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*ORIGIN AND ORIGINALITY IN RUSHDIE'S FICTION,*  
BY MARTINE HENNARD DUTHEIL DE LA ROCHÈRE

“You don’t have to read shit to know that it’s blasphemous, you get me?” remarks a character in Zadie Smith’s recent novel *White Teeth*. He is referring, of course, to Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. As Smith suggests, the actual “reading” of Salman Rushdie’s text is precisely what has been left behind in the storm of controversy which has surrounded it ever since its publication in 1988. In *Origin and Originality in Rushdie’s Fiction* (1999), which centres on *The Satanic Verses*, Martine Hennard Dutheil re-emphasises the novel’s status as a text rather than a political tool, while using the implications and ironies of the “Rushdie affair” to explore Rushdie’s own concern with origins, rewritings and (mis)interpretations. Her study provides an important contribution to the study of Rushdie and also to post-colonial studies.

The *fatwa* issued by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 which condemned Rushdie (and his publishers) to death for producing a novel “in opposition to Islam, the prophet and the Koran”, moved consideration of *The Satanic Verses* far beyond the realm of literary criticism. The book became an icon, the centre of a furious debate which was soon polarised into a simplistic opposition of West and East, of upholders of the democratic right to freedom of expression versus the autocratic censorship of supposedly “blasphemous” material. In this way, as Hennard Dutheil points out, the “affair” reproduces many of the binary oppositions which Rushdie himself rigorously challenges throughout his fiction, and there is a profound irony in the way that the “meaning” of *The Satanic Verses* becomes lost in its controversial reception, exemplifying the loss of origin through re-presentation.

Hennard Dutheil focuses on origin as the governing motif of this study, and this allows her to consider a variety of aspects of Rushdie’s fiction, including the figure of the migrant, the satanic verses incident (both historical and fictionalised) and the textual origins of the novels themselves. Although *The Satanic Verses* is the primary text under consideration, Hennard Dutheil also devotes space to Rushdie’s earlier novels, *Midnight’s Children*

and *Shame*, which both, particularly in their questioning of familial and national origins, prefigure *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie's use of the figure of the migrant, representative of actual and symbolic migration, allows him to address not only the literal loss of homeland but also the unstable nature of identity and the impossibility of retaining any original meaning. The migrant represents the transgression of boundaries, the translation of cultures, and becomes a trope for the creative process itself, "the migration of ideas into images".

Most fascinating is the way in which the migrant, in Hennard Dutheil's writing, becomes a metaphor for Rushdie's novels themselves, which exist on the boundaries of Indian and English culture, and reveal the author's awareness of the impossibility of ever properly representing their origins. Instead, the books find alternative "filiations" in the adopted literary fathers Daniel Defoe and Charles Dickens. Hennard Dutheil traces the literary origins of *The Satanic Verses* in the work of Defoe, and the influence of Dickens on Rushdie's novels in general. The novels are thus inserted into English culture and literature in a deliberately parodic way — and parody itself, with its emphasis on repetition and translation, is shown to be an aspect of the trope of the migrant.

Through her focus on origins and the figure of the migrant, Martine Hennard Dutheil demonstrates a continuity between Rushdie's earlier fiction and *The Satanic Verses*, and her insistence on the textuality of the novel allows her to keep the Rushdie "affair" in proportion and to relocate *The Satanic Verses* in the domain of literature.

Kirsten STIRLING

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