

Playing Hide and Seek with Names and Selves in  
Salman Rushdie's *Joseph Anton, A Memoir*

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The British government's protection of Rushdie after Khomeini's *fatwa* came at a cost: Rushdie was forced to change his name. Years later he tells the story of the secret life he led by revealing the names of his near and dear as if this restitution of reality would remake and reposition his self tossed between fantasy and fanaticism in a globalized world. Like Jhumpa Lahiri's, Rushdie's American experience has helped him find a creative way out of the drama of naming and identity he undergoes as a migrant writer.

Keywords: life writing; *roman à noms*; name drama; unnamings; renaming; invention of lineage

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Jugando al escondite con los nombres y las identidades en  
*Joseph Anton, A Memoir*, de Salman Rushdie

La protección de Rushdie por el gobierno británico, a raíz de la *fatwa* de Jomeini, tuvo un coste. Rushdie se vio obligado a cambiar de nombre. Años después, cuenta en esta obra la vida secreta que se vio forzado a llevar, revelando los nombres de sus parientes y amigos, como si esta restitución de la realidad pudiera reconstruir y reubicar su yo, zarandeado entre la fantasía y el fanatismo en un mundo globalizado. Al igual que le sucedió a Jumpa Lahiri, la experiencia estadounidense ayudó a Rushdie a encontrar una salida creativa del drama de nombre e identidad que sufre como escritor migrante.

Palabras clave: escritura de vida; *roman à noms*; drama onomástico; dejar de nombrar; renombrar; invención de linaje

Magic realism, hybridity, polyphony and interlinguistic word play are typical features of the Rushdie brand of writing. Obviously, the most appropriate critical approach to his works would be one that avoids intentional fallacy and positions itself within the poststructuralist postulate of the death of the author. If giving “a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text”, as Barthes contended (1977: 147), Rushdie’s hypertextual fiction, that challenges the familiar mechanisms of smooth reading, stands to gain from not being encumbered by the ostensible weight of authorship. When Rushdie, who is himself a fiercely independent literary critic, and who refutes the psychological orientation of reality (1988: 432), publishes a memoir which retraces his life and works, his readers might wonder what this exercise in life writing means. Indeed the projected novelization of Rushdie’s life by Gabriel García Márquez (Rushdie 2012: 408) might have been a determining factor in his decision to write his life so as to assert his control over it. Besides, his third wife was very unwilling to return some personal photos to him after their divorce (239). The memories attached to these photos were thus locked away and the probability of a mis- or false representation of these by her at a later stage existed. If monumental biographies of famous authors written by critics establish their immortal place in literary history, Rushdie’s memoir, brought out at age sixty-five,<sup>1</sup> is both a literary testimony and a testament, and vicariously fulfils his wish to write a novel with an eponymous title like the classics *David Copperfield*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Jones*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Daniel Deronda* and *Oliver Twist*.<sup>2</sup> It is also a homage paid to departed loved ones and friends who stood by him during trying times.<sup>3</sup> However, Rushdie resorts to a third-person singular narrative voice and presents it as the memoir of a fictive character, *Joseph Anton*. Although this narrative position gives him the necessary (albeit minimal in this case) ironical distance between himself as author and himself as narrator, he chooses to talk as much about himself as about the pre and post production lives of his books. In terms of Philippe Lejeune’s definition of autobiography as a “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (1989: 4), *Joseph Anton* cannot be strictly identified as an autobiography. Nevertheless, as Rushdie’s life has been overexposed in the media because of the extraordinary circumstances he has had to confront and overcome, and as he mostly uses real names for the people who mattered and continue to matter in

<sup>1</sup> Compare with Rushdie’s friend and contemporary Paul Auster’s *Winter Journal* (2012), a history of his body and its sensations, written at age sixty-three.

<sup>2</sup> See Seth Lehrer’s interview at the University of California at San Diego on 22 September, 2012. Rushdie’s obsession with names of famous authors came to light during a recent quarrel with Facebook which obliged him to use his first name Ahmed, as in his passport, rather than his middle name Salman for his account. From what we have read about Salman, the Persian scribe of the prophet in *The Satanic Verses*, it is easy to understand Rushdie’s preference for this writerly forename. Rushdie is quoted by the BBC on 15 November, 2011: “Dear Facebook, forcing me to change my FB name from Salman to Ahmed Rushdie is like forcing J. Edgar to become John Hoover” and “Or, if F. Scott Fitzgerald was on Facebook, would they force him to be Francis Fitzgerald? What about F. Murray Abraham?” (<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15733026>>).

