

Salman Rushdie as public intellectual

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine Salman Rushdie's position across his career as a public intellectual, in the multiple senses expounded by Edward Said in *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994). Rushdie may be viewed as a paradigmatic example of precisely such a Saidian intellectual, in being engaged, critical, secular, and, to use Said's significant term, 'worldly'. While pre-eminently a novelist, he has never hesitated to intervene visibly on public issues, and his works of non-fiction constitute a significant portion of his oeuvre. The present paper, while not neglecting Rushdie's fiction, examines his implicit and explicit conceptions of the role of the intellectual, as embodied in various key texts from his two essay collections, *Imaginary Homelands* and *Step Across This Line*, and in his recent memoir *Joseph Anton*. Consideration is given to the view held by some that the post-fatwa Rushdie has moved away from an oppositional intellectual stance as advocated by Said, the provisional conclusion to be offered being that such a critique does not necessarily reflect current political and global realities as perceived by a writer for whom worldliness is the essence of literature, whose defining attitude may be called libertarian, and who is no mere observer but a necessarily engaged participant in the face of today's worldwide cultural battles.

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‘Exile’, according to Edward Said, ‘is the condition that characterises the intellectual’ (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 43)¹, and Salman Rushdie’s position as intellectual in today’s world may be felt to bear out that observation. For multiple reasons, the author of *Joseph Anton* may be considered paradigmatic of the intellectual who belongs everywhere but above all nowhere – like Satan in the epigraph to *The Satanic Verses*, ‘without any fixed place, or space, allowed him to rest the sole of his foot upon’ (ix)². At the same time, his is, indubitably, the status of a public intellectual, as a commentator and analyst not only within his specialist field but also with regard to public events and issues in general. The public intellectual may be defined as a figure consecrated in a given area of knowledge or creation who writes in the press, appears on audiovisual media or, today, blogs or tweets on the internet on a variety of subjects of public interest and whose opinions are listened to, dissected and syndicated as an important contribution to debate. Rushdie is thus part of a modern-day tradition which has perhaps its most distinguished exemplar in George Orwell and has in recent times included such figures (whether exponents primarily of literature or of other disciplines) as Harold Bloom, Umberto Eco, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Christopher Hitchens, Eric Hobsbawm, Octavio Paz, Edward Said, José Saramago, Susan Sontag or Mario Vargas Llosa.

One such figure, Rushdie’s friend, associate and defender Edward Said, has offered a working definition of the public intellectual. To invoke Said in discussing Rushdie is, besides, of particular pertinence. Said’s and Rushdie’s careers both straddle East and West – for Said as a Jerusalem-born Palestinian Christian resident in the US, for Rushdie as a British

¹ All quotations from Rushdie and from Said’s *Representations of the Intellectual* are indicated parenthetically, all other quotations in footnotes.

² The epigraph is from Daniel Defoe’s *The History of the Devil* (1726).

citizen of subcontinental Muslim origin, domiciled in the UK and later the US: neither can be said to ‘belong’ anywhere. In addition, it is important to stress Said’s unremitting defence of Rushdie over the *Satanic Verses* issue. Neither Said’s identification with the left nor his highly visible stand in Middle East politics as voice of the Palestinian cause prevented him from aligning with the libertarian, anti-theocratic and anti-censorship camp on the ‘Rushdie affair’. Another figure associated with both, Christopher Hitchens, notes in his memoirs that Rushdie actually sent Said a pre-publication draft of the *Verses*. Hitchens tells how one evening ‘in late 1987 or early 1988’, he happened to be visiting Said at his New York home when a courier arrived bearing ‘a huge box, which contained the manuscript of a forthcoming novel by Salman Rushdie’³. The recipient may not have predicted the storm ahead, but the episode suggests a significant level of trust between the two, and anticipates the fact that later, Said left no punches pulled in his repeated and eloquent defence of the *Verses*⁴. Thus, in an interview of 1993, Said offered a trenchant vindication of Rushdie, declaring: ‘In the Islamic world I’ve been vociferous in attacking the banning of the book’⁵. Interviewed again in 1999, he stated unequivocally: ‘I am an absolute believer in absolute freedom of expression’, adding: ‘To condemn him to death and to burn his book and to ban it – these are horrible, horrible things’⁶.

