



Perspectives on Migrant Homelessness in Salman Rushdie’s Novel *The Satanic Verses*

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The purpose of this article is to explore a territory that is widely contested in colonial and postcolonial studies. *Home* appears with particular intensity in the literary and critical narratives of empire, while postcolonial writers appropriate it as a site of contestation and rewriting. Although *home* is a standard topos in postcolonial research, my study focuses on a particular authorial position that reveals enticing new perspectives on the ways in which the domestic is both inscribed and subverted in the rhetoric of migration.

Keywords: migration, postcolonialism, home, homelessness, Sufism, subversive self-location.

Introduction

The capacity of fiction to provide itineraries of migration was welcomed with enhanced awareness in the twentieth century when mass movements of people took place on a previously unseen scale. Technological advances brought into existence planet-shrinkers (the airplane being outstanding among them), the two World Wars brought about disorder and eventually the collapse of colonial empires, decolonization spawned new waves of mass movement. While it is true that the concept of migration is, above all, transhistorical, extending beyond the particularity of any “epochal” event, its unprecedented growth in recent times, along with the daily reality of globalization, make twentieth- and twenty-first century literature particularly sensitive to these phenomena.

Within such contextual limits, the migrant writer can easily be envisaged as a major intellectual figure of our time. Salman Rushdie, a migrant writer of Indian-Pakistani origin, both articulates and exemplifies this position in his life and writing. His lifetime coincides with the turbulent political processes that mark India’s decolonization (and partition!) and stage an accelerated wave of postcolonial migration. The latter forms a significant part of his experience and is widely problematized in his works. Born in Bombay (present-day Mumbai), the city which contains the “sea of stories” that gave birth to his life-narrative, Rushdie moved to England at the age of thirteen, as his Cambridge-educated father insisted, earned, in his turn, a Cambridge degree in history, spent time attempting to settle in London, and then moved to New York, where, in his own words, he feels comfortably in the city’s bustling noisiness (Teverson 104). The sense of movement in time and space prevails in both his biography and texts. In fact, much like Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of *Midnight’s Children* (1981), who claims to be in the text of the novel, “a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter” (125), Rushdie has been experiencing a very special relationship between *bios* (life) and *gráphos* (writing) in his post-*fatwa* life and literary quests, which suggests a kind of reverse “re-writing” of the author by his book. The publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1989) produced him, by and large, as the author of a “demonic” text. In his autobiographical novel *Joseph Anton* (2012), which tells of his life in a disembodied third-person voice, Rushdie contemplates his experience in the aftermath of the *fatwa* in the following way:

He was the person in the eye of the storm, no longer the Salman his friends knew but the Rushdie who was the author of *Satanic Verses*, a title subtly distorted by the omission of the initial *The* ... ‘Satan Rushdy’, the horned creature on the placards carried by demonstrators ... the hanged man with protruding red tongue. (5)¹

¹ Emphasis in the text.

As a sequence of these events, Rushdie had to spend more than five years of restricted life under police surveillance facing the delimiting finality of controversial labels, but this experience sharpened the subversive angle of the writer's vision, enabling him to observe and articulate the world from "underneath."

The Rushdie affair had worldwide repercussions. Radical Muslims organized demonstrations and public burnings of the "satanic" book, the Japanese translator of the novel was killed, its Italian translator and Norwegian publisher were attacked but, luckily, remained alive. At the same time, intellectuals, writers, artists, political figures and liberal Muslims pleaded Rushdie's cause, stressing the essential for democratic societies right to freedom of speech and the dialogic nature of art. Rushdie's situation improved when in 1997 Muhammed Khatami, a moderate cleric, was elected to the presidency of Iran, and set about trying to improve relations with Europe and America in the hope that Iran would be able to benefit from lucrative trade agreements from which it had been excluded. The *fatwa*, however, being a religious document that does not comply with secular agreements, cannot be revoked and is still in force. In 2007 Rushdie was accorded the honour of British knighthood, becoming *Sir Salman*, apparently as a sign of appreciation of his ongoing battle. While these events certainly contributed to his worldwide popularity, they ultimately helped to generate his popular demonic-angelic image, which seems to echo the Luciferian transformation of his protagonists in *The Satanic Verses*.

Still ignorant of the afflictions to which his chosen career of writing would expose him, Rushdie began his first novel, *Grimus* (1975), after an unsuccessful attempt to settle down in Pakistan and work there for the television service in Karachi. Although the novel did not enjoy critical acclaim, it introduces his preferred thematic focus – the migrant's quest for Elsewhere – and anticipates his more fully developed manner of narration. These two aspects of the text, the former related to the content, the latter, to its form, likewise reveal the co-presence of two stable influences on Rushdie's literary quests. The first is the Hollywood film *The Wizard of Oz*, based on Lyman Frank Baum's eponymous novel, from which Rushdie borrowed the land of Oz as a metaphor for Otherness ("Elsewhere"), and the turbulent space of air as a metaphoric space of migration; the second, the *Arabian Nights*, made him sensitive to the cyclical narrative movements, characteristic of eastern storytelling. While the former inspired his intense use of the rhetoric of homelessness, the "over-the-rainbow", "aerial" vocabulary of uprootedness and the "no-such-place-on-earth" definition of *home*,² the latter alerted him to the role of storytelling in identity construction. For him, both migration and storytelling are essentially concerned with metamorphosis and hybridization, severing of ties and forming new connections, in which "pure" selves and stories cannot exist as they constantly flow in and out of each other: " 'Things – even people – have a way of leaking into each other,' I explain, 'like flavours when you cook'" (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 44–5).

Rushdie's pre-*fatwa* works elaborate the relationship between storytelling and migration to the point when the migrations between the "secular" and "sacred" modes of narration in his works start compromising the "innocence" of storytelling itself. Attempting to fend off the accusations of blasphemy levelled at his secularized rewrites of sacred discourses in *The Satanic Verses*, he explains that the "offensive" sequence concerning Prophet Muhammad "happened in a dream, the fictional dream of a fictional character, an Indian movie-star, who is losing his mind" (quoted in Weatherby 129). The wide religious and political repercussions of the "blasphemy" episodes, however, confirm Michel Foucault's assertion that discourses, however fictional they may be, are never "innocent" insofar as they operate within systems of power that can affirm or contest perspectives, attitudes and practices (quoted in Hall 58). The interaction of the innocence (levity) and power (gravity) of enunciation is subject to constant negotiation in Rushdie's narratives. In *Midnight's Children* it takes the form of Saleem Sinai's ability to disconnect himself imaginatively from his biological parents by inventing a fictionalized version of his genealogy, and the oppressive presence of too many stories in himself, that, finally, crack his frame. In *Shame* (1983) and *The Satanic Verses* the gravity-levity paradigm takes on a more articulate form in the representation of migrants as both "rooted" and "winged," i.e. rootless. *Shame*, which tells the story of male oppression and the culture of shame in Pakistan, is also the novel in which Rushdie uses an elaborate aerial vocabulary to describe the migrant condition:

And I have a theory that the resentments we mohajirs [migrants] engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds; that is to say, we have flown.

² See Rushdie's critical appraisal of the movie *The Wizard of Oz* (1992).

