“THE ETHICS OF IRREVERENCE: BLASPHEMPY IN LITERATURE AS ETHICAL CRITIQUE”

By

ANDERSON MOSS

(Under the Direction of Carolyn Jones Medine)

ABSTRACT

The Ethics of Irreverence: Blasphemy in Literature as Ethical Critique will observe how blasphemy in the novel, works as a powerful literary trait for the critique of hegemonic power. The two novels addressed are José Saramago’s *Cain* and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. Both works utilize blasphemy and both do so through parodying their respective tradition’s sacred texts. This project, in observing these novel’s critique of hegemony, will address two issues concerning literature and concerning blasphemy in literature: (1) how does the novel, which is understood as mere fiction, have any ethical authority and any claim to reality? (2) How does blasphemy have any claim as a legitimate form of religious discourse? Finally, in addressing these issues and observing criticism in *Cain* and *The Satanic Verses,* this project will conclude with a section on the limitations of blasphemy and the point at which critical offense, as in the Rushdie Affair, becomes polemical hate speech.

INDEX WORDS: Blasphemy, Critique, Literature, the Novel, Rushdie, Saramago, Ethics

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By

ANDERSON MOSS

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ANDERSON MOSS

Major Professor:	Carolyn Jones Medine
Committee:	Bradley Otto Bassler
	Baruch Halpern

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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CHAPTER 1

"STICKS AND STONES": LITERARY QUALITIES OF BLASPHEMY

The national reaction to NFL player Colin Kaepernick's choice to kneel during the national anthem in protest to police brutality was predictable. Debate and conflict on the subject were found at dinner tables, on sidewalks, in classrooms, in barbershops, and in newsrooms. In his protest, onlookers saw him attributing to the flag and the nation the crimes of brutality that he was fighting against, and more directly, onlookers felt that Kaepernick was attacking the nation. They questioned whether protesting during the anthem was appropriate and whether it indicated a lack of for the troops or for the president, thereby, directly impacting his status as an American. I was in an "Introduction to Political Science" class when Kaepernick began to shake things up, and I remember the Professor asked whether or not it was patriotic for Kaepernick to do so, and most in the class agreed that it was not. I remember one student crying as she talked about how much the anthem meant to her; another student chimed in saying that "An attack against the flag and the anthem is an attack against all of us." It was at that moment that I began to find interests in the topic of this project, blasphemy.

Kaepernick and his protest revealed to Americans that, for them, the flag and the anthem are sacred, and ought to be considered with the utmost respect. A protest, regardless of how justified it is, ought never transgress these symbols. Many of the students in this course agreed that police brutality was something horrible and ought to be punished, but they felt deeply uncomfortable with their sacred symbols, the very core of their identity being placed under scrutiny.

Blasphemy is understood as an offense--an illegality, perhaps, in religious law-one commits by making evil and or hurtful speech specifically about things deemed sacred. Leonard Levy, in his historical study of the legal offense, argues that "Blasphemy is a litmus test of the standards a society believes it must enforce to preserve its unity, its peace, its morality, its feelings, and the road to salvation."[1] In Christian culture, when one thinks of blasphemy, he may think, first, of religious references such as Mark 3:29: "But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness; they are guilty of an eternal sin"; or Exodus 20:7: "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name." One may also think of the Inquisition and how those horrors played out on the bodies of non-Christians both in Spain and its colonies. The charge of blasphemy has been used as the sword by religions to silence and punish. As a legal offense, blasphemy exists in cultures as old as the ancient Greeks, with Anaxagoras in the 6th century BCE, to as recent as the 20th century in the UK with the *Gay News* trial.

Blasphemy charges, in the *Gay News* case and in that of Anaxagoras,, were brought against the defendants with the intention of showing how their evil speech--i.e., writing about Jesus in a homosexual relationship--or supposing that the gods are merely human creations, disrupts the very social fabric of some religious realities and puts believers' existences in moral danger. The charge of blasphemy tells historians and thinkers what a societies' sensitivities are and how challenges made to those sensitivities are dealt with. These sensitivities are the underlying norms of society, and their destruction surely means the end of identity or truth. With all of this, it becomes easier to see why Kaepernick's protest is blasphemy to American sentiments, regardless of its secular foundations.

[1] Leonard Levy, *Blasphemy: Verbal Offense Against the Sacred, from Moses to Salman Rushdie* (New York: Alfred A Knoff, 1993), VI.

It is the aim of this project to move away from the legal and theological history of blasphemy. There are countless histories of blasphemy as a legal or theological offense, including Leonard Levy's *Blasphemy*, Alain Cabantous' *Blasphemy*, and David Lawton's *Blasphemy*. These texts observe a long history of blasphemy, from the ancient to the modern, and discuss many manifestations from blasphemous speech to religio-political pamphlets. This project's concerns are focused on contemporary literature, specifically the novel, which is a medium that the previous authors have spoken on but not at great length. All three of the previous authors mention one contemporary novel that is responsible for reignited concerns over blasphemy in the western world, *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, a novel that resulted in a global outrage for its blasphemous depictions of Muhammad.

Rushdie's book and its rapid spread around the world put on display the problems of secularity and religiosity, of west and east, and perhaps, most startling, between Christianity and Islam. The last point is important: the charge of blasphemous libel that Muslim protesters in the United Kingdom brought against Rushdie was overturned because the 1647 Blasphemy act in English common law only protected Christians from blasphemous libel, highlighting the hypocrisy in the common law which was meant to represent all of the U.K.[2] The so-called "Rushdie Affair" showed that the world of the 17th century was much smaller than this moment in which the secular and the sacred pressed against one another in alarming ways, as a result of four centuries of colonialism, global capitalism, world wars, cold war, and mass telecommunication. The complexity of this global moment moved the above-stated authors to discuss the legal and cultural implications of Rushdie's blasphemy. Sum up what they argue.

[2] Richard Webster, *A Brief History of Blasphemy: Liberalism, Censorship and "The Satanic Verses".* (Suffolk: Orwell Press, 1990), 14.

This project aligns itself closer to the more recent work *Blasphemous Modernism* by Steve Pinkerton, which approaches blasphemy as a literary device commonly used in modernist literature, and which discusses, specifically, how that blasphemy was used as a mode of ethical critique.[3] This notion of ethical critique is why I chose to start with Kaepernick. His transgressive mode of protest triggered something more powerful than mere disagreement with his protest's position; it provoked an aggressive backlash that put on display, at once, the sensitivity of the social standards of America while also showing the cracks in that standard's exemplary status.

The project at hand is primarily concerned with the blasphemous content of two novels, one well known because of its scandal, *The Satanic Verses,* and the other lesser-known *Cain* by José, Saramago a Nobel Prize winning Portuguese author. Both novels are transgressive in the way that they critique society through their rewriting of sacred texts. Both novels have significantly different histories of reception. *The Satanic Verses*, as we already detailed, was met with global backlash while Cain's aggressive challenging of Abrahamic piety was met with little more than regional upset. Their diametrically opposed receptions play a part in why I chose to focus on *Cain* and *The Satanic Verses*. Despite both novels reworking the foundational texts of the Abrahamic traditions, the varied receptions of these texts display key differences in the locality of these works, Saramago's audience is much smaller than Rushdie's. Saramago's audience is primarily western and an audience who has seen its fair share of immensely irreverent re-imaginings of sacred characters and stories. *Cain* to a western audience is merely one drop in the bucket of blasphemous works. *The Satanic Verses* is a novel whose audience includes the Western world and the Muslim world, a nearly global audience, the latter of which

[3] Steve Pinkerton. *Blasphemous Modernism: The 20th-Century Word Made Flesh* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 11.

does not have the same literary tradition of sharp critique and irreverent re-imagining of the sacred. The two novels and their receptions put on display the varying understandings of the relationship between secularity and religion in the two different cultures.

One principle that the so-called "Rushdie Affair" problematizes is the notion of disenchantment or secularization, whose central thesis rests upon the notion that religion will begin the fade away as a predominant force in culture. Recent theorists of secularization will admit that this is a predominantly western trend, and even more specifically that this trend might only reflect the European reality, as America remains a firmly religious country.[4] This notion of disenchantment explains the calm response to *Cain* whose audience exists in a disenchanted world, while the global upset in response to *The Verses* reveals that the rest of the world is still very much an enchanted one. To find the "religious" in "literature," I will use Mircea Eliade's construction of the sacred and the profane to suggest how cultures construct untouchable figures, ideas, and practices--the sacred--that, when profaned, made secular, become sites of violent contention. I recognize the tensions around Eliade's work, particularly the sense that he constructs a binary that he, then, universalizes. I want to align Eliade's notion of the construction of the sacred with Max Weber's "enchanted" world, one in which religious meaning offers what Peter Berger calls a protective "sacred canopy," and to argue that blasphemy disenchants the world, disconnecting meaning and being, leading, in the Rushdie case, to violent response.

Blasphemy's play with the relationship between the sacred and profane is more than mere transgression. This project's aim is to suggest that blasphemy is a sort of literary sleight of hand wherein the sacred figure is presented, but is characterized with human traits, and specifically, morally egregious human traits. The act of literary blasphemy in this way is to bring the sacred down to the level of the profane. This manifests in *The Satanic Verses* as human characters both

[4] Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 10.

become sacred figures or human characters reflect sacred figures. This reduction of the sacred to the profane manifests most clearly in *Cain* in the attribution of human character traits to the ultimate non-human, God. God in *Cain* becomes a murderer through sheer stupidity and forgetfulness, and, perhaps,, God kills because God can in *Cain*; therefore, this God is devoid of the traditional attribute of being just. In each instance of blasphemy in these two novels, the sacred is either emasculated, in the case of Gabriel and the Quran in *The Satanic Verses*, or shown to be a vile dictator, in the case of Mahound (Muhammad) in *The Satanic Verses* and God in *Cain*. These blasphemous, morally egregious character traits, along with the emasculation of the sacred display (reveal?) God as a monster.

The form of literary blasphemy is reliant upon three literary formations-- adaptation, parody, and, finally, irony--which serve as the weight and power behind blasphemy. It is evident at this point that blasphemy is a form of adaptation; whether the blasphemer is directly drawing from some other text or story, he is displacing characters or themes from one context to another and from one genre to another. Blasphemy disrupts the common, and often unarticulated, understandings of these characters and their stories. Genre is important in this movement. Blasphemy, in a Bhaktian way, novelizes the epic figures of the sacred text, whose character and plotted interpretations have been completed through the routinization process of tradition.[5] The novelization of epic figures is a revitalization process by which epic figures become responsive and open to the explosion of intersubjectivities found in the novel. Displaced, such figures express a range of ideological perspectives that were impossible for their previous forms to express, and these ideologies are placed next to each other in both dialogue and combat. To borrow from Bhaktin again, the novelization process that *Cain* and *The Verses* put the

[5] Mikhail Bahktin. *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 17. You might add Eliade to the footnote too.

