

“Dark newnesses”: The Failures of *Joseph Anton*

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He was a new self now. He was the person in the eye of the storm, no longer the *Salman* his friends knew but the *Rushdie* who was the author of *Satanic Verses*, a title subtly distorted by the omission of the initial *The*. *The Satanic Verses* was a novel. *Satanic Verses* were verses that were satanic, and he was their satanic author, “Satan Rushdy”, the horned creature on placards carried by demonstrators down the streets of a faraway city, the hanged man with protruding red tongue in the crude cartoons they bore. *Hang Satan Rushdie*. How easy it was to erase a man’s past and to construct a new version of him, an overwhelming version, against which it seemed impossible to fight. (Rushdie, 2012: 5)

Salman Rushdie’s writing – both fictional and non-fictional – has traditionally been concerned with the question: “How does newness come into the world?” (Rushdie, 1998: 8). The motif is most prominently a play in *The Satanic Verses* (1988), and, as Homi Bhabha has influentially argued, often constitutes a progressive connecting point between the postcolonial and the postmodern. As Bhabha puts it, the novel “move[s] the location of cultural difference away from the space of demographic *plurality* to the borderline negotiations of cultural translation” (1994: 319). Indeed, he writes, *The Satanic Verses* shows that “[t]he newness of cultural translation is akin to what Walter Benjamin describes as the ‘foreignness of languages’ – that problem of representation native to representation itself” (325). Rushdie’s memoir, *Joseph Anton* (2012), however, is explicitly concerned with undercutting – or at least expressing strong reservations about – the element of “cultural translation” that has underpinned this fascination with newness throughout his career. “The arrival of the new was not always linked to progress,” he writes, “Men found new ways of oppressing one another, too, new ways of unmaking their best achievements and sliding back towards that primal ooze; and men’s darkest innovations, as much as their brightest ones, confused their fellow men” (2012: 344). These “dark newnesses”, as he calls them, “were innovations that came into being in the name of a totalizing ideology, an absolute ruler, an unarguable dogma, or a god” (ibid.).

However, the “new self” that he describes in the quotation above, which appears in the memoir’s opening pages, clearly problematises the author’s uncharacteristically simplistic binary of newnesses “bright” and “dark”. As he goes on to show throughout the book, the “new self” that has emerged in the wake of the fatwa is one brought into being by a combination of multiple opposing forces. While it is true that Khomeini’s Iranian Islamist theocracy has created the *circumstances* for a new identity to become necessary, the identity itself, as the passage above attests, is created largely through a maelstrom of public debate: that is, by politicians, the press and sections of the Muslim community, as well as the British population more generally. It is with this in mind that Rushdie attempts to use his memoir as a tool to help him fight the “impossible” fight against this false, usurper identity by offering up another: that of “Joseph Anton”, the top-secret, allusive alias he took while under police protection (the pseudonym is a literary portmanteau combining the first names of two of his favourite writers: Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov). One of the results of this is that within the first few pages of the memoir, the reader is already presented with at least four different Rushdies: the “old” pre-fatwa “*Salman*”, the media-simulacral “*Rushdie*”, the authentic but until now hidden away “Joseph Anton” (who, throughout the memoir, is referred to in the third person), and the present-day Salman Rushdie, the author of the book. As is the case in many of his novels, the protagonist of *Joseph Anton* is, even when presented otherwise, never quite reducible to a single authentic identity, but is always instead a “jostling crowd of ‘I’s” that together constitute Rushdie’s unique and constantly shifting place in the contemporary world (2013: 179).

It is not the primary purpose of this article to critique the apparent changes in Rushdie’s post-9/11 politics (even when his opinions are disagreeable, they are surely at least understandable, considering what he has been through). Nor is it to diminish a book that is already unavoidably an important artefact of late twentieth- and early twenty-first century history, documenting a key event of recent times. Rather, the aim is to show how the memoir’s inability to persuasively follow through on its rhetoric of a world simplistically torn between newnesses “bright” and “dark” might still, indirectly, prove useful in reinforcing the complex, pluralistic approach to identity that Rushdie has often taken in his past work. In other words, despite its frequent reliance upon binary language, it is precisely *Joseph Anton*’s patent *failure* to convincingly represent the contemporary world in a starkly binary way that, I argue, inadvertently makes it a valuable text for foregrounding the very complexity of contemporary global identity politics that its author ostensibly seeks to deny.