I am comparing gravity with belonging. Both phenomena observably exist: my feet stay on the ground, and I have never been angrier than on the day my father told me he had sold my childhood home in Bombay. But neither is understood. We know the force of gravity, but not its origins; and to explain why we become attached to our birthplaces we pretend that we are trees and speak of roots. Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths spouting through the soles. Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places. (90–1)

Being both “heavy,” because of the gravity forces that act upon them, and “light,” because “on the move”, migrants abide in the uncertain space of constant self-relocation. Although Rushdie points out that the “origins” of the “gravity force” are uncertain, the continuation of the quote explains that they are engendered by singularities – “a land,” “history,” “memory,” “time.” By contrast, the migrant enters “airspace” when s/he steps over those singularities, from place into space, into histories and times, from memory as a picture-frame to memory as an exercise of looking at a broken mirror.³

The Satanic Verses amplifies Rushdie’s vision of migration by a more complex representation of the levity-gravity modalities. This time, they resurface in the life narratives of two Indian-born migrants in England whose migration translates them, literally, into a quasi-angelic figure and a quasi-satanic goatman. Rather than representing the conventional opposition of Good and Evil, the novel invalidates it as each of the polar opposites proves to contain traces of its rival. For example, Gibreel, when invoked two times by Mahound, the founder of a new religion (the name “Mahound” itself is employed ambiguously in the text)⁴, admits that it was he who inspired the false verses in spite of Mahound’s own declaration that the first time he had encountered Shaitan (i. e. Satan). Finally, Gibreel becomes the angel of death. Saladin, on the other hand, apart from his quasi-satanic, goatlike figure and sulphurous breath, is definitely not an embodiment of absolute evil and is merely “human”. The disruption of binary divisions in the novel establishes the ambiguous nature of the migrant condition as a “translated” existence of impurity and “satanic” hybridity. It gravitates towards the episode of the falsely translated “satanic” verses, which is at the narrative core of the novel and illustrates Rushdie’s desire to reflect on the potential of ambiguity.

In the Introduction to his book *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie explains that the incident of the “satanic” verses is based on “the quasi-historical tale of how Muhammad’s revelation seemed briefly to flirt with the possibility of admitting three pagan and female deities into the pantheon ... of archangels, and of how he then repudiated these verses as being satanically inspired” (399). The verses are symmetrically related to the rhymes that Saladin invents to make Gibreel jealous and drive him insane. The admission of the verses into the sacred text and into Gibreel’s mind stresses the role of translation in establishing origins and constructing versions of identity. Rushdie indicates that there is no such thing as “pure” identity and origins: “[s]uch distinctions, resting as they must on an idea of the self as being (ideally) homogeneous, non-hybrid, ‘pure’, – an utterly fantastic notion! – cannot, must not suffice” (*The Satanic* 427). Identity undergoes various “angelicdevilish” translations and we should always question them as possible versions of the self, but not the complete self. Rushdie introduces the “satanic” verses as a subversive element that works against the grain of purity and certainty to show that all firmly entrenched dichotomies such as *good* and *evil*, *religious* and *secular*, *orthodox* and *liberal*, *east* and *west*, *gravity* and *levity* rest on the false vision that each member of the pairs is a homogeneous whole.

Rushdie’s post-*fatwa* novels reprise his literary quests, albeit with an enhanced awareness of rupture and imprisonment. During his years of restriction, he produced his novel for children *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), which was written for his son Zaphar, but the novel also forms part of Rushdie’s *fatwa*-targeted defence of freedom of speech. He likewise published *Homelands*, a collection of essays written between 1981 and 1991, *The Wizard of Oz* (1992), a collection of short stories, *East, West* (1994) and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995). They abound in tropes of imprisonment and redemptive storytelling. Some of the novels that follow, along with the collection of critical essays *Step Across This Line* (2002), *The Ground*

³ Rushdie dwells on the broken-mirror effects in the Introduction to his collection of essays *Imaginary Homelands*.

⁴ The name is associated with the Crusades, when the Arabs had overrun the Holy Land and Islam was seen by Europeans as the enemy, the Prophet as the Devil (Goonetilleke 99). In the novel Mahound is both the devil and the Prophet Muhammad; it is implied that both “satanic” and sacred verses may exist.

beneath Her Feet (1999), *Fury* (2001), after settling down in New York), *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), *Two Years, Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights* (2015) and *The Golden House* (2017) share an expanded vision of the migrant's problematic movement as more de-territorializing, far-reaching and cosmopolitan, in which the "gravity" of belonging is subsumed by the "levity" of re-inventing the "ground beneath" the migrant's "feet."

The Migrant Form. Catoptric Representation

The question of what "ground" the migrant will tread – whether s/he will step on pathways of nostalgically reproduced domestic soil or walk "over the rainbow" in pursuit of Elsewhere, is inextricably concerned with the forms that configure the migrant itineraries and imagination. In his study of the (post)colonial aesthetics of migration, Majumdar Gaurav links the migrant form with the figural or narrative form of simulacrum, a form of representation, reconceptualized by Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze recalls Plato's vision that the simulacrum establishes a relationship with its model, which is more complex than that of a simple mimetic correlation. He further notes that mimesis serves to produce copies as it implies resemblance, while simulacra produce the effect of resemblance by masking themselves as the Idea of the model, but in fact have the intention of undoing it. They are essentially disruptive, because "[a]t least two divergent series are internalized in the simulacrum – neither can be assigned as the original, or as the copy. It is not enough to evoke a model of the Other, for no model can resist the vertigo of the simulacrum" (Deleuze, quoted in Gaurav 262). This very seriality makes simulacra subversive in that they "do not follow any geometric logic: they swirl, veer and spread in various directions[;] [t]he simulating vertigo obviates any privileged points of view ... and establishes 'the world of nomadic distributions and crowned anarchies'" (Gaurav 12–3). According to Gaurav, the "nomadic world" of the simulacrum makes it a preferred form in postcolonial migrant writing. The migrant form, he remarks, works to subvert authoritative narratives and figures as it adopts and exposes them to catoptric reflection, refraction and modification: "I call 'migrant form' the ... simulacra ... which perform a figural, as well as narrative, transfer from 'standard' meaning or ... narrative" (14).

The subversive effects of the migrant form consist, above all, in the unsettling optics it produces. The direction of postcolonial migration is apparently guided by an "Orphic" attempt to enter the "infernal" space of dominant discourses in what Florence Cabaret calls an "archaeological plunge" (52), a down-bound movement through the layers of sedimented meanings and practices that have worked to establish the postcolonial migrant subject's marginalized position. The movement is "Orphic" in that it brings out hidden meanings, attempts to unveil the ideological masks of violent practices and revives buried memories, but it fails to call them out to the very surface. They remain trapped in the infernal realm of shadows that haunt the migrant subject's itinerary. The subversive effects of this subterranean activity, therefore, take shape in making this underground realm subject to constant reinvention.

The subterranean perspective is particularly relevant to the present article in that it establishes tight correspondences with the elevated position of the imperial gaze. The imperial eyes, as described by Mary Louise Pratt, can best "see" when they are located at elevated points, that is, visual positions that enable them to experience superiority passively, through visual appropriation (204–206). The imperial perspective contributes to the production of forms of order and unity in the midst of disorder in a movement that simplifies, modifies and registers only the most distinctive points of reference, and perceives them in their totality, making it easier to appropriate and maintain an imagined integrity.

Echoing the "elevated" position of the imperial eyes, Rushdie elaborates an impressive optical system of "subterranean superiority," powered by the distorting effects of the broken mirror. The broken mirror, he argues, is an indispensable means for the migrant (the subject of a specific case of migration or of a general human condition) to see the world: "It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors" (*Imaginary* 10–11). "But human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions" (*Imaginary* 12). This type of vision, he continues, allows meaning to be gleaned "out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death" (*Imaginary* 12). Although here Rushdie opts for a more general

configuration of migrancy as a general human condition, the benefits (and pitfalls) of such a fragmented vision have an enhanced instrumental value for migrant writers like him. The broken mirror is not simply a medium of reflection, it forms part of what Vassilena Parashkevova calls “a system of catoptric representation,” which makes it possible to perceive things through a multiplicity of refracted reflections, a variety of equally tenable itineraries, times and places where no single view dominates the observed” (9–11). In this way catoptric vision acts a major part in postcolonial writing as a subversive technique of production of simulacra and contestation of hegemonic perspectives.

