

is a beheshti, a despised water-carrier, drawing up the vital, dangerous fluid. He has a name. Khalid.

A city of businessmen, Jahilia. The name of the tribe is Shark. In this city, the businessman-turned prophet, Mahound, is founding one of the world's great religions; and has arrived, on this day, his birthday, at the crisis of his life. There is a voice whispering in his ear: *What kind of idea are you? Man or mouse?* We know that voice. We've heard it once before.



While Mahound climbs Coney, Jahilia celebrates a different anniversary. In ancient time the patriarch Ibrahim came into this valley with Hagar and Ismail, their son. Here, in this waterless wilderness, he abandoned her. She asked him, can this be God's will? He replied, it is. And left, the bastard. From the beginning men used God to justify the unjustifiable. He moves in mysterious ways; men say. Small wonder, then, that women have turned to me. — But I'll keep to the point; Hagar wasn't a witch. She was trusting; then surely He will not let me perish. After Ibrahim left her, she fed the baby at her breast until her milk ran out. Then she climbed two hills, first Safa then Marwah, running from one to the other in her desperation, trying to sight a tent, a camel, a human being. She saw nothing. Then a man when he came to her, Cibreel, and showed her the waters of Zamzam. So Hagar survived; but why now do the pilgrims congregate? To celebrate her survival? No, no. They are celebrating the honour done the valley by the visit of, you've guessed it, Ibrahim. In that loving consort's name, they gather, worship and, always all spread

Jahilia today is all perfume. The scents of Araby, of Arabia *odorifera*, hang in the air: hulkam, coccia, oincu..., frankincense, myrrh. The pilgrims drink the wine of the date-palm and wander in the great fair of the feast of Ibrahim. And, among them, one wanders whose furrowed brow sets him apart from the cheerful crowd: a tall man in loose white robes, he'd stand almost a full head higher than Mahound. His beard is shaped close to his slanting, high-boned face, his gait contains the lilt, the

Am abusive
 "battered"
 is used
 of Ibrahim
 (Abraham)
 Prophet
 of God whom
 the Jews,
 Christians
 and Muslims
 regard as
 being a
 prominent
 messenger
 of God.

The graves of Ismail and his mother Hagar the Egyptian lie by the north-west face of the House of the Black Stone, in an enclosure surrounded by a low wall. Abu Simbel approaches this area, halts a little way off. In the enclosure is a small group of men. The water-carrier Khalid is there, and some sort of bum from Perria by the ourlandish name of Salaman, and to complete this trinity of scum there is the slave Bilal, the one Mahound freed, an enormous black monster, this one, with a voice to match his size. The three idlers sit on the enclosure wall. 'That bunch of riff raff,' Abu Simbel says. 'These are your targets. Write about them; and their leader, too.' Baal, for all his terror, cannot conceal his disbelief. 'Grandee, those goons - those fucking clowns? You don't have to worry about them. What do you think? That Mahound's our God will bankrupt your temple? Three-sixty versus one, and the one wins? Can't happen.' He giggles, close to hysteria. Abu Simbel remains calm: 'Keep your insults for your verses.' Giggling Baal can't stop. 'A revolution of water-carriers, immigrants and slaves . . . wow, Grandee. I'm really scared.' Abu Simbel looks carefully at the tittering poet. 'Yes,' he answers, 'that's right, you should be afraid. Get writing, please, and I expect these verses to be your masterpieces.' Baal crumples, whines. 'But they are a waste of my, my small talent . . .' He sees that he has said too much.

'Do as you're told,' are Abu Simbel's last words to him. 'You have no choice.'

Derogatory terms used for Bilal and Salaman - close companions of the Prophet - upon him for much use of any derogatory expressions for the companions of the Prophet is very offensive



The Grandee lolls in his bedroom while concubines attend to his needs. Coconut-oil for his thinning hair, wine for his palate, tongues for his delight. *The boy was right. Why do I fear Mahound?* He begins, idly, to count the concubines, gives up at fifteen with a flap of his hand. *The boy Hind will go on seeing him, obviously; what chance does he have against her will?* It is a weakness in him, he knows, that he sees too much, tolerates too much. He has his appetites, why should she not have hers? As long as she is discreet; and as long as he knows. He must know; knowledge is his

The Grandee sits up and at once concubines approach to resume their oilings and smoothings. He waves them away, claps his hands. The eunuch enters. 'Send a messenger to the house of the kahin Mahound,' Abu Simbel commands. *We will set him a little test. A fair contest: three against one.*



