COSMOLOGY, MYTHOLOGY AND MYSTICISM
IN THE NOVELS OF SALMAN RUSHDIE
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ABSTRACT

Otherworldly constructions such as "the Mountain of Qaf" or "the Serpent" are seldom the focus of Rushdie criticism, yet they are integral to Rushdie's narrative structures and to his assault on coercion, division and violence. In particular, Rushdie uses Attar's Sufi poem Conference of the Birds to supply Grimus and Haroun with narrative structure, cosmic topography and iconoclastic ideals, and to supply Midnight's Children and The Satanic Verses with mystical ideals which persist in symbolic opposition to tyrannical and demonic figures. In the fantastical other world of Grimus, the iconoclastic journey of Flapping Eagle to the peak of Mount Calf/Qaf structures the novel and provides an ontological and epistemological framework for a multidimensional universe, a conflated cosmology made up of Sufi, Dantean, Germanic and Hindu elements. In the magical yet historical world of Midnight's Children, otherworldly constructions create a shifting, uncertain cosmos, one in which mysticism furnishes Saleem and his nation with moon-high ideals and with paradoxical meanings, and one in which clashing mythic constructions exacerbate the ambiguity with which the novel ends. In contrast to Midnight's Children, Shame depicts a focused dynamic between the worldly and the otherworldly: Raza's fundamentalist regime forces democratic, sexual and other expressions beneath the geographic and psychological "landscape" of Pakistan, from where they rise in the demonized form of the Beast/Kali, a satanic yet scourging counterforce to Raza's God-centred, monotheistic regime. In The Satanic Verses Rushdie pushes the role of the Beast a dangerous step further by allowing a "satanic narrator"
to swoop in and out of a text dominated by satanic revisions of cosmology and morality, by a rhetoric which makes Satan look heroic, and by the hellish visions of the conveniently schizophrenic “archangel” Gibreel. Possessing Chamcha and manipulating events so that Chamcha plays the parts of Iago and the Devil, the satanic narrator drives the archangel to murder Alleluia, who yearns to ascend Everest/Qaf. Rushdie’s fiction thus becomes increasingly dominated by coercive, violent, divisive and demonic figures, yet the children’s fantasy *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* marks a return to the triumphant mystical values and to the conflated cosmologies of *Grimus*. 
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

G  Grimus
H  Haroun and the Sea of Stories
IH  Imaginary Homelands
MC  Midnight's Children
S  Shame
SV  The Satanic Verses
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Over the last fifteen years Rushdie's fiction has provided critics with innumerable points of reference for their studies in metafiction, narratology, cultural identity, postcoloniality and postmodernism. Mehdi Abedi and Michael Fischer's *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition* provides a striking case in point. The authors note that "Rushdie was always a reference figure along with James Joyce and Thomas Pynchon for notions of encyclopedic postmodern novels." They also suggest that with the publication of *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie becomes almost inescapable in any exploration of postmodernism as it pertains to Islamic culture:

> Increasingly, the essays [in *Debating Muslims*] seemed to provide important background in understanding the furious struggle for political appropriation and interpretation of Rushdie’s book; and inversely, the Rushdie literary imagination seemed to complement our own intercultural crossreadings, providing one powerful example of the various sorts of hybridization we see emerging. (xxxiii-xxxiv)

In a more cautionary vein, Revathi Krishnaswamy observes that Rushdie "stands foremost among those [...] who have been elevated by global media-markets and metropolitan academies as the pre-eminent interpreters of postcolonial realities to postmodern audiences.” He adds that since writers such as Rushdie are “increasingly forming the critical archival material of alternative canons in the metropolitan academy, the language of migrancy has gained wide currency among today’s theorists of identity and authority” (127).

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1 One could quote from a wide variety of sources praising Rushdie’s postcolonial and postmodern sensibility, yet I quote from Krishnaswamy because he highlights some of the problems created by giving too much importance to Rushdie’s position as the “insider-outsider endowed with a unique, although splintered, sensibility.” While seeing reality in fragments may sit well with the
surprisingly, Rushdie's novels figure prominently in postcolonial studies such as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back* (the title of this work is taken from an article by Rushdie) and in postmodern studies such as Akbar Ahmed's *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* and Linda Hutcheon's two general studies on postmodernism (*The Politics of Postmodernism* and *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*).

Rushdie's fiction is also the subject of some twenty books, and of at least 1001 articles,

"postmodernist epistemology of the fragment"--the "affirmation of the partial nature of all perception" (141-143)--one must also ask. What are the criteria the migrant writer uses to choose certain fragments and to leave out others? How do such choices marginalize the experience of those who have not migrated? By giving too much prominence to "immigrant writers," critics run the risk of overlooking "alternative strategies for change [and for] dismantling the dichotomy between margin and centre" (144). I agree with Krishnaswamy here, although I wish he would elucidate these "alternative strategies." Also, Rushdie's metafiction, his constant questioning of his own texts, exonerates him somewhat from the charge of setting himself up as an "insider-outsider" authority on subcontinental culture as it pertains to postmodern identity. In general, it is Rushdie's genius as a writer, rather than his migrant perspective, which makes him stand out. His popularity results from his humour, his verbal dexterity, his idiosyncratic characters, his structural complexity, his metafictional explorations, and his ability to frame difficult questions of ontology and epistemology in ways which challenge readers from all sorts of philosophical and cultural backgrounds. Jean-Pierre Durix points out that much of "the pleasure produced by Rushdie's work" derives from his "play on verisimilitude" and from his "adroit juggling with different levels of 'reality.'" This juggling is "meant to confuse and entertain readers, who hesitate between fully accepting the conventions of fiction--consequently forgetting that this is fiction--and realizing that they remain in a world of make-believe" (1984:454). I will explore the way Rushdie plays with different levels of reality, yet I focus less on the metafiction of his texts than on the interplay of worldly and otherworldly versions of reality. The metafiction in Rushdie could easily constitute a study in itself, and it remains crucial to my interpretation of *The Satanic Verses*, in which Rushdie structures a gap between a conventional narrator and a satanic narrator, and to my interpretation of *Midnight's Children*, in which Saleem constantly questions his own existence as a writer in Mary's pickle-factory.

essays, poems and shorter pieces, many of which are listed in the Bibliography. The variety and mass of Rushdie criticism demonstrates the relevance of his fiction to contemporary worldly issues and theories. In this study I accept this relevance as a given, and I focus instead on the relevance of ancient otherworldly constructions to the narrative structures and to the values found in his novels prior to *The Moor’s Last Sigh.* I will focus on the problematic dynamics between mystical ideals, mythical figures and cosmological dramas, as well as on the way otherworldly elements and patterns are integrated into Rushdie’s characterizations and into his complex narrative structures. While the manner in which otherworldly constructions determine structure and theme will be central to my analysis, I also argue that Rushdie’s use of cosmology, mythology and mysticism remains consistent with his basic values of individual liberty, multivocal democracy, tolerance, compassion and love.


3 This study examines the following novels: *Grimus* (1975), *Midnight’s Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990). Because *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995) was published after this study was virtually complete, it has not been included here. Because *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* does not present the degree of textual difficulty found in Rushdie’s other novels, I do not devote a chapter to it, although I refer to it throughout the thesis and I use it in the Conclusion to gauge the degree of structural unity and thematic clarity in Rushdie’s other novels.
For want of a better phrase or term, I use *otherworldly constructions* to refer to settings, scenarios, ideals, schemes, figures, motifs, themes, paradigms, images, symbols and ideas which one finds in the vast and overlapping fields of cosmology, mythology and mysticism. In employing the word *constructions* I do not mean to imply that otherworldly settings, figures or ideas have no existence independent of human thought or linguistic fabrication. Instead of implying that they were originally constructed by human thought or language, I maintain that they have been and that they continue to be constructed in language. Given that most of these otherworldly constructions derive from antiquity and from sacred history, their contemporary status is an extremely involved and sensitive issue that cannot be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Rushdie's reworking of these constructions has been seen by some as an assault on the purity and integrity of traditional systems of belief, and by others as a revivification of elements and concerns found in these systems. I would contend that it is possible to see his fiction as both a destructive, iconoclastic assault and a creative, regenerative reconstitution.

My use of *otherworldly* is also tailored to this study. I might have used *metaphysical, religious, magical or miraculous*, yet each of these terms has its drawbacks in the context I wish to establish. *Metaphysics* is often associated with specific Western traditions, such as those of Aristotle or Kant. Such an association presents a problem given that the Western distinctions between physics and metaphysics do not necessarily apply to Islam or Hinduism, the two main sources of otherworldly constructions in Rushdie's novels. *Religion* is a term I use repeatedly, yet I avoid making it a key umbrella term for two reasons. First, *religion* tends to exclude, or put itself above mythology. Some would have it the other way around,
arguing that the recurrent mythic elements in different religions are more valid than any one particular religion. Second, religion tends to distinguish itself from mysticism, the latter often being seen as marginal or unorthodox. Also, for my purposes, magic is either too closely associated with legerdemain and the occult or to magic realism, which is a helpful term yet which does not usually refer to mythological figures such as Shiva or to cosmological paradigms such as Qaf Mountain. Like miraculous, magic tends to describe an event rather than a symbol or motif: I need a term which covers both the concrete and the abstract.

Another problem with miraculous is that it is usually associated with sacred occurrences. It would be difficult, for instance, to think of the Devil's appearance as a miraculous event.

In using otherworldly I make a distinction between the verifiable, everyday and practical (the worldly) and the fantastical, metaphysical, magical, miraculous, mythical, occult, mystical, mystic and revelatory (the otherworldly). In the latter category I include cosmologies found in mythology and religion, although I do not include the studies of astronomy and astrophysics. I realize that my terminology forces astronomy and astrophysics into the category of "worldly," given that they are based on, or oriented towards, scientific verification. This is not a serious problem, however, since Rushdie's fiction is rarely concerned with the other worlds of astronomy and astrophysics. For instance, the dimension of Calf in Grimus is entirely fantastical, the moon in Haroun lies in a fabulous realm inhabited by Gups and Chups, and the interstellar space in Shame is inhabited by imaginary gas monsters. While Rushdie refers to "many potential presents and futures" (G 235), to "the parallel universe of history" (S 64) and to "the parallel universes of quantum theory" (SV
these references are clearly along the lines of metaphysical, historical and ontological speculation rather than scientific inquiry.

Rushdie explores both worldly and otherworldly versions of reality, and the freedom he allows himself in exploring sacred otherworldly constructions remains based on the conviction that no one has a monopoly on the truth about whatever might lie beyond this world of practical experience or positivist inquiry. Rushdie opposes the implementation of religious rules in the political arena, yet he also recognizes the need to take otherworldly beliefs seriously. For instance, he says that in writing about India one ought to “develop a form which doesn’t prejudge whether your characters are right or wrong,” one ought “to create a form in which the idea of the miraculous can coexist with observable, everyday reality.” He makes it clear that his ideal of “form” includes ancient, time-honoured constructions, for immediately following his comment about the coexistence of the miraculous and the mundane, he adds the following: “The way I’ve always written has been shaped by the everyday fact of religious belief in India—not just Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh, but every belief” (Rushdie with Wachtel 149). Rushdie’s interest in “every belief,” in every version of reality, crops up again and again in his fiction, from the infinite dimensionality of *Grimus* to the infinite Sea of Stories in *Haroun*. While he does not attempt the impossible task of reconciling the multitude of beliefs in the world, he insists that imposing one’s own vision of the universe at the expense of another’s is a violation of the most basic form of respect or tolerance.

Rushdie’s personal view of otherworldly constructions is difficult to determine. He has defined himself as an atheist, yet his fiction is permeated by figures from Islamic
cosmology and Hindu mythology, and he returns again and again in both his fiction and his criticism to the mystical symbols and ideals of Farid ud-Din Attar. In the essay “‘In God We Trust’” (1985, 1990) he claims that he lost his belief in “God, Satan, Paradise and Hell” at the age of fifteen (IH 377), and in the essay “Is Nothing Sacred?” (1990) he says that his “sense of God ceased to exist long ago” (IH 417). Yet he follows up this latter statement by one which suggests a large scope for the exploration of religious belief:

as a result I was drawn towards the great creative possibilities offered by surrealism, modernism and their successors, those philosophies and aesthetics born of the realization that, as Karl Marx said, ‘all that is solid melts into air.’

It did not seem to me, however, that my ungodliness, or rather my post-godliness, need necessarily bring me into conflict with belief. Indeed, one reason for my attempt to develop a form of fiction in which the miraculous might coexist with the mundane was precisely my acceptance that notions of the sacred and the profane both needed to be explored, as far as possible without pre-judgement, in any honest literary portrait of the way we are. (IH 417)

Rushdie’s attitude to religious belief is further obscured by his later affirmation (in 1990) of “the two central tenets of Islam--the oneness of God and the genuineness of the prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad” (IH 430)--and by his retractions of this affirmation, the most recent being on April 3, 1995 (Rushdie with Cronenberg 24). While it may seem unfair to quote from a declaration he has since withdrawn, his initial affirmation is accompanied by the suggestion that the sensibility he finds in Sufism (Islamic mysticism) has consistent value in his fiction:

I have been engaging more and more with religious belief, its importance and power, ever since my first novel used the Sufi poem Conference of the Birds by Farid ud-din Attar as a model. (IH 430)

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Rushdie makes extensive use of Attar’s notions of a conference of birds and a flight of bird-souls to the Mountain of Qaf. Indeed, Attar’s poem supplies the main structural and thematic foundation for *Grimus*, it supplies one of the two structural and thematic models for *Haroun*, and it supplies mystical ideals of “unity” and “annihilation” which persist in symbolic opposition to tyrannical and demonic figures in *Midnight’s Children*, *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie often interprets Attar’s conference in terms of democratic tolerance and he almost always interprets Attar’s journey in terms of the self’s struggle towards an indeterminate Divinity and Love, towards an abstract infinity of dimensions which is the antithesis of political tyranny and demonic coercion. For Rushdie, Attar’s conference can symbolize the tolerant interaction of disparate selves within society, and Attar’s flight to Qaf can symbolize a spiritual ideal which is neither devoid of a mysterious, magical depth nor manacled by dogma.

Rushdie’s interest in spiritual flight—and in the love, yearning and anguish which are associated with mystical flight in Attar’s poem—surfaces forcefully in several essays from *Imaginary Homelands*. In “The Location of *Brazil*” Rushdie comments that in Terry Gilliam’s film *Brazil* “flight represents the imagining spirit” and that this spirit is at war with the real world in which “centres cannot hold.” He adds that *Brazil* is about “the struggle between private, personal dreams (flying, love) and the great mass-produced fantasies, eternal youth, material wealth, power” (IH 122, 124). In “Is Nothing Sacred?” Rushdie defines transcendence as “that flight of the human spirit outside the confines of its material, physical

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5 Attar’s poem *The Conference of the Birds* was written in Persian in approximately 1177 A.D. For detailed information on the Impossible Mountain of Qaf, the Simurg, and the various stages in Attar’s iconoclastic quest, please see the beginning of “Mystical Journeys” in my chapter on *Grimus*. 
existence which all of us, secular or religious, experience on at least a few occasions” (IH 421). In “Rian Malan” he comes closest to commenting on what in his own fiction might be seen as a combination of mysticism and tragedy. He describes Malan’s novel, *My Traitor’s Heart*, as a “cri de cœur too painful to be controlled fully” (IH 198), and he contends that the novel exemplifies the notion that love enables one “to transcend defeat.” *My Traitor’s Heart* tells of “the defeat of its author’s illusions, his ideals, his sense of his own goodness, his courage, and his ability to comprehend his fellow South Africans,” yet even though it “is full of bitterness, cynicism, anger and storms,” it remains “a triumphant instance of this type of defeated love” (IH 200). A similar mixture of mystical idealism and tragic realization first surfaces in Virgil’s resignation in *Grimus*, and this combination takes on greater force in Saleem’s tragic view that Attar’s ideals can only be realized in their destruction. *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses* present a further marginalization of Attar’s ideals, a further suggestion that idealism cannot survive in the midst of dictatorship, ethnic hatred or diabolic possession and intervention. In *The Satanic Verses* Allie’s devotion to Everest/Qaf does, however, carry an implicit, symbolic power, one which takes an optimistic and comic form in the children’s novel *Haroun*, where Attar’s Muslim ideals merge effortlessly with Somadeva’s Hindu ideals.

In using Attar’s conference to symbolize multivocal democracy and in using Attar’s “annihilation” in tragic contexts, Rushdie may be creating his own “Attar”—extending Attar’s mysticism beyond the bounds which the poet himself would countenance.⁶ Rushdie’s possible

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⁶ It is of course impossible to verify whether or not Attar would approve of Rushdie’s fiction, although such approval appears unlikely given that the Persian poet displays a conservative streak largely absent in Rushdie. One might recall that Attar condemned his contemporary Omar Khayyam because of the latter’s supposed hedonism.
distortion of Attar is an important question, yet it is one I leave for experts on Sufism. This study is less concerned about whether or not Rushdie is faithful to the sources from which he draws than about the way he uses otherworldly constructions to create his own fictional worlds and to promote the values he considers essential to the imagination and to a healthy society. I will on occasion take note of the general manner in which Rushdie may be distorting otherworldly constructions or employing them in a stereotypical fashion, yet given that Rushdie borrows from a wide array of sources and that many of these are exceedingly complex, it would be folly on my part to pass judgment on whether or not Rushdie is being true to his sources. I am not even sure that I know what being "true" to sources really means. In any case, I leave such deliberations to those who are intimately familiar with both English Literature and one or more of the traditions employing Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Italian, Norse, etc.

* 

The tension between mystical unity and demonic division in Rushdie's fiction is often expressed in terms of the opposition between an abstract notion of transcendent divinity, usually Attar's Mountain of Qaf, and a far less abstract demonic figure, sometimes a mythicized figure such as General Shiva, more often the Devil. The dynamic between these two poles is often intricate and paradoxical, requiring a general familiarity with the otherworldly constructions themselves and an intimate grasp of Rushdie's complex narrative designs. One complicating factor is that both poles are elusive by nature: Qaf cannot be located (just as God cannot be defined) and Satan slides surreptitiously in and out of this world. Also problematic is the way Rushdie occasionally associates Qaf and God with figures
such as the egomaniacal Grimus or the indifferent and tyrannical "Oopervalu," and the way he occasionally allows his "Devil" to liberate humans from a tyrannical "God." Yet the ideal of unity which Qaf represents transcends any portrait of a limited, anthropomorphic God, and the possessions and coercions of the Devil nullify any of his "liberating" actions. I should note here that I consider satanic possession, which figures prominently in *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*, to be both coercive and divisive. In the cases of Sufiya and Chamcha, possession entails the forceful division of the self from what the self desires and it situates the soul as far as possible from God.

Rushdie's notion of mystical unity is accompanied by notions of tolerance, democracy, liberty, peace and love, and his view of demonic division is correspondingly associated with coercion, tyranny, repression, war and violence. Because Rushdie's fiction is often parodic, ironic, metafictional, and at times intentionally convoluted and ambiguous, the opposition between the negative values of division, coercion and violence on one hand and the positive values of unity, tolerance and love on the other is often difficult to discern. This opposition becomes clearer, however, when one sees that Rushdie consistently slants his stories against characters or figures who embody or express negative values. This slant is particularly evident in the children's fantasy *Haroun*, in which Khattam-Shud divides the Chups from the Gups and in which this Cultmaster censors and terrorizes the entire population of the moon. Rushdie's preferred values are also evident in *Midnight's Children*. While Saleem's possession by his two-headed demon leads to his uncle's death, and while Saleem excludes Shiva from his otherwise democratic Conference, Saleem's aims remain antithetical to the evil designs of figures such as Ravana, General Shiva and the Widow. Rushdie's basic values are
more difficult to see in *The Satanic Verses*, yet they become clear once one acknowledges the presence of a satanic narrator. This narrator possesses Chamcha and turns him into a demonic puppet, one which divides Gibreel from his sanity and from his heavenly Alleluia. Exacting revenge on God via His human creations, the satanic narrator turns love and unity into jealousy and alienation. *Grimus* and *Shame* also require some explanation, for in both novels tyrants attempt to impose uniformity, a negative type of unity, on their subjects. This coercive “unity” is antithetical to tolerance and to what I mean by unity or the meaningful coexistence of otherwise disparate selves or communities. By coercing others to follow an esoteric Order and a religious Law, Grimus and Raza impose a uniformity which crushes the freedom to express, confront, appreciate or resolve differences. *Grimus* differs from *Shame* in that it exemplifies the principle that violence is justified only insofar as it is used to counter tyranny. While Flapping Eagle uses just as much force as necessary to destroy Grimus’ hold over Calf Mountain, the Beast in *Shame* becomes coercive, tyrannical and vengeful in the course of its scourging assault on the dictatorship of Raza.

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While one can easily understand why a writer would promote the values of tolerance, unity and love, it is less obvious why a secular and at times skeptical writer such as Rushdie uses otherworldly—rather than worldly—constructions to promote such values. One reason is that he wishes to express the otherworldly beliefs of the subcontinental citizens who are his primary subjects. Apart from this, however, Rushdie may be wanting to shake up his more skeptical, realism-oriented readers, supplying them with a jolt of the unexpected, much as writers of magic realism introduce the inexplicable into otherwise realistic scenarios. Or, as
Rushdie puts it in his essay on Gilliam's *Brazil*, “Unreality is the only weapon with which reality can be smashed, so that it may subsequently be reconstructed” (IH 122). This possible motive seems to fit with what one might call a Romantic project, with a post-Enlightenment struggle to escape a universe dominated by rationality and materialism. In Blakean terms, Rushdie invokes the otherworldly in order to break the mind-forged manacles of an empirical, realistic or positivist view of reality. In his essay on Michel Tournier’s *Gemini*, Rushdie repeats Louis Aragon’s idea that the marvellous “is the eruption of contradiction within the real.” Suffusing the marvellous into everyday life “requires a relentless intensity of vision, powered by an innately iconoclastic form of intellectual energy.” Rushdie is not only thinking about the otherworldly of the magical and the marvellous, but also about the otherworldly of religion and mythology: he praises Tournier for suggesting that this type of iconoclastic enterprise does not necessarily imply the destruction of such constructions as God: “in a passage of startling metaphysical originality, we are told that ‘Christ has to be superseded’—not by any Manichean Satan, but by the Spirit, the Holy Ghost” (IH 249).

Yet such a stance contains a problem: the otherworldly can help to liberate the self from a materialist conception of the universe yet it can also present manacles of its own. While the introduction of a magical or inexplicable event may not force the writer into an established system or cosmology, the use of a religious symbol or motif can lock the writer into a religious system, a pre-fabricated universe dominated by such figures as Satan and God. In *The Sacred and the Profane* Mircea Eliade suggests that a *hierophany*, an eruption of the sacred, “allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation” (Eliade 1959:21). In Rushdie’s fiction, such an eruption
occasionally provides liberation from an existential universe, yet it also opens up a cosmology in which the self can become trapped in a scheme or system and in which the self can become prey to nefarious forces or figures in that system. What starts off as a liberating orientation, a meaningful vision of the universe, can turn into a nightmare. This is particularly the case in *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*, where the main characters succumb to the violent disorientations, the cosmic inversions and the chaotic meaninglessness promoted by the otherworldly figure of Satan. Perhaps in order to harness the liberating potential of the otherworldly without allowing it to lock his protagonists into one particular orientation, Rushdie depicts *hierophanies* of many types in a single continuum. Whether one sees a *hierophany* as an event or a symbol (both signify a greater “orientation”), multiple *hierophanies* call into question both the value of the orientation and the danger of confinement inherent in any single eruption. While multiple *hierophanies* create the problem of conflicting orientations or epistemologies, such a problem may be preferable to being trapped in a seamless material existence or to allowing any one sacred orientation to dominate over all others. Or, multiple *hierophanies* might be seen as inevitable rather than preferable, especially to a writer who has been steeped in the diverse orientations of Islam, Hinduism and Christianity.  

Rushdie’s recurrent use of Qaf seems an exception here, seems to present a

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7 Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born on June 19, 1947, to Anis Ahmed Rushdie (a businessman from Delhi) and Negin Rushdie (a schoolteacher from Aligargh), and the family members were keenly aware of their status as Muslims in the largely Hindu city of Bombay. Salman’s sister Sameen attests, “From a very young age, we were conscious of being a Muslim minority in India” (Hamilton 92). The family was not, however, orthodox or strict, and their parents (who would speak to their children in both Urdu and English), allowed them to read whatever they wanted. Rushdie was also strongly influenced by the liberal, scientific and Christian biases of English education at the English-language school to which he went in Bombay (the religious bias is evident in its name, Cathedral School), at Rugby School (where he went at the age of thirteen), and at King’s College, Cambridge (where he completed his Masters degree in Islamic History in 1968). Details of Rushdie’s life can be found in Ian Hamilton’s succinct
fixed point and a clear orientation. Yet one must remember that Rushdie uses Qaf as an iconoclastic, auto-destructive symbol, one which suggests rather than defines an infinity of potential dimensions and orientations. Qaf is “Impossible” precisely because it cannot be fixed or clearly defined.

The question remains: Why does Rushdie make such extensive use of ancient otherworldly constructions rather than fabricate constructions which do not carry such ontological and epistemological baggage? If he were to follow in the footsteps of magic realist writers, he could shake up a reader’s four-dimensional view of the universe without trapping his characters in a traditional system or cosmology. Yet one could also argue that in order to break free of conventional conceptions one cannot ignore them, one cannot focus exclusively on magical moments which shatter a positivist universe in a startling or illuminating way. Given that ancient otherworldly constructions orient the individual and constitute the world in a psychologically, culturally and historically responsive way, one could argue that in order to offer effective alternatives to any one particular established orientation one ought to respond to it with an equally weighty or developed orientation. For instance, in

and lively 16-page biography, which appeared in the December 25, 1995-January 1, 1996 edition of *The New Yorker*, in William Weatherby’s 1990 biography, *Salman Rushdie: Sentenced to Death* (this biography is heavily slanted towards the Rushdie Affair and it appears very conjectural at times), and in his interviews—especially those with Phillips (1995), Haffenden (1985) and *Scripti* (1985). Further biographical information can be found in the early sections of the chapters in this thesis. Hamilton notes that in Rushdie’s fiction “autobiography is re-experienced as fairy tale,” the intention being at times “celebratory and fond” and at others “lavishly delinquent.” Referring to the similarity between Anis Ahmed Rushdie’s propensity to tell never-ending bedtime stories and Rashid’s “Ocean of Notions” in *Haroun*, Hamilton asks, “What if his father could be turned into a character in one of his own bedtime stories? What if all supposedly true-life experience could be fabulously reimagined? The wilder the fictional conjecture, the more gleefully energized Rushdie becomes.” As he has said, his books have a spirit of connection with real life. But the spirit is mischievous. Readers who try to tease out links between Rushdie’s life and Rushdie’s fiction are likely to end up feeling teased” (92).
promoting an alternative to the notion of a single afterlife in Paradise or Hell, a scenario
exemplifying the doctrine of *karma-samsara* is more challenging than a story which introduces
magical or fantastic worlds inhabited by souls of the departed dead. Even if one does not
believe in any particular version of the afterlife, there is nevertheless a hierarchy based on
usage and precedence, a sort of Common Law of the Unknown which makes mythological
and religious constructions carry more weight than those which never gained adherents or
which appear to be freshly hatched from the imagination. Rushdie may not believe in the
otherworldly constructions he includes in his fiction, yet he knows that these have been
employed for centuries and that they consequently have a deep-seated place in the human
heart and mind. In *The Study of Literature and Religion* David Jasper observes that when
people ask themselves fundamental questions, the language used is still steeped in figures and
settings such as those of Eden and Satan:

> The story of Eden and the figure of Satan remain alive in our emotions, and in the
textuality of theodicy they continue to address the problem of suffering and evil in
God's world, however dead their 'theory.' (129)

While the "theory" or "system" which provides a superstructure for particular otherworldly
constructions may be "dead" in the sense that its status as eternal or absolute can be
undermined by skepticism and by other theories, Rushdie nevertheless brings various
superstructures to life by acknowledging their influence on characters such as Padma or
Gibreel, and by revivifying their constituent elements in ever new and changing forms.

In his fiction, Rushdie engages in an iconoclasm which sometimes appalls the
orthodox, yet which also bring sacred constructions to the fore, working them into new and
vibrant contexts. In this sense he resembles what Jorge Luis Borges calls "the heresiarch," a figure which, according to Elizabeth Dipple, acts both destructively and creatively:

One of Borges's favorite terms or ideas is that of the heresiarch—the arch heretic who questions all before him, and particularly all forms of established dogma. For Borges, the artist and writer [...] reality itself is an infinite mise-en-abyme that cannot be traced to any secure source and requires a brilliant heresiarch to demonstrate its infinite resonances. (66)

Rushdie's attack on dogma or established ways of conceptualizing the universe is most evident in *Grimus* and *Haroun*: in the former Flapping Eagle destroys Grimus' cosmic Order and replaces it with non-insistent allusions to Shiva, who destroys and creates cosmic schemes *ad infinitum*; in the latter the tyranny and censorship of the Cultmaster is defeated so that the Sea of Stories (which resembles Borges' Library of Babel) can continue to harbour the outpouring of new, and the reworking of old, tales. The iconoclasm of the "heresiarch" is also evident in Rushdie's other novels, yet these novels highlight the tyrannical imposition of cosmic Plans rather than the playfulness and creativity which results from the destruction of rigid and coercive versions of reality.

Rushdie differs slightly from the Borges who, according to André Maurois, is "attracted to metaphysics" yet accepts "no system as true" and "makes out of all of them a game for the mind" (Borges xii). Rushdie is certainly a great game-player, yet he does not

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8 Borges is a particularly appropriate writer to compare to Rushdie given their intense interests in ontological and epistemological exploration, and given that they both use ancient otherworldly constructions to express their contemporary sensibilities. For instance, Rushdie's use of the Phoenix, Dante, Norse mythology and Islamic mysticism in *Grimus* mirrors Borges' use of the same in "The Sect of the Phoenix," "Inferno, I, 32," "Ragnarök," and "The Zahir" (all of which can be found in *Labyrinths*). In his interview with *Scritpi*, Rushdie expresses his admiration for the Argentinean writer: "Borges is one of those writers who opens doors. He shows you. It seems to me that Garcia Marquez is only the confirmation of the kinds of possibilities that Borges showed. Borges opened the doors and Marquez went through. [...] the South American novel was all to do with the emotions, with
reduce metaphysics to a game. In *Grimus* the extraterrestrial Koax is reprimanded for turning Flapping Eagle's mind into his private testing-ground, and Grimus is blamed for transforming esoteric ideas into a game, for not seeing Qaf as an ideal which transcends his own mental satisfaction. Rushdie's criticism in *Imaginary Homelands* makes it clear that while he delights in "elegant correspondences," "skillfully woven shimmering web[s]" and "twining thick forest[s] of marvellous ideas," he dislikes it when a narrative "web becomes a trap," when links offer no "enrichment" and when the "journey to [a] truth becomes so turgid that it's impossible to care about reaching the goal" (IH 350, 249, 256, 293, 242, 272). Rushdie's elaborately constructed novels do reach a goal, albeit an abstract one, for they promote what Elizabeth Dipple (in her discussion of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*) calls "an open cosmos of understanding." His fiction does not lead to any "rigid myth," but rather to a reverberative perspective which will "lead the mind fluidly forward," thus helping the self to accommodate new versions or orientations of reality (118). The result is neither a reaffirmation of any one traditional religious view nor an affirmation of any vague notion that all religions and mythologies have some hidden underlying cohesion or universal meaning.

In questioning and in not entirely dismissing the notion that different epistemologies can be marshalled into a heterogeneous yet coherent view of the universe, Rushdie's fiction can be situated somewhere between what Lonnie Kliever calls monotheistic and polytheistic polysymbolism. Kliever associates monotheistic polysymbolism with modernity and with the

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'passion' and so forth, and it was Borges who showed that ideas came first. He placed the mind before the emotions, and the result was *El Boom*, as they call it" (116-117).
view that diverse systems contain universal meanings. Polytheistic polysymbolism on the other hand rejects this universality:

It too celebrates the variousness and many-sidedness of all expressions of culture and religion. But it decidedly rejects the monotheistic ideal of a fundamental unity underlying and integrating this heterogeneity. Thereby it calls into question modernity's sense of centered self, integral universe, and historical destiny. In short, this rival form of polysymbolic religiosity appears to be polytheistic and postmodern.

(178)

Rushdie often suggests fragmented, pessimistic, "polytheistic" perspectives. His novels from Midnight's Children to The Satanic Verses increasingly reflect the "historical dislocation," the "apocalyptic pessimism" and the "rising tide of occultism" which accompanies the ontological and epistemological chaos of polytheistic polysymbolism (Kliever 178). Yet Rushdie also suggests universal, idealistic, "monotheistic" perspectives, for he returns again and again to Attar's ideals of mystical unity and annihilation, and to paradigms of infinite contextuality and creativity. Midnight's Children and The Satanic Verses in particular suggest—albeit indirectly, esoterically or tragically--a mystical point of view, a possibility of underlying transcendental unity.

Rushdie's interest in an indeterminate number of ontological and epistemological orientations might also be seen in terms of postcolonialism, insofar as it signals a reaction against the monocentrism of colonialism, and in terms of modernism and postmodernism, insofar as postmodernism signals an exacerbation of the fragmentation inherent in modernism.

In The Empire Writes Back, the authors observe that

the alienating process which initially served to relegate the postcolonial world to the 'margin' turned upon itself and acted to push that world through a kind of mental barrier into a position from which all experience could be viewed as uncentred, pluralistic, and multifarious. (Ashcroft et al. 12)
Rushdie expresses a similar notion in the aptly titled essay “Imaginary Homelands”: he claims that “those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us” (IH 12). Rushdie here uses modernism much as one would use postmodernism, as he does when he equates modernism with a “rudderlessness,” a “moment beyond consensus” (IH 387). It is not until his essay “Is Nothing Sacred?” (1990) that he starts to use postmodern rather than modern to indicate the uncertainty of the age in which we live: he says that there are several reasons “for proposing the novel as the crucial art form of what [he] can no longer avoid calling the post-modern age.” He argues that because the literary text offers alternative versions or orientations of the universe, it is, “of all the arts, the one best suited to challenging absolutes of all kinds.” He adds that “because it is in its origin the schismatic Other of the sacred (and authorless) text, so it is also the art most likely to fill our god-shaped holes” (IH 424). Rushdie explores such “holes” in Grimus, in which Flapping Eagle destroys that part of himself which defends traditional beliefs (G 89), and in Midnight’s Children, in which Aadam Aziz’s inability to “worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve” creates a “hole” (MC 12). In The Satanic Verses Rushdie pushes the notion that the novel is the schismatic Other of the sacred text to a dangerous extreme, for events and rhetoric in that novel are manipulated by the cosmic Other, Satan. Yet even here Rushdie does not give up on unifying or “monotheistic” mystical ideals. While the Devil slips in and out of the text, wreaking havoc, encouraging revolt, and generally “raising hell,” the Impossible Mountain of Qaf (disguised as Everest) presents readers with a beleaguered, marginalized, yet nevertheless potent ideal of unity, tolerance and love.
One could debate endlessly whether or not Rushdie's fiction mitigates the problems posed by modernism and postmodernism, whether or not it helps to fill what Rushdie calls "the god-shaped holes" (IH 424) left by the lack of belief in a single text which explains the whole of the cosmos. Yet, clearly, Rushdie's fiction confronts the problems resulting from the traces left by the otherworldly in a secular world, a world which lacks what Theodore Ziolkowski calls a "unified faith" and an "epistemological field" deriving from such a faith. As Ziolkowski notes, this lack of a unifying context or field creates a critical dilemma:

the general secularization of Western culture has produced a new problem for literary interpretations because there is no longer a unified faith—what structuralists would call an epistemological field—that provides an automatic context of understanding for the literary work. (20)

This dilemma is also a challenge to which Rushdie's novels respond, for they insistently question their own structure and meaning, and they consistently offer a confluence of secularism and multiple hierophanies, a disorienting exploration of the lack of any unified faith and an exciting exploration of a universe in which one finds an infinite number of potential orientations or fields. Because Rushdie refuses to discount the possibility—or the iconoclastic, mystical "Impossibility"—of transcendent meaning amid shifting layers of truth, he challenges those who would argue that multiple versions of reality necessarily imply the absence of spiritual or otherworldly meaning.
CHAPTER 2

GRIMUS: AN INFINITY OF DIMENSIONS

Among Rushdie's novels, *Grimus* is arguably the most otherworldly: its characters have strong mythological and mystical associations, its structure derives mainly from Attar's mystical journey and its main setting is a strange conflation of four cosmic topographies.

Rushdie's first published novel, 1 *Grimus* was written for a science-fiction contest it did not

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1 *Grimus* appears to be Rushdie's fourth literary attempt. Of his first endeavor, Hamilton makes the following comment: "Salman's Sunday-morning outing to the cinema [in Bombay] was the high point of his week, and it is no surprise that the first story he attempted, at the age of ten, was movie-based. Its title was 'Over the Rainbow,' and it featured 'a talking pianola whose personality is an improbable hybrid of Judy Garland, Elvis Presley and the "playback singers" of the Hindi movies'" (93). His first-hand experience of racism at Rugby led him to pour out his feelings "in a short autobiographical novel entitled *Terminal Report* that featured a conservative, conventional hero--such as he had once been--transformed by his experiences into an aggressive, radical fellow whenever he encountered racial prejudice" (Weatherby 18). From Rugby, Rushdie went to King's College, Cambridge, where he completed his M.A. in Islamic History in 1968. Rushdie's first serious or mature experiment in writing came after finishing at Cambridge and after visiting his family, who had moved in 1964 to Karachi. Settling in London, Rushdie acted on occasion at the Oval Theatre and worked as a copy-writer for Ogilvy and Mathur. In 1971 Rushdie completed the manuscript of *The Book of the Pir*, which "featured a Muslim guru, in some unnamed Eastern land, who gets taken up by a military junta and installed as the figurehead President of its corrupt regime" (Hamilton 100). A *pir* is a spiritual master, a sheik (Schimmel 22). Hamilton continues: "It was a strong enough plot, but it was written in what the author calls 'sub-Joyce.' After being rebuffed by various literary agents ('It couldn't even achieve that!' Rushdie says of it), the book was set aside, and Rushdie decided to go back to advertising" (100). Weatherby comments that after finishing the novel, Rushdie "decided its experimental style made it 'totally incomprehensible' to the general reader, and he abandoned it. He was still trying to find his own style forged by his experiences in both East and West" (Weatherby 33). In *Grimus* Rushdie forges strong links between East and West, although less in terms of geography, history or psychology than in terms of cosmology, mythology and mysticism. *Grimus* was written in the Lower Belgrave Street flat vacated by Clarissa Luard's mother in 1973. Rushdie met Clarissa in 1970, although, according to Clarissa, their relationship "was clandestine for about two years" because she "had a boyfriend and he had a girlfriend" (Hamilton 100). Rushdie married Clarissa in April, 1976,
win, perhaps because its unearthly setting is more a product of cosmology, mythology and
mysticism than of anything one might associate with science. Rushdie himself calls the novel
a “fantasy that didn’t grow out of the real world” (Rushdie with Haffenden 246) and the
degree to which this is true can be gauged by comparing it to Haroun and the Sea of Stories,
Rushdie’s only other novel whose main setting is an imaginary world. In Haroun Rashid and
Haroun have a normal father-and-son relationship and they begin and end their fabulous
journey (to the moon Kahani) in a contemporary city similar to Bombay. In Grimus, on the
other hand, Flapping Eagle seems more archetypal than human, he begins his journey (to the
dimension of Calf Mountain) near the post-apocalyptic city of “Phoenix,” and he ends his
journey in a nebulous infinity of dimensions. Flapping Eagle also lacks the engaging
emotional complexity of later Rushdie protagonists such as Midnight’s Children’s Saleem,
who remains too human to lose himself forever in the blank-mindedness of his “buddhahood”
or in the oblivion offered by the houris in the Sundarbans Jungle. Flapping Eagle does not
exhibit the types of human traits that would tie him to this world—let alone to anything as
specific as a country or a family. It therefore comes as no surprise that, instead of returning to
“Phoenix,” he extends his journey into an indeterminate number of settings or dimensions.

In depicting Flapping Eagle’s journey, Rushdie champions the notion that we live in an
infinity of dimensions and that whoever attempts to define or “fix” this infinity into one pattern
ought to be opposed. In this sense he resembles Borges’ heresiarch, “the arch heretic who

after Liz Calder (who was an editor at Victor Gollancz and who was the third resident in the Belgrave
Street flat) had Grimus published in 1975.

2 Weatherby notes that Grimus did not win the Gollancz science fiction contest in which it was entered.
He surmises that “probably the judges didn’t know what to make of this attempted literary flight
masquerading as science fiction” and he adds that critics “liked it even less than the judges” (37).
questions all before him”--especially “all forms of established dogma” (Dipple 66). Consistent with this aim, Rushdie ends the novel with an open-ended scenario which implies any number of future patterns or dimensions. This open-endedness prevails throughout the novel, which conflates figures, landscapes and scenarios deriving from the following four sources: Attar’s *Conference of the Birds*, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Shaivite mythology and the *Voluspá* of Germanic or Norse mythology. Borrowing from these four sources, Rushdie depicts a scenario in which the mystic (Virgil) and the demonic trickster (Deggle) both help the iconoclastic hero (Flapping Eagle) defeat the God-like tyrant (Grimus).

*Grimus’s* wide spectrum of literary, philosophic and religious sources has created confusion in the minds of some critics. While most critics echo Rushdie’s dissatisfaction with his use of language, Timothy Brennan, Catherine Cundy and James Harrison also suggest that the various elements of the novel do not come together in a coherent manner. In *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* Brennan complains that *Grimus* is “a volatile playground of Western and Eastern literary sources that mix together uneasily in a sustained and

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3 The *Voluspá* or *Prophecy of the Seeress* gives an overall account of Germanic cosmology and constitutes the first book of *The Poetic Edda*.

4 In a *Scripsi* interview Rushdie says that he is unhappy with his use of language in the novel: “It’s a question of hearing your own voice, and I don’t hear it because I hadn’t found it then” (125). The dialogue is rather wooden and at times awkward. Also, Rushdie makes excessive use of anagrams and puns, many of which are deciphered by Parameswaran in *The Perforated Sheet* (57-60). After unravelling “an elaborate reordering of the same fifty-six letters,” Parameswaran comments that this reordering is “rather heavy-handed,” although it indicates “the method we should adopt for analysing the theme of the novel.” The obsessive transpositions involved in this anagram point to Grimus’ convoluted thinking and to “the elitist isolation that is intruded upon by Flapping Eagle” (60). Apart from obsessive word-play, *Grimus* might be faulted for its awkward shifts in the narrator’s point of view. These shifts from first to third person only vaguely anticipate the metafictional gamesmanship of *Midnight’s Children*. While they suggest that Flapping Eagle is revising his account (or having his account revised—the changes in person thus slipping into the narrative) from another world (Paradise? Gimle? some other dimension?), such speculation remains inconclusive. I return to this question at the end of the chapter.
uninterpretable allegory” (70). Cundy likewise comments that the elements in *Grimus* are “insufficiently blended to make the novel appear a skillfully amalgamated whole.” She contends that Rushdie comes short of a “synthesis of diverse cultural strands and narrative forms” (137). Brennan, Cundy and Mujeebuddin Syed also imply that because Rushdie’s later novels explore cultural and postcolonial themes, his first novel must initiate such exploration. This enforced postcoloniality seems somewhat contradictory in Cundy’s article, where she stresses the importance of Menippean satire and Sufi mysticism. She quotes from Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, in which the author observes that Menippean satire’s “bold and unrestrained use of the fantastic and adventure is internally motivated, justified by and devoted to a purely ideational and philosophical end.” In this satire the self of the protagonist “ceases to mean only one thing; he ceases to coincide with himself” (134). Cundy also stresses that in the Sufi quest “the multiplicity of existence is seen to be gathered into totality and unity,” an experience which Laleh Bakhtiar describes as passing “from form to formlessness” (133). If Menippean satire and Sufi idealism are central to the novel, then it makes sense that Rushdie does not ground his concerns in a specific political, national, cultural or postcolonial context or identity. Cundy argues that “Rushdie’s failure to engage fully with questions of migrant identity in *Grimus* has led to a dissipation of critical interest, away from the seeds of the engagement and towards more abstruse theorization of the novel’s

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5 Brennan also notes the confluence of “Persian, Quranic, Dantean” and Shaivite myths related to Calf Mountain (77), yet he does not link the references to Shiva’s lingam to the sexual and eschatological climax of the novel. Instead, he returns to a political reading, concluding that Grimus fails to attain “a transcendent vision of heterogeneity” and Flapping Eagle fails to reach a “home” (77-78). Yet it is Flapping Eagle—not Grimus—who is the seeker on the novel’s mystical quest, and it is Flapping Eagle who succeeds in attaining or incarnating a mystical vision of heterogeneity. He attains this vision precisely because he, like Shiva, is occasionally pulled toward, yet ultimately rejects, the notion of a fixed abode.
complex structure” (133). Yet Rushdie does engage fully in questions of migrant identity, to the point where the protagonist “ceases to coincide with himself” and to a point where, to borrow from Cundy’s own citation of Laleh Bakhtiar, “one passes the tree-line and enters the world with-out [sic] forms” (133). Just because Rushdie does not develop migrant identity in the manner to which some postcolonial critics are habituated does not mean that the novel is not successful in its own philosophical and mystical terms.

Harrison is somewhat less damning than Brennan or Cundy, although he does contend in *Salman Rushdie* that the disparate elements in the novel lead to a “lack of focus” and that the novel presents readers with “a plethora of possible readings, none of which fits perfectly but all of which are interestingly if in some cases only marginally relevant” (38). Harrison ends his chapter on *Grimus* by suggesting that it is an “incipient Nietzschean black farce culminating in the death of God as a stone frog.” Yet the symbol or figure of God in the novel is not a frog, but rather the Mountain of Qaf, the Simurg, the Stone Rose, and, to a lesser degree, Grimus himself. Harrison adds that the “death of God” in *Grimus* makes even *The Satanic Verses* seem innocuously tame. If that is Rushdie’s intended message, it clearly self-destructs en route to the reader. But it is worth noting that his grasp, even in his notorious fourth novel, may have been exceeded by his reach in his first. (40)

Yet the message about the death of God does not “self-destruct.” Rather, it forms part of an iconoclastic argument in which Rushdie attacks fixed and self-serving notions of God.

Johansen comes closer to appreciating Rushdie’s mix of otherworldly constructions in *Grimus*. In “The Flight of the Enchanter,” he calls the novel a “strange blend of mythical or

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6 In this article Johansen lists a range of potential influences on *Grimus*. one of which suggests a parallel between Grimus and an evil sorcerer in the *Walam Olum*. “According to several Native American myths evil enters the world through the intervention of an evil sorcerer, who starts messing
allegorical narrative, fantasy, science fiction, and Menippean satire.” He observes that the text “is characterized by its very heterogeneity, its refusal to adhere to any one particular semiotic code, any one narratological scheme.” Unlike Cundy, he applies the notion of Menippean satire in an appreciative manner: he says that Rushdie’s “predilection for code switching” fits with such satire, which is typified by “its lack of homogeneity and its ability to incorporate and assimilate to its own purposes a number of other genres.” Quoting Northrop Frye, he notes that the purpose of Menippean satire is not to attain realism, for it “deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes” (29). As I noted above, Cundy takes this point further when she quotes Bakhtin, who says that Menippean satire is “internally motivated, justified by and devoted to a purely ideational and philosophical end.” Yet Cundy does not seem to see this as a valid mode of writing. I prefer Johansen’s “abstruse theorization,” which explores the manner in which Rushdie aims at the ideational and the philosophic.

I disagree, however, with Johansen when he argues that because Flapping Eagle’s quest lacks a final goal the novel therefore parodies the journey in Dante’s Divine Comedy and degrades the Simurg and Qaf in Attar’s Conference. Ignoring the figure of Shiva, he concludes that Rushdie parodies Dante because “there is no successful search for an ultimate or divine truth” (24). Cundy makes a similar point when she contends that the “confusion of genres and philosophies in Grimus means that the truth sought by Flapping Eagle is never
clear, never entirely spiritual in a Sufi sense” (134). Yet Flapping Eagle’s identification with
Shiva allows him to enter a realm in which mystical truth, which need not be “clear,” can be
explored in an elastic infinity of potential dimensions. Indeed, the notion of “clarity” itself
clashes with the ideals of mysticism, ideals according to which the seeker is to transcend fixed
epistemological frameworks and fixed concepts of the soul and God. Johansen also claims
that because Flapping Eagle does not implement Grimus’ Sufi scheme, Rushdie’s use of Attar
constitutes “a degraded or down-graded or ironic version of the myth of the Simurg and the
mountain of Kaf” (27). Yet Rushdie’s lack of insistence on the Sufi name or characteristics of
his transcendent otherworldly mountain works for rather than against his narrative design: if
he were to fix the mountain into one pattern he would be doing what Virgil and Flapping
Eagle accuse Grimus of doing; that is, he would be denying the divine mountain its status as
infinite, transcendent and “Impossible.” Instead of parodying and down-grading the
otherworldly constructions of Dante and Attar, Rushdie conflates them with a recurrent cycle
of death and rebirth, of eschatology and cosmogony, suggested by non-insistent allusions to
Shiva’s cosmic dance and lovemaking.

Uma Parameswaran and Mujeebuddin Syed are the only critics so far to appreciate the
way the theme of multidimensionality allows for an open-ended play of otherworldly
constructions in *Grimus*. In *The Perforated Sheet* Parameswaran observes that the “action
combines imaginative flights of science fiction, extravagance of fantasy, and clever twists of
sexual humour” and she argues that the various levels of the novel “are ingeniously
interconnected through what the Gorfs in the novel call ‘Ordering.’” She points out that “the
narrative is reinforced at every step with a network of allusions” and that the plot suggests
“there could be a space-time continuum parallel to our own, concurrent and conspatial but separated by the limitation of our senses” (55-56). I would expand on this and say that the plot to destroy Grimus’ esoteric tyranny centres on the notion that there are an infinite number of parallel space-time continua, all of which might exist conspatially just as Sufi, Dantean, Shaivite and Germanic cosmographies are conflated to form the mountainous topography along which Flapping Eagle journeys.

Parameswaran also appreciates the import of Rushdie’s references to Shiva, that is, to the “Hindu myths which are relevant to two main references in the novel--Dance and Dissolution--that come together in the final scene.” Referring to the creation of Calf, to Flapping Eagle’s destruction of Calf, and to Flapping Eagle’s subsequent construction of a pristine otherworldly mountain, she explains that “the universe came into being” when Shiva bangs his drum, after which “he dissolves the universe back into formless energy. Then another cycle begins” (64-65). At the same time that Rushdie alludes to Shiva’s destructive and creative cosmic dance, he alludes to Shiva’s intercourse with Parvati on Mount Kailasa. Just as Shiva’s union with Parvati “is so intense that it shakes the cosmos, and the gods become frightened” (Kinsley 43), so Flapping Eagle’s “Weakdance” with Media shakes the foundations of Calf and ends the coercion of Grimus, the self-styled god.

_Grimus_ invites all sorts of cosmological speculations. Referring to Calf’s dissolution and re-creation, Parameswaran suggests that the opposition between Grimus and Flapping Eagle might be seen in terms of the battle “between the Prince of Darkness and the Prince of Light in Zoroastrian mythology” or in terms of “the Greek cycle of Cronos-Saturn-Zeus or any of its equivalents in other mythologies” (65). Because of Rushdie’s allusions to Loki,
Odin, Yggdrasil, Ragnarok and the primordial couple who survives the cataclysm of Ragnarok, I find Germanic myth most relevant to Rushdie’s conflation of Sufi, Dantean and Shaivite constructions.

Syed’s article, “Warped Mythologies: Salman Rushdie’s Grimus,” covers in less detail several of the main points I make in this chapter, although he (along with Brennan and Cundy) sees the novel as failing to satisfy what he sees as the demands of postcoloniality.7 His following statement on Grimus’ intertextuality is especially consonant with my own argument:

Strange and esoteric at times, Grimus has a referential sweep that assumes easy acquaintance with such diverse texts as Farid Ud ‘Din Attar’s The Conference of the Birds and Dante’s Divina Commedia as well as an unaffected familiarity with mythologies as different as Hindu and Norse. (135)

Also, his contention that the “book’s basic sources” are Attar and Dante, that “some of the book’s important motifs” come from Norse and Hindu mythologies and that “Sufi and Vedantic thoughts are at the core of the novel’s theme” (144-145) resemble my argument that

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7 His article appeared in Ariel October 1994, after I had finished my research on Grimus and after I had presented papers on syncretic narrative in Rushdie’s fiction (CACLALS, Victoria, May 1990), on “The Divine Comedy in Salman Rushdie’s Grimus” (Philological Association of the Pacific Coast, San Jose, November 1990) and on “Eclectic and Syncretic Narrative in the Otherworldly Fiction of Salman Rushdie” (International Conference on Narrative Literature, Vancouver, April-May 1994). A quote from the latter paper demonstrates both the overlap and the different directions of our arguments: “In Grimus, Rushdie’s attack on the coercive use of esoteric knowledge involves the following four constructions: one) Attar’s mystical journey to the mountain of Qaf; two) Dante’s journey to the peak of Purgatory; three) the cosmos-shaking union of Shiva and Parvati on Kailasa (in the novel Flapping Eagle becomes a Shiva figure and Media becomes a Parvati figure); and four) the struggle leading to the fall of Yggdrasil and the rise of a green island containing the paradise of Gimle (in the novel Grimus is an Odinic figure and Deggle plays the role of Loki). The superimposition or syncretism of these four mountain and island settings makes it impossible to insist on any one version of the mountain island. Syncretism thus reinforces Rushdie’s argument against the tyranny of Grimus, who uses his esoteric power to impose a fixed, definitive order on the mountain island of Calf.” Whereas I argue that Flapping Eagle’s defeat of Grimus’ coercive, fixed dimension champions the notion of an infinite number of dimensions and that this is in itself a valuable goal, Syed emphasizes the manner in which Grimus suggests mystic possibilities, distorts myth, and fails to offer “a well-defined identity,” that is, fails to anchor itself meaningfully in the postcolonial world (148).
Grimus is structured largely on the schemas of Attar and Dante, that Hindu and Germanic mythological motifs are consistently integrated into the novel’s structure and that the Sufi notion of union and annihilation is central to the theme. While Syed’s analysis differs from mine in a number of ways, he makes several points which are helpful in the larger contexts of my study.\textsuperscript{8} In particular, he emphasizes the link between Hindu and Sufi mysticism and he suggests a link between Calf, Qaf, Kailasa and Alleluia Cone’s “mystical Himalayas” (139-140).

**MYSTICAL JOURNEYS**

Rushdie’s most recurrent otherworldly construction—the flight of thirty birds to the Mountain of Qaf—forms the structural backbone of Grimus. Rushdie himself states that at the core of Grimus lies a transposition of Attar’s “eastern philosophy and mythology.” He outlines Attar’s poem about Qaf and the Simurg in the following manner:

In *The Conference of the Birds* twenty-nine birds are persuaded by a hoopoe, a messenger of a bird god, to make a pilgrimage to the god. They set off and go through allegorical valleys and eventually climb [Qaf] mountain to meet the god at the top, but at the top they find that there is no god there. The god is called Simurg, and they accuse the hoopoe of bringing them on -- oh dear -- a wild goose chase. The whole poem rests on a Persian pun: if you break Simurg into parts -- ‘Si’ and ‘murg’ -- it can be translated to mean ‘thirty birds’, so that, having gone through the process of

\textsuperscript{8} Syed sees Flapping Eagle’s journey in terms of Muhammad’s famous night flight, the *miraj*, at the peak of which Muhammad sees God (137); he observes the similarity between the town of K and the land of Gog and Magog, where people are imprisoned and “bide their time until just before the end of the world, when they shall be unleashed on the world” (139); he associates the union of Shiva and Parvati with Calf’s *lingam* and *yoni* (140) but not with the “dance” of Flapping Eagle and Media; he notes that Rushdie echoes the Qur’an when he has Grimus tell Flapping Eagle that he created him from clay (146); he emphasizes Rushdie’s warping of myth whereas I emphasize Rushdie’s use and conflation of myth; he concludes that “Grimus falters in its failure to countenance postcolonial concerns” (148) whereas I do not expect Rushdie to countenance concerns that are specifically postcolonial.
purification and reached the top of the mountain, the birds have become the god.
(Rushdie with Haffenden 245)

When Rushdie says that the birds “become the god” he is referring to the climactic moment in Attar’s *Conference* when the birds reach the state of mystical union, that is, when they realize that God does not exist as an alien Force, but as their very souls (219). The birds then experience a dissolution or “annihilation,” at which point the infinity of God destroys all their previous conceptions of God and the soul (220-221). In *Grimus* Rushdie echoes this union and this annihilation when Flapping Eagle unites with Media and when their lovemaking dissolves their selves as well as the mountain which constitutes the novel’s main setting.