Abrahamic sacred figures through brings them from a particularized instance of Eliadian sacred time, where temporality is determined and unique.[6]

The culturally constructed sacred bears the weight of the absolute past, reflecting communal notions of origin, first sin, or victory over ignorance. In the context of their sacred texts, these sacred figures must represent these historical plots that call back to the past for the sake of the traditions and identities that they represent. These figures, who are so firmly fixed in the sacred finite, are unfixed in their novelistic movement into contemporaneity and more so through blasphemous adaptation. The novel as an experimental genre can put in the mouths of sacred figures ideas that disrupt tradition, making sacred texts targets for the parodic nature of blasphemy.

Blasphemy always has an intertextual relationship; it is constantly drawing from sacred text and tradition to make its point, but the two texts in this project *Cain* and *The Verses*, show that blasphemy is more than mere adaptation, it is a parody of sacred text and tradition. Both novels wield comedy to make light of the serious sacred figures and texts. They present the sacred as something that can be mocked, and in mocking that sacred, the blasphemer's point is made clear. Parody in its popular conception is always understood as a comedic adaptation, but a more serious study of genre conventions suggests that parody arises as an intertextual relationship that is critical of its parent text/genre through the exaggeration or underplaying of its parent text's attributes.[7] It is suggested that the novel is a genre that developed in an era of constant parodying of previous modes of literary expression, especially the genre of the romance, where notions of chivalry are taken to their most extreme, for example, in *Don Quixote*.[8]

[6] Ibid, 20.
[7] Simon Denith, *Parody* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 9.
[8] Ibid, 55.

These previous modes of expression, for the parodying novel, become moments to show the dangers of these parodied modes of thought, like, for example, optimistic chivalry, and to let the audience either wince or laugh at the parodied foolishness. For Bhaktin, this laughter, and I believe he would also agree with the power of wincing, is an important element to the way in which the novel parodies higher forms of art. For him, the novel, in evoking laughter (or perhaps any affective response to a mockery) towards epic figures familiarizes them and strips the necessity of reverence towards these figures; thus, parody in the Bhaktian sense, allows us to investigate the epic subject thoroughly.[9]

These notions of exaggeration or underplaying are most evident in the way that *Cain* adapts the Book of Job to firmly lay blame on God for the destruction of Job's property and family and the economic turmoil of the land of Uz. The way that Saramago parodies the Book of Job is not humorous in any way, but it does find elements of the biblical story that represent significant ethical problems, both in the Job narrative as well as in the problems of human nature. Parody at this level becomes a mocking of the sacred figure of God and the traditions that read Job to provide a theodicy. Making tangible the flaws of human nature and the crimes of authoritarianism, *Cain's* parody of Job adds textures of the reality of violence and authoritarian notions of the right to live and die. *Cain* forces the reader to investigate Job not as a sacred text who must be read with theodicy in mind, but instead, must be read with human justice in mind.

What drives the novelization of the sacred text and the parodying of the sacred figure and story is the irony of their status as divine and omni-ethical entities who are characterized with the most profane qualities of the profane world. It is the pre-established characteristics of the sacred figures that make blasphemy such an offensive and powerful rhetorical technique. The

[9] Mikhail Bahktin. *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist. trans Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 23.

characteristics of the divinity or the prophet are exemplary; even when they make moral mistakes, the sacred figures moral failings are explained away by various philosophical and theological theodicies and anti-theodicies. The irony of blasphemy is the exaggeration of the crimes buried inside these sacred stories, or the attribution of these crimes to sacred figures raises the blasphemer's critique to near universal levels. When Gabriel Farishta becomes the messenger angel Gabriel, we are met with a messenger with no message whose voice becomes the profane voice of Mahound, a depiction of Muhammad that exaggerates his trader background. Here ultimate power, the sacred, is stripped of its authoritative voice and is manipulated by the profane for the sake of political authority and the regulation of society and thought. The offense of this scene is twofold: the criminality of Mahound/Muhammad's actions and the profanation of the messenger angel's message. The ironic treatment of these characters-- one whose power is far beyond human manipulation and the other who is supposed to be a moral exemplar-- undercuts their culturally understood power.

Irony, as a feature of blasphemy, can offer the most subtle interpretations, Linda Hutcheon suggests, defining irony, "not a static rhetorical tool to be deployed, but [as a mode that] comes into being in the relations between meanings, but also between people and utterances and, sometimes, between intentions and interpretations."[10] This seems to be Rushdie's strategy, one that led to a questioning of his intentions. His ironic stance allowed some devout Muslims to assume that his aim for *The Verses* was to destroy the very notion of Islam. At the same time, secularist western readers read *The Verses* as a book that put on display varying levels of Muslim piety and that interrogated the dangers of fundamentalism. The varying communities of readers in their hermeneutical situations read the novel differently.

[10] Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 13.

The tension between the highly interpretive aspect of irony in blasphemy and the very rhetorical elements of parody and adaptation makes pinning down what blasphemy is very difficult. When is something simply insult or comedic parody and when does it rise to the level of potentially punishable blasphemy--as it did in the Rushdie Affair? Has secularization eased the impact of or eliminated the possibility of blasphemy? Does placing profane characteristics on culturally sacred beings and objects in interpretive communities change over time? Does the power of a religion, its religion's cultural capital, affect blasphemy? In this project both *Cain* and *The Verses* are texts that come from traditions with global presences, unlike, for example, , figures like Odin or Pazuzu who have been relegated to myth, which, in modern culture is accepted as fiction. The blasphemy of Anaxagoras today might not be blasphemy, but read as something from pagan Greek religion. What I want to point out here is that the tension between the hermeneutical and rhetorical elements of blasphemy brings about questions of taxonomy, of categorizing "real" religion and other forms. Blasphemy, as a philosophical category, has important implications on how we understand the interplay between the sacred/religious and profane/secular, how we read and interpret, and how we respond to the world around us.

In the chapters to come, I outline how irreverence and blasphemy play out in parts of *Cain* and *The Satanic Verses*, and how we can see notions of adaptation, irony, and parody at play in the two novels. Before getting to the two novels, I spend some time in chapter two addressing what might be seen as a problem concerning literature and ethical criticism, specifically, what authority does literature to express any ethical critiques? Here I provide a short philosophical survey to make a case for literature's claim to a kind of truth, and through that "truth,", the ability to make ethical statements despite its status as fiction. Chapter Two will provide an answer to a question that underlies all projects on literature and its relationship to

entities outside of itself, specifically, literature's relationship with philosophical truth as well as the truth of genuine human experience.

Chapter Three will turn to the *The Satanic Verses*, specifically to the way in which the profane forces the sacred to do its bidding, using the metaphor of the "sacred puppet" to examine Rushdie's novel. The sacred is both victim and criminal in *The Verses*. The idea of the sacred puppet highlights at once the frailty of the divine voice while also putting under investigation the way we twist sacred text and voice for our own purposes, how we use Word to empower our words.

Chapter Four is a look at the Saramago's adaptation strategy of the book of Job. Here, I suggest that Saramago is creating not an atheist polemic, but instead, a modern adaptation of Job that contributes to the conversation on theodicy in Job. Specifically, *Cain* does not just contribute to the conversation on Job; *Cain* expands the conversation. The novel adds perspectives to the Job narrative that have been left out or routinely ignored by interpretive communities, and in doing so, Cain strives to go beyond theodicy, Cain sues God for his gamble with Satan.

Chapter Five is the concluding chapter of this project. Here I try to address the wider cultural and legal problems that blasphemy faces; specifically, whether blasphemy is hate speech, a question that I try to answer with both legal and literary qualities in mind. In addition to trying to keep blasphemy and hate speech separate, I also try to distinguish blasphemy as a mode of criticism from polemic in the warlike Foucauldian sense. Finally, in this chapter, I address the problem of an authentic sacred that serves to be the proverbial line in the sand for blasphemy.

CHAPTER 2

DECIT AND DECEPTION: LITERATURE'S CLAIM TO TRUTH & REALITY

Why should we consider literature, specifically, here, the novel, as a source for legitimate ethical insights? Does the medium of the novel itself, which is creative fiction, invalidate blasphemy's claim to any sort of ethical authority.

The answer that I suggest rests in the mode of expression that all fiction must use given their status as linguistic works. Fiction, a linguistic mode of storytelling, must express reality. This imitative quality of fiction is recognized in the western literary and philosophical world as mimesis; this concept has kept the attention of philosophers from Ancient Greece to the Modern/Post-Modern world. The goal of this chapter is to observe how mimetic thought has manifested in several key figures in the conversation. This project is by no means an exhaustive survey of mimetic theory in the western canon. In addition to tracing a few mimetic arguments, this project will then turn to the ethical implications of mimesis in literary work.

Plato and Aristotle's views on mimesis begin this survey. Both Plato and Aristotle are some of the oldest thinkers on the matter of mimesis, and both have opposed views concerning the value of mimesis. Plato's concerns about the mimetic quality of art are found in Book X of *The Republic*, and Plato's metaphysics is most central to his concerns about art. This sentiment is expressed in *The Republic* by the well-known example of the thrice-removed nature of art, that is that there is an ideal form that exists metaphysically and represents the perfect form of

[11] See, for example, David Parker, *Ethics, Theory, and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

something, here a bed.[12] A carpenter then creates a bed that is based on the ideal form of bed; and then, the artist, thrice removed from the ideal form, paints the bed or recites a poem about the bed. Here the mimetic quality of literature is negative, for it does not imitate truth or reality, but the imitation of an imitation. For Plato, literary art is illusory.

The reference of the bed example is directed towards painters, those who imitate mere appearances rather than create a thing in truth, the painter does not actually know how to make a functional bed, only its appearance.[13] The lack of knowledge of the thing that the painter paints is central to Plato's contention with the poet, who recites poems about war, medicine, and philosophy without ever studying these subjects. Socrates' critique of poetry here is intense, for he presents to Homeric poetry a challenge, to name any city that has been ruled better due to Homeric poetry on virtue.[14] The question is answered in the negative, and it seems unlikely that a city has been ruled better because of Homer's poetry. The poet, like the painter, knows only imitation, not the truth. For Socrates, poetry is not just merely imitative, and it is destructive to the moral quality of the audience. Poetry, according to Socrates, only imitates the wild and exaggerated forms of character, rather than the true and noble forms of character.[15]

This understanding of the mimetic quality of literature is damning for those who find morality in literature. The virtue of friendship in Harry Potter, for example, is not only empty by Socrates' account, but the characters represented are destructive to the moral character of the reader/audience. The glimmer of hope for the status of poetry is found in *The Republic* 2-3, in which Socrates inspects the value of poetry for the training of youth and desires a direct censor

[12] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012), 358
[13] Ibid, 360.
[14] Ibid, 362.
[15] Ibid, 371.

of poetry to remove elements that would profane the gods or incite immoral behavior.[16] Poetry, Socrates recognizes, despite its thrice removal from the truth, has immense sway over its audience; the power of poetry is effective when the empty imitations are of virtuous actions and people.