Water-carrier immigrant slave: Mahound's three disciples are washing at the well of Zamzam. In the sand-city, their obsession with water makes them freakish. Ablutions, always ablutions, the legs up to the knees, the arms down to the elbows, the head down to the neck. Dry-torsoed, wet-limbed and damp-headed, what eccentrics they look! Splish, splash, washing and praying. On their knees, pushing arms, legs, heads back into the ubiquitous sand, and then beginning again the cycle of water and prayer. These are easy targets for Baal's pen. Their water-loving is a treason of a sort; the people of Jahilia accept the omnipotence of sand. It lodges between their fingers and toes, cakes their lashes and hair, clogs their pores. They open themselves to the desert: come, sand, wash us in aridity. That is the Jahilian way from the highest citizen to the lowest of the low. They are people of silicon, and water-lovers have come among them.

Baal circles them from a safe distance – Bilal is not a man to trifle with – and yells gibes. 'If Mahound's ideas were worth anything, do you think they'd only be popular with trash like you?' Salman restrains Bilal: 'We should be honoured that the mighty Baal has chosen to attack us,' he smiles, and Bilal relaxes, subsides. Khalid the water-carrier is jumpy, and when he sees the heavy figure of Mahound's uncle Hamza approaching he runs towards him anxiously. Hamza at sixty is still the city's most renowned fighter and lion-hunter. Though the truth is less glorious than the eulogies: Hamza has many times been defeated in combat, saved by friends or lucky chances, rescued from lions' jaws. He has the money to keep such items out of the news. And age, and survival, bestow a sort of validation upon a martial legend. Bilal and Salman, forgetting Baal, follow Khalid. All three are nervous, young.

Ju du (ablation)
a major
shamic ritual
is the built
message in
nurt the
feelings of
Muslims



Caricature
of Gibreel
an angel whom
Muslims esteem

Gibreel: the dreamer, whose point of view is sometimes that of the camera and at other moments, spectator. When he's a camera the pee oh vee is always on the move, he hates static shots, so he's floating up on a high crane looking down at the foreshortened figures of the actors, or he's swooping down to stand invisibly between them, turning slowly on his heel to achieve a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree pan, or maybe he'll try a dolly shot, tracking along beside Baal and Abu Simbel as they walk, or hand-held with the help of a steadicam he'll probe the secrets of the Grandee's bedchamber. But mostly he sits up on Mount Cone like a paying customer in the dress circle, and Jahilia is his silver screen. He watches and weighs up the action like any movie fan, enjoys the fights infidelities moral crises, but there aren't enough girls for a real hit, man, and where are the goddamn songs? They should have built up that fairground scene, maybe a cameo role for Pimple Billimoria in a show-tent, wiggling her famous bazooms.

And then, without warning, Hamza says to Mahound: 'Go ask Gibreel,' and he, the dreamer, feels his heart leaping in alarm, who, me? *I'm* supposed to know the answers here? *I'm* sitting here watching this picture and now this actor points his finger out at me, who ever heard the like, who asks the bloody audience of a 'theological' to solve the bloody plot? - But as the dream shifts, it's always changing form, he, Gibreel, is no longer a mere spectator but the central player, the star. With his old weakness for taking too many roles: yes, yes, he's not just playing the archangel but also him, the businessman, the Messenger, Mahound, coming up the mountain when he comes. Nifty cutting is required to pull off this double role, the two of them can never be seen in the same shot, each must speak to empty air, to the imagined incarnation of the other, and that is technology to create the missing vision, with scissors and Scotch tape or, more exotically, with the help of a travelling mat. Not to be confused ha ha with any magic carpet.

He has understood: that he is afraid of the other, the business-

Mahound

the duty to five prayers and I refused to return. I felt ashamed to beg any more. In his bounty he asks for five instead of forty, and still they love Manat, they want Uzza. What can I do? What shall I recite?