Said’s position on the intellectual is set out in his influential volume *Representations of the Intellectual*⁷, which collects his six Reith lectures given on BBC radio in 1993⁸. For Said, the genuine intellectual is by definition public - a figure politically and ideologically engaged, but directly beholden to no party or movement. Said believes, as we have noted at the beginning of this paper, that the true intellectual is, whether literally like himself or else figuratively, an *exile*, someone who, however committed to his or her beliefs, has no absolute ties anywhere. The intellectual is also – to use a key Saidian term – one who is *worldly*, in the sense of identifying with ‘our world, the historical and social world made by human effort’ (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 65). Said also rejects narrow specialisation (‘the cult of the certified expert’ - 58) and defends a notion of the intellectual as *amateur* (61), in the sense of being unafraid to speak out on public issues not strictly related to his or her core expertise (‘I do not consider myself bound by my professional training in literature, consequently ruling myself out from matters of public policy’ - 65). If in this conception, ‘uncompromising freedom of opinion’ is a sine qua non (65-66), the intellectual is also someone ‘in a state of constant alertness’, whose ‘whole being is staked on a critical sense’ (17). It is thus the intellectual’s role to cast a sceptical eye on established institutions on all sides: ‘to confront orthodoxy and dogma’ (9), and to be a thorn in the flesh of authority - in Said’s formulation, ‘speaking truth to power’ (75). This includes the critique of religion, since for Said ‘the true intellectual is a secular being’ (89). Secularism, he argues, implies a rationalist view of the world that rejects accommodation with any religion and subjects all discourses, including the religious, to a relentless critical gaze. It should be added that Said, while a man of the left, makes it clear that he does not believe the intellectual necessarily has to be aligned with that political tendency (xi).

³ Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22: A Memoir* (London: Atlantic, 2010), 267-268.

⁴ Rushdie records Said’s defence in *Joseph Anton* (148, 318).

⁵ Edward W. Said, ‘Orientalism and After’, interview with Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, in *Radical Philosophy*, 1993. Repr. in *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said*, ed. and intr. Gauri Viswanathan. 2004. London: Bloomsbury, 2005, 208-232 (221).

⁶ Edward W. Said, ‘What people in the US know about Islam is a stupid cliché’, interview with Hasan M. Jafri, *The Herald* (Karachi), 1999. Repr. in Said/Viswanathan 2004, 368-384 (382, 383).

⁷ Said’s volume makes specific reference to Rushdie, in the uncompromising affirmation that ‘the defence of Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* has been so absolutely central an issue’ (66).

⁸ The Reith lectures have been given annually since 1948 on BBC radio in the UK by a prominent intellectual.

The corpus of Rushdie's fiction may be considered the product of a critical and engaged intellectual writing principally in the novel mode. He critiques the betrayal of Nehruvian ideals in *Midnight's Children*, the decline of cosmopolitan Bombay in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, or the fundamentalist onslaught on Kashmiri syncretism in *Shalimar the Clown*. His fiction is also typically the outcome of careful research, an activity we may associate with the intellectual: *The Satanic Verses* is on one level a solid product of the British educational system, its Arabian chapters originating in Rushdie's study of the birth of Islam as a special subject as part of his degree in history at Cambridge⁹, while *The Enchantress of Florence* pushes its researchedness to the point of appending an academic-style bibliography. At the same time, Rushdie's claim to the status of intellectual also rests on a significant body of non-fiction. This takes the form, firstly of large numbers of essays, reviews, interviews, speeches and occasional pieces, much of which material (up to 2002) has been collected in the two volumes *Imaginary Homelands* and *Step Across This Line*; and, secondly, two full-length books – one a minor work, the Nicaraguan politico-travelogue *The Jaguar Smile*, the other the very substantial memoir *Joseph Anton*. Thus, of Rushdie's sixteen published books to date, four are non-fiction. The range of subjects taken on by Rushdie in his non-fiction is breathtaking, and what emerges from the corpus with particular strength is a sense of the intellectual as commentator on culture. As critic of culture, Rushdie differs from Said, who – notably in his writings on classical music, alone or with the conductor and pianist Daniel Barenboim¹⁰, with whom he founded a major cross-cultural orchestra¹¹ – tends to stick to the high-cultural side; Rushdie, by contrast, in fiction and non-fiction alike (Bollywood in *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*; western rock music in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*¹²; articles on the Rolling Stones or a Hollywood classic like *The Wizard of Oz*), offers a close engagement with popular culture and a constant crossing and recrossing of the high culture/mass culture divide.

