

12. 20th century fiction I

Second half of the 20th century: background

- Post-war years: great loss of lives; great damage of British cities; general exhaustion and scarcity
- changes after WW2: upper classes have lost much of their wealth during the war and in the post-war years due to high taxation; during the War everyone had to “bring sacrifices” and all were applauded as equally valuable; 1945: Labour Party wins the election. All this contributes to a growing egalitarianism of English society. Slowly, grammar school and university education become more available to people from working class background and education ceases to be connected primarily to the higher classes.
- Cold War and the scare of the atomic bomb (a new threat: the world can end very suddenly)
- disintegration of the British Empire; United States become the world’s leading country; citizens of the Commonwealth countries come to live the UK and English society becomes increasingly more diverse
- the sense of fragmentation (after WW1) changes into a sense of meaninglessness and futility after WW2

In literature:

- boom in literary production and rise of popular culture; diversity of art forms
- influence of French existentialism, theater of the absurd
- starting in the 1960’s, Postmodernism: acceptance of diversity, eclecticism and parody, pastiche, and self-reflectiveness—postmodern art forms are typically aware of themselves as a medium and explore how the representation of experience produces even greater variety; absence of a unifying metanarrative, instead the emphasis is on the multiplicity of experience; the postmodern focus is typically on the self and identity: who I am?—socially, ethnically, sexually, intellectually; identity is seen as constructed and ever changing
- in academic study a similar change has taken place after the rise of New Historicism and revisionist histories: focusing not only on the “official” historical accounts and stories of military and political winners but also on the ordinary people, on marginalized groups and on everyday experience in historical situations

The theater of the absurd left a lasting influence in British drama (and in Western drama in general) but in Britain it coincided, or nearly coincided with another shift that was taking place in theaters and that was ushered with **John Osborne’s** (1924-1994) *Look Back in Anger* (1956), a play which many found shocking at the time. The success of Osborne’s play was made possible by changes that were already going on in Western theater: French existentialist drama, the new American drama by Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller—plays which not only opened a new view of life and society but also experimented with the theatrical form and introduced new themes and techniques. *Look Back in Anger* was the first successful English play that focused on the working class, with its roughness and uncouth vocabulary. This kind of drama has been given the self-explanatory title “kitchen sink realism.” Osborne’s play captures the disillusionment of the post-war (lower class) youth for whom the old “elites” and the elitist stance of some of the Modernists were too remote from their everyday life and concerns. This clash between the sobering reality of post-war life and the former regard for the elite classes of Edwardian times is reflected in the tension in the marriage of Jimmy and Alison Porter.

Jimmy is a working class man and his wife Alison, from an upper class, married him partly as an act of rebellion against the norms of her social circles. Jimmy and Alison love each other but Jimmy acts rudely and continually insults her. Alison confesses to her friend Helen that she is pregnant and Helena telegraphs for Alison’s father to come and rescue her. As Alison leaves Jimmy is in rage; afterwards he attacks Helena and the rage changes into sexual attraction. Helena takes the place of Alison in the household until one day Alison shows up, looking pale, saying that she has lost the baby. Helena is ashamed of what she has done and decides to leave Jimmy; Alison moves back with Jimmy.

The ending is open: it is not at all clear if there is any hope that Jimmy will change in his behavior to Alison or if things will go back to the same old tracks.

Osborne's work came to be seen as an example of the 1950's "Angry Young Men" movement which brought this kind of new writing and focus into British literature. Other authors associated with this development include Kingsley Amis, Allan Sillitoe or John Wain. **Kingsley Amis** (1922-1995) is perhaps the main representative, alongside Osborne; a novelist, poet, and critic. His novel *Lucky Jim* (1954) was one of the first "**campus novel**" in British literature, a genre that gained considerable popularity in the 1950's and onward. Jim Dixon is a young college lecturer in history who gets involved in a series of unfortunate accidents and clumsy actions; the novel satirizes the would-be high standards of the academic elite: again, as in Osborne's play, there is the critical, satirical attitude toward those who have been considered "elite." This story follows a common theme and plot of the works of the Angry Young Men: a young man from a lower class background has been given access to education, becomes an intellectual, is critical of many aspects of the British society but despite his critical attitudes, eventually moves up socially not by his own hard work, but by marrying a woman from a higher class background.