Gibreel remains silent, empty of answers, for Pete's sake, bhai, don't go asking me. Mahound's anguish is awful. He asks: is it possible that they are angels? Lat, Manat, Uzza . . . can I call them angelic? Gibreel, have you got sisters? Are these the daughters of God? And he castigates himself, O my vanity, I am an arrogant man, is this weakness, is it just a dream of power? Must I betray myself for a seat on the council? Is this sensible and wise or is it hollow and self-loving? I don't even know if the Grandee is sincere. Does he know? Perhaps not even he. I am weak and he's strong, the offer gives him many ways of ruining me. But I, too, have much to gain. The souls of the city, of the world, surely they are worth three angels? Is Allah so unbending that he will not embrace three more to save the human race? - I don't know anything. - Should God be proud or humble, majestic or simple, yielding or un-? What kind of idea is he? What kind am I?

Present
He Prophet
as
doubtful
and
sceptic
his office
and mission



Halfway into sleep, or halfway back to wakefulness, Gibreel Farishta is often filled with resentment by the non-appearance, in his persecuting visions, of the One who is supposed to have the answers, He never turns up, the one who kept away when I was dying, when I needed needed him. The one it's all about, Allah Ishvar God. Absent as ever while we writhe and suffer in his name.

The Supreme Being keeps away; what keeps returning is this scene, the entranced Prophet, the extrusion, the cord of light, and then Gibreel in his dual role is both above-looking-down and below-staring-up. And both of them scared out of their minds by the transcendence of it. Gibreel feels paralysed by the presence of the Prophet, by his greatness, thinks I can't make a sound I'd seem such a goddamn fool. Hamza's advice: never show your fear: archangels need such advice as well as water-

of respect, and it impresses the assembled crowd. The Prophet's disciples are no longer shoved aside, but allowed to pass. Bewildered, half-pleased, they come to the front. Mahound speaks without opening his eyes.

'This is a gathering of many poets,' he says clearly, 'and I cannot claim to be one of them. But I am the Messenger, and I bring verses from a greater One than any here assembled.'

The audience is losing patience. Religion is for the temple; Jahilians and pilgrims alike are here for entertainment. Silence the fellow! Throw him out! — But Abu Simbel speaks again. 'If your God has really spoken to you,' he says, 'then all the world must hear it.' And in an instant the silence in the great tent is complete.

'The Star,' Mahound cries out, and the scribes begin to write.

'In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful!

'By the Pleiades when they set: Your companion is not in error; neither is he deviating.

'Nor does he speak from his own desires. It is a revelation that has been revealed, one mighty in power has taught him.

'He stood on the high horizon: the lord of strength. Then he came close, closer than the length of two bows, and revealed to his servant that which is revealed.

'The servant's heart was true when seeing what he saw. Do you, then, dare to question what was seen?

'I saw him also at the lote-tree of the uttermost end, near which lies the Garden of Repose. When that tree was covered by its covering, my eye was not averted, neither did my gaze wander; and I saw some of the greatest signs of the Lord.'

At this point, without any trace of hesitation or doubt, he recites two further verses.

'Have you thought upon Lat and Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other?' — After the first verse, Hind gets to her feet; the Grandee of Jahilia is already standing very straight. And Mahound, with silenced eyes, recites: 'They are the exalted birds, and their intercession is desired indeed.'

As the noise — shouts, cheers, scandal, cries of devotion to the goddess Al Lat — swells and bursts within the marquee, the

In this usage the inclusion is to call the Satanic Verses to the Quran. He unalterable word of God hence is a devastating attack on the Muslims' creed of wine revelation, reception of the revelation and god.

analytical and

The Satanic Verses and the Orientalists, published in Howard Islamicus 5 (1) 1982, pp. 27-36 114

Waiting, in a dark corner of the city's outer walls, the thing of his vision, the red manticore with the triple row of teeth. The manticore has blue eyes and a mannish face and its voice is half-trumpet and half-flute. It is fast as the wind, its nails are corkscrew talons and its tail hurls poisoned quills. It loves to feed on human flesh . . . a brawl is taking place. Knives hissing in the silence, at times the clash of metal against metal. Hamza recognizes the men under attack: Khalid, Salman, Bilal. A lion himself now, Hamza draws his sword, roars the silence into shreds, runs forward as fast as sixty-year-old legs will go. His friends' assailants are unrecognizable behind their masks.

