

CROSSING FRONTIERS: DIASPORA IDENTITY IN *THE SATANIC VERSES*

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is a novel about frontier crossing. Transgression, an underlying device, is the key to the issue of diaspora identity. In juxtaposing the re-imagining of the rise of Islam and the representation of the black immigrant community in London, Rushdie traverses the frontiers of fact, fiction, and antagonistic cultures and ideologies with his deferred/different cultural translation of the "authentic" English/Islamic culture. In this dialogic form, the novel represents a palimpsest vision of metropolitan culture.

Locating its setting in London, *The Satanic Verses* centers on the diasporic anxiety about identification and its transgressive attempt. It depicts the diasporic subject's wavering choice between assimilation and remaining intact, its longing for a unitary identity, and its final liberation from that myth. Its palimpsestual cultural representation re-maps the cityscape of the imperial center, making visible the city's inherent "Third Space," its cultural heterogeneity, and its vitality. In transgressing cultural frontiers, Rushdie no doubt productively turns the diasporic neurosis into an impetus for the making of newness.

Key Words: cultural translation, diaspora identity, frontier crossing, the Third Space, transgression

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost.

—Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 3

. . . I had admired the perfect form of my [unknowing hosts]—their grace, beauty and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I who was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. . . .

I should first win their favour, and afterwards their love. . . . My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I?

—Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* 117, 133-34

The Satanic Verses is, following Rushdie's representation of the imaginary "homelands" in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, a novel about frontier crossing. It aims to delineate the palimpsest vision of imaginary 'homes' by dint of rehistoricizing the story of Islam with the postcolonial/postmodern discursive practice. In transcending the cultural frontiers between the West and Islam, the surrealistic representation of the British black immigrant society in the novel challenges not only the liminality of the *grand récit* of Islam but also the temporality of national narrative that reinforces the homogeneity of the British culture with the rhetoric of *Englishness*. Cultural translation, transgression, hybridization, and border crossing—acts that disturb the borderlines between genres, ideologies, languages, and cultures—thereby remain crucial to the perusal of the text and help dramatize the ambivalent identification of the diasporic subject.

Masked under the disguise of blasphemy, the question of the diaspora identity is metaphorically projected upon the cinematic scenes that highlight the immigrants' relocation of London and Gibreel's re-imagining of the story of Islam. It is no wonder a pity that the undertone behind this carnivalesque performance is seldom judiciously read within a postcolonial/ postmodern context but is treated as a provocation to the anathema of the Islamic world. A re-examination of how the question of the diaspora identity is metaphorically expressed by the transgressive act of cultural translation is therefore worth notice here. Contrariwise, reading Rushdie's postcolonial comic epic also brings forth awareness of how the postcolonial representation of the nuance of the Indian-Pakistani-English diaspora activates the redefinition and relocation of the postcolonial/postmodern metropolis.

Teetering between dislocated realities and fragmented memories, the diaspora people in *The Satanic Verse* are commonly tortured by ambivalent feelings—their desire for assimilation as well as their revulsion against racism; yet, quite frequently, the heavier burden comes from the restraining power of their native tradition. The kind of ambivalent struggles entail not only the physical metamorphoses, such as Saladin Chamcha's Kafkaesque transformation into horny, hooved devil or Gibreel Farishta's abrupt growth of the angelic halo, but also ceaseless coerced mental metamorphoses in the process of establishing new coordinates of self-identification. Accordingly, emergent in the formation of new selves is often a set of questions that eternally haunts the migrants: "Who was I? What was I? Who am I? What am I?" For the diasporic subject with the Muslim background, the question is even more complicated. More often than not, the issue of cultural heritage involves the problem of the religious belief, which serves as the indispensa-

ble part in the Islamic culture. Therefore, when Rushdie makes his dream prophet muse on the nature of his God and query, “*What kind of idea is he? What kind am I?*” in the “Mahound” chapter (SV 111), he is in fact contextualizing his problem and asking, “What kind of idea is Islamic culture? What historical kind am I?” Just as Sara Suleri observes, this prophetic questioning resonates throughout the text with an equal poignancy (192). More importantly, these interrelated questions problematize the dialectic relation between one’s native cultural tradition and the metamorphosed translated self. The incessant interrogation of one’s situatedness within the current social, cultural context, thereupon, forms the leading thread of the text, which incorporates the text’s episodic, transmogriying plots into the persistent rumination on the issue of the diaspora identity.

Such rumination on the question of identity lies at the heart of *The Satanic Verses* as much as it lies at the heart of Rushdie’s complex conception of the diasporic identification. For this reason, the major concern of the following exploration will mainly focus on four aspects which are one way or the other crucial to the issue of the diaspora identity. To begin with, I intend to illustrate how the transgressive act of cultural translation,¹ notably blas-

¹ The reading of cultural translation as a transgressive act here mainly derives from Homi K. Bhabha’s theoretical description of “blasphemy as a transgressive act of cultural translation” (*Location* 226). By proposing the concept of cultural translation, Bhabha sees translation as “a way of imitating.” Far from a bare reduplication, the act of cultural translation is defined here as a way of imitating in a “mischievous, displacing sense—imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it *can* be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum” (Bhabha, “Third” 210). Namely, it emphasizes the transferring process and opposes the act of totalization because “[t]he ‘originary’ is always open to

phemy, opens the possibilities of different articulation for the diasporic subject. Secondly, I hope to argue how the diasporic subject's quest for the self is dramatized and carnivalized by the avatars of two contradictory yet complementary properties—Farishta (angel/virtue) and Chamcha (devil/evil). Thirdly, I am interested in how the diasporic subject undergoes the transformation that begins from the pursuit of the Symbolic and ends with the repudiation of it. In the ending section, I hope to summarize how this anxious search is animated by the metaphor of metamorphosis and how the metropolis becomes the locale of heterogeneous cultures. The city, I will argue, is the place where the grand narrative is most likely to undergo inner self-deconstruction and where the rigid definition of the cultural identity is destabilized by transgressive, border-crossing discursive practice. In doing so, I hope to map out Rushdie's itinerary of self-quest in the postcolonial and postmodern metropolis and see it as the epitome of the turn-of-the-century insurgent discursive practice that demands sober reflections on such late twentieth-century dominant discourses as racism, nationalism, religious essentialism, and other totalizing ideologies.

translation so that it can never be said to have a totalized prior moment of being or meaning—an essence" (210). Near the end of his acute anatomy of "foreign relations" in *The Satanic Verse* Bhabha concludes that "cultural translation desacralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy, and in that very act, demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation within minority positions" (*Location* 228).

My concern here, however, does not just consist in the carnivalization of "the supreme" or the emergent heterogeneity of minority positions in the Rushdie Affair; instead, I am more interested in how the transgressive act of cultural translation helps defamiliarize the already stereotyped assumption of different cultures and how this defamiliarization enables the diasporic subject to rethink and interrogate the grand narrative with the critical eye/I.

Making Visible the Unseen in the Act of Transgression

In *The Satanic Verses*, the question of identity is vigorously expressed by the diaspora aesthetic that emphasizes the notion of cultural translation and the transgressive mode. Plotwise, the interrogation of the diasporic subjectivity is dramatized in the scenario of two intertwining, contrapuntal movements² and oscillates in the ambivalent interstices of dominant cultural stereotypes through vigorous cultural translation.

Developing against a setting of London black community, Brickhall,³ the novel interweaves three independent plots into the

² Ronald Bush also observes that the novel embodies the division of the sacred and the profane in the “dialogic form” (252), which is, in fact, mentioned by Rushdie himself earlier (*IH* 397). This antithetical juxtaposition of the two worlds—the West and Islam—is also mentioned by Rushdie himself in his apologetic essay titled “In Good Faith”: “Throughout the novel, I sought images that crystallized the opposition between the sacred and the profane worlds. . . . The two struggling worlds, pure and impure, chaste and coarse, are juxtaposed by making them echoes of one another” (*IH* 401). However, in my view, in juxtaposing the two incommensurable worlds Rushdie not only makes them echoes of one another but also transcends the limits of the two worlds to create “newness.”

³ Rushdie’s description of the black community is based on a neighbourhood in London’s East End, Brick Lane, where 40,000 Asians people, mostly Muslims from Bengal (Marzorati, “Fiction’s” 24). The district derives its name from its narrow shopping street. Rushdie deftly renames it as Brickhall, which not only suggests its fictionality but also alludes to the spiral “Yellow Brick Road” in *The Wizard of Oz*, a road that leads not to the stifling home but to the promising wonderland of dreams and hopes. See also Rushdie, *The Wizard of*

surrealistic representation of the Indian-Pakistani-English diaspora: two lines move along with two Indian immigrants' (Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta) magic-realistic landing in London after the wreckage of a hijacked aircraft, which leads to their disparate transformation into the devilish and angelic forms and thereby antipodean fates; a third inserted plot, ostensibly irrelevant with the former two, is concerned with a series of Gibreel's dream sequences based on the historical account of the founding of Islam. The main scenes, where several climactic events take place, are located in London, yet the cityscape is intersected with visions of other cities. Such an alternative representation of London, when compared with Saleem Sinai's Bombay in *Midnight's Children* or the fictionalized Pakistan in *Shame*, symbolizes Rushdie's transitional attempt to explore the issues of migration and identities from *within*; that is to say, he chooses to write, as a diasporic writer, from the very center of the former British Empire. As a result, the subtle position the author takes renders the text a Janus-faced nature, which impels him to adopt the politics of ambivalence for the hybrid representation of the diaspora experience. Renaming, therefore, becomes an essential method not only to make contingent and indeterminate the institutions of naming, which are often treated as "the expression and embodiment of the shared standpoint of the community, its traditions of belief and enquiry" (Macintyre 378), but also to substitute an ambivalent, *untranslated space* for the originally fixed, liminal *geographical space*.