Grimus' Calf Mountain is an iconic, “golden calf” version of Attar’s Qaf or Kaf, the mountain which is at once very far from, and very close to, the human heart. In Attar’s *Conference* the Hoopoe tells his gathering of birds that “beyond Kaf’s mountain peak / The Simorgh lives, the sovereign whom you seek, / And He is always near to us” (33). Likewise, God is very far (He is nowhere to be seen) and very near (in the Qur’an God is said to be closer than one’s jugular vein). In *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* Annemarie Schimmel points out two related uses of the “Q” in “Qaf”:

The *q* is mainly connected with the concept of *qurb*, “proximity,” and the *qaf-i qurb*, the “first letter,” or “Mount Qaf,” of proximity, becomes a rather common expression—especially since this mountain is regarded as the station at the end of the created world, the place where man can find true proximity, *qurb*, on his way toward God (who, since Attar, has sometimes been symbolized by the Simurgh). Another combination is that of *q* with *qana’at*, “contentment”: the perfect Sufi lives, like the mythological bird, in the Mount Qaf of *qana’at*. (421)

At the end of *Grimus* Flapping Eagle realizes the “*qurb* of proximity” by journeying beyond the peak and by uniting with the infinite spirit which is at once within him and beyond any conception he might have about the soul. This type of mystical experience differs from the
experience of Grimus, for whom mysticism consists in predicting and prescribing rather than letting go and allowing the infinity of God to overwhelm the self. Grimus understands Qaf to be a “model for the structure and workings of the human mind” (G 232), yet he forgets that “the inaccessible mountain of Kaf” (G 133) is primarily an auto-destructive symbol which urges the spiritual pilgrim to explore the formlessness of the heart and soul.9

The other crucial component of Attar’s mystical scheme is the figure of the Simurg, which Schimmel calls the “mystical bird that, according to Islamic tradition, lives on the world-encircling mountain Qaf and that became the symbol of the divine” in Attar’s poetry (260). At times the Simurg of Persian myth takes on a fairly concrete shape: Anthony Mercantante defines it as “a gigantic bird whose wings were as large as clouds” and adds that it “sat on the magical tree, Gaokerena, which produced the seeds of all plant life. When he moved, a thousand branches and twigs of the tree fell in all directions.” Rushdie by and large employs Attar’s less figurative Simurg, which Mercantante calls “a symbol of the godhead” (590-591). The only time Rushdie’s Simurg takes on a concrete form is when Koax foresees “the imminent clash of the Eagle, prince of earthly birds, and the Simurg, bird of paradise,

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9 Rushdie uses “Qaf” in his other novels, although only in Grimus and Shame does he refer to it explicitly. Despite the numerous references to conferences, convocations, thirty birds and annihilations in Midnight’s Children, Saleem does not mention Qaf or Kaf in his account. In Shame Omar finds a “screen on which was portrayed the mythical circular mountain of Qaf, complete with the thirty birds playing God thereupon” (S 33) and the narrator refers to the peripheral city of Quetta as the city of Q. In Grimus the isolated town on Calf Island is similarly called K. The peripherality of Q, K, and Calf is appropriate since Mount Qaf is “regarded as the station at the end of the created world” (Schimmel 421). Also, in Shame Omar learns as a child that Hell “lay in the west of the country in the vicinity of Q” (S 194), and he is raised by demonic mothers who eventually fly “off into the Impossible Mountains in the west” (S 285). Rushdie may be drawing here on the popular tradition that “the chief abode of the Jinn is in the mountains of Qaf, which are supposed to encompass the whole of our earth” (Thomas Hughes 136). In The Satanic Verses Rushdie depicts a Qaf-like Everest (which Alleluia yearns to ascend) and in Haroun and the Sea of Stories he refers to the Hoopoe (who flies Haroun and Rashid to the moon) and to “fabulous multicoloured birds” on the road to the “Valley of K” (H 33-34).
wielder of the Stone Rose” (G 197). Grimus sees himself as the Simurg--“Grimus” is an anagram of “Simurg”--yet this is precisely the type of egomania which Rushdie attacks in the novel. Flapping Eagle is not only on a quest to destroy the definitions and boundaries Grimus imposes on the otherworldly mountain and those who live on it; he is also on a quest to defeat the very desire to play God.

Flapping Eagle’s mystical, iconoclastic journey begins on a mesa near the revivified city of “Phoenix”—a name which fits with the American Southwest locale, with Rushdie’s many ornithological references, and with the novel’s cyclical cosmology—represented initially by the Phoenix and eventually by Shiva’s drum, his cosmic dance and his intercourse with Parvati. When Rushdie writes that Phoenix “had risen from the ashes of a great fire which had completely destroyed the earlier and much larger city also called Phoenix” (G 24), he subtly foreshadows the destruction and re-creation of Calf Mountain. Flapping Eagle’s initial name, Born-from-Dead, could describe the Phoenix as well as Shiva, who gives rise to new universes once he has destroyed old ones.

It seems appropriate that a novel which ends with Flapping Eagle’s revolt against a cosmic status quo would begin with an act of rebellion: Flapping Eagle’s sister Bird-Dog rejects the strict, dogmatic rules of her Axona culture by daring to leave the confines of Axona. In her rebellions, in her being the object of incestuous desire, and in her eventual submission to male authority, Bird-Dog anticipates the Brass Monkey in Midnight’s Children. Both sisters urge rebellion, yet their rebellions are superseded by those of their brothers. The sexual politics this might entail are in both cases superseded by the politics of esoteric and
religious coercion. Bird-Dog becomes a pawn in Grimus' game of controlling Calf, and the Brass Monkey allows her voice to become "a weapon with which [Ayub Khan's dictatorship will] cleanse men's souls" (MC 315). For more sustained rebellion on the part of female characters one must look to such figures as Aunt Alia in *Midnight's Children*, Rani in *Shame*, and Mishal Sufyan, Alleluia Cone and Zeenat Vakil in *The Satanic Verses*. In terms of female revolt against a patriarchal hierarchy which augments its power by appropriating religious language, Liv's bitter opposition to Grimus and the Rose—which she calls his "infernal machine" (G 215)—prefigures the three sisters' hatred of Raza and his God in *Shame* as well as Hind and Al-Lat's opposition to Mahound and his Allah in *The Satanic Verses*. Whereas the three sisters, Hind and Al-Lat are formidable opponents of patriarchal otherworldly power, Liv remains ineffectual. She functions most as the keeper of Virgil's diaries, an even more passive role than that of *Shame*’s shawl-knitting Rani.

Bird-Dog's most rebellious act is to descend from Axona, to defy the taboo of the Whirling Demons. These imaginary spirits are reputed to surround the plateau and they appear designed to keep Axonans in their isolation and on their moral high ground. The Demons represent alien, demonized cultures and as such they anticipate "the evil thing," "the alien nation" so despised by the Imam in *The Satanic Verses* (SV 206). Direct experience of the Demons proves they are merely fabrications of a xenophobic culture—or, as Bird-Dog puts it, "They're nothing at all but air" (G 19). The Whirling Demons crop up later in *Grimus* when Virgil "dissolves" Khallit and Mallit, whose transient existences derive from Flapping Eagle's childhood memories of mesas and of Axona's ethnocentric division between *us* and *them*, *pure* and *impure*. Just as Bird-Dog finds that the Demons which represent the Other
are “nothing at all but air,” so Flapping Eagle finds that the dangers posed by Khallit and Mallit do not exist once they are confronted (and replaced) by a more unified way of thinking, represented by Virgil and his Sufi dance of unity.

Flapping Eagle escalates the revolt against hierarchy begun by his sister. Yet before he can destroy Grimus’ fixed, hierarchical, coercive structure of Calf, he must first learn to destroy fixed ideas and structures in himself. He starts to do this by descending from the Plateau and by travelling until the age of 777, at which time he has played so many parts in life that his self becomes “nameless as glass”:

He was Chameleon, changeling, all things to all men and nothing to any man. He had become his enemies and eaten his friends. He was all of them and none of them. [...] Contentment without contents, achievement without goal, these were the paradoxes that swallowed him. (G 31-32)

In becoming “all things” and “nothing,” Flapping Eagle embodies Keats’ ideal of “Negative Capability,” a fluid, open psychological state in which one can remain in “uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason” (587). In embodying this ideal, Flapping Eagle differs from the unnamed man on the cliff who, when asked what he is doing, “called back—and each word was the word of a different being:—I am looking for a suitable voice to speak in” (G 32). The man’s anxious mental searching is also seen metaphorically as a physical reaching, and both result in his downfall: “As he called, he leaned forward, lost his balance and fell.” In contrast, Flapping Eagle’s willingness to accept the

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10 Given that Rushdie uses the poetry of Attar, Dante, Eliot and Hughes to express the notion of a changeable identity, Keats’ comment on the “poetical Character” is also apropos: “As to the poetical Character... it has no self -- it is every thing and nothing -- It has no character -- it enjoys light and shade: it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated -- It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the chameleon Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one: because they both end in speculation” (608).
changes in himself and in everything around him allows him to experience the bizarre, dislocating dimensions of Calf Mountain without completely losing his psychological balance.

Flapping Eagle's emptiness makes him reminiscent of both the bird-soul in Attar's *Conference* and the central character in Ted Hughes' book of poems, *Crow*. Attar's bird-soul enters an ontological void when he states, "I neither own nor lack all qualities" (194) and this void corresponds to an epistemological void in which "All claims, all lust for meaning disappear" (184). Flapping Eagle also resembles Hughes' Crow, who appears in the third epigraph of Rushdie's novel as "his own leftover." In another poem from Hughes' book, Crow's "footprints assail infinity" and he makes a conscious choice to be used "for some everything" (41). Here Crow resembles Flapping Eagle, who at the end of the novel enters a vague and infinite realm of "some everything" represented by the peak of Attar's Impossible Qaf and by Shiva's cosmic dance.

Flapping Eagle learns to see his self as infinitely changeable, which is perhaps what signals his readiness for his journey to an otherworldly dimension, to an island mountain which is as different from this world as is Dante's Purgatory. The Dantean elements of Flapping Eagle's quest are not immediately apparent, for it is the sinister Deggle and not the benevolent Virgil who guides him to this otherworldly realm. One could argue, however, that since Dante's Satan is conversant with death and with the corresponding depths of the Earth, the devilish Deggle is the character best suited to show Flapping Eagle the hole in the ocean which leads to death and the afterlife. Deggle has taken centuries to find his escape route from this world (G 36), and with his advice Flapping Eagle drowns and subsequently surfaces in "that other sea, that not-quite-Mediterranean" (G 37). It is in this otherworldly sea that
Flapping Eagle finds the mountain island of Calf and it is on the shores of this island that Flapping Eagle meets Virgil Chanakya Jones, who is an Anglicized and Indianized version of Dante’s guide Virgil.\footnote{Virgil’s middle name refers to Chandragupta Maurya’s “very able and unscrupulous brahman adviser, called variously Kautilya, Canakya and Visnugupta” (Basham 51). In Grimus Rushdie sees Chanakya as a great ascetic (G 133), and in The Satanic Verses he sees him as a man whose detachment was so great that he “could live in the world and also not live in it” (SV 42). Virgil’s surname, Jones, may emphasize his poetic mediocrity (he may be a commonplace version of the great classical poet) or may emphasize his Britishness, in which case he is, like Rushdie, something of a hybrid of Indian and English backgrounds. Margery Fee suggested to me that “Jones” may refer to Sir William Jones (1746-1794), the Orientalist scholar who discovered the link between Sanskrit, Latin and Greek. This makes sense given Virgil’s interest in language and in both English and Indian culture—Virgil cites Eliot’s Four Quartets and sees Calf Island as “a giant lingam weltering in the yoni that is the Sea” (G 55-56).}

In helping Flapping Eagle to understand the multidimensionality possible on Calf, Virgil refers to the ontological and epistemological explorations of T.S. Eliot. Rushdie cites Four Quartets in the first epigraph and Virgil reiterates this citation when he mutters to Flapping Eagle, “Go, go, go, said the bird.” Virgil calls his citation a “literary reference […] a piece of self-indulgence” (G 52), yet it draws attention to an important moment in the text. So far, the narrator has not explained how readers ought to understand the otherworldly mountain of Calf—a world which does not operate so much under the laws of physics as of metaphysics. Virgil apologizes for his literary indulgence after telling Flapping Eagle that he must have realized, because of his “acceptance of immortality, for instance,” that the world is “no simple, matter-of-fact place”: the world is both “what it appears to be and not what it appears to be” (G 51). Echoing Eliot’s notion that knowledge based on any one mode of perception “imposes a pattern, and falsifies” (199), Virgil claims that “the limitations we place upon the world are imposed by ourselves rather than the world” (G 52). Eliot also posits a
"still point of the turning world," a spiritual point which is antithetical to "fixity" and which allows the soul to feel free, to "dance" amid life's multiple ontological possibilities (191). Likewise, Virgil promotes the notion of a "consciousness" which stays constant "in the shifts between the dimensions" (G 72). Just as Eliot's dance at the still point of the turning world leads to a release "from action and suffering" and "from the inner / And the outer compulsion" (191), so Flapping Eagle's cultivation of "consciousness" and his dance with Media leads to what Virgil calls "the way out" (G 72), which could mean both an escape from his own inner compulsions (symbolized by Khallit, Mallit and Axona) and from the outer compulsions of Grimus' tyrannical dimension. From beginning to end, both Eliot's poem and Rushdie's novel focus on the attempt to break free of old patterns--or, as Eliot puts is, "To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern" (219).

The multidimensional nature of Calf may also owe something to the short fiction of Borges. In "The Library of Babel" Borges notes that "Cavalieri said that all solid bodies are the superimposition of an infinite number of planes" (58). Likewise, Virgil comments that an "infinity of dimensions might exist, as palimpsests, upon and within and around our own, without our being in any wise able to perceive them" (G 52-53). Grimus employs the idea of overlapping dimensions or multidimensionality for his own ends: using the Crystal of Potentialities to isolate individual lives--or "lines"--from their many potential "line[s] of flux" (G 235), he chooses the "lines" that will fulfill his esoteric and egomaniacal Plan. The culminating aspects of his Plan involve his martyrdom and the perpetuation of Calf by his look-alike, Flapping Eagle. Yet Flapping Eagle rebels against the "line" chosen for him.
Refusing to follow in Grimus' footsteps, Flapping Eagle destroys Grimus' esoteric machinery and thus makes it possible for the individuals on the mountain to choose their own paths.

The next stage in Flapping Eagle's mystical journey involves his entry into the multidimensionality theorized by Virgil. Seized by "dimension fever," Flapping Eagle plunges into a psychological version of Dante's Inferno:

As the unknowable swept over me, I went all but mad. Hallucinations... I thought they were hallucinations at first, but gradually they gained the certitude of absolute reality and it was the voice of Virgil Jones that came drifting to me like a dream. The world had turned upside down, I was climbing a mountain into the depths of an inferno, plunging deep into myself. (G 69-70)

This first internal dimension consists of two "extrapolations" which the extraterrestrial named Koax "sets" in Flapping Eagle's mind. These "extrapolations" take the form of Khallit and Mallit, two cantankerous automatons who engage in endless arguments about morality and mortality. They pretend to resolve these arguments—but instead merely revolve them—by flipping a coin. With each flip, the canyon walls which Koax has "set" in Flapping Eagle's mind move toward him like two sides of a vice. Left alone, Flapping Eagle would die in this polar mindscape, yet fortunately Virgil performs his dervish-like dance of unity, his "Weakdance," which makes the two "extrapolations" return "to the shreds of energy they had

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12 Flapping Eagle’s internalized Inferno derives from The Divine Comedy, which can be seen as both a journey across a cosmic topography and as an exploration into the hell, purgatory and heaven of the spirit. Throughout their journey Flapping Eagle and Virgil Jones feel uncertain, as do Dante and Virgil when they are in front of the city of Dis and immediately after their encounter with the Malebranche (Inferno IX 1-15, XXIII 1-57). The situation of Flapping Eagle and Virgil is even more precarious, however, for while Dante’s Virgil knows he has the support of the omnipotent and benevolent Being above Purgatory, Virgil Jones does not trust Grimus, who skillfully manipulates the people below him.

13 In The Perforated Sheet Parameswaran comments that the "town called K and the two spectres, Khallit and Mallit, conjured up by Gorf Koax, bring to mind Kafka and there are Kafkaesque nightmare elements elsewhere; Khallit and Mallit tossing coins over seemingly meaningless banter recall Tom Stoppard’s Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; the Whirling Demons conjure up the fantasy of Arabian Nights" (59).
once been” (G 79). Flapping Eagle calls his liberator “the Whirling Demon!” (G 79) because Virgil acts as a “whirling dervish” by helping Flapping Eagle break through a confining and dichotomous way of thinking, one which was represented earlier by the Whirling Demons.

This leg of Flapping Eagle’s journey resembles Cantos V to VII of Dante’s *Inferno* as well as the fifth and sixth “Valleys” in Attar’s *Conference*. After Virgil saves his charge from Koax’s trap, they find themselves on a raft moving “from anywhere to nowhere across the infinite sea [...] Towards infinity [...] where all paradoxes are resolved” (G 82). Their isolated yet unified state resembles that of the pilgrim soul in Attar’s Valley of Unity, a “place of lonely, long austerity” where the “many [...] are merged in one” (191). After Flapping Eagle drifts in this fifth “Valley,” becoming one with the sea “where all paradoxes are resolved,” he returns to a state of confusion, which corresponds to the sixth Valley, that of Bewilderment. After describing the Valley of Unity, Attar implores the pilgrim to wake and scourge the evils inside him, to “encourage them, and they will swell / Into a hundred monsters loosed from hell” (192). Likewise, Virgil tells Flapping Eagle that he must “leap” the obstacles that lie within him, for “Lurking in the Inner Dimensions of every victim of the fever is his own particular set of monsters. His own devils burning in his own inner fires” (G 84).

Questioning one’s place in the universe figures prominently in the mystical quests of both Attar’s bird-soul and Rushdie’s Flapping Eagle. In the Valley of Bewilderment, Attar’s

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14 Cundy spells out this parallel with *Inferno* in considerable detail, noting that the cantos correspond to Chapters 24 and 25, in which Virgil and Flapping Eagle enter a tunnel, Flapping Eagle defeats Axona, and both characters return from their journey within a journey (131). She also establishes a link between the point at which Flapping Eagle and Virgil reach “the edge of the Forest of Calf,” entering “alternative states,” and the point at which Bakhtiar’s Sufi “passes the tree-line and enters the world with-out [sic] forms” (133).
pilgrim feels he has lost "both key and door" (201). He awakes from a dream and cries out, "Was it a dream, or was it true?" (200). He also asks, "Who am I?" (197) and admits to himself, "I have no certain knowledge any more" (196). Likewise, once Flapping Eagle returns from "the infinite sea," that is, once he realizes he is still on the mountain slope, he not only questions where he is but also what it means to be in one place and not another:

Flapping Eagle awoke with a splitting headache. The words where am I? formed on his lips for a second time on Calf Island; he dismissed them with a wry twist of his mouth. Where is anywhere? he asked himself. (G 90)

The first time Flapping Eagle asks "Where am I?" he has just landed on Calf Island (G 40) and he has not yet been lectured by Virgil on the perplexing subject of infinite dimensionality. Now that he has listened to Virgil and has experienced one of these strange dimensions within him, he is able to consider the wider question, What does it mean to be anywhere? This is an important step which anticipates his role in the greater cosmological drama, a role in which he dismantles Grimus' dimension of Calf. For the time being he is still in the process of conquering the fixed ideas and dimensions in his own mind.

In attacking the devotee of Axona and in raping the iconic goddess, Flapping Eagle works himself free from iconic structures that have fixed themselves deep in his subconscious. He derives the instrument of his attack, "the bone of K," from a surreal dream, a taboo-breaking trip into a hallucinatory dimension. In this dream Bird-Dog tosses Flapping Eagle a bone, lifts her skirt, and challenges him to bury the bone. (That the bone falls "unerringly" into Flapping Eagle's hand reinforces the notion that Flapping Eagle falls into his iconoclastic role; that a "rose grew from a crack in it" anticipates his assault on the Cracked Rose.) When Flapping Eagle enters her surrealistically enlarged womb, she runs away, and he then chases
her down the womb's cave-like mouth (G 71). Flapping Eagle uses this same "bone" to
defeat the weapon-wielding devotee of Axona, who might be seen as both Axona's "alter-

ego," in that he protects Axona's altar, and Flapping Eagle's "alter-ego," in that he stands for
that part of Flapping Eagle which fears and defends an object of worship. Here the "object" is
a goddess, later it will be the Stone Rose. These objects resemble icons which must be
smashed before the spiritual pilgrim can reach the formlessness of God. After Flapping Eagle
throws the bone at the devotee, the devotee's weapons disappear and nothing remains to
defend the "sanctity" of the goddess. While the bone or "os" of K (K-os, Chaos) garners
some of its destructive power from Flapping Eagle's revolt against Axonan "purity," and
while Flapping Eagle's use of it cleanses "the guilt and shame that possessed some hidden part
of [his] mind" (G 89), it also derives its power from the Hindu god of destruction, Shiva. It is
appropriate that Flapping Eagle hides this "bone" in his pocket, for Shiva is the ithyphallic
god, that is, the god whose penis is always erect, symbolizing at once his ascetic control and
his cosmogonic potency.

When Flapping Eagle attacks the devotee with the bone, the result is "Chaos," "a
hole," a "turbulent disarrangement in the structure of the dimension" (G 89). In Midnight's
Children Aadam Aziz also rebels against (and in this sense attacks) religious tradition. The
result is similar: in becoming "unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not
wholly disbelieve," Aadam experiences a "[p]ermanent alteration" and enters "a hole" (MC
12). Aadam's refusal to follow orthodox practices does not, however, correspond to a stage
in any mystical progression. Rather, it is the beginning of his fall into a divided existence, one
which ends ambiguously when he carries a lock of Muhammad's hair into a shrine dedicated
to the Hindu god Shiva (MC 277-278). Flapping Eagle’s attack on the devotee and the
goddess, on the other hand, is a necessary and quite literal iconoclastic or “icon-breaking”
stage on a journey which ends with an implosion of Grimus’ dimension, an identification with
Shiva, and an upward journey into various possible heavens.

Flapping Eagle’s quest involves rejecting the notion of a fixed self and a fixed place (or
home) where this self belongs. His momentary “urge to fit in, to be accepted” in the town of
K and to abandon his “long-time search” (G 122) derives from “the natural condition of the
exile” who yearns to go beyond a state in which he can only put “down roots in memories” (G
107). The theme of a fluid self resulting from the exile’s (or immigrant’s) dislocation crops up
in many of Rushdie’s essays, “Imaginary Homelands” providing the most notable example.
The comments of the narrator in *Shame* are equally appropriate to Flapping Eagle’s condition.
This narrator says that roots and gravity are conservative myths “designed to keep us in our
places” (S 86). *Shame*’s narrator replaces these myths with “flight,” which is applicable to
Flapping Eagle’s name, and “freedom,” which is applicable to Flapping Eagle’s final state—for
he leaves behind him the confines of Grimus’ Calf and he journeys on the drumbeat of Shiva
into a new and as-of-yet undefined cosmos. Flapping Eagle eventually realizes that his desire
to strike roots in K is also “a coming home [...] to a town where he had never lived” (G 106);
it is a desire founded on the “persuasive” voice in his head which tells him that he knows
himself and that because he has a fixed self he can fit in somewhere (G 122). Yet the concepts
of self-knowledge and of a fixed self are notions Rushdie challenges throughout the novel.
Eventually, Flapping Eagle sees that his desire to have a fixed abode is a by-product of his
falling into “the Way of K” (G 164), that is, into a false philosophy of permanence.
Flapping Eagle is lured by the notion of “belonging” in the town of K, the citizens of which are under the dual influence of the Grimus Effect and the Doctrine of Obsessionalism. These two influences complement each other, for the more desperately Grimus tries to control the town, the more desperately its citizens hold on to their fixed conceptions of the way things are (these conceptions become obsessions). When Grimus’ hold on the island weakens, the townsfolk start to see that the obsessive interests on which they based their lives are meaningless once their minds are opened to other ways of looking at reality. Ignatius Gribb is the originator of the Doctrine of Obsessionalism and is thus hardest hit: when “the Inner Dimensions [are] unleashed upon him,” they scald “his nerve-centres, burning out the synapses of a brain which could not accommodate the new realities invading it” (G 180). Flapping Eagle on the other hand can accommodate “new realities” because he has already confronted his inner demons and has already learned to accommodate what Virgil calls “the shifts between the dimensions” (G 72). Also, Flapping Eagle does not become totally dependent on Irina or Elfrida, whereas Gribb uses Elfrida’s love to verify or solidify his existence (G 177). Flapping Eagle’s infatuations with Elfrida and Irina do, however, make him momentarily like Attar’s princess in the Valley of Bewilderment, who thinks highly of divine love but feels entangled in the snares of earthly love. She has “read a hundred books on chastity” yet she remains frustrated: “And still I burn--what good are they to me?” (198). In

15 Johansen notes that in Angela Carter’s The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffmann, the title-figure resembles Grimus in that he “possesses a diabolical power over the minds of others.” Johansen elaborates: “Grimus misuses the Stone Rose and Doctor Hoffmann is capable of creating powerful illusions, of disrupting the very sense of reality: ‘I lived in the city when our adversary, the diabolical Dr Hoffmann, filled it with mirages in order to drive us all mad....’ In Rushdie’s novel there are several references to ‘the Grimus effect,’ and in Angela Carter’s novel there is correspondingly a ‘Hoffmann effect’” (28).
Sufi terms, the princess is not wrong to pursue earthly love, since this love partakes of divinity and frees the soul from pre-occupation with the self. Flapping Eagle's passionate love for Elfrida and Irina forces him to focus his attention on something besides himself, which is necessary after having climbed "a mountain into the depths of an inferno, plunging deep into [him]self" and after having confronted his "own devils burning in his own inner fires" (G 70, 84). Eventually, however, Flapping Eagle sees Elfrida and Irina as Circe-like impediments, as "witches weaving their spell, binding him in silken cords" (G 147).

Because they keep him in Calf and because they are possessive, Elfrida and Irina remain antithetical to the free-spirited Media, whose uninhibited and unconditional love helps Flapping Eagle set himself and the Island free. Cundy observes that Media resembles Dante's Beatrice, which makes sense in that she is the woman who takes the spiritual pilgrim to the higher realms which are inaccessible to Virgil. Media also resembles Parvati, who is the Mountain Goddess, who is Shiva's mate on Kailasa, and who incarnates primal energy or shakti. Rushdie subtly suggests Media's benign, Parvati-like influence when their ascent of Calf is accompanied by "the tangible mystery of the mountain" and by a "hum of insects." Her

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16 Cundy does not, however, seem to approve of Rushdie's Media, whose description she limits to "the far-from-beatific Media, a whore from Madame Jocasta's brothel in K" (131). Cundy later claims that the novel "seems disturbingly simplistic" in its "division of virgins and whores" (136). Although I do think there is much that feminists might criticize in Rushdie's depiction of females, I think Cundy is too eager here, for she does not allow Media the status of a free-spirit or of the Beatrice or Parvati figures Media evokes. Cundy is perhaps closer to a legitimate point in her criticism of the stereotypical way Irina is portrayed as "sexually rapacious and worldly" while Elfrida appears "innocent and naive." In "Eschatology and Cosmogony" I suggest that these two women, like Media, represent a prakriti/shakti (nature/energy) combination which complements Shiva's purusha (spirit). Yet even if one cannot ascribe such an elevated association to them, one ought to take into account that Flapping Eagle's mystical quest involves transcending all attachments--including not only women but also his own self. Such an interpretation fits with the notion of Menippean satire, in which personality is subjugated to philosophical ideals--in this case, to the infinite dimensionality of the mystical self.
presence is also reflected in “the esoteric messages of birds in flight” (G 201-202), a subtle reference to the mystical flight of Attar’s thirty birds.

While Deggle and Virgil are trapped on the lower levels of the otherworldly mountain by Dantean convention (Deggle’s demonic associations and Virgil’s pagan associations preclude their ascent), Flapping Eagle and Media pass through Grimus’ “gate” and journey up to Grimushome, a labyrinthine mansion situated near the top of the mountain. Reaching Grimus’ elitist realm, they enter a sterile “Heaven” presided over by an egomaniacal “God.” The proof of Grimus’ selfish, coercive vision lies in his domestication and enslavement of Flapping Eagle’s erstwhile free-spirited sister, Bird-Dog. Flapping Eagle decides that he must destroy this tyranny that can reduce the spirit (a bird) to a slave (a dog). He accomplishes this by transforming Calf into Qaf, that is, by reconstructing the island without the Stone Rose (G 252), the instrument which can be used to expand consciousness yet which Grimus uses to maintain his control over Calf and its inhabitants.

The death of Grimus and the continued existence of Flapping Eagle and Media parallel the Germanic scenarios in which Odin falls from power and the primordial couple survives inside a revivified Yggdrasil. Grimus resembles Odin, who is “the master of arcane (‘runic’) wisdom, poetry, and magic” (Puhvel 193) and who communes with Yggdrasil. Grimus’ last-ditch efforts to save Calf from dissolution resemble Odin’s efforts to forestall the cataclysm of Ragnarok, which Odin “foresees and tries to stave off by increasingly desperate and deviant

17 Yggdrasil is Odin’s “strange source of arcane wisdom,” and in the crisis before Ragnarok Odin communes “necromantically with his preserved head” (Puhvel 218). Grimus’ death beneath his giant tree echoes Odin’s ritual eye-poking under Yggdrasil, which derives its name from “one of Odinn’s names.” Grimus’ discovery of the elixir of immortality also parallels Odin’s discovery of the mead of wisdom, which “is hidden in the other world, in a place difficult to get to, but Odinn manages to obtain it, and from then on it is accessible to all the gods” (Eliade Vol. 2:160-161).
expedients” (Puhvel 198). While Grimus attempts to garner some Odinic brand of immortality or wisdom by sacrificing himself under his giant ash-tree, his “martyrdom” remains an egomaniacal and ugly spectacle which is not accorded nearly as much importance as the fate of Flapping Eagle and Media, who in this Germanic context become the primordial couple who weather Ragnarok inside the trunk of Yggdrasil. In both Germanic myth and in Grimus, a magician figure dies without ever attaining control over the destiny of his world, yet a human couple finds new life in the next world. Destiny “is hidden in the subterranean well into which Yggdrasill’s roots plunge” (Eliade Vol. 2:158), yet neither Odin nor Grimus plumbs this depth successfully. While Grimus foresees what Koax calls “the imminent clash of the Eagle, prince of earthly birds, and the Simurg, bird of paradise, wielder of the Stone Rose” (G 197), he is powerless to determine the outcome of this clash. He wants the Rose to captivate Flapping Eagle’s imagination, yet Flapping Eagle destroys it instead. Flapping Eagle and Media are free not merely because they destroy Grimus’ tyranny but also because Flapping Eagle refuses to inherit the esoteric machinery which makes such tyranny possible.

The bed on which Flapping Eagle and Media make love is at once the place where Attar’s birds reach union and annihilation on the Impossible Mountain of Qaf, where Dante’s pilgrim flies with Beatrice from the mountain of Purgatory to the spheres of Heaven, where Shiva makes love with Parvati on Kailasa, and where the primordial couple of Germanic mythology survive inside the trunk of Yggdrasil. Their fate remains neatly outside the text, although some kind of continuity seems likely given that Islamic, Christian, Germanic and

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18 The cosmic tree of Germanic myth has an ambiguous fate: it falls yet it also brings humanity from the cataclysmic present to the post-Ragnarok future by harbouring the primordial couple (Eliade Vol. 2:157, 169).
Shaivite cosmologies all contain post-cataclysmic realms. This ending which augurs new beginnings indicates that Flapping Eagle's journey is successful. It does not indicate, as Cundy contends, that his "voyage of discovery buckles under the weight of the different elements it seeks to assimilate" (131).

**THE DEVIL AND THE DERVISH**

The success of Flapping Eagle's quest to destroy Grimus' tyranny depends on assistance given him by Deggle, who is vain, sarcastic and occult, and Virgil, who is self-deprecat ing, ironic and mystical. Deggle's character is extremely elusive, deriving as it does from the slippery mythical personalities of Loki and the Devil. Virgil Jones is a less elusive character, yet he too has various antecedents: he is a blend of Dant ean guide, Sufi mystic and tantric guru. Despite their differences Deggle speaks for them both when he expresses his hope that Flapping Eagle will succeed in destroying the Rose:

One thing is certain, he told himself, if Flapping Eagle doesn't get to Bird-Dog and [destroy the Rose], I'm stuck here for life. With [Dolores O'Toole] who loves me because she thinks I'm Virgil Jones. He wondered if Virgil Jones would see the joke. (G 99)

More important than sharing a wry sense of humour, Deggle and Virgil share a determination to help Flapping Eagle reach and destroy the Rose. Deggle points Flapping Eagle to the "gate" or "hole" in the ocean which leads to the other world of Calf, and Virgil points him to the "gate" which leads to Grimus and his Rose. While Deggle partially resembles the Mephistopheles figure in *The Satanic Verses*, who "always wills the Bad, and always works the Good" (SV 417), and while Virgil wills and works the good, both bad and good are to a large extent subsumed in the larger cosmic drama that the two characters help bring to an
implosive climax. Just as Virgil, Flapping Eagle and Liv form a front of “weakness, ignorance and hate, united against their will” (G 205), so Deggle and Virgil become unwilling partners in an alliance against Grimus’ tyranny.

In general terms Deggle is a “Trickster,” although in specific terms he is a blend of Loki and the Devil. Rushdie makes the parallel between Deggle and the Germanic god Loki explicit when Deggle renames himself “Lokki,” referring vaguely to “the old Norse and so forth” (G 34-35). Deggle is less overt about his scheming than is the crude Loki of the Lokasenna, yet Deggle steers Flapping Eagle to the gate in the ocean so that Flapping Eagle can destroy Grimus’ realm, an action which mirrors events in the Voluspa, in which Loki steers a ship over the ocean in order to further the scenario in which “Trembles the towering tree Yggdrasil” and “screams the eagle” (10). While the tree in front of Grimus’ mansion may call to mind the mythical Persian tree Gaokerena, it is explicitly referred to as “the Ash Yggdrasil” (G 230). Eliade writes that from “the time of its emergence (that is, from the time

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19 Deggle’s playful and demonic character suggests affinities with “the Trickster” which Jeffrey Russell describes in his study *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity*: “The curious figure of the Trickster, the spirit of disorder, the enemy of boundaries, is also related to the divine, but his functions are too ill defined to make it possible to equate him with the principle of evil. He is sensual, childish, foolish, sometimes ugly and cruel, but he is also lighthearted and funny. Sometimes his opposition to the gods entails a creative attempt to help man, as when Prometheus steals the gods’ fire. The fundamental characteristic of the Trickster is the upsetting of order; as in the myth of chaos, order upset can release creative energies as well as destroy established values” (75).

20 *The Flying of Loki* or the *Lokasenna* is the eighth poem in *The Poetic Edda*. Lee Hollander calls the *Lokasenna* “the product of a witty and clever skald who conceived the idea of showing the solemn and glorious gods from their seamy side. As interlocutor he uses Mephistophelian Loki, who engages the various gods and goddesses in a *senna* (a *flyting*, or running dialogue of vituperation) of at times very spicy quality in which each and every one gets his or her share of defamation, until the disturber of the peace is finally put to flight by Thor’s threat of violence” (*Poetic Edda* 90).

21 The eagle eating the leaves of Yggdrasil (Eliade Vol. 2:157) also recalls the Simurg felling the branches of Gaokerena (Mercantante 590-591), although it remains unclear whether or not Rushdie intends any reference to Gaokerena.
that the world was organized by the gods), Yggdrasill was threatened with ruin: an eagle set out to destroy its foliage, its trunk began to rot, and the snake Nithhogg began gnawing at its roots” (Vol. 2:157). In rough terms one can equate the gods (especially Odin) with Grimus, the eagle with Flapping Eagle and the snake with Deggle. Also, the indirect struggle between Grimus and Deggle parallels that between Odin and Loki. Finally, the dramas which pit Deggle against Grimus, and Loki against Odin, end in cataclysm. Much of what these opposing pairs stand for is superseded by the creation of a new island, one which Flapping Eagle reconstructs in Grimus, and one which rises “from out of the sea” in the Voluspa (12).

Deggle is a mix of the Loki who propels the world toward Ragnarok, and the Devil or Antichrist who drives the world toward the Day of Judgement. As attested by Virgil’s diary, Deggle’s life parallels that of the Devil cast from Heaven. The diary’s mini-cosmology starts when Grimus brings a dead bird of paradise (the Phoenix? the Simurg?) to the graveyard in which Virgil (working as a gravedigger) discovers the Stone Rose. Given that Grimus’ coercion and egomania destroy the beauty of the Rose, the Simurg and Qaf—all of which can be used to symbolize God—it is appropriate that a bird symbolizing the spirit and Heaven lies dead in Grimus’ hands. When Virgil shows Grimus the Rose, Grimus demonstrates an immediate proficiency in using it. Virgil and Deggle, however, lose consciousness when they first try to use it (G 208)—which makes sense in that a mystic (Virgil) excels in exploring the soul rather than controlling external things, and a devil remains fundamentally alienated from

22 While Loki does not directly kill Odin, he mates with the giantess Grief Boding, who then gives birth to the wolf Fenrir, the snake Mithgarthsomr and the guardian of the underworld, Hel. These three “children” oppose Odin and the gods (Eliade Vol. 2:168-169), and eventually Fenrir kills Odin (Poetic Edda 11).
any God-like power which can connect and shape an infinity of dimensions. Deggle’s belief “that the power in Grimus’ possession should be destroyed” (G 158) may result from an envy of Grimus’ ability to control the Rose, and this envy perhaps prompts his subsequent philosophical objection to the Rose’s power. After Deggle breaks the stem from the Rose (G 26), Grimus and Virgil cast him from their company and condemn him to wander over the face of the earth—much like the Satan in the epigraph of The Satanic Verses.

The narrator further suggests Deggle’s satanic nature by describing him as a “wickedly-smiling conjurer” (G 36) and by using the name Deggle, which resembles “Devil.” After Deggle lets “drop some dark conversational flower” (probably some *fleur de mal*) from his “saturnine lips,” the decadent Livia Cramm cries out in admiration: “Ain’t that the Deggle himself talkin’ to you” (G 27). “Deggle” also bears a strong resemblance to ad-Dajjal or Deggial, which literally means “the deceiver” or “the impostor” (Glasse 91). Ronald Hatch drew my attention to the Penguin edition of William Beckford’s *Vathek*, in which Peter Fairclough defines “Deggial” as the Mohammedan version of Antichrist; he has one eye and on his forehead is written the word, ‘Infidel.’ Traditionally he will destroy the whole world except Mecca but will himself be slain by Jesus at the gate of the church at Lydda in Palestine. (501)

According to Cyril Glassé, ad-Dajjal is the Antichrist who appears “shortly before Jesus returns to earth at the end of time,” and who seeks “to lead people into disbelief, or to the practice of a false religion” (91). Deggle shares Livia Cramm’s interest in “the tarot, the scriptures, the cabbala, palmistry, anything and everything which held that the world was more

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23 Deggle also has a sorcerer’s “*malin talent*” (G 26) and dresses in “dark svelte finery, ring-laden and perfumed, with a rose in his buttonhole” (G 26). The rose may be a symbol of his defiance, of his belief that the Stone Rose ought to belong to him. Other details suggest a satanic nature—as when “he was feeling very angry with himself, and, therefore, with the universe” (G 97).
than it seemed" (G 26). This shared interest in a spiritual world does not, however, produce a communion of souls. Rather, Deggle appears to be the one who murders Livia (G 31). Also, Deggle’s potential status as “a kind of saviour” or “popular messiah” in K (G 215) may echo the Muslim notion that the Jewish people “will mistake [ad-Dajjal] for the true Messiah” (Thomas Hughes 328).

Deggle’s role in Grimus’ cosmic drama deserves attention in its own right, yet Deggle also anticipates the most problematic of all of Rushdie’s constructions, the satanic narrator of The Satanic Verses. In light of Deggle-cum-Lokki’s assertion that he has become the descendent of his “illustrious ancestor Nicholas Deggle” (G 35), one might see “their” descendent in turn as the tricksterish, sinister, elusive satanic narrator of The Satanic Verses. Both bring to the fore the motives behind satanic evil: the satanic narrator refers to Iago’s refusal to furnish a motive for destroying the happiness of Othello and Desdemona and he then suggests that jealousy of Gabriel is his motive (SV 424-425); Flapping Eagle tells Deggle that he would “love to know what motivates” him, to which the “wickedly-smiling conjurer” responds, “perhaps I don’t like your friend Sispy [Grimus] very much either. But then, perhaps I do” (G 36). As a Satan-figure, Deggle is attracted to Grimus’ power and he understands Grimus’ desire to maintain an esoteric control which borders on the occult. The difference between Deggle and Virgil in this regard is treated symbolically when, after Grimus’ gate is destroyed, they choose opposite directions: Deggle wants to climb toward the peak while Virgil wants to walk down to the beach (G 250). Their choices suggest that while Deggle is still lured by the power which resides at the top of the mountain, Virgil refuses to
give Grimus and his hierarchical view of the universe any more importance than Grimus has already given it.

Unlike Deggle, Virgil evokes no particular Germanic associations, although his actions suggest those of a Sufi sheikh, and thus he presents a benevolent contrast to the devilish Deggle. Virgil's role as sheikh surfaces clearly in Flapping Eagle's encounter with Khallit and Mallit, who carry on an absurd debate which applies insidiously to Flapping Eagle's deathless existence. Khallit and Mallit argue in an absurd manner, both in the sense that their arguments are arbitrarily resolved by flipping a coin and in the sense that their arguments aggravate the anguish Flapping Eagle feels at not knowing his place or fate in the universe. What Flapping Eagle needs is not a resolution to the irreconcilable dichotomies they represent and inflict (such a resolution is impossible), but a dis-solution, a response which will dissolve or dis-solve the sadistic puzzle by refusing to admit, and be pulled in two by, its very axiom of polarity. Luckily for Flapping Eagle, Virgil has previously used the Stone Rose to reach "the planet of the Spiral Dancers," where he learned a dance which transcends dichotomy. Virgil explains that the "scientist-poets" of that planet "elevated a branch of physics until it became a high symbolist religion," in which they found "a harmony of the infinitesimal, where energy and matter moved like fluids" (G 75). Although Virgil learns his Weakdance and his religion of Spiral Unity from the scientist-poets on the planet of the Spiral

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24 Virgil's whoring is less a comment on the pre-Ragnarok days, when there is much woe and wantonness in the world (Poetic Edda 9), than a prefiguration of Flapping Eagle's sexual union, one which in the light of Hindu myth represents both the destruction and creation of the universe.

25 Cundy notes that Dante's Virgil "was often regarded as a white magician," an association which works well in the novel, since Deggle is both a Satan-figure and a magician. She takes this information from Dorothy Sayer's introduction to her translation of The Divine Comedy, adding that as a white magician Virgil "is able to master many of the supernatural obstacles on the path to Grimus" (131).
Dancers, Rushdie is clearly borrowing from the theory and practice of the Sufi brotherhoods, commonly referred to as “the whirling dervishes.” In their ecstatic sama dances the dervishes imitate the whirling of atoms and celestial spheres. Energy becomes a unifying plane on which worldly and otherworldly spaces converge. Rushdie employs such a notion when he has Virgil dance his way into primal matter and dissolve the dichotomous construction in which Koax binds—or “fixes”—Flapping Eagle.

Schimmel begins her discussion of the sama by noting that Nwyia calls the ecstatic bliss of union with God “‘instasy’ instead of ‘ecstasy’ since the mystic is not carried out of himself but rather into the depths of himself, into ‘the ocean of the soul,’ as the poets might say” (178). This notion of an interior ocean associated with the ecstasy of union is relevant to Grimus in that after Virgil dances the Weakdance he and Flapping Eagle float on a raft “from anywhere to nowhere across the infinite sea” (G 82). This “sea” is clearly inside them (in a shared dimension) rather than around them on the mountain slope. One might also note that Rushdie’s use of a “Strongdance” which corresponds to the moment of unity, and of a “Weakdance” which corresponds to the moment of falling “back into the Primal” (G 75), could allude to Attar’s union and annihilation as well as to the second and third “turns” of the sama dance. The Turkish poet Mehmed Tchelebi explains that the Sufi mystics, called “lovers,” “turn a second time until they disappear.” At this point God declares, “You have known My Unity through your own experience.” The third turn corresponds to Attar’s

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26 In her introduction to the sama, Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch quotes from Jalal al-Din Rumi: “Oh daylight, rise! atoms are dancing / The souls, lost in ecstasy, are dancing / To your ear, I will tell you where the dance will take you. / All the atoms in the air and in the desert, / Let it be known, are like madmen. / Each atom, happy or miserable, / Is in love with the Sun of which we can say nothing” (43).
annihilation and to Rushdie's "falling back into the Primal": Tchelebi's lovers attain "absolute Truth," "complete annihilation and death," "complete disappearance and death," at which point God exclaims, "Peace be on you, oh lovers! / In dying you have liberated yourselves from death. By the annihilation you have found [...] the path toward Me" (de Vitray-Meyerovitch 49-51). As I will stress below, Virgil's "Weakdance" finds its ultimate expression when Flapping Eagle and Media perform it at the top of the mountain, thus "annihilating" and "liberating" Calf and everyone on it.

In his battle with Koax, Virgil takes the form of a whirling dervish, of a mystical whirlwind which counteracts the spinning action of the coin Khallit and Mallit use to inflict the anguish of uncertainty and arbitrary resolutions on Flapping Eagle. Both the whirlwind and the coin spin, yet the unifying power of the whirlwind neutralizes the dichotomizing power of the coin. Ensconced in the polar rotation of their logic, Khallit and Mallit fear the force of Virgil's unifying whirlwind:

Mallit looked up. --It can't be, he said.
--But it is, it is, cried Khallit.
The whirlwind came closer and closer.
--Fascinating paradox, said Mallit.
--Fascinating, said Khallit doubtfully. (G 79)

In his *sama* dance of unity, Virgil comes as close as possible to the unifying presence of God and hence to the dissolution of dichotomy into unity. From this position, he is able to make Khallit and Mallit return "to the shreds of energy they had once been. On the planet of the Spiral Dancers, people would have said: --they danced the Weakdance to the end" (G 79).  

In addition to teaching Flapping Eagle the Weakdance, Virgil leads the way to a tantric sexuality which adds a mystical and cosmogonic potency to Flapping Eagle's final union with
Media. In his role as whorehouse poet Virgil anticipates the irreverent Baal of *The Satanic Verses*, yet the immediate importance of Virgil’s whoring is that it brings Flapping Eagle to the brothel where he meets Media, the prostitute who helps him enter into the role of the ithyphallic Shiva. In suggesting such a Hindu context, Rushdie has a prostitute named Kamala Sutra contort herself into a sexual position described in the *Kama Sutra*. Given that Flapping Eagle is climbing Calf Mountain it is appropriate that she demonstrates the “climbing-up-the-mountain position” (G 156). Rushdie also alludes to the sacred and symbolic genitalia of Shaivism when Virgil observes that Calf Mountain “is rather like a giant *lingam* weltering in the *yoni* that is the Sea” (G 55-56). Rushdie then shifts into a more subtle mode of allusion when Flapping Eagle takes on Shiva’s “erotic-ascetic” aspect, that is, Shiva’s ability to remain aroused without climaxing: Flapping Eagle remains balanced “between denial and consummation, standing at the peak, from which the only direction was down” (G 172). Flapping Eagle and Media also take on the aspects of Shiva and Parvati, whose intercourse threatens the very structure of the cosmos. In *Shiva: The Erotic Ascetic* Wendy O’Flaherty observes that Shiva’s raised phallus “is the plastic expression of the belief that love and death, ecstasy and asceticism, are basically related” (1981:10). Flapping Eagle’s final union with Media clearly links love and death, for in making love they terminate their existence in Grimus’ dimension. Rushdie thus manages to conflate Sufi and Shaivite motifs, for, as noted above, Tchelebi’s “lovers” also attain mystical annihilation or “complete disappearance and death.”

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27 While Baal plays a blasphemous role by insulting Mahound with doggerel verses and by mocking his sexual appetite, Virgil does not mock Grimus. Virgil’s sexuality is exemplary rather than parodic. Nevertheless in both cases Rushdie suggests that sexuality plays a part in resisting or destabilizing a monolithic power structure.
Although Deggle and Virgil are opposite in many ways, both help Flapping Eagle to destroy Grimus' dystopic Calf. Perhaps it makes sense for the devilish Deggle to help Flapping Eagle journey through the lower regions of the cosmos and for the mystical Virgil (as well as the Beatrice-like Media) to aid him in his ascent to the higher realms. Rushdie may also be suggesting that while good and evil are major factors in the soul's journey, they are less important than the transcendental, liberating union which lies, at least in theory, beyond moral dichotomy. This appears appropriate to the Sufism in the text, given that Sufi poets suggest that "purity" and "impurity" are not as important as mystical experience. Attar claims that "Islam and blasphemy have both been passed / By those who set out on love's path at last" (57), and Sana'i declares, "If you were really a lover / you'd see that faith and infidelity / are one" (Pourjavady and Wilson 73). The Hindu tantric element in the text—by which I mean the use of sexuality to attain mystical experience—also suggests that traditional morality is not as important as spiritual liberation (moksha or nirvana). Another way of looking at Rushdie's subordination of orthodox morality is by situating it in a Romantic context, one in which fixed values are often casualties in the war against whoever imposes a hierarchy on the landscape of the human imagination. While Rushdie does not champion Prometheus or Satan in the same way Shelley, Blake and Byron do in Prometheus Unbound, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell and The Vision of Judgement, he does take a step in that direction by making his devilish Deggle work in concert with his altruistic Virgil. One might even say that Virgil, Flapping Eagle and Deggle all gain in nobility the more they oppose Grimus and his coercive use of the Stone Rose.
Deggle's role in *Grimus*’ cosmological drama anticipates the dynamic in *Shame*, where the Beast is instrumental in defeating the tyrannical Raza. There is a crucial distinction, however: in *Shame* the Beast itself becomes tyrannical and dominating; in *Grimus* Deggle is neither an overwhelmingly coercive and violent figure nor a dominating presence. Unlike the roles of the Beast in *Shame* or the satanic narrator in *The Satanic Verses*, Deggle’s role in *Grimus*’ cosmic drama is marginalized. His actions and the things he represents are clearly superseded by those of Virgil and Flapping Eagle.

**DESTROYING THE GOD-OBJECT**

Flapping Eagle, Virgil and Deggle all aim to liberate Calf from Grimus and his use of the God-Object, the Stone Rose. Grimus’ manipulation of the Rose allows him to maintain control over Calf, yet this does not mean that the Rose is in itself a coercive machine. Indeed, it starts off as a wonderful Object that not only has strong associations with the mystic’s God, but also is capable of linking dimensions and of hence opening people’s minds to new realities. In this sense the Rose resembles Grimus’ “Crystal of Potentialities,” which allows him to see into “many potential presents and futures” (G 235). The Rose also suggests Flapping Eagle’s status as Shiva at the end of the novel, as well as the parallel universes referred to in *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses* (S 64, SV 523). The Rose especially resembles the infinite Sea of Stories in *Haroun*, a Sea which churns out new stories or versions of reality, much as the Rose allows its user to penetrate new realities or “dimensions.” Yet Grimus’ megalomania makes of the Rose a dangerous God-Object, one which enables the finite self to manipulate dimensions as if it were God. In creating a plot in which a God-Object must be destroyed,
Rushdie is not proposing that God must be destroyed. Rather, he is suggesting that God as an Object or definable Entity must be destroyed because it is subject to being used for an individual's gratification. The notion of an unattainable or mystical God, one which cannot be manipulated to further personal agendas, remains entirely valid. Indeed, such a notion is consistent with Virgil's poetic, mystical, liberating use of the Rose.

In explaining the nature of the Rose to Flapping Eagle, Virgil begins by noting that Koax, the rebellious extraterrestrial Gorf, used "Conceptualism" to open the door to an infinite and not merely theoretical arena of dimensions. Taking Dota's (or Magister Anagrammari's)\textsuperscript{28} ultra-Cartesian notion, "I think therefore it is," Koax postulated "that anything of which such an intellect could conceive must therefore exist" (G 66). Koax's "conceptualization" of endless dimensions eventually nonplussed the Gorfs because it destroyed the possibility of reaching a final "Ordering" of reality, a goal highly prized by the intersteller race of rational stone frogs. Because Koax's infinite dimensionality threatened the Gorfian "Divine Game" of Ordering, Koax "conceptualized an Object" which structured interdimensional knowledge. This Object brought together or "ordered" otherwise disparate, runaway dimensions (G 66). Following Koax, the Gorfs then "created the Objects which linked the infinity of Conceived and Inconceivable Dimensions." The Gorfs continue to hope

\textsuperscript{28} Magister Anagrammari calls to mind Magister Ludi in Hermann Hesse's \textit{The Glass Bead Game}. In his Introduction to that novel, Theodore Ziolkowski comments that Hesse "depicts a future society in which the realm of Culture is set apart to pursue its goals in splendid isolation, unsullied by the 'reality' that Hesse had grown to distrust." The rise of Nazism and other events disillusioned Hesse about the value of "any spiritual realm divorced wholly from contemporary social reality" and of "a life consecrated exclusively to the mind" (xii-xiii). Rushdie's distrust of any isolated, esoteric, intellectually-controlled realm is expressed mostly in terms of an attack on Grimus and his vision of Calf, although it also applies to Dota and his race of rational frogs. Grimus' re-arrangement of the planes of the Rose and Dota's Divine Game of Ordering may both owe something to the Game which gives rise to Hesse's title.
that such Objects, with their "elements" beaming "directly to the planet Thera," will help them
order, or account for, the universe (G 244-245). Koax's rebellion may constitute a revolt
against those who use rationality and then restrict or control the arenas within which this
rationality might operate.

While the Gorfs might be faulted for controlling rationality, they must be credited for
not interfering with other dimensions (or "endimions") and for refusing to use the Objects to
coerce others into accepting their rational point of view. As a result of Koax's meddling (his
"gross Bad order"), he is "banned from Thera" and he "stands or falls" with Grimus' dimension (G 245). The Gorfs also strongly object to Grimus' use of the Rose to
"conceptualize" his sub-dimension of Grimushome. Dota argues that a place "is either part of
an Endimions or it is not" and that "To conceptualize a place which is both a part of an
Endimions and yet secret from it could stretch the Object to disintegration-point" (G 244-
246). Grimus goes to great lengths to protect his elitist realm: he controls access to it by
constructing a gate above K and by hiding the Rose in a "small room" in a house of
"labyrinthine excesses" (G 241). Grimus' elitist, hierarchical scheme of things makes him a
dangerous "God," one who treats humans as pawns or servants—the most concrete proof of
this being the way he treats Bird-Dog.

The infinite dimensionality established by Koax calls to mind the library in Borges' "The Library of Babel." Borges' library contains books with every possible permutation of

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29 Given that the Gorfs from Thera are, anagrammatically, Frogs from Earth, Rushdie may be
suggesting a human propensity for unfeeling, hyper-logical thinking. In light of the allusion to
Descartes, one might be forced to conclude that Rushdie means his "Frogs" to suggest "the French" in
particular, although any such allusion is clearly meant to be playful rather than insulting.
letters, and Borges' narrator hopes that if "an eternal traveler" (such as Flapping Eagle) were to cross the library in any direction, "after centuries he would see that the same volumes were repeated in the same disorder (which, thus repeated, would be an order: the Order)" (58).

Borges' narrator bases this principle of Order on the repetition of the given disorder of the library. Yet what if he were given other libraries or disorders? And what if he were given an infinite number of other libraries, including libraries in which books floated from one shelf to the next and letters resembled black fish that swam in oceans of white paper? Borges' narrator and Koax are both fascinated by the notion of permutations, yet Koax derives an anarchic pleasure from the notion of an infinity of dimensions, that is, from the notion that there are always more dimensions beyond any given number of dimensions in which permutations occur. Koax does not seem bothered by the implication that an infinity of dimensions makes one increasingly unimportant in the ever-expanding schemelessness of things. Borges' narrator on the other hand is unnerved by what might exist beyond the library. Also, one might compare the Stone Rose to Borges' "perfect compendium" and Grimus to Borges' elusive librarian who has read the compendium and is "analogous to a god" (56). Grimus would no doubt applaud such a deification, yet he would also gloss over the notion that it highlights hubris and the egomania of dictatorship rather than wisdom and the selflessness of the Sufi mysticism he exploits. Unfortunately for him, he believes that to "be wise and powerful is to be complete" and he believes that he has retained "the faculties

30 Koax's name may be a skewed version of "Kaox" or "Chaos." His name also contains the K of the Simurg's Kaf and Shiva's Kailasa--appropriate given the dissolution implicit in Attar's mystical annihilation and the entropy implicit in Shiva's cosmic destructions.
which add potency to wisdom” (G 232). In exercising this “potency” for his own ends, he destroys this “wisdom.”

Infinite dimensionality also crops up in a modified form in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. The hero of the story, Haroun, sees in the currents of the moon Kahani (Hindi for “Story”) “a liquid tapestry of breathtaking complexity.” In this Ocean Haroun sees “all the stories that had ever been told” as well as those “that were still in the process of being invented.” The Ocean of the Streams of Story “was in fact the biggest library in the universe” (H 72). Both Grimus and Haroun posit infinite dimensions or permutations and both depict a scenario in which the protagonist defeats a megalomaniac who tries to impose a specific pattern on what is otherwise a metamorphic, multidimensional “setting.” Flapping Eagle takes this victory furthest, for while Haroun and company restore the flow of story-streams into the Ocean, Flapping Eagle (as Shiva) becomes the Ocean that contains an infinity of potential settings.

In political terms, the order Grimus imposes on Calf and the rationalization for this order are undermined when Flapping Eagle refuses to use the Rose in Grimus’ coercive and self-aggrandizing manner. In theological terms, Flapping Eagle’s destruction of the Rose suggests that an interdimensional God-like power either should not exist or should not be accessible to finite beings. Rushdie may also be speculating about a universe without a personal God. Couching his thoughts in highly metaphoric terms, Rushdie has Flapping Eagle ask an assembly of Gorfs if it is possible to conceptualize a dimension which does not contain an Object. He receives the following response:

A long pause, in which I felt complex arguments flashing between the assembled Gorfs.
--We cannot be sure, said Dota. For us, the answer would be No, since the very existence of the Endimions relative to us is a function of the Object. But for a dweller in the Endimions ... a mental shrug-form followed. (G 246)

Because the Gorfs think structurally, they cannot imagine a dimension without an ordering or contextualizing mechanism such as the Rose. Dota, however, concedes "that he could conceive of a Dimension-dweller devising such a Concept" (G 251). Having no Object or having a hidden, unattainable, transcendent Object (a Supradimension or transcendent God) both suggest the possibility of living in dimensions that are not constantly manipulated as if from above or outside.

In *Grimus* Rushdie suggests that if dimensions must have Objects, then such Objects ought to remain hidden or they will be subject to harmful manipulation. As intimated in Virgil’s diary, the Rose initially appears to be hidden, inactive or dead—a status symbolized by the dead bird of paradise and by the Rose’s location in the forest next to the cemetery (G 208). Virgil brings the Rose from the cemetery into the world and he uses it to fly to the far-off (but mystically near) planet of the Spiral Dancers. Virgil employs the Rose to attain a mystical experience which turns out to be helpful to others: he flies to a mystical planet and he uses the esoteric knowledge he finds on that planet to free Flapping Eagle from Koax’s “extrapolations.” Grimus, on the other hand, makes the Rose the instrument of his ego. In so doing, he reduces reality to a game and he reduces the lives of others to fictions, to entities which have no free will. He is “so far removed from the pains and torments of the world” that he sees death as “an academic exercise” (G 236). Grimus’ detachment might thus be seen as a
degradation of Attar’s notion that the universe—and everything within it—is irrelevant once one reaches mystical union with God.  

The Rose in *Grimus* suggests Dante’s Blessed Rose, which is a meeting-place of souls (or human dimensions), as well as the rose of Persian and Turkish poetry, which attracts the souls of those who would fly into spiritual realms:

Since [the rose] reveals divine beauty and glory most perfectly, the nightingale, symbol of the longing soul, is once and forever bound to love it—and the numberless roses and nightingales in Persian and Turkish poetry take on, wittingly or unwittingly, this metaphysical connotation of soul-bird and divine rose. (Schimmel 299)

Given Rushdie’s use of Eliot, the Stone Rose might also be seen in light of the rose in *Four Quartets*. Eliot concludes his long poem by affirming that “All manner of thing shall be well / When the tongues of flames are in-folded / Into the crowned knot of fire / And the fire and the rose are one” (223). In *Grimus* Flapping Eagle’s passionate union with Media accompanies the destruction of the dysfunctional God-Object (the Cracked Rose) and replaces it with the fire of their deified union. One might say that just as Eliot’s “spectre of a Rose” becomes a “symbol perfected in death” at the end of his poem (220), so the mystical potential of Rushdie’s Rose becomes possible once its imperfect form has been destroyed at the end of the novel. In the same manner, the mystical potential of Attar’s Impossible Qaf surfaces once Flapping Eagle destroys Grimus’ dystopic Calf. The beauty of this symbol lies in its “Impossibility,” that is, in the notion that it surfaces only in the space which no longer exists.