Actually, the visual properties of Rushdie’s fiction have recently attracted academic interest in a manner that inspires new ruminations on the interaction of the “visible” and the “readable” components of his works. *Salman Rushdie and Visual Culture. Celebrating Impurity, Disrupting Borders* (2011), a collection of academic essays edited and compiled by Ana Cristina Mendes, coordinates a new direction in the attempts to cross the disciplinary borders between visual and literary studies. In the introductory chapter to the volume Mendes argues that the visual modes of representation in his novels (ranging from painting to cinema and photography) and the adoption of those very modes to serve narrative and other purposes, point to the visual aspects of writing and the visual “lens” through which historical, cultural and political meanings are produced.⁵ This emerging shift of perspective from the “linguistic” to the “pictorial” properties of writing is largely accelerated by the possibility of deconstructing such discrete categories as *image* and *text* through the concept of the *imagetext*, introduced and theorized by W. J. T. Mitchell.⁶ Mendes takes this concept as one of the theoretical cornerstones of the edited volume and argues that what follows from it is writing that operates as a form of visual representation: “in its physical, graphic form ... an inseparable suturing of the visual and the verbal” (Mitchell, quoted in Mendes 4). Seen from that critical angle, Rushdie’s catoptric formations are not merely optical experiments that extend his lifelong fascination and preoccupation with the visual media such as cinema; more than that, such visual constructions are part of the verbal hybridity of his texts and his general cross-border repertoire of subversive resistance. We may identify a number of definitely stated catoptric tools in his writing, the most frequently recurrent one of which, the camera, operates as a literal means of visual representation in the hands of news reporters, filmmakers and photographers. At the same time, all forms of physical displacement (aerial, in particular); and forms of inward or artistic transition such as memories, dreams and hallucinations, quest-journeys as well as artistic undertakings (plastic and visual arts in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*)⁷ operate as catoptric mirrors that destabilize conventionally held hegemonic divisions and generate new, hybrid maps and identities.

Revisiting Sufism. Rewriting the Sufi Quest

Rushdie’s lifelong commitment to the study of religion (varying from deeper spiritual involvement to greater alienation) opens a further perspective on his experience and articulation of migration. He was brought up in the family of practising Muslims, but neither of his parents “was insistent or doctrinaire” (*Imaginary* 376-7). In this liberal atmosphere, Teverson observes, he “was able to familiarize himself with the tenets of the religion whilst never feeling the pull of faith too deeply” (72). Rushdie himself comments on his preferred position of a secular “believer,” of being neither completely outside, nor entirely within the stories that prescribe the believer’s stance, and argues that this stance enables him to explore them through constant interrogation:

I have a great interest in the stories of religion, which seem to me to be the codes with which human beings have tried to understand their presence on the planet and discuss their moral behaviour. Obviously, these are of colossal importance as texts. But I don’t subscribe to the literal truth of the Bible story or the Koran story or the Talmud story. My perspective is that of someone who takes a serious interest in religion without being a devout believer. (*Salman Rushdie Interviews* 100)

⁵ For further reference, see her introductory notes in “Salman Rushdie’s ‘Epico-Mythico-Sexy-High-Masala-Art,’ or Considerations on Undisciplining Boundaries”.

⁶ Mendes refers to his *Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (1994).

⁷ For a detailed analysis of how artistic forms operate as catoptric refractors in Rushdie’s fiction, see Vassilena Parashkevova, “‘Living Art’: Artistic and Intertextual Re-envisionings of the Urban Trope in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*.”

Rushdie's secular vision likewise empowers him to handle multiple religions in a very particular, syncretic manner. The religious "syncreticism" in his writing, which takes shape in interweaves of different (sometimes incongruent) belief codes and practices, temptingly suggests that he could be viewed as what G.A. Lipton calls a representative of "secular" Sufism, the "Oriental version of a Kantian universal faith" (429), that is, a free-thinking intellectual who embraces non-conformism and aspires after a liberal, intellectually enlightened acknowledgement of religious multiplicity. The secular perception of Sufism, Lipton explains, is a largely Orientalist claim, an attempt to redeem Sufi commitment to individual rather than institutionalized belief, from its Islamic configuration. Lipton further remarks that the concept of "secular Sufism" has long been present in western culture and thought. As early as the beginning of Sufi Studies in the west (1819) Lt. James William Graham of the British East India Company links Sufi unwillingness to practise rituals prescribed by Islamic law, to Protestantism's insistence on spiritual, rather than formal attitude to God (429). Lipton observes that Graham's early admiration of Sufism as a type of philosophical Protestantism freed from all outward prescriptions of religious law echoes Kant's notion of "'pure rational religion' ... autonomously accessible to all men through reason alone" (429). Such an accommodated vision of one of the most spiritually devout and elaborate branches of Islamic mysticism has persisted in contemporary western perspectives on Sufism, becoming particularly helpful as a pathway of peaceful negotiation in cases of religious confrontation.

The pan-religious awareness of Rushdie's texts, however, seems to have less certain and more problematic effects. Rather than being harbingers of peace or bringing alleviation of religious tension, his works are likely to provoke outbreaks of violence; rather than moving freely between religions, the reader finds himself/herself exposed to the corrosive effects of such free movement, becoming particularly sensitive to the "slippage of tectonic plates" beneath his/her feet. Applying the Orientalist tag of a "secular" Sufi to a postcolonial writer should, among other things, not be expected to yield fruitful insights. Moreover, in this case labelling relies largely on external parallels and fails to read the intrinsic Sufi routes in Rushdie's fiction.

I suggest that what makes Sufism a substantial intertext in Rushdie's works is, above all, its historical and doctrinal kinship to migration. Sufi philosophy and practices have had their beginnings in the enhanced awareness of the necessity of movement both in the sense of physical displacement and as a quest of deviation from the formal norms of mainstream Islam. Emerging as a worship that recommends a nomadic lifestyle and intense self-effacing experiences, Sufism echoes the primal migration (*hijra*) to Medina that announced the first year of Muslim history (Green 493). The idea of nomadic displacement also reflects the notion of homelessness positively in a movement that seeks a "better home place" than earthly, material existence. The spiritual aspects of Sufi migration also had a number of more practical considerations: it helped disseminate the new teachings, established a network of holy places (shrines) to commemorate the time that Sufi teachers spent in these places and produced new, "sacred" geographies alongside the commercial ones. That the inter-regional trade routes were followed by Sufis no less than by merchants (Green 493) is a less convincing sign of the unbridgeable split between sacred and secular activities.

Extremely sensitive to the secular contexts of sacred statements, Rushdie problematizes the imminent threats of religious commercialization in the Mahound and birth-of-Islam episodes of *The Satanic Verses*. He likewise rewrites the Sufi quest-journey motif by retaining its elevated destination and trials, but replaces divine authority at the end of the route with an ambiguously defined quasi-satanic figure. Thus Gibreel, in his Mahound reincarnation, climbs Mount Cone and merges with the Angel of the Recitation only to receive a possibly "satanic" revelation. Flapping Eagle, the protagonist of Rushdie's debut novel *Grimus*, embarks on an ascending route only to merge with the demonically manipulative author and initiator of the mysterious dimension that he enters. Significantly, both novels seem to rewrite (implicitly, in the first case, and more explicitly, in the second) the twelfth-century Islamic mystical poem by Farid ud-din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, which tells how the birds' attempt to reach their god the Simurg succeeds only when they realize that they are the Simurg themselves in their unity. Elements of *The Conference of the Birds* likewise reappear in *Midnight's Children* where the Conference takes the form of a mystical gathering of all children, born with India's independence, in Saleem's mind. The place of the conference, however, does not seem to suggest the achievement of a higher goal, nor does it point to benign prospects for India's future. Rather, the meeting dissolves as each child becomes a separate story. In the end, multiplicity and fragmentation prevail over singularity and unity.