Needless to say, Rushdie aims to write about London, yet he does not write about the *Proper London*. Rather, he takes a greater interest in its neglected periphery—the immigrant's community that

has long existed and yet remained unseen in the London of seventies.⁴ Immigrants (Saladin Chamcha, Gibreel Farishta, the dream prophet Mahound, Salman the Persian, and many other minor characters), exiles (the Imam, Muhammad Sufyan, Otto Cohen, and Allilulia Cohen), and the Britons with other ethnic backgrounds (Mimi Mamouljian, Rose Diamond, and Don Enrique Diamond) constitute the leading roles on the stage of Rushdie's fictional worlds. Namely, the city Rushdie depicts—be it Saladin Chamcha's London or Gibreel Farishta's Jahilia,⁵ a dream city reminiscent of Mecca—is the migrant's palimpsest city, a city of heterogeneity intersected with different social groups' memories. Therefore, the making of its vision is conjured up in the process of ongoing crossing. It is a city that transcends the frontiers among different worlds. By fusing together miscellaneous elements of different cities to make his own palimpsest one,⁶ Rushdie makes visible the

⁴ As Rushdie has referred in his 1996 interview with the London Consortium, his analysis of the invisibility of black community and race relations is especially explicit in the long central section, "A City Visible But Unseen," in *The Satanic Verses* (68). Even if he agrees that London may offer more hope as a multi-cultural and hybrid city now, Rushdie believes that the section captures certain lived experience of the black immigrants in the seventies (68). Additionally, the title no doubt parodies the title of Italo Calvino's novel, *Invisible Cities*.

⁵ "Jahilia," literally "ignorance," is the name "given by Arabs to the period before Islam" (*IH* 398). It is used in *The Satanic Verses* to fictionalize the seventh-century Mecca.

⁶ Rushdie once explained to his interviewer about this fusion of different cities: "the city [Jahilia] doesn't look like Mecca; it's a radial city. It has a version of Ka'aba at the center, then it has concentric circles. It's actually much like New Delhi except built of sand. So it's a dream city that fuses India with things from Arabia. Also, quite a lot of the behaviour in the city, unemployed gangs of youths mugging people and so on, has much more to do with London

omitted black community in London and represents the metropolis through the immigrants' eyes with the tint of cultural difference. Take the defamiliarized cultural translation of "England"—*Vilayet*, literally "foreign country," for example.⁷ The sense of *foreignness* emerging in the process of cultural translation not only indicates "the untranslatable space" (Bhabha 225, 227) of the diaspora, which mediates different interpretations, but also alludes to the mockery of the eternal loss of the un-retrievable "origin" or "the authentic," a result of ruptured, deferred temporality and a notion elaborated in *Midnight's Children* earlier. In other words, no single race can claim the authentic representative. London belongs to not only the white Britons but also the black; consequently, it can be renamed and rewritten in different versions. The hybrid mixture of "*here*" (the lived reality) and "*there*" (the discontinuous past) in these deferred versions indicates how the diasporic subject reads and translates the city they dwell in *culturally different* ways.

The *translation* of the Proper London into culturally different versions no doubt refers to the black immigrants' reclamation for a home "here" other than "there." For the black Britons who live in such a postmodern metropolis as London, the question of identity is not only a question of self-adjustment but also that of an endless resistance against intrinsic racism. In analyzing the new form of ra-

than with India. The city was a mixture of all three places and that's why it's not called Mecca. It isn't just one place" (Rushdie, "Interview: Salman Rushdie Talks" 55). Such a representation of the dream city seems to anticipate Aurora Zogoiby's palimpsest art, which fuses together features of the red fort in Granada and that of the Mughal fortress-palace in Delhi and Agra to make her own hybrid one in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (225-26).

⁷ The term is used as a name for England. See "Notes for Salman Rushdie: *The Satanic Verses*, Chapter I." Available FTP: http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/anglophone/satanic_verses/

cism emergent in Britain, Rushdie once wrote:

The facts are that for many years there has been a sizeable amount of white immigration as well as black, that the annual number of immigrants coming in; and that, of the black communities, over forty per cent are not immigrants, but black Britons, born and bred, speaking in the many voices and accents of Britain, and with no homeland but this one. And still the world 'immigrant' means 'black immigrant'; the myth of 'swamping' lingers on;⁸ and even British-born blacks and Asians are thought of as people whose real 'home' is elsewhere. (*IH* 132)

This examination on race relations in the seventies and early eighties impels Rushdie to write about the migrant's vision of the city—both London and Jahilia. In Rushdie's view, the London that torments Saladin Chamcha is ontologically the same heterogeneous city as Gibreel Farishta's dream Jahilia, a polytheistic city constructed out of the shifting sands of the desert, where the fictional prophet "Mahound" preached his new monotheistic idea as an immigrant. Historically, they are both cities with newly settled immigrants and their urban landscapes mutate with the transformation of the structure of the population. Thus, hybridized by the overlapping visions of such cities as Jahilia, Mecca, Bombay, Delhi, and Karachi, London is represented and renamed as a palimpsest city, a certain *Elloven Deeowen*,⁹ whose landscape is constantly

⁸ The phrasing refers to Margaret Thatcher's speech about the fear of being "swamped" by immigrants (*IH* 131).

⁹ This nursery-rhyme-like appellation is in fact the accented Indian-Pakistani-English spelling of London: "Ell-ow-en-Dee-ow-en"; that is, L-O-N-D-O-N. Therefore, this intentional act of renaming suggests that the London is the migrant's city and the boy Chamcha's dream-city in the fairy-

remapped by the migrant's memories and re-imagination.

This re-mapping and re-inscription of the cityscape in London suggest the palimpsest nature of the diasporic narration and the deconstructive, subversive tendency of the post-colonial diaspora. The spectacular representation of the black community in London and the episodic rehistoricization of the founding of Islam imply that the post-colonial metropolis, especially the imperial center, with its large immigrant population, is gradually challenged and re-configured by the emergence of the heterogeneous space—the *untranslatable* space of the invisible *other*, whose existence, made possible by the deconstructive impulse of the diasporic narrative, interrogates and breaks down the temporality of the original homogeneous British national narrative. Moreover, in the transgressive act of cultural translation *The Satanic Verses* does not just go beyond the boundary of the homogenizing national narrative and the essentializing ideology but destabilizes their stability. Its radical praxis of transgression makes visible *the finite*, tests the existence of *the infinite*, challenges the territory of *the unthought*, and finally cultivates what Bhabha would call the “Third Space,”¹⁰ an ambivalent space of mediation and negotiation, for the articulation of the metropolitan, hybrid diasporic subject. For instance, for the Bangladesh immigrant, Hind, wife of Muhammad Sufyan, England becomes the *Vilayet* where “everything she valued had been upset

land.

¹⁰ This well-known term coined by Bhabha is appropriated here to illustrate how Rushdie deconstructs the fixed meanings or symbols of different cultures in the act of cultural translation. According to Bhabha, “[i]t is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (*Location* 37).

by the change; had in this process of translation, been lost" (SV 249) and "the poison of this devil-island had infected her baby girls, who were growing up refusing to speak their mother-tongue" (SV 250); while for Saladin Chamcha the *Elloven Deowen* in this *Vilayet* means the ambivalent space that represents the source of attraction, escape, liberation, and, ironically, racial discrimination.

From this interstitial, untranslated space Rushdie not only unravels the diasporic subject's struggle between the desire for assimilation and the resistant impulse to assert cultural difference but also undertakes his critique of the domestic policies of the Thatcher Government, the institutionalized racism,¹¹ and the Islamic Fundamentalism. These hidden agendas reveal the painful identification of the Third-World writers in the process of modernization and secularization. They also indicate the challenge "to settled habits, to lazy authority, to unthinking, unconscious assent," which is comically travestied in "a riotous carnival" (Said, "Against the Orthodoxies" 260).

Unfortunately, before Rushdie's defiant experiment raises further serious discussion on these agendas, the novel's explosive topic and self-conscious blasphemy¹² have drastically ignited the rage of

¹¹ For further reference about Rushdie's critique of the domestic policies of the Thatcher Government and the institutionalized racism, see Salman Rushdie, "The New Empire Within Britain," *New Society* 62 (Dec. 9, 1982): 417-21.

¹² Sara Suleri holds the similar opinion by stating that "one of the most imperatives that *The Satanic Verses* exudes is an acute consciousness of its status as blasphemy" (191). In fact, in a bizarre foreshadowing of his own fate, Rushdie has the Mahound character address the Persian scribe Salman in the novel: "Your blasphemy, Salman, can't be forgiven. Did you think I wouldn't work it out? To see your words against the Word of God" (SV 374). Rushdie's exquisite awareness of religion and censorship meant that he knew that writers dealing with religious subjects routinely get into trouble in the Middle East

rage of the British Muslim community at Bradford, which very soon spreads worldwide and results in the Ayatollah Khomeini's issue of the *fatwa* (the edict or the death sentence).¹³ Blasphemy, a device intentionally employed by Rushdie as a transgressive mode of representation, has been deeply misread by many of the book's Muslim readers. To better clarify my discussion on the novel's transgressive mode, however, I consider it necessary to briefly sketch the reasons why some Muslim readers accuse the novel of blasphemy.

First, much of the outrage caused by the text focused more precisely on the description in the two chapters—"Mahound" (Chapter Two) and "Return to Jahilia" (Chapter Six). These two chapters concerning Gibreel Farishta's dream sequences appear especially offensive to many Muslims for mainly the following reasons: first, "the Blessed Prophet is given the Middle Ages name of 'Mahound' (The word means 'devil' or a 'false Prophet')" (Ruthven 15); second, the satirist Baal and twelve prostitutes impersonate the Prophet Muhammad and his twelve wives in a Jahilian brothel, known as "Hijab, or the Curtain," which seems a double provocation to some Muslims because the name of the brothel alludes to Muhammad's divinely inspired decree that requires the separation of his women from visitors by a curtain, or a veil, a practice extended to society at large (Aravamudan 11).

Worse still, even the very title itself, distortedly rendered as

(Pipes 74). However, the greatest mistake he made is probably that he underestimates the tolerance of some readers in the Muslim world.

¹³ For further reference about the Rushdie Affair, see Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland, *The Rushdie File* (Syracuse, USA: Syracuse UP, 1990); Daniel Pipes, *The Rushdie Affair: The Novel, the Ayatollah and the West* (New York: Carol Pub., 1990); Malise Ruthven, *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie & The Rage of Islam* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990).

