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Shigemi Inaga

## Crime, Literature and Religious Mysticism: The Case of the Japanese Translator of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*

### Further Reflections on Literature and Religion<sup>1</sup>

The Japanese translator of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, IGARASHI Hitoshi<sup>2</sup> (1947–1991), was stabbed to death in 1991 on Tsukuba University Campus. His killing was obviously a religious assassination. The case deserves further investigation as he was a leading figure in the studies of Islamic thought in Japan. The present paper proposes some new insights into the reasons and intentions behind his translation of the controversial novel. I will argue that the Japanese translator wanted to reconcile the controversy between the Western Modern secular view of literature and the Islamic religious view of Scripture as directly dictated by God Almighty. So as to bridge the two opposite and incommensurable views, the Japanese translator elaborated his own ideas according to his understanding of the 'structure of prophecy.' By analyzing the fragments of his previous as well as his unaccomplished writings, the present paper tries to reconstruct his concept of literature and religion – a concept he could never fully articulate because of his untimely death.

### 1. Historiography as a 'criminal act'

In the guise of a theoretical framework, let me begin by a brief introductory remark on the choice of the subject. I deliberately chose to write about two individuals represented by their names as Salman RUSHDIE or Igarashi Hitoshi. But why am I entitled to do so? We talk about these two individuals as if it were our privilege to manipulate their names. Yet we should ask at first: By what kind of legitimacy are we

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of the text was read in the International Colloquium Literature and Religion, as "Freedom in Suffering & Freedom of Suffering – The Case of Japanese Translator of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, Hitoshi Igarashi (1947–1991) in Memoriam." The First International Conference for Literature and Religion in Korea, was organized by The Korean Society for Literature and Religion, and held at the Chung Nam University, Korean, on June 29–July 2, 2005. In this paper, translation from the Japanese texts is mine, unless otherwise mentioned.

<sup>2</sup> As for the order of Japanese names, the present paper respects the current convention. For historical figures, family name precedes given name; for the publications in Western languages, given name precedes family name. Authors in the reference are ordered in the alphabetical order of the family names. In the body of the text, family names are indicated by capitals followed by small capitals when they appear for the first time. Experience shows that this is the only way to avoid frustrating confusions.

authorized or entitled to pick up these names? In the Japanese high-school history textbooks and study manuals, students are asked to learn no less than 6,000 individual names by heart (for "Japanese history" and "world history", respectively). Teachers take these individual names for granted and ask the students to memorize them as if it were a matter of course, without questioning why and how these names have been previously selected. These distinguished individuals listed in educational materials were selected over and above others who have been excluded and eliminated from the possibility of being remembered in a nation's collective (and compulsory) memory. Furthermore, it is also true that our common knowledge of literature or religion often depends on the sacrifice of the silenced voices of those who were erased from the list of our common memory.

Any written history inevitably conceals unwritten histories and forecloses the latter as if it never existed. Indeed the fact of exclusion and repression of the voiceless is erased from the public sphere, contributing to efface any trace of elimination itself. Here lies a double operation. Firstly, history consists of producing, for better or worse, the fissure between what is described and what is not, or more precisely between what is authorized to survive and what is condemned to oblivion. Secondly, history veils the fissure (crack or fault line, to use Franco MORETTI's terms) itself as if such an intentional elimination had not been conducted. While arbitrarily choosing *de facto* some privileged individuals as memorable and worth being memorized, history pretends *de jure* that the elimination of the excluded was not arbitrary but justifiable. History (or an authorized version of a collective memory imposed upon a nation through its educational system) is woven by concealing these cracks of partialities and fault lines of inequalities. In other words, history is by nature an act of violence inasmuch as it pretends to be infallible and neutral despite its deliberate exclusion of what it claims to be worthless. If the arbitrary choosing is regarded as an act of violence, constituting a 'crime,' any historical description is by definition a 'criminal act.'

You are allowed to say anything, but you are not capable of saying everything. This logical limit shows our doomed incompleteness. The extent of our knowledge only gives evidence to our ignorance which spreads beyond the limit of our knowledge. As mortal creatures without omnipresence or omnipotence, we have to accept our limits. Limited in temporal existence, we are jailed in history and our original sin consists in our inevitable engagement to history. Still this imprisonment in history is not our misfortune but rather the honor and privilege of being human and our dignity as historical beings stems from the responsibility we assume in choosing – arbitrarily – our own limited and incomplete history.

To choose a name in this condition is no less 'criminal' than not to choose it, insofar as it commits a violent act by arbitrarily privileging someone (Itô Hirobumi, who is considered to have been a great Prime Minister in Japan, while being a criminal from a Korean perspective) to the detriment of other possible names (An Chung-gun (baptized Thomas as his Christian name), Korean 'national hero,' who assassinated the Japanese Prime Minister and was a criminal from the Japanese point of view). Still, it is only at the cost of this 'criminal' act of selection and through our arbitrary

engagement in history that we can detect the fissure in history. Having said this, let me now 'criminally' choose such proper nouns as Salman Rushdie or Hitoshi Igarashi (I give here his name in the order as he used to be cited in the West), so as to take my historical responsibility. As we shall see, the 'criminality' of selection, as we have defined here, will turn out to be a key of the Rushdie affair.

## 2. To know Salman Rushdie or not to know

To declare proudly that "I know Salman Rushdie" is no more significant than to confess that "I don't know who Salman Rushdie is." You may have learnt many names by heart to prepare for entrance examinations, and it does not matter if you forget them after having entered university, which is also true for the name of Rushdie. Yet we have to be aware that there are places on earth where professing to know him and his *Satanic Verses* has serious ramifications. Declaring that you know *The Satanic Verses*, i. e. confessing that you have read it through, may constitute a criminal act in certain societies. To know or not to know this fact may not necessarily be insignificant for your own life and death. Although the ban of the novel was officially lifted in Iran, it would be of some interest to know that in the 1990s, you might have been publicly criticized and accused of sacrilege in many Islamic countries just for confessing to have read the novel. "Have you read it? Gosh, you shouldn't have read it," was a reaction I got when I was in Tunisia in 1994. Apparently, the person who reproached me had not read the novel. And how was it possible for him to pass such a categorical judgment of denial on a literary work he did not know, because he had refused to read it? Here, the choice of trying to know a story (if not history) and its story-teller was judged to be criminal. What was wrong, then, with Salman Rushdie's fictional story?

A brief overview of the history (of the story) is needed here. *The Satanic Verses* (1988) by Salman Rushdie, a British national born in Mumbai (1947), was met by protests and auto-da-fe in Bolton (Dec. 2, 1988) and Bradford (Jan. 14, 1989) and other cities in England by Islamic immigrants. Immediately after its publication, it was also banned in India for political concern over religious susceptibilities. Shortly before the forthcoming publication of the novel in the United States, due on Feb. 15, a massive rioting mob tried to assault the U.S. embassy in Islamabad on Feb. 11, which eventually resulted in the pronouncement of a *fatwa* by Āyattulāh KHOMEINĪ (1901–89) on Feb. 14. Though widely described in the West as "sentence to death," the *fatwa* was in reality a legal ruling issued in response to a question. Yet it recommended "all zealous Muslims to execute quickly" those committed to the publication of the novel, which Āyattulāh found "insulting the faith." After Khomeini's edict, a six million dollars reward for Rushdie's head was offered, because he was judged a "shameless renegade (*mortard*)." In London, the novelist and his wife Marianne WIGGINS were immediately taken into protective custody (Appignanesi & Maitland 1989: 3).

Khomeini's intervention shortly before the novel's publication in the U.S. resulted in an immediate escalation of the crisis. Twelve EU foreign ministers published a

communiqué unanimously and unequivocally condemning the *fatwa* as an “incitement of murder” that violated “the most elementary principles that governs relations among sovereign states” (*Independent*, Feb. 23, 1989).<sup>3</sup> Western institutions, both public and private, appealed for the protection of human rights and freedom of expression. The American PEN Club, in particular, accused Iran of “international terrorism” (*US News & World Report*, March 6, 1989)<sup>4</sup> and most Western states, except for Canada, supported the publication of Rushdie’s novel. These Western reactions were perceived from Tehran as “signs of newly conspired Western total arrogance and sacrilege toward the Islam Republic of Iran” (Âyathullâh MONTAZERI, Feb. 25, 1989).<sup>5</sup>

While the Japanese press observed this frontal collision of incompatible values without explicitly taking position in the debate, the publication of the first volume of the Japanese translation of *The Satanic Verses* came to the agenda on Jan. 16, 1990. This provoked protest by the Islamic Association of Pakistanis in Japan on Jan. 11, and Jeanni PALMA, Italian promoter of the publication, was publicly threatened and attacked at the Foreign Press Club conference at Yûrakuchô, in downtown Tokyo on Jan. 13. Faced with this situation, both the Japan Book Publishers Association and the Japanese PEN Club refrained from actively supporting the publication, despite the request made by their Western headquarters. The Japanese PEN’s reluctance to follow the Western headquarters’ request suggests its unusual hesitation. At the death of Âyatullâh Khomeini on June 3, 1989, Ali Hashemi RAFSANJANI, then President of the Iranian Parliament, declared that the withdrawal of the *fatwa* was unconceivable. Still the emotional excitement seemed to have gradually been appeased and the controversy was thought to have lost its tension, when the assassination of Hitoshi Igarashi, Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses*, occurred on July 11, 1991.

### 3. The Revelation of the Rushdie Affair

Rushdie was condemned of religious sacrilege by many Muslim authorities and believers while he was regarded by many Western opinionates as a symbol of freedom of expression and his novel was identified with the final fortress of Western secular democracy (as opposed to theocracy). The American PEN Club was especially outspoken as it insisted upon the publication of the novel at any cost, as if by not doing so, democracy would otherwise be lost once and for all. The Western insistence on freedom of expression was, in turn, interpreted by Tehran as malicious provocation and damage done to the Islamic belief.

Rushdie’s double identity triggered the aggravation. (1) From the Islamic *Um’ma* viewpoint, Rushdie as an ex-Muslim apostate or renegade could be legitimately ‘purged’ by a *fatwa*, which could be enforced beyond the border of any nation-state. (2) In contrast, the supporters of Western international law asserted that under its

<sup>3</sup> The meeting was held on Feb. 20, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> The meeting was held on Feb. 22, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Japanese translation in *Asahi Newspaper*, Feb. 26, 1989 (retranslation into English is mine).

legal system, it found such a ‘purge’ to be an unacceptable violation of human rights. (3) By the same token, the ‘evilness’ of Rushdie’s novel (if it were ‘evil’ at all) would not justify massive assassinations by Muslim fundamentalists, who believe in Khomeini’s authority. (4) It is nonetheless true, however, that the freedom and relative safety Rushdie enjoyed in England caused many ‘innocent casualties’ in India and Pakistan, even if they were victims of political abuse or manipulations. (5) It would also be a short-cut argument to declare (as did many American news media) that Rushdie was totally innocent because it was Emâm<sup>6</sup> Khomeini, ruler of the ‘evil empire,’ who had ‘sentenced him to death.’ (6) In turn, Khomeini’s authority which was grounded in the Iranian Islamic Revolution, did not permit him to remain silent any longer in the face of the riots provoked, or manipulated, or in protest to, or under the pretext of, Rushdie’s novel. (7) Furthermore, some Islamists saw that the Western freedom of expression was nothing but the result of the corruption and the degradation of its secular society to which nothing is sacred any more. (8) This in turn was countered by Western secular observers to conclude that the ideal of the holy Islam was no more than a religious fanaticism and a political dictatorship totally lacking in tolerance. Such are, in brief, the contradictions which the Rushdie affair revealed.

The real achievement of the Rushdie affair, if not that of Rushdie’s novel, resides in its revelation of such contradictions. They are interconnected with each other and inscribed in Rushdie’s own destiny in the so-called post-modern borderless world. There is indeed a deep-rooted vicious circle between restricting freedom to prevent religious sacrilege and permitting sacrilege for the sake of freedom. Entangled in this dilemma, *The Satanic Verses* ceased to be a literary work and was reduced to an icon of propaganda for ‘freedom of expression,’ as Tehran suspected with some relevance. The novel was no more than “empty symbols: symbols that at the same time are the prisoners of a Western liberal conscience and hostages to an Islamic fundamentalist orthodoxy,” as Homi BHABHA declared (*New Statesman*, March 1989).<sup>7</sup> “Freedom of expression has become a fetish,” and Rushdie is brought “into the position of enforced martyrdom,” observed John EZARD (*Guardian*, March 7, 1989). Rushdie was ‘punished’ precisely for his (un-fortunate) merit of revealing the incompatible confrontation of values which had remained concealed for so long. As an incarnation of border-crossing multiple identities, he was exposed (“irradiated” as he wrote in “Out of the Whale”)<sup>8</sup> to the danger he revealed himself, a danger which had taken root in his own uprooted and deracinated/alienated existence.

<sup>6</sup> From the Islamic theological point of view, Igarashi insists on the necessity of distinguishing Emâm from Imâm. See his ‘Explanation’ to his Japanese translation of *The Satanic Verses*, vol. 1 (Igarashi 1989–90 vol. 1: 293–295). The use of ‘Emâm’ here implies the accusing person’s unwillingness of accepting the authority that Khomeini was exercising as ‘Imam’ in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Further see Igarashi 1990: 48–53.

<sup>7</sup> For more details, see Inaga 1989: 172–197.

<sup>8</sup> Rushdie, Salman: *Imaginary Homelands*, London: Penguin, 1991, 100 (1984). The Japanese translation of Salman Rushdie’s ‘Out of the Whale’ was published in *Heureka*, Nov. 1989.

#### 4. The Choice of Hitoshi Igarashi

What was then the intention of the Japanese translator who dared to "put his nose into this intricate case?"<sup>9</sup> (as he said himself). According to the afterword to his translation, he was searching for a third alternative as an Islamic scholar, and locating himself between the frontal collision of Western and Islamic worldviews. "Isn't it our task as Japanese to intervene into the affair, when the Western and Islamic worlds find themselves in a deadlock? Isn't the intervention indispensable so as to clarify the points at issue and to "internationalize" the affair? If the "internationalization" of the Suez Canal was a bad case, the "internationalization" of this kind must be a good one." (Igarashi 1989–90: 290) The publication of a reliable Japanese translation would serve as a necessary touchstone to establish, as Igarashi believed with some megalomaniac assumption, "a mutual respect between Emâm Khomeini and Mr. Rushdie, which would hopefully bring the deadlock to an end" (*Eureka*, Nov. 1989, p. 148; English translation is mine).

Contrary to the Western view, as well as in opposition to Islamic presumption, Igarashi's intentions weren't based on the Western political dogma of 'freedom of expression.' On the contrary, Igarashi manifested his fundamental disagreement with the *Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948 and he shared the same opinion with Islamic thinkers and statesmen who criticized and refused to ratify it. While the *Declaration* states that "all human beings are born equal," it must be modified to read that "all human beings *should* be born equal,"<sup>10</sup> said Igarashi, given that human slavery and inequality still subsist on earth. Moreover, he added, it is arrogant, from the Islamic point of view, to declare such right without paying due respect to its source, God Almighty.

As far as I know, no other person in defense of Rushdie's novel so openly criticized the Western cause of human rights as Igarashi did. Yet, logically speaking, his criticism of the Western cause did not automatically strengthen nor justify his defense of the novelist against Islamic accusations. Nonetheless, Igarashi tried to refute the Islamic condemnation of Rushdie. In this respect, he appears as the defender of a notion of modern Western literature which had established itself as the achievement of liberation from religious dogma and proscriptions. Yet Igarashi's defense has its particularity, because it attempts at rehabilitating the novelist from within an Islamic point of view. Paradoxically, the relevance of his philological judgment was based on his lack of social competence in Islamic world, as he remained an outsider to the believers' *Um'ma* community. (Despite his deep understanding of Islam and his familiarity with Iranian society, Igarashi remained non-Muslim. To the consternation of the Muslim people, this happens frequently with the Japanese, and some pious Muslims living in Japan find it intorelable).

<sup>9</sup> Igarashi's 'explanation' to his translation of *The Satanic Verses*, vol. 1 (Igarashi 1989–90 vol. 1: 290). Translation into English is mine.

<sup>10</sup> Igarashi, 'Explanation,' *The Satanic Verses*, vol. 1 (Igarashi 1989–90: vol. 1: 297–298). English Translation is mine.

Igarashi did not perceive *The Satanic Verses* as a malicious fiction or a sarcastic parody of the *Qur'ân* (as the condemnation maintained), but as the spiritual record of a frustrated exile.<sup>11</sup> In his love and hatred – balanced between the homeland he rejected and the unfamiliar Old Empire to which he is now confined – "Rushdie composed a sort of reversal of E. M. FOSTER's *Passage to India*." Although Rushdie's own defense claims that it is only a fiction, Igarashi reasons that "his novel represents one of the dimensions of Islam and the novel finds its place at the extreme limit of the sphere of English Literature – or more precisely, literature written in English" (Igarashi, 1990: 6, 20, 56, The translation is mine).

Here Igarashi did not explicate the "Islamic dimension" in question. Yet his books like *Ecriture du mysticisme* (1989) provide us with the key. Being a student of Greek philosophy, Igarashi certainly had in mind the expulsion of poets from the republic by Plato. Likewise, it is a common destiny of prophets to be rejected from their home. Rushdie's novel, beginning with the fall of "Gibril" from the airplane, metaphorically subscribes to the fall of the Archangel Gabriel, followed by the story of a soul in forced exile incarcerated in a corrupted Western city (London). Feti BENSLAMA, Tunisian psychiatrist, detects here a parallel with the trials the Prophet Muhammad had to undergo during his *hejrae*.<sup>12</sup> The writer Abdelwahab MEDDEB, also a Tunisian, for his part, finds here a similarity with Suhrawardî's *Imprisonment in the West* which he experienced in Kairouan.<sup>13</sup> These comparisons permit them to locate Salman Rushdie at the extreme end of the lineage of Islamic mystics stemming from BASTÂMI and HALLÂJÎ, famous Islamic historical figures who were executed as heretics.

By the same token, Igarashi seems to detect affinities between Salman Rushdie's deracinated existence and a famous elegy by RÛMÎ, the *Song of the Reed*.<sup>14</sup> The mystical poet listens to the reed singing the sorrows of its deracinated vagabondage. So long as it could stay on the reed field where it grew, it could not sing. To become a musical instrument, it must be cut and taken away. But the music it now plays is the song of the pain it experienced. The poet shares with the reed the sorrows of parting, the suffering of his existence. Every human being is nothing but a reed (Pascal), deracinated from its "ground (i.e. from God Almighty)."<sup>15</sup> Its 'presence' bears witness to an 'absence,' like a flute which has lost its beloved player. (The creation of a novel may imply the fact that the novelist is, by definition, separated from God). Although Igarashi never mentioned this elegy in discussing Salman Rushdie, the resonance between

<sup>11</sup> Igarashi, 'Explanation,' *The Satanic Verses*, vol. 1 (Igarashi 1989–90: vol. 1: 284–285). English Translation is mine.

<sup>12</sup> Benslama 1994; Japanese translation by Nishitani Osamu (Benslama 1994b: 53–54).

<sup>13</sup> Abdelwahhab Meddeb, "En attendant une autre communauté," *Pour Rushdie*, Paris: La Découverte, 1993: 217–221. Also his conversation with the author in Hamamet on May, 1992 and in Paris on June 1993. Cf. Benslama 1994b: 56.

<sup>14</sup> Rumi, *Mathnawî-ye MaCnawî*, Teheran edition, established by Badi' zZamân Furûzânfar in Persian, is quoted and translated by Igarashi 1989: 218–226. English translation by R. A. Nicholson, *The Mathnawî of Jalâlû'd din Rumi*, E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1926. Cf. Inaga 1995a: 327–328.

<sup>15</sup> Inaga 1995a: 334.

the two seems undeniable. We can detect here Igarashi's hidden sympathy to the suffering of the novelist, as an exiled expatriate writer.

### 5. Intellectual Neg – Entropy and Negative Capability

In translating *The Satanic Verses*, Igarashi confessed that “an intellectual should not think about the ultimate consequence of one's work. I for my part, translated it as I thought that the work is valuable as a novel.”<sup>16</sup> At first glance, this seems arbitrary and irresponsible, but scholars in German philology may easily notice that the first phrase comes from Friedrich Nietzsche. A deeper reading shows that this statement should be recognized as a clear manifest of the Japanese translator's personal conviction. And when framed within our initial question of intellectual responsibility, it will become clear that Igarashi was ready to assume his responsibility through his ‘criminal’ act of ‘choosing’ Salman Rushdie.

“Under violently shaky circumstances, at the center of turmoil, a man exposing himself to harsh criticism, or even risking his own life, breaks through the crisis with intelligence. To borrow a term from mathematical topology, this responsibility makes of him a ‘particular point’ in terms of a geometrical *locus*. The Islamic history and heritage is a complex composed of loci of these particular points.” This is a passage from Igarashi's “Iranian Requiem.”<sup>17</sup> We shall see later what this ‘particular point in the geometrical *locus*’ means. At present, let us simply indicate that in this text, Igarashi is not referring to Salman Rushdie, but he is addressing his personal homage to the memory of the late Âyatullâh Khomeinî. Being a close eyewitness of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Igarashi thought it to be his moral duty to pay a respectful tribute to the deceased religious teacher. Igarashi also reminds us that the “charge (*amâna*)” in Arabic is derived from “belief” (*imân*). Igarashi did not conceal his sympathy to the Middle-Eastern “readiness” to one's destiny.<sup>18</sup> “The final judgment being entrusted to God, a calm resignation, which is inseparable from resolution and readiness, shows a way of assuming one's own responsibility, where one's own perdition is previously calculated and input” (Igarashi 1991: 164, Translation is mine).

Recognizing in this attitude a mechanism of ‘intellectual neg-entropy’ – our Japanese scholar appears here as a student in natural science –, Igarashi related it with a term coined by a famous English Romantic poet, John Keats. Indeed it was the “negative capability” or, according to Igarashi's reinterpretation, “a resolution of assuming negative matters and taking charge of it”, which seems to have prompted him to the translation of the apparently anti-Islamic and controversial novel.<sup>19</sup> To accept the sufferings and to sustain the violent energy which the novel manifests –

<sup>16</sup> Igarashi, reported in *Asahi Newspaper*, Jan. 21, 1990. Translation is mine.

<sup>17</sup> “Iranian Requiem” is included in Igarashi, 1989a: 278–79. Translation is mine.

<sup>18</sup> Igarashi 1991: 164. Translation is mine. Igarashi would not have accepted the current expression of “Middle-Eastern fatalism,” as the term ‘fatalism’ implies a passive surrender to one's destiny.

<sup>19</sup> Igarashi 1986: 216–217, cf. Igarashi 1989: 110–113. Translation is mine. Cf. Inaga 1992: 332–334.

those were the intellectual tasks Igarashi voluntarily assumed as an Islamic scholar, at the risk of becoming the victim of it. In this sense Igarashi was fully aware of his ‘crime’ of arbitrarily choosing the name of Salman Rushdie and his *Satanic Verses* in token of his deliberate involvement in the affair.

### 6. Literature and Crime

“One of the side effects of the mass media,” Umberto ECO observed in relation to the Rushdie affair, “is that they bring fiction to people who've never read a novel before, and who don't share in the fictional agreement, the suspension of disbelief.” “There were probably,” he added, “no more than 50.000 people in any country who belonged to the category of novel-readers” (*Observer*, Oct. 1, 1989).<sup>20</sup> I am not quite sure of the statistics Umberto Eco compiled without giving any evidence.<sup>21</sup> And yet, as to the lack of familiarity with the terms of the ‘fictional agreement,’ Umberto Eco's observation seems to be fully confirmed. In secularized ‘modern’ Western societies, a piece of literature cannot constitute any blasphemy or defamation to the honor of a person so far as the piece belongs to the category of fiction. Still the Rushdie affair brought to the fore the fact that this ‘fictional agreement’ was far from acceptable to many Muslim populaces. At the beginning of this essay, we have pointed out a potential ‘criminality’ in the act of choosing arbitrarily one proper noun at the cost of others. The question now is to ask the reason why in many Muslim countries evoking proper nouns of the *Qur'an*, like “Aîsha” or “Mahound” was regarded as a literally criminal act in the case of the Rushdie affair.

In his remarkable essay, *La Fiction troublante: De l'origine en partage* (1994), Feti Benslama raises a fundamental question about the relationship between fiction and reality. The ‘fictional agreement,’ to use Umberto Eco's terminology, tolerates a fiction because it is nothing but a fiction. Despite its claim of privileging literature as an inviolable human right, however, this acceptance of literature as a fiction minimizes in reality the latent and ‘real’ power inherent in literature. In fact, privileging literature as a symbol of freedom of expression reduces a piece of literature into a mere propaganda machine of a certain ideology for the purpose of dogmatic struggle. Defend-

<sup>20</sup> Umberto Eco, “Rushdie Affair,” *Observer*, Oct. 1, 1989. The text is quoted by Ruthvan 1990: 160 and also by Reda Bensmaïa through French translation in *Pour Rushdie* 1993:93 The passage is also analysed by Feti Benslama 1994: 30; 1994b: 25.

<sup>21</sup> According to the minor editor, Shinsensha, mainly specialized in academic publications of religious studies, it is reported that around 20.000 copies had been sold when Igarashi was assassinated. And this was almost synonymous to a commercial failure in the Japanese market (judging from the commission fee). In a country where million sellers were not rare in the 1980s, and where each of the three ‘quality papers’ were enjoying more than 5 million subscribers, the score of 50.000 inhabitants indicated by Eco as the legitimate ‘novel readers’ is at least statistically baseless, if not entirely deprived of symbolic significance (This statement is based on my personal conversation with Umberto Eco in Bologna in 1995).

ing literature from political and religious 'abuse' amounts to admitting that literature is innocuous and harmless, thereby undermining its potential impact.

What is more, the people who started rioting (even if the riots had been provoked by political manipulations) had refused or were quite simply unable to read the novel. This fact reveals the formidable power which a fiction is capable of exercising on the social reality (at the profit of some sectors of politicians and religious ideologues). In the face of this plain fact, the question as to whether Rushdie was a criminal or not, or whether his novel was blasphemous or harmless loses its validity. It is rather the categorical refusal of reading *The Satanic Verses*, and the anger it provoked among many believers that must be taken seriously. Feti Benslama recognizes in this formidable "real effect" ("effet de réel") the truth that fiction is capable of endangering even the life of its author himself.<sup>22</sup> Fiction here reveals itself as refusing to be kept apart from outer realities and violates the protected belt of the 'fictional agreement.' The fact that Rushdie's novel could constitute a real 'crime' testifies to the initial power of literature, the 'power' ("Macht" in Nietzsche) which we have re-defined as 'criminality' (which lies "Beyond Good and Evil").

In the modern era, however, literature seems to have lost its dangerous power of mobilizing people directly for political or religious action. At the cost of obtaining its freedom of expression, literature seems to have been confined to the realm of fiction, thereby losing its potential power of endangering the society as well as its author. To put it another way, it may be said that literature was dwarfed or atrophied and thereby segregated from the realm of religion and confined to an artificial playground so as to harmlessly enjoy the previously given freedom. In exchange to the permission that you are allowed to write whatever you want so far as you respect the 'fictional agreement,' you are now satisfied with a *fictional* 'freedom' which is guaranteed only within the zone of 'literature.' This separation of literature from religion is a definition of 'modernity' in Western societies, as Harold Bloom has demonstrated on many occasions.

What was revealed, then, through the Rushdie affair, was not so much the shame of the Islam in its degradation as the corruption of Western societies. It is in a society where literature can no longer constitute any scandal or crime, that the awful power originally possessed by the literature has been shamelessly confiscated and eventually destroyed. In this sense, the blasphemy Rushdie was blamed for cannot be regarded as a disgrace Islam should be ashamed of, but rather, the 'crime' he committed adds to the glory of Islam. It is to this that Rushdie is deeply inscribed.

## 7. Origin and Sacrilege

The origin of Islam is a kind of 'origination' through which God's utterance was transmitted to human beings. It was thanks to God's arbitrary but merciful 'choice' of an Arab named Muhammad that human beings could have access to the *Qur'ân*

<sup>22</sup> Benslama 1994b: 27.

(which had remained in the realm lying beyond the verbal articulation). The 'criminality' of God Almighty, who committed himself (limitless, by definition) to history (which is inevitably limited in time and space) theologically guarantees the sacred uniqueness of the Holy Scripture, dictated to the Prophet.

According to Benslama, the 'criminality' of Salman Rushdie resides in the fact that by retracing the original prophecy in a negative image, *The Satanic Verses* induced people to awaken their suspicion about the 'fictitiousness' of the origin. (Benslama 1994b: 34–44). And this was by definition a sacrilege. In this essay, I have chosen Igarashi. Igarashi chose Rushdie, and Rushdie had chosen Muhammad as a model for his fiction. But it was not Muhammad who chose God. The Islamic theology insists on the fact that it was God who chose Muhammad as his beloved prophet. If Muhammad had 'chosen' God, it would have been a Supreme Crime of sacrilege, since the *Qur'ân* would then have lost its claim to sacred authority as the Holy Scripture. Here lies the ultimate fissure ('clivage' or fault line)<sup>23</sup> human beings are not allowed to cross or overstep. And Rushdie's "criminality" consisted in breaking the taboo by transgressing this impassable limit separating the human realm from that of God.

The 'criminality' of choosing, which (as we have defined it at the beginning) is a deliberate assumption of inevitable arbitrariness, now turns out to be directly touching upon the core of monotheism. In a Christian context, it would be called the 'Original Sin,' but this notion does not exist in Islam. In the Jewish tradition, it has been forbidden to name what 'should not be named' by anyone, for it would reduce a limitless entity into limited existence, a 'choice' strictly reserved to the will of God Almighty. Isn't this act – to reduce what is timeless and limitless into a limited being confined in a certain time and in a defined space – literally and etymologically a desecration and profanation? This sacrifice constitutes sacrilege. And the sacrilege demands sacrifice for compensation.

It is in this strict sense that Hitoshi Igarashi was chosen by God as a privileged sacrifice for the compensation of the sacrilege made by the *Satanic Verses*. (The headquarters of the Pakistani Muslim Association in Japan publicly recognized the fact by saying that "Igarashi was punished by God").<sup>24</sup> And it would underestimate our Japanese translator if we failed to recognize the fact that Hitoshi Igarashi was fully aware of the whole mechanism of the 'criminality', i.e. violation of the sacredness of the prophecy, as we have just outlined. Indeed, the title of the book he was planning to write at the time of his assassination was *The Structure of Prophecy*. Igarashi was saying: "Etymologically, criticism stems from *krinô*, an act of choosing. To choose the best at the risk of one's own life and under one's own responsibility was what Odysseus did before his long voyage. The criticism is a critical act in the crisis." (1983: 4;

<sup>23</sup> As mentioned earlier these are the key-terms used by Franco Moretti 2000.

<sup>24</sup> A public statement by Rais Shidikki, President of the Association of Pakistanis in Japan. Reported in the weekly, *Shûkan Bunshun*, Aug. 15–22, 1991, p. 185, as well as in *Shûkan Asahi*, July 26, 1991, p. 34. Translation is mine.



1984: 176)<sup>25</sup> Evidently, to have chosen Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* in full awareness of the *Structure of Prophecy* in *Qur'an* was a "critical act in crisis" for Igarashi and he claimed his own critical responsibility by his choice of a 'criminal novel.' Critical responsibility is the synonym of the 'criminality' we defined.

History shows from the Ages of prophets and philosophers that the important task of intellectuals was to perceive the crisis and give warning of it. To recognize a crisis seems to be one of the essential characteristics of knowledge. But history also shows in many cases that such intellectuals risked and lost their lives because of their knowledge. (Igarashi 1984: 4; Igarashi 1991: 158–8)<sup>26</sup>

Igarashi's readiness of assuming responsibility was also a manifestation of his "negative capability." Thus, our Japanese translator of the *Satanic Verses* searched for freedom in suffering for a work of literature and tried to legitimize the freedom of suffering as an essential aspect at the core of the Islamic prophecy.

Guided by his own mystical conviction of Islamic religious practice to which he passionately chose to devote himself, Hitoshi Igarashi chose Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. Through this decision, the Japanese translator seems to have occupied a legitimately "singular position" at the margin of the "geometric locus of the Islamic mystical thought," (Igarashi 1986: 218; cf. Igarashi 1990: 89) where the poets, philosophers and mystics searched for the trace of divinity in their own sufferings as a proof of, and in token of, their separation from God. As it is put in the *Song of the Reed*:

Every one who is left far from his Source  
Wishes back the time when he was united with IT.<sup>27</sup>

And Igarashi Hitoshi, I believe, is now lying in the bosom of his own Source, eternally united with God Almighty.

<sup>25</sup> In both cases Igarashi gives the same expression. The translation is mine.

<sup>26</sup> Once again, Igarashi consciously repeats key terms. The translation is mine.

<sup>27</sup> From Rumi, *Mathnawi-ye MaCnawī*. Igarashi's own translation from the Persian original into Japanese is in Inagashi 1986: 219. Here the quote in English is from R.A. Nicholson's translation. Nicholson 1926. I capitalizes here 'Source' and 'IT' so as to specify the context.

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<sup>28</sup> IGARASHI Hitoshi's books are written in Japanese. The added titles in English or French are tentative translations for the sake of comprehension of those readers not conversant with the Japanese original. 'Écriture' is given as it is in Japanese transcription by Igarashi himself, which I respected here, due to the fact that Igarashi frequently quotes from French literature. For the sake of coherence, the book title including 'écriture' is tentatively translated into French.

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Hans G. Kippenberg

## From Shiite Rituals to Revolution in Iran 1978/79

### Components of a Tradition of Performance

#### Visuals of a Revolution

During the revolution in Iran 1978/79 the International Press agencies distributed strange photos. One photograph shows a young demonstrator holding his bloody hands defiantly aloft (fig. 1). On another photo a shirt stained with blood is shown, allegedly belonging to a demonstrator shot dead by the troops of the Shah (fig. 2).



Fig. 1: Press photo, distributed by UPI on January 31, 1979.<sup>1</sup>

For the participants of these events the meaning of these acts was less strange (Fischer, ch. 5 and 6; Keddie, *Roots of Revolution* 239-258; Tilgner 110-132). Hands or shirts stained with blood are known from the Shiite mourning practices and recall the fate of Imam Husain and his faithful followers during the days in Karbala in 680 A.D./61 A.H., when the small group of steadfast believers had been encircled by the

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in (Kippenberg 247). The caption reads: "Demonstrator displays bloodied hands after Army troops opened fire on crowds protesting a massive military display in central Tehran 1/31 on the eve of the return of the Ayatollah Khomeini from 15 years of exile." A similar scene is found on a photo in (Chelkowski and Dabashi 110).