“Das Ich”: Storytelling and self-representation

Although sometimes awkward and occasionally giving the impression of pomposity, the use of third-person narration in *Joseph Anton* is, on a certain level, necessary. The memoir is a work of historical storytelling, and, despite its problems, the third-person narration works to show that the increasingly confrontational and outspoken Rushdie of the present day still retains more in common with his postmodern, pre-fatwa self than might at first seem the case. Indeed, the occasional awkwardness that results from the narration, often unintentionally, actually helps maintain a self-reflexivity of sorts, jolting the reader into remembering that they are reading a story: that is, merely one person’s perspective (albeit a highly unique one) on recent historical events. One of the key causes of his distress while he is in hiding, “when *Rushdie* detached itself from *Salman* and went spiralling off into the headlines” (2012: 164), is precisely that “[he] had lost control over his name” (ibid.). However, rather than straightforwardly attempting to *regain* his lost name (and the identity that went with it), his approach is to try to challenge what he sees as the misguided compulsion to think about identity in an overly objective, authentic or empirical way in the first place, instead striving to convey a much harder-to-pin-down sense of what he unironically describes as “soul”. As he puts it in one of the memoir’s more reflective moments:

The soul had many dark corners and books sometimes illuminated them. But what did he, an atheist, mean when he used the word “soul”? Was it just poetry? Or was there something non-corporeal in us, something more than flesh, blood and bone, the thing that Koestler called the ghost in the machine? He toyed with the notion that we might have a mortal soul instead of an immortal one; a spirit housed in the body that died when the body died. A spirit that might be what we meant when we spoke of *das Ich*, the I. (107)

By creating a degree of distance between himself and the “Joseph Anton” character through the use of the third person, Rushdie goes further than simply offering a recollection of events as they, in his view, really occurred (although, of course, he *is* doing this too): more importantly, he is drawing attention to the spaces between the multitudinous signifiers that, when joined together, map a person’s identity at a given time. In doing so, he offers his

reader multiple Rushdies, encouraging them to make their own judgments about the author's "soul".

However, as already indicated, despite its frequent *gestures* towards plurality and nuance, the memoir ultimately fails to actually enact these values in a way that is fully convincing, or that suggests any possibility for productive cultural translation. Instead, it betrays a more conservative worldview than that which has tended to be at play in much of Rushdie's previous work, either fictional or non-fictional. As Robert Eaglestone has pointed out, "While Rushdie is clear that he disagrees with the detail of Samuel Huntington's controversial 'clash of civilisations' thesis, much of *Joseph Anton* seems to suggest a parallel line of thought, very unlike his earlier work" (Eaglestone, 2013: 122). This is perhaps most evident in Rushdie's analysis of the ideological clashes at play in the context of the war on terror. His view on the conflict, elucidated most clearly in the memoir's final chapter, in which the author discusses his feelings about 9/11, relies upon a binary between "human nature" and "rage" that – though clearly impassioned and sincere – is ultimately rather reductive:

And he too refused anger. Rage made you the creature of those who enraged you, it gave them too much power. Rage killed the mind, and now more than ever the mind needed to live, to find a way of rising above the mindlessness.

He chose to believe in human nature, and in the universality of its rights and ethics and freedoms, and to stand against the fallacies of relativism that were at the heart of the invective of the armies of the religious (*we hate you because we aren't like you*) and of their fellow travellers in the West, too, many of whom, disappointingly, were on the left. (2012: 626)

While the anti-fundamentalist sentiment in this passage, as well as its attack on relativist "invective", have been present throughout Rushdie's career, they here congeal into a simplistic binary language that is quite at odds with what Eaglestone has rightly identified as the fact that, in the author's fictional writing, "[t]here are no straightforward answers ... indeed, it piles paradox on paradox" (8). Zoë Heller has prominently argued that the memoir "involves a significant retreat from views he has formerly espoused about fiction's inextricable involvement with politics and history" (Heller, 2012). Meanwhile such has been the degree to which Rushdie has shifted away from the nuance of his earlier work that Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate have included him, alongside Ian McEwan and Martin Amis, as

part of a group of contemporary “New Atheist” authors, whose writing, in line with that of Richard Dawkins, is characterised by “a disturbing aesthetic-political dogmatism – about science, about reason, about religion and, in many cases, about Islam” (Bradley and Tate, 2010: 12).