For Socrates, the metaphysical distance of poetry dooms it as a linguistic work, while for Aristotle, that distance saves it. Aristotle's thought on the value of the imitative quality of literature in *The Poetics* is markedly different from that of Socrates. Aristotle goes beyond Plato's analysis of imitative poetry, analyzing how imitative poetry imitates. These qualities are rhythm, meter, music, and, most importantly, narrative. Rhythm, meter, and music are imitative of sonic realities, perhaps the sound of rain or war horns. Narrative, the linguistic element of poetry, is imitative of visual reality. Narrative forms subjects, objects, and places in the poetic work. Distinct in Aristotle's thought, narrative imitates the actions of subjects, actions in the form of moral character.[17] Aristotle, unlike Socrates, identifies that in reality, literature does not imitate the base forms of human expression, but rather, in imitating human character and actions, captures both the lowliness of subjects as well as their high moral action.

This range of imitation is found in how Aristotle positions narrative's relationship to truth. Unlike in Socrates, where there is no truth, or there is an extreme distance from the truth in art, Aristotle sees truth as an integral part to literature. In fact, the way that literature is expressed makes it a more philosophical linguistic form than that of history, a form of linguistic work that is associated with truth-telling.[18] This seems unusual since we think that the historian does not tell mere stories but recounts what happened at any given event. The historian consults empirical data in the form of primary sources and pieces together the event to better inform listeners and

[16] Ibid, 100.
[17] Aristotle. *The Poetics*. Trans S.H. Butcher. (The Internet Classics Archive. 2000), VIII.
[18] Ibid, IX

readers of the event and how the event happened.[19] For Aristotle, this is understood as the relationship history has with particular truths--that is, truths that are linked to people, places, and things that happened in reality. The actions that are presented are the actions of real people, rather than characters, and therefore, a historical narrative can cover only the actions of individuals. In contrast, literary narrative's relationship with truth is universal: the distance of literary narrative from particular truths makes it a higher form of truth than historical narrative, and that distance makes it a highly philosophical form of narrative.

The scope of literary work's range of depicting the truth is expansive; literary narrative is not about particular characters, but instead, how certain types of people would respond to certain events. The broadened scope of truth reveals literary narrative as presenting not particular truth but potential truth; therefore,, it is potentially true that four swordsmen united by friendship fight against the evils of the ancient regime.[20] This conception of the potential truth of literary narrative bleeds into the fantastical when characters perform acts that are impossible. Aristotle, notes that the nature of literature erupts beyond the irrational and fantastical. That is to say, excellent fantastical narrative will still express the action of the character. Stories, of pre-teen wizards or men metamorphosed into beetles are clearly not real stories, but it is the action that they depict that is true and the way that the world reacts to their fantastical form. Departing from Aristotle for a moment, here we see metaphor acting as the bridge between the fictitious and the real. What is the purpose of a man being metamorphosed into a beetle? The power of metaphor transforms, or here, metamorphosed the lowly beetle into a powerful symbol of cultural critique.

The Aristotelian conception of literary narrative's relationship to truth is one filled with potential for the assessment of the novels in my thesis. Aristotle's assessment offers a

[19] Ibid, IX
[20] Ibid, XXIV.

materialistic, or non-metaphysical, placement of literary narrative. It is a common-sense placement and is a positive use of mimetic arts, specifically, literature. If the goal of literature is to merely copy reality as Socrates suggests then literature is just falsity.

Plato's notion is mirrored in Hegel's aesthetics. Hegel argues that the imitation of nature cannot be the purpose or end of art because reality's beauty is already presented to enjoy.[21] Simply, art as an imitation of nature is redundant. Furthermore, if the imitation of nature is a necessity of art, that skillful imitation is merely a display of the skill of the author.[22] Hegel addresses three other false purposes of art: that art is for evoking emotions, that art is for instruction, and that art is meant to teach ethics. Hegel's challenge to the idea that ethical/moral instruction is the purpose of literature is similar to the reason why literature is not just merely the imitation of nature; literature is not merely for the moral of the story.[23] For Hegel, art is a product with an imaginative and sensuous level that becomes unnecessary if the purpose of art is solely ethical and moral education.[24] Hegel uses an analogy of an empty husk: once you learn the moral lesson of the art, the imaginative and sensuous husk may be thrown away, never to be used again. Therefore, though, ethical/moral lessons are part of the process of art, they are merely an aspect of it. What draws scores of people to take stories such as Harry Potter or *The Three Musketeers* as sources of ethical guidance, for example, are not explicitly found in the narrative of these stories.

Hegel's rejection of these three common understandings of the ends of art reflect what is most central to his aesthetic philosophy--that is that art is the revelation of truth in sensuous

[21] Georg Wilhelm Hegel. *On Art, Religion, and the History of Philosophy*, ed. J. Glenn Gray. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 69.
[22] Ibid, 73.
[23] Ibid, 81.
[24] Ibid, 82.

form.[25] For art to reveal truth, it must be free from a purpose outside of itself.[26] Hegel, predicts that one might find this a problematic stance to take since what is often understood as truth is that which is empirical and made of matter. The empirical or external appearances of the natural world are mere appearance to Hegel, and that what is genuinely true is situated in the mind.[27] Art, as a product of the mind, exists in a more genuinely real way than nature, as it draws truths from the appearances of the natural world. According to Hegel, the truths of the appearances of the natural world are impossible to grasp.[28] Art grasps the appearance of the natural world and eases ? the truth that is found in the appearances. Again this truth is sensuous, which Hegel sets aside as distinct from philosophical truth and religious truth. For Hegel, all three truths--the philosophical, religious, and sensuous--display to human beings the deepest human interests. Simply put, these three truths remind readers/viewers/listeners what it means to be human.[29] This clearly leads to the previous ends of art that Hegel rejected without placing them as the sole end of art; therefore, art, in revealing the deepest truths of humanity, may indeed invoke emotions and instruct us morally.

Beyond Hegel, this notion of literature revealing to us the deepest human truths is easily seen in works that situate literature, especially novels, as a continual interaction and encounter with the Other. Literary works carry within them worlds that readers may not exist in, but the worlds are decorated with the personalities and traits of characters, who as we have seen through Aristotle and Hegel, reflect, most clearly, people in our world. Their stories might reflect our own or might diverge significantly, and yet, no matter how bizarre the story of an Orc, an Elf, and a Warlock might be, they still hold within them the spark of humanity. The Other is always

[25] Ibid, 29.
[26] Ibid, 29.
[27] Ibid, 27.
[28] Ibid, 32.
[29] Ibid, 32.

present on the page. This means that the literary claim to ethics is not found in the meaning of the entire story. There are plenty of didactic literary works, but what makes the novel, the poem, or the drama powerful ethical authorities are their emplotments of moments of human justice and human evil.[30] Specifically, these literary genres convey to what extent just and evil actions impact the lives of human beings regardless of whether or not these stories actually happened. The ethical emplotment is a two-fold formation requiring narration wherein the character's stories and interactions unfold before the reader who interprets their actions seeing within them reflections of the reader's world as well as the world of the character.[31] It should be noted that narration is not merely a stream of descriptive information about the world of the characters. The description comes with narrative techniques that shroud the experience of the characters in metaphor, irony, and humor and turn the merely imitative into the real or human. This makes the act of interpretation difficult, and yet, it requires the reader to sit with the Other in the text longer than pure description.

What happens to the Other during the interpretation process is a question worth exploring. There is one path that this encounter with Other in narrative could lead to, a path of absorption, a sort of fusion of horizons as posited by Hans Georg Gadamer. The reader's horizon, which is the sum total of all his prejudices (understood as pre-judgments consisting of politics, race, religion, gender, and other identities) is expanded by the encounter with the Other.[32] This expansion of horizons, according to Gadamer, should lead to better interpretations of texts and also better interactions with the world. This conclusion seems to be the most optimistic outcome of what happens to the Other in the process of reading and interpretation. But

[30] Adam Newton, *Narrative Ethics*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 26.
[31] Ibid, 26.
[32] Hans-Georg Gadamer *Truth and Method*, trans Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 256.

I think, looking through the lens of literature and reality, this fusion of horizons has a powerful effect on the reader and the Other. To get to that effect is challenging, and Gadamer does not address how much work is involved in the act of fusing the horizon of the Other and the reader. Genuine reading is a difficult task, almost herculean.

The amount of effort that is put into understanding the intentions, emotions, and actions of a character creates a texture to the text that would not be there if the hard work of interpretation had not occurred. I use the word texture because of its tactile quality. Texture indicates that something is being raised from something. Indeed, the Other is not absorbed into the horizon of the reader, but it raised out of the text and made more real in the eyes of the reader via interpretation. A fusion of horizons indicates that the prejudices of the Other can become the prejudices of the reader. This absorption of the prejudices of the Other seems an impossible task, and it would require to live another life solely as the Other. In this, how do the reader's previous prejudices have an impact on the way that he or she interprets Other? The task is too circular.

The act of genuine reading makes the prejudices presence? of the Other real and true. This is why some stories follow readers beyond the last pages of the text; the stories haunt them because the characters and plot have become very real to the readers: they have created textures in their worlds. It is not that the readers of Harry Potter are more like Potter because they have read and sat with the text, but instead, that they have concretized a reality completely different from their own that highlights the just and evil actions in their own reality. The narrative of Harry Potter or any other story deepens the perception of reality to the reader. In this fashion, fiction is not falsity. Fiction is the shocking grasp of the Other--that shocking grasp which has behind it the real experiences of a range of characters, locations, and emotions that drawn from the genuinely human.

CHAPTER 3

SACRED PUPPETS: THE SATANIC VERSES & DIVINE MANIPULATION

The Satanic Verses is to the modern period a reminder that the secularization thesis is nowhere near as clean as theorists and scholars had supposed. The global backlash against the novel and the Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* calling for Rushdie's death are an example of a world that still finds value in the sacred. The energy put forward by scholars, religious institutions, and media outlets on the topic of the novel and the concept of blasphemy is enormous. Much of the scholarship on the novel is primarily focused on the Rushdie Affair, rather than the world of the text. The overabundance of conversation about the "affair" contributed to little more than political back and forth between those for and against the novel. These conversations often came down to notions of reverence and freedom of speech, which made no headway on the central topic. It was in the conversation on freedom of speech and reverence surrounding the novel that made apparent the notion of blasphemy's interpretive range. Those who defended Rushdie's right to write *The Verses* did so on the very basis of freedom of speech and the necessity for author's freedom to be protected. In this instance, blasphemy is a word that means nothing. This is most evident in Margret Thatcher's response to the novel in which she indicates that there was no need to convict Rushdie of blasphemy because he was acting and writing according to the law. This remained the case even after she recognized the offensive nature of the novel; her recognition of the novel's blasphemy was interpreted through the realities of British law.