It could appear artificial or arbitrary to separate off fiction from non-fiction in discussing Rushdie as intellectual. However, genres such as essay and memoir are those in which intellectuals typically define themselves as such, and the remainder of this paper will concentrate on his output in those genres, while not forgetting that, unavoidably, a substantial portion of his non-fiction is umbilically tied to the *Verses* controversy, and thus to his fiction. *Imaginary Homelands* and *Step Across This Line* both include important essays, speeches and other material directly related to the *Verses* issue (notably the trio of essays, 'Is Nothing Sacred?', 'In Good Faith' and 'One Thousand Days in a Balloon', which conclude the paperback version of *Imaginary Homelands*¹³), while *Joseph Anton* explicitly centres on his life under the fatwa. Rushdie as *individual intellectual* is also a standard-bearer of *intellectual freedom*, a concept extending far beyond himself of which he has become a symbol, indeed

⁹ Rushdie recalls this academic background in *Joseph Anton* (38-45): in his final year in history at Cambridge, he chose an option on 'Muhammad, the Rise of Islam and the Early Caliphate', which was on offer for the first time, for which he was the only student, and which was discontinued the following year. This course, Rushdie says, 'studied the life of the Prophet and the birth of the religion as events inside history, analytically, judiciously, *properly*' (40 – Rushdie's italics).

¹⁰ See Said and Barenboim, *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society*, New York: Random House, 2004.

¹¹ In 1999 Said and Barenboim co-founded the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which brings together young musicians from both Israel and other Middle Eastern countries.

¹² On this point, see Christopher Rollason, 'Rushdie's Un-Indian Music : "The Ground Beneath Her Feet"', in *Studies in Indian Writing in English, vol. II*, ed. Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Pier Paolo Piciuccio, New Delhi: Atlantic, 2001, 122-157; rev. version (2006) at: <http://yatarollason.info/files/RushdieGFupdated.pdf>

¹³ The last-named essay did not appear in the original hardback.

for many *the* symbol. He evokes that concept explicitly in *Joseph Anton*, starting out from ‘the presumption of intellectual freedom’ (117), deploring ‘the assault on creative and intellectual freedoms’ (331), and affirming his personal struggle as part of a wider ‘intellectual battle’ (346). The novelist’s awareness of the resonance of the ‘Rushdie affair’ beyond his particular case is patent in that book’s pages, in his repeated and eloquent evocations of what he calls ‘*the freedom of the imagination and the overwhelming, overarching issue of freedom of speech*’ (550)¹⁴.

More generally, Rushdie’s stance as public intellectual across his career reveals a position in essentials very similar to Said’s. He certainly appears to see himself as an exile in the Saidian sense, arguing provocatively at the end of his 1992 essay on *The Wizard of Oz* that ‘the real secret ... is not that “there’s no place like home” but rather that there is no longer any such place *as home*’ (Rushdie, *Step Across This Line*, 33)¹⁵. He is patently both *worldly* and *amateur* in Said’s definition of those terms, unafraid to speak out on matters beyond the purely literary while laying claim to no academic specialisation. He is also non-beholden, in the sense that he has never been a ventriloquist for any political party or pressure group. As for *talking back to power*, the pre-*Verses* Rushdie was widely perceived as playing such a role in the context of postcolonial or even third-worldist discourse. Indeed, he even coined the now-famous phrase ‘the empire writes back’, in a London *Times* article in 1982 (Rushdie, ‘The Empire Writes Back With a Vengeance’, 8)¹⁶; whether today’s somewhat different Rushdie can still be deemed a thorn in the flesh of power, and if so of what power, will be considered later in this paper.