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31 Attar expresses himself in the following hyperbolic manner: “If you should see the world consumed in flame, / It is a dream compared to [mystical union], a game; / If thousands were to die here, they would be / One drop of dew absorbed within the sea; [...] If all the worlds were swept away to hell, / They’d be a crawling ant trapped in a well; / If earth and heaven were to pass away, / One grain of gravel would have gone astray; [...] And if the nine revolving heavens stop, / Think that the sea has lost a single drop” (185-186).
In *The Perforated Sheet*, Parameswaran enumerates the similarities between Rushdie's Rose and Borges' Zahir. She notes that the Aleph is "the object or abstraction through which one can control the Dimensions" and that the Zahir, "though literally a rose, is also 'the shadow of the rose and the rending of the veil'":

Rushdie uses the Dance of the Veils in the final denouement; he combines the qualities of Aleph and Zahir in his rose: the Aleph gives a miraculous vision of the universe and the Zahir eclipses everything. (61).

Apart from noting several minor similarities between Borges' Aleph and Rushdie's Rose, Parameswaran also notes that Borges uses Arabic and Persian allusions--in particular, he alludes to a Persian who "speaks of a bird which is somehow all birds" (61).

Rushdie's use of the Rose, the Simurg and Qaf demonstrate interest in a mystical God, one which is not definable or manipulable. A deep and recurrent strain of his thinking is summed up in Virgil's following aphorism: "If there were no god, we should have to invent one [and] since there is a Grimus, he must be destroyed" (G 101). Rushdie is not denying a mystical God who is forever beyond human conception; rather, he is suggesting that humans generally fail to conceive of such a God. People create an anthropomorphic, finite or otherwise manipulable God, they realize the limitations either of this God or of those who take advantage of "Him," and they eventually feel they must destroy their creation. Virgil's aphorism reflects Rushdie's wit as well as his doubt about his doubt. The conditional phrase, "If there were no god," also anticipates his more developed explorations of doubt in

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32 "The Aleph is in the basement of a house, and the Rose is in a secret room; the narrator arranges various objects in the room as instructed and gets a vision. The Rose in *Grimus* is a set of stone slabs that can be arranged and aligned in different ways. Among the many things that the narrator sees in the Aleph are 'all the ants in the world' and a 'beach along the Caspian Sea'; Eagle, during his 700-year travel sees 'A beach on which a maiden had been staked naked, as giant ants moved up her thighs,' (G. p. 32)" (61).
Midnight's Children, where Aadam cannot wholly disbelieve in God, and in The Satanic Verses, where doubt results from a human reluctance to choose between belief and disbelief.

ESCHATOLOGY AND COSMOGONY

The death of Grimus and the continuing journey of Flapping Eagle and Media open wide the doors of cosmological and narratological speculation. The intercourse of Flapping Eagle and Media is crucial to the ending of the novel, for it confirms a series of Shaivite associations and it suggests that Flapping Eagle takes on Shiva's role as cosmic destroyer and creator. Because of the novel's disparate cosmological traditions, readers cannot be sure of Flapping Eagle's fate. Rushdie ends the novel in a clever manner by at once annihilating the setting and suggesting an infinite number of potential settings.

Prior to his confrontation with Grimus, Flapping Eagle states, "I must know that a way back exists: a way back to the place, world, dimension, whatever, that I came from" (G 192). Eventually, he abandons this goal of returning to his native setting, dimension or world. His "home" becomes the mountain of K, which is both the Mountain of Kaf and Mount Kailasa, the "home" of Shiva. In his novel The Serpent and the Rope, Raja Rao suggests that Shiva exists in the mystical conjunction of personal and cosmic space:

The Himalaya was like Lord Shiva himself, distant, inscrutable, and yet very intimate there where you do not exist. He was like space made articulate, not before you but behind you, behind what is behind that which is behind one; it led you back through abrupt silences to the recesses of your own familiar but unrecognized self. (42)

33 Shiva has no real home as such, although his consort Parvati urges him to stay in one place. David Kinsley observes that on one occasion Shiva describes his house as the universe "and argues that an ascetic understands the whole world to be his dwelling place." Kinsley adds that philosophical arguments such as this "never satisfy Parvati, but she rarely, if ever, wins this argument and gains a house" (48).
Rushdie also links his mystical mountain to an “unrecognized” part of the self: “Calf
Mountain: as alien to [Flapping Eagle] as it was to the world he had known; and yet there was
a similarity: a likeness of self and mountain” (G 45). As has been noted above, Qaf and God
are at once impossibly far away and yet closer than the jugular vein.

There are numerous reasons for associating Calf Mountain with Kailasa and Flapping
Eagle with Shiva. Apart from previously discussed references to Calf as lingam (G 55-56), to
the “bone of K” (G 89), to “erotic asceticism” (G 172) and to Media as Parvati, Flapping
Eagle’s status as “the Destroyer” links him to Shiva. Flapping Eagle derives his name from
the Eagle, the Amerindian symbol of “the Destroyer” (G 46), and Grimus tells Flapping Eagle,
“Your Ionic Pattern [...] is the strongest destructive pattern I have ever seen” (G 234). Shiva
is likewise identified with destruction. In The Myths and Gods of India, Alain Daniélou calls
Shiva “the embodiment of tamas, the centrifugal inertia, the tendency toward dispersion,
toward disintegration and annihilation” (190). Flapping Eagle’s mountain of K is both the
Sufi mountain of Kaf, which “brings an end to all rhyme” (G 133) and the mountain of
Kailasa, where Shiva’s intercourse with Parvati is so intense that it shakes the universe.
Finally, Flapping Eagle makes love with various women--especially Media--just as Shiva
makes love with various women, who are “media” in that they are the matter and energy Shiva
uses in his cosmic constructions. Shiva is the principle of spirit or purusha and his consorts
embody the principle of nature (prakriti) and the related principle of energy (shakti) (Kinsley
49). Rushdie suggests the notion of femininity representing the combination of these
principles when Elfrida and Irina “become one, joined by the intercession of his love” and
when their names become fused into “Elfrina, Irida” (G 171-172).
Media is the perfect match for Flapping Eagle because she can lend herself to many forms and because his union with such an archetypal “woman” emphasizes the creative power of the Hindu god. Media tells Flapping Eagle she is “a woman who can cope with [him]” (G 187), meaning, I believe, that she is like primal energy and matter which can transform itself in order to create innumerable forms of existence. Before re-creation occurs, however, Flapping Eagle and Media enter into a destructive mode—one which constitutes the novel’s sexual, eschatological and textual climax:

Deprived of its connection with all relative Dimensions, the world of Calf Mountain was slowly unmaking itself, its molecules and atoms breaking, dissolving, quietly vanishing into primal, unmade energy. The raw material of being was claiming its own.

So that, as Flapping Eagle and Media writhed upon their bed, the Mountain of Grimus danced the Weakdance to the end. (G 253)

While Shiva is often seen as the god of death and destruction, he is also “the reproductive power, perpetually creating again that which he destroys” (Daniélou 206). Because Shiva exists at the juncture of being and non-being, and because he is “the link between the impersonal-substratum (brahman) and the causal-divinity (ishvara)” (Daniélou 190), he can reproduce himself and other forms of existence from his own death. He is, in this sense, Born-from-Dead, which is the name given to Flapping Eagle at birth.

Conflating Attar’s union and annihilation with Shiva’s destructions and creations creates a slight problem, given that Islam and Hinduism are not generally seen as compatible. Islam does not envisage a universe which is continually destroyed and created:

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34 Flapping Eagle’s other name, Joe-Sue, might also be seen as an allusion to Shiva-Shakti or the Ardhanarisvara form, which is “half male, half female,” also symbolized by the union of the lingam and yoni (Daniélou 203).
The idea of continuous emanation [evident in Platonic and Hindu cosmology] in contrast to the unique divine act of creation was considered, by both Muslim and Christian mystics, to be incompatible with the Biblico-Koranic idea of a *creatio ex nihilo*. (Schimmel 5)

I would argue, however, that *Grimus* is a novel very much concerned with incompatibilities—especially with the paradoxes of mysticism and with the conundrums of multidimensionality. Throughout his fiction and his essays Rushdie demonstrates a deep interest in fusions and hybridity. He argues fervently against the idea that traditions or people can—or even ought to—remain “pure.” He believes in “change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining,” and he argues against “the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation” (IH 394). Rushdie’s cosmological conflation also serves a narrative purpose: he follows Attar’s schema throughout most of *Grimus*, yet he emphasizes Shiva toward the end in order to suggest that Flapping Eagle’s journey has a multitude of cosmogonic directions.

The emphasis on Shiva also reintroduces the struggle between fixed meaning and chaos which came up in Koax’s establishment of infinite dimensionality. By associating Flapping Eagle with Shiva, Rushdie aligns his protagonist with what O’Flaherty sees as dominating Hindu myth: “the tension between variety and pattern” and “the resolution of chaos into order, and its dissolution back into chaos.” Against the Apollonian structure of transforming chaos into order, “there flows another, Dionysian, current in Indian thought, which views the act of creation as the transformation of order into chaos” (1975:12-13). Like Koax, Rushdie is interested in extending the arenas in which the ordering game can be played. Shiva’s infinite destructions and creations raise the possibility that there will be no final ordering and that there will be an eternal struggle between the forces of chaos and order.
By destroying the Rose and by having sex with Media, Flapping Eagle enters a nebulous sea of dimensions. The structures and paradigms which partially defined him are no longer definitive and even the paradigm of Shiva must be left behind. While the circularity of Hindu cosmology seems appropriate to Flapping Eagle’s fate, it too has an aspect of closure: it may be seen as “a closed system, a ‘world-egg’ with a rigid shell, so that nothing is ever ‘created’ ex nihilo; rather, things are constantly re-arranged” (O’Flaherty 1975:13). If universes are eternally re-arranged, if they are continually created and destroyed, where is the possibility of cessation? Such a possibility must be admitted if one is to entertain all possibilities. To insist on the eternity of Flapping Eagle’s quest would be to fix him in an ever-changing pattern, an eternal series of scenarios which themselves become a fixed pattern—albeit a very fluid one. Perhaps this is why Rushdie keeps Flapping Eagle’s future vague. Rushdie suggests Shiva because Shaivite cosmology appears to open more possibilities than the relatively linear cosmologies of Christianity and Islam. Yet to insist on this Hindu element would be to go against the main thrust of the novel, which is to contextualize individual transformation within a stream of otherworldly constructions and to suggest that the soul can sail forward, beyond that stream.

Rushdie ends *Grimus* with a conflation of Sufi, Dantean, Germanic and Shaivite constructions and this conflation helps to suggest—by its very looseness and variety—an open-ended future for his characters. Among his other novels, only *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* depicts a cosmos in which otherworldly constructions syncretize in such optimistic harmony. In both novels, conflation encourages readers to think associatively and imaginatively and the notion of open-endedness is emphasized by appropriate otherworldly constructions: in
Haroun the fusion of Attar’s flight and Somadeva’s Ocean highlights notions of eternal flow and transformation; in Grimus the inconclusive conclusion remains even more of a speculator’s fantasy, given that Attar’s poetry is intentionally allusive and evocative, Dante’s Paradiso stresses the inability to find metaphors for heavenly experience, the Voluspá vaguely suggests a new realm, and Shiva suggests an infinite and indefinite variety of cosmic constructions.

Although the “climax” of Grimus suggests heaven and bliss, the narrator also suggests very early in the novel that Flapping Eagle (as narrator) is not a liberated or happy man: “Bird-Dog had always been a free spirit. I say this with some envy, for I never was, nor am” (G 17). Various interpretations present themselves, none of which is conclusive, and all of which may be based on according too much importance to this early comment. Nevertheless, one might say that Flapping Eagle attains a moment of perfection with Media, a moment which can hardly be matched by subsequent experience. More than with Elfrida and Irina, Flapping Eagle is, at the end of the novel, at the point of both “denial and consummation, standing at the peak, from which the only direction was down” (G 172). Thinking in terms of the Divine Comedy, one might see Flapping Eagle’s fate as a return from the light-filled realms of Heaven to the obscure forest of this world. Keeping in mind Attar’s Qaf, one might note that Attar’s pilgrim returns to the mundane world after his union and annihilation. In The Satanic Verses the sherpa Pemba warns Allie that “it is not permitted to mortals to look more than once upon the face of the divine” (SV 303). Given the Hindu references in the text, one might conclude that Flapping Eagle remains on the wheel of death and rebirth, and that after his heavenly experience with Media he will proceed to a less exalted state of being. This fits
with the references to Germanic myth, for the afterlife in Gimle is not nearly as exciting as the heroic battles and the eschatological chaos which precede it. Referring to existence after Ragnarok, Puhvel notes that as “with the postconflict *Mahabharata*, life has gone out of the story, for paradises, posthumous or postcataclysmic, are almost by definition dull places of marginal mythic interest. [...] Norse cosmology begins with fire and ice [...] and culminates with a bang in fire and water and ends as divine epigones whimper about the days that are no more” (220).

One might also see the conclusion of *Grimus* as the initial, heavenly point in a cosmic cycle which starts with a heavenly unity in *Grimus*, progresses into fallen, divided, demonic states in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*, and returns to cosmic unity in *Haroun*. It is thus appropriate that after the heavenward, unifying climax of *Grimus* we arrive in the first chapter of *Midnight's Children* at the beginning of a new cosmological cycle, one starting with the annihilation of a great-grandfather amid thirty species of birds, and with the fall of a man called Aadam.
CHAPTER 3

MIDNIGHT’S CHILDREN: THE ROAD FROM KASHMIR

In terms of otherworldly constructions, Midnight's Children differs from Grimus in several fundamental ways: the otherworldly elements are largely rooted in history and “real-life” detail, the protagonist’s journey toward meaning and mystical unity is not a triumphant success, and otherworldly constructions are not conflated to underscore the achievement of any tolerant or multidimensional state of the world or cosmos. Rushdie’s use of otherworldly constructions in Midnight's Children is at once provocative and challenging, not so much in the high modernist or Eliotic sense of offering readers a chance to decipher the way in which they form an integrated structural pattern, but in the sense of disorienting readers and making them examine the reasons behind the lack of conflation, unity and coherence. Given the instability and unpredictability of otherworldly constructions in the novel, it is impossible to delineate or uncover a consistent otherworldly structure, although I will argue that Saleem’s search for unity and meaning is expressed in terms of the following otherworldly constructions and dynamics: a fall from, and a potential return to, the “Eden” of Kashmir; a mystical union represented by the ornithological figures of the Hummingbird, the Hoopoe and the paramahamsa; a Magic Jungle which resembles a Hell and a Purgatory; and an incessant clash between figures such as the Hummingbird and Ravana (the mystical bird and the demonic monster), Padma and Schaapsteker (the lotus goddess and the snake man), Aadam Sinai and General Shiva (the new Aadam and the priapic god of destruction), and Durga and the Widow
(the life-nourishing goddess and the tyrant who appropriates OM and Bharat Mata).

Rushdie’s use of cosmology, mythology and mysticism in *Midnight’s Children* thus suggests both the destruction of hopes and ideals and the possibility of social and spiritual regeneration.

Whereas in *Grimus* Rushdie fulfills the otherworldly expectations hinted at throughout the novel, in *Midnight’s Children* he sets up otherworldly expectations and then proceeds to ignore, change and only sometimes fulfill them. In a 1984 interview with *Scripsi* Rushdie says that *Midnight’s Children* “sets up the expectation of a family saga and then puts a bomb under it” by revealing that the family in question is not Saleem’s family.” Rushdie also literally puts a bomb underneath the family by blowing it up “with a quarter of the book still to go” (119). Likewise, Rushdie plays with expectations set up by otherworldly constructions. For instance, Saleem initially suggests that his *Midnight’s Children’s* Conference (modelled on Attar’s mystical Conference) will “give meaning to it all” (MC 127). When he writes, “I am the bomb in Bombay ... watch me explode!” (MC 174), readers are led to believe that this explosion will be an *éclat de joie*, an exclamation of *vive la différence!* Yet at the end of the book, Saleem repeats the phrase, “watch me explode,” in a much darker context:

> Shiva and the Angel are closing closing, I hear lies being spoken in the night, anything you want to be you kin be, the greatest lie of all, cracking now, fission of Saleem, I am the bomb in Bombay, watch me explode, bones splitting breaking beneath the awful pressure of the crowd. (MC 463)

Saleem’s “bomb” comes from many sources and may represent many things, yet ultimately it is the English meaning (bomb) which supersedes meanings based on similarities to *bom bahia* (Portuguese for “good bay”), Mumbadevi (a Koli goddess), and Bhimadeva or Bimba (a fourteenth-century king) (Moraes 12). Contrasting the harmony he tries to bring to India with the havoc Shiva wreaks, Saleem asks, “Was Shiva’s explosion into my life truly synchronous
with India’s arrival, without prior warning, at the nuclear age?” (MC 406-407). Beginning as a symbol of Saleem’s desire to join in the construction of the new nation, and ending as a symbol of General Shiva’s destructive power, Saleem’s “bomb” dramatically advances the notion that India has not lived up to Nehru’s midnight ideal of building “the noble mansion of free India” (MC 118). This failure is not overwhelming, however, for it is in some measure undermined (pun intended) by hints of a tragic mystical meaning, one based not on defeating violent and coercive forces, but in retaining lofty ideals in the face of defeat.

Rushdie’s decision not to supply *Midnight’s Children* with a clear or optimistic conclusion and his decision not to conflate otherworldly constructions makes sense given the proximity of the times about which he writes, and given the divisive role religion has played, and continues to play, in the subcontinent. Because Saleem’s story ends in the late 1970s—more or less synchronous with the novel’s completion in June 1979 (Hamilton 102)—Rushdie could not possibly have made any final statement about the political or spiritual health of his amazingly diverse subcontinent. Much less could he have predicted what historical direction the subcontinent might take in years to come. Even now we are too close to the subcontinent evoked in *Midnight’s Children* to evaluate Rushdie’s depiction of it. Or, as Rushdie puts it: “In fifty years time, when what Mrs Gandhi did has become a historical event, the book will either get worse or better, fortunately I don’t know and I don’t have to, but it won’t stay the same” (Rushdie with Scripsi 112). The lack of unity or conflation in the novel is also a function of its subject matter, for Rushdie bases the story of Saleem’s life on a history characterized by increasing political and religious divisions. The diverse elements in the subcontinent, especially those pertaining to Islam and Hinduism, could not be neatly
reconciled or conflated without ignoring Partition, the separation of East from West Pakistan, the continuing ethnic and religious clashes, and the possibility of future conflict and division.¹

In contrast to Flapping Eagle’s mystical, iconoclastic journey into a unifying multidimensionality, Saleem’s journey into the diversity of subcontinental geography and history could not become the basis of a conflated narrative structure without entering the realm of fantasy—something that after *Grimus* Rushdie was very reluctant to do.

Rushdie’s decision to root *Midnight’s Children* in the “real world” was a conscious one. He calls *Grimus* “a kind of fantasy novel set in an imaginary island, out of space and time.” He suggests, “one reason *Midnight’s Children* is so obsessively rooted in a particular place and with dates and times all the way through is because I felt that I wanted to really anchor myself in that way to something and to write from closer to myself” (Rushdie with Phillips 18). In his interview with Scripsi, he says that *Grimus* is “a fantasy in the sense [he] now disapprove[s] of, a fantasy without any roots in the discernible world” (125). In this interview Rushdie also acknowledges his debt to Dickens, who grounds the unreal in the real: Dickens puts his “Circumlocution Office down in an absolutely credible London street […] [T]he circumstantial detail is so well-observed that it’s impossible not to believe that the place existed, because it is kind of described into existence.” Rushdie likewise grounds *Midnight’s Children* in “circumstantial information” so that he can then “implant the insanity and it would

¹ In his February 1995 interview with Phillips, Rushdie notes that *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is a leave-taking from the ideals of a secular India, “where religion is so important that if you allowed it to enter the fabric of the state then the partition riots would happen all the time.” He makes an explicit link between his latest novel and *Midnight’s Children* when he claims that what “impelled” *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is that “the thing whose beginning *Midnight’s Children* described, is coming to an end.” He adds that, in addition to religious divisions, “you have this odd growth of nationalisms, sometimes linked to Hinduism, sometimes purely regionalist—which is an echo of something happening across Central Europe” (21).
seem to fit because the other stuff would give it ballast and weight” (116). In particular, Rushdie grounds the unreal or mystical aspirations of Saleem in a realistic or “discernible” Bombay. The main exceptions to this geographic realism are the Rann of Kutch and the Sundarbans. As I argue in “The Forces of Death and Regeneration,” the Rann’s phantasmagoric atmosphere is a product of propaganda while the Magic Jungle of the Sundarbans is a hellish and purgatorial realm, an otherworldly dimension which has a geographical correlate yet which remains an other world of the afterlife.

The grounding of Rushdie’s second novel in history and geography, in real time and space, was probably enhanced by his personal experience of the subcontinent. In particular, the disparity between the way he depicts a lively, eclectic India and the way he depicts a depressing, repressive Pakistan may have been enhanced by the trip he took with Clarissa Luard after he completed *Grimus*. Hamilton comments on this five-month vacation, highlighting the sentiments of Rushdie’s girlfriend and future wife:

> The proofs of “Grimus” reached him in Karachi. He also, on this trip, saw Bombay again, and Delhi and Kashmir, the places of his childhood. “I loved India!” Clarissa exclaims. “The people, the smells, the colors, the history, the architecture!” She was less thrilled with Pakistan, where on at least one occasion she and Rushdie had stones thrown at them. “I wasn’t dressed badly,” Clarissa says. “I knew about the country and I was wearing long skirts. But I wasn’t wearing the dupatta.” In one town, a driver tried to run them down. (Hamilton 101).

After his marriage in 1976, Rushdie wrote *Madame Rama*, whose “main character bears some resemblance to Indira Gandhi, whose state-of-emergency repressions had left Rushdie disillusioned and indignant” (Hamilton 102). This perhaps partly explains why Rushdie is not

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Madame Rama was never published. Rushdie offered it to Gollancz, “but, to his surprise, Liz Calder turned it down. ‘It had some great stuff in it,’ she concedes, and points out that ‘he plundered it’” in writing *Midnight’s Children* (Hamilton 102).
entirely black and white in his depiction of a stultifying Pakistan and a progressive India. One should also note that Rushdie’s 1965 summer visit to Karachi coincided with the fighting between India and Pakistan, and that he had personal experience of Pakistani censorship when he stayed briefly in Karachi after finishing at Cambridge in 1968.3

_Midnight’s Children_ is also grounded in the “real world” in another way: Saleem and his family bear some resemblance to Rushdie and his family. In his interviews with Haffenden and Scripsi Rushdie delineates several of the similarities and the differences. In the latter interview he says: “Saleem doesn’t _feel_ like me to me at all. We have things in common, things that have happened to me happen to him.” He adds that he introduces a character named “Rushdie” into the novel (in the episode at Saleem’s school dance) for a specific reason: “I thought I’d make a Hitchcock-like appearance in order to prove [Saleem] wasn’t me” (117). Rushdie’s transformation of his parents and grandparents into fictional characters who became more interesting the more they differed from the originals was also illuminating:

3 Rushdie comments on his reactions to the 1965 hostilities: “I didn’t particularly feel India was my enemy, because we’d only very recently come to Pakistan. And yet if somebody’s dropping bombs on you, there is really only one reaction that you can have toward them, which is not friendly” (Hamilton 96). Rushdie sums up his position vis-à-vis the way people from these two nations might view his writing: “In Pakistan there is suspicion because I’m Indian and in India because I’m Pakistani. Both sides wish to claim me. Both sides find it hard that I don’t reject the other side” (Hamilton 105). Rushdie also had difficulties with Pakistani censorship when he arrived there after travelling overland (via Iran) in 1968: “Before production could begin [on a televised version of Edward Albee’s _Zoo Story_] there had to be a series of ‘censorship conferences.’ An Albee remark about the disgustingness of pork hamburgers was seized on by the censors. ‘Pork,’ they said, is a ‘four-letter word.’” Rushdie argued that Albee’s hamburger remark was ‘superb anti-pork propaganda’ and should stay. “You don’t see,” the executive told me.... “The word ‘pork’ may not be spoken on Pakistan television.” And that was that.” He also had to cut a line about God being a colored queen who wears a kimono and plucks his eyebrows” (Hamilton 97). While Rushdie’s experiences with censorship appear to have left him feeling bitter, he nevertheless supplies a lively account of him being required (as an actor in the above play) to use a knife which was not retractable, and of the background noise, provided by chants of an Urdu-language crowd which had marched on the TV station (Rushdie with Phillips 17).
“It was like discovering that you have to make things up” (118). His comments suggest that the fascination of *Midnight's Children* lies not only in the way it is grounded in realistic detail, but also in the way it takes off from the real world, much as Dickens' Circumlocution Office takes off from the “circumstantial information” in which it first appears to be rooted.

The most important ways in which Rushdie deviates from the real world in *Midnight's Children* is in his depiction of the Magic Jungle (which I return to in the last section) and in his subtle, extensive use of a mythic cycle which starts in the “Eden” of Kashmir. This cycle gives the novel a vague otherworldly shape, thus complementing the more worldly or linear shape given it by the chronologies of history and autobiography, and the more literary shape given it by the use of leitmotif.\(^4\) While this mythic shaping is less obvious than the chronological and leitmotif shaping, it can also be found throughout the novel, and it, unlike the others, leaves traces of optimism even after one has finished reading the final scene, which is at once hypothetical and pessimistic.

\(^4\) In his use of leitmotif, Rushdie does what he praises Nurrudin Farah for doing in the novel *Maps*: “Farah weaves a web of leitmotifs drawn from folk-tales and from dreams” and his remaking of history “meshes with nightmare and myth to form the basis of a new description of the world, and offers us new maps for old” (IH 202). Referring to his own use of the silver spittoon in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie comments on the way leitmotif or a “non-rational network of connections” supplies a loose sort of unity to *Midnight's Children*: “The meaning of the leitmotif is the sum total of the incidents in which it occurs. So it accumulates meaning the more it is used. And what one is able to do by using the leitmotif is to orchestrate what is otherwise a huge mass of material, which doesn’t always have rational connections, but the leitmotif can provide this other network of connections and so provide a shape” (Rushdie in *Kunapipi* 3-4). In her chapter, “The Perforated Sheet: Metaphor as Method and Meaning,” Parameswaran demonstrates how leitmotifs such as the perforated sheet, holes, leakages, blows, pickling and chutnification help give shape to the novel. Because my focus is on otherworldly constructions, I will not dwell on Rushdie’s use of such motifs, or on his extensive pairing of personal and national chronologies. Parameswaran examines the latter in “Handcuffed to History: Salman Rushdie’s Art” and “Autobiography as History: Saleem Sinai and India in *Midnight’s Children*,” Aruna Srivastava’s “‘The Empire Writes Back’: Language and History in *Shame* and *Midnight’s Children*” is also helpful in contextualizing Rushdie’s two novels about South Asia within subcontinental historical frameworks.
Rushdie makes extensive use of a “fall” from mythical unity to historical division as well as a potential “return” to an original state of unity. Aadam’s refusal to bow to God in Kashmir separates him from both the “certainties” of his Muslim heritage and the mystical possibilities suggested by old Aziz sahib’s “annihilation” amid his “thirty species of birds.” Saleem inherits the uncertainty of Aadam Aziz’s Fallen World, and it is thus appropriate that Rushdie leaves his readers asking the question, Will Saleem complete the mythic cycle by marrying Padma and by honeymooning in Kashmir? A host of worldly and otherworldly factors come into play, many of them as ambiguous and inconclusive as the mythic cycle itself. In attempting to evaluate the fate of Saleem and his nation, one might weigh the positive influence of figures such as the Hummingbird and Padma against the negative influence of figures such as Ravana and Schaapsteker. While Saleem’s ideals of mystical “conference” and of return to “the paradise of Kashmir” appear defeated by figures such as General Shiva and the Widow, his suggestion that the future will be as rich and perplexing as the past, and his references to Scheherazade’s fate and to Attar’s annihilation, supply some cause for optimism.

I do not, however, want to give the impression that the otherworldly shape provided by the above mythic cycle is not problematic, not in a sense contradicted by other notions of mythic circularity. Aadam Aziz’s fall fits into the Islamic and Judeo-Christian scheme of “the Fall from Eden,” yet Saleem also tumbles pell-mell into the Dark Age or Kali Yuga of Hindu cosmology, an Age which Saleem sums up as “the worst of everything” (MC 194). Saleem claims that it is due to Kali Yuga that the Midnight’s Children are “always confused about being good” (MC 200). If readers focus on the notion of Kali Yuga, which Saleem tells us began in 3102 B.C. and lasts 432,000 years (MC 194), then there appears to be no relief in
sight from the divisive violence which has characterized recent history. As Saleem and his nation proceed further into the darkness of Kali Yuga, Saleem’s physical and spiritual demise appears increasingly imminent. If, on the other hand, readers focus on the notion of a Fall from Eden, they can read optimism or a return to Paradise into Saleem’s fate, especially since Rushdie evokes a “thirty-first chapter,” as well as a possible return to Kashmir with Padma and “the new Aadam.” Rushdie employs the above Hindu and Muslim schemes yet he refuses to clarify either the relation between them or their application to Saleem’s precarious existence in Mary’s pickle factory. These ambiguities do not, however, weaken the novel. Rather, they complement Saleem’s confused and equivocal (one might even say multivocal) state of mind, as well as his mixed heritage and his vague aspirations to “encompass” the hectic diversity of his nation.

Among critics of *Midnight’s Children*, Chelva Kanaganayakam provides one of the most helpful examinations of the relation between *Midnight’s Children*’s narrative structure and Rushdie’s use of Hindu cosmology and mythology. In “Myth and Fabulosity in *Midnight’s Children,*” he argues that Rushdie sets twentieth-century India “against a backdrop of the timelessness of myth,” and that myth has “the function of unifying and structuring all the fragments which constitute the novel” (88). Kanaganayakam argues that the consistent presence of Hindu myth gives consistency or “unity” to the novel and that

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5 While the darkest Age thus lasts 432,000 years, a minute degree of comfort might be found in the notion that the happier Ages (which will come again and again) last for 1,728,000, 1,296,000 and 834,000 years (Danielou 249).
6 Srivastava makes a related point in regard to Mohandas Gandhi’s view of history, which includes a mythic element subsuming “synchronic and diachronic historical axes”: “Both the synchronic and diachronic, archaeology and chronology, are placed on the vertical axis, while a transcendent concept of history must also encompass, along the horizontal axis, what Gandhi calls myths and mythologies, or fictions” (71).
Saleem's mythic inversions and distortions are themselves consistent with life in Kali Yuga. Because Saleem lives in this Dark Age, his distortions, inversions and inconsistencies are themselves consistent with the debased times in which he lives. Kanaganayakam also argues that Rushdie restores or "rights" certain mythic inversions by the end of the novel. For instance, Parvati initially remains at odds with Shiva, yet she eventually follows the pattern of Hindu myth and gives birth to a Ganesh-eared child by Shiva. This instance of "righting" is not without ambiguity, however, since Parvati leaves Shiva to live with Saleem, and since she converts to Islam before their marriage. *Midnight's Children* also contains a number of instances where no "righting" occurs: "Hanuman" remains unheroic (he exacerbates rather than foils the designs of the evil Ravana) and Saleem's "Buddha" remains unenlightened even after sitting under his bodhi tree. In arguing that myth gives unity to *Midnight's Children*, Kanaganayakam emphasizes the distortion and inversion of mythological constructions and he allows for the return of constructions to their original forms. I think Kanaganayakam's reading is insightful and I am not disagreeing with him when I argue that otherworldly constructions in *Midnight's Children* are chaotic and intentionally ambiguous. I simply mean that they neither follow a consistent pattern of inversion (or of inversion and "righting") nor do they come together into the type of coherent, focused plot or narrative structure one finds in *Grimus, Shame, The Satanic Verses* and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. The notion that we live in a dark, fallen, chaotic world where traditional otherworldly constructions are

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7 Kanaganayakam sees numerous important uses of Hindu myth in *Midnight's Children*, whereas Brennan contends that the novel's "use of classical Indian myth relies above all on a single episode--the union of Parvati and Shiva." While Brennan claims that other mythic figures "are usually mentioned only in passing" (1989:109), he leaves out many of the mythological references in the novel. For example, in his analysis of Padma, he does not comment on her mythological associations with Padma/Shri/Lakshmi.
inverted, distorted and used inconsistently remains, within my terms of reference, indicative of chaos rather than coherence.

Rushdie’s inconclusive use of otherworldly constructions in *Midnight’s Children* is particularly evident when one compares the ending of the novel with the ending of *Grimus*. Flapping Eagle’s quest leads him to a single, focused location—the transcendent “peak” of Attar’s Qaf. In contrast, Saleem’s crisscrossing of the subcontinent resembles the flight of a confused and increasingly tired bird around a mountain that hosts a bewildering mix of good and evil beings. Because *Midnight’s Children* contains abundant references to Hinduism, and because Saleem sees himself as the *paramahamsa*, a Hindu yogi named after a famous swan, Saleem’s “flight” might be seen to take place on Mount Meru, which Daniélou calls the “meeting place and pleasure ground of the gods,” a divine mountain which “overshadows the worlds above and below and across” and on whose slopes hosts of “gods, celestial musicians (*gandharva*), genii (*asura*), and demons (*rakshasa*) play with heavenly nymphs (*apsaras*)” (144-145). Rushdie himself compares the “architectural notion” of *Midnight’s Children* to “the spire of the Hindu temple,” which is “a representation of the world mountain” and which is “crowded [and] swarms with life, all forms of life” (Rushdie in *Kunapipi* 19). One might also compare the two novels in terms of Mount Kailasa, to which Rushdie alludes in both *Grimus* and *Midnight’s Children*. Rushdie supplies *Grimus* with a sense of completion and closure when Flapping Eagle unites with Media in a cosmic dance strongly reminiscent of Shiva’s union with Parvati on Mount Kailasa. In *Midnight’s Children* no such sense of completion can be found: Saleem remains unable to make love with his wife Parvati and he is

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8 For Saleem’s identification with this “yogic swan,” see “Mystical Personas” below.
left a widower after she is killed in the slum-clearings which accompany the Emergency.

Rushdie does, however, return to the possibility of a Muslim-Hindu alliance on the personal level when Saleem contemplates marriage with Padma, his Hindu lover.

While Saleem forges strong ties with Parvati and Padma, he seems to think primarily in Muslim terms, often expressing his alienation and confusion by referring to Hinduism. Saleem tells his readers that he is born and raised in “the Muslim tradition” and that he finds himself “overwhelmed all of a sudden by an older learning,” one strand of which posits reality to be a “dream-web of Maya” (MC 194). He uses the notion of Maya or Illusion to his advantage when he argues with those who think he is crazy: “If I say that certain things took place which you, lost in Brahma’s dream, find hard to believe, then which of us is right?” (MC 211). He also uses Hindu epics to express his dismay at the confusing currents of history which are whirling around him. Saleem measures his account against the tales of Mary Pereira (MC 79), his ayah and patron, who repeats ancient stories about the “supernatural invasion” of ghosts and rakshasas, and who finds “the old-time war of the Kurus and Pandavas happening right outside.” Saleem calls these stories “rumours and tittle-tattle,” yet he adds, “I remain, today, half-convinced that in that time of accelerated events and diseased hours the past of India rose up to confound her present” (MC 245). Mary’s notion of a Hindu “invasion” and Saleem’s notion that the Hindu past “rose up” suggest that, being Christian and Muslim, they do not feel entirely at home or comfortable with Hindu figures and scenarios.

Given that I focus on the Hindu and Muslim constructions which dominate the novel, I should note that the distortion, ambiguity and unpredictability which characterize allusions to Islamic and Hindu constructions also characterize references to other religions and
mythologies. Rushdie parodies the ideal of Buddhist detachment when Saleem enters an empty-headed “buddhahood,” one of the few non-Hindu and non-Muslim references which I will later examine in some detail. Christianity often suggests a rather worldly or non-committed faith: Saleem refers to Tai’s “bald gluttonous Christ” (MC 16), to “the Christians’ considerately optional God” (MC 230), and to the Brass Monkey’s “flirtation with Christianity” (MC 253). These references to Christianity fit with the general stereotypical polarity Rushdie sets up in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Satanic Verses* between the mysticism and magic of India on one hand and the positivism and realism of Europe on the other. Yet Christianity also suggests other things--from the refuge of “the hidden order of Santa Ignacia” (MC 316) and Mary’s reassuring presence in the pickle factory to “the dreadful
logic of Alpha and Omega" (MC 123).¹¹ In general, Rushdie’s non-Muslim and non-Hindu constructions¹² are integrated neither with each other nor with allusions to Islam or Hinduism.

Rushdie’s use of magic and the supernatural resembles his use of otherworldly constructions deriving from cosmology, mythology and mysticism in that they all underscore Saleem’s confusion and equivocation. On some occasions, Saleem insists on the truth of events that defy the laws of physics: he insists that Parvati makes him disappear and that he subsequently learns “how ghosts see the world” (MC 381). On other occasions he undermines supernatural events: Amina realizes that, instead of levitating, Ramram Seth is sitting on a protruding shelf. Yet this debunking of magic is then followed by a further incursion into otherworldly logic: Ramram makes an accurate (though at first confusing) prediction outlining the decisive events in Saleem’s life. When Saleem asks if Ramram is a “huckster, a two-chip palmist, a giver of cute forecasts to silly women--or the genuine article,

¹¹ This latter reference is to both Saleem’s blood-type (which confirms that he is not genetically part of the Sinai family) and to Saleem’s fear of death, to his fear of dissolution at the hands of the Black Angel (and at the knees of Shiva). Other references to Christianity include those to Mary’s “good Christian folk,” who ought to remain apart from communalist fighting because the communalists are “Hindu and Muslim people only” (MC 105), to a Jesus who takes on the blue colouring of Krishna so that he will be more comprehensible in the land of the blue god Krishna (MC 103, 136), to Saleem’s questioning of Christ’s resurrection (MC 211), and to Mary’s fear of the notion (accepted by Ahmadiyya Muslims) that “the tomb of Lord Jesus” lies in Kashmir (MC 245).

¹² Among the non-Hindu and non-Muslim references which I do not examine elsewhere are the ones made to Khusrovand’s cult, which employs Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and anti-Jewish propaganda (MC 267-269). This cult results from the early illumination of Saleem’s friend Cyrus or “Fair Khusrovand,” and it parodies cults, hyperbolic religious language and the use of science to promote religion. Khusrovand’s cult may also parody the Iranian Sohrawardi’s mysticism of Light. Quoting Corbin’s Histoire de la philosophie islamique, Mircea Eliade observes that Sohrawardi’s vast œuvre “arises from a personal experience, a ‘conversion which came upon him in his youth.’ In an ecstatic vision, he discovered a multitude of the ‘beings of light whom Hermes and Plato contemplated, and the heavenly radiation, sources of the Light of Glory and the Kingdom of Light (Ray wa Khorreh) which Zarathustra proclaimed, toward which a spiritual rapture lifted the most faithful king, the blessed Kay Khosraw’” (Vol. III:142).
the holder of the keys?” (MC 86), he is asking a difficult question, one which can be applied to Saleem and to his wavering claim to hold the key or meaning to his own story. Saleem not only supplies contradictory claims about supernatural events, but he also questions his own reliability. This metafictionalizing complements the multi-valent, problematic exploration of otherworldly constructions in the novel. For instance, Rushdie employs a debunking strategy when his Saleem writes that Aadam saw God (MC 38, 67, 275-276) and that Mary saw the “full-fledged ghost” of Joseph (MC 205) yet later reveals that what they saw was in fact the leprosy-ridden body of Musa (MC 280). Notwithstanding his contradictory claims and his metafictionalizing, Saleem exhibits a fairly consistent belief in palmistry, astrology, telepathy, Parvati’s invisibility and Soumitra’s ability to foretell events by travelling in the “spidery labyrinths of Time” (MC 229, 254, 435).

Given that the otherworldly constructions in Midnight’s Children do not supply the novel with a clear sense of direction, meaning or structure, it is not surprising that Rushdie builds into the novel elements which help it to cohere, to hold together as a work of literature. Apart from using history, autobiography, leitmotif and a mythic cycle starting in the “Eden” of Kashmir, Rushdie supplies his narrative with a sense of coherence by employing a literary style deriving in part from the Hindu oral tradition, which is replete with references to magic, cosmology, mythology and mysticism. Rushdie acknowledges his debt to this oral tradition, the elements which he stresses being those of oral narrative, Ganesh as a “patron deity of

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13 He tells readers that he distorts events so that he can take a starring role in his nation’s history. He admits to a “lust-for-centrality” (MC 356) and confesses that he “persists in seeing himself as protagonist” (MC 237). He also refers to his own “inflated macrocosmic activity” (MC 435) and admits that he “entered into the illusion of the artist and thought of the multitudinous realities of the land as the raw unshaped material of [his] gift” (MC 174).
literature” and “the spire of the Hindu temple” (Rushdie in Kunapipi 6-10). Saleem’s claim to model his writing on Mary’s oral tales (MC 79) suggests that his fluid, rambling, myth-laden story has much in common with that of the widow who narrates Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1938), a village-eye view of Indian history in the days of Gandhi’s Satyagraha. K.R. Iyengar’s comments on the narration of Rao’s “elderly widow” could in many ways apply to both Mary and Saleem:

the manner of her telling too is characteristically Indian, feminine with a spontaneity that is coupled with swiftness, vivid with a raciness suffused with native vigour, and exciting with a rich sense of drama shot through and through with humour and lyricism. The villager in India is an inveterate myth-maker, and he has not lost his links with the gods of tradition: the heroes and heroines of epics jostle with historic personalities, and time past and time present are both projected into time future. (390)

Saleem’s spontaneity, raciness, humour and mix of time frames, as well as his jostling of gods, heroes and historic personalities, certainly puts him in league with the myth-makers of Hindu oral tradition. The idea of a myth-maker is particularly appropriate since Saleem not only borrows myths but constantly integrates mythic elements into the histories of his family and nation.

Midnight’s Children also owes some of what narrative unity it possesses to The Arabian Nights, the tenth-century Indian and Arabian collection of stories alternatively titled The Thousand and One Nights. Following Scheherazade, Saleem fights his demise (which he sees as a physical and metaphorical “cracking up”) by telling a very long story in which there are many interconnected smaller stories. This reflects the narrative design of The Thousand and One Nights, which has a fixed frame story (Scheherazade tells the despot Shahriyar stories for 1001 nights and is then released from her narrative bondage) yet no fixed internal organization. Given this similarity, one might infer that the exact relationship between
Saleem’s jumbled stories is not as important as the beginning and ending of his story. This raises further complications since Saleem’s attempt to arrive at his origins merely points to his muddled ancestry, consisting of Kashmiri, Indian, English, French, Muslim and Hindu origins. One might wonder, for instance, how much of Saleem’s nature derives from Methwold and Vanita, the British father and Hindu mother who are his biological parents? Saleem’s “ending” is equally confusing: his imagined dissolution (MC 462-463) remains at odds with the equally convincing (or equally unconvincing) fiction in which he lives in Mary’s pickle factory and in which he may return to the Kashmir of old Aziz sahib and Aadam Aziz. While Rushdie himself imagines Saleem dying at the end of the novel, he writes the ending in an ambiguous manner. One can make a strong argument that with the help of Padma, who ignores “the implacable finalities of inner fissures” (MC 384), Saleem may become whole again. Saleem’s imagined demise is also debatable from another angle: he realizes that it is an illusion to think that “it is possible to create past events simply by saying they occurred” (MC 443), yet he feels compelled “to write the future as [he has] written the past, to set it down with the absolute certainty of a prophet” (MC 462). Saleem’s “certainty” about his demise remains as hypothetical as any other thirty-first chapter scenario, one which could begin with, “No, that won’t do. In fact, I never saw Shiva....” In depicting Saleem’s open-ended fate, Rushdie creates a variant of the “lines of flux” in Grimus (G 235) and he anticipates “the

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14 The story “is on Saleem’s part a sort of heroic attempt to reconstruct his picture of the world. He’s writing when he knows the end, and he’s trying to say ‘this is how I thought it was’ and at the end of the book he again has to say ‘it wasn’t like that’ and then he dies. I mean, it’s not overt in the book in any way but that’s how I thought about it” (Scriptsi 119). I think Rushdie is missing a chance here to explore the ambiguity he has built into his ending, to explore the reasons behind thinking about the final scene (which Saleem imagines) in another way.
parallel universe of history” and “the parallel universes of quantum theory” in *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses* (S 64, SV 523).

Rushdie further complicates Saleem’s fate—and the outcome of his narrative—by combining hints of Scheherazade’s release with hints of Attar’s mystical annihilation. Saleem’s speculation that “the purpose of Midnight’s Children might be annihilation” (MC 229) gains mystical significance when one remembers that Saleem at the end of the novel is thirty years old, that he writes thirty chapters or “pickle jars,” and that he leaves readers with the image of an empty or “annihilated” thirty-first pickle jar. Just as Scheherazade is set free by the magical logic of her 1001 nights, so Saleem may be set free by the magical logic of his “thirty jars and a jar” (MC 461).

A MYTHIC CYCLE

In order to appreciate the potential for regeneration in the novel—suggested by Saleem’s empty thirty-first pickle jar, by his partnership with Padma, and by the forceful personality of the “new Aadam”—one must take a close look at Rushdie’s subtle references to Attar’s conference, unity and annihilation. These references are situated within a mythic cycle, one which starts with old Aziz sahib and which ends (or does not end) with Aadam Sinai. Rushdie begins the cycle in Kashmir, yet he leaves it open as to whether or not it will come full circle in Kashmir. On the worldly level, Rushdie suggests Saleem’s disintegration, yet on a symbolic otherworldly level he suggests that Saleem may survive his “annihilation.” Rushdie also hints that Saleem’s enterprise of invigorating and unifying the nation will be carried on by his son, whose regenerative power derives from the fact that he is the son of
Shiva, from his status as "the new Aadam," and from his identification with the god Abraxas. Moreover, Rushdie suggests a link between Aadam Sinai's powerful, god-like personality and Saleem's potential union with Padma. The first word the new Aadam utters is not "abba" (father), but "cadabba," which reminds Saleem of the "cabbalistic formula derived from the name of the supreme god of the Basilidan gnostics, containing the number 365, the number of the days of the year, and of the heavens, and of the spirits emanating from the god Abraxas" (MC 459). Clearly Aadam shares Saleem's urge to control the shifting tides of history, to encapsulate the world around him. The continuation of Saleem's ideals are thus subtly hinted at when, after Padma proposes marriage, the "moths of excitement" stir in Saleem's stomach, and her words take on a magical power, "as if she had spoken some cabbalistic formula, some awesome abracadabra, and released [him] from [his] fate" (MC 444).

The starting point of the mythic cycle in Midnight's Children is the primal, paradisiacal unity represented by both Kashmir and Saleem's great-grandfather, old Aziz sahib. The "mystical unity" of Saleem's great-grandfather is treated ambiguously, for he sits "hidden behind the veil which [his] stroke had dropped over his brain" (MC 12). Rushdie may be implying that the veiling of his rationality allows him to enter a mystical state and that he

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15 The association of paradise with Kashmir is by no means unambiguous, for the boatman Tai is also associated with a mythical yet not a paradisiacal Kashmir. Tai claims to have met Christ (MC 16) as well as a soldier in Alexander's army (MC 18), and he resembles Charon when he ferries Ilse to her death (MC 30). While Tai remains somewhat peripheral to Saleem's family history and to the Sufi constructions which are associated with Saleem's genealogy, his loud personality provides an effective contrast to the anonymity of old Aziz sahib. Tai's less than tolerant view expresses itself in his antipathy to anything foreign, an antipathy which anticipates the stubborn ethnocentrism of Aadam's wife Nassem. Tai's view that Aadam's pig-skin medical bag "represents Abroad [,] the alien thing, the invader, progress" (MC 21) also anticipates the xenophobia of the Satanic Verses' exiled Imam, who fears that "the evil thing might creep into [his heavily curtained] apartment: foreignness, Abroad, the alien nation" (SV 206).
has thus begun his final journey toward God. Or, Rushdie may be playing good-humouredly, associating senility with the beginning of a mystical journey and making the dropped veil accomplish what the lifting of the veil usually accomplishes—a vision of God. In any case, the dropping of the veil puts old Aziz sahib into a “mystical senility,” a spiritual state comically modeled on Attar’s conference of thirty birds:

in a wooden chair, in a darkened room, he sat and made bird-noises. Thirty different species of birds visited him and sat on the sill outside his shuttered window conversing about this and that. He seemed happy enough. (MC 12)

Saleem later evokes a humorous combination of senility and Sufi “annihilation” when the old man sits “lost in bird tweets” (MC 14), is “deprived of his birds,” and dies “in his sleep” (MC 28). Saleem also refers to old Aziz sahib’s birds when he tells us that his great-grandfather’s “gift of conversing with birds” descended “through meandering bloodlines into the veins” of his sister (MC 107). Jamila “talked to birds (just as, long ago in a mountain valley, her great-grandfather used to do)” (MC 293). When Jamila sings for Major Alauddin Latif, other birds stop “chattering,” people stand awed in the streets, and the Major starts crying (MC 313). On another occasion Saleem points to the poetic and mystical associations of her singing:

I listened to her faultless voice [...] filled with the purity of wings and the pain of exile and the flying of eagles and the lovelessness of life and the melody of bulbuls and the glorious omnipresence of God. (MC 293-294)

This “flying of eagles” recalls the flight of Flapping Eagle in Grimus and anticipates the birds in the upper reaches of the Sundarbans, who are so high in the Jungle that they “must have been able to sing to God” (MC 361).

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16 Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch comments that “Allah has 700 (or 70 or 70,000) veils of light and darkness. If he [sic] was to take them away, the splendour of His face would certainly consume the one who would see Him.” She also notes that the mystical imagery of Attar’s seven valleys leading to Qaf Mountain “can be compared to the one of the 70,000 veils which separate man from the Creator” (94).
Attar's "conference" of thirty birds is transmitted from generation to generation, from happy old Aziz sahib to feisty Aadam Aziz, whose return to Kashmir is more a leave-taking than a homecoming. As his name suggests, "Aadam" is the first man in this family history to confront the divisions which characterize the fallen world (Aadam Aziz's name also alludes to the Muslim doctor who retires to Kashmir at the end of E.M. Forster's A Passage to India). Aadam's desire to bring Hindus and Muslims together into a tolerant conference is evident in his support for the Hummingbird's Free Islam Convocation, a forerunner to Saleem's Midnight's Children's Conference. Both congregations fail as a result of violence: the Hummingbird is murdered by the "six new moons" and "six crescent knives" of the Muslim League (MC 47) and the Midnight's Children are silenced, confined and sterilized by the Widow with her muzzles, shackles and scalpels (MC 435-440).

Aadam reacts against the divisive zeal which is the nemesis of the Hummingbird's Convocation when he ejects the tutor who teaches his children "to hate Hindus and Jains and Sikhs and who knows what other vegetarians" (MC 42). His antagonism to religion, which separates Indians, reaches an extreme of its own when in "the iconoclasm of his dotage" he lashes out "at any worshipper or holy man within range" (MC 277). His final act is to steal

17 Rushdie's re-introduction of a Muslim doctor named "Aziz" suggests that while England forced Indians to the margins of their own history, Indians reclaim centre-stage, and Indian writers set the scene.
18 In The Perforated Sheet Parameswaran identifies the historical figure behind Rushdie's fictional Hummingbird: "While the Muslim League was firmly established and intent upon the creation of Pakistan, Sheikh Abdullah, a Kashmir Muslim, founded the Muslim National Conference, which leaned towards Gandhi's undivided India and against the Muslim League. Sheikh Abdullah lived long after Independence, but Rushdie's Mian Abdullah, founder of Free Islam Convocation, is killed by six assassins, 'six crescent knives held by men dressed all in black,' but before he dies there is a supernatural aura given to him" (23). In Shame Mahmoud's death is also accompanied by the supernatural——"a sound like the beating wings of an angel" (S 62). The Hummingbird and Mahmoud both fight against the communalism which eventually rips the subcontinent in two.
the sacred lock of Muhammad's hair from the Hazratbal Mosque and bring it into the Hindu
temple of Shankara Acharya (MC 277-278). This act can be seen as a desperate, symbolic
attempt to bring Hinduism and Islam together under one roof, especially when one recalls that
the temple of Shankara Acharya has both Muslim and Hindu history associated with it.
According to Saleem, the temple is built on "the hill which Muslims erroneously called the
Takht-e-Sulaiman, Solomon's seat" (MC 278). One might note in passing that Attar's
conference of birds derives from "the Koranic figure of Solomon, representative of the
mystical leader who was able to converse with the soul birds in a secret tongue" (Schimmel
306). Rushdie may or may not be suggesting a link between "Solomon's seat" and Attar's
conference, yet Aadam's act may be seen as an attempt to make Hinduism and Islam come
together or "converse." Also, Aadam's desperate act takes place on what one might call "a
mountain of K," given that in Grimus and Haroun "K" refers to Attar's Kaf and that in
Haroun "K" also refers to Kashmir. The same temple which has Muslim associations is also
the site of a Hindu temple which contains "the shrine of the black stone god" (MC 11), at
which Aadam finds women performing "the rite of puja at the Shiva-lingam" (MC 278).
While one can link the temple further with Shiva--"Shankara" or "the Giver of Joy" is one of
Shiva's names (Danielou 202)--the temple is named after the eighth century Shankara, the
major exponent of non-dual Vedanta (Advaita Vedanta). This link to Shankara is appropriate
given Aadam's abhorrence of communalism, for in his Advaita philosophy Shankara envisages
a transcendental unity in all things.

Aadam's fall from religious certainty and his subsequent battles with God initiate the
downward arc of the mythic cycle in the novel. Aadam Aziz's "failure to believe or disbelieve
in God” (MC 275) derives largely from his education in the West, where his friends mock “his prayer with their anti-ideologies” (MC 11). His fall from religious certainty is expressed in general religious terms as well as in specifically Islamic terms: his refusal to continue performing his morning prayers echoes in general what John Milton in *Paradise Lost* calls “Man’s First Disobedience” (PL 1.1), while his refusal to touch his head to the soil (or clay) more particularly echoes Iblis’ unwillingness to bow before Aadam, God’s first human creation (Iblis feels that since he is made of fire he is superior to man, who is made of clay).

Aadam Aziz’s resolve never to “kiss earth for any god or man” is laden with ambiguity, for, in rejecting the miraculous or otherworldly, rubies and diamonds drop miraculously from his nose and eyes (MC 10). Most important, Aadam’s rebellion has the same tragic consequences as those suffered by Iblis: both rebellions begin a protracted, losing battle against God.

The mythic cycle in *Midnight’s Children* is depicted mostly in terms of patrilineage, yet Saleem’s mother Amina also inherits Aadam’s fallen world, one in which Hindus and Muslims remain divided and antagonistic. Just as Aadam fights Muslim separatism by supporting the Free Islam Convocation in Agra, so Amina stands up to fellow Muslims by defending Lifafa Das’ right to ply his trade in a Muslim part of town. Rushdie makes the link

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19 Aadam does not, however, capitulate to an Orientalism in which India “had been discovered by the Europeans.” Saleem comments that “what finally separated Aadam Aziz from his friends” was their belief “that he was somehow the invention of their ancestors” (MC 11). In *Midnight’s Children* Rushdie’s strategy seems to lie in marginalizing Europe from Saleem’s account of Indian history. Apart from the raging Zagallo, whose Peruvian ancestry is dubious (MC 230), Methwold is the only representative of European imperialism we see in any detail, although what we see of him is ambiguous. What, for instance, is the meaning of his final, toupee-lifting wave? Schaapsteker plays an ambiguous yet largely occult role, and he too is a peripheral figure, one who is assigned to an attic and who remains instrumental in, rather than the focus of, Saleem’s “diabolic” plans.

20 Milton’s version is close to the Islamic one, in which the responsibility for eating the forbidden fruit “lies not with man but with Iblis, the Devil, who tempted Adam” (Glassé 23).
between father and daughter explicit: at the moment she turns against her neighbours in order to protect the harmless Hindu itinerant, "something hardened inside her, some realization that she was her father's daughter" (MC 77). Amina's refusal to demonize those who are culturally and religiously alien to her surfaces when, following Lifafa into the old city, she confronts her fear of the Others (Hindus, magicians, the poor) who live on "the wrong side of the General Post Office." These Others initially seem to comprise "some terrible monster, a creature with heads and heads and heads" (MC 81), yet Amina does not succumb to her fearful, demonizing imagination. Instead, she realizes that it is her fear that makes her see these people as monsters: "'I'm frightened,' my mother finds herself thinking" (MC 81). She learns very quickly to discard the "city eyes" which are blind to poverty (MC 81) and to see that the powerless masses have little to do with the type of evil communalist monster that terrorizes her husband and threatens to kill Lifafa Das.

Amina's defense of Lifafa Das is important to Saleem's larger mystical concerns, for Lifafa's peepshow represents the vision of a unified subcontinent, the vision which old Aziz sahib could take for granted, which Aadam and his Hummingbird failed to maintain, and which Saleem attempts to retrieve. The ideals of interreligious unity encouraged by Amina and Lifafa remain antithetical to the social evil--symbolized by the Hindu demon Ravana--which divides Hindus from Muslims. Lifafa's peepshow thus serves as a prototype for the

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21 The modern, secular sensibilities of Saleem's mother and maternal grandfather may have been suggested to Rushdie by his own family: "Rushdie always speaks with warmth of his maternal grandfather, and Dr. Butt does seem to have been unusually enlightened for the time. A medical doctor, he had seen to it that his daughters got an education, and he never required them to observe purdah. When Zohra divorced in order to marry Anis (who was himself a divorcé), the arrangements were handled by her father. It was his idea that her new marriage contract should give her the right to divorce: a practice normally enjoyed only by the husband" (Hamilton 92).
All-India Radio and the Lok Sabha (Lower Parliament) in Saleem's brain. The peepshow anticipates the Conference in Saleem's brain, and his cry, "See the whole world, come see everything!" (MC 75) anticipates Saleem's cry, "I am the bomb in Bombay ... watch me explode!" (MC 174). Lifafa shows his fellow citizens a microcosm and Saleem's brain becomes a microcosm, yet both Lifafa and Saleem are almost destroyed or "blown away" by the very diversity they attempt to embrace. *Shame* contains a similar scenario: communalists kill Mahmoud by blowing up the theatre in which he attempts to "show" both sides of India by playing Hindu and Muslim movies back to back—a screening which becomes "the double bill of his destruction" (S 62).