“The Satanic Qur’an” for the impossibility of finding equal terms in several Asiatic languages,¹⁴ is very often misread, through the aggrandizement of the mass media, as a sacrilegious insult by many pious Muslims who have no idea about the content of the book. To these unexpected accusations, Rushdie does not hesitate to defend himself with slyness as usual:

Even the novel’s title has been termed blasphemous; but the phrase is not mine. It comes from al-Tabari, one of the canonical Islamic sources. Tabari writes . . . [that] Muhammad then received verses which accepted the three favorite Meccan goddess [Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Manat] as intercessionary agents.¹⁵ Meccans were delighted. Later the Archangel

¹⁴ For further reference about the title’s being inadequately translated into other Asiatic languages, such as Arabic, Turkish, and Persian, see Pipes 116-17.

¹⁵ In fact, the incident of the satanic verses themselves, around which the novel has structured and plays with subtlety, is accepted by a few scholars and disputed by others (Cundy 66). N. J. Dawood, the scholar and translator of the *Qur’an*, offered one expository description about the pre-history of Islam. Dawood writes in his notes that:

Long before Muhammad’s call, Arabian paganism was showing signs of decay. At the Ka’bah the Meccans worshipped not only Allah, the supreme Semitic God, but also a number of female deities whom they regarded as the daughters of Allah. Among these were Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Manat, who represented the Sun, Venus, and Fortune respectively. (ix)

These goddess, according to Rushdie, were once praised as “the exalted birds whose intercession is greatly to be desired” (“Interview: Salman Rushdie Talks” 61). Strangely, the Islamic Tabari states that Muhammad received the verses praising the intercession of the goddess but that these were removed from the *Qur’an* when Gabriel informed the Prophet that they were inspired by the devil (Cundy 66). The abrogation of these verses, for Rushdie, seems to suggest the attenuation of the female power in the gradually urbanized nomadic society in Mecca (“Interview: Salman Rushdie Talks” 60-62).

Gabriel told Muhammad that these had been “Satanic verses”
 [s i c] ,
 falsely inspired by the Devil in disguise and they were removed
 from the Koran [sic.]. (qtd. in Pipes 114-15)¹⁶

Rushdie’s explanation about the sources of the phrase “satanic verses” may require careful analysis.¹⁷ However, these extratextual debates seem to have distracted its reader’s attentions from the novel’s major concern about migration. As it is, the question of blasphemy is exactly the key to the reading of Rushdie’s transgressive mode. The novel is likely to remain misread and controversial in estimations of Rushdie’s literary achievement as long as the employment of the transgressive mode in *The Satanic Verse* is left out of account.

Early in the very beginning of the novel, Rushdie has hinted this transgressive intention in a metaphoric number, 420. This significant number implies that when Chamcha and Gibreel take Flight AI-420 to London, they are destined to commit a series of transgressive acts. Ostensibly, the number seems to remind the

Therefore, Rushdie writes the incident into his novel in the hope that by historicizing the rise of Islam, he may depict the transition of such a matriarchal, nomadic society to a patriarchal, settled one so as to make it a parallel to the mutation of London. This appropriation of the retreat of the female power, as what has been largely appropriated in *Shame*, is likewise grafted to the central theme of postcolonial and postmodern migrancy in *The Satanic Verses*.

¹⁶ See also *The Observer*, January 22, 1989.

¹⁷ Daniel Pipes points out that the phrase “Satanic Verses” does not come from Tabari but is formulated in the orientalist tradition by some Western scholars. Pipes thinks that in erroneously asserting that the phrase is taken from the Islamic heritage, Rushdie apparently irritates the Muslim world more for being “siding with the Orientalists” (115-16). For more detailed analysis of the title, see Pipes 113-20.

cinematic connoisseurs of its rich connotation in the Indian popular film. When the aircraft hijacked by the Sikh terrorist explodes in the air, Gibreel, tumbling from the heaven, sings and translates to his co-survivor, Chamcha, a hit from a popular Hindi film musical of 1955, *Shri Charsawbees* (*Shree 420*, or *Mr. 420*): “O my shoes are Japanese. These trousers English, if you please. On my head, red Russian hat; my heart’s Indian for all that” (SV 5).¹⁸ The apparent impact of the cosmopolitanism in the late-capitalist consumer’s society (the Japanese shoes, the English trousers, and the red Russian hat) on the national pathos (my heart’s Indian for all that) certainly indicates Rushdie’s self-mockery of the diasporic subject’s cosmopolitan personality. But just as Srinivas Aravamudan incisively points out, *420* implies a subtler cultural connotation:

The hold of “420” on the Indian imagination . . . lies in the juridical apparatus installed by the British imperialists to better govern the country, an effort that was launched under the forensic skills of Lord Macaulay in 1833 and submitted to the Privy Council in 1837, culminating in the Indian Penal Code,

¹⁸ Directed by India’s most popular screen actor, Raj Kapoor, *Shree 420* is an attempt at social cinema. The film gets its title because its protagonist, Raju, leaves home to seek his fortune at Bombay, which is situated appropriately at a distance of 420 miles. The film portrays all riches as ill-gotten gains, obtained by hoodwinking and cheating a gullible public: a rich man is a “Mr. 420” (Aravamudan 7, note 1). See also Ephraim Katz, *The Film Encyclopedia* (New York: Harper & Row, Pub., 1990) 634. Notably, the number 420 also appears elsewhere in *Midnight’s Children* to serve as one of the novel’s recurring metaphors, which respectively indicates the villainy of politicians, the umbilical relation between British Empire and the Indian subcontinent, and Saleem’s cosmopolitan character (Rushdie once asserted that the hit ‘could almost be Saleem’s theme song’ [IH 11]).

which was finally promulgated in 1860. As in many post-colonial societies, the colonial apparatus forms the basis for current law: the numeral “420” in India is still readily understood as an abbreviated reference to the section of the Code of Criminal Procedure under that number: ‘Whoever cheats and thereby dishonestly induces the person deceived to deliver any property to any person, or to make, alter or destroy the whole or any part of a valuable security, or anything which is signed or sealed, and which is capable of being converted into a valuable security, shall be punished with imprisonment. . .’ [Chitale and Appu Rao, vol. 4]. (Aravamudan 7)¹⁹

Therefore, this inside joke, *420*, not only aims to “subvert, in carnivalesque fashion, the legitimacy and originality of the Islamic founding order” (Aravamudan 11-12) but also to transgress any grand narrative (the codified ‘law’ that regulates our habitual way of thinking, such as racism, or any totalizing authority). Its joking undertone alludes to the return of the colonized to the colonial center with the transgressive desire. It also indicates the intrinsic umbilical relation between the colonizer and the colonized. Thus, it would be not difficult to discern that the appearance of Flight AI-420 in the opening of the novel signifies the beginning of transgression.

Apart from this initiatory gesture of transgression, the title itself and the name of the dream prophet, “Mahound,” exhibits the most conspicuous attempts to transgress the taboo of Islam. Just as Aravamudan discerningly remarks, “Rushdie’s choice of ‘Mahound’ as the name for Gibreel’s fictional self-projection is especially ironical, because it has been cited as proof of his bad faith,

¹⁹ For further reference, see D. V. Chitale and S. Appu Rao, *The Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 (2 of 1974) with Exhaustive, Analytical and Critical Commentaries* (Bombay: All Indian Reporter, 1974-76) 4 vols.

using as it does a historically polemical and derogatory Christian epithet for Muhammad” (11). The ironic blasphemous renaming, according to Rushdie, is purposely designed to liberate the previously stigmatized names from their negative connotations:

To turn insults into strengths, whigs, tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn; likewise our mountain-climbing prophet-motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby-frightener, the Devil’s synonym: Mahound. (SV93)

This carnivalesque renaming, in addition to its deliberate intention to transform negation into affirmation, also vests its narrative with a counter power that refutes against the racist’s demonization of the black immigrants. Elsewhere in his apologetic essay, “In Good Faith,” Rushdie spends more space explaining how the title is intentionally used to reclaim the stigmatized stereotype of the black immigrants:

If migrant groups are called devils by others, that does not really make them demonic. And if devils are not necessarily devilish, angels may not necessarily be angelic. . . . From this premise, the novel’s exploration of morality as internal and shifting (rather than external, divinely sanctioned, absolute) may be said to emerge. The very title, *The Satanic Verse*, is an aspect of this attempt at reclamation. Your call us devils? it seems to ask. Very well, then, here is the devil’s version of the world, of ‘your’ world, the version written *from the experience* of those who have been demonized by virtue of their otherness. Just as the Asian kids in the novel wear toy devil-horns proudly, as an assertion of pride in identity, so the novel proudly wears its demonic title. (IH 402-3)

The above defense manifests how blasphemy is intentionally employed as a transgressive act to challenge *the unthought*. Throughout the novel, there are moments when blasphemy becomes not only the symbolic sign of Rushdie's interrogation of his native tradition but also the subversive gesture that antagonizes the racist discourse. Blasphemy, in this sense, becomes the attempt to cross over the frontiers between the incommunicable. It recurs throughout the text, as Suleri insightfully points out, in mutant forms:

the question of blasphemy is by no means confined to the overtly Islamic chapters. The Thatcherism of contemporary London takes on the features of a mutant blasphemy, while a postcolonial desire for deracination, emblemized by the protagonist, Saladin Chamcha, is equally represented as cultural heresy. (193)

These blasphemous moments, thus, are more the transgressive acts that aim at crossing the fix boundaries and totalizing narratives that confine *Culture* within the homogeneous realm than the mere act of profanity or "a statement of religious conviction" (Suleri 201). Furthermore, the transgressive act becomes, as Suleri wisely discerned, "a narrative device" and "an aesthetic form that is indeed aligned to the structure of magic realism, or the favored shape of Rushdie's earlier novels" (201).