One dimension where Rushdie must be considered unequivocally a Saidian intellectual is the crucial one of secularism¹⁷. Across his work, he invokes secularism in two different but complementary senses – the global sense of commitment to a non-religious outlook, and the specifically Indian or Nehruvian sense of state neutrality between religious groups. The global sense prevails in his essay of 1990 ‘In Good Faith’, where, in the wake of the fatwa, he defines himself as a ‘wholly secular person’ (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 377), and affirms secularism as ‘life without God’ (412-413), while, in parallel, also invoking ‘Nehru’s vision of a secular India’ (404)¹⁸. Comparably, in a 1993 speech from Cambridge University Rushdie defends the *Verses* as ‘a committedly secular text’, and, while upbraiding ‘religious fanaticism’s scorn for secularism and for unbelief’, laments the latter-day decline of the Indian secularist model (Rushdie, *Step Across This Line*, 252). In *Joseph Anton*, he opines that with the *Verses* controversy ‘the secular world’ yielded ‘much vital ground’ to religion (124), and calls on the Islamic world to ‘take on board the secularist-humanist principles on which the modern is based’ (625)¹⁹.

¹⁴ Rushdie’s italics.

¹⁵ Rushdie’s italics. This essay, ‘Out of Kansas’, was originally published in pamphlet form in 1992 as *The Wizard of Oz*. It is about the Hollywood film, not L. Frank Baum’s original novel.

¹⁶ This essay, published in *The Times* on 3 July 1982, remains uncollected..

¹⁷ On Rushdie and secularism, see Christopher Rollason, ‘Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar The Clown*: A Secularist Manifesto?’, 2013, <http://yatrarollason.info/files/RushdieShalimarCergvEN.pdf>; French version, ‘*Shalimar the Clown*, de Salman Rushdie, récit laïque: une éducation séculaire et syncrétiste’. In Evelyne Hanquart-Turner and Ludmila Volna (eds.), *Éducation et Sécularisme: Perspectives africaines et asiatiques*, Paris: Harmattan, 2013, 197-210.

¹⁸ For a classic exposition of this concept, see Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998.

¹⁹ Rushdie here cites a *New York Times* piece of his from 2 November 2001. That article, originally entitled ‘Yes, This Is About Islam’, was reprinted as ‘November 2001: Not About Islam?’, in *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2002, 394-396.

Secularism as embodied by Rushdie is today by no means always a popular intellectual stance: since *The Satanic Verses* was published, there has been a trend – beyond any doubt general, albeit not universal - in the Western liberal-to-left establishment that may (be it said in passing, in stark contrast to the earlier hegemony of Marxism, with its anti-religious slant and its belief in progress) be summed up in the terms ‘respect for religion’²⁰, ‘cultural relativism’ and ‘political correctness’. This fraction is today arguably even hegemonic on the Western left. Rushdie for his part clearly rejects it, as is evident in his continued refusal to recant over the *Verses*. The only qualification here concerns the two early episodes, the ‘apology’ published in the press in February 1989 and the ephemeral ‘conversion’ essay of 1990, ‘Why I Have Embraced Islam’²¹, in both of which he appeared to have shifted towards the relativist camp. Both are disavowed in *Joseph Anton* (144-145; 281-286) as acts of backsliding under duress, and have not been repeated. Thus, Rushdie is today anathema to a certain kind of Western liberal.