One of the more ominous and mythicized indications that Aadam Aziz and his children exist in a Fallen World is the presence of a fiery communalist demon, the result of whose evil actions is pointed to in Lifafa’s newspaper photo of "a fire at the industrial estate" (MC 76). This fire is the work of the extortionist gang, Ravana, named after the most infamous of the Hindu demons or rakshasas. Lifafa's picture of the fire and Saleem's fabulous cloud in the shape of a pointing finger both serve to link the Ravana gang that sets fire to Ahmed's warehouse to the Muslim mob that threatens Lifafa in Amina's *muhalla* or neighborhood.

Danielou notes that the "ten-headed Ravana, who ruled over Lanka and was the enemy of Rama, is the most celebrated king of the rakshasas," who "take any form they like," who "are children of darkness who wander at night" and whose "rule is unchallenged until midnight" (309-310). Saleem's Midnight's Children are born after midnight and most of them seem to have little in common with the *rakshasa* demons. The darkness associated with the pre-midnight reign of the *rakshasas* seems concentrated in Shiva, who is born closest to midnight.

A cloud shaped like a pointing finger forms as a result of the Ravana gang's burning of a Muslim industrial estate, and this cloud then hovers over Ahmed in the Red Fort. Literally "hanging around in the background of [his] own story" (MC 74), Saleem follows this same cloud to the old city, where "the insanity of the cloud like a pointing finger and the whole disjointed unreality of the times seizes the *muhalla*" (MC 76).
Given that Saleem titles his chapter "Many-headed Monsters," and given that this chapter deals with the Hindu Ravana and the Muslim lynchmob, Rushdie seems to be suggesting that the Muslim mob is merely a less organized version of the Ravana gang. Rushdie may also be suggesting that by extorting money from Muslims, Hindus create a twisted, nightmarish version of Hindu mythology, one in which the heroic monkey king Hanuman exacerbates the harm caused by the demonic Ravana. Balancing his attack, Rushdie also suggests, that by persecuting the defenseless Lifafa Das, Muslims prove themselves to be anything but valiant soldiers for Allah. Amina shames her neighbours by crying out, "What heroes! Heroes, I swear, absolutely! Only fifty of you against this terrible monster of a fellow! Allah, you make my eyes shine with pride!" (MC 77). Instead of living up to their ideals of tolerance and heroism, Rushdie’s Hindus and Muslims create a demon which, like Frankenstein’s monster, turns upon those who are responsible for its creation. Rushdie is fond of this type of dynamic in which worldly intolerance and coercion create a violent and scourging otherworldly force. He employs such worldly-otherworldly poetic justice effectively in Saleem’s episode in the Sundarbans, where the four Pakistanis are punished by *houris-cum-apsaras* for their part in persecuting East Bengalis, and in *Shame*, where Raza is hounded by the Beast created by his own tyranny and repression.

Amina marks a continued struggle with the violent forces of a fallen world, while her husband marks a low-point and also a turning-point in the cycle which begins with old Aziz sahib’s annihilation and Aadam Aziz’s fall. Initially, Ahmed compounds Aadam’s alienation
from Islamic tradition by drinking alcohol—the fiery spirits or "djinn" in his gin bottles—and by making sexual advances to his secretaries. His lasciviousness prefigures Saleem's search for impurity in Karachi—a search which leads Saleem to the ancient crone Tai Bibi and to the realization that he desires his sister. Ahmed's possession by a fiery, djinn-like anger also has a devastating effect on the mystical Conference in Saleem's head: when Saleem tells his father about the voices in his head, Ahmed exhibits "wild anger" and strikes a "mighty blow" that sends Saleem into "a green, glass-cloudy world filled with cutting edges," a "swirling universe in which [he] was doomed, until it was far too late, to be plagued by constant doubts about what [he] was for" (MC 165). Ahmed's violence exacerbates Saleem's fear of meaninglessness, and it has the immediately debilitating effect of turning Saleem's potentially coherent Conference into a confusing babble. Ahmed's initially debased or fallen nature can also be seen in his "dream" of re-arranging the Qur'an (MC 82, 133). This dream is not shared by Muslims in general, many of whom "believe that the ordering of the chapters and verses was itself divinely inspired" (Esposito 25). Ahmed's dream sets a precedent for

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24 Djinns are not always fiery or lustful, although they tend to be so. In his study of The Arabian Nights, Irwin notes that "the evil djinn are descendants of Iblis, while the good djinn are the offspring of the six angels who did not fall" (204). Like Awn (whose study on Iblis crops up repeatedly in my chapter on The Satanic Verses), Irwin notes that Iblis is often considered to be "the Father of the Jinn" (205). In Midnight's Children djinns reflect the ugly anger of Ahmed, in The Satanic Verses they take on a more powerful association with Iblis, and in Haroun Iff the genie is a helpful and likable sprite. Although conjectural, one might see a rather bizarre transformation of the dark or disgusting side of djinns in Haroun. In legend, djinns "haunted lavatories," and in one of the tales in The Arabian Nights a character is conducted by Iblis "to the land of the jinn, via a magic exit concealed in one of the lavatories of the caliph's palace" (204-205). In Haroun Iff is first sighted by Haroun in the bathroom, where he is reluctantly disconnecting the link between this world of stories and the fabulous Sea of Stories on the moon Kahani (H 540).
Saleem, who flouts the dietary—and "literary"—laws of halal, and who advances the notion that other prophets at the time of Muhammad should not be considered "false simply because they are overtaken, and swallowed up, by history" (MC 305). Rushdie is treading on sacred ground here—ground he treads with heavy boots in *The Satanic Verses*—although he writes with playful hyperbole when Saleem claims that "future exegetes" will "inevitably come to this present work, this source-book, this Hadith or Purana or *Grundrisse*, for guidance and inspiration" (MC 295). By juxtaposing Karl Marx's materialist *Grundrisse* (his early ground-plan of Marxism) with the sanctified religious accounts of Muhammad's life (Hadith) and the post-Vedic stories of the gods (the Puranas), Rushdie may be humorously suggesting Saleem's confused mix of materialist and spiritual viewpoints.

In addition to occupying a debased, fallen place in family history, Ahmed signals a turning-point in the mythic cycle which start with old Aziz sahib's "annihilation." Redirecting her love from Nadir Khan (who represents a low-point or nadir in the prospects of Muslims in India) to Ahmed, Amina replaces the anger of Ahmed's djinns with the laughter of her love:

under Amina's care, he returned not to the self which had practiced curses and wrestled djinns, but to the self he might always have been, filled with contrition and forgiveness and laughter and generosity and the finest miracle of all, which was love. (MC 297)

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25 Saleem claims to be "the first and only member of [his] family to flout the laws of halal" (MC 59). By "the laws of halal" Saleem means not so much the type of laws Gibreel breaks in *The Satanic Verses* when he gorges himself on pig meat (SV 30) as the treatment or "digestion" of forbidden topics.

26 In his Introduction to Marx's *Grundrisse* David McLellan observes that the "thousand-page manuscript" of *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Okonomie* is "the most fundamental of all Marx's writings" (Marx 14). It is thus a canonical or fundamental text, as are the various texts of the Hadith and the Puranas.

27 Like Nadir, who hides in the depths of Aadam's Agra basement, Ahmed suffers as a result of the Hummingbird's failure to keep Muslims firmly within the fabric of India: Ahmed is persecuted not only by the criminal Ravana gang, but also by the legitimate Indian government, which seizes his assets after the State Secretariat "got the whiff of a Muslim who was throwing his rupees around like water" (MC 134).
Ahmed's redemption through love suggests the Sufi paradigm in which even the frightening djinn Iblis can be redeemed by the power of love. Saleem's fate vaguely parallels Ahmed's redemption in that he starts with grand ideas of mystical unity, he falls into demonic and depraved states (he is possessed by his own two-headed demon and he falls in love with his sister) and he eventually receives a redeeming measure of love from Parvati, Padma and Mary. In terms of the overall mythic cycle in *Midnight's Children*, one might say that old Aziz sahib enjoys bliss and unity in Eden (Kashmir), Aadam disobeys God and consequently falls into a violent and divided world, Ahmed and Saleem live degenerate lives yet are redeemed by love, and Aadam Sinai (the new Aadam) heralds a return to the Kashmiri Paradise of old Aziz sahib and Aadam Aziz.

Rushdie goes out of his way to associate the new Aadam with the end of one cycle and the beginning of another. Convinced of his own "approaching demise" (MC 446), a worn-out Saleem sees post-Emergency India (symbolized by the new MCC, the Midnight Confidential Club) as a dark "nightmare pit in which light was kept in shackles and bar-fetters." Yet in this darkness Aadam Sinai's ears burn "with fascination; his eyes shone in the darkness as he listened, and memorized, and learned ... and then there was light" (MC 454). In emphasizing this cosmogonic reference I do not mean to ignore Aadam Sinai's potential selfishness (he is after all the son of Shiva) or his potential to fall (he is named after Aadam Aziz). My point is that Rushdie suggests a movement from the darkness of non-existence (Saleem's death) to the

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28 As Al-Jann, Iblis is the father or originator of the djinns (Awn 31). Schimmel comments that in "some mystical circles something like a rehabilitation of Satan was attempted." She then outlines the way Iblis is depicted as a great monotheist and lover (of God) by al-Hallaj, Sana'i, Ahmed Ghazali, Attar, Sarmad, and Shah Abdul-Latif (194-195). Peter Awn takes an in-depth look at this rehabilitation or redemption in his study, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology* (1983).
light of existence (his son’s life), and that this light is associated with a state of exalted grace (like that of old Aziz sahib) which also carries with it the possibility of falling from grace (as does Aadam Aziz). If or when the new Aadam trips, his fall will be a hard one, for in identifying himself with the powerful Gnostic god Abraxas he expresses an exaggerated form of Saleem’s “inflated macrocosmic activity” (MC 435). Aadam Sinai can also be situated within a Hindu context, given that his natural father is Shiva. Kanaganayakam contends that Aadam’s birth, modelled as it is on the birth of Ganesh (the son of Shiva and Parvati), “brings in a ray of hope.” He adds that there is “the suggestion that good is born out of evil and that the present collapse might lead to a future unity” (92). Yet there is also the suggestion that the new cycle started by Saleem’s son will run its course and that this cycle will repeat itself ad infinitum. For “until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died,” Indians will continue to be “sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes and to be unable to live or die in peace” (MC 463). Rushdie thus intimates that Saleem, his ancestors and future generations may be on a giant wheel, one which may turn towards an optimistic future or towards “the worst of everything.” In this sense Midnight’s Children mirrors both the optimistic future of Flapping Eagle in Grimus and the pessimistic “new cycle of shamelessness and shame” in Shame (S 276-277).

THE SNAKE MAN AND THE LOTUS GODDESS

Another major otherworldly dynamic in Midnight’s Children is the opposition between “the snake man” (Dr. Schaapsteker), who threatens Saleem’s existence in Mary’s
pickle factory, and the “lotus goddess” (Padma), who encourages this existence. The dynamic between the snake man and the goddess can be related to the above mythic cycle in that the snake man characterizes the Fallen World and the goddess augurs a return to the Paradise of Kashmir. This dynamic also anticipates the otherworldly dynamics which I will explore in the last two sections, for the coercion, division and violence associated with the snake man can be seen in Shiva, the Widow and the Pakistani generals, while the life-supporting qualities of the goddess can be associated with figures such as Durga and with the regenerative tidal wave in the Sundarbans Jungle.

A “sibilant old man” who thinks of himself as “another father” to Saleem (MC 257-258), Dr. Schaapsteker believes the “superstitions of the Institute orderlies, according to whom he was the last of a line which began when a king cobra mated with a woman.” Saleem calls him “a mad old man” and says that “the ancient insanities of India had pickled his brains,” yet he also suggests that Schaapsteker’s knowledge is not that of a deluded old man: Saleem insists that the professor’s occult medicine saved him from typhoid and he finds that the two-headed demon Schaapsteker conjures within him is very effective in exacting revenge on Lila Sabarmati. As with the account of old Aziz sahib’s “mystical annihilation,” it is difficult to say exactly what status to ascribe to the account of Schaapsteker’s demonic powers. An old man who talks to birds and then is deprived of their discourse is not senile if one sees Attar’s paradigm as a mystical truth and not as a figment of the imagination. Likewise, an old man who can conjure a demon inside a willing victim is not senile if one sees demonic possession as more than a mere metaphor for an immoral state of mind. This may seem an idle distinction to many Westerners, for whom much in theology has been reduced to the status of
superstition, yet possession remains a viable concept to many Indians, especially to unskeptical Indians such as Padma, Saleem's ostensible audience.

Saleem's use of Schaapsteker's snaky logic leads him to think and act in a diabolic manner, a manner which eventually threatens his very existence in Mary's pickle factory. Seduced by the logic of the snake man, Saleem adopts a reasoning reminiscent of the snake in the Garden of Eden: he challenges "the unchanging twoness of things, the duality of up against down, good against evil." He argues that the game of snakes and ladders lacks "one crucial dimension," that of the ambiguity which makes it "possible to slither down a ladder and climb to triumph on the venom of a snake" (MC 141). Saleem changes the rules of snakes and ladders to a point where he can no longer distinguish between good and evil, and this has disastrous consequences when he acts on the belief that he can use evil means for good ends.

Lashing out at the adulteress Lila Sabarmati (and indirectly at his mother, who is having a rather chaste affair with Nadir Khan), he aligns puritanical rationalization with violence. In so doing, he becomes more vicious than the woman who is the object of his vituperative frenzy:

'Loose woman,' the demon within me whispered silently, 'Perpetrator of the worst of maternal perfidies! We shall turn you into an awful example; through you we shall demonstrate the fate which awaits the lascivious.' (MC 258)

In a similar manner, Dawood in *Shame* and the Imam in *The Satanic Verses* align extreme religious zeal with diabolical violence. Yet unlike Dawood or the Imam, Saleem eventually sees that his puritanical violence hurts himself as well as those he loves.

Saleem's falling in with the demonic snake leads indirectly to the death of his uncle Hanif, whose struggle to create a realistic "pickle epic" mirrors Saleem's own struggle to

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Schaapsteker encourages Saleem to strike from cover (MC 258), which Saleem does by sending an anonymous letter (composed of newspaper clippings) to Commander Sabarmati, informing him of his
find meaning in Mary's pickle factory. Remembering he is Aadam Aziz's son, Hanif fights “against everything which smacked of the unreal” (MC 243) and he rails “against princes and demons, against gods and heroes, against, in fact, the entire iconography of the Bombay film” (MC 244). It is not coincidental that the realist “pickle epic” (MC 243) Hanif writes for the Bombay screen is the story of a pickle factory similar to that owned later by Mary. By indirectly destroying “the high priest of reality” who “espouse[s] the cause of truth and put[s] illusion to flight” (MC 244, 271), Saleem unwittingly aligns himself with Homi Catrack, who does not take Hanif's “pickle epic” seriously (Catrack realizes that such an epic would not be a box-office success). The snaky thread which connects Schaapsteker to Hanif is significant because it suggests that Saleem's involvement with evil leads to the death of the man who constructs—and to the death of constructing—a pickle factory scenario. Rushdie plays a convoluted metafictional game here, for Saleem almost destroys the theoretical ground on which he might stand, walk, marry and lead a normal life. Saleem's involvement with the snake man thus eventually reinforces the traditional morality—the "twoness of things," the distinction between good and evil—that during his possession he attempts to subvert.

Schaapsteker and Padma are antithetical both in their mythological associations and in the effect they have on Saleem's "existence" in the Bombay pickle factory. In *The Perforated Sheet* Parameswaran calls Padma "the archetypal Earth-Mother put through the Rushdie anti-romance wringer" (11). According to Saleem, Padma is named after the "Lotus Goddess" who " Possesses Dung" and who "grew out of Vishnu's navel." She is "the Source, the wife's affair with Homi Catrack (MC 260). Sabarmati's consequent murder of Catrack deprives Hanif (whose wife was previously having an affair with Catrack) of his income. Hanif then kills himself by walking off his roof (MC 271).
mother of Time” (MC 194-195). Parameswaran takes exception to Rushdie’s association of dung with the goddess of Fortune: she says that dung has only “one meaning and that very definitely has nothing to do with the lotus or the goddess Lakshmi, one of whose names is Padma” (54). Parameswaran also notes that Saleem calls Padma a dung lotus “after a colloquial interpolation of a word that has beautiful connotations in Sanskrit,” adding that “Rushdie is iconoclastic of both Hindu and Muslim beliefs” (40). While Rushdie distorts the attributes of the goddess, Padma’s personality does not distort that of her namesake in the same way that General Shiva’s brutish and lascivious personality distorts the attributes of his namesake. Rather, Saleem’s momentary loss of Padma, resulting from his failure to perform as a lover and “to consider her feelings” (MC 121), echoes an episode in which Lakshmi disappears “from the three worlds” after Indra insults her:

In the absence of the goddess the worlds become dull and lustreless and begin to wither away. When she returns, the worlds again regain their vitality, and the society of humans and the order of the gods regain their sense of purpose and duty. (Kinsley 27)

In the novel, Padma’s absence makes Saleem confused and “afraid of being disbelieved” (MC 166-167). Without her, Saleem is reduced to statements such as, “if it hadn’t happened it wouldn’t have been credible,” or, “Padma would believe it; Padma would know what I mean!” (MC 140, 158). As in Hindu myth, Padma’s return reinstates order, re-establishing the base from which Saleem can launch into his literary and philosophical flights:

once again Padma sits at my feet, urging me on. I am balanced once more--the base of my isosceles triangle is secure. I hover at the apex, above present and past, and feel fluency returning to my pen. (MC 194)

While Padma does not succeed in restoring Saleem’s sexual potency, she restores his penis substitute, his pen. Kanaganayakam notes that Padma is “on the level of myth, the source of
life and the goddess of wealth,” yet in the novel Padma is poor “and her main grudge is that Saleem is impotent and that she cannot bear his child” (91). This inversion might be seen as one of the reasons Padma is essential to Saleem’s narrative: Saleem’s attempt to respond to her fecundity results in the lively, profuse, rich stories which flow from his surrogate pen.

Padma’s association with the life-supporting goddess of Hindu myth can also be seen when, in her attempt to cure Saleem’s impotence, she throws his “innards into that state of ‘churning’ from which, as all students of Hindu cosmology will know, Indra created matter, by stirring the primal soup in his own great milk-churn” (MC 193-194). Saleem may be referring here to myths in which “creation proceeds from an infinite body of primordial water” and in which “the milk ocean when churned yields valuable essences, among them, in most later versions of the myth, the goddess Shri-Lakshmi” (Kinsley 26-27). Despite the fact that Saleem sometimes mocks Padma’s elevated mythic associations, Padma remains a “valuable essence” to Saleem. Without her, he would topple into the mire of his own incredulity or lose himself in his own tangents, circles and baseless lines. In general, Padma supplies Saleem with a centripetal, gravitational force which counteracts the centrifugal nature of his thinking.

Commenting on oral narrative, Rushdie asserts that “it frequently digresses off into something that the story-teller appears just to have thought of, then it comes back to the main thrust of the narrative” (Rushdie in Kunapipi 7). With her “ineluctable Padma-pressures of what-happened-nextism” (MC 39), Padma forces Saleem back to the main thrust of his story. This is ironically evident when Saleem reads to Padma his rambling list of the many aspects of the feminine Divine, a list which could include Padma’s namesake. After reading the list, Saleem
receives the following response from his "lotus goddess": "I don't know about that,' Padma brings me down to earth, 'They are just women, that's all'" (MC 406).

While Brennan sees Padma "as an image of the Indian masses' gullibility" (1989:105), such a view depreciates the "Indian masses" as well as Padma, who is a lively, provocative character, one who at once brings Saleem down to earth and urges skeptical readers to ponder otherworldly meanings which may shake up their epistemological frameworks. One could argue that Rushdie makes fun of Padma and that therefore she cannot constitute a serious audience, let alone a challenge to skepticism. Yet one would have to ask, What character--including Saleem himself--remains unscathed or unparodied in the novel? I would argue that Rushdie does his best to make Padma, as much as anyone, seem a real presence. By not dismissing Padma, readers may more readily contemplate the ramifications of seeing the world with Padma's eyes. They may entertain the significance of feelings and thoughts which allow scope for such things as astrology, magic and myth. Such is the case when, after claiming that Naseem could dream her daughters' dreams, Saleem watches Padma for her response:

(Padma accepts this without blinking; but what others will swallow as effortlessly as a laddoo, Padma may just as easily reject. No audience is without its idiosyncrasies of belief.) (MC 55)

While Saleem admits his own fabrications, he also challenges his readers, for all of us have our "idiosyncrasies of belief." In addition, one ought to note that Padma's beliefs are not far-fetched in the light of Hindu myths in which people can dream other people's dreams and in which a god can be "the place where we all meet in our dreams, the infinity where our parallel lives converge" (O'Flaherty 1984:214). Padma reminds readers that the borders between reality and unreality, between truth and fantasy, are relative to cultural and personal
interpretation. When the betel-chewers of Agra say that omens “matter,” Saleem implies that this is not merely an exotic fiction, for to someone like Padma they do matter: “Padma is nodding her head in agreement” (MC 47). And after Saleem claims that Parvati has “the true gifts of sorcery” (MC 378) and that he disappeared in her magic basket, Padma is surprised, yet asks, “So, [...] she really-truly was a witch?” (MC 381).

It is because of—rather than in spite of—Padma’s extremely flexible beliefs that Rushdie provokes his otherwise skeptical readers into considering the possibility of such things as omens, dreaming other people’s dreams, invisibility and sorcery. One should expand this list to include Saleem’s magical or mystical telepathy, which is the premise of the Midnight’s Children Conference— that is, of Saleem’s attempt to become the convener of a conference which will reflect and unify the disparate elements of his nation. From a positivist point of view, such telepathy and such a mirror are nonsense, yet when they are seen in terms of mysticism or in terms of Padma’s open belief structure, they remain within the indeterminate realm of possibility. In this sense Padma resembles Grimus’ Virgil, who keeps an open mind to the infinite possibilities of seen and unseen dimensions. While one could argue that Schaapsteker’s occult perspective also opens the door to unseen dimensions, it is more important to observe that his snaky vision leads to the death of Hanif and thus tends to close the door which leads Saleem to a viable future. Padma, on the other hand, opens this door.

MYSTICAL PERSONAS

The struggle for meaning and unity is represented obliquely by the potential marriage of Saleem and Padma, and is represented more directly by Saleem’s attempt to convene his
Midnight Children's Conference and by his identification with the *paramahamsa* and the moon god Sin. In the subcontinental context, where Muslims and Hindus are seriously divided, Saleem's attempt to don the personas of the Muslim Hoopoe (the convener of Attar's Conference) and the Hindu *paramahamsa* (also an ornithological mystical figure) is itself a statement, similar to the one Aadam Aziz makes by bringing a Muslim relic into a Hindu temple, and similar to the one Mahmoud makes in *Shame* when he screens a Muslim-Hindu double-bill. Like Mahmoud's fateful double-bill, Saleem's identification with the Hoopoe and the *paramahamsa* ends in failure. Yet it remains potent because it represents resistance to the forces of division. Rushdie also attacks Hindu-Muslim divisions indirectly and parodically by having Saleem identify with the moon god Sin and with the Buddha. These two figures represent detachment—in the case of Sin a positive detachment from communal conflicts, and in the case of the Buddha a negative detachment from (and a mindless compliance with) the anti-Hindu and anti-Bengali militarism of West Pakistan.

Modelled on the Conference which Attar's Hoopoe convenes, Saleem's Midnight's Children's Conference aims at bringing a large and diverse number of souls together and directing them towards a common goal of freedom. Rushdie's use of Attar's bird-guide is subtle, as is his use of old Aziz sahib's conversation with thirty species of birds and Jamila's bird-like voice. In this sense *Midnight's Children* differs from *Grimus*, in which Rushdie makes his use of Attar explicit. While Grimus' egomania prompts him to proclaim his affinity with the Simurg (G 232), Saleem's disastrous announcement that he hears archangelic voices (MC 164-165) teaches him that speaking like a prophet can be dangerous. He learns that to keep secrets is "not always a bad thing" (MC 169).
Saleem also learns that the Midnight's Children are not destined for the type of unity and annihilation envisioned by Attar. Echoing his own fear of disintegrating into "six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust" (MC 37), Saleem realizes that the Midnight's Children are "as profane, and as multitudinous, as dust" (MC 168). Saleem's Conference is composed of imperfect individuals, most of whom will never reach the goal of which Attar's Hoopoe speaks. Commenting on the imminent demise of the Midnight's Children's Conference, Saleem gives a nihilistic twist to Attar's annihilation:

"with the optimism of youth--which is a more virulent form of the same disease that once infected my grandfather Aadam Aziz--we refused to look on the dark side, and not a single one of us suggested that the purpose of Midnight's Children might be annihilation; that we would have no meaning until we were destroyed. (MC 229)

Saleem entertains Attar's mystical paradox (that meaning can be found only once the self no longer exists) and gives it a tragic slant. This becomes clear when one compares the events in Saleem's chapter "Midnight" with the events at the end of *Grimus*: the Midnight's Children are separated, tortured and sterilized in the Widow's dark Hostel whereas Flapping Eagle and Media unite, find bliss and create a new cosmos on the top of a newly-liberated Qaf Mountain. This more tragic use of Attar is something Rushdie continues in *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*, after which he returns in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* to a more paradigmatic or optimistic use of Attar's mystical scheme.

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30 In Attar's *Conference*, "few perceive the throne" of God and "Among a hundred thousand there is one" who makes it to this throne (77). Saleem is among the many birds who struggle to find unity and who encounter pain and bewilderment along the way. Attar describes the plight of the struggling birds in the following manner: "How many search for Him whose heads are sent / Like polo-balls in some great tournament / From side to giddy side--how many cries, / How many countless groans assail the skies!" (34).
Saleem’s identification with the Muslim Hoopoe is complemented by his identification with the Hindu *paramahamsa*,\(^{31}\) which is also an ornithological mystical figure of unity and which also contains a mystical pun in its name:

The goose or swan (*hamsa*) is the *vahana* or mount of Brahma. It swims on the surface of the water but is not bound by it. It is a homeless, free wanderer. It has a secret, for those who understand it, concealed in its name which in its inverted form, *sa-ham*, ‘this-I’ (i.e. ‘this am I’), epitomizes the whole philosophy of the *Upanishads*. In *pranayama* or breath control, the inhalation is said to make the sound of *ham*, the exhalation, *sa*. *Hamsa* is thus the sound of the living *prana*. Hence the emancipated saint is given the title of *paramahamsa*, ‘highest swan.’ (Walker 155)

In having Saleem identify with both the *paramahamsa* and the Hoopoe, Rushdie may be entering into the spirit of the type of Hindu syncretism which allowed the image of the Simurg to be “assimilated” to the image of Vishnu’s mount, Garuda.\(^{32}\) In identifying with the *paramahamsa* Saleem is not saying that he is God in the same way a Hindu mystic might say that his soul and God are one. Yet since the Hindu mystic identifies with a God who encompasses and exists in everything,\(^{33}\) and since Saleem wants to encompass India, it is natural for him to try on the garments of such a mystic. Saleem’s identification with the *paramahamsa* also makes sense in light of his sinus condition, for the *paramahamsa* adept

\(^{31}\) Saleem sees himself as the mystical swan, as “the hamsa or parahamsa, symbol of the ability to live in two worlds, the physical and the spiritual” (MC 223). He says he “shall take wing (like the parahamsa gander who can soar out of one element into another) and return, briefly to the affairs of my inner world” (MC 226). He does not mention the *paramahamsa* again until 78 pages later, when, after his sinuses are drained, he writes that his “connection” to the Midnight’s Children has been “broken (for ever)” (MC 304).

\(^{32}\) “By an interesting transference the old Persian Simurgh, a great mythical bird used as a Sufi symbol of the highest divinely spiritual element in man, became known in India with the coming of Islam. Sometime after 1600 it was assimilated to an older image of a great vulture-bird called Garuda, whose chief earlier role had been to symbolize the celestial air and light upon which the high god Vishnu was borne” (Rawson 185-186). While Rushdie may or may not be aware of this use of the Simurg, he creates a Muslim-Hindu “transference” of his own when Saleem identifies with both the Hoopoe and the *paramahamsa*.

\(^{33}\) In the above context of the *Upanishads* this God would be Brahman.
uses *pranayama* (control of the breath and the nasal cavities) to achieve personal liberation and mystical powers (Walker 155). Rushdie makes use (and makes fun) of the practice of *pranayama* when “[s]not rockets through a breached dam into dark new channels” and when “within the darkened auditorium of [Saleem’s] skull, [his] nose began to sing” (MC 162).

Finally, Saleem’s depraved state in Karachi may be a degenerative twist of the *paramahamsa* as “anti-Brahmanic ascetic tradition,” one which foreshadows “certain ‘extremist’ yogico-tantric schools” and one which makes “no distinction between differing mundane values” or “opposing moral standards” (Stutley and Stutley 219). After his sinuses are drained Saleem becomes a “grounded parahamsa” (MC 304), that is, his high-flying search for unity takes on a lower, left-handed direction. He becomes “convinced of an ugly truth—namely that the sacred, or good, held little interest” for him. Instead, “the pungency of the gutter seemed to possess a fatally irresistible attraction” (MC 318).

Rushdie’s use of the Hoopoe and the *paramahamsa* implicitly links Hinduism and Islam, while his use of the Sumerian moon god Sin represents an attempt to rise above communal conflicts. Saleem sees himself as Sin both when he is gripped by “the spirit of self-aggrandizement” (MC 175) and when he is in the grip of his own two-headed demon, his own “sin” (MC 261). The “Sumerian god of earth and air,” Sin is associated with Sinai—Saleem’s family name—and with an all-encompassing yet distant control of events:

As ‘lord of the calendar,’ his cult exhibited monotheistic tendencies, since it was Sin ‘who determined the destinies of distant days’ and whose ‘plans no god knows.’ According to Genesis, Abraham hailed from Ur by way of Harran, both cities devoted to the moon god. In Arabia, Sin was also worshipped under various titles and it is likely that Mount Sinai, first mentioned in Hebrew texts about 1000 BC, was connected with moon-worship. (Cotterell 49).
Saleem appears to emulate Sin's inscrutability when he is gripped by the two-headed demon which secretly plots the downfall of Commander Sabarmati's wife. Saleem also attempts to determine "the destinies of distant days" by playing the role of "the ancient moon-god [who is] capable of acting-at-a-distance and shifting the tides of the world" (MC 175). Rushdie here uses the moon god to describe Saleem's active role in his story. Whereas before his birth Saleem imagines himself moving passively with the cloud that floats from the industrial estate to Amina's muhalla, after his birth he sees himself as a moon god actively overseeing events, actively controlling the "ebb and flow" of subcontinental history. The cloud and the mythological figure are both supra-worldly entities, although the cloud points to the antagonism between Muslims and Hindus while Sin symbolizes a power beyond the Muslim-Hindu dichotomy. Rushdie makes it clear that his Saleem is choosing a construction deriving neither from his own religious tradition nor from that of the Hindus who surround him: "I became Sin, the ancient moon-god (no, not Indian: I've imported him from Hadhramaut of old), capable of acting-at-a-distance and shifting the tides of the world" (MC 175).

Saleem's identification with Sin signals his belief that he can influence the course of Indian history, yet with the benefit of hindsight he sees this "self-aggrandizement" as a self-protective delusion: "If I had not believed myself in control of the flooding multitudes, their massed identities would have annihilated me" (MC 175). Two-thirds of the way into the novel, Shiva starts to usurp his control: the "modes of connection" which link Saleem to all Indians also enable Shiva "to affect the passage of the days" (MC 299) and to usher in his own selfish and violent brand of history-making. The turning point in Saleem's career as a unifier of his nation comes after his sinus operation, at which time he associates his last name, Sinai,
with the barren dryness of the Sinai Dessert. He no longer identifies with the distant control of the moon god Sin, with the loftiness of Mount Sinai, with the skill of Ibn Sina (the “master magician” and “Sufi adept”)\(^4\) or with the diabolical power of his two-headed demon or snake:

but when all is said and done; when Ibn Sina is forgotten and the moon has set; when snakes lie hidden and revelations end, [Sinai] is the name of the desert--of barrenness, infertility, dust; the name of the end. (MC 305)

The end of Saleem’s mystical career comes when the Widow dries up his procreative power and his optimism by performing a vasectomy, which is also a “sperectomy,” a cutting or draining of hope (MC 437).

After Saleem finds that his high-flying ideals are brought crashing to earth, he sees himself as a failed Hoopoe, a grounded *paramahamsa* and the barren desert of Sinai. Yet the major symbol of his defeat is his identification with a mindless amnesiac “Buddha.” Clearly making fun of the Buddhist ideal of detachment, Rushdie expresses Saleem’s amoral, dog-like state of mind in terms of Buddha’s enlightenment. Saleem says he uses the Urdu word for old man, *buddha*, to describe himself, yet he adds, “there is also Buddha, with soft-tongued Ds, meaning he-who-achieved-enlightenment-under-the-bodhi-tree” (MC 349). Rushdie parodies the mystical state of *nirvana* (in which the self is “snuffed out” and merges with the Absolute) when Saleem’s identity is snuffed out by the bombs that fall on his family’s Rawalpindi bungalow (MC 342-343) and when he becomes “capable of not-living-in-the-world as well as living in it” (MC 349). The important distinctions between Buddha and Saleem lie in the qualities of their existence both outside and inside this world. Buddha’s otherworldly state

\(^4\) Perhaps Saleem sees Ibn Sina (the Andalusian physician and philosopher, Avicenna) as a Sufi because of his “unified study of Plato, Aristotle, and Neoplatonism” and because of his being “one of the prime targets of al-Ghazzali,” who “was obliged to denounce the philosophers […] in order to forestall a neo-pagan renaissance within Islam” (Glasse 176, 311).
was one of detached awareness, while Saleem’s is one of forgetful ignorance. Also, Buddha fought a pacifist battle against religious institutions and ideas which he felt were impeding spiritual progress, while Saleem becomes a tool of a military establishment which abuses religion and squelches freedom.

Saleem’s parodic “buddhahood” reflects Rushdie’s view that Pakistani leaders crush the imaginative, liberating and mystical aspects of religion. Saleem goes so far as to assert that Pakistan is less real than India because in “the Land of the Pure” the magic of religion is replaced by an unsavory mix of dogma, propaganda and blind allegiance. Saleem takes the fact that “Islam” literally means “Submission” (to God’s will) and he twists it in order to suggest that the “submission” of Muslims in Pakistan boils down to acquiescence and conformity (MC 308). Also, he takes the fact that “Pak” means “Pure” and then complains that in Pakistan he is “surrounded by the somehow barren certitudes of the land of the pure” (MC 316). He suggests that he becomes “the buddha” not so much because of the explosion that knocks him senseless, but because he starts to think in what he considers a Pakistani mode: “emptied of history, the buddha learned the arts of submission, and did only what was required of him. To sum up: I became a citizen of Pakistan” (MC 350). The military rule in Pakistan also perverts the political and mystical potential of Saleem’s sister. Instead of following the example of Aunt Alia, who speaks “out vociferously against government-by-military-say-so” (MC 330), Jamila becomes a tool of the dictatorship and its bizarre mix of religion and violence. The Brass Monkey who was “once so rebellious and wild” falls “under the insidious spell of that God-ridden country” and adopts “expressions of demureness and submission” (MC 292). She sings “patriotic songs” which raise her into a “cloud”—not the
“rosy cloud” of Hashmat Bibi’s mysticism in *Shame* (S 34), but a “cloud” which Saleem likens to the closed minds of Pakistani students (MC 315). The degree to which the Pakistani leaders mix religion with their own militaristic agenda becomes evident in Ayub Khan’s praise of Jamila, and in Saleem’s sarcastic comments on this praise:

‘Jamila daughter,’ we heard, ‘your voice will be a sword for purity; it will be a weapon with which we shall cleanse men’s souls.’ President Ayub was, by his own admission, a simple soldier; he instilled in my sister the simple, soldierly virtues of faith-in-leaders and trust-in-God. (MC 315)

Saleem also mocks the government’s use of phrases such as “Holy war” (MC 339), “the evildoers of the earth” (MC 353) and “soldiers-for-Allah” (MC 357). His mockery is aimed at the abuse of religion rather than at religion *per se*, for Rushdie changes his tone—from satiric to sympathetic—when Saleem carries the bisected Shaheed to the height of a minaret and then accidentally turns on the loudspeaker. Saleem tells us that the “people below would never forget how a mosque screamed out the terrible agony of war” (MC 377). Although Islam may be used by generals as an excuse for killing, the mosque cries out against the suffering caused by such abuse of religion. Rushdie uses the propaganda of the generals in an even more ingenious way in the episode which takes place in the Sundarbans: in the Magic Jungle their propaganda takes on a higher order of truth which both tortures and redeems those who believe their promises. While the Pakistani generals tell their soldiers that they are “Martyrs,” “Heroes, bound for the perfumed garden” where they will “be given four beauteous houris, untouched by man or djinn” (MC 340), the “afterlife” in East Bengal resembles a Hell rather than a Heaven.
THE FORCES OF DEATH AND REGENERATION

The concluding chapters of *Midnight’s Children* contain a host of surreal otherworldly elements, some suggesting regeneration for Saleem and the subcontinent, and others suggesting continued division and violence. In terms of settings, the most otherworldly realms are the phantasmagoric Rann of Kutch and the magical Sundarbans Jungle. While the otherworldly elements in the Rann are figments of frightened imaginations,\(^{35}\) the Jungle is an other world which operates according to its own otherworldly logic—a logic which contradicts the otherworldly propaganda of the West Pakistani generals. While the generals promise their soldiers a Heaven replete with *houris*, the Magic Jungle gives them a Hell or Purgatory complete with soul-draining *apsaras*. The Jungle also supplies Saleem and his unit with a magic tidal wave which washes them back into the currents of Indian history. This tidal wave contributes to the regenerative, unifying possibilities in the novel, elsewhere suggested by such figures as old Aziz sahib, the Hummingbird, Padma and the Hoopoe. Against these life-supporting forces, Rushdie pits both General Shiva, a savage version of the Hindu god, and

\(^{35}\) In his depiction of “the phantasmagoric Rann,” Rushdie’s Saleem exposes what he sees as the lies and deceptions of Pakistani leaders and he concocts a realm which is both similar to the Sundarbans (it is a bizarre realm full of visions and threatening spirits) and different from the Sundarbans (its visions are completely illusory). The Rann of Kutch is “phantasmagoric” because it changes rapidly and because the layers of propaganda which surround events in it are so thick that these events become unreal. Saleem does not even bother to relate the official version of events in the Rann. Instead, he relates a story “which is substantially that told by [his] cousin Zafar” and which is “as likely to be true as anything; as anything, that is to say, except what we were officially told” (MC 335). Apart from its political content, Saleem’s description contains “legends” of “an amphibious zone, of demonic sea-beasts with glowing eyes,” of “fish-women [who tempt] the unwary into fatal sexual acts,” of a “sorcerers’ world [where] each side thought it saw apparitions of devils fighting alongside its foes,” of “great blubbery things which slithered around the border posts at night,” and of a “ghost-army [and] spectres bearing moss-covered chests and strange shrouded litters piled high with unseen things” (MC 335-336). Saleem’s treatment of the Rann’s “sorcery” is similar to that of Ramram’s “levitation”: both seem miraculous until Saleem uncovers the illusion behind the apparent magic.
the Widow, who divides and "sperectomizes" the Midnight's Children in the name of both Bharat Mata (Mother India) and the sacred Hindu syllable OM. As in the case of the religious propaganda of the Pakistani generals, however, the Widow's abuse of religion does not go unchallenged: Rushdie employs the mythicized figures of Durga and Aadam Sinai to suggest opposition to the Widow.

Except for Kanaganayakam, critics say little about the episode in the Sundarbans--although what they do say suggests that there is much yet to be examined. In his interview with Rushdie, Haffenden remarks that the episode "seems to be an eternity of disintegration and mania" (239). Harrison states that it is a "strangely ecumenical episode" in which four Muslims spend many nights in a Kali temple and "emerge in some sense cleansed" (1992:46). Swann compares Saleem's flight into "the magical night-forest" with "Simplicissimus' descent to the bottom of the lake" and he stresses the importance of the journey "back from the jungle of forgetfulness" (251-252). Durix comments that superfluity of dreams leads to "the gradual disappearance of all social identity and existence," and that the "journey to the end of dreams opens out onto the void" (1987:126). Kanaganayakam puts greater emphasis on Chapter 25, arguing that it "can only be understood in relation to myth." He notes the strangeness of the houris appearing in the Kali temple and he suggests that "Saleem's sojourn in the jungle is not unlike the period of exile imposed on the Pandavas in the Mahabharata." He adds that Shiva's presence in Bangladesh and his failure to spot Saleem are not very different from the attempts made to spot the Pandavas before the allotted time and consign them to a further period of exile. Subsequently, Saleem returns to India and is called upon to confront Shiva. Saleem, instead of vindicating the cause of justice by destroying Shiva, runs in abject terror and is all but killed by the latter.
This mythic inversion happens during the turmoil of the Emergency, thus re-emphasizing “the dichotomy between the harmony of the past and the chaos of the present” (91-92). Rushdie himself comments that “In the Sundarbans” was among his “favourite ten or twelve pages to write”:

It seemed to me that if you are going to write an epic, even a comic epic, you need a descent into hell. That chapter is the inferno chapter, so it was written to be different in texture from what was around it. (Rushdie with Haffenden 239)

While the chapter remains apart in many ways—it comes very close to depicting a truly other world—it is also integral to Saleem’s story and to his regeneration. As a result of the mystic workings of the Jungle, he goes from rejecting to accepting his life, from being an empty-headed dog of war to becoming a socially aware citizen. He goes from a tortured and meaningless afterlife to a difficult yet meaningful life.

The Sundarbans is the most otherworldly realm in the novel, for in it “Strange alien birds” hover in the sky, the trees are so tall “that the birds at the top must have been able to sing to God,” and the edge of the Jungle is “an impossible endless huge green wall, stretching right and left to the ends of the earth!” (MC 359-361). Before Saleem and his unit enter the Sundarbans, an enraged peasant attacks Saleem with a scythe, apparently as a result of something (perhaps rape) that the mindless “Buddha” has done to his wife. The scythe-wielding farmer takes on the allegorical status of “Father Time,” and when Ayooba shoots him, “Time lies dead in a rice-paddy” (MC 359). Besides implying the rape of Bengal and the violent suppression of Bengali indignation, this incident marks the barrier between a worldly realm in which one finds time and violence, and an otherworldly realm in which one finds timelessness and the result of violence: death. Whereas in the Rann of Kutch unreality distorts
the contours of geography and history, in the Sundarbans the impossible logic of another world erases these contours. Space and time in the Sundarbans is as “impossible” as the “impossible endless huge green wall” that reaches to the end of the world. It is a Jungle “so thick that history has hardly ever found the way in” (MC 359). What lies beyond the known world is a realm where myth becomes reality and the fabric of the self wears thinner than gauze. Just as the city of Q. and the Impossible Mountains in Shame have a logic of their own (S 145, 274), so the Jungle has a logic of its own, one in which tears cause rain and rain makes the trees grow so big that their fruit drop “like bombs” (MC 361). This otherworldliness echoes yet surpasses the unreality of the Rann, for the Jungle is not the product of propaganda; rather, it takes the afterlife propaganda of the generals and turns it into a reality of a higher order, one which tortures, purges and regenerates Saleem and his fellow soldiers.

The episode in the Magic Jungle also supplies Midnight’s Children with an otherworldly logic according to which the afterlife promised by generals is, like their official account of war, the opposite of what it purports to be. Rushdie takes their promise of perfumed gardens and beautiful virgins and turns it on its head: he makes the Jungle’s Kali temple a place of “double-edged luxury” (MC 363), a realm which is initially seductive yet subsequently horrific. The four “daughters of the forest” have sex with the soldiers, thereby appearing to fulfill their innermost desires (MC 366) as well as the promises of the generals. In Islamic terms, these girls first appear to be houris or “female companions, perpetual virgins, of the saved in paradise.” They are the “symbols of spiritual states of rapture” found in Qur’an 2:23, 3:14 and 4:60 (Glassé 160). The celestial status of the girls in the Jungle takes
on a suspicious aspect, however, for “their saris, under which they wore nothing at all, were torn and stained by the jungle,” their caresses “felt real enough” and their scratches “left marks” (MC 366-367). In the end they do not resemble *houris* as much as *apsaras*, the Hindu nymphs whose “amours on earth have been numerous” and who, by “their languid postures and sweet words […] rob those who see them of their wisdom and their intellect” (Daniélou 305). Appropriately, the “daughters of the forest” leave Saleem and his unit “without a single thought in their heads” (MC 366-367). Luckily, however, Saleem and his comrades come to understand that, by giving in to their own desires, the Jungle “was fooling them into using up their dreams, so that as their dream-life seeped out of them they became as hollow and translucent as glass” (MC 367). While it may seem that Rushdie is parodying and hence rejecting mystical states of oblivion, this hollow transluence is the opposite of mystical union—just as Saleem’s empty-headed buddhahood is the opposite of Buddha’s enlightenment. The spiritual death suggested by hollowness and transluence has little to do with the “full void,” the “inner light” or the “annihilation” of mysticism. Rather, it has everything to do with doing the dirty work of undemocratic leaders and with believing that in reward for doing this dirty work one will be flown first-class, directly to Heaven.

The Sundarbans has yet another logic of its own, for in the same abyss where worms drain colour from the blood and nymphs drain life from the soul lies an inexplicable force which turns Saleem’s violent trajectory toward oblivion into a boomerang ride back into this world of thought and action. In explaining this nebulous regenerative force, one might recall that in the upper reaches of the Jungle the birds “must have been able to sing to God” (MC 361) and that the word “impossible” (which Rushdie consistently associates with Attar’s
mysticism) is used twice on the page which introduces the Jungle (MC 359). The notes of the birds may reverberate in some way with the chirpings of old Aziz sahib and with the songs of Jamila Singer, and Attar’s Qaf may have something to do with the Jungle’s magical powers. Leaving aside these speculative associations, Rushdie clearly builds into his Jungle a magical regenerative force, a tidal wave which interrupts Saleem’s atemporal oblivion with a single, powerful stroke of temporal linearity. The Jungle’s wave washes Saleem back into the tides of history and back into the violent world he has helped militarists to create.

Saleem’s experience in the otherworldly Jungle corresponds to one of the darkest moments in subcontinental history, to the moment when the subcontinent’s bird-spirit is torn apart—that is, when the East and West wings are violently torn asunder. Rushdie gives this bleak moment a human dimension when Deshmukh, the “vendor of notions,” is reduced to scavenging gold fillings from dead corpses on what one might call a “killing field” on the outskirts of Dacca. In a moment of pathos equal only to the moment when Aadam Aziz tells his wife that Jallianwallah Baag is “Nowhere on earth” (MC 36), Deshmukh makes an impassioned plea which stops Shaheed from attacking Saleem (Shaheed thinks that because Saleem recognizes the three dying Bombayites—Indian “enemies”—he must be a traitor). Deshmukh cries out, “Ho sirs! Enough fighting has been already. Be normal now, my sirs. I beg. Ho God” (MC 373). Deshmukh is a very pathetic, down-to-earth character who brings the emotional content of Saleem’s narrative back into the contours of space and time, back

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36 I borrow this metaphor from Shame, in which the narrator says that pre-1971 Pakistan is a “fantastic bird of a place, two Wings without a body, sundered by the land-mass of its greatest foe, joined by nothing but God” (S 178). This metaphor is especially appropriate to Midnight’s Children, in which Rushdie takes a closer look at the West-East split than he does in Shame, and in which Saleem sees the unity of the subcontinent and India in terms of the bird-figures of the Hummingbird and the Hoopoe.
into this world of geography and history, location and memory. The world to which Saleem returns is, however, one dominated by the darker forces of a Hindu India: the Widow and General Shiva.

Rushdie prefigures his shift from Islamic to Hindu realms when his Muslim soldiers enter the Kali temple, and this shift is completed once Saleem returns to the heart of Hinduism, Benares. While Bombay symbolizes the future of India (in Bombay Saleem finds the MCC of the future, the Midnight Confidential Club), Benares symbolizes (and stereotypes) an ancient Hindu world that threatens to overwhelm a progressive secular India.\(^{37}\) Hindu practice is clearly at odds with Bombay modernity when worshippers turn Narlikar’s tetrapods into Shiva-lingams (MC 176-177), a humorous incident given the gynecologist Narlikar’s obsession with birth control. While in the progressive Bombay Shiva is associated with an ancient mix of religion and fertility, in Benares Shiva is associated with forced sterilizations—an ironic turn given that Shiva is the god of creation and that Benares is the city of Shiva.\(^{38}\) Saleem claims that it is in Benares that the “goddess Ganga streamed down to earth through Shiva’s hair” (MC 432), yet little of that goddess’ beneficence streams into Benares. Rather, Saleem’s account of the city is dominated by the torture chambers of the Widow and by suggestions of General Shiva’s collaboration. While Saleem calls Benares “the shrine to

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\(^{37}\) The polarity between Bombay’s secular modernity and Benares’ religious antiquity crops up in another novel published in the same year as *Midnight’s Children*. In Arun Joshi’s *The Last Labyrinth*, Bombay is depicted as a city of sky-scrapers and businessmen, while Benares is seen as a cluttered, dangerous, labyrinthine world of winding streets and mystical conundrums. The darkness in Joshi’s novel is not relieved by humour (as it is somewhat in *Midnight’s Children*), yet, in regard to the otherworldly forces operating in Benares, Joshi focuses on a redemptive Krishna whereas Rushdie focuses on a ruinous Shiva.

\(^{38}\) One of Benares’ names is “the resplendent city of Siva” (Daniélov 220). For Shiva’s association with light, knowledge, the Ganges, the Milky Way and temples, see Daniélov 220-221.
Shiva-the-god” and while he refers to Benares as the “City of Divine Light, home of the Prophetic Book, the horoscope of horoscopes, in which every life, past present future, is already recorded” (MC 432), what occurs in the Benares Hostel is anything but enlightening: the Widow perverts the sacred notions of Bharat Mata and OM and drains all hope from the magical children.

Conveniently, Benares is at once the city of the dark god Shiva and the site of a famous temple dedicated to Bharat Mata, the divine Mother India figure appropriated by the Widow. Inside this temple, “in the place where there would ordinarily be an anthropomorphic image of the goddess, there is a large, colored relief map of the Indian subcontinent” (Kinsley 184). Rushdie makes good use of maps in *Midnight’s Children*, and particularly apropos here is Methwold’s map-shaped swimming pool—a clear symbol of imperialistic appropriation. Like the British with their Myth-world (or Meth-wold) of a “British India,” the Widow wants to create India in her own image. She wants to take in and control all of India and she therefore pretends to the status of Bharat Mata or Mother India. While Saleem also wants to take in or encompass all of India, his desire to chair a tolerant, multivocal, democratic Conference remains antithetical to the Widow’s aims, expressed not by any desire to convene a Lok Sabha (as Saleem does in his head) but rather by the suspension of Parliament and by the torture of the Midnight’s Children.

Rushdie emphasizes the darkness and strength of the forces which crush Saleem and his multivocal Conference by associating these forces with the frightening figures of Kali and Shiva. The Widow aspires “to be Devi, the Mother-goddess in her most terrible aspect, possessor of the shakti of the gods” (MC 438). Kinsley notes that several Tantra texts
“proclaim Kali the greatest of the *vidyas* (the manifestations of the Mahadevi, the ‘great goddess’) or divinity itself; indeed, they declare her to be the essence or own form (*svarupa*) of the Mahadevi” (122-123). In his short book, *The Wizard of Oz* (1992), Rushdie notes that in Saleem’s portrait of the Widow “the nightmare of Indira Gandhi is fused with the equally nightmarish figure” of the Wicked Witch of the West (33). The depiction of the Widow in Saleem’s dream also strongly suggests the more contextually relevant figure of Kali, who “is always black,” who “has long, disheveled hair” and “clawlike hands,” and who “gets drunk on the hot blood of her victims” (Kinsley 116). In his nightmare, Saleem sees that the hair of the Widow is “black as black,” her “arm is long as death,” and her skin is green yet her “fingernails are long and sharp and black.” She rips children in two, rolls them into “little balls” and eats them, leaving only “splashing stains of black” (MC 208). Seeing the Widow as Kali also makes sense in that mythologically Kali is Shiva’s “consort, wife or associate” and she excites him “to take part in dangerous, destructive behavior that threatens the stability of the cosmos” (Kinsley 116). Saleem implies that Shiva evades castration because of the Widow’s oversight (MC 441), yet Shiva’s “immunity” (MC 430) renders this suspect. In any case, Shiva’s status as “midnight’s darkest child” (MC 441) and his subsequent “love of violence” (MC 430) make him a fitting conspirator with the Widow as Kali, the black deity associated with dissolution into “shapelessness in the all-pervading darkness of the eternal night” (Daniélou 273). While together these two dark figures succeed in dividing the Midnight’s Children, a note of optimism can be seen when the Widow allows Shiva to escape vasectomy. She thus unwittingly makes it possible for him to give rise to the hopes of a new generation—symbolized by one of Shiva’s sons, the tough and unblinking Aadam Sinai.
While Saleem employs the religious ideals of the Hoopoe and the *paramahamsa* in an unsuccessful attempt to unify Indians, the Widow uses the Hindu notion of OM in her successful bid to tear them apart. Her servants “sperectomize” the Midnight’s Children in the name of OM, that is, in the name of the syllable which expresses a sacred unity and which serves as a link between the world of humans and the other worlds of the gods. This syllable is extremely important in Hinduism (see Daniélou 338-341); among other things it can be seen “as the first thought-form from which the universe develops” (Daniélou 339). The Widow’s helper mocks this extremely sacred paradigm when she tells Saleem, “You are Muslim: you know what is OM? Very well. For the masses, our Lady is a manifestation of the OM” (MC 438). The Widow anticipates *The Satanic Verses*’ Imam, who abuses Islamic paradigms in order to stop the flow of history and to fix reality into one pattern. Joseph Swann puts it concisely when he says that the Widow “would stop the flow of history, fixing the ‘OM’ (which cannot be fixed) in the narrow limits of her own being” (257).

The coercion, division and violence of the mythicized Widow is in some ways countered by the mythicized figure of Durga. While Rushdie’s Durga is a “monster” who forgets “each day the moment it ended,” she nevertheless wet-nurses Aadam “through his sickness, giving him the benefit of her colossal breasts.” She is rumoured to have two wombs and she represents “novelty, beginnings, the advent of new stories events complexities” (MC 445). Rushdie’s Durga is thus the opposite of his Widow, who drains the magic from Saleem and who destroys the creativity or “new things” of the Midnight’s Children. Kinsley notes that in mythology, Durga displays a combination of “world-supportive qualities and liminal characteristics that associate her with the periphery of civilized order.” As a fierce warrior
who resembles Kali in her liminal character, and who can create goddesses (such as Kali) from herself, Durga is a formidable opponent (Kinsley 97). Rushdie's description of Durga suggests that while the Widow may have done her worst to his generation, there is a fierce spirit in the land which rises in response to the tyranny of the Widow. I am aware of the contradiction which presents itself when I suggest that Durga opposes Kali (the two are too closely associated to maintain such an opposition), yet Rushdie is not using mythic figures here to make any fixed correspondences or to enact any consistent mythic pattern. He is using distorted, incompletely depicted mythic figures in an attempt to suggest the mood or spirit of the historical and political period during and after the Emergency. The Kali in Saleem's Widow represents the political coercion and destruction characteristic of the Emergency. The goddess in Saleem's Durga represents a fierce spirit which rises from the earth to help the next generation oppose the decay and disintegration of the nation. Suckling at her enormous breasts, the new Aadam undoubtedly imbibes some of her fierce spirit.

In Saleem's story about his family and his subcontinent, Rushdie highlights the desire to overcome division, coercion and violence. Saleem looks nostalgically to the heroic struggles of Aadam Aziz and Amina, and he tries desperately to embody the ideals of unity represented by such figures as the Hoopoe and the paramahamsa. Although Saleem appears defeated by the violence and divisiveness of subcontinental history--by the Ravanas, Shivas and Widows of this world--Rushdie nevertheless wrings tragic meaning from the destruction of Saleem's ideals. He suggests that the annihilation of the Midnight's Children may contain the meaning which eludes Saleem. Their annihilation might be seen in light of a "thirty-first pickle jar," which implies a meaningful annihilation, and also in light of the completion of
Scheherazade's 1001 nights, which implies a liberation as well as a permanent living arrangement. Yet Rushdie does not insist on either the dissolution or the regeneration of Saleem and the India he represents. Rather, he explores the possibility that Saleem will return to Kashmir with Padma and Aadam, and the opposite possibility that Saleem's involvement with the demon snake and the Pakistani generals may combine with other dark forces in the subcontinent to destroy any meaningful future. *Midnight's Children* is a brilliant novel in that it does not dictate whether or not Saleem and his nation will find the road back to the mythical Paradise of Kashmir. Rushdie indicates that while we can, to some degree, see where we have come from, we cannot see where we are, or where we are going. He uses the analogy of watching a film to illustrate that we cannot interpret the present. From a spatial distance from the screen, which corresponds to a temporal distance from the present, we can see what is taking place on the screen. When we move closer to the screen, however, the picture starts to break up and we see only "dancing grain" and "tiny details" (MC 165-166). Rushdie is refreshingy honest, for in writing a novel which ends in the present, he places his narrator-protagonist, himself and his readers close to that screen.
In *Shame* Rushdie escalates his attack on the mix of religion and dictatorship which led in *Midnight's Children* to Saleem's “buddhahood” and to Saleem’s subsequent “hollowness” in the embrace of the *houri-cum-apsaras* in the Kali temple. Yet *Shame* is also a much shorter book, one in which Rushdie restricts his historical and political range and in which his use of otherworldly constructions forms part of a relatively focused dynamic: the worldly tyranny of Raza is defeated by the otherworldly power of the Beast/Kali. Rushdie prepares the ground for the rise of this otherworldly force by depicting the marginalization and repression of various groups (particularly women, the Baluchis, the mohajir and Hindus), and by suggesting that repression creates distorted lives—-from the witch-like three Shakil sisters to the maniacal “holy man” Dawood. Repression also creates an invisible, underground, subconscious realm seething with frustration and anger. In this realm one finds heroic otherworldly figures, such as subterranean angels, as well as a frightening hybrid monster which rises out of this invisible underground to wreak havoc and to scourge the repression which created it. This monster usurps the subconscious of the innocent young Sufiya, taking the form of both the Beast and Kali—a dual challenge to Raza's God-centred, monotheistic State.
While the peripheral anti-hero, Omar Khayyam Shakil, is partly to blame for the rise of the Beast/Kali, Rushdie focuses culpability on Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder, fictional versions of the late Pakistani politicians, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1928-1979) and Zia ul-Haq (1924-1988). According to Shame’s narrator (who can, for practical purposes, be likened to the author, who is also a Londoner with ties to Pakistan), Iskander sets up a secular dictatorship which leads to Raza’s equally ruthless yet more religiously repressive dictatorship. Both regimes destroy the innocence and potential of the nation—symbolically as the young Sufiya. Iskander’s culpability is dramatically depicted by his wife Rani in her fourteenth shawl, titled “Iskander the assassin of possibility.” Rani shows Iskander throttling the nation’s potential, seen “as a young girl, small, physically frail, internally damaged: she had taken for her model her memory of an idiot, and consequently innocent, child, Sufiya Zinobia Hyder” (S 194). Rushdie constructs another link between the repressions of Iskander and Raza when, in his death cell, Iskander wonders if “someone is dreaming him” and he asks if this someone is God. He then answers his own question: “No, not God,” but Raza, the “General of whom this cell is one small aspect, who is general, omnipresent, omnivorous” (S 230). Iskander expresses an ironic view of

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1 Omar opportunistically and shamelessly supports Iskander and Raza, and he mesmerizes women so that he can have sex with them. Although Omar appears to love Sufiya, his attempt to keep her alive yet sedated symbolizes the repression of the nation’s anger. His murder by the Beast/Kali, “the most powerful mesmerist on earth” (S 236), demonstrates a form of poetic justice. I return to Omar in “Subterranean Angels and Impossible Mountains.”