Another case in point occurs in the section of "Return to Jahilia," in which Mahound failed to detect the Persian scribe Salman's deliberate alteration of God's verses (*SV* 367-68). Salman the Persian,²⁰ an immigrant convert to Islam and the scribe of the

²⁰ As Rushdie confessed, the name is for sure 'an ironic reference to the novel's author' (*IH* 399). Furthermore, Pipes asserts that the name Salman also re-

dream prophet Mahound, having grown suspicious of the prophet's imposing rules to suit his purpose, begins to alter details of Muhammad's recitation and is appalled to discover that the prophet pays no notice. Rushdie's namesake character's transgressive act has a significant symbolic meaning here in that the scribe's skepticism signifies the author's effort to construct the counter discourse that destabilizes the grand narrative of Islam, or any confirmation of the authenticity and purity of the *Origin* so as to make possible an interstitial space for different interpretations of the Absolute or the authorized continuity of tradition. It is in this sense that "blasphemy goes beyond the severance of tradition and replaces its claim to a purity of origins with a poetics of relocation and reinscription" because it is used to indicate "a theatrical form of the staging of cross-genre, cross-cultural identities" (Bhabha, *Location* 225). The transgressive act of cultural translation, thus, is not a matter of *misrepresentation* but a project of *destabilization*, which is radically appropriated to activate the deconstructive impulse of the postcolonial diaspora:

fers to "one of Muhammad's closest companions and a major figure in Islamic history, Salman al-Farsi ('Salman the Persian')" and that "some fringe Islamic sects hold that he was actually the angel Gabriel in disguise" (62). Joel Kuortti offers another annotation of the historical fact which Rushdie's fictional episode is based upon:

A similar tradition is recorded, where the Muhammad employed 'Abd-Allah Ibn Abi Sarh as his scribe; but the latter began to make changes in the recitation and finally lost his faith as these verses were accepted by Muhammad. Later 'Abd-Allah was sentenced to death and pardoned in the same way as Salman Farsi.

See "Notes for Salman Rushdie: *The Satanic Verses*, Chapter VI." Available FTP: http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/anglophone/satanic_verses/

Blasphemy is not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular; it is a moment when the subject-matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation. Into the asserted authenticity or continuity of tradition, 'secular' blasphemy releases a temporality that reveals the contingencies, even the incommensurabilities, involved in the process of social transformation. (Bhabha, *Location* 225-26)

Just as Bhabha has perceptively argued in the above reading of blasphemy in *The Satanic Verses*, the transgressive act is subversive not so much in its misinterpretation of the *Kur'an* as in its "opening up a space of discursive contestation that places the authority of the Koran [sic] within a perspective of historical and cultural relativism" (*Location* 226). Furthermore, the observation acutely makes explicit the symbolic code these blasphemous moments imply:

It is not that the 'content' of the Koran is directly disputed; rather, by revealing other enunciatory positions and possibilities within the framework of Koranic reading, Rushdie performs the subversion of its authenticity through the act of cultural translation—he relocates the Koran's [sic] 'intentionality' by repeating and reinscribing it in the locale of the novel of postwar cultural migrations and diasporas. (Bhabha, *Location* 226)

I quote Bhabha in length here to clarify how the transgressive desire in *The Satanic Verses* makes contingent the absoluteness of Islam and threatens the cementing power of the shared sense of a homogeneous community. Without this desire to rewrite, it will be impossible for the diasporic subject to highlight the in-betweenness of the ambivalent diaspora experience.

Finally, allow me to conclude this long discussion on trans-

gression with another of Bhabha's comments:

If hybridity is heresy, then to blaspheme is to dream. To dream not of the past or present, nor the continuous present; it is not the nostalgic dream of tradition, nor the Utopian dream of modern progress; it is the dream of translation as 'survival' as Derrida translates the 'time' of Benjamin's concept of the after-life of translation, as *sur-vivre*, the act of living on borderlines. Rushdie translates this into the migrant's dream of survival: an *initiatory* interstices; an empowering condition of hybridity; an emergence that turns 'return' into reinscription or re-description; an iteration that is not belated, but ironic and insurgent. For the migrant's survival depends, as Rushdie put it, on discovering 'how newness enters the world.' (*Location* 226-27)

This newness has, for sure, to be born in the process of border crossing even if the creation of the new means a phoenix-like rise from the ashes, which is axiomized in *The Satanic Verses* as "To be born again, first you have to die" (SV 403). Yet, to be reborn after death, on the other hand, means ceaseless painful split of subjectivity—the split between the "good" (sticking to one's religious faith, Islamic cultural heritage, and the like) and the "evil" (secularization, modernization, and deracination, for instance)—and the embarrassing amalgamation of the past and the present. If transgression is an act that blurs the borders between oppositional worlds, then the most difficult task for the diaspora people consists in crossing over the gap between them, or in adjusting themselves to the state of in-betweenness. This existential dilemma inevitably brings us to the former propositional interrogation in the opening of the essay: "Who was I? What was I? What am I? Who was I?" What is implied in these questions seems not only the rupture of time but

the rift of space.

The Split of the Diasporic Subject: Farishta vs. Chamcha

As the previous discussion indicates, the identification of the diasporic subject has to confront the discontinuity of time and the dislocation of space. The discontinuity of time, on the one hand, results in the time lag between the newly grafted living present and the old ruptured past—histories, traditions, social decorum, standard of evaluation, class, and religious beliefs, all of which require reconfiguration in the map of the *brave new world*. The invisible luggage that migrates with the immigrants cannot avoid confronting the fate of amputation, transformation, elimination, and reservation in translated versions. On the other hand, the dislocation of space weakens the sense of connection to the original “homeland.” The impact of modernization, postmodern urbanization, and the oppression of institutionalized and intrinsic racisms²¹ dilute the previous *third-worldness* of the diasporic subject (in this case the Third World intellectual) and thereby intensifies the need for the redefinition of the ambivalent identity. Whether one should cling to one’s native culture and tradition, as Gibreel Farishta does in *The Satanic Verses*, or

²¹ In using the term “intrinsic racism” I am referring to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s definition of the term, which denotes a belief that “differentiates morally between members of different races” because it asserts that “each race has a different moral status, quite independent of the moral characteristics entailed by its racial essence” (*Anatomy* 6-7). Therefore, it holds that “the bare fact of being of the same race is a reason for preferring one person to another” (7). The term may best elucidate Chamcha’s being demonized by the British police for the mere fact of his racial difference.

totally abandon them, as Saladin Chamcha chooses to act, becomes a complex issue. In *The Satanic Verses*, neither ways seem satisfactory. Gibreel loses his faith after his recovery from the unknown disease and constantly struggles with his religious doubts in dreams; while Chamcha, a thoroughgoing anglophile, deprived of job, wife, friends, and social status after his demonic metamorphosis, finally reconciles with his former Bombay self before his father's death-bed. By splitting the properties of the diasporic subject into the two antithetical characters,²² Rushdie allows each of them to represent one particular dimension of his exploration of the diaspora identity. The slippage between purity (sticking to native tradition and religious belief) and impurity (assimilation, modernization, and secularization) is thus incarnated in their disparate dilemma and complementary personalities.

This split of the diasporic subject's psychology is further dramatized by the carnivalesque performance reinforced by the act of cultural translation. The iconology of their names echoes the book's title and serves as the leading thread that weaves all the

²² The prototype of Chamcha and Gibreel is probably inspired by two split halves in Italo Calvino's *The Cloven Viscount*, which has been mentioned in Rushdie's essay "Italo Calvino":

The Cloven Viscount is about a cloven viscount, vertically bisected by a cannonball in medieval Bohemia. The two halves continue to live, the one fiendishly evil, the other impossibly good. Both halves are unbearable. In the end they fight a duel; the Bad 'Un and the Good 'Un each manage to slice each other at the very edges, reopening the terrible wounds of their bisection, and are sewn back together by the story's most appealing character. . . . This is a happy ending, but for the story's youthful narrator it is also the moment of childhood's end. (IH 255-56)

The ending is reminiscent of Chamcha's reconciliation with his father and his farewell to his haunting memories of childhood and adolescence.

book's hilarious episodes into the serious questioning on the issue of diaspora identity.

Gibreel Farishta, a translation of "Gabriel the Archangel" from Urdu and a pseudonym, summarizes all the holy qualities the name can indicate even if it contradicts the character's nature in reality. Having been born *Ismail Najmuddin*, Gibreel changed his name into *Gibreel Farishta* (*Gibreel* is a nickname in memoriam of his late mother) to initiate the career as an actor. Symbolically and ironically, the name change foreshadows his later abandon of faith because "he'd given up quite a name when he took the angel's": "Ismail after the child involved in the sacrifice of Ibrahim (Abraham), and Najmuddin, *star of the faith*" (SV 17).²³ Originally a minor actor in the Bollywood Hindi films,²⁴ Gibreel makes his first hit in *Ganpati Baba*, a production based on the story of the elephant god Ganesha. Growing up believing in God, young Gibreel studies various kinds of theological works to get his mind off the subject of love and desire. After his success, Gibreel begins to lead a life of debauchery. Deified by his audience and adored by women, he is regarded as the avatar of great deities in the Hindi

²³ Rushdie's naming is replete with connotations. The story of Ismail here is the Islamic version of Abraham's sacrificing his son Isaac to God in Genesis 22; however, in this version Ishmael, brother of Isaac, becomes the protagonist. Additionally, the name Ismail also alludes to the narrator in Melville's *Moby Dick*.

²⁴ Rushdie offered an explanation for the prototype of this character:

[T]he character of Gibreel himself is a mixture of two or three types of Indian movie star. . . . And then there was an element of the big South Indian movie stars, a bit of Rama Rao. . . . [T]here was a large bit of the biggest movie star in India for the last fifteen or twenty years, Amitabh Babchchan. (Rushdie, "Interview: Salman Rushdie Talks" 52)

“theologicals.”²⁵ Off-screen he gradually masters the arts of dissimulation and deserts women relentlessly (SV 25). Dramatically, Gibreel lost his faith after a mysterious recovery from an almost fatal haemorrhage. While the whole country saw it as an act of the Supreme and a national holiday was even declared to commemorate his miraculous convalescence, Gibreel attributes it to the abrogation of his belief in God. How was he cured of the unknown disease? Gibreel told himself later that “on that day of metamorphosis [loss of faith] the illness changed and his recovery began” (SV 30). This inner declaration of the non-existence of God extends to the later doubts in his sequential dreams. Such a deified actor, when placed in the scene of London, was comically transformed into an angelic figure with a halo overhead right after the symbolic fall.²⁶ But tragically, refusing to adjust himself to the *Proper London* and struggling with his faith, Gibreel becomes a lunatic with “paranoid schizophrenia” (SV 429). Just as the name “Gibreel Farishta” suggests, Gibreel represents all the virtuous properties: faith (to one’s belief and tradition), sanctity, purity, piety, eternity, immutability, and other qualities that precipitate the conglomeration of the community. Yet these virtues ironically become sources of self-doubts that finally lead to his lethal *schizo*. Gibreel’s abiding doubts in the sequential dreams, therefore, do not just symbolize

²⁵ The term “theological,” according to Rushdie, is a “deliberate mistake” in the book (“Interview: Salman Rushdie Talks” 52). It is actually called “mythological.” Rushdie explains that by changing it to “theological” he wishes to make it more intellectual (52).

