MEDITATIONS ON GENRE IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *JOSEPH ANTON*

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Abstract

In Salman Rushdie's book *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012), the narrator alternates between first-person and third-person and leaps from the present back to his childhood. He combines the sub-genres of life writing with a novelised account, stressing the concept of story. In the former, we study the implications of "memoir," the possibility of defining the work as an example of J M Coetzee's "*autre*-biography" or autobiography "against itself" à la Barthes. Through the contribution of the latter aspect, read as a literary novel and also a detective story, Rushdie has created a work in which all these apparently defining factors are present and which can therefore only be described as generically "hybrid."

Keywords: Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir,* genre, life writing, novel.

Resumen

En la obra de Salman Rushdie *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012), el narrador usa primera persona y luego tercera persona y salta desde el presente a su niñez. Une varios sub-géneros de autobiografía con una versión novelizada, con el énfasis sobre el concepto de contar historias. En el aspecto de autobiografía, estudiamos las implicaciones de "memoria", la posibilidad de definir la obra como un ejemplo de "*autre*-biografía" inventada por J M Coetzee, o incluso de autobiografía "contra sí misma" de Roland Barthes. Como también se puede leer como una novela literaria o como una novela policíaca, el conjunto pide que lo llamemos híbrido, ya que todos estos factores de definición están presentes.

Palabras clave: Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir,* género, autobiografía, novela

1. AT FIRST GLANCE

If we begin *Joseph Anton* by scanning the title pages or turning to the end to scrutinise the "Acknowledgements" (*Joseph Anton* 635-6), we see that Salman Rushdie calls his book a memoir: "I would like to thank all those whose help and advice shaped this memoir: [...]" (635). We find "A Memoir" also on the front cover,

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though in very small letters, while “Joseph Anton” and “Salman Rushdie,” in that order, one at the top and the other at the bottom, both come in gold lettering of the same size. This is deliberately ambiguous, for since the title of a book may come at either bottom or top, if we were not more familiar with the name of Salman Rushdie, we might wonder who was the author and which name formed the title. In her article “Playing Hide and Seek with Names and Selves in Salman Rushdie’s *Joseph Anton, A Memoir*,” Geetha Ganapathy-Doré reminds us of Rushdie’s desire to write a novel with the name of the protagonist as eponymous title, as in *David Copperfield* or *Tom Jones* etc. (12, note 2, which references Seth Lehrer’s interview of Rushdie at the University of California at San Diego on 22 September, 2012). In considering names to adopt when he went into hiding, he apparently rejected “Conrad Chekhov” (Ganapathy-Doré 14), among others, thus by choosing these authors’ less obvious Christian names, there is further ambiguity. On the inside title page, there is a frame with the two names, again in that order, though with Salman Rushdie in slightly smaller letters, as the name contains two letters more and has to fit into the same space. Because of the frame, the effect on the inside page is to suggest that Joseph Anton and Salman Rushdie are at one and the same time both title and author. Ganapathy-Doré is quite right when she points out in her article that to call it just a memoir is not as straightforward as it might appear. Firstly, the book itself does not give us much help regarding the punctuation after the main title *Joseph Anton.* Should it be a comma, as Ganapathy-Doré suggests, a colon (as it appears in her bibliography), a full stop or even a dash? Whatever we opt for, the idea is of apposition, thus suggesting that the work *Joseph Anton* is endowed with truth as is a memoir, but it is the assertion of the author and the author’s stance is what is ambiguous:

> Besides, the book’s subtitle “A Memoir” reinforces the presupposition of truthfulness. The memoir is a sub-genre of self-writing much like the letters, diary and notebook entries woven into the text of *Joseph Anton.* What is really fictional about the narrative is the posture of utterance, not its diegetic substance or its time frame. (Ganapathy-Doré 13)

With this problematics in mind, especially concerning the “posture of utterance,” we can delve a little further into the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in Rushdie’s approach. But first let us examine a relevant aspect of the incident that changed Rushdie’s life.