On a more basic level, however, one of the oddest aspects of the above passage is that Rushdie uncharacteristically chooses to ignore the inherent overlap in the categories between which he wishes to distinguish: rage is, after all, itself an emotion deeply associated with the idea of human nature. One need look no further than his own 2001 novel *Fury* to see that he has not always necessarily considered the two to be so irrevocably opposed:

Life is Fury [... it] drives us to our finest heights and coarsest depths. Out of *furia* comes creation, inspiration, originality, passion, but also violence, pain, pure unafraid destruction, the giving and receiving of blows from which we never recover. ... This is what we are, what we civilize ourselves to disguise – the terrifying human in us, the exalted, transcendent, self-destructive, untrammelled lord of creation. We raise each other to the heights of joy. We tear each other limb from fucking limb. (2002: 31–1)

Indeed, there is a sharp contradiction in *Joseph Anton* between, on the one hand, Rushdie’s stated desire to maintain a suspicion towards easy solutions (through a questioning of the idea of “the ‘real’ place in which human beings mistakenly believed they lived” (71)), and, on the other, the binary language that he flirts with throughout the book, eventually fully embracing in the final chapter. It is precisely the ideological binary underlying the very *language* that he uses to argue for pluralism and complexity that renders these arguments contradictory. One page on from the above passage about rage and human nature, he posits the value of fiction in encouraging expansive thinking about human identity, furthering tolerance between different cultures through the establishment of “common ground” (a phrase that recurs throughout the book and appears twice in the following paragraph alone):

In the pages of a novel it was clear that the human self was heterogeneous not homogeneous, not one thing but many, multiple, fractured and contradictory. ... All writers and readers knew that human beings had broad identities, not narrow ones, and it was the breadth of human nature that allowed readers to find common ground and

points of identification with Madame Bovary, Leopold Bloom, Colonel Aureliano Buendía, Raskolnikov, Gandalf the Grey, Oskar Matzareth, the Makioka Sisters, the Continental Op, the Earl of Emsworth, Miss Marple, the Baron of the Trees, and Salo the mechanical messenger from the planet Trafalmdore in Kurt Vonnegout's *The Sirens of Titan*. Readers and writers could take that knowledge of broad-based identity out into the world beyond the pages of books, and use the knowledge to find common ground with their fellow human beings. (627)

On a superficial level there is little about this statement, in itself, that is disagreeable (novels clearly *do* encourage an imaginative identification with experiences potentially far beyond their readers' own). However, there is a set of unquestioned ideological assumptions at play here that, when taken along with similar statements throughout the memoir, point towards an inability on Rushdie's part to demonstrate as full a commitment to the seeking of "common ground" as his argumentation initially suggests. By once again relying so heavily on the language of humanism, and in particular what he takes to be the inherent conduciveness of literary writing to a furthering of humanistic empathy with others, he moves away from his earlier work's productive questioning of the human as an *idea*, and instead shifts towards a reductive essentialising of it. A key passage in *The Satanic Verses*, with which the reader is clearly encouraged to agree, asks: "What is the opposite of faith? Not disbelief. Too final, certain, closed. Itself a kind of belief. Doubt." (1998: 92). Contrastingly, in *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie's attitude towards doubt is more selective: while it remains a key feature of the post-Enlightenment secularism that he clearly wishes to cultivate, it is also an object of scorn, associated with the kind of "cowardly" (2012: 629), bigotry-appeasing cultural relativism that in his view afflicts many on the political left. This is not to say that he naïvely adopts a dogmatic new sense of certainty in his convictions, nor that he has suddenly become impervious to doubt. Rather, it is that there has evidently been a shift in his values: whereas once he aspired to doubt as a kind of strength, he now strives to avoid it like a weakness.