Nonetheless, his libertarian, anti-theocratic and anti-relativist stance is spelt out in *Joseph Anton* and reiterated in multitudinous interviews around that book²². To some, Rushdie, with his defence in his memoir of ‘Western’ values such as free speech, rejection of the concept of ‘Islamophobia’ (which he sees as Orwellian ‘Newspeak’ - 344-346), and refusal to conflate religion and race (‘A religion was not a race. It was an idea’ - 345)²³ may appear as a traitor - a onetime ally of the postcolonial, multicultural and relativist left who has reneged on its values. This fraction of the left included, early on, those such as John Berger or Germaine Greer who refused to defend Rushdie over the *Verses*²⁴, and is today represented by those, such as Zoë Heller or Rushdie’s arch-enemy Pankaj Mishra²⁵, who responded unsympathetically to *Joseph Anton* and, reading it individualistically, saw it more as subjective personal vindication than as manifestation of collective values.

For Rushdie himself, it is clear that if he has not changed, the left (or a major part of it) has. This is crystal-clear in the passage in *Joseph Anton* where he attacks ‘the cancer of cultural relativism’, contrasted with ‘the rich multicultures of the modern world’, distinguishing the secular multiculturalism he approves from the neo-theocratic relativism and ‘respect for Islam’ he abhors (357). He may be claimed to have affirmed himself, as a free thinker beholden to none – and thus as a Saidian intellectual - by refusing over the years to change

²⁰ Rushdie satirises the concept of ‘respect’ at length in *Luka and the Fire of Life* (‘He was struck by a large sign reading YOU ARE AT THE FRONTIER OF THE RESPECTORATE OF I. MIND YOUR MANNERS’ - Rushdie, *Luka*, 69).

²¹ This essay appeared in the hardback of *Imaginary Homelands*: it has been suppressed in all subsequent editions. In *Hitch-22*, Hitchens recalls how he felt it read as if ‘written at gunpoint, which of course it had been’, and how Rushdie later presented him with a copy of the *Imaginary Homelands* hardback with every page of the offending article ‘carefully crossed out ..., signing each one’ (280).

²² One example among many is provided by Rushdie’s late 2012 interview with the French weekly *Marianne*: ‘Les religions sont une sorte de mafia’ - interview with Alexis Liebaert, *Marianne*, 8 Dec 2012. www.marianne.net/Salman-Rushdie-Les-religions-sont-une-sort-de-mafia_a224979.html

²³ Both these points are repeated in the *Marianne* interview, where Rushdie states unequivocally that Islam is not a race and ideology is not an ethnic category. On the non-conflation of religion and race, Rushdie is very close to Hitchens, who denounces what he sees as the ‘wilful, crass confusion between religious faith, which is voluntary, and ethnicity, which is not’ (*Hitch-22*, 269n).

²⁴ See *Joseph Anton*, 125, 263-264, 396.

²⁵ Pankaj Mishra, review of *Joseph Anton*. *The Guardian*, 18 Sept 2012; www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/sep/18/joseph-anton-salman-rushdie-review; Zoë Heller, ‘The Salman Rushdie Case’, *New York Review of Books*, 20 Dec 2012. www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/dec/20/salman-rushdie-case/

his views on vital subjects or to convert to postmodern orthodoxy. In this characteristic – the refusal to convert (to whatever) - he resembles such peers as Bloom, who has stood firm in his defence of canonic literature, or Saramago and Hobsbawm, who both remained loyal Marxists to their dying day²⁶. One may also compare Hitchens, another libertarian refusenik whose stand on freedom of speech and secularism consistently echoed Rushdie's. Hitchens relates in *Hitch-22* how, when asked by the *Washington Post* on that fatal St Valentine's Day in 1989 to state his position, he leapt to his friend's defence: 'Here was something that completely committed me. It was ... everything I hated versus everything I loved ... No more root-and-branch challenge to the values of the Enlightenment ... or to the First Amendment ... could be imagined'²⁷. Rushdie was aware of this at the time and repaid Hitchens in kind in his obituary of 2012: 'Everything that I loved and valued ... was ranged against everything I detested ... Then I read Christopher using exactly the same everything-he-loved-versus-everything-he-hated trope, and felt ... understood'²⁸.