<sup>3</sup> Compare with Vikram Seth’s *Two Lives: A Memoir* (2005) and Hanif Kureishi’s *My Ear at His Heart* (2005).

his life and quotes newspaper and television reports, it is difficult, indeed even impossible, for readers to disassociate his role as author, narrator and character and function outside the “autobiographical pact” between author and reader (Lejeune 1989: 14). Besides, the book’s subtitle “A Memoir” reinforces the presupposition of truthfulness. The memoir is a sub-genre of self-writing much like the letters, diary and notebook entries woven into the text of *Joseph Anton*. What is really fictional about the narrative is the posture of utterance, not its diegetic substance or its time frame.

Milan Kundera has posited that the protagonists of novels are the author’s imaginary egos (1986: 51). In that sense, any novel could be viewed as being always already autobiographical. Several of Rushdie’s protagonists, i.e., Saleem Sinai, Omar Khayyám Shakil, Saladin Chamcha, Rashid Khalifa known as The Shah of Blah, Abraham Zogoiby, the Cambridge educated academic Malik Solanka, the besotted singer Orphus Cama and Niccolò Vespucci dubbed the Mogor del Amore, could thus be said to bear the imprint of the storyteller and embattled writer Rushdie. *Joseph Anton* is neither an autobiographical novel, where the distance between the author and the narrator is sufficiently wide for the reader to clearly distinguish between the two,<sup>4</sup> nor a fictitious autobiography where the real is transfigured by the narrator. Moreover, it cannot be considered autofictional because Rushdie does not choose to give preference in this account “to the adventure of a language rather than to the language of adventure”, as Serge Doubrovsky puts it (1997, dustjacket). The typical Rushdian word play is less abundant here compared to the novels and focuses more on proper names. His memoir constitutes a fuzzy, hybrid and postmodern variety of writing that combines elements of autobiography, autofiction, detective fiction and metafiction and blurs the borderline between fact and fiction.

Rushdie’s memoir abounds in names —real names of the near and the dear, politicians, writers, editors, agents, translators, critics, artists, movie makers, stars from show business, journalists, estranged wives and adversaries, pet names, code names, pseudonyms and acronyms, not to mention the names he was called by his adversaries alongside the names of fictional characters— prompting an article in *The Guardian* suggesting that Rushdie should include a proper name index for this “finely produced work of non-fiction” (Sutherland 2012). Indeed Zoe Heller, in her review of the book in the *New York Review of Books*, denounces the name-dropping in the novel by deploring “the lordly nonchalance with which Rushdie places himself alongside Lawrence, Joyce and Nabokov in the ranks of literary merit” (2012). The narrative primarily deals with naming of people, literary works and characters, the invention of new names and the act of renaming. Quite naturally it explores the inheritance and significance of names, the destinies they carry, the burden of a name and the association of name and fame. The relationship between name and life and between name and self, loss of name and self, the aliases and guises that put the sense of the self to test and the retrieval of name and self and the sense of renaissance that accompany it are other narrative strands that crisscross the text. This article will first review the issues

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<sup>4</sup> Compare with Michael Ondaatje’s *The Cat’s Table* (2011).

of naming, unname, and renaming in Rushdie's life and works as represented in his memoir, then argue that his American experience has helped him find a creative way out of the drama of identity as a migrant writer by comparing his book with Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* (2003), and finally sustain that Rushdie's forging of his fictive name, socially discarded but literarily brought back as the title of his text, is his way of inventing a cosmopolitan literary lineage.

It is not unusual for a writer to voluntarily take on a pseudonym to hide his or her gender, ethnic origin or the socio-historical context of writing in order to avoid their interference in the imaginary world of fiction. In contrast to this ideological choice is that of censored and persecuted writers who adopt pen names out of necessity with a view to continuing writing. Indeed, the French translator of *The Satanic Verses* sheltered behind François Rabelais's *nom de plume* Alcofribas Nasier, an anagram of Rabelais's own name (2012: 341). This borrowed name protected the translator from the threat of assassination by Islamic fundamentalists.<sup>5</sup> However, it was at a critical point in his real life that Rushdie was obliged to invent not a penname, but a name to designate himself. After the *fatwa* pronounced by Ayatollah Khomeini on 14 February, 1989, the British secret services that protected him urged him to find an imaginary name which was easy to remember and without any ethnic connotation so he could go incognito. They invented a code name for this metamorphosis of notoriety into anonymity: Operation Malachite. Ironically, this task was novel for the officers of the special branch themselves insofar as they had been trained to protect a high-profile person, not to hide him (171). Unlike a non-Muslim converting to Islam and enthusiastically donning a new first name, Rushdie perceived this sudden and forced name change as an existentially critical process that was both painful and humiliating.