Gibreel and Saladin's quest for a secure place to inhabit is another modification of the Sufi path in *The Satanic Verses*. Significantly, neither of them experiences homecoming as the "end" of their home-seeking routes. While Gibreel's efforts to decide between different versions of reality frustrate him to the point of suicide, which he actually commits, Saladin's final return to India does not signal a final homecoming. The novel ends with his turning back to the turbulent sea beneath his childhood window to make for a new beginning. Always claiming an arrival at its end, the Sufi migrant quest enters Rushdie's vocabulary of homelessness as an open-ended journey, an ever renewed departure.

Strategies of Subversive Conquest

The Satanic Verses is a novel that, like Rushdie's other works, exhibits the "satanic" quality of excessive movement – between languages, genres, literary and cultural contexts, angles of reality, places and times, "sacred and profane" perspectives. The movement is "satanic" in that it entails constant transformation and reinvention of routes and identities. Such spectacular mobility works against the grain of unifocal representation by offering various and, as Parashkevova insightfully observes, catoptric narrative lenses that project protean chronotopicity and produce a sense of general disorientation and confusion (12). The latter, Upstone and Tlostanova argue, is technically meant to trace the "new kind of journey ... with no arrival or departure" (Upstone 59) which "invents intentionally" new routes out of old ones and, in the process, dominant boundaries, topoi and identities are subverted and reconfigured (Tlostanova 407).

Gibreel and Chamcha's metropolitan experience exemplifies two strategies of subversive operation: submission and open conquest. In his study of the subversive features of the Solomonic narrative in the Bible, Eric A. Seibert refers to these types of subversion as "concealed" and "conspicuous" (16). He explains that the *concealed* form involves "underground propaganda ... [t]he 'secretive subversive' launches his or her calculated critique in such a way that seeks to avoid open detection without totally obscuring the message ... [p]resumably, concealed subversion is used most commonly by subversives who lack the power (or will) openly to critique some dominant entity" (16–7). By contrast, *conspicuous subversion* is

subversion deployed overtly. As such, it is obvious and openly recognizable ... The "shameless subversive" launches a frontal assault and has little or no fear of the consequences of being directly associated with his or her subversive efforts ... [The subject that] engage[s] in this form of subversive activity [is] one who enjoys some distance – be it historical, sociological, geographical, or otherwise – between themselves and the object of critique. (17)

Commenting on the protagonists' different strategies of confronting the metropolis, the narrator of *The Satanic Verses* evokes these pathways of subversion in the following way: "they [Gibreel and Chamcha are] conjoined opposites ... each man the other's shadow ... – One seeking to be transformed into the foreignness he admires, the other preferring, contemptuously, to transform" (426). Restricted in his actions because of his "satanic" appearance and surrender to metropolitan control, Chamcha exemplifies the concealed subversive, who can only launch his/her critique from within, submissive to the power s/he seeks to contest. The secretive verses that he recites to Gibreel in a succession of anonymous phone calls to make him jealous of Alleluia ("Allie") Cone, whom he loves deliriously, likewise operate as a form of disguised subversion. Gibreel's conquest of the metropolis is an example of the other subversive mode – that of conspicuous subversion. He does not conceal his disregard for Englishness and the English, but demonstrates it openly in his "angelic" attempts to purify and "tropicalize" London. Gibreel's "open" conquest, I suggest, is largely enabled by the distance from which he observes and experiences metropolitan realities because of his schizophrenic mindset. In what follows, I am going to explore how the protagonists' different strategies of subversive conquest operate in the novel.

Gibreel and Chamcha's first "conquest" of the metropolitan world is largely visual. Flying over Europe and England they are impressed by the whiteness of European land: "Sand gave way to snow. Europe in winter, beneath its *white*, transforming carpet, its *ghost-white* shining up through the night. The Alps, France, the coastline of England, white cliffs rising to *whitened* meadowlands [my emphasis]" (86–7). After landing, however, Chamcha finds himself in the "dark heart" of the metropolitan underworld – the illegal immigrants' detention hospital, the attic room in Muhammad Sufyan's Shaandaar Café in Brickhall High Street, Pinkwalla's

Club Hot Wax. In one of his night dreams Chamcha sees London as an utterly black place: “The city thickened around them like a forest; the buildings twined together and grew as matted as her hair. ‘No light can get in here,’ she whispered to him. ‘It’s black; all black’” (255). The woman who accompanies him in this dream is Hyacinth Phillips, the physiotherapist at the migrants’ detention hospital, who helps him flee from there. Significantly, he perceives the metropolis through the blackness of her hair and this example of sexualizing the city-scape is an ironic reversal of the imperial gaze that beholds the colonial land as an inviting female body. In this postcolonial version of the gaze, however, the city, rather than being seductive, is demonically oppressive and threatens the male spectator with abuse. The prevailing colours in the two migrants’ postcolonial cartographic constructions of the metropolis – white and black – are symptomatic of the gamut used by metropolitan cartographers to designate the non-European parts of the world as either white and innocent, and hence inviting settlement, or black and oppressive, calling for conquest. Making the metropolitan land look “colonial” is, therefore, one of the effects of the subversive “imperialism” of the postcolonial gaze.

Chamcha likewise participates in two subversive demonstrations organized by migrant minorities in London: a ritual one, which takes shape as a carnivalized rebellion against past and present figures of oppression in Club Hot Wax, and a more violent one, the Brickhall street protests against the murder of the black activist Uhuru Simba. While the first form of protest succeeds, the second is curbed down violently by the police.

Restricted by metropolitan regulations to the limits of an underground amusement, carnivalesque resistance in Club Hot Wax is not presented solely as a harmless performance. It operates as a seismic undercurrent which destabilizes the official versions of metropolitan solidity, shattering its historical and political underpinnings. The club’s dim-lit interior of dark and bright figures is a catoptric reflection of the black-and-white highlights in Chamcha and Gibreel’s visualizations of the English metropolis. In this case, the constant interflux of darkness and “lights,” “gleams,” “the on-off rainbow brilliance of the space” (291–2), “yellow and black” (294) also questions the stereotypical white-black divide which racial and ethnic discourses tend to project. The disco party is dominated by the figure of the deejay Pinkwalla, an albino Indian from the West Indies, whose body is “black” and “white” at the same time:

Truly, he is exceptional, a seven-foot albino, his hair the palest rose, the whites of his eyes likewise, his features unmistakably Indian, the haughty nose, long thin lips, a face from a Hamza-nama cloth. An Indian who has never seen India, East-India-man from the West Indies, white black man. (292)

The figure of the “white black man” calls forth and deviates from Fanon’s “black skin, white masks” model of the colonized subject who dreams of taking the colonizer’s place (see Bhabha 44). While Fanon maintains that the “white black man” position is articulated by the distance between “the colonialist Self” and “the colonized Other” (quoted in Bhabha 45), Rushdie argues that it is the result of a metamorphic process that follows itineraries of mutability suggested by the Roman authors Lucretius and Ovid: “changing ... brings immediate death to ... old self” and “[a]s yielding wax ... is stamped with new designs ... even so our souls” (*The Satanic* 276–7). According to these perspectives, translation and fusion are at work in the construction of migrant identity. By blurring racist dichotomies, Pinkwalla’s body exposes the fissures and fractures in the ethnically and racially defined body of the metropolis and undermines hegemonic figures of clear-cut distinctions.