2. RUSHDIE AND THE NOVEL

Commenting upon “the Rushdie case” in *The Location of Culture,* Homi Bhabha attributes the blasphemy perceived in *The Satanic Verses* less to secular social causes involving diasporic identity, otherwise interpreted as Rushdie’s apostasy from Islam and secularization, and more to the profane spaces to which the sacred concepts of the faith have been translated in the novel (Bhabha 322). Just as Islam prohibits the visual depiction of the human form in art, it frowns upon the verbal depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in any space that is not sacralized, which would mean the genre of the novel –and, of course, the comic or satirical magazine, as we have seen recently with tragic outcomes– regardless of how the Prophet were portrayed therein. Bhabha strengthens his argument by reference to the ignominious "accoutrements" of the description of Muhammad and his wives:

> The fundamentalist charge has not focused on the misinterpretation of the Koran, as much as on the offence of the "misnaming" of Islam: Mohamed referred to as Mahound; the prostitutes named after the wives of the Prophet. It is the *formal* complaint of the fundamentalists that the transposition of these sacred names into profane spaces –brothels or magical realist novels–is not simply sacrilegious, but destructive of the very cement of community. (Bhabha 322)

Rushdie has tried on many occasions to explain himself, even justify himself, up to the point where he felt he had crossed a line as regards his principles, and regretted it (*JA* 275-276). He has written about the novel and the fatwa in "In Good Faith", "Is Nothing Sacred?" and "One Thousand Days in a Balloon" (*Imaginary Homelands* 393-414; 415-429; 430-439), in "February 1999: Ten Years of the Fatwa" (*Step Across This Line* 2002: 265-267); and a decade after this piece, in *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012), he sets out in full detail the effects upon his life of the fatwa from its proclamation in February 1989 to almost the time of writing (a reference to an event in 2011, p. 630). Thus, as a writer, he lays claim to the space of the novel to set out his ideas without respecting the prohibitions of his former faith. Equally, in *Joseph Anton,* he claims the right to incorporate a mixture of genres, to include what looks novelistic with "memoir," when originally was strictly factual. He makes of this work what Henry James called the novel: "a loose, baggy monster."

3. *JOSEPH ANTON* AND THE GENRES OF LIFE WRITING AND OF DRAMA AND THE NOVEL

In this latest work, Rushdie lays claim to certain textual spaces and communities of readers as the rights of a writer, especially a polyfacetic writer –novelist and critic– like himself: memoirs, novels, essays, and within these, he asserts his dignity and undoubted principles. *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* can be read as any of the following genres, and we see which readerships would be involved and what their interest would be:

1. Life writing, memoir/diary: to record intimate details and thoughts in the first person, apparently for himself but which others may contemplate, looking over his shoulder.
2. Non-fictional account: the details are made public, which may affect the choice of material, thus a readerhip interested in the details of the effects of the fatwa are told what appears to be the truth, but it is a truth edited by the writer.

3. A re-enacting, sometimes reading almost like a play in which Rushdie is yet again an actor: a going back years later and an attempt to explain.
4. Literary novel (3rd-person protagonist) and intertextual references (models): in the name of literature.
5. Detective story: of general interest, on how the victim managed to evade the pursuers.

The book can be read as any of these genres or sub-genres, and the effect on the first, on the life writing, is to make it an "enhanced" form of life writing. To read *Joseph Anton* as a detective story, with the police trying, if not to catch a criminal at least to prevent a crime, does not detract from its nature as autobiography, since it is true that Rushdie was the potential victim of a crime (For the offended Muslims, of course, he was the perpetrator of the initial crime). Equally, since Rushdie is a novelist and critic, that he should incorporate analysis of his own work and criticism of that of others into the account is a justified part of his life story. Overall, *Joseph Anton* manages to combine all of the genres and sub-genres into what Ganapathy-Doré calls a postmodern fuzzy hybrid, as we shall see.

Yet the combination of the genres changes the nature of its autobiographical aspect. Rushdie has written his own biography, and it is the version he wishes to be known, thus it is only one version, or a version actually alternative to the full truth. The first three of these sub-genres all fall under the loose umbrella of autobiography. But when autobiography combines with what is ostensibly a novel, it can be more or less "true", based on facts, according to the wishes and objectives of the author. *Joseph Anton* is undoubtedly based upon fact, upon what really happened to Rushdie in those two decades straddling the millennium, the beginning of the twenty-first century. Like most writers, Rushdie will have kept at least one diary or notebook at a time, in which he recorded not only what happened to him, but what he thought and felt about it all. Doubtless, also, his thoughts will have included his immediate reactions and his later ponderings, which, over a twenty-year period, may or may not coincide. These jottings will have formed the nucleus of this "Memoir," as he calls it, but at the time, their function will have been an aide-mémoire. As he "wrote up" these jottings, as a professional and successful writer with a known following, he would have fleshed them out for his imagined readership. Some writers insist that they just write for themselves, with no audience in mind, but it is difficult to conceive of Rushdie writing in such a vacuum. Furthermore, he knew that he had a bifurcated readership: those who sympathise with him and enjoy reading his works with a more or less critical stance in terms of the literary merit rather than the ideologial concerns, and his opponents, who are unlikely to be persuaded anyway. So in *Joseph Anton: A Memoir,* Rushdie tries to at once reveal and conceal himself, to create the paradox of a somewhat fictitious autobiography.