Rushdie first toyed with hybrid names such as Conrad Chekhov, Vladimir Joyce, Marcel Beckett, Frantz Sterne, a fact which in itself says a world about the formative influences on his work of the writers whose forenames or surnames are mentioned here, before settling for Joseph Anton, a name that combines the first names of Conrad and Chekhov. On the one hand, the permutation and combination of various first names and surnames bear witness to the Rushdian penchant for word play and double entendre. On the other, such considerations transcribe the hesitations of a writer compelled to choose between fiction and autobiography:

He had a fragment of a character in a notebook, called Mr. Mamouli. Mr. Mamouli was a benighted, even cursed, Everyman figure whose literary relatives were Zbigniew Herbert's Mr. Cognito and Italo Calvino's Mr. Palomar. His full name was Ajeeb Mamouli —Ajeeb like the Bradford Councilor, whose name meant "odd". Mamouli meant "ordinary". He was Mr. Odd Ordinary, Mr. Strange Normal, Mr. Peculiar Everybody, an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. (163)

<sup>5</sup> Hitoshi Igarashi, the Japanese translator of *Satanic Verses*, was stabbed to death in 1991 and the Italian translator wounded in a knife attack. The novel's Norwegian editor William Nygaard survived a shooting incident in 1993.

Rushdie's choice might have been unconsciously influenced by his witty American wife Marianne Wiggins who excelled in the art of inventing names for herself as a fictional character and the other characters in her novels. The protagonist of her novel *Separate Checks* is Ellery McQueen and, as Rushdie points out, this plays on the pen name of a divided-self pair of Brooklyn cousins, Manfred Lee and Frederick Dannay "who used that alias to disguise names that were themselves aliases for other names" (2012: 127), i.e. Manford Emanuel Lepofsky and Daniel Nathan. According to Rushdie, the name Joseph Anton perfectly expresses the feelings of alienation and melancholy that emanate from Chekhov's writing and connects them with the stoic motto of the sailor James Wait in Conrad's *Nigger of the Narcissus*, which was adopted by Edward Said when he was suffering from cancer: "I must live until I die" (2012: 165). Although Rushdie thought he had invented a new name by combining the first names of Conrad and Chekhov, it is to be noted that 'Joseph Anton' exists as the combined name of two real people. This knowledge that his readers might have does not in any way diminish the transforming force of the moment of name change during which one name is hidden and superseded by another. "The name hidden in its potency possesses a power of manifestation and occultation, of revelation and encrypting. What does it hide? Precisely the abyss that is enclosed within it", Derrida explains in *Acts of Religion* (2002: 213-14). The proverbial lapse in memory of Reverend Mother in *Midnight's Children*, who often punctuates her remarks with a "whatisitsname" as an aural echo to the visual metaphor of the perforated sheet, already points to Rushdie's interest in the act of naming (1981: 41) and the abysmal gap that separates words and things.

In normal circumstances, naming follows birth, a christening that endows an individual with an identity and inserts him in the social fabric. In Rushdie's case, it was clearly an example of autogenesis in which the individual came into being by re-embodiment in a new name that endowed him with a different lineage. On the surface of it, this false invented self looked like a protective shell that would give the threatened writer a new lease on life. But in reality, it caused a malaise insofar as the frontier is thin between being unknown and being a non-person. A renaming involves a necessary and preliminary phase of un-naming. In the case of African slaves, such a process of un-naming and renaming represented a break with the traumatic past and the affirmation of a newly found economic and social freedom (Benston 1982: 3), whereas for an established writer like Rushdie, who had already felt his intimate self as represented by his first name split from his social self as represented by his surname, ever since the "Rushdie affair" broke out (Rushdie 2012: 163; 251), setting aside his true name, denying his origins, and relinquishing the reputation he had made for himself —by working hard as a script writer in advertising companies for thirteen years before publishing his first novel— amounted to a symbolic death. Without a proper name, and therefore without a legal domicile, he lost his democratic right to vote (163). The humiliation of being buried alive, or condemned to live a 'life-in-death' and be on the run, was all the greater when the protection forces planned to evacuate him in a body bag after dental surgery, as if to enact his symbolic death in a literal manner (181). To

make matters worse, actor Meinhardt Raabe actually sent him a death certificate (305) by way of a humorous tribute to Rushdie's book on *The Wizard of Oz* (1992). Rushdie's own immigrant credo as expressed in *The Satanic Verses*, i.e., "to be born again first you have to die" (1988: 3), gets ironically illustrated in this autobiographical sequel where he learns that "to write a book is to make a Faustian contract in reverse" (2012: 91).