The Rushdie Affair happened thirty years ago in 1988; the fervor over the affair has died down, and the culture war rumblings have moved on to more pertinent examples. The temporal distance from the initial reception of the novel and this project allows for conversation beyond

the socio-political reception of the novel or notions of reverence and freedom of speech. It is worth recognizing that *The Satanic Verses* is a profoundly blasphemous novel in both the offensive sense as well as the artistic and critical sense recognized in the idiom of this project. While there are many works on why *The Verses* is offensive to Islamic principles, this project is interested in the way *The Verses* violates the most central tenant of Islam, its first pillar, which is the recognition that there is no god but God and that the Prophet Muhammad is his messenger. In violating this central tenet of Islam, *The Verses* commits what is understood in traditional Islamic theology as *shirk* which forbids associating God with something or someone else.

The Verses commits *shirk* in its inversion of the divine voice in Islamic theology. Taking a historical-critical approach, *The Verses* places revelation of the Quranic verses in the control of the profane actors below who are politically motivated by profane-world interests. This is far from the universal ethic that traditional Islam attributes to the Quran during the life of the prophet. The range of this divine inversion is concentrated in how the messenger angel Gabriel's voice is replaced with the profane voices of Mahound, the Imam, and Salman the Persian.

Of these characters who wield the divine voice for profane interests, the character Mahound, *The Verses'* profaned prophet, arises as the most blasphemous in nature. Muhammad another sacred character whose character is firmly established in Islamic textual tradition is profaned to reflect the very nature of another character the Imam, who is *The Verses'* version of Khomeini or any other theocratic dictator. One can argue that Rushdie is playing into centuries-old stereotypes of suggesting that the prophet was merely a theocratic dictator and that his revelations were purely for political gain. The addition of these blasphemous attributes to Muhammad and linking them to that of a tyrannical entity in the world outside of the text serves to intensify the condemnation of the very act of abusing the sacred voice. This notion of applying

triumphant and powerful character is replaced by a confused and weak one: the sacred in this novel has been emasculated. In the removal of its power, the novel draws attention to the sacred text as an object whose voice belongs to whoever reads it and commands that text to act. The sacred becomes a political voice for Mahound, a voice of conquest for the Imam, and a voice of revenge for Salman.

Mahound, the central character in the dream chapters "Mahound" and "Return to Jahilia," is a businessman turned prophet who is caught in the middle of determining whether his new religion Islam, should be a Monotheistic or Henotheistic tradition. The tension between these two theological systems is propagated largely by Mahound's political rival Abu Simbel who in the chapter "Mahound" pressures the prophet-businessman to accept three pre-Islamic goddesses as minor deities. Mahound's status as a businessman throughout his eponymous chapter starkly contrasts with the composition of his character in the hadiths and other Islamic biographical literature, in which Muhammad as a prophet was far more important than his status as a businessman. In *The Satanic Verses*; however, the text is far more interested in the prophet's profane and worldly duties as a businessman. Mahound's decision-making, his processing of the problematic situation, is that of a businessman weighing the pros and cons of a business deal, rather than that of a prophet working through a theological challenge. The complete isolation of the divine from the Prophet primes the reader for Mahound's primary role in the novel as a profane prophet.

Mahound, when faced with Abu Simbel's offer to accept three pre-Islamic goddesses into the Islamic worldview, goes to Mt. Hira and meets with Gibreel, one of the protagonists of *The Verses* who is represented as the angel Gabriel, the messenger of divine revelation for the prophet Muhammad in the Quran. Gibreel is a Muslim whose faith has been challenged by the

absence of God's mercy throughout his life, particularly during a time when Gibreel is mortally ill and when Gibreel eats pork and commands that God strike him down. When Gibreel's demands for mercy and wrath are not answered his faith in the divine slips. Gibreel's lack of faith in God makes his role as the messenger ironic, for his delivery of the word of God ought to come from confidence, but Gibreel the messenger has no message and no revelation for Mahound. The lack of a message for Mahound's theo-political troubles reflects the silence that Gibreel met during his phase of bad health and moral decay. Mahound, rather than taking Gibreel's path of disbelief, seizes the opportunity of the silence. When profane angel and prophet meet for the first time on Mt. Cone, Gibreel is floating above Mahound, who enters a dream-like state in which he asks the doubting angel questions concerning the future of his new religion. The two are connected to an umbilical cord of light, where Gibreel states that he feels himself being dragged into the body of the prophet, a connection that unites the two together into one total self.

This fusion is made clear by Gibreel's dual point of view. He is above and looking down representing Gibreel's angelic position, and below-staring up, representing Mahound's worldly position. This dual nature is however controlled completely by Mahound's will, and it reveals Mahound's role in the authorship of the Quran. All of the questions that Mahound asks of his supposedly sacred messenger he asks of himself, and they concern how he ought to act. Mahound asks twelve questions in this trance state, eight of which are questions that place action in Mahound's hands, questions like, "Haven't I already done my best to make things simple for them?" "What can I do?" "Must I betray myself for a seat on the council?" When thinking about Abu Simbel, Mahound asks "Does he know? Perhaps not even he. I am weak, and he's strong, the offer gives him many ways of ruining me." The most telling questions are: "What shall I

recite?" "Should God be proud or humble, majestic or simple, yielding or un-?" "What kind of idea is he?" "What kind am I?" It is the self-centeredness of these questions that make Gibreel's response to Mahound's questioning so fitting: "He never turns up, the one who kept away when I was dying when I needed him. The one it's all about, Allah Ishvar God. Absent as ever while we writhe and suffer in his name" (page#).

The presence of potential sacrality, manifested in Gibreel, has no way of speaking for itself; rather, it becomes, connected to the profane through this marionette-like cord of light: a puppet whose connection to the transcendent makes it valuable for empowering profane words to be sacred Word. Mahound's will travels to Gibreel and forces the doubting angel to speak, and in this way, Mahound determines God's character and God's attributes in the same way that an author might determine the attributes and characteristics of a novel's protagonist.

The scene after the revelation on Mt. Cone is where we find that God, according to Mahound, has allowed for the three goddesses to be minor goddesses, compromising the firmly held monotheism of Mahound's Islam. This revelation backfires against Mahound as Hind, Mahound's true antagonist who worships the three goddesses, declares that the three goddesses and God will never be equal and that they will always fight for supremacy; the next scene is Mahound wrestling the refutation of his previous revelation out of Gibreel. The profane angel and prophet throw each other around the room until Gibreel pins Mahound to the ground, proving that God and his angels are powerful. Mahound again transforms profane words to sacred Word, and he then attributes the previous verse to that of Satan, despite Gibreel's insistence that it was his angelic voice, though manipulated by Mahound both times.

In both instances of Mahound forcing revelation from Gibreel, we have scenes in which Mahoud speaks, and Gibreel speaks back, but it is understood that the prophet does not hear or

listen to the angel. In *The Verses*, the transcendent, the angel and the divine's voice, is made completely powerless; or specifically, its power only manifests in the form of profane political and cultural authority that is wielded by profane actors such as Mahound and, later in the novel, Mahounds mirror character the Imam. The will of the profane reality to organize and structure a sacred figure and character is taken to its most extreme in the later chapter, "Return to Jahillia," in which Salman the Persian, a scribe for Mahound, drunkenly recounts the Medinan period of Islam.

Here Salman's inebriated and stammering recount tells of a Medina where Mahound dictated everything from how one sleeps, eats, has sex, and deals with money. Salman states that Allah became "obsessed with law" (Rushdie 376). Salman then draws a conclusion from this law obsessed God, "How excessively convenient it was that he should have come up with such a very businesslike archangel, who handed down the management decisions of this highly corporate, if not non-corporeal, God" (Rushdie 376). Later in his recounting, Salman states that "It would have been different if Mahound took up his positions after receiving the revelation from Gibreel; but no, he just laid down the law and the angel would confirm it afterwards" (Rushdie 377). Here again, the character of that which should be sacred is molded, not by true revelation, but by a profane figure whose primary goal is the continuation of power.

Salman serves as a way to explain the novel's rendition of the significant portion of Islamic historiography, where the prophet and his followers are ousted from Mecca to Medina. In traditional Islam, this period's revelations focus on specific legal and moral guidelines, especially concerning war and inter-religious law. In many ways, this period's revelations reflect the status of Islam as a religion that has developed significantly since its time as a minority religion in Mecca, and in addition to this, these revelations also display the fact that Islam now

shares a territory with tolerant but powerful religions, represented in revelations about the *Dhimmi* or people of the book. At the socio-historical level, it makes perfect sense that these revelations come about during this time period when the prophet and his followers are both at the mercy of warfare and, yet, are a growing community, with neighbors who do not share their religious sentiments; Islam's survival depended on the adoption of a more rigorous system of law and ethics.

Salman's rendition adds a skeptic's twist concerning the Medinan period: all the legalistic additions are for solidification of Mahound's power for selfish reasons and these laws that restricted life began to strain Salman's own faith in the divinity (Rushdie 379). Salman the Persian's "Return to Jahillia" episode is more than a recounting of the Medinian period of Islam, but another example of the way that the sacred is manipulated. Salman, doubtful of Mahound's authentic status as a prophet, begins to record Mahound's revelations inaccurately, at first changing minor details and then editing the entire meanings of verses (Rushdie 380). Though there is no direct relationship between Salman and a transcendent sacred, the implication is clear: Salman's scribal voice becomes that of the sacred. Even when Gibreel is not in a scene, his voice is manipulated by the profane as an act of revenge, rather than a theo-political act. Here, Mahound's spoken Word battles Salman's written Word in an effort to reveal the profane words behind them. Nice

Up until this point, this project has looked at the ways that sacred power is manipulated by the profane in a linguistic sense, specifically, in a profane revelatory sense. Gibreel's status as an angel, an entity whose power is greater than a human's is constantly debilitated by the hijacking of his voice. Gibreel, both in and out of revelatory scenes, holds no weight in the Jahillia chapters; Mahound neither hears his confusion nor does Salman have a chance to speak

to him before editing the revelations. Gibreel, whose own role in the dream is stated as a camera or spectator, is but a mere passive entity (Rushdie 110), who in the finale of the "Jahillia" chapters, only appears as a refrain that repeats twelve times to set the scene: for example, "Gibreel dreamed this" (Rushdie 375); "Gibreel dreamed campfires" (Rushdie 383); and "Gibreel dreamed the Grandee's return home" (Rushdie 383). Gibreel appears nowhere in the "Return to Jahillia" chapter, mimicking the silence of the sacred in the "Mahound" chapter when Gibreel asked for assistance in giving the profane prophet a satisfactory answer. What we will turn to next is a look at the way that sacred power is inhabited by the profane, either by directly controlling the sacred's body or literally becoming the sacred. I will address the former first.