²⁶ The name of the hijacked plane is metaphorically entitled *Bostan*, one of the two traditional heavens of Islam (Finney 76). Hence, the fall is in one sense a postmodern parody of the Miltonic *Paradise Lost*.

Rushdie's reflections on his "Indian part,"²⁷ the part that is inclined for his native culture. Furthermore, it indicates that the ostensibly homogeneous dominant narrative, in this case the grand narrative of religion articulated by its angel incarnate, Gibreel, on the stage of the Hindi theologians, is likely to be deconstructed by its inner subversive heterogeneous discourses, such as Gibreel's cinematic re-historicization of the story of Islam in his dreams.

Contrary to Gibreel, Saladin Chamcha, an anglophile who pursues in every aspect the imperial cultural values and tries his best to promote himself to the standard of "cultural literacy" of the British citizen, embodies "one of the most typical qualities of many metropolitan Indians" (Aravamudan 14). His name is rich in the meanings that are produced in the act of cultural translation. Aravamudan noticed that

[the name] 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. (14)

Moreover, the name "Saladin" is also a comic self-parody of 'Salman' together with 'Aladdin,' which constantly reminds the reader of the Arabian tale parodied by the novel with its recurrent reference to Gibreel's dead lover (Rekha Merchant) visiting him on a

²⁷ That Gibreel and Chamcha represent the two split parts of Rushdie's multiple identities is manifested in his explanation in a 1989 interview: "[I]n writing *The Satanic Verses*, I think I was writing for the first time from the whole of myself. The English part, the Indian part. The part of me that loves London, and the part that loves Bombay" ("Fiction's" 100).

magic carpet, the dijins in Changez Chamchawala's story-telling, and Changez's treasured possession—the magic lamp. More like an epithet than a real family name, “Chamcha” refers to Rushdie's self-teasing of his colonial background and anglophile complex. An almost over-quoted explanation by Rushdie may still be useful to better elucidate the richness of this cultural translation:

A *Chamcha* is a very humble, everyday object. It is, in fact, a spoon. The word is Urdu; and it also has a second meaning. Coloquially, a *chamcha* is a person who sucks up a powerful people, a yes-man, a sycophant. The British Empire would not have lasted a week without such collaborators among its colonized peoples. You could say that the Raj grew fat by being spoon-fed. (“The Empire Writes” 36)

Therefore, Saladin Chamcha, son of Changez Chamchawala (‘seller of spoon’) is the descendent of the family whose wealth is accumulated on the basis of sucking up the Empire's favor. Such an autobiographical implication of the author's own background, the national *comprador* class (the yes-man, or the sycophant), indicates a strong impulse of self-teasing. Yet, this translated term on the other hand affirms, by implication, the contribution of the class' mediating role—spoon-feeding the flourishing of the British Empire. Or, more precisely, through this self-teasing, Rushdie tries to interrogate the meaning of his role as one of the “comprador intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery” (Appiah 348).

Unlike Gibreel, Saladin Chamcha undergoes a terrifying metamorphosis that turns him into the demonic monster with goat horns, hooves, and the halitosis. Just as Bhabha has pointed out, codified

codified by the metaphoric metamorphosis, Chamcha's devilish form visualizes "the discriminatory sign of a performative, projective British culture of race and racism—'illegal immigrant, outlaw king, foul criminal or race hero'" (*Location* 228). It stands for "the phobic projections that fuel great social fears, cross frontiers, evade the normal controls, and roam loose about the city turning difference into demonism" (Bhabha 226).

Having woken up from the fall, Chamcha was appalled and taken aback, as the metamorphosed monster did in *Frankenstein*, by his horrible transformation. When he looked into the mirror, he can hardly accept the new monstrous appearance because educated at Cambridge, he is the man craving for the thorough assimilation into the middle class white society; that is, being a good proper Englishman:

Looking into the mirror at his altered face, Chamcha attempted to remind himself of himself. I am a real man, he told the mirror, with a real history and a planned-out future. I am a man to whom certain things are of importance: *rigour, self-discipline, reason, the pursuit of what is noble without recourse to that old crutch, God. The ideal of beauty, the possibility of exaltation, the mind.* (SV 135-36; emphases added)

The above "virtues" enumerated by Chamcha synopsis the modernist atheism, and the Victorian, not least the Arnoldian, ideal of perfection, which seeks all the best that has been known and thought; namely, the "sweetness and light" (Arnold 47). Among these concepts, the most interesting ones are the "the ideal of beauty, the possibility of exaltation, the mind," which remind us of Matthew Arnold's definition of "culture" in 1869:

Yet we in Oxford, brought up amidst the beauty and sweetness

of that beautiful place, have not failed to seize on truth:—the truth that beauty and sweetness are essential characters of a complete human perfection. . . . [T]his is *an inward spiritual activity, having for its characters increased sweetness, increased light, increased life, increased sympathy.* (Arnold 42-44; emphases added)

Like Rushdie, educated at Rugby and then Cambridge, the institutions that are custodians and transmitters of English culture (Dodd 5), Chamcha is deeply immersed in the pursuit of the so-called “Englishness,” the preoccupation that is deliberately constructed as the practices of a cultural politics by the British educational institutions since 1900.²⁸ But such an internalized value

²⁸ Philip Dodd makes an in-depth analysis of the formation of the notion of “Englishness,” which consolidates a national identity through cultural politics, in “Englishness and National Culture”:

The centrality of educational institutions for the control and dissemination of a national identity . . . was especially clear during the later years of the nineteenth century with the dramatic reorganization and extension of state education. . . . [I]n 1869, Matthew Arnold argued in *Culture and Anarchy* that to belong to the national life one had to belong or to affiliate to certain English institutions: the Anglican Church and Oxford or Cambridge University. . . . The shift of national authority to the (ancient) university—their establishment as custodians of the national culture—may be encapsulated in the example of the school subject History which was made compulsory in 1900 in secondary school. . . . [W]hat was authorised as History for the new national education constituency was under the control of a particular specialised group. . . . In order to join Oxford and Cambridge as the guardians of English cultural life, the public schools also had undergone change. . . . [T]he relationship of the schools to Oxford and Cambridge was intensified: between 1855 and 1899 four fifths of Oxford and Cambridge students were public schoolboys, a greater percentage than ever before. . . . [T]he schools were fit to

contradicts the reality he has to confront. Even if he speaks perfect English, he is allowed, at best, to work only as a voice-over for some commercials. “Culture,” in this case, is a double-standard way of evaluation, which may well be realized in Arnold’s Anglo-centrism:

No people in the world have done more and struggled more to attain this relative moral perfection than our English race has; for no people in the world has the command to *resist the Devil*, to *overcome the Wicked One*, in the nearest and most obvious sense of those words, has such a pressing force and reality. (Arnold 38; emphases added)

This is exactly what Said has commented in *Culture and Imperialism*:

In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them,” almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one. . . . (xiii)

Thus, however hard Chamcha may try to be a civilized, proper Englishman, he is doomed to be sorted out from the category of “us” and put into the group of the uncouth “them.” Therefore, when he was arrested by the police and found that he became the stereotypical illegal immigrant rogue in their eyes, he began to reflect on his English identity but still cannot accept this demonization:

I am the incarnation of evil, he thought. He had to face it. However, it happened, it could not be denied. I am *no longer myself*, or not only. I am the embodiment of wrong,

of what-we-hate, of sin.

Why? Why me? . . .

Had he not pursued his own idea of *the good*, sought to become that which he most admired, dedicated himself with a will bordering on obsession to the conquest of Englishness? Had he not worked hard, avoided trouble, striven to become new? Assiduity, fastidiousness, moderation, restraint, self-reliance, probity, family-life: what did these add up to if not a moral code. . . . Then how cruel these fates were, to instigate his rejection by the very world he had so determinedly courted; how desolating, to be cast from the gates of the city one believed oneself to have taken long ago!—What mean small-mindedness was this, to cast him back into the bosom of *his people*, from whom he'd felt so distant for so long! (SV 256-57)

This interrogation on the cultural identity grew stronger and stronger when Chamcha, with his newly transformed appearance and hence socially marginalized status, began to see London with different eyes. The more efforts he made to obtain supports and trust in his good nature and social credibility, the more difficult it seems to erase the bare fact of his racial difference, which, like an imprint, signifies the threats to the stability and security of the dominant white society.

In this way, the two characters are represented as complementary and contrapuntal figures. By labeling one morally and religiously impure person “angel” and the other mimic Arnoldian *good Englishman* “devil,” Rushdie delineates the in-betweenness of the diaspora people by blurring the borderline between good and evil, or continuity and discontinuity. While putting contradictory qualities into these two icons, Rushdie is trying to hint: neither Gibreel nor Chamcha is a complete person; rather, they are two halves of a split whole. Just as their metamorphosed forms sym-

bolize, they reflect two dimensions of Rushdie's interrogation of the diaspora identity: the doubts about the native cultural tradition (in this case Islam) and the attraction to changes—secularization, modernization, and westernization.

Later in the text, Rushdie makes explicit this intention through a postmodern authorial voice:

Should we even say that these are two fundamentally different *types* of self? Might we not agree that Gibreel . . . has wished to remain, to a large degree, *continuous*—that is, joined to and arising from his past . . . whereas Saladin Chamcha is a creature of *selected* discontinuities, a *willing* re-invention; his *preferred* revolt against history being what makes him, in our chosen idiom, 'false'? And might we then not go on to say that it is this falsity of self that makes possible in Chamcha a worse and deeper falsity—call this 'evil'—While Gibreel, to follow the logic of our established terminology, is to be considered 'good' by virtue of *wishing to remain*, for all his vicissitudes, at bottom an untranslated man.