2 Rushdie deals with at least four levels of fictionality in Shame: the entirely fictional “three mothers,” the almost purely fictional Omar Khayyam Shakil, the quasi-fictional Iskander and Raza, and the almost autobiographical or non-fictional narrator. Rushdie says that he is the narrator in Shame but that “novelists, being sneaky people, will fictionalize even the bit that looks like autobiography” (Rushdie with Turnstile 46). Unlike the narrators in Midnight’s Children or The Satanic Verses, the narrator in Shame does not greatly complicate or obscure the theme of the
his place in history when he adds the following exaggerated cosmogonic observation:

“Death and the General: Iskander sees no difference between the terms. From darkness into light, from nothingness to somethingness. I made him” (S 230). In imagining that he “made” Raza, Iskander is admitting to himself that he fostered the conditions which allowed Raza to rise to power unchecked by any democratic process that he might have put into practice.³ Iskander and Raza foster tyranny and together they represent the opposing forces of “the epicure against the puritan.” Rushdie raises the stakes of this conflict to cosmic proportions: “Virtue versus vice, ascetic versus bawd, God against the Devil: that’s the game. Messieurs, mesdames: faites vos jeux” (S 240). Neither Raza the God nor Isky the Devil fares well in this game, however: as a libertine Devil, Iskander creates the conditions for his own fall and for the rise of a God-centred tyranny; as a puritanical God, Raza exacerbates the devilish Iskander’s throttling of the nation’s potential and thus gives rise to the Devil.

Rushdie’s fierce antagonism to Zia’s dictatorial Islamic regime of the early 1980s led him to take liberties in depicting Zia’s life so that it could conform to his fictional aims. I refer in particular to Raza disguising himself as a woman, fleeing for his life to the home of Omar’s three mothers and dying a gruesome death—all of which was written while the Pakistani dictator still held power. Much of the novel does, however, follow historical novel. Whereas in my chapter on Midnight’s Children I maintained the more obvious distinction between author and narrator, in this chapter an insistent distinction between the two is unnecessary.

³ Explaining the rise of Zia, Rushdie claims that Bhutto “chose Zia because he wanted a weak command. He didn’t want the army to be strong so he picked the stupidest man he could find, absolutely explicitly, he used to say so. [...] He made him out of nothing on the grounds of his stupidity. Then you get this bizarre relationship where the protege becomes the executioner” (Rushdie with Scripsi 108).
accounts. For instance, Zia mounted “Operation Fair Play” in 1978, an operation which led to the incarceration and eventual hanging of Ali Bhutto in April 1979. As in the novel, this Operation was followed by the postponement of elections and by the implementation of Islamic Law. It was not until 1984 (after Rushdie’s novel was published) that Zia “announced a national referendum to elicit the peoples’ views about his Islamization program.” Zia held elections in 1985 in which parties were not allowed to participate and on December 30, 1985 he lifted martial law. He also restored a revised constitution and revived human rights. Zia died in a plane crash on August 17, 1988, and Benazir Bhutto (“Arjumand” in the novel)5 won the national elections in December of that year (Burki 214-216). Yet at the time Rushdie was writing Shame it was impossible to foresee these events, to say if or how Zia’s dictatorship might be toppled. It is perhaps for this reason that Raza’s opposition takes a mythic rather than a political or military form.

4 In his 1995 interview with Phillips, Rushdie says that the public incident which triggered Shame was “the execution of Mr. Bhutto.” He then makes the point that this incident was not simply a case of a tyrant executing a democrat: “the Bhutto government in its time of office had been at least as oppressive and corrupt as the military dictatorship that followed it” (18). I spend less time on Iskander than on Raza because the oppressions of the latter are far more closely linked to the main otherworldly event in the novel: the rise of the Beast/Kali. Also, Raza’s dictatorship has an explicitly otherworldly monotheistic rhetoric against which Rushdie pits much of his own secular, and at times polytheistic, rhetoric. Earlier in the above interview, Rushdie betrays his bias against religious (as distinct from secular) dictatorship: comparing the several months he spent in Pakistan after he graduated from Cambridge in 1968, he says that “even though it was a military dictatorship it didn’t have anything like the degree of what’s called Islamization that it now suffers from” (Rushdie with Phillips 17).

5 Rushdie cautions his reader: “To say that Arjumand Harappa is Benazir Bhutto is nonsense, she isn’t, that was never the intention. She has one touch of Benazir, which is that she thinks of her father as somebody who can do no wrong” (Rushdie with Scripsi 108).

6 For a summary of Pakistani politics from the relatively secular constitution of Ayub Khan (who imposed martial law in 1958) to Zia’s Islamization and Benazir Bhutto’s desire for “secularist policies.” see Rafiq Zakaria’s The Struggle Within Islam, 230-240.
In one of his many metafictional comments, Rushdie defends his use of a mythicized agent of revolt:

My dictator will be toppled by goblinish, faery means. ‘Makes it pretty easy for you,’ is the obvious criticism; and I agree, I agree. But add, even if it does sound a little peevish: ‘You try and get rid of a dictator some time.’ (S 257)

Rushdie’s use of “goblinish” and “faery” elides the more serious and terrifying aspects of the Beast which possesses Sufiya and which stalks Raza to Nishapur. In his interview with Haffenden, Rushdie admits that he was frightened by Sufiya, and he claims that “the dark area at the centre of her” is what the “book is about” (255). In his interview with Scripsi he says that what happens in the novel is “very alarming” and that it is certainly “the most savage writing” he has ever done. He even had a nightmare about Sufiya as the Beast: “I woke up and realized that I had been scared out of my mind by somebody I’d made up” (109-110). No doubt Rushdie sets up a very serious cause-and-effect, worldly-otherworldly dynamic, one in which the dictatorial power controlling the State professes godliness and the rebellious power opposing this State incarnates devilishness.

Remembering that Islam literally means Submission, one might say that Raza’s imposition of God and Submission creates the Beast and Rebellion. One might also say that Raza replaces the Sufi in Sufiya with the Beast. As this replacement suggests, it would be difficult to support the contention that Sufiya in her possessed state represents a liberating

7 Rushdie’s discovery that Zia had “a mentally retarded daughter”—a discovery made after he had already written Sufiya into the plot—also gave him “a really eerie feeling” (Rushdie with Phillips 111).

8 As with Sufyan in The Satanic Verses. Rushdie’s use of a name similar to Sufi is given to a character who suggests rather than defines the open-minded, open-hearted ideals of mysticism. Mysticism is often an unorthodox mode of devotion, one which is not necessarily aware of its “religious” nature.
or Romantic “Satan.” The Beast is vicious in its possession of Sufiya and it suggests a
“human guillotine” (S 244) rather than Rushdie’s borrowed ideals of liberty, equality and
fraternity (S 251).

RAZA’S STATE

In analyzing Rushdie’s use of the otherworldly in *Shame* one ought to emphasize
from the outset that regardless of the manner in which a political leader might implement
Islamic Law, Rushdie remains antagonistic to the very idea of such implementation.
Rushdie fervently resists any political philosophy in which “Law” deriving from an other
world of angels, gods or God ought to be applied literally to this world. He believes that
all law must be flexible enough to accommodate cultural and historical changes. In
promoting this secular view, Rushdie mocks the notion that a text can be eternal and
infallible, and he paints unsavory portraits of those who support Islamization—chiefly Raza
Hyder and his fundamentalist advisor Maulana Dawood. He also suggests that in
imposing a religious system on Pakistanis, Raza assumes a God-like status, one which
betrays inordinate presumption and which serves to highlight the discrepancy between
God’s traditional justice and mercy on one hand and Raza’s arbitrariness and cruelty on
the other. Finally, Rushdie devises what he would no doubt consider fitting punishments
for the two characters who impose their religious views on Pakistanis: Dawood enters a
senility in which he degrades the Islamic sanctities he tries to promote; Raza falls into a
schizophrenic state of mind in which he is harassed by an angel and a demon and in which
he is hounded by the Beast—all of which are integral figures of the religion he politicizes.
Raza thus eventually enters a state of mind in which he is terrorized by the offspring of his Islamic State.

In his essay “Zia ul-Haq. 17 August 1988,” written immediately after Zia’s death, Rushdie argues that Zia’s version of Islam is antithetical to the more tolerant spirit of subcontinental Islam:

It needs to be said repeatedly in the West that Islam is no more monolithically cruel, no more an ‘evil empire,’ than Christianity, capitalism or communism. The medieval, misogynistic, stultifying ideology which Zia imposed on Pakistan in his ‘Islamization’ programme was the ugliest possible face of the faith, and one by which most Pakistani Muslims were, I believe, disturbed and frightened. To be a believer is not by any means to be a zealot. Islam in the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent has developed historically along moderate lines, with a strong strain of pluralistic Sufi philosophy; Zia was this Islam’s enemy. (IH 54)

In Shame Rushdie attacks and satirizes a zealous, fundamentalist Islam, and it is consistent with this attack that he suggest Islam can have a positive influence in society. He argues that Islam “might well have proved an effective unifying force in post-Bangladesh Pakistan, if people hadn’t tried to make it into such an almighty big deal” (S 251). He also suggests that if honest and sincere Islamic sentiments were heard, Pakistanis would be better able to fight authoritarianism. Unfortunately, these voices are silenced before they have a chance to change things for the better:

there were a few voices saying, if this is the country we dedicated to our God, what kind of God is it that permits—but these voices were silenced before they had finished their questions, kicked on the shins under tables, for their own sakes, because there are things that cannot be said. No, it’s more than that: there are things that cannot be permitted to be true. (S 82)

At the basis of Rushdie’s attack lies his view that Pakistani leaders impose fundamentalism “from above” (S 251), that is, without including free and open debate, without attempting
to convene the type of Conference Saleem attempts to convene in *Midnight's Children*. Instead, those with opposing views are “kicked on the shins under the table.”

Rather than creating an open forum in which everyone can be heard, Raza imposes his suspiciously convenient understanding of religion “from above” and he takes advantage of religious language which Pakistanis are “reluctant to oppose” (S 251). Rushdie undermines Raza’s opportunistic employment of religious language, as well as his appeal to the sacred writings from which this language derives, by suggesting that all writing is a fallible human construction, however divine the original inspiration or source. For instance, Rushdie mocks the manner in which the story of Bilquis’ flight from her father’s burning cinema takes on the rigidity of a sacred text:

[Bilquis’] story altered, at first, in the re-tellings, but finally it settled down, and after that nobody, neither teller nor listener, would tolerate any deviation from the hallowed, sacred text. (S 76)

Rushdie continues to mock this sanctification when he says that the account of Bilquis’ life in Delhi becomes inscribed in “formulaic words which it would be a gross sacrilege to alter” (S 78). Rushdie’s antagonism to “formulaic words” which cannot be altered also surfaces in his depiction of a senile Dawood walking through Islamabad “with his hands opened before him like a book, intoning verses from the Quran in an Arabic which the loss of his reason led him to adulterate with other, coarser dialects” (S 205).

This is not the first or last time Rushdie mimics and questions the notion of an infallible sacred text. In *Grimus* both Liv’s “recitation” of Virgil’s diary and Virgil’s
exhortation to believe what he has written mimic the Quran. Virgil's diary also contains a thinly disguised cosmic history, complete with the fall of the Devil (Deggle) from God's grace (communion with the Rose). In *Midnight's Children*, Ahmed dreams of rearranging the Quran, and Saleem thinks of his autobiography as a Hadith or Purana. Saleem observes that "Memory's truth [...] selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies," and he claims that "no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own" (MC 211). Saleem also draws his reader's attention to the spaces that are outside a given picture frame (MC 122-123), thus emphasizing the selective nature of any depiction or version of reality. Likewise, *Shame*’s narrator observes that "snapshots conceal as much as they make plain" (S 116). Rushdie's antagonism to "formulaic words which it would be a gross sacrilege to alter" also surfaces in *The Satanic Verses* and *Haroun*: the Imam believes that history ought to stop because the words of the Quran are the final Truth, and Khattam-Shud wants to stop the endless permutation of stories and to replace this creative flow with his idol Bezaban or "Without-a-Tongue."

In *Shame* Rushdie’s opposition to making revelation a fixed, normative standard ranges from light-hearted humour to harsh satire. He writes playfully when he has Baramma insist that sex cannot be “like sitting on a rocket that sends you to the moon” because “the faith clearly stated that lunar expeditions were impossible" (S 146). He hits a

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9 Surah 96 begins with “Recite,” many verses begin with “Say,” and the Quran is constantly reminding its readers not to doubt its contents. For instance, the first surah begins, “ALIF lam mim. This book is not to be doubted” (Koran 11).
more serious note when the “organizers of the war” in Kashmir give their soldiers promises of an afterlife in a blissful other world:

Those who fell in battle were flown directly, first-class, to the perfumed gardens of Paradise, to be waited on for all eternity by four gorgeous Houris, untouched by man or djinn. ‘Which of your Lord’s blessings,’ the Quran inquires, ‘would you deny?’ (S 77)

In Midnight’s Children the Pakistani State similarly urges Saleem and his fellow soldiers into battle with cries of Holy War and with promises of perfumed gardens and houri girls. In Shame the backlash against using religious propaganda for military purposes is not as immediate as in Midnight’s Children, in which Saleem and his troop proceed directly into a hellish “afterlife.” In Rushdie’s fictional Pakistan, anger first goes underground and then surfaces in the form of the Beast/Kali.

Rushdie does, however, make his antagonism to Raza’s Islamization clear from its inception. After his coup, Raza appears on national television, “kneeling on a prayer-mat, holding his ears and reciting Quranic verses.” Rushdie forces his readers to wonder what is in Raza’s hand while Raza explains that in putting Iskander under house arrest he simply wants to be an honest broker, an “honest ref or ump” to the nation:

What, leatherbound and wrapped in silk, lent credibility to his oath that all political parties, including the Popular Front of ‘that pluckiest fighter and great politician’ Iskander Harappa, would be allowed to contest the rerun poll?

Rushdie delivers his answer in studied fashion:

The television camera travelled down from his gatta-bruised face, down along his right arm, until the nation saw where his right hand rested: on the Holy Book. (S 223)
Rushdie emphasizes the word “right” partly because the left hand is considered impure, yet mostly because Raza justifies his elimination of the Opposition by declaring that Iskander’s leftist politics are incompatible with Islamic rule:

He announced that God and socialism were incompatible, so that the doctrine of Islamic Socialism on which the Popular Front had based its appeal was the worst kind of blasphemy imaginable. (S 247)

“Right” thus also brings to mind Raza’s right-hand man, Dawood, who reviles socialism, secularism and everything he considers impure or “un-Islamic.”

Prior to the Imam of The Satanic Verses, Maulana Dawood remains Rushdie’s most caustic portrait of “the violent Muslim fundamentalist.”\(^{10}\) Dawood tells Raza that the reason the Army “must not stop at stamping out tribal wild men” (the separatist Baluchis in Needle Valley) is that violence can be elevated to a religious plane: “Prayer is the sword of the faith. By the same token, is not the faithful sword, wielded for God, a form of holy prayer?” (S 99). Rushdie combines the type of puritanical violence Saleem directs at Lila Sabarmati (MC 258) with the ruthlessness of Saleem’s Pakistani leaders

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\(^{10}\) Dawood appears to be a caricature of Abu’l Ala al-Maududi, who “feared that Pakistan (which means ‘Land of the Pure’) would become na-Pakistan (‘Land of the Impure’) in the hands of Muslims of doubtful faith.... Politically, al-Maududi was never much of a force until the time when the free-living, modern-thinking Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was ousted from power by General Ziaul Haq. [Zia] was basically a military dictator, not answerable to the people; his support of the Jama’at [Maududi’s religious organization], therefore, had no popular approval. He was not a fundamentalist, but in order to give legitimacy to his seizure of power, he made use of the Jama’at” (Zakaria 9). Maulana Dawood’s name suggests two possible origins. First, “Maulana” may be an ironic allusion to the commonly used name of the Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi. Dawood’s violent politics and intolerance are antithetical to Rumi’s mystical love and tolerance. “Dawood” could also refer to N.J. Dawood, who first translated the Quran into contemporary English (1956) and whose translation of Tales from the Thousand and One Nights was published (as Penguin No. 1001) in 1954. N.J. Dawood’s translation of the “pure Arabic” of the Quran could be seen as a blasphemous act in itself, as could the fictional Dawood’s unwitting adulteration of the Quran “with other, coarser dialects” (S 205).
when he has the ghost of Dawood scream into Raza's right ear that he should punish women who speak out against Islamic Law. Dawood counsels Raza to "strip the whores naked and hang them from all available trees." Responding to Dawood's suggestion that he kill the leader of these "whores," Raza feels "reluctant to ask God to make the bitch disappear, because you can't ask the Almighty to do everything, after all" (S 249).

Rushdie escalates the otherworldly element of his attack on the political abuse of religion when he has his dictator identify himself with God. After rounding up Talvar and two other highly placed officers, Raza says to their executioners, "Well, well, now it is all in the lap of God" (S 250). Rushdie underscores Raza's presumption of otherworldly authority when he recounts the Baluchi "joke" about God being gulled into helping successive dictators destroy their opposition (S 112), and when he deliberately confuses God with Raza:

> God was in charge, and just in case anybody doubted it He gave little demonstrations of His power: he made various anti-faith elements vanish like slum children. (S 248)

Given that Rushdie is deliberately confusing God and Raza, it is difficult to say if the small case *he* is a misprint for *He* or whether it is meant to stand for Raza. One might note in passing that in *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie also satirizes those who usurp God's position in the otherworldly chain of command: the Imam "summons, conjures up, the archangel, Gibreel" and commands him, "you must fly me to Jerusalem" (SV 211-212); also, Mahound "just laid down the law and the angel would confirm it afterwards" (SV 365).

Returning to *Shame*, Rushdie makes it clear that Raza's version of Islamic Law is not a compassionate one, that it in no way reflects the Quranic insistence that God is merciful.
Rather, Raza’s Law is one according to which God operates in the manner of a right-wing death squad. Neither does this Law have much to do with the notion of God’s justice, for Raza replaces the legal system with “religious courts presided over by divines whom Raza appointed on the sentimental grounds that their beards reminded him of [Dawood,] his deceased advisor” (S 248).

Rushdie emphasizes his main point—that religious tyranny creates the Beast—when he has the Beast appear dramatically just at the moment Raza becomes comfortable in his exercise of a God-like power. Raza exclaims that the Russian invasion of Afghanistan is “the final step in God’s strategy” (S 255), immediately after which he is confronted by the devastating effects of his tyranny: the Beast. Omar tells him that Sufiya is on the loose, and the ghost of Iskander whispers in his ear that Sufiya resembles “Fortune” and “an impetuous river” that destroys everything in its path (S 256). Sufiya takes on mythic dimensions when she becomes a “white panther” and when it is rumoured that this magic animal “could fly, or dematerialize, or grow until it was bigger than a tree” (S 254). Anticipating the Beast’s final disappearance (S 286), Sufiya becomes “a demon” which can vanish into the air (S 254). When the demon panther circles its prey, “moving slowly inwards, spiralling inexorably in to the centre, to the very room in which [Raza] paced,” Raza fully realizes that he is no longer in God’s position of omnipotence. Instead, he feels he “had been left to his fate by God” (S 258).

Rushdie punishes the fundamentalism of his Dawood and Raza by ridiculing and terrifying them with hallucinations and horrors, the elements of which derive from the very religion they promote. Expressing in parodic form his fierce antagonism to zealots,
Rushdie has his Dawood make a fool of himself by prostrating “outside fish-shops as if they were the holy places of Mecca,” by abusing the citizens of Islamabad “for their irreligious blasphemies,” and by mistaking an activated sludge tank for Mecca’s holy Kaaba (S 205-206). Rushdie magnifies the import of Dawood’s “vision” of the Kaaba, which is “a sanctuary consecrated to God since time immemorial,” by having this “vision” occur at the moment of his death, a moment in which one is supposed to “see” into the spiritual world (as Mirza appears to do in The Satanic Verses). In depicting Dawood’s senility and death, Rushdie takes a dangerous step beyond his previous depictions of religiously-obsessed senility, those in which old Aziz sahib loses himself in his mysticism and Aadam Aziz brings a lock of the Prophet’s hair into a Hindu temple. While Attar’s symbology supplies meaning to old Aziz sahib’s senility, and while Aadam’s disgust with communalism makes sense of his crazed act, Dawood’s vision only points to his utter senility. One must of course keep in mind—as one must when considering the “visions” of Gibreel in The Satanic Verses—that the degraded visions of deranged characters point to the derangement of the characters more than to the things degraded by their hallucinations. One might also compare Dawood’s “vision” to the iconoclastic rape of Axona in Grimus. The latter does not constitute parody, for there is no “real world” correlate for Axona. In contrast, Dawood sees a sludge tank as the most concrete, verifiable and sacred object in the otherwise iconoclastic world of Islam.

11 Glassé adds that the Kaabah is “a spiritual centre, a support for the concentration of consciousness upon the Divine Presence,” and that “it is towards the Ka’bah that Muslims orient themselves in prayer” (214).
Raza's fate also contains a poetic justice of sorts: Dawood the "angel" and Iskander the "devil" sit on his shoulders, driving him to distraction, and the Beast tracks him to Nishapur, where the three sisters have him cut to pieces in their elevator of many blades. I will return to Raza's fate below, although I observe here that in having Omar's hallucinating mind give form to the dichotomous voices that once tortured Raza, Rushdie suggests that Omar and Raza deserve a similar apocalyptic fate, one that cannot be avoided by closing one's eyes, by indulging in shamelessness. In an unnerving mix of the apocalyptic and the absurd, Rushdie has Iskander "the monkey" make his final point:

[Omar] shut his eyes, but eyelids were no defense any more, they were just doors into other places, and there was Raza Hyder in uniform with a monkey on each shoulder. The monkey on the right had the face of Maulana Dawood and its hands were clasped over its mouth; on the left shoulder sat Iskander Harappa scratching his langoor's armpit. Hyder's hands went to his ears, Isky's, after scratching, covered his eyes, but he was peeping through the fingers. 'Stories end, worlds end,' Isky the monkey said, 'and then it's judgment day.' Fire, and the dead, rising up, dancing in the flames. (S 276)

Omar's hallucination (which anticipates those of Gibreel in The Satanic Verses) also associates Raza and Omar with the rise of the violent, apocalyptic Beast/Kali. Earlier in the novel, Sufiya's body is burnt by the fire of the Beast: "the fire pulls the nerve-strings of

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12 Iskander's voice occasionally takes on a comic aspect, as when Raza ignores it "even though Isky kept trying to make his points" (S 246), while Dawood's voice is consistently violent and ominous. The loss of Dawood's voice (S 258) results from Raza's refusal to kill Sufiya, to sacrifice his only child. One can only surmise that such a sacrifice would further repress the forces that would eventually rise against Raza, for the Beast "has many faces" and it "takes any shape it chooses" (S 279).

13 Gibreel sees demons "with open eyes" and also with closed eyes, just as the monk Richalmus "would shut his eyes and instantly see clouds of minuscule demons surrounding every man and woman on earth" (SV 321). Raza's "monkeys" also anticipate the "demons of jealousy" that sit on Gibreel's shoulders (SV 442). Yet there is a crucial distinction between the hallucinations of Gibreel and Raza: Gibreel's irreligion appears to open the door to uncontrollable visions whereas Raza's politicized religiosity opens this door.
the corpse, which becomes the fire’s puppet, conveying a ghastly illusion of life amidst the flames” (S 243). This image of dancing in flames resurfaces in Iskander’s apocalyptic words about “judgement day,” which can in turn be associated with the Beast as Antichrist (who wreaks havoc prior to “the End of Time”) and to Kali (who is “Shiva’s power of Time,” dancing in the chaos wrought by her destruction). These associations help to provide a subtle, poetic infrastructure for Rushdie’s main point: by imposing a violent and puritanical form of Islam upon his people, Raza precipitates the coming of the Beast in the forms of the Antichrist and the Hindu goddess.

BORDERS OF THE GODLY

The cause-and-effect relation of Raza’s repression to the Beast’s vengeance remains fairly subtle, yet not as subtle as the way Rushdie skillfully constructs a hidden, underground, subconscious realm in which readers can find the following elements: sexual and democratic impulses denied by puritanism and Islamic Law, the anger of marginalized women (especially Rani, who is banished to Iskander’s rural mansion, and Sufiya, who is chained in Raza’s attic), Hindu polytheism and multivocality, subterranean angels who have been “kept down” by Raza’s centralized State, and a host of underground and peripheral forces feared by Omar. The undercurrents and pressures in this realm

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14 Daniélou notes that it is “under her fierce aspect as the Power-of-Time” or “the power of disintegration closely connected to the power of liberation, that the consort of Shiva is mainly worshipped. She is then shown under a fearful form. She is a fierce-looking goddess, fond of intoxicants, of lust, of bloody sacrifices. Cruel and orgiastic rituals are performed in her honor by the followers of the Tantra cult” (264).
accumulate throughout the novel and are associated with Hinduism in general and with the otherworldly figure of Kali in particular.

Rushdie’s use of “shame’s avatar” and “disorder’s avatar” to describe the possessed Sufiya is important, for the term “avatar” derives from Hinduism, which is also referred to when the narrator speaks of Sufiya’s Indian or “mohajir ancestry” (S 254), and when Raza hopes to father a “reincarnation” or “avatar” of his first still-born son. Raza hopes that the spirit of this child will return in another body, yet when Bilquis has a second child the “shame” of giving birth to a dead baby is replaced by the “shame” of giving birth to a female baby. Thus Sufiya is at once an “avatar” of the still-born child and of the “shame” associated with that child. One might find some degree of irony in that while Raza once believed in the Hindu notion of avatars, it is he who superimposes Islamic dogma onto Pakistani life. Raza thus eventually exacerbates the Pakistani tendency to deny “that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface” of Pakistan (S 87). In depicting a revolt—or striking back—against such denial, and against the repression of multivocality in all its religious, cultural and political forms, Rushdie constructs the composite figure of the

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15 A “muhajir” is an Indian-born immigrant to Pakistan. The problems of the muhajir go back to Partition, when Pakistan gained 7.2 million refugees from India, most of whom settled in and dominated the cities and towns of the south. The muhajir from East Punjab “sought the establishment of an Islamic state and a state-managed economy” while the other more urbanized mujahir (from a variety of Indian locations) “believed in relatively ‘secular’ politics and laissez-faire economics” (Burki 203).

16 An avatar refers to the freely willed descent of a deity into human or animal form, whereas reincarnation or samsara refers to the necessary rebirth of a soul from one body to the next. Rushdie uses avatar rather loosely, perhaps in order to suggest that his Muslims do not grasp the distinction between it and samsara, or perhaps in order to accommodate the “descent” of Kali into Sufiya. Another possible explanation may be that Raza supplies his still-born son with such a spectacular fictional life (S 83) that this son might be seen as a god who descends into Sufiya’s body after his death in Bilquis’ womb.
Beast/Kali. This figure takes on satanic and Hindu associations, which is understandable given that “it/she” revolts against a centralized, monotheistic, patriarchal power that is at once Mosque and State. One might also see the Beast/Kali as an avatar in that the spirit of Sufiya—and of the innocence and sympathy she represents—is repressed, dies and then comes back from the dead in a destructive form, a form in which it can avenge those who kept it down and snuffed it out.

The anti-Indian and anti-Hindu streak in Rushdie’s Pakistanis can be situated in a global context, one in which Pakistanis also see the West as a godless place, yet in *Shame* the association between the foreign—the Other—and the demonic pertains mostly to the subcontinent and to Muslim demonization of Hindus. Rushdie suggests that in Pakistan the Other is forced into the role of Satan, the antithesis of Islam’s Allah. The Other is also forced into the role of Kali, the most infamous of the Hindu goddesses who represent polytheism and female cosmic power—both of which are rejected by those who insist on the superiority of Islam over Hinduism. Although Rushdie is not explicit about the cause-and-effect relation between the insults Pakistanis hurl at the muhajir and the vengeance of the Beast/Kali, these insults and the attitudes behind them contribute to the

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17 Rushdie makes fun of the view that there is a “demonic quality” in “Western-style dance music” (S 16) and he has Dawood express the extreme view that products from the West are “Foreign devilments,” “Devil things from abroad” and “items from hell” (S 99). He also writes of “wild lovers” copulating “in the aisle of the vegetation-covered house of the Christian God” (S 55) and of international hotels “where the naked white women go” (S 97). Rushdie’s account of bias against Westerners is more damning to Pakistanis than to Westerners, since this bias is extreme and therefore ridiculous, and since Pakistanis appear to relish thinking about the shameful acts they attribute to Westerners and Christians. For instance, speculating on the relationship between Rodrigues and his student Farah, the “good people of Q. hit upon the most shameful, scandalous explanation of all” (S 48).
angry and vengeful nature of the force which is called "shame's avatar" and "disorder's avatar," and which is given a specifically "mohajir ancestry."

While Rushdie initially lends a degree of humour to the insults Pakistanis direct at Hindus and the muhajir, he eventually makes it clear that the violence behind these insults is anything but funny. Highlighting the ludicrous degree to which religion divides the citizens of pre-Partition Delhi, Rushdie remarks:

goings to the pictures had become a political act. The one-godly went to these cinemas and the washers of stone gods to those; movie-fans had been partitioned already. (S 61)

Bilquis' father, Mahmoud, revolts against this division between the "washers of stone gods" and the "one-godly" by playing a Hindu-Muslim double-bill, that is, by playing one film which caters to Hindus (in this film cows are set free) along with another film which caters to Muslims (in this film cows are eaten). Aadam Aziz's "optimism disease," which in *Midnight's Children* amounted to the belief in a tolerant, united subcontinent, here takes the form of Mahmoud's "mad logic of romanticism" and of a "fatal personality flaw, namely tolerance" (S 62). Aadam's heroic status in Amritsar and Agra also anticipates Mahmoud's celestial status. When Mahmoud's theatre explodes in a "hot firewind of apocalypse," Bilquis hears "a sound like the beating wings of an angel" (S 62-63).

Rushdie's imagery suggests that Mahmoud's death is not merely a worldly event, but partakes in the divinity associated with angels. In giving the name Mahmoud to his anti-communalist crusader, Rushdie may also be borrowing from the Sufi depiction of Mahmud of Ghazni, whose love of his slave Ayez represents a love so great that it crosses the otherwise impenetrable boundaries of status and rank. In the novel Mahmoud crosses the
all-too fortified boundary between Muslims and Hindus, and he thus attains a sort of angelic status.¹⁸

The violent and divisive sentiments which result in the double-bill of Mahmoud’s destruction resurface when Bariamma assails Raza and Bilquis for importing the Hindu notion of reincarnation into her Muslim country. When the matriarch learns that they think God has “consented to send them a free substitute for the damaged goods” (a new child for their stillborn child), she reacts zealously to what she sees as a vestigial Hindu mode of thinking:

Bariamma, who found out everything, clicked her tongue noisily over this reincarnation nonsense, aware that it was something they had imported, like a germ, from that land of idolaters they had left. (S 83)

Iskander also uses Raza’s Indian background against him when he reminds people (during his trial) that the pro-Islamic Raza once believed in avatars. Isky’s supporters then mutter that there is “evidence of a Hindu great-grandmother on his father’s side,” and that “those ungodly philosophies had long ago infected his blood” (S 84). While these comments are somewhat humorous because of their extremity, humour disappears when Bariamma calls Bilquis “a fugitive from that godless country over there” (S 84) and when she yells at Raza’s wife, “Come on, mohajir! Immigrant! Pack up double-quick and be off to what gutter you choose” (S 85).

¹⁸ Helen Watson-Williams suggests that Rushdie’s Mahmoud alludes to the historical Mahmud of Ghazni. She observes that Mahmud was “the founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty” and that he led Islamic Turks “into Peshawar, crossed the Indus in 1005 A.D. and took Lahore in 1010” (44). In this case, Rushdie applies the name “Mahmoud” ironically, given that the historical Mahmud was warlike and orthodox, and that the Mahmoud of the novel is a pacifist who confronts Muslims and Hindus alike with their prejudice.
Rushdie argues that to build Pakistan "it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface." He sees "the subsequent history of Pakistan as a duel between two layers of time" (S 87), and he champions the Indian "layer of time" which he feels has been repressed. Against the Islamic nationalism which created Pakistan at Partition, and which Raza reinforces with his Islamic Law, Rushdie advances "shame's avatar," a mythic, cosmic force which surfaces from the depths of Time, from the "Indian centuries," to exact vengeance on those who use coercion and violence to impose their version of Islamic purity on others. O.P. Mathur draws much the same conclusion:

[Rushdie's] sensibility is basically Indian—democratic, secular and humanistic. Indian myths and legends have been so extensively used in Midnight's Children and even in Shame one may perhaps get glimpses of goddess Kali in the retributive and murderous Sufiya Zinobia, and of the legendary demons in Raza Hyder. In fact, as we have seen, throughout Shame, the nightmarish and monochromatic Pakistani reality has been examined, satirized and ridiculed from the perspective of one who has his "roots" fixed in undivided India and drawn sustenance from its values. (92)

A goddess such as Kali is a fitting opponent to the "monochromatic Pakistan" promoted by Raza, rising as she does from the "Indian centuries" and from the polytheistic, polymorphic, polyvocal mythology that comes with these centuries.

SUBTERRANEAN ANGELS AND IMPOSSIBLE MOUNTAINS

Rushdie invests the hidden realm, the "Indian layer of time," that lies beneath Pakistan with a variety of cosmic forces. Prominent among these are the rebellious subterranean angels which Omar fears and with which Omar's younger brother Babar identifies. Rushdie creates an effective dichotomy between marginalized rebellious forces
and centralized conservative forces by having Babar join the subterranean angels of the Baluchis (an ethnic group marginalized and repressed by the central government) and by having Omar (who keeps close to the centre of power) fear the type of rebellious, mythic force suggested by these underground angels. While Rushdie does not make it clear that the Beast (as fallen angel) rallies the subterranean angels, he clearly uses Omar’s fears of peripheral and underground forces to create a foreboding backdrop for the Beast/Kali, who surfaces right before Omar’s terrified eyes.

Whereas Omar moves from “Q.” (which stands for the city of Quetta near the border with Afghanistan) to Karachi, Babar drifts from Q. to the furthest hinterland of the country, that is, to the camps of the Baluchi rebels in the mountains surrounding Q. Babar’s move to the hinterland is initially an “act of separatism” against his three mothers, a reaction to their idealization of Omar (S 131), yet his subsequent revolt is against the central government and the control it exerts through its military strongman Raza.19 The suppression of the Baluchis has a long history in the subcontinent20 and Rushdie makes of it one more instance of political and ethnic repression which will eventually find its agent

19 At this point in the story Raza is Iskander’s general. It is Raza who quells the Baluchi revolt in Needle Valley and who leads the party which shoots Babar.

20 The five million Baluchis in Pakistan speak an Indo-Iranian language and they have never been well integrated with “British India” or the rest of Pakistan. After attempting to subdue them, the British “accorded” them an autonomous region in 1876. “On the partition of India [in] 1947 the khan of Khalat [the large central region south of the regional capital, Quetta] declared Baluchistan independent; the insurrection was crushed by the new Pakistani army after eight months” (Hutchinson 97). Early in the Bhutto era, opposition governments “in Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier [home to the Pathans] suffered open discrimination; their leaders were frequently criticized for being unpatriotic. Finally, on February 12, 1974, the Baluchistan government was dismissed on the charge of inciting the people of that province to rebel against the central authorities” (Burki 213). Since the creation of Pakistan, there have been three rebellions, the last being from 1973 to 1977 (roughly corresponding to the Bhutto era), when 3,300 Pakistani soldiers and some 6,000 Baluchi were killed (Hutchinson 97).
of vengeance in the Beast/Kali. Rushdie does not allude to the Devil as the leader of the rebellious angels of Baluchistan, yet he does prepare the ground (or the "underground") for such an inference. Babar writes in his notebook that Baluchi separatists believe their desire for freedom is supported by "golden angels" who are trapped—presumably by an unjust "God" or by such a God's corollary, a despot such as Raza—beneath the surface of the earth:

their belief that the golden angels were on their side gave the guerrillas an unshakeable certainty of the justice of their cause, and made it easy for them to die for it. "Separatism," Babar wrote, "is the belief that you are good enough to escape from the clutches of hell." (S 130)

When Babar dies for this cause he finds Heaven below rather than above the earth: he soars "lucent and winged into the eternity of the mountains" and he is "received into the elysian bosom of the earth" (S 132). Given that this account is imagined by the three mothers, one cannot ascribe it a straightforward meaning.21 It does, however, suggest that when forces of resistance are defeated they join other forces of resistance, other angels trapped beneath the earth. The rise of Sufiya as Beast makes sense in this context, for the Devil is a fallen and, to some degree, a trapped angel who would find it in his interest to rally such forces of resistance.

Omar aligns himself with the central powers in the land (Iskander and then Raza) and he fears the peripheral, repressed, destabilizing forces joined by Babar. Omar’s

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21 The three sisters first idolize Omar and then Babar. Their initial idolization and their subsequent hatred of Omar is not inconsistent. Omar is initially a product and symbol of their revolt against marriage, yet he eventually leaves the three mothers and befriends Raza, who not only kills their only other son, but also promotes the patriarchal religious standards they vehemently reject. One could also argue that their idolization of Omar serves to torture Babar, who, once dead, is in turn idolized (or “angelized”) so as to make Omar feel guilty.
It should be said that his professional success, and his friendship with Iskander Harappa, have had the effect of reducing the frequency of these giddy spells, of keeping our hero’s feet on the ground. But still the dizziness comes, now and then, to remind him how close he is, will always be, to the edge. (S 127)

Whereas Babar gains glory when he is defeated by the central government, Omar appears to lose both body and soul when he is devoured by the force which stalks the leader of this government. The punishment of Omar may seem harsh, yet one should remember three points. First, Omar is punished by the Beast and the three mothers. One cannot expect appropriate justice from such vindictive and evil figures, despite the fact that they act as the necessary scourge of Raza’s tyranny. Likewise, one cannot expect appropriate justice from Madame Guillotine. Second, Omar is punished largely for the company he keeps, for his friendship and compliance with the autocratic Iskander and Raza. Third, Omar is not merely an innocent bystander. As the “top man” in Karachi’s leading hospital, he hypnotizes women so that he and Iskander can have “some highly charged sex,” after which he rationalizes his abuse of power by saying that it is impossible “to persuade a subject to do anything she is unwilling to do” (S 128). Omar’s sexual abuses and shamelessness, combined with the many other instances where women are marginalized and repressed in the novel, make it easy to see why the agent of revolt and retribution takes a female body, and why this agent bears a striking resemblance to the goddess Kali and to “old Madame Guillotine with her basket of heads” (S 240).
Rushdie skillfully conflates cosmology and psychology in his depiction of Omar’s escalating fear of the dark forces which emerge from the depths of outer space, the mountains of Baluchistan and the subterranean “mountains” of Nishapur. At first Omar sees the mountains surrounding Quetta as the last barrier between humanity and a fearsome, meaningless cosmos which he imagines to contain “silicon creatures or gas monsters”:

the child Omar Khayyam surveyed the emptiness of the landscape around Q., which convinced him that he must be near the very Rim of Things, and that beyond the Impossible Mountains on the horizon must lie the great nothing into which, in his nightmares, he had begun to tumble with monotonous regularity. (S 22)

Omar’s fear of unseen cosmic forces worsens when he explores the depths of Nishapur, a mansion haunted by the witch-like three sisters. In this “Nishapur,” Omar finds a terrifying abyss lying within a mountainous underworld:

he discovered ruined staircases made impassable by longago earthquakes which had caused them to heave up into tooth-sharp mountains and also to fall away to reveal dark abysses of fear ... in the silence of the night and the first sounds of dawn he explored beyond history into what seemed the positively archaeological antiquity of ‘Nishapur.’ (S 31)

This passage differs tellingly from an earlier description of the Impossible Mountains, one in which readers find the image of “crumpled ochre slopes,” as well as a skillfully placed ellipsis between “stonemasonry” and “divine dream-temples” (S 23). In place of such imagery, readers now find “tooth-sharp mountains,” as well as an ellipsis between “dark abyss of fear” and “silence of the night.” Omar appears to see the “mountains” beneath Nishapur in terms of a tradition not emphasized by Attar, one in which “the chief abode of the Jinn is in the mountains of Qaf, which are supposed to encompass the whole of our earth” (Thomas Hughes 136). This possibility is enhanced when the three mothers appear
to fly to these Impossible Mountains at the end of the novel. Such a flight suggests that they are returning to their homeland of mischievous spirits.

The imagery of “stonemasonry” and “divine dream-temples” is given its most harrowing and its most overtly psychological transmogrification when Omar returns to Nishapur at the end of the novel. Here he hallucinates that the destabilizing forces under the mountains, the angelic pressures which make the dream-temples rise and fall (S 23), have descended upon the rest of the country:

The world was an earthquake, abysses yawned, dream-temples rose and fell, the logic of the Impossible Mountains had come down to infect the plains. In his delirium, however, in the burning clutches of the sickness and the foetid atmosphere of the house, only endings seemed possible. He could feel things caving in within him, landslips, heaves, the patter of crumbling masonry in his chest, cog-wheels breaking, a false note in the engine’s hum. (S 274)

Rushdie skilfully combines earlier images of tectonic shifting with Omar’s mental and anatomical breakdown. He gives all of these a cosmic and apocalyptic tone, suggesting that Omar’s universe turns out to be as dark and destructive as he feared when a child.

Much of Omar’s terror can be attributed to the influence of his three witch-like mothers, who actively discourage their son from exploring the possibilities or consolations of rationality, philosophy and mysticism. When Omar sets out “the most elegant proofs of Euclidian theorems” and when he “expatiate[s] eloquently on the Platonic image of the Cave,” Munnee responds, “Who is to understand the brains of those crazy types? [...] They read books from left to right” (S 36). The three sisters reject Greek ideas, which can be associated with the poet Omar Khayyam, without giving these ideas much thought,

22 In studying medicine, Omar Khayyam takes after his namesake, who resided in the Persian city of Nishapur in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and who was influenced by Greek science as well as Sufi mysticism. Khayyam’s Rubā’iyyat can be read as a straightforward text in which the love
perhaps because one of the main outcomes of such thought—atheism—complements their anti-religious sensibilities. In the Islamic context, atheism is considered one form of the sin of shirk (replacing God with other deities, ideas or things) since it puts “nothingness in the place of God” (Glassé 370). Yet mysticism creates something sacred from apparent nothingness and hence it constitutes a considerable threat. It may be for this reason that the three sisters very deliberately discard the screen of Qaf, thus rejecting the mystical symbolism developed by that other famous twelfth-century resident of Nishapur, Farid ud-Din Attar:

And one day the three mothers sent a servant into the study to remove from their lives an exquisitely carved walnut screen on which was portrayed the mythical circular mountain of Qaf, complete with the thirty birds playing God thereupon. (S 33)  

While Omar goes on to study the “arcane science” of hypnotism and the medical science of immunology, he does not pursue the mystical ideas suggested by the screen or by its curious association with Hashmat Bibi’s mystical death. After the three sisters’ removal of the screen--after the “flight of the bird-parliament”--Omar uses hypnotism to give Hashmat Bibi “glimpses of non-being.” Hashmat Bibi then “apparently will[s] herself into death” (S 33-34). Whereas Omar’s grandfather old Mr Shakil dies cursing himself and other people to Hell (S 12, 14), Hashmat Bibi dies with whispers of Heaven and God on her lips: “at the very end she had been heard muttering, ‘...deeper and deeper into the heart of the rosy cloud’” (S 34). Her somewhat comic “mystical death” (her name of wine and women signifies a love of physical pleasure, or as an allegorical text in which drunkenness stands for the intoxication of divine ecstasy and in which sexual union signifies the bliss of union with God (the Beloved, the Friend).
suggests a flight into oblivion on a carpet or *mat of hashish*) echoes that of old Aziz sahib in *Midnight’s Children.* Yet in *Shame* Attar’s notion of mystical annihilation does not recur, as it does in *Midnight’s Children,* to suggest ideals of conference, unity, divine song or a meaning which transcends death. Rather, the three sisters seem to have succeeded in expunging Attar and his mystical flight from the mansion of Omar’s birth.

The three mothers’ sinister influence, combined with their dismissal of science (the “material”) and their exclusion of mysticism (the “spiritual”) make Nishapur a “hideously indeterminate universe,” a “third world that was neither material nor spiritual, but a sort of concentrated decrepitude made up of the decomposing remnants of those two more familiar types of cosmos” (S 30). Instead of encouraging the best of twelfth-century Nishapur, the three mothers bring to mind what Khayyam and Attar fear—the malicious wheel of heaven and the “hundred monsters loosed from hell” (Khayyam 49, Attar 192).23 Omar finds what the Persian poet hints at in his *Ruba’iyat:* a cosmos in which humans exist “beneath unscrupulous stars” and in which the wheel of heaven “is a thousand times more helpless than you” (Khayyam 81, 47).

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23 The use of both Khayyam and Attar suggests two sides of Rushdie’s sensibility: the hedonist and the mystic. The dichotomy may not be an unbridgeable one given the dual nature of Khayyam’s *Ruba’iyat,* although Attar’s rejection of Khayyam suggests a serious gap. In passing I would note that a curious parallel exists between the way Khayyam was rejected by Attar and the way Rushdie has been rejected by many Muslims. In his Introduction to Khayyam’s *Ruba’iyat,* Peter Avery notes that Attar imagines an afterlife for Khayyam in which the latter is “ashamed and confused on being rejected at God’s threshold.” Avery adds that Khayyam thus “stood condemned alike by the spiritually and intellectually tolerant Sufi poet, from whom, exceptionally, he received no compassion because he was so heinously a materialist, and by the Sufi schoolman, who abhorred him as a spurner of religion, lacking the grace to attain the Sufi’s gnostic beatitude” (17). Like Khayyam, Rushdie employs metaphors drawn from Sufism, and, like Khayyam, he has not been embraced by those who use such metaphors within a more orthodox framework of belief.
The demonic nature of the three sisters is important to the otherworldly structuring of the novel because it suggests a diabolic nexus of forces (composed mainly of the three sisters and the Beast) as well as a nefarious supernatural presence running from the opening to the closing scenes. While the sisters might initially seem heroic, even feminist, they are, as Haffenden observes, an “enjoyable but ultimately sinister complex” (256). Rushdie associates them with the Satan who plots the downfall of Adam and Eve, for they sleep in “a huge mahogany four-poster [bed] around whose columns carved serpents coiled upwards to the brocade Eden of the canopy” (S 21). They reject religious customs by refusing to circumcise, shave or whisper to their newborn son, and by living apart from the Ummah or community which gives meaning to the social ideals of Islam. Their rejection of men and patriarchal authority is also suggested in the “rumours that they would indolently explore each other’s bodies during the languorous drowsiness of the afternoons, and, at night, would weave occult spells to hasten the moment of their father’s demise” (S 13). Their inseparability might mock the “three-in-oneness” of the Trinity (S 35), and their communal pregnancy—during which one cannot identify the father or the mother—might mock the immaculate conception of Christ (later they say, perhaps merely to spite Omar, that Babar’s father was an angel while Omar’s father was a devil). Rushdie suggests the three sisters’ antagonism to God and mysticism in a variety of ways, explicitly in Munnee’s assertion that “there is no God” (S 281) and more subtly when they discard the walnut screen of Qaf.

Further evidence of the demonic nature of the three sisters can be found in the characteristics they share with the Beast, and in the way their actions complement those of
the Beast. Three of the main forms of the possessed Sufiya—the Beast, Kali and Madame Guillotine—can be associated with the three Shakil sisters: the Beast can be seen in the triune mothers' antagonism to God, in their vicious acts and in their refusal to perform Islamic rites; Madame Guillotine can be seen in their violent rejection of traditional hierarchy and in their body-shredding contraption which dispatches the tyrant Raza; Kali can be seen in their female revolt against patriarchal and monotheistic Islamic power structures. Rushdie strengthens the link between the Beast and the three sisters when, joining forces in Nishapur, they kill Raza and Omar and then appear to lift themselves above the final gruesome scene: the Beast leaves Sufiya's body and hovers ambiguously over Nishapur and the three sisters crumble, "perhaps, into powder under the rays of the sun," or they grow wings and fly off "into the Impossible Mountains in the west" (S 285). In his interview with Scripsi, Rushdie says that he "was very pleased" with the way "the text sets up the expectation that The Beast, this nemesis figure, is coming to get the general and then she doesn't. Somebody else gets the general" (111). This "somebody else" is the three sisters, who Rushdie calls the "sort of Macbeth-like witches [who] become the avengers at the end" (110). On a superficial level of plot, Rushdie is correct about the upsetting of expectations. Yet the final actions of the three sisters fulfills expectations one might have about their evil, Macbeth-like, behind-the-scenes designs. The fact that the three mothers act in concert with the Beast during the final scene also confirms the basic similarity between them and the other dominating otherworldly presence in the novel, the Beast.
The fear of metaphysical evil instilled in Omar during his childhood in the home of the three mothers is helpful to the plot, since it makes him at once afraid and aware of the malicious evil which lurks in the universe. Observing the sulfurous "pricks of yellow light" in Sufiya's eyes, Omar admits to himself that there are more things in the universe than can be explained by a scientific philosophy:

From the flickering points of light he began to learn that science was not enough, that even though he rejected possession-by-devils as a way of denying human responsibility for human actions, even though God had never meant much to him, still his reason could not erase the evidence of those eyes, could not blind him to that unearthly glow, the smouldering fire of the Beast. (S 235)

Having demonstrated considerable skill as a mesmerist, Omar is well qualified to recognize the "eyes of Hell," "the golden eyes of the most powerful mesmerist on earth" (S 236).

When he sees these eyes he is terrified and turns instinctively to God for help:

'God help us,' said Omar Khayyam, in spite of his uncircumcised, unshaven, unwhispered-to beginnings. It was as though he had divined that it was time for the Almighty to step forward and take charge of events. (S 239)

Omar's plea to God stands out in the text because it is in direct opposition to everything he has been taught by his mothers and to everything scientific he has learned as an immunologist.

Omar's experience with the strange forces of the universe and the subconscious combine with his attraction to the young Sufiya to make him the ideal observer of the transformation of Sufiya into the Beast. Omar's dreams about the pedophile Rodrigues were "prescient warnings against the dangers of falling in love with under-age females and then following them to the ends of the earth," for once one is at the edge of the world (presumably near "the Rim of Things") the young girls "inevitably cast you aside" and "the blast of their rejection picks you up and hurls you out into the great starry nothingness"
beyond gravity and sense" (S 141). With his imagination that fills the depths of space with
"silicon creatures or gas monsters" (S 23), and his understanding that young females can
cast older men into the void, Omar provides the reader with a unique vantage point from
which to watch the rise of the Beast in Sufiya. Rushdie emphasizes the power of the
Beast as well as Omar’s position as chief witness by having the possessed Sufiya escape
through a brick wall and by having Omar stare for “hours on end” at the “fantastic outline”
of “his departed wife.” Rushdie also suggests that Sufiya becomes a surreal otherworldly
presence that roams freely and cannot be chained by human power when Omar’s “eyes,
roving outwards through the attic window, seemed to be following someone, although
there was nobody there” (S 243). Omar’s life has come full circle, since he once again
confronts the frightening voids of his childhood. This time, however, the cosmic force
which haunts him does not lurk beneath the precipices of mountainous staircases or hide in
the depths of outer space. Rather, it appears right in front of his very eyes. Even more
frightening, it disappears, and then tracks him all the way back to Nishapur.

SUFiya AS THE BEAST/KALI

Rushdie himself was unnerved by the extremely dark undercurrents expressed by

Sufiya:

I find [Sufiya] is the most disturbing thing in the book, and she was very disturbing
to write because she more or less made herself up. [...] [S]he did frighten me. I
think it’s unusual to be frightened by one’s own creations, but she did make me
worried about her. I worried about what she meant. [...] Yes, I know where she
comes from and the process of making her, but she seems to transcend her source
material. There is a dark area at the centre of her, and the book is about that dark
area. (Rushdie with Haffenden 255)
The "dark area" within Sufiya results from the merciless possession of an innocent and sympathetic girl, from the way a fragile self is overwhelmed by hellish fire, dirty water and a monster of the deep. This monster has some of the same associations as Omar's interstellar gas monsters--fearsomeness, dark cosmic power--yet it is also a specifically satanic power which possesses an innocent girl whose name suggests union with God.

In the process of creating Sufiya, Rushdie employs three different media accounts, the first two pointing to the way shame is inflicted by sexist morality, and the last pointing to the way metaphysical forces feed on a physical body. The first two accounts focus on the notion that dishonour leads to shame: in London "a Pakistani father murdered his only child, a daughter, because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain" (S 115); again in London, a teen-aged "Asian" girl is beaten by white boys and afterwards she feels shame rather than anger (S 117). The first instance illustrates the imposition of shame, the second the internalization of values which define dishonour and shame. Sufiya is subject to both of these. The third media account supplies a hint of the metaphysical mechanics which allow Sufiya to be transformed: a boy "had simply ignited of his own accord, without dousing himself in petrol or applying any external flame. We are energy; we are fire; we are light. Finding the key, stepping through into that truth, a boy began to burn" (S 117). While Sufiya blushes so hotly that her skin burns whoever touches it, she does not step into any liberating "truth." Rather the fire of the Beast pulls the nerve-strings of her corpse, "which becomes the fire's puppet, conveying a ghastly illusion of life amidst the flames" (S 243).
Rushdie also skillfully creates an aqueous "realm" which corresponds to Sufiya's subconscious and which becomes an "ocean" from which the Beast rises. Sufiya becomes a "sponge" which soaks up invisible shame and shamelessness; she becomes a janitor "of the unseen," mopping up the "dirty waters" so that Pakistan can live up to its name, "Land of the Pure" (S 120, 122). She "soaks up" all the negative energy or "dirty water" resulting from military, political, ethnic, sexual and religious repression, and these waters then serve as the subconscious realm or "ocean" from which the Beast rises. Rushdie establishes the depth of the sea as a metaphor for sexuality when Bilquis tells Good News to think of male penetration as "having a fish up your fundament" (S 146) and when, on the eve of Sufiya's wedding, Shahbanou tells her to think of herself as the ocean and the man as a "sea creature." Shahbanou tells her, "that is what men are like, to live they must drown in you, in the tides of your secret flesh" (S 199). Sufiya replies "obstinately in her voice of a seven-year-old girl, which was also the eerily disguised voice of the latent monster: 'I hate fish'" (S 199). Rushdie suggests that Sufiya's child-like mind is not ready for sex, although her body may be. The monster takes advantage of this situation by harnessing and magnifying her body's sexual energy. Shahbanou gives the monster more scope by denying Sufiya any release of the accumulating sexual energies in her body. Because of Shahbanou's overprotective or selfish actions (she sleeps with Omar in Sufiya's place), the monster usurps Sufiya's subconscious "sea" and then stalks the land in its monstrous seven league boots.

Sufiya appears to become the passive victim of possession in the form of satanic rape when her subconscious becomes a sea in which the Beast rises. While Rushdie
previously suggests that the monster hates fish, the association between the threat of male sexuality and satanic rape becomes likely given the above association between phallus and fish and given the following eerie description of the way the Beast stirs in Sufiya’s “ocean”:

There is no ocean but there is a feeling of sinking. It makes her sick.
There is an ocean. She feels its tide. And, somewhere in its depths, a Beast, stirring. (S 215)

This description evokes a great deal of pathos in itself, yet it also comes immediately after a pathos-laden account of the way Sufiya takes things in and out of her head (S 213-215), signifying that while she has sympathy for the world around her, this world does not allow her to construct any form of meaningful existence. While she “packs her head full of good things so that there won’t be room for the other things, the things she hates,” these other, foreign things “that don’t seem to be from anywhere” invade her mind: “They come most often during the sleepless nights, shapes that make her feel like crying, or places with people hanging upside-down from the roof.” These invasions confuse Sufiya about the nature of good and evil, and about whether she is good or evil:

If she were good the bad things would go elsewhere, so that means she is not good. Why is she so bad? What makes her rotten, evil? She tosses in her bed. And pouring out from inside the fearsome alien shapes. (S 214)

It is not only the world which is against her: the otherworldly satanic force which is traditionally said to prey on the blindness and cruelty of this world also steals her body and terrifies her fragile consciousness. Rushdie hits a similar note in *The Satanic Verses* when Chamcha sees Pamela’s face as “a saintly mask behind which who knows what worms feasted on rotting meat (he was alarmed by the hostile violence of the images arising from his unconscious)” (SV 402), and when Chamcha asks himself, “What evil had he done--
what vile thing could he, would he do? For what was he -- he couldn’t avoid the notion -- being punished? And, come to that, by whom? (I held my tongue.)” (SV 256). One of the main differences in the possessions of Sufiya and Chamcha is that Sufiya’s possession is explicitly the work of the Beast, whereas Rushdie only slyly intimates that the Beast is responsible for Chamcha’s possession. Also, Chamcha is to some degree aware of, and responsible for, his actions. Sufiya, on the other hand, is completely ignorant and innocent of what is really going on in her mind and body.

Because the path which links *sharam* (shame) to violence is hidden (S 139), people do not recognize it, and in self-destructive denial they “pretend the menace is not loping towards them in seven-league boots” (S 199). They do not examine the monster they create, for to do so would mean to question their most basic beliefs: to “comprehend Sufiya Zinobia would be to shatter, as if it were a crystal, these people’s sense of themselves” (S 200). Rushdie underscores society’s ignorance when he has its bewildered members concoct myths to explain the invisible “demon” and the “white panther” (S 254) and when Sufiya indiscriminately tears the heads off youths and no one knows where these heads have landed. As I will explain below, the severed heads also suggest Kali, who remains incomprehensible to those who are immersed entirely in an Islamic version of reality, to those who have forgotten that Indian centuries lie beneath them.