Rushdie begins the story of his life *in medias res* in 1989, incorporating flashbacks to his Indian childhood and training in Cambridge and flashforwards to his marriage in 2004 to Padmalakshmi (who seemed to embody "his Indian past and his American future") and to the subsequent divorce from her in 2007. He chooses to stop his narrative on 27 March, 2002, when he felt released, not from the *fatwa* itself,<sup>6</sup> but from the stifling presence of police protection after the Iranian government's official announcement that it would neither support nor stop operations to execute him. This is how Rushdie chose to perform the journey of a return to life and to his true writer's self (2012: 458). However, much as he tried to identify with his new persona of Joseph Anton, the common nickname used by the protection team 'Joe' offended his self-esteem. Even though he had himself invented the alternative and provisional name it was as if Joseph Anton had somehow become the *Doppelgänger* of Salman Rushdie. The symmetrically opposed characters of The Shah of Blah and Khatam Shud in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) had earlier explored this struggle between the hidden and the visible, light and shadow, speech and silence, freedom and captivity. The code name used by the person in charge of security at Penguin Books to refer to Rushdie, Arctic Tern (Rushdie 2012: 149), infuriated him because it reduced him to his exilic condition as migrant. For a writer who invented the poetic and affectionate character of Butt, the hoopoe in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* by drawing inspiration from Farid ud-Din Attar's *The Conference of Birds*, this attributed avian identity was unpalatable precisely because it was so prosaic. Rushdie's anger and frustration echo Chekhov's 'name drama' (Senderowich 1993: 31) when the latter felt torn between the weight of his literary name and the inauthentic existence his career had condemned him to. Chekhov's particular sensitivity to names is illustrated in the names he chose for his characters.

Rushdie benefited from Level 2 protection by the secret service, which meant that he had to change houses for safety about fifty-six times in the course of thirteen years (1989-2002). He even had to duck down behind the kitchen counter to avoid being seen by a farmer at a farmhouse in Wales. For a person who was brought up in a Muslim honor

<sup>6</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini is said to have pronounced it on 14 February, 1989. However it was a typed sheet that his son brandished before the press. The aged Ayatollah was too ill to have read Rushdie's novel. Though the Iranian government had slightly relaxed its position in 1998, a religious decree cannot be declared null and void. The Khordad foundation reaffirmed it in 2006. Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad referred to it in 2007. The recent and changed regime might or might not review this issue. The initial price on Rushdie's head was one million US dollars (Rushdie 2012: 147). This was soon doubled and further increased by 600,000 US dollars in 1998. After the publication of the controversial American video 'Innocence of Muslims' on Youtube in 2012, the bounty has been upped to 3.3 million dollars.

culture, having to hide meant a loss of self-respect that was possibly worse than death (2012: 147). Yet, when, by signing a document, he officially assumed his Muslim identity and thus obliged Muslim leaders, he became aware of his share of responsibility in becoming the Egyptian dentist “Essawy’s zombie” (274), and declared himself guilty of committing “a crime against himself” (276). On another occasion, when he was asked to wear a wig to go out in, he was immediately spotted as “that bastard Rushdie in a wig” (237) due to the ptosis condition he used to suffer from and his drooping eyelids, which physically and incontrovertibly made him stand out. This anecdote gives us a clue as to how, in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995), Rushdie gets to spin a whole theory of reclaiming postcolonial identity by re-appropriating and subverting one of the outrageous names he is called: “*Bastard*: I like the sound of the word. *Bass*, a smell, a stinky-poo. *Turd*, no translation required. Ergo, *Bastard*, a smelly shit, like, for example, me” (1995: 104). When he was insulted by being called Satan, he took it with a sense of humour as he saw the similarity between the condition of the exiled Satan and that of the unhoused migrants (2012: 73), an idea that Rushdie had explored in *The Satanic Verses*. However, he was wounded by the other names he was called —blasphemer (170), apostate (168), traitor (74) and villain (260). When his opponents accused him of hiding behind his fiction, Rushdie affirmed that he was no Polonius hiding behind a curtain or a veil for that matter (75). These literary allusions to Shakespeare and Richard Burton put the emphasis on the rather derisory nature of the contraptions used for hiding in the face of impending peril in any culture. When Rushdie went to Australia to hide, he met with an accident and was taken to a hospital for treatment where he had to reveal his identity. He went through an unsettling experience in invisibility, when he as Joseph Anton (who had obliterated his existence as Salman Rushdie) encountered the Chief of American Counterterrorism, Ambassador Maurice Busby “who officially did not exist” (237).