The chapter "Ayesha" opens with the introduction to the character named the Imam, who, based on the description of his London apartment, is a type of theo-political exile in the same way that Mahound was an exile in Medina. The two characters share many similarities that suggest that they are mirrored characters. Both of Mahound and the Imam are obsessed with the notion of singularity, and both vow to eradicate the religion of Al-Lat, who is the strongest of the three goddesses mentioned above, and both are also obsessed with water and cleanliness. But the most significant similarity between the Imam and Mahound is their relationship with Gibreel, as both directly manipulate the angel: Mahound manipulates his voice, and the Imam manipulates the angel's body to deal death even after revelation is complete (Rushdie 217).

In this brief section, the Imam conjures Gibreel and forces him to battle a cosmic Al-Lat to the death for ideological supremacy: singularity vs. hybridity (Rushdie 220). The Imam commands Gibreel to kill Al-Lat (Rushdie 220) and grows the angel until he is as large as a building and arms him with deadly thunderbolts (Rushdie 220). The background of this scene is that of a street revolution where nameless supporters of the Imam throw themselves in front of

guns to be martyred for the love of the Imam's singularity (Rushdie 220). These nameless supporters are but mere gunfire fodder, or simply, sacrifices; and, the Imam sees even Gibreel's holy form as merely something that can be sacrificed in combat for ideological supremacy. Gibreel has no agency in this episode, as he is summoned without his permission (Rushdie 217), commanded to fly the Imam to the sight of the battle (Rushdie 218), and commanded to fight and potentially die for the Imam (Rushdie 220-221). As Gibreel's deed is done and he kills Al-Lat, he is diminished in power, as the Imam's grows in power and consumes the marching people at the gates, and eventually will eat his own sacred messenger (Rushdie 221). The Imam episode is an example of extreme fundamentalism, but specifically, how that extreme fundamentalism finds both its supporters and the sacred that is at the core of its ideology to be bare in nature. Both the supporters and the sacred are mere tools to be sacrificed when necessary to gain ideological power. Gibreel is at the very whim of this profane actor and is sacrificed in the end for the gain of a potential dictator.

The final example of the profane manipulating the body of the sacred comes about in a very short section of the chapter "A City Visible But Unseen," in which Gibreel's archangelic dream persona begins to seep into reality. Gibreel's section of this chapter deals with his romantic relationship with Alleluia Cone and then their eventual falling out as he is met with the manifestation of God, who is described as "A man about the same age [as Gibreel], of medium height, fairly heavily built, with salt-and-pepper beard cropped close to what the line of the jaw. What struck him most was that the apparition was balding, seemed to suffer from dandruff and wore glasses" (Rushdie 328). Here the author, Rushdie, represented as God makes the final and ultimate move to manipulate the sacred in both senses.

The author-god charges Gibreel to fulfill his duty and spread the word of Islam to the world thereby, placing the role of a sacred figure, the angel Gabriel, onto a profane figure Gibreel Farishta. Here, a loop of sacred manipulation and charge is pressed onto and outside of the page, both author-god and author have charged Gibreel with the sacred status. Gibreel's status as the messenger angel occurs at the metanarrative level with the silent author granting him this status in the "Mahound" and "Return to Jahilia" chapters and then also in the narrative during the author-god's own manifestation, charging Gibreel' with his messenger's mission. Rushdie himself, in all of this, shows the way that profane reality always has control over the depiction, action, and character of the sacred. For Rushdie, the manipulation in this author-god scene was humorous. But for Mahound or the Imam, the manipulation has significant effects: the sacred is something that needs the profane to wield it to effect the course of history and to restrict and free society. The blasphemy of the verses underscores the significance of this point and suggests an ethics of sacred text that moves away from the demanding voice of the tyrant, one that would perhaps allow the voice of the sacred to speak clearly.

CHAPTER 4

TO SUE GOD: CAIN AND HOLDING GOD RESPONSIBLE

Jose Saramago's *Cain* is among a group of modern novels that are concerned with religious institutions, religious people, and religious thought. Rewriting the Western metanarrative while avoiding--or in some modern authors' cases embracing--blasphemy and what strategies in doing so writers use are what this chapter interrogates. These religious institutions, people, and thought, with the rise of Enlightenment skepticism of religious authority and textual tradition in the 18th century and the wave of secularization that followed it in the 19th and 20th centuries, faced a different kind of interrogation than a theological one. In the 20th century, authors, like Salman Rushdie, turn the critical gaze to the sacred text itself, a task that is, as my title suggests, a dirty job. Salman Rushdie, in his novel *The Satanic Verses*, rewrites a few chapters of the Sunna, or the history of Muhammad, in irreverent ways. This blasphemy, as it was characterized in the Rushdie Affair, led to a two million dollar death sentence on Rushdie and took the lives of four members of his editorial team.

Rushdie's rewriting of the Prophet's life was only a small portion of the novel, whereas Jose Saramago's *Cain* is an entire irreverent reworking, rewriting, and reimagining of the stories found in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. We follow the story of Cain, who as the bible's first murderer finds himself an ironicly sympathetic hero in the novel. In Saramago's rewriting, Cain adds a skeptical voice to the biblical narrative. Saramago, in many respects, stays very close to the biblical narrative, perhaps to keep the critique and skepticism focused. *The Satanic Verses*, in taking many liberties with the early history of Islam, comes off as an irreverent atheist polemic. *Cain* approaches the *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament* as though it wants to speak back to it and the

community that reads it, especially on the subject of justice and the role of the divine in that justice.

In this essay, I will examine the adaptation of biblical myth in the novel. To do so, and to understand Jose Saramago's concern with justice, I will focus on the episode of the novel in which Saramago retells the story of the Book of Job. Specifically, I will focus on how the way that Saramago's retelling or adaptation of the Book of Job is an adaptation strategy to highlight the ways that violence and oppression are ever present in the Book of Job to reveal the ways that human vulnerabilities are overlooked in light of uplifting and venerating the status of God. Saramago's adaptation is a modern interpretation of the book that stands in stark contrast to traditional Christian and Jewish readings of the Book of Job that cast judgment against the character of Job rather than the actions of the divine. Saramago's additions to the narrative and removal of elements from the narrative allow his novel to propose to its readers that the divine justice read into Job, by traditional readers, is not there, or more precisely that God refuses to wield God's power to create a just world. Therefore, *Cain* is more than a polemical rejection of the divine; it is a trial against the divine. Before addressing the topic in further detail, it may prove helpful to move to observe the process of rewriting and adapting source material.

In its most literal sense, rewriting is not the most helpful term for talking about the way *Cain* tells the biblical narrative. Rewriting is a process by which one writes something again to improve it. Rewriting is editorial, rather than an artistic strategy. Rewriting suggests that a written discourse was fixed to its medium and will stay in that medium and within the prior source's genre conventions. Adaptation arises as a better term to situate the transformative process of the biblical narrative into the ironic, humorous, and callous nature of the narrative found in *Cain*.

Here, transformation is key. Julie Sanders, in "Adaptation and Appropriation," suggests several ways of defining or understanding adaptation, but she rests on one common structure underlying all adaptations, that they are; "a highly specific process involving the transition from one genre to another: novels to film; drama into musical; the dramatization of prose narrative and prose fiction; or the inverse movement of making drama into prose narratives."[33] Within this understanding of what it means to be an adaptation, *Cain* is the novelization of a sacred text from the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. In adaptation, in moving a text from one genre to another, the editorial process of rewriting can and will occur, as the author of the adaptation can emphasize and de-emphasize narrative elements from the source material.

The process of changing the elements of narrative, highlights a key feature of the relationship between the source material and the adaptation--that is, that an adaptation is a resuscitation of the source material, bringing it back to life, so to speak, in new ways. The source material comes with its own set of meanings and modes of expression, but the reader, and here the adapter, brings to life newer meanings and renditions of the source material. Sanders suggests that "Cartmell's second category of commentary, or adaptations that comment on the politics of the source text, or those of the new *mise-en-scene,* of both, usually [use] alteration or addition."[34] Therefore, the adaptation is not just going from genre to genre; it may also move from one cultural period to another. The adapter may see the way in which the text might express sentiments no longer valued in the adapter's culture, and therefore, the adaptation, in moving the story from genre to genre, explicitly or implicitly might change the values of the source material to fit the adapter's culture. *Cain* most certainly fits within this view of adaptation as not only a

[33] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 24.
[34] Ibid., 27.

novelization of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament but also as a commentary or resuscitation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament to the skeptical modern era.

Cain's source-adaptation relationship is unique. Its source material, the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, is omnipresent in the western context, and no other text quite holds that level of relevance. In this sense, to read an adaptation of the Hebrew Bible might suggest a reader with a greater level of knowledge of the source material than adaptations from less culturally relevant sources. Therefore, the adaptation of the biblical text comes with both a textual tradition and a tradition of its reception, and in adapting that work, the adapter must be aware of both.

This argument is important for distinguishing the reception of an adaptation of a sacred text from that of a secular text, for Sander's suggests, in secular works, "Knowledge of the adaptational work…is not necessary for a satisfying experience…but we might argue that such knowledge brought into play in the process of understanding could enrich the spectator's experience and may indeed enhance or complicate the pleasures involved."[35] The reader of an adaptation of a sacred text, however, cannot read and appreciate the qualities of the adaptation if she is not familiar with the source material, for the novel's discourse and primary theme is that of criticizing the biblical narrative and the traditional community. Without knowing some context of the biblical text or the Christian and Jewish interpretations, the reader might read the novel, but she could not grasp the total goals and meaning of the text. *Cain* cannot be a standalone adaptation. A reader without knowledge of the Judeo-Christian tradition may see that this figure named God is a cruel character and that Cain is the only character who challenges God; but the uninformed reader would miss the irony and incredible significance of that relationship, the

[35] Ibid., 28.

criticism of religion, the inverted relationships of the biblical characters, and divine faults. These concepts are central to an adaptation of a sacred text, but secondary attributes, such as stream of consciousness writing, the unusual narrative pacing, and the uninformed reader can enjoy the humor of the text.