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Sharam is the Urdu word for shame (Chandra 77). Since Islamic society is, in general, more concerned than Western society with sexual purity and with family and personal honour, the notion of shame takes on greater importance. Rushdie’s use of the Hegirian calendar (starting in 622 A.D.) in Chapter Four suggests that he feels Pakistan’s Islamic codes of shame and honour bear resemblance to Medieval European codes.
Kali’s status as a powerful, female, polytheistic deity makes her a fitting figure of opposition to Raza and his powerful, male, monotheistic State. Sufiya’s initial confinement in the attic indicates repression in general and the oppression of women in particular. Fittingly, the anger which springs from this chained state expresses itself in terms of a revolt against patriarchal culture and religion. Peter Van der Veer emphasizes the link between sexual oppression—what Rushdie calls “the intolerable burden of honour and propriety” (S 173)—and a Hinduized backlash against this repression:

The more [Sufiya’s] father restrains women and female sexuality through his Islamic laws, the more frightening becomes his daughter, who ends as a monster wandering through Pakistan beheading men and drawing out their entrails like a Muslim version of the Hindu goddess, Kali. (102)

O.P. Mathur comments that Sufiya suggests Beauty and the Beast, Medusa, Kali, and Yeats’ “terrible beauty” of revolution (87-88). M.D. Fletcher also observes:

The details of the victims being beheaded and having their entrails eaten link the beast’s modus operandi to that of the goddess Kali, and despite the beast’s whiteness in contrast to Kali’s blackness the nudeness, matted hair, terrifying eyes, “blood-curdling howls,” nauseating stench of death, and ability to be everywhere at once also fit. (130)

In a footnote to the above he adds:

The role of Kali in Indian religion and mythology is, of course, complex, with different emphasis in various contexts and time periods, but her association with death and destruction is consistent. (132)

Fletcher ends his paragraph on Sufiya-as-Kali by concluding that “there is suggestiveness without equation,” and that “Shame is clearly not a religious allegory in which, for example, Sufiya ‘stands for Kali’” (130). While Sufiya stands for many things—repressed

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25 Her location in the attic suggests Brontë/Rhys’s “madwoman.” That the “darkened room” is “an echo of other death-cells” (S 237) suggests Iskander’s prison cell and anticipates the elevator in which Raza dies.
sexuality, marginalized women, the guillotine which avenges despotism, brutalized
innocence, etc.--the Kali associations are strong, particularly given Sufiya's "mohajir
ancestry" and her ominous names, "disorder's avatar" and "shame's avatar." Rushdie also
alludes to Kali when Sufiya finds "four youths," kills them by yanking off their heads, and
then hurls these heads "into the scattered clouds" (S 219). Rushdie emphasizes the point
that the "heads were never found" (S 216) and that "nobody saw them fall" (S 219). The
heads are missing, presumably, because the Kali in Sufiya has taken them with her and has
strung them around her neck--thus adding more skulls to her necklace. 26

Just as one must make associative jumps to see the Beast/Kali as a sea-monster
rising from the nation's oceanic subconscious, so one must make associative jumps in
order to appreciate the way images of necklaces and nooses of vengeance are scattered
throughout the story, serving to link Sufiya as the Beast/Kali to the punishment of the
chief "culprits" in the novel: Dawood, Iskander, Raza and Omar. The first of such
"necklaces of vengeance" is a "garland of shoes" which Bilal accidentally throws around
Dawood's neck--thus humiliating the divine who tries to whip up pious fervor against the
three sisters (S 43). In the next instance, Iskander sees the instrument of his death (a
hanging rope) in terms of the umbilical cord that strangled Raza's son in Bilquis' womb.

26 Dr. Mandakranta Bose of The University of British Columbia informed me that in some Bengali
myths Kali sticks her tongue out because she feels shame for having stepped on Shiva in her wrath.
In Shame the Beast/Kali chases Raza to the mansion of the three sisters, who use their booby-
trapped dumbwaiter to pierce his body and chop off his tongue. In the context of Bengali versions,
the chopped tongue may symbolize that Raza does not know the meaning of shame (he never bites
his own tongue) but that cosmic forces--the Beast who pursues him and the three sisters who
murder him--will punish him for such ignorance (they will chop his tongue off completely). Or,
Rushdie may be suggesting a form of poetic justice by having the three sisters cut the tongue of the
tyrant who stops others from speaking. One finds a variant of the "chopped tongue theme" when
the Cultmaster in Haroun sets up the idol Bezaban ("Without-a-Tongue") in the Citadel of Chup.
Iskander also sees his prison cell as "an inverse womb, dark mirror of a birthplace," and he feels that "its purpose is to suck him in, to draw him back and down through time, until he hangs foetal in his own waters" (S 231). His final thought, "I am being unmade" (S 231), suggests that while he "made" Raza (he fostered the conditions under which Raza rose to power), he will be "unmade" by his own creation. As with Rani’s shawl implicating Iskander in the throttling of Sufiya, the umbilical cord links the tyrannies of Iskander and Raza. This link is strengthened when, in Nishapur, Raza recovers from his illness to find himself immersed in excrement, making him feel "as if a hangman’s knot had smashed him in the back of the neck" (S 280). Events have come full circle, for Raza’s blatant sexism inculcates the shame which becomes associated with the umbilical cord, which is in turn associated (via Iskander’s umbilical noose) with the punishing “hangman’s knot.” Raza’s fate is sealed when, after Munnee tells the promoter of Islamic Law that “there is no God” (S 281), the three mothers push him into the small room of the elevator (reminiscent of Iskander’s cell) and pull the lever which sends knives through his body (S 282). That one of these knives emerges through his Adam’s-apple suggests the action of “old Madame Guillotine” (S 240), whose mode of execution also involves a metal blade slicing the neck.

Omar is likewise visited by a “necklace of vengeance” when his three mothers place Dawood’s “garland of shoes” around their son’s neck:

Behind his eyelids Omar Khayyam saw his mothers placing, around his neck, the garland of their hatred. This time there was no mistake; his sweat-drenched beard rubbed against the frayed laces, the tattered leathery tongues, the laughing mouths of the necklace of discarded shoes.

The Beast has many faces. It takes any shape it chooses. He felt it crawl into his belly and begin to feed. (S 279)
By transforming Dawood's "garland" into a sinister leather being, and by claiming that the Beast "has many faces," Rushdie underscores both the process which allows invisible forces to take a "form" or a "face," and the associative logic which allows the spirit of cosmic vengeance to take many forms—principally those of an innocent girl, a "white panther," Kali and Madame Guillotine. Its final action is to tear Omar's head off, and its final form is that of a cloud in the shape of a "giant, gray and headless man" (S 286)—both of which further link it to the work of Kali with her necklace of skulls and to "old Madame Guillotine with her basket of heads" (S 240).

Whether one associates "shame's avatar" with a noose, a necklace of shoes, Madame Guillotine or Kali, this otherworldly force operates by violently severing the head.

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27 The list of the Beast's possible faces includes Chudale, "the bogey woman who eats children" and who is a "myth familiar to many Muslim children" (Jussawalla 1987:7) as well as the aforementioned Gorgon Medusa and Yeats' "terrible beauty" of revolution (Mathur 87-88). One might also note the similarity between the Beast and the composite monster depicted in Rushdie's 1982 short story, "Yorick." The story begins with metafictional gamesmanship reminiscent of Tristram Shandy: and it includes a banquet at which a table is loaded with "boars' heads, sheep's eyes, parson's noses, goat-breasts, calves' livers, tripes, venison haunches" and "pig's trotters" (East. West 72). The narrator refers to "the anatomy of the table," and speculates that "were its several dishes assembled into a single edible beast, a stranger monster would lie there than any hippogriff or ichthyocentaur!" This "edible beast" prefigures the possessed Sufiya in that both are explicitly fabricated from disparate animalistic, demonic elements. The narrator of "Yorick" asks, "is it not conceivable that [Fortinbras], seeing upon the laden board the dismembered limbs of this fearsomely diverse and most occult of creatures, and constructing in his mind's eye a behemoth with antlers on his giant turkey's head and hooves set weirdly down beneath his scaly lower half, might lose all appetite for the fray?" (73). The Beast/Kali is similarly a "fearsomely diverse and most occult of creatures," one which takes an active role by severing the heads of turkeys and humans, and one which is likened to a white panther stalking its prey. The Beast/Kali is also "diverse" in that it incarnates various repressed aspects of society, it expresses a positive scourging side as well as a demonic side, and it contains within it aspects of Leviathan, the Beast, Kali and Madame Guillotine. Another link between "Yorick" and Shame might be found when the narrator of "Yorick" exclaims that Ophelia's breath resembles a witch's brew, "a tepid stench of rats' livers, toads' piss, high game-birds, rotting teeth, gangrene, skewered corpses, burning witchflesh, sewers, politicians' consciences, skunk-holes, sepulchres, and all the Beelzebubbling pickle-vats of Hell!" (66). Shame itself might be seen as a hellish vat in which Rushdie boils the consciences of his politicians Iskander and Raza.
from the body—a poetically just mode of operation in that the main reason shame and violence accumulate is that the head (of the State or the anatomy) refuses to listen to the body. Sufiya is the victim of this accumulation since she is close to the dictatorship of Raza and since society’s puritanical rules (which Shahbanou enforces and Omar agrees to) make it impossible for her to fulfill her body’s needs. Sufiya’s dual status as innocent victim and agent of violence is reflected in one of Omar’s hallucinations in Nishapur: he sees her on the day of their wedding with “a noose around her neck” (S 275). This rope links her to Dawood’s ignominy, the strangulation of Raza’s son, the hanging of Iskander, and Omar’s gruesome death. The rope also suggests that while the Beast/Kali punishes the four male “culprits” in the novel, the most pathetic victim is Sufiya herself.

The vengeance of the Beast (and of the three Shakil sisters who act in concert with it) marks the end of the story, although Rushdie provides a hint that just as the Beast took the form of Sufiya, so it will take other forms if required. In his malarial delirium, Omar imagines “visions of the future, of what would happen after the end”:

And at last Arjumand and Haroun [are] set free, reborn into power, the virgin Ironpants and her only love taking charge. The fall of God [i.e. Raza], and in his place the myth of the Martyr Iskander. And after that arrests, retribution, trials, hangings, blood, a new cycle of shamelessness and shame. (S 276-277)

Rushdie predicts the rise of a more democratic and secular leader, “Arjumand” (Benazir Bhutto), yet he suggests that even such a turn of events will not put an end to the vicious cycle of shame and violence which he sees as characteristic of Pakistani religion, culture and politics.

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In its attack on tyrannical figures and in its exploration of subcontinental politics, *Shame* follows in the wake of *Grimus* and *Midnight's Children*, yet in its depiction of a battle between demonic and polytheistic forces on one side and patriarchal and monotheistic forces on the other *Shame* anticipates *The Satanic Verses*. Speaking metaphorically, yet in terms of the otherworldly constructions present in Rushdie's fiction, one might say that in *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses* several of the most aggressive figures or “birds” of polytheism stage an assault on God and monotheism: in *Shame* the three Shakil sisters command Omar to discard the screen of Qaf and they fly towards the Impossible Mountains, in *The Satanic Verses* the three “high-flying birds” of the *gharaniq* incident hover over Mount Cone and tempt Mahound from an uncompromising monotheism.\(^{28}\) The most important difference between the two texts in this regard is that in *Shame* the Devil is at once vicious in its possession of Sufiya, and scourging in its attack on Raza and Omar. In contrast, the Devil in *The Satanic Verses* viciously possesses his victim, yet this possession serves no greater purpose than those of attacking God, making

\(^{28}\) In “A Textual Unicorn: Identity and Islamic Reference in Salman Rushdie's *Shame,*” Griffith Chausee notes that in the *gharaniq* incident the three birds or goddesses “are eliminated, and it is Allah Himself who serves as the ordering principle,” whereas in *Shame* “the Allah-figure Old Mr Shakil dies, thereby empowering his three malign daughters and leaving the legacy-ordering to them” (24). My argument in Chapter Five is that the “satanic narrator” manipulates events so that the three birds are not eliminated, and so that he makes himself the supreme--albeit chaotic--principle.
the Devil appear heroic, and setting humans against each other. Unlike the Beast/Kali in *Shame*, the Devil in *The Satanic Verses* does not seek and destroy the sources of violence and repression.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE SATANIC VERSES: DREAMSCAPES OF A GREEN-EYED MONSTER

A DANGEROUS EXPERIMENT

While religion is a major concern in The Satanic Verses and while the politics between religions is crucial to the larger controversy known as the Rushdie Affair, very few critics have taken a close look at the otherworldly power struggles in the text itself. Critics have analyzed the treatment of Muhammad and the “satanic verses” or gharaniq incident,1 yet they have not looked in detail at the way Rushdie depicts the characteristics and power struggles of the figures integral to this incident: God, the Devil, angels and goddesses. Moreover, critics have not analyzed the degree to which a satanic narrator2 invades the text and influences events so that evil is promoted at the expense of good. This narrator possesses Chamcha and uses him to play out his antagonism to God (his cosmic enemy), to Gabriel (his archangelic rival, of whom Gibreel is a parody)3 and to the spirit of mysticism (represented by Alleluia and her devotion to Qaf/Everest). In constructing this otherworldly plot, Rushdie borrows from

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1 In this incident Satan substitutes his voice for that of Gabriel so as to tempt Muhammad into accepting three goddesses (or “high-flying birds”) as intercessors between God and humanity. Muhammad initially accepts the goddesses, then rejects them when he realizes that the idea came from Satan rather than Gabriel. I refer to this incident throughout this chapter and I outline its quranic context in “Previous Satans” below.

2 The possibility of satanic narration in the text was first suggested to me in early 1990 by Dr. Ken Bryant (South Asian Studies, The University of British Columbia).

3 Throughout this chapter I refer to God’s archangel by the Western name Gabriel, rather than by the Muslim name Gibreel. I do so in order to avoid confusion between the character and the Archangel.
Shakespeare's *Othello*, the *gharaniq* incident, the story of Adam and Eve, and Attar's *Conference of the Birds*. According to the first of these, Gibreel plays the part of the bright but falling star Othello, Alleluia that of the innocent, forgiving Desdemona, and Chamcha that of the deceptive, supersubtle Iago. Rushdie inserts key elements of the *gharaniq* incident into this Shakespearean drama when the possessed Chamcha whispers doggerel "satanic verses" over the telephone, thus driving Gibreel into a monstrous green-eyed jealousy. While the snake-like Chamcha succeeds in turning Gibreel's heavenly garden of love into a hellish labyrinth of jealousy, Chamcha's actions are undermined by Allie's unwavering devotion to the Impossible Mountain of Qaf/Everest. The satanic narrator marginalizes this devotion, as he does the tolerance of Sufyan, yet Allie's mysticism is all the more tragic and inspiring because of this marginalization. *The Satanic Verses* thus carries on from *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, in which mystical ideals take on a tragic meaning, that is, a meaning which derives from their marginalization and from their inability to mount a successful defense against coercive and demonic forces.

In terms of its dominating otherworldly presence, *The Satanic Verses* most resembles *Shame*, for both novels depict a universe in which the Beast or Satan possesses characters and invades the world. In *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie takes the role of the Beast a step further by giving his Satan an active role in narration itself. The origin and goals of the Devil are also different in the two novels: in *Shame* repression creates the Beast, who is a scourging as well as a diabolic force; in *The Satanic Verses* Satan portrays himself as a victim of God's oppression, yet upon closer examination the textual evidence suggests that Satan is God's oppressor and that his aim is not to scourge but to divide and conquer.
The Satanic Verses is particularly tricky to read, in that its two worldly protagonists and its worldly narrator appear unaware of the way the satanic narrator contrives events so that evil triumphs over good. Instead of reassuring readers, as does the omniscient narrator of such novels as Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, the satanic narrator catches them unawares. He humours them with jokes and fires up their sense of rebellion with heroic notions, yet all the time he drags them deeper into the universe as he would have it, that is, into a universe in which his native Hell and his antagonism to God and Gabriel triumph over heavenly love, symbolized by Allie’s desire for both Everest and Gibreel. Exploring *The Satanic Verses* in the dark light of satanic narration will not be pleasing to all readers, for it involves taking a close look at numerous instances of blasphemy and at a patently diabolic plan. Yet this exploration remains rewarding insofar as it demonstrates the extent to which a novelist can push the moral boundaries of art, and insofar as it reveals an ingenious narrative strategy involving the superimposition of a satanic otherworldly plot on top of worldly scenarios. Also, once readers become aware of the sinister manipulations of the satanic narrator, the aspirations of those he victimizes and marginalizes become all the more poignant and moving.

Before proceeding with the novel itself, I feel it is necessary to say a few words about the personal and political circumstances surrounding a text which drastically altered Rushdie’s life and which sent the literary world into a dangerous conflict. Rushdie has made numerous

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4 Rushdie’s life before and after the *fatwa* has been hectic and replete with literary activity. In 1984 he attended the Adelaide Festival’s Writers’ Week and then travelled for two months in Central Australia with Bruce Chatwin, author of *The Songlines* (1987). In 1986 he travelled for three weeks in Nicaragua as the guest of the Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers, after which he wrote a 170-page travelogue, *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (1986). In 1987 he visited India, made a BBC documentary called “The Riddle of Midnight,” and decided that “the old functioning anarchy will, somehow or other, keep on functioning for another forty years” (Weatherby 78). In 1987 he was divorced from Clarissa Luard and in January 1988 he married the American novelist Marianne
moving statements to the effect that his old life in which he was a free and mobile individual no longer exists, and there is an abundance of eloquent responses (in both prose and poetry) to his predicament and to many of the things the book has come to represent. Without going

Wiggins. In between writing *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie was also very active writing essays—some reflecting on the above travels, others making political arguments about race, class and culture in Britain, and still others commenting on novels and novelists from all over the globe. These essays can be found in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (1991). The *fatwa*, delivered on February 14, 1989, sent the author into hiding, resulted in numerous deaths and put many lives in danger. The most recent detailed chronology of events in the Rushdie Affair can be found in *The Rushdie Letters* (pages 130-183), although an excerpt from the back cover is adequate for my purposes here: "The death sentence—or *fatwa*—quickly drew blood. Bookshops in London, Oslo, and Sydney were firebombed. Five people were killed and a hundred wounded when demonstrators attacked the U.S. embassy in Islamabad. In Bombay, twelve rioters were shot dead. The Italian translator of *The Satanic Verses* was stabbed viciously and the Japanese translator was stabbed to death." The death threat has not, however, stopped Rushdie from writing. Indeed, he feels it would be a victory for those who want to silence him if he became so preoccupied with the problems created by the *fatwa* that he did not continue to write. In the six and a half years of hiding from assassins, Rushdie has written a children’s fantasy (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*), several defenses of *The Satanic Verses*, a collection of essays (*Imaginary Homelands*), a collection of short stories (*East, West*) and a full-length novel (*The Moor’s Last Sigh*). The most imaginative and provocative of the three new stories in *East, West* may well be "Chekov and Zulu," in which Rushdie superimposes Star Trek characters and scenarios onto paradoxes of Khalistan politics. Another story, "The Harmony of the Spheres," suggests that Rushdie may be exasperated or depressed by the consequences of exploring diabolology: the "cacodemonic crowd" in Eliot’s head leads him into, or at least exacerbates, his madness. The narrator clearly sees the occult as an area which leads to illness: "And I know what made [Eliot] sick, I thought: and vowed silently to remain well. Since then there has been no intercourse between the spiritual world and mine" (144).

Apart from Rushdie’s essays, "In God We Trust," "In Good Faith" and "1,000 days in a leaking balloon," the section entitled "At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers" in *The Wizard of Oz* contains the following allegorical scenario: "The fundamentalists have expressed their desire to buy the magic footwear in order to burn it. and this is not, in the view of the liberal Auctioneers, an unreasonable request. What price tolerance if the intolerant are not tolerated also? Money insists on democracy; anyone’s cash is as good as anyone else’s. The fundamentalists fulminate from their soap-boxes, and are ignored: but some senior figures speak ominously of the thin edge of the wedge" (60). In a poetic mode, Rushdie echoes his use of butterflies in *The Satanic Verses*: "here’s my choice: / not to shut up. To sing on, in spite of attacks, / to sing (while my dreams are being murdered by facts) / praises of butterflies broken on racks.” Borrowing images from the infamous novel, Esmail Kho’i calls *The Satanic Verses* “beautiful and dangerous, / like the architecture / of an iceberg, / or the geometry of a forest,” and he asserts that "God must be redeemed / from Religions” (5, 9). Mohammed Bennis appears to borrow from *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame* when he claims that “this writing is blood that points / trembling into a distance that is out of joint,” and when he asks, “are you the madman of the frontiers?” (Abdallah 79-80).
into the complexities of what Islamic Law means to the diversity of Muslim countries and individuals, one must keep in mind that Rushdie lives in a country in which Islamic Law does not apply (any more than British Law applies in Iran). While many Muslims are offended by a book which they understand to be insulting to Muhammad and Islam, most see Islam as a peaceful religion which is antithetical to death-threats and assassinations. Notwithstanding the tolerance of the overwhelming majority of Muslims, Khomeini's elevated status among some Shi'ites suggests that even were the Iranian government to repudiate the *fatwa*, the author may never live without the threat of death hanging over his head.6

The possibility of a strong negative reaction to the novel seems to have been entertained by Rushdie as he was writing it, although Rushdie later expressed dismay at the violence following its publication. Rushdie as author appears to be different than Rushdie as critic, for the former expresses a keen awareness of the blasphemy in the text7 while the latter

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6 The words of the February 14, 1989 *fatwa* are as follows: “I inform all zealous Muslims of the world that the author of the book entitled *The Satanic Verses*—which has been compiled, printed and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet, and the Qur’an—and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content, are sentenced to death. I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they may be found, so that no one else will dare to insult the Muslim sanctities. God willing, whoever is killed on this path is a martyr.”

7 In the novel, Sisodia says that his prospective film (which mirrors the contents of Chapter Two and Chapter Six) “would be set in an imaginary city made of sand, and would recount the story of the encounter between a prophet and an archangel [and] also the temptation of the prophet.” Countering an interviewer’s objection that this film would “be seen as blasphemous, a crime against ...,” Billy Battuta responds naively, “Certainly not [...] Fiction is fiction; facts are facts” (SV 272). Also, Baal suggests to the Madam of “The Curtain” that a prostitute use the name of Mahound’s favorite wife (Ayesha) in order to give a customer a forbidden thrill, to which the Madam replies, “If they heard you say that they’d boil your balls in butter.” Upon reflection, the Madam allows her prostitutes to use the names of the prophet’s wives, observing that it “is very dangerous” but “it could be damn good for business” (SV 380). In addition to realizing the danger of lampooning Muhammad’s conjugal arrangements, Rushdie also seems to have been aware that attacks on Muhammad’s revelation would be met with fierce opposition. In the Jahilia chapters Baal is most closely associated with blasphemy: he is the friend of Salman Farsi (the scribe who distorts Mahound’s recitation), he writes devotional verses to the goddess Al-Lat (as well as parodic verses about Mahound and Allah) and he takes the role of “husband” to the twelve prostitutes or “wives” in the brothel. It is thus appropriate that he bear the
downplays this blasphemy. Given that those threatening Rushdie’s life accuse him of blasphemy and of playing the part of the Devil, he may not deem it helpful to emphasize the elements of satanic narration in the novel. In general, his comments on the instances of blasphemy in the text appear designed to downplay rather than confront the issue. If he does not find it helpful to admit that his text contains blasphemy, he is unlikely to admit to creating a narrator who promotes blasphemy in every form. Instead, he emphasizes that the devilish elements in the novel explore a political rather than a theological theme. In “In Good Faith” Rushdie argues that the use of such blasphemous or theologically charged phrases as “the satanic verses” shows the West its own insulting view of the Muslim Other: “You call us devils? [...] 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” (403). The Satanic Verses shows the Devil’s version of the world, yet it does not do so only to make a political point. The Devil in the novel has an otherworldly agenda, one which supersedes the worldly insofar as the Devil uses the politics of rebellion to justify and promote rebellion against God. Rushdie as author pushes this version much further than does Rushdie as critic. In his comments on the novel Rushdie notes that the Devil descends into the world of the text (IH 403, Rushdie with Ball 35), yet he says nothing about having created

brunt of Mahound’s anger. Routed from the Curtain and condemned to death by Mahound, Baal shouts at his monothestic opponent: “Whores and writers, Mahound. We are the people you can’t forgive.” Eerily anticipating Khomeini’s unforgiving position, Mahound retorts coldly, “Writers and whores. I see no difference here” (SV 392). Khomeini stated his position thus: “Even if Salman Rushdie repents and becomes the most pious man of [our] time, it is incumbent on every Muslim to employ everything he has, his life and his wealth, to send him to hell” (Pipes 30, quoted from Islamic Revolution News Agency, February 19, 1989). A grim irony presents itself, given that Rushdie’s existence in hiding resembles that of the exiled Imam in London, for whom paranoia “is a prerequisite of survival” (SV 207).
a satanic narrative personality, one who cares as little about the demonized, dark Other
(Chamcha and Gibreel) as about the “angelized,” white Alleluia. In an interview with John
Ball, given several months prior to the fatwa, Rushdie says that Gibreel’s dreams “are
reworkings, in a kind of nightmare way, of incidents from the early life of Islam.” Given that
Gibreel is a Muslim, his “nightmare of religion” is naturally “a nightmare about God and the
Devil” (35-36). My point is that Gibreel’s dreams are not merely mental scenarios shaped by
inner human fears or frustrations, but that they are also shaped by a figure who invades and
darkens these dreams. One can see these dreams—as well as the dreams set in India—as
nightmares which Gibreel can neither control nor understand and as subject to the insidious
manipulations of an autonomous otherworldly Satan-figure. I do not here wish to preempt
arguments which need to be developed in greater detail, yet I want to make it clear that I am
skeptical of Rushdie’s pronouncements on the novel, particularly insofar as they elide
discussion of the blasphemous satanic voice he has written into it. Like his momentary
“embrace of Islam,” his comments seem aimed to appease Muslim critics rather than to
continue the provocative challenges one finds in the novel itself.8

8 Harveen Mann notes that Rushdie “has offered contrastable interpretations of The Satanic Verses.”
Initially, Rushdie contended that the novel is a serious investigation of religious conflict. Then, “faced
with the hard reality of the fatwa and after a year of life in hiding, Rushdie fell back on the fabulosity
of his narrative as his key defense against the charges of blasphemy” (288). Mann also notes that
Rushdie claims his audience to be “Indian migrants in Britain,” while it is much more likely to be “the
Western(ized), liberal cosmopolite” (288, 290). I would suggest that Rushdie is excessively selective
when he claims to write for South Asian Muslims in England, and that he also attempts to appease
these same people by suggesting that what they perceive as blasphemy is in fact for their political
benefit. No doubt Rushdie is writing for South Asians in Britain and no doubt certain demonic
depictions are meant to illustrate the demonizations inflicted on migrants by the West, yet his major
audience is a cosmopolitan, postmodern one, and much of the blasphemy in the novel reflects a satanic
narrator’s version of both this world inhabited by humans and an other world inhabited by figures such as
Gabriel, Satan and God.
The Satanic Verses is a confusing and problematic text even on the most fundamental structural level, the level on which the various settings of the novel and the theme of "the satanic verses" are tenuously linked by the oneiric, surreal imagination of Gibreel. One of the geneses of Gibreel's kaleidoscopic dreams can be found in his childhood readings, which include "metamorphic myths of Greece and Rome, the avatars of Jupiter," "the incident of the Satanic verses," "the politics of Muhammad's harem," and newspaper accounts "in which butterflies could fly into young girls' mouths, asking to be consumed" (SV 23-24). Gibreel's readings make sense of the chaotic jumps from setting to setting, for these settings can be seen as psychological manifestations of ideas and scenes which had a formative influence on his mind. Gibreel's early readings, combined with the "inaccurate" stories about the Prophet told by his adoptive mother (SV 22), link the novel's title to the diverse settings in which the gharaniq incident is reworked: to the Arabian peninsula, where Iblis tempts Mahound to compromise his monotheism by allowing the intercession of the three goddesses; to rural India, where Mirza tempts Ayesha the butterfly girl to compromise her faith by accepting his material help; and to London, where Chamcha whispers his "satanic verses" to Gibreel and where Rekha tempts Gibreel to say "just three-little-words" (SV 334). These three words may be "I love you," yet they also imply the three short names of the goddesses of the gharaniq incident (Lat, Manat and Uzza), and hence they imply a compromise of what Gibreel mistakenly sees as his archangelic mission. Another possible genesis of Gibreel's dreams is the alam al-malakut of Islamic cosmology, a realm inhabited by spiritual forces, including djinns. Gibreel finds a similar "subtle world," one increasingly dominated by mischievous and
evil spirits—in particular, the father of the djinns, Iblis (or Al-Jann). I will return to the *alam al-malakut* during my discussion of the way Satan “raises Hell” in both Gibreel’s mind and in the various settings of the novel. A third reason behind Gibreel’s nightmares may be that Satan is particularly skillful at manipulating the dreaming mind:

Man’s confrontation with Satan’s disguised form attains its fullest intensity not in man’s everyday conscious life, but in the semi-conscious realm of dream and sleep. The power of the spirit world is felt with far greater force there than in the waking state because Satan can avail himself of the most frightening of nightmarish forms. (Awn 49)

Awn notes that Satan’s power in the dreamworld was considered to be so great that it “even seemed conceivable that Satan might appear as the Prophet of God himself,” although Muhammad is reputed to have said that this cannot happen (49). In *The Satanic Verses* Satan does not appear in Gibreel’s dreams as Muhammad or God, although Satan appears to the waking Gibreel disguised as God (or Oopervala) and a strong case can be made that he disguises himself as Gabriel in the dreams which rework the *gharaniq* incident.

The oneiric structure of the novel also makes sense in light of Hindu myth, particularly when one recalls that Gibreel’s adoptive father teaches him about reincarnation (SV 21), that Gibreel portrays Hindu gods in films, and that he has “a bee in his bonnet about avatars” (SV 17). In *Dreams, Illusions and Other Realities* Wendy O’Flaherty analyzes many instances in Hindu myth where versions of reality are “dreamt” by average people, sages or gods. Her comments on the *Yogavasista* are particularly relevant to the shifting narrative structures in *The Satanic Verses* as well as to the ensuing interpretive difficulties:

If [the sage] Vasistha can plunge into the page and come face to face with the monk in his own story, as Rudra [a Vedic god, often seen as a precursor of Shiva] can go into his dream and wake up the people who are dreaming him, we cannot rest confident in our assumption that our level of the story is the final one. (244)
Critics often compare the ontological and metafictional play in Rushdie's fiction to that found in the writings of Borges, Kafka and Marquez, yet Hindu texts also provide relevant points of comparison as to what it means to exist in this or any world, and as to what it means to arrive at a confident reading of any story. In her comments on the story of Lavana and Gadhi, O'Flaherty asks, "Why could there not be a woman, say, dreaming that she was a king dreaming...?"

In fact, this cannot happen in our text. For the Hindu, the chain stops with the Brahmin, the lynchpost of reality, the witness of the truth. To the extent that the Brahmin represents purity and renunciation, he is real, safely outside the maelstrom of samsara and illusion. Our confusion about our own place in the frames of memory, one contained within another like nesting Chinese boxes, is shared by Lavana until the very end of his tale. But to Gadhi, who is, after all, a Brahmin, the god who pulls the strings is directly manifest and takes pains to open his bag of tricks right from the start;

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9 The ontological and epistemological applicability of Hinduism to Rushdie's fiction deserves a study in itself. From the earliest expressions of Rig Veda (c. 1200 B.C.), in which the poet speculates that perhaps even the being who lives in the highest heaven does not know from whence this universe arises (Rig Veda 25), to the ponderings of modern writers such as Arun Joshi, who in The Last Labyrinth (1981) questions whether or not there is "a mystery into which everything fitted" (161), the three millennia of Hindu thought provide much grist for the type of speculative mill which appears to fascinate Rushdie. Another tradition which might bear interesting results is Taoism, especially that of Chuang Tze, who posits an ineffable Being yet refuses to pronounce on such things as the afterlife. Rushdie may be borrowing from Chuang Tze (especially if one keeps in mind the recurrent and metamorphic butterflies in the novel) in that Gibreel's notion that he is part of Gabriel's dream echoes Chuang Tze's parable in which a man wonders if he dreamt he was a butterfly or if he is a butterfly dreaming he is a man (Chuang Tze 245). Much of the import of Chuang Tze's parable lies in the parable which precedes it, in which the status of the self is seen to depend on forces outside of it, and these forces in turn cannot be evaluated since they depend on forces outside of them. Rushdie's fiction in general and Gibreel's predicament in particular suggest that since the self is dependent on an infinite number of unknown factors, it cannot construct a firm, coherent, encompassing framework or ideology. While one might be tempted to read a deconstructive stance into Chuang Tze's ontology, his notions that we may be the dream of another being, and that we cannot understand the increasingly remote network of forces which constitute and change our nature, lead to an acceptance of change and identity transformation--an acceptance which works in his philosophical system because he asserts a strong belief that the Way guides and helps everything under Heaven. The crucial difference between Chuang Tze and Rushdie is that Rushdie asks the disturbing question, What if there is no such Way which gives meaning to the transformations of the self? Gibreel dreams he is the Archangel yet he wonders if the Archangel is "the guy who's awake and this is the bloody nightmare. His bloody dream: us" (SV 83). Readers, on the other hand, cannot be sure that his dreams do not result from the machinations of the Devil.
moreover, he returns three times at the end to make sure that Gadhi has understood his lesson properly. (138-139)

In *The Satanic Verses* there is no “Brahmin” or god who enlightens Gibreel about the nature of the strange and dark journey he takes from one reality to the next. Rather, his “strings” are pulled without his knowledge by Chamcha, whose “strings” are in turn being pulled--again without his knowledge--by the satanic narrator. Here a distinction between *The Satanic Verses* and *Grimus* may be helpful: while Flapping Eagle learns the meaning of his quest from Virgil and Grimus, Gibreel remains puzzled to the very end of his increasingly miserable life. Gibreel’s universe is not a Hindu “mobius universe” whose final level is the “transcendent continuum” called God (O’Flaherty 244). Rather, it is a downward, chaotic, splintering spiral whose final level is madness and suicide.

The chaotic, oneiric structure of *The Satanic Verses* makes it a challenging novel to read, yet even more problematic and perplexing is the way Rushdie mixes his conventional narrator’s attacks on orthodoxy with the demonic scheming and innuendo of a satanic narrator. While it is something of a simplification to say that the text has only two narrative voices, I would argue that it has both a conventional omniscient narrator and an otherworldly narrator, and that the latter occasionally speaks in the first person and indicates that he is Satan. These two types of narrator are not clearly distinguishable--except when the satanic narrator tells readers he is Satan, when he expresses a personal antagonism to God and His angels, and when he specifically plays the role of Iblis in prompting doubt and distorting revelation. The satanic narrator exerts a surreptitious influence over the conventional narrator’s text in much the same way he exerts influence over Gibreel’s mind: just as Gibreel loses awareness at important moments of satanic intervention, and just as Gibreel’s mind is
increasingly thrown into a hellish chaos, so the text is taken over by the satanic narrator at key moments and so the text is increasingly dominated by hellish and chaotic scenarios. It is tempting to suggest that the conventional narrator is at times possessed, yet this is not indicated, at least not in any substantial way. Likewise, there is no unambiguous indication that Gibreel is possessed. The exact relation between the conventional, Rushdie-like narrator and the satanic narrator remains problematic. Rushdie has created a text in which readers are alerted about the possibility of demonic incursions yet in which they cannot expect everything to have demonic intention. They cannot, as can readers of C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, simply invert each immoral point into its moral opposite.

One of the most confusing yet crucial moments of satanic narration in the novel occurs in Allie’s bedroom, where the satanic narrator disguises himself as a bumbling God (or Oopervala, “the Fellow from Upstairs”) who resembles Rushdie (SV 318). Readers are led to see Oopervala as a God who illustrates the notion that an anthropomorphic Deity is archaic, obsolete, a ridiculous “Thing.” God is made to look old and myopic, an inversion of the conventional all-seeing narrator. Instead of benignly controlling events and instead of supplying a revelation which clarifies the meaning of Gibreel’s visions, Oopervala becomes a stereotype to be manipulated--just as Chamcha conveniently becomes a heroic rebel angel and Gibreel conveniently becomes an angel without a will of his own. We do not discover the identity of Oopervala until ninety pages after the satanic narrator’s deceptive theophany in

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10 Among these one could include the hellish nightmare into which Chamcha is thrown, the riots in London and Bombay, the genocide in the Imam’s “Desh,” the mining disaster and the drownings in India, the surreal multiple deaths of Gibreel in Rosa’s Argentina, the execution of Baal, the murder of Sisodia and Alleluia, and the suicide of Gibreel. In “Raising Hell” I take a closer look at the way Gibreel’s mind is flooded by rage and by a desire to destroy reminders of heavenly bliss.
Allie’s bedroom: the satanic narrator echoes the devilish Iago (he says, “I’m saying nothing”) and then tells readers that it was he rather than God who “sat on Alleluia Cone’s bed and spoke to the superstar” (SV 408-409). Crucial to the otherworldly plot is that Oopervala here plays the roles of Shakespeare’s Iago and Milton’s infernal Serpent by pushing Gibreel away from Allie, who is the one person who might be able to restore his sanity and lead him to a state of grace. Immediately following the satanic narrator’s admission, Rushdie gives a strong indication that his satanic narrator dips in and out of the text: the satanic narrator states matter-of-factly, “I’m leaving now,” after which the narrative of Rushdie’s conventional narrator takes over (SV 409). This is one of the few instances where the satanic narrator’s presence is clearly suggested. In most cases, one can neither be sure of his presence nor of his absence.

In The Satanic Verses Rushdie plays a subtle and dangerous game, one far surpassing the metafictional game of narratorial unreliability in Midnight’s Children. While Saleem’s story contains elements of chaos, uncertainty and cosmic evil, Rushdie highlights Saleem’s desire for a mystical, democratic “conference” and he shows that imitating the actions of the snake—implementing Schaapsteker’s strategy of striking from cover—leads to violence, death and meaninglessness. The Satanic Verses contains even greater elements of chaos, uncertainty and cosmic evil. Moreover, its narrative is not tenuously held together by the hopeful dreams

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11 In Shakespeare’s text, Othello asks Iago why he has ensnared his soul and body, to which Iago responds, “Demand me nothing, what you know, you know, / From this time forth I never will speak word” (V, ii. 304-305).

12 Allie’s concern for Gibreel’s spiritual health is apparent from the moment readers meet her. After giving up his appeal to God in his sickness, and after gorging himself on forbidden pork, Gibreel concludes that not being struck by a “thunderbolt” proves his point, that is, proves the “the non-existence of God.” Allie tells Gibreel that his appeal to God and his subsequent survival is “the point” (SV 30).
of an idealist, but by the inescapable nightmares of a schizophrenic. Gibreel calls his increasingly fragmented life a "bloody dream" and wonders if he and everyone around him are merely cogs in the greater archangelic machinery of Gabriel. When Gibreel wails, "Then what the hell [...] is going on in my head?" (SV 83), readers would be right in answering that the "bloody dream" which ends in murder and suicide is the fantasy or dreamscape of the fallen archangel Satan. Rushdie depicts a dark and confusing universe in The Satanic Verses, yet he also supplies his readers with hints that the darkness is largely the work of his satanic narrator, who acts as a puppetmaster, pulling the strings of Chamcha and Gibreel.

One might well ask, What is the purpose of writing a novel in which Satan has such a profound yet elusive voice and influence? One possible explanation is that Rushdie is taking a narrative experiment as far as he can. Unlike C.S. Lewis' The Screwtape Letters, Rushdie's novel has no subtitle, such as Letters from a Senior to a Junior Devil, and unlike Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, sections have no titles, such as "The Voice of the Devil" or "Proverbs of Hell." Rushdie pushes his narrator-construction to its limit, that is, to the point where he does not give clear and consistent warnings to his readers about the nature of this narrator. This is in keeping with Satan's legendary mode of operating, which is characterized by disguise, deception and insinuation. Yet Satan also has an archetypal pride, one consequence of which is that he cannot stop himself from boasting and gloating on occasion, thus giving himself away--as when he tells readers that in "the matter of tumbles" he will "yield pride of place to no personage" (SV 133). In supplying just as many hints as are absolutely necessary that the narrative is invaded and influenced by a Satan figure, Rushdie puts into practice what he learns from Günter Grass: "Go for broke. Always try to do too
much. Dispense with safety nets” (IH 277). The wisdom of such advice appears uncertain when one asks questions such as the following ones. What moral effect does it have on readers when a traditional narrator is interrupted, possessed or replaced by a satanic narrator? What happens when an already chaotic narrative is infused with the voice of a satanic narrator, one who is by very definition comfortable—one might even say “well-versed”—in meaninglessness and chaos? Does such a narrative strategy support Kliever’s contention (to which I referred in the Introduction) that postmodernism contains an “apocalyptic pessimism” and a “rising tide of occultism”? Has “the narrator as God” been replaced with “the narrator as Devil”? And will this inevitably lead to the type of misunderstanding and irreconcilable difference that has thus far characterized the Rushdie Affair? Must one conclude that it is culturally and personally counterproductive to write novels which include a satanic point of view? Is Rushdie learning the same lesson Babasaheb Mhatre’s “too-friendly” spirit teaches Gibreel: “don’t meddle [...] in what you do not comprehend”? (SV 21). In creating an elusive satanic narrator, Rushdie also puts his readers in a difficult spot, for, as Srinivas Aravamudan observes, if “we wish to spot the ruses of the devil, we are in a catch-22 [...] situation, as we have to proceed in a vein more diabolical than the devil himself” (16).

Yet it is also logical to assume that if Rushdie writes some of the novel in the voice of Satan, and if he points to Satan’s voice on occasion, then he expects readers to be skeptical of this voice—just as they are to be skeptical of Saleem’s wild claims to control the destiny of the subcontinent. It is also logical to expect that a novel which includes Satan’s voice will be horrifying or obscene to those who shun any voice resembling that of Satan. This may partly explain why many Muslims refuse to read The Satanic Verses. While they may not take a
close enough look at the novel to see the satanic narrator, they can nevertheless ascertain numerous points of view which are antithetical to those promoted by the God of the Quran. In the West the problem of reading the novel is by and large different: readers either do not realize what horrible things the narrator is saying about Islamic sanctities, or they have their suspicions about the narrator (even though they may not see him as Satan). Western readers are conditioned to separate the narrator from the author, whose message, they often assume, lies deeper than that of his narrator.

One of the more helpful articles in coming to terms with the literary import of *The Satanic Verses* is Aravamudan’s “Being God’s Postman is No Fun, Yaar: Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*.” Aravamudan combines contemporary deconstructive theory with the ancient mythic idea highlighted by the novel’s epigraph--Satan’s homelessness:

> We might say that the slipperiness of the devil is that of the signifier itself; it is the very indeterminacy of the devil’s actions that make [sic] him truly diabolical. The *desimerrance* of his vagrancy, his lack of address which summarizes his delinquency, his nomadic refusal to recognize the law of settlement, is an eternal escape from the transcendental signified--God. (16)

One could apply this indeterminacy to the satanic narrator, who moves in and out of the text in order to insinuate that there is no such thing as a single, transcendental Meaning and Unity, an Ideal toward which all beings can aspire. Casting doubt on everything sacred, he offers us his alternatives: continual doubt, a choice of deities (including himself), and a world in which no sacred Meaning or *hierophany* orients the self. In replacing the God-like author with Satan, Rushdie appears to drift in the “rising tide of occultism,” the darker side of Kliever’s “polysymbolic polysymbolism.” Yet Rushdie also suggests the possibility of Qaf, of what one might call a transcendental signified which can neither be defined nor discarded--an antidote
or invisible nemesis to the insidious indeterminacy of the Devil. While Rushdie's experiment in satanic narration may be dark and dangerous, it nevertheless contains hidden within it the same ideal one finds most clearly expressed in *Grimus* and *Haroun*, and which one finds in similarly tragic, marginalized forms in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*.

While the Devil slides unseen through much of the novel, creating a meaningless and hellish world for Chamcha, Gibreel and Alleluia, Rushdie also suggests that Satan's elusiveness differs in kind from the mysticism, love and ineffability represented by Allie and her Everest/Qaf. The exact nature of Qaf in *The Satanic Verses* remains unclear, although Rushdie skillfully avoids saying that Allie sees the face of God at the peak of Everest. Rather, Allie believes that it is possible to see the face of God (SV 198). In her spiritual intoxication she enters a blissful realm of angels and Deity, a realm which, as I will argue in more detail in "Murdering Alleluia," is one against which the satanic narrator sets all his powers of rhetoric. Not only does he try to convince the reader that this realm is ruled over by a tyrannical God, but he also manipulates events so that Allie cannot find annihilation in this realm. He appears to stop her from remaining at the peak of Everest by firing a gun (which echoes the initial explosion of Bostan and anticipates Gibreel's final gunfire), and he manipulates events so that she is eventually pushed from the roof of his demonic apartment, Everest Vilas. The satanic narrator's antagonism to God, Allie and their Qaf/Everest underscores the fundamental cosmic division which the satanic narrator does his best to disguise when he argues that good and evil are interpenetrable, that God is mainly evil and that Satan is also good.

In *The Satanic Verses* Everest/Qaf stands for a Meaning which lies beyond the arguments and manipulations of the satanic narrator, just as in *Grimus* the otherworldly
mountain Flapping Eagle creates lies beyond Grimus' egocentric understanding. Grimus fashions himself into his vision of the Simurg, yet because he does not control the narrative he cannot perpetuate his vision. Grimus intrudes into the life of Flapping Eagle and he spies on the citizens of Calf, yet the narrative is slanted in favour of Virgil, who wants to free everyone from Grimus' tyrannical definition of Qaf. Unlike Deggle, Virgil does not want to seize power at the peak of the mountain. The satanic narrator, on the other hand, does want to seize power. Moreover, he has the narrative sway to defile the reputation of the figure atop the otherworldly mountain, to destroy Gibreel's heavenly union with Alleluia, and to stop Alleluia from ascending the peak a second time. This does not, however, mean that the ideals of love, unity and tolerance—represented chiefly by Allie and Sufyan—are demolished. As with Desdemona in Othello, a character may be defeated on the worldly level, yet on the otherworldly level the spirit and the ideals of this character may live on.

SATANIC REVISIONS AND INVASIONS

The consistent and strategic influence of an otherworldly satanic narrator becomes increasingly likely when one sees that a sly, sinister narrative voice revises the myth of Satan's disastrous fall from Heaven, revisits the site of Satan's victory in the Garden of Eden, and reworks in various ways Satan's unsuccessful attempt to sow doubt in the mind of Muhammad. My argument rests on the notion that the text can be read from the very beginning on two levels, the worldly and the otherworldly. I will, of course, be emphasizing the latter. On the worldly level, the plane Bostan explodes and crashes as a result of the political struggles in the Punjab. On the otherworldly level, the plane Bostan represents the
Muslim heaven of the same name, and the miraculous landing of Chamcha and Gibreel revises the myth of Satan’s rebellion in Heaven and his subsequent fall to Hell. One should note that the novel begins with the fall of the “good angel” (Gibreel) as well as the “bad angel” (Chamcha), a fall which constitutes a distortion or satanic revision of the myth in which only “bad angels” fall. One should also note that “Bostan” explodes at exactly the height of Everest, the mountain at the top of which Alleluia sees angels and “the face of God” (SV 198-199), and that the two “angels” plummet to the “cosy sea-coast” on which “danced Lucifer, the morning’s star” (SV 131). Having brought his two main characters down with him onto his home turf, the satanic narrator proceeds to replay his victory in Eden: he uses Oopervera and his devilish, Iago-like Chamcha to sow the seeds of division in the heavenly, Edenic garden of love inhabited by Gibreel and Alleluia.\textsuperscript{13} He also sows the seeds of doubt, arguing that fallen angels exercised the freedom to dissent from God’s tyranny and that humans ought to follow their example by doubting revelation and by exploring the doubt which lies between belief and disbelief (SV 92). The satanic narrator’s cosmic drama reaches its climax when Gibreel Farishta (“Gabriel Angel”) murders Alleluia Cone (“Praise God Mountain”) before the latter can see the face of God a second time. At this point several important distinctions between \textit{The Satanic Verses} and \textit{Othello} present themselves: Gibreel does not attain Othello’s self-knowledge, nor does he praise the virtues of the woman he has murdered. Instead of delivering an impassioned eulogy before killing himself, Gibreel stutters that Allie is a “whore” and a “bitch” but that he loved her nevertheless. Instead of falling on his dagger in heroic

\textsuperscript{13} The relationship between Adam and Eve was presumably perfect or “heavenly” before Satan’s temptation. In Arabic, Paradise or al-Jannah literally means “the garden” and “also refers to the Garden of Eden where Adam dwelt with Eve before the Fall” (Glassé 206).
style, he puts a gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger (SV 544-545). The anticlimax comes when Chamcha, conveniently purged of his evil by a heart by-pass, reconciles with Zeenat Vakil and with his Indian self. While on the worldly level this reconciliation suggests optimism, on the otherworldly level it contains what Aravamudan calls “the slyly ironical last laugh of the devil, who has conquered by fading away into innocuous moral virtue” (15).

Fundamental to the satanic narrator’s revised cosmic drama is the way he possesses and manipulates the bodies and minds of Chamcha and Gibreel. He manipulates these two protagonists as if they were actors on a stage or puppets dangling beneath his strings. The satanic narrator’s invasion of the text in the opening scene has been overlooked by critics (except Corcoran) and tends to be seen merely as a magic realist episode. Yet when one looks closely at the last two pages of the opening scene one finds that the satanic narrator is in the process of lodging himself—in the form of a “will to live,” a will to survive his own fall from Heaven—in the stomach and vocal cords of Chamcha. Treating Chamcha in much the same ruthless way the Beast treats Sufiya in Shame, he possesses the inner parts of Chamcha’s body, wanting “nothing to do with his pathetic personality.” The satanic narrator uses Chamcha’s vocal cords as if they were his strings, and he works Chamcha’s mouth so that Chamcha can in turn take control of Gibreel’s vocal cords:

[What] had taken [Chamcha] over was the will to live, unadulterated, pure, and the first thing it did was to inform him that it wanted nothing to do with his pathetic personality, that half-reconstructed affair of mimicry and voices, it intended to bypass all that, and he found himself surrendering to it, yes, go on, as if he were a bystander in his own mind, in his own body, because it began in the very centre of his body and

14 One might compare and contrast the satanic narrator as puppetmaster to the elusive wayang puppetmaster/narrator in Christopher Koch’s The Year of Living Dangerously (1978). Both are dark, shadowy figures whose manipulations are difficult to interpret and both have given rise to charges (against the authors) of stereotyping and insulting Asians.
spread outwards, turning his blood to iron, changing his flesh to steel, except that it also felt like a fist that enveloped him from outside, holding him in a way that was both unbearably tight and intolerably gentle; until finally it had conquered him totally and could work his mouth, his fingers, whatever it chose, and once it was sure of its dominion it spread outward from his body and grabbed Gibreel Farishta by the balls.

‘Fly,’ it commanded Gibreel. ‘Sing.’ (SV 9)

Since in mythology the angel Gabriel never lost his angelic wings, Gabriel’s parodic stand-in is manipulated to produce a flight of song that will land them both safely on the ground. On the otherworldly level, Satan is working through Chamcha so that Chamcha can command his “Archangel,” so that he can usurp God’s position in the cosmic chain of command. This usurpation will become especially important when we look at the satanic narrator’s reworking of the gharaniq incident, in which Satan substitutes his own voice for that of God’s archangelic messenger. In appreciating the significance of the opening scene, readers also ought to note the insidiousness of the words, “yes, go on,” for they are slyly inserted in a passage which suggests possession--euphemistically called “dominion.” Is the satanic narrator urging Chamcha to surrender to his power? Is he urging the reader to accept, even enjoy, this possession? The opening scene ends on a particularly suspicious note, the full import of which is developed by Marlena Corcoran in her article, “Salman Rushdie’s Satanic Narration”:

In a command much like the archangel gave to Muhammad to “Recite,” the will-to live commands Gibreel to “Sing.” […] A narrator who claims, “I know the truth, obviously,” comments on this chain of inspiration, and questions its type:

“Chamcha willed it and Farishta did what was willed.
Which one was the miracle-worker?
Of what type -- angelic, satanic -- was Farishta’s song?
Who am I?” (10)

By asking “Who am I?” this narrator poses for the novel the same question Muhammad asked of the dubious “Satanic verses”: who is their narrator? (Corcoran 157-158)

I would add to this that Rushdie often suggests the presence and influence of his satanic narrator by asking questions, and that in this opening scene a question is asked (“Who am I?”)
which ought to be kept in mind throughout the novel. One also ought to keep in mind that the rhetorical answer, "Let's put it this way: who has the best tunes?" is placed at the start of the novel by a narrator who quotes from Mick Jagger's "Sympathy for the Devil," and who extols the "sweet songs" Satan sings "from hellbelow" (SV 286, 91).

The demonic possession of Chamcha subsequently takes the outward form of horns and a tail as well as the inward forms of heart palpitations, black water lapping at his heart, and evil thoughts rising from some hitherto unknown place within him. Chamcha experiences heart palpitations—which echo with the sound of "doom"—at early moments in the novel when he appears to undergo possession (SV 34, 57, 63, 65). The satanic narrator tells us that Chamcha's "palpitations" are the result of his heart wanting "to metamorphose into some new, diabolic form" (SV 253), yet this is what the narrator wants, not what Chamcha wants. While one might say that deep down in his heart Chamcha desires "to substitute the complex unpredictability of tabla improvisations for [his heart's] old metronomic beat" (SV 253), Chamcha does not desire the "black water" of evil to lap at his heart. Yet he has no choice but to give in to it. In the hellish hospital, "bitterness" overcomes Chamcha, who reflects, "Once I was lighter, happier, warm. Now the black water is in my veins." Immediately after this he thinks to himself, "What the hell," and the narrator comments, "That night, he told the manticore and the wolf that he was with them, all the way" (SV 170). Also, in the protected environment of the Shaandaar Café he feels that the "grotesque" has taken hold of him and that he is "sliding down a grey slope, the black water lapping at his heart." He feels there is "no-way-back" to his old life, and he tells himself, "Leave your nail-marks in the grey slope as you slide" (SV 260).
Chamcha’s demonization makes a political statement about the way immigrants are mistreated or “demonized” in Britain, yet this “demonization” also fits into an otherworldly plot in which Satan possesses and manipulates an innocent victim. Rushdie makes use of the association between the culturally demonized Other (the “dark foreigner,” especially “the Muslim”) and the otherworldly Other (the Devil), an association which is unfortunately part of the Western intellectual heritage. As a demonized Other with hooves, the Devil is sympathetically and at times humorously present in the body of Chamcha, yet as the demonizing otherworldly Other who puts these hooves on Chamcha’s feet, the Devil is not so obvious. While Rushdie sides with the demonized Other (and consequently criticizes the demonizing West), he does not side with the demonic and demonizing otherworldly Other. The demonized worldly Other struggles for cultural and political equality in this world and the demonizing otherworldly Other will do whatever is required to this world in order to take revenge on God and usurp His power. While much in the narrative suggests a concern for the plight of immigrants, the satanic narrator plays immigrant politics for all it is worth, that is, for all it is worth to him. He is only concerned about those who are marginalized and demonized insofar as they can be used to further his own case against the cosmic status quo.

In Orientalism Edward Said notes how Dante positions Muhammad “in the eighth of the nine circles of Hell,” one circle “before one arrives at the very bottom of Hell, which is where Satan himself is to be found.” Said then goes on to argue that the “discriminations and refinements of Dante’s poetic grasp of Islam are an instance of the schematic, almost cosmological inevitability with which Islam and its designated representatives are creatures of Western geographical, historical, and above all, moral apprehension.” He also argues that Orientalism and its “self-reinforcing” system of representation “turned Islam into the very epitome of an outsider against which the whole of European civilization from the Middle Ages on was founded” (68-70). Rushdie emphasizes the association between the Devil and the Muslim Other when he has his Prophet adopt “the demon-tag the farangis hung around his neck [...] the Devil’s synonym: Mahound” (SV 93).
While Chamcha learns to sympathize with the people for whom he becomes a rallying symbol, and while he eventually accepts his political status as arch-Rebel, there is a disjunction between his own thoughts and the evil thoughts rising within him. He becomes “alarmed by the hostile violence of the images arising from his unconscious” and he thinks to himself that forgiveness “seems to be out of [his] control; it either operates or it doesn’t and [he finds] out in due course” (SV 402-403). This lack of control occurs just before his heart palpitates with its “boom badoom doodoodoom.” His heart palpitations become worse when he chooses the “new, dark world” of his vengeful “left-hand path” (SV 416-419), and when an unseen force kicks him twice in the chest (SV 257, 466). The palpitations subside after he whispers the “satanic verses” which eventually lead Gibreel to kill Allie, and they disappear once he receives a heart by-pass (SV 516). On the worldly level, this “by-pass” is a medical operation, yet on the otherworldly level it is a satanic trick or “operation” which dismisses Chamcha’s evil in a superficial manner. From the beginning to the end of the novel, Chamcha is both the worldly Other, who is defined and manipulated by the British status quo, and the stand-in and chump of the otherworldly Other, who transforms and manipulates him without his knowledge.16

16 Abedi and Fischer observe that “Chamcha” connotes “toady” and “collaborator” as well as “a range of intercultural types.” As examples of Chamcha’s subservience they point to his bowler hat, his singing of “Rule Britannia,” and his embarrassment at slipping back into an Indian accent (339-440). I agree that Chamcha is portrayed in this way, although he is also possessed by Satan and plays Satan’s ancient cosmic role in a contemporary setting. Srinivas Aravamudan explains Chamcha’s name in the following way: Saladin Chamcha “combines the romanticized enemy of Richard the Lionheart in the Crusades with a shortened version of his family name, ‘Chamchawala,’ literally, ‘seller of spoons.’ Just as ‘Saladin’ was originally ‘Salahuddin,’ Chamcha contracted his name from ‘spoon-seller’ to ‘spoon,’ in order to better serve English palates. The etymology hints at an elaborate crosscultural intellectual joke, because Chamcha has no long spoon to sup with the devil; he is both devil and spoon at once” (14).
The satanic narrator has two separate strategies in dealing with Chamcha and Gibreel: he possesses Chamcha and turns him into a confused version of his demonic self; he produces gaps in Gibreel’s consciousness and takes advantage of what transpires during these gaps. While both Chamcha and Gibreel become puppets, Gibreel is most like a puppet in that he often appears empty-headed and without a will of his own. Gibreel first appears to lack awareness and volition when he stands at the top of Rosa Diamond’s stairs and says nothing while Chamcha (who is growing horns) is taken away by the police. On the otherworldly level, this scene suggests that the angel Gabriel collaborates with the tyrannical Powers That Be, that he demonstrates no solidarity with the “rebel hero” Satan. The satanic narrator makes a similar point earlier in the novel: he interrupts Gibreel with his “devil’s talk,” arguing that angels are merely God’s lackeys, without the gumption and free will to dissent (SV 92-93). Such a view of angels goes some way in explaining why Gibreel is so easily manipulated: his malleability and his empty-headedness express in parodic form the disdain of the rebellious fallen angel. Equally important, the satanic narrator benefits from what transpires when Gibreel evinces no will of his own. At Rosa’s, Gibreel’s blank-mindedness and his subsequent inaction thrust Chamcha into the role of the forsaken, unjustly accused angel—a role which makes Satan appear justified in his antagonism to Gabriel and God. Chamcha is of course ignorant of his rebellious stature—he even tells the officers that he has a “lovely, white, English wife” (SV 141). This superimposition of an otherworldly power struggle onto a worldly scenario anticipates the superimposition which occurs during the party at Shepperton Studios, where Chamcha sees “the great injustice of the division” between Gibreel, with his stardom
and his “glacial” English Alleluia, and himself, who has lost both job and wife (SV 425). 