—But, and again but: this sounds, does it not, dangerously like an intentionalist fallacy?—Such distinctions, resting as they must on an idea of the self as being (ideally) homogeneous, non-hybrid, 'pure',—an utterly fantastic notion!—cannot, must not, suffice. (SV 427)

Such a presumption that regards the self as homogeneous and changeless can not, for sure, suffice to fulfill the diasporic subject's requirement that demands the obfuscation of the Manichean division. In making comments on the coinage of the two figures, Rushdie tries to ridicule the association of moral judgement with the issue of identification. In other words, remaining intact does not necessarily connote virtue. Contrariwise, transformation does not have to signify evil, either. But even if the ironic division aims to expose

the absurdity of the Manichean division itself, the design seems unable to escape from its own trap if we judge from the book's metaphorical ending—devil (Chamcha) survives while angel (Gibreel) perishes. It seems that to appropriate the logic of the hypothesis that good is associated with purity and continuity, evil impurity and discontinuity in order to subvert the logic from within often risks the danger of falling into the same mire. However, this dramatization of the diasporic identification captures the subtle mentality of the diaspora people. The inner struggles of Gibreel and Chamcha, therefore, embody the rift of the diasporic identification and bring forth another significant agenda—the reconfiguration of the subjective position in the symbolic order of the new society.

The Repudiation of the Symbolic Father

The identity crisis is, no wonder, the most embarrassing and agonizing problem that the migrant has to confront. The dilemma of making choices between different traditions, which is analyzed earlier, along with the operation of racism, hinders the migrant's assimilation into the mainstream white society. Furthermore, when the question of cultural identity is intertwined with the problem of self identification—one's *bildung* in the course of post-colonial diaspora in the imperial metropolis for instance, the re-construction of one's subjectivity usually has to undergo a more complicated, subversive reconfiguration. It may involve inner rift, annoying oscillations, the anxious need for symbolic models—the symbolic father, for instance—for new identification, and finally, in Chamcha's case, the metropolitan intellectual liberation from the imprisonment of the identity myth in the act of crossing cultural, ideological frontiers.

Either Gibreel's spiritual division, his "rift in the soul," or

Chamcha's secular, societal struggle between Bombay and London (*IH* 397) suggests that the impulse to resist against the dominant grand narrative always comes from *within*. If Gibreel's schizo symbolizes the internal heterogeneous self-deconstruction of the dominant discourse—be it national narrative or the grand narrative of Islam, then Chamcha's mimicry, his intentional visualization of his invisibility, may well be considered as the intrinsic resistant gesture to the rhetoric of Englishness. Working as an "invisible" actor with "a Thousand Voices and a Voice" (*SV* 60), Chamcha tricks his audience into believing that he is white by his feigned Oxbridge accent. In addition, Chamcha, together with his Jewish female counterpart, Mimi Mamoulian, an inner joke that echoes the idea of mimicry, performs the transmogrifying travesty to make fun of the notion of authenticity (colors of skin and the belief in an immutable space, for instance) in his first big hit, "The Aliens Show," a TV program utilizing the computer-generated imagery to turn all the backgrounds into simulations (*SV* 62-3). This inner hybridization and mimicry of the English language, animated by the carnivalesque rendition of the Fanonian metaphor of "Black Skin, White Masks," strategically mock the cultural politics that emphasizes the homogeneity and continuity of the English culture. Thus, both Gibreel's religious transgression and Chamcha's cultural heresy are directed to the repudiation of the symbolic father that demonstrates the patriarchal authority of the dominant discourse.

Compared with Gibreel's spiritual division, Chamcha's inner struggle is a more flesh-and-blood self-analysis of the author's own cultural transgression over the boundaries of the triply displaced Indian-Pakistani-English diaspora. However, both cases suggest that the subject's ambivalent slippage of identification subverts the myth of the authentic, unitary identity. It also indicates that the oscillation

between faith and the non-existence of faith or between here and there constitutes the phenomenal reality of the diasporic subject.

In fabricating the two figures, Rushdie presents several climactic scenes that symbolize the diasporic subject's postcolonial/postmodern repudiation of the Symbolic, *the Name-of-the-Father* that signifies *the Law* (Lacan, *Écrits* 199), in its repositioning in the symbolic structure of the newly settled society. The agent of the symbolic, in this case God or the omnipotent father, is transferred in the process of the diasporic identification. Its symbolic dominance is finally discharged by the intervention of the discourse of the female. This antagonistic power of the female finally brings in an open space for a celebration of the notion of hybridity, cultural eclecticism, and the postmodern denunciation of grand narratives.²⁹

In the case of Chamcha, his positional shifts in the symbolic structure can be roughly divided into three phases, which include his projection of the self-image elsewhere, the discovery of the difference between the real and the Imaginary, and the readjustment of his position in the new symbolic structure by dint of the repudiation of the symbolic father. Just as Lacan has stated in his theory of the triad, it is in the network of signifiers that *the Ich*—the subject—must come into existence (*Four* 45). It is only by cross-checking one's position

²⁹ In saying this I am adopting Jean-François Lyotard's definition of postmodernism:

I define *postmodernism* as incredulity toward metanarratives. . . .
 Still, the postmodern condition is as much a stranger to disenchantment as it is to the blind positivity of delegitimation. . . .
 [I]nvention is always born of dissent. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable.
 (xxiv-xxv)

back and forth in the map of this network that one can make sure one's position (*Four* 45). In other words, man treats the real by the symbolic because it is seen as "the determining order of the subject" and its function is more important than the imaginary (Lacan, *Four* 6, 279). In this sense, "the subject is himself an effect of the symbolic" (Lacan, *Four* 279). This effect is exercised not by the real father but by the very name of the father because "it is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of *the law*" (*Écrits* 67; emphases added).

For young Chamcha, the earliest executor of "the Law" is no doubt his father. As a boy, he was always obsessed by the shadow of the omnipotent father—Changez Chamchawala, a "giant" signifying wealth, public standing, and foreign education. He is the agent of the Almighty, the owner of the magic lamp, and the transmitter of English culture. Having a great expectation on his only son, Changez is especially severe to Chamcha, which results in a tense relation between the father and the son. Yet, this great expectation turns out to be a stifling pressure. Chamcha, in his later re-memory, can never erase from his mind two traumatic scenes—the scenes that initiate his longing for the escape from the patriarchal surveillance. First, he was deeply humiliated when his father whipped "the young Salahuddin's bedsheets off at night to reveal the shameful penis in the clutching, red hand" (*SV* 36). Secondly, while he was happy to pluck a bulging wallet with the pounds sterling from the street (*SV* 36), a sign that associates him with the promising life in *Vilayet*, he was frustrated by his father's admonition: "you should not pick things up from the street" (*SV* 36).

Here the Oedipal complex is slightly twisted. On the one hand, Changez signifies the Name-of-the-Father. His midnight detection

of Chamcha's masturbation is a symbolic scene that signifies the paternal promulgation of the prohibition: "Thou Shalt Not." But the prohibition is not just a prohibition. The symbolic is operated here on a double level. It demonstrates its power not just by prohibition but by the hint of repetition. The prohibition is simultaneously an admonition that conveys a warning and an instruction about delimitation: following the father's admonition means inheriting his symbolic positioning (as the middle class successful businessman) in the network of the signifiers and hence remaining the same symbolic order in the society. On the other hand, the father is not *the symbolic incarnate* but a *mimic* one because it alludes not to *here* but *there*. He is, as best, the proxy of the symbolic that operates out of the signified network of the colonial discourse. Just as the family name "Chamchawala" suggests, Changez is representative of the mediating *comprador*. His toadyism and Anglomania epitomize the existential reality of the colonial subject: it exists as a *similar* but *different* other that is almost the same as a Self but can never be the Self; its self-image takes shape as a simulated projection tinted by internalized imperial values and cultural disciplines.³⁰ This internalization of the colonial standard, together with the cosmopolitan character of Bombay, of which the old song sang: "Gateway to India . . . with her face to the West" (MC 115),

³⁰ That I define the identity of the colonial subject as an ever-changing simulation of a Self is mainly an appropriation of Bhabha's analysis of the ambivalence of colonial identity:

The ambivalent identification of the racist world . . . turns on the idea of man as his alienated image; not Self and Other but the otherness of the Self inscribed in the perverse *palimpsest* of colonial identity. (*Location 44*; emphasis added)

It is noteworthy here that the term "palimpsest" is used by Bhabha to describe the *rewritability* and *mutability* of colonial subject's identification.

helps invoke an illusionary sense of cultural belongingness, which promises an ideal fairyland *elsewhere* other than *here*. Take the English currency in the wallet picked up by the boy Chamcha for example. The foreign currency serves as the signifier of the powerful British economy here. The accidentally acquired money not only denotes Britain's symbolic omnipotence but also projects a fantastic vision of Oz *over there*,³¹ which alleviates the coarseness of the "home" right *here*:

. . . when he saw the black leather billfold lying at his feet, the nausea vanished, and he bent down excitedly and grabbed, —opened, —and found, to his delight, that it was full of cash, —and *not merely rupees, but real money, negotiable on black markets and international exchanges, —pounds! Pounds sterling, from Proper London in the fabled country of*

³¹ Like in *Shame*, there are frequent allusions to *The Wizard of Oz* in *The Satanic Verses*. Oz, in Rushdie's view, represents both the never-land in the fairytale and the dream-city, London, in young Rushdie's and Chamcha's imagination. A quotation from Rushdie's film criticism of *The Wizard of Oz* may well illustrate this autobiographical metaphorization:

I remember that when the possibility of going to school in England was mentioned, it felt as exciting as any voyage beyond rainbows. It may be hard to believe, but England felt as wonderful a prospect as Oz. . . . The Wizard, however, was right in Bombay. My father, Anis Ahmed Rushdie, was a magical parent of young children, but he was also prone to explosions, thunder rages, bolts of emotional lightning, puffs of dragon-smoke, and other menaces of the type also practised by Oz, the great and terrible, the first Wizard Deluxe. And when the curtain fell away and his growing offspring discovered, like Dorothy, the truth about adult humbug, it was easy to think, as she did, that our Wizard must be a very bad man indeed. It took me half a lifetime to discover that the Great Oz's *apologia pro vita sua* fitted my father equally well—that he, too, was a good man, but a very bad Wizard. (9-10)

Vilayet across the black water and far away. . . . [F]or a moment it seemed to him that a rainbow had arched down to him from the heavens, a rainbow like an angel's breath, like an answered prayer, coming to an end in the very spot on which he stood. (SV 35; emphases added)

Yet, once the dream materialized, he was disappointed to find that over the rainbow the dream was empty. There was no heaven, only nothingness, which, contrary to his expectation, crashed his illusion of the Imaginary.