Of course, Rushdie is not the first to conceal himself in his autobiography and will not be the last, as autobiographies are notoriously "unreliable" in terms of the truth.To offer a parallel: Nabokov, both a biographer and autobiographer, does not tell the truth, or not the whole truth; as I have written elsewhere: "When Nabokov wrote his autobiography *Speak, Memory,* he put into it what he wanted to be known about himself, and he comes over as a chess-playing butterfly enthusiast with little of the inner motivation an audience likes to learn about a writer” (Wallhead 455).

The bias of the partial truth or the imaginative act of elaboration upon the truth brings us back to Rushdie’s idea of using the concept of story to overcome the problem of the paradox presented by the generic separation or differentiation through cataloguing of non-fiction and fiction.

4. ON THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL: SUBGENRES IN *JOSEPH ANTON*

When the book came out, it was made known to those that did not already know, that “Joseph Anton” was the code name Rushdie used when in hiding after the pronouncement of the *fatwa*, based upon writers he admired, Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov, and thus that the book was an autobiographical account of his life at least during the period after the condemnation of his book *The Satanic Verses* in February 1989, or “life after the *fatwa*.” As Ganapathy-Doré sums up, and much more succintly than Rushdie’s own explanation of this semi-fictionalizing of his self: “the name Joseph Anton perfectly expresses the feelings of alienation and melancholy that emanate from Chekhov’s writing and connects them with the stoic motto of the sailor James Wait in Conrad’s *Nigger of the Narcissus* [...]: ‘I must live until I die’ (165).” (15; Ganapathy-Doré’s reference here is directly to *Joseph Anton*). Yet when we begin to read, we see that the text is not a first-person narration and the protagonist is referred to as “he”. The Prologue has the subtitle “The First Blackbird” and in referencing Hitchcock’s film *The Birds,* it gives an account of the day on which Rushdie heard of the *fatwa* as if he were suffering the same life-threatening terror as the characters of the film. The filmic reference functions as a trope to place the story within the context of gothic horror. This strategy may be interpreted as a distancing technique, while at the same time transmitting to the reader the real fear Rushdie felt.

The second paragraph tells us that it was Valentine’s Day (*JA* 3) but it does not say of which year. However, as the narration goes on to quote the text of Ayatollah Khomeini’s condemnation of “‘the author of the ‘Satanic Verses’ book’” (5; in quote marks to express disagreement with Khomeini’s erroneous naming of the book, without the article) the person in question is obviously identified as Rushdie. Other factual references that confirm the autobiographical nature of the account are mentions of his family members and their places of residence in Karachi, London and California. Intimate information concerning his son Zafar (his only son at the time) such as the address where he lived with his mother Clarissa, Rushdie’s first wife, is also included (7). So there is no doubt that at least the Prologue contains autobiographical material, although Rushdie tries to make the account mysterious by making it appear the story of an anonymous “he”. Chapter I then begins: “When he was a small boy [...]” (19), thus going back in time to start at the beginning of his life, again with an anonymous narrator. This may be an aspect of the ambiguity of what Ganapathy-Doré called his “posture of utterance,” as we saw (13).