While the narrator says he is supplying us with the motive behind the evil of Iago and Chamcha, he is also attempting to lead his audience to the conclusion that Satan’s bitterness and vengeance are justified because they are reactions to God’s injustice. Chamcha and Gibreel are not aware that they are merely puppets in a cosmic drama being shaped in favour of the fallen angel. Chamcha may, however, be aware that he manipulates Gibreel as if he were a puppet: in devising his plan to destroy Gibreel, Chamcha becomes what the narrator calls a “tyro puppeteer” studying Gibreel’s “strings, to find out what was connected to what” (SV 432). After Chamcha delivers the “little, satanic verses” which drive Gibreel mad with jealousy, the narrator exclaims: “How comfortably evil lodged in those supple, infinitely flexible vocal cords, those puppetmaster’s strings!” (SV 445). At this point, the distinction between the sentiments of the satanic narrator and those of his devil-puppet is difficult to gauge. What becomes clear, however, is that the satanic narrator has managed to execute his diabolic plan by using his devil-puppet to pull the strings of his angel-puppet.

Gibreel also resembles a puppet when he presides over Allie’s fall from the roof of Everest Vilas (SV 545), a fall which strongly indicates the satanic narrator’s opposition to those who would climb to the top of God’s Mountain. 

Another incident during which Gibreel remains inactive, yet actions or words are attributed to him, occurs when he

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17 Chamcha sees Gibreel’s “celebrity, and the great injustice of the division” (SV 425), yet he does not see that Gibreel and Alleluia are also in pain. He fails to see that “Gibreel the embodiment of all the good fortune that the Fury-haunted Chamcha so signally lacked, was as much the creature of his fancy, as much a fiction, as his invented-resented Allie” (SV 429). 

18 I return to Allie’s descent from Mount Everest, and to Gibreel’s role in her descent from Everest Vilas, in “Murdering Alleluia” below.
unintentionally lies next to the Indian Ayesha. It is while lying together that Ayesha first entertains (or “conceives”) the idea of leading a pilgrimage across the Arabian Sea (SV 226, 234-235). Gibreel protests that he “never laid a finger on her,” and in his dream he sees her “receiving a message from somewhere that she called Gibreel.” In exasperation, he exclaims: “Damn me if I know from where that girl was getting her information/inspiration. Not from this quarter, that’s for sure” (SV 226). That Ayesha’s “inspiration” comes from Gabriel or God is difficult to imagine, given that neither appear to have any voice or influence in the text. Satan, on the other hand, has a pervasive yet elusive voice, as well as an effective yet covert influence. Rushdie often suggests the presence of his satanic narrator by employing questions, and he appears to do the same when Gibreel speaks to himself in the following manner:

All around him, he thinks as he half-dreams, half-wakes, are people hearing voices, being seduced by words. But not his; never his original material. -- Then whose? (SV 234)

Ayesha’s “being seduced by words” appears particularly suspicious in light of the “soft seductive verses” Satan sings “from hellbelow” (SV 91) and in light of the fact that seduction implies cunning and temptation, both of which are characteristic of Satan.

The most problematic instance in which Gibreel remains unable to exert his own will occurs during the scenes of “revelation” on Mount Cone. Immediately prior to the “false” or “satanic revelation” which in Islamic history is ascribed to Satan, Gibreel hangs in suspension, “held up like a kite on a golden thread” (SV 112). Here Gibreel hovers much as he did when

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19 For more instances of such a use of questions, see “Debating the Satanic Narrator” below.
he abandons Chamcha on Rosa’s stairs, or when he agrees to go on a “motor tour” which leads to his being murdered in surreal fashion over and over again in Rosa’s Argentina (SV 151-155). On all of these occasions Gibreel remains inert, yet damaging things happen during the time his will is absent. One should also note that his hovering over Mount Cone resembles the hovering of the three high-flying birds (SV 123), the same birds who are Satan’s “fiendish backing group,” and who giggle “behind their hands at Gibreel” because they have a trick in store for him “and for that businessman [Mahound] on the hill” (SV 91). One can argue that just as the satanic narrator works Chamcha’s strings, making him whisper satanic verses over the telephone, so the satanic narrator works Gibreel’s strings, making him recite satanic verses to Mahound. Seeing the satanic narrator as a hidden puppetmaster helps to make sense of Gibreel’s two following statements, both of which can be taken to mean that it is God’s opposite who manipulates the drama or “picture” on Mount Cone by pulling the mouth-strings of his unwilling “Archangel”:

Being God’s postman is no fun, yaar.
But but but: God isn’t in this picture.
God knows whose postman I’ve been. (SV 112)

it was me both times, baba, me first and second also me. From my mouth, both the statement and the repudiation, verses and converses, universes and reverses, the whole thing, and we all know how my mouth got worked. (SV 123)

It is not at all obvious how his mouth gets worked, yet if one accepts that the first of the above statements implies that it is the opposite of God who is “in this picture,” and if one follows the trail of possessions, heart palpitations, blanked-out minds, puppet strings and dangling threads, one can conclude that it is the satanic narrator who works his mouth. In

20 Gibreel sees his experience in terms of a movie “picture.” This anticipates Sisodia’s movie based on Gibreel’s anguished imagination.
addition, one ought to recall that Satan is the author of the spurious verses in the original, quasi-historical *gharaniq* incident, which Rushdie clearly refers to when he has his Mahound say to himself that “the Devil came to him in the form of the archangel” (SV 123). A reworking of the original incident allows the narrator to dwell on the momentary victory he once appears to have gained over the Prophet. After accepting the three high-flying birds as intercessors, Mahound endures a hellish night full of “phantasmagoria and lust” (SV 117). He wakes up with the memory of “his wild anguished walk in the corrupt city, staring at the souls he had supposedly saved, looking at the simurgh-effigies, the devil-masks, the behemoths and hippocrits” (SV 120).

Whether or not Gibreel is puppeteered by Satan on Mount Cone remains ambiguous: Mahound either hears the words of Satan disguised as the words of Gabriel/Gibreel or he hears what he wants to hear, that is, he hears the words he forces from Gabriel/Gibreel’s mouth. The possibility that Mahound works Gibreel’s mouth is explicitly indicated when the narrator describes the manner in which Rosa controls Gibreel’s “cord”: Gibreel “was being held prisoner and manipulated by the force of Rosa’s will, just as the Angel Gibreel had been obliged to speak by the overwhelming need of the Prophet, Mahound” (SV 150); “As with the businessman of his dreams, [Gibreel] felt helpless, ignorant ... [Rosa] seemed to know, however, how to draw the images from him. Linking the two of them, navel to navel, he saw a shining cord” (SV 154).²¹ I do not take these statements as proof that Mahound works Gibreel’s mouth, for the satanic narrator is a deceptive and unreliable guide to the novel.

²¹ This shining cord appears to be the “golden cord of light linking [the soul] to the body.” The narrator tells us that “it is known to archangels” (SV 322), although Rosa and Mahound also appear to “know” it.
These two statements might be counted among what Alex Knö nagel calls the “numerous tactics” which the narrator uses “to confuse the reader’s insights into the novel’s structure” (71). If, however, one sees Mahound as the one who works Gibreel’s mouth, the satanic narrator still advances his position in his battle against Allah and his Prophet: he suggests that Muhammad is either self-deluded or an impostor. In either case, he implies that the Quran is not purely the word of God, that it shares in the imperfections and partialities of humans. By insinuating that both Satan and Mahound are the sources of revelation, the satanic narrator may be prompting readers to conclude that Mahound could not distinguish between the voices of Gabriel and the Devil and that Mahound sometimes hears what he wants to hear. Both conclusions suggest that God is not always the source of what later becomes known as His revelations. The satanic narrator may also be hoping to benefit from the above ambiguity in that it further serves to focus attention on an episode which many Muslim writers regard as “‘apocryphal gossip’ dredged up from the past by Western orientalists to discredit Islam” (Ruthven 38-39).

DEBATING THE SATANIC NARRATOR

Religion and otherworldly constructions are important in The Satanic Verses even if one does not locate the presence of a Satan in the text, yet they become crucial when one sees

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22 Ruthven goes on to argue that the incident is not merely gossip, but that it has been accepted by numerous scholars. More important than the authenticity of the episode is the way it is linked in the novel “with other episodes in the accounts of early Muslim annalists which cast doubt on the divinity of the Qur’an”—especially with accounts of Abdullah ibn Sa’ad (Salman Farsi in the novel), who “temporarily lost his faith after a mistake he had made in transcription went unnoticed by the prophet” (Ruthven 39). In “Blaspheming Muhammad, God and Angels” I return to Rushdie’s less than flattering portrait of Muhammad and to his sympathetic portraits of Salman Farsi and Baal.
the rhetoric and plot as largely influenced by this most infamous of mythic figures. By locating Satan in the text, the narrative becomes less a pastiche of voices and perspectives than a study in the insidious manipulations of a tricksterish and untrustworthy figure, one who has a specific otherworldly agenda. Because most critics ignore this agenda, I feel it necessary to point out that several critics note a satanic voice in the text, and that a few among these agree that this voice is consistent enough to constitute a major influence in the overall narrative design. While the following section is largely a critical review, it highlights the elusiveness of the satanic narrator as well as the instances of unambiguous satanic narration in the text. It also raises questions pertaining to the distinction between God and Satan in *The Satanic Verses.* In this sense it serves as a preamble to the next section, which examines the nature of the Satan in Rushdie's text.

Among the few critics who note a satanic voice (though not a consistent agenda) are Timothy Brennan, Keith Booker and Marlena Corcoran. In *Salman Rushdie & The Third World,* Brennan observes that *The Satanic Verses* "projects itself as a rival *Quran* with Rushdie as its prophet and the devil as its supernatural voice." He adds: "Or perhaps it is not the devil but only what the parasitical self-servers within the Faith call the devil by invoking God 'to justify the unjustifiable'" (152). The Devil is clearly the novel's "supernatural voice," yet this voice is less a product of "parasitical self-servers" than an autonomous, independent voice which speaks ill of anyone promoting, or associated with, faith in God. In "Beauty and the Beast: Dualism as Despotism in the Fiction of Salman Rushdie," Booker observes that there "are many indications in the book that the narrator is, in fact, Satan," yet he also claims that "God and Satan are indistinguishable, irrevocably intertwined" (988). Apart from noting
the difficulty in distinguishing a satanic narrator who is indistinguishable from God, I would argue that God does not enter the text as a figure or as a voice (the “theophany” of Chapter Five is a deception engineered by Satan) and that the symbol of God (Allie’s Everest) remains too symbolic to “intertwine” with the figure or voice of the Devil. In a different article, “Finnegans Wake and The Satanic Verses: Two Modern Myths of the Fall,” Booker claims that “the narrator of The Satanic Verses turns out to be none other than Satan himself but may also be God or the archangel Gabriel; it is difficult if not impossible to distinguish among such figures in Rushdie’s book.” Booker notes only one instance in which the narrator “clearly indicates a satanic component in his identity” (195), whereas Corcoran notes that the second chapter in the novel “has a suspicious narrator who may be, as in the case of the original troubling verses [of the gharaniq incident], Satan himself” (156). Despite the title of Corcoran’s article, “Salman Rushdie’s Satanic Narration,” she does not illustrate the pervasive influence of a Satan-figure in the text.\(^{23}\)

One cannot quickly dismiss Booker’s contention that God and Satan are indistinguishable in The Satanic Verses, especially since such indistinguishability is suggested in the comment that Everest is “diabolic as well as transcendent, or, rather, its diabolism and its transcendence [are] one” (SV 303), and in the notion that Love is “that archetypal, capitalized djinn” (SV 314). This “Djinn” appears to be Al-Jann or Satan, the father of the djinn (Awn 31). The interpenetration of God and Satan is more directly asserted by the Rekha of Gibreel’s tortured imagination, who comments in exegetical fashion that the “separation of

\(^{23}\) Another similarly titled article, T. Sprigge’s “The Satanic Novel: A Philosophical Dialogue on Blasphemy and Censorship,” contains no discussion of a satanic narrator.
functions, light versus dark, evil versus good, may be straightforward enough in Islam, yet if one goes back in time one finds that it is "a pretty recent fabrication":

"Amos, eighth century BC, asks: ‘Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?’ Also, Jahweh, quoted by Deutero-Isaiah two hundred years later, remarks: ‘I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.’ It isn’t until the Book of Chronicles, merely fourth century BC, that the word shaitan is used to mean a being, and not only an attribute of God." (SV 323)

Such comments, however, also fit into satanic agendas making God look evil, and making Satan and God look so similar that one might conclude that Satan is as worthy of worship as God. Indeed, the satanic narrator takes advantage of the Romantic argument that he liberates the imagination while God enchains it. Yet there are many problems with this, the most important being that the satanic narrator enchains Chamcha in his evil, and that he uses Chamcha to ensnare Gibreel’s spirit. I return to these points in due course, and throughout this chapter I establish the presence of a Satan whose antagonism to God makes sense only if one sees the object of his antagonism as separate from Satan himself.

Perhaps the most provocative article on the indistinguishability of God and Satan as it pertains to Rushdie’s novel is Leslie Brisman’s “Satanic Verses of the Bible: Swallowing Ezekiel’s Loathsome Word.” In it Brisman argues that Ezekiel’s “God” is satanic, especially when one compares “Him” to the God of Jeremiah. Her argument is specific to The Satanic Verses in that she suggests Ezekiel’s reworking of Jeremiah displays the same ruthless, uncompromising, unpoetic and ultimately anti-human sentiments as Muhammad’s rejection of the verses accepting the three goddesses. A more general point might also be drawn from Brisman’s essay: just as the “God” in Ezekiel 20 (and elsewhere) appears diabolic, so the

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24 Brisman admits that Ezekiel 20 remains “one of the most troublesome passages, but not a wholly exceptional one. My passage resembles others about God seeking to slay Moses, hardening Pharaoh’s
“God” portrayed in *The Satanic Verses*—especially the “God” of Ayesha—appears more interested in “His” own glory than in enlightening humans or diminishing their suffering. Yet one must remember that in Rushdie’s text God never speaks; it is only Satan’s, Gibreel’s or Rekha’s version of “the Deity” (often called “It”) that we find. A comparison with *Grimus* may be helpful here. Grimus plays God and thus creates a golden Calf which is rightly superseded by the Impossible Qaf. Likewise, the selfish, indifferent and ultimately ridiculous “Deity” imagined by the satanic narrator and Gibreel is superseded by Allie’s Everest/Qaf, a divine, Impossible Mountain which is described by Allie in such a way as to preclude it from being diabolic.25

One might object that the God atop Everest is the same “God” whom the satanic narrator and Gibreel accuse of selfishness and indifference, that this God is as Brisman’s Ezekiel would have “Him.” Yet Allie’s experience indicates the contrary, and, as I will argue heart, pushing the Egyptians into the sea, expressing the desire to exterminate the Israelites and start a new nation from Moses, sending an evil spirit to Saul, inciting David to take a census, plaguing Ahab with false prophets, and, in a fragment of a parable in Matthew, casting the man without a wedding garment into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. To this list might be added the Book of Job, which, however, is really about the meaningless suffering of the innocent, while the phenomenon I wish to consider is the conception of a deity who needs to give an added push to a soul already going astray. For sheer wretchedness of human spirit projected as the machinations of a vengeful God, nothing can come close to the author of Revelation” (4).

25 The word “impossible” is associated with Allie’s Everest/Qaf on numerous occasions, although often indirectly, as when the “impossible city” stands at 27,000 feet (SV 295). Allie’s mistaking of Gibreel’s “abandoned, hurtling” love seems to her “impossible” (SV 300). When Allie thinks of “the impossibility of [Gibreel]” lying in the snow at her feet, she is reminded of her visions on Everest (SV 301). (Until Gibreel smashes her Everest models and their mock-Everest bed, Allie sees Gibreel in terms of Everest). Allie’s Mountain is also “Impossible” in the sense that she is neither allowed to remain at Its peak nor climb It a second time. Also, “in her heart of hearts [Allie] kept hidden an impossible scheme, the fatal vision of Maurice Wilson, never achieved to this day. That is: the solo ascent” (SV 304). I return to Gibreel’s attack on Allie’s Himalayas in “Raising Hell,” and I return to Allie’s experience on Everest in “Murdering Alleluia.” In these sections I argue that the satanic narrator’s antagonism to God is expressed insidiously in Gibreel’s smashing of Allie’s ice-mountains and in Allie’s fall from Everest Vilas.
in the last section, it is Satan rather than God who drags Allie down from the heavenly heights of Everest. Also, it is as a result of Satan’s manipulations (and perhaps a result of his direct actions) that Allie is prevented from returning to Everest. While Satan and God are at times indistinguishable, Rushdie sets up the same opposition in *The Satanic Verses* which he sets up throughout his fiction—that between a transcendent, Impossible God, one who is consistent with a tolerant and iconoclastic mysticism, and a tyrannical God, one who is barely distinguishable from the Satan who opposes “Him.”

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Brennan, Booker and Corcoran are not the only critics to note a satanic element in the novel. Sami Nair sees the world of the novel as one in which meaning is eaten away by evil:

Une profusion de personnages et d’actions, autour des deux protagonistes Saladin Chamcha et Gibreel Farishta, mettent en évidence la quête rushdienne du sens dans un monde rongé par le mal (le cancer, qui traverse ce roman comme une obsession vive et déchirante). (22)

While many critics see Chamcha as a liberated character at the end of the novel (he is no longer possessed and he regains his Indian “roots”), Aravamudan and Nair maintain that both Chamcha and Gibreel remain caught in the Devil’s trap:

The book ends with the spectacular self-destruction of Gibreel, while Chamcha’s final, sudden decision to remain in Bombay (where he had gone back to reconcile with his dying father) and revive his Indian roots might contain the slyly ironical last laugh of the devil, who has conquered by fading away into innocuous moral virtue. This nagging doubt suggests itself through the book’s closing lines, which painfully re-emphasize the repression of the diabolical rather than its seeming expulsion from Chamcha’s personality. (Aravamudan 15)

Mais le mal est profond; si Chamcha, le diable, se retrouve à la fin du roman face à lui-même, sans aucune réponse véritable, condamné pour l’éternité à douter, Gibreel Farishta, lui, rongé par le cancer (le mal incurable du monde), finit par se suicider. (Nair 23)
One might even say that the satanic narrator contrives events so that his archangelic Gibreel meets a violent end, while his devilish Chamcha is rewarded for destroying the divine love between Gibreel and Alleluia. This is not to say that the satanic narrator ever makes life easy for Chamcha: his “reward” is preceded by numerous degrees of mental anguish, and when it finally comes it is a mixed blessing, tarnished with alienation and doubt.

In “The Satanic Verses: Narrative Structure and Islamic Doctrine,” Alex Knönagel makes a strong argument in favour of a satanic narrator, for a “‘satanic’ point of view as the novel’s ideological centre” (73). He admits that the narrator is not easy to identify, yet he maintains that “the text contains some hints that the novel’s narrator [...] is the inversion of ‘the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds’ (Qur’an, 1:2)” (71). He notes that Oopervala is in fact Satan and that Oopervala’s appearance in the bedroom can be linked to the gharaniq incident in which Muhammad is deceived by Satan on Mount Hira (Mount Cone in the novel).26 Knönagel argues that Oopervala’s appearance in Allie’s bedroom, and the narrator’s comments about it, identify “the devil not only as the narrator of the whole novel but also as the origin of the mysterious revelations in the Mahound dreams” (71). His next point is also consistent with my reading:

Initially, Mahound correctly identified the source of the confusion [Mahound believes that “the Devil came to him in the form of the archangel” (SV 123)], but the narrative attempts to dispel this knowledge, and the narrator uses numerous tactics to confuse the reader’s insights into the novel’s structure, but a careful reader with a background in Islamic cosmology is nevertheless provided with sufficient information to recognize the novel’s narrative situation. (71)

26 In changing “Hira” to “Cone” Rushdie may be emphasizing the link between the God-Mountain of Mahound and the God-Mountain of Alleluia Cone. He may also be creating humorous redundancy: “Mount Cone” could mean “mountain in the shape of a cone or mountain.”
Knöngel makes three other points which support the notion of a satanic narrator: because the world-view presented in *The Satanic Verses* is antithetical to that of the Quran, “the whole novel can be read as an inversion of the qur’anic text” (70); the narrator insinuates that because God has very little power one may as well start worshipping “other deities as well,” including (one would assume) Satan (73); the narrator’s satanic point of view also “becomes an important factor for the construction” of the embarrassing and offensive “portrait of the immigrant community in London” (73).

In *Salman Rushdie*, James Harrison concludes against the idea of sustained satanic narration, yet his argument raises interesting points and it focuses attention on a debate which I feel is far from over. I find his conclusion unconvincing, particularly since it seems to rest on the speculation that Rushdie started out with the “bright idea” of a satanic narrator and that he abandoned it, leaving “vestiges” behind (114). I doubt, however, that Rushdie would name his novel after an episode in which Satan interrupts and fabricates “revelation,” and then relegate to “vestiges” the instances where Satan interrupts and manipulates the narrative. His conclusion aside, Harrison raises provocative questions. For instance, he observes that the author provides “each narrative stream with an angelic and a diabolic presence,” and that this may have motivated “the half-dozen or so instances in which Satan steps forward and comments on what is happening” (99). He also does what many critics have failed to do---draw attention to the text rather than to what people think about it. Particularly helpful is his list of six instances of satanic narration, a list which I include here in a slightly expanded form:

What did [Gibreel and Chamcha] expect? Falling like that out of the sky: did they imagine there would be no side-effects? Higher Powers had taken an interest, it should have been obvious to them both, and such Powers (I am, of course, speaking of myself) have a mischievous, almost a wanton attitude to tumbling flies. And another thing, let’s be clear: great falls change people. You think *they* fell a long way? In the
matter of tumbles, I yield pride of place to no personage, whether mortal or im-. From clouds to ashes, down the chimney you might say, from heavenlight to hellfire ... under the stress of a long plunge, I was saying, mutations are to be expected, not all of them random. (SV 133)

I know the truth, obviously. I watched the whole thing [i.e. the fall of Gibreel and Chamcha]. As to omnipresence and -potence, I'm making no claims at present, but I can manage this much, I hope. Chamcha willed it and Farishta did what was willed.

Of what type--angelic, satanic--was Farishta's song?

Who am I?

Let's put it this way: who has the best tunes? (SV 10)

[Doubt characterizes the] human condition, but what of the angelic? Halfway between Allahgod and homosap, did they ever doubt? They did: challenging God's will one day they hid muttering beneath the Throne, daring to ask forbidden things: antiquestions. [...] Angels are easily pacified; turn them into instruments and they'll play your harpy tune. [Angels] don't have much in the way of a will. To will is to disagree; not to submit; to dissent.

I know; devil talk. Shaitan interrupting Gibreel.

Me? (SV 92-93)

[Hagar] asked [Ismail], can this [leaving me alone in the desert] 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. (SV 95)

I'm saying nothing [...] Don't think I haven't wanted to butt in; I have, plenty of times. And once, it's true, I did. I sat on Alleluia Cone's bed and spoke to the superstar Gibreel. Ooparvala or Neechayvala; he wanted to know, and I didn't enlighten him; I certainly don't intend to blab to this confused Chamcha instead.

I'm leaving now. (SV 408-409)

I'm giving [Gibreel] no instructions. I, too, am interested in his choices--in the result of his wrestling match. Character vs destiny: a free-style bout. Two falls, two submissions or a knockout will decide. (SV 457)

I would modify this list, replacing the last instance with the following one:

I, in my wickedness, sometimes imagine the coming of a great wave, a high wall of foaming water roaring across the desert, a liquid catastrophe full of snapping boats and drowning arms. (SV 94)
There are also numerous references to evil which take on satanic undertones when one considers them in conjunction with the above instances, and in conjunction with the overall plot in which the evil of Chamcha triumphs over the good of Alleluia:

[Gibreel] was the beneficiary of the infinite generosity of women, but he was its victim, too, because their forgiveness made possible the deepest and sweetest corruption of all, namely the idea that he was doing nothing wrong. (SV 26)

in fact, we fall towards [evil] naturally, that is, not against our natures” (SV 427)

[Chamcha] was heading for a human ruin; not to admire, and maybe even (for the decision to do evil is never finally taken until the very instant of the deed; there is always a last chance to withdraw) to vandalize. To scrawl his name in Gibreel’s flesh: *Saladin woz ear.”* (SV 433)

There is the moment before evil; then the moment of; then the time after, when the step has been taken, and each subsequent stride becomes progressively easier. (SV 438-439)

How comfortably evil lodged in [Chamcha’s] supple, infinitely flexible vocal cords, those puppetmaster’s strings! (SV 445)

Is it possible that evil is never total, that its victory, no matter how overwhelming, is never absolute? (SV 467)

The novel also contains moments of narration which appear satanic when one reads them together with other comments. For instance, the narrator’s claim that the transformation of “Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha” is not a random mutation (SV 5) takes on a sinister tint in light of his later claim that in the matter of tumbles he yields pride of place to no one and that under the stress of a long plunge “mutations are to be expected, not all of them random” (SV 133). One can also associate the satanic narrator’s questions, “Shaitan interrupting Gibreel. Me?” (SV 93) and “Who am I? Let’s put it another way: who has the best tunes?” (SV 10), with the following questions: “Who am I? Who else is there?” (SV 4), [Chamcha asks.] “what’s happening to me? What the devil?” (SV 60); “All around [Gibreel] are people
hearing voices, being seduced by words. But not his; never his original material. -- Then whose?” (SV 234); “What evil had [Chamcha] done--what vile thing could he, would he do? For what was he -- he couldn’t avoid the notion -- being punished? And, come to that, by whom? (I held my tongue.)” (SV 256); [Chamcha asks himself] “Devil, Goat, Shaitan? Not I. Not I: another. Who?” (SV 257).

Harrison’s analysis is also helpful in that he asks, “shouldn’t the devil be allowed to have his say”? and he raises the question of whether or not a narrative voice invades the text:

If Saladin Chamcha qua horned beast can invade the dreams of immigrant youth, why shouldn’t the original, of which Saladin is a mere parody, invade Gibreel’s dreams? (115)

I would respond with Rushdie’s “Yes, why not?” and I would add that the satanic narrator invades the text on numerous occasions. A sustained narrative invasion helps to explain what Harrison sees as a “curiosity”—that is, why Chamcha as Romantic postcolonial rebel “directs all his hatred at a fellow colonial” (96). One can see Chamcha’s hatred as the expression of an internalized self-hatred—what Fanon calls the oppressed person’s permanent dream “to become the oppressor” (SV 353)—yet Chamcha’s antagonism makes more sense when it is seen as an expression of Satan’s antagonism to his archangelic rival Gabriel—an antagonism which is emphasized when the narrator explains “the nature of evil” by pointing to the scene in which Allie’s presence next to Gibreel makes Chamcha feel “the entirety of his loss” and “the great injustice of the division” (SV 425). Because I see a coherent otherworldly drama being played out on a worldly stage, I cannot conclude as Harrison does that “the device” of a satanic narrator “is less than perfectly worked out and executed,” and that “it is too infrequently used to establish a clear function for itself” (115). In order to be diabolically
effective, this voice need not have a clear function. Indeed, its obscurity increases the level of uncertainty and insinuation in the text. Instead of saying that the satanic voice offers “at least a kind of challenge to authorial hegemony” (115), I would say that the satanic narrator offers a sustained challenge.

PREVIOUS SATANS

The idea of Satan playing a narrative role in The Satanic Verses raises the question, What type of Satan plays this role? Is he a Muslim or Christian Satan? Is he a traditional Satan, the embodiment of evil, or is he a Sufi or Romantic Satan, one who has redeeming qualities? While there are similarities between Islamic and European versions of the Devil, readers cannot go beyond the title of Rushdie’s novel before differences cause divergent interpretations:

On one hand, non-Muslim readers are unlikely to know what the title means. They are therefore in the position of someone who picks up an English Romantic poem championing Satan without having read any earlier versions of the Fall. On the other hand, Muslims may recognize the title and find themselves systematically insulted throughout the novel. (Corcoran 155-156)

In Islam, Satan (Iblis, Shaitan, Azazeel) has a variety of personalities. The diversity of Islamic depictions of Satan is illustrated by Muhammad Iqbal’s “multicoloured picture of

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27 In his series of four books, The Devil, Satan, Lucifer and Mephistopheles, Jeffrey Russell illustrates the multifarious nature of the Devil in Western religion and literature. His third book, Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages, contains the concise, helpfully comparative chapter, “The Muslim Devil” (52-61). In Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology, Peter Awn gives an extensive view of the Devil in both orthodox and unorthodox Islam. For a brief introduction to the Sufi Satan, see Schimmel’s section, “Good and Evil: The Role of Satan” in Mystical Dimensions of Islam (193-199). For a large selection of Sufi references to Iblis, see Javad Nurbakhsh’s The Great Satan ‘Eblis.’

28 Azazeel is not to be confused with Azrael, the Angel of Death whom Saleem fears at the end of Midnight’s Children and whom Gibreel believes he has become in Chapter VII, “The Angel Azrael.” Before his fall, Iblis was known as Azazeel, who “was among the most industrious and dedicated” of
Satan": the Pakistani poet follows Sufi poets in painting Satan as a lover, an intellectual, a monotheist, and an evil being who longs to be "broken in order to find salvation," yet he also employs "the more common image of Satan the seducer, the materialist, and the destroyer" (Schimmel 196). Whether a Sufi or a traditional Satan, Iblis "functions only by the permission of God, who uses him against his will for the purpose of testing and punishing" (Russell 1984:60). The actions of Rushdie's satanic narrator do not, however, fit into a higher Plan or Scheme concocted by God, the ultimate Schemer—unless one were to equate Rushdie's hidden Sufi scheme with a divine scheme. I am unwilling to go as far as this, although the otherworldly yearning of Alleluia does provide a mystical ideal of love and unity which symbolically counteracts the satanic scheme dividing her from her angelic lover and her Divine Mountain.

Despite his attempt to make himself appear heroic and Liberating, the satanic narrator does not attain the status of a Sufi or Romantic Satan. To some Sufis, Iblis is a ProuD, tragic figure who loves God so passionately that he disobeyes His command to bow before humanity, that is, to bow before anyone but God. According to al-Hallaj, Sana'i, Ahmad Ghazzali, Attar, Sarmad and Shah Abdul-Latif, Iblis remains a devout monotheist, a great lover of God (Schimmel 194-195). Rushdie's satanic narrator differs from this Satan in that he speaks ill of God and he does everything possible to discredit Him. In an attempt to garner power from his spirits on Earth, and who moved "from heaven to heaven, until God raise[d] him to the Throne itself" (Awn 25-30).

29 Schimmel emphasizes Iblis' subservient role in the Islamic cosmic scheme of things: "never in the history of Islam has Satan been given absolute power over men: he can tell them lies and seduce them as he did with Adam, but they have the possibility to resist his insinuations (Iqbal's Satan sadly complains that it is much too easy for him to seduce people). Iblis never becomes 'evil as such'; he always remains a creature of God and, thus, a necessary instrument in His hands" (193-194).
antagonism, he promotes himself as a Promethean, Romantic figure who helps humans shake off the tyranny of God. While he may evoke the plight of Prometheus, he does not display the type of compassion one finds, for instance, in Shelley's Prometheus. More often than not, he resembles one of Gloucester's gods when he says that "Higher Powers" such as himself treat humans as boys treat flies: such Powers "have a mischievous, almost a wanton attitude to tumbling flies" (SV 133). 30

The satanic narrator resembles both the Christian and Islamic Satan insofar as he is the fallen angel (or djinn) 31 who attempts to lure humans away from God. Christianity and Islam by and large share the notion that Satan's insidious counsel in Eden led to the expulsion of Adam and Eve, yet the two religions differ crucially in the way Satan tempts their chief human figures, Christ and Muhammad. In Matthew 4:8-10 and Luke 4:5-8, Satan offers Christ dominion over the world and Christ immediately rejects this offer. This type of temptation is not employed by the satanic narrator, who follows instead in the footsteps of the Muslim Iblis. According to several hadith, Iblis, pretending to be Gabriel, tempted Muhammad to gain followers by accepting the already-existing three Arabian goddesses as intercessors between Allah and humans. Muhammad accepted this offer, then rejected it when he realized it came from Satan. Daniel Pipes notes that Tabari, ibn Saad, al-Bukhari and Yaqut all cite different wordings of the following verses which (according to Tabari) "Satan threw on [Muhammad's] tongue":

30 After having his eyes poked out, Gloucester tells his son, who is disguised as Poor Tom, "As flies to wanton boys, are we to th'Gods: / They kill us for their sport" (King Lear IV, i, 36-37).
31 In Islamic cosmology it remains unclear whether Satan is a djinn or an angel. For discussions on Iblis' status as angel or djinn, see Awn 26-33, The Encyclopaedia of Islam Vol. III, 668-669, and Russell's Lucifer 55-56.
These are the exalted birds,  
And their intercession is desired indeed. (Pipes 58)

The Quran does not directly refer to these “satanic verses,” yet the quranic verses which are believed to put an end to the gharamiq incident are as follows:

Have you thought on Al-Lat and Al-'Uzza, and thirdly, on Manat, the other? Are you to have the sons, and He the daughters? This is indeed an unfair distinction!  
They are but names which you and your fathers have invented: God has vested no authority in them. (Koran 372)

Also relevant are the following verses:

Never have We sent a single prophet or apostle before you with whose wishes Satan did not tamper. But God abrogates the interjections of Satan and confirms His own revelations. (Koran 238)

The title of Rushdie’s novel occasions insult because “the satanic verses” can be read as “Satan’s verses” and as “the satanic quranic verses,” given that “verses” in this context means verses from the Quran (Pipes 1990:116-117). The title not only suggests that the novel is about verses by Satan but also that the Quran was written by Satan. The religious politics surrounding the novel are extremely involved and I refer readers to several of the numerous critics who have ventured explanations as to why the novel and its title have insulted Muslims.\(^{32}\) My argument takes a different direction, for I contend that much of the novel, including its title, are naturally blasphemous, given that they are the product of a narrative strongly influenced by a satanic narrator. This narrator acts in the manner of the Iblis in the gharamiq incident, and he is in general an embodiment and a promoter of sin and blasphemy. I

\(^{32}\) I refer readers specifically to Pipes 113-120 for the insults caused by the title, to Pipes 53-69 for the blasphemous elements in the book, to Fischer and Abedi 405-419 for the six main Muslim complaints and for an account and explanation of the gharamiq incident, to Ruthven 35-53 for information on the Orientalist context and on blasphemy in Islamic narrative, and to Ali, Akhtar and Anees for more strongly antagonistic responses to the book.
do not, however, want to sound too ominous about this, for while Satan is horrifying to orthodox Muslims and Christians, Rushdie infuses a certain amount of tricksterism into his narrator. In this sense the satanic narrator might be seen as a “descendent” of Grimus’ Deggle. Also, Rushdie cannot but be influenced by the diverse Satans that populate Western literature--from the charismatic Satan of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* to the good-hearted Satan of Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita.*

In his 1990 essay “In Good Faith” Rushdie gives several indications about the nature of the Devil in *The Satanic Verses:*

> the two books that were most influential on the shape this novel took do not include the Qur’an. One was William Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* the classic meditation on the interpenetration of good and evil; the other *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov, the great Russian lyrical and comical novel in which the Devil descends upon Moscow and wreaks havoc upon the corrupt, materialistic, decadent inhabitants and turns out, by the end, not to be such a bad chap after all. (IH 403)

In citing these two works Rushdie suggests that his Devil is not thoroughly sinister, not entirely dedicated to making his evil triumph over God’s good. Yet when one compares the actions of the Devils in Blake and Bulgakov to those of the satanic narrator, one finds that Rushdie’s suggestion belies what happens in his text. Before making these two comparisons, I would make the general observation that the satanic narrator meditates on the interpenetration of good and evil, yet his aim is to trick his reader into accepting the presupposition that lies behind the question, “Is it possible that evil is never total, that its victory, no matter how overwhelming, is never absolute?” (SV 467). By framing his question in this way, the satanic narrator tries to trick the reader into assuming that evil is victorious to begin with. One should also note that the act which represents the “small redeeming victory
for love” (SV 468)—Gibreel’s rescue of Chamcha—does not erase the effect of Chamcha’s evil: Gibreel remains insanely jealous and this leads to Allie’s death and to his own suicide.

Among Rushdie’s two “most influential” books, Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793) is referred to directly and indirectly in the novel: the narrator quotes from Blake’s second “Memorable Fancy” (SV 304-305, 338) and he compares the visible Oopervala to Blake’s abstract God (SV 318). Yet Blake’s poem differs in fundamental ways from Rushdie’s novel. While Rushdie’s satanic narrator uses evil to trap souls, Blake’s “diabolical” poet uses what is conventionally thought of as evil to liberate the imagination. Blake’s poet uses the inversion of moral categories to demonstrate that everything is holy and that the flux of energy (the fire of Hell) is eternal delight. Blake’s poet can argue this successfully since he casts himself in the starring role of a scenario which proves his argument.

In *The Satanic Verses*, however, a crucial gap exists between the satanic narrator and his most puppet-like protagonist, who is led into a confusing and tormenting labyrinth in which he destroys his own delight. Because Gibreel cannot fathom what is happening to him and because he cannot reconcile—let alone “marry”—the heaven and hell within him, he cannot see that the supposedly evil woman he calls a whore is in fact holy. While Blake inverts cosmology and morality in order to liberate the imagination, the satanic narrator inverts cosmology and morality without allowing his angel to take any sort of meaningful flight.

Blake sends his poet on a journey which confirms the value of the imagination while the satanic narrator sends Gibreel on a journey which ends in nightmarish hallucination. The journey Blake describes in his fourth “Memorable Fancy” illustrates the idea that one can experience the eternal delight of genius by opening one’s mind: the Analytical Angel takes the
poet down through a church vault into an Abyss containing fire, darkness, spiders, a cataract of blood and “the scaly fold of a monstrous serpent.” The poet then uses his imagination to change this hell of “raging foam” and “beams of blood” into “a pleasant bank beside a river by moonlight” (102-104). The poet uses the destructive (or “Devouring”) power of his mind to destroy the reptiles of the mind, and he uses the creative (or “Prolific”) power of his mind to penetrate the mystic’s ineffable, amorphic God. This destructive and creative process calls to mind the iconoclastic journey during which Flapping Eagle rapes Axona, destroys the Cracked Rose, and creates a pristine otherworldly Qaf. In contrast, Gibreel’s journeys enact only the destructive power of the imagination. Instead of following the descent and ascent of Flapping Eagle or Blake’s poet, Gibreel travels down from the Edenic garden of his love with Alleluia, down into the world as the narrator wants to see it—a hellish world of confusion, violence, deception and disturbing revelations. Gibreel’s visions do not become the basis of what Blake’s Isaiah calls “firm perswasion” [sic], nor of what Blake’s poet calls “the enjoyments of Genius” (99, 95). Instead, his visions lead to a state of mind in which he kills the woman whose aim in life is to see God, and whose very name expresses the joy of spiritual salvation.

Gibreel’s dreams link the temporally and geographically disparate settings in the novel and they tie together “the satanic verses” theme for the reader, yet Gibreel cannot reconcile or “marry” the physical and metaphysical layers of his perception. Unable to tell if he is being overwhelmed by otherworldly forces or if he is going insane, and unable to close the doors of apocalyptic perception which have somehow been opened inside him, he kills Sisodia.

While it is tempting to think that the satanic narrator plays the role of Job’s Satan, that he is the one who inflicts punishment on Gibreel, there is no clear indication of this. In addition, the satanic narrator has already fallen from God’s Court or Heaven and he is not likely to run errands for God or do His bidding. Rushdie suggests (in “In Good Faith”) that Gibreel’s insanity is the result of his rejection of
Alleluia and then himself. The narrator sees this suicide as liberating: "Gibreel put the barrel of the gun into his own mouth; and pulled the trigger; and was free" (SV 546). Reading Gibreel’s suicide in light of a satanic revenge on God via His angelic and human creations, one might ask the following question: What greater pleasure could the Devil imagine than to drive his archangelic rival into such a state of jealousy and schizophrenia that he murders himself as well as a woman who represents love, self-sacrifice, and return to the otherworldly Mountain of God?

As was seen, Rushdie indicates that the other main influence on The Satanic Verses is Mikhail Bulgakov’s The Master and Margarita (written between 1928 and 1940). The two texts resemble each other in that both are written on two levels, the worldly and the otherworldly, and both shift back and forth between contemporary secular settings and ancient religious settings. Mirra Ginsburg makes the following observations in the Introduction to the 1967 translation of The Master:

The novel is built essentially on two planes. On the transcendent, the towering figures of Yeshua, Satan, his retinue, even in its clownish incarnation, and, yes, Pilate are God: he claims that the purpose of the Jahilia dream sequences "is not to vilify or 'disprove' Islam, but to portray a soul in crisis, to show how the loss of God can destroy a man's life" (IH 399). Yet if this were the case, why does Gibreel not regain sanity once he regains God in his archangelic visions? Likewise, the notion that God inflicts punishment on Gibreel does not answer the following question: Would God punish one of His creatures by making him a suicidal parody of His most valued angelic messenger? The notion of God punishing Gibreel does, however, make sense when one suspects that the satanic narrator is allowing God to resemble a torturer, a cold Deity, an "It" that sends dissidents (or unbelievers) to the "gulag-infernos of Hell" (SV 332).

Bulgakov’s fiction was subject to censorship and The Master “first appeared in Moskva in late 1966 and early 1967” (Bulgakov xiii). Rushdie comments that “The Master and Margarita and its author were persecuted by Soviet totalitarianism,” and that it “is extraordinary to find [The Satanic Verses] life echoing that of one of its greatest models” (IH 404). Mirra Ginsburg’s remarks concerning censorship of The Master also apply to The Satanic Verses: “Another element is [Bulgakov’s] lasting concern with the relation of the artist, the creative individual, to state authority, and with the fate of the artist’s work—the manuscript, the created word—which, he came to feel, must not, cannot be destroyed. As Satan says in his novel, ‘manuscripts don’t burn.’ Alas, a metaphysical statement” (xii).
accorded the full dignity of their immortal being—of myth. On the earthly plane, few escape the author’s satiric barbs. And even the tale of the Master and Margarita, who are perhaps of both worlds, being closest to myth, is tinged with irony.

The four principal strands in the novel’s astonishing web—contemporary Moscow, the infernal visitors, the story of the Master and Margarita, and the events in Yershalayim—are each distinct in style. (xi)

The diverse settings of The Satanic Verses are likewise distinct in atmosphere, and each contains an interplay between “earthly” and “transcendent” forces. The “transcendent” level becomes violent in both novels: in The Master and Margarita Woland (the Devil) wreaks havoc in Moscow, and Pilate has visions of fire and bloody streets in Yershalayim (36-42); in The Satanic Verses the satanic narrator delights in the fiery chaos of London, dreams of a tidal wave in the desert, and revels in “the festival of Ibrahim”—during which Hind’s followers, represented by “the red manticore with the triple row of teeth,” attack Mahound’s followers (SV 116-117). The violence in both novels is succeeded by redemptions of sorts. After inflicting punishments on Muscovites, Woland leads his familiars across the sky into the oblivion of a strangely redemptive Night (381-389). In The Satanic Verses, Chamcha is saved by Gibreel (SV 467-468) after multicoloured flames devour “the screaming city,” and after “the universe shrinks” and the doorway of the Shaandaar Café becomes “the maw of the black hole” (SV 464). Also, Mirza experiences an ambiguous sort of mystical union with Ayesha after he imagines a giant crushing a forest and after he sees the tree-village of Titlipur explode “into a thousand fragments and the trunk crack, like a heart” (SV 506).

The most striking feature common to The Satanic Verses and The Master and Margarita is that both contain second chapters which are more clearly narrated by Satan than are any other chapters. In The Master, Chapter Two is the only chapter narrated directly by Woland, and in The Satanic Verses the first four pages of the second chapter make it rather
clear that Satan is narrating. In both novels the second chapters are set in ancient, religiously-charged locations and these locations reappear later in both novels (Pilate’s dilemma continues in chapters 16, 25 and 26, and Mahound’s story continues in Chapter Six). The events in the second chapters can also be felt throughout the novels: Woland’s narrative, together with the effect of his prediction of Berlioz’s death, casts a strange light over the whole text, much as the gharamiq incident reverberates throughout the rest of Rushdie’s novel. As was noted earlier, Harrison suggests that passages of satanic narration “seem to be vestiges of an apparently promising but short-lived bright idea” (114). Contrariwise, one could argue that Rushdie follows Bulgakov in that he gives a strong indication of Satan’s presence early in the novel and then allows this satanic narrative presence to become less obvious. The major difference in this regard is that Bulgakov eventually delineates the Devil’s personality whereas Rushdie keeps his satanic narrator shadowy and elusive.

The second chapters of both novels also suggest that errors have crept into written accounts which are later considered to be sacred. In The Master Matthu Levi follows Yeshua (Jesus) and “writes things down incorrectly” (21), and in The Satanic Verses Salman the Persian goes “on with [his] devilment, changing [Mahound’s] verses” (SV 386). The most crucial difference between the two novels in this regard is that The Satanic Verses contains harsh criticism of Muhammad and grave doubts about his holy words, whereas The Master

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35 Two of the six instances of satanic narration listed by Harrison occur on the first four pages of Chapter Two, as does the satanic narrator’s wicked fantasy about a tidal wave in the desert (SV 94). One might recall Corcoran’s remark that Chapter Two “has a suspicious narrator who may be, as in the case of the original troubling verses, Satan himself” (156).
contains a very sympathetic portrait of Jesus and does not emphasize doubt about his holy words.

Two important differences between the Devils in *The Satanic Verses* and *The Master and Margarita* lie in the manner in which they torment humans and in the manner in which they affect the endings of the novels. The satanic narrator relishes inflicting pain whereas Woland becomes weary of his scourging chores. Also, their incursions into the world lead to opposite ends: Woland eventually unites the Master and Margarita, whereas the satanic narrator drives a fatal wedge between Gibreel and Alleluia. Bulgakov’s Satan “turns out, by the end, not to be such a bad chap after all,” while Rushdie’s Satan only fades away once Alleluia falls to her death and Gibreel commits suicide.

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Recalling previous versions of Satan contributes to an understanding of the character of the satanic narrator, yet this narrator’s “game” remains both unique and obscure. While Rushdie quotes from Mick Jagger’s song “Sympathy for the Devil” (SV 286), the satanic narrator does not come out and say, “just call me Lucifer,” as does the Devil-figure in Jagger’s song. Yet both Devils are proud of their cosmopolitan sensibilities and of their ability to sow the seeds of doubt in God’s chief representatives—Mahound in *The Satanic Verses* and Christ in “Sympathy for the Devil”:

Please allow me to introduce myself,  
I’m a man of wealth and taste  
I’ve been around for many a long, long year  
I’ve stole many a man’s soul and faith  
I was around when Jesus Christ had His moment of doubt and pain  
I made damn sure that Pilate washed his hands and sealed his fate

Pleased to meet you, hope you guess my name  
But what’s puzzling you is the nature of my game.
Like the Lucifer in Mick Jagger's song, the satanic narrator also puzzles readers by reversing moral categories and by making them guess the nature of the "game" he plays with humanity.  

BLASPHEMING MUHAMMAD, GOD AND ANGELS

In his previous novels Rushdie has made harsh attacks on Islamic fundamentalism, yet he has never taken direct aim at the holiest figures in Islam and he has never engaged in gratuitous blasphemy. While The Satanic Verses contains the harshest, crudest, most blasphemous and most insulting attacks to date, the severity of these attacks is in keeping with the notion of a satanic narrator, for such a narrator is God's sworn enemy. As such, he indulges in blasphemy, in attacks on God and in attacks on God's chief links to humanity (which in Islam are of course Muhammad and Gabriel). All of these attacks are evident when Salman the Persian claims that Mahound justifies polygamy (and frustrates his young wife Ayesha) by obtaining "God's own permission to fuck as many women as he liked," and when Salman says that Mahound exonerates Ayesha from suspicions of impropriety (she spent a night in the desert without Mahound) by calling upon "his pet, the archangel," after which "the lady didn't complain about the convenience of the verses" (SV 386-387). One of the most gratuitous instances of irreverence occurs when the prostitutes in the Curtain take the

36 A weird twist of fate surrounds both song and novel: just as Jagger was shocked when, during a rendition of "Sympathy for the Devil" at Altamont Freeway, the Hell's Angels beat fans with pool cues and knifed a gun-wielding fan to death, so Rushdie was shocked by the riots and deaths resulting in Pakistan and India from the reaction to his book. Also, "outrage that 'Sympathy for the Devil' had in some way incited the violence led the Stones to drop the tune from their stage shows for the next six years" (The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll 477). So at the end of 1990 Rushdie temporarily dropped the notion of publishing his novel in paperback.
names of Mahound's twelve wives—a narrative playfulness which is obscene to many Muslims. Rushdie takes the irreverence of his satanic narrator to the extreme when one of these prostitutes panders to necrophilia by mimicking Mahound's deceased wife (SV 382).

The satanic narrator filters the reader's view of Islamic religion and history in ways which highlight blasphemy. Readers often see events through the eyes of Mahound's opponents, and what readers hear is often sifted through the narrator's favourite Jahilia setting, the brothel, which is "ruled over by the ancient and nameless Madam of the Curtain whose guttural utterances from the secrecy of a chair shrouded in black veils" are "the profane antithesis of Mahound's sacred utterances" (SV 376). Within the context of the brothel, the narrator gives voice to extremely crude language. For instance, Mahound's soldiers refer to women as "cunts" and "slits." Richard Webster's comments in *A Brief History of Blasphemy; Liberalism, Censorship and 'The Satanic Verses'* are insightful here, especially when he says that such extreme language "is potentially the most violent and the most insulting of all the registers available to Western writers." Like myself, he finds it important to note that such language "is brought into conjunction with some of the most sacred traditions of Islam" (93).

One should also note that Chapter Six is focused on Baal, who is dear to the satanic narrator on account of his pagan name, his whoring ways, his mockery of Mahound, and his praises of the goddess Al-Lat. Falling in love with the prostitute who takes the name Ayesha, Baal succumbs to "the seductions of becoming the secret, profane mirror of Mahound" (SV 384). The verses he writes are, like the words of the Madam, "the profane antithesis of Mahound's sacred utterances." The narrator also draws a sympathetic portrait of Salman Farsi, who calls Mahound a "conjurer" (SV 363) and who admits to playing a diabolic role when he alters
Mahound's recitation: "I went on with my devilment, changing verses, until one day I read my lines to [Mahound] and saw him frown and shake his head as if to clear his mind, and then nod his approval slowly, but with a little doubt" (SV 386).37

In addition to making Mahound seem careless, the suspiciously anti-religious narrator uses an extremely derogatory name for the exemplar of Islam. Like the phrase the satanic verses, the name Mahound carries strong anti-Islamic baggage:

Mahound--with his variants Mahum, Mahun, Mahoune, Macon, Machound and so forth--is a medieval European version of Muhammad, whom Christians presumed the infidel Muslims worshipped as God. For poets from Langland to Burns, Mahound is synonymous with the devil--an expletive by which people swear, or a false god. (Ruthven 35)

Although Muhammad is not portrayed as the "impostor" who "formed that mighty scheme of fraud, which, under the name of Islamism, he at length proclaimed to the world,"38 he is

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37 Much could be made of the link between Salman the Persian and Rushdie the author influenced by Persian writing. I have suggested Rushdie's indebtedness to Attar in every chapter and to Khayyam in my chapter on Shame. One might also keep in mind Shame's Zoroaster, who is said to have "addressed the sun, begging it to come down to earth and engulf the planet in its brilliant cleansing fire" (S 54). In their section, "The Two Salmans: Salman Farsi and Salman Rushdie," Abedi and Fischer note that the scene in which Salman the Persian tests Mahound derives "from Tabari's account of Muhammad's scribe, 'Abdullah ibn Sa'd, who lost his faith after the Prophet failed to notice a deliberate mistake in his transcription." They explain that the "figuration here is of the secular Muslim, Salman Rushdie adapting the Islamic message to the contemporary world, and at some point becoming subject to the repressive wrath of fundamentalist brethren whose sense of Islam is violated. This is all too realistic and obvious, long before Khomeini issued a literal death sentence" (413). In their discussion of "Expanding cosmopolitan sensibilities" they note that an "interesting undercurrent thematic in Rushdie's work is a redemption of a cosmopolitan Persian sensibility ('I must say I'm very taken with the idea of being a Mughal'), against both political or Arabicized ('pure') Islam and against European cultural colonialism. This is most explicit in Grimus and in The Satanic Verses" (438). They also supply two Iranian poems, one in which Ayatollah Khomeini employs Sufi metaphors and ideas, and another in which Khomeini's Sufi stance is ridiculed (451-454). The latter poem fits with Rushdie's "cosmopolitan Persian sensibility."

38 This is from H. White's 1865 textbook, Elements of Universal History. page 227. White adds that the Quran "is filled with stories from the Old Testament and parables borrowed from the New [Muhammad] asserted that it was brought in fragments from heaven by the Angel Gabriel, and appealed to the pure classical style of the work as a proof of its divine origin. It comprises a mass of tales, visions, discourses, laws, precepts, and counsels, in which truth and falsehood, the sublime and
nevertheless portrayed as an opportunist who seizes upon revelations that are suspiciously close to what he desires to be true (as when it is “revealed” to him that polygamy is acceptable). This characterization cannot help but influence the reader’s view of the Mahound who responds eagerly to Abu Simbel’s proposal that the three goddesses “be given some sort of intermediary, lesser status”:

‘Like devils,’ Bilal bursts out.
‘No,’ Salman the Persian gets the point. ‘Like archangels. The Grandee’s a clever man.’

‘Angels and devils,’ Mahound says. ‘Shaitan and Gibreel. We all, already, accept their existence, halfway between God and man. Abu Simbel asks that we admit just three more to this great company. Just three, and, he indicates, all Jahilia’s souls will be ours.’ (SV 107)

The narrator puts Mahound in a questionable light by suggesting that he tries to sell the goddesses to his followers in order to win souls. Mahound’s language is ambiguous, as it is when he asks, “The souls of the city, of the world, surely they are worth three angels?” (SV 111). While it ought to be clear that Mahound is thinking of winning souls for God, the narrator makes Mahound sound less like a prophet than a materialistic entrepreneur. (He is thus profit-motivated rather than prophet-motivated.) Just as the satanic narrator suggests that God is a manipulative manager, so he suggests that His Prophet is a greedy accountant. Within this context, it is hard to credit Rushdie’s notion that Mahound’s derogatory name derives from a desire to “turn insults into strengths” (SV 93). While I would not discredit this motive altogether, the use of “Mahound” has clearly backfired on political and cultural
levels. Moreover, the use of “Mahound” fits all too well with a demonic agenda which has nothing to do with raising the status of the majority of Muslims, who believe that Muhammad is the exemplar of human thought and action.

Although Rushdie allows for a certain amount of ambiguity in the depiction of Mahound (he may be opportunistic and greedy yet he also struggles with himself), there is no mistaking the negative portrayal of God in the novel. Disguising himself as a balding “God” with dandruff, the narrator suggests that God is a bumbling cosmic figure and that He is either indifferent to human confusion and suffering or does not know His own nature. “Oopervala” tells Gibreel: “Whether We be multiform, plural, representing the union-by-hybridization of such opposites as Oopar [up] and Neechay [down], or whether We be pure, stark, extreme, will not be resolved here” (SV 319). The narrator also has his Archangel Gibreel remember telling God (“at the very beginning” of time) that it was a mistake to allow “criminals and evildoers” to live on earth, to which “the Being, as usual, replied only that he knew better” (SV 336). Because Gibreel is filled “with resentment at the non-appearance” of God both at the moment of his illness and during his “persecuting visions,” he thinks to himself:

*He* never turns up, the one who kept away when I was dying, when I needed him. The one it’s all about, Allah Ishvar God. Absent as ever while we writhe and suffer in his name. (SV 111)

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39 In his essay “In Good Faith” Rushdie argues that Muhammad is called Mahound in order to reclaim “language from one’s opponents” (IH 402). Or, as he puts it in the novel, Muhammad is given “the Devil’s synonym,” “the demon-tag the farangis hung around his neck” in order to “turn insults into strengths” (SV 93). If this is in fact the reason Rushdie uses the name, he miscalculates the effect of using it, for Muslims have clearly not joined him in using it. Arguing analogically, Webster points out that “blacks have not attempted to reclaim and wear with pride the word ‘nigger’ and Margaret Thatcher is unlikely to call herself ‘Mrs. Torture’” (94).
The narrator also indirectly suggests God's absence when, after Gibreel and Chamcha fall "from the Everest of the catastrophe to the milky paleness of the sea," he asks "Who am I?" Readers cannot answer this question unless they have read the novel at least once. Puzzling readers further, he "answers" his question "Who am I?" with the rhetorical question "Who else is there?" (SV 4), implying that he exists while God does not. Because God is marginalized by the satanic narrator does not mean, however, that readers will conclude that Satan is the only one who exists, who "is there." God's absence from this world is also stressed in Babasaheb's psychic experiment: the question "Is there a God [?]" remains unanswered (Babasaheb's "glass medium" does not move, "not a twitch") while the question "Is there a Devil [?]" provokes an unmistakable response (the glass falls off the table and shatters "into a thousand and one pieces") which strongly suggests that the answer is Yes (SV 21). The satanic narrator portrays himself as the dominant and victorious otherworldly Higher Power and he does his best to keep God both out of the picture and out of the running.