Rushdie’s readers are aware that while Rushdie resents having to resort to aliases and disguises, he easily and joyfully slips into his writing posture and pens imaginary letters to real and imaginary people to give them a piece of his mind (185-87). This continuous hide and seek with names and selves, fact and fiction, certainly gives the memoir a queer turn. Rushdie’s reference to the histrionic talents that had won him various roles in school and undergraduate productions, including notably one as the “hunchbacked, woolen-stockinged drag” and mad doctor Fräulein Mathilde von Zahnd in Dürrenmatt’s *The Physicists* (Rushdie 2012: 605), and another in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* —a cameo appearance in which he gets to be kissed by Hugh Grant— reinforces the queer side of Rushdie. Nevertheless, he seems to be tired of such games with gender identity and confesses that it was hard to play the character Rushdie “whose dialogue was written by someone else” (605).

Naming forms part of the anthropological rite of passage (birth in a family, incorporation in a clan or religious or national community).

The name: What does one call thus? What does one understand under the name of name? And what occurs when one gives a name? What does one give then? One does not offer a thing,

one delivers nothing, and still something comes to be, which comes down to giving that which one does not have. What happens, above all, when it is necessary to sur-name, renaming there where, precisely, the name comes to be found lacking?

asks Derrida (1995: xiv) while analyzing the linguistic, ethical and political significance of the act of naming in making meaning of the world. It is obvious that Rushdie found Joseph Anton inadequate as a name to embody his self because it detached his name from his fame. His conscious struggle with his name and its significance is not totally tied to circumstantial factors. In his family, there exists a tradition of voluntary changes of names stemming from the belief that such a change will literally allow the individual to control and shape his or her destiny. Rushdie's memoir completes the revelation of the facts regarding his personal life started in *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), which was dedicated to his maternal grandfather, Dr. Attaulah, and to his maternal grandmother, Amir Un Nissa Butt. In *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie reveals for the first time that his paternal grandfather was called Khwaja Muhammaed Din Khaliqi Dehlavi (22). The Persian surname Dehlavi denotes that the family of the writer who was shaped by modern Bombay culture belongs to the line of those born in or residing in Medieval Delhi. But Rushdie's father Anis Ahmed decided to shed this rather long, inherited name and initiated the shift to modernity by choosing a short name for himself. The name Rushdie is a reference to the Andalusian philosopher of the twelfth century, Abdul Walid Muhammed Ibn Ahmed Ibn Rushdie, commentator of Aristotle known as Averroes in the West, for whom Anis had a great admiration because he had privileged the rational, as opposed to the literal, interpretation of Islam (23). Salman Rushdie's surname, which he considers a gift from his father, had predestined him to be the defender of rationalism against obscurantism, thus giving him the courage to fight against his adversaries. Salman Rushdie's mother Zohra Butt changed her first name into Negin after she married Anis Ahmed in order to break clean from her earlier self as the wife of Shaghil (19). Anis Ahmed was a divorcee too. The children from his second marriage were not told the name of their stepmother and their half sister who tragically died (567). After Anis's death, Negin, alias Zohra, refused to renew the relationship with her divorced husband who had not remarried (566). These real and complicated filiations pertain to the dislocated Name-of-the-Father which makes the son's position symbolically unsteady.<sup>7</sup> Between his father's rejection of his patronym and his mother's suppressed desire for a different name, the son was obliged to seek putative fathers. The author thus tries to establish connections between his own life and the life of the characters in his novel. The clandestine lovers Amina and Nadir Khan in *Midnight's Children* are loosely modelled on Zohra and Shaghil. Akbar's lost great aunt in *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) might be a shadow of Anis's abandoned wife.