At the same time, the wax figures party in the Club reinstates the colonial subject’s right to self-definition. The disco show seems to take shape as a *danse macabre* of history in which present migrants dance with motionless wax figures of migrants from the past. The figure of the dance itself works against representations of history that rely on western forms of progress such as evolution with its forward-running flow. The dancers are “bodies shaking themselves, singly, in pairs, in threes, moving towards possibilities” and “other figures, obscure in the on-off rainbow brilliance of the *space* ... forms frozen in their attitudes amid the frenzied dancers,” a discontinuous and scattered throng (*The Satanic* 291). While the living dancers are capable of “moving towards possibilities,” the frozen, dead forms of history stand amidst them, interrupting their movement and producing fragmented figures.

Like the past, which the exiled Imam (possibly modelled on the Iranian religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini), seeks to restore fully in one of Gibreel’s dream visions, this fossilized form of history threatens to consume the subjects of the present by urging them to constantly remember, reclaim and restage it. Pinkwalla’s wax figures show works against historical fossilization by showing the fragility of the wax effigies and exposing

them to meltdown. With his overdeveloped “satanic” powers, Chamcha melts all wax figures – those of the oppressed migrants and of their oppressors alike – and paves the way for his subsequent restoration to human shape. Among other things, the meltdown scene calls forth the postcolonial subject’s capacity of self-definition and emancipation from the oppressive past, which s/he can rewrite critically:

The creature [“satanic” Chamcha] bared its teeth and let out a long, foul breath, and the waxworks dissolved into puddles and empty clothes ... they [his friends] observed a scene of frightful devastation ... and at the centre of the carnage, sleeping like baby, ... Mr Saladin Chamcha himself, ... humanized ... by the fearsome concentration of his hate. (294)

Gibreel’s schizophrenic perspective represents another subversive instrument in the postcolonial reconstruction of the metropolis. If Chamcha’s horned figure embodies metropolitan discourses that demonize the postcolonial migrant, Gibreel’s “angelic” looks represent the other extreme in the metropolitan articulations of colonial otherness. Unlike Chamcha, who enters England for the second time and has consequently been exposed to metropolitan descriptive powers more than once, Gibreel is a “fresh” migrant, a figure that embodies the mystery of the Oriental other. He is received well in the UK and reaches the upper echelons of London’s cultural spheres (as an actor who stars in theologicals, consequently needed to fill in the spiritual gap of European “materialist culture”⁸). Nevertheless, his “angelic” superiority turns out to be the outcome of a spiritual problem – he develops a schizophrenic vision, which might also be a supernatural ability of inhabiting multiple worlds. The novel validates both alternatives and handles them as equally tenable under the magical-realist norms of its universe. The possibility of being hybrid, however, causes Gibreel’s identity crisis since he experiences hybridity as a “satanic” deformation, an unhomely condition of abnormal excess.

His metropolitan experience persistently problematizes the “demonic” aspects of his “angelic” condition. As a result he views London as a chaotic and unstable place that both invites and resists colonization and domestication. Gibreel’s delirious conquests of England go through several stages, according to the advancement of his mental disease – his ability to assimilate the metropolis into his own and other people’s dreams (for instance, when he accompanies old Rosa Diamond in her walk to the baker, he sees a group of foreign riders in archaic dress, who have apparently migrated from her memories and dreams of Argentina into the streets of London); his inability to control “the shape of that most protean and chameleon of cities [i.e. London]” as he runs through its “hellish maze, that labyrinth without a solution” (201); his subsequent attempt to “enlighten” the capital city and its inhabitants and help them find the right direction as the Angel of Revelation; and, finally, his tropical invasion and fiery extermination aimed at purifying the metropolis. The latter likewise forms part of the Brickhall riot narrative and is referred to as both conditioned by and conditioning the “rise of temperatures” of social unrest. In all these instances of attempted colonization, Gibreel appears as either the comic figure of a madman, both pitied and ridiculed by street people, or as a supernatural figure obscured by people’s disbelief. Both roles, along with his status of a world-famous actor, provide him with the necessary distance from which he can “colonize” the metropolis by means of overt, bold subversion.

One of the major effects of Gibreel’s delirious *conquistas* is the fictionalization of London, its transformation into an illusory and mythical place. This becomes best visible with the theatrical re-arrangement of the city as a setting for his “coming-out” party, organized to welcome his return on the stage. The party takes place amidst a quasi-reconstruction of Dickensian London, in which the city-scape is “squeezed” within the limited area of the theatre stage and parts of the city look comically distorted, displaced and rerouted to geographically false, but theatrically spectacular new combinations:

Why, here’s the Stucconia of the Veneerings, those bran-new, spick and span new people, lying shockingly adjacent to Portman Square ... – And worse: behold the dustman’s mounds of Boffin’s Bower, supposedly in the near vicinity of Holloway, looming in this abridged metropolis over Fascination Fledgeby’s rooms in the Albany, the West End’s very heart! (422)

⁸ Rushdie critiques metropolitan discourses that produce versions of Indian culture for commercial purposes as exotically “superior” to the Western world – in terms of spiritual practices, archaeological monuments, natural remedies, cuisine (see Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic. Marketing the Margins*).

The metropolis is also displaced historically, as it is assembled according to Dickens's map of Victorian London in *Our Mutual Friend*. The stage version of Dickens's novel, abridged to a musical, is intended to unveil Gibreel's identity as a movie star (after his disappearance) in a revelation similar to that of the novel's protagonist John Harmon.⁹ Being a central figure in this re-enactment, Gibreel stands on London Bridge and is "London's conqueror ... the world now falling at his feet" (425). Like Chamcha's underground revolt in Club Hot Wax, which is represented as a carnivalesque event, Gibreel's rule over London is ostensibly theatrical. As the welcome party proceeds, guests mingle with actors in the same way as the living migrants dance with the wax figures of the past in the Club's wax party. The two festive events mirror and invert each other – one is "underground," the other is staged in the high circles of London cultural life. While Chamcha is locked up alone in the Club after the party has ended, Gibreel dominates the multitude of guests who show him their respect. Nevertheless, both festivities articulate the protagonists' relationship with the metropolis in fictional terms, producing it as a place that can be entered, inhabited and appropriated imaginatively.

Gibreel's "tropicalization" of London represents another occasion of handling the metropolis as a fictional place. Following his dream sequences of the Imam, Mahound and Ayesha, his delirious wanderings through the metropolis make him experience the perplexity of what Otto Cone, Alleluia's father, describes in his speech as the "modern city":

'The modern city.' Otto Cone on his hobbyhorse had lectured his bored family at table, 'is the locus classicus of incompatible realities. Lives that have no business mingling with one another sit side by side upon the omnibus. One universe, on a zebra crossing, is caught for an instant, blinking like a rabbit, in the headlamps of a motor-vehicle in which an entirely alien and contradictory continuum is to be found. And as long as that's all ... it's not so bad. But if they meet! It's uranium and plutonium, each makes the other decompose, boom'. (314)

Earlier in the novel, we read about another, this time arboreal, "locus ... of incompatible realities" that has, however, managed to survive their mutual decomposition and grow as a "chimeran graft," a "tree ... of laburnum and broom" (298–9). This particular tree is planted in the centre of Otto Cone's English floral garden as a reminder of the migrant's hybrid condition (Otto is of Jewish descent). Gibreel's experience evokes the first interpretation of the collision of worlds. He embodies the apocalyptic version of hybridity, in which the meeting of incompatible identities is mutually destructive. His final confession that he is no longer capable of being "Gibreel," either Gibreel the film star or Gibreel the Angel of Recitation, and his subsequent suicide, reveals the impossibility of his quest for firmly-fixed, singular being.