It has been a night of masks. Walking the debauched Jahilian streets, his heart full of bile, Hamza has seen men and women in the guise of eagles, jackals, horses, gryphons, salamanders, wart-hogs, rocs; welling up from the murk of the alleys have come two-headed amphisbaenae and the winged bulls known as Assyrian sphinxes. Djinn, houris, demons populate the city on this night of phantasmagoria and lust. But only now, in this dark place, does he see the red masks he's been looking for. The man-lion masks: he rushes towards his fate.



mother
hack
= the
character
the prophet's
companions

In the grip of a self-destructive unhappiness the three disciples had started drinking, and owing to their unfamiliarity with alcohol they were soon not just intoxicated but stupid-drunk. They stood in a small piazza and started abusing the passers-by, and after a while the water-carrier Khalid brandished his water-skin, boasting. He could destroy the city, he carried the ultimate weapon. Water: it would cleanse Jahilia the filthy, wash it away, so that a new start could be made from the purified white sand. That was when the lion-men started chasing them, and after a long pursuit they were cornered, the booziness draining out of them on account of their fear, they were staring into the red masks of death when Hamza arrived just in time.

. . . Gibreel floats above the city watching the fight. It's quickly over once Hamza gets to the scene. Two masked assailants run

away, two lie dead. Bilal, Khalid and Salman have been cut, but not too badly. Graver than their wounds is the news behind the lion-masks of the dead. 'Hind's brothers,' Hamza recognizes. 'Things are finishing for us now.'

Slayers of manticores, water-terrorists, the followers of Mahound sit and weep in the shadow of the city wall.



As for him, Prophet Messenger Businessman: his eyes are open now. He paces the inner courtyard of his house, his wife's house, and will not go in to her. She is almost seventy and feels these days more like a mother than a. She, the rich woman, who employed him to manage her caravans long ago. His management skills were the first things she liked about him. And after a time, they were in love. It isn't easy to be a brilliant, successful woman in a city where the gods are female but the females are merely goods. Men had either been afraid of her, or had thought her so strong that she didn't need their consideration. He hadn't been afraid, and had given her the feeling of constancy she needed. While he, the orphan, found in her many women in one: mother sister lover sibyl friend. When he thought himself crazy she was the one who believed in his visions. 'It is the archangel,' she told him, 'not some fog out of your head. It is Gibreel, and you are the Messenger of God.'

He can't won't see her now. She watches him through a stone-latticed window. He can't stop walking, moves around the courtyard in a random sequence of unconscious geometries, his footsteps tracing out a series of ellipses, trapeziums, rhomboids, ovals, rings. While she remembers how he would return from the caravan trails full of stories heard at wayside oases. A prophet, Isa, born to a woman named Maryam, born of no man under a palm-tree in the desert. Stories that made his eyes shine, then fade into a distantness. She recalls his excitability: the passion with which he'd argue, all night if necessary, that the old nomadic times had been better than this city of gold where people exposed their baby daughters in the wilderness. In the old tribes even the

Indecent
reference
about the
Prophet and
his first
wife.

disappointed,' he offered. The other ignored this remark. 'Mahound is coming,' he said.

This flat statement filled Baal with the most profound terror. 'What's that got to do with me?' he cried. 'What does he want? It was a long time ago - a lifetime - more than a lifetime. What does he want? Are you from, are you sent by him?'

'His memory is as long as his face' the intruder said, pushing back his hood. 'No, I am ~~not~~ his messenger. You and I have something in common. We are both afraid of him.'

'I know you,' Baal said.

'Yes.'

'The way you speak. You're a foreigner.'

'"A revolution of water-carriers, immigrants and slaves,"' the stranger quoted. 'Your words.'

'You're the immigrant,' Baal remembered. 'The Persian, Sulaiman.' The Persian smiled his crooked smile. 'Salman,' he corrected. 'Not wise, but peaceful.'

'You were one of the closest to him,' Baal said, perplexed.

'The closer you are to a conjurer,' Salman bitterly replied, 'the easier to spot the trick.'

And Gibreel dreamed this:

At the oasis of Yathrib the followers of the new faith of Submission found themselves landless, and therefore poor. For many years they financed themselves by acts of brigandage, attacking the rich camel trains on their way to and from Jahilia. Mahound had no time for scruples, Salman told Baal, no qualms about ends and means. The faithful lived by lawlessness, but in those years Mahound - or should one say the Archangel Gibreel? should one say Al-lah? - became obsessed by law. Amid the palm-trees of the oasis Gibreel appeared to the Prophet and found himself spouting rules, rules, rules, until the faithful could scarcely bear the prospect of any more revelation, Salman said, rules about every damn thing, if a man farts let him turn his face to the wind, a rule about which hand to use for the purpose of cleaning one's behind. It was as if no aspect of human existence was to be