But, we may ask ourselves, is a memoir, even if it is a long and complete one, the same as an autobiography? Geetha Ganapathy-Doré expresses her misgivings:

> *Joseph Anton* is neither an autobiographical novel, where the distance between the author and the narrator is sufficiently wide for the reader to clearly distinguish between the two, nor a fictitious autobiography where the real is transfigured by the narrator. Moreover, it cannot be considered autofictional because Rushdie does not choose to give preference in this account "to the adventure of a language rather than to the language of adventure," as Serge Doubrovsky puts it (1997, dustjacket). (13)

Rushdie certainly uses the language of adventure, in so far as *Joseph Anton* is a detective story too. Ganapathy-Doré concludes, more generally, that "[h]is memoir constitutes a fuzzy, hybrid and postmodern variety of writing that combines elements of autobiography, autofiction, detective fiction and metafiction and blurs the borderline between fact and fiction" (13). In her conclusion that the book is not autofictional because it does not prioritise Doubrovsky's "adventure of a language," we assume she means that Rushdie does not create a narrator whose words are self-referential and differ in some way from what we know of Rushdie, and is producing something absolutely new (hence "adventure"). But as we explore what she called the "posture of utterance," in the book, we can round out a little more the implications of writing "a memoir" and then explore all the possible genres and sub-genres that this umbrella term may encompass.

4.1. On the memoir

Definitions of "memoir" point up differences within the genre (or rather, sub-genre of life writing):

> By the nineteenth century there was a definite hierarchy of values in relation to self-representation with memoirs occupying a lower order since they involved a lesser degree of "seriousness" than autobiography. As Laura Marcus puts it: "The autobiography/memoirs distinction –ostensibly formal and generic –is bound up with a typological distinction between those human beings who are capable of self-reflection and those who are not" (21). (Anderson 8)

That Rushdie might not be "capable of self-reflection" is risible, nor can we suspect him of lack of seriousness in this work, so we cannot apply this distinction too pedantically. Certainly, he might want to aspire to the generic category of autobiography, as it has traditionally been associated not only with middle-class (western) and masculine modes of subjectivity, but also with a canon of works celebrating the extraordinary lives of "great men". In the nineteenth century it was felt that "Autobiography should rather belong to people of 'lofty reputation' or people who have something of 'historical importance' to say" (Anderson 8). Time will no doubt confirm that the Rushdie case will have been of historical importance, but we hope that the quality of his work and its multiple messages will in the long run prove to attract readers rather than the circumstances of its composition. But in any case, as Anderson continues, attitudes began to change in the latter part of the 20th century, as the subject of an autobiography no longer had to be a great man or a genius, as long as noble values continued to be in play: “an important group of modern critics writing in the 1960s and 1970s deduced abstract critical principles for autobiography based on ideals of autonomy, self-realization, authenticity and transcendence which reflected their own cultural values” (2001: 4).

Perhaps “authenticity” is the word to be applied in the context of Rushdie’s book: he wants his readers to accept the truth value of this account, but the obverse of this is his equal need to distance himself from the subject of his travails.

4.2. Auto/biography as story

> “All biographies like all autobiographies like all narratives tell one story in place of another”. (Hélène Cixous & Mireille Calle-Gruber 177)

Rushdie overcomes the paradox presented by the generic cataloguing of the two modes, autobiography and memoir alongside fiction, by concentrating on the idea of story. Storytelling covers all genres except perhaps lyric poetry; even epics have narratives. He begins the first chapter of this work with a long explanation of how not only his childhood and boyhood, but indeed, his whole life, has been marked by the stories his father told him and his attitudes towards them:

> When he was a small boy his father at bedtime told him the great wonder tales of the East, told them and retold them and remade them and reinvented them in his own way – the stories of Scheherazade from the *Thousand and One Nights,* stories told against death to prove the ability of stories to civilise and overcome even the most murderous of tyrants; and the animal fables of the *Panchatantra*; and the marvels that poured like a waterfall from the *Kathasaritsa gara,* the “Ocean of the Streams of Story,” the immense story-lake created in Kashmir where his ancestors been born; and the tales of mighty heroes collected in the *Hamzanama* and the *Adventures of Hatim Tai* [...]. To grow up steeped in these tellings was to learn two unforgettable lessons: first, that stories were not true (there were no real “genies” in bottles or flying carpets or wonderful lamps), but by being untrue they could make him feel and know truths that the truth could not tell him; and second, that they all belonged to him, just as they belonged to his father, Anis, and to everyone else, they were all his, as they were his father’s, bright stories and dark stories, sacred stories and profane, his to alter and renew and discard and pick up again as and when he pleased, his to laugh at and rejoice in and live in and with and by, to give the stories life by loving them and to be given life by them in return. Man was the storytelling animal, the only creature on earth that told itself stories to understand what kind of creature it was. The story was his birthright, and nobody could take it away. (*JA* 19)

