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The Satanic Verses: Towards a Viable and Productive Ethics of Representing Otherness

Masters Dissertation for the Department of English Literature

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Abstract

The Satanic Verses focuses on issues of migrancy, faith and belonging towards negotiating a new historical voice and levelling a challenge against master narratives of legitimacy and authority, including Islamic fundamentalism, Indian nationalism and British neocolonialism. The text grapples with emergent forms of otherness in an attempt to embrace newness and therefore engages an ethics of representation that can fully countenance the other's heterogeneity. Levinasian ethics positions otherness as wholly absent, thus avoiding the play of power in representation. However, this also excludes the other from being a part of a shared humanity. Thus I propose that a viable and productive ethics of representing otherness locates the other as *both* absence and as a subject of humanity. This "hybrid ethics" is exemplified in *The Satanic Verses.* It is achieved by creating linguistic and structural frames around sites of absence, thus highlighting the aspects of otherness that elude representation. Concurrently, the other is represented as a subject and thus has political, social, historical and cultural bearing within a shared humanity. Importantly, this allows the other to emerge without eliding difference. The broader significance of this research is the potential emergence of a radically transformative and productive voicing of otherness within dominant discourses.