*is passage
wishes the
early and character
wishes pious
as robbers.*

The Satanic Verses

Satanic
description
of the contents
of the Quran
- the Holy
Book of
Muslims.

left unregulated, *sic*. The revelation — the recitation — told the faithful how much to eat, how deeply they should sleep, and which sexual positions had received divine sanction, so that they learned that sodomy and the missionary position were approved of by the archangel, whereas the forbidden postures included all those in which the female was on top. Gibreel further listed the permitted and forbidden subjects of conversation, and earmarked the parts of the body which could not be scratched no matter how unbearably they might itch. He vetoed the consumption of prawns, those bizarre other-worldly creatures which no member of the faithful had ever seen, and required animals to be killed slowly, by bleeding, so that by experiencing their deaths to the full they might arrive at an understanding of the meaning of their lives, for it is only at the moment of death that living creatures understand that life has been real, and not a sort of dream. And Gibreel the archangel specified the manner in which a man should be buried, and how his property should be divided, so that Salman the Persian got to wondering what manner of God this was that sounded so much like a businessman. This was when he had the idea that destroyed his faith, because he recalled that of course Mahound himself had been a businessman, and a damned successful one at that, a person to whom organization and rules came naturally, so 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 non-corporeal, God.

After that Salman began to notice how useful and well timed the angel's revelations tended to be, so that when the faithful were disputing Mahound's views on any subject, from the possibility of space travel to the permanence of Hell, the angel would turn up with an answer, and he always supported Mahound, stating beyond any shadow of a doubt that it was impossible that a man should ever walk upon the moon, and being equally positive on the transient nature of damnation: even the most evil of doers would eventually be cleansed by hellfire and find their way into the perfumed gardens, Gulistan and Bostan. It would have been different, Salman complained to Baal, if Mahound

It casts
serious
aspersions
on the process
nature of the
process and
divine revelation
sent down by God
to the prophet
Muhammad
(peace be
upon him)

2nd part
of a word

said nothing, but I lost a lot of friends after that, I can tell you, people hate you to do them a good turn.

In spite of the ditch of Yathrib, the faithful lost a good many men in the war against Jahilia. On their raiding sortics they lost as many lives as they claimed. And after the end of the war, hey presto, there was the Archangel Gibreel instructing the surviving males to marry the widowed women, lest by remarrying outside the faith they be lost to Submission. Oh, such a practical angel, Salman sneered to Baal. By now he had produced a bottle of toddy from the folds of his cloak and the two men were drinking steadily in the failing light. Salman grew ever more garrulous as the yellow liquid in the bottle went down, Baal couldn't recall when he'd last heard anyone talk up such a storm. O, those matter-of-fact revelations, Salman cried, we were even told it didn't matter if we were already married, we could have up to four marriages if we could afford it, well, you can imagine, the lads really went for that.

What finally finished Salman with Mahound: the question of the women; and of the Satanic verses. Listen, I'm no gossip, Salman drunkenly confided, but after his wife's death Mahound was no angel, you understand my meaning. But in Yathrib he almost met his match. Those women up there: they turned his head half-white in a year. The point about our Prophet, my dear Baal, is that he didn't like his women to answer back, he went for mothers and daughters, think of his first wife and then Ayesha: too old and too young, his two loves. He didn't like to pick on someone his own size. But in Yathrib the women are different, you don't know, here in Jahilia you're used to ordering your females about but up there they won't put up with it. When a man gets married he goes to live with his wife's people! Imagine! Shocking, isn't it? And throughout the marriage the wife keeps her own tent. If she wants to get rid of her husband she turns the tent round to face in the opposite direction, so that when he comes to her he finds fabric where the door should be, and that's that, he's out, divorced, not a thing he can do about it. Well, our girls were beginning to go for that type of thing, getting who knows what sort of ideas in their heads, so at once,

Character
of
the
Prophet
Muhammad
(peace be upon
him) for
whom the
misnomer
"Mahound"
is applied to
him in the
medieval
West - is
used.

Return to Jahilia

Long, out comes the rule book, the angel starts pouring out rules about what women mustn't do, he starts forcing them back into the docile attitudes the Prophet prefers, docile or maternal, walking three steps behind or sitting at home being wise and waxing their chins. How the women of Yathrib laughed at the faithful, I swear, but that man is a magician, nobody could resist his charm; the faithful women did as he ordered them. They Submitted: he was offering them Paradise, after all.

