

Research Paper

**SALMAN RUSHDIE'S SHALIMAR THE CLOWN AND
THE SATANIC VERSES AN ANALYSIS**

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INTRODUCTION :

In the reception of *Shalimar the Clown*, reviewers linked *The Satanic Verses* to *Shalimar the Clown* by referring to *The Satanic Verses* and its reception.

Chapter 2 illustrates that *The Satanic Verses* had quite an impact. Hence the assumption that references to this novel were made to signify something about *Shalimar the Clown* and thereby influenced the way the latter novel was read and reviewed.

The analysis presented in chapter 3 shows that the references to *The Satanic Verses* and its reception did indeed influence the reception of *Shalimar the Clown*. The Confirmation of the hypothesis immediately led to the next question: how did these influence the reception of the latter novel.

Chapter 4 elucidates why a link was established between *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Satanic Verses*, it answers the question how it influenced the reception of the former, and it demonstrates the effect of this influence. References lead to expectations, and these expectations resulted in biased criticism. Since the majority of the reviews contained such references (chapter 3), the effect was a large number of reviews contained biased criticism.

Chapter 5 shows the biased criticism that dominates in the reviews creates an incorrect image of *Shalimar the Clown*.

The introduction points out why I originally started researching the topic of this thesis: the way the book was presented in reviews simply did not correspond to my impression of the novel after reading it. It is understandable the books are compared, since the subject matter seems similar. However, the subject matter is not the same. Moreover, the books are not the same. This is confirmed by the observation, mentioned in chapter 3, that the reception of *Shalimar the Clown* was uneventful, which is in sharp contrast with the reception of *The Satanic Verses* (chapter 2). The observation in chapter 4 and 5, that reviewers have criticised the novel disparagingly, because it was not the novel they had expected it to be, also confirms the books are different.

The drawing on the cover illustrates this. The dip pen is a vivid symbol of the fierceness of the attacks on Rushdie. They dealt him a deadly blow: the dip pen, still dripping with plenty of fresh ink, has pierced Rushdie's body. But Rushdie's unshaken demeanor suggests the attack has been less deadly than it seems to be. This is logical since the disparaging criticism was based on the reviewers' own expectations and prejudices and not on Rushdie's novel.

In this paper the reception of *Shalimar the Clown* is compared with that of *The Satanic Verses*. The reception of each novel is different, there by illustrating both novels are different. A comparison of their content by means of a literary analysis might also show that each of them is unique. The reviewers' disappointment with *Shalimar the Clown* shows they expected the novels to be similar, but concluded they were not. Ironically, both novels do have things in common in spite of their uniqueness. A literary analysis can explore both their uniqueness, their differences, and their similarities. *Shalimar the Clown's* different style might have put reviewers on the wrong track. In comparison with *The Satanic Verses*, it is much more subtle. However, a literary analysis might show the issues Rushdie presents contain no less vitol. It also might show Rushdie tackles similar issues in both books. Consider the following quotation from *The Satanic Verses*, which illustrates how Chamcha has managed to slowly but steadily drive Gibreel completely insane and make him commit suicide: His mounting excitement, his babbling determination [...] must have suggested to Chamcha that it wouldn't take much, now, to push him over the edge. [...] *The art of the assassin is to draw the victim close; makes him easier to knife.* (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* 454) This passage instantly reminds everyone who has read *Shalimar the Clown* of the key scene: "*The art of the assassin is to draw the victim close; makes him easier to knife*" is exactly how Shalimar kills Ophuls. None of the reviewers mention this or other similarities. It would be interesting, therefore, to stop looking at what is written about both books, and to start comparing their content.

This paper has also attempted to gather objective 'evidence' to be able to adjust or reject my own view of the book.. It would be interesting to see what would happen with the level of subjectivity of reviews, if reviewers could apply the same principle. After all, Rushdie is unlikely to be the only author who has received fierce, biased criticism, since novels are especially suitable for subjective interpretations: authors tend to built in dilemmas and leave room for speculation. In addition, reviewers are expected to give their opinion about the novel in their reviews.

