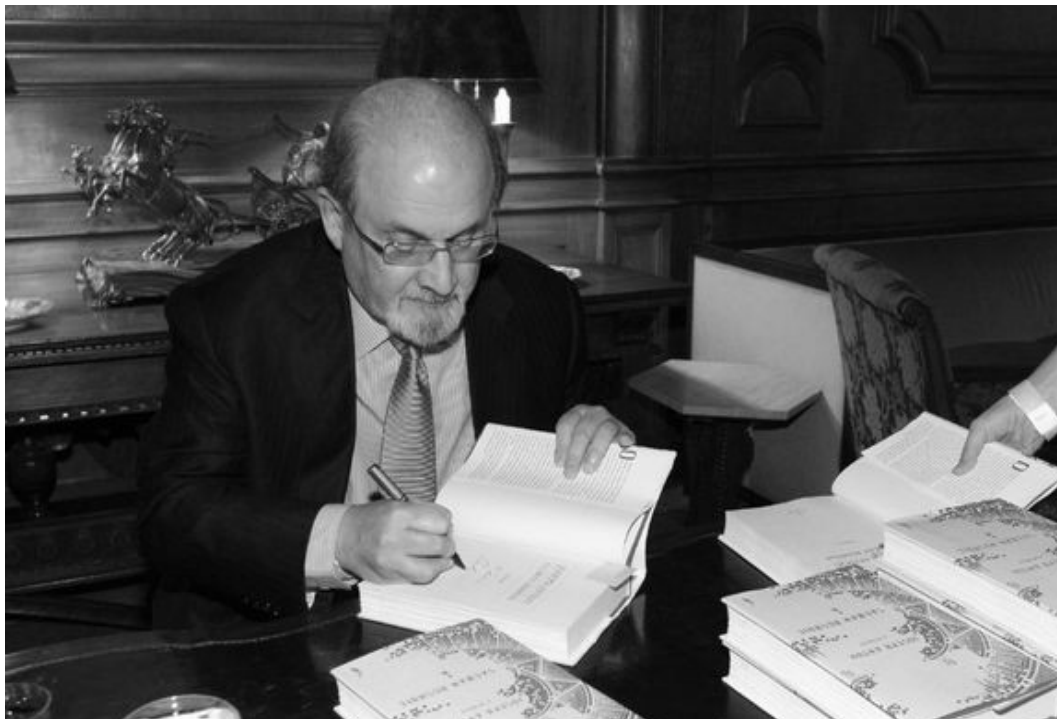
2

3

1. Ettore Capriolo, the Italian translator of *The Satanic Verses*. Beset and stabbed in his apartment in Milan on 3rd July 1991
2. Hitoshi Igarashi, the Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses*. Killed in his office at the University of Tsukuba on 12th July 1991
3. Aziz Nesin, the Turkish translator of *The Satanic Verses*. On 2nd July 1993 he escaped a massacre at Madimax Hotel in Sivas (Anatolia)



William Nygaard, Norwegian publisher of *The Satanic Verses*. On 11th October 1993 he was shot outside his home near Oslo, but fortunately he survived



On 23rd September 2012 the Library Foundation of Los Angeles celebrated its 20th Anniversary at a cocktail reception in Maguire Gardens followed by a gala dinner and awards ceremony at the California Club. There Rushdie signed some copies of his memoir *Joseph Anton*, five days after the publication of the book

"In writing *The Satanic Verses*, I think I was writing for the first time from the whole of myself. The English part, the Indian part. The part of me that loves London, and the part that longs for Bombay. And at my typewriter, alone, I could indulge this."

*Salman Rushdie*

[Source: BrainyQuote <<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/s/salmanrush580431.html>>]

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<<http://www.exberliner.com/culture/salman-rushdie-i-must-live-until-i-die/>>

## **Images**

All images included in the Appendix have been used for illustrative purposes only. Some images have been found in newspaper articles read on the Web, others found online through Google Images. The copyright of every image belongs to its rightful owners.

## CRITICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Appignanesi, Lisa, and Sara Maitland. *The Rushdie File*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1990.**

This essay initially presents the life of Salman Rushdie and his book *The Satanic Verses*, then relates first the events that led to the *fatwa* issued by the Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, then those that have taken place in different parts of the world, particularly in Europe, Canada and the United States of America, after the issue of the *fatwa*. Finally the authors, Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland, reflects on the subject of the essay by wondering about the distance between truth and fiction, about the use of religion as a topic of writing and then Islam, censorship and tolerance.

**Bloom, Harold. *Salman Rushdie*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003.**

This essay brings together several critical articles on the figure of Salman Rushdie as a writer. After an introduction part by Harold Bloom himself, the following chapters, written by different essayists, have to do with the issue of censorship from a literary point of view, the Rushdie Affair, *The Satanic Verses* as

a work of art seen by a cinematographic point of view and, finally, with a vision of the book as a diasporic narrative.

**Booker, Keith M., *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999.**

This essay, as the previous one, is a collection of different essays, written by different essayists, first of all on Rushdie's literary reputation, particularly during the period of the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, and then not only on the topic of women and feminism but also on Rushdie's use of the English vernacular as an aspect of hybridity. Two different essays account for a reading of the Rushdie Affair and an interpretation of *The Satanic Verses* as a Rushdie's love letter to Islam, that has to do with the ancient Arab conquest and domination of India and the consequent diffusion of Arabic literary models to which Rushdie may have been inspired by writing *The Satanic Verses*.

**Brennan, Timothy. *Salman Rushdie and The Third World: Myths of The Nation*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989.**

This essay is a large account of the literary, historic and social context that lead Rushdie to become one of the most important Cosmopolitan writers and consequently write *The Satanic Verses*.

**Evans, Eric J. *Thatcher and Thatcherism*. London: Routledge, 2004.**

This essay by Eric J. Evans describes in detail the period known as

Thatcherism, due to the rise in politics, and later as British Prime Minister, of Margaret Thatcher during the Eighties. During this period Rushdie lives in London and has the possibility to deal in a directly way with the hyper-restrictive policy of Margareth Thatcher, particularly about immigration. A clear critique of Thatcher's attitude on immigration appears just in *The Satanic Verses*.

**Gurnah, Abdulrazak. *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. 1-138.**

This book is collection of different essays on the three important themes in Rushdie's novels: the Bollywood cinema, the English tradition and Rushdie's account of family and genders in his writings. Two different essays has to do directly with The Rushdie Affair: in particular, one of them is about the *fatwa* and its consequences, the other is a particular reading of *The Satanic Verses* based on the quotes "To be born again, first uyou have to die".

**Kuortti, Joel. *Fictions to Live In: Narration as an Argument for Fiction in Salman Rushdie's Novels*. Frankfort Am Main: Peter Lang, 1998.**

This essay is based in particular on the issue of identity and names for the several characters of the novels, but in particular it deals with the figure of Salman Rushdie inside his own novel: as the author, as the narrator and a character.

**La'Porte, Victoria. *An Attempt to Understand the Muslim Reaction to the Satanic Verses*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1999.**

This essay is an account of all *The Satanic Verses* Affair exclusively from the point of view of the Muslim people.

**Mittapalli, Rajeshwar, and Joel Kuortti. *Salman Rushdie: New Critical Insights*. Vol. 1-2. New Delhi: Atlantic & Distributors, 2003.**

This collection of essays deals with different aspect of *The Satanic Verses*, but in general with the issue of identity; in addition it accounts for Rushdie's affiliation with Dickens.

**Sanga, Jaina C. *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy and Globalization*. Westport: Greenwood, 2001.**

This book is a logical path that starts from the description of the characters in *The Satanic Verses* by their different backgrounds and their different language, in order to appont the themes that, to a greater extent, are treated in the novel: migration, translation, hybridity, blasphemy and globalization.

**Smale, David. *Salman Rushdie: Midnight's Children, The Satanic Verses*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.**

This book, edited by David Smale, is a collection of articles published about the two best known novels of Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* and *Midnight's*

*Children*. As for the *Verses* they has to do with literary and thematic aspects of the novel.