<sup>7</sup> The concept of the Name-of-the-Father formulated by Jacques Lacan (1977: 67) refers to the laws and restrictions that control the subject's desire and the rules of communication. The Father-of-Enjoyment constitutes his shadow.



Salman Rushdie mentions the real name of his elder sister and lawyer Sameen, debars the name of the second sister, who has cut off with the family after a misunderstanding, and provides a fictive name for his third sister, Nabeelah, alias *guljum* (a nickname meaning sweetheart), who died young (84). These three siblings inevitably recall the three sisters in *Shame*, while the subtle mixing of real, fictive and untold names creates a grey area of potentiality between fact and fiction. Although Rushdie cites the anthropologist Edmond Leach who holds that “the *family*, with its narrow privacy and tawdry secrets, is the source of all our discontents” (104), in his memoir he himself comes off as a loving and affectionate father, when, following the unique naming tradition in his family, he chooses to name his son born of his first marriage with Clarissa Luard, Zafar (14); Zafar means victory in Arabic and harks back to the last Mughal emperor of India (30). Rushdie’s younger son born of his marriage to Elizabeth West was named Milan (389) after Milan Kundera. Just as *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* was written for Haroun, its sequel *Luca and the Fire of Life* (2010) was written for Milan. Rushdie, surprisingly, discloses the name of his fourth wife Padmalakshmi’s father Vaidhyanathan (Rushdie 2012: 578), which she had herself kept confidential because of her mother’s divorce. Apart from his several marriages with women of different cultures, this mixing of names helps the migrant author make his family a truly cosmopolitan one, as names function as metonyms for culture. Names are not mere signs here but form the material nodes of the social network.

Salman Rushdie feels secure enough to unravel the hidden side of his creative self by giving the names of his failed attempts, i.e., two novels “The Book of the Peer” (49) and “The Antagonist” (50), and a play inspired by Beckett, “Crosstalk”, and by flatly acknowledging that the title of his first published science fiction work *Grimus* (1975) is an anagram of Simorg (50). “The Antagonist” is the proto-novel that would eventually become “Sinai”, “Child of Midnight”, and then “Children of Midnight” (56) before being formally baptized *Midnight’s Children*. The name Sinai was inspired by both a childhood friend and the philosopher Ibn Sina, or Avicennes, as he is known in the West. It is the change of identity of the protagonist (an Indian living in London into an Indian living in Bombay) that would give the failed and remade novel a triumphant future. The Indian living in London would reappear in *The Satanic Verses* under a different name, Chamcha. Rushdie deconstructs the name as one derived from Kafka’s Gregor Samsa and Gogol’s Chichikov (69). The twin protagonist of this novel, Gibreel Farishta, has a girlfriend called Allelouia Cone, which is a sarcastic name for Rushdie’s paramour at that time, the Australian writer Robyn Davidson (78). Robyn herself takes vengeance by portraying him as an unpleasant American in her novel called *Ancestors*.

Playing with names is a common feature of many authors who transmute life into fiction. Nevertheless, a prior knowledge of all of Rushdie’s fictional and non-fictional works on the part of the reader is required to make sense of this *roman à noms* of celebrity culture. Obviously, Rushdie does not give this list of names to equate his fiction with coded life. His purpose is to lay bare the complex signifying process that makes a genotext

emerge as a phenotext (Kristeva 1969: 281).<sup>8</sup> Besides, there seems to be a mystique of onomastics in Rushdie's memoir that shows the imprint of his Muslim cultural heritage. Indeed, the Sufi mystic tradition he is drawn to lists the ninety-nine names and qualities that God uses to refer to himself in *The Koran*.

The excess of names cited and the readiness with which they are disclosed enable us to decode the meaning of *Joseph Anton* as a sign. It is an expression of Rushdie's attempt to name the unnamable abjection or narcissistic crisis (Kristeva 1980: 22) he felt as a persecuted human being and writer. While names infuse cultural depth into the characters they designate, they seem to function at times as objects that the narrator manipulates with childlike pleasure as if demonstrating how storytelling is a juggling act. The nicknames of the protection team members — Piggy, Stumpy, Fat Jack and Horse— and the name of the armored vehicle Rushdie acquires from Sir Ralph Halpern, the 'bimbomobile', attest the English language's genius of brevity and caricature and provide comic relief.