So if we live in stories, we must ask questions like: What is the relevance of the truth factor? Who has the right to tell stories? Who has power over them? Rushdie asks all this in relation to his own story about half-way through *Joseph Anton*. Here he lays claim to a right to tell a story from his point of view and he does so with defiance. Later in the book, he recalls his address to the Swedish Academy in Stockholm, where he received the Kurt Tucholsky Prize, awarded to writers who resisted persecution:

> At the heart of the dispute over *The Satanic Verses,* he said, behind all the accusations and abuse, was a question of profound importance: *Who shall have control over the story?* Who has, who should have, the power not only to tell the stories with which, and within which, we all lived, but also to say in what manner those stories may be told? For everyone lived by and inside stories, the so-called grand narratives. The nation was a story, and the family was another, and religion was a third. As a creative artist he knew that the only answer to the question was: *Everyone and anyone has, or should have that power.* We should all be free to take the grand narratives to task, to argue with them, satirise them, and insist that they change to reflect the changing times. We should speak of them reverently, irreverently, passionately, caustically, or however we chose. That was our right as members of an open society. In fact, one could say that our ability to retell and remake the story of our culture was the best proof that our societies were indeed free. (360)

Because of the different "communities" he belongs to: family, nation, culture, ideology, and because of his eventful life, Rushdie sees different selves in these contexts and stages. He writes of these selves when recording the "solidarity and love" shown to him by twelve hundred people at his surprise entrance at the annual benefit event for Canadian PEN in Toronto. But the *fatwa* has turned his life into a before and an after, thus he has at least an old self and a new self, though this new self is a Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde type of doppelgänger which is out of his control:

> This business of being turned into an icon was very odd, he thought. He didn't feel iconic. He felt... *actual.* But right now it might just be the best weapon he had. The symbolic icon-Salman his supporters had constructed, an idealised Salman of Liberty who stood flawlessly and unwaveringly for the highest values, counteracted and might just in the end defeat the demon version of himself constructed by his adversaries. (365, suspense marks and emphasis in the original)

This persona invented for him by his supporters is far less dangerous, but also falsifies what he might consider his essential self, his sense of the basic and less transitory with regard to his character, attitudes and feelings. While taking care not to fall into the fallacy of the essentialist or Romantic notion of selfhood, our self-realisation tends to see itself building upon a solid and stable basis: "We are captivated by an uncanny sense that each one of us constitutes one irreplaceable human form, and we perceive a noble life task in the cultivation of our individuality, our ineffable self," writes Weintraub (xiii). The protagonist-narrator-Rushdie experiences this self in the here-and-now and finds it strange to have a new persona "extracted" and made public and famous as if he were the bearer of a banner for others to acclaim.

As regards Rushdie's use of the third person to refer to himself, Chapter One focusses immediately on a "small boy" and his story is told in the third person, but it then proceeds to refer to his father as Anis and his mother as Negin Rushdie (*JA* 19), thus after an oblique beginning, the protagonist and author are identified and equated through the details to do with his family story. There is a caveat, however, as Rushdie reveals only what he wants to reveal, and in the naming of his sisters there is a "subtle mixing of real, fictive and untold names" as Ganapathy-Doré explains (19). Similarly, in the "Prologue: The First Blackbird" (*JA* 3-16), the narrator at first focusses on an anonymous third person protagonist and situates the events on "Valentine's Day" with no year, though before long, or already, we know that it is 1989 and that the anonymous hero becomes identified as Rushdie the author himself, as his wife, almost immediately named as Marianne Wiggins, asks him: "'How does it feel [...] to know that you have just been sentenced to death by the Ayatollah Khomeini?'" (3). Also, the quote from the text of the Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* naming him indirectly as "the author of the 'Satanic Verses' book" (5), confirms his identity, but now, the narrator affirms, that identity has become confused. In this story, the narrator does not recognise himself, or at least not his "old self": "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*" (5).

What worries Rushdie concerning this demon self is that if you repeat something often enough, it becomes true: "(Repeated denials could establish a new truth that erased the old one.)" (436). Thus, he has little control over this particular self, however much he denies its existence.