"The great constant": Literature and universality

In *The Satanic Verses*, a doubting of the idea of the human – and in turn what Paul Gilroy might describe as the category's inherent "mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion" (Gilroy, 2007: 45) – is encouraged through another of its motifs, the recurring question: "*WHAT KIND OF AN IDEA ARE YOU?*" (Rushdie, 1998: 335). Of course, *The Satanic Verses* is a

novel, and as such by default invites a different kind of reading than *Joseph Anton* does. However, this is arguably *The Satanic Verses*' central motif: a question clearly aimed outwardly at the reader as much as it is at any of the novel's characters. In *Joseph Anton*, contrastingly, Rushdie asserts: "If the art of the novel revealed anything, it was that human nature was the great constant, in any culture, in any place, in any time" (2012: 626). Not only has human nature become "the great constant", but it is also now, for him, a *universal* value. Again, on a superficial level, there is nothing particularly objectionable about this idea (even the most relativistic of thinkers would be unlikely to disagree with, for instance, the imperative for universal human rights). Nonetheless, on a deeper ideological level, it becomes problematic when the very point Rushdie is ostensibly trying to make is one about literature's inherent conduciveness to heterogeneity and, in turn, an "encourage[ment] of understanding, sympathy and identification with people not like oneself" (628). By insisting on the universality of human nature, he is not, in practice, establishing common ground with others so much as imposing upon them a rather prescriptive, narrowly value-laden rationalist version of it. As Pankaj Mishra has argued, *Joseph Anton*'s

simple binaries ... belong to an intellectually simpler time, when non-western societies, politically insignificant and little-known, could be judged solely by their success or failure in following the great example of the secular-humanist west; and writing literary fiction could seem enough to make one feel, as Tim Parks wrote in a review of Rushdie's novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, "engaged on the right side of some global moral and political battle". (Mishra, 2012: web)

Admittedly, Rushdie has always placed the novel form on a pedestal of sorts. In his essay "Is Nothing Sacred?", for instance, he memorably writes that

this, finally, is why I elevate the novel above other forms, why it has always been, and remains, my first love: not only is it the art involving least compromises, but it is also the only one that takes the "privileged arena" of conflicting discourses *right inside our heads*. The interior space of our imagination is a theatre that can never be closed down; the images created there make up a movie that can never be destroyed. (Rushdie, 1992: 426)

However, Rushdie's view on the novel form in *Joseph Anton* is more banally sentimental. Its subversive "conflicting discourses" are, for him, now superseded by its political utility (particularly since 9/11), in helping writers "continue to insist on our essential humanity," and encouraging readers "to go on making love, so to speak, in a combat zone" (2012: 627). Indeed, there is a palpable affectedness in the way he valorises literature throughout, a particularly apposite example appearing when he recounts his feelings in response to the discovery of Shakespeare's original Globe Theatre in March 2009:

He thought of the greatest words in the English language being spoken for the first time at Anchor Terrace and Park Street, the Elizabethan Maiden Lane. The birthplace of Hamlet and Othello and Lear. A lump rose in his throat. The love of the art of literature was a thing impossible to explain to his adversaries, who loved only one book, whose text was immutable and immune to interpretation, being the uncreated word of God. (2012: 213)

The sentimentality with which he imbues his "love of the art of literature" here has precisely the opposite effect of that intended, *devaluing* literary writing by reducing it to an ideological tool. Indeed, it goes completely against the celebration of hybridity and cultural translation that often characterised his fiction in his earlier career. Moreover, his straightforward characterisation of Shakespeare's plays as the exact antithesis of the Qur'an is also deeply problematic as it wilfully ignores the fact that, generally speaking, Muslims are not reactionary literalists opposed to literature, but complicated and conflicted people just like anyone else: individual Muslims may or may not foster a serious antipathy to Rushdie, but the reasons that some may do so are by no means necessarily contingent upon an absolute intolerance towards the version of secular thinking that he describes. I am not referring here to the contingency of people who continue to support the fatwa – an abhorrent position that obviously cannot be justified – but rather to the diverse millions around the world who identify as Muslim and might possess complicated or conflicted feelings about both Rushdie *and* the Qur'an.