Attention also needs to be paid to place names in the memoir. As it has a global sweep, we come across place names disseminated throughout the whole world. However, metropolitan cities such as Bombay, Karachi, London, Paris, New York, Mexico and Buenos Aires, and names of homes such as Windsor Villa, Wimbledon House, Anis Villa, as well as the safe houses used during Rushdie's hiding, universities such as Cambridge, Columbia and Oslo, power centres such as 10 Downing Street and the White House, media centres such as the BBC and the CNN, theatres such as the The Globe and Abbey Theatre and paradisiacal beaches in Mauritius and Australia become household names and attest the degree of social and geographic mobility Rushdie has demonstrated in order to exist as an individual and make a living out of writing. Accelerated global time has made migrants of all and all migration a way of staying put. As Rosa Hartmut remarks, "we run as fast as we can in order to stay in the same place" (2013: 119).

The migrant writer's metamorphosis from "a nice quiet boy" in Rugby boarding school to a rebel undergraduate who takes up a course in Cambridge on Muhammad, the Rise of Islam and the Early Caliphate, and to a multiple prizewinning author who receives a knighthood, is fraught with the danger of the annihilation of his life and his name associated with his fame. This ordeal symbolizes the confusing and traumatic search for fulfilment that a migrant journey represents and warrants a comparison with the drama of identity that the American born Indian Desi undergoes in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. Gogol, alias Nikhil, is conscious of the tentativeness of names in the postmodern world when he concludes that "there is no such thing as a perfect name" (2003: 245).

Long before Rushdie and Lahiri, A.K. Ramanujan and Bharati Mukherjee had dealt with how names change progressively in exile (Ganapathy-Doré 2008: 82). Names follow a destiny of their own in the time of migration. The shortening in length, the

<sup>8</sup> 'Genotext' refers to signifying infiniteness. 'Phenotext' considers the text as a fact.

alteration of spelling and pronunciation, the difference in accent, the acclimatization to a different language all transform the name and transfigure the individual who embodies it. In the case of Jhumpa Lahiri's protagonist, the good name intended by the grandmother gets literally lost in postal transit (56), reflecting the baffling and inevitable loss of cultural heritage that occurs in the migratory context. His parents give him the *daknam*, or pet name, Gogol (26, 28), for the intimate family space, reserving the proper Bengali *bhalonam*, or good name, Nikhil, which bears a vague resemblance to Nikolai, for the public space (57). Just as his parents initiate him into Bengali culture with the *annaprasan* ceremony (38), the elementary school principal Mrs Lapidus initiates Gogol into American freedom by giving him the choice of being called by the name he wants (59), and which is in the records, rather than by the good, unrecorded, official name, off record, that his parents want to bestow upon him. Little Gogol does not associate the right signified with the signifier. He confuses it with traffic signs containing the English verb "go" (66). However, the sight of the mailbox on which the surname Ganguly is abusively shortened to "Gang" (67) and combined with green, sensitizes him to racism. The name given by his father in memory of Gogol's *Overcoat*, which he was reading during the train accident that would trigger his journey to America, becomes unbearable when Gogol learns about the life of his namesake at school. The Russian surname adopted as a Bengali American forename jars the ears of American kids, while it would have been quite normal in Bengal because of both the generally cosmopolitan culture of the Bengalis and their particular interest in Russia (Dasgupta 2011: 531). They prefer to play around his name and call him "Giggle", "Gargle" (67). Even his sister Sonia good-humouredly calls him by the name of a thing, "Goggles" (74). Gogol realizes that his name is totally truncated and mixes up Indian, Russian and American traditions. He undertakes to change his official name into "Nikhil" (100). Like the former slaves who rebaptized themselves, he is a born-again and self-made American citizen. His girlfriend fully Americanizes him by calling him "Nick" (177). When Nikhil finally opens Gogol's short stories his father had given him as a birthday present (288), he mourns not only his father's death but also his own former and uneasy in-between self embodied in the alliterative Gogol Ganguly.

Between the ready-made identity given by a fixed name in an entrenched culture, and the identity-in-making of the diasporic, the journey is tortuous. Rushdie is forced to fathom the void in between two names as Nikhil does or before him the sculptor Lyon Hartwell in Willa Cather's short story 'The Namesake' (Dalton-Brown 2011: 337), both literally and philosophically, through his creative transmigrations. The connecting link between Rushdie and Lahiri, with regard to the drama of naming, is Chekhov, whom both writers admire. Gogol is another common literary reference (*supra*). If Jhumpa Lahiri had lived a short while in England before settling down in the US, Rushdie set up home in New York after his trying years in England. His marriages to Marianne Wiggins and Padmalakshmi and his American experience have brought him closer to the American capacity for self-invention and re-invention. It is

to be remembered that it was at Folger Library in Washington that Rushdie playfully renamed some of Shakespeare's plays (Blue 1996: 36), and that the personal archives he used for writing *Joseph Anton* are housed at Emory University's Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library.<sup>9</sup> Both Rushdie and Lahiri illustrate the American idea of the self-made and mobile identity through their engagement with naming, respectively in the autobiographical and fictional form.