'Anyway,' Salman said near the bottom of the bottle, 'finally I decided to test him.'

One night the Persian scribe had a dream in which he was hovering above the figure of Mahound at the Prophet's cave on Mount Cone. At first Salman took this to be no more than a nostalgic reverie of the old days in Jahilia, but then it struck him that his point of view, in the dream, had been that of the archangel, and at that moment the memory of the incident of the Satanic verses came back to him as vividly as if the thing had happened the previous day. 'Maybe I hadn't dreamed of myself as Gibreel,' Salman recounted. 'Maybe I was Shaitan.' The realization of this possibility gave him his diabolic idea. After that, when he sat at the Prophet's feet, writing down rules rules rules, he began, surreptitiously, to change things.

'Little things at first. If Mahound recited a verse in which God was described as *all-hearing, all-knowing*, I would write, *all-knowing, all-wise*. Here's the point: Mahound did not notice the alterations. So there I was, actually writing the Book, or re-writing, anyway, polluting the word of God with my own profane language. But, good heavens, if my poor words could not be distinguished from the Revelation by God's own Messenger, then what did that mean? What did that say about the quality of the divine poetry? Look, I swear, I was shaken to my soul. It's one thing to be a smart bastard and have half-suspicious about funny business, but it's quite another thing to find out that you're right. Listen: I changed my life for that man. I left my country, crossed the world, settled among people who thought me a slimy foreign coward for saving their, who never appreciated what I, but never mind that. The truth is that what I expected

all info the question of the authenticity of the word of God for Muslims

id, 'Now verily do I know that the God of Mahound is the true God, and this stone but a stone.' Then Khalid broke the temple and the idol and returned to Mahound in his tent. And the Prophet asked: 'What didst thou see?' Khalid spread his arms. 'Nothing,' said he. 'Then thou hast not destroyed her,' the Prophet cried. 'Go again, and complete thy work.' So Khalid returned to the fallen temple, and there an enormous woman, all black but for her long scarlet tongue, came running at him, naked from head to foot, her black hair flowing to her ankles from her head. Nearing him, she halted, and recited in her terrible voice of sulphur and hellfire: 'Have you heard of Lat, and Manat, and Uzza, the Third, the Other? They are the Exalted Birds . . .' But Khalid interrupted her, saying, 'Uzza, those are the Devil's verses, and you the Devil's daughter, a creature not to be worshipped, but denied.' So he drew his sword and cut her down.

And he returned to Mahound in his tent and said what he had seen. And the Prophet said, 'Now may we come into Jahilia,' and they arose, and came into the city, and possessed it in the Name of the Most High, the Destroyer of Men.

asphemous
blasphemy
God



How many idols in the House of the Black Stone? Don't forget: three hundred and sixty. Sun-god, eagle, rainbow. The colossus of Hubal. Three hundred and sixty wait for Mahound, knowing they are not to be spared. And are not: but let's not waste time there. Statues fall; stone breaks; what's to be done is done.

Mahound, after the cleansing of the House, sets up his tent on the old fairground. The people crowd around the tent, embracing the victorious faith. The Submission of Jahilia: this, too, is inevitable, and need not be lingered over.

While Jahilians bow before him, mumbling their life-saving sentences, *there is no God but Al-Lah*, Mahound whispers to Khalid. Somebody has not come to kneel before him; somebody long awaited. 'Salman,' the Prophet wishes to know. 'Has he been found?'

'Not yet. He's hiding; but it won't be long.'

There is a distraction. A veiled woman kneels before him, kissing his feet. 'You must stop,' he enjoins. 'It is only God who must be worshipped.' But what foot-kissery this is! Toe by toe, joint by joint, the woman licks, kisses, sucks. And Mahound, unnerved, repeats: 'Stop. This is incorrect.' Now, however, the woman is attending to the soles of his feet, cupping her hands beneath his heel . . . he kicks out, in his confusion, and catches her in the throat. She falls, coughs, then prostrates herself before him, and says firmly: 'There is no God but Al-Iah, and Mahound is his Prophet.' Mahound calms himself, apologizes, extends a hand. 'No harm will come to you,' he assures her. 'All who Submit are spared.' But there is a strange confusion in him, and now he understands why, understands the anger, the bitter irony in her overwhelming, excessive, sensual adoration of his feet. The woman throws off her veil: Hind.