The second phase of Chamcha's positional shift in the symbolic order begins with his first visit to London, the dream-city, El-lowen Deeowen, when his father agrees to send him to the boarding house in England. This new beginning in life is a symbolic rebirth. In expectation of his son's independent start for the new life in London, Changez gave Chamcha a wallet and said to him: "Now that you are a man, it is for you to look after your old father while we are in London now. You pay all the bills" (SV 42). Somehow or other the son thought that he failed the expectation and felt angry at this training. London, after all, is not the familiar fairyland in young Chamcha's imagination but an alien city in reality. Having not known how to manage his money, Chamcha first chose to fast in the hotel and finally bought some cheap take-away roast chicken nearby, feeling so much embarrassed that he "stuffed it inside double-breasted serge and went up in the lift reeking of the spit-roast" (SV 43). The roast chicken episode is almost a ritualistic farewell to boyhood and father-worship:

[The rage] would boil away his childhood father-worship and make him a secular man, who would do his best, thereafter, to live without a god of any type; which would fuel, perhaps, his determination to become the thing his father

was-not-could-never-be, that is, a goodandproper Englishman. . . . [H]e would be English, even if his classmates giggled at his voice and excluded him from their secrets, because these exclusions only increased his determination, and that was when he began to act, to find masks that these fellows would recognize, paleface masks, clown-masks, until he fooled them into thinking he was *okay*, he was *people-like-us*. (SV 43)

This angry decision, however, is not yet a repudiation of the Symbolic but the discovery of the inability of the Imaginary. It would be not so much appropriate to call this a repudiation of the Symbolic as to see it as the transference of it because at this moment the Symbolic is not eliminated but exists *in absentia*. It is mainly apprehended on the linguistic level. Its abstraction (Englishness) can only be partially concretized through metaphor or metonymy, as is discerned by Bhabha in his analysis of colonial discourse.³²

Like the roast chicken episode, another traumatic experience, the later kipper episode at the boarding school (Rugby) (SV 44), forces young Chamcha to recognize his cultural difference³³ and

³² Bhabha, when analyzing the operation of the colonial discourse, has pointed out the four-term strategy of the colonial praxis:

The construction of colonial discourse is then a complex articulation of the tropes of fetishism—metaphor and metonymy—and the forms of narcissistic and aggressive identification available to the Imaginary. Stereotypical racial discourse is a four-term strategy. There is a tie-up between the metaphoric or masking function of the fetish and the narcissistic object-choice and an opposing alliance between the metonymic figuring of lack and the aggressive phase of the Imaginary. (*Location 77*)

Bhabha's combination of the Fanonian and Lacanian anatomy of the colonial strategy may well elucidate Chamcha's ambivalent internalization of the colonial value and his alienated image of the self.

³³ This autobiographic indication leaves an indelible trauma in Rushdie's heart.

the falsehood of the Imaginary. The apathy of his English classmates reveals to young Chamcha quite a sarcastic apocalypse: “England was a peculiar-tasting smoked fish full of spikes and bones, and nobody would ever tell him how to eat it” (SV 44). Deeply hurt by the frustration, he determines to transform himself into a good, proper Englishman. To achieve this cultural metamorphosis, he tries all his best to mimic the English language to a perfect extent, hoping that the affiliation acquired through the mastering of that language may compensate for the lack of the Symbolic. In other words, Chamcha re-establishes his identity in language. His decision to work as a voice-over and his attraction to Pamela, the “decent upper-class Englishwoman,” for her standard accent indicates that his pursuit of the symbolic father, when placed under the culturally dislocated context, can only be carried out on the linguistic level. It is worth noticing here that this operation of the colonial discourse demonstrates its discursive power to its colored, emasculated colonial subject not through the male but the female. The issues of class and gender subtly intersect the Lacanian analysis of the Bildungsroman here. Chamcha, son of an Indian middle class businessman and a Cambridge graduate, can only act as a voice-over because he has the “wrong” skin color. As a black immigrant, he is destined to become “one of the many” and lose a face of his own. The only way to participate in the dominant society, in Chamcha’s view, is to build a filiation, through body and blood. Therefore, the fulfillment of the quest for an English Self is not yet complete in

It is also symbolic of the ending of his imaginary relation with the Self falsely constructed under the operation of the colonial discourse: “at Rugby I was suddenly Indian. There are no Indians in India. There are classes, of course, and regional identifications. Here in England, however, it is largely understood as a race. . . .” (Rushdie, “Fiction’s” 49).

the mastering of the English language unless he is able to inaugurate a newer generation (a son) through miscegenation. Nonetheless, just as his wife's name, Pamela Lovelace (a pun of "loveless"),³⁴ foreshadows, Chamcha's marriage is based on his Anglomanical adoration of "English Culture" rather than real love. It is no surprise that the marriage contains no hope about any fruitful reproduction and ends with divorce. While Chamcha makes efforts to court Pamela by expressing his appreciation of English culture, hoping that he may "put down roots in the woman [he] love[s]" (SV 59), she derisively sneers at his Anglomania and sees it as the hackneyed thought of the Conservative.

It is not until he shockingly discovered his demonic metamorphosis in the mirror that Chamcha enters the third phase of his positional shift. Painful and embarrassing though it may be, the discovery convinces him of the futility of possessing a British passport. Humiliated by the police in the Black Maria and witnessing other demonized black immigrants in the hospital, Chamcha begins to discern his otherized position in the symbolic structure of the dominant white society, recognizing the impossibility of filling the lack of the Symbolic by his mimicry or by miscegenation. This is the very moment when the collapse and the repudiation of the Symbolic happened. The recognition of a distorted, otherized self from the perspective of the white eye/I produces an effect reminiscent of Fanon's discovery of his otherness in a well-known scene: "Look, a Negro. . . . Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened. . ." (*Black* 112). Interestingly, it is from this moment that the affirming power of the female is

³⁴ The name contains an inner joke to Samuel Richardson's two novels: *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. Aravamudan points out that it is "a Richardsonian composite, combining the name of *Clarissa's* rapist with that of the victim-protagonist in *Pamela*" (15).

grafted to the loss of the Symbolic. Deprived of wife, job, friends, and social status, Chamcha finds a new life in Zeeny Vakil, an art critic who opposes to “the myth of authenticity” and advocates “an ethic of historically validated eclecticism” (SV 52). Just as it is appropriated in *Shame*, feminism intervenes here as a functional counter discourse that defies against the patriarchal grand narrative. The variant play of the name Ayesha (which respectively denotes Mahound’s favorite concubine, the prostitute at the brothel of Jahilia, the imbecile female prophet from Titlipur [‘Butterfly Abode’], and the Bangladesh immigrant girl)³⁵ is deliberately designed to contest Mahound’s (the agent of the-Name-of-Father) dominant patriarchal discourse. Likewise, Zeeny signifies the attraction of native Indian culture and native intellectual women’s rising counter power in the metropolis. Her appearance in the story’s ending suggests an opening of new possibilities for self-identification. In spite that the final Dickensian reconciliation between the father and the son³⁶ seems to

³⁵ Brian Finney also takes notice of Rushdie’s multiple use of the same proper name by pointing out that

[Rushdie] takes from the Islamic history Ayesha, the name of the Prophet’s favorite wife, and uses the same name for the most popular of the prostitutes in the Jahilia brothel, for the Muslim visionary who led her fellow villagers to drown in the sea, and for one second generation Bangladesh immigrant girl in London. Sacred and profane versions of womanhood become fused and indistinguishable by this linguistic sleight of hand. (85)

³⁶ Both Suleri and Bush mentioned this flaw. Suleri comments that the book “begins as Joyce [and] ends as Dickens, melding linguistic and cultural mayhem with the problematic excesses of sentimental resolution” (191). Bush holds a similar view by stating that

the climactic scene in this drama is regenerative and almost Dickensian. Rushdie . . . steps Dickensian sentiment in an irony poised between belief and skepticism. Gibreel is magnetically

attenuate the book's transgressive intent, its attempt to cross borders is intensified by the text's final elaboration of Zeeny Vakil's art theory, which summarizes Rushdie's cultural eclecticism and anticipates the palimpsest vision depicted by Aurora Zogoiby in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. This intention is manifested in Vakil's thesis about the pictures in the legendary *Hamza-nama* cloths collected by Changez:

The pictures also provided eloquent proof of Zeeny Vakil's thesis about the eclectic, hybridized nature of the Indian artistic tradition. The Mughals had brought artists from every part of India to work on the paintings; individual identity was submerged to create a many-headed, many-brushed Overartist who, literally, was Indian painting. One hand would draw the mosaic floors, a second the figures, a third would paint the Chinese-looking cloudy skies. On the backs of the cloths were the stories that accompanied the scenes. The pictures would be shown like a movie: held up while someone read out the hero's tale. In the *Hamza-nama* you could see the Persian miniature fusing with Kannad and Keralan painting styles, you could see Hindu and Muslim philosophy forming their characteristically late-Mughal synthesis. (SV70)

This art theory represents Rushdie's highest ideal of culture, which is later enlarged to the palimpsest art of Aurora Zogoiby in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. What is interesting here is that the discourse of the female is appropriated to signify an emerging possibility of a new space that embraces heterogeneous discourse and hybrid identities. It is appropriated to counter the dominant patriarchal dis-

drawn to a blazing house in which Saladin is about to perish. But instead of repaying Saladin once and for all his treachery, Gibreel draws back and instinctively rescues his Iago from the charred rubble, initiating Saladin's spiritual redemption. (246)

course, as is manifested in Zeeny Vakil's Third-Word feminism, the woman mountain climber Allilua Cone's wavering feminist stand, and the ambivalent discourse of the illiterate girl Ayesha. Yet, this appropriation of the female is not unilaterally operated as binary opposition. Rather, its deconstruction of the Name-of-the-Father proceeds in a subtler way. Take the most touching and enigmatic scene in the book, "the Parting of the Arabian Sea," for example. The female prophet's image in this section is represented ambivalently: Ayesha, a young Indian Muslim girl whose naked body is clad in butterflies, is the avatar of Eros and sanctity. Like Mahound, claiming to be inspired by the angel, Ayesha speaks as a female prophet with the language that "teeters between the discourses of imbecility and prophecy" (Suleri 204). Regardless of the landlord's distrust, she convinces the villagers of Titlipur that the Arabian Sea will part, allowing them to walk to Mecca. This re-imagination of a modern event³⁷ is adroitly pasted, as the counter discourse