Graham Greene (1904-1991)

Graham Greene's very long life and his prolific output make him one of the most fruitful 20th century British authors but he also achieved his fame by his masterful construction of plot, by his mixture of thrill, suspense, violence and reflections on morality, on man's capacity for good and evil and man's troubled search for God. Greene suffered from bipolar disorder most of his life, he was addicted to medical drugs and to alcohol and he was also torn between the Roman Catholic faith (which he at one point embraced) and his inability to believe in the doctrine. He became a Roman Catholic under the influence of his wife Vivien, quit practicing after several years but remained influenced by Catholicism for the rest of his life. He is often spoken of as a "Catholic" author but that label refers more to his sensibility as a writer and his preoccupation with questions of ethics and faith from a Catholic perspective. Neither his characters nor Greene himself were "good Catholics"; Greene for example abandoned his wife after several years and had many love affairs throughout his life. This is what he said of about being a Catholic author: "Many of us abandon Confession and Communion to join the Foreign Legion of the Church and fight for a city of which we are no longer full citizens."

Greene's unsettled life was not influenced only by his nervous disorder, his addictions and his Catholic sympathies, but also by travels. He worked as a journalist and he traveled over the world: Liberia and Sierra Leone, Southeast Asia, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America; during one period of his life he even gathered information for the British intelligence service. He was also involved in the film industry as a critic and author; many of his books were turned into films. In his travels he visited Czechoslovakia twice, first in February 1948 just during the Communist coup, and then again in January 1969 when he met some of his Czech friends and connections and heard their stories of Communist persecution.

The first novel which became very successful and critically acclaimed was *Brighton Rock* (1938), a criminal story set in Brighton, the popular English seaside resort. Its main character, a young murderer Pinkie, is a ruthless, corrupt gangster who, together with his gang, kills not only the chosen victim, alongside several other people, but later he also kills his bride who was a potential witness of those murders. What makes Pinkie unique as a character is a mixture of his malice and corruption and his Roman Catholic beliefs. Pinkie is obsessed with sin, and the novels makes it clear that good and evil are two real forces struggling against each other.

Greene's next novel, *The Power and the Glory* (1940), depicts a similar conflict between good and evil, related to a religious perspective. Its main protagonist is a "whisky-priest," i.e., a heavy drinking Catholic priest, in the Mexican state of Tabasco at a time when Catholicism is under persecution, and in Tabasco much more so than in other states. This is based on the real historical situation; Greene visited Mexico in 1938 and witnessed it. The whisky priest (whose name we never learn) is going

through the state of Tabasco, trying to minister to people as much as he can while being troubled by his own failures (he drinks too much, he broke celibacy and fathered a daughter). The priest is followed by a lieutenant who is trying to hunt him down and shoot him, which was the rule for priests who refused to give up priesthood. The priest is eventually betrayed by a mestizo who asks him to see a dying man; the lieutenant captures the priest and executes him, proclaiming that he has now cleared the province of priests. The following day, however, another priest arrives in the town and the executed whisky-priest becomes one of the legendary Catholic figures that the local believers talk about with great devotion. So while the lieutenant managed to kill that one particular priest physically, the novel suggests that the Church itself and people's beliefs will prevail.

The whisky-priest is obviously a very problematic Catholic, let alone priest, and the book did meet with some reservations in English Catholic circles. Generally Greene kept using Catholic characters in his novels and most of them are, like the whisky-priest, very troubled figures. Later Greene connected these themes to a critique of colonialism, as in *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), set in West Africa, or his espionage novel called *The Quiet American* (1955), set in Vietnam during the Vietnam War, in which a British journalist finally decides to turn in a young American diplomat-spy to Vietnamese guerilla fighters after he sees that the American was responsible for a car bomb incident in which innocent people were killed. In a number of Greene's novels there is a conflict between the promise of the Catholic church and the promise of Communism or socialism; if Greene offers any reconciliation or resolution to this, it may very well be one expressed in his novel *The Human Factor* (1978), another espionage novel, in which the chief protagonist argues that what is convincing for him is the good, moral individual—what matters is who is a good person, not whether s/he is a Communist or a Catholic.