'The wife of Abu Simbel,' she announces clearly, and a hush falls. 'Hind,' Mahound says. 'I had not forgotten.'

But, after a long instant, he nods. 'You have Submitted. And are welcome in my tents.'

The next day, amid the continuing conversions, Salman the Persian is dragged into the Prophet's presence. Khalid, holding him by the ear, holding a knife at his throat, brings the immigrant snivelling and whimpering to the takht. 'I found him, where else, with a whore, who was screeching at him because he didn't have the money to pay her. He stinks of alcohol.'

'Salman Farsi,' the Prophet begins to pronounce the sentence of death, but the prisoner begins to shriek the qalmah: 'La ilaha ilallah! La ilaha!'

Mahound shakes his head. 'Your blasphemy, Salman, can't be forgiven. Did you think I wouldn't work it out? To set your words against the Words of God.'

Scribe, ditch-digger, condemned man: unable to muster the smallest scrap of dignity, he blubbers whimpers pleads beats his breast abases himself repents. Khalid says: 'This noise is unbearable, Messenger. Can I not cut off his head?' At which the noise

*Describes
Salman,
a companion
of the Prophet
whom Muslims
hold in esteem
in the worst
estours.*



When the news got around Jahilia that the whores of The Curtain had each assumed the identity of one of Mahound's wives, the clandestine excitement of the city's males was intense; yet, so afraid were they of discovery, both because they would surely lose their lives if Mahound or his lieutenants ever found out that they had been involved in such irreverences, and because of their desire that the new service at The Curtain be maintained, that the secret was kept from the authorities. In those days Mahound had returned with his wives to Yathrib, preferring the cool oasis climate of the north to Jahilia's heat. The city had been left in the care of General Khalid, from whom things were easily concealed. For a time Mahound had considered telling Khalid to have all the brothels of Jahilia closed down, but Abu Simbel had advised him against so precipitate an act. 'Jahilians are new converts,' he pointed out. 'Take things slowly.' Mahound, most pragmatic of Prophets, had agreed to a period of transition. So, in the Prophet's absence, the men of Jahilia flocked to The Curtain, which experienced a three hundred per cent increase in business. For obvious reasons it was not politic to form a queue in the street, and so on many days a line of men curled around the innermost courtyard of the brothel, rotating about its centrally positioned Fountain of Love much as pilgrims rotated for other reasons around the ancient Black Stone. All customers of The Curtain were issued with masks, and Baal, watching the circling masked figures from a high balcony, was satisfied. There were more ways than one of refusing to Submit.

In the months that followed, the staff of The Curtain warmed to the new task. The fifteen-year-old whore 'Ayesha' was the most popular with the paying public, just as her namesake was with Mahound, and like the Ayesha who was living chastely in her apartment in the harem quarters of the great mosque, at Yathrib, this Jahilian Ayesha began to be jealous of her pre-eminent status of Best Beloved. She resented it when any of her 'sisters' seemed to be experiencing an increase in visitors, or receiving exceptionally generous tips. The oldest, fattest whore,

and utterly abusive
description
of the Holy
Wives of
the Prophet
shown Muslims
respect.

ointed derogatory
reference to
Ayesha - one of
the Holy Wives
of the Prophet.

The Satanic Verses



From the peak of Mount Cone, Gibreel watches the faithful escaping Jahilia, leaving the city of aridity for the place of cool palms and water, water, water. In small groups, almost empty-handed, they move across the empire of the sun, on this first day of the first year at the new beginning of Time, which has itself been born again, as the old dies behind them and the new waits ahead. And one day Mahound himself slips away. When his escape is discovered, Baal composes a valedictory ode:

*What kind of idea
does 'Submission' seem today?
One full of fear.
An idea that runs away.*

Mahound has reached his oasis; Gibreel is not so lucky. Often, now, he finds himself alone on the summit of Mount Cone, washed by the cold, falling stars, and then they fall upon him from the night sky, the three winged creatures, Lat Uzza Manat, flapping around his head, clawing at his eyes, biting; whipping him with their hair, their wings. He puts up his hands to protect himself, but their revenge is tireless, continuing whenever he rests, whenever he drops his guard. He struggles against them, but they are faster, nimbler, winged.

He has no devil to repudiate. Dreaming, he cannot wish them away.

Irreverent
description
of Hs. Prophet's
migration
to Madina