Hitchens, however, in the last phase of his career and in the wake of 9-11, ended up openly dissociating himself from the left. By contrast and despite the patent overlap of beliefs between himself and Hitchens, Rushdie has not. Today's Salman Rushdie is a supporter of the Labour party in the UK – as always and despite the pro-censorship positions notoriously affirmed by certain Labour MPs at the height of the *Verses* controversy²⁹ - and of President Obama in the US. The closer analogy may lie with a rather earlier intellectual, George Orwell, who, despite the traumatic experience of a Stalinism that almost killed him as recounted in *Homage to Catalonia*, remained a man of the left and a Labour supporter to the end³⁰: future scholars may yet conclude that Stalinism is to Orwell as Islamism is to Rushdie. Few could doubt Rushdie's eloquence and conviction when, in line with an entire tradition of defence of intellectual freedom, he declares in *Joseph Anton*: 'The world of the book, in which free people made free choices, had to be defended' (150).

²⁶ Rushdie has never been a Marxist, but he and Saramago have in common the factor of religious controversy, and a close comparison of the two as public intellectuals would yield interesting results. Saramago's rewritings of, respectively, New and Old Testament material in his novels *O Evangelho segundo Jesus Cristo* (*The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, 1991) and *Caim* (*Cain*, 2009), invite comparison with *The Satanic Verses*. One of Saramago's critics, João Céu e Silva, cites an exhibition of 2008 one of whose texts decried the Portuguese writer in the following terms: '[Na] sua dedicação à literatura, Saramago soube e quis associar uma notável dimensão pública internacional, como intelectual, crítico e cidadão comprometido com a sua época' ('Saramago consciously and deliberately linked his dedication to literature to a significant international and public dimension as an intellectual and critic and as a citizen committed to his time') - a formulation which could equally well be applied to Rushdie (João Céu e Silva, *Uma larga viagem com José Saramago*, Oporto: Porto Editora, 2009, 231).

²⁷ Hitchens, *Hitch-22*, 268. Hitchens' stand on religion as a committed atheist, a position from which he never wavered, is of course well-known and is set out in full in his book *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007).

²⁸ Rushdie, 'Christopher Hitchens', *Vanity Fair*, Feb 2012: <http://salmanrushdie1.tumblr.com/post/15369634397/christopher-hitchens-vanity-fair-feb-2012>.

²⁹ Most prominent among the anti-*Verses* Labour MPs were Keith Vaz and Max Madden (see *Joseph Anton*, 6, 129-131, and, for a view from the time, Malise Ruthven, *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Rage of Islam*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1990, 4). Rushdie nonetheless stresses in *Joseph Anton* that 'he had been a Labour supporter all his life' (131).

³⁰ See 'Orwell's Statement on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*' (1949), in *Orwell and Politics*, ed. Peter Davison. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001, 499-501: 'My recent novel .. is NOT intended as an attack on socialism, or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter)' (500). It may be recalled that Orwell was always a hero of Hitchens' (for which see his book of 2002 *Why Orwell Matters*). Rushdie made some rather harsh comments on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in his essay of ... 1984 (!), 'Outside the Whale', which he partly retracted in the introduction to *Imaginary Homelands*, in which volume it was reprinted. His denunciation in *Joseph Anton*, as noted above, of the term 'Islamophobia' as 'Newspeak' is a hundred per cent Orwellian.

Nonetheless, there remains a problem in Rushdie's self-projection as free-speech and secularist icon. His arguments in *Joseph Anton* and elsewhere, however eloquent, are typically couched in what is very much a 'Western' discourse evoking the Enlightenment (*Joseph Anton* 129) and the First Amendment [to the US Constitution] (320)³¹ - in terms very similar to those used by Hitchens. He has accordingly been castigated - by, for example, Priyamvada Gopal in her widely-circulated *Guardian* piece on the occasion of Rushdie's controversial knighthood - for addressing free speech issues with 'Western' rather than 'Eastern' concepts³². This is not entirely fair: in his post-fatwa lecture 'One Thousand Days in a Balloon' (1991), he invokes his near-namesake Ibn Rushd, or Averröes, and his concept of *ijtihad*, or individual interpretation within Islam (*Imaginary Homelands*, paperback edition, 436). However, there is certainly a case for suggesting that were Rushdie to refer more often to non-Western, and notably Islamic, freethinkers - one may here invoke Iqbal, or Rumi and other Sufis, or the nineteenth-century Nahda movement in Egypt³³ - he might succeed in getting more 'Eastern' intellectuals on his side, even at the cost of reduced accessibility for his 'Western' constituency.