From St. Valentine's Day 1989, Rushdie found himself caught up in a new story. He speaks of his "old self" (5), a state of being which no longer holds sway in his life: "But he also knew that his old self's habits were of no use any more. He was a new self now" (5). What he most protests about is that his new self, himself as protagonist of a new story, has not been chosen or controlled by himself, his new selves have been grotesquely invented by others:

> *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 the 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 Rushdy.* 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. (5)

He compares himself to King Charles I, who, however much he declared that he did not recognise the authority or legitimacy of those who dethroned him, was killed by them, and Rushdie further protests that he is no king, merely "the author of a book" (5). We must not forget, however, that the Ayatollah Khomeini was not unaware of the adage "The pen is mightier than the sword" (even if he may not have known it had been coined by Edward Bulwer-Lytton).

Perhaps when Philippe Lejeune penned his definition of autobiography and wrote of the development of the personality, he was thinking of the possibility of a succession of selves: "A retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" (193). Such a definition reads like the stages of a life-story in chronological order. But Linda Anderson has pointed out the problems with this definition, noting that even its author was not satisfied with it:

> However, Lejeune himself remained dissatisfied with this since it did not seem to provide a sufficient boundary between autobiography and the adjacent genres of biography and fiction. A certain "latitude" in classifying particular cases might be admitted but one condition for autobiography was absolute: there must be "identity between the *author,* the *narrator,* and the *protagonist*" (Lejeune 1982: 193). However, the difficulty is how to apply this condition since the "identity" Lejeune speaks of can never really be established except as a matter of *intention* on the part of the author. (2)

When Rushdie asserts that the nation is one story, the family another and religion yet another, his point is that every linear event or series of events that develop in time can be seen as a story, with its beginning, middle and future end. Yet on separating these stories he overlooks the complicating problem of the overlap of these story domains: they do not exist in isolation, for while the idea of nation may be imaginary, as Benedict Anderson asserts (2006), families exist more or less within their nation(s). That is one problem, and another is the question of truth. To return to that initial question we had posed in considering stories: some "stories" demand to be considered and respected as truth, while others do not. Linda Anderson references Candace Lang in a wide concept of authoriality: "Autobiography is indeed everywhere one cares to find it" (Lang 6), but adds a caveat concerning what is strictly life-writing done by one and the same person:

> However, autobiography has also been recognized since the late eighteenth century as a distinct literary genre and, as such, an important testing ground for critical controversies about a range of ideas including authorship, selfhood, representation and the division between fact and fiction. (Anderson 1-2)

In the Romantic or transcendental view of art we mentioned before, it could be envisaged that these different selves and stories are in search of an author, an autobiographer, to bring them together: "...autobiography [...] is turned to in the first place because it offers an unmediated and yet stabilizing wholeness for the self. [...] it offers the possibility of alleviating the dangers and anxieties of fragmentation" (Anderson 5). What makes Rushdie's account interesting is this difficulty in finding wholeness, in reconciling two opposing views of himself. The only path through the problem is for Rushdie to show us that neither one is true. His experiences also seem to confirm the idea that identity, far from being essential, is a social construct. The "posture of utterance" is Rushdie in his different contexts, fulfilling his various literary ambitions and offering himself to his different readerships.

4.3. Prosopopoeia

That autobiography is “plagued” by such questions that are difficult to answer to everyone’s satisfaction was argued by Paul de Man in his essay “Autobiography as De-Facement” (1979). As Linda Anderson comments:

> As his own alternative point of departure, de Man proposes that autobiography is not a genre at all but “a figure of reading or understanding” that is in operation not only within autobiography but also across a range of texts. He identifies biography with a linguistic dilemma which is liable to be repeated every time an author makes himself the subject of is own understanding. The author reads himself in the text, but what he is seeing in this self-reflexive or specular moment is a figure or a face called into being by the substitutive trope of prosopopoeia, literally, the giving of a face, or personification. The interest of autobiography, according to de Man, is that it reveals something which is in fact much more generally the case: that all knowledge, including self-knowledge, depends on figurative knowledge or tropes. Autobiographies thus produce fictions or figures in place of the self-knowledge they seek. What the author of an autobiography does is to try to endow his inscription within the text with all the attributes of a face in order to mask or conceal his own fictionalization or displacement by writing. Paradoxically, therefore, the giving of a face, prosopopoeia, also names the disfigurement or defacement of the autobiographical subject through tropes. In the end there is only writing. (12-13)

This harks back to the epigraph at the beginning of this section: Cixous’s “one story in place of another.” Relating the idea of prosopopeia to Rushdie’s “posture of utterance,” one might say that Rushdie is saying to the reader “Now you see me, now you don’t.” But de Man’s view cannot be refuted because a life has been converted into text and in doing so, a writer must inevitably have created a story for the reader, with him or herself as a persona, and not just given a list of dates and events.