Of course, the almost universal relevance of the biblical text is facilitated by its status as a text used for worship by religious communities. The communities that utilize the biblical sacred texts have formulated their religious, cultural, and personal identities around these texts. These same identities have disseminated into the wider western consciousness, influencing everything from the artistic to the political. Paul Ricoeur, in *The Sacred Text and the Community*, states, "You preach on canonical texts, but not profane; the community would be completely changed if you chose a modern poet to do its sermon… this is a crisis of the community because its own identity relies on the identity of the text, as both distinct from non-sacred texts and from other sacred texts."[36] This reciprocal notion of identity making between the traditional community and the text is important; that is, that the community stakes its own identity on maintaining the validity of the text's identity as sacred. This is what makes texts such as *The Book of Job* so valuable to the modern study of religion. Its conceptualization of God is divergent from the expected understanding of God, and scholars of religion ask how there can be an omnibenevolent God that would harm Job in such a way? The text offers serious ethical and philosophical implications for the traditions that read it. To discuss the interpretations and justifications of *The Book of Job* in the traditional communities, we should briefly summarize the biblical narrative and note some of the consistent themes.

[36] Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer, Ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 70.

The Book of Job belongs to the section of the HB/OT called the Ketuvim or the writings, which contain much of the HB/OT's rich poetic elements and self-contained stories. Job holds these elements, containing prose at the story's front end and back end with poetic verse that fills in the middle between the prose narratives. The biblical narrative begins by providing the setting, the land of Uz, a location that is neither mentioned anywhere else in the bible nor are traditional biblical readers or modern scholars sure where it is. Living in Uz is a man named Job who is described as "blameless and upright, he feared God and shunned evil." [37] The narrative moves the reader to a heavenly court where the character "the satan," whose role is like a doubter or prosecutor in the court rather than the ultimate evil, is introduced, and he posits that Job would curse God and fall from his blameless state if someone destroyed all that he possessed. God allows the satan to do so, and Job's thousands of livestock and land are destroyed and taken from him, and his family is killed by winds from heaven. This punishment is repeated when Job refuses to curse God, and the satan posits that if God hurt Job to within an inch of his life, he will curse God, and so God allows the adversary to afflict Job with a myriad of afflictions.

Yet, Job does not curse God. Job is left to scrape his pus-filled boils off his legs with a potsherd. In his suffering, Job's three friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar come to mourn with Job, and the narrative opens into the middle section in which Job's three friends and Job have a debate about the nature of God's justice. All three of his friends conclude that evil befalls those who sin. Therefore, Job must repent his sins. Ultimately, Job recognizes that he is blameless, dismisses his friends' positions, and asks God to explain his undeserved suffering. God appears before Job in a tempest and explains that because God is the creator and that God sees the world and its workings more complexly than Job. Ultimately, the workings of justice in the world are

[37] Jewish Publication Society, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 1657.

out of Job's understanding, and he has no right to question the God to explain Godself. The story concludes with Job admitting that he has a smaller perspective in the world and could not possibly have the perspective that God has to understand divine justice.

The biblical narrative is perplexing: here, we see a man, Job, who is the pinnacle of moral uprightness, whose suffering and punishment occur for no reason. The irony of the story is in God's refusal to admit Job's suffering is arbitrary, despite the reader knowing the real reason for Job's suffering is the bet between God and Satan. God's punishment of Job is justified by the ineffable nature of God; in fact, that ineffable nature of God translates into the traditional religious communities highlighting that ineffability and Job's patience, faith, or guilt.

The rabbis, the group of trained interpreters of the HB/OT, were interested in Job's innocence or guilt.[38] Several rabbis argue for Job's guilt in the *Baba Bathra*, noting that in the biblical narrative after Satan assaults Job, the text states in 2:10: "In all this Job did not sin with his lips." The rabbis who argue for Job's guilt suggest that he may not have sinned with his lips, but that Job did sin with his heart. Additionally, the rabbis also note that Job's sin is also in his arguing with his master, God.[39] Mark Larrimore notices, in his study of the Midrashic work on Job, that much effort is given to ensure that God is not blamed for being "unfair" or abusing God's power over Job.[40] The focus on Job's character continues in the Christian tradition, where Larrimore notes that the most significant pre-modern writing on Job, Pope Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job* is concerned with understanding Job's suffering through the lens of Christ-like suffering and sacrifice.

[38] Mark Larrimore, *The Book of Job: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 57.
[39] Ibid.,59-60.
[40] Ibid., 60.

In both pre-modern notions, the critical lens is locked on Job, either in praise or condemnation of him. The character of God is not up for critique or questioning, neither for God's willingness to inflict suffering on the innocent or for God's seeming abuse of the innocent when asked for a reason for the suffering. Both the Jewish and Christian interpreters of the text have their identity at stake in maintaining the legitimacy of the central figure of their sacred text, God. For example, in his *Guide to the Perplexed* Moses Maimonides argues that the point of *Job* is to learn to base knowledge on authority and that when Job spoke, he spoke from a position of ignorance and lack of authority.

A philosopher in the Christian tradition challenges Maimonides' conclusion. Thomas Aquinas argues that Job, able to refute the claims of his three friends, shows perfect wisdom but lacks the justness to argue his claims without blaspheming. For Aquinas, Job's blasphemy is his claim that he can know the workings and justice of God. Finally, Aquinas states that the knowledge that Job tried to gain was ultimately unknowable.

It should not be surprising that the pre-modern interpreters are unwilling to address God and focus on the character of Job both as a believer and as a thinker. Besides finding their identity in the validity of the text, the traditional interpreters have a positive relationship with their tradition's theological and religious principles. Therefore, when they read *Job*, they are not reading it as a text to be interpreted by itself, but rather, as one to be read and interpreted with those very theological and religious principles in mind. These pre-modern interpreters of Job, reading in the contexts of their traditions, suggest the hermeneutics of horizons in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, in which he argues that everyone's status as an interpreter is contextualized in his socio-historical moment. This he calls the interpreter's horizon, and that horizon is limited by how the interpreter moves to transcend his socio-historical moment, to

allow the text to speak/express its fullest range of meanings.[41] The presence of the religious tradition was so strong that the pre-modern readers may never have seen the need to escape/transcend the limited horizon of the religious traditions that constructed their subjectivites while reading the text. It is necessary to clarify that this is not to say that the religious readings of Job were simple. Rather, they were not reading for the fullest range of meaning, and instead, read for prescriptive purposes on correct practice, belief, and argumentation.

The temporal distance that the modern era has from a time in which religious authority influenced almost every aspect of life opens the possibility of reading HB/OT as a text in and of itself and of detaching both the text and the reader from the perspective of the religious prescriptive reading of the text. Though heavily contested, I would suggest for this essay, that when I use the term "modern," I am speaking of a condition that begins in the mid-19th century and that culminates in a weakening grasp of religion in the 20th century. In the modern era, the reader, even the religious reader, was open to questioning the role of God in the book of Job and to asking the central question of theodicy: how an all good and all loving God would allow for there to be evil in the world, to allow the innocent, such as Job, to suffer. This question's power and force in the world only grew as the modern reader witnessed events from the Atlantic Slave Trade to the Holocaust, as well as looked back to events such as the Crusades and the Inquisition. Seeing the traditional readings as incapable of responding to these events, the modern reader began to see novel meanings in the HB/OT.

Cain, unbound and detached from the expectations of interpreting the text with traditional theology and religious principles in mind, opens the Job narrative up to questioning the character of God. Saramago's adaptation of the Job narrative fits with the earlier mentioned strategy, in

[41] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* translator? (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 247.

which certain narrative elements of the original text are emphasized, deemphasized, added, or entirely removed from the narrative to better frame Saramago's interpretation of Job. The major change that Saramago makes in his adaptations of the HB/OT story is the addition of a new character, Cain, from the Genesis story, who acts as both an observer and a critic of God and God's action in the novel. Where the HB/OT's narrative can be sparse, Cain acts as an additional voice to add what the skeptical modern reader might ask. "The person who stays to keep watch over the guard is just as much a thief as the one who actually goes into the vineyard," Cain says when God asks him why he killed Abel (page#). And: "That's where you're wrong, never is not the opposite of late, the opposite of late is too late, retorted Cain" (page#), in response to the Angel, saying "Better late than never," when he failed to arrive to stop Abraham from killing Isaac, causing Cain to step in and stop the unyieldingly loyal father. Maybe set these apart?

Cain's presence in the novel as the voice of the modern skeptical reader alters the flow of information in the Job narrative. The novel replaces the courtly scene as the opening scene with that of Cain entering the land of Uz and talking to two guards to ask about employment. When Cain realizes that the guards are the two angels he helped in Sodom and Gomorrah, they decide to help him by telling him about Job as a form of repayment. The two angels warn Cain what will happen to Job. In the novel, the courtly scene is a faithful rendition of the biblical narrative, and its closeness is required for the pointed critique of God that will happen in the conversation between Cain and the two angels.

If this were a novel simply trying to anger the religious reader, it might have altered the courtly scenes' narrative to be ridiculous or humorous. In refusing to alter the courtly scene, the novel shows its seriousness in contributing to the interpretive community. The conversation, after the angels recount the courtly scene and wager, highlights the importance of the addition of

the angels in the *Cain* adaptation of Job as interlocutors to whom Cain can express his bewilderment and disdain for God's injustice. Conversation is important here, as Cain does not espouse his modern skeptical position in a one-sided fashion, but, instead, has a dialogue with the two angels, who represent the traditional religious interpretation.

After the angels' recounting of the courtly meeting, Cain, breaking the dam that held back the centuries of silence on the character of God in Job, states, "If I've understood you rightly, the lord and satan made a wager, but this man job isn't to know that he is the object of that gambler's agreement between god and the devil… That doesn't seem very fair to the lord."[42] With this, Cain stakes his position: he addresses Job's innocence and how, even when a mortal is the most faithful amongst his peers, God does not trust him or treat him well. Ultimately, Cain blasphemes: he states that God does not love human beings. The angels' response will highlight an important aspect of Saramago's observation of the reception of the Job narrative, the impotence of the traditional response to address a glaring problem of the Job narrative, theodicy.

The angel's response to Cain's asking how it is fair or right for God to punish Job is that the ways of the lord are inscrutable and that the angels (and, here, we can assume humans, since this is how the Biblical narrative will end) are incapable of fathoming the workings of God's mind. Their response matches that of Aquinas and Maimonides, and yet, when asked to ruminate on why the innocent suffer despite the existence of an omnibenevolent God, they can only express (even at length) that God's will cannot be understood. It is ironic to have angels, beings who, according to many of the great medieval philosophers, are closer to God's knowledge, be the representatives of the traditional philosophical discourse. The traditional response's inability to move beyond itself is highlighted by the two angels' inability to argue against Cain's points.

[42] Saramago,122.