Doris Lessing (1919-2013)

Lessing is a representative of those British writers who have a mixed cultural background. She was English but her parents lived outside of England: Doris was born in Persia (nowadays Iran) but when she was five her parents moved to what is nowadays Zimbabwe (then called Southern Rhodesia - a British colony in South Africa established in 1923) and she lived there at a farm. She had only little formal education; from her 14th year she learned at home, and then she had some ordinary jobs before she turned to writing. As an adult she moved to England; in the 1940's she was very active in the Leftist circles. She joined the Communist Party but stepped out after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Later she moved away from her leftist views and became interested in religious traditions, especially in Sufi mysticism (an Indian religious tradition with connections to, and influences on Islam). Her writing deals with the issue of colonialism; she is also a feminist writer who explores political issues and the situation of people caught up in difficult social or political situations; she also often uses autobiographical elements in her writing. Her first novel focuses on the theme of race and interracial relationships: *The Grass Is Singing* (1950) is the story of Mary Turner who marries a poor white farmer in Rhodesia in the 1940's and finds farm life unbearable; she is mean to the African workers until she develops a fearful but also flirtatious relationship with one them, who then stabs her to death. Lessing was the author of many novels and short stories; her best known works include *The Golden Notebook* (1962), or the five novels that together make the series called *Children of Violence* (1952-1969), or *The Good Terrorist* (1985) about a London squat, focusing on the radical, leftist main heroine. Lessing is a writer of disillusionment, a sense of disappointed political hopes and the difficulties of women's social situation. Much later in life she was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 2007.

VIDEO

Nobel Prize Doris Lessing interview, start from 1:10 to 3:49 - about *The Grass Is Singing*
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/interview/>

Her 1988 short novel *The Fifth Child* fits in with her focus on disappointment and disillusionment and has been described as a horror story. It is not horror in the sense of supernatural elements or a thriller with murders; instead, it is the disquieting story of a happy family irredeemably torn apart by their dysfunctional fifth child, Ben, who has no ability for social skills, lacks empathy altogether, is mean and selfish without any hope for improvement. The mother, Harriet, faces the complexities of the situation: she feels that her relatives indirectly blame her for giving birth to such an ugly, mean and dangerous child, she also feels, ever since her pregnancy, that her relationship with the child is one of sheer hostility and fight, she realizes that the strain of living with a child like this devastates not only her but also the older four children and her husband, she hates Ben and wishes he were dead, and yet when he is put in an institution where he is being slowly drugged to death, she finds herself unable to leave him there and brings him back home. This is not a heart-warming story about motherly love but a frightening story of a disintegration of a family. At the end of the story Ben makes friends, in a way, with a group of bad boys, they start engaging in criminal activities and Harriet expects they will all disappear soon into the world to become criminals.

Many years later, in 2000, Lessing wrote a sequel called *Ben, in the World* about the further life of Ben, who remains an outsider in the society, essentially vulnerable, despite his dangerous nature.

Ben's story is hopeless but the book makes the reader think about what society has to offer to those who are seriously different, who are a combination of threat and vulnerability, as in Ben's case, and about the lack of alternatives and the lack of options for a family that is facing such a difficult situation. The sequel also raises the danger of scientific abuse.

This is how Harriet experiences the attitude of her wider family who used to come for extended visits to David and Harriet's house:

Just before Ben went to the local secondary modern school, the only school of course that would have him, there was a summer holiday, almost like those in the past. People had written each other, had rung: "Those poor people, let's go there, at least for a week . . ." Poor David . . . always that, Harriet knew. Sometimes, rarely, poor Harriet. More often, irresponsible Harriet, selfish Harriet, crazy Harriet . . .