4.4. *Autre*-biography

The idea that one’s life-story is converted into a semi-fictional personification also calls up the concept of “*autre*-biography”. This is a term coined by South African writer J.M.Coetzee about himself. Coetzee is the author of a trilogy of fictional memoirs: *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997), *Youth* (2002) and *Summertime* (2009), and by the time of this third installment, the protagonist John Coetzee is dead, so we see that fortunately, these are not entirely based on fact. Both Rushdie and Coetzee underwent linguistic and territorial dislocation, a sense of hovering between languages and cultures. *Autre*-biography is a postmodern combination that suggests that there is never a single version, and as Coetzee himself said: “all autobiography is *autre*-biography”, meaning that there is no one truth. As María J. López comments as regards the French “*autre*”:

> This adjective has become generalized among Coetzee's critics in order to describe the inextricability between truth and fiction, personal engagement and detachment that we find in all the works in which he deals with his own self. The term "*autre*-biography" was actually coined by Coetzee himself in the "Retrospect" of *Doubling the Point* (1992a: 394), in which he indulges in a typically Coetzeean autrebiographical exercise. In a 2002 interview with David Attwell, he similarly asserts that "All autobiography is *autre*-biography". (216)

Alternatives in life are preferably chosen by the subject, but these different "others" or "other selves" are dangerous and frightening when imposed upon one. As Rushdie queries and laments:

> How to tell the stories of such a world, a world in which character was no longer always destiny, in which your fate could be determined not by your own choices but by those of strangers, in which economics could be destiny, or a bomb? (*JA* 69)

4.5. Autobiography "against itself"

There is a similarity, too, with Roland Barthes' autobiography *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (by Roland Barthes, one might add –as long as he wrote it), "the most famous attempt", says Linda Anderson, "to write an autobiography 'against itself'" (70). Rushdie's use of the third person is one of the most salient similarities:

> While purporting to be an autobiography, it deconstructs from within the major assumptions underlying the genre. The text's most salient break with tradition is achieved through discarding the first-person singular and substituting instead multiple-subject positionings: "he", "R.B.," "you" and "I" exchange places almost arbitrarily in an attempt to reinforce the effect of distance between the writer and the written text: "I had no other solution than to rewrite myself –at a distance, a great distance– here and now [...]. Far from reaching the core of the matter, I remain on the surface" (142) (Anderson 2001: 70; suspense marks in the text)

5. *JOSEPH ANTON* AS NOVEL

5.1. The literary novel

Turning now from the forms of autobiography, I would like to comment briefly on the other two sub-genres of the novel in *Joseph Anton.* Regardless of the truth content, the work undeniably reads like a novel. The 3rd-person protagonist contributes to this, as do the intertextual references. The opening comparison to Hitchcock's horror film *The Birds* also points to other genres of popular culture. But then references to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (346), Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* (319), Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (431), G.K.Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* (359), and Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller...* (351) remind us of political suppression of cultural artifacts, as does, of course, the reference to the condemned books: *Lady Chatterley's Lover, Ulysses, Lolita* (115). Another aspect that makes it read like a postmodern self-conscious novel is the explanation he gives of the genesis of *Midnight's Children.* The decisions he took regarding narrative strategy sound like self-conscious, internal literary criticism:

> History rushed into his pages, immense and intimate, creative and deconstructive, and he understood that this dimension, too, had been lacking from his work. He was a historian by training and the great point of history, which was to understand how individual lives, communities, nations and social classes were shaped by great forces, yet retained, at times, the ability to change the direction of those forces, must also be the point of his fiction. He began to feel very excited. He had found an intersection between the private and the public and would build his book on that crossroads. The political and the personal could no longer be kept apart. This was no longer the age of Jane Austen, who could write her entire oeuvre during the Napoleonic Wars without mentioning them, and for whom the major role of the British Army was to wear dress uniforms and look cute at parties. Nor would he write his book in cool Forsterian English. India was not cool. It was *hot*. It was hot and overcrowded and vulgar and loud and it needed a language to match that and he would try to find that language. (55-56, emphasis in the text)

5.2. The detective story

Finally, *Joseph Anton* is definitely a detective story with a beginning, middle and possible end: how the victim managed to evade the pursuers. It is successful in 3 ways: 1) so far he has eluded his pursuers (and we hope he continues to do so); 2) the "plot" is an engaging story of the stages of the "adventure" with suspense, etc.; and 3) no doubt it is/will continue to be a best-seller. It is not a "whodunnit," as nothing, that is, no crime, has been committed, but crime novels can be enjoyed even if we know from the beginning who the criminal is: the how or why becomes the focus, rather than the who. Similarly, novels that presume to be many-coated, for example –to cite Nabokov again– *Lolita*, where Humbert Humbert, the narrator of the main part of the novel, tells us on his first page that he is a murderer: such novels engage the reader in the pursuit of the details as well as the motivations.