As a migrant writer, Rushdie is compelled to invent a literary lineage. Years ago in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991) he had declared "It is one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his parents. My own —selected half consciously, half not— include Gogol, Cervantes, Kafka, Melville, Machado de Assis; a polyglot family tree, against which I measure myself, and to which I would be honoured to belong" (2012: 21). His memoir is a determined step towards that ambitious objective. Rushdie invents a name evocative of literary fame that transforms him into a fictive persona, comes out of it to reclaim and remake his authorial self, recording the life of that avatar of his self as another in the process. The author's rebirth is accompanied by the resurgence of the name he had shed in the realm of literature, as the title of his voluminous text. It is Rushdie's American experience that seems to have inspired this creative and liberating way out of the crisis. The texture of this narrative that spans five continents is heterogeneous, oscillating between the existential and retrospective and experiential and dynamic modes of self-writing. It indirectly takes stock of the size, variety, quality and reach of Rushdie's literary production and consolidates his name and reputation by giving his version of the truth.

His readers may find the demystification of what was enigmatic in his writing by the author, who invites them to the green room of his creativity, slightly disappointing. Rather than flatten the paragrammatic field of his writing, Rushdie's unraveling of his true sources,<sup>10</sup> albeit serving to spice up the thrill of the mundane ride, also opens up newer and wider fields of interpretation by setting up a space for dialogue between

<sup>9</sup> Rushdie was initially Distinguished Writer-in-Residence at Emory University. He is currently Distinguished Professor.

<sup>10</sup> The real model for Ayesha in *The Satanic Verses* is a Shia Muslim called Sayyad Willayat Hussain Shah, who led a pilgrimage to Karbala in 1983 (1998: 70). Another character in the same novel, Rosa Diamond, is based on Rushdie's wife Clarissa's grandmother, May Jewell (2012: 308), who has an Anglo-Argentine past. Shaandaar Café is "a thinly disguised Urdu-ing of the real Brilliant Café in Southall" (71). Chaggan Bhujpal, the Shiv Sena mayor in whose house Rushdie's documentary film, *The Riddle of Midnight*, was shot is the model for the politician Mainduck in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (2012: 82). The green telephone in the form of a frog found in Bhujpal's house is the basis for the extended metaphor describing Mainduck's physique. The portrait of Aurora Zogoiby, painted by Vasco Miranda and covered over by another painting which roots the palimpsest metaphor in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is, in reality, inspired by a portrait of Rushdie's mother, Negin, by Krishen Khanna, on which the painter M.F. Husain had executed another picture (463). The names of Rushdie's friends behind the fictional characters of Yorick, Chekhov, Eliot Crane in *East, West* (1994) are respectively editor Bill Buford, diplomat Salman Haider and writer Jamie Webb. His Mangalorian ayah Mary Menezes (2012: 429-30) appears therein simply as Ayah Mary. Much later we learn that the Brazilian film, *Orfeu Negro* is the source for the musical theme in *The Ground Beneath her Feet* (1999) (2012: 495).

random and obligatory intertextualities. Such a dialogue does, however, leave the space open for the persecution of the writer by obsessive readers like Nalini Mehta (223) and religious fanatics who ignore the fact that there are seven variants of the sacred *Koran* itself (213).<sup>11</sup> Defining himself as a story-telling animal with freedom of speech (17), Rushdie empowers his readers by saying that a book changes when it leaves its author's desk (90). Ultimately, the author's happiness consists in being "a writer among readers" (147). This democratic and dialogic enunciatory position establishes a new power balance between the author and the reader, and allows the text to triumph.

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<sup>11</sup> The seven variations in the recital of *The Koran* according to the *hadith* (tradition) are known as *abruf*. But whether they were variants at all or simply seven linguistic ways of recitation is a matter of debate as much as their total number. Non-Arabic speakers might consult Ingrid Mattson's *Story of Qur'an* for more details (2007).

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