What Rushdie's simplistic binary does here is to elevate the role of the novelist to that of a kind of warrior on the frontline in a war against Islamist extremism. Indeed, at its core, the story that the memoir tells is that of Rushdie's own metamorphosis into a free speech soldier whose weapon is his writing. The turning point comes approximately halfway through

the book, when he recounts the aftermath of his final, desperate attempt to appease his adversaries by affecting a public conversion to Islam in December 1990:

...it was not enough to know what one was fighting against. That was easy. He was fighting against the view that people could be killed for their ideas, and against the ability of any religion to place a limiting point on thought. But he needed, now, to be clear of what he was fighting for. Freedom of speech, freedom of the imagination, freedom from fear, and the beautiful, ancient art of which he was privileged to be a practitioner. ... He had asked himself the question: *As you are fighting a battle that may cost you your life, is the thing for which you are fighting worth losing your life for?* And he had found it possible to answer: *Yes*. He was prepared to die, if dying became necessary, for what Carmen Callil had called “a bloody book”. (2012: 285)

Once again, the aim of the present study is not to belittle the importance of the free speech principles that Rushdie is rightly struggling for, nor the danger that he has put himself in while doing so. Rather, it is to show that the combative, binary language that he resorts to in order to make his case is actually detrimental to his cause. An easy point could be made here about Rushdie’s struggle for free speech being comparable, ironically, to a secular version of *jihad*, and indeed his preparedness “to die” for it does frame him unequivocally as a kind of martyr, but there is also a more complicated problem at play. As before, the “beautiful, ancient art” of storytelling that he wishes to defend is diminished by his overly earnest reverence towards both it and, in turn, its authors; an issue that might at first seem uninteresting outside the context of academic or literary discussion, but that in actuality has implications for post-9/11 ethical thought more broadly. Specifically, by investing such sanctity in the political role of writers, and in particular on the *intentions* underlying their writing, he again turns his back on the key idea that underpins *The Satanic Verses*, and that also tends to permeate his fiction more broadly: namely, the idea that literature brings newness into the world precisely because of its complicated *incongruity* with the idea of the sacred.

“Common ground”: Secularism and the sacred

Overwhelmingly, Rushdie’s fiction is about hybridity and the metamorphosis that results from it (not only thematically, but also in terms of style and literary influence, as well as the

aforementioned notion that literature is brought to “life” in the “privileged arena” of the reader’s head). In *Joseph Anton*, he discusses literature in much more fixed terms: it is sacrosanct and untouchable, a resource to draw upon in order to lend an argument rhetorical weight and, in turn, to *reinforce* rather than subvert preconceived ways of seeing the world. Any “common ground” that Rushdie might ostensibly wish to find with others through literature is limited by his inclination to use it as a mirror for his own rationalist, Enlightenment-Liberal values. Although not intended this way, the irritation he recounts experiencing when his police guards begin referring to him as “Joe”, in philistine ignorance of the literary references his pseudonym contains, is testament to this fact (2012: 164).

Nevertheless, it is precisely this kind of *unintended* meaning permeating *Joseph Anton* that not only undermines the reductiveness of its binary political language, but that also, paradoxically, infuses this (in some ways) rather untypical Rushdie book with a more traditional – if perhaps sometimes inadvertent – “Rushdie-esque” value. Much as he might try, the author is unable to convincingly divide the world into a clear-cut “us and them”, and this very failure itself only underscores the complexity of global identity relations towards which his fiction has, in the past, tended to point. Admittedly, Rushdie does also gesture more consciously towards such complexity on a handful of occasions throughout the memoir (not least when he describes his primary concern as a writer being “the great matter of *how the world joined up*” (2012: 70)), but there is essentially only one section in which he does so without reverting to binaries. This is in an extended passage early on in the book, in which he recounts the moment that the idea for *The Satanic Verses* was sparked, twenty years before its eventual publication in 1988. Describing an encounter, while a student at Cambridge, with the history of Islam’s genesis, he enthusiastically recounts the story of Muhammad’s controversial “satanic verses” incident as if plotting a novel.¹ He imagines what the Prophet’s desires, fears and motivations might have been, and pays particular attention to the questions raised by what remains unknown about Muhammad’s life:

Then what happened? Did the city’s grandees renege on the deal, reckoning that by flirting with polytheism Muhammad had undone himself in the eyes of his followers? Did the followers refuse to accept the revelation about the goddesses? Did

¹ The incident of the “satanic verses”, which inspired Rushdie’s novel, refers to a contested segment of Qur’anic lore in which the Prophet Muhammad is alleged to have been unable to clearly distinguish between devilish deceit and divine revelation. For a sophisticated account of the incident, see ‘Chapter 6: The Satanic Verses’ in: Karen Armstrong (2004) *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*. London: Phoenix, 108–33.

Muhammad himself regret having compromised his ideas by yielding to the siren call of acceptability? It was not possible to say for sure. Imagination had to fill in the gaps in the record. (2012: 45)

There is a quite telling ambiguity and depth to Rushdie's depiction of Muhammad here. Ostensibly, he recounts the events that lead to the Prophet's establishment of Islam in order to fill in his reader on the historical background of *The Satanic Verses*. However, in doing so, he inevitably shifts into storytelling, turning this history into an engaging fictionalised narrative through characterisation and humorous rhetorical flourishes ("People making offerings to gods usually did so for specific reasons, the health of a child, the future of a business enterprise, a drought, a quarrel, a romance. They preferred gods who were experts in their field to this non-specific all-rounder of a deity" (2012: 41)). Indeed, he concludes the passage with the enthusiastic declaration, "*Good story*" (45). Unlike elsewhere in the memoir, by literally telling the *story* of the birth of Islam – that is, recounting the events using devices borrowed from fiction – the passage explicitly blurs, rather than reinforces, the boundary between the secular and the sacred, and in turn blurs the rhetorical "us and them" binaries that underpin much of the book. He writes: "Here was a fascinating paradox: that an essentially conservative theology, looking backwards with affection towards a vanishing culture, became a revolutionary idea, because the people whom it attracted most strongly were those who had been marginalised by urbanisation – the disaffected poor, the street mob" (43). In recognising early Islam as simultaneously both radical and conservative, he acknowledges the complexity of its position in the world.

It is this sense of complexity that is manifestly – and uncharacteristically – missing from so much of the memoir, but that incorrigibly makes itself manifest at moments such as this, when Rushdie seems to forget himself and his many personal grievances, and instead allows himself to be drawn back into his palpable, longstanding passion for storytelling. His nuanced engagement with Islam here belies the contrived binary thinking that permeates the rest of the book, re-emphasising what Joel Kuortti has, in an analysis of Rushdie's earlier writing, described as its underscoring of "fictionality", or in other words an understanding that "'fundamentalist and intolerant Islam' is a fiction, just as much as the 'secular, nihilistic West' is a fiction" (Kuortti, 1997: 161). (Kuortti is not denying the existence of Islamic fundamentalism, but, rather, taking issue with the sweeping essentialism often involved in representations of Islam more generally.) While there is of course a kind of conscious fictionality at play in some of the memoir's narrative devices (most overtly in its third-person

narration), there is also a less obviously conscious kind that undercuts the author's repeated attempts to depict a world so neatly divided between the secular and the sacred, or the "bright" and the "dark". This becomes most clear when, once again reverting to the playful metaphorical complexity of *The Satanic Verses*, he couches his secularism in religious terms: namely, by identifying himself with the Devil. Again, in another section detailing the inception of his 1988 novel, Rushdie writes:

His conscious mind was, as usual, at odds with his unconscious, which kept throwing angels and miracles at his rationality and insisting that he find new ways to incorporate them into his way of seeing. So, a book about angels and devils, but perhaps it would be difficult to know which was which. Angels could do terrible deeds in the service of allegedly holy principles, and it was possible to have much compassion for Lucifer, the rebel angel whose punishment for rising up against the stultifying absolutist harp music of God's will was, as Daniel Defoe put it, to be 'confined to a vagabond, wandering, unsettled condition ... without any certain abode ... without any fixed place, or space, allowed him to rest the sole of his foot upon'. This unhoused, exiled Satan was perhaps the heavenly patron of all exiles, all unhoused people, all those who were torn from their place and left floating, half this, half that, denied the rooted person's comforting, defining sense of having solid ground beneath their feet. So, scenes from the life of the archangel and the archdevil, in which his own sympathy lay more on the devil's side, because, as Blake said of Milton, a true poet was of the Devil's party. (2012: 73)

As in the novel itself, the figure of the Devil is here invoked in its longstanding role as chief doubter in both religious and literary tradition. However, Rushdie's problematic consecration of literature is present once again: his reliance on heavyweight male literary figures (Defoe, Milton, Blake) to lend weight to his point evidences a shift *away* from doubt, revealing instead a kind of faith in the ability of canonical writing to legitimate his own personal struggle. While ostensibly aspiring to the doubt that these figures all celebrate, he does so in a way that imbues them with a perceived universal wisdom which is somehow beyond it (just as he does elsewhere with Shakespeare). As a result, Rushdie paradoxically goes some way towards *sanctifying* the Devil, and in turn the doubt that the figure represents.

The political scientist Elizabeth Shakman Hurd argues that in a global political context, secularism has taken "two distinct paths": "a laicist trajectory, in which religion is

seen as an adversary and an impediment to modern politics, and a Judeo-Christian secularist trajectory, in which religion is seen as a source of unity and identity that generates conflict in modern international politics” (Hurd, 2008: 23). *Joseph Anton* is, on the surface, clearly aligned with the former trajectory, while Rushdie’s fictional writing has traditionally had more in common with the latter. However, in its sanctification of doubt, the memoir inadvertently also blurs the boundary between the two: on a superficial level, its secularism is of a kind that attacks the idea of the sacred, but in doing so it imbues sacrilege itself with a form of sacredness. This is not necessarily to accuse Rushdie, as some critics have done, of resorting to what might be described as a kind of secular fundamentalism (see e.g. Guldberg, 2008), but rather to show that despite his apparent best efforts, he ultimately *fails* to fully escape thinking in religious terms: religious, that is, in the basic etymological sense of the word – “to bind”. Although ostensibly pinning his stripes to “the Devil’s party”, in actuality, the community of secular humanists to which Rushdie lays claim are not bound through a sharing of doubt, but by a lack of it.

In conclusion, despite his turn towards binary language in a perceived struggle against the twenty-first century’s “dark newnesses”, the messy, paradoxical world of Rushdie’s early fictional writing ultimately refuses to be stifled. In his memoir, neither “Satan Rushdy” nor “Joseph Anton” have somehow re-emerged from the headlines. The author has not been “reborn” in the form of an authentically self-determined “Salman Rushdie, author of Indian origin” (Rushdie: 2012, 610). Rather, the figure “Mr Rushdie” of “Pembridge Mews, Notting Hill”, as he contentedly refers to himself towards the end of the book, simply takes its place as the latest – and newest – of the multiplicity of Rushdies already at large in the world. While the book is unable, finally, to offer an advocacy of secular doubt that is fully convincing, this very failure itself encourages a kind of critical doubt in the reader. As Edward Said argued in his influential essay “Secular Criticism”, “[c]riticism in short is always situated; it is skeptical, secular, reflectively open to its own failings” (Said, 1983: 26). *Joseph Anton*, while vociferous in its secular proclamations, largely eschews any such reflection or openness to its own failings. Nonetheless, it is precisely the messy contradictions that the book’s failings repeatedly bring to the fore – from its jarring reliance on fictional devices to its bathetic aggrandisement of canonical male authors – that ultimately keep its readers “situated” in the way that Said describes, giving the lie to the simplistic “dark” and “bright” binaries through which Rushdie seeks to characterise an unsettling post-9/11 world.

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