Introducing a set of objectifying criteria that reviewers can adhere to would have two advantages. It might constrain bias and produce validated, substantiated criticism that is grounded in the novel and concerns the novel. This could give literary supplements the added value that is needed to guarantee their continued existence. As poet points out, literary supplements need to publish reviews with. Only then will they be able to face the heavy competition from Weblogs, as the *NYTimes.com* shows with its hundreds of millions of page viewers per month (Vloet). A set of objective criteria will help produce reviews with content, quality criticism. This would allow for discriminating between a statement that originates from a Weblog and one from a review. In Weblogs and other Internet phenomena, anyone can express their opinion. In general, they do not adhere to any quality criteria. Every opinion seems to be equally valid since 'de gustibus non est disputandum'. In addition, bloggers constrain themselves to mainly criticising the traditional media instead of generating content (Vloet, Red de Boekenbijlage!).

A set of objective criteria, a measure for quality, will make unsubstantiated criticism less reliable, less potentially informative and less potentially meaningful. It could be crucial for the continued existence of literary supplements that it helps to discriminate between reviews in supplements and the many other pieces published. Also, these reviews might become of more value to readers and be much more interesting to read. To recapitulate, the recommendations

given here are to compare the novels' content via literary analysis and to develop a set of objectifying criteria. How the latter can be realised reaches beyond the scope of this paper.

The confirmation of the sub-hypothesis entails the hypothesis is accepted. It can be concluded that the references made to the reception of *The Satanic Verses* and to *The Satanic Verses* itself have indeed influenced the reception of *Shalimar the Clown*.

The analysis answers the question of whether such references influenced the reception of *Shalimar the Clown*. It cannot, however, answer the question of how they have influenced it. Chapter 4 attempts to answer this question. Chapter 5 attempts to determine whether this influence is desirable or not. Both chapters do so by examining the context in which the references and additional factors appear.

The results presented show that the references have influenced the reception of *Shalimar the Clown*. It would be interesting to research the effect of this influence. It is striking that all the factors in listed in Table 3.4 are mentioned only when the review also contains such references. All these factors might also remind readers of the Rushdie Affair. This supposed association could be the starting point for researching in more detail the effect of the references made to *The Satanic Verses* and its reception. There is no point in continuing to screen the sources for biased criticism, since there are no criteria that can denominate whether a review is biased or not. For example, a factor may denote biased criticism in one review, but may be mentioned in another to criticise its presence in other reviews. In the context it can be demonstrated whether there is an association between the factors, quotes and points of criticism.. The context illustrates what cannot be shown with the results of this analysis: the first and third point of criticism comment on Rushdie's wide-ranging subject matter and associative way of writing by insinuating it is an attempt to encompass the whole world which is illustrative of Rushdie's ambition and large ego. In short, the additional factors that are frequently mentioned concurrently with a reference to the reception of *The Satanic Verses* and its reception are indeed associated to criticism and demarcate bias.

The argument that criticism is often biased when it comes to the reception of *Shalimar the Clown* is supported by yet another observation: some aspects of the novel are equally likely to attract criticism or praise. Notably, only 9 out of 129 reviewers abstain from using biased criticism. It is, therefore, conceivable that this kind of biased criticism has influenced the reception of *Shalimar the Clown* and it would be interesting to research how this occurred.

The hypothesis of this thesis is that references to *The Satanic Verses* and its reception have influenced the reception of *Shalimar the Clown*. Before any conclusion can be drawn about the supposed influence of such references, it is necessary to demonstrate that they were actually made. Moreover, it is important to establish their influence was not negligible. If, for example, only two reviews out of a hundred contain such references, they would be unlikely to exert significant influence, on the reception of *Shalimar the Clown* would depend on how many of the sources contain them. If the references are numerous, they are likely to have influenced the reception of *Shalimar the Clown*. The more numerous they are, the more significant their influence will be. To test this sub-hypothesis, the amount of sources that contain such references to *The Satanic Verses* will be counted.

In addition to the references, other factors were also often mentioned. These might be associated to the references. An example is Brown's description of Rushdie as a "fearless critic

of Islam". The same sub-hypothesis is applied to such factors: if they are frequently mentioned, they might also have influenced the reception.

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