With the addition of the exchange between the modern reader (Cain) and traditional reader (the Angels) added to the story, Saramago highlights how the attachment to theological and religious principles may limit orthodox readers of the bible and, in particular, of the Job narrative, and even those who should not be blind, philosophers or angels, share this limitation. In their blindness, their answers to the questions that Job lead modern readers to ask are unable to address the desire for fair divine justice.

Saramago's addition of Cain does more than allow for there to be a modern reader represented in the narrative. In repositioning the protagonist of the narrative from Job to Cain, the novel can focus on the tragedy of God's wager with Satan on more than Job. In the biblical narrative, the death of Job's servants is lumped into the list of Job's possessions, and the reader of the biblical text is not even given the opportunity to think about the loss of those unnamed lives. The biblical narrative only focuses on the loss and its effects on Job. Additionally, turning to the traditional interpretation of the text, the rabbi's, priests, and philosophers also paid no attention to the loss of servants, only paying attention to Job.

In the novel, Cain who worked for Job for a short tenure before Satan destroyed all Job owned, lived in Uz as a temporary worker and citizen. In the novel, the land of Uz becomes a particularized place or location, rather than the name of a mysterious land only mentioned once to show that it is a faraway place that is disconnected from the other biblical stories. In emphasizing the land of Uz, the novel brings the reader's attention to the servants whose lives were caught in the crossfire of God and Satan's wager. There is a description of Uz after Job rends his cloths and tears at his head, "Mourning had fallen like a tombstone on the land of Uz, because all those who died had been born in the city, which was now condemned, who knows for

how long, to a general poverty in which job would not be the least of the poor."[43] The novel rightly addresses numerous families' lost members and that the land of Uz, with its largest employer gone, is thrown into an economic downturn.

With the effects of the wager expanded beyond Job, the readers may further question the character of God, for although it is morally reprehensible to destroy the life of one person, it becomes a matter of absolute moral negligence to destroy the life of an entire city that had nothing to do with the wager between Satan and God. This element of the narrative is further deepened when Cain asks the two angels if God will bring the slaves back, and he is given a short "no." Cain, in his bewilderment, asks why Satan is allowed in the heavenly court, a question that ends the conversation between him and the angels. Saramago, in this description of a post-wager Uz, includes not only the suffering of the landed wealth in the biblical narrative, but also the urban poor whose voice in the source text is silent. Saramago, here, reflects the adaptation strategy in visual adaptations of the biblical flood narrative that depict the wicked humans clinging to rocks once God opens the heavens and floods the earth. One only needs to turn to Gustave Dore's print *The Deluge* or Aaron Aronofsky's flood scene in his film *Noah* to see these images. The people who died in both the flood and Job narratives were people, and their suffering and death, though not told in the source, can be placed in the adaptation with startling results.

One exchange stays the same in Saramago's narrative. In the biblical narrative, after Job is afflicted with boils and scabs, his wife comes to him, and her only line is, "You still keep your integrity! Blaspheme God and die!" Job responds, "You talk as any shameless woman might

[43] Saramago,126.

talk! Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?"[44] Saramago's adaptation, much like the courtly scene, stays very close to the bible's account of the couple's exchange, but Saramago extends the exchange, allowing Job's wife to answer her husband. She addresses the situation that causes Job's suffering. She states, "Evil is satan's business, it would never occur to me that god would appear to us now in the guise of satan's rival" (page#). When Job realizes that Satan and not God could have punished him in such a way, she replies, "Yes, but with the lord's agreement, according to the ancients, the devil's wiles would never prevail over the will of god, but I'm not sure now that things are that simple, it seems likely that satan is just another instrument of the lord, the one who does the dirty work to which god prefers not to put his name."[45]

Job's wife, in the novel, replaces an important aspect of the biblical source material, the debate between Job and his friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. In the novel, the debates between Job and his friends are there, but they are heavily de-emphasized. Saramago only dedicates a short sentence to indicate that they happened. The adaptation strategy here suggests that there is no point to give voice to Job's three friends when the correct response was voiced by the angels before the mention of the debate. At another level, for the modern reader, Saramago has directly addressed Job's confusion about his suffering. Rather than either blaming Job for something he has not done, as his friends do, or stating that God's will is mysterious, like the angels, Saramago gives Job the real answer: that Satan made him suffer with God's permission and for no discernible reason. Knowing this, Job realizes the arbitrariness of his suffering.

In the Job narrative in the bible, the conclusion of the narrative is the moment when Job calls for God to answer his questions, and God appears before Job as a tempest and tells him that

[44] Jewish Publication Society, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (Philadelphia:Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 1659.
[45] Saramago, 127-128.

his perspective is too small to dare ask the questions he asks. Job, unable to show that his perspective is wide enough to know the divine will, concedes. The argument is another element of the source material that is removed from Saramago's adaptation. In fact, the conclusion of Job's story is only mentioned in a second-hand account by God to Cain in Saramago's adaptation of the Genesis flood narrative. In the novel, God and Cain have an informal argument about who is meant to hold God accountable when God is responsible for unnecessary suffering; therefore, Cain replaces the original questioner, Job. God in his argument with Cain is neither wreathed in tempests or winds nor does he shout powerful examples of his omnipotent feats, as he does in Job. Rather, this God is dressed in work clothes, and the two speak to each other not as servant and master or father and ignorant son, but as the novel suggests "as two old friends meeting after a long separation."[46] Job could not argue with God about justice and the suffering of either the wicked or the innocent because, reflecting Maimonides, he did not have the same level of authority and solid information as Cain, who knew that God made a wager with Satan. In the novel, Cain wields the information that was kept from Job in the source material and is able directly to address God for what God is in this moment, unjust. The implications of Cain being one who can speak to God in this way means that the modern reader may also "speak" in that way to God, as the modern reader like Cain, has witnessed the wager between Satan and God that leads to arbitrary and unnecessary suffering. The problem of evil in Job cannot escape the dilemma of the third person perspective of the reader.

The conclusion drawn from Saramago's adaptation of the Job narrative is that the veneration of God has gotten in the way of us asking who God is, and when taking the entire story into account, we see a God who is willing to punish a man, his family, his servants, and an

[46] Saramago, 137.

entire city unnecessarily for the sake of a wager. Saramago's adaptation asks its reader to be like Cain and to place God on trial for injustice and indifference towards their creation. We can see how Saramago, like Aquinas or the ancient rabbis, is only trying to take what the text is saying and respond to it with his own position, this time as a modern reader. This does not mean a dismissal of the sacred or the sacred text, as new atheists such as Dawkins and Harris suggest. Though one could potentially read from *Cain* an atheistic conclusion, the text itself does not lend very well to that conclusion, as the presence of God is strong. Similar to Bahwari's point in his essay "Not My Bible's Keeper," *Cain* is not an atheist text, because, Saramago sees God's character trait of avoidance as cruelty and as the very reason for the oppression and violence in the world.[47] Saramago's sense for justice has always been to strive against totalitarian forms of power, and to call for that power to acknowledge suffering and evil.[48] This is clearest in his secular works, but is also clear in his treatment of God in his religious adaptations. God, both in the narrative of the book of Job and *Cain,* comes off as a dictator whose power should be questioned. Saramago accepts the dirty job of asking those questions aggressively.

[47] Nazry Bahwari, "Not My Bible's Keeper: Saramago's Cain Translates Postsecular Dissent," in *Reading the Abrahamic Faiths: Rethinking Religion and Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 259.
[48] Mark Sabine, *José Saramago: History, Utopia, and the Necessity of Error* (Cambridge: Legenda, MHRA (Studies in Hispanic and Lusophone Cultures, 23, 2016), 22.

CHAPTER 5

WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE?

Blasphemy, as a mode of critique against secular power through the lampooning of sacred power, immediately presses against us the problem of offense, and not just mere offense, but cutting and harming offense. The audience who received these literary works felt pained to see something central to their identity mocked. *The Satanic Verses* did not just attack the Ayatollah, but also the sentiments of an entire religious group. *Cain*, whose reception history was not as volatile as *The Satanic Verses*, still holds within it deeply offensive portrayals of beloved biblical characters and sacred stories. Even when art that does not have an explicitly parodic nature, such as Scorsese's *The Last Temptation*, was met with crowds of Christians who found the film's less reverent depiction of Jesus as deeply offensive. This offense inevitably leads to legal action and mass protest to push back against the blasphemer. Muslims and Christians in Europe have requested that films and political cartoons be banned for their offense to religious sentiment. In the case of blasphemy against Islam and Judaism, these legal actions have been framed not only by the concepts of blasphemy but also as hate speech. All of this indicates an important element: that literary blasphemy does not exist in a vacuum, that its offense does not land just at the doorstep of the dictator or one who commits genocide, but in bookstores and libraries, where the populace can and will read and will respond with rage and frustration. It leads me to ask, at what point is blasphemy as a mode of critique effective?

Where must the line in the sand be drawn before blasphemy stops being successful at reaching out to the believing audience? These are questions that are perhaps impossible to answer. Offense is a swirling and vaporous reaction that impacts some and lands upon others

mere hate speech and when it is genuine "first-rate" blasphemy. This conversation requires a willingness to take a few steps. The first step is *the demarcation between hate speech and critique in modern western law*. If hate speech is "any form of expression through which speakers intend to vilify, humiliate, or incite hatred against a group or a class of persons," a case can be made for setting Rushdie and Saramago aside legally against the damning accusation of hate speech.[49] Second, we must *investigate the goal and end of critique,* arguing that critique and hate speech are two separate concepts. *Finally, we are called to address of the problematic of an authentic sacred figure*. This last conversation seems far afield of the previous inquiries, but it addresses the problem that receivers have towards blasphemous works and their authenticity, or specifically, their relationship to the canon of the religious tradition. In talking about these points, I hope to clarify and make complex the difficult question of where to draw the line in the sand with blasphemy as a legitimate mode of critique.

Evil speech and hate speech, both are forms of an injurious and offensive utterance, and yet, both target different victims and deal different kinds of injury. When one thinks of hate speech, especially as it has manifested in the 20th and 21st century, we can bring forth images of early 20th-century European political cartoons about Jews or post-911 posters claiming that all Muslims are terrorists. Hate Speech is exactly what it suggests: hateful discourse about a specific group of people, here, religious groups of people, either to incite harm against them or to damage their dignity in society.[50] When hate speech specifically addresses religion, it addresses religion solely on a cultural level; therefore, religious hate speech collapses theological, ethical, and

[49] Kenneth D. Ward, *Free Speech and the Development of Liberal Virtues: An Examination of the Controversies Involving Flag-Burning and Hate Speech*, 52 U. Miami L. Rev. 733 (1998)
Available at: https://repository.law.miami.edu/umlr/vol52/iss3/4.
[50] Jeremy Waldron, *The Harm in Hate Speech* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 5.

philosophical principles of religion into mere bodies to be targeted in heated rhetoric.[51] Hate speech is a type of discourse that desires to damage a minority, meaning that, hate speech is a *reactionary* mode of discourse created by a majority populace for the sake of a return to or the glorification of that majority populace. Fascist cartoonists created Anti-Jewish political cartoons to attack those who belonged to the majority population, and Christian reactionaries create Islamophobic posters and pamphlets out of fear an increasing Muslim population. This asymmetrical quality of hate speech makes it difficult for the minority to levy the same type of discourse back in any meaningful way; specifically, hate speech is always a warning to the majority by the majority and a threat against the minority made by the majority. Can you footnote this?