But in Rushdie's latest work, the attempted explanations and overtures of appeasement come at a price: one cannot preach successfully to those whose ears are stopped, and reiterated attempts can aggravate. Also, what I wonder is if, just as the novel that contained Muhammad provoked the ire of Ayatollah Khomeini and much of the Muslim world, this novel has upset the police, for a new field of possible grievance opens up: the security services. In his Acknowledgements he thanks the members of his protection teams and says that he has changed their names (635-636) but much is revealed. The revelation of secrets, one of the trump cards of both the detective story and the memoir, in this case, may offend both sides. One hopes not.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In *Joseph Anton,* Rushdie has combined different genres –life writing and the novel– and different sub-genres, like the literary novel and the detective story, to produce a multi-faceted work that can be read exclusively as any of these or as a mixed-bag. When Geetha Ganapathy-Doré called it "a fuzzy, hybrid and post-modern variety of writing" (13), it was because she maintains that the work asks to be read in its full combination and that the lines between the genres or sub-genres are not clear. She places it within the temporal frame of the postmodern and this can be justified also in terms of content, as today we no longer have to distinguish categorically between genres as in the classical tradition –the memoir no longer has its strict limitations– and can mix the formal and serious with the popular and comic. Postmodernism has also taught us that there is no one truth, there are only points of view, and Ganapathy-Doré quite rightly shows that Rushdie has a "posture of utterance" which is varied, but which is the perspective, or multiple perspective, he wishes his readers to share with him.

Rushdie was an actor at Cambridge and there is an element of posturing about his stance, but this is more understandable when we recognize that he is a sort of *doppelgänger* or has more than one self. There is the Salman Rushdie he feels himself to be and has always been, however much in development as he grew to maturity, and as a socially-constructed rather than an essential self, and there are the selves he has been forced to become: "Satan Rushdy," "Salman of Liberty" and the "Joseph Anton" or even worse, the "Joe" or the "Arctic tern" (*JA* 149) of the period of his enforced hiding. The posturing may run in the family, as his father, Anis Ahmed, adopted the surname Rushdie in honour of Ibn Rushd or Averroes.

It is all a form of prosopopoeia, as Salman Rushdie creates selves that are personifications of himself, faces that try to mask, as de Man suggested, the fictionalization that forms a layer superimposed over the self-knowledge. There are similarities to Coetzee's *autre*-biography, but Rushdie shows less of a free hand, it would have been preposterous to have included the death of "Rushdie" or "Joseph Anton" in this work, as Coetzee did in his. There are also similarities to Barthes's autobiography "against itself," especially in the different stances, first and third person, and the distancing between the author, narrator and the surface of the text.

The questions we have to ask ourselves are whether this mixing is successful, and what we mean by successful. *Joseph Anton: A Memoir,* is not a great novel like *Midnight's Children,* which also has a large component of autobiography, while not ostensibly an autobiography. By comparison, *Joseph Anton* is inferior and will not be remembered as long as the prize-winning novel. But Rushdie did not intend to write such a work. We assume he considered, quite rightly, that there would be "out there" a readership interested in what happened to him and in what it is like when someone has to go into hiding. So he has given us a detective story where the object is also the subject, the victim gets to write the story. And story is the appropriate word: Rushdie is able to combine strict factual description, autobiographical detail and tell the story of a victim all as if they were stories. This is done fairly smoothly, there are just one or two points of transition that seem to jar, like the beginning, referring to the Hichcock and then going back to his boyhood, but we could say that even there, Rushdie makes the juxtaposition conspicuous in order, precisely, to draw attention to the playful nature of the varied narrative stance. So we can say that if we accept that the work is of a hybrid nature, it is successful, for the postmodern outlook invites variety and even contradiction.

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