The satanic narrator's attack on God's angels--particularly Gabriel--is an integral part of his attack on God and His heavenly realm. The satanic narrator maligns his archangelic rival Gabriel by creating a Gibreel who is extremely fallible and "fallable," as well as schizophrenic and prone to homicidal rages. The narrator constructs such an "angel" and then prompts him to think bitter satanic thoughts: Gibreel thinks to himself that "the Deity [is] unconfident of Itself" because "It" does not "want Its finest creatures to know right from wrong" (SV 332). This is, of course, a variant of the argument made by Eden's infernal Serpent. Gibreel also thinks that God reigns "by terror" and that "It" insists "upon the
unqualified submission of even Its closest associates, packing off all dissidents to Its blazing Siberias, the gulag-infernos of Hell” (SV 332). The satanic element in Gibreel’s thoughts is strongly indicated by “Its closest associates,” for Iblis before his fall was raised to the highest Heaven. The satanic narrator also depicts God and His angels in terms of a tyrannical manager and servile workers. He contends that just as workers should doubt and rebel against managers, so angels ought to doubt and rebel against God (SV 92). Above all, he wants to cast doubts on the entire chain of command which puts Muhammad, Gabriel and God in positions of power. He does this by making Mahound, “that businessman on the hill” (SV 91), seem opportunistic, and by promoting skepticism toward Gabriel and God, toward the “very businesslike archangel” who hands down “the management decisions of this highly corporate, if non-corporeal, God” (SV 364).

THE SATANIC LIVES OF SALADIN CHAMCHA AND MIRZA SAEED

The depictions of Chamcha and Mirza further corroborate a satanic slant in the narrative, for the satanic narrator fashions them both into heroic versions of his devilish self. The narrator aligns Chamcha with the figure of the rebel angel by having Chamcha revolt against his God-like father and by describing in detail Chamcha’s fall into physical and moral hells. Early in the novel Chamcha repeatedly accuses his father of “becoming [his] supreme being” (SV 41). Chamcha rebels against this supreme being, who then repudiates him,

40 Please refer to the second section of this chapter for a discussion of the satanic possession or invasion which results in Chamcha’s demonization.
41 For at least 25 years Chamcha felt an “implacable rage” boiling away “his childhood father-worship,” until at last he learned to be a “secular man,” to “live without a god of any type.” He rejects the tyranny of his father, replacing it with the weight of being English: “On winter nights he, who had never slept beneath more than a sheet, lay beneath mountains of wool and felt like a figure in an ancient
calling him "a ghoul, a hoosh, a demon up from hell," and telling him that he has his "own bad
djinni" (SV 48). Without realizing what is happening, Chamcha feels the floor give way
beneath his feet and he stares "into the inferno" (SV 68). While he tries to convince himself
that he is not in Hell, the sky above him is "blood-orange flecked with green," he enters a
"void," and he wakes into "the most fearsome of nightmares" which becomes "ever more
infernal and outré" (SV 132, 141, 160). In making Chamcha’s devilish appearance
unmistakable and Gibreel’s angelic appearance ambiguous, the satanic narrator may be
implying that the Devil clearly exists while God and His angels are only figments of the
imagination. It is equally important to note that Chamcha takes on the physical likeness of the
Devil as a result of the viciousness of authoritarian powers: he grows horns and starts to bleat
while he is being abused by policemen in "the black Maria of his hard fall from grace"

myth, condemned by the gods to have a boulder pressing down upon his chest; but never mind, he
would be English” (SV 43). Changez is also seen as a resented God-figure when his “letter of
forgiveness” is felt to be more insulting than his “earlier, excommunicatory thunderbolt” (SV 47).

Djinns can be either good or bad, although their fiery nature often prompts them to be mischievous
and evil. The use of djinns is very subtle and problematic in the novel. The butterfly cloud which
hovers over the pilgrims in India and the giant who crushes Titlipur vaguely suggest a djinn. In his
destructive and apocalyptic mode, Gibreel sees himself as “the genie of the lamp, and his master is the
Roc” (SV 461). The gun which pops out of Changez’s lamp, and which Chamcha dismisses all too
easily, is seen explicitly in terms of a genie. One may well ask, Can Chamcha dismiss such a subtle
violent force? Or will it resurface to hound him in the future—like Gibreel’s jealousy and like the
amorphous Beast in Shame? Chamcha’s final “freedom” becomes increasingly doubtful when one
remembers that Iblis (as Al-Jann) is considered the father of the djinn.

The police at Rosa’s see Gibreel’s halo only for an instant, and the only characters who see
it clearly are John Maslama (John the Baptist?) and Maslama’s three clerks (the three wise
men?). Maslama sees himself as “the chief herald of the returned Celestial and Semi-God-like
Being,” whom he immediately recognizes as Gibreel (SV 447, 191). Maslama’s vision of the
halo only raises the following questions: Why does God give prophetic visions to someone
who cannot put these visions into perspective and to someone who kills himself? Why does
the world not end as the visions prophesy?
His transformation is completed in a hospital in which immigrants succumb to the tyrannical and self-serving definitions of the West. According to the narrator, the racist and fascist State—which supposedly parallels the Heaven which God rules “by terror”—creates Chamcha’s demonic state. It is only after he submits to the diabolic force within him that he can escape the tyranny of the hospital: once the “black water” seeps into his veins (SV 170), he joins the wolf and the manticore, travelling “without hope, but also without shame” on one of “the low roads to London town” (SV 170-171). One should note that the manticore is the symbol of Jahilia’s Hind, the fiercest opponent of Muhammad and his Allah. Thus Chamcha’s identification with the manticore takes on a specifically anti-Islamic association.

While critics tend to see Chamcha’s transformation as heroic (they tend to echo Mishal Sufyan’s enthusiasm for this victimized rebel who learns to fight back), the Promethean elements should not blind readers to the evil which destroys Chamcha’s moral fiber, or to the cruelty which characterizes Chamcha’s subsequent actions. Readers initially have sympathy for Chamcha, which is understandable on the worldly level (where he is being persecuted by the police and English society) and on the otherworldly level (where he is being possessed and manipulated by Satan), yet readers feel increasingly uneasy as Chamcha’s thoughts and actions take on darker and darker directions. The satanic narrator gloats over the “dark fire of evil” which continues “perniciously to spread” in Chamcha and which he says “springs from some recess in his own true nature” (SV 463). In a gross parody of God’s words to Moses in

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44 Chamcha’s partnership with the wolf may also have mythic ties to Loki, who fathers the wolf Fenrir and who appears obliquely in the fall of the Yggdrasil-like Titlipur. This association remains conjectural, although Chamcha’s partnership with the wolf suggests that he is, like the wolf, a wild and peripheral threat to established culture.
Exodus 3:14 ("I am that I am") and in a gross parody of the submission to God from which Islam derives its name, Chamcha "submits" to the dark angry force which is transforming his habitually peaceful and tolerant state of mind into a violent and aggressive state of mind:

Bitterness, too, and hatred, all these coarse things. He would enter into his new self; he would be what he had become: loud, stenchy, hideous, outsize, grotesque, inhuman, powerful. He had the sense of being able to stretch out a little finger and topple church spires with the force growing in him, the anger, the anger, the anger. Powers.

He was looking for someone to blame. [...] I am, he accepted, that I am.
Submission. (SV 289)

Evil lodges "comfortably" in his vocal cords and the narrator likens the easy, natural movement of evil in him to the confidence of "a handsome man in a perfectly tailored suit!" (SV 445)—an image which calls to mind the Devil as sophisticate, as Mick Jagger's "man of wealth and taste." (These images contrast to the image of God as a bumbling, myopic, dandruff-flaked old man). The satanic narrator gives a particularly sick twist to Chamcha's evil when his devil-puppet cloaks his "profoundly immoral verses" in children's rhymes, in an "infernal childlike evil" (SV 444-445). We are then privy to the delight the narrator and Chamcha take in separating Gibreel from the real world and in warping Gibreel's mind so that Allie appears to be covered in a slimy green film:

One by one [Chamcha's satanic verses] dripped into Gibreel's ears, weakening his hold on the real world, drawing him little by little into their deceitful web, so that little by little their obscene, invented women began to coat the real woman like a viscous, green film, and in spite of his protestations to the contrary he started slipping away from her; and then it was time for the return of the little, satanic verses that made him mad. (SV 445)

Chamcha takes a satanic delight in constructing his "deceitful web" and in destroying Gibreel's strongest link to reality: Allie's love.
Mirza is also modelled on Satan, particularly the Iblis of the *gharaniq* incident. Given that everything happening in the India of Mirza and Ayesha is dreamt by Gibreel, one might see the two poles of Mirza’s skepticism and Ayesha’s certainty as the same two poles that rip Gibreel apart in London. One might also see Mirza’s eventual union with Ayesha at the moment of his death as Gibreel’s inability to keep these poles apart or as his belief that only in death can he escape his torment. I will return to Ayesha and her sensual allure in the next section, yet I want to note here that the portrayals of Mirza and Ayesha are both slanted in favour of the Devil: Mirza is the diabolic, reasonable, compassionate counterpart to the angelic, unreasonable, hard-hearted Ayesha. Rushdie plays a complicated game here, for Mirza plays Iblis’ role in tempting the pilgrims away from Ayesha’s God, yet Ayesha, with her sexual and polytheistic associations, also brings to mind the three goddesses who tempt Mahound away from his God.

The satanic narrator turns the protagonist of the rural Indian chapters into a heroic Satan-figure, one who complements the devil-puppet Chamcha. Mirza clearly behaves in the manner of the Iblis who tempts the faithful to revolt against authoritarian monotheistic powers: he rejoices in his “first convert” when Muhammad Din enters his “station wagon of scepticism” (SV 481); he gives people a choice between himself (the Devil) “and the deep blue sea” into which Ayesha leads the pilgrims (SV 484); he does his best to point out the cruelty and partiality of Ayesha’s God; he offers Ayesha a “compromise” (SV 498) which echoes both the compromise offered by Satan to Muhammad and the “compromise solution” offered by Rekha to Gibreel; he laughs an “echoing laughter of revenge” when he hears that Ayesha’s
Archangel sings to her in pop songs (SV 497); he tells himself that “Revenge is sweet” when he feels that Ayesha’s hold over the pilgrims will “be destroyed forever” (SV 499).

Mirza resembles Chamcha in that both initially resist figures associated with religious authority (Ayesha and Changez) and both eventually reconcile themselves to these figures--yet on terms which emphasize the sensual and irreligious sides of these “religious authorities”: Mirza unites with Ayesha at the moment of his death, at which time it is not clear what appeals to him more, her spiritual or her sexual qualities, and Chamcha makes peace with his father only after Changez loses his God-like status. The images used in the “liberations” of Chamcha and Mirza also suggest continued demonic influence. While Gibreel’s rescue of Chamcha seems to purge him of his evil, Chamcha finds that the fire of love had not “driven those devils out into the consuming flames” (SV 540). I noted above that Gibreel’s rescue of Chamcha does not erase the effect of Chamcha’s evil, thus suggesting that evil’s victory is in fact total. The lingering evil in Chamcha himself also suggests a negative response to the question, “Is it possible that evil is never total, that its victory, no matter how overwhelming, is never absolute?” (SV 467). Mirza’s “liberation” is equally ambiguous, for he is “set free” by a burning wind which has strong demonic associations. This burning wind suggests at least two mythic possibilities. Because the village of Titlipur takes the form of a giant tree, its burning and fall suggests the drama in which Loki precipitates the fall of Yggdrasil and in which his comrade Sutr sets fire to Earth and Heaven (Puhvel 220). The burning wind which

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45Changez resembles Shame’s old Mr Shakil with his death-bed blasphemies when he denies the afterlife (SV 529) and when he refuses to pronounce the name of God in the hour of his death (SV 531). Chamcha admires his father for his resistance to religious rites and he acts in his father’s behalf by violently rejecting the mullah’s sacred cloth (SV 532). Chamcha’s reconciliation with his erstwhile supreme being might be seen as another excuse to reject God and religion.
“frees” Mirza may also derive from Iblis as Al-Jann, who is closely associated with “the fierce heat of a smokeless fire,” the “hot winds that blow at night” and the “whirlwind capable of stifling a person” (Awn 31). It seems appropriate that since Mirza plays the role of Iblis, he should be “set free” by the fiery wind of his exemplar. Mirza’s potential for bliss with Ayesha might also be seen in light of Saleem’s embrace with the *houris-cum-apsaras* in the Kali temple, an embrace which becomes the opposite of what it first appears to be.

**RAISING HELL**

Apart from mocking Muhammad, God and Gabriel, and apart from turning Chamcha and Mirza into Devils, the satanic narrator transforms Gibreel’s mind into a chaotic, fire and brimstone landscape. One of the origins of Gibreel’s hellish otherworldly perception can be found in the sunken world he finds in his youth:

Sometimes when he looked around him, especially in the afternoon heat when the air turned glutinous, the visible world, its features and inhabitants and things, seemed to be sticking up through the atmosphere like a profusion of hot icebergs, and he had the idea that everything continued down below the surface of the soupy air: people, motor-cars, dogs, movie billboards, trees, nine-tenths of their reality concealed from his eyes. (SV 21)

As was seen earlier, Rushdie’s depiction of Gibreel’s invisible or hallucinatory world might be influenced by the notion of the “subtle or immaterial—or subtly material—world,” the *alam al-malakut*, “into which the material and physical world is plunged, as if into a liquid.” Glasse explains:

*If we picture a room in our mind, the “medium” in which that imagined room exists supports form, but is itself subtle [...] In traditional cosmology, the physical world is a “crystallization,” or projection, out of the subtle world, the “ether”; the “ether” is a projection out of the surrounding formless, or Angelic world; and the Angelic world is projected out of Being.* (210)
This "subtle world" helps to make sense of Gibreel's early visions as well as of his notion that the surrealistic nightmare of his life is being dreamed (or projected) by the archangel Gabriel (who of course would belong to "the Angelic world"). I previously suggested that instead of being the projection of the Archangel, Gibreel's nightmarish world is largely a projection of Satan, whose "disguised form attains its fullest intensity" in "the semi-conscious realm of dream and sleep" (Awn 49). That Gibreel's sunken world contains "God, angels, demons [and] afreets" also makes sense, for afreets are one of the five types of djinn, all of whom live in the alam al-malakut (Glassé 210). Apart from noting that the alam al-malakut is a possible cosmological source of Gibreel's visions, I would note that in depicting Gibreel's hellish visions Rushdie conflates cosmology and psychology much as he does in Shame, in which subterranean angels and fearful cosmic forces dwell beneath the surface of the Earth, Nishapur and Omar's mind. Just as the Beast rises out of galactic, subterranean and oceanic depths in Shame, so the Devil rises out of the invisible world, invading Chamcha's body and Gibreel's mind, and turning this material world into a version of Hell.

Gibreel's invisible world initially appears to be a "fabulous world beneath" in comparison to the "dense, blinding air" above (SV 21-22), yet the hidden watery bulk of this world, seen in terms of hot icebergs, becomes associated with a rage and hatred which is directed at Allie and her symbolic ice replicas of God. The image of hot icebergs is appropriate not only because icebergs are mostly hidden, but also because heat characterizes the climate of Hell. One might note that djinns, of whom Iblis is sometimes considered the originator or father, are created from the "creative substance" of *nar as-samum*, which is characterized by "violent heat" and by an "immaterial quality" (Awn 31). Gibreel's hot
icebergs thus create an effective contrast to Allie’s cold mountains, representative of God’s Himalayan realm. The two are brought into closer juxtaposition when Allie sees “the ten highest mountains in the world” as “icebergs” floating up the Thames (SV 302-303). Allie’s mountains (or “icebergs”) become representative, in Gibreel’s confused mind, of a “diabolism” he must destroy. Once the green-eyed monster of jealousy rises in Gibreel, he hacks to pieces Allie’s “priceless whittled memento” of Everest, and he thaws “the ice-Everest she kept in the freezer” (SV 446). Given that Allie’s Everest stands for Qaf, one can infer that Gibreel’s attack is, on the otherworldly level, an attack on God. Gibreel also pulls down and rips “to shreds the parachute-silk peaks that rose above her bed” (SV 446). On the otherworldly level this act expresses Satan’s jealousy of Gabriel in a most insidious manner, that is, by having the “Archangel” destroy his own heavenly bliss. The degeneration of Gibreel’s mind is almost total, for he calls Allie a “whore” and he cannot string together a coherent sentence:

So I called down the wrath of God I pointed my finger I shot [Sisodia] in the heart but she bitch I thought bitch cool as ice […] I pointed my finger at her […] Bloody hell I loved that girl. (SV 545)

On the otherworldly level the satanic narrator’s antagonism to the cool, glacial Himalayas, and to whoever remains devoted to the God-mountain of Everest, plays itself out consistently in terms of Chamcha’s jealousy and hatred of Gibreel (with his glacial Alleluia) and in terms of Gibreel’s increasingly violent relationship with Alleluia. The satanic narrator thus takes a heavenly unity between two people and turns it into a hellish division.

Gibreel’s increasingly violent mental condition can be seen as a fantasy of Satan. In its violent destructiveness, this fantasy resembles the satanic narrator’s imagined flood in the
Arabian desert, his “liquid catastrophe full of snapping boats and drowning arms” (SV 94). The narrator appears to revel in Gibreel’s hellish vision of a wasted “Brickhall” cityscape—a “concrete formlessness [in] the howling of a perpetual wind, and the eddying of debris” (SV 461). The demonic element in this landscape is made explicit on numerous occasions. For instance, the “screaming city” mirrors “the dark fire of evil” in Chamcha’s soul (SV 463) and Gibreel sees London as “a tortured metropolis” in which the Devil is everywhere:

Gibreel with open eyes and by the light of the moon as well as the sun detected everywhere the presence of his adversary, his -- to give the old word back its original meaning -- shaitan. (SV 320-321)

Even with his eyes closed Gibreel “instantly see[s] clouds of minuscule demons surrounding every man and woman on earth” (SV 321). In the narrator’s empty apocalypse—in his Final Hour which has no genuine theophany and no redemption—he portrays London as an even more violent place than the London of Hanif Kureishi’s Sammy and Rosie Get Laid, a movie which appeared just before the novel and which also focuses on ethnic tension in London.

The satanic narrator’s fantasy becomes more and more violent and lurid. He revels in the fires that “are every colour of the rainbow,” in the “garden of dense intertwined chimeras” (SV 462), and in the transformation of the Shaandaar Café’s doorway into “the maw of the black hole” (SV 464). As fire devours Chamcha’s soul as well as the “screaming city,” the satanic narrator pretends to find these flames horrendous: “Truly these are ‘most horrid, malicious, bloody flames, not like the fine flame of an ordinary fire’” (SV 464). The narrator’s use of quotations suggests he is parodying established religious language, that he

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46 Brickhall is most probably a mix of Brixton and Southall—predominantly African and South Asian parts of London.
finds these flames delightful rather than horrid. One might recall that Iblis (as djinn) was born of fire and that his admission of such an origin in the Quran is seen as proof of his evil nature:

And when Iblis, in the Kur’anic text, declares himself to be “created from fire” (nar) and not from light (nur), this is because God intended that, by a lapsus linguae, he should in a sense utter his own condemnation. (The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol. III, 669)

By suggesting that the flames devouring London are not “ordinary” and that they display “every colour of the rainbow,” the satanic narrator may be making a similar slip. This would fit with his general view of angels (who are created from light) as spineless lackeys compared to his fiery, dissenting self.

Implicitly justifying his superimposition of Hell onto this world, the satanic narrator claims that destruction cleanses his increasingly nightmarish city of Ellowendeeowen, and that humans desire this destruction: Gibreel “proclaims to the riotous night, ‘that men be granted their heart’s desires, and that they be by them consumed’” (SV 461). Again, the satanic narrator twists religious language--this time to suggest that bloody flames could be God’s way of fulfilling human desires. The scene he paints is clearly one of Hell on Earth:

In the High Street [Gibreel] sees houses built of flame, with walls of fire, and flames like gathered curtains hanging at the windows. -- And there are men and women with fiery skins strolling, running, milling around him, dressed in coats of fire. The street has become red hot, molten, a river the colour of blood. -- All, all is ablaze as he toots his merry horn, giving the people what they want, the hair and teeth of the citizenry are smoking and red, glass burns, and birds fly overhead on blazing wings. (SV 462)

47 The voiced spelling of London--“Ellowendeeowen”--suggests “Halloween,” which is appropriate since London becomes a town presided over by pagan spirits--especially the Devil, the hybrid shapes in the hospital (SV 164-171), the demons Gibreel sees everywhere (SV 321) and the ghost of Rekha Merchant (SV 323-326). A Halloween atmosphere also pervades Jahilia’s “festival of Ibrahim.”
The "men and women with fiery skins" adds a hellfire element to Chamcha's nightmarish dreams of cracking glass skin (SV 34), and the birds flying "overhead on blazing wings" suggests the djinns, afreets and three high-flying birds which hover over Mount Cone (SV 122-123).

In addition to inundating Chamcha's body with his black water and engulfing Gibreel's vision in flames, the satanic narrator steers his two principal puppets into a spiritual world which is characterized by vengeance and violence. Gibreel acknowledges "this world and another that was also right there, visible but unseen" and he feels that "the splitting [of these two worlds] was not in him, but in the universe" (SV 351). Two pages later readers find Gibreel interpreting the devil horns below him on the Earls Court stage as "the adversary's sign" and then "in that instant when he saw the adversary's sign he felt the universe fork and he stepped down the left-hand path" (SV 352). Chamcha also perceives a split in the universe, and he too chooses the "left-hand path." In the Brickhall community centre Chamcha experiences "the kind of blurring associated with double vision," and he seems "to look into two worlds at once; one was the brightly lit, no-smoking-allowed meeting hall, but the other was a world of phantoms, in which Azraeel, the exterminating angel, was swooping towards him, and a girl's forehead could burn with ominous flames" (SV 416). Three pages later readers find Chamcha in a taxi cab, insanely jealous of Gibreel and ready to embark on his satanic revenge:

A new, dark world had opened up for him (or: within him) when he fell from the sky; no matter how assiduously he attempted to re-create his old existence, this was, he now saw, a fact that could not be unmade. He seemed to see a road before him, forking to left and right. Closing his eyes, settling back against taxicab upholstery, he chose the left-hand path. (SV 418-419)
The diabolic purpose behind the two “left-hand” or “sinister” paths becomes clear when one sees that not only the Devil (Chamcha) but also the Archangel (Gibreel) chooses the sinister path of destructive violence over the right-hand path of justice and constructive love:

Gibreel’s choice of the left-hand path comes at the moment he decides he is Azraeel, the Angel of Doom; Chamcha’s choice of the left-hand path coincides with his acceptance of his transformation into an agent of darkness, and coincides with the moment he begins avenging himself on Gibreel.

SHIRKING REVELATION

In his attempt to take power from God and to extend his demonic realm, the satanic narrator also promotes the three goddesses of the gharaniq incident. Although polytheism is obviously not demonic in itself (gods generally prevail over demons), it takes on demonic associations in the Islamic context of the gharaniq incident. In reworking this incident, the satanic narrator makes it far more successful--far more anguishing to Muhammad--than it appears to have been according to historical accounts. He also applies it in contexts which go far beyond the Mecca (Jahilia) of Islamic history: he employs it on numerous occasions in London and on one occasion in India. These reworkings of the original incident serve to emphasize the doubt about Muhammad’s revelation engendered by the original episode, and

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48 Muslim interpreters do not generally interpret the episode as casting doubt on Muhammad or the Quran. Rather, they see the incident in light of the quranic verses in which God says that every prophet is tempted by Satan yet God always “abrogates the interjections of Satan and confirms His own revelations” (Koran 238). Shabbir Akhtar comments that “the incident of the satanic verses is actually a tribute both to the scrupulous honesty of a Muslim tradition that recorded such a potentially damaging event and also to the integrity and sincerity of Muhammad as God’s spokesman” (Akhtar 20). It is, however, to the “potentially damaging” aspects which the satanic narrator consistently refers.
they also suggest that any form of revelation—be it that of Mahound, Gibreel or Ayesha—may be a harmful delusion.

At the root of the gharaniq incident lies what Muslims call shirk, which is the association of something with God other than God Himself:

The sin of shirk (“association”) is a name for paganism; pagans are called “the associators” (mushrikun). But shirk is the fundamental state of being in revolt against God, irrespective of any professed belief in other gods. It is also atheism, or the putting of nothingness in the place of God. (Glasse 370)

Satan is the otherworldly figure who most strongly enacts “revolt against God.” It is thus appropriate that it is the satanic narrator who not only promotes doubt and skepticism but also uses various forms of “polytheistic temptation” to lure the soul from the strict monotheism upon which Islam is based. We have previously seen how the satanic narrator reworks the original episode so as to cast doubt on Mahound, yet one should also emphasize the less obvious reworkings of the incident, both in India, where Mirza tempts Ayesha to compromise her faith, and in London, where Gibreel’s rejection of Allie mocks Muhammad’s rejection of the three goddesses. This mockery is not straightforward, for it is complicated by Gibreel’s rejection of Rekha. Echoing Muhammad’s triumph over Satan and the goddesses in the gharaniq incident, Gibreel rejects Rekha, who tells him that a “compromise solution is always possible,” who asks him to say “just three-little-words,” and who tells him, “I can take for you any form you prefer” (SV 333-334). Gibreel’s rejection of Rekha’s offer does not create mockery (or at least not a clear instance of mockery), yet it does set up the conditions for

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49 The rejection of Rekha’s verses might suggest mockery, for Gibreel rejects them even though they have a soothing effect—at least compared to the torture they inflict on Mahound as he walks through the nighttime streets of Jahilia. Gibreel’s walk is not an anguished one, nor is the city transformed into a violent carnival of demonic spirits: “All that night [Gibreel] walked the city streets, which remained stable, banal, as if restored to the hegemony of natural laws; while Rekha -- floating before him on her
mockery by running parallel to Gibreel’s unjust, harmful rejection of Allie. Infected by a puritanical and misogynistic fervor, Gibreel thinks of Allie as a “temptress” and a “creatrix of strife.” He feels that he has become “enmeshed by her in the web of a love so complex as to be beyond comprehension,” and that in loving her “he had come to the very edge of the ultimate Fall” (SV 321). Because Rekha is recognizably fiendish, Gibreel’s rejection of her more or less follows the model of Muhammad’s rejection of the goddesses. Yet because Allie incarnates a mystical, Sufi devotion to the Mountain of God, and because she wants to “salvage him so that they could resume the great, exciting struggle of their love” (SV 341), Gibreel’s rejection of her mocks Muhammad’s rejection.

In promoting the sin of shirk, the satanic narrator also sets up a self-serving distinction between tyrannical monotheistic “purity” and liberating polytheistic “impurity.” In his portraits of Tavleen and the Imam, he provides examples of those who resemble Mahound in their uncompromising stance and in their desire to impose an otherworldly scheme on the world around them. The satanic narrator infuses a certain amount of heroism into the ruthless Tavleen (her fight against India’s status quo mirrors his fight against God’s status quo), yet her overriding character is one of austerity and refusal to compromise. The Imam is equally uncompromising and ruthless, yet his depiction does not contain a shred of heroism or dignity.

carpet like an artiste on a stage, just above head-height -- serenaded him with the sweetest of love songs” (SV 334). These “sweetest of love songs” bear striking resemblance—both in the context they are found and in the words used to describe them—to the “sweet songs” of Satan and his “fiendish backing group” (SV 91). Despite their soothing effect, Gibreel follows in the footsteps of the exemplar of Islam: he rejects the compromise solution offered by Rekha. In so doing he feels he is breaking the tyranny of “all the women who wished to bind him in the chains of desires and songs” (SV 336). Thus while Gibreel’s rejection of the fiendish Rekha mostly parallels Mahound’s rejection of the three goddesses, it also suggests—as does his rejection of Allie—that he rejects what might calm his severely over-heated mind.
A caricature of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, the Imam sees the West as a place where people know little--and care less--about God. As a result, he sees London as "the Sodom in which he had been obliged to wait." Consciously attempting to remain "ignorant, and therefore unsullied, unaltered, pure," he blocks the London light with thick curtains, "because otherwise the evil thing might creep into his apartment: foreignness, Abroad, the alien nation" (SV 206-207). The "devilish" Chamcha's struggle to transform himself according to his environment is the opposite of the "holy" Imam's struggle, which is to maintain cultural difference and "purity" at all costs. While Chamcha avoids contemporary postcolonial politics in London, the Imam forces political change on the world around him--while at the same time attempting to turn back the hands of time. He wants Iran to return to a pre-Westernized Islamic era, an era which the satanic narrator and the Rushdie-like narrator (both fiercely antagonistic to such a return) call "Untime" (SV 215). The Imam's version of a return to old time Islamic religion is one in which he smashes clocks (SV 214) and in which history is the forbidden "intoxicant, the creation and possession of the Devil, the great Shaitan" (SV 210).

While on one level Rushdie is expressing his antagonism to Khomeini's vision of Islam, on another he is allowing his satanic narrator to benefit from the distinction between the coercive, tyrannical figure of the Imam and the liberating figures of the Empress, Al-Lat and Hind. These three female figures are linked through the figure of Al-Lat. Hind worships Al-Lat, and her revenge against Mahound leads to the appearance of Al-Lat in Mahound's bedroom (SV 393-394). The Empress is also associated with Al-Lat, for she appears to take the goddess' form when the Imam storms her palace:

Then the golden dome of the palace bursts open like an egg, and rising from it, glowing with blackness, is a mythological apparition with vast black wings, her hair
streaming loose, as long and black as the Imam’s is long and white: Al-Lat, Gibreel understands, bursting out of Ayesha’s shell.

‘Kill her,’ the Imam commands. (SV 214)

The Empress, Al-Lat and Hind might be associated with what in the Muslim subcontinental context might be called the “threat” of Hinduism, or, in particular, the “threat” of Kali, the black goddess of Time. Abedi and Fischer observe that “Abu Simbel’s Queen is that other great threat, Hind, India, land of female goddesses par excellence: from Kali to Indira Gandhi, exalted females, 360 idols and more, polymorphous perversity and fecundity run riot” (135). The references to Kali and Indira Gandhi are appropriate given the related spellings of Hind, Hinduism, India and Indira, and given the resemblance between the Kali-like Widow in Midnight’s Children and the Empress with her black wings and loose streaming black hair.

One could object that there is nothing threatening let alone demonic in suggesting that polytheism provides multivocal and therefore liberating forms of theology. Yet the context is all-important here, for the novel is steeped in Satan’s promotion of shirk, in the otherworldly circumstances surrounding the gharaniq incident. One must note that the satanic narrator champions polytheistic female figures not because he believes in gender equality but because they are alternatives to the monotheism of Islam. He is, of course, the self-professed leader of these alternatives.

The satanic narrator at once champions the three goddesses of the gharaniq incident and suggests that these goddesses are his daughters. Not only does he have the “best tunes” (SV 10), but he also has his “daughters” serve as his “fiendish backing group”:

[After his fall from Heaven, Satan] lived on, was not couldn’t be dead, sang from hellbelow his soft seductive verses. O the sweet songs that he knew. With his daughters as his fiendish backing group, yes, the three of them, Lat Manat Uzza, motherless girls laughing with their Abba, giggling behind their hands at Gibreel, what a trick we got in store for you, for you and for that businessman on the hill. (SV 91)
Apart from noting that the popular tune, "Sympathy for the Devil," has a backup chorus, and
apart from noting that the three goddesses here appear to join the campaign of psychological
terrorism which the satanic narrator wagers against Gibreel, one should note the ambiguity of
the narrative voice. Is the voice Satan’s, or simply that of someone who appreciates Satan’s
verses, his “sweet songs”? Also unclear is whether or not Rushdie employs one of the
following legends in which Satan and Satan’s wife hatch daughters from eggs:

Allah created al-Shaitan, perhaps another name for Iblis, who then produced eggs from
which other demons were hatched. In a variant legend, Allah created not only al-
Shaitan, but a wife, who produced three eggs. When hatched, the children were all
ugly, having hoofs instead of feet. (Mercantante 208)

Such legends could be used to associate the Devil’s daughters with the Empress, who bursts
from the shell of her palace once the Imam takes power (SV 214). While Satan is created by
God in both of the above legends, the satanic narrator does not mention having such a father.
And while the three hatched daughters in the second legend have a mother, the three
daughters of the satanic narrator are “motherless” (SV 91). The satanic narrator admits to no
matriarchal equal, although he does make his daughter Al-Lat “Allah’s opposite and equal”
(SV 100). Hind tells Mahound that Al-Lat “hasn’t the slightest wish to be [Allah’s] daughter.
She is his equal, as I am yours” (SV 121). Manipulating mythic genealogy, he allows
himself—but not God—to be Al-Lat’s father, and he allows Al-Lat to be God’s equal. He thus
positions himself above the three goddesses and above the “God” who is the equal of one of
these goddesses.

In his bid to usurp power from God, the satanic narrator implies that he deserves to
take over God’s role because God is unjust to women. Referring to Ibrahim’s belief that God
wanted him to leave Hagar alone in the desert, the narrator comments:
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. (SV 95)

As has been seen, the satanic narrator suggests that Chamcha suffers under the yoke of a father who is his "supreme being," and that angels suffer under the yoke of a business-like and tyrannical God. The satanic narrator also suggests that women suffer under the yoke of a patriarchal God, and that Satan is the cosmic power who sympathizes with their plight. One must, however, recall that the satanic narrator daydreams about genocide in the desert and he admits to treating humans as wanton boys treat flies. He also possesses Chamcha, drives Gibreel into a homicidal insanity, and turns Allie's potentially mystical ascent of Everest into a sordid scene in which she is pushed from the roof of an apartment. It therefore remains extremely unlikely that his cosmic leadership would prove any more compassionate than that of the "God" he depicts as aloof and tyrannical.

The satanic narrator also tempts humanity from strict monotheism by making the sensual and polytheistic aspects of the Indian Ayesha seem more appealing than her austerity and her devotion to what she sees as a holy pilgrimage ordained by God via Gabriel. Marlena Corcoran sums up the feminine, polytheistic attraction of the Indian Ayesha, whom she considers to be "the most powerful female figure in all of Rushdie's fiction":

Her erotic magnetism is clear from the moment we see her, through the eyes of Mirza Saeed, a man who, standing in the bedroom he shares with his beloved wife, looks out the window at Ayesha and is overcome with lust. The compelling call of Ayesha is erotic, but not only carnal. Ayesha is married to the archangel, and her desire is for the holy city. Is she a female version of the true Prophet, or a return of the banished goddesses of the "Satanic verses"? (164)

Readers are left to wonder whether or not Ayesha's appeal does not include something of the polytheism of Srinivas--who sees Ayesha as the Hindu goddess of wealth, Lakshmi. Mirza
tells Srinivas that goddesses are "abstract concepts only," yet Srinivas proceeds to see Ayesha as Lakshmi despite Mirza's objections:

'I am no philosopher, Sethji,' he said. And did not say that his heart had leapt into his mouth because he had realized that the sleeping girl [Ayesha] and the goddess in the calendar on his factory wall had the identical, same-to-same, face. (SV 476)

While one might be tempted to see Srinivas' vision as an indication that the narrator condones beatific visions, one must remember that the narrator is chiefly fighting Islam and its God, and that the praise of goddesses is exactly what the Devil tempts Muhammad with in the incident which gives the novel its title.

MURDERING ALLELUIA

The satanic narrator uses the three goddesses and associated female figures to promote the shirk of polytheistic compromise and to place himself in a position of power. This is not, however, the strategy he uses in his treatment of Allie, who is arguably his most challenging opponent, as well as one of the few characters over whom he does not seem able to exert a victorious demonizing influence. For Allie represents a very deep, yet in no way fanatic or unreasonable, devotion to the God-Mountain, Everest. In order to see the extent to which the narrator goes in attacking Alleluia, one must note the links between the events which occur at the start, the middle and the end of the novel: the explosion of the plane Bostan at the height of Mount Everest, the gunshot Allie hears at the peak of Mount Everest, and the shots which appear to be fired on the roof of Everest Vilas. One must also note that

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50 Allie's temperament is antithetical to the violent and puritanical zeal of characters such as Tavleen and the Imam, and she avoids the dogmatism and intractability of Eugene Dumsday, Mahound and Jahilia's Hind. She is closest to Sufyan in her open-minded sympathy.
Chamcha's antagonism to Allie is couched in terms of a jealousy which derives from Satan's jealousy of the good angel Gabriel, and that Chamcha's revenge combines the actions of the snake in the Garden of Eden with those of Iago in Othello. While the satanic narrator is successful in keeping Allie from her angel Gibreel and from her God-Mountain, he nevertheless fails to eradicate the traces of Sufi yearning and unity which Allie leaves behind.

In locating the satanic narrator's antagonism to Allie and her mystical peak of Everest, one must note that Rushdie subtly associates the explosion of Bostan at the height of Everest with the explosive sound, the "sharp report, like a gun," which occurs when Allie reaches the peak of Mount Everest:

'I recall sort of floating over the last overhang and up to the top, and then we [Allie and Pemba] were there, with the ground falling away on every side. 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, rainbows looping and dancing in the sky, the radiance pouring down like a waterfall from the sun, and there were angels, the others hadn't been joking. I saw them and so did Sherpa Pemba. We were on our knees by then. His pupils looked pure white and so did mine, I'm sure. We would probably have died there, I'm sure, snow-blind and mountain-foolish, but then I heard a noise, a loud, sharp report, like a gun. That snapped me out of it. I had to yell at Pem until he, too, shook himself and we started down. The weather was changing rapidly: a blizzard was on the way. The air was heavy now, heaviness instead of that light.'

(SV 199)

In mythology, Satan is the one responsible for the battle in Heaven, a battle which is symbolized by the explosion of Bostan, itself echoed in the "sharp report" which precipitates Allie's descent from the peak of Everest. (As I made clear in "Satanic Revisions and Invasions," the plane Bostan falls from the height of Everest.) Despite the immense pain of her fallen arches, Allie yearns to make a second ascent of Everest and this effort is mirrored in her yearning to climb the mountain of Gibreel's love:
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. (SV 314).

After forgiving Gibreel for smashing her miniature mountains, Allie returns to India only to be shot or pushed to her death after being brought to the roof of Gibreel's apartment, Everest Vilas. Given that Gibreel pointed his finger at Sisodia and shot him, Gibreel's admission that he pointed his finger at Allie before her death suggests that he shot her as well (SV 545). Gibreel may thus have entered his most disastrous gap in consciousness. The text, however, is ambiguous: Allie may have been pushed by Rekha, the angry, jealous spirit who argues (unconvincingly) that she is not jealous of Alleluia and that she would be happy to be Gibreel's mistress. If Allie is pushed by Rekha, one still has to ask, Why did Gibreel bring her to the roof of his apartment? Another possibility is that Satan pushes her--a possibility not far removed from the previous two, for if Gibreel is possessed or if the witch-like Rekha pushes her, both cases suggest strong satanic intervention. As with so many other instances in the novel, we are left to puzzle. Despite these ambiguities, the final events in the house of Chamcha's birth can be seen as a satanic fantasy in which the schizophrenic Archangel commits suicide after presiding over the death of a woman who represents salvation and a return to the mountain of God. These final gunshots thus conclude the dark cosmic drama in which the satanic narrator has his characters relive his own mythic fall.

Alleluia's association with angels and mystical unity makes her the target of Satan, who depicts her in the same negative way he depicts God--that is, as cold and self-serving. While Rushdie cannot go too far in allowing his satanic narrator to make her look self-centred, he certainly allows him to have Chamcha see her as cold and sterile. This has a
double-edged effect, however, for while it suggests God's frosty indifference (a theme on which the satanic narrator often harps), it also suggests Satan's jealousy of Gabriel and of the human spirit that can ascend to God's icy realm:

The moment Saladin Chamcha got close enough to Allie Cone to be transfixed, and somewhat chilled, by her eyes, he felt his reborn animosity towards Gibreel extending itself to her, with her degree-zero go-to-hell look, her air of being privy to some great, secret mystery of the universe; also her quality of what he would afterwards think of as wilderness, a hard, sparse thing, anti-social, self-contained, an essence. Why did it annoy him so much? Why, before she'd even opened her mouth, had he characterized her as part of the enemy? (SV 428)

Allie's spiritual "essence," her celestial visions and her yearning to climb the Mountain of God, make her a clear target for the satanic narrator, who (mythologically speaking) once enjoyed the plenitude of being which comes from proximity to God. As was noted earlier, the narrator transmits his jealousy of Gabriel to Chamcha, his hoofed double. In describing the party at the Shepperton film studio, the narrator notes how Chamcha "struggles alone through that partying throng," while Farishta is "beset with admirers, at the very centre of the crowd."

It is in this setting that the "glacial presence by Farishta's side of Alleluia Cone" makes him feel "the entirety of his loss," and, "at its bottom, his own anonymity, the other's equal celebrity, and the great injustice of the division" (SV 425). To avenge the "great injustice" of this otherworldly division, the satanic narrator makes his Archangel fall deeper and deeper into madness, and he revels in transforming the potential paradise of Gibreel's love into a hell of jealousy and violence.

In locating the satanic narrator's cosmic jealousy, as well as his resultant diabolic version of theodicy, one must note that his description of Chamcha's jealousy occurs
immediately after the passage in which he tells us that he will not shrug off the question of why evil exists:

It’s not unknown for literary-theatrical exegetes, defeated by the character, to ascribe his actions to ‘motiveless malignity’. Evil is evil and will do evil, and that’s that; the serpent’s poison is his very definition. -- Well, such shruggings-off will not pass muster here. (SV 424-425)

The satanic narrator does not then give us a clear explanation of why evil exists, although he does illustrate his implicit meaning (that envy lies at the root of evil) by depicting Chamcha’s jealousy of Gibreel during the Shepperton party. Implicitly, he is arguing that Satan’s evil is a reaction to divine injustice, and that Satan’s motives have little in common with the supposed motivelessness that gives evil a bad name. The satanic narrator returns to the theme of Gabriel’s collaboration with a tyrannical God (the theme he introduced by having Gibreel stand aloof at the top of Rosa’s staircase while Chamcha was taken away by the police) when he refers to Othello’s inability to understand Iago’s evil:

[Chamcha] has destroyed what he is not and cannot be; has taken revenge, returning treason with treason; and he has done so by exploiting his enemy’s weakness, bruising his unprotected heel. -- There is satisfaction in this. (SV 466)

The contention that evil is God’s fault opens the door to the endless and irresolvable debates on theodicy and dualism. Suffice it here to say that the satanic narrator uses the argument that evil is God’s fault, not to emphasize that God allows evil, but to show how the exercise of evil is at once justified and satisfying.

In addition to having Allie murdered, the satanic narrator contrives events so that the Sufi-like Sufyan dies in the flames of his own Shaandaar Café, and so that Sufyan’s views are marginalized in the text. We do not hear Sufyan’s views about Othello, but instead we hear the views of his wife, who is far more concerned about money than ideas:
And what was it that made them a living in this Vilayet of her exile, this Yuke of her sex-obsessed husband’s vindictiveness? What? His book learning? His *Gitanjali*, *Eclogues*, or that play *Othello* that he explained was really like Atallah or Attaullah except the writer couldn’t spell, what sort of writer was that, anyway? (SV 248)

Sufyan’s views on important questions—such as the motives of Iago—are thus marginalized. Readers only know that Sufyan’s wife has distorted something Sufyan appears to have said into the contours of her own misunderstanding. One can only wonder what her husband might say about Shakespeare’s tragedy, given his love of *De Rerum*, *Gitanjali*, *Eclogues* and a thousand other philosophic things, and given that his tolerance, his eclecticism, his status as “least doctrinaire of hajis” (SV 243), his name, and his sympathy for the wool-covered Chamcha, all associate him with the Sufis. Just as Rushdie allows his Hind to frame, to edit, and to omit Sufyan’s opinion on a matter which has direct applicability to the theme of the novel itself, so Rushdie allows his satanic narrator the freedom to frame his own case, to plead his own cause, to define his own terms, and to marginalize or eliminate whatever or whoever does not help him attain his goals. Clearly, the satanic narrator does not encourage readers to contemplate Allie’s fate in light of Sufyan’s implicit Sufism.

That Allie supplies an invisible, mystical opposition to the demonic scheming of the satanic narrator is not a conclusion reached by other critics. Sufi mysticism is hinted at by several critics, yet the references are very indirect or very brief. Hélène Kafi refers to Qaf and

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51 Sufyan “swallow[s] the multiple cultures of the subcontinent” (SV 246), and he has a “pluralistic openness of mind” which allows him to “quote effortlessly from Rig-Veda as well as Quran-Sharif, from the military accounts of Julius Caesar as well as the Revelations of St John the Divine” (SV 245). He thus displays the same open-mindedness and eclecticism as Virgil, Saleem and Rashid.

52 “The derivation [of Sufism] from suf, ‘wool,’ is now generally accepted—the coarse woolen garment of the first generation of Muslim ascetics was their distinguishing mark” (Schimmel 14). Rushdie seems to go to some pains to bring in this association when he has the goat-like Chamcha wrapped in a “sheepskin jacket” (SV 244). Sufyan immediately accepts Chamcha in his fallen, transformed state (SV 243-244).
to several other Sufi ideas in her creative essay, “Ballad, or the *Fatwa* of the Masters” (Abdallah 188-190), yet she does not show where Sufi motifs enter the text. Fischer and Abedi suggest that Everest and Qaf can be associated with “the ice-woman,” Allie and Pamela (420). In “From Satiric Farce to Tragic Epiphany: Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses,*” David Myers calls Rushdie a “free-thinking mystic,” and he contends that the ending of the novel suggests that the only way out of the maze created by loss of faith is “through unorthodox, mystic faith or intellectually open discussion in a framework of altruistic socialism” (145). It is difficult, however, to see why in an article in which he calls Rushdie a mystic, he ignores Sufi mysticism. In “Contraband Histories: Salman Rushdie and the Embodiment of Blasphemy,” Sara Suleri offers a provocative reading which, although not specifically focused on mysticism, suggests that Rushdie has a religious sympathy not alien to iconoclastic mysticism: “Even before the fundamentalists descend to burn the published text, the book itself inflames, unfolding as an act of archaic devotion to the cultural system that it must both desecrate and renew”; Rushdie’s use of the *ghazal* links him “to a highly wrought tradition in which a recurrent trope is the rejection of Islam for some new object of epistemological and erotic devotion” (606, 609). Suleri argues that just as poets such as Ghalib (who Rushdie quotes in the novel) take on the “burden of devotional blasphemy” (in which “irreligion compels” and “faith retards”), so Rushdie’s religious renunciation “is figured as a taut and ironized submission to the alterities represented by an Islamic culture in a

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53 Myers also interprets the narrator’s notion that the writer inverts the Faustian contract—the writer “agrees to the ruination of his life, and gains […] posterity” (SV 459)—by arguing that Rushdie is “so interested in deconstructing the Romantic notion of the artist as inspired by God that he grotesquely overstates the opposite case purely for the sake of a clever metaphor” (151). Yet when the satanic narrator concludes, “Either way […] it’s the Devil who wins” (SV 459), this may be another instance in which the narrator biases arguments so that the Devil gets the best of God.
colonial world" (609). While Suleri does not include the notion of a satanic narrator in her analysis, one might argue that the satanic narrator’s blasphemy be seen as a type of devotion—an idea which is not impossible within the type of paradoxical Sufi and Romantic logic often used by Rushdie. This reading is difficult to maintain, however, given that the symbol of Qaf, which suggests an infinite dimensionality transcending human conceptions of God, is marginalized by the Devil. One could see why Rushdie would champion the Devil’s opposition to a tyrannical, anthropomorphized God, yet one cannot make sense of a scenario in which he would condone an assault on a symbol which represents freedom from tyranny.

One might ask, What is the point of marginalizing good and allowing evil to dominate in a novel? More specifically, What is the value of a drama in which a devil-figure drives an angel-figure to homicide and suicide, and in which the devil-figure walks away scot-free? I would argue that this scenario is meaningless in the same way that the evil Satan and Iago stand for is without any positive or redeeming features. Nevertheless, while the text is meaningless on the level of the satanic narrator’s vision (as is Othello on the level of Iago’s vision), it affirms the value of love and tolerance on a symbolic and mystical level. The suffering caused by the satanic narrator gains meaning when readers recognize the coercion, divisiveness and violence of this narrator, and when they sympathize with the victims of his manipulations. In this sense the novel can become everything the satanic narrator does not mean it to be.
Rushdie’s fiction from *Grimus* to *The Satanic Verses* takes on an increasingly dark and tragic direction, yet his ideals of tolerance, unity and love nevertheless surface in one form or another in all four novels. In his fifth novel, Rushdie reverses the trend toward dark tragedy, directing his creative energy instead to an unambiguous endorsement of positive values. Like *Alice in Wonderland* or *Gulliver’s Travels, Haroun and the Sea of Stories* can be read on the child’s level of fun and fantasy, as well as on a more thought-provoking level. *Haroun’s* major otherworldly paradigm—a liberating flight toward a Sea of infinite stories\(^1\)—remains Rushdie’s most explicit paradigm of the journey toward tolerance and multidimensionality. The Sea of Stories not only implies his belief that there are endless versions of “reality,” but it also constitutes an optimistic literary response to the problems of societal division and intolerance which crop up repeatedly in his novels. The division between Chupwalas and Gupwalas can of course represent any religious, cultural or political division, and as such it brings to mind the division between *us* and *them, pure* and *impure* made by the Axonans in *Grimus*, by Bariamma in *Shame*, and by the Imam in *The Satanic Verses*. In light of *Haroun’s* subcontinental settings (probably Bombay and certainly Srinagar), the division between Chup and Gup suggests the tension between Muslims and Hindus, a tension which permeates *Midnight’s Children* and which surfaces in *Shame* when Mahmoud’s exasperation with communalism leads to “the double-bill of his destruction.” While the unifying flights of the

\(^1\) The flight derives from Attar’s *Conference*, and the Sea derives from Somadeva’s twelfth century Sanskrit collection of stories, *Bhaktakisasrtisagara* or *Ocean of the Rivers of the Great Romance* (a selection from which can be found in J.A.B. van Buitenen’s *Tales of Ancient India*).
Hummingbird, Saleem and Mahmoud are cut short, the travellers in *Haroun* succeed in unifying the dark and light sides of the moon, and in restoring harmony to the earthly city by the sea. Such clarity and optimism is a product of the book’s status as a children’s fantasy, and Rushdie underscores this fanciful fictionality by calling both the moon and the Indian city “Kahani” or “Story.” When Rushdie returns to a more realistic exploration of subcontinental politics in his short story, “Chekov and Zulu,” he sees political problems (in this case Sikh separatism) as multi-faceted, and he sees political “solutions” as ambiguous at best.

 Appropriately, *Haroun* suggests Muslim-Hindu reconciliation by conflating Muslim and Hindu paradigms: Attar’s two “Hoopoes” (the speed-possessed bus driver and the mechanical bird)\(^2\) fly Haroun and Rashid to Kashmir and to the moon, where the two protagonists help restore the values of creativity and tolerance, represented by the flow of Somadeva’s Stream of Stories into the Ocean of Stories. Haroun and Rashid are successful in making the poles of Kahani spin once again, and this suggests a union of opposites, a commingling of the many things symbolized by light and dark. The perfect 360 degree spinning of the antipodal moon loosens the fixated opposites of light and dark, of us and them, and consequently brings reconciliation (between Gupwalas and Chupwalas, between Rashid and his wife), as well as a release of the monsoon and of the flow of waters deep in Rashid’s Ocean of Notions. As new stories churn in the lunar ocean, the Cultmaster’s idol of sewn lips topples from its place in the Citadel of Chup, and as Rashid finishes his story (which is *not* the one Snooty Buttoo pressures him to tell), Snooty Buttoo sneaks away from the Valley of K.

\(^2\) These “Hoopoes” named Butt appear to derive their name from the right to differ. “Butt” in this sense complements “Iff,” the name of the water genie. Another derivation (albeit rather oblique) of “Butt” might be found in Rushdie’s progressive maternal grandfather, Dr. Butt.
Buttoo’s departure provides a worldly form of the liberty which, on the fantastic, otherworldly level, is provided by the Cultmaster’s defeat. When Buttoo slinks out of town, he leaves “the people of the Valley free to choose leaders they actually liked” (H 207). Whereas in *Midnight’s Children* identification with the Hoopoe and the *paramahamsa* leads to confusion on worldly and otherworldly levels, in *Haroun* Attar’s flight to Somadeva’s Ocean leads to a reconciliation on a cosmic level, and to a meaningful existence in both Kashmir and Bombay.

In *Haroun* Rushdie depicts the opposition between tolerance, unity and love on one hand and coercion, division and violence on the other in such a straightforward manner that the novel can be used to gauge Rushdie’s other novels. *Haroun* also supplies such a clear case of conflation and idealism that it can be used to measure the degree of structural cohesion and optimism in *Grimus, Midnight’s Children, Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*. I do not mean to imply that because *Haroun* employs an evident conflation and sets up an evident opposition between such qualities as tolerance and coercion that it is in any way Rushdie’s best novel. Yet *Haroun* does clarify certain ideals which become increasingly difficult to discern amid the tangled webs of clashing mythic figures, inverted ideals, narrative ambiguity, demonic possession, diabolic innuendo, and outright satanic invasion. In “*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*: Metamorphosis of an old Metaphor,” Vidyut Aklujkar notes that each story in *Haroun’s* lunar Ocean has its own parameters of reality, although these parameters interact and recombine. Also, names as well as dreams “are shared by more than one individual in *Haroun*] which is in keeping with the treatment of names and dreams” in the Sanskrit collection of tales from which Rushdie draws (10). Whereas dreams in *The Satanic Verses* lead Gibreel into dark, entangling webs, and lead readers into confusion, dreams in *Haroun*
suggest clear, liberating allusions to Rushdie's "personal situation and to the general concepts of freedom of speech, growth of language, binary oppositions and the life-line of good literature" (3).

*Haroun* is also Rushdie's clearest example of a process Rushdie calls "mongrelization," "change-by-fusion," and "change-by conjoining" (IH 394), a process which highlights openness and commonality. This process might be seen as an antidote to the xenophobia of *Grimus'* Axonans, represented by the Whirling Demons which Bird-Dog proves to be nothing but air. The spirit of tolerance and the desire for "change-by-fusion" can also be seen as a democratic and multivocal ideal which counters Grimus' elitist sub-dimension, the Widow's self-serving appropriation of OM, Raza's Islamization, the Imam's Untime, the satanic narrator's possessions and coercions, and the Cultmaster's censorship. Rushdie's ideals of conference and tolerance take a joyous form in the gusto of Haroun and the young Saleem, and a somber form in the weariness of Virgil, the older Saleem, Rashid and Sufyan.

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Given Rushdie's diverse cultural background and education, and given that he comes from a subcontinent torn by religious conflict, it is not surprising that he strongly criticizes any attempt to divide people into camps and to coerce them to believe in one particular version of "reality." It is hard to say how Rushdie could have written about what he knows best, furthered an eclectic philosophy, and attacked coercion and intolerance without employing constructions deriving from Islam and Hinduism, the two dominant traditions of subcontinental thought and belief. While Rushdie sometimes stereotypes Islamic and Hindu
figures—for example, Dawood the “violent Muslim fundamentalist” and General Shiva the “priapic destroyer”—he does so in order to attack the notion that one religion or religious sensibility ought to prevail over another. My contention that his goal is not simply to attack sacred traditions is supported when one sees that he invests sympathy in characters who represent the tolerant aspects of Islam and Hinduism—characters such as Saleem, Padma, Mahmoud and Sufyan. Rushdie may have a reputation for making fun of religion, yet he also attacks the abuses of cosmology, mythology and mysticism, and he promotes a free and open space for the exploration of old, new and hybrid versions of reality. One might argue, as does Fawzia Afzal-Khan, that Rushdie has failed “to construct a viable alternative ideology” to the myths he debunks (175). Yet one might also ask, What alternative could there be? Instead of insisting on any one alternative, Rushdie promotes a tolerance which encourages the exploration of all possible alternatives.

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Previous to Haroun, Rushdie’s novels depict a darkening cosmos, one in which otherworldly eruptions cease to furnish his characters with the type of orientation or universal meaning supplied by what Eliade refers to as a hierophany. Increasingly, otherworldly eruptions reflect the “apocalyptic pessimism” and the “rising tide of occultism” which Kliever saw as characteristic of postmodernism and of “polytheistic polysymbolism.” Yet Rushdie’s darkening cosmos also contains hints of an elusive transcendental ideal, principally symbolized by Attar’s Impossible Mountain of Qaf. Throughout this study I have made it abundantly clear that such an ideal crops up again and again in Rushdie’s novels, supplying a vision of ontological and epistemological plurality, as well as a refuge from the coercion and violence of
demonic figures. I have run the risk of overemphasizing this ideal, yet I have done so in order to right a critical imbalance, one which privileges politics over mysticism, the polemics of culture over philosophical and theological speculation.

Among the many otherworldly aspects of Rushdie's fiction which are yet to be explored, there remains the question of why mystical ideals become increasingly marginalized in Rushdie's texts. I have already suggested that in *Grimus* and *Haroun* mystical ideals can dominate because they do not confront the intransigence of the real world. Yet this does not necessarily explain the trend in his three intervening novels, a trend which takes the reader deeper and deeper into a satanic universe. Among the possible reasons for the diminishing efficacy of mysticism in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses* may be Rushdie's increased awareness of the destructive forces in this world. While the pessimistic elements in *Grimus* and the optimistic elements in *Haroun* preclude the view that Rushdie simply outgrew youthful idealism, Rushdie appears increasingly pessimistic about the chances of finding political, cultural or interreligious harmony. More and more, he seems to doubt that believers will extend the ideals of religion beyond the written or spoken word. In light of Rushdie's avowed leftist leanings, one might also speculate that he sees a parallel between the forces of a market economy ruled by self-interest and a spiritual world governed by coercion and self-interest. Or, one could say that mysticism in Rushdie's fiction becomes what it has always been: a marginal force, pushed to the periphery by established ideas, and by those who benefit from forms of politics and religion which promote group consensus at the expense of the individual's creative and spiritual exploration. In the context of Rushdie's oeuvre, one may also be compelled to interpret the defeat of ideals in a paradoxical manner—as Saleem does
when he says that it is only in their annihilation that the Midnight's Children can find meaning. The same argument can be applied to Mahmoud's defeat by the terrorists who blow up his cinema, to Sufiya's possession by the Beast, and to the deaths of both Alleluia and Sufyan. While it is easy to find optimism in the comic denouement of Haroun, it remains a challenge, though a worthwhile one, to find the roots of the same optimism in the tragic endings of Shame and The Satanic Verses. I would argue that in all of Rushdie's novels, from the darkest to the most optimistic, one finds a yearning toward mutual understanding and love, as well as toward a magic which lies beyond a positivist universe. Like Saleem, Rushdie appears to dream about a road that will lead us back to Kashmir.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography comprises three sections: "Works by Rushdie," "Interviews with Rushdie" and "Secondary Sources." In "Works by Rushdie" I have included an essay only if it cannot be found in Imaginary Homelands. "Secondary Sources" includes all works cited, as well as major criticism on Rushdie not cited. I have left out minor conversations, commentaries and articles, as well as articles in languages other than English or French.

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