This notion of hate speech as a mode of discourse meant to cause harm to a group of people or to destroy their dignity is what is most central to the difference between hate speech and blasphemy. Both might be seen as a sort of discursive violence, but the violence of hate speech may lead to real material violence--lynching, assaults, murder, and genocide. The memory of these violent acts looms in the hate speech laws of countries across Europe from the UK, France, Spain, and Germany; who all have strict regulations on injurious speech against minority populations.[52] United Nations documents, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, both prohibit the use of speech that would incite national hatred and violence against a group of people (ICCPR 20(2) & ICERD 4(a)). This material violence is most central to the legal protection of blasphemy and open critique of religion because the immaterial or blasphemous and critical modes of discourse might lead to the material. The courts are only

[51]Richard Moon, *Putting Faith in Hate: When Religion Is the Source or Target of Hate Speech*(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1.
[52] Jeremy Waldron, *The Harm in Hate Speech* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 29.

responsible for protecting the wellbeing of believers in so far as their material wellbeing is threated; thus, the elements of religion that hate speech tends not to address, that is, the theological, philosophical, and ethical dimensions, are also not a concern for courts of law.[53] Surely, the believers who are at the receiving end of blasphemy and criticism would feel as though this speech is meant to rally harm against them, but the law and the discursive notions of blasphemy and criticism do not indicate, necessarily, that its narrative goal is the inciting of violence or mass hatred of a group of people. Blasphemy, here, is the undermining of power, but that undermining happens in the place of a minority position.

Marx's short treatment of religion may be read as blasphemy that is truly the critique of the political or the law. The critique of religion, for Marx, will critique unholy forms of the social substantiated by the holy, and through this criticism, a revelation of what makes humanity suffer will be made clear.[54] There is, therefore, a mode of blasphemy that can reveal the abuse of power through criticism. For Marx, the criticism of religion reveals truest conditions of reality. This notion of the revealing of truth is, at one level, integral to criticism and may not be blasphemous. The revelation of truth is found in the west, on the one hand, in a rich tradition of critical or open forum preaching where one preaches the Christian truth in public for all to hear; and, on the other, in scholarly reading of sacred and secular literature in which scholars seek a truth hidden in the text through the clearest interpretation of the text.[5556] Criticism then is an epistemological practice--that is, an ever-moving process of the destruction of concealments and the establishing of genuine truths.

[53] Richard Moon, *Putting faith in Hate: When Religion Is the Source or Target of Hate Speech.*(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1.
[54] Karl Marx, *Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 3.
[55] 1. Talal Asad, *Is Critique Secular?:Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 48-49.
[56] 1. Michael Warner, "Uncritical Reading," in *Polemic*, ed. Jane Gallop (New York: Routledge, 2004), 19.

This revelation of and establishing of truth rests upon an empirical criterion of identification and verification that highlights a notion about critique--that is, that it can never truly be *about* the sacred, but rather, always *about* the profane.[57] Talal Asad uses the example of Pope Benedict in his criticism of the Muslim outrage towards the 2006 Danish Cartoons. Pope Benedict, using a quotation from Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos during an address in Regensburg, criticized Islam as irrational and violent, while aligning Christianity's with reasoned discourse.[58] Rather than seeing in this alignment a sort of purely sacred critique, Asad makes note that Benedict aligned Christianity with reason and, thereby, with civility and Islam with chaos and barbarism.[59] These notions of civility and barbarism are not reflected in the sacred Other itself but rather in the society that is aligned with Christianity or Islam.

Benedict's critique of Islam does little to distance itself from the problems of hate speech. Though not a direct call for the destruction of Islamic society, Benedict's critique of Islam did little to reveal the truth of the historical moment he is reflecting upon. Benedict entrenched himself in a typical polemical rhetoric that pits the reasonable west against the barbarous east, ignoring counter-example after counter-example for both Christianity and Islam. What is produced in this speech is not a true religious critique; rather, it is the undermining of a theological system through the attack on the society, and rhetorically, this undermining is meant for the uplifting of another theological system, connecting that system to a set of positive traits. In this way, Benedict engages in polemic, in the fashion that Foucault warns about, in which discourse becomes a type of war against the other rather than a search for truth.[60] Foucault felt

[57] Talal Asad, *Is Critique Secular?:Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 51.
[58] See, for example, Nandagopal R. Menon, "The Pope and Islam: An Interview with Daniel Madigan, SJ. *Commonweal* (25 September 2006), https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/pope-islam-0.
[59] Asad, 52.
[60] Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 382.

uncomfortable with the warlike quality of polemic and indeed the term itself is connected to the Greek words *polemos* (war) and *polemikos* (warlike).[61]

This connection with violence may seem to damn critique rather than save it from hate speech or polemic, but what sets critique apart is the way it deploys violence in a different manner than the latter modes of discourse. Where hate speech calls for violence against a group and polemic is the mere destructive undermining of the other for the sake of uplifting one's own ideology, critique is the revelation of truth through the destruction of the Other who conceals that truth. The power dynamics of critique, in this case, are often the reverse of hate speech. Critique becomes a way that the minority strikes the majority and puts to the sword ideologies that oppress, threaten, or damage humanity.

At the level of religious criticism, José Saramago, for example, ascribes human attributes to God the capacity to commit human crimes, and in forcing the viewer or reader to see this profaned sacred, he calls to trial the very dangers the majority/powerful pose to those without power. Most readers will understand at once the weight of the criticism because of the importance of the figure criticized. In applying the critique to God, Saramago, for example, expands the criticism beyond the local problem of a national tyrant or dictator, and makes justice an international, if not universal, question.

On another level, religious criticism becomes a criticism of the interpretative community. In Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Muhammad's person and teachings create community. Muslims try to emulate the character of Muhammad, from the way that he dressed to the way that he spoke; and in particular, Muslims see their piety measured in how closely they follow the

[61] 5. Jonathan Crewe, "Can Polemic Be Ethical? A Response to Michel Foucault," in *Polemic*, ed. Jane Gallop (New York: Routledge, 2004), 136.

ways that Muhammad conducted his life.[62] The sacred, as Emile Durkheim would aruge, is society. As we see in the "Rushdie Affair," for many believers, especially those most serious about emulating the Muhammad, an attack against the man and his teachings is destructive not only to the most important character in their tradition, but an attack against their society, and themselves. This identification with sacred teaching leads believers even to violence if they see the critic's depiction of the sacred as incorrect or false. For the believer, the sacred must be rendered accurately or not at all.

As already covered in this project, novelistic fiction is inventive and imaginative; the artist, my cases, Rushdie and Saramago, bend and shape the narrative traditions they receive-- and, indeed, reality-- in whichever way they see fit. Both the Rushdie Affair and its American counterpart *The Last Temptation* controversy, in which American Christians protested the depiction of Jesus, show that, for believers, the fidelity to sacred texts and tradition is imperative to for the artist's depiction of founders. Christian film critics and Muslim readers tried to express their distaste for *The Last Temptation* and *The Satanic Verses* in ways that targeted the text at the technical level, but many of their most damning criticisms came at the inaccurate depictions of Jesus and Muhammad, and some critics went as far as saying that Rushdie and Scorsese's works were character assassinations. The displacement of the traditional sacred character into someone different than the compassionate shepherd or the patient and just leader becomes perceived as violence against the sacred, a sort of assassination. Thus, blasphemy, for the believer, is an infinitely expanding offense.

Austere and dignified. Magnificent and holy. If these sacred figures, both the prophet and God, are going to be on artistic display, according to believers, they have to be depicted in these

[62] Talal Asad, *Is Critique Secular?:Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 78.

austere and holy ways. The inflexible notion of an "authentic sacred" is the most direct challenge to blasphemy's rhetorical efficacy. At this level, the conversation becomes concerned with the cultural war between the secular and the traditional; a battle for who truly gets the final word in how art ought to represent the sacred. What is at stake for both sides is the death of truth. Specifically, at the traditional level, truth dies with the assassination of the prophet or the divinity, and at the secular level, truth dies without the constitutional protection of speech and becomes, literally, the death of freedom. This battle between the secular and the sacred leads to polemical pieces that pit one unmoving position against another unmoving position.

This problem of the authentic sacred leads to what seems to be the proverbial line drawn in the sand--that is to say, blasphemy as a rhetorical strategy has little effect on religious receivers. Blasphemy seems to defeat itself in a paradox, where it rests between a sort of recognition of the sacred while, in the same stroke, undermines itself through its dependence on the very tradition that it depicts irreverently. This means that blasphemy, even with its hermeneutical complexities, struggles to effectively speak to its receiving audience. The character of the sacred tradition may hijack the narrative, the message, and the critique and directs its reader to see how it sharply contrasts with the authentic religious depiction; therefore, the character of the sacred reverses the very strategy of blasphemy back onto itself. This reversal will go on infinitely in a cycle of the blasphemer creating an unorthodox sacred figure whose characteristics only highlight the problems with the morally egregious qualities ascribed to the unorthodox sacred when positioned next to the orthodox sacred. This notion of blasphemy leads to an infinite regress.

The central question to this conclusion is whether there is a limitation to the offensiveness of blasphemy. Where do we draw the line between criticism and blasphemy?

Critics will suggest that blasphemy is hate speech; however, blasphemy does not call for violence or the destruction of the dignity of religious groups. Nor does blasphemy seek to eradicate religion similar to what the new atheists want or position one group over another in the case of Benedict II. Both examples are religious polemic, and, I would argue, are not quite at the level of blasphemy.

It is not enough to read blasphemy as the mere rejection of the sacred, especially in the cases of Rushdie and Saramago, whose writings beg to be read as social critique, as realities uncovered or interpreted with an eye for political violence. All sacred figures from gods, prophets, and saviors, and even sacred symbols are available for the artist to use in his criticisms of reality. The sacred traditions will survive the onslaught of blasphemy; they have withstood so much more than the assault of a novel or film. But the victims of war crimes, genocides, patriarchy, racism, and a slew of corporeal and incorporeal violence will not and do not survive. Blasphemy arises as a mode of art and criticism that is willing to fight back against the atrocities of humanity, to remind us of our capacity to over-value the non-human over the human, and to emphasize the dangers of relying on ossified tradition.

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