

man represents ever-advancing age, and has no way out but death. The "war of the pig" runs its course and comes to an end, but not without leaving a foretaste of things to come.

There is a parallel between Bioy Casares's *Diary* and Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947). In the conflicts of his plague-afflicted city of Oran, Camus discovered the absurdity of existence as well as the bravery of the human being in facing the ordeals of living. Through Vidal, his protagonist, Bioy Casares arrives at a similar discovery: the human being is "repulsively weak" but, paradoxically, strong and brave in meeting the challenges of life and death.

This novel was first published in Buenos Aires in 1969. It is not a typical work of Bioy Casares, whose great specialities were the fantastic and intellectual fiction, but the massacre of one part of human society by another is an allegory that lends to many interpretations. After turning the last page of this *Diary*, readers are left with the notion of some temporary truce and of an uncertain future.

Malise Ruthven

A SATANIC AFFAIR: SALMAN RUSHDIE AND THE RAGE OF ISLAM

London: Chatto & Windus, 1990. Pp. 176. \$14.95

Reviewed by Axel Knoenagel

The controversy concerning Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* was the literary event of 1989. For most Westerners interested in literature, the vehemence of the Muslim reaction over a work of fiction came as an almost incomprehensible surprise. Ruthven's book is intended to shed some light on the background of this reaction. The book is therefore "not about an author, but about a book and some of its readers" (10). In six chapters Ruthven discusses "Satanic Fictions," "Honour and Shame," "Islam in Britain," "Conspiracy," "Ayatollahs of the North," and "The Word and the Text." Ruthven's study focuses primarily on the reception of *The Satanic Verses* in Bradford, where copies of the novel were burned as early as November 1988. The Muslim community of Bradford, like that of most other British cities, consists largely of immigrants from India and Pakistan. Ruthven's attempt to analyze this particular case of reader-response develops primarily into a study of these readers' sociopsychological constitution.

Unfortunately, Ruthven, who declares himself "an admirer of Rushdie's writing, and a student of Islam" (10), introduces into the text a note highly critical of Islamic dogma and practice. In the book's first paragraph, the protesters are, by implication, disqualified as intellectually and culturally incompetent to deal with the intricacies of the kind of literature Rushdie offers: "After decades of living in Britain, they still seemed utterly *foreign*: even in Hyde Park . . . they were aliens. They were not sophisticated . . . they seemed like men from the sticks, irredeemably provincial" (1; Ruthven's emphasis). Similarly negative is the portrait of Islam in the prologue: "The scenes of this demonstration . . . con-

firmed one of the oldest images of Islam: a triumphalist faith of uncompromising masculine supremacy" (5). In line with such generalities, the prologue states that the Rushdie affair resulted primarily from cultural and religious retardation: "For that vast majority of British Muslims, unaccustomed to the conventions of contemporary fiction with its rich and varied ingredients, Rushdie's riotous post-modernist pudding proved highly indigestible. They vomited their fury all over the streets of London" (9). The unqualified and insulting generalities of the prologue are unfortunate not only because they introduce anti-Islamic emotions into a topic that finally deserves to be treated with intellectual detachment, but also because the remainder of the book is markedly less prejudiced.

Ruthven suggests that the essential reason for the vehement protests lies in the difficult social and psychological situation of the Indo-Pakistani Muslims in Britain: "An attack on the sacred text and the person of its revelator, which is what *The Satanic Verses* was seen to be, was experienced as an attack on the honour of the whole community" (8). This community, as Ruthven shows at length, lives with but not in the Britain society. Not partaking of that social value system, the Muslims do not know, Ruthven argues, how to solve conflicts with it. The various factions among British Muslims, which display various degrees of "fundamentalism," emerge as the most important actors in the conflict. Ruthven points out how the anger against Rushdie was utilized by these groups to serve their own ends in their struggle for leadership among the Muslims.

The more deeply Ruthven studies the relationship of British Muslims to the society around them, the more *The Satanic Verses* disappears in the background. The chapter on "Satanic Fictions" provides some essential information, but readers of this "'difficult' literary novel, which many people confess to finding unreadable" (12), who are not familiar with Islamic traditions and symbols, still have to depend far too strongly on speculation.

Only small space is accorded to the role Rushdie himself plays in the whole affair. While Rushdie appears as a somewhat tragic figure caught in a dilemma between artistic ambition and inevitably hurt religious feelings, the book also contains some strong criticism of him: "Rushdie seemed blissfully unaware of the realities. . . . Rushdie's indignation exploded into a fit of rage that revealed the same combustible mixture of insecurity and arrogance that characterized his enemies" (89-90). Although the book's overall tone is very sympathetic towards the author, we still find that room has been given to the expression of the reason for the Muslim anger by a Muslim whose feelings we can understand: "Most people in the West haven't read the Qur'an. . . . There are truths here which people haven't discovered or haven't decided on, and here's this man already presenting them in a distorted form" (139). A statement like this being presented as a serious contribution marks a large gain in discursive quality for this emotionally overheated debate. The reader has to keep in mind, though, that the book is necessarily partial. Ruthven considers from the point of view of Western intellectualism a problem which cannot be fully grasped with rationalist thought alone. But his book creates the basis for a broader understanding of the many-faceted implications of the Rushdie affair.