Who had not let Ben be murdered, she defended herself fiercely, in thought, never aloud. By everything they — the society they belonged to — stood for, believed in, she had had no alternative but to bring Ben back from that place [the mental institution]. But because she had, and saved him from murder, she had destroyed her family. Had harmed her life . . . David's . . . Luke's, Helen's, Jane's . . . and Paul's. Paul, the worst.

Her thoughts circled in this groove.

David kept saying she should simply not have gone up there . . . but how could she not have gone, being Harriet? And if she had not, she believed David would have.

A scapegoat. She was the scapegoat — Harriet, destroyer of her family.

John Fowles (1926-2005)

As a young man in the 1940's Fowles was in military training but instead of entering the army he went to study languages at university, specializing in French. It was during his studies that he became acquainted with the work of the French existentialists, and he was influenced by their thought. He worked as an English teacher, first in Greece and later in England (English as second language) and in the 1950's he started to write fiction. The first book he published was *The Collector* (1963), a novel relying on the conventions of a thriller, which tells of a mediocre, basically harmless man, Clegg, a collector of butterflies, who unexpectedly wins a large sum of money in a lottery and decides to make up for all that he has missed in life: he kidnaps a beautiful young woman, Miranda, and keeps her locked in a house. He doesn't abuse her but cares for her well-being. She is in all respects his superior: she is young and beautiful but also educated, intelligent and self-assured, so that she eventually becomes something like his teacher. He proposes to marry her but Miranda tries to seduce him and

discovers that he is sexually impotent. Miranda then catches the flu, Clegg doesn't want to go for the doctor and Miranda dies. While this sounds to some extent like a mediocre thriller, Fowles writes the story in such a way that it is also a commentary on class differences, social deprivation and lack of education (Clegg) and the advantage of the privileged (intelligence and education, although also a degree of pride and arrogance—Miranda). In the names of characters, the story constantly and explicitly references Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (Miranda, Frederick Clegg—and Miranda nicknames him Kaliban).

Fowles' second novel was *The Magus* (1966). Fowles began to write it even before *The Collector* but finished and published only after it. It is a novel about an English teacher on one of the Greek islands (like Fowles himself was) who "falls prey" to an eccentric Greek millionaire Conchis. Conchis prepares and directs an incredible theater play that involves the entire island and in which long dead characters reappear, characters change identities etc., so that it is no longer possible to know for certain what is fiction and what is reality. Conchis becomes the all-powerful ruler through this because no one is any longer able to recognize what is true and what is "fiction"—which is of course a meta-textual reflection on the nature of art and literature as such, for this is precisely what the novel itself does: it constructs a false reality. The theater orchestrated by Conchis in effect shatters our illusions about absolute knowledge. As such, the novel is an important text in postmodern literature.

The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969) is set in Victorian England and tells of the love triangle between Charles Smithson, his fiancée Ernestina Freeman and a mysterious woman called Sarah Woodruff, known as the "French Lieutenant's woman." It is not, however, a historical novel but uses techniques typical for postmodern writing. This is especially the role of the narrator and the self-conscious nature of the narrative, the novel's self-referentiality; there are also anachronistic references connecting the time of the plot in 1867 with the present time of Fowles as the author (and of the reader). Another technique typical for postmodernism is the use and layering of different kind of materials: the novel not only narrates the 19th century plot but also gives commentary on the intellectual climate of the Victorian society, using both contemporary sources like Darwin or Marx and 19th century literary authors, but also gives commentary on the historical details of everyday life in the 19th century, commenting on the dreary living conditions of the working classes, for example, or on sexual practices of the era. The characters themselves can be taken as representatives of Victorian stock characters: Charles as the typical Victorian gentleman, and Ernestina as a typical Victorian lady. Sarah Woodruff is an elusive character; she attracts and also escapes Charles, just like the novelist, who plays tricks with his readers. The narrator offers three different endings to the novel: the first is a conventional one, in which Charles is married to Ernestina (this ending is later dismissed by the narrator); a second one, a happy one which suggests that Charles and Sarah might be happily married (Sarah has a baby born out of her relationship with Charles); and a third, tragic ending, in which Charles and Sarah part from each other in estrangement. The narrator himself appears in the ending as one of the characters in the story as a wealthy, snobbish looking manager who adjusts his watch and so seems to cancel out the second ending:

It is a time-proven rule of the novelist's craft never to introduce any but very minor new characters at the end of a book. (...) I did not want to introduce him; but since he is the sort of man who cannot bear to be left out of the limelight, the kind of man who travels first class or not at all, for whom the first is the only pronoun, who in short has first things on the brain, and since I am the kind of man who refuses to intervene in nature (even the worst), he has got himself in—or, as he would put it, has got himself in *as he really is*. I shall not labour the implication that he was previously got in as he really wasn't, and is therefore not truly a new character at all; but rest assured that this personage is, in spite of appearances, a very minor figure—as minimal, in fact, as a gamma-ray particle. (...) And now, as he negligently supports himself on the parapet, he squeezes the tip of his nose lightly between the knuckles of his beringed first and middle fingers. One has the impression he can hardly contain his amusement. He is staring back towards Mr Rossetti's house [where Charles and Sara just had a conversation leading toward their reunion]; and with an almost proprietary air, as if it is some new

theatre he has just bought and is pretty confident he can fill. In this he has not changed: he very evidently regards the world as his to possess and use as he likes.

But now he straightens. This *flanerie* in Chelsea has been a pleasant interlude, but more important business awaits him. He takes out his watch—a Breguet—and selects a small key from a vast number of a second gold chain. He makes small adjustments to the time. It seems—though unusual in an instrument from the bench of the greatest of watchmakers—that he was running a quarter of an hour fast. It is doubly strange, for there is no visible clock by which he could have discovered the error in his own timepiece. But the reason may be guessed. He is meanly providing himself with an excuse for being late at his next appointment. A certain kind of tycoon cannot bear to seem at fault over even the most trivial matters.

He beckons peremptorily with his cane towards an open landau that waits some hundred yards away. It trots smartly up to the kerb beside him. The footman springs down and opens the door. The impresario mounts, sits, leans expansively back against the crimson leather, dismisses the monogrammed rug the footman offers towards his legs. The footman catches the door to, bows, then rejoins his fellow-servant on the box. An instruction is called out, the coachman touches his cockaded hat with his whip-handle.

And the equipage draws briskly away.

Salman Rushdie (born 1947)

Rushdie was born in Bombay, India; his parents were from Kashmir and they were intellectuals, by tradition Muslim but themselves largely non-religious. Rushdie went to England to study at high school and university and he lived in England for most of his life; for the last 20 years he has lived in New York City. He first worked as a copywriter for a marketing agency; at that time he also started to write fiction. His writing typically deals with themes and topics related to India, his original homeland, and with Indian characters coming to England. He draws on the traditions of magic realism, the picaresque novel, and postmodern writing techniques; the style of his novels is usually comic, surreal, a mixture of dream and reality, history and fantasy and satire; his narrative technique often employs fragmentation and digression. His first successful novel was *Midnight's Children* (1981), telling the story of Saleem Sinai, born on midnight August 15, 1947, the very moment when India becomes an independent country. He discovers that because of that he has supernatural powers and finds out that there were a total of 1,001 midnight children like him who were born around that midnight and that they also have these supernatural powers in various degrees. We also learn the family history before his birth and how the midwife changed the name tags of Saleem and another boy born at the same time so that each ends up growing in the other's family until the exchange is revealed many years later. The book ends with Saleem going to be married to his faithful companion and listener Padma, after many wild episodes, love affairs and military fights and a memory loss, on the day when he turns 31 and India celebrates the 31st anniversary of its independence. Saleem predicts that on that day he will blow up and disappear. Interspersed through the basic plot line are references to real characters from Indian history, like Indira Gandhi and her alleged policies of forced sterilization and oppression of certain minority communities, or there are fictional historical events like Saleem's uncle performing a military coup in Pakistan.