Gibreel's pursuit of singularity conditions his frustration with London and desire to shape and order it in a cartographic manner. For instance, after meeting God (whose identity remains unresolved in the novel – he possesses the features of the bespectacled Rushdie himself, and he claims satanico-angelic multiplicity¹⁰), Gibreel takes up the task of "bring[ing] this metropolis of the ungodly ... back to the knowledge of God" (320) in a series of manoeuvres that mirror catoptrically Mahound's efforts to convert polytheistic Jahilia to his particular form of monotheism. Both Gibreel's and Mahound's endeavours to translate secular multiplicity into religious uniformity are thwarted by the hybrid forms these attempts produce. Just as Mahound's Jahilia turns out to be a place of surreptitious labyrinthine corridors that conceal Baal's subversive reconstruction of the Prophet's life, Gibreel's London takes shape as a "chimeran graft" of metropolitan and subversive tropical elements. Initially, he wants to change the city systematically, "all the way from A to Z," using the Geographer's London street atlas as a guide (322). But he becomes aware that "the city in its corruption ... [is] changing shape at will and without warning, making it impossible for [him] to approach his quest in the systematic manner he would have preferred" (327). His inability to map the metropolis is indicative of the postcolonial critique of map-making and ordering as ineffective strategies of colonization that rely on externally imposed figures of stability. Instead, Gibreel opts for a conquest "from within," finding the problem of the English in

⁹ In *Our Mutual Friend* John Harmon is summoned as the heir to a dustman's fortune, but only on condition that he marry a certain girl. On his way to London, he is assaulted and robbed while crossing the Thames and everybody believes him to be dead. He makes use of this opportunity to approach the girl intended for his wife and reveals his true identity only after proving that she is not attracted to the money he is supposed to inherit.

¹⁰ "Whether We be multiform, plural, representing the union-by-hybridization of such opposites as Oopar and Neechay [God and Satan], or whether We be pure, stark, extreme, will not be resolved here'." (319)

their weather, that is, the “spirit” of the city, not the “letter.” He then diligently elaborates a conquest plan which includes rising the temperatures and the changes this will entail:

increased moral definition, institution of a national siesta, development of vivid and expansive patterns of behaviour among the populace, higher quality popular music, new birds in the trees (macaws, peacocks, cockatoos), new trees under the birds (coco-palms, tamarind, banyans with hanging beards ... A new mass market for domestic air-conditioning units ... religious fervour, political ferment. (355)

The tropical transfiguration of England is also expected to have some negative results, such as poor hygiene and the development of a culture of excess. Excess does appear a dominant feature of Gibreel’s pronounced transformation, but it takes the shape of more violent militant actions. His colonization of London does not take place in the clear-cut, optimistically drafted kind of supernatural – hence unproblematic – transfigurations, but is carried out within the oppressive mechanisms of social regulation.

The Brickhall riots blur the protagonists’ fictional and real experiences of the metropolis into a single indivisible perspective. Gibreel reaches the upper limits of his “angelic” and human condition: he blows Azrael’s golden trumpet of destruction, walks amidst the flames of both divine/satanic and human fires and, finally, saves Chamcha from death in the burning Shaandaar Café. In the meantime, black and Asian armed protests break out in the streets in the aftermath of the murder (allegedly by prison wards) of falsely accused Dr Uhuru Simba, as the series of murders he is charged with, continues. When it becomes evident that the real murderer is white and the police are reluctant to arrest him, the inhabitants of the Brickhall neighbourhood, mostly migrants (there are hints that white supporters are also involved) take measures to confront the injustice.

The event is rendered from different perspectives, one being the effect of Gibreel’s attempts at tropicalization of the metropolis. Viewed from this angle, the protests become the outcome of the residents’ “fervour” and “ferment,” which are the “tropical” qualities they have supposedly acquired under his pronouncement of a “tropical” weather. The riot also reveals the threats of a “culture of excess” and implies that the ethnic problems the rising number of migrant population poses may lead to an expansion of the idea of British identity towards more intense ethnic and racial negotiations. Gibreel’s perspective likewise renders ethnic violence in characteristically religious terms – having assumed the role of the Angel of extermination, he refers to what is going on as a process of purification, an apocalyptic fiery consumption in which the dross and dirt of the metropolitan city are being removed. In one of his street encounters, he meets a group of teenage prostitutes whom he appears to know as the mock Prophet’s wives from his dreams of the Jahilian brothel. In his hallucinations, Gibreel experiences the meeting of London and Jahilia as a collision that leads to the mutual decomposition and transformation of the incompatible worlds Otto Cone envisages. As a result, the place Gibreel traverses is no longer “proper” London, or Mahound’s Jahilia, but “Mahagonny, Alphaville, Babylondon,” a hybrid location (459).

Defeat as Conquest

Unlike Chamcha’s and Gibreel’s previous “theatrical” conquests of the metropolis, in Brickhall they experience the prevailing repressive mechanisms of metropolitan power. In fact, Chamcha does not take active part in the protests. He is a passive figure throughout the riots, having already taken his revenge in the wax revolt. Brickhall is likewise one of the landmark topoi in the novel that, just like air, constitutes a turning point in the itinerary of the two migrants. If the protagonists’ aerial fall takes them into England, fire (an air-eater and destroyer of Icarus’s wings) makes possible their return to India. The Brickhall events result in numerous deaths amidst which those of Pamela, Chamcha’s former wife, Jumpy Joshi, his best friend and Pamela’s lover; and the whole of the Sufyan family with the exception of their daughter Mishal who marries and resumes her life. Chamcha and Gibreel themselves emerge from the fire no longer willing to remain in the metropolis. Chamcha suffers a heart attack in the burning Shaandaar Café, and is taken to hospital. Then he is informed that his father has cancer, and leaves for Bombay. After the fire, Gibreel stars in a theological movie patterned after his dream of the parting of the Arabian Sea, but the film is received poorly and he returns to the Indian subcontinent to resume his career. Eventually, he commits suicide.

Temporarily enough, we might read the protagonists’ fiery experience as an intertextual reference to the myth of Icarus where fire (of the sun) signals his defeat and destruction. We might likewise conclude that

having undergone metamorphic translation in London, they are finally defeated by the metropolis. This perspective, however, works against Rushdie's construction of the migrant condition in *The Satanic Verses* which insists that its "defeated" form can work out victories and redirect hegemonic routes. Thus, it is through Chamcha and Gibreel's defeat that we read the metropolis differently as a place of discontinuities and uncertainties, of "forbidden" underground activity and a seemingly stable surface. The zamindar Mirza Saeed's fiery death in the final episodes of Gibreel's serial dreams of Titlipur and Ayesha suggests the necessity of defeat in the postcolonial migrant itinerary. Having failed to see the parting of the sea and walk the underwater way to Mecca, he returns to the abandoned village of Titlipur a victorious unbeliever, but it is only when crushed in the fire that he becomes able to "open ... the instant his heart broke ... and at the moment of [the] opening the waters parted, and [he] walked to Mecca across the bed of the Arabian Sea" (507). Chamcha's heart attack in the Brickhall fire is a catoptric variation on this itinerary. Finally, he survives and embarks upon new routes, while Gibreel, who chooses to remain "continuous" and "undefeated," commits suicide.

Rewriting the Sufi Path. Homecoming in *The Satanic Verses*

The protagonists' entrance into the metropolis as translated and subversive figures, their subsequent concealed and open reciprocal subversion of hegemonic metropolitan forms, and their return to India, configure the itineraries of their migration. Like the Sufi path, the journeys they undertake take the form of a home-quest. Unlike the Sufi quest, however, the protagonists locate home in a place different from that of their origins and as they move forward in a sequence of uprootings and re-groundings, they become even more detached from anything (both in physical and in metaphysical terms) likely to constitute a permanent domicile for them. The Sufi insistence on absolute, transcendental domesticity is likewise questioned in the novel by breaking the absolute into several "elevated" positions that do not operate as sources of permanence and stability, but further complicate the homeless state of the migrant subject. Throughout this revised version of the Sufi quest, the religious readings of the domestic are progressively dismantled.

Several places represent points of possible transcendental experience in the novel, which both direct and confuse the characters' home-quest, and all of them (with the exception of the Arabian Sea of Ayesha's pilgrimage) are topoi of high altitude. They are likewise catoptric versions of each other and occupy more than one level of reality. These places are Mount Everest, a geographically prominent signifier of natural grandeur; the skyscraper Everest Villas, its urban catoptric reflection; Mount Cone – its dream counterpart in Gibreel's Mahound series; and Alleluia's bedroom in England – whose interior abounds in Everest-like shapes. The Everest topos, as it becomes evident, dominates Gibreel and Alleluia's home-seeking routes and symbolizes their quest for a single, dominant version of the world. Chamcha's itinerary is also marked by elevated points (his birth tree, his childhood dream of flying over and into the metropolis, his upper room in the five-storey mansion in Notting Hill), but his home-quest takes a clearer shape in the recurrent pattern of a dream-like vision:

... a simple dream, set in a city park, along an avenue of mature elms, whose overarching branches turned the avenue into a green tunnel into which the sky and the sunlight were dripping, here and there, through the perfect imperfections in the canopy of leaves. In this sylvan secrecy, Saladin saw himself accompanied by a small boy of about five, whom he was teaching to ride a bicycle. The boy, wobbling alarmingly at first, made heroic efforts to gain and maintain his balance, with the ferocity of one who wishes his father to be proud of him. The dream-Chamcha ran along behind his imagined son, holding the bike upright by gripping the parcel-rack over the rear wheel. Then he released it, and the boy (not knowing himself to be unsupported) kept going: balance came like a gift of flight, and the two of them were gliding down the avenue, Chamcha running, the boy pedaling harder and harder. (400)

Chamcha's vision signals a major shift from configurations of the domestic as a fixed place or state that one could make efforts to reach, towards an open-ended route in which all possible locations of home are consumed by the velocity of movement.

This "velocity" model of the domestic generally applies to both protagonists' home-seeking itineraries. Each elevated point in their home quests represents a moment of revelation in which the height of this particular point dissolves and becomes a path (often downwards) towards a new revelation of the domestic. For instance,

when Alleluia Cone steps on top of Mount Everest, she finds herself “at rest” outside and beyond uncertainty and confusion (there is a pun on Everest as “ever-rest”): ““Why I really went up there. Don’t laugh: to escape from good and evil’ ... what I thought was, you can either break your heart trying to work it all out, or you can go sit on a mountain, because that’s where all the truth went, believe it or not, it just upped and ran away from these cities where even the stuff under our feet is made up, a lie ” (313). The mountain operates as a sign of freedom from moral decisions and choice of direction because up there they are simply irrelevant. Alleluia’s Everest epiphany whose sublimity resounds in the praising tonality of her name, is thus comparable to a revelation of pre-natal or after-death eternity, a version of the paradisaical configurations of the domestic where the dichotomy of good and evil has not been established yet. The paradisaical aspects of Everest are likewise signalled by the presence of rainbows and angels, and the sense of infinitude, ““Such light; the universe purified into light. I wanted to tear off my clothes and let it soak into my skin ... Then the visions began, the rainbows looping and dancing in the sky, the radiance pouring down like a waterfall from the sun, and there were angels”” (199). At the same time, her experience configures Everest as a place haunted by demons such as that of Maurice Wilson, the soloist climber of the mount, who never descended from there. The Himalayas are persistently defined as a site that partakes of the demonic fluidity of air and its metamorphic shape-shifting – the summit is both a solid rock and a “ground [that is] falling away on every side” (199); it appears both as an abode of angels and as a brain-eating “satanic” land that causes climbers to hallucinate; it tempts with the freedom of detachment promising heavenly routes, and warns against the gravity of the tomb it represents, “so it occurred to her that her vision of the eccentric of 1934, the first human being ever to attempt to scale Everest on his own ... was the angel of her death” (196–7). The place is also temporally unstable in that its crystalline acoustics reproduces a gun shot (possibly Wilson’s ghost has produced it to save Allie and Sherpa Pemba from the euphoria of the height), which can also be the echo of Gibreel’s final suicidal shot, a “memory” of the future. With its ambiguous characteristics and spectacular spatio-temporal twists, Everest is constructed as a metamorphic locality that cannot be a “solid” ground beneath the climber’s feet. The Himalayas likewise spill over into other metamorphic configurations such as “the apparition of the impossible city,” the paradigmatic image of Alleluia’s father Otto Cone’s vision of the metropolis (295). Alleluia sees it on her way down from Everest: “glittering in the sunlight below the massif of Cho Oyu ... a metropolis of gigantic ice-needles, thin, sharp and cold. Her attention was distracted by Sherpa Pemba warning her to maintain her concentration, and the city had gone when she looked back” (295). The vision of the ice city repeats itself in the deadly whiteness of London that Allie and Gibreel traverse in winter, “[p]roper London ... dressed in white, like a mourner at a funeral” (200), and in this particular version of the metropolis its sepulchral “whiteness” belongs to the vocabulary of Indian, not western, ceremonial mourning. Instead of providing her with the elevated perspective she needs to make her way through the confusion of the downward world, Allie’s ascent enhances her sense of confusion as it affects her perceptions and her visions enhance the hybridity of the metropolis. One of the effects of her Himalayan ascent is the ability to see angels and demons in the streets of London. Rushdie elaborates this idea suggesting that her meeting with the angelico-satanic Gibreel and Chamcha is also part of the aftermath of her Everest experience.

Alleluia’s love for Gibreel and efforts to restore him to sanity are represented as a possible reproduction of the Himalayan route. Not knowing that Gibreel has survived the plane explosion, she meditates on her love for him: “I could have learned him, step by step, climbed him to the very summit. Denied mountains by my weak-boned feet, I’d have looked for the mountain in him: establishing base camp, sussing out routes, negotiating ice-falls, crevasses, overhangs. I’d have assaulted the peak and seen the angels dance” (314). Alleluia’s fall from Everest Villas, the downsized urban counterpart of Mount Everest and Gibreel’s residence in Bombay, translates the sublimity of the prototypical summit into an apocalyptic experience of end and death. The fall is ambiguously rendered as either an act of suicide, or a murder Gibreel allegedly commits in a fit of jealousy before his own suicidal death. Alleluia’s fall also signals the fallibility of the routes of ascent, which may produce the illusion of a singular, dominant perspective – and destination – in the home-seeking subject, but in fact they prepare the erosion of such hegemonic itineraries by actual experience.

Mount Cone which Gibreel ascends as the Angel of the Recitation and the Prophet in his Mahound dream series operates in much the same way as does Mount Everest in Alleluia’s ascent. Both Alleluia and Gibreel’s home-seeking itineraries are catoptrically intertwined and refract each other, producing one of the many metamorphic, hybrid combinations in the novel. In this particular metamorphic configuration, Alleluia

Cone and Gibreel embody the destinations of their quests – Gibreel is the “divine” mountain she is longing to climb, while she is Mount Cone (there is a pun on her surname), the site of his encounter with both God and Shaitan. Both “vantage points” are constructed as topoi of transcendence and illusion, both are places where angels and devils dwell, both exemplify the satanico-angelic migrant – and general human condition. Like Alleluia, who climbs Everest to gain a clearer view of herself and her surroundings, Gibreel-Mahound climbs Mount Cone in search of divine revelation. There he is faced with the possibility of having been in the presence of the Angel of the Recitation or the devil, or neither of them. The last option seems most reliable as we learn that the Angel and Mahound are versions of Gibreel’s dreamed identity, and all of them form a “satanically” confusing trinity: “he feels a dragging pain in the gut, like something trying to be born ... in these moments it begins to seem that the archangel is actually *inside the Prophet* ... I am the angel being extruded from the sleeper’s navel, I emerge, Gibreel Farishta, while my other self, Mahound, lies *listening*, entranced” (*The Satanic* 110).¹¹ The ambiguity of the revelation is likewise declared by Gibreel himself who admits that it was he who inspired the false verses in spite of Mahound’s insistence that the first time he had encountered Shaitan (i.e. Satan). Like Everest, Mount Cone operates as a point of “epiphany” that does not illuminate, but blurs the trajectory of his longing for certainty and stability. Mahound’s experience on Mount Cone engenders his downward itinerary of compromise and submission that erodes the integrity of the supposedly divine message he is expected to bring to the Jahilians. The dream is catoptrically reproduced as Gibreel’s inability to discern the falsity of the verses whispered by Chamcha on the telephone receiver. They drive him maniacally jealous and destroy his relationship with Allie. On both levels of reality, high, supposedly “divine” points of revelation are dismantled by subversive operations that work against their elevated positions.

Chamcha’s itinerary likewise forms elevated points, but they do not evoke such spectacular elevation as do those that shape Gibreel’s path. Moreover, unlike Gibreel, he is less inclined to “climb” heights than eager to dismantle them himself. For instance, in his unwillingness to get reconciled with his father and return home, he orders the felling of the walnut tree his father planted on the day he was born, and thus officially declares his disconnection from the Chamchawala family line. The roots of the stump, however, stay undamaged and promise partial restoration of the domestic world. Renovation of the domestic is likewise signalled by the fact that Chamcha opts for a symbolic arboreal structure to represent his translated condition:

There it palpably was, a chimera with roots, firmly planted in and growing vigorously out of a piece of English earth: a tree, he thought, capable of taking the metaphoric place of the one his father had chopped down in a distant garden in another, incompatible world. If such a tree were possible, then so was he [Chamcha]; he, too, could cohere, send down roots, survive. (406)

Chamcha is tempted to resume his life as a “translated man,” apparently adapting the arboreal metaphor to configure his own partial belonging to the paternal familial world. He might have likewise wished to stick to his English “roots” and fulfil his childhood dream of Englishness. Chamcha’s itinerary, however, is shaped by movements that question both India and London as possible destinations of his home-quest. His return to India takes shape as a re-routed rather than resumed rootedness, as his final exit from the familial house indicates:

He stood at the window of his childhood and looked out at the Arabian Sea ... moonlight, stretching from the rocks of Scandal Point out to the far horizon, created the illusion of a silver pathway ... like a road to miraculous lands. He shook his head; could no longer believe in fairy tales.

‘Come along,’ Zeenat Vakil’s voice said at his shoulder ...

‘I’m coming,’ he answered her, and turned away from the view. (547)

The scene revisits both Gibreel’s dream of the parting of the sea and Chamcha’s vision of the boy pedalling a bicycle along a park avenue. In both cases, his choice to continue does not imply the necessity of *roots*, but focuses on the figure of the *route* as a means of structuring his relationship with both the past and the future. Thus, his final gesture of turning back to the pathway across the waves signals only his unwillingness to walk the miraculous paths of self-invented worlds – such as the dreamed “homeland” he constructed for himself in his childhood longing for Englishness. Rather than meaning complete rejection of magic and dream, the novel’s end suggests other routes and pathways to the miraculous that emerge, just like in the story of Titlipur, at the

¹¹ Rushdie’s emphasis.

moment of departure from what has been imagined and pursued as a home or homeland: “On the last night of his life he heard a noise like a giant crushing forest beneath his feet, and smelled a stench like the giant’s fart, and he realized that the tree was burning ... the ... flames were consuming histories, memories, genealogies ... Then the sea poured over him ...” (506).

Conclusion

The Satanic Verses is a text that focalizes the problematic location of the domestic in a postcolonial narrative of deracination, migration and re-grounding. In his essay “In Good Faith” Rushdie writes the following illuminating explanation of the novel’s title:

You call us devils? it seems to ask. Very well, then, here is the devil’s version of the world, of “your” world, the version written from the experience of those who have been demonized by virtue of their otherness. Just as the Asian kids in the novel wear toy devil-horns proudly, as an assertion of pride in identity, so the novel proudly wears its demonic title. The purpose is not to suggest that the Qur’an is written by the devil; it is to attempt the sort of act of affirmation that, in the United States, transformed the word black from the black standard term of racist abuse into a “beautiful” expression of cultural pride. (403)

In other words, the novel’s purpose, as Rushdie sees it, is to use the racially and ethnically denigrated position of the postcolonial migrant subject as a vantage point from which s/he can rewrite critically the very discourses that have produced it.

This perspective reflects in reverse the vantage point of Pratt’s “imperial gaze.” If the latter turns out to be the dominant mode of vision in narratives of imperial conquest, postcolonial writers like Rushdie argue that imperial “triumph ... has made us the heirs of [its] long undoing” (Calvino 5) and that surrender may turn out to be the more viable form of conquest than its open expression. Thus, unlike pressing on notions of visual superiority such as those that abound in imperial romance, postcolonial rewrites of such victorious accounts make use of subtle, surreptitious strategies of conquest – carnivalized ritual resistance (Chamcha’s outbreak of fury in Club Hot Wax, Gibreel’s theatrical conquest of London) or clandestine movements (Baal’s grotesque reconstruction of Muhammad’s harem), which operate within the limits of the hegemonic regimes of power and destabilize them from within. Where open resistance does take place, it is either violently curbed (the Brickhall riots), or simply neglected (Gibreel’s “tropicalization” of the metropolis).

The very texture of *The Satanic Verses* is riddled with instances of subversive activity as it radiates from the plot core of the apocryphal story of the “Satanic” verses. Like the verses, falsely admitted as “sacred” in the Qu’ran, an account that Rushdie uses to problematize the unquestionable authority of a religious text, the two migrant protagonists enter the official discourses of the English metropolis to expose the fractures and fissures they conceal. Their aerial journey from the (former) colonies into the (former) metropolis on board a plane makes a case for redeeming air from its higher “euphoric” uses as an elevated platform of imperial vision to reclaim it as a space of fall, fragmentation and subversion.

The protagonists’ entrance into the metropolis as translated and subversive figures, their subsequent concealed and open reciprocal subversion of hegemonic metropolitan forms, and return to India, configure the itineraries of their migration. Like the Sufi path, their journey takes shape as a home-quest. Unlike the Sufi quest, however, the protagonists locate home as a place which is different from that of their origins and as they move forward, in a sequence of uprootings and re-groundings, they become even more detached from anything (both in physical and in metaphysical terms) likely to constitute a permanent domestic world. The Sufi insistence on absolute, transcendental domesticity is likewise questioned in the novel by breaking the absolute into several “elevated” positions that do not operate as sources of permanence and stability, but further complicate the homeless state of the migrant subject.

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