Salman Rushdie remains an intellectual committed to a firmly articulated belief-system, who will not water down or alter his deeply-held convictions. In view of the distancing from left-wing orthodoxy that now requires, it may be asked whether he is still, today, a Saidian intellectual in the sense of talking back to something called 'power'. Here, there is a case for arguing that it is not he who has changed, but the Islamic world and the Western liberal establishment - and that Islamism and cultural relativism have by now, in their respective environments, acquired sufficient influence to permit them to be considered as manifestations of power - a power to which Rushdie, as critical intellectual, talks back as he has talked back to other forms of power in the past. His recent performance has not been faultless: since *Joseph Anton*, he has been less eloquent politically and culturally than he might have been³⁴ (a Twitter feed is a poor substitute for a New York Times column), and his role of keeper of the flame may be in course of passing to others - to the likes of Pakistan's Malala Yousafzai³⁵, today as iconic a symbol of educational rights as Rushdie has been of free speech.

³¹ In a speech given on 10 August 2004 to the PEN American Center (www.democracynow.org/2004/8/10/salman_rushdie_on_terrorism_intellectual_freedom), Rushdie states: 'People like me came to America because of our admiration for the protections afforded by the first amendment'. It is worth noting that the First Amendment simultaneously defends freedom of speech and the free exercise of religion, and that over the years the presence of the latter element has not detracted from the symbolic force of the former.

³² Priyamvada Gopal, 'Sir Salman's Long Journey'. *The Guardian*, 18 June 2007. www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/jun/18/comment.bookscomment

³³ See Catherine Golliou (ed.). *L'Islam: Faits et Mythes*. *Le Point* (special issue - Collection Références), Mar-Apr 2013.

³⁴ Rushdie admits in an interview of October 2013 that since *Joseph Anton* appeared he has paying less attention to politics, and having worked arduously on a non-fiction book, now wishes to return to fiction. See Salman Rushdie and David Grossman, 'Rushdie, Grossman: la rencontre'. Interview with Didier Jacob. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 3-9 Oct 2013 (internet version; in the same interview, Rushdie discusses his Twitter feed).

³⁵ See Marie Brenner: 'Malala Yousafzai: The 15-Year-Old Pakistani Girl Who Wanted More from her Country', *Vanity Fair*, Apr 2013. www.vanityfair.com/politics/2013/04/malala-yousafzai-pakistan-profile; Malala Yousafzai (with Christina Lamb): *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2013. A line links Rushdie to Malala: in her memoir, she refers to a debate on the *Satanic Verses* issue held in 1989 at Jehanzeb College (Saidu Sharif, Pakistan), where her father was a student. According to her account, her father 'saw the book as offensive to Islam', but as a believer in free speech declared at the debate: 'First, let's read the book [he had not had the opportunity to] and then why not respond with our own book ... Is Islam such a weak religion that it cannot tolerate a book written against it?' (37).

Nonetheless, Rushdie's present relative silence may be temporary or strategic. His intellectual stance to date is arguably best defined as that of a libertarian in the line of George Orwell, who refuses all rigid orthodoxies and schemas. The price of libertarianism may, indeed, be exile. In the end, if, as Said affirms, exile is the condition of the intellectual, then for Salman Rushdie as an embattled critical intellectual in the postmodern world - as one who stakes his being on dissent and pays no tribute to fashion - it may be, ineluctably and irredeemably, the case that 'there is no longer any such place *as home*'.

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