³⁷ The Ayesha episode of *The Satanic Verses* is based on an actual historical event, the Hawkes Bay case, which occurred in Pakistan. The whole event may be summarized as follows:

The Hawkes Bay case took place in February 1983, when thirty-eight Shia Muslims walked into the Arabian Sea in the expectation that the waters would part, allowing the pilgrims to walk on to Basra, and finally, to the sacred site of Karbala. They were inspired by a young woman, Naseem Fatima, who claimed to be in direct visionary contact with the twelfth Imam. By the time the Karachi police reached Hawkes Bay, most of the pilgrims had drowned; the police proceeded to arrest the survivors, on the ground that they had attempted to leave Pakistan illegally without visas. In the notoriety that followed the Hawkes Bay case, rich Shias, impressed by the devotion of the survivors, paid for their journey by air for a week to and from Karbala. In Iraq, influential Shias, equally impressed, presented them with gifts, including rare copies of the Holy Quran. Naseem's promise that they would visit Karbala without worldly means was fulfilled. (qtd. in Suleri

from the peripheral, onto the text to balance the centrality of the patriarchal discourse of the prophet “Mahound.” In addition to this narrative balance and its intention to rebut against the religious fanaticism, the re-writing of the historical event also alludes to the intimacy between blasphemy and devotion or that between eroticism and religious frenzy. Whether it is the holy or the profane may depend on the way the paradoxical religious discourse is interpreted or how it exists in the believer’s empirical comprehension. To believe or not to believe, Rushdie seems to hint, is indeed a private question of existential leap instead of a totalizing discourse in the name of the Father.

Apart from the above-mentioned indications, the different characteristics manifested in the various women with the same name Ayesha seem to indicate the multiple possibilities of the female. The dialogical indication aroused in the name Ayesha—the bloody image of Muhammad’s favorite wife³⁸—and the prophet girl Ayesha’s forcing the landlord Srinivas to open himself in his final trance contains a possible double connotation: the power of the female can be as devastating as generative. On the one hand, the appropriated idea of the female, that of parting and opening, can be as violent as the unitary male power. On the other, it is possible to be historically productive for its capability of absorbing heterogeneous elements. Thus,

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See also Akbar S. Ahmad, *Pakistan Society: Islam, Ethnicity, and Leadership in South Asia* (Karachi: Oxford UP, 1986) 56. See in particular Chapter 4, “Death in Islam: The Hawkes Bay Case” 46-67.

³⁸ The bloody and unsuccessful military campaign conducted after Muhammad’s death by his favorite wife, Ayesha, against the fourth Khalifa, the Prophet’s son-in-law, Ali, is a historical reference often cited by fundamentalists (both Sunni and Shi’ite) as proof that women should not enter public life (Aravamudan 13).

the strategic repudiation of the Symbolic in *The Satanic Verses*, is not achieved by a substitution of the female for the male but by the liberating will to create fissures in the unitary closed space delimited by any dominant authority. Such an interstice space, a unique space from which the diaspora identity takes stand, is the one with palimpsest nature. It mediates the antagonism between different cultural groups and obfuscates the rigidity of cultural, ideological frontiers. More importantly, it ensures the fluidity of culture and affirms the multiplicity of identities that mutate and multiply with the on-going re-inscription and re-imagination of different cultural memories.

Metamorphosis and the Metropolis

If, following Rushdie's metaphor, every metamorphosis symbolizes a rebirth, then the question of metamorphosis should never be limited within the debates on the change of body or mind, as is pondered by Muhammad Sufyan. It would be more productive if we perceive it as the procedural necessity to create newness and the challenging task that defamiliarizes the habitual ways of thinking. Gibreel's perish, consequently, may be read as a resistance to mutation and hence a failure to regenerate new identities. On the contrary, Chamcha's Kafkaesque transformation into the devilish monster and his second metamorphosis suggest that the embrace of cultural eclecticism promises the productivity of a culture. Metamorphosis, therefore, becomes one of the most rigorous metaphors that visualizes the operation of the colonial discourse, racism, and the religious discourse on the one hand and the migrant's disturbing in-betweenness and inderterminacy on the other.

The image of "devil," magnified by the metaphor of metamorphosis, is thus played with nuance to allude to the indetermi-

nacy of the diaspora identity. A cited passage from Daniel Defoe's *History of the Devil*, the book's epigraph deftly borrows the rootless and rambling nature of Satan to best express the similar predicament of the migrant:

Satan, being thus confined to a vagabond, wandering, unsettled condition, is without any certain abode; for though he has in consequence of his angelic nature, that he is . . . without any fixed place, or space, allowed him to rest the sole of his foot upon. (Defoe 81; qtd. in *SV*)

The slipperiness of the devil here becomes the leading signifier. The main cause of the devil's sin, it can be apprehended here, consists in the very indeterminacy of his actions. It is this "*destinerance* of his vagrancy, his lack of address" that "summarizes his delinquency, his nomadic refusal to recognize the law of settlement" (Aravamudan 16). His "eternal escape from the transcendental signified—God" (Aravamudan 16), if perceived from an alternative perspective, can be regarded as a liberation from the Symbolic.

It can be argued that no modern metropolis, "the *locus calisicus* of incompatible realities" (*IH* 404), would be able to flourish without some "satans"—wanderers, immigrants, exiles, flâneurs, diaspora people that come from different corners of the world and carry with them the luggage of different cultural memories. Heterogeneity, instead of homogeneity, is what makes a city grow and prosper. It is in this sense that Rushdie declares that "all urban culture is migrant culture" ("Minority" 36). Compact with memories of the present and the past, the metropolitan migrants create newness in the act of cultural translation and adds to the city different tints. Such is Rushdie's conception of culture and diaspora identity, which sees the identification of the diasporic subject and

the mutation of culture as the re-inscribed palimpsest that records traces of different histories.

Thus, as Rushdie's third major novel, *The Satanic Verses* writes not just about migration, the act of crossing over, but about the palimpsest nature of the city. Its self-reprimanding tone and its reflection on the colonial metropolis reveal the author's unsettled anxiety about his in-betweenness, yet its celebration of hybridity and its comic performance indicate an unremitting desire to create productivity from this indeterminacy. The transgressive design of the text, therefore, understands that the metropolis is in fact the most possible locus where metamorphoses may take place. It is also the potential place for the inauguration of new spaces. Rushdie's transgressive act of cultural translation, therefore, can best represent a self re-examination of his diaspora identity by setting the scene in the imperial center where the perverse acts of metamorphosis may highlight the culturally stereotyped difference and defamiliarize an accustomed view of one's self. The hybridization of the English language and the palimpsest re-inscription of London in *The Satanic Verses*, therefore, creates a Benjaminian performativity of translation powerfully elaborated by Bhabha:

The complementarity of language as communication must be understood as emerging from the constant state of contestation and flux caused by the differential systems of social and cultural signification. This process of complementarity as the agonistic supplement is the seed of the 'untranslatable'—the foreign element in the midst of the performance of cultural translation. And it is this seed that turns into the famous, overworked analogy in the Benjamin essay: unlike the original where fruit and skin form a certain unity, in the act of translation the content or subject matter is made disjunct, overwhelmed and alienated by the form of signification, like a

royal robe with ample folds. (Location 227; emphases added)

The “ample folds,” the uncanny, hybrid *difference*, is the newness that distinguishes the robe from its former “smooth” shape.

To sum up, diaspora identity, according to Rushdie, is born in the process of cultural translation. It celebrates mutability and exists in transition and border crossing. Its need to invent histories and impulse to create newness may be transgressive and be rendered as heresy. But this desire to change, on the other hand, helps animate the vitality of a culture. In the ending paragraph of *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino writes:

The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space. (165)

The summary may well feature the transgressive intent of *The Satanic Verses*, which aims at an itinerant border crossing and a Promethean attempt to snatch the seed of the forbidden fire. Thus, a retrospective glimpse at the initial questioning about one’s identities may motivate us to read the book’s implied question *otherwise*. To ask “who was I” or “who am I” is not as much productive for Rushdie, it seems, as to interrogate “what will be created in the act of transgression.” In rewriting memories, histories, and the city-scapes of the metropolis to form a palimpsest, Rushdie challenges

the dominant narratives by crossing frontiers, preferring neither the heaven nor the inferno but *this* world.

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跨越邊界：《魔鬼詩篇》中的離散認同

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摘 要

魯希迪 (Salman Rushdie) 的《魔鬼詩篇》(*The Satanic Verses*) 是一部有關跨越邊界 (frontier crossing) 的小說。踰越 (transgression) 成為小說處理離散認同 (diaspora identity) 問題的重要底層結構：作者將伊斯蘭教創立史的改寫和倫敦亞裔移民社區的再現兩相疊覆，形成對話，以文化翻譯 (cultural translation) 踰越行為一再延／異 (defer/differ) 「道地」(authentic) 的英國／伊斯蘭文化，跨越了歷史、想像、文化、意識形態交鋒的邊界，再現大都會文化 (metropolitan culture) 層層刮覆的羊皮紙視境 (the palimpsest vision)。

離散認同的主要困境在於選擇同化 (assimilation) 或維持不變；然而，在種族主義的放大鏡下，兩者都難逃異化／變形 (metamorphosis) 的命運。離散主體在歷經渴望認同、尋求拉岡式 (Lacanian) 「象徵的父親」(the symbolic father)、棄絕父權典範、超越認同等轉變後，終於結合大都會新興論述，達成自我解放，以「居間性」(in-betweenness) 顛覆強勢論述。

《魔鬼詩篇》以倫敦為背景，刻畫離散族群掙扎於文化、意識形態邊界夾縫的認同焦慮和踰越渴望，重新繪製帝國中心的市景 (cityscape)，提示了都市潛藏的對話性「第三空間」、文化異質性，和創造力；就此層面而言，跨越邊界無疑富有其創造性和積極面。

關鍵詞：文化翻譯、離散認同、跨越邊界、第三空間、踰越