Shame (1983) is a counterpart to *Midnight's Children*, a novel about Pakistan, which was created in 1947 as an independent country to solve the religious "problem" of independent India: Pakistan was meant to be a country for Muslims, and the Hindus were supposed to stay in India. Thus, many millions of people were relocated within just a few months. Rushdie's own family lived in Pakistan for some time and Rushdie would go visit them there. He claims never to have liked the country. The novel's central character is Omar Khayyam Shakil; his three mothers and an unknown father, who we learn was an Englishman, are a representation of the multi-ethnic heritage that people like Rushdie have. Omar eventually marries Sufiya Zinobia Hyder, who as a character represents Pakistan: "a

miracle that went wrong,” a girl born in a Muslim community in Pakistan—a shame to her mother: a daughter, not a son. Moreover, Sufiya gets a brain fever as a child which leaves her mentally retarded. Her other prominent characteristic is that she blushes. She is the very embodiment of shame.

The narrator comments freely on the process of writing and at what he is trying to say, on how he invents his characters and lets them develop. Here is a central comment on the novel’s main theme, shame:

Not so long ago, in the East End of London, a Pakistani father murdered his only child, a daughter, because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain. The tragedy was intensified by the father’s enormous and obvious love for his butchered child, and by the beleaguered reluctance of his friends and relatives (all “Asians”, to use the confusing term of these trying days) to condemn his actions. Sorrowing, they told radio microphones and television cameras that they understood the man’s point of view, and went on supporting him even when it turned out that the girl had never actually “gone all the way” with her boyfriend. The story appalled me when I heard it, appalled me in a fairly obvious way. I had recently become a father myself and was therefore newly capable of estimating how colossal a force would be required to make a man turn a knife-blade against his own flesh and blood. But even more appalling was my realization that, like the interviewed friends etc., I, too, found myself understanding the killer. The news did not seem alien to me. We who have grown up on a diet of honour and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to peoples living in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy: that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altars of their pride. (And not only men. I have since heard of a case in which a woman committed the identical crime for identical reasons.) Between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn; meteorological conditions at both these poles are of the most extreme, ferocious type. Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence.

And at the end of the novel, we see this acted out in the plot, when Sufiya comes to her husband Omar, after a horrific scene of killings. Omar’s three brothers murder cruelly the man who killed Omar’s younger brother, in revenge; the three mothers disappear, the house is plundered by a mob and Omar wakes up, ill, just to see Sufiya coming to him as a beast into which she turns from time to time:

There were strange screams. He heard them rise to their peaks and then die with uncanny abruptness, and then he knew what was coming into the house, something that could freeze a shriek in the middle, something that petrified. Something that would not, this time, be sated before it reached him, or cheated, or escaped from; that had entered the night-streets of the city and would not be denied. Something coming up the stairs: he heard it roar.

He stood beside the bed and waited for her like a bridegroom on his wedding night, as she climbed towards him, roaring, like a fire driven by the wind. The door blew open. And he in the darkness, erect, watching the approaching glow, and then she was there, on all fours, naked, coated in mud and blood and shit, with twigs sticking to her back and beetles in her hair. She saw him and shuddered; then she rose up on her hind legs with her forepaws outstretched and he had just enough time to say, “Well, wife, so here you are at last,” before her eyes forced him to look.

He struggled against their hypnotic power, their gravitational pull, but it was no use, his eyes lifted, until he was staring into the fiery yellow heart of her, and saw there, just for an instant, some flickering, some dimming of the flame in doubt, as though she had entertained for that tiny fragment of time the wild fantasy that she was indeed a bride entering the chamber of her beloved; but the furnace burned the doubts away, and as he stood before her, unable to move, her hands, his wife’s hands, reached out to him and closed.

His body was falling away from her, a headless drunk, and after that the Beast faded in her once again, she stood there blinking stupidly, unsteady on her feet, as if she didn’t know that all the stories had to end together, that the fire was just gathering its strength, that on the day of reckoning the judges are not exempt from judgment, and that the power of the Beast of shame cannot be held for

long within any one frame of flesh and blood, because it grows, it feeds and swells, until the vessel bursts.

And then the explosion comes, a shock-wave that demolishes the house, and after it the fireball of her burning, rolling outwards to the horizon like the sea, and last of all the cloud, which rises and spreads and hangs over the nothingness of the scene, until I can no longer see what is no longer there; the silent cloud, in the shape of a giant, grey and headless man, a figure of dreams, a phantom with one arm lifted in a gesture of farewell.

This is Rushdie's concluding parable of shame and the way it produces violence. It can also be read as a reverse image of that story of the father who killed his daughter because she brought disgrace on her family.

Rushdie's most famous book are *The Satanic Verses* (1988), a book which gave rise to a wave of religious violence years before 9/11 and all the ensuing attacks. The story follows two Indian actors Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha; as they travel from Bombay to London their airplane is hijacked and explodes, and Gibreel and Saladin fall to the ground and are transformed into an angel and into the devil; these categories are problematized as Gibreel is perpetually torn between his desire to believe and his inability to do so. Saladin represents the tension between Bombay and London, the East and the West, never reconciled. In the end the categories of good and bad are questioned when the "good" Gibreel kills his girlfriend and himself, while the "bad" Saladin returns home and reconciles with his father. Again, it is a very postmodern text, breaking up all notions of coherence, unity and linear development. The characters exist simultaneously in different time periods and places, the book continuously thwarts readers' expectations of plot development, recognizable characters and predictable narrative.

The Satanic Verses contain a lot of commentary on the Prophet Mohammed, who is represented in the novel by the character of Mahound, a distracted and troubled figure, and the wives of the Prophet Mohammed are paralleled by female prostitutes in the novel. (It should be added that Rushdie is not referencing only the Islamic tradition but in a similarly daring way he, for example, refers to Margaret Thatcher as Mrs Torture.) In Muslim countries the book has been banned (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and elsewhere) and in 1989 the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran issued a fatwa on Rushdie, sentencing him to death under Islamic law and offering a bounty for his death. Rushdie then lived with a false identity and was under police protection for the following ten years; later he published a memoir of that time called *Joseph Anton*, which was his false name then. Rushdie survived the period unharmed but several other people associated with the book were attacked, and a translator was assassinated.

For some years the danger seemed to have subsided but in 2022 Rushdie was attacked during a public reading in New York by a man with a knife. Rushdie survived the attack but was seriously wounded, he lost sight in one eye and one of his arms has been permanently damaged. Rushdie has been a lifelong advocate of the freedom of speech and in 2023 he was awarded the Freedom to Publish Award in Britain in recognition of his lifetime struggle for the freedom of speech. He created a video message for that opportunity where he once again argues for the importance of free speech and free knowledge and argues especially against the ban on books that is currently happening in Florida. He made the same appeal later on when he was awarded the Centennial Courage Award by PEN America.

YOUTUBE:

Author Salman Rushdie warns against threat of freedom of expression, by USA Today

1 min

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMR962OMSa4>

Bibliography

- Abrams, M. H. (gen. ed.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature. The Major Authors*. 5th edition. New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1987.
- Acocela, Joan. "Graham Greene's Dark Heart." *The New Yorker*, March 15, 2021. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/03/22/graham-greenes-dark-heart>
- Baker, Stephen. "Salman Rushdie: History, Self and the Fiction of Truth." In: *Contemporary British Fiction*, eds. Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew. Malden, MA; Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007. Pp. 145-157.
- Carter, Ronald and McRae, John: *The Routledge History of Literature in English*. 2nd edition. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Denčevová, Ivana Chmel. "Byl spisovat Graham Greene v Československu vítaný, nebo ne?" *Český rozhlas Plus*, July 29, 2020. Available at: <https://plus.rozhlas.cz/byl-spisovatel-graham-greene-v-ceskoslovensku-vitany-nebo-ne-8236695>
- Hilský, Martin. *Současný britský román*. Praha: H+H, 1992.
- Rushdie, Salman. "Imaginary Homelands." *London Review of Books*, October 7, 1982, vol. 4 no. 19. Available at: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v04/n18/salman-rushdie/imaginary-homelands>
- Sanders, Andrew: *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. 3rd edition. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Stříbrný, Zdeněk. *Dějiny anglické literatury*. Volume 1 and 2